

Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP)

2021-2025

Working together for a healthy, connected shire



Acknowledgement of country

Mount Alexander Shire Council acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Owners of country. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continuing relationship with the land.

We pay our respect to leaders and Elders, past, present and emerging of the Dja Dja Wurrung and the Taungurung peoples as the traditional owners of the lands and waters of Mount Alexander Shire. We also recognise all other Indigenous people of the Shire.

We acknowledge the vital role that Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung peoples and their forebears play as custodians of this region for many centuries, performing age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal.



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Acknowledgement artwork by local artist Daikota Nelson.

CEO's Message



I am delighted to introduce the first Gender Equality Action Plan for Mount Alexander Shire Council. This plan outlines our strong commitment to organisational gender equality, and the planned initiatives to seek and undertake further improvements.

We are proud of the results that have been achieved to date and outcomes from our recent gender audit demonstrate that this commitment is resulting in further positive and meaningful outcomes.

We acknowledge that there is further work, focus and effort required, to enable an ongoing achievement of gender equality for staff.

Mount Alexander Shire Council understands that gender equality is a fundamental human right and we also understand that gender equality in society and organisations will bring significant social, health, wellbeing and economic benefits.

The Gender Equality Act 2020 (The Act) is recognised as an important opportunity for our organisation to deepen and extend our commitment to gender equality and to continue to build upon our strong position.

For its part, the Council (comprising the seven elected Councillors) has also acknowledged the importance of achieving equality and included the following commitment in the Council Plan (2021-2025): Ensure Council is a leader in equity and gender equality, and in the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021- 2025 Section 6 Preventing all forms of violence. Further support and policy positions to support gender equity will be developed via key strategic priorities, including the Disability Action Plan 2022-2025.

This Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP) will form the basis of Mount Alexander Shire Council's (MASC) response to this commitment to our staff.

In doing so, we will ensure that our workplace:

- Is safe and has equal access for all staff to opportunities, authority, rewards, outcomes, and resources, and
- Treats all staff, regardless of gender, with respect, dignity and fairness and supports equal pay for equal work.

We believe that advancing gender equality within our organisation and supporting our community to understand and address the systemic causes of gender inequality will have significant benefits to people of all genders, as everyone deserves to be free of gender-based discrimination, harassment, and violence, both at home and in the workplace.

Darren Fuzzard
Chief Executive Officer, Mount Alexander Shire Council

Introduction

Note on language

This plan uses language inclusively. When this document refers to women or men, it refers to female or male identifying people. This includes girls, boys, transgender people, and others who identify themselves within the spectrum of the gender identity of women or men.

This plan also uses the term gender diverse people, who may identify as non-binary, transgender, genderqueer, genderfluid or with any other term.

For further definitions on terminology used throughout this document, please refer to the glossary of terms in the appendix.



Why the need for workplace change in Australia and our Region?

The prevalence of sexual harassment, sexual assault and family violence within society is strong and unwavering. *Our Watch*¹ states that on average:

- one woman a week is murdered by her current or former partner;
- one in three women (30.5%) have experienced physical violence since the age of 15;
- one in three women (31.1%) have experienced physical and/or sexual violence perpetrated by a man they know; and
- Just over one in two women (53%) has experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime.

Locally, within the Loddon Campaspe region:

- Women in the region experience higher rates of sexual offences than across the state and are much less likely to feel safe than men. Women are four times less likely to walk alone after dark than men because they feel unsafe.

- Women are disproportionately impacted by sexual violence and abuse, with Loddon Campaspe performing worse than the Victorian average. Over three quarters or 76.2% of persons affected by family incidents were female in Loddon Campaspe in the year to September 2021.
- Young Mothers aged 20-29 in Loddon Campaspe are nearly 40 per cent more likely to have incomes below \$650 per week than young women without kids.

Workplaces, as microcosms of broader society, often replicate broader societal norms. As such, workplaces can play an important role in addressing and changing behaviour. Workplaces can reinforce, as well as challenge, existing societal norms, such as gender inequalities, violence towards women and the role of women in society. By addressing stereotypical attitudes, gendered norms and gendered structures in the workplace can have a broader flow on effect that supports gender equality in society.



1 Our Watch is a national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia - <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/>.

2 Our Watch Quick facts: <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/quick-facts/>

3 *Gender Equity Loddon Campaspe* - an analysis of gender equity for the Loddon Campaspe Regional Partnership, 2021

The legislative environment and performance assessment process

In 2020, the Victorian Government enacted the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, the first of its kind in Australia. The Act was created out of a response to the 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence. The Royal Commission had found that a driver of family violence and all forms of violence against women was gender inequality. The Victorian Government's commitment to gender equality and to ending family violence and violence against women is embodied in the enactment of this legislation.

Principles of the Gender Equality Act

1. All Victorians should live in a safe and equal society, have access to equal power, resources and opportunities and be treated with dignity, respect and fairness.
2. Gender equality benefits all Victorians regardless of gender.
3. Gender equality is a human right and precondition to social justice.
4. Gender equality brings significant economic, social and health benefits for Victoria.
5. Gender equality is a precondition for the prevention of family violence and other forms of violence against women and girls.
6. Advancing gender equality is a shared responsibility across the Victorian community.
7. All human beings, regardless of gender, should be free to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and make choices about their lives without being limited by gender stereotypes, gender roles or prejudices.
8. Gender inequality may be compounded by other forms of disadvantage or discrimination that a person may experience on the basis of Aboriginality, age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation and other attributes.
9. Women have historically experienced discrimination and disadvantage on the basis of sex and gender.
10. Special measures may be necessary to achieve gender equality.

The objectives of the Act are to:

- promote, encourage, and facilitate the achievement of gender equality and improvement in the status of women
- support the identification and elimination of systemic causes of gender inequality in policy, programs, and delivery of services in workplaces and communities
- recognise that gender inequality may be compounded by other forms of disadvantage or discrimination that a person may experience based on Aboriginality, age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation, and other attributes
- redress disadvantage, address stigma, stereotyping, prejudice, and violence, and accommodate persons of different genders by way of structural change
- enhance economic and social participation by persons of different genders
- further promote the right to equality set out in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*.

Obligations under the Act

The Gender Equality Act requires the Victorian public sector, local councils, and universities to take positive action towards achieving workplace gender equality. There are five requirements that need to be met for relevant organisations to comply with the Act. Relevant organisations must:

1. promote gender equality;
2. conduct gender impact assessments (GIA's);
3. undertake a workplace gender audit;
4. create a Gender Equality Action Plan; and
5. report on progress.

We will fulfil the Act's obligations by:

- applying a holistic organisational approach, with education and awareness campaigns to highlight outdated gender norms, stereotypes, and prejudices;
- conducting GIA's with an intersectional approach;
- delivering the GEAP actions;

- measuring change;
- reporting to the Public Sector Gender Equality Act Commissioner every two years.

The GEAP will complement our work under the Council Plan 2021-2025, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025 and other legislative and organisational initiatives. It will strengthen and extend upon the organisation's commitment to gender equality for all employees as well as people in our community whilst working to understand and address the systemic causes of inequality.

