



GENDER EQUALITY ACTION PLAN 2021 - 2025

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INTRODUCTION

Swan Hill Rural City Council (Council) plays a pivotal leadership role to advance gender equality within the community. The design and delivery of our Community Vision and Council Plan and services is the organisational mechanism for charting gender equality and intersectional approaches to our work.

Council recognises that improving gender equality for women, in particular, is an important issue and is endorsed in both our Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (incorporated into the Community Vision and Council Plan 2021-2025) and our Workforce Plan 2021-2025 and supports the delivery of the primary prevention aspects of the Family Violence Prevention Act. 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 within Council.

A Gender Equality Committee has been formed and has overseen, and guided the development of this Plan. The Plan guides initiatives to address gender equality across Council.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Swan Hill Rural City Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land in which we live and pays its respects to their elders, past, present and emerging.

The Wamba Wamba, Latji Latji, Tatti Tatti, Waddi Waddi and Barapa Barapa peoples are the original custodians of the land known as the Swan Hill Rural City and our region remains strong in Aboriginal Cultural heritage values.

The Murray River (Milloo) was a constant source of both food and water and an integral aspect in the day-to-day lives of Aboriginal people.



CEO MESSAGE

Imagine a gender equal world. A world free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination. A world that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive. A world where difference is valued and celebrated.

It is with great pleasure that I present to you Swan Hill Rural City Council's Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025.

Council is committed to providing a workplace where all employees can access and enjoy the same rights, responsibilities, resources and opportunities; and can bring their unique selves to the workplace.

Considerable progress towards gender equality in the workplace has been made, however we know there is much more that we can do. We have outlined three key priorities for our organisation that we will work to achieve by 2025.

- Ensure the language of our communications, recruitment, staff and community engagement is free from bias, encourages diversity and promotes non-traditional roles
- Identify and remove barriers for women to access jobs or career progression
- Build understanding and awareness of discrimination, harassment and violence toward women and provide the tools to call it out

Our Gender Equality Action Plan will assist Council to plan, implement and measure change in order to achieve workplace gender equality. I am pleased to say it has been developed with the meaningful consultation and input from women and men across the organisation.

Swan Hill Rural City Council is committed to lead our organisation and community in achieving gender equality along with the prevention of violence against women and minority groups in our community.

Working alongside our Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (incorporated into the Community Vision and Council Plan 2021-2025) and Workforce Plan 2021-25, this Gender Equality Action Plan will ensure that we attract, develop and retain an inclusive, high performing and engaged workforce that will continue to deliver outstanding services to our community. I commend the Plan to you.

Rosanne Kava

Acting Chief Executive Officer

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Intersectionality: Section 6(8) of the Act outlines 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. The concept of intersectional disadvantage or discrimination is sometimes called intersectionality. Intersectionality explains how people may experience overlapping forms of discrimination or disadvantage based on social characteristics such as (but not limited to) sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, religion, class, socioeconomic status, gender identity, ability or age.¹

Family or Domestic violence: Is an abuse of power. It is the domination, coercion, intimidation and victimisation of one person by another by physical, sexual or emotional means within intimate relationships.⁴

Gender: Refers to the way in which a person identifies or expresses their masculine or feminine characteristics. Gender is generally understood as a social and cultural construction. A person's gender identity or gender expression is not always exclusively male or female and may or may not correspond to their sex.²

Gender equality: Is defined as the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men, trans and gender-diverse people. Equality does not mean that women, men, trans and gender diverse people will become the same but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on their gender.³

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.³

Sex: Refers to a person's biological characteristics. A person's sex is usually described as being male or female. Some people may not be exclusively male or female, which is referred to as intersex. Some people identify as neither male nor female.²

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

Background

The Gender Equality Act 2020 (the Act) requires defined entities to develop a Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP) every four years. The GEAP includes strategies and measures for promoting gender equality in the workplace based on the results of our workplace gender audit.

In order for Council to implement the GEAP, data was collected from The People Matters Survey and through internal Council HR data.

Our workplace gender audit was submitted to the Commission via the reporting platform on 1 December 2021.

Council engaged a Consultant to prepare the Workplace Audit Analysis Report based on the seven key gender equality indicators. The Workplace Audit Analysis Report was shared widely across the organisation and formed the foundation of the consultation process in February 2022. Three consultations sessions were held and a Consultation Report was then provided to Council with recommendations.

Legislative Framework

The Gender Equality Act 2020 requires each Council to address its obligations to promote gender equality in the workplace, consider gender equality when developing policies and programs and delivering services to the public. Council will achieve this through promoting, auditing, delivering on action plans, conducting gender impact assessments, and reporting to the Gender Equality Commission every two years.

Under the Local Government Act 2020, the Chief Executive Officer also has obligations to develop and maintain a Workforce Plan. The overarching principle of workforce planning is to ensure that the Council has assessed, planned, and reviewed its current state and future requirements to deliver on our Community Vision and Council Plan commitments. For that reason, Council's Workforce Plan also addresses gender equality and diversity related to the Gender Equality Act 2020.

Council plays an important role in increasing opportunities and access to programs and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

GENDER EQUALITY ACTION PLAN AND OBJECTIVES

The Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025 (GEAP) and objectives is building on a foundation of engagement and emerging capacity towards gender equality and intersectional inclusion. This is embedded in the Community Vision and Council Plan that highlights the value of Fairness; embracing diversity and ensuring everyone is treated equally.

Council has developed objectives for each of the seven indicators, these are outlined in further detail in the Strategies and Measures section on page 37.

Objectives

Indicator 1 – Gender composition at all levels of the Swan Hill Rural City Council workforce

- 1.1 Develop and implement gender equality policies, practices and data collection across the organisation.
- 1.2 Increase the visibility of women, men and gender diverse people in non-traditional roles.
- 1.3 Appropriate use of gender neutral and inclusive languages and diverse images in Council communications.
- 1.4 Leadership commitment to gender and intersectionality equality.

Indicator 2 – Gender composition of governing bodies

- 2.1 Increase the visibility of women and people of diverse genders as Councillors.

Indicator 3 – Equal remuneration

- 3.1. Decrease the gender pay gap.

Indicator 4 – Sexual harassment

- 4.1. A workplace free from sexual harassment, bullying and discrimination.
- 4.2. Maintain awareness and promote prevention of violence against women and intersectionality.

Indicator 5 – Recruitment and promotion practices

- 5.1. Gender impact reporting including data review indicators to determine staff turnover.
- 5.2. Increase attraction for recruitment of diversity in the workplace.
- 5.3. Strive to achieve equitable outcomes in all recruitment and promotions.

Indicator 6 – Utilisation of flexible work and other support practices

- 6.1. Increase awareness of flexible work arrangements.
- 6.2. Provide support for parental leave, family violence leave and carers leave.

Indicator 7 – Gendered work segregation

- 7.1. Provide professional development on gender, intersectionality and inclusion.
- 7.2. Increase gender and intersectionality awareness and support.



BASELINE AUDIT ANALYSIS

Sources of Data for the Workplace Gender Audit

The Workplace Gender Audit is based on two sources of data – one quantitative and the other qualitative.

Key to the Act and its implementation is that both forms of data are presented in a way that allows for the Commission to compare and contrast public entities across the whole public sector and align the data across common indicators.

The two sources of data are:

- Data from organisation's payroll system aligned and reported against the seven indicators.
- Data from the People Matter Survey which is also reported against the seven indicators based upon a consistent set of employee experience questions set by the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector.

People Matter Survey:

A total of 133 respondents completed the People Matter Survey which represents 53% of Swan Hill Rural City Council's workforce.

The Women's Health Atlas⁵ was considered in relation to shaping an understanding of the local community, the demographics and key indicators of gender and rates of violence within the Swan Hill community.

Swan Hill Rural City Council Workplace Gender Audit Report

The following Swan Hill Rural City Council Workplace Gender Audit report was prepared by Dr Genine Hook, Gender Equality Consultant who was engaged by Council to analyse the Workplace Gender Audit data and provide key insights.

SWAN HILL RURAL CITY COUNCIL WORKPLACE GENDER AUDIT REPORT AGAINST 7 WORKPLACE GENDER EQUALITY INDICATORS



INDICATOR 1: GENDER COMPOSITION

This indicator helps organisations examine where it can benefit from greater diversity by highlighting whether there is equality of representation across all levels. In a gender-equitable workplace, all employees will have equitable access to opportunities, responsibilities and outcomes. This includes equitable access to different modes of employment and career progression through various levels of management

Composition impacts performance, decision making and culture. That is, a lack of diversity in thinking and workplace leadership impedes innovation.

Outcomes from this indicator are linked to and inform other indicators.

Gender composition at all levels of the Swan Hill Rural City Council workforce

Figure 1 displays the proportions of men and women who make up the Swan Hill Rural City Council's 306-person workforce.

Swan Hill Rural City Council has 186 women and 120 men currently employed, with women representing 61% (186) of Swan Hill Rural City Council's workforce and men representing 39% (120) of the Swan Hill Rural City Council team.

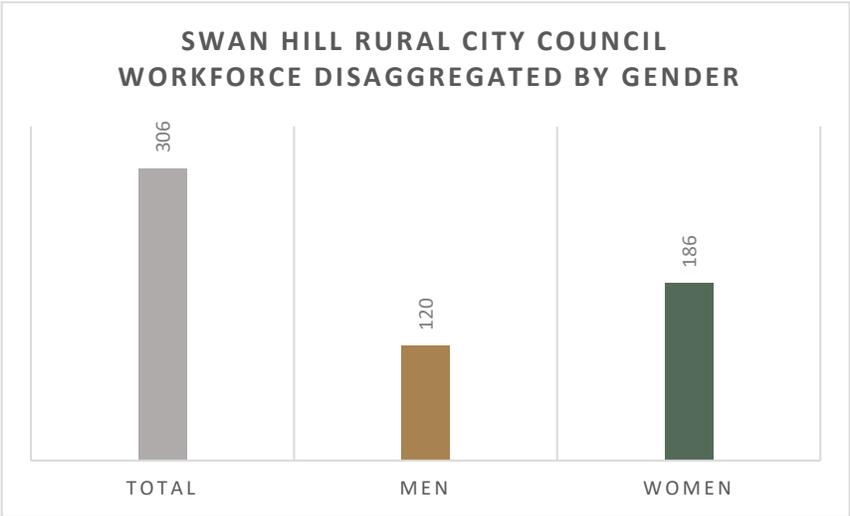


Figure 1a. Total proportions of staff, disaggregated by gender. Note: Headcount includes full-time, part-time, casual and contract staff.

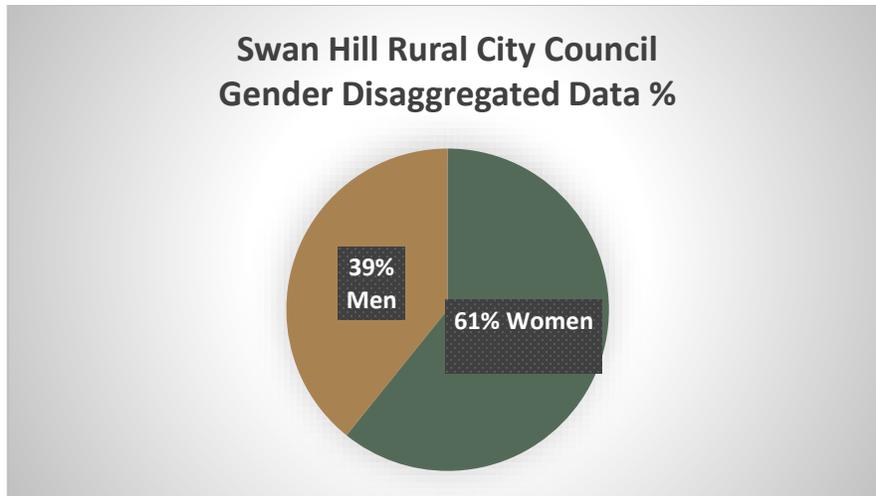


Figure 1b. Total percentage of staff, disaggregated by gender. Note: Headcount includes full-time, part-time, casual and contract staff.

Figure 2 shows that:

- The **Executive Team** (CEO and Level -1) includes **2 women** and **4 men**.
- The **Senior Leadership Team** (CEO and Levels -1 and -2) includes **8 women** and **10 men**.
- An overall picture of the gender disaggregated data across all levels of the workforce.

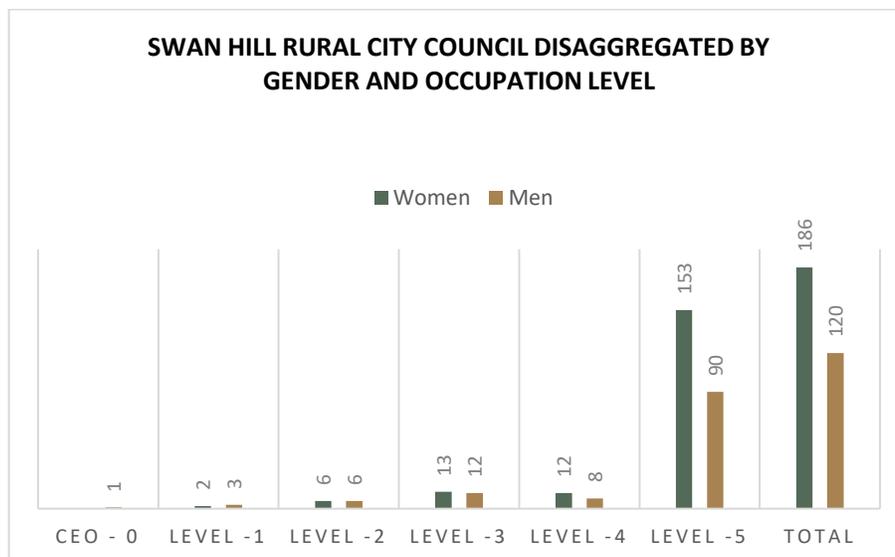


Figure 2. Breakdown of staff by level, disaggregated by gender. Note: Headcount includes full-time, part-time, casual and contract staff. Key: 0 = CEO, -1 = directors who report to CEO, -2 to -4 = direct reports of the level above.

Breakdown by age

Figure 3 shows the distribution of age for the Swan Hill Rural City Council team based on the responses from the People Matter Survey.

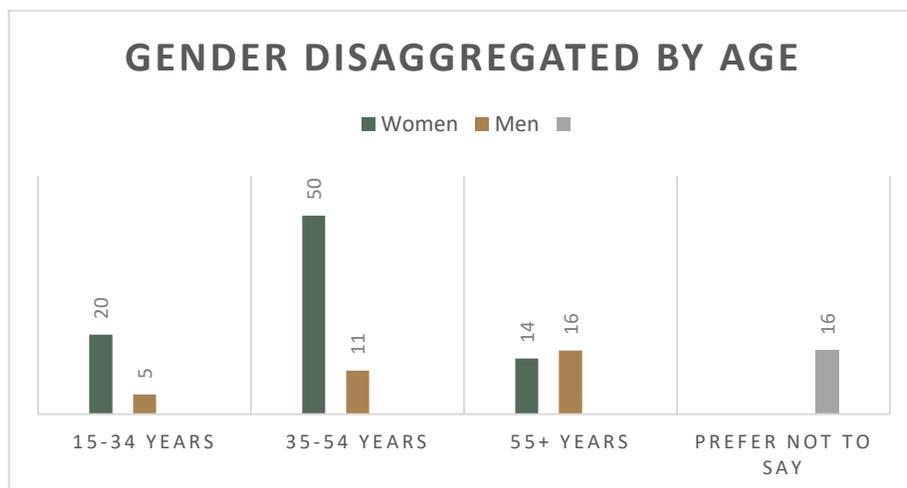


Figure 3. Breakdown of staff by age, disaggregated by gender.

Gender disaggregated data by age is critical because it can indicate a power imbalance between the male and female staff. Often and traditionally, staff who retain little to no power are typically younger and female, whereas the staff who hold positions of power are older men. Swan Hill Rural City Council data shows strong age distribution across the age ranges, with a high level of women ($n=20$) working in the organisation in the younger age range which can assist to shape career progression and leadership potential in the future.

Diversity and inclusion – gender and intersectional insights

Additional insights from the 2021 *People Matter Survey*, can provide a useful overview of the culture and workforce experiences at Swan Hill Rural City Council. These insights are critical for understanding and improving professional experiences and retention across the team. The focus for this current data analysis is on gendered experiences and responses, with a critical exploration of significant gaps in responses from men and women to key workplace gender equality questions from the *People Matter Survey*.

When asked if there is a positive culture within my organisation in relation to employees with disability, only 69% of men and 49% of women felt that this was the case. Similarly, when asked if disability was not a barrier to success in my organisation, responses from both Men (66%) and women (48%) illustrate a high level of concern in relation to inclusion particularly in relation to disability. In comparison with other response rates, these survey questions relating to disability are low and may therefore indicate further review and work is required to support Swan Hill Rural City Council team members living with a disability.

It is also important to note very low responses levels to questions of positive culture in relation to employees from the LGBTIQ+ community with only 37% of men and 44% of women agreeing or strongly agreeing with this question. These very low response rate illustrates an area of concern and it is suggested that a further exploration of experiences of the queer community within the organisation is prioritised.

The People Matter Survey data shows **63% of men and 69% of women agreed that senior leaders actively support diversity and inclusion in the workplace** which perhaps suggests policies, practices and successes in this area could be developed and more widely shared and profiled across the organisation. However, stronger results are evident in the survey in relation to the question - “people in my workgroup actively support diversity and inclusion in the workplace” the survey found higher positive responses with **83% of men and 85% of women** agreeing with this question. The People Matter Survey also asked if workers “feel culturally safe at work” with **74% of men and 84% of women** agreeing with this statement. Strong responses in relation to managers’ management of diversity were seen through the response to the question – “My manager works effectively with people from diverse backgrounds”, with **83% of men and 82% of women** agreeing with this statement. This data shows a gap between people’s experiences of diversity and inclusion with their workgroups and managers, compared to less confidence with senior leaders.

Both men and women responded with low levels of confidence when asked if the “organisation takes steps to eliminate bullying, harassment and discrimination”, with **66% of men and 64% of women** agreeing with this statement. This is concerning given the survey responses to experiences of bullying, with **11% of men and 18% of women** sharing that they had experiences of bullying and **17% of men and 22% of women** stating that they had witnessed bullying of a colleague. Countering this response level is the much higher positive response rate to the question – “My organisation encourages respectful workplace behaviours” **with 74% of men and 84% of women** responding that this encouragement is in place at Swan Hill Rural City Council.

Initial Intersectional insights can be explored through two important questions as part of the *People Matter Survey* data-set, including the creation of positive organisation culture and reducing barriers to success across the workforce for diverse team-members across the organisation. Figures 4 and 5 below illustrate the level of positivity and the perceptions of barriers to success for key cohorts for inclusion and ensuring the Swan Hill Rural City Council reflects the community it serves.

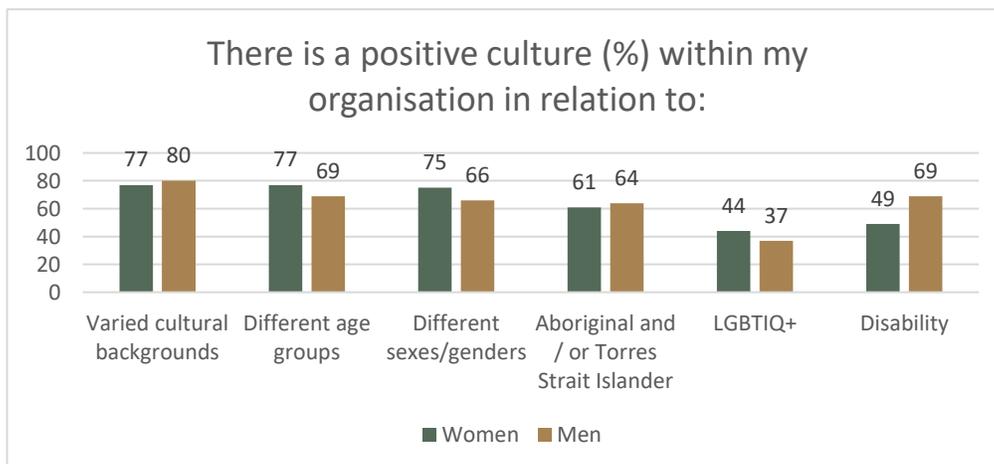


Figure 4. Percentage breakdown of positive culture at Swan Hill Rural City Council, intersectional factors disaggregated by gender.

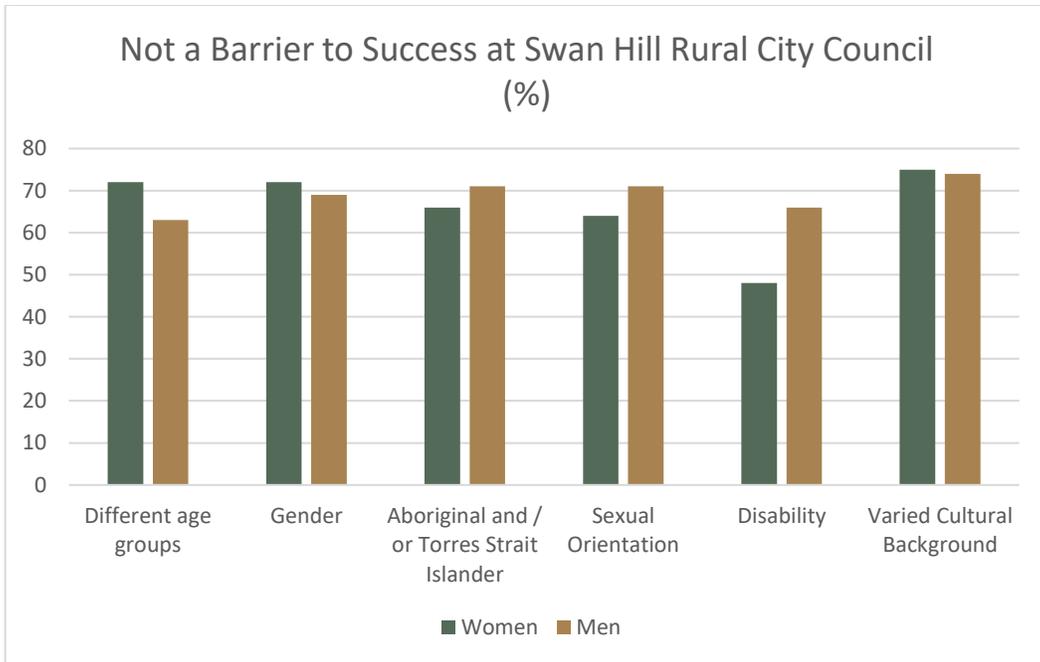


Figure 5. Percentage breakdown of perceptions of intersectional barriers to success, disaggregated by gender.

The People Matter Survey also questioned the Swan Hill Rural City Council team in relation to the fair distribution of work, pleasingly, the response to this question was very relatively even across both genders. A strong positive response was recorded as Figure 6 below illustrates.

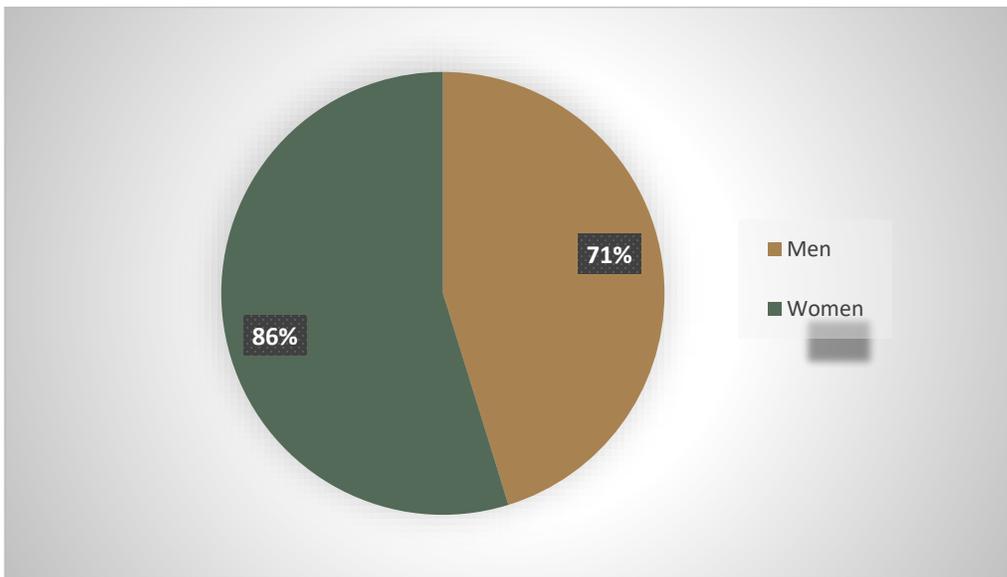


Figure 6. Breakdown of fair workload distribution, disaggregated by gender.

INDICATOR 2: GENDER COMPOSITION OF GOVERNING BODIES

This indicator reports on female representation in the governing bodies.

Boards, councils, committees of management and other governing bodies make important decisions about finances and strategy. It's important that governing bodies have diverse voices at the table. The Victorian Government has made a commitment that at least 50% of all new appointments to courts and paid government boards will be women. Consistently collecting and reporting this data will help ensure more gender-balanced governing bodies.

Advocacy from the Victorian Local Government Association (VLGA) has developed the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter – Local Women Leading Change¹ that works towards women representing 50% of local government councillors across Victoria.

The Swan Hill Rural City Council's governing body is the Council which has seven members. At 30 June 2021 Bill Moar was the Mayor. Of the six other member of the Council, three are women and three are men. It is important to note that the current Mayor is a woman with Jade Benham elected as Mayor in November 2021².

Further considerations of intersectional approaches to the composition of the governing body will be critical in the future, both to reflect the broader Swan Hill community and to successfully implement the Gender Equality Act 2020.

¹ [Local Women Leading Change | VLGA | Victorian Local Governance Association](#)

² [Mayor and Councillors - Swan Hill Rural City Council](#)

INDICATOR 3: EQUAL REMUNERATION

Recent national analyses have identified a persistent gender pay gap, favouring men, for full-time workers in all industries and occupational categories.³ Across the Victorian public sector, there is currently a 10.7% gender pay gap. While women make up 68% of the public sector workforce, they are significantly over-represented in lower paid roles. In public sector leadership positions, a gender pay gap favouring men also persists.⁴

Beyond the need to meet legal and moral obligations, additional organisational benefits of achieving gender pay equity include improved attraction of talent through building a reputation as an employer of choice, and increased efficiency and productivity through retention of staff and reduced turnover costs.⁵

How is the pay gap measured?

The gender pay gap is commonly influenced by a number of factors, including:

- Conscious and unconscious discrimination and bias in hiring and pay decisions.
- Women and men working in different industries and different jobs, with female-dominated industries and jobs attracting lower wages.
- Lack of workplace flexibility to accommodate caring and other responsibilities, especially in senior roles.
- High rates of part-time work for women.
- Women's greater time out of the workforce for caring responsibilities impacting career progression and opportunities.
- Women's disproportionate share of unpaid caring and domestic work.

Equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value

The gender pay gap equals the average (or mean) total remuneration.

The full-time total remuneration gender pay gap based on WGEA data is 20.1%, meaning men working full-time earn nearly \$25,534 a year more than women working full-time.⁶

Breakdown by Gross Base Salary at Swan Hill Rural City Council.

Figure 7 and 8 shows the gendered nature of the four gross base salary ranges collected via the People Matter Survey. This data shows that women are clustered at the lowest salary range of below \$65k and that women have very low representation at the highest salary range of +\$125K.

³ Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2021, Gender Pay Gap Fact Sheet

⁴ Victorian Public Sector Commission, 2020, Employee and Gender Pay Gap

⁵ Fair Work Commission, Gender Pay Equity Best Practice Guide; Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2016, Guide to Gender Pay Equity

⁶ [Australia's Gender Pay Gap Statistics | WGEA](#)

Figures for each salary range:

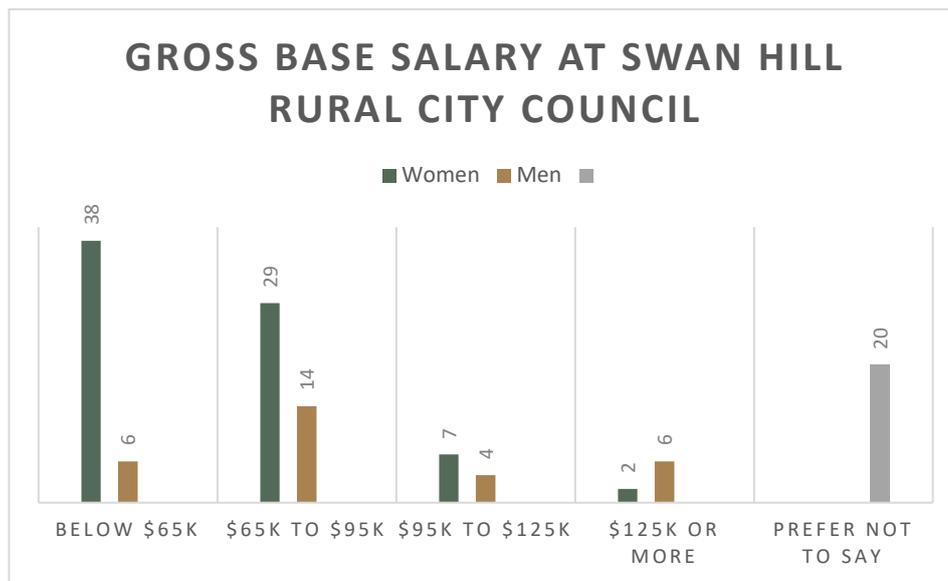


Figure 7. – Gross Base Salary gender disaggregated – People Matter Survey Data

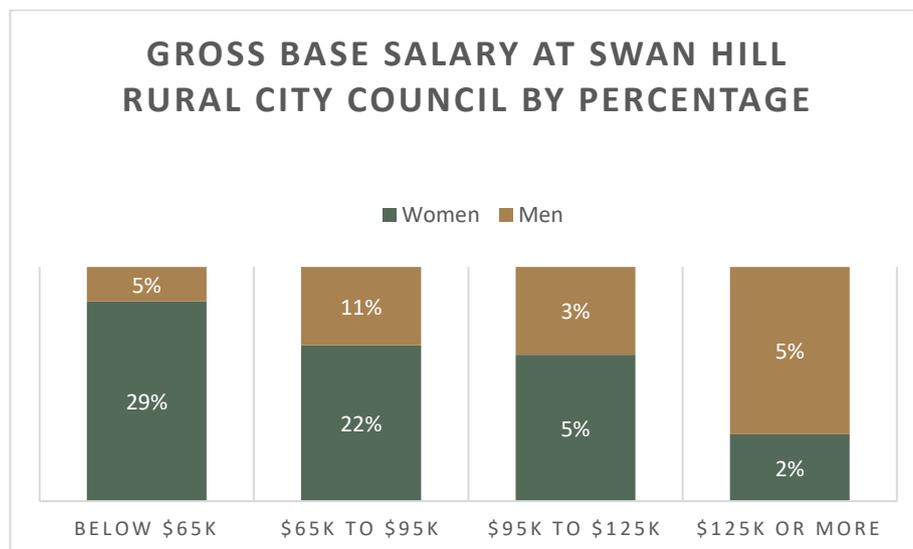


Figure 8. – Gross Base Salary gender disaggregated by percentage of **survey** responses (n=133).

Total Remuneration

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency reports the full-time total remuneration gender pay gap based on WGEA data is 20.1%, meaning men working full-time earn nearly \$25,534 a year more than women working full-time⁷. Total remuneration is a critical gender equality indicator because it includes full-time base salary plus any additional benefits payable directly or indirectly, whether in cash or in a form other than cash. Includes: bonus payments (including performance pay), superannuation, discretionary pay, overtime, other allowances and other benefits.

⁷ [Australia's Gender Pay Gap Statistics | WGEA](#)

This report has calculated the remuneration gap for Swan Hill Rural City Council management/leadership for Levels -1, -2 and -3. As figure 9 below demonstrates, at level -1 the yearly remuneration gap on average is \$11,721.00. The averaged gap for total remuneration between men and women is also evident at level -2 with women earning \$13,428.00 less. A \$6,086.00 gap also exists at level -3 with men earning more than women at this level for average total remuneration.

Further investigation of occupation category coding (ANZSCO) may offer additional understandings of these gaps. Figure nine illustrates average total remuneration, with employment basis also critical in understanding the layers of remuneration difference and how this is recorded.

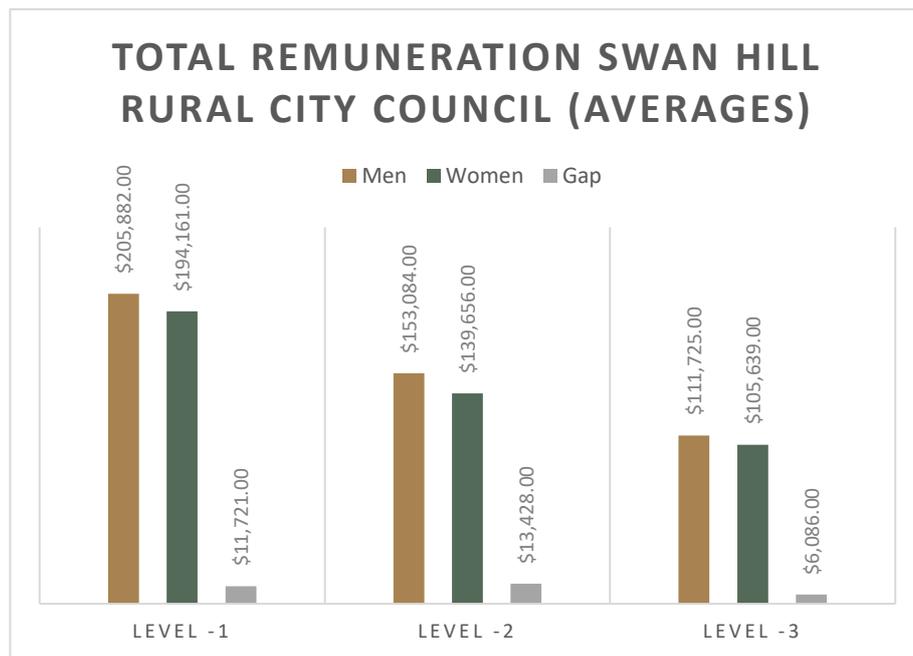


Figure 9. – Average full-time total remuneration gap for categories -1, -2, & -3,

For Swan Hill Rural City Council leadership at Level -1 (Executive) **all five of the team work in a full-time ongoing capacity.**

Similarly, at Level -2 (Senior Leadership) **all twelve of the team**, both men (6) and women (6) work in a **full-time ongoing** capacity.

Of the 12 men at the Senior Management level (-3) all work in a full-time capacity. However, at this level, **six of the 13 women work part-time** which has a significant impact on the average total remuneration at this level.

INDICATOR 4: SEXUAL HARASSMENT

How your workplace responds to incidents and allegations of sex-based discrimination and harassment **has a significant impact on staff safety and perceptions of workplace support for women.** Reporting experiences of sexual harassment builds confidence and retention among employees.

This indicator tracks the workplace environment and enables equality more broadly. Consistent collection and reporting on data leads to transparency and accountability.

Under the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic), employers have a duty to take positive action to eliminate sexual harassment in the workplace.⁸ Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic), employers must also provide and maintain a work environment that is safe and without risk to the health of their employees, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Recent research suggests that “workplace sexual harassment occurs in all industries, in all locations and at all levels.”⁹ Recent reports by the Victorian Auditor General’s Office found that the Victorian Public Service and Local Government sector workplaces were not free from sexual harassment and that reporting levels were consistently low compared to the level of experiences of sexual harassment identified through self-reporting surveys.¹⁰ Some employees were also found to be at higher risk of sexual harassment than others, including women aged 15 to 24, those with a self-described gender identity, LGBTIQ+ identifying employees, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and those who earned less than \$75,000 per annum.¹¹

No formal complaints of sexual harassment have been lodged at Swan Hill Rural City Council in the year to 30th June 2021.

People Matter Survey

In addition to formal complaints of sexual harassment, the People Matter Survey provides a space for the team at Swan Hill Rural City Council to share experiences and concerns in relation to sexual harassment. In response to the survey prompt “During the last 12 months in your current organisation, have you experienced any of the following behaviours at work”, **94% of men and 92% of women** said that they had not experienced sexual harassment in the workplace.

During the last 12 months,

- **3% of women and 6% of men** responded that they had experienced – “Intrusive questions about your private life or comments about your physical appearance”
- **7% of women** shared their experience of – “Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made you feel offended (in either a group or one on one situation)”

⁸ Equal opportunity Act, Part 3

⁹ Australian Human Rights Commission, 2020, Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report (2020)

¹⁰ Victorian Auditor-General’s Office (VAGO), 2019, Sexual Harassment in the Victorian Public Service; VAGO, 2020, Sexual Harassment in Local Government

¹¹ VAGO, 2019

This data demonstrates a relatively low level of sexual harassment experienced shared by the Swan Hill Rural City Council staff through the *People Matter Survey*. Following a zero-tolerance approach, perhaps Bystander Action training and a review of induction/training engagement that reinforces a clear and whole-of-organisation understanding of sexual harassment and the reporting mechanisms to address any concerns across the team would be advantageous. Continued engagement with advocacy and awareness through programs such as 16 Days of Activism is also suggested.¹² Swan Hill Rural City Council could also examine the existing mechanisms for reporting sexual harassment, the efficacy and confidence in this process across the workforce to improve the overall response to this form of workplace violence which women disproportionately continue to experience.

Illustrating the importance of combating sexual harassment in the workplace, in addition to direct experiences of sexual harassment, the *People Matter Survey* also sought responses of witnessing sexual harassing behaviours in the workplace. The 2021 People Matter Survey demonstrated higher levels of reporting sexual harassment when witnessed rather than experienced.

When asked - “During the last 12 months in your current organisation, have you witnessed any of the following negative behaviours at work”, **74% of women and 80% of men** at Swan Hill Rural City Council responded that they had **not** witnessed bullying, discrimination, violence or aggression against a colleague or sexual harassment. When asked if they had witnessed sexual harassment, no men or women responded in the positive. It is important to note that gender-diverse people responded that they had witnessed sexual harassment, and also directly experience sexual harassment ($n=9\%$)



¹² [16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence 2021 – Domestic Violence Victoria \(dvvc.org.au\)](https://www.dvvc.org.au)

INDICATOR 5: RECRUITMENT AND PROMOTION PRACTICES

The objective of this indicator is to uncover possible conscious or unconscious bias in recruitment, promotion and professional development processes.

While gender bias in recruitment and promotion decisions can sometimes be overt and intentional, it is often neither deliberate nor recognised. In some cases, bias can be masked by a strong reliance on the socially-constructed notion of 'merit', which can in turn work to entrench gender and intersectional inequalities in the workplace. Under the cover of 'hiring the best person for the job', a focus on ill-defined notions of 'merit' may actually work to justify recruiting and promoting 'those who think, look and act like us.'¹³

Women may not have access to the same career opportunities as men. Furthermore, other forms of disadvantage and discrimination can also have an impact on career progression with limiting career opportunities for women from different backgrounds, such as women with a disability or older women.

Data on recruitment and promotion outcomes can show where women's careers are stalling and help identify strategies to create more equal opportunities. Strong recruitment practices are critical to building gender equality and intersectional equity for organisations assisting in meeting targets and quotas and the legislated requirements of the Gender Equality Act 2020.

Recruitment practices in the workplace

As can be seen in Figure 10, there were 62 appointments during the reporting period: 26 men (42%) and 36 (58%) women.

At the senior level positions, no appointments were made at the CEO level, one man at -1 was appointed on a full-time contract (fixed-term) and one man at -2 on a full-time permanent contract. No women were appointed at CEO, -1 or -2 leadership levels in the reporting period. Two women were appointed at level -3, one in a full-time permanent position and other on a part-time fixed-term contract. Three women were appointed at level -4, with one in a full-time permanent position and two taking up part-time permanent positions in the team.

This data and the overall break-down of recruitment is illustrated in Figure 10 below. This data does indicate strong levels of recruitment for women but not in the higher leadership levels. Over time, strategic recruitment, perhaps drawing on targets and quotes could result in gender equity across the whole organisation.

¹³ McKinsey & Company & Business Council of Australia, 2018, Women in Leadership: Lessons from Australian companies leading the way

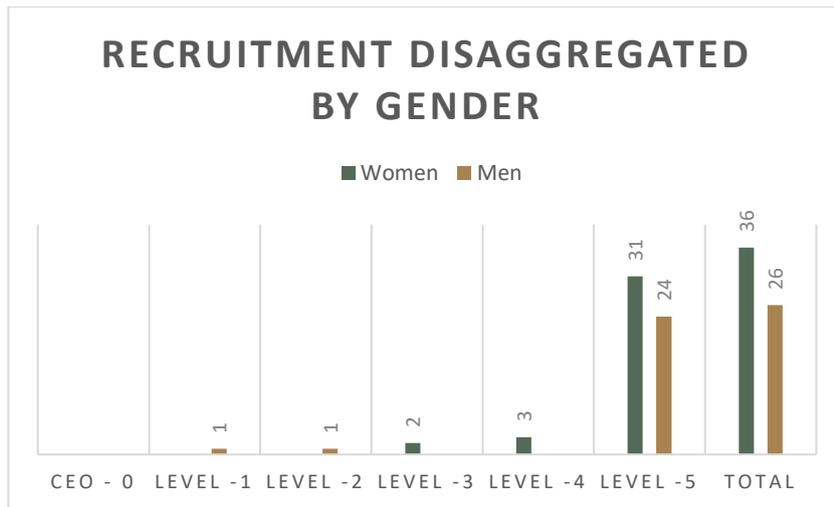


Figure 10. Breakdown of recruitment by level, disaggregated by gender.

Breakdown by employment basis

In addition to examining gender disaggregated recruitment data, it is also important to consider the types of employment that are offered to women and men who join the Swan Hill Rural City Council team. We know that women tend to work in part-time roles and casual positions which can both restrict career progression and financial security over the course of a working-life.

During the reporting period, Swan Hill Rural City Council's recruitment across employment basis illustrates a disproportionate recruitment of men to full-time permanent positions and women are over-represented in part-time and casual work, as per Figure 11.



Figure 11. Breakdown of recruitment by employment basis, disaggregated by gender.

Internal appointments

During the reporting period there were **two permanent internal promotions of which one was a woman and one a man** and both promoted to level -5 in full-time permanent positions. Internal promotions are an effective way of meeting targets and ensuring gender equity and intersectional diversity across the whole organisation.

In addition, fifteen women and ten men were awarded higher duties across all occupation levels in the organization. It is important to note that five women were appointed to higher duties at leadership levels, both -1 and -2 and all in full-time permanent positions.

People Matter Survey

Learning and development

Career development is critical to retaining staff and creating strong opportunities and organisational culture. The Gender Equality Act Audit data, which shows that **five women and one man participated in formal career development training**. Further details and recording of formal training offered to the across the whole team is critical to meeting the requirements of the Gender Equality Act 2020 and this would be an important action for the Council to include in their planning.

Further details regarding training and career development was explored through the *People Matter Survey* which recorded very low responses in relation to training and promotion opportunities.

Respondents were asked about learning and development opportunities relating to recruitment and promotion practices in their workplace. The survey found that only **51% of men and 57% of women** are **satisfied with the way their learning and development needs** have been addressed in the last 12 months. Similarly, **54% of men and 57% of women** stated that there are **adequate opportunities for them to develop skills and experience**.

Interestingly, very low positive responses are evident in relation to the question of feel they have an **equal chance at promotion** with **43% of women** and **49% of men** agreeing with this proposition. Similarly, very low positive responses were evident in the survey question – “My organisation makes fair recruitment and promotion decisions, based on merit”, with **only 56% of women and 63% of men** agreeing with this statement.

It is suggested that pathways to leadership and promotion be reviewed over the next four years and that professional development supporting career progression be effectively offered and linked to stronger career pathways.

INDICATOR 6: UTILISATION OF FLEXIBLE WORK AND OTHER SUPPORT PRACTICES

Leave and flexible work

Structural and cultural factors mean women are far more likely than men to work flexibly.

Leave and flexible work arrangements help workers of all genders balance paid work with other responsibilities. On average, women do nearly twice as much unpaid work as men¹⁴. Structural and cultural support for flexible work and parental leave is key to supporting more equitable sharing of care responsibilities and increasing women's representation in leadership roles.

Collecting clear data on who is accessing flexible work will help the Swan Hill Rural City Council see what extra support might be needed and the requirement of flexible work options available to the whole team and clearly outlined across the whole of the organisation with successful use of these options promoted widely.

By encouraging more men to work flexibly and take leave to care for children or others, organisations can contribute to a more equal gender balance in unpaid work. As per research collated by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, the benefits of flexible work are wide reaching for individuals, organisations and society. Key benefits in the workplace include improved productivity resulting from increased employee engagement and performance; improved wellbeing resulting from autonomy to balance professional and personal commitments; and increased gender diversity as a result of flexible work arrangements enabling improved career progression opportunities for women with caring responsibilities.¹⁵

Availability and use of leave and flexible work arrangements

Swan Hill Rural City Council currently has **five women utilising formal flexible working arrangements**. These working arrangements include job sharing, working remotely and flexible start and finish times. The experiences and take-up of these arrangements would be an important inclusion in the Council's Gender Equality Action Plan, particularly the promotion and engagement of men. Formal flexible working arrangements, with a particular focus on leadership utilising flexible leave as an effective way of modelling and creating a strong organisational culture of flexible work.

Parental leave is critical to inclusion and retention of staff, both paid and un-paid leave is required to be collected and recorded by Swan Hill Rural City Council. In the reporting period between 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021, **nine women and two men utilised parental leave**. It is important to note that only women took unpaid parental leave during the reporting period. This is important because during the unpaid weeks while women are caring for and raising children, they are not receiving contributions to their superannuation

¹⁴ [HILDA-Statistical-Report-2021.pdf \(unimelb.edu.au\)](#)

¹⁵ Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2019, Flexible Working is good for business: The Business Case

and their career progression is on hold while male colleagues continue to progress their careers.

Carer's leave and family violence leave are both critical to an overall understanding of gender equity, particularly retention and promotion practices across the organisation. During the reporting period **63 women and 35 men took carer's leave.**

Family Violence Leave is available to the Swan Hill Rural City Council workforce and during the reporting period **two women utilised this leave.** The *People Matter Survey* response shows strong support for the organisation's family violence leave provisions. The survey question – "My organisation would support me if I needed to take family violence leave", with **91% of women and 69% of men** agreeing with this statement. It would be useful to review the promotion and understanding of Family Violence Leave across the whole team and ensure that mechanisms for taking up this leave are effective.



People Matter Survey

Workplace flexibility

Respondents were asked three questions about their perceptions of positive cultures established at Swan Hill Rural City Council in relation to flexible working arrangements in their workplace and relating to caring and parenting responsibilities.

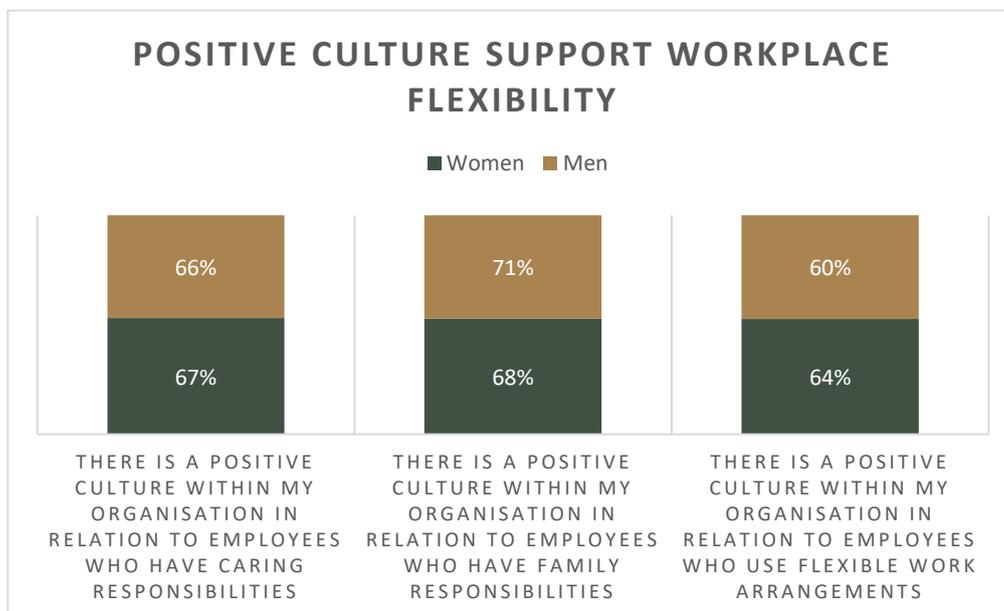


Figure 12. Positive workplace culture supporting workplace flexibility – percentage and gender disaggregated.

Figure 12, shows relatively moderate levels of support for positive workplace cultures in relation to flexible working arrangement and for caring/family responsibilities. This is repeated in the responses to the survey question – “Using flexible work arrangements is not a barrier to success in my organisation” with only **56% of women and 63% of men** responding positively. These perceptions could be explored further to improve the confidence and profile of flexible working arrangements across the Swan Hill Rural City Council workforce.

Somewhat stronger positive responses were evident with **74% of men and 67% of women** responding that they are confident that “flexible working arrangements would be considered should they request them”. It is important to note, however, that the wording of this question does not imply that flexible working arrangements would be granted and thus it is important not to deduce this from the responses. Similarly, slightly higher positive responses to the survey question – “I have the flexibility I need to manage my work and non-work activities and responsibilities” with **77% of women and 74% of men** agreeing with this statement.

INDICATOR 7: GENDERED WORK SEGREGATION

Many workforces across Australia remain dominated by a particular gender, with little change over the past 20 years. Segregation tends to follow traditional gender norms, with women disproportionately represented in caring and administrative roles, and men disproportionately represented in building and construction trades, engineering and technical occupations as well as in leadership roles across all industries. Research has shown clear differences in workplaces with high gender segregation, relating to opportunities to enter leadership, access to career progression, flexible work and pay equity.

For example, research findings show that:

- a) Male-dominated workplaces have smaller proportions of part-time employees and more full-time employees and tend to work longer hours. Such attributes may deter people with family and caring responsibilities.
- b) The proportion of women in traditionally female-dominated industries (e.g., Health Care and Social Assistance and Education and Training) has increased.¹⁶

Gendered work segregation is driven by gender norms and stereotypes about what work is appropriate for men and women, as well as structural factors including workplace culture and access to flexible working arrangements.

Gendered segregation in the workplace at Swan Hill Rural City Council

Figures 13 and 14 reflects that the Swan Hill Rural City Council workforce is aligned closely with traditional occupation roles. Women are clustered in traditional occupation roles such as Professionals, Clerical and Administrative Workers and Community and Personal Services. Men tend to work in areas with very clear gender roles including Machinery Operators and Drivers, Labourers and Trades.

Closer analysis is required to consider if the occupations dominated by women result in lower remuneration, particularly in the fields of community and personal workers and clerical/administration. It is also important to consider which occupations are more readily available for flexible working arrangements, including job sharing and part-time work as this has clear implications for ongoing gender norms attached to occupations and career progression and work-life balance. Critical monitoring of the success and experiences of women in non-traditional roles is also critical to understanding and building on this work to encourage and support both women and men in non-traditional roles. Further, scholarships, bursaries, mentoring and gender-neutral pathways across the Swan Hill Rural City Council workforce would be critical to addressing conventional gendered-occupation roles as required by the Gender Equality Act 2020.

¹⁶ Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2019, Gender segregation in Australia's workforce based on data source from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's (WGEA) dataset (2017-18 reporting period), the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) and the Labour Force Quarterly Survey (May 1998 and May 2018 periods)

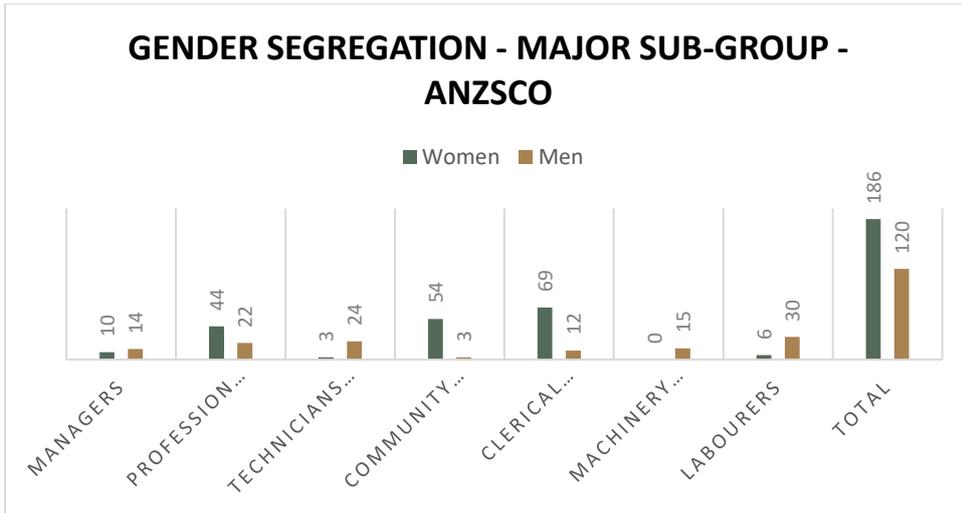


Figure 13. Number of staff within each occupation sub-group by gender.

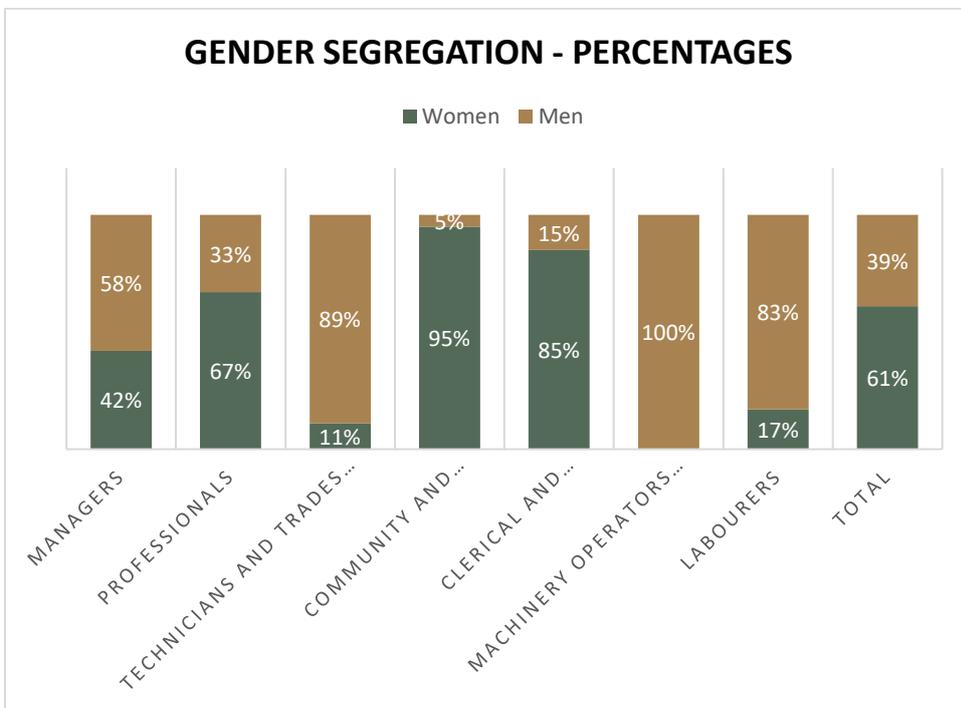


Figure 14. Percentages of gender segregation across occupation by main sub-groups – ANZSCO.

DATA GAPS

During the workplace audit various gaps were found including data collection, record keeping and recruitment processes. We aim to close some of these gaps with the below:

- We aim to broaden the reach and the response rate for the People Matter Survey.
- We aim to develop recruitment processes to request and record intersectional data for new team members.
- We aim to improve the recording of professional development completed across the whole organisation by developing internal processes within our existing HR practices.
- We aim to improve the recording of all leave accessed across the whole organisation by developing internal processes within our existing payroll system.

KEY INSIGHT

A key insight when undertaking the workplace gender audit was for Council to undertake training and capacity building in relation to intersectionality. It was evident that a wider understanding of intersectionality, its benefits and ways that it relates to the community will be a critical process over the coming years, to build confidence in the application of intersectional approaches.



MEANINGFUL CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Three consultation sessions were planned to ensure that a wide range of experiences and views were shared from across the whole Council team. Each consultation session provided background to Gender Equality, including international, national and Victorian contexts.

Two consultation sessions were held face-to-face with the Executive Leadership Team and also the Gender Equality Committee. A third open online session was held with the whole organisation, with specific invitations sent to the following employee representatives:

- OHS Committee
- Consultative Committee
- Gender Equality Committee
- Leadership Team

To support engagement and build capacity, each consultation session also provided foundational information and an overview of the Gender Equality Act 2020. The concept of intersectionality was outlined, intending to build the capacity across Council in relation to intersectional approaches to this ongoing Gender Equality Act work.

In addition to the above consultation sessions regular communication with our workforce has been provided through:

- Gender Equality Committee meetings
- Occupational Health and Safety Committee Meetings
- Consultative Committee meetings
- Leadership Team Meetings
- Weekly Wrap Newsletter
- HR Staff Matters Newsletter
- Staff Portal Banner

The consultation sessions were designed and completed with two clear elements. Firstly, the sessions stepped through each of the seven Gender Equality Act indicators, outlining key elements of the data for each indicator to inform the Swan Hill Rural City Council team of the baseline data and analysis completed.

This overview of the key indicators provided the framework for the broader discussion and meet the obligations under the Act to share the Gender Equality Audit data across the organisation and to provide space and time for conversations and consultation. The second element of the consultation process was a facilitated full and frank conversation reflecting on the data analysis presented and seeking feedback and ideas for future work towards gender equality and intersectional inclusion across the organisation.

Consultation Report

A comprehensive Gender Equality Consultation Report has been prepared and is available via the staff intranet. This report outlines the consultation process and provides extensive details of the scope of the consultation sessions.

CASE FOR CHANGE

Council has an emerging body of existing work that demonstrates a strong commitment to gender equality and inclusion. This includes establishing the Gender Equality Committee, engagement with regional partners through the *Collective Action for Respect and Equality (CARE)* and the newly developed Workforce Development Plan.

Council has a strong whole-of-organisation approach to gender equality and inclusion, framing this work with a human rights lens and is continuing to build its focus towards gender equality and intersectional inclusion. This approach and existing work have strengthened the profile and benefits of gender equality and inclusion across Council and puts the organisation in good stead to now align this work within the parameters of the Gender Equality Act 2020.

Council recognises the importance of gender equality in the workplace and is building on a foundation of engagement and emerging capacity towards gender equality and intersectional inclusion. The consideration of gender equality and intersectional approaches across Council is aligned strongly with the existing strategic plans and processes, this ensures that the Gender Equality Act requirements are embedded within and supported by existing frameworks. This is embedded in the *Community Vision and Council Plan* that highlights the value of Fairness; embracing diversity and ensuring everyone is treated equally

The values articulated in the *Community Vision and Council Plan* align strongly with the Gender Equality Act, particularly with the legislated requirements of community engagement, ensuing leadership is proactively engaged with the Gender Equality Act implementation and the ongoing reporting mechanism required every two and four years. The values of leadership and accountability will provide an excellent foundation for the Council to chart an organisation response to gender equality and the Gender Equality Act's requirements.

Council actively encourages a diverse and inclusive workplace. This is reflected in the highlighting of Harmony in the *Community Vision and Council Plan*– where the diversity of the municipality is celebrated. This sense of harmony in the community's diversity is aligned strongly to the Gender Equality Act 2020 which requires a strategic response to intersectional approaches for both the organisation and its engagement across the municipality. This intersectional approach within the Gender Equality Act 2020 will build on the existing focus for the Council to engage with and respect Aboriginal Culture as articulated in the *Community Vision and Council Plan*;

“Strengthening our trust, relationships and partnerships with Traditional Owners and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community”

The Women's Health Victoria Atlas⁵ shows that the municipality records significantly higher levels of family violence compared to the wider Loddon Mallee region and state-wide across Victoria. This data illustrates the critical importance for the municipality to begin to address family violence. This is closely aligned to Council's existing work to address family violence as highlighted in the *Community Vision and Council Plan* with strategies included to:

- Work in collaboration with local and regional partners to increase access to information, programs and services to contribute to the prevention of family violence
- Lead change through the development and coordination of local strategies and initiatives to promote cultures of non-violence, respect and gender equity
- Create safe and inclusive places and spaces

The Gender Equality Act 2020 also has an important impact on *Council's Workforce Plan* through the monitoring of recruitment and promotion and offering a mechanism for action to enhance the retention and workforce diversity across the organisation.



VISION STATEMENT

Our vision is to have a workplace free from violence and discrimination based on gender, where employees are respected and safe to participate in all aspects of work life. A place where employees are valued and have equal access to the resources they need to succeed and where gender is not a determining factor to success, inclusion and equality.



Women in leadership. From left to right: Heather Green - Director Development and Planning, Rosanne Kava – Acting CEO, Jade Benham – Mayor, Helen Morris – Acting Director Corporate Services, Svetla Petkova – Director Infrastructure

STRATEGIES AND MEASURES

Indicator 1 – Gender composition			
Objective	Strategic Initiative	Due Date	Responsible Officer
1.1. Develop and implement gender equality policies, practices and data collection across the organisation	Review and improve employee data collection, recording and storage capacity, particularly in relation to intersectional data.	2023/24	HR Recruitment Officer
	Review ways to promote the People Matter Survey across the organisation to increase response rate and gather accurate data.	2024/25	Senior HR Officer
	Review Equal Employment Opportunity Policy	2021/22	Senior HR Officer and Governance Officer
1.2. Increase the visibility of women, men and gender diverse people in non-traditional roles	Regular profiling of Council staff who are employed in non-traditional roles to promote and encourage varying career opportunities.	2021/22 and ongoing	HR Officers
	Examine costs for offering traineeships, apprenticeships, scholarships, targeted to improve representation of gender and intersectionality.	2022/23	Organisational Development Manager
1.3. Appropriate use of gender neutral and inclusive languages and diverse images in Council communications	Review recruitment processes, including language of position descriptions and where Council advertises positions.	2021/22	HR Recruitment Officer
	Review community engagement processes, including the use of diverse images and gender-neutral language.	2022/23	Media
1.4. Leadership commitment to gender and intersectionality equality	Conduct a Disability Audit to ensure inclusion and diversity for people living with a disability.	2022/23	OHS Officer

Indicator 2 – Gender composition of governing bodies			
Objective	Strategic Initiative	Due Date	Responsible Officer
2.1. Increase the visibility of women and people of diverse genders as Councillors	Participate in the VLGA project of 50/50 representation for Local Government (Local women leading change VLGA)	2022/23	Governance Officer

Indicator 3 – Equal remuneration			
Objective	Strategic Initiative	Due Date	Responsible Officer
3.1. Decrease the gender pay gap	Review the high levels of part-time work for women and any barriers preventing career progression.	2023/24	HR Officers
	Review remuneration gaps across all levels, including ANZCO coding and part-time work factors.	2022/23	Senior HR Officer / ODM
	Review salary structures in the lead up to the next EBA negotiations.	2023/24	ODM

Indicator 4 – Sexual harassment			
Objective	Strategic Initiative	Due Date	Responsible Officer
4.1. Provide a workplace free from sexual harassment, bullying and discrimination.	Review staff induction content and processes to strengthen the focus on understanding and preventing sexual harassment.	2022/23	HR Training Officer
	Investigate external and internal training options to be provided to Council team members on topics such as sexual harassment, bullying, discrimination and bystander action.	2022/23	HR Training Officer
	Review and strengthen staff awareness of the process for reporting sexual harassment, bullying and discrimination at Council.	2021/22	Governance Officer / Senior HR Officer
	Set an annual training plan for all Leaders, Managers and Coordinators to complete gender equality and intersectionality training.	2021/22 & 2	HR Training Officer
4.2. Maintain an awareness and promote prevention of violence against women and intersectionality.	Provide training focused on the prevention of Domestic Violence and Everyday Sexism to Council staff.	2022/23	HR Officers
	Provide access for Council staff members to engage with and complete training such as Unpacking Resistance.	2022/23	HR Training Officer
	Continue to build the awareness of Family Violence, including engagement with 16 Days of Activism and International Women's Day.	2021/22 and ongoing	Gender Equality Committee

Indicator 5 – Recruitment and promotion practices			
Objective	Strategic Initiative	Due Date	Responsible Officer
5.1. Gender Impact Reporting including data review indicators to determine staff turnover.	Investigate the option for exit interviews to include the Gender Equality Act indicators and intersectional data.	2022/23	HR Recruitment Officer
	Exit interviews to be offered in both online and face-to-face capacities.	2021/22	HR Recruitment Officer
5.2. Increase attraction for recruitment of diversity in the workplace.	Engage with the Rainbow Tick program to support inclusion for the LGBTQIA+ community, both internally and externally.	2022/23	Director Community and Cultural Services / Children Services Manager
5.3. Strive to achieve equitable outcomes in all recruitment and promotions.	Provide Unconscious Bias training to all staff with responsibilities to sit on recruitment panels.	2021/22	HR Training Officer
	Review the higher duties process to increase transparency and access across the whole organisation.	2024/25	Organisational Development Manager

Indicator 6 – Utilisation of flexible work and other support practices			
Objective	Strategic Initiative	Due Date	Responsible Officer
6.1. Increase awareness of flexible work arrangements	Review flexible leave and work arrangements application process to ensure equitable access.	2022/23	Organisational Development Manager
	Increase the visibility and the benefits of utilising Council's formal flexible work arrangements to all employees regardless of gender.	2021/22	HR Officers / Gender Equality Committee
	Explore training for managers to understand the opportunity for successful utilisation of flexible work arrangements within their teams.	2022/23	HR Training Officer
6.2. Provide support for parental leave, family violence leave and carers leave	Strengthen the awareness across Council of the provision of Family Violence Leave and the process to access this leave.	2023/24	HR Training Officer
	Support carers to return to work after parental leave and take steps to minimise disruption to their career progression.	2022/23	Organisational Development Manager

Indicator 7 – Gendered work segregation			
Objective	Strategic Initiative	Due Date	Responsible Officer
7.1. Provide professional development on gender, intersectionality and inclusion.	Increase targeted professional development and training for staff members who express interest in transitioning into non-traditional work roles across the organisation.	2022/23 and ongoing	HR Training Officer
7.2. Increase gender and intersectionality awareness and support	Review the options and funding availability to assist with accessible bathrooms across Council.	2023/24	OHS Officer / Assets Manager
	Complete a pilot project to find out what works in promoting non-traditional work.	2023/24	Gender Equality Committee

STRATEGIC RESOURCE PLAN

A projected, summarised Strategic Resource Plan for the years 2021/22 to 2024/25 has been developed as part of Council’s financial planning based on the forecasted budget.

The plan takes the objectives and strategies from the Gender Equality Action Plan and expresses them in financial and resources terms for the next four years.

The GEAP will be reviewed and updated periodically to ensure the underlying assumptions remain accurate, and to take into account any unexpected changes. These changes may be significant especially when grants and funding become available.

In preparing the Strategic Resource Plan, Council has complied with the following factors:

- The impact on existing staff/human resources.
- Barriers to making progress including lack of allocated budget and Council’s operational priorities.
- Conforming with the GEAP principles as defined under the Act.

A summary of the staff resources and budget availability are shown below to assist with implementing the strategies and measures included in this GEAP. This includes the allocation of time from cross-functional teams and committees to develop and implement the GEAP.

Summary of financial and human resources

GEAP and initiatives delivered by: Gender Equality Committee, Health and Wellbeing Committee, Governance Officer and Human Resources Department.

Resource	Financial years (four year plan)			
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Gender Audit	\$10,782*			
Workforce Plan	\$4,910			\$5,210
GEAP	\$4,726	\$4,797	\$4,869	\$4,942
External Gender Equality training	\$2,910	\$2,954	\$2,998	\$3,043
Health and Wellbeing Committee	\$4,626			
Gender Equality Committee	\$9,792	\$9,939	\$10,088	\$10,239

*Gender Audit figure for 2021/22 includes consultancy costs

MEASURING PROGRESS

The Gender Equality Act 2020 requires Council to prepare and submit a progress report in relation to the strategies and measures set out in the GEAP to the Gender Equality Commission at least every second year.

In addition to the progress report submitted to the Commission, Swan Hill Rural City Council is committed to regularly monitoring and reporting progress of the GEAP measures internally, in order to be transparent and accountable.

The actions will be monitored and measured on how well they have been implemented or adopted and a progress report presented to the Executive Leadership Team bi-annually and Council annually. The Gender Equality Committee will monitor Swan Hill Rural City Council's progress through regular meetings and communicate progress to the wider organisation through a staff newsletter 4 times per year.

A schedule of reporting dates is set out below:

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Executive Leadership Team						✓						✓
Gender Equality Committee		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Council Assembly						✓						
HR Staff Matters Newsletter			✓			✓				✓		✓

The GEAP will be reviewed periodically, to identify and address changing circumstances and reflect the Council's and Community priorities.

REFERENCES

1. Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025 Guidance for Defined Entities, 2021.
2. Australian Human Rights Commission, Addressing sexual orientation and sex and/or gender identity discrimination, 2011.
3. Victoria State Government, Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy, 2016.
4. Australian Medical Association (1998, p.1).
5. [Victorian Women's Health Atlas \(victorianwomenshealthatlas.net.au\)](http://victorianwomenshealthatlas.net.au)

