

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT
WORKPLACE GENDER AUDIT PILOT PROJECT**

FINAL REPORT ON LEARNINGS

**For
The Municipal Association of Victoria**

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ACRONYMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ANZSCO	Australian and New Zealand Standards Classification of Occupations
ATO	Australian Tax Office
CGEPS	Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector
DPC	Department of Premier and Cabinet
GEAP	Gender Equality Action Plan
GIA	Gender Impact Assessment
MAV	Municipal Association of Victoria
VPS	Victorian Public Service
WGA	Workplace Gender Audit
OfW	Office for Women – Victorian State Government

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Gender Equality Act 2020 (The Act) aims to improve gender equality outcomes in workplaces and in the community. The Act is applicable to all defined entities including the Victorian Public Service, Victorian councils, and public entities with 50 or more employees. The Act creates obligations for all defined entities to promote gender equality.

The legislation requires entities to undertake a Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) when developing or reviewing programs, policies and plans which have a significant impact on the public. It also requires entities to prepare a Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP) and to undertake a Workplace Gender Audit (WGA) against a series of workplace gender equality indicators identified in the Act. The results of the audit aim to indicate the current status of gender equality in the organisation and provide a transparent basis for organisations to develop strategies and measures for inclusion in their Gender Equality Action Plans.

Obligations under the Gender Equality Act come into effect in March 2021 and the first WGAs and GEAPs are to be completed by October 2021.

As part of the process of preparing the local government sector for the implementation of the Gender Equality Act, the State Government funded the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and ten councils to undertake two separate pilots. The first pilot focused on Gender Impact Assessment processes and the second on Workplace Gender Auditing.

The Local Government Gender Impact Assessment Pilot Project was completed in June 2020 and the Workplace Gender Audit Pilot Project concluded in September 2020. Each of the ten pilot councils provided reports on their participation in the pilot processes to the MAV and the State Government. A learning capture process was supported by the MAV resulting in two reports on the overall learnings from the two pilots: *Local Government Gender Impact Analysis Pilot Project; Final Report on Learnings June 2020* and this report, *Local Government Workplace Gender Audit Pilot Project; Final Report on Learnings September 2020*.

1.1 Background to the Workplace Gender Audit Pilot

The Local Government Workplace Gender Audit Pilot aimed to identify what is currently possible and what will be needed in the future to support Victorian councils to improve their capability to undertake WGAs in accordance with the Act. The Pilot also aimed to trial a draft WGA Guide developed by the State Government, and to identify support that may be needed for councils to implement workplace gender auditing.

The WGA Pilot was designed as a learning and development exercise for the participating organisations and an opportunity to assess their preparedness to undertake workplace gender audits once the Act commences in 2021.

The participating organisations formed a Workplace Gender Audit Pilot Working Group to facilitate the sharing of implementation issues and lessons emerging through the pilot.

The Working Group membership included representatives from the ten pilot councils:

- Glenelg Shire Council
- Greater Geelong City Council
- Greater Shepparton City Council
- Horsham Rural City Council
- Manningham City Council
- Maribyrnong City Council
- Monash City Council
- Mount Alexander Shire Council
- Yarra City Council
- Yarra Ranges Shire Council

Officers from the MAV and the project consultants participated, as well as a number of Victorian State Government officers from the:

- Office for Women
- Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector
- Industrial Relations Victoria
- Victorian Public Sector Commission

The Working Group held five meetings during the pilot process, to share experiences, discuss barriers and strategies and to learn from one another.

The ten pilot councils undertook specific WGA related activities using the templates and information provided in the 'Guide to Undertaking A Workplace Gender Audit' (The Guide) produced by the Office for Women, Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC).

The pilot councils were required to focus on three key areas and to provide data, information and advice based on this work. The three focus areas are outlined below:

Quantitative Data

Conducting an audit of selected workplace gender equality indicators using quantitative measures linked to workplace gender equality indicators identified in the Gender Equality Act (Section 3). Each pilot council was allocated one of these indicators for investigation within their council.

The selected workplace gender equality indicators were as follows:

- Gender composition of all levels of the workforce
- Gender composition of governing bodies
- Equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value across all levels of the workforce, irrespective of gender
- Sexual harassment in the workplace

Qualitative Data

Analysis of capacity to collect and analyse qualitative data on the availability and utilisation of terms, conditions and practices relating to:

- family violence leave
- flexible working arrangements, and

- working arrangements supporting employees with family or caring responsibilities.

Advice on data collection capability for workplace gender equality indicators

Provision of detailed advice on current and prospective data collection capabilities for the following:

- Recruitment and promotion practices in the workplace
- Availability and use of flexible work
- Gendered segregation within the workplace.

Having undertaken the above tasks, the ten councils provided data, feedback and suggestions through individual council reports using a common reporting template.

1.2 This Report

This report provides an overview of the key learnings which emerged from the Workplace Gender Audit Pilot Project. It should be noted that the report is not intended to be a summary of the detailed data collection issues and suggestions identified by each of the pilot councils. These are contained in the reporting template documents submitted to the CGEPS.

The project consultants drew on key issues identified in the individual council reports, the Working Group meetings, as well as other one-on-one consultation with the pilot councils and prepared an Initial Overview of Learnings report. This was circulated to participating organisations and their feedback was sought at the final Working Group workshop which was held on 2 September 2020.

This final report provides an overview of the key learnings emerging from the WGA pilot and makes suggestions as to how best to support local government to undertake WGA processes as required by the Gender Equality Act. It includes information and ideas to inform the further development of guidance resources and associated communication and support systems.

This report is presented in five sections as follows:

1. A brief description of the activities and processes undertaken for the Local Government WGA Pilot Project
2. An overview of the local government context within which WGAs will be undertaken
3. The learning and issues associated with the collection, analysis and reporting of the quantitative gender equality indicators
4. The learning and implications associated with the collection of qualitative data
5. General conclusions and proposals for consideration.

SECTION 2: LEARNINGS - LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONTEXTUAL ISSUES

<i>Key Learning</i>	<i>Issues for Consideration</i>
<p>2.1 Organisational Culture, Communication and Co-ordination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is critical to have a supportive organisational culture and policy foundation to sustain initiatives linked to the Gender Equality Act and the undertaking of the required WGA processes • Council, councillors, the executive and the council’s workforce need to understand the intent of the Gender Equality Act, why it is important, and how the WGA will be used to progress equality and inclusion in the workplace and within the community • Creating a culture with high levels of trust and respect for individual differences and diversity in the workplace fosters confidence and engagement in WGA processes • Implementation plans need to consider how to minimise and constructively respond to resistance to WGA processes and the development of GEAPs within the workplace • There is significant variation between councils with regard to their organisational readiness for undertaking WGA processes and this needs to be respected rather than expecting that one change process suits all • A staged approach to implementation would enable councils to focus on key areas for attention and then progressively build on these over time • Some councils identified that an internal cross functional working group structure is needed to co-ordinate a WGA process, as relevant knowledge and data are typically managed across different functional areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention should be given to building a supportive and informed organisational culture and policy setting to enable WGAs to be effectively undertaken • As noted in relation to the Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) processes, accessible communication strategies, gender equity awareness and training programs are required for the local government sector, tailored for all levels of a council’s workforce • Information, awareness raising, and training programs could be supported by the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector (CGEPS), especially in the lead up to implementation of the Act in March 2021 and beyond • Councils are already underway with business and budget planning for 2021-2022, so there is a growing need for timely guidance from the State Government on the requirements for 2021. • Organisational development and readiness processes will take time and investment over some years • Approval of a staged implementation process would enable councils to undertake focused, practical WGA processes and build on these progressively over an agreed timeframe. This staged approach could then form part of the GEAPs • A cross functional co-ordination structure within each council could support more effective planning and implementation of WGA processes

2.2 Linking WGA, GEAP and Workforce Plans

- Councils are seeking clarity on the best ways to link WGAs and GEAPs with the Workforce Plans required under the Local Government Act, to ensure the effective use of resources and to avoid duplication
- The Local Government Act (Section 46, 4) states that Chief Executive Officers ‘must develop and maintain a workforce plan that –
 - describes the organisational structure of the Council; and
 - specifies the projected staffing requirements for a period of at least 4 years; and
 - sets out measures to seek to ensure gender equality, diversity and inclusiveness’
- While the Acts recognise the alignment between the GEAPs and Workforce Plans, it is understood that a Workforce Plan will have a broad focus on such issues as operational structure, industrial conditions, and workforce demand and supply trends relevant to a council’s overall strategic plan
- It would be ideal if the reporting timeframes for the GEAPs (initially due in October 2021) and Workplace Plans (due in December 2021) could be aligned

- There is a need for clear guidance for local government on the link between WGAs, GEAPs as required through the Gender Equality Act, and Workforce Plans, as required under the Local Government Act, to ensure effective alignment and to avoid duplication
- It would be beneficial to consider alignment of the reporting timeframes for GEAPs and Workforce Plans
- Practical support should be provided to enable the ongoing sharing of learnings and good practice in WGAs, GEAPs and Workforce Plans within the local government sector, as well as between local government and other public sector entities e.g. ‘Communities of Practice’, other processes to share ideas through the CGEPS and the MAV

2.3 Privacy and Confidentiality of Data

- Concerns were raised about the need to ensure the protection of privacy, confidentiality and sensitive workforce data, especially if the results of WGAs are to be made publicly available
- Some noted higher risk in situations where there are small numbers of ‘self-identified gender’ or other intersectionality indicators and where councils operate in relatively small local communities where identification is possible
- It is important to maintain a privacy threshold which takes into account a council’s unique circumstances, such as what will suit small councils operating within small communities or townships
- May need to consider a consent for publication process, especially for staff with high profile within communities

- Advice and support should be provided for councils to develop clear privacy and protection of workforce data policies
- Important for the CGEPS to provide clear guidance on the nature of the WGA and GEAP public reports, how data are stored and how privacy will be protected

SECTION 3: QUANTITATIVE DATA LEARNINGS – WORKPLACE GENDER EQUALITY INDICATORS

<i>Key Learning</i>	<i>Issues for Consideration</i>
<p>3.1 Gender Disaggregated Data and Gender Identity Terminology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender disaggregated data are not always collected by councils, and when collected, are often binary sex disaggregated data • Terminology used for gender identity varies across councils, is not always understood, can be unclear, contested or seen as too sensitive or problematic to use • Typical approaches used by councils include using ‘female’, ‘male’ and ‘self-described’ or ‘other’ • Gender identity data collection needs to support respect and inclusion of gender diverse and trans people, as well as an individual’s choice not to disclose, and an understanding of the concerns they may have about disclosure • However, using generic terms can miss important evidence of gender or intersectional inequality • Collecting gender identity data can be seen as intrusive or a risk for respondents • Some suggest using terms of Female/Male/Self-described, with the latter used as part of a broader process to collect other intersectional data • Some wider systems create barriers to organisations using inclusive gender terminology, especially the Australian Tax Office (ATO) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) which use binary categories • Some councils reported that their human resource information systems used the restrictive binary gender terms used by the ATO and this impacted on their capacity to collect inclusive non-binary data. Others stated that they had ensured their systems went outside the ATO terms to avoid this constraint. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glossary and guidance on good practice, inclusive gender identity terminology is critical, understanding that standards will change over time and these may need updating • It will be important to have ongoing engagement with relevant representatives from diverse gender identity and intersectional communities and specialist organisations to understand contemporary good practice • Resources will be critical to support awareness raising, education and communication on the importance of inclusive gender identity terminology, and why such information is being collected. • Further advocacy required on the current use of gender binary terminology by organisations such as the ATO and the ABS

<i>Key Learning</i>	<i>Issues for Consideration</i>
<p>3.2 Intersectionality Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is very common for councils to have limited workforce intersectional data for WGA processes • Issues need to be considered for the collection of workforce intersectionality data including sensitivity of the data, ensuring respect for individual decisions to disclose or not disclose, and protection of privacy • A very clear rationale and a positive culture of trust is required to encourage staff to participate and disclose their personal information • Approaches are needed to ensure protection of privacy, especially when there may be small numbers in specific categories which would compromise confidentiality • Some suggestions were made for intersectional workforce data to be gathered through more tailored, targeted research rather than through generic organisational systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop resources and approaches for implementing organisational communication and engagement on the importance of intersectional data, and how it will be applied to improve workforce equality • Develop guidance on policy and procedures for how privacy and individual identifying data will be protected, especially for councils with small staff numbers • Important to ensure engagement with intersectional representatives and specialist organisations to inform approaches and terminology used
<p>3.3 Workforce Information Systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of different Human Resource/Personnel related data systems are being used across different councils • Some are fairly easy to adapt for congruence with Gender Equality Act indicators, while others are not • Many have internal data systems which do not ‘talk’ to each other – especially payroll systems not aligned with other HR systems • Many have restricted analysis and reporting capacity and WGA pilot work has required manual extraction, exporting data to separate excel modules etc. This has implications for workforce capacity and capability • Collection of some WGA indicators require going back to the base source such as individual HR files, requiring more staff resources and time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be valuable to undertake a mapping exercise of existing Local Government Human Resource and Payroll ICT systems across the sector • This mapping could be used to identify opportunities for collaborative approaches to system updates, and or new specifications, to enable data collection and reporting consistent with the Gender Equality Act and WGA requirements • Ideally the aim should be to minimise the need for additional manual data extraction while maximising the practical value of the data reporting which can be achieved • This work could be used to enhance the local government

- Efficiency of WGA work is exacerbated by responsibilities spread between different functions, and WGA related data being collected by different sections of a council's operations
- There could be opportunities for system upgrades to occur to be compliant with the requirements of the Gender Equality Act through collective work across councils using the same provider, or for councils about to undertake reviews and/or new procurement processes
- At the same time, it is important to recognise that retrofitting existing human resources data systems can be very costly and time consuming
- As Workforce Plans required under the Local Government Act also need to be supported by fit-for-purpose workforce data systems, including access to gender equality and diversity indicators, it will be important to consider system improvements which can enable councils to successfully undertake these workforce analysis and planning activities

sector's capacity to develop Workforce Plans as required by the Local Government Act 2020 and which must incorporate measures to progress gender equality and diversity

3.4 Specific Workplace Gender Equality Indicators

- Councils are variably placed to collect quality data on the workplace gender equality indicators, and it will take some time for capability to grow within individual councils and across the whole sector
- Clarity of the definitions used for each indicator was important – the current glossary in the Guide was helpful and would be improved by the inclusion of local government examples
- Some lead indicators are binary – e.g. ‘men and women receive equal remuneration for comparable work’

The six detailed quantitative areas are discussed below

- It will take time for councils to develop full capacity to collect meaningful data relevant to the workplace gender equality indicators - this is likely to be a progressive process undertaken over some years
- There will need to be a level of understanding and acceptance that compliance will be a progressive process and that full compliance will take some years to achieve
- Maintaining a contemporary and clear glossary of terms and indicators will be crucial, supported by practical local government examples
- It is important to consider how to achieve more alignment with other gender equality workforce processes, such as WGEA, to enable comparisons and good practice across different sectors

3.4.1 Gender Composition of the Workforce

- The current classification structure has limitations for gender equity analysis as the scope and scale of positions can vary significantly within categories, especially for Senior Officer and Senior Executive Officer (SEO) roles in local government
- Local government employment classification categories differ from ANZSCO ones
- The local government workforce includes many traditionally gendered workforce categories – e.g. childcare, home care, engineering, outdoor maintenance etc
- Casual workforce data are critical to understand and monitor gender equity issues
- The suggestion was made that gender representation within the workforce hierarchy as well as ratios within different functional areas would be a valuable metric for gender equality analysis

- Consider other metrics such as gender representation within levels of the workforce hierarchy and within different functional areas
- Develop a guide for local government occupation categories compared to the ANZSCO system

<p>3.4.2 Gender Composition of Governing Body</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important to recognise the democratic and political process applying to elected councillors in accordance with the Local Government Act rather than an appointment process • Gender identity of candidates could be captured as one way of understanding the barriers and enablers to encouraging gender diversity of councillors • There was concern about council officers collecting personal data on elected councillors with preference for this to be led through an appropriate central agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender profile of elected representatives and candidates would be best managed through a central agency such as Local Government Victoria • Consideration will need to be given to the sensitivity of gender diversity and intersectionality factors for elected councillors • Recognition of broader sector work occurring to encourage gender diversity of candidates and elected councillors e.g. the Local Government Women’s Charter initiatives
<p>3.4.3 Pay Equity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As in 6.1, the classification system does not readily enable gender equity analysis with large variations possible, especially in senior role categories in terms of scope, scale and remuneration • Remuneration in local government is impacted by various allowances, and historical conditions which can skew the picture • Councils have different EBAs with diverse allowances, conditions etc • Councils have several awards operating – e.g. nursing, pre-school teachers, ‘indoor’ and ‘outdoor’ staff etc • Annualised salary data can be skewed by special leave arrangements e.g. parental/maternity leave, people moving from part time to full time roles etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider developing guidance on gender composition and pay equity tailored to the circumstances of Victorian local government • Explore the opportunity to design sector wide workforce research which can be used to inform consistent data and analysis of gender equity workforce issues e.g. how the annual MAV Local Government Human Resource Benchmarking Survey can be used to assist councils to undertake their WGA as well as develop their GEAPs and Workforce Plans.
<p>3.4.4 Sexual Harassment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note that this indicator was not explored by all pilot councils as it coincided with the Local Government Survey on Sexual Harassment being undertaken by VAGO across most Victorian councils • Two councils did work on this indicator by collecting data for one year • One council (Maribyrnong) identified a number of challenges and opportunities for data collection and analysis of ‘sexual harassment’ incidents as an indicator • Issues identified included multiple data collection points, variable data descriptors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance will be needed on sexual harassment data, terminology used, collection and how the data is used to inform workplace gender equity policy and planning • Use of sexual harassment incident data should be seen as one part of a broader approach to the prevention of sexual harassment • It will be important to have access to the key learnings

<p>not matching the WGA indicator, and variable interpretations and understanding of terms such as ‘gender-based bullying’, gender discrimination’ and ‘sexual harassment’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual harassment incident data can focus on reactive, complaints-based approach rather than a pro-active, prevention-based approach • Non-reporting needs to be investigated and will not necessarily be picked up by incident data • Guidance will be needed on how councils gather information on sexual harassment and how the information is used to inform proactive workforce policies, planning and programs 	<p>emerging from the VAGO Local Government Sexual Harassment survey to inform positive workplace action to prevent and respond to sexual harassment</p>
<p>3.4.5 Recruitment and Promotion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment – gender and intersectional data are rarely collected at applicant stage as it can be seen as intrusive or potentially discriminatory • It is more common to collect gender and some intersectional data at appointment and ‘on boarding’ stage of employment • Combination of on-line and hard copy application systems mean gender identity data are inconsistently collected, and not necessarily collated or used • Useful to understand trends in temporary higher duties and secondments as contributors to career pathways • Promotion data are not typically captured by gender for analysis but can be manually retrieved and analysed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure clarity of definition for ‘promotion’ as a permanent change compared to other ‘acting’ or ‘secondment’ arrangements • Consider gender profile and analysis of other elements of staff career pathways which support promotion such as temporary secondments, higher duties, professional development plans etc

3.4.6 Flexible Working and Leave Arrangements

- Variable levels of formal capture of flexible work arrangements
 - Some types of flexible arrangements are formally captured such as ‘purchased leave’
 - Often localised arrangements within work units rather than formal approval processes or centralised records which means there is a risk of under reporting
 - These localised arrangements can have the advantage of being flexible
 - Understanding utilisation of flexible conditions needs to be complemented by qualitative information on staff attitudes, perceptions etc
 - Specific types of leave are often captured under ‘Other Leave’ or ‘Special Leave’ but not captured in more detail for any analysis e.g. Family Leave, Family Violence Leave
 - Carers leave should be included in the WGA Guide
 - Family Violence Leave data need to be carefully protected and generally kept confidentially in separate in HR personnel files
- Definitions of flexible working arrangements needs to be clear and guidance on this will assist more accurate and consistent data collection
 - Detailed feedback from the council reports provides valuable information on the current limitations of data in these areas and suggestions on how this could be improved over time
 - The common use of ‘informal’ flexible workplace arrangements will mean there is a risk of under-reporting and a skewed understanding of staff access to such arrangements
 - Family Violence leave data require specific management to ensure safety and confidentiality for staff members

SECTION 4: QUALITATIVE DATA LEARNINGS – FOCUSED ON FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

<i>Key Learning</i>	<i>Issues for Consideration</i>
<p>4.1 Workforce Surveys</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the Victorian Public Sector has an annual employee opinion survey which is run through the Victorian Public Sector Commission, there is no common qualitative workforce survey method used by Victorian councils • While many councils undertake workforce surveys of some kind, these vary in terms of design, frequency, purpose and scale • Some councils have not undertaken workforce surveys previously or have only undertaken them for a specific time limited purpose • There is variable capacity and capability across councils for workforce surveys which is influenced by the financial resources available, available internal skills and competing priorities • The variable approach to qualitative workforce research within the local government sector mean that comparative data within the sector will not be available in the short term • At the same time this variability across the local government sector also means that comparative data with other public sector entities covered by the Gender Equality Act will not be readily available • The Local Government Act requirement for Workforce Plans in addition to the requirements of the Gender Equality Act, are providing increased impetus for councils to develop workforce surveys to inform their planning • Councils would be assisted with clear advice on how to best collect staff experience data which will align with the legislative requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider undertaking a mapping exercise of current workforce survey processes and tools used by councils • Consider co-ordination and possible resourcing of workforce survey design support to enable councils to undertake WGA and Workforce Plans relevant to requirements of the Gender Equality Act and the Local Government Act • Resources are needed to implement good quality qualitative workforce research within councils, and the type of support needed will differ across the local government sector • As for quantitative data, it will take time for all councils to build capacity and capability for qualitative workforce research

<p>4.2 Depth and Quality of Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When organisation wide surveys are being planned there can be competition for ‘focus areas’ in such broad workforce surveys and this has an impact on the depth and breadth of data collected • Achieving strong response rates and valid data can be a challenge given the diversity of local council workforces, high numbers of part time staff etc • Some councils complement qualitative surveys with other more tailored engagement methods, such as focus groups and interviews to capture staff attitudes, perceptions and experiences e.g. staff consultation undertaken for the ‘Listen, Learn and Lead program’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative workforce surveys are important but can have limitations in terms of variable response rates across council functions, different methods needed (hard copy and on-line) and the depth of data that can be gleaned from a survey. • Guidance on other complementary staff research and engagement methods would be beneficial
<p>4.3 Frequency and Timeframes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different councils undertake workforce engagement surveys with variable timeframes – e.g. every 2 or 3 years, or on an ‘ad hoc’ basis • It will now be important for councils to consider an appropriate timeframe to support WGA and Workforce Plans linked to reporting timeframes in the Local Government Act and the Gender Equality Act • Under the Gender Equality Act, WGAs and GEAPs are due for submission in October 2021 and Workforce Plans are due for submission on December 2021 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is proposed that a timeframe guide for Victorian councils be developed relating to WGA, GEAPs, Workforce Plans and other key reporting requirements • Local Government Victoria could consider developing such a reporting timeframe guide

SECTION 5: CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND PROPOSALS

The focus of the WGA pilot has been on understanding current local government data collection capability and the challenges and opportunities that exist to support councils to undertake WGA processes in accordance with the requirements of the Gender Equality Act.

The reports prepared by the individual pilot councils provide a detailed overview of their current capacity, the limitations they identified and their feedback on what would assist them to build their capability to undertake a WGA in the future. It is important to recognise that this work has been undertaken in the context of councils managing during the COVID-19 pandemic which has placed additional demands on key staff including those managing human resources and workforce data functions.

In undertaking the WGA pilot, participants were very aware that, while the ability to access and analyse gender equality workforce indicators is important, the central aim is to use the analysis to inform proactive gender equity action and to build an organisational culture which truly champions gender equality.

In summary, the WGA Pilot process has highlighted the importance of a number of issues, including the following.

5.1 Organisational readiness, capacity and capability

- Victorian councils have a positive commitment to implementing the Gender Equality Act reforms, however, it will take time to build their capacity to undertake WGAs, including having systems which will enable them to collect and utilise meaningful data relevant to the key workplace gender equality indicators specified in the Act.
- Councils vary in their capability and capacity to undertake WGAs with some already well placed, and others much less so.
- All councils would be supported to undertake effective WGAs by the co-ordination and development of accessible guidance and communication resources, as well as the provision of support to enhance systems such as workforce data systems and qualitative research processes.
- Provision of practical support to enable councils to share skills, learnings and good practice will be beneficial within the local government sector, as well as facilitating sharing between local government and other public sector entities.
- It is critically important that councils, councillors, executive leaders and all staff develop a good understanding of the intention of the Gender Equality Act and how information being sought through WGAs is to be used in positive ways within the workplace and the community.
- Throughout the pilot process, it has been recognised that it will take some years to build the capacity to undertake thorough WGAs in compliance with the Gender Equality Act. Given this recognition, it is proposed that the State Government

consider formalising a staged implementation process which will enable councils to focus on specific workplace gender equality priority areas over time. This staged process can then be built into their GEAPs.

5.2 Managing sensitive information, privacy and confidentiality

- Information relevant to WGAs can be highly sensitive and careful consideration needs to be given to the use of appropriate gender identity terminology, protecting privacy and confidentiality, and respecting individual rights and diverse needs.
- Councils will need clear guidance on the WGA reporting that is to be made public, how privacy protection will be managed and how the information will be used by the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector Office.

5.3 Linking requirements of the Gender Equality Act with the Local Government Act

- Integration of workforce planning processes will be an important consideration as all councils prepare to implement WGAs and GEAPs as required by the Gender Equality Act, and to develop Workforce Plans as required under the Local Government Act.
- The Gender Equality Act and the Local Government Act are aligned in that the Workforce Plans need to 'set out measures to seek to ensure gender equality, diversity and inclusiveness'. However, Workforce Plans have a broad strategic and operational purpose and it will be helpful to develop guidance resources to support councils to develop GEAPs and Workforce Plans that are well integrated and avoid unnecessary duplication. It is noted that the Gender Equality Act has provision for an entity to submit a document 'prepared for another purpose and request that it be taken to be a Gender Equality Action Plan' provided it fulfils specific requirements (Gender Equality Act Section 13). This option needs to be clarified with clear guidance relevant to the local government context.
- With regard to the links between WGAs and Workforce Plans, there are potential opportunities for collaboration and co-ordination across the local government sector to enhance workforce information systems (existing or new) so they are consistent with the requirements of the respective legislation and support effective GEAPs and Workforce Plans. This collaboration could include the design of staff experience qualitative research tools.
- This collaborative work on compliance and improvements in human resources data systems could be supported through the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector in partnership with the MAV and Local Government Victoria.

As previously noted through the Local Government Gender Impact Assessment Pilot, the Workplace Gender Audit Pilot has affirmed that councils are actively committed to progressing gender equality in their workplaces and in their communities. The pilot has also highlighted that councils are very diverse and will have variable capacity to implement the full requirements of the Gender Equality Act in the short term. It will take time to build the capacity and capability for effective WGAs.

This report presents a number of issues and suggestions to inform the development of timely guidance resources and other support systems which can respond to the unique and diverse needs of local government.

The Gender Equality Act and the establishment of the new Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector represent a very significant advance for gender equality in Victoria and the local government sector is well placed to play a key role in this reform. Continuing the positive partnership approach between the Commission, the MAV, Victorian councils and Local Government Victoria will provide an important foundation for this reform to achieve substantial improvements to gender equality in Victoria.

REFERENCES

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