



## ACTING ON THE CHARTER — AN UPDATE

# Appreciating how municipalities are implementing the Charter

March 2013

**As councils across Victoria assemble and consider their priorities for the next four years following the local government elections held last October, now is an ideal opportunity to consider how to implement the principles of the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter of gender equity, diversity and active citizenship. To date, 64 councils have formally endorsed these principles (see the listing on the back page of this report).**

The Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition (WPILGC) was gratified to see an increase in the number of women elected to councils at the recent elections, however the proportion of women councillors at 34 per cent is still well below equal representation with men. Ten councils still have only one female councillor.

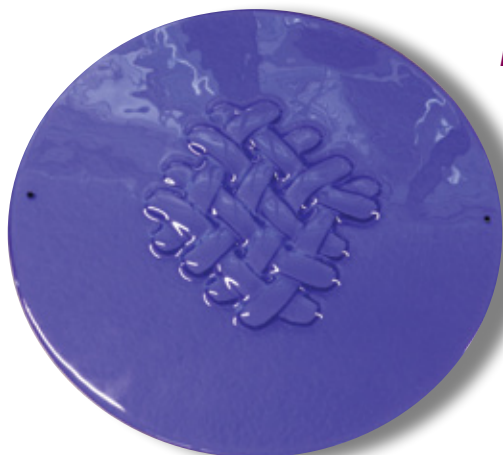
We continue to reiterate the benefits of having women involved in leadership positions as an important way to strengthen council decision-

making and ensure it is relevant to the communities they represent. There are multiple ways councils can do this, and some wonderful projects have been implemented in Victoria over the past few years, with more being planned.

The Charter has often acted as the impetus to drive momentum for significant effort in the areas of preventing violence against women and working to ensure gender equity in policy formation and program delivery. For some councils, such action is relatively 'easy' due to strong organisational and political support for what is core business including the funding of dedicated officers to manage programs in this area. Other councils have significant challenges and work hard to implement innovative ways to 'get around' some of the tricky aspects of working in this space.

Beth Ripper  
Chair, WPILGC

*Designed by Wathaurong Glass and Arts, this distinctive award has been presented to metropolitan and rural councils for outstanding initiatives aimed at increasing participation of women in local government. Award winners have included Yarra City Council and Baw Baw Shire Council (2010); Darebin City Council and Latrobe City Council (2008); Moreland City Council and Port Phillip City Council (2006); Yarra City Council and Swan Hill Rural City Council (2004).*



MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA



Connecting Communities  
Strengthening Democracy

## Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition

The Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition (WPILGC) is a non-party political coalition formed in 1996 between Victorian local government peak, philanthropic and community organisations with support from individual women.

The Coalition organisations are:

- Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA) Vic Local Government Professionals Inc (LGPro)
- Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV)
- Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition (VIRWC)
- Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA)
- Victorian Women's Trust (VWT)
- Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL)
- Women's Planning Network Inc (YWCA)

Further details about the Coalition and the Women's Charter can be found at [www.women.vlga.org.au](http://www.women.vlga.org.au)

To contact the Coalition Secretariat, email [linda@vlga.org.au](mailto:linda@vlga.org.au)

## Models that work – a snapshot of Council initiatives

### About this report

In December 2012 and January 2013, Ruth McGowan of Halara Enterprises conducted eight interviews with a cross-section of metropolitan, regional and rural Victorian councils to gather a snapshot about how the Charter was being implemented by councils, hear about what was working well and to understand the challenges and opportunities.

The results of these interviews are detailed in this report. We recognize that these are snapshots, and that there is much more work being done across the state.

Ruth was pleased to report that the Women's Charter is alive and well in the minds of those interviewed. They were all passionate about working with women from their local community and within their organisation. They were also enthusiastic about the value of the Charter in focussing this work into action plans under the umbrella of the three principles.

As was expected, different councils were at various stages in adopting action on the Charter. They all, however, were notable for the innovative ways they sought to imbed the principles and actions in policy development, programs and services. Collaboration with community groups, women's business and health networks, state and local government was important to success.

## CITY OF DAREBIN

***"When policy support, leadership and community come together it is pretty powerful."***

**S**INCE endorsing the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter, and being an Award winner in 2010, Darebin has been active in embedding gender equity within the council and across its organisation, providing resources for women's issues, and seeking input and support from the community.

In 2012 the council released a three year *Women's Equity Strategy* aimed at increasing women's participation, well-being and leadership in Darebin.

Darebin has progressed implementation of the Charter principles of gender equity, diversity and active citizenship through links with its significant role in preventing violence against women under the *White Ribbon Program*.

Darebin City Council has:

- A Women's Policy portfolio
- Dedicated officers working on women's policy and prevention of violence against women
- A Women's Staff Network that supports the council's work in promoting active citizenship through an open and flexible structure
- A Women's Advisory Committee, plus an email contact list of women from the community who wish to stay connected with the council on women's issues
- Collaborated with community groups in running 2012 pre-election forums encouraging women to stand for council.

## CITY OF GREATER GEELONG

***"The most important thing is to collaborate with your community. This stuff can't be run from council alone. Is it best practice in local government to have ideas imposed from the top down or collaboration coming from the base line up? Things are much more successful when they are community driven."***

**F**OLLOWING the endorsement of the Charter in 2011, the appointment of Cr Jan Farrell as Charter Champion, and development of a *3x3 Action Plan* at a council hosted forum, the community group *Women in Local Democracy (WILD)* was formed.

In 2012 with support of the VLGA, the council together with WILD, organised two pre-election forums resulting in an increase in women standing for council in the Geelong region.

WILD surveyed all candidates for the new directly elected Mayoral position and the 12 wards regarding their support for implementing the Charter principles. Results showed support for a dedicated staff officer, a women's

portfolio and a budget allocation to promote women's participation and leadership.

Greater Geelong City Council has:

- Established a new portfolio called *Women in Community Life* with Mayor Keith Fagg as the portfolio Councillor.
- Committed to consideration of resources for a dedicated part-time women's policy officer and support for a Women's Advisory Group in the 2013/14 budget discussions.
- Plans to host a community forum in 2013 to review and update the *3x3 Action Plan* and develop implementation priorities.



## CITY OF MARIBRYNONG

***“Sometimes it can be difficult to clearly link prevention of violence against women to gender equity principles. So, we have worked on the ‘low hanging fruit’ projects first and then moved to looking at ways we can improve women’s leadership and participation. The Gender Equity Strategy will provide a newer framework where we can focus on opportunities to open up the conversation into these other areas.”***

**I**N 2012 the council adopted a *Gender Equity Strategy* and appointed Cr Sarah Carter as council’s first annual ambassador for the strategy, which was launched as part of 2013 International Women’s Day celebrations.

Maribyrnong City Council has:

- A dedicated Coordinator for Gender Equitable, Safe and Inclusive Communities with this position, held by Emma Wilkinson, shared with Brimbank and Wyndham councils

- Collaborated with other councils, women’s health and community groups in *Preventing Violence Together* – the Western Region’s Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women
- Hosted a *Leading Women in the West* forum attended by over 60 women to promote community and political leadership in the lead up to the 2012 elections
- Conducted a council audit to measure how women in the

community were accessing council services, using complaints mechanisms and participating on committees

- Received strong feedback in community consultations that gender equity issues should be retained in the Council Plan
- Conducted three *Gender Equity Forums* for senior staff which have built commitment and encouraged staff to address gender equity issues in day-to-day operations.

## CITY OF HOBSON’S BAY

***“Some councillors were very much against it, but now we have a team of community minded councillors who are fantastic. All seven of us work much better as a team and are absolutely behind the Charter.”***

**F**OLLOWING establishment of a Women’s Advisory Committee late in 2011, the council has undertaken a number of initiatives to further promote the three Charter principles of gender equity, diversity and active citizenship both within council and the community.

Hobson’s Bay City Council has:

- Initiated the annual Hobson’s Bay Inspirational Women Awards which recognise and celebrate twenty inspirational women from different backgrounds in the community
- Utilised resources such as the WPILGC publication, *A Gender Agenda*, to promote women’s participation and leadership
- Held women’s leadership and pre-election forums to encourage women to become active in the community and to stand for council

- Doubled the number of women councillors at the 2012 elections with the numbers of women increasing to four
- Publicised and attended events hosted by other Charter Champion Councils, such as Darebin and Moreland, for innovative ideas that can be used and/or adapted locally.

The council’s Charter Champion, Cr Luba Grigorovitch, has worked closely with the local media to create a greater profile on gender equity issues which has helped promote increased involvement of women and in turn reinforced the need for support from other councillors.



