

Merri-bek City Council

# **Gender Equality Progress Report 2023**

Reporting period: 1 July 2021 – 30 June 2023



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## Introduction

Merri-bek City Council adopted our Gender Equality Commitment in 2019. This Commitment is to the community we serve and has led to many actions which promote gender equity through our services and programs.

In 2022, we launched our first Gender Equality Action Plan, focussed on our staff and workplace. We commit to being an inclusive organisation that reflects the diversity of our community, and promotes an environment of respect, equality and dignity.

In this report you will find a summary of what we achieved between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2023.

Improvements so far under our Gender Equality Action Plan include advances in:

- equity and inclusion training
- data collection
- inclusive policies and processes.

We have also identified areas for future focus and will be adjusting our approach to some initiatives. Change doesn't happen in a vacuum and our Plan must respect the changing shape of our organisation and the changing needs of our community.

We recognise that gender-based discrimination interacts, and overlaps, with discrimination based on cultural background, sexuality, disability, religion, class and residency status. We commit to working intersectionally to combat this.

Our internal vision – One team, brave and diverse, making a difference – underpins our commitment to diversity, inclusion, and an equitable workplace for all.

## Progress against our Gender Equality Action Plan

As of 30 June 2023, more than 37% of our action items are complete. A further 12% are ongoing and 32% are in progress.

### Focus area 1: Gender composition at all levels of the workforce

#### Action 1.1

Provide training on gender equality to all staff and people leaders as part of induction and orientation, and as part of ongoing professional development requirements.

**Status:** Complete

- Cultural Safety Training offered to all staff on 11/10/2022 and 15/06/2023.
- Bystander Training offered to all staff 06/09/2022 and 02/05/2023.
- Equal Opportunity Training offered as mandatory to all staff every 3 years, with a view to increasing frequency to every two years.
- Introduction to Gender and Sexuality Training 101 offered to all staff on 04/04/2023.
- Sexual harassment training is now offered every two years.
- Gender Commission Leader Session held in October 2023.

#### Action 1.2

Provide cultural safety, diversity and inclusion and bystander training to all staff as part of induction and orientation, and as part of ongoing professional development requirements.

**Status:** Ongoing

- Cultural Safety Training offered to all staff on 11/10/2022 and 15/06/2023.
- Bystander Training offered to all staff on 06/09/2022 and 02/05/2023.
- Equal Opportunity Training offered as mandatory to all staff every 3 years, with a view to increasing frequency to every two years.
- Introduction to Gender and Sexuality Training 101 offered to all staff on 04/04/2023.
- Sexual harassment training is now offered every two years.
- Gender Commission Leader Session held in October 2023.
- Induction training now includes gender equality and diversity obligations.
- Training is ongoing and incorporated into the Corporate Training Calendar.

### **Action 1.3**

Embed the appropriate use of pronouns in all communications and provide appropriate training methods for staff to understand gender diversity and the importance of pronouns.

**Status:** Complete

Staff can now update their email signatures and Intranet profiles to include their pronouns.

Communications were sent to educate all staff on the importance of pronouns in February 2023, including:

- A video from the CEO
- A post on the staff intranet
- An All Staff newsletter.

#### **Action 1.4**

Improve our data collection systems to enable safe and accurate recording of employee identity information (i.e. gender, sexuality, cultural identity, disability, First Nation identification) and monitoring/reporting of workforce diversity.

**Status:** Complete

Payroll system updated to capture the following data points:

- First Nations identification
- Sexuality
- Religion
- Cultural identity
- Disability.

Onboarding data collection processes have been updated to reflect these changes, and existing staff have been encouraged to update their profiles if they wish.

#### **Action 1.5**

Update the Code of Conduct to demonstrate inclusive practice and improve staff awareness around appropriate use of gender inclusive and affirming language, principles and practices.

**Status:** In progress

The Employee Code of Conduct is scheduled to be reviewed before the end of 2023/2024.

The Community Development team has developed an Inclusive Language Guide for both internal and external use. The guide will sit within the Accessible Communications Policy, and communications are being developed to promote its roll-out.

#### **Action 1.6**

Create a more gender inclusive and safe workplace by providing all gender bathrooms.

**Status:** Ongoing

Planning is now underway to create gender neutral bathrooms near the IT office.

#### **Action 1.7**

Develop and implement a campaign to encourage a culture that challenges rigid gender roles, expectations and stereotypes within the workplace.

**Status:** In progress.

In November 2022, an event was held at Council's Coburg Civil Centre for Council staff, community partner organisations and interested community members. High-profile speakers talked about the Gender Equality Act, and engaging men in violence prevention. This event had over 70 attendees, including Councillors, the CEO, the Executive team, and many managers from across all departments. The presentation resulted in extensive debate and reflection amongst staff, and attendee surveys said the forum was inspiring and encouraging.

#### **Action 1.8**

Actively monitor and respond to resistance and backlash to gender equality in the workplace and equip leaders to respond.

**Status:** In progress

The Human Resources team are monitoring and tracking any backlash through Council's Case Management Process.

Leadership training on responding to backlash will be reviewed when required.

## **Focus area 2: Gender composition of governing bodies**

### **Action 2.1**

Council Advisory Committees and Reference Groups have a gender balance and representation from diverse communities.

