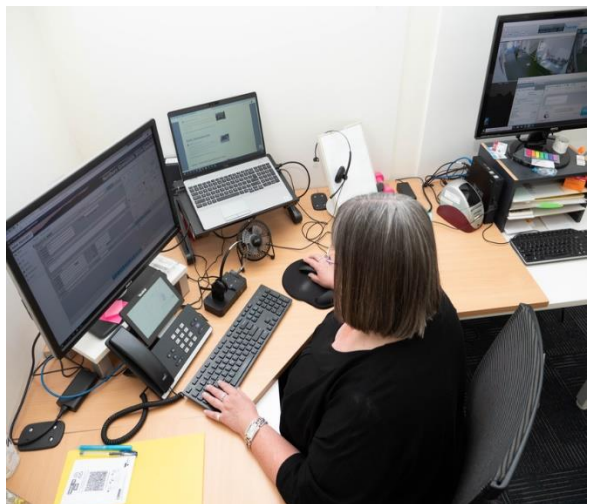
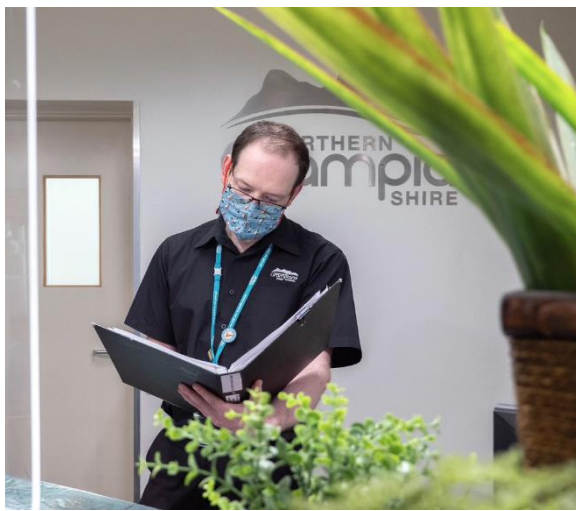


# Northern Grampians Shire Council

## Strategic Workforce Plan 2021-2025



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## Executive Summary

In March 2020, the Victorian State Government legislated substantial changes to Local Government operations through the introduction of a new Local Government Act. Amongst many other changes, the new Act legislated that all Councils were required to develop, adopt, and implement Workforce Plans by the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2021. These plans were not limited to, but needed to at least contain information that:

1. Describes the Organisational Structure of the Council
2. Specifies the projected staffing requirements of the Council for at least 4 years and
3. Sets out measures that seek to ensure gender equality, diversity and inclusiveness.

This Foundational Plan complies with those requirements. Furthermore, this Strategic Workforce Plan outlines the current staffing models and staffing skills in Council, identifies gaps in those areas and produces strategies that will be undertaken to best place the Council to provide the services outlined in the Council Plan 2021 -2025.

To determine those future strategies, this document has been largely developed by gathering internal and external workforce data and aligning it to the PESTEL framework, a process that allows examination of the Political, Environmental, Social, Technical, Economic and Legal impacts on and for our workforce.

This process identified several overarching themes and pressing issues that are addressed in the Strategy Section of the Workforce Plan. In precis, they are:

1. **Retention and attraction** - Council has a higher than average attrition rate when compared to the other similar local governments and often has difficulty attracting staff to the more skilled or specialised roles/positions.
2. **An ageing workforce** – Council has a workforce that is of a higher than average age when compared to the local government sector and this presents both Workcover and succession planning issues.
3. **Specialist skills** - There are a lack of some specialist skills and personnel to deliver on the 2021-2025 Council Plan and the Council Strategic Planning process has not been traditionally aligned to Workforce Planning or with workforce requirements considered, and
4. **IT Skills and Platforms** - Council will need to address, in the life of this plan, the number of specialist employees, the skills of individual employees and the IT platforms currently in use, to enable progress towards more efficient and cost-effective operations. This issue also impacts on retention and attraction of employees.

Whilst these issues are all addressed in more detail, in this Strategic Workforce Plan it is important to note that the ultimate aim, in undertaking this workforce planning exercise, is for the NGSC People and Culture Team to use the analysis to produce Annual Operational Plans that work towards achievement of Council's Strategic Workforce Plan.

## Introduction

Workforce Planning is the systematic identification, analysis and planning of organisational needs in terms of people. It is an active and continuous process used to generate intelligence to inform Council about the current and future impact of the external and internal environment on their business and services, and in the process, to become resilient to structural and cultural changes and be better positioned for the future. There are two separate but interrelated tasks that define workforce planning:

- **Strategic Workforce Planning:** which covers a defined period, aligned to organisational strategy. In the case of this plan, 4 years.
- **Operational Workforce Planning:** which covers a defined period, aligned with the organisations planning cycle and usually no more than 12 months. In this case the People and Culture 12 Month Operational Plan.

The information in this paper outlines the Northern Grampians Shire Council (NGSC) approach to the research for and implementation of these tasks.

## Development of the NGSC Workforce Plan 2021 – 2025

The following information is presented to depict how the NGSC Strategic Workforce Plan was developed:

### 1. Analysis of the NGSC Councils Workforce

An analysis of our existing workforce profile in addition to an examination of National and State Local Government workforce trends was undertaken. Identification of roles that are essential to meeting legislative requirements and those that are at risk of effecting service delivery if they become vacant or are not able to be filled was also undertaken. This analysis enabled the identification of risks associated with the impact on business, should these positions become vacant. Shortfalls and opportunities were highlighted to utilise current resources more efficiently and effectively and to align strategy with Council's values and with projections and trends within the Northern Grampians Region. It is important to note that significant research and comparisons were made in this analysis process. However, due to the overwhelming amount of information, only those issues that were seen as critical or most needing attention or those that provide context are presented in this document.

### 2. Forecast of Future Needs

Research and consideration of NGSC Council Plan 2021-2025 content and objectives were undertaken to understand our capacity and capability to deliver current and future work requirements and identify future skill and competency needs. Future workforce requirements were projected based on identification of gaps in the current workforce profile, the future requirement to support community capacity via local employment and projections of national, state and regional skill shortages. To ensure that identified positions are aligned with Council's strategic direction and that the Strategic Workforce Plan remains an active working document, all vacant or new positions will be analysed against the findings of this Strategic Workforce Plan.

### 3. Gap Analysis

Findings from our workforce analysis and forecasting steps enabled the identification of gaps in demand and supply, internal and external impacts, challenges on current resources and potential strategies to be undertaken.

#### 4. Developing an Action Plan to Address Key Issues

This document contains strategies for a 4-year period that have been developed to address gaps in demand and supply of labour and skill shortages. An Operational Plan will be developed annually to support the achievement of objectives in the 4-year plan. This Operational Plan will work in conjunction with other People and Culture Plans that address development of current staff and recruitment of future employees.

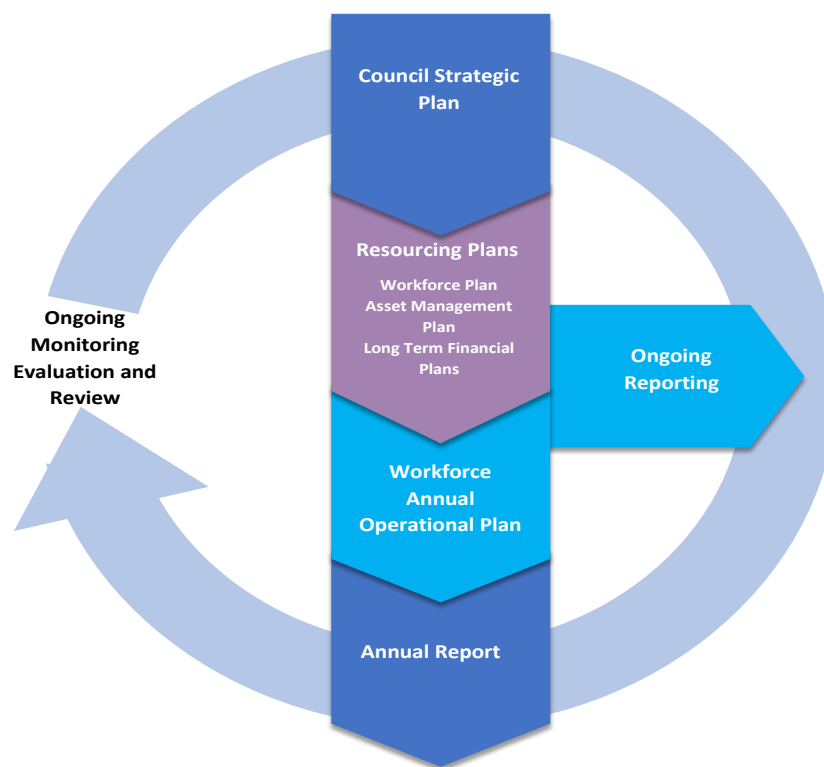
#### 5. Implementation of Strategies

For the Workforce Strategies to be effectively implemented it is critical that key stakeholders are consulted and involved at all stages of the delivery. Management will hold key responsibilities in the delivery of the strategies and will be supported by the People and Culture Team to ensure innovative and best practice human resource tools are used, in line with Council Values, to support them in this endeavour.

#### 6. Monitoring and Evaluation

Ongoing review of the Strategic Workforce Plan will be undertaken on regular basis with alignment to Council's planning documents and processes with remedial actions to be implemented as required. The annual Operational Plan will be used to measure the effectiveness of this Strategic Workforce Plan.

### **Relationship of the Strategic Workforce Plan to Council Operations**



The Strategic Workforce Plan operates in conjunction with other key strategic and management documents that NGSC Council has implemented to meet the needs of our community.

## **Workforce analysis**

### **1. Organisational Direction and the External Environment**

To determine organisational direction, working documents that were utilised to establish the Council Plan 2021 – 2025 were examined and considered. The final Council Plan was also considered. This examination identified that whilst most strategies in the Plan were catered for by our current workforce there were several areas where Council either does not have sufficient staff or the skills to deliver outcomes. This was especially evident in areas that cover indigenous culture relationships, protecting and enhancing the natural environment and managing the impacts of climate change.

Through workshops with individual Senior Leadership Team (SLT) Managers, internal issues in delivering the Council Plan were also examined. Whilst most managers showed a good general understanding of the Plan and outlined staffing strategies to achieve it, they did raise some concerns on the current capacity to deliver increased and improved services. This was particularly evident in and exacerbated by the increasing need to modernise and review IT Platforms and the increasing State Government demands for legislation compliance. These issues may interfere with the current staff capacity to progress towards achievement of the Council Plan.

Many Managers also raised the issue of the Council Plan not being done in conjunction with the Strategic Workforce Plan. This would have allowed a full consideration of the resources and skills needed to achieve strategic outcomes. However, this is a circumstance brought on by State Government Legislation and the order of its implementation and future versions of both Plans will need to take this requirement into account.

A necessary part of Workforce Plan compilation is the consideration of the environment and community in which an organisation operates. This is particularly so for small remote rural communities who gain most of their skills and staff from local sources. To determine the external workforce environment in which the NGSC operates, a range of statistics, demographics and data was examined. Whilst the Northern Grampians Shire is not that different to a number of other small rural shires it does have some issues that are worth highlighting in regard to workforce planning. In precis, they are:

- The age demographic of the residents of the Northern Grampians Shire is quite old and not always that conducive to recruiting suitable staff, and
- The socio economic and education levels of Northern Grampians residents is quite low and not always suitable for recruiting the right staff, especially for highly skilled and qualified positions.

Comment: Given that resourcing required to achieve some outcomes in the Council Plan are not adequately catered for by the present staffing and skill sets and the existence of a limited labour market in the Northern Grampians Shire, Council will need to be increasingly innovative in retaining current staff and attracting suitable future employees and these issues will be addressed by strategies in this plan.

### **2. Analysis of the Internal and External influences on Labour Supply and Demand**

A PESTEL is a simple and effective way to identify what is happening with the external and internal environment that may impact the workforce. The below table was produced through consultation

with the NGSC Managers responsible for the delivery of the Council Plan and those responsible for managing the workforce in supporting that delivery. Some of the findings are explored more fully in the body of this document and were used to inform the strategies contained in this Plan.

<p><b>Political</b> – What are the political factors that are likely to affect the business?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Rate capping by State Government puts pressure on Council’s capacity.</li> <li>2. Negotiating shared services may be required to find adequately skilled staff.</li> <li>3. Decreasing grants from different levels of government may impact levels of services and staff.</li> <li>4. New legislative requirements require specialist skills to implement.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Economic</b> – What are the economic factors that will affect Council?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Grants (See point 3 in Political).</li> <li>2. Council inability to sustain current assets – staff may need to negotiate more meaningfully with the public.</li> <li>3. Grant attainment could be affected by a shortage of skills to focus on and attain grants. This may limit Council applications for new funds.</li> <li>4. Resourcing the growth in aged care may increase labour costs considerably.</li> <li>5. NGSC Workforce predictions/data sets are not currently set up to accurately establish future costs and needs.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Social</b> – What cultural aspects, attitudes, beliefs will affect the demand for service?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ongoing Pandemic restrictions may make some staffing issues problematic.</li> <li>2. The NGSC aging workforce pool may make recruitment increasingly difficult.</li> <li>3. NGSC community has a skill/education gap that may not readily supply a labour force for Council’s more skilled/technical needs/jobs.</li> <li>4. Inadequate staff with the right skills to engage the changing demographics of the NGSC community. E.g., Aging Population.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Technology</b> – What technical factors will affect Council?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increased expectation of residents to interact with Council electronically.</li> <li>2. Staff efficiency and customer service may be affected by outdated platforms that are either not fit for purpose or too complex.</li> <li>3. Current staff numbers and skills may not be adequate for future delivery of IT Platforms or to leverage current capacity of current platforms.</li> <li>4. Current Council Website is not adequate for future use and may require specialist skills to be further developed.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Environmental</b> – What factors need to be considered?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Targets for Council on the carbon footprint may be forced from outside of our control and there are presently no staff who could manage this.</li> <li>2. There are inadequate staff and skills to cater for Climate Change impacts.</li> <li>3. The community may have expectations on increased green space which will require an increase in the current staff skills.</li> <li>4. Council stance on climate change has not been expressed and there are no staff in Council to address an increased focus in this area.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Legal</b> - What current and impending legislation will affect Council?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Local Government Act Changes have a considerable impact on the current staff capacity.</li> <li>2. The Gender Equity Legislation will shortly impact Councillors and Council Elections and specialist staff will need to manage this issue.</li> <li>3. Planning and Environment and Building Act and Environmental Health staff are currently inadequate to meet legislated requirements.</li> <li>4. The Victorian Protective Data Security Framework standards require effort outside Council’s current capacity.</li> </ol>

### 3. What does better practice look like?

Workforce planning is intrinsically linked with strategic and business planning and should be part of the normal business planning process, effectively enabling Council to identify the workforce implications of annual and strategic council plans.

The Workforce Plan, in future times, will help Council to identify and ideally put in place human resources with appropriate skills to deliver Council business and plans. It will expose gaps in addressing priority workforce segments, work locations, roles, functions and capabilities. It will provide the evidence to justify the adoption of workforce risk management and risk mitigation strategies. To do this it is important that:

- Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined,
- Data capture and analysis reporting are part of everyday business, and
- Data is reliable and trusted to inform decision making.

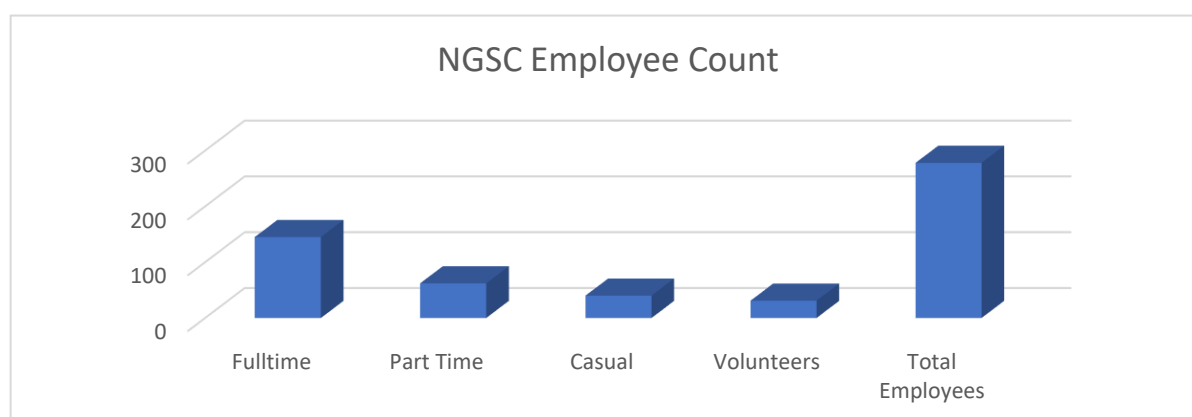
This foundational Workforce Plan starts the NGSC on the journey of creating smarter and improved workforce skills and capacity, in order to deliver community service and planned outcomes.

### 4. NGSC Workforce Data

#### **Employee Numbers**

As of October 2021, internal data indicates that the NGSC has 247 paid employees. This total includes 145 fulltime and 62 part time employees and 40 Casuals.

Council is currently hosting 2 Trainees and 5 Apprentices in the paid employee total. Council's Full Time Equivalent (FTE) is 183 people. Council also has 31 Volunteers that are primarily used for meals on wheels, which in turn means that the NGSC has an effective total of 278 employees.

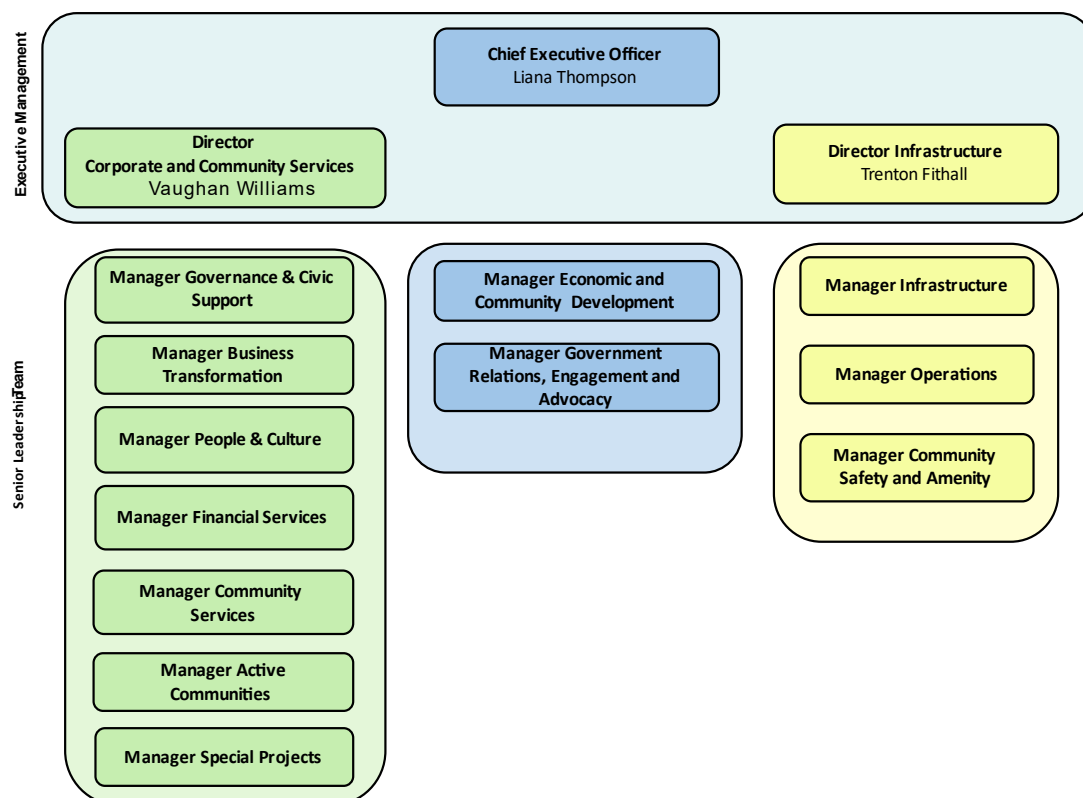


**Comment:** The NGSC, in comparison to other Small Regional Councils, employs an average number of staff. Council has slightly more part time workers than most other similar councils but generally the figures, overall, are unremarkable.



## Organisational Structure

In many surveys and government working documents, Local Governments are often classified by either their location, size and/or budget. In all of those measures the NGSC is classed as a “Small Rural Council”. When comparisons are made with other like Councils the following organisational chart and management set up is not unlike a significant number of those Local Governments. The NGSC, in regard to population, budget and employee numbers sits at about the middle of the group of Small Rural Councils in Victoria. The following chart outlines the Council Structure at management level:



**Comment:** This Organisational Structure was revised in September 2021 through a restructure that reduced 3 Directorates to 2 in an effort to create more streamlined operations and contingencies of scale. This restructure created a number of new positions designed to better implement the Council Plan 2021 – 2025, especially in the Economic Development area.

## Band and Salary Levels

There is a large amount of data and information available on the pay rates and banding in Local Governments across Australia and Victoria. The following table outlines the pay rates for employees at the NGSC in comparison to the Victorian State Average for Small Rural Councils:

Band	NGSC pay rate at the base level (A) per week	Victorian Small Rural Council average pay rate at the base level (A) per week
1	\$979.08	\$1009.88
2	\$1029.05	\$1056.43
3	\$1071.16	\$1097.19
4	\$1162.44	\$1178.82
5	\$1281.45	\$1284.60
6	\$1559.72	\$1544.28
7	\$1749.26	\$1728.13
8	\$2031.51	\$2049.49
SEO (Managers)	\$2616.50	\$2872.35 (Variable dependent on vehicle packaging)

Analysis shows that whilst the NGSC is slightly below the average in Bands 1 to 5 it is slightly above in Bands 6 to 8. Although there are many different variances in the pay rate for Managers (SEOs), a general comparison shows that NGSC Managers are well below average when compared to other comparable Councils. This is often due to some Local Governments supplying Managers with vehicles for private use as part of their salary package.

Comment: The NGSC is currently negotiating a new Enterprise Agreement. This agreement will see Band 1 to 5 employees raise to the average comparable wage and will address the inequities in SEO packages. This should go some way to addressing the attraction and retention difficulties currently being experienced and outlined further in the mobility section of this document. Given the concerns outlined throughout this document regarding retention and attraction of staff, Council will need to be vigilant in maintaining attractive salary packages in future Enterprise Agreements.

## Age

Like many other Small Rural Councils, the NGSC has an aging workforce - 68 of the 247 permanent employees are over the age of 55, and 12 of those are over the age of 60. It would be reasonable to assume that a significant number of these employees are either looking toward retirement or to transition into retirement. Compounding this issue is the fact that 23 of those employees over 55 have more than 20 years' service and experience in Council. This will present Council with a significant loss of knowledge and expertise over the coming years. The following chart outlines respective employee age groups in the NGSC:

	Manager		White Collar		Blue Collar		
Age Group	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Total
15-25			2	9	9	15	35
26-39	2	1	16	16	13	19	67
40-54	3	3	6	29	20	16	77
55-65	3	1	7	20	18	7	56
65-74		2	2	1	5	1	11
75+						1	1
							247

ABS data indicates that the percentage of employees working in Small Rural Councils across Australia over 50 years of age makes up 37% of the workforce. In the NGSC this percentage is 36% and replicates that national trend.

Comment: Council is currently working on several initiatives to address the aging workforce issue. These include both procedural and legislated flexible working arrangements, a health and wellbeing employee assistance program and alternative recruitment methods. However, there is an urgent need to address the long-term issues associated with the age of our workforce in a more holistic manner and this issue will be addressed by strategies in this plan.

## **Gender**

As a result of legislative requirements in the Victorian Gender Equality Act 2020, the NGSC has recently completed a Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP). For a more extensive breakdown of gender data and actions planned to address gender issues, see The GEAP at Appendix "A".

In précis, The GEAP contains the following findings:

- There is no pay gap, at given levels, between males and females in the NGSC. However, there is a far larger percentage of females working in part time and casual positions which means that the overall pay average for women is less than men.
- The overall percentage of woman employees is slightly higher than men with 55.31% female employees to 44.69% male.
- Whilst the NGSC Leadership Team has a majority of males, the workforce composition for non-managerial positions has more women than men. This tends to be vocationally aligned with men predominately performing outdoor labour roles whilst women tend to perform roles associated with in home care, early learning and organisational support.
- Whilst the NGSC does not have any known substantial gender issues, there is a significant lack in available data to analyse issues to a proper level and actions in the GEAP will address the issue of how future data will be gathered and used.

Comment: The GEAP addresses actions that need to be taken in regard to Gender Equality.

## **Diversity**

As a result of legislative requirements in the Victorian Gender Equality Act 2020, the NGSC has recently completed a Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP). This included an examination of Diversity issues. For a more extensive breakdown of diversity data and actions planned to address diversity issues, see The GEAP at Appendix "A".

In précis, The GEAP contains the following findings:

- Like many other Small Rural Councils, NGSC is predominately Australian but over the last 2 years there has been a significant shift, with 18% of the shire now culturally identifying as other than Australian.
- A significant majority of NGSC employees are heterosexual.
- A significant majority of NGSC employees were born in Australia.
- There is a significant lack of available data within Council to understand diversity issues and this is the subject of Action Items in the GEAP.

Comment: The GEAP addresses actions that need to be taken in regard to Diversity.

## Staff Mobility

Organisations often measure their turnover rate as a means of determining the effect that it has on culture, succession planning and delivery of goals and projects. Turnover rate is calculated by  $\% = \frac{\text{total number of voluntary resignations}}{\text{total number of permanent staff}} \times 100$ . Meerkin and Apel (Lawyers representing the majority of Local Governments in Victoria), produce an annual “Salaries, Leave and Turnover” Survey Report. This paper is formulated through a survey completed by at least 50 Local Governments from across Victoria. An examination of the November 2021 results is useful in determining where the NGSC sits in regard to other similar Small Rural Councils. The following table outlines the turnover rate in the NGSC compared to the State average for Small Rural Councils:

Year	Number of Permanent Employees	Terminated Permanent Employees	NGSC % Turnover	State Average % Turnover
2019/2020	232	48	20%	14%
2020/2021	236	35	14%	13%
2021/2022 (5 months)	247	18	7% Pro Rata (Estimated full year is approximately 15%)	N/A

Comment: Extensive research has shown that any turnover rate greater than 10% per annum may be considered unhealthy for most organisations. Examination of the data in the Meerkin and Apel Survey shows that the NGSC has a turnover rate slightly higher than the average but also indicates that this is a significant problem for most Small Rural Councils.

Anecdotally, a small number of work teams are responsible for most of the turnover and whilst there has been some improvement in the last 2 years, there is still a need to better understand the work areas with higher turnover and the reasons for that turnover.

The NGSC also has an aging workforce and this may increase the number of terminations in the coming years (see Age Section). Council has recently attempted to address the termination rates by introducing more flexible working arrangements and other measures designed to attract and retain staff, but it is clear that this area needs to be a continual focus. Understanding and reacting to the turnover rate and forthcoming retirements will be addressed by strategies in this Plan.

## Skill Shortages

Whilst the Local Government sector has been able to traditionally maintain a relatively stable employment base due to the state of the Labour Market, this situation would appear to be waning quickly. Most Small Rural Councils are currently experiencing labour shortages in the areas of planning, engineering and local law enforcement and all of these positions are critical to a Council’s legislated responsibilities. Should any of these positions remain vacant in a Council for some time, then this would interfere with its ability to conduct essential business. This is no different for the NGSC, where recent times have seen unqualified, unskilled and/or no applicants applying for job opportunities in these fields. The NGSC is increasingly having to take special efforts to attract and attain staff for a significant number of specialised positions. This results in higher recruiting costs and often results in new employees working remotely.

The NGSC operates in a world and environment that increasingly uses and relies on technology. This may mean that the manner in which shire residents interact with Council will change and Information Technology (IT) use will increase. It may also mean that the manner in which employees work and achieve outcomes is increasingly reliant on IT. Whilst the NGSC is currently fairly well placed in this area, there is a need to be continually vigilant on the changing environment and the skills that are required to operate in this area.

As noted, in the age section of this document, the NGSC operates in an aging demographic with an aging workforce and acquiring younger workers to take up employment from within the Region will present challenges in the future should the appropriate strategies not be put in place now.

Comment: The issues associated with skill shortages is perhaps the most pressing problem that Council needs to deal with. It impacts on nearly every other workforce planning issue and rather than being forecast it is present right now. There is a need to holistically address skill shortages with attraction and retention, staff development and the aging workforce and this will be addressed by strategies in this Plan.

## Workforce Strategies - The Plan

The following strategies form the basis of the NGSC 4-year Strategic Workplace Plan. They have been devised from the research and data that identified the workplace issues outlined in this document. As previously discussed, a 12-month Operational Plan will be produced for each year of the Plan to ensure the achievement of more tangible outcomes.

Strategy	Key Actions
Employee Attraction and Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review recruitment agencies and sources with a view to establishing evidence of their effectiveness.</li> <li>Improve and conduct Exit Interviews in a more consistent and formal manner.</li> <li>Improve and better market the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)</li> <li>Investigate the possibilities and opportunities to share resources and employees with other local governments and utility authorities.</li> </ul>

Strategy	Key Actions
Training and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and implement initiatives to multiskill current employees.</li> <li>Fully utilise and market the NGSC Learning and Development Hub.</li> <li>Explore and offer further assistance with tertiary education and industry specific education.</li> <li>Explore the increased possibility of external staffing placements.</li> <li>Create internal and external staffing networks designed to improve management, leadership and technical knowledge.</li> </ul>

Strategy	Key Actions
The Aging Workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and implement more flexible working options and plans for older workers.</li> <li>Improve targeting and placements of local students with a view to them seeing local government as a career.</li> <li>Explore increased cadet, internships and apprenticeship opportunities.</li> <li>Develop and implement a Transition to Retirement Policy.</li> <li>Develop and implement a Succession Policy and Procedure.</li> </ul>

Strategy	Key Actions
Skill Shortages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement improved workforce planning tools and systems.</li> <li>• Establish more reliable data sets for skills and qualifications.</li> <li>• Develop and implement initiatives to multiskill current employees outside of their teams.</li> <li>• Research and identify future IT skills and platform requirements.</li> <li>• Undertake a staff skill audit in line with the delivery of the Council Plan 2021-2025 to identify skill shortages.</li> </ul>

Strategy	Key Actions
Gender and Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieve the Actions outlined in the GEAP</li> </ul>

## Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring of this Strategic Plan will be done annually through the People and Culture Operational Workforce Plan. This annual evaluation will be presented to the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and used to realign or amend the Strategic Plan as required.

## Conclusion

The NGSC has some workforce challenges that are universal in nature while others are unique to our organisation. Council is currently developing or has in place a number of initiatives, policies and procedures that address the key issues of succession planning, the aging workforce, technology changes and requirements for employee retention and attraction. These will need to be built on and advanced to ensure the achievement of strategies in this plan.

Over the next 4 years, Council will be seeking to not only maintain current services but to achieve strategic outcomes outlined in the Council Plan, whilst operating in an environment where budget and resource increases may be limited. Although this document highlights a number of workforce gaps and issues, it is not intended to be solely a submission for more staff. As such, the Workforce Strategies are also centred on developing and multiskilling current employees.

## References

1. Northern Grampians Shire Council Gender Equality Plan 2021.
2. LGPro Future Ready – Workforce Planning Handbook and Guide.
3. Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions - Local Government Act 2020 – Foundational Workforce Planning Guide.
4. Local Government Act Victoria 2020
5. Gender Equality Act Victoria 2020
6. Australian Government Census 2016
7. Meerkin & Apel Annual Salary and Termination Survey
8. ABS data
9. The Gender Equality Commission Guidelines and Notes

## Version Control

Date	Version	Review Date	Author
November 2021	1.1	November 2025	Daryl Clifton (Manager of People and Culture)



## **Northern Grampians Shire Council Gender Equality Action Plan - 2021**

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## Introduction

In 2020, the Victorian State Government passed the Gender Equality Act which is designed to improve workplace gender equality in the Victorian public sector, universities and local councils. The Act commenced on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2021 and required defined entities to:

- Take positive action towards achieving workplace gender equality, and
- To consider and promote gender equality in their policies, programs and services.

The Northern Grampians Shire Council (NGSC) is a defined entity and, in compliance with the legislated requirements, this Gender Equality Action Plan outlines the general research undertaken, the findings of the required Gender Audit and actions to address issues of gender equality. Each section of data and research, throughout this plan, includes comments that inform the actions to be taken and the body of the document is produced in line with guidance and templates provided by the Gender Equality Commission. The actual “Action Plan” is attached at Appendix “A” and sets goals and outcomes to achieve improved gender equity in and for the Northern Grampians Shire Council.

## The Northern Grampians Shire

The Northern Grampians Shire is in the Wimmera Region of Victoria, located in the Western part of the state. The shire covers an area of approximately 5,730 square kilometres and is divided into four electoral wards: Kara Kara, Stawell, Central and Southwest. Towns found in Northern Grampians Shire include Stawell, St Arnaud, Marnoo, Great Western, Halls Gap, Glenorchy, Stuart Mill and Navarre. The Shire is primarily a rural farming area with a significant number of small businesses/industries.

In 2016 the population of Northern Grampians Shire was 11,439 with 49.4% males and 50.6% female. One point five percent (1.5%) of the Shire are Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander. Whilst most residents of the Shire identify as Australian, some other nations of birth include:

- England - 2.0%
- New Zealand - 0.6%
- Philippines - 0.5%
- Netherlands - 0.4%
- India - 0.3%

These statistics are well below the average number of residents, born in other countries, across Victoria.

The median age of people within Northern Grampians Shire is 48 years of age, a considerably higher median when compared to Melbourne’s 27 years of age. Northern Grampians also has a higher proportion of people aged 60 plus than that of children (Under 19). The 60 plus age group has been increasing at a steady rate. In 2016 the age breakdown was:

- 20.8% aged 0-19 years,
- 18.4% aged 20-39 years,
- 27.7% aged 40-59 years, and
- 33.2% aged 60 plus.

The percentage of people over 60, in the Shire, is well above the Victorian average. The people under 19, in the shire, is well below the Victorian average.

## The NGSC Organisation

The NGSC currently has 278 employees. These people work in Full Time, Part Time, Volunteer and Casual positions. These staff members cover a range of different services, including but not limited to, Aged Care, Parks and Gardens, Local Laws Enforcement, Planning and Building and Maternal Child Health.

Council is currently being led by Chief Executive Officer Liana Thompson, who has been with the organisation for two years. Reporting to Liana are a team of two Directors:

- Trenton Fithall- Director Infrastructure and Amenity
- Vaughan Williams- Director Corporate and Community Services

## The Gender Equality Audit

As part of the regulations contained in the Gender Equality Act and to inform the foundational Action Plan, each defined entity was required to undertake an internal gender audit. The following sections outline the findings of that Audit which is set out from a template supplied by the Gender Equity Commission. The Audit results have also been supplied to the Commission.

### General Data

The NGSC, as required, undertook a Gender Equality Audit in June 2021. This audit showed the following key general findings:

- 55.31% of employees are female,
- 44.69% of employees are male,
- 61.28% of employees are full time,
- 38.72% of employees are Part Time/Casual, and
- Given the small numbers, there are no remarkable statistical gender imbalances in Managers Positions. However, there are some remarkable variances in the non-managerial levels of employees which is generally related to the function or type of work undertaken.

Workforce Composition		
Workforce Composition: Managers	Female	Male
CEO (1)	100%	0%
Directors (2)	0%	100%
Managers (11)	45.46%	54.54%
Coordinators (17)	57.15%	42.85%

Workforce Composition		
Workforce Composition: Non-Managers	Female	Male
Officers	60.42%	39.58%
Community and Personal Service	91.67%	8.33%
Educators	100%	0%
Machinery Operators	0%	100%
Labourers	15.39%	84.61%

Whilst undertaking the audit, there was a requirement to also report on general employee statistics regarding Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, Disability, Religion, Cultural Identity and Sexual Orientation of employees. It was found that significant gaps were present in this data and attaining this data will be the subject of an Action Item in this Plan.

### Gender Pay Gap

The Gender Pay Gap measures the difference between the average earnings of women and men in the workforce. The Gender Pay Gap is an internationally established measure of women's position in the economy in comparison to men. The Gender Pay Gap is the result of the social and economic factors that combine to reduce women's earning capacity over their lifetime. (WGEA, 2021 *What does the 'Gender Pay Gