

Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan

Towards 2030



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Acknowledgement of Country

Parkes Shire is in the land of the Wiradjuri nation – the largest Aboriginal territory at the time of European settlement, encompassing the Central West slopes and plains.

Wiradjuri Country extends from Coonabarabran in the north, straddling the Great Dividing Range down to the Murray River and out to western NSW, encompassing around one fifth of NSW. The people of Wiradjuri Country are known as ‘people of three rivers’, due to the three rivers that border their lands: the Wambool (Macquarie River), Galari (Lachlan River) and Marrambidya (Murrumbidgee River).

In the spirit of reconciliation, Parkes Shire Council acknowledges and the Wiradjuri people as the traditional custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and future and we extend our respect to all Indigenous Australians in Parkes Shire.

We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continuing connection with the land and rivers. We also recognise the resilience, strength, and pride of the Wiradjuri community.





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Foreword



Welcome to Parkes Shire Council's first Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan.

We are pleased to present to you Parkes Shire Council's first Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan. This is a welcome milestone in our equity, diversity, and inclusion journey.

Real changes take commitment, energy, and time, and we have undertaken work to understand where we are right now and where we want to be, confirming we need to prioritise this work.

This document identifies the opportunities and challenges facing Council in achieving gender equity and sets out our commitment to taking action to support Council to become an organisation that better reflects the community in which we operate. One where both men and women are represented equitably across the organisation. While the principle of merit as a basis of recruitment remains a priority, we want to ultimately achieve greater diversity across Council.

We trust that the implementation of this Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan, along with actions Council takes in delivering its Disability Inclusion Action Plan, will support Council to be the most inclusive it can be, where the principles of diversity and inclusion underpin all that we do. These strategies will see us deepen our understanding and progress in various aspects of our work.

We plan to review and update this Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan during the latter part of 2028. The inclusion of measures and targets across this document will support Council to monitor its progress over this time. This will provide any future identified gender equity objectives and actions which can then be incorporated into Council's 2029-2033 Delivery Program.

We thank everyone who shared their experiences and contributed ideas to support the development of this Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan. We welcome feedback during the life of this Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan, including new ideas and innovations for supporting Council on its gender equity journey.

Handwritten signatures of Kent Boyd and Ken Keith. The signature of Kent Boyd is on the left, and the signature of Ken Keith is on the right.

Kent Boyd PSM
General Manager

Ken Keith OAM
Mayor

01

Introduction



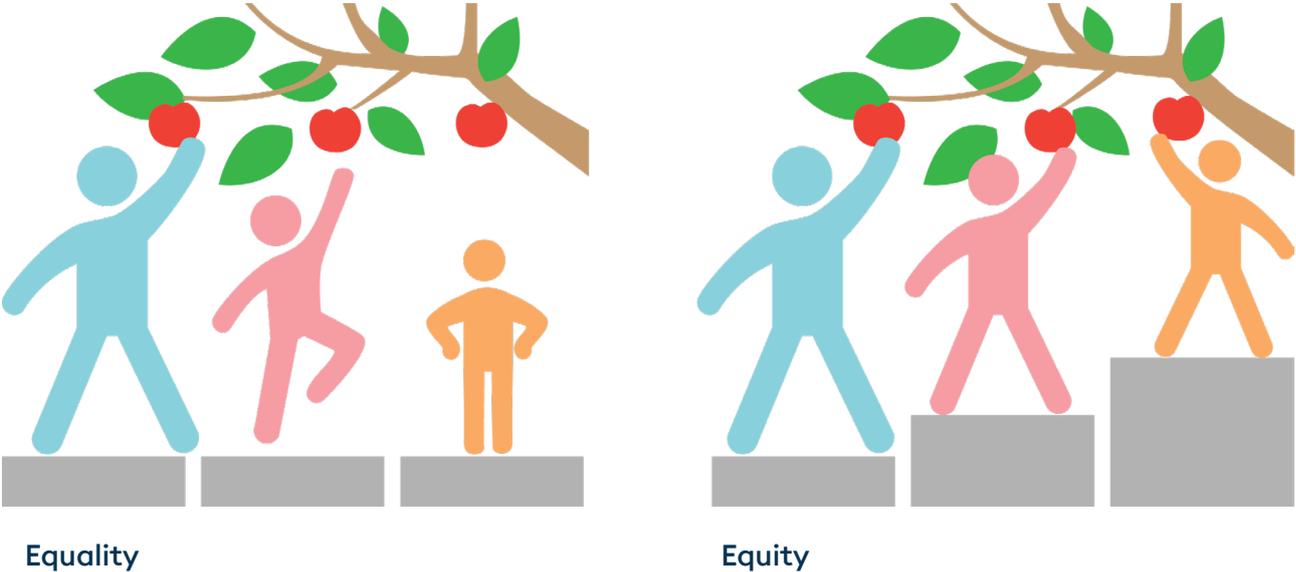
- What is gender equity?
- The broader gender equity context
- Our local context
- Developing this Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan
- Relationship to other Council planning and reporting

What is gender equity?

For the purposes of this Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan, it is useful to understand the difference of the terms 'Equity' and 'Equality'.

- **Equality** refers to providing the same supports, resources, and opportunities to everyone, regardless of their individual circumstances and differences (inputs).
- **Equity** refers to providing supports, resources, and opportunities that consider the individual needs and circumstances of people, in order that they may achieve the same results (outcomes).

The illustration below helps to demonstrate that not everyone starts from the same base, and therefore the supports, resources and processes individuals will need to achieve the same outcome might be quite different.



The support Council might provide to enable all its workforce to achieve agreed results may look different depending on individuals' needs.

The notion of gender equity considers that many women start from a different base to their male colleagues.

As well as consideration of individuals' needs, gender equity is achieved through organisational culture, policies and practice. This Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan identifies how both organisational and individual actions might support Council to achieve its strategic gender equity goals over time.

The broader gender equity context

Each year on International Women's Day, we are reminded about the inequalities that exist between outcomes for men and for women across the world, in a multitude of settings. Conversations about gender equity and gender equality are happening all over the world.

In Australia, the legal and cultural environment is one that promotes social justice - equity, access, participation, and rights for all citizens. However, despite this, outcomes for women continue to be poorer than for men against many indicators.

For almost a decade, the Australian Government's Workplace Gender Equality Agency has prepared a Gender Equality Scorecard. The

Scorecard includes information about the gender pay gap, workforce participation, representation in leadership, and employer actions to improve gender equality.

The 2022 Scorecard was produced with data from almost 5,000 employers, accounting for just under 5 million employees. The following excerpt illustrates the key findings:



The Workplace Gender Equality Agency's Gender Equality Scorecard also considered what employers were doing to act on gender equality. The annual data collection makes clear the challenge of achieving gender equity in the workplace is not one unique to Parkes Shire Council.

In summary, this is what they found:

Australia's Gender Equality Scorecard 2021-22

How are employers acting on gender equality?

Pay gap analysis:
54% of employers conducted a gender pay gap analysis. 40% didn't act on the findings

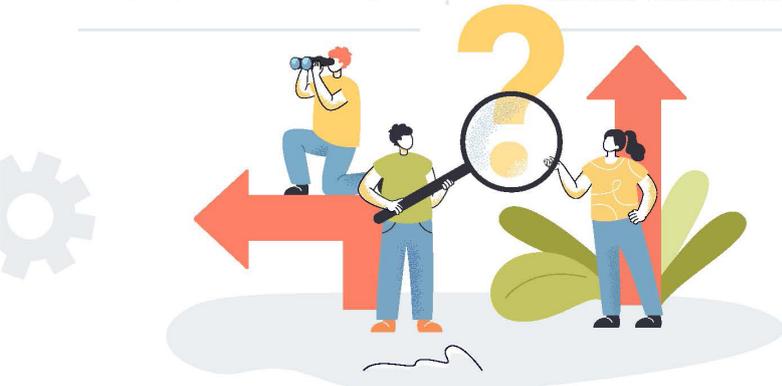
Setting targets:
53% of employers set targets for improving workplace gender equality. The most popular goal was to increase the number of women in leadership

Flexibility:
82% of employers have a formal policy on flexibility – 71% of employers have a formal policy on remote working

Paid parental leave:
3/5 employers offer employer funded paid parental leave and 92% of those offer it equally to men and women

Men account for 13% of all paid primary carer's leave taken – up from 12% in 2021 and 6% in 2020

Domestic violence support:
70% of employers have a formal policy or strategy to support employees experiencing family or domestic violence – but only 47.5% of employers offer paid domestic violence leave



Workplace Gender Equality Agency | www.wgea.gov.auPage 5

Our local context

As well as reflecting the gender diversity of the local community, a local council should also be striving to reflect the diversity of all elements of its demography.

'Democracy' has often been referred to as "government of the people, for the people and by the people".

Inherent in this description is the concept of representation, meaning that our democratic governments (including local governments) should reflect and be representative of the communities they exist to serve.

As well as reflecting the gender diversity of the local community, local councils should also be striving to reflect the diversity of all elements of its demography. In 2021, the Parkes local government area's demography and community had the following attributes, and is compared with the Central West region of NSW:

2021	Parkes LGA	Central NSW Region
Population	14,361	160,028
Males	49.8%	50.06%
Females	50.2%	49.94%
Median age	41 years	43.2 years
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander	13.1%	8.9%
Homes where not only English language used	10.9%	11.65%
People with disability	22.5%	21.7%
Local government election candidates	19	248
Female councillors	2 of 10 = 20%	36%
Domestic violence assault rate/100,000	116	104.1
Socio-economic ranking (1 = poorest)	28 (of 128)	56 (average)
Unemployment rate (March 2022)	3.1%	2.36%
15-19-year-olds fully engaged in education/employment	72.9%	75.1%
Median personal weekly income	\$700	\$717.30
Average house price	\$300,000	\$349,250
Completed Year 12 or equivalent	31.3%	34.1%
Homes with internet access	70.7%	72.4%

Data sources include: ABS Census, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics & Research, NSW Electoral Commission, and the NSW Office of Local Government

This information also helps us to understand the diversity and attributes of our local community, and how this may affect Council's recruitment, staff retention, employment conditions policies and workplace culture.

Developing this Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan

Parkes Shire Council welcomes this milestone development of a Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan. Real changes take commitment, energy and time, and we have undertaken work to understand where we are right now, and where we want to be, confirming we need to prioritise this work.

Work has been undertaken by other levels of government and industry sectors to proactively promote and achieve gender equity outcomes. This extensive work was reviewed and helped to inform the development of this Strategy & Action Plan.

In addition to the literature review, it was important to understand the current experience of councillors and staff at Parkes Shire Council in relation to gender equity. To achieve this, a survey was undertaken which asked respondents a series of questions related to:

- Demographic characteristics of the respondent
- Their overall experience at Parkes Shire Council
- Leadership, Strategy and Accountability
- Developing gender balance/ a gender-balanced workforce
- Gender pay equity
- Support for caring responsibilities
- Work flexibility
- Gender-based harassment and discrimination, sexual harassment and bullying.

Councillors and staff at Parkes Shire Council were asked to provide feedback that could inform Council's direction, policy, and practice. Respondents were asked about:

- What Council currently does that supports equity and diversity
- What Council should fix that is currently preventing organisational equity and diversity
- What Council could do in the future to be an organisation that enables and encourages equity and diversity
- Suggestions for increasing the number of women, who are elected as councillors
- Suggestions for increasing the number of women, in senior and Executive roles
- Suggestions for increasing opportunities, for employees to work in non-traditional roles
- Any other suggestions or comments about Council's development of a Gender Equity Strategy.

Responses were received from 5 councillors (50%) and 77 staff members (34%). The collated survey responses, along with employee data collected by the Human Resources team at Council, has been used to:

- a) Identify where we are now, including some of the issues, challenges and opportunities for gender equity at Parkes Shire Council,
- b) Provide answers to where we want to be, how we will get there and how we will know we're on track, which forms the basis of the Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan that follows.

Several staff focus group sessions were also held, to discuss the survey results, and to provide further opportunity for discussing gender-related issues and solutions at Council.

A recurring theme in the feedback was that addressing gender equity would also position Council better to address equity, access, participation and rights for all social justice considerations, including ethnicity, disability, age, gender expression, religion, socio-economic background, or cultural background.

A small number of survey respondents reported there wasn't a gender issue at Council that needed to be addressed. However, this view was far outweighed by those who cited examples of gender-based issues in the workplace. Concern was expressed by some staff that in promoting gender equity, some people may end up being discriminated against. However, this work is about creating equitable opportunities for everyone – opportunities that enable everyone to reach their potential, grow professionally, learn and develop for the benefit of themselves, for Council and for our local community.

Relationship to other Council planning and reporting

The planning and reporting activities of Parkes Shire Council are guided by the Integrated Planning & Reporting (IP&R) framework of the NSW Local Government Act. The IP&R framework is a cycle of planning and reporting that aligns with each elected term of Council.

The achievement of Council and community goals occurs through the implementation of the plans in the IP&R framework, including supporting strategies and plans like this Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan. The IP&R framework at Parkes Shire Council is illustrated below:



The development of this Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan fulfils a commitment of the current Parkes Shire Council. This document addresses the challenges identified in Council's Workforce Management Plan and becomes one of the "other Council strategies" referred to in the diagram above.

Following the next local government elections in 2024, the incoming Council will develop a Delivery Program to identify its commitments for that term of office, supported by an updated Resourcing Strategy. To enable the achievement of these commitments, the recommended directions, actions and resources identified in this Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan will be reflected into the next suite of IP&R documents.

02

Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan



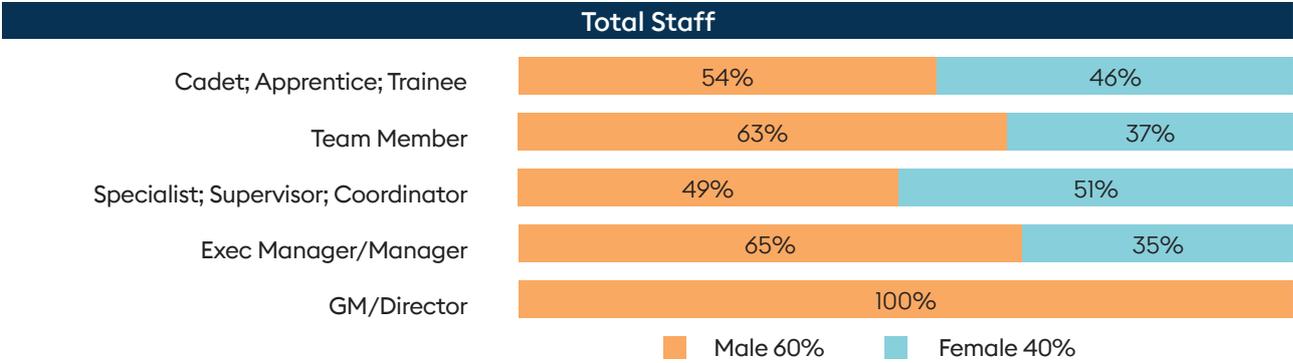
- Theme One - Recruitment and Selection into Council
- Theme Two - Conditions of Employment
- Theme Three - Learning and Professional Development
- Theme Four - Leadership and Leader Development
- Theme Five - Our Elected Governing Body
- Theme Six - Culture and Behaviour
- Theme Seven - Communications and Engagement

The primary purpose of this Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan is to support Parkes Shire Council to achieve gender equity.

Where are we now?

As at the end of May 2023, Parkes Shire Council's workforce had a clear gender imbalance, with higher rates of males than females at many levels of the organisation, including at the senior leadership levels of Council.

To establish a baseline for this Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan, data was collated about the current gender make-up of Council's workforce. There were two areas of Council which did achieve gender equality: at the specialist/supervisor/coordinator level and at the cadet/apprentice/trainee level. The table below provides an overview of males and females working across the organisation in 2023:



In 2023, the gender profile of Council's elected representatives also did not achieve gender equity, with the governing body made up of 80% men and 20% women.

How will we get from where we are now to where we want to be?

Council commits to taking action over the coming years to help us to achieve gender equity. These actions are described under several themes, with target timeframes for their completion, and responsibility assigned to each action. The actions are captured under the following themes:

1. Recruitment and selection
2. Conditions of employment
3. Learning and professional development
4. Leadership and leader development
5. Our elected governing body
6. Culture and behaviour
7. Communications and engagement

In order to establish a baseline (current position) for this Strategy, data was collated about the current gender makeup of Council's workforce (see table on previous page). It reveals a significant gender imbalance across almost all levels of Council. To better understand why this might be the case, a survey of staff was conducted that sought information about staff experience at Parkes Shire Council, and provided opportunity for staff to provide feedback and suggestions that would support the development of this Strategy.

How will we know we're on track?

Ultimately, Parkes Shire Council aims to achieve gender balance across the organisation, including representation on the elected governing body, and at all levels of the Council, particularly across our Executive Team and broader leadership group.

We will monitor and report on the gender balance of our workforce and our elected councillors, as well as reporting on progress towards each of the strategic objectives identified across the seven themes of the Action Plan, below.

Theme One - Recruitment and Selection into Council

To inform the development of this Strategy, data was collated about the current gender makeup of Council's workforce (see page 12, above). It reveals a significant gender imbalance across almost all levels of Council. To better understand why this might be the case, a survey of staff was conducted that sought information about staff experience at Parkes Shire Council, and provided an opportunity for staff to give feedback and suggestions that would support the development of this Strategy.

Challenges and opportunities:

In their survey responses, staff made clear that achieving better gender balance across the organisation needed to be grounded in the principle of merit-based selection – whether at entry into Council, or for the progression or promotion of existing staff.

Staff made clear that establishing quotas to increase gender equity was not appropriate. They felt that hiring and promotional decisions must always be made based on who is the best person for the job, regardless of gender, age, cultural background, disability or other personal attributes.

A number of questions were asked in the survey used to inform this Strategy that serve to establish a 2023 baseline from which future progress and performance can be measured.

The table below summarises staff feedback related to recruitment and selection in 2023:

Survey Statement	% of respondents who agree	Male	Female
Gender is not a barrier to success at Council	54.6%	41%	13%
Council makes fair recruitment and promotion decisions, based on merit	49.4%	28%	22%
I feel that I have an equal chance for promotion at Council	58.5%	36%	22%
At my most recent job interview at Council, the panel consisted of a diverse group of people	83.1%	42%	41%
I would recommend this Council to my male friends	80.5%	42%	38%
I would recommend this Council to my female friends	76.6%	42%	34%

Strategic Objectives:

Council recognises that gender equity change doesn't happen overnight. By 2030, it is Council's goal to achieve the following workforce results on our way to gender equity:

- An overall workforce that is as close as possible to equal male/female representation
- An executive team (GM/ directors/executive managers) with at least 40% female representation
- A leadership team (managers/ supervisors/coordinators) with at least 45% female representation
- At all other levels of the organisation, as close as possible to equal male/female representation
- Staff survey results in 2030 will demonstrate at least 60% of staff 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with statements about gender equity at Council.

Action Plan

ID	Action	Timeframe	Responsibility (plan alignment)
1.1	Provide recruitment and selection training to all staff with recruiting responsibilities, including refreshers about gender equity and social justice.	Every two years	People, Safety and Culture (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 1)
1.2	Prepare and adopt a Recruitment & Selection Policy and Procedure that makes clear Council's expectations in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diversity of recruitment panel - How vacancies are communicated internally and externally - Approaches to advertising vacancies that promotes diversity in applicants - Factors for consideration when two or more applicants have equal merit - Advice provided to external recruiters working on Council's behalf 	By December 2023	People, Safety and Culture
1.3	Establish a project supported by a staff working party to identify and suggest solutions to issues of systemic barriers that may exist to achieving gender equity.	During 2024	Gender Equity Working Group 2023
1.4	Ensure recruitment packages include information about Council's flexible work options and support provided to promote Council as an employer of choice for a diverse range of candidates.	By December 2023	People, Safety and Culture
1.5	Use annual staff appraisal process to identify desired career pathways of staff within Council, and support this with professional development, including mentoring programs (including external mentors if appropriate).	Annually	Learning and Development

Theme Two - Conditions of Employment

As part of the development of this Strategy, Council staff were asked questions about gender pay equity, work flexibility and support for caring responsibilities. The 2023 results are summarised below:

Survey Statement	% of respondents who agree	Male	Female
I think I am paid fairly compared to others who do similar work in Council	41.6%	21%	21%
I think I am paid fairly compared to others who do similar work outside this organisation	28.6%	11%	11%
I think men and women are paid the same rates for performing similar work in Council	53.3%	38%	14%
I feel confident that due consideration would be given by my manager to a request by me for flexible work arrangements	71.5%	29%	42%
My immediate manager/supervisor leads by example by using flexible work options	71.4%	38%	34%
Job-sharing or reduced hours are options for managers at Council	28.6%	17%	12%
Having family and/or carer responsibilities is not a barrier to success at Council	70.1%	41%	30%
Council supports employees with family and/or carer responsibilities regardless of their gender	67.6%	39%	29%
Leave arrangements are sufficiently flexible to enable me to attend to important caring issues (eg medical appointments, school meetings, sick family member)	90.9%	49%	42%
Council managers and supervisors are supportive of the needs of staff who are soon to be parents (first and subsequent children)	55.9%	32%	25%

Challenges and opportunities:

The survey findings indicate that not all staff share a similar experience at Council. There appears to be general agreement that flexible work arrangements are available and appreciated. However, some staff also feel that some options for flexibility in the workplace are not as possible for

people in manager roles. This may be a barrier for women who are seeking to advance into leadership roles, but who also need to balance that with their family or carer responsibilities.

Strategic Objectives:

Parkes Shire Council recognises that gender equity is supported when the conditions of employment enable people with diverse needs to achieve similar work outcomes. By 2030, it is Council's goal to achieve the following results on our way to gender equity:

- a) People across the organisation with similar levels of responsibility are paid equitably
- b) Roles at Parkes Shire Council are paid equitably with similar roles (with similar responsibilities) at other Councils of a similar size and type
- c) Flexible work conditions (including job-share arrangements, compressed hours, reduced hours and working from home options) are available to be used across the organisation
- d) All staff with carer or family responsibilities are supported to use flexible work conditions and to access appropriate leave balances to meet their caring or family responsibilities
- e) Staff survey results in 2030 will demonstrate at least 60% of staff 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with statements about gender pay equity, work flexibility and support for caring responsibilities.

Action Plan

ID	Action	Timeframe	Responsibility (plan alignment)
2.1	Undertake a pay review across all positions of Council, and make recommendations for adjustments, if necessary, to achieve gender pay parity for roles with similar levels of responsibility.	By June 2024	Human Resources (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 3)
2.2	Prepare and adopt a Recruitment & Selection Policy and Procedure that makes clear Council's expectations in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diversity of recruitment panel - How vacancies are communicated internally and externally - Approaches to advertising vacancies that promotes diversity in applicants - Factors for consideration when two or more applicants have equal merit - Advice provided to external recruiters working on Council's behalf 	By June 2024	People, Safety and Culture (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 4)
2.3	Review Council's Maternity/ Parental Leave policy to ensure all staff have access to reduced hours and/or job share arrangements as they transition back from their period of leave. Communicate to staff about their leave entitlements under the Award.	During 2024 Annually	Human Resources (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 1)
2.4	Review Council's Rostered Day-Off policy and consider options for 'flex' days taken at agreed times instead of a regular 9-day fortnight for those staff who request it.	By June 2024	People, Safety and Culture (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 4)
2.5	Identify and apply flexible work arrangements for senior managers and executive team members to address issues of systemic barriers that may exist to achieving gender equity.	By June 2024 with annual review	People, Safety and Culture (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 4)

Theme Three - Learning and Professional Development

Council's staff have provided feedback about learning and professional development as part of the development of this Strategy.

In the survey, staff were asked to respond to a series of statements in order to gauge their experiences at Parkes Shire Council. The 2023 results are summarised below:

Survey Statement	% of respondents who agree	Male	Female
I am satisfied with how my learning and development needs have been addressed by Council in the last 12 months	67.60%	34%	34%
I am knowledgeable about opportunities for my training and development	62.40%	34%	29%
I am encouraged to participate in activities that will help my career development	71.50%	37%	34%
Men and women have equal access to training and development at Council	74.10%	43%	30%

Challenges and opportunities:

The survey findings indicate that not all staff share a similar experience at Council. There are opportunities to utilise the annual staff appraisal process to document and action identified learning and development needs. Opportunities also exist to enhance the way available training and development opportunities are promoted so that relevant staff hear about them in a timely way.

Staff have also made many practical suggestions for supporting women to develop professionally and support their advancement through Council. This is covered in more detail in Theme Four: Leadership and leader development.

When budget permits, inviting staff from a range of functional areas of Council to take up training opportunities that might otherwise be targeted at specific teams will support skills development and allow people to be considered for a broader range of roles as they move through Council.

A more innovative approach to learning and development practice at Council may help to mitigate some of the factors that might cause existing staff to move on from Council, ultimately reducing staff turnover and retaining corporate knowledge and expertise in-house.

Strategic Objectives:

Parkes Shire Council recognises that gender equity is supported when all staff are provided with fair access to learning and professional development activities. By 2030, it is Council's goal to achieve the following results on our way to gender equity:

- a) All staff have an up-to-date learning and professional development plan in place that informs Council's overall Learning & Development Plan, and decisions about Council's investment in learning and development
- b) Contemporary information about learning and development opportunities related to identified objectives of Council's Learning & Development Plan is distributed to all staff in a timely way
- c) Career progression pathways are mapped in consultation with staff who have identified specific career objectives within Council as part of their annual appraisal
- d) Annual audits of Council's investment in learning and development demonstrate that men and women receive proportionally similar investment
- e) Staff survey results in 2030 will demonstrate at least 70% of staff 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with statements about learning and professional development opportunities at Council.

Action Plan

Actions for future consideration include distribution of a quarterly Learning & Development Calendar to all staff that identifies upcoming opportunities that address goals identified in the Council's Learning & Development Plan

ID	Action	Timeframe	Responsibility (plan alignment)
3.1	<p>Review Council's annual staff appraisal process to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a development/refresh of individual learning and development plans for each staff member - individual learning and development needs are reflected in Council's Learning and Development Plan - progress identified against the learning and development needs is monitored and reported to the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) 	By June 2024	Learning and Development
3.2	Conduct an annual audit of learning and development investment, including an analysis of proportion invested in men and in women. Provide a report to the Executive Team prior to each year's budget build to inform the following year's investment decisions.	By June 2024	
3.3	Conduct an annual audit to determine which staff (and proportion of all staff) have participated in learning and development activities, to ensure opportunities for participation are fair and equitable across the organisation.	During 2024 Annually	Learning and Development
3.4	Develop and implement a Secondments Policy which supports staff to temporarily move into different roles across Council as part of achieving their learning and development objectives. This may include consideration of 'career swap days' to enable staff to better understand options across Council.	By June 2024	In conjunction with the Consultative Committee
3.5	<p>Update all position descriptions to ensure the capabilities required for the role are appropriately described. Support staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to understand how their skills may be transferrable in other areas of Council - with the right skills but little experience to be considered for roles where they can receive 'on the job' training 	By June 2024 with annual review	Human Resources (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 1)
3.6	Deliver Mental Health First Aid Training across the organisation, including tailored sessions for Senior Managers and the Executive Leadership Team.	Every two years, from 2024	Education, Capability and Wellbeing (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 2)
3.7	Provide refresher training to all managers/ supervisors. who conduct annual appraisals of staff to ensure they are confident and properly equipped to have these important conversations, including documenting in Council's records management system.	Every two years ahead of the next annual appraisal cycle	Education, Capability and Wellbeing (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 2)
3.8	Investigate and implement opportunities for staff exchanges with peer councils that enable professional development.	Commence during 2024-25	Education, Capability and Wellbeing (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 2)
3.9	<p>When training is on offer that might otherwise be considered role-specific, invite expressions of interest from all staff to participate. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - computer training (eg Word, Excel etc) - tickets (eg forklift, concreting, etc) - manual handling and ergonomic work environment design - first aid training 	Ongoing	Education, Capability and Wellbeing (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 2)

Theme Four - Leadership and Leader Development

Leadership at Council, and opportunities for leadership development, were discussed with staff as part of the development of this Strategy.

