

TOWONG SHIRE COUNCIL GENDER EQUALITY ACTION PLAN 2022-2025



Numbers Are			
0	1	2	3
4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19
20			

Front cover image: Tallangatta Early Years Learning Centre.

An incredible amount of learning and development takes place during the first five years of a child's life. Council provides health, family support, education and childcare services to support children and their families through these important early years. Research has shown that children who participate in a high quality early years program are more likely to be prepared for formal education.

The Tallangatta Early Years Learning Centre offers both kindergarten and long day care services and is based at the Tallangatta Integrated Community Centre at 33-37 Towong St, Tallangatta. Educators provide an educational program based on the interests, abilities and emerging skills of each child in line with the Australian National Learning Framework Standards.

Contents

Chief Executive Officer’s Introduction	4
1. Legislative Requirements	5
2. Development of this Plan.....	6
3. Alignment to Council Strategy.....	6
4. Workplace Gender Audit Findings	7
5. Strategies and Actions	7
5.1 Awareness and Skills.....	7
5.2 Recruitment and Remuneration.....	8
5.3 Flexibility.....	8
5.4 Gender Impact Assessments	9
5.5 Workforce Data.....	9

Chief Executive Officer's Introduction

I am pleased to present our *Gender Equality Action Plan 2022-2025*. In line with the gender equality principles outlined in the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, we believe that everyone should be able to live in a safe society and have access to equal power, resources and opportunities, while being treated with dignity, respect and fairness.

We seek to encourage and empower our staff to make choices about their lives and careers without being limited by gender stereotypes or prejudices, and to promote employment opportunities with Council in the same spirit. We recognise that there is great value in having a diverse workforce, with the people in our teams bringing different backgrounds and perspectives.

This *Gender Equality Action Plan* sets out the strategies and measures that we will put in place to promote gender equality in the workplace. It includes the findings of the workplace gender audit that we undertook in 2021, in line with the requirements of the *Gender Equality Act 2020*. It also reflects feedback from our staff, including what they told us through the *People Matter Survey 2021*, a special edition of which was commissioned by the *Victorian Public Sector Commission* to aid organisations in developing their Gender Equality Action Plans.

I am proud to say that Team Towong is well represented by women, broadly and at all levels. At the same time several areas of our workforce are heavily biased towards traditional gender roles. While our staff broadly indicate that they feel supported in any career path that they wish to pursue regardless of gender, there is more that we can do to consciously pursue gender equality and diversity. The strategies and actions in this *Plan* are divided into five main areas:

- Awareness and Skills
- Recruitment and Remuneration
- Flexibility
- Gender Impact Assessments
- Workforce Data.

I look forward to working with our Councillors and staff to ensure that we have an inclusive workforce, and that we are able to tap into the breadth of diverse talent available in our communities.



Juliana Phelps
Chief Executive Officer

1. Legislative Requirements

The *Gender Equality Act 2020* requires defined entities, including public service bodies, universities and councils in Victoria with more than 50 employees, to consider and promote gender equality, and to take necessary and proportionate action towards achieving gender equality. Specific obligations of the *Act* include:

- Developing and implementing a Gender Equality Action Plan
- Publicly reporting on progress in relation to workplace gender equality
- Completing gender impact assessments in relation to policies, programs and services that impact the public.

Progress reports are to be submitted to the Public Sector Gender Equality Commissioner every two years, and the first progress report is due on 31 October 2023. Progress reports must show that the organisation has made reasonable and material progress towards gender equality.

Gender Equality Principles

The Gender Equality Action Plan must take into account the gender equality principles as defined by section 6 of the *Gender Equality Act 2020*:

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

Gender Pay Equity Principles

The *Gender Equality Act 2020* is supplemented by the *Gender Equality Amendment Regulations 2021* which includes new gender pay equity principles which must also be taken into account in the preparation of the Gender Equality Action Plan. In line with section 5A of the *Regulations*, these include the following:

- (a) *equal pay for work of equal or comparable value, which refers to work valued as equal in terms of skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions, including different types of work;*

(b) employment and pay practices are free from bias and discrimination, including the effects of unconscious bias and assumptions based on gender;

(c) employment and pay practices, pay rates and systems are transparent and information about these matters is readily accessible and understandable;

(d) employment and pay practices recognise and account for different patterns of labour force participation by employees who undertake unpaid or caring work;

(e) interventions and solutions are collectively developed and agreed to, sustainable and enduring;

(f) employees, employee representatives and employers work collaboratively to achieve mutually agreed outcomes.

2. Development of this Plan

The *Gender Equality Action Plan 2022-2025* has been developed with reference to the outcomes of Council's workplace gender audit results and is also based on consultation with staff (including feedback received through the *People Matter Survey 2021* and the *Workforce Survey* conducted in 2021), Councillors, and employee representatives, including the Australian Services Union.

3. Alignment to Council Strategy

The *Gender Equality Action Plan 2022-2025* is guided by overarching Council strategy including:

Community Vision

Towong Shire will be the ideal place to be: welcoming, vibrant and diverse communities with quality facilities and services.

Council Mission

To provide strong leadership and work with our communities to enhance their social, economic and environmental wellbeing.

Council Values

Respect: We will listen and consider other perspectives and treat each other with courtesy.

Integrity: We will be honest with strong moral principles.

Pride: We will always take care in what we do.

Teamwork: We will help others to achieve by being positive, enthusiastic and confident.

Council Plan Objective: Community Wellbeing

Encourage and support all people in our Shire to be healthy, happy, connected and resilient.

Council Plan Strategy: People

Provide a great place to work that supports a high performing organisation.

The *Action Plan* also expands on the Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusiveness strategies outlined in the *Workforce Plan 2021-2025*.

4. Workplace Gender Audit Findings

It is noted that the Audit is based on information as at 30 June 2021.

Workforce Composition

The organisation was 63% female and 37% male by headcount, and the CEO and her direct reports (levels 0 and 1) were all females. The gender composition of levels 2 was 50% female and 50% male; level 3 was 71% female and 29% male; and level 4 was 58% female and 42% male. In this context the level refers to the number of supervisors from the CEO to the employee.

Governing Body

The governing body (the Councillors) consisted of four males and one female. It is noted historically that the gender balance has shifted between males and females.

Remuneration

Remuneration data did not indicate systemic pay discrimination and, in line with Council's Enterprise Agreement, remuneration is reflective of role, abilities, experience and qualifications.

Sexual Harassment

There were no cases of sexual harassment reported during the audit period. Two Council policies relating to reporting sexual harassment were reviewed for improvements during the period.

Recruitment, Promotion and Exits

54% of new recruits were female and 46% were male. The composition of promotions and exits were reflective of the composition of the organisation.

Flexible Work and Leave Arrangements

Females favoured flexible working arrangements, comprising 91% of part time staff and 89% of casual roles; there were more part time females than full time within every age group. Four males and three females took parental leave, with females taking much more parental leave than males.

Composition by Occupation

The outdoor crew was almost entirely male, while educators and administrative staff were almost entirely female.

Intersectional Factors

Data was not available to audit most intersectional factors such as Aboriginality, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, race, religion, or sexual orientation. Age group data identified that males are more likely to be in older age groups than females.

5. Strategies and Actions

5.1 Awareness and Skills

Council has several policies which promote diversity, which set a no tolerance approach to inappropriate workplace behaviours, and which help staff to understand the avenues available to them if they experience such behaviours. These include the *Employee Code of Conduct* and the *Discrimination, Harassment, Bullying, Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity Policy* which are signed by new recruits, as well as the *Issue Resolution Policy*. All policies are regularly circulated to staff.

Further training will be provided to staff to support their awareness of appropriate workplace conduct, issue resolution avenues, and gender equality issues and solutions.

Training will also be provided to relevant staff to assist them in conducting Gender Impact Assessments in relation to the policies, programs and services within their remit.

Number	Action	When
1.1	Develop and embed regular periodic mandatory training regarding workplace conduct and issue resolution avenues	2022
1.2	Rollout unconscious bias training to Councillors and staff involved in the recruitment process	2022
1.3	Rollout gender impact assessment training to relevant staff	2022
1.4	Integrate gender equality and diversity training into the Councillor induction program	2024

5.2 Recruitment and Remuneration

Council's *Recruitment Policy* sets out measures to ensure that recruitment decisions are made on merit and with regards to gender equality, diversity and inclusiveness. Interview panels will preferably consist of a mix of genders and selection is to be based on demonstrated skills, abilities, experience and behaviours.

The remuneration offered as part of the recruitment process is also the foundation for pay equity. Council's remuneration levels are set in accordance with the bands and levels outlined in the *Local Government Award* which set clear expectations as to how remuneration is to be based on skills, experience and qualifications. Position descriptions are benchmarked against these bands and levels whenever they are significantly altered, and staff progress against levels is reviewed regularly through the workplan process.

Additional measures may be taken to encourage diverse applicants to apply for Council roles through ensuring that recruitment advertisements support and promote diversity and inclusiveness. Additional support could also be provided to encourage diverse candidates to step forward for Councillor roles.

Number	Action	When
2.1	Review recruitment advertisements and imagery to support diversity and inclusiveness	2022
2.2	Encourage diverse candidates leading into the next Council election cycle in collaboration with relevant associations	2024

5.3 Flexibility

Council recognises the value of flexible work practices in enabling a diverse and productive workforce. The results of the *Workforce Survey* undertaken in 2021 reflects that staff feel supported by their supervisor and colleagues in relation to flexibility and support for work/life balance issues. Flexible work practices are both formally supported, for example through the arrangements outlined in the *Enterprise Agreement 2018*, the *Work From Home Application* and the *Flexi Time Policy*, and through informal or case-by-case arrangements, for example varied start and finish times.

This strength could be further harnessed as part of Council's employee value proposition and explicitly promoted to existing and prospective staff.

Number	Action	When
3.1	Include flexibility as part of Council's employee value proposition in the development of our People Plan, and consider avenues to promote it	2022

5.4 Gender Impact Assessments

Council strongly supports and welcomes diversity in its communities and the introduction of gender impact assessments presents the opportunity to take a more formal approach. It is proposed that gender equality and diversity impact assessments are included in all Council reports and policies.

Number	Action	When
4.1	Following the rollout of gender impact assessment training, include a Gender Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment section in the templates for Council papers and policies	2022

5.5 Workforce Data

Council's first workforce gender audit revealed that we do not collect adequate data to support analysis of intersectional factors. This may be remedied through collecting this data when employees commence employment with Council.

Number	Action	When
5.1	Commence collection of intersectional data as part of employee onboarding	2023

6. Strategic Resourcing Statement

The Senior Management Team is committed to the delivery and embedding of the Gender Equality Action Plan. Implementation of the Action Plan will be facilitated by the People and Culture Coordinator and Human Resources Officer. Funds have been allocated within Council's training budgets towards the relevant initiatives.