## Models that work – a snapshot of Council initiatives

### MOIRA SHIRE COUNCIL

*“In this community there can be a bit of a mindset that the male is the main person and some women find it hard to accept that they can be equal or better — it can be hard for women to accept that they are equals in the face of a blokey-blokey culture.”*

**T**HE COUNCIL adopted the Charter in 2011 and established the Moira Charter Steering Committee with councillor, officer and community representatives. The Committee developed a 3x3 Action Plan related to the three Charter Principles.

Moira Shire Council has:

- Established both a *Woman of the Year* and a *Junior Woman of the Year* award with a follow-up nomination to the *Victorian Women's Honour Roll*
- Nominated a young officer for the *Sally Isaac Award*
- Held two pre-election information sessions to encourage more women candidates in the council election
- Collaborated with the adjoining council of Strathbogie, the local

Yorta Yorta community, and regional secondary schools for the VLGA's *Think Women for Local Government Campaign*

- Produced a simple guide on meeting procedures to promote active citizenship
- Received funding from the Department of Planning and Community Development to run a *Community Leadership Program* with a special focus on women.

Cr Alex Monk, Moira's Charter Champion, said that in 2013 there are plans to develop in conjunction with the neighbourhood house, a leadership training program, *How a Leader Behaves* and to hold a business breakfast/brunch for business women from across the shire.

### CITY OF MORELAND

*“The Charter is a useful mechanism to look at what's been done and identify where the gaps are. It brings all the projects and initiatives together and provides a really good framework.”*

**M**ORELAND integrates its work around the Charter principles with relevant council policies, frameworks and initiatives. Its history of action and innovation around gender equity is reflected in many areas, such as an increase from 8 per cent to 15 per cent in women's participation in sport and recreation has been achieved since the council adopted its *Active Women's and Girl's Strategy* in 2009.

Moreland City Council has:

- Introduced a clause on family violence into the staff Enterprise Bargaining Agreement which has raised organisational awareness

- Held an annual *Honouring Women in Moreland Awards*, that include a category for young women with follow-up nominations to the *Victorian Women's Honour Roll*
- Collaborated with other organisations such as Women's Health in the North, Merri Community Health and Family Violence Network and the Moreland Business Women's Networks around policies, programs and community initiatives

With a majority of our Councillors being women and having Cr Meghan Hopper as the Councillor Responsible for the Status of Women, issues of gender equity and safety are high on the agenda.

In 2013 the council's Unit Manager of Community Development Nalika Pieris, says there are plans to review a number of council policies/structures which include enhancing active citizenship within council's advisory committees. Moreland City Council will also be participating in a pilot program to become a *White Ribbon* accredited organisation.



## CITY OF WHITTLESEA

***"The next step I'd like to see happening is an audit of what's going on in this area, what it is addressing, where is it going in the next 12 months."***

**T**HE COUNCIL has initiated a *Women of Whittlesea - WOW - Program* for women staff aimed at supporting and empowering women in workplace decision-making; and a community network, *Women Matter 2*, to address systemic barriers and identify opportunities for women's participation, including women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Whittlesea City Council has:

- Built on the momentum created by the successful 2008 WPILGC *Women Matter in Local Democracies* workshop in Whittlesea by establishing the WM2 community based and driven network
- Held three annual forums under the WM2 banner with speakers, celebrations of achievements, and opportunities to identify new priorities for the council and community

- Linked gender equity issues with its *White Ribbon* campaign including a forum for community leaders to further empower women to act to address unsafe situations.

In 2013, Charter Champion Cr Kris Pavlidis says that council plans to utilise the new sector-wide local government gender equity factsheets to review policies, programs and services through a gender equity lens, and with a resultant audit, be better equipped to consider resources for a dedicated worker on gender issues.

## CITY OF YARRA

***"We have a strong focus on promoting the charter principles within the organisation and aim to be an employer of choice for women."***

**I**N 2012 Yarra City Council played a key role, together with other councils and regional women's health services with MAV and VicHealth support, in producing *Ten Ways Local Government can Advance Gender Equity* factsheets.

This involvement continues Yarra's strong history of promoting women's participation in community, organisational, civic and political life.

Yarra City Council has:

- Appointed a dedicated Women's Health Planner, adopted a *Multicultural Policy and Action Plan* which acknowledges the Charter, and included within the council's Community Grants Program a focus on women
- As part of the local *Australia Day Awards*, recognised a *Woman of the Year*

- On *International Women's Day*, celebrated the contribution of staff on gender equity through recognition on Yarra's *Women's Honour Roll*
- Developed online gender reporting resources for staff
- In 2011-12 jointly with the Neighbourhood Justice Centre conducted the *Yarra Photo Project* – an online blog where women could post their own stories which further assisted the council to address women's concerns.

The council's Community Planner, Maryanne Clarke, says challenges for the council in 2013 include the development of a new community driven advisory committee to further coordinate work on women's issues through working with leading women, networks and groups within the municipality.

## MAV Promoting Gender Equity

The MAV recognises the important need to achieve greater numbers of women participating in local government at the councillor, council administration and community levels, including:

- Supporting the principles of the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter
- Endorsing an MAV Statement of Commitment to Cultural Diversity in support of strong and healthy communities free of inequity by harnessing and nurturing the richness of cultural diversity
- Launching the MAV Promoting Gender Equity *Prevention of Violence Against Women Leadership Statement*, which acknowledges the enormous contribution being made by councils to progress work in this area; pledges to support councils through leadership; and suggests strategies for councils to consider when undertaking prevention of violence against women initiatives

- Resourcing the MAV Preventing Violence Against Women Leadership Group, made up of councillors and council directors and managers, and convening the MAV Preventing Violence Against Women Network
- Distributing regular prevention of violence against women and gender equity updates to a network of over 200 subscribers
- Delivering workshops to more than 90 councillors, executives and senior managers on how to apply a gender lens to council business
- Developing an MAV Gender and Emergency Management Strategy, along with a factsheet to assist councils in applying a gender lens to emergency management planning and recovery efforts

- Encouraging women to consider standing for local government election through the Stand for Council campaign, including through the numerous articles published in metropolitan Leader papers in the lead-up to the 2012 elections
- Promoting the *Australian Local Government Women's Association's* activities and the *national framework for women in local government*
- Participating in the Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition
- Ensuring that MAV *events and training* encourage people to stand for council election are welcoming and attractive to female participants.

For the first time, the new MAV Board, elected in March 2013, has a female majority, with seven of the 13 member Board being women.

## LG Pro

- The LGPro Executive Leadership Program and Emerging Leaders Program both have gender balance built into the selection criteria. The primary target audience for the Executive Leadership Program is CEOs and Directors and women comprise approximately 20 per cent of that target audience. In the four Executive Leadership Programs to date we have only failed to achieve gender balance once.
- We are aware that more than 30 per cent of people working in local government in Victoria are women and that more than 50 per cent of those women work part-time. We introduced full membership at 50 per cent of the cost for anybody working 0.6 or less.

- From 2003-4 to 2011-12 the percentage of women members of LGPro has grown from 29 per cent to over 50 per cent.
- We hold an annual full-day Women's Professional Development Forum which attracts 150 – 250 participants and our annual Women's Network Dinner attracts approximately 500 people.
- LGPro Board currently comprises 60 per cent women and the two predecessor Boards comprised 50 per cent women.

## Women's Charter Principles

### GENDER EQUITY

*That women and men have an equal right to be representatives in local governments, committees and decision-making positions.*

### DIVERSITY

*The inclusion of different experiences and perspectives in local governments and community decision-making strengthens local democratic governance and helps build cohesive communities. Councils and communities encourage and welcome the participation of all women.*

## VLGA

The principles of the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter are strongly congruent with what the VLGA is on about.

The Victorian Local Government Association (VLGA) is a unique peak body for councillors, community leaders and local governments working to build and strengthen their capacity to work together for progressive social change. Our membership consists of local governments (representing over 80 per cent of Victoria's population), community organisations and individuals.

Our vision is for Victorian communities to be inclusive, sustainable and dynamic, characterised by strong leadership and effective local governance. We believe that transparent, accountable and democratic governance policies and practices in all settings enable citizens to create their own sustainable futures.

The VLGA acts on the principles of the Charter through:

- employment of a dedicated Women's Policy Officer
- providing the Secretariat for the WPILG Coalition
- undertaking activities which support the gender equity work of the sector, e.g. support for the 16 days of action (making the link between the White Ribbon campaign and Human Rights); support and advice for members implementing the Charter in diverse ways
- creating and delivering gender equity projects, most recently the *Think women for local government 2012* Project which resulted in significant increases in the numbers and diversity of women candidates in the October 2012 elections.

The opportunities for achieving

gender equity, diversity and a recognition of women's active citizenship in local government and communities have been increased as a result of the election results. For the first time, every single council has at least one woman councillor elected and the goal identified in 2000, of achieving 200 women councillors has been well and truly met with 215 women now elected.

The VLGA, along with local government and other sector partners, is already thinking about the 2016 elections and how to build on this momentum.



WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION  
IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
COALITION  
STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES  
THROUGH WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

## ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

*Local governments will work with the community to increase the numbers and participation of women in public life, so that decision-making more clearly represents and reflects the interests and demographics of communities.*

## ALGWA

ALGWA is a non-party political organisation which supports and encourages women's participation in local government as both councillors and officers. It provides forums, conferences, networks and mentoring for current and former councillors and officers to network and support each other. It is a national organisation with a branch in every state and the Northern Territory.

Its objectives include:

- Assisting in furthering knowledge and understanding of the function of local government
- Encouraging women to participate in local government

- Encouraging women to make a career in local government
- Watching over and protecting the interests and rights of women in local government
- Taking action in relation to any subject or activity affecting local government and local government legislation
- Acting in an advisory capacity to intending women candidates for local government election.

ALGWA initiated and is the lead partner in the national 50:50 Vision Awards & Accreditation Programme for Gender Equity in Local Government, supported by the Federal Government.

## What works well?

Almost universally, the recent local government elections and the 2010 Year of Women in Local Government were a wonderful hook for councils to hold forums and promote women's active citizenship. Examples of programs that the interviewees reported worked well may be useful for other councils to consider. These include:

- Awards programs that recognise outstanding women in the community and the organisation (e.g. through a separate Australia Day award, IWD events or internal program for female staff)
- Monitor council programs and evaluate the data so that evidence can be used to tell a story which shows how programs improve women's participation, active citizenship and equality. Use this to brief new councillors and as part of staff induction programs
- Implement programs that build internal capacity, not just community, in order to encourage buy-in. This could include staff training on the ten Local Government Gender Equity Fact Sheets
- Successfully source outside funding to help give impetus to programs
- Review customer-service aspects of council program delivery to see how women-friendly services are, including advisory groups to council
- Invite community feedback on the Council Plan especially regarding gender equity issues
- Form a community based women's advisory council and/or, an internal gender equity working group to help nurture wide-spread support for actions
- Utilise the work that may have been done on preventing violence against women and White Ribbon campaigns, as an opportunity to open up the conversation around what can be done to address gender inequality and power imbalance
- Tap into the peak bodies for their support and resources
- Plan for a Gender Equity Strategy and nominate a councillor as the Gender Equity Ambassador

## Resources

- WPILGC website [www.vlga.women.org.au](http://www.vlga.women.org.au) to access links and publications:
  - Women's Charter Checklist Tool
  - A Gender Agenda
  - Now You're A Councillor
- MAV website [www.mav.asn.au](http://www.mav.asn.au) : see gender equity and women in local government sections for research and policy documents
- MAV's Stand for Council website which contains information and advice about becoming a councillor – [www.standforcouncil.com.au](http://www.standforcouncil.com.au)
- VLGA's website "Think Women for Local Government: [www.thinkwomenlg.org.au](http://www.thinkwomenlg.org.au)
- Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA) Victoria [www.algwa.com.au](http://www.algwa.com.au)
- Seeking accreditation under the ALGWA 50:50 Vision program of accreditation and awards – see <http://5050vision.com.au/> for more information.
- Women's Planning Network's (WPN) Listening to Women – women's participation in local decision-making listed on the WPN website [www.wpn.org.au](http://www.wpn.org.au)

## Charter Councils

64 Councils have endorsed the Women's Charter principles gender equity, diversity and active citizenship (as at October 2012):

### Metropolitan

- Bayside
- Boroondara
- Cardinia
- Casey
- Darebin
- Frankston
- Greater Dandenong
- Hobson's Bay
- Hume
- Kingston
- Knox
- Manningham
- Maribyrnong
- Maroondah
- Melbourne
- Melton
- Monash

### Regional

- Ballarat
- Greater Bendigo
- Greater Geelong
- Greater Shepparton
- Horsham
- Latrobe
- Mildura
- Swan Hill
- Warrnambool

### Rural

- Ararat
- Bass Coast
- Baw Baw
- Benalla
- Buloke
- Campaspe
- Central Goldfields
- Colac Otway
- Corangamite
- East Gippsland
- Gannawarra
- Glenelg
- Golden Plains
- Hepburn
- Hindmarsh
- Macedon Ranges
- Moira
- Moorabool
- Mount Alexander
- Moyne
- Murrindindi
- South Gippsland
- Southern Grampians
- Strathbogie
- Surf Coast
- Towong
- Wangaratta
- Wellington
- Yarriambiack

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