**Status:** Complete

Council Advisory Committees and Reference Groups currently have diverse representation.

### **Action 2.2**

Participate in campaigns that support women and gender diverse people from diverse backgrounds to run for Council.

**Status:** Ongoing

Current elected Councillors represent diverse backgrounds. Ongoing promotion of this is required.

## **Focus area 3: Equal remuneration**

### **Action 3.1**

Continue to support equal pay and equal recognition for all types of paid work within the organisation.

**Status:** Complete



Council supports equal pay and has a banded structure for all positions below senior management, which ensures equal pay/recognition.

Senior Officer and Senior Executive Officer salaries are monitored in the annual review process to ensure equal pay and equal recognition.

### **Action 3.2**

Undertake a pay gap audit and analysis every two years to monitor changes at all levels and work types.

**Status:** In progress

Initial analysis was completed in 2023, and plans are in place to share it with the Executive Team.

## **Focus area 4: Sexual harassment**

### **Action 4.1**

Collect information about sexual harassment at work at least once every two years by:

- Incorporating relevant questions into staff culture or staff engagement surveys, and exit surveys
- Reviewing complaints information to identify trends
- Exploring ways Councillors views are included.

**Status:** Ongoing

Survey questions included in the:

- 2023 Staff Engagement survey
- 2023 People Matter survey
- Organisational exit survey.

Human Resources now undertake an annual review of sexual harassment complaints.

#### **Action 4.2**

Review and revise Council's sexual harassment policy and procedure with a victim-survivor-centric approach to ensure:

- Safety in reporting and complaint handling
- Appropriate case management support, and
- Accountability for perpetrators.

**Status:** Complete

The Prevention of Sexual Harassment Policy and Guidelines were reviewed and updated in 2021 using a victim-survivor centric approach.

Staff communications were undertaken, and people leaders across Council were instructed to revisit the topic of sexual harassment within their own teams.

#### **Action 4.3**

Update relevant policies, procedures and training to explicitly cover sexual harassment from the public.

**Status:** In progress

The Prevention of Sexual Harassment Policy and Guidelines now explicitly cover sexual harassment from the public. Staff training now needs to be updated.

#### **Action 4.4**

Prepare regular communications to customers and staff affirming that Council does not tolerate any form of sexual harassment from the public.

**Status:** Not started

#### Action 4.5

Work with key stakeholders to review training methods and develop a plan for ongoing delivery to better utilise and/or offer alternative training methods to promote Council's Appropriate Workplace Behaviour Policy and other relevant policies.

**Status:** Not started

#### Action 4.6

Work with key stakeholders to develop an annual communications plan to more effectively communicate Appropriate Workplace Behaviour Policy and other related policies as they relate to equal employment opportunity and sexual harassment.

- Communication specific to sexual harassment to come from senior members of staff as a way of role modelling respectful behaviour.
- Consider ways of communicating to staff and Councillors about how and where to find sexual harassment policies outside of the mandatory training, conducted every two years i.e. standard agenda items in team/organisation-wide meetings.
- Communication to also come from senior members of staff on a more regular basis including before staff-wide or local level functions.

**Status:** Ongoing

Leadership communications have been reviewed periodically to ensure key messages regarding respectful behaviour and sexual harassment are reinforced.

A Senior Management Team/leadership session was held in December 2022, focussing on sexual harassment.

Training was delivered to Councillors in 2022 about sexual harassment and respectful workplaces.

#### **Action 4.7**

Regularly communicate to staff and Councillors about our policies on sexual harassment, promote complaint channels and provide training for managers on how to respond to complaints of sexual harassment.

Ensure people managers are trained to respond effectively to a sexual harassment complaint that concerns a staff member they supervise.

Update relevant policies i.e. dispute resolution policy to allow for anonymous complaints.

**Status:** Not started

#### **Action 4.8**

Update internal central registry with specific categories to easily identify complaints of sexual harassment.

Improve processes for keeping complete records of complaints through to resolution, including documenting rationale for not investigating complaints or not continuing with an investigation.

**Status:** Complete

The Case Management Register has been reviewed and updated to allow reporting on sexual harassment complaints. Case management folders now include pertinent details and evidence, and any decisions made relating to the complaint through to resolution.

#### **Action 4.9**

Update complaint procedures to ensure the complainant is provided with an outcome of the complaint.

Provide further guidance on how investigators can support reluctant complainants.

**Status:** Complete

The Dispute Resolution Policy and Procedure were updated in December 2022 to ensure a complainant is notified of the outcome of their complaint.

A clause has also been inserted to include advice, support and resolution options to assist reluctant complainants.

#### **Action 4.10**

Organise sexual harassment training for Councillors at least twice per council term.

**Status:** Complete

Councillors completed Sexual Harassment Prevention, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace, and Respectful Workplace training in 2022.

#### **Action 4.11**

Ensure Councillors are informed of their internal and external options for sexual harassment support and complaints, in line with the training and policy details.

Councillors to be provided with a copy of the revised standalone policy once it has been approved.

**Status:** Complete

Councillors completed Sexual Harassment Prevention, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace, and Respectful Workplace training in 2022.

The Presentation of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace – Councillor Policy has been approved and included in Councillor induction.

#### **Action 4.12**

Deliver mandatory bystander training to all staff, that includes how to identify and safely respond to gender and sexual harassment in the workplace.

**Status:** In progress

Bystander training was offered to all staff in September 2022 and May 2023, and is provided on an ongoing basis through Council's learning system.

This training is currently optional, with work needed to make it mandatory.

## **Focus area 5: Recruitment and promotion**

### **Action 5.1**

Continue to implement and review guidelines to support more inclusive and accessible recruitment practices, including our approach to advertising, application and selection processes.

**Status:** In progress

Updates to the following are currently underway to increase inclusivity and accessibility:

- Job ad inclusions
- Pre-screening questions
- Interview guides
- Onboarding paperwork
- Hiring Manager Checklist.

A First Peoples Employment Officer has been recruited and the First Nations Employment Plan now includes specific support for First Nations job applicants.

### **Action 5.2**

Ensure that processes and decisions regarding recruitment and promotion are clear, consistent and transparent, and based on equity principles.

**Status:** In progress

The Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedure are currently being reviewed.

The First Nations Employment Plan implementation now includes specific support for First Nations Applicants.

### **Action 5.3**

Establish identified positions to prioritise targeted recruitment of people with lived experience in various roles across Council.

**Status:** In progress

An initial implementation of identified roles has commenced in the Social Policy and Libraries teams.

### **Action 5.4**

Provide more coaching and mentorship opportunities for women, including women from under-represented communities, who wish to work in part time roles or who are currently working in part time roles who want to progress to more senior positions in the organisation.

**Status:** Not started

### **Action 5.5**

Continue to provide and promote opportunities for part time staff to take up secondments and higher duties to support their career progression.

**Status:** In progress

Secondment guidelines have been developed to support opportunities for internal staff.

## **Focus area 6: Leave and flexibility**

### **Action 6.1**

Support more people to access flexible working arrangements, including remote work options and reduced or flexible spread hours.

Simplify the process for applying for formal flexible working arrangements.

**Status:** Complete

The Flexible Work Arrangements Policy has now been updated and communicated to all staff.

Staff in roles suitable for working remotely now have access to hybrid working arrangements.

### **Action 6.2**

Update and implement policy on flexible working arrangements.

**Status:** Complete

The Flexible Work Arrangements Policy has now been updated and implemented.

### **Action 6.3**

Actively encourage men to take up flexible working arrangements, primary carer parental leave and other leave entitlements specific to caring responsibilities.

**Status:** Complete

Human Resources have developed a video to promote parental leave and flexible working arrangements to male employees across the organisation. This video was published on the staff intranet and communicated to all staff via email.

### **Action 6.4**

Support more job share opportunities at Council, particularly in senior management roles.



**Status:** Not started

#### **Action 6.5**

Introduce paid superannuation for people on parental leave.

**Status:** Complete

Paid superannuation for people on parental leave has been included in the current Enterprise Agreement.

#### **Action 6.6**

Explore options for expanding the range of leave entitlements available to staff, including miscarriage and leave to support gender affirmation and transition.

**Status:** Complete

The outlined leave provisions have been included in the current Enterprise Agreement.

#### **Action 6.7**

Promote availability of family violence leave, including what support is available and how confidentiality is maintained.

**Status:** Complete

Family violence leave provisions were put into the most recent Enterprise Agreement.

The Family and Domestic Violence Policy, which was updated to include details of available support, and clauses around confidentiality, was endorsed by the Executive team.

### **Focus area 7: Occupational gender segregation**

#### **Action 7.1**

Actively engage more men at Council to participate in gender equality initiatives, raise awareness and provide capacity building activities.

**Status:** Ongoing

A social campaign was undertaken in November and December of 2021.

In November 2022, an event was held at Council's Coburg Civil Centre for Council staff, community partner organisations and interested community members. High-profile speakers talked about the Gender Equality Act, and engaging men in violence prevention. This event had over 70 attendees, including Councillors, the CEO, the Executive team, and many managers from across all departments. The presentation resulted in extensive debate and reflection amongst staff, and attendee surveys said the forum was inspiring and encouraging.

### **Action 7.2**

Gender Equality Reference Group continue to meet and support action.

**Status:** Not started

### **Action 7.3**

Develop and implement targeted strategies to improve gender equality in teams which are dominated by either men or women e.g. Information Technology or Home Support.

These strategies should include tailored training, campaigns and culture change activities that create safer and more inclusive work environments.

**Status:** In progress

Work has begun on an organisational Employee Value Proposition which will promote Council's approach to diversity and inclusion.

### **Action 7.4**

Encourage more women to pursue careers in professions they are typically underrepresented in, including through apprenticeships and traineeships.

**Status:** In progress

Work has begun on an organisational Employee Value Proposition which will promote Council's approach to diversity and inclusion.

## Progress against the key gender equality indicators

Information in this section was sourced from Merri-bek City Council's:

- 2021 & 2023 Gender Equality Data Audits
- 2021 & 2023 People Matter surveys

We are not currently able to adequately report on the experience of our gender diverse staff or provide sufficient intersectional analysis. Work is currently being undertaken to bring our demographic data practices up to best practice and build organisational trust to disclose personal identities.

### **Indicator 1: Gender composition at all levels of the workforce**

Has progress been made? No

The organisational breakdown of staff by gender has remained relatively steady between 2021 (39% men and 61% women) and 2023 (40% men and 60% women).

Gendered breakdown of staff at Band 7 and above (including SEOs and SOs), and the gendered breakdown of contract type (full time vs part time) have also remained relatively steady with little to no variation between 2021 and 2023.

Currently, we don't have sufficient data to report on gender diverse staff. Work needs to be done to bring our gender data question for employees up to best practice to create a culturally safe reporting environment.

### **Indicator 2: Gender composition of governing bodies**

Has progress been made? Yes

The gender balance of Councillors moved closer to parity between 2021 and 2023, with a 13% drop in the percentage of male councillors (to 45%) and a 13% rise in the percentage of female councillors (to 55%).

In both years, the mayor was female.

### **Indicator 3: Equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value across all levels of the workforce irrespective of gender**

Has progress been made? No

Merri-bek City Council's pay gap has moved further in favour of women across all measurements:

- Median Base Salary: -2.5% in 2023 (down from 0.8% in 2021)
- Mean Base Salary: -1.3% in 2023 (down from -1% in 2021)
- Median Total Remuneration: -2.2% in 2023 (down from 1% in 2021)
- Mean Total Remuneration: -1.4% in 2023 (down from 0.9% in 2021)

However, all measurements are within the target range of -5% and +5%, as outlined by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA).

A preliminary audit of remuneration indicates a fair disbursement across all roles, regardless of gender. Banded roles are consistent and do not allow adjustments to be made based on subjective decisions.

Further analysis of salary reviews will be undertaken at the Executive level in 2024.

### **Indicator 4: Sexual harassment in the workplace**

Has progress been made? Yes

No formal sexual harassment complaints were received during the reporting period.

Survey reports of sexual harassment experiences remained relatively steady during the reporting period (7% in 2021 and 6% in 2023). There was a 6% drop for gender diverse staff members to 7%, which is 3% lower than the Local Government Agency benchmark.

The disparity between formal sexual harassment complaints and informal reporting via the People Matter survey indicates the need to focus on raising awareness of sexual harassment compliant processes.

Positive sentiment regarding “my organisation takes steps to eliminate bullying, harassment and discrimination” rose 4% in the organisation, up to 76%, and rose 14% for staff with disability. This indicates rising organisational trust in organisational commitment to combatting harassment.

Focus areas going forward will be promoting respectful workplace behaviours, and empowering staff to challenge inappropriate behaviours.

### **Indicator 5: Recruitment and promotion practices in the workplaces**

Has progress been made? Yes

Between 2021 and 2023 Merri-bek City Council moved closer to gender parity in recruitment figures (51% men and 49% women in 2023); staff exits (44% men, 55% women and 1% gender diverse people); higher duties (49% men and 51% women); and career development opportunities (41% men and 59% women).

Promotion options within Council are infrequent however key leadership roles have been successfully filled with existing employees where appropriate. Council roles are often highly technical and as such promotion from within can be difficult.

Opportunities for internal secondments are shared across the network and provide employees with opportunities to work in different branches and teams.

### **Indicator 6: Leave and flexibility**

Has progress been made? Yes

During the reporting period:

- 849 weeks of paid parental leave were accessed, 68 weeks of which were utilised by men.
- 69 weeks of unpaid parental leave were accessed, 4 weeks of which were utilised by men.
- 2 staff have accessed family violence leave.
- 43 staff were on formal flexible working arrangements.

The People Matter survey revealed a 3% rise in overall positive staff sentiment towards organisational support for family violence leave (to 88% in 2023), and a 17% rise in positive staff sentiment amongst gender diverse employees (to 89% in 2023).

Positive sentiment regarding “I am confident that if I requested a flexible working arrangement, it would be given due consideration” rose 6% overall (to 82% in 2023), 10% for female employees (to 89% in 2023), and 16% for gender diverse employees (to 70% in 2023). Strong rises were also seen for male carers (up 6% to 85% in 2023) and female carers (up 15% to 94% in 2023).

### **Indicator 7: Occupational gender segregation**

Has progress been made? Yes

Merri-bek City Council moved further towards gender parity in the following occupational groupings:

- Managers – men 37% (up 4%) and women 63% (down 4%).
- Professionals – men 33% (up 2%) and women 67% (down 2%).
- Labourers – men 53% (down 2%) and women 47% (down 2%).

## Gender Impact Assessments

Under the Gender Equality Act 2020, Merri-bek City Council is required to undertake Gender Impact Assessments (GIAs) when developing or reviewing any program, policy or service which has a direct and significant impact on the public.

The GIAs completed during the reporting period are listed below.

### Climate Risk Foundational Action Plan 2023 – 2025

#### Status

New policy

#### Description

The Climate Risk Foundational Action Plan identifies actions for 2023 – 2025 to improve the climate resilience of Merri-bek in 5 areas:

- Our organisation
- Our infrastructure, open spaces and natural environment
- Our services
- How we can best make information and support available to community and business; and
- Partnerships.

#### Actions

The vision of the Climate Risk Strategy is for Merri-bek to be a climate ready and resilient community with no one left behind. Taking an equity and inclusion lens Council has been looking at the risk factors people may experience including age, gender, language and technological barriers, income and other factors to address the needs of the most at-risk groups.

Changes are being made regarding how information is collected, including data points within surveys that address gender and caring responsibilities. These changes enhance Council's



understanding of how women, gender diverse people and/or people with caring responsibilities may be impacted differently by climate change.