In the survey, staff were asked to respond to a series of statements in order to gauge their experiences at Parkes Shire Council. The 2023 results are summarised below:

Survey Statement	% of respondents who agree	Male	Female
Most senior managers at Council genuinely support diversity and inclusion in the workplace	64.9%	37%	28%
My immediate supervisor/manager genuinely supports diversity and inclusion in the workplace	85.7%	45%	41%
My immediate supervisor/manager treats everyone fairly	66.3%	43%	43%
My immediate supervisor/manager recognises me for my contribution to Council	79.3%	38%	42%
Work is allocated fairly, regardless of gender, in my workgroup at Council	79.2%	41%	38%
Council makes fair recruitment and promotion decisions, based on merit	49.4%	28%	22%
I feel that I have an equal chance for promotion at Council	58.5%	36%	22%
My immediate manager/supervisor is a positive role model for work/life balance	74.0%	37%	38%

Challenges and opportunities:

The survey findings indicate that not all staff share a similar experience at Council. There are opportunities to support leaders across Council to better understand and practice diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Some staff have noted that “you can’t be what you can’t see”, referring to the current minimal female representation in leadership roles across Council, and particularly in the most senior levels of the organisation. During focus group discussions, several women remarked that it was difficult to imagine becoming a Council leader in such a male-dominated environment.

Staff have also made many practical suggestions to specifically support women to develop professionally as leaders, and to support and enable their advancement in Council to achieve enhanced gender equity in the leadership of Council. Staff have also suggested that these initiatives are discussed openly and communicated broadly to staff.

Staff identified that women (more often than men) often have extended periods out of the workforce when their children are young. This creates gaps in experience that weighed against others competing for the same role, and may be an inhibitor to success. Finding innovative ways of providing opportunities for women to gain experience that helps to address that gap is seen as a key step in addressing gender equity, particular in relation to leadership development.

Also key is supporting leaders to achieve work/life balance, including modelling this to their teams so that leadership responsibilities are regarded as aspirational and desirable, not overwhelming and unmanageable.

Strategic Objectives:

Parkes Shire Council recognises that gender equity is enhanced when all levels of the organisation reflect gender equity, and women are supported to develop as leaders within Council. By 2030, it is Council's goal to achieve the following results on our way to gender equity:

- a) An executive team with at least 40% female representation
- b) A leadership team (managers/supervisors/coordinators) with at least 45% female representation
- c) A successful women's leadership development program is in place that has supported the achievement of the above results
- d) Men and women are equal contributors to decisions made across Council.

Action Plan

ID	Action	Timeframe	Responsibility (plan alignment)
4.1	Implement a Women's Leadership Development Program in Council that includes a formal mentoring program for women who have leadership aspirations, including existing leaders who wish to advance further in Council.	By December 2024	Education, Capability and Wellbeing (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 2)
4.2	Formalise succession planning practice in Council and identify pathways for emerging women leaders to be part of the succession solution.	During 2024	People, Safety and Culture (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 4)
4.3	In line with Council's adopted Workforce Management Plan, actively target, coach and mentor high potential women to move into Manager and Director roles, including providing opportunities to 'act up' in higher graded roles during periods of leave or recruitment.	Ongoing	Education, Capability and Wellbeing (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 2)
4.4	As Manager and Director roles become vacant, consider job redesign if required to address systemic barriers that may prevent women from applying.	Ongoing	Human Resources (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 1)
4.5	Conduct an audit of actual hours worked by senior managers and executive team members to identify where/if long and unreasonable hours are routinely being worked. Use the findings of this audit to address issues of systemic barriers/inhibitors that may be contributing to a lack of gender equity at these levels of the organisation.	By December 2024	People, Safety and Culture (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 4)

Actions for future consideration include development of a Gender Equity in Decision-Making Policy that requires all formal decision-making process of Council to invite additional participants to the table if that is required to achieve gender equity in informing the decision-making process.

Theme Five - Our Elected Governing Body

Leadership at Council starts with the ten councillors who make up our elected governing body.

Councillors were also surveyed to inform the development of this Strategy, with 50% completing the survey, including providing feedback and suggestions for achieving gender equity at Parkes Shire Council.

Some key findings from the councillor survey results are provided below:

Survey Statement	% of respondents who agree	Male	Female
I feel valued at Council	80%	40%	40%
Council encourages respectful behaviours	100%	60%	40%
I would recommend being a councillor at this Council to my male friends	80%	60%	20%
I would recommend being a councillor at this Council to my female friends	80%	60%	20%
There is a positive culture in relation to diversity at Council	100%	60%	40%
Gender is not a barrier to success at Council	20%	20%	0%
I believe that everyone is treated fairly at Council	60%	40%	20%
Inappropriate behaviour is openly addressed at Council	40%	40%	0%
Opportunities for councillors to participate in Council-related activities and events are shared fairly	60%	40%	20%
I am encouraged to participate in activities that will help my development as a councillor	60%	20%	40%
Council supports councillors with family and/or carer responsibilities regardless of their gender	60%	40%	20%
Councillors leave arrangements are sufficiently flexible to enable me to attend to important caring issues (eg medical appointments, school meetings, sick family member)	60%	40%	20%
I believe Council's leaders are positive models for work/life balance	60%	40%	20%
I feel safe at when undertaking my duties as a councillor	80%	60%	20%
Council takes steps to eliminate bullying, harassment and discrimination	80%	40%	20%

Challenges and opportunities:

In 2023, only two (20%) of the ten elected councillors were women. At the local government elections held in 2021, there was a similar ratio in the 19 candidates who stood for election. Does this mean that if a higher proportion of the candidates had been women, a higher proportion of those elected would also be women?

We can't know for sure, but we can consider what might prevent women from standing for election in the first place.

Councillor and staff survey respondents mentioned the impact inappropriate behaviours has on councillors and others who observe Council meetings. If such behaviour is ignored or laughed off, it can have the effect of embedding it into the organisation's culture.

Increasing the profile of current female councillors through their participation in community events and local government sector activities may assist in breaking down perceptions of Council as a "boys club" that some survey respondents felt exist.

Strategic Objectives:

Parkes Shire Council recognises that gender equity is important at all levels of the organisation, including the elected governing body, so that Council reflects the community it serves.

By 2030, it is Council's goal to:

- a) Have an increased number of women standing as candidates for local government election (at least 40%)
- b) Achieve an increase in the proportion of elected councillors who are women (to at least 40%)
- c) In the longer term (by 2036), achieve gender parity (50% men and women) on the elected Council.

Action Plan

ID	Parkes LGA	Timeframe	Responsibility (plan alignment)
3.1	Develop and implement a Candidate Attraction Plan ahead of each local government election that includes opportunities for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Meet and greet' sessions where interested community members can chat to councillors about the role. - Hold candidate workshops, including some that are targeted to women. - Proactively reach out to existing groups of women (eg Que Club and the CWA) and women leaders in the community to promote standing as a candidate. - Utilising resources such as Women for Election (wfe.org.au) and ALGWA (Australian Local Government Women's Association). 	June-August 2024, and June-August 2028	Office of the General Manager, Governance
3.2	Promote and provide information and education about access and inclusion, including as it relates to gender equity, in councillors' induction program and learning and development plans.	Review plans annually	People, Safety and Culture (Disability Inclusion Action Plan: Focus Area 1)
3.3	Encourage first-term councillors to engage a mentor, for example through LGNSW's program, to support them as they develop into the role.	At the commencement of each Council term	Office of the General Manager, Governance
3.4	At the commencement of each Council term, survey the new Council about preferred meeting days and times to ensure it best enables councillor participation, considering work, family and other commitments they may have.	Within first week of election results being confirmed	Office of the General Manager, Governance
3.5	Encourage and enable participation of female councillors in local government networks and events, such as ALGWA and the annual Women in Local Government conference.	Annually	Office of the General Manager, Governance
3.6	Periodically survey councillors to ensure issues of gender-based discrimination, harassment and bullying are identified and action is taken to address any issues identified as part of breaking down barriers to female candidacy.	Twice per Council term	Office of the General Manager, Governance
3.7	Review Councillors Expenses & Facilities Policy to include consideration of support that may enable a more diverse group of candidates to stand for election (eg childcare offered for Council meetings).	Within 12 months of each new Council term	Governance

Theme Six - Culture and Behaviour

The culture and behaviours evident in an organisation can be important contributors to attracting and retaining staff (and councillors). During focus group discussions and in survey feedback provided to inform the

development of this Strategy, several cultural and behavioural issues were discussed. In the survey, staff were asked to respond to a series of statements in order to gauge their experiences at Parkes Shire Council.

The 2023 results are summarised below:

Survey Statement	% of respondents who agree	Male	Female
I feel valued at Council	71.5%	34%	38%
There is a positive culture at Council in relation to employees from diverse backgrounds	77.9%	43%	34%
My immediate supervisor/manager openly addresses inappropriate behaviour	66.3%	37%	30%
My immediate supervisor/manager recognises me for my contribution to Council	79.3%	38%	42%
I feel safe at work	96.1%	50%	46%
Council takes steps to eliminate bullying, harassment and discrimination	64.9%	36%	30%
I feel confident that I could get the support I needed if I experienced bullying, harassment or discrimination within Council	72.7%	39%	33%
I believe bullying, harassment and discrimination issues raised will be treated with confidentiality at Council	55.9%	30%	26%
I believe valid complaints about bullying, harassment and discrimination will be taken seriously and the consequences will be managed appropriately at Council	64.9%	37%	29%

Challenges and opportunities:

The survey findings indicate that not all staff share a similar experience at Council. There are opportunities to address actual or perceived culture and behaviours that will support the achievement of a safer workplace, and which may address some barriers to achieving gender equity.

The survey asked staff about their experience of specific behaviours (either personally or as a witness). Just over half of all respondents reported that they had not experienced or witnessed any of the identified behaviours. Many of the behaviours at the extreme end of the bullying, harassment and discrimination spectrum also received a nil response in the survey, including:

- Unwelcome touching, hugging, cornering or kissing
- Repeated or inappropriate invitations to go out on dates
- Sexual gestures, indecent exposure or inappropriate display of the body
- Repeated or inappropriate advances on email, social network sites or internet chat rooms
- Request or pressure for sex or other sexual act
- Sexually explicit pictures, posters or gifts that offended
- Inappropriate staring or leering that caused intimidation
- Discrimination on the basis of breastfeeding.

However, other behaviours were reported as having been experienced or witnessed by some survey respondents, including:

Behaviour	% of staff who reported experiencing or witnessing this behaviour
Exclusion (from relevant meetings and/or decision-making processes)	18.2%
Gaslighting behaviour (manipulation causing someone to question their own reason)	14.3%
Deliberate undermining of performance	14.3%
Claiming credit for others' work for own advancement or recognition	13%
Discrimination on the basis of carer responsibilities	11.7%
Comments about my physical appearance	11.7%
Intrusive questions about my private life	10.4%
Other unwelcome behaviours	7.8%
Discrimination on the basis of gender	5.2%
Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that offended me	3.9%
Discrimination on the basis of pregnancy	2.6%
Inappropriate physical contact	1.3%

Staff have made several suggestions for promoting and maintaining an organisational culture that minimises such behaviours and acts when they occur. Key to successfully addressing inappropriate behaviour will be to ensure that complaints are taken seriously, confidentiality is maintained, and staff have access to appropriate support if they experience such behaviours.

Supporting leaders across the organisation to identify and appropriately and confidently address bullying, harassment and discriminatory behaviours will also be important.

Some staff also reported that sometimes language used in Council can reinforce a masculine culture, for example having 'team scrums' instead of 'staff meetings'.

This, and other examples of 'casual sexism' (such as remarks about the temperament of women as a factor in recruiting to leadership roles or outdoor crews) should be 'easy fixes' if everyone is part of a conversation that supports calling out such remarks that inadvertently challenge gender equity. As one survey respondent said:

“By having genuine conversations with staff, assumptions and miscues can be clarified and a better outcome for all can be achieved.”

Strategic Objectives:

Council recognises that gender equity is enhanced when there is an organisational culture that does not accept inappropriate behaviour, addresses inappropriate behaviour quickly and confidentially, and supports leaders and staff to feel confident about speaking up if inappropriate behaviour occurs.

By 2030, it is Council's goal to achieve the following results on our way to gender equity:

- a) 100% of staff report feeling safe at work
- b) All other culture and behaviour questions in the survey receive fewer than 10% combined 'disagree'/'strongly disagree' responses.

Action Plan

ID	Action	Timeframe	Responsibility (plan alignment)
6.1	Continue to host events for staff and the community that celebrate inclusion and diversity, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International Women’s Day on 8th March - Harmony Day on 21st March - NAIDOC Week in July 	Annually	Economy, Destination and Activation
6.2	Review and refresh staff induction materials to ensure information about Council’s policies and procedures relating to expectations of appropriate behaviour are up to date and include information about support available, for example the Employee Assistance Program.	By June 2024, then at least every two years	Human Resources (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 5)
6.3	Provide leaders with opportunities to further develop their skills in having difficult conversations to confidently address inappropriate behaviours.	Ongoing	Education, Capability and Wellbeing (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 5)
6.4	Monitor gender equity activities being implemented in other councils with success and apply them at Parkes Shire Council when they are identified as possible solutions to local gender equity gaps.	Ongoing	Office of the General Manager, Governance
6.5	Include as part of the all-staff mandatory training calendar regular updates on what constitutes appropriate behaviour.	At least every two years	Education, Capability and Wellbeing (Workforce Management Plan: Pillar 5)

Theme Seven - Communications and Engagement

Effective and targeted internal and external communications and engagement will be part of the solution to achieving gender equity at Parkes Shire Council.

In responses to the 2023 staff and councillor surveys used to inform the development of this plan, many suggestions were made about using communications and engagement tools to affect change.

Challenges and opportunities:

As noted earlier, some staff have noted that “you can’t be what you can’t see”, referring to the current minimal female representation in leadership roles across Council, and particularly in the most senior levels of the organisation.

Equally, using images in recruitment and other publications that demonstrate a commitment to gender equity may support women to apply for roles in Council or stand as candidates for election to Council.

There are opportunities for Council to use its communications and engagement tools to showcase and encourage women in Council, as well as to encourage applicants to apply for non-traditional roles.

Strategic Objectives:

Parkes Shire Council recognises that gender equity is enhanced through effective and targeted communications and engagement, both within Council and externally to the broader community.

By 2030, it is Council’s goal to achieve the following results on our way to gender equity:

- a) 100% of Council publications include images depicting equal numbers of men and women, including women in leadership roles, and men and women in non-traditional roles
- b) Information about 100% of job vacancies being recruited to is circulated to all staff.

Action Plan

ID	Parkes LGA	Timeframe	Responsibility (plan alignment)
7.1	Conduct an audit of Council's website to assess gender and diversity balance in depictions of staff across all levels of the organisation, and take action to address any imbalance found.	Actions by December 2024	Customer, Corporate Services and Economy
7.2	Review Council's publications guidelines to ensure the depiction of gender and diversity balance is a requirement of all publications.	By March 2024	Customer, Corporate Services and Economy
7.3	Refresh Council's image library to ensure images are available for all Council publications and communications that depict: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - women in leadership roles - men and women in non-traditional roles - women as councillors - meetings and teams with gender balance 	By December 2024	Brand and Corporate Communications (Disability Inclusion Action Plan: Focus Area 3)
7.4	Identify and pursue opportunities to promote Council as an employer of choice and local government as a sector full of opportunities for a diverse range of people, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - school careers days - University/TAFE final year careers information sessions - Council careers 'open days' - work experience placements - primary schools' visits to Council 	Ongoing	People, Safety and Culture (Disability Inclusion Action Plan: Focus Area 1)
7.5	Proactively engage staff from across Council in Council-wide gatherings to encourage interaction, raise awareness and break down barriers, particularly between traditionally gendered areas of the organisation.	Twice yearly	Customer, Corporate Services and Economy
7.6	Publish this Gender Equity Strategy and include in each of Council's Annual Reports a status update in relation to progress made in the delivery of actions identified in this Strategy.	Annually	Brand and Corporate Communications

03

Further information



The following resources were referred to in the development of this Strategy & Action Plan and provide further information:

Resource	Website
50:50 Vision: councils for gender equity program	www.5050vision.com.au/
Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data	www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA16200
NSW Gender Equality Dashboard	www.nsw.gov.au/women-nsw/toolkits-and-resources/nsw-gender-equality-dashboard
NSW Office of Local Government's Become a Councillor resources	www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/about-councils/become-a-councillor-section/
NSW Women's Strategy 2023-2026	www.nsw.gov.au/women-nsw/nsw-womens-strategy#toc-nsw-womens-strategy-2023-2026
Parkes Shire Council Workforce Management Plan	www.parkes.nsw.gov.au/Council/Strategies-policies-and-publications/Strategies-and-plans
Workplace Gender Equality Agency	www.wgea.gov.au/

For further information about Parkes Shire Council and this Gender Equity Strategy, contact Council at:

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