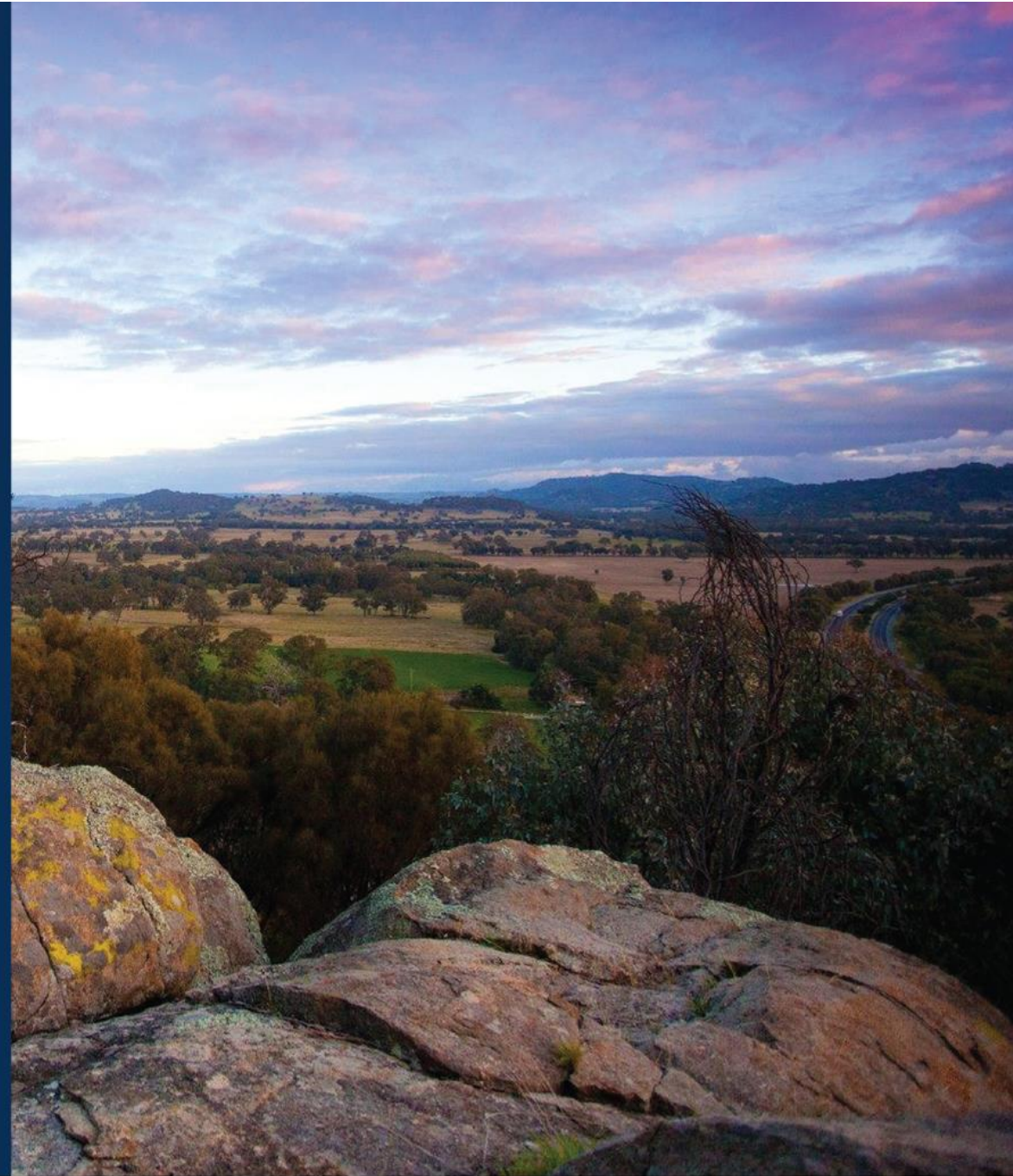


Gender Equality Action Plan

Strathbogie Shire Council
2021-2025



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we strive, the peoples of the rivers and the hills of the Strathbogie Shire region who walked these lands for generations.

We pay our respects to the elders of the past, the speakers of the first words, who lived in harmony with this country.

We acknowledge the elders of the present, who seek to regain their culture, and to teach the elders of the future their law, their history and their language.

We pay our respects to them and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

We honour their spirit – and the memory, culture, art and science of the world's oldest living culture through 60,000 years

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CEO Foreword



I am truly pleased to present Strathbogie Shire Council's first Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP), which will guide our actions in this space over the next four years.

Council plays a pivotal leadership role in advancing gender equality. Not just within our organisation, but also in the design and delivery of Council services and programs.

Our organisation believes strongly in gender equality. We aim to create a culture of inclusion and respect where bad behaviour is stamped out. We believe very strongly that equality and inclusion help drive participation and creates engaged communities. As leaders in our municipality, this is something we will continue to strive for every day.

The Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025 is an internal Council document that will provide an integrated whole-of-Council approach to increase gender equality for women, men and trans and gender-diverse people across our organisation.

The plan guides initiatives to address gender equality across Council. It was developed with significant staff engagement, which included a staff survey, workshops and two feedback opportunities through our internal engagement platform. In addition, a gender audit was undertaken in 2021 to collect information about our organisation and our current practices relating to gender equality.

From this process a number of actions have been identified under the seven workplace gender equality indicators outlined in the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, these being:

Gender composition of the workforce

Gender composition of government bodies

Pay equity

Sexual harassment

Recruitment and promotion

Leave and flexibility

Gendered work segregation.

We will track our progress in implementing this plan every six months through the Audit and Risk Committee, along with an annual review to ensure we address any emerging issues and ensure the GEAP is always relevant.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie Salomon', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Julie Salomon
Chief Executive Officer

Introduction

Strathbogie Shire Council welcomes the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, which requires organisations within the Victorian public sector, including local councils, to demonstrate positive progress towards achieving gender equality in the workplace and in the community. As the level of government closest to communities, it's vital councils reflect all the people they serve.

We have conducted workplace gender audit to assess its organisational performance against workplace gender equality indicators and then developed clear actions to improve our performance against these indicators over time through our Gender Equality Action Plan.

What is the difference between gender equality and gender equity?

Gender equality is the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men and trans and gender-diverse people. Equality does not mean that women, men and trans and gender diverse people will become the same but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on their gender.

Gender equity entails the provision of fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities on the basis of gender. The concept recognises that people may have different needs related to their gender and that these differences should be identified and addressed in a manner that rectifies gender related imbalances.¹

Why are equality and equity valuable in the workplace?

Research shows that proactive approaches to gender equity have been proven to deliver measurable benefits, such as:

- increased productivity across an organisation
- improved performance in financial operations, innovation and safety
- reduction staff turnover
- a boost staff retention
- an improvement in access to new talent.

Gender equality is a human right, a necessity for social justice and delivers a range of other social benefits. Research also shows that gender equality is a precondition for the prevention of family violence and other forms of violence against women and girls.¹

¹ [Best practice guide for gender equity in local government](#)

Integration with the 2021-25 Council Plan

Importantly, this GEAP aligns to our 2021/25 Council Plan, which is the key strategic document that identifies how Council will focus on the delivery of the Community Vision 2040 over the next four years.

One of the key six pillars of the Council Plan is Strategic Focus Area 6: Accountable. Transparent. Responsible.

A strategy under this Strategic Focus Area is to embed gender equity principles across the organisation and proactively encourage reporting of any form of inappropriate behaviour.

Key action 6.5 for delivery over the four-year life of the plan is:

Development and implementation of a comprehensive gender equity framework through policies, training and proactively acting on feedback from staff, Councillors and the community.

Action 6.1.5 for 2021/22 of the Council Plan is:

Develop a gender impact assessment tool to allow Council to assess the gendered impacts of policies, programs and services.

Action 6.8 is a key initiative to be undertaken during the life of the Council Plan and commits the organisation to:

Undertake a biannual staff satisfaction survey, supported by an action plan developed by the Executive Leadership Team to address the issues raised.

These actions have been included in this Plan to provide continuity with the Council Plan.

2021-25 Workforce Plan

Our 2021-25 Workforce Plan, developed under the *Local Government Act 2020*, also supports the progression of gender equity through various actions and initiatives. It is essential that these two plans in particular 'talk' to, and support, each other.

The two are interconnected by:

- Identifying the need to develop knowledge and understanding of gender equity through ongoing training and development
- Recognition that while there is a good overall balance of male and female employees across our workforce, there is currently lack of cross-sectional data means we are unable to identify any other focus areas for equity initiatives

- Cross referencing the implementation of this GEAP as an action in the Workforce Plan, with the overall aim of supporting gender equity
- Cross referencing the need to monitor the implementation of the GEAP as part of the Workforce Plan implementation reporting and monitoring
- Inclusion of transition to retirement focussed actions and initiatives in both the GEAP and Workforce Plan

Our Gender Equality Vision

To create a diverse workplace where achieving gender equity underpins all that we do and where the composition of our workforce reflects the differences across the community we serve.

Development of this Action Plan

Gender Audit (Stage 1)

A Gender Audit was undertaken in 2021 to collect information about our organisation and our current practices relating to gender equality. This audit reviewed both workforce data and employee experience data.

Workforce data was identified from existing information that our People & Culture department already had collected regarding our employees and our organisational practices. This data was de-identified and then analysed.

Employee experience data was how employees felt about the organisation. All employees were invited to undertake the People Matter survey in June 2021 and 60% of our employees participated.

Gaps found in our Gender Audit

We identified gaps in our Gender Audit that will be listed in our Action Plan so better data can be accessed in the future. These included:

- Not currently collecting information about intersectionality of our employees
- Not capturing all flexible working arrangements utilised by our employees.

Consultation and Development of Draft GEAP (Stages 2 - 4)

Following the Gender Audit undertaken in mid-2021, organisation wide consultation occurred during September and October. Results from the Gender Audit were made accessible through graphs and presentations were held with the various levels and representatives throughout the organisation including the Executive Management Team, Management Group, Councillors, OHS Committee and Staff Consultative Committee.



A whole of staff presentation was held on 22 September 2021 and following this feedback was sought through our consultation page 'Share Strathbogie'. Managers and Team Leaders were also asked to discuss the results at their team meetings. The 'Share Strathbogie' page was open for four weeks and 40 staff visited the page to view results and provide feedback on what strategies and measures would improve our current Gender Audit results.

Following the first round of consultation, a draft Gender Equity Action Plan was listed on 'Share Strathbogie' for staff review and comment; staff were asked to rate their level of support (from 1 – 5) for each proposed action in the GEAP, along with the ability to provide comments under each of the gender equality indicators.

The level of support for actions ranged from:

- 3.44 for Action 1.1 around collating intersectional data

to:

- 4.78 for Action 1.2 around pathways and skill development for emerging leaders
- 4.78 for Action 4.4 around structures, practices and culture to respond to violence, discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment
- 4.78 for Action 5.4 around ensuring structures, practices and culture promote and develop staff, with equal opportunities to develop and apply for roles.

Overall, 25 out of the 28 draft actions received a support rating of 4 or higher.

Comments were focused around the following themes:

- Questioning aim for gender equity on interview panels with priority given to knowledge and understanding of the role instead
- Questioning targets for secondment and promotion opportunities
- All people leaders should undertake unconscious bias training, not a percentage target
- Flexible working arrangements should be left to departmental level and no standard set through the Enterprise Agreement or organisation wide
- Care needs to be taken to ensure people leaders engage with all staff when flexible working arrangements are in place so that more introverted people remain engaged
- The need for more education around flexible work options
- There is a lack of development opportunities in the organisation – people may be looking for a career change or step up but if there are no opportunities to develop and take on new roles, staff will be less motivated to be high performers
- Inequities in pay is at the Senior Officer level, not within the Bands
- Participation of women in council needs to form a broader education campaign at schools and youth to demystify what a councillor does and the role of local government

- Intersectional data can be gleaned from OHS data as well and more explanation of what intersectional data is would be useful.

In response, a number of actions have been amended to address the feedback, including the insertion of an action around lobbying local government bodies to develop a State-wide education campaign on the role of local government and councillors.

Consultation has also been undertaken with the three unions that represent various sectors of our workforce to invite their comment.

Review of the Action Plan (Stage 5)

The People & Culture Department will monitor and evaluate the Gender Equality Action Plan on an annual basis to measure short and longer term outcomes and impacts.

A review will be provided to the Executive Leadership Team following the annual evaluation and also be submitted to Council via its Audit and Risk Committee for independent oversight.

Under the requirements of the Gender Equality Act 2020, progress reports are due to the Commission biannually.

Resource Plan for Gender Equality

Council prepares a four-year budget and long-term financial plan to support the delivery of the Council Plan and Community Vision. These key financial documents identify the human resources needed to deliver on Council's priorities, along with how important support mechanisms such as Employee Assistance Programs, staff and Councillor training and the actions outlined in this GEAP are to be funded.

In particular, funds have been specifically allocated to the implementation of a staff satisfaction survey in the preliminary 2022/2023 budget, along with funds allocated for training at a corporate level in addition to funds at the departmental level. These budget allocations will cover the identified training outlined in this Plan. Other initiatives will be undertaken from within existing resource allocations in the budget and long-term financial plan. Budget and resource allocations to implement this GEAP will be assessed through the annual budget process, which includes a review of the Long Term Financial Plan.

Action Plan

Our Action Plan provides a framework for implementing initiatives designed to drive improvements toward gender equality by listing strategies and measures under the seven workplace gender equality indicators outlined in the Gender Equality Act 2020.

Indicator 1: Gender composition of the workforce

No.	Action	2022	2023	2024	2025	Responsibility	Measure
1.1	Improve the ability to capture intersectionality data (e.g. ethnic background, ATSI origin, gender identification) of across organisation, including OHS data	X				People & Culture	Intersectionality data captured for existing staff and all newly recruited staff
1.2	Support pathways and skill development opportunities for emerging leaders to support them to take the next step	X	X	X	X	Executive Leadership & Management Teams	Number of skill development opportunities provided to emerging leaders
1.3	Ensure gender equality is specifically identified within Council's Recruitment CEO Directive, Code of Conduct and any other key strategic documents	X	X			People & Governance Executive Leadership & Management Teams	Gender equality identified in all relevant documents

Indicator 2: Gender composition of Council as the governing body

No.	Action	2022	2023	2024	2025	Responsibility	Measure
2.1	Provide opportunities for all genders to represent Council at community and Council events (e.g., opportunity to be guest speaker)	X	X	X	X	Communications & Engagement	Percentage of gender representation at events
2.2	Support for women to stand for council through hosting a Women in Local Government Workshop during Council election year				X	People & Governance	Workshop held during election year
2.3	Support strategic advocacy at the local, state and federal levels that supports all genders to fully and equally participate in community life, including Council life	X	X	X	X	Communications & Engagement People & Governance	Number of projects, policies, services advocated for
2.4	Provide opportunities for all Councillors to learn about the importance of diversity and gender equity in local government, and the importance of a diversity of views in decision-making processes	X	X	X	X	People & Governance	Number of opportunities provided
2.5	Advocate to Local Government Victoria, the Municipal Association of Victoria and Victorian Local Governance Association to develop ongoing education campaigns around the role of local government	X	X	X	X	People & Governance Communications & Engagement	Advocacy completed

Indicator 3: Pay equity

No.	Action	2022	2023	2024	2025	Responsibility	Measure
3.1	Review and report on pay equity (based on position/organisational hierarchy) annually, developing appropriate actions to address any inequitable trends	X	X	X	X	People & Culture	Number of actions completed
3.2	Provide resources to staff relating to preparing for retirement and building their superannuation with resources aimed at different intersectional groups	X	X	X	X	People & Culture	Number of accessible resources developed, and opportunities provided to staff
3.3	Organisation supports wage equity across banding and SEO levels	X	X	X	X	People & Culture and Executive Leadership Team	Strathbogie compares positively across the LGA sector in area of wage equity

Indicator 4: Sexual harassment

No.	Action	2022	2023	2024	2025	Responsibility	Measure
4.1	Collect information regarding the prevalence and nature of sexual harassment within the workplace	X		X		People & Culture	Workplace survey conducted biannually
4.2	Hold mandatory biannual live training sessions for all staff		X		X	People & Culture	Percentage of staff that participate in training
4.3	All staff attend bystander training to encourage them to speak up and report disrespectful experiences	X				People & Culture	Percentage of staff that participate in training
4.4	Ensure that we have the structures, practices and culture to respond appropriately to staff and stakeholders affected by violence, discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment	X				People & Culture	Review of current practices to ensure they are appropriate

Indicator 4: Sexual harassment (cont'd)

No.	Action	2022	2023	2024	2025	Responsibility	Measure
4.5	Undertake a biannual staff satisfaction survey to receive anonymous feedback from staff, supported by an action plan developed by the Executive Leadership Team to address issues raised.	X		X		People & Culture	Surveys completed and action plans implemented

Indicator 5: Recruitment and promotion

No.	Action	2022	2023	2024	2025	Responsibility	Measure
5.1	Selection panels will include at least one person who has completed unconscious bias training	X	X	X	X	People & Culture	All recruitment panels have one person with unconscious bias training
5.2	Create opportunities, support and encourage emerging leaders to take on secondments, act in higher duties and build leadership capability	X	X	X	X	Executive Leadership & Management Teams	Number of secondment and internal promotion of staff (after Year 1 of the plan, this indicator can change to a target once a baseline has been set)
5.3	Reduce impact of unconscious bias on recruitment, promotion, performance and career progression decisions, and ensure managers have the skills and behaviours to build gender equality, by ensuring all managers complete unconscious bias training.	X		X		People & Culture	100% of people leaders have completed unconscious bias training
5.4	Ensure that we have the structures, practices and culture to promote and develop our staff, and that all staff are given equal opportunity to develop and apply for roles		X			People & Culture	Review of current practices to ensure they are appropriate

Indicator 5: Recruitment and promotion (cont'd)

No.	Action	2022	2023	2024	2025	Responsibility	Measure
5.5	Create opportunities, support and encourage staff to participate in career development opportunities such as training in line with their goals	X	X	X	X	Executive Leadership & Management Teams	70% of staff participate in career development opportunities annually
5.6	All recruitment panels have diversity in gender representation	X	X	X	X	People & Culture	100% of recruitment panels have gender representation

Indicator 6: Leave and flexibility

No.	Action	2022	2023	2024	2025	Responsibility	Measure
6.1	Improve the ability to capture and report on flexible work arrangements	X				People & Culture	Flexible work arrangements captured
6.2	Ensure Council's EBA is in line with best practice provisions regarding Family Violence leave and entitlements		X			People & Culture	Family Violence leave and entitlements are in line with best practice
6.3	Improve leaders' awareness of Family Violence provisions and support for employees, including taking domestic and family violence training	X		X		People & Culture	Training provided to people leaders biannually
6.4	Promote and support the take-up of flexible work arrangements by all staff through formal and informal communication channels	X	X	X	X	People & Culture Management Team	Increase of flexible work arrangements across organisation

Indicator 7: Gendered work segregation

No.	Action	2022	2023	2024	2025	Responsibility	Measure
7.1	Utilise media and communication opportunities to promote non-stereotypical gender roles and raise awareness of gender equality and violence against women	X	X	X	X	Communications & Engagement	Number of internal & external communications relating to gender equality
7.2	Monitor shared workplace tasks (for example, meeting preparation, minute taking) to ensure no unconsciously biased workplace behaviours	X	X	X	X	Management Team	Tasks shared between team members equally regardless of gender
7.3	Development and implementation of a gender impact assessment tool to enable organisational planning and development drive gender equality	X	X	X	X	People & Culture	Gender Impact Assessments conducted on all policies and plans when introduced or reviewed

Measuring our performance and annual reviews

A review of the progress of implementing actions identified for each financial year will be undertaken every six months.

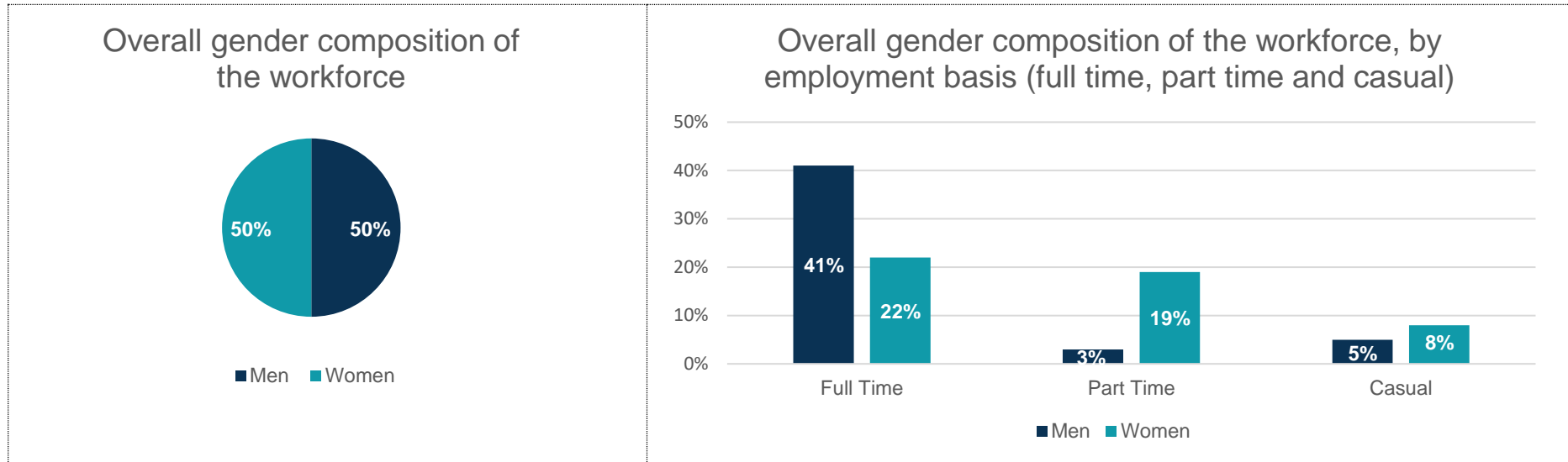
A report on our performance will be submitted to Council's Audit and Risk Committee, which in turn is then forwarded to be considered by Council at an Ordinary Council meeting.

An annual review of the GEAP will be undertaken to delete any completed actions, replacing them with new initiatives.

A more wholesale review will be undertaken at the mid-term point of this plan's life to ensure we address changing internal and external factors.

Appendix – Data from 2020-21 Gender Audit

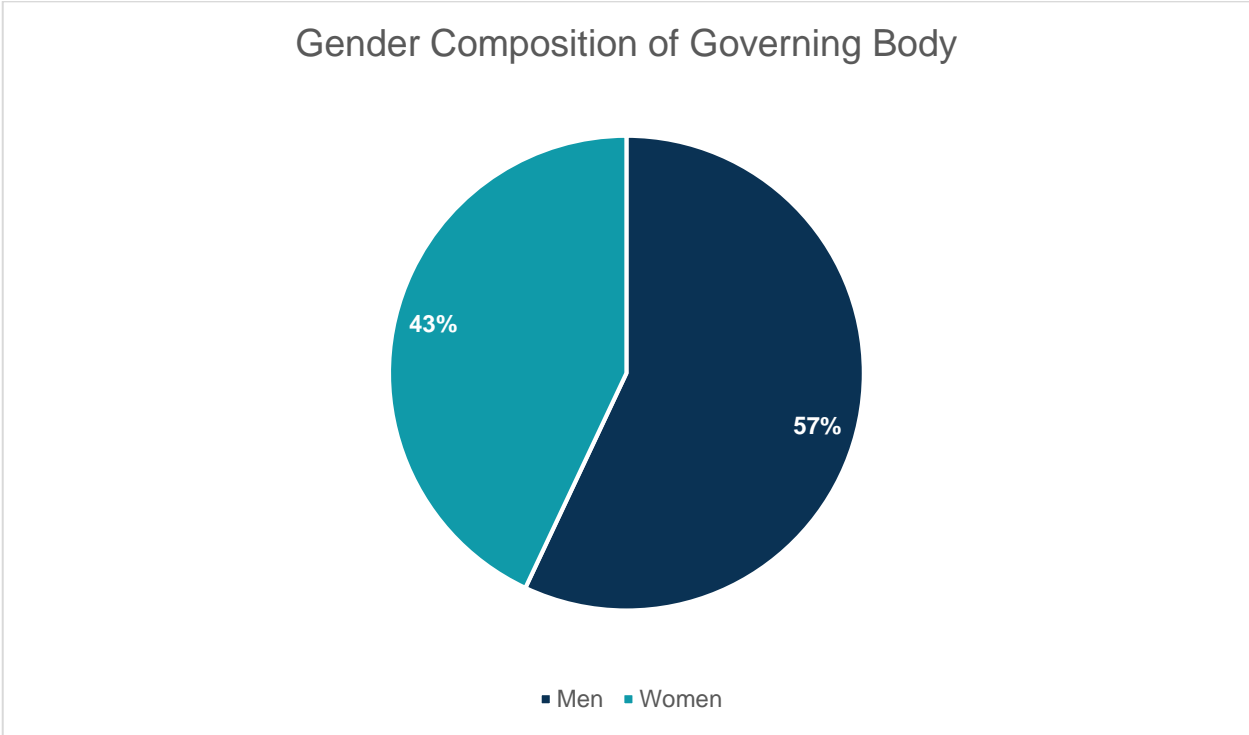
Indicator 1: Gender composition of the workforce



Percentage of survey respondents who agreed with the following statement, by gender:

- There is a positive culture within my organisation in relation to employees of different sexes/genders - **82% of men and 86% of women.**

Indicator 2: Gender composition of governing bodies



Indicator 3: Pay equity

The overall organisation gender pay gap:

- Women are paid 11.7% more than men (based on median base salary and median total remuneration gap)

Indicator 4: Sexual harassment

No formal sexual harassment complaints were made during the 2020-21 financial year

Percentage of survey respondents in the organisation who experienced sexual harassment, by gender: **7.1% of men and 4.7% of women**

Percentage of survey respondents who agreed with the following statements, by gender:

- I feel safe to challenge inappropriate behaviour at work – **71.4% of men and 86% of women**
- My organisation takes steps to eliminate bullying, harassment and discrimination – **57% of men and 76% of women**
- My organisation encourages respectful workplace behaviours – **78.5% of men and 90.6% of women**

Indicator 5: Recruitment and promotion

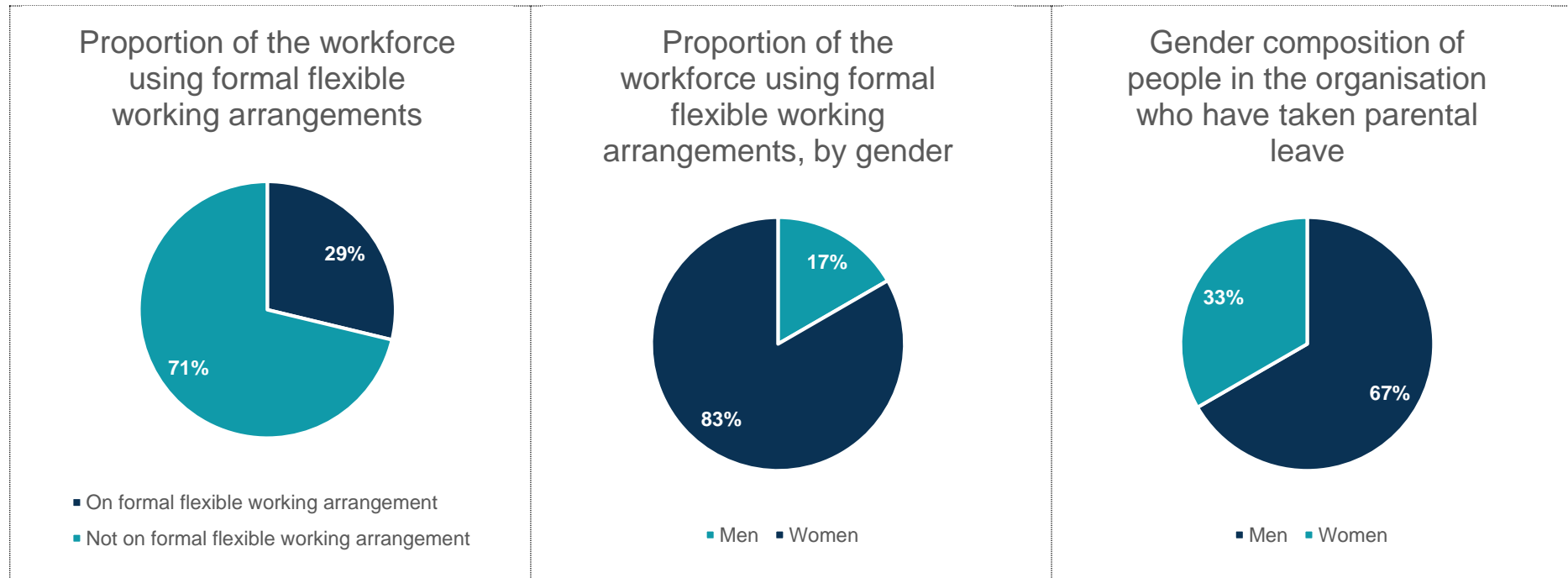
Percentage of survey respondents who agreed with the following statements, by gender:

- My organisation makes fair recruitment and promotion decisions, based on merit – **57% of men and 55.8% of women**
- I feel I have an equal chance at promotion in my organisation – **50% of men and 53.4% of women**
- Gender is not a barrier to success in my organisation - **75% of men and 81% of women**
- Being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander is not a barrier to success in my organisation - **60.7% of men and 76.7% of women**
- Cultural background is not a barrier to success in my organisation - **78.6% of men and 83.7% of women**
- Sexual orientation is not a barrier to success in my organisation – **75% of men and 81.4% of women**
- Disability is not a barrier to success in my organisation – **75% of men and 69.8% of women**
- Age is not a barrier to success in my organisation – **64.3% of men and 81.4% of women.**

Indicator 6: Leave and flexibility

Percentage of survey respondents who agreed with the following statements, by gender:

- My organisation would support me if I needed to take family violence leave – **85.7% of men and 97.7% of women**
- I am confident that if I requested a flexible work arrangement, it would be given due consideration – **85.7% of men and 93% of women**
- My organisation supports employees with family or other caring responsibilities, regardless of gender – **92.9% of men and 90.7% of women**



No employees exited the organisation during parental leave throughout the 2020-21 financial year.

Indicator 7: Gendered work segregation

