# Inclusive Language Guide

As Councillors, our words and actions carry weight. Whether it’s in chambers, with community, or with Council staff, our language **sets the tone** and signals our values.

The words we use are **powerful tools for inclusion** and a mirror for our culture. Inclusive language isn’t about ‘political correctness’ – it’s about treating everyone in our diverse community with **dignity and respect**.

## What is inclusive language?

Inclusive language describes words or phrases that are **respectful**, **accurate**, and **free from bias**. That means it:

* recognises and affirms people of all genders, identities, backgrounds, and abilities
* avoids stereotyping or reinforcing outdated norms
* is mindful of power, privilege and social context.

## A note on intersectionality

It’s important to remember **people experience inequality differently** depending on how aspects of their identity *intersect* at any given time – such as Aboriginality, gender, race, disability, or age. Inclusive language helps ensure that no one is made to feel invisible, disrespected, or unsafe.

## Simple language swaps

While these **everyday expressions** may seem harmless, they carry gendered biases or assumptions. Here are some ways to promote greater respect and inclusion through words.

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| **Instead of…** | **Try…** | **Why?** |
| “Chairman” | “Chair” or “Chairperson” | Gender-neutral and avoids default to masculine |
| “Hey guys” or “Ladies and gentlemen” | “Hi everyone” or “Hi all” | Avoids male-default language or gender binary |
| “Girls in admin” or “boys in the depot” | “The team” or “Council staff” | More professional and avoids gendering roles |
| “He/she” e.g. “ensure he/she has completed the task” | “They” e.g. “ensure they have completed the task” | Simpler and inclusive of gender-diverse people |
| “Females” or “males” | “Women”, “men” or “people of all genders” | “Females” and “males” are biological terms better suited to scientific contexts. We want to centre identity, not anatomy. |
| “LGBT” or “LGB” | “LGBTIQA+” | More inclusive and most up-to-date term for diverse identities |
| “Mothers and fathers” or “mums and dads” | “Parents and carers” or “families” | Includes all family types |
| “Wife” or “husband” | “Partner” or “spouse” | Affirms all relationship types |
| “Boys and girls” | “Young people” | Gender-neutral and affirming |
| “Policeman”, “fireman”, “tradesman” | “Police officer”, “firefighter”, “tradesperson” | Avoids unnecessary gendering of roles |
| “Manpower” or “manning the event” | “Workforce” or “Staffing” | Gender-neutral; reflects everyone’s contribution |
| “Mankind” or “manmade” | “Humankind”, “society”, or “artificial”, “human-made” | These terms centre men as the default and erase other’s contributions. |
| “That’s just how men are” or “boys will be boys” | “Let’s not excuse poor behaviour” | Avoids normalising gendered disrespect |
| Phrases like “fairer sex” or “alpha males” | “Women and gender-diverse people” or “competitive people” | These phrases reinforce outdated and often sexist stereotypes. |

## A vibrant City for all

As the level of government closest to the community, here are some ways to make our **everyday interactions** as Councillors more inclusive:

### In public

***Acknowledge diversity and affirm inclusion***

* Celebrate and recognise the diversity of the community, e.g. “It’s great to see such a diverse turnout today, it’s what makes City of Melton great.”
* Do an Acknowledgement of Country that names local language groups and recognises the vital contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

### In the community

***Consider pace and accessibility when you’re on the move***

* Speak at an accessible pace, particularly for community members with English as an additional language or communication support needs.
* Choose language that’s warm and respectful, but avoids diminutives like “love,” “dear,” or “sweetheart”, which can feel patronising or unprofessional.

### In writing and online

***Avoid gendered assumptions and model respectful engagement***

* Be aware of tone – written words can come across as more blunt or harsh than spoken ones, so read it back and check that it reflects warmth and respect.
* Avoid posting or sharing content that reinforces gender stereotypes, even if it seems humorous or harmless.
* Moderate public pages or your profile with care and don’t allow offensive comments to remain visible or unchallenged.

### Internally

***Show respect in action and avoid gendered labels***

* Create space for diverse voices by modelling inclusive behaviour, and not interrupting or speaking over colleagues, especially women and gender-diverse people.
* Avoid jokes or comments based on gender, appearance, or stereotypes, even if they’re meant to be ‘light-hearted’ or ‘fun’.
* Support a culture of accountability by gently pointing out inappropriate language or behaviour, and seek support from HR if needed.

## Common scenarios

It’s unrealistic to expect we will never make mistakes. What’s important is how we **respond**. These scenarios offer simple ways to put inclusive language into practice.

#### Scenario 1: You hear a colleague refer to depot staff as “the boys”.

**Try**: “Hey, I know that’s a warm and familiar phrase but it’s a bit outdated and not necessarily accurate. How about ‘the team’ or ‘staff’ instead?”

**Why**: Using gender-neutral and professional terms shows respect for everyone’s role, regardless of gender. It helps create a culture where no one is unintentionally excluded.

#### Scenario 2: You overhear someone being misgendered by accident.

**Try**: “Hi, just a heads up — I think <Name> uses <they/them> pronouns. Easy mistake to make, but I thought I’d flag it so we can all get it right.”

**Why**: Repeated misgendering has been linked to increased rates of stress, anxiety, and depression. Gently correcting in the moment helps create a safer, more respectful engagement.

#### Scenario 3: Someone refers to being “woke” or “political correctness gone mad”.

**Try**: “I get that this might feel new or uncomfortable, but making sure everyone feels respected is important. Language evolves, and as leaders, we have a responsibility to evolve with it.”

**Why**: Pushing back respectfully shows that inclusive language isn’t about being trendy or ‘PC’. It’s about fairness and respect. Councillors play a key role in normalising these conversations and helping others understand that inclusion is a key part of a strong community, not a threat to it.

*Promoting respectful relationships through engagement, excellence, and inclusion.*