



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Local Government**

Women in Local Government: Towards a Strong and Sustainable Sector 2009-2012

WORKING PAPER APRIL 2009

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Department of Local Government

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Foreword

Having taken up the local government portfolio as the Western Australian Minister for Local Government in September 2008, I have been delighted to hear of the initiatives of the Advisory Committee on Women in Local Government and other industry bodies and organisations. I am keen to support these initiatives.

The local government sector is facing significant challenges at the present time. These include an increased need for a range of knowledge and skills, greater community expectations of local governments and increasing complexity in their functions, each of these placing demands on the sustainability of governance and service delivery. I have recently introduced a number of strategies to address such challenges.

At the same time, there are wonderful opportunities for local governments to develop their governance capability and enhance their service provision to their communities.

Women have a great contribution to make in this regard.

Unfortunately, overall, women are very much under-represented in senior positions in the sector. In this State, with 139 local governments, there were only 8 women in Chief Executive Officer positions in October 2008. This reflects the situation at a national level, only 51 CEO positions across Australia being filled by women, and there have been recent national initiatives to address this.

In September 2008, Local Government Managers Australia hosted a National Forum on Women in Local Government Management. The forum resulted in shared commitment to advancing women into senior management by local, state and commonwealth governments, local government associations and peak industry bodies. A number of strategic outcomes were agreed upon at the conclusion of the forum, including the development and implementation of a **Year of Women in Local Government for 2010**.

On 19 and 20 November 2008, a meeting of the Australian Local Government Women's Association National Steering Committee was held in Adelaide. Proposals for the implementation of the Review of the National Framework for Women, "The Way Forward", were developed and, as part of this process, copies of the document were forwarded to all local governments across Australia. Mayors, Presidents and CEOs are asked to consider ways in which their local government is currently, and may in the future, take up opportunities to enhance the contribution of women in management and decision making in the organisation.

National initiatives to increase the participation of women in local government are also on the agenda of the Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council.

This document sets out a number of strategies which aim to increase the participation of women in senior positions across the sector. The strategies will guide the work of the Advisory Committee over the coming three to four years. I encourage you to contribute to this process with ideas, suggestions and initiatives of your own.



Hon G M Castrilli MLA
MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT; HERITAGE;
CITIZENSHIP AND MULTICULTURAL INTERESTS

1. PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT

This document has been prepared as a working paper:

- as a guide for the work of the Advisory Committee on Women in Local Government;
- and
- as a basis for comment and suggestions from others with an interest in effective and sustainable local government and the contribution which women can make to this.

The document presents a business case for greater participation of women in senior management in the sector.

It sets out a number of strategies which aim to:

- encourage and support initiatives which enable women to achieve high level management and decision making positions in the sector;
- bring about culture change and processes which maximise opportunities for women and men in the sector; and to
- develop the governance and service provision capability of the sector at a time of heightened demand for greater sustainability in local government operations, high community expectations of management accountability and substantial opportunities for providing additional infrastructure in local communities.

The strategies have been developed by the Advisory Committee on Women in Local Government.

They link with national initiatives which are committed to advancing women into senior management in local government across Australia in the next three to four years.

While the strategies aim particularly at achieving greater participation of women at senior management level, initiatives also aim to benefit all women, including elected members, and men in the sector.

2. ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Advisory Committee on Women in Local Government provides advice to the Minister for Local Government on ways of encouraging and assisting women to seek employment and progress their careers in the local government sector in Western Australia.

To achieve its aims, the Advisory Committee:

- provides a forum to identify and consider matters relevant to the employment of women in the sector;
- develops and implements strategies to support and encourage women's employment and career development in the sector; and
- works in partnership with local governments, other government agencies, local government organisations, the private sector and individuals.

The members of the Advisory Committee contribute from a wide range of experience and background.

The Advisory Committee is supported in its work by a number of ambassadors who are senior local government managers and educators from the university sector.

2. ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Members

Mayor Paddi Creevey, City of Mandurah, Chair

Ms Joanne Abbiss, Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Serpentine - Jarrahdale

Ms Anne Banks-McAllister, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Peppermint Grove

Ms Danika Chandler, Accountant/Senior Administration Officer, Shire of Irwin

Ms Adelle Cochran, Director of Community Engagement, City of Gosnells

Mr Cliff Frewing, Chief Executive Officer, City of South Perth

Ms Eva Haydon, Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Mount Marshall

Ms Leonie Hollow, Human Resources Advisor Recruitment Services, City of Perth

Ms Jennifer Mathews, Director General, Department of Local Government

Ms Lynnette O'Reilly, Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Moora

Mr Michael Palermo, A/Director, Equal Opportunity in Public Employment

Ms Andrea Selvey, Director of Creative Communities, City of Geraldton-Greenough

Mr Daniel Sims, Chief Executive Officer, City of Wanneroo

Ms Gay Thornton, Director Community Development, City of Rockingham

Professor Elizabeth Walker, Director, Small and Medium Enterprise Research Centre, Faculty of Business and Law, Edith Cowan University

3. POLICY BACKGROUND

Current situation

Across Australia, there is widespread concern at the low level of representation of women in Chief Executive Officer and senior management positions in local government.

This also applies in the government and private sectors, in terms of women on boards and committees and with respect to female elected members of local governments.

In Western Australia, there has been a steady increase in the number of women employed in the sector overall, increasing from 48.9% in 2006 to 50.6% in 2007. However, as at December 2007, there were only 453 women in Director and General Manager positions out of a total workforce of 15, 917. With 139 local governments in all, there were only 8 females in Chief Executive Officer positions as at October 2008.

Nationally, available data in October 2008 indicates that there are only 51 women in CEO positions, including those in WA.

National developments and initiatives

At both State and National levels, industry bodies Local Government Managers Australia (LGMA) and the Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA) have put in place initiatives which aim to increase the participation of women in local government.

In 2007, LGMA developed a national strategy for women in local government and, in October 2008, hosted a national forum comprising representatives from local, State and Commonwealth governments, local government associations and peak professional bodies. An outcome of the forum was that there would be a "Year of Women in Local Government" in 2010 and a Steering Committee and several working parties have been established to develop and implement the year. The Department of Local Government is participating in these initiatives.

ALGWA was founded in Canberra in 1952. Its main aim is to promote and encourage women in, and into, local government and it has branches in each State and the Northern Territory.

In conjunction with the Office for the Status of Women, ALGWA produced the National Framework for Women in 2001. This was reviewed in 2006-2007 and "The Way Forward" underpins the Association's current activities. A National Steering Committee was formed in 2007 and the Department of Local Government is represented on this. This enables linkages to be made between ALGWA and Advisory Committee initiatives at the State and National level.

The Steering Committee reviewed progress with the implementation of “The Way Forward” in November 2008, with outcomes providing directions for the next three to four years. A number of proposals are being progressed through the Local Government Joint Officers Group (LOGJOG) and the Local Government and Planning Ministers’ Council (LGPMC) during 2009 - 2010.

Related Western Australian legislation and policies

Equal Opportunity legislation

In Western Australia, local governments, as public authorities, are subject to the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984*. Part IX of the legislation requires all public authorities to prepare and implement an equal opportunity management plan and to provide a copy of the plan to the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment. The strategies in this document can be incorporated into local governments’ EEO plans.

Office for Women’s Policy

The Office for Women’s Policy (OWP) is part of the Western Australian Department for Communities and works to improve the status of women by providing advice to government based on evidence, quality research and community consultation. The Office recognizes the diversity of women across the broadest spectrum, including age, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation and location and strives to adopt an inclusive approach to policy development. OWP works with the Department of Local Government on initiatives such as regional and metropolitan information sessions for potential candidates prior to local government elections.

4. THE BUSINESS CASE FOR MORE WOMEN

Underpinning the strategies in this document is a business case for greater participation of women in management in the local government sector.

This argues that:

- increased sustainability, improved governance and greater accountability are key issues for the sector;
- CEOs are focused on attracting and retaining the best possible people to meet these demands;
- the educational achievements of women in the sector and community generally are high;
- women represent a strong pool of talent; and
- greater diversity of decision makers better reflects community interests and concerns.

There is a business imperative to attract, develop, promote and retain senior women.

This will enable the sector to capitalise on the participation of women, build the capacity of local governments and achieve innovative and effective governance in communities across the State.

Research confirms the business impact of gender diversity. In companies that focus on diversity – developing and leveraging women’s talent – the relationship to the bottom line is remarkable (Catalyst, 2004: *The Bottom Line: Connecting Corporate Performance and Gender Diversity*). This study was based on 353 of the 500 Fortune Companies and published in October 2007.

Note: The above has been prepared with reference to the ANZ business case for the organisation’s initiative to increase women in leadership, including the presentation by Fiona Krautl at the LGMA National Forum on Women in Local Government Management, Sydney, September 2008; and material from the Catalyst organization, New York, San Jose and Toronto.

5. THE VISION AND MAIN AREAS OF FOCUS

Vision

Better local government through increased numbers of women in executive decision making positions.

Main areas of focus

- Recruitment and selection processes for senior management/decision making positions
- Skills development and mentoring and coaching of women seeking senior positions
- Culture change within local governments and across the sector
- Employees and elected members working together
- Marketing and promotion of the sector and of women as contributors to the sector

6. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Acknowledging the national perspective and business case imperatives underpinning its planning and activities, the Advisory Committee works to the following principles:

- recognition of the significant contribution women have to make in ensuring a strong and sustainable local government sector;
- commitment to the enhancement of people development skills, including leadership, to create a work environment in which both men and women will succeed;
- recognition of the value, and benefits for both individuals and organisations, of provision for developing employee potential, career planning and career enhancement and advancement;
- recognition of the importance of providing wide and equitable access to information and initiatives regarding:
 - all local government management vacancies, enabling current employees and others to make informed decisions regarding job opportunities and careers in the sector; and
 - the local government sector generally, encouraging interest, involvement and contribution as employees or elected members;through regional and local approaches;
- commitment to policies and practices in local governments which recognise the value of flexible working arrangements and other social impacts of work;
- the right of all local government employees to work in an equitable workplace;
- commitment to the need to identify inequitable attitudes, behaviours, policies and practices at sector and organisational level and to take appropriate steps to change these; and
- promotion of awareness of attitudes, behaviours and policies which perpetuate misconceptions about women's abilities, career interests and commitment.

7. PRIORITIES

First 12 months (2009)

- Endorsement of the business case for women's contribution
- Stocktake of where women are now through a survey to CEOs
- Professional/skills development workshops for women
- Mentoring Program
- Recruitment and selection training for elected members involved in CEO selections
- Women in local government conference
- Featuring of senior women in the sector
- Input to planning of the Year of Women in Local Government 2010
- Training on workplace communication in mainstream DLGRD programs

Second 12 months (2010)

- Activities as part of the Year of Women in Local Government 2010
- Regular professional development luncheon events

Third and fourth years

- Review of outcomes of activities to date
- Implementation of other initiatives as indicated by review and outcomes of national initiatives

8. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Strategy 1: Recruitment and Selection

This strategy aims to improve local government recruitment and selection processes so that they are consistent with best practice and result in the selection of the best person for the position.

Actions:

- Develop a business case for the value of sound selection processes, encompassing consideration of the best person for the position, and promote this through the Minister for Local Government and the Director General of DLG.
- Provide timely information and advice to local governments regarding panel composition and other key aspects of recruitment and selection processes, using existing and revised resources in a more targeted manner.
- Arrange for the Minister/Director General to write to each individual councillor promoting the importance and business case benefits of best practice recruitment and selection processes for CEO positions.
- Mirror and promote best practice from the Commonwealth and State public sectors, particularly the composition of selection panels.

8. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Strategy 2: Development Opportunities

This strategy aims to provide opportunities for skills development for women, particularly with respect to selections for senior positions and the development of a professional profile in the industry.

Actions:

- Continue the Mentoring Program, with increased profile and targeting about ten senior women.
- Identify women managers and directors in the sector, DLG to seek information through Chief Executive Officers.
- Target a number of women with respect to skills development and coaching.
- Establish a fund/scholarships to this purpose.
- Continue professional development events with guest speakers.
- Target events for the targeted pool.
- Ask Chief Executive Officers to arrange for a female officer to attend industry professional development events with them.
- Include interview skills, presentation and ways of developing a profile in the industry in training and development activities.
- Identify opportunities for women's representation on committees, peak bodies.
- Promote cross-funded acting opportunities and secondments, along with retention strategies as ways of developing and retaining women's expertise in the sector.
- Mainstream issues relating to skills development through policy forums convened by industry bodies.

8. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Strategy 3: Culture change

This strategy recognises that there are continuing difficulties with respect to organisational culture in local governments, affecting opportunities for staff, including women, and detracting from the performance of local governments and the public image and perception of them. It also recognises the contribution which women can make in the development of organisations and the interface with the community.

Actions:

- Promote the business case for more women in executive decision making positions within mainstream local government.
- Hold mainstream workshops around communication patterns and ways of changing them.
- Conduct training with the executive women's cohort around "unwritten" rules.
- Include a segment on women in the workplace in the Code of Conduct training.
- Hold LGMA lunches akin to those in which men participate.
- Utilise experiences and approaches from outside the local government sector, including those from the private sector.
- Support the LGMA National Women in Local Government Management Strategy and the ALGWA National Framework initiative.
- Promote features essential to achieve a positive image of the sector, both within and outside the sector.
- Provide for differences between country and metropolitan local governments in implementing strategies.

8. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Strategy 4: Working with Elected Members

This strategy recognises the need for, and the benefits to be gained from, elected members and staff working together and improving knowledge and skills, especially in areas such as the recruitment and selection of CEOs, roles and responsibilities and overall communication practices in local governments.

Actions:

- Develop targeted training, including a behavioural and value based component, for elected members and incorporate in current training regarding the Code of Conduct and Conduct of Certain Officials provisions of the *Local Government Act 1995*.
- Arrange targeted training on best practice CEO recruitment and selection processes for elected members, the training to be delivered by employment consultants, possibly from outside the local government sector.
- Provide training in a timely, proactive manner such as prior to recruitment and selection processes for vacant CEO positions as they arise.
- Hold lunch events, inviting senior women, both employed in the sector and elected members.
- Promote senior women in the sector.

8. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Strategy 5: Marketing and Promotion

The development and implementation of a marketing strategy which promotes the local government sector and in which the business case setting out the value of women's contribution is clearly articulated is a key initiative.

Actions:

- Prepare and disseminate with the endorsement of the Minister for Local Government a business case for the benefits of women's contribution.
- Engage and promote the place of women in the sector through women holding senior positions in the sector.
- Initiate an award which recognises the achievement of a local government(s) in enabling the effective participation and contribution of women in the workforce.
- Invite the involvement of the Western Australian Local Government Association in the promotion of the sector and of the benefits to be gained from the participation of women in the sector.
- Use conferences, both local government and mainstream, as opportunities for marketing and promotion through events, speakers and presentation of papers.
- Arrange a main event such as a luncheon with senior women as guest speakers.
- Include mayors and presidents as ambassadors for the Advisory Committee.
- Broaden the pool of women taking up executive decision making positions through promotion and marketing of opportunities in the sector.