The following two tables outline Council's priority objectives and strategies that are the basis of the organisation's current work in gender equity. The Act is one of five priority pieces of work that encompasses our Foundational Work as listed in Table 1.

Table 1 outlines the objectives and strategies included in the Council Plan 2021-2025. Table 2 outlines the objectives and strategies included in the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan which has a strong focus on primary prevention initiatives.



Table 1 - Gender Equality Act and the Council Plan 2021-2025

VISION: Working together for a healthy, connected shire			
Key Principle	We are engaging genuinely with the community		
Key Pillar	A healthy, connected, and inclusive community		
Key Objectives	Our community is inclusive and connected	Our community feels safe, regardless of identity or circumstances	
Key strategies	Developing a Gender Equity Policy and Action Plan	Implementing initiatives aligned with the <i>Gender Equality Act 2020</i>	Recognise, support and celebrate the diversity within our community
	Ensure the Shire is a leader in equity and gender equality	Improve the safety and wellbeing for LGBTQIA+ and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) members of our community	Implement initiatives to change the behaviours and attitudes that contribute to family violence in our community
Foundational work	<i>Gender Equality Act 2020</i>	Disability Action Plan	Reconciliation Plan
	Climate Change Declaration		Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan

Table 2 - Gender Equality Act and the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025

VISION: Working together for a healthy, connected shire					
Key Objectives	6.1 Prevent family and gendered violence.	6.2 Facilitate Effective referral mechanisms between key stakeholders	6.3 Raise the profile of the prevention of violence at events and facilities to ensure safety, access and inclusion for all.	6.4 Ensure emergency management works towards best practice of prevention of family violence.	6.5 Incorporate gender inclusivity and equity in all decision making.
Key strategies	6.1.1 Advocate for the Orange Door to be located within the Shire for enhanced accessibility for people experiencing family and gendered violence.		6.2.1 Align LGA policies and processes with State Government MARAM framework.		6.3.1 Promote prevention of family and gendered violence at venues and events within the Shire.
	6.3.2 Plan and design Council venues, facilities and events to ensure they are inclusive, welcoming, relevant, and safe for people in high risk groups.		6.4.1 Promote and support mental health services for people who may be affected by extreme events and emergencies.		6.5.1 Review existing and new Council policies to ensure incorporation of gender equality.

Assessing our performance – the gender equality indicators

A requirement of the Act is to conduct a Workplace Gender Audit. This audit is to determine the organisational performance against the following seven gender equality indicators:

1. gender composition at all levels of the workforce
2. gender composition of governing bodies
3. gender pay equity
4. sexual harassment in the workplace
5. recruitment and promotion
6. gendered leave and flexibility arrangements
7. gendered work segregation.

The data (2020-2021 reporting period)

The Gender Audit required the use of two types of data taken from the reporting period of 1 July 2020 to the 30 June 2021:

1. Employee experience data – the People Matter Survey 2021 was used to collect employee feedback.
2. Workforce data – extracted from the organisation’s Human Resources employee data systems.

The resulting data was analysed against the above gender equality indicators. The Gender Audit and the resulting two data sets is herein referred to as the Audit Data.

In addition to collecting the Audit Data, the Act also requires us to consult with all stakeholders and to take into account the gender equality principles as listed in the Act.

The outcomes from the consultation sessions and the Audit Data analysis were used to inform the strategies and actions outlined in this GEAP.

The Audit Data and consultation process highlighted areas where the organisation was doing well and areas for improvement.



Snapshot of our 2020-2021 reporting position

The following table shows the gender composition of MASC in comparison to all Victorian Local Governments.

	MASC (No.)	MASC (%)	Victorian Local Governments (%)
Employees	254	100%	(45,000+) 100%
Women	151	59%	53%
Men	103	41%	47%

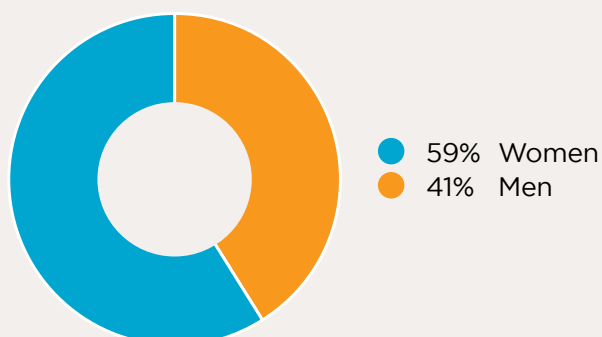
Local Governments state-wide employ more than 45,000 Victorians. While more than half of that workforce is female, only one third of directors and managers are women, including 30 per cent of the 79 Chief Executive Officers.

Our organisation recorded higher employment levels of women in senior roles than the average in Local Government as the following table demonstrates:

	MASC (No.)	MASC (%)	Victorian Local Governments (%)
Directors & Managers	12	100%	100%
Women	7	58.3%	33.0%
Men	5	41.7%	67.0%

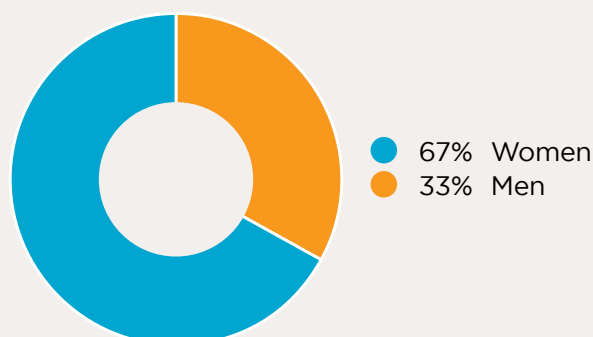
At the time of the Gender Audit our workforce comprised a headcount of 254 employees and the Audit Data indicated that:

Workforce composition by gender



1. The gender composition of the workforce was 59% (151) women and 41% (103) men. **No workforce data was available for gender diverse employees.**

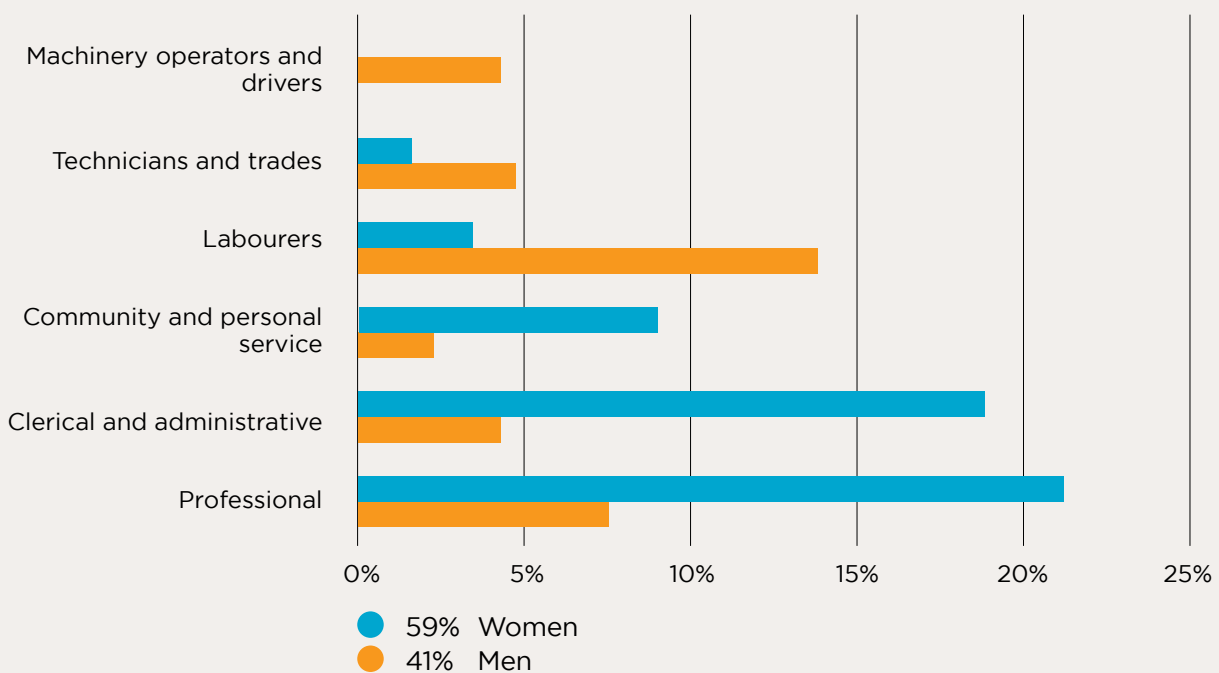
Senior roles at Mount Alexander Shire



2. Four of the six most senior roles were occupied by women; with the organisation being led by a male CEO.

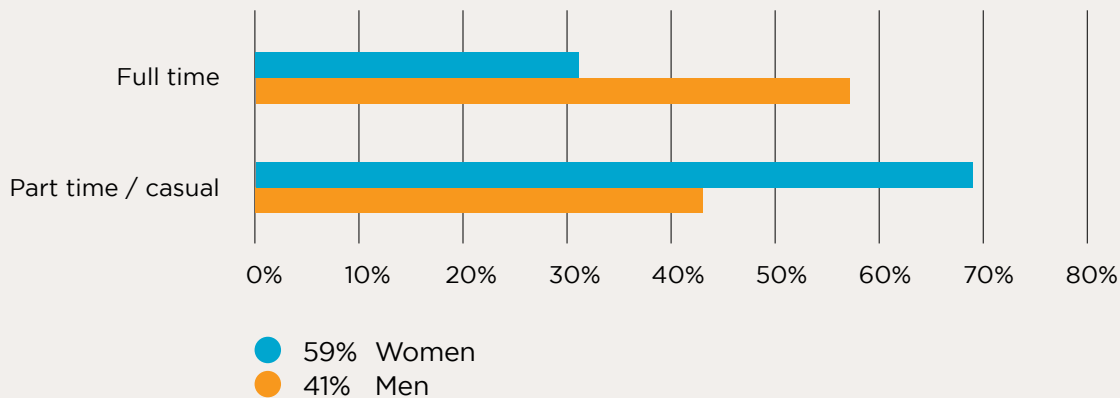
3. Of the seven Councillors elected, two are women and five are men. The Mayor of the sitting Council prior to the October 2020 elections was held by a woman.
4. Women's representation across the lower classification levels (Bands 1 – 6) was higher (at 58.7% or 122 women) than men (41.3% or 86 men) however this is even higher in the more senior and executive positions.
5. A higher percentage of women are in traditional caring and office-based roles and men in traditional outside Depot roles -
 - a) women dominated the following job roles:
 - i. Professional - 21.3% compared to 7.5% for men,
 - ii. Clerical and Administrative Workers - 18.9% compared to 4.3% for men and
 - iii. Community and Personal Service Workers 9% compared to 2.3% for men
 - b) men dominated the following job roles:
 - i. Labourers 13.8% compared to 3.5% for women,
 - ii. Technicians and Trades workers - 4.7% compared to 1.6% for women; and
 - iii. Machinery Operators and Drivers - 4.3% with no women.

Breakdown of gender representation across categories



6. 105 (or 70%) of the 151 women were employed as either casual or part-time.
7. 44 (or 42%) of the 103 men were employed as casual or part-time.
8. An equal number of men and women were permanently promoted.
9. 40 employees were awarded higher duties. 17 were men and 23 were women.
10. Nine employees were awarded internal secondments. All of these were women.
11. No cases of sexual harassment were reported however unreported cases were cited in the People Matter survey.
12. A low number of employees (one male and one female) accessed family violence leave.

Full time and part time / casual employees

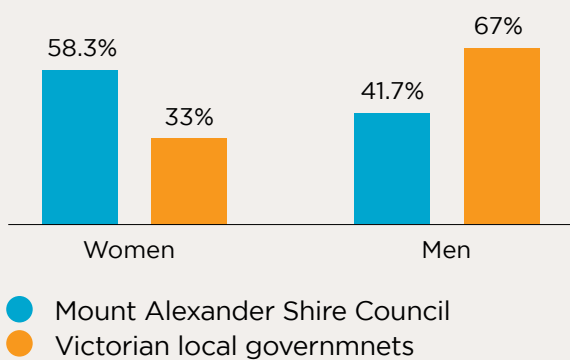


Analysing our results

The Audit Data tells us:

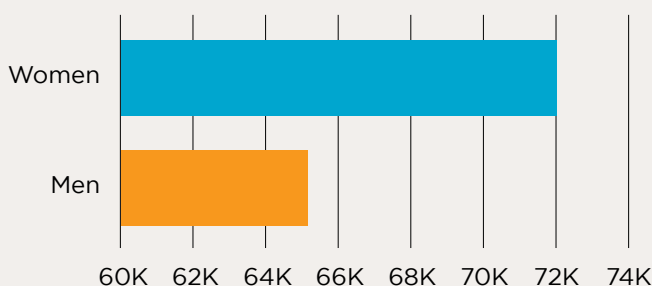
- We have more women than men in senior management roles – four women and two men. This is an area where, organisationally, we are excelling.

Representation: directors and managers



- When full time equivalent salaries between men and women are compared, women earn more than men. The factor that reduces the income of women is the higher number of women working part time.

Average FTE salary

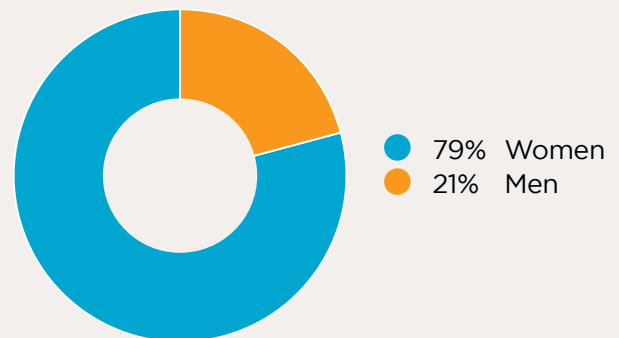


- We have 30 men (or 30%) working under casual or part time arrangements. This suggests we are a workplace that encourages and supports both men and women to work

part time, despite some of the identified barriers to men working part time (discussion following).

- Out of the 40 employees who were awarded higher duties, 58% were women;
- 100% of the nine internal secondment opportunities were awarded to women;
- 42 employees participated in career development opportunities 9 men and 34 women; and
- 56% of women and 48% of men felt that they had an equal chance of promotion.

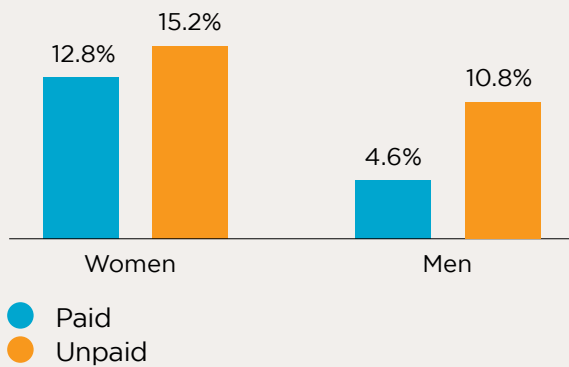
Participation in career development opportunities



We also have a range of policies and programs in place to support a healthy work/life balance, including:

- Paid parental leave as noted in clause 9.1 of the EBA 2020-2024
- Unlimited paid family violence leave as noted in clause 9.13 of the EBA 2020-2024
- Flexible work arrangements
- Trained Contact Officers (staff outside of usual HR channels)

Paid and unpaid parental leave



In addition, the organisation demonstrates proactive measures in policies committed to preventing and eliminating bullying, harassment, violence, discrimination, and victimisation in the workplace, such as the *Employee Code of Conduct 2021* and in our *Appropriate Workplace Behaviour Policy*, currently being rolled out as of June 2022.

There is also a significant suite of initiatives, programs, and memberships in place as part of our work in the community that help our knowledge of and commitment to equality for staff. These include:

1. The female friendly pavilion addition at the Harcourt Recreation Reserve 2022
2. We were one of 10 LGA's who participated in the *Gender Equality Bill Implementation Pilot project 2019-2021*, providing feedback on the toolkits and guidelines that ultimately are used by the Gender Equality Commissioner as resources for prescribed entities.
3. Membership of the Mount Alexander Family Violence Prevention Network since 2010
4. Signatory to the Victorian Local Government Association's (VLGA's) Women's Charter

5. Membership of the Loddon Mallee Collective Action for Respect and Gender Equality (CARE) Partnership, a regional collective of action for respect and equality
6. The adoption of a Gender Equity Statement in 2014
7. The development of a Gender Equity Action Plan and the Prevention of Violence against Women and Children Action Plan in 2017
8. The appointment of a Social Equity and Inclusion Officer in 2020
9. Established an internal 12-member Gender Equality Working Group which holds monthly meetings
10. Organisation wide online inclusion training, modules include, Gender, LGBTIQ+, Age, Disability, Culture and Indigenous topics.

Further, but not limited to, the organisation has led and actively participated annually in significant events such as International Women's Day, 16 Days of Activism and White Ribbon Day. Activities on these days encourage dialogue around Human Rights, discrimination based on gender, gender stereotypes and stereotypical ideas about gender.

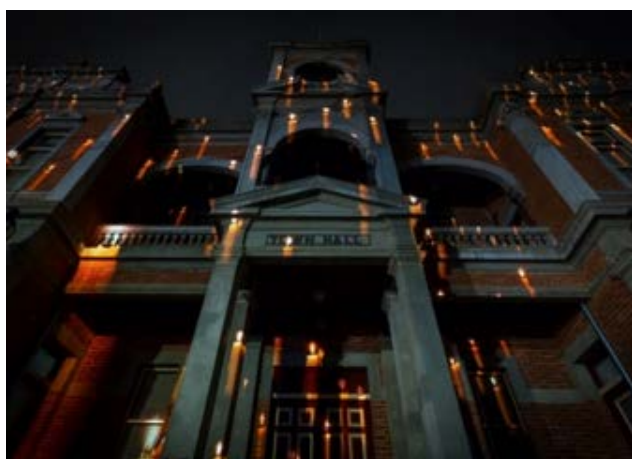
The organisation has approached the development of this GEAP by understanding that a person's gender is only one part of any person and by recognising that someone's identity and circumstances cannot be disentangled or considered in isolation. For example, an understanding that disability and gender, or age and gender can act together to affect a person's experience of equality in the workplace.

Areas to build upon

The Audit Data has highlighted areas for the organisation to improve and build upon.

We could:

- Improve in areas such as gender neutral or gender sensitive language, for example the use of pronouns and non-binary terminology (she/her, he/him, they/them).
- Collect other data from employees, such as disability, age, ethnicity etc. so we can explore the combined effect of these attributes on gender.
- Better promote and sponsor HR policies, processes and entitlements, such as domestic violence leave, so as to increase employee use of these entitlements and support.
- Address some of the structural barriers in male and female dominated work areas to encourage both men and women to work in non-traditional work areas.



16 Days of Activism 2021 campaign light projection on Castlemaine Town Hall – 201 candles representing reported cases of family violence in Mount Alexander Shire 2020-2021.



16 Days of Activism 2019 Campaign – local business winning window display

Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025

To build upon the Audit Data findings, the following seven objectives have been developed for this GEAP:

1. increase awareness, education, and support;
2. continue the organisation's commitment to equity principles through embedding these principles in policy development;
3. ensure diversity is a factor considered in the strategic planning process;
4. ensure diversity is factored into everyday workplace practices - such as recruitment, promotion, secondment;
5. promote and encourage all genders to seek non-traditional roles;
6. provide a workplace that supports employees experiencing family violence;
7. continue advocating for structural and systemic change at all levels of government to achieve gender equality.

The following is an assessment of the organisation against the seven equality indicators, considering our strengths and where the organisation can improve its performance. Actions that flow from this assessment are outlined in Appendix 1.

Indicator 1: Gender composition of all levels of the workforce

Strength: We have a gender balanced workforce overall, with 59% of the workforce being comprised of women. Women and men still tend to be congregated in traditional work areas or roles.

The Audit Data indicates that women are congregated in roles that offer workplace flexibility – such as office based or caring roles. This is consistent with the

organisation's gendered composition of part-time and casual workers. Parental and carers leave as well as part-time/casual employment help employees balance paid work with other responsibilities. It is well researched and understood the reasons of why more women access flexible work arrangements than men:

- Societal expectations continue to regard women as 'care givers' and men as 'bread winners' – for example on average, women spend almost 32 hours a week on household labour and caring for children, compared with only 19 hours by men. This can impact on how women and men contribute and participate in the workforce, by:
 - a. women being attracted or drawn or channelled into roles that are more suitable/acceptable for part time or flexible work arrangements;
 - b. men being attracted or drawn or channelled into roles that are full time, or which attract overtime or other payments.
- It can be seen as more socially acceptable for women to do certain work, such as Personal Care Workers and for men to do certain work such as labouring work.
- Some roles are better structured for flexible work arrangements, such as office based or administration roles, traditionally dominated by women. These arrangements are more difficult structurally in male dominated areas, such as in the depot.
- It can be seen as generally more socially acceptable for women to work part time or not to work in paid employment at all, than for men to do so.

In conclusion, there are structural as well as societal barriers that affect if and how

men and women access the workplace. It is for this reason the organisation should justifiably be proud that it has 30 men working flexibly, or 11.8%, despite some of the barriers mentioned. However, the Audit Data indicates that these men are predominantly located in office-based roles, not traditional male roles, so there is work to be done in the traditional male areas.

MASC should also be justifiably proud that it is an organisation where employees of all genders have been able to access well paid, flexible jobs.

Areas for Improvement: Collecting broad employee data

The organisation's current systems and processes do not collect data on, for example, disability, aboriginality, cultural identity, religion, sexual orientation or age.

The collection of this information could lead to tailored policies, programs, and services by highlighting groups of employees who would benefit from greater resourcing, support, and the elimination of barriers in the workplace.

The organisation will work towards a safe and transparent process to capture this data. However, the Gender Audit and consultation processes have highlighted issues of employee privacy. As a small regional local council, with only 254 employees, the collection of this data needs to be carefully considered as the collected information could identify individual employees due to the inherently small numbers of employees and the regional nature of the Shire.

Collecting personal data would need to be undertaken in accordance with privacy legislation and provide an opportunity for employee concerns to be raised and addressed.

Ultimately it is the decision of the individual if they choose to disclose personal information, and this is respected and supported.

Indicator 2: Gender composition of governing bodies

Following the council elections in October 2020, Victoria leads the country in terms of the proportion of female councillors, representing a total of 43.8 per cent of councillors. This is a marked increase from the previous high of 38 per cent. Of the 76 councils that went to election, 47 now have a majority of women councillors or gender parity. This is a significant step towards the goal of 50 per cent representation by 2025 set out in the Victorian Government's Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Act Strategy.

Strength: We have female representation on Council and the sitting Council prior to the 2020 election we had a female Mayor.

Areas for improvement: We have unequal representation of females and males on Council - only two women out of seven councillors.

The Municipal Association of Victoria and the Victorian Local Governance Association have tailored programs to assist Councils to work with women to encourage more women to run for Council positions. As a signatory of the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter, the Council can use these resources to engage with the women of Mount Alexander Shire.

Indicator 3: Pay Equity

Strength: This is an area with a particularly strong result. When assessed on full time equivalent salaries, women earned more than men in comparison to other workplaces, Nationally, women are paid on average 14% less per week than men. Within the organisation, on actual salaries, women were paid on average \$71,074 whereas men are paid on average \$65,191.

Areas for improvement: We will continue to look at pay equity data as it becomes available to ensure the organisation remains equitable in this area.

When considering pay equity principles the data has shown that no pay differences exist in relation to gender.

The organisation is leading by example. This makes working for local government an attractive proposition and sets an aspirational target for other organisations.

Indicator 4: Sexual harassment

In 2019, more than 20% of Victorian women reported experiencing sexual harassment in the previous 12 months, compared with less than 10% of Victorian men. Within the Victorian Public Sector, 10% of women report experiencing sexual harassment, compared to 7% of men. The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) surveyed university students in 2016 and found that 32% of women and 17% of men had experienced sexual harassment in a university setting.

Strength: There were no reported cases of sexual harassment

Areas for improvement: The People Matter data cites unreported incidents of sexual harassment.



Table 3 Sexual harassment in the organisation

Measure	Employment Type	Employment Type	Gender Man	Gender Woman
	Non-ongoing	Ongoing		
Inappropriate physical contact (including momentary or brief physical contact)		3%		2%
Inappropriate staring or leering that made you feel intimidated		2%		2%
Intrusive questions about your private life or comments about your physical appearance	8%	2%	4%	4%
No, I have not experienced any of the above behaviours	92%	89%	92%	89%
Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made you feel offended (in either a group or one on one situation)	4%	8%	4%	9%
No, I have not witnessed any of the situations above	83%	76%	72%	83%
Violence or aggression against a colleague		10%	12%	4%

Whilst the workplace data showed no reports of sexual harassment, there were cases mentioned in the People Matter survey, as indicated above. This indicates that employees may not be aware of how to report these incidences, and/or are hesitant to report cases and/or there may be other barriers to reporting (such as stigma).

Indicator 5: Recruitment

Strength: Vacancies are not restricted to specific genders.

To encourage a diverse and gender equal workforce, applications are welcomed from people of all genders particularly within certain fields historically dominated by one gender. These areas include the Works, Parks and Gardens and Direct Care Worker teams.

As outlined in the Mount Alexander Shire Council Recruitment Policy, selection panels for all vacancies are required to give consideration to the gender and diversity of panel members. Shortlisting is undertaken with consideration to an applicant’s alignment with organisational values and culture, demonstrated experience, the required qualifications and responses to questions or selection criteria as required.

There are no roles within Council that are restricted to a specific gender.

Areas for improvement: Ensuring all advertisements and selection processes encourage applicants of all genders and all work locations have adequate facilities to accommodate the recruitment of staff of all genders.

Indicator 6: Leave

Strength: The organisation supports all employees to access family and other leave.

Women accessed both paid and unpaid parental leave more than men. The reasons, as with gender dominance of certain roles, can also be associated with social stereotypes.

Gender neutralising leave, such as carers leave, parental leave and family violence leave, as well as encouraging men and women to access traditionally female leave arrangements, can have long term benefits to the organisation. These benefits include positive health and wellbeing outcomes, increasing job satisfaction, higher retention rates, being considered an attractive employer and contributing to a happy and productive workplace.

Areas for improvement: Education, awareness, and support for all genders to access to workplace flexibility.

Flexible work arrangements and parental & carers leave entitlements

As an organisation, many employees are accessing flexible working arrangements.

Men are more likely than women to work full-time with 57.7% of men doing so, while women are more likely to utilise flexible working arrangements with 42% of women doing so.

Other flexibility arrangements that are being accessed by all staff are recorded as follows:

Shift swap	1%
Working more hours over fewer days	6%
Flexible start and finish times	43%
Part-time	23%
Job sharing	1%
Study leave	3%
Purchased leave	5%
Using leave to work flexible hours	15%
Other	5%
Working from an alternative location (e.g. home, hub/shared work space)*	43%

*Figures inflated due COVID 19 related working from home requirements

Family violence

Evidence shows that family violence impacts all facets of a person's life including the workplace. Family violence can affect a person's ability to function and contribute to society. Many people experiencing family violence experience high levels of stress, anxiety and economic stress compounded by isolation from family and friends and possibly homelessness.

Family support needs and caring responsibilities can have a health and wellbeing and economic impact on the organisation. Impacts are varied and include factors such as absenteeism and productivity. The organisation can provide support and education on health and wellbeing initiatives, access to support agencies (such as financial advice, prevention of domestic and family violence) to enable supports that will benefit both employees and the organisation.

The prevalence of family violence is well documented, in Australia 1 in 3 women experienced violence perpetrated by a man they know, however, the Audit Data shows that only 0.8% of employees have accessed family violence leave. Opportunities exist to raise awareness in a safe environment of eligibility criteria and how to access leave entitlements.

Indicator 7: Gendered segregation within the workplace

Strength: An increasingly diverse employment of women and men. For example, more women road workers and male care givers.

Areas for improvement: Improve single gender dominated work areas.

As a sector, local government tends to offer a diverse and varied employment due to the very nature of the business lending itself to areas traditionally dominated by a composition of one gender over another, for example women as customer service officers and Direct Care Workers and men as engineers or rubbish collectors.

Gender Equality Action Plan methodology

The GEAP has been developed in alignment with the guidelines developed by the Gender Equality Commission. The Gender Equality Principles have also been taken into consideration and measured against the Equality Indicators as required by the Act.

A Gender Equality Act Project Plan and Communications Plan were developed and implemented through:

1. **Gaining leadership support:** Promoted in the CEO weekly email, staff newsletter, intranet.
2. **Engagement and consultation:** Presentations and workshops with all levels of the organisation, business units, internal and external committees – Wellbeing Committee, Occupational Health and Safety Committee, Healthy Heart of Victoria PCG, Mount Alexander LGBTIQ+ Steering Group and union representatives.
3. **Establishing the Gender Equality Working Group (and its Terms of Reference)** which holds meetings as required and has 12 members representing the following departments of the Shire:
 - People and Culture
 - Economic and Culture
 - Visitor Services
 - Community Wellbeing
 - Parks, Recreation and Facilities
 - Community Partnerships
 - Communications and Customer Service
 - Operations.
4. **Implementing the People Matter survey** which was communicated and distributed in 2021 and completed by 86 staff (34% of workforce).
5. **Conducting the Workplace Gender Audit** which collected data on 254 employees and was analysed against the Gender Equality Indicators.
6. **Reviewing the Shires existing policies, strategies, and plans including but not limited to:**
 - Council Plan 2021-2025
 - Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025
 - Gender Equity Action Plan 2016
 - Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Action Plan 2016
 - Mount Alexander Gender Equity Statement 2014
 - Reconciliation Plan 2020-2023
 - Early Years Plan 2017-2021
 - Middle Years Plan 2020-2023
 - Integrated Municipal Emergency Management Plan 2018; and
 - Disability Action Plan (in development)
7. **Referring to relevant guidelines, reports, plans and documents for best practice,** including:
 - the Gender Equality Act 2020
 - the Commission for Gender Equality guidance material
 - the Royal Commission into Family Violence Report
 - Safe and Strong – Victoria’s First Gender Equality Strategy 2018
 - Victorian Auditor General’s Office (VAGO) Sexual Harassment in Local Government Report 2020⁷.

8. **Keeping the workforce informed** by providing progress updates which are shared and published in the monthly staff newsletter, at unit meetings, as agenda items, on the intranet, and in the CEO's weekly email as appropriate.

This GEAP will be publicly available on the organisations website.



⁷ Free from violence - Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women, second action plan 2022-2025 La Trobe University Private Lives 3 - The Health and Wellbeing of LGBTIQ People in Australia Report 2020, Rainbow Health Victoria - Pride in Prevention, A guide to primary prevention of family violence experienced by LGBTIQ communities 2019-2021, LGBTIQ Inclusive Language Guide - Victorian Government, Our Watch - Workplace Equality and Respect and Our Watch - Change the Story, Australian Human Rights Commission, Face the facts, Gender Equality 2018 VicHealth (En)countering Resistance Report, Central Victorian PCP Prevention Report 2017-2021

Leadership and strategic resource plan

The Executive Team have endorsed this GEAP and was involved in its development and in the consultation processes, which ultimately was approved by the Chief Executive Officer.

The Manager of People and Culture will take accountability for implementing the GEAP and reporting to the Commission for Gender Equality.

The implementation will be led and coordinated by the People and Culture team supported by the CEO's office, the Executive Team and Leadership Team, to ensure a cross organisational approach.

Funding opportunities will be sought to assist with implementing projects, training and utilisation of any consultants.

Measuring Progress

Progress will be measured and evaluated through organisational reporting systems. This will ensure that progress and outcomes associated with the GEAP and Gender Impact Assessments are measured, and that continuous


improvement opportunities are sought. The establishment of processes, including measuring/evaluation processes are included as an action in the GEAP.




Appendix 1


Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025


Executive - **Exec**, Manager People and Culture - **MPC**, People and Culture - **P&C**, Community Partnerships - **CP**, Communications - Comms, Economy and Culture - **Eco Dev**, Governance - **Gov**, Lead project officer - **LPO**, Information and Technology - **IT**, Gender Equality Act Working Group - **GEWG**, Managers – refers to all business unit managers, Parks Recreation and Community Facilities - **PRCF**


Focus Areas	Strategies	Who	Year	Measures	Indicator
1. Awareness, education & training 	1.1 Develop a baseline of employees understanding of gender equity principles and current Human Resources procedures and reporting lines through conducting an all staff survey.	P&C	2	Development of and implementation of an all employee survey.	other
	1.2 Increase awareness with employees to develop the skills to recognise gender inequalities and gendered segregation of occupations within the workplace and industry.	P&C	2	Increased understanding of the impact of gender stereotypes on roles within the organisation.	7
	1.3 Implement an organisation wide awareness program and training modules around intersectionality i.e. LGBTIQ+ Inclusive training, cultural awareness training.	P&C	2	Development of an ongoing training model to ensure that staff training and practices are embedded in the yearly training calendar.	7
	1.4 Implement an organisation wide awareness program and training modules for the prevention of domestic and family violence, violence against women and intimate partner violence - e.g. disclosure response training, managing backlash & resistance, unconscious bias, bystander action training, coercive control, intimate partner violence.	P&C	2	Increased understanding of the drivers of gender-based violence and increased confidence of employees to respond.	4
	1.5 Continue to promote the current Inclusion Training Program - modules include, Gender, LGBTIQ+, Age, Disability, Culture and Indigenous topics (mandatory). Ensure staff completion	P&C	1	Raised awareness and understanding of the diverse nature of people's lived experiences.	7


Focus Areas	Strategies	Who	Year	Measures	Indicator
	1.6 Increase the knowledge base and skill level of the Gender Equality working group of the Gender Equality Act requirements and gender equity principles through training.	P&C	1	Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) champions to become internal subject matter experts.	5
	1.7 Improved awareness and understanding by all employees of sexual harassment and bullying protocols and the associated reporting process.	P&C	2	A workforce that is aware of the standard of behaviour expected in the workplace, and understand the reporting process if this type of behaviour is experienced.	4
	1.8 Improved understanding and awareness to possible barriers of leave options, conditions and flexible work arrangements. E.g. Is language used in policies encouraging of people of all genders to take carers leave, what are the barriers that that employees experience to accessing these options.	P&C	2	Create a workforce that is aware and confident of their rights and accountabilities.	6
	1.9 Increase education of P&C policies and reporting pathways.	P&C	2	Create a workforce that is aware and confident of their rights and accountabilities.	6


Focus Areas	Strategies	Who	Year	Measures	Indicator
2. Commitment & policy 	2.1 Promote more diverse representation from across the hierarchy of the organisation to become members of the Gender Equality working group.	P&C	1	Increased diversity and participation in the working group.	2
	2.2 Incorporate the Gender Equality Act and associated requirements into relevant organisation policies and protocols.	Gov	1	Increased awareness and adherence of the Gender Equality Act.	1
	2.3 Review the current Gender Equity Statement for validity and accuracy.	Exec	2	A statement that reflects the organisation's commitment and richer understanding of Gender Equality Act in 2022.	1
	2.4 Update organisational reporting templates to include the Gender Equality Act and Gender Equality Statement.	Gov	1	Updated organisational reporting templates and relevant documents.	Other
	2.5 Encourage women's active participation in local government - by reaffirming the VLGA Women's Charter by nominating a Charter Champion (a Councillor) to overview the reaffirmation. Review Charter to understand any barriers women face to participate.	Gov	4	Increased participation of women in the next Council elections and more women elected to Council.	2
	2.6 Review resources available to implement the Actions against the Women's Charter.	MPC	2	Committed to ensuring that the reaffirming will occur.	2
	2.7 Review and update the sexual harassment policy and reporting pathway.	P&C	3	Updated policy endorsed and employees trained.	4

Focus Areas	Strategies	Who	Year	Measures	Indicator
3. Strategic planning 	3.1 Ensure resources are available to implement the Actions of the Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025.	MPC	1	Create employee objectives as part of the performance review process.	Other
	3.2 Develop a Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) implementation plan.	P&C	1	Increased efficiency and employee confidence to conduct GIA's.	Other
	3.3 Embed the Gender Equality Act into the organisations strategic documents.	Exec	3	All relevant documents updated.	Other
	3.4 Add measures against the GEAP Action items and reported against on a quarterly basis with regard to outcomes and measures from completed GIA's.	MPC, Exec	3	Actions reported on quarterly.	Other
	3.5 Coordinate and manage the Gender Equality Act Working Group as per the Terms of Reference, to include keeping the group informed of any changes to the Gender Equality Act, reporting the results of future workplace gender audits and collaboration to input into future GEAPs.	P&C, GEWG	ongoing	Continue with meetings as scheduled.	1
	3.6 Gender equality principles embedded within the Workforce Plan.	MPC	2	Gender equality principles included in the Workforce Plan.	1
	3.7 Involve internal committees & working groups, i.e. Health & Wellbeing Committee, OH&S Committee to ensure gender is factored on any initiatives and projects as needed.	MPC	2	Inclusion of Gender Equality as a standard agenda item for relevant committees.	1

Focus Areas	Strategies	Who	Year	Measures	Indicator
4. Embedding diversity into everyday practice 	4.1 Update internal systems ('My Details') to include employee diversity questions-pronouns and gender identity.	P&C, IT	1	Provide a welcoming and safe environment for existing and new employees	5
	4.2 Review language and gendered messaging in corporate documents i.e. Position Descriptions, employment/induction documents, EOI's.	P&C, Managers	2	Existing and new employees feel welcome and be their true selves.	5
	4.3 Promote and review opportunities to increase inclusion and diversity through Communications.	Comms	1	Increased use of gender equity principles in all communications.	5
	4.4 Complete a Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) utilising the toolkit and template.	Managers	4	GIA's completed and are compliant to guidelines.	7
	4.5 Include options on external surveys and consultation material to include options for pronouns & gender identity as well as an-opt out option.	Comms, Managers	2	Improve ability to collect data.	1
	4.6 Include options on internal surveys and consultation material to include options for pronouns & gender identity as well as an-opt out option.	P&C, Comms	2	Opportunity to collect desegregated data and employees sees themselves reflected in the options for data collection.	1
	4.7 Take all opportunities to collect desegregated data, for example women with disability to better understand individual needs and opportunities.	P&C, LPO, Managers	4	Capture intersectional data to inform the next GEAP.	7

Focus Areas	Strategies	Who	Year	Measures	Indicator
5. Promote and encourage all genders into non-traditional roles 	5.1 Undertake an assessment of work areas with consideration to gender to understand the barriers that prevent anyone of any gender to work in the space, for example the men's toilet at the Depot opens directly into the lunch room and the women's toilet is accessed outside by stairs only.	P&C	3	Create an appropriate audit process.	1 & 7
	5.2 Investigate ways to encourage and build gender balance in single dominated gender roles with the goal of offering apprenticeship / traineeship programs. Implement the findings and mechanisms to address the barriers.	P&C	4	More people employed into non-traditional gender work roles.	1 & 7
	5.3 Improve workspaces, meeting spaces and communal areas and facilities to be accessible, safe, welcoming and comfortable spaces to be in for all genders.	P&C	4	Opportunities identified through the assessment of work areas.	1 & 7
	5.4 To acknowledge and celebrate achievements of our diverse employees of all genders.	P&C, GEWG	3	Appropriate plan developed.	7

Focus Areas	Strategies	Who	Year	Measures	Indicator
6. Primary prevention of family violence in the workplace 	6.1 Raise awareness of family violence and violence against women (prevalence, dynamics, impacts, underlying drivers) by participating in evidence-based campaigns and initiatives such as (but not limited to) 16-Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence, Walk Against Family Violence.	CP, Comms, GEWG,	ongoing	The organisation participates in relevant campaigns.	4

Focus Areas	Strategies	Who	Year	Measures	Indicator
7. Advocacy for structural and systemic change to achieve gender equality 	7.2 Continue collaboration with existing networks, such as Women's Health Loddon Mallee and Loddon Mallee CARE partnership. Loddon Mallee Multicultural Services, MASDAG.	P&C, Exec, CP	ongoing	Knowledgeable employees with up-to-date industry best practice.	other

Appendix 2

Council Plan 2021-2025 and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025 reference.

2021-2025 Council Plan references:

Strategies	These will include:	Council role
Ensure Council is a leader in equity and gender equality	Implementing the Mount Alexander Shire Council Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan	Lead
	Ensuring reporting of inclusion and diversity performance in corporate reporting	Lead
	Developing a gender equity policy and action plan	Lead
Implement initiatives to change the behaviours and attitudes that contribute to family violence in our community	Incorporating family violence strategies into our emergency management responsibilities	Lead
	Developing a Gender Equity Policy and Action Plan	Lead
	Implementing initiatives aligned with the Gender Equality Act 2020	Lead

2021-2025 Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan references:

Objectives	Strategies	Responsibility	Council role	Priority	MPHWP Year	Aligns with priority areas
6.1 Prevent family and gendered violence.	6.1.1 Advocate for the Orange Door to be located within the Shire for enhanced accessibility for people experiencing family and gendered violence.	MASC CH Women's Health Loddon Mallee Centre for Non-Violence Orange door	Advocate	Medium	1-4	5,8,9,10, 11
6.2 Facilitate effective referral mechanisms between key stakeholders.	6.2.1 Align LGA policies and processes with State Government MARAM framework.	MASC MAV DFFH	Lead	High	1-2	5,8,9,10, 11

Objectives	Strategies	Responsibility	Council role	Priority	MPHWP Year	Aligns with priority areas
6.3 Raise the profile of the prevention of violence at events and facilities to ensure safety, access and inclusion for all.	6.3.1 Promote prevention of family and gendered violence at venues and events within the Shire.	MASC CH Asset Management Committees	Partner	Low	3	5,8,9,10, 11
6.4 Ensure emergency management works towards best practice of prevention of family violence.	6.4.1 Promote and support mental health services for people who may be affected by extreme events and emergencies.	MASC CH DHS CCH MNC	Lead	Medium	2-3	5,8,9,10, 11
6.5 Incorporate gender inclusivity and equity in all decision making	6.5.1 Review existing and new Council policies to ensure incorporation of gender equality.	MASC MASLGBTQIA+ Steering Group	Lead	High	2	5,8,9,10, 11

Appendix 3

Glossary of key gender terms and concepts

The following section contains key terms and concepts you may come across in implementing the GEAP, conducting a GIA, or seeking to gain a more nuanced understanding of gender equality.

We acknowledge that Gender Terms and Concepts are constantly evolving and the key terms outlined here are not exhaustive.

Source: *Safe and Strong*, A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy, Safe and Strong Victorian Gender Equality Definitions and Educating for Equity – Glossary of Terms and definitions,

Our Watch, Educating for Gender Equality– Glossary of Terms and definitions

Gender Equality Act 2020, pg. 2-4, Part 1, 3 Definitions

Employee: of a defined entity, means a person employed by the defined entity on a fulltime, part-time, casual or fixed term basis (including an apprentice or trainee) but does not include – (a) a contractor or subcontractor; or (b) an outworker; or (c) a person on a vocational placement; or (d) a student gaining work experience; or a volunteer.

Gender: The socially-constructed differences between men and women, as distinct from ‘sex’, which refers to their biological differences.

Gender-based violence: Violence that is used against someone because of their gender. It describes violence rooted in gender-based power inequalities and gender-based discrimination. While people of all genders can experience gender-based violence, the term is most often used to describe violence against women and girls, because the majority of cases of gender-based violence are perpetrated by men against women.

Gender diverse: People who are gender diverse are those whose gender expression differs from what is socially expected. This includes individuals who identify as agender (having no gender), as bigender (both woman and man) or as non-binary (neither woman nor man). There is a diverse range of non-binary gender identities such as gender-queer, gender neutral, gender fluid and third gendered. Language in this space is still evolving and people may have their own preferred gender identities that are not listed here, and these preferences should be respected.

Gender equality: The equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men and trans and gender-diverse people. Gender 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 and power related to their gender and that these differences should be identified and addressed in a manner that rectifies gender related imbalances.

Gender inequality: The unequal distribution of power, resources, opportunity, and value between people of different genders and sexualities, due to prevailing gendered norms and structures.



Gender identity: A person's innate, deeply felt psychological identification of their gender, which may or may not correspond to the person's designated sex at birth. Many terms may be used to self-describe gender identity (see LGBTIQ+ and gender diverse). A person's gender identity may be different from their biological and physiological sex or sexual orientation and may change over their lifetime.

Gender norms and structures: Ideas about how people should be and act according to the gender they are assigned or identify with. We internalise and learn these 'rules' early in life. This sets up a life-cycle of gender socialisation and stereotyping.

Gender roles: Functions and responsibilities expected to be fulfilled by women and men, boys and girls within society or culture.

Gender stereotypes: Simplistic generalisations about the gender attributes, differences and roles.

Governing body: in relation to a defined entity, means a board of directors, trustees, committee of management, council or other governing authority of the defined entity.

Intersectionality: A methodology of studying the overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination.

Intersex: This refers to the diversity of physical characteristics between the stereotypical male and female characteristics. Intersex people have reproductive organs, chromosomes or other physical sex characteristics that are neither wholly female nor wholly male. Intersex is a description of biological diversity and may or may not be the identity used by an intersex person.

LGBTIQ+: An acronym used to describe members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer or questioning community. It is sometimes used to

include allies or supporters of the LGBTIQ+ community. Other acronyms used to describe this community include LGBTIQ, or LGBTIQA+.

Primary Prevention of family violence and violence against women: are actions, strategies or policies that work to stop violence from occurring in the first place – this means creating conditions where violence is less likely to occur.

Sex: The biological and physical characteristics typically used to define humans as male or female. A person's sex does not mean they have a particular gender identity or sexual orientation.

Sex and gender discrimination: Treating, or proposing to treat, someone unfairly because of their sex or gender. In Australia, it is against the law to treat people unfairly on the basis of their sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, intersex status, marital or relationship status, pregnancy and breastfeeding, and caring responsibilities.

Sexism: Discrimination based on gender, and the attitudes, stereotypes and cultural elements that promote this discrimination. Sexism refers to the language, attitudes, behaviours, and conditions that create, support or reinforce gender inequality. Sexism can take many forms, such as jokes or comments, sexual harassment, or sex discrimination. It can be perpetrated by individuals or embedded within the structures and systems of institutions and organisations.

Sexual harassment: Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours or other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that makes a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated. Sexual harassment can be physical, verbal or written. It is not consensual interaction, flirtation or friendship, or behaviour that is mutually agreed upon. Under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth), sexual harassment in Australia is unlawful.

Sexual harassment can include:

- comments about a person's private life or the way they look
- sexually suggestive behaviour, such as leering or staring
- brushing up against someone, touching, fondling or hugging
- sexually suggestive comments or jokes
- displaying offensive screen savers, photos, calendars or objects
- repeated requests to go out, requests for sex, sexually explicit emails, text messages or posts on social networking sites, and
- sexual assault.

Sexual orientation: A person's sexual or emotional attraction to others. People express their sexuality in different ways. A person's sex or gender does not mean they have a particular sexual orientation, and vice versa.

- A **lesbian** woman is attracted to other women.
- A **gay** person is attracted to people of the same gender as themselves.
- A **bisexual** person is attracted to people of their own gender and other genders.
- A **heterosexual** or 'straight' person is attracted to people of the opposite gender to themselves.
- An **asexual** person does not experience sexual attraction, but may experience romantic attraction towards others.
- A **pansexual** person is attracted to people of all genders, binary or non-binary.
- **Queer** is an umbrella term for diverse gender or sexualities. In the past, queer was used as a discriminatory term and can be offensive to some people, particularly older LGBTIQ+ people. The term has been reclaimed in recent years and is increasingly used by people to describe themselves in an empowering way.

- **Questioning** is used as an umbrella term for people who are still exploring or questioning their gender or sexual orientation. People may not want to have other labels applied to them yet but may want to be clear that they are non-binary or non-heterosexual.

Sexual violence: Any sexual activity that occurs without free and informed consent. It refers to a broad range of sexual behaviours that make a person feel uncomfortable, intimidated, frightened, or threatened. It includes any time a person is forced, coerced or manipulated into any unwanted sexual activity, such as touching, sexual harassment and intimidation; forced marriage; trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation; image-based abuse; sexual assault and rape.

Transgender: An umbrella term referring to people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. A transgender person may identify specifically as transgender or as male or female, or outside of these categories. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Transgender people may identify as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, or in other ways. Also often abbreviated to 'trans'.

Workforce: in relation to a defined entity, means the employees of the entity.

Quotas: Quota systems have been viewed as one of the most effective special measures or affirmative actions for increasing gender equality in participation. There are now 77 countries with constitutional, electoral or political party quotas for women. In countries where women's issues had always been relegated to the lowest priority, increases in the number of women in decision-making positions help move women's agendas up to a higher priority level.

Appendix 4

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