Implementation of specific actions is also under review; e.g. how older women can be targeted to be beneficiaries of energy subsidies for low-income households as the GIA identified that they are at increased risk of death and illness during heatwaves.

The GIA also identified that there are barriers for women and gender diverse people in engaging with energy solutions like installing solar and maintenance and there is potential to target this cohort as potential beneficiaries.

### **Intersectional approach**

An intersectional approach was put into practice by:

- Translating surveys and information materials in different languages.
- Conducting surveys and gathering information at community events attended by target groups, including older people and culturally diverse communities.
- Working with community services to support clients and community in areas with high multicultural diversity and lower socio-economic backgrounds.

## **Merri-bek LGBTIQA+ Action Plan**

### **Status**

New policy

### **Description**

An Action Plan to support Council to improve services, build community capacity and create an inclusive workplace for LGBTIQA+ communities.

### **Actions taken**

Council's first LGBTIQA+ Action Plan spans 2023 – 2026 so no actions have been taken at this time.

The Plan promotes leadership, inclusion and activities to support LGBTIQ+ communities across the municipality. Priorities were identified with assistance from community members and actions finalised before endorsement by Council.

The Action Plan is funded over the three years to provide a solid foundation for Council to work collaboratively on key projects.

### **Intersectional approach**

The Action Plan took an intersectional approach when exploring the impacts of gender and sexual orientation to address heteronormative structures and barriers that many LGBTIQ+ people may face.

Consideration was taken to ensure the voices of trans and gender diverse people were heard throughout the process, through direct representation in working groups and via larger engagement. However, there were some limitations in our engagement of other priority groups, including First Nations People, people with a disability, migrant refugee and multifaith communities, older people and young people.

We'll consider how to address this in the future, e.g. through community engagement and expanding community connections.

## **Human Rights Policy 2016 – 2026**

### **Status**

Reviewed policy

### **Description**

Council's first Human Rights Policy was adopted in 2016, and this update reflects the changed social, political, economic, environmental and health context.

This policy aligns with Commonwealth, Victorian and Local Government policies and legislation and aims to achieve consistency in Council's approach to be an inclusive

organisation, deliver inclusive and accessible services, and advance inclusion and social cohesion in the community.

It applies to all areas of Council, and informs the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of all policies, services, programs and infrastructure.

### **Actions taken**

The Human Rights Policy 2016 – 2026 was refreshed with the following key updates:

- Alignment with current Legal context (Local Government Act, Gender Equality Act, Privacy Act).
- Alignment with broader policy and contemporary context (Treaty, Climate change/climate justice, Disaster response).
- Life stage considerations (children, young people and older people).

Council's Policy gives precedence to specific groups who are recognised as being at greatest risk of exclusion from social, economic and political life due to access barriers and discrimination.

The Policy includes Statements of Commitment to these groups, including:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- People with Disability
- LGBTIQ+ communities
- Migrant, Refugee and Faith communities
- Women, Girls and Gender Diverse communities.

The Policy has also identified additional priorities when considering human rights, including:

- An age and lifespan lens, with attention to children, young people and older people
- Poverty, inequality and socioeconomic status
- Climate change and climate justice
- Issues exacerbated by COVID-19
- Carers, volunteering and civic participation (unpaid caring/contributions).

Examples of action outcomes by 30 June 2023 include:

- Human Rights Charter training for staff
- Joint community and staff forum to identify opportunities to collaborate around human rights priority issues
- The establishment of an Interfaith Network
- Funding of community projects to enhance civic participation by members of our culturally diverse community.

### **Intersectional approach**

The members of Council's Human Rights and Inclusion Advisory Committee and associated Community Reference Groups represent the Policy's priority groups and were closely involved in the review process. Members had the opportunity to shape the process, input changes and comment on the updated draft policy. Further, the Human Rights and Inclusion Advisory Committee endorsed the policy following their meeting on 18 August 2022.

## **Safe Movement of Pedestrians and Cyclists - Outcomes of 12-Months Trials**

### **Status**

New program

### **Description**

The installation and monitoring of 4 trial sites aimed at increasing community members' uptake of cycling and walking by making it easier to walk and cycle around Merri-bek through changes to road infrastructure and operation. The trial sites included 3 separated bike lane infrastructure projects and a shared zone alongside Fleming Park.

### **Actions taken**

Trial infrastructure (3 separated bike lanes and 1 shared zone) was installed in July 2021. Following the conclusion of the trial, a decision was made in August 2022 to make the infrastructure changes permanent at all sites except one separated bike lane.

Evidence indicates that women in the community ride bikes for transport significantly less often than men, despite there being minimal gender differences in the desire to ride. Council's separated bike lane project has aimed to reduce barriers to bike riding for less confident cyclists by providing more protection from vehicle traffic and parked vehicle doors. Post-intervention surveys confirmed the success of this project, with female ridership at the trial sites increased when compared to nearby on road bike lanes where separation is not provided.

The decision not to install permanent separated bike lanes at one trial site was partly influenced by community concerns about potential accessibility barriers in relation to a medical centre located alongside the infrastructure treatment. Council is now considering options for prioritising pedestrian safety in the design of future infrastructure projects around sensitive sites.

Shared zones at one project site were workshopped for impacts to visually impaired pedestrians and, as a result, custom totem signs explaining the operation were installed at 6 locations around the shared zones, with braille panels explaining the treatment.

### **Intersectional approach**

Summary information about the projects was translated into the 4 most common languages for the area, to assist with community engagement.

Council undertook usage surveys at all sites reporting on numbers of pedestrians and cyclists by gender, both before and during the 12-months-trial in all different seasons. Feedback was also received through Council's website and onsite interviews with users, with results considering age and gender.

## **Community Grants Policy**

### **Status**

Reviewed policy

## Description

The Merri-bek Community Grants Policy outlines Council's commitments and responsibilities in providing grants to the community. The policy and guidelines ensure that clear information and guidance are available to promote fair and equitable access to the grants, and foster transparency and accountability in the grant allocation process.

## Actions taken

Following the Gender Impact Assessment, a number of changes were made to Council's Community Grants Policy to meet the needs of people of different genders, promote gender equality and address gender inequality, including:

- A streamlined and simplified application process to make it more accessible and user-friendly to apply for those with time constraints and fewer resources.
- Initiatives benefiting under-represented groups, including women, girls and gender diverse people, are now one of the program's funding priorities, ensuring more equitable access to funding opportunities.
- The assessment process is now conducted independently from Council by a Community Advisory Panel consisting of eight Merri-bek residents and representatives of the Inner North Community Foundation to bring lived experience and diverse voices to the process.

## Intersectional approach

Council undertook extensive community consultations. Participants included:

- Community members who had or had not applied for any grants before
- Community organisations
- Council staff involved in the process, including by supporting applicants
- Coordinators of Council's Human Rights Policy and Gender Equity Policy.

The feedback received during these consultations assisted Council in making improvements regarding the policy content, applicant experience and internal processes.

## Children, Young People and Families Implementation Plan 2022 – 2025

### Status

Reviewed policy

### Description

A four-year plan to address the needs of children, young people, and families. The Plan focuses on improving health, wellbeing and educational outcomes.

The Plan is led by Council's Early Years and Youth Branch who coordinate actions with input from teams across Council.

### Actions taken

Examples of key actions over the last 2 years to meet the needs of people of different genders, address gender inequality and promote gender equality include:

- Supporting fathers in their parenting role and promoting father-inclusive services. This program has gone from strength to strength since it commenced in 2019 in collaboration with not-for profit organisation Dads Group. Key outcomes over the last 2 years include co-design and delivery of the Pilot 'Improving Community Support Pathways for New Fathers Program', which provided:
  - Capacity building and engagement for fathers through new parent and peer support groups focussed on parenting and respectful and equitable relationships.
  - Training and events that address participants' needs, e.g. Dads' Night In education session; Man with a Pram Walking Group; COVID Digital Support Group.
  - Supporting Council's Workforce and program participants to address mental health issues, family violence and suicide risk.
- Collaborating with early years services to increase gender equity. Educators were trained in Gender Equality in the Early Years in 2022 by one of Council's key partners, Women's Health in the North.

- Collaborating with service providers to provide a targeted response to children, young people and families. The team created a range of programs to increase participation in sport and recreation by female and gender diverse young people 12 years and older from culturally diverse backgrounds. These programs included a basketball program, self-defence classes to empower participants, a boxing program and a young women's social support group. All programs have been well-attended and have improved participants' confidence and wellbeing.
- Facilitating the Youth Ambassadors Program and supporting young people to participate in civic life and Council decision making. Council adopted a participant-centred approach, and the recruitment process involved getting to know applicants in-person and recruiting through multiple channels, including schools, social media and posters in community locations. As a result, the successful Ambassadors represent a more diverse and intersectional cohort than previously. Council's ability to offer participants payment to reimburse time-off-work and public transport has been important, as has providing a safe space and establishing trust with participants' parents.

### Intersectional approach

Key learnings to increase intersectionality include:

- The importance of reducing barriers to participation barriers, e.g. by providing training and programs for minimal or no cost.
- It is impossible to create a program that is inclusive of everyone who identifies as a woman due to the intersectionality of this group. Instead, it is best to create multiple groups with different inclusion requirements so that all women have a chance to participate in a space that is comfortable for them and fits with their other commitments.
- By increasing the intersectionality of Council's Youth Ambassadors, Council can gain far greater insights as these young people are part of multiple different communities.



## **Kerbside Waste Reform - Proposed Kerbside Waste Service and Charge Policy**

### **Status**

New policy

### **Description**

The Kerbside Waste Service and Charge Policy 2021 defines the future kerbside waste collection service provided by Council. It includes the decision-making principles and guidance for setting annual waste charges and fees to achieve full cost recovery.

### **Actions taken**

No actions have been taken at this time.

Council's research and extensive community consultation identified that women, who are the predominant care givers of young children and elderly family members, would be most impacted by the garbage services changes proposed in the policy. Council addressed this by inserting a new concession enabling families with 2 or more children in nappies to access an increased garbage capacity at no additional cost.

The policy was adopted by Council in December 2021 with the new concession category. This concession is yet to be enacted as the change to garbage collection frequency has not yet been trialled/implemented.

### **Intersectional approach**

Council conducted social research, an analysis of the Merri-bek ID community profiles, and extensive community consultation to ensure the GIA considered intersectionality.

## **Accessible And Inclusive Communications Policy**

### **Status**

New policy

## **Description**

The goal of the Merri-bek Accessible and Inclusive Communications Policy is to facilitate broader community engagement by removing barriers to accessing information and participating in community consultations.

The Policy outlines a commitment to providing information in formats that are easily understandable and accessible to individuals with diverse needs. This includes proactive measures to ensure that communication materials, including public notices and documents, are designed with inclusivity in mind.

## **Actions taken**

The Policy acknowledges the need to consider various cultural considerations and sensitivities when communicating and consulting with our culturally and linguistically diverse community.

This has been incorporated in our consultation process, e.g. a women-only focus group for the Open Space Strategy review. This group provided 27 women from diverse backgrounds with an opportunity to share their ideas in a safe and supportive discussion.

Further, to ensure inclusivity and accessibility in our community engagement practices, especially for workshops and focus groups, we offer various attendance options. These options help to eliminate barriers that might deter women from participating by considering factors such as school holiday schedules and drop-off/pick-up times. By providing more suitable options, such as hosting workshops on weekdays after school drop-off, we have observed a positive impact on women's attendance at our events.

## **Intersectional approach**

COVID-19 restrictions impacted Council's ability to undertake community engagement through usual approaches.

This policy was developed with input from community members representing Council's priority groups:

- People with Disability
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- People whose first language is not English
- People who are gender diverse
- LGBTIQ+ people
- Older people.

The community consultation feedback Council received was positive.

Consultation was also carried out with Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Elders and Merri Health, one of Council's key community partners.

## **Connectors Program**

### **Status**

New program

### **Description**

The Connectors Program helps Council to communicate with, and hear from, community members who speak languages other than English. This program is supported by paid volunteers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who have strong ties to Merri-bek. These paid volunteers help Council communicate with the community and better understand community needs.

### **Actions taken**

The Connector program emerged from the Accessible and Inclusive Communications Policy and challenges during the COVID pandemic in communicating successfully with the municipality's multilingual community.

The Program is now supported by a Program Officer and 20 paid community volunteers across culturally and linguistically diverse groups. These paid community volunteers are recruited annually to share Council communications through their own closed, in-language channels.

It has emerged that this opportunity is of particular interest to women, who make up the majority of the Connectors. These women are using this opportunity to gain skills and confidence, and to continue in community leadership roles beyond their Connector roles. Council supports them through community grants and participation in Council's gender equality community network.

### **Intersectional approach**

The Connectors program has a focus on recruiting Merri-bek residents who speak community languages. These include Italian, Greek, Arabic, Mandarin, Cantonese, Turkish, Vietnamese, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Dari, Nepali, Spanish, and Pashto, Persian.

Connectors may be newly arrived residents as well as those who have lived in Australia for decades.

## **COVID-19 Recovery Plan**

### **Status**

New policy

### **Description**

The COVID-19 Recovery Plan aims to support recovery from the multiple social and economic impacts of the pandemic on the Merri-bek community.

Council's analysis identified that the pandemic had a disproportionate effect on many vulnerable groups and magnified existing inequalities. Young people, women, international students, and people from asylum seeker, refugee and migrant backgrounds were particularly impacted by the collapse of the jobs market.

### **Actions taken**

Specific actions in Council's Recovery Plan that benefitted women and other priority groups included:

- Maternal and Child Health Immunisation – changes were made to service delivery in response to family needs, and additional services and outreach counselling were provided to support parents with COVID19 anxiety/experience.
- Community grants programs targeting small businesses and arts communities.
- Mental health and wellbeing initiatives targeting young people, seniors, culturally diverse communities and those experiencing family violence.
- Job seeker and employment programs targeting women and culturally diverse communities.

### **Intersectional approach**

COVID-19 restrictions impacted Council's ability to undertake engagement through usual approaches, however significant research and consultation with key stakeholders and a cross-section of the community has informed the development of the Recovery Plan.

The Secondary Impact Analysis, in particular, was informed directly by a telephone survey of local residents, based on the weighted sample of 75% female, 22% male and 3% participants of other genders. Further, a cross-Council steering group with links to Council Advisory Groups; Council's Gender Equity Community Reference Group; local organisations and other stakeholders have been consulted in the development of the Recovery Plan. A business survey had been undertaken earlier, in the early stages of the pandemic.

## **Proposed Budget 2023 – 2027**

### **Status**

New policy

### **Description**

The Proposed Budget details funding required to provide services and community infrastructure to support Merri-bek's diverse and growing community and positively impact the community.

This was Council's first participatory budget process. The consultation process included gathering ideas from the community to inform the budget preparation followed by a process where residents could vote on community budget ideas and provide feedback to the Draft Budget.

### **Actions taken**

No actions have been taken at this time.

The proposed actions will be implemented between 1 July 2023 and 30 June 2024 and will be reported in the 2025 Gender Equality Progress Report.

Core Services delivered by Council that seek to have a positive impact on genders and marginalised groups include:

- Assessment Services: providing programs and assistance to older people of all genders, people with disabilities and their carers.
- Children Services and Programs: benefit families and promote the well-being of children.
- Community Development and Social Policy: actions to promote human rights, accessibility, social cohesion and gender equality.
- Recreation Services: Sport and physical activity participation for people of all genders, ages, backgrounds and abilities.
- Social Support Services: Programs addressing social needs and supporting individuals from all genders and marginalised groups.
- Maternal and Child Health (and Immunisations) Service: Support the health and development of infants and families.
- Youth Services: Provide safe, supportive and inclusive programs and spaces for young people.

Examples of relevant capital works projects include:

- Continuing the \$36.9 million Fawkner Leisure Centre redevelopment
- Continuing the \$29.0 million Saxon Street Community Hub

- Commencing the upgrade on several early years facilities over the next five years totalling \$32.1 million, including completing Oak Park Kindergarten and Derby Street, Pascoe Vale in 2023-24
- Further inclusive changerooms and refurbishments for Parker Reserve, Coburg, and Shore Reserve, Pascoe Vale South.

### **Intersectional approach**

A range of community engagement methods were used to maximise participation and feedback.

The first stage included:

- Post cards to provide a written idea
- Calls for written submissions by post and via Council's website
- An insert that was included in the aged care newsletter.

The second stage included:

- Opportunities for residents to vote on the community budget ideas, including at 3 pop-up sessions.
- Opportunities to comment on the Draft Budget via post or the Council's website.
- Targeting previous submitters and non- English speaking and CALD communities to invite feedback.
- An in-person Feedback Forum.

## **Proposed Budget 2022/23 and 4-Year Budget 2022 – 2026**

### **Status**

New policy

### **Description**

This was Council's first participatory budget process. The consultation process included gathering ideas from the community to inform the budget preparation followed by a process

where residents could vote on community budget ideas and provide feedback to the Draft Budget. Women represented 50% and more of participants in both consultation stages.

The budget acknowledges the ongoing challenges of COVID-19, particularly for vulnerable groups, and incorporates cost savings while continue supporting the community.

### **Actions taken**

Core Services delivered by Council that seek to have a positive impact on genders and marginalised groups include:

- Assessment Services: providing programs and assistance to older people of all genders, people with disabilities and their carers.
- Children Services and Programs: benefit families and promote the well-being of children.
- Community Development and Social Policy: Actions to promote human rights, accessibility, social cohesion and gender equality.
- Recreation Services: Sport and physical activity participation for people of all genders, ages, backgrounds and abilities.
- Social Support Services: Programs addressing social needs and supporting individuals from all genders and marginalised groups.
- Maternal and Child Health (and Immunisations) Service: Support the health and development of infants and families.
- Youth Services: Provide safe, supportive and inclusive programs and spaces for young people.

### **Intersectional approach**

A range of community engagement methods were used to maximise participation and to ensure that people could contribute ideas to the budget in the first stage in an accessible and inclusive way, including: post cards to provide a written idea; call for written submissions by post and via Council's website; an insert included in the aged care newsletter.

The second stage included: opportunity for residents to vote on the community budget ideas, including at 3 pop-up sessions. Further, opportunity to comment on the Draft Budget



via post or Council's website. Previous submitters, non- English speaking and culturally and linguistically diverse communities were targeted to invite feedback. Further, a Feedback Forum to attend in person and share their feedback.

## **Proposed Budget 2021 – 2025**

### **Status**

New policy

### **Description**

The document intends to provide the community with visibility over how the broad range of services and community infrastructure are funded to support the diverse and growing community and positively impact the community.

The budget acknowledges the ongoing challenges of COVID-19, particularly for vulnerable groups, and incorporates cost savings while continuing to support the community.

### **Actions taken**

The Proposed Budget for 2021 – 2025 aims to meet the needs of individuals of different genders, promote gender equality and address gender inequality through various core services and operational projects. Some of these were proposed by community members at budget ideas forums.

The Proposed Budget includes operational and strategic projects that contribute to gender equality and support marginalised groups. Examples include:

- Covid-19 Relief and Rebuild program
- Merri-bek Affordable Housing initiative
- Arts Investment Grant
- Ballert Mooroop Community Hub
- Men's Program: Building Safer Relationships (Public Feedback Submission)
- More support for homeless communities
- Youth Strategy Implementation.

Examples of relevant capital works projects include:

- Footpaths and bike paths: Merri Creek Path Widening, Upfield Shared Path Widening and Lighting, De Carle Street Protected Bike Lanes
- Pavilion and Sports Clubs: Holbrook Reserve Female Friendly Change Rooms, John Pascoe Fawkner reserve (social rooms)
- Community Use Facilities: Glenroy Community Hub, Saxon Street Community Hub
- Aquatic and leisure centres: Coburg Leisure Centre (lighting, CCTV), Coburg Outdoor Pool
- Playgrounds and Open Spaces: Upgrades and improved lighting at various locations and implementing the Park Close to Home program.

### **Intersectional approach**

A range of methods were used to maximise community participation and ensure that people could contribute ideas in an accessible and inclusive way.

Activities included:

- A listening post to capture ideas at ten community-based pop-up events at different geographical locations around Merri-bek
- A call for written submissions by post and via our digital engagement platform Conversations Merri-bek
- Targeted engagement with non-English Speaking communities
- An Ideas Forum event where community members could meet with Councillors in person or via Zoom to share their ideas.

The pop-up events were designed to be as welcoming as possible, including encouraging children's participation. Council also arranged a specific session for women from emerging communities. Based on participant feedback this session was held online and incentives to maximise women's participation were offered, including the provision of free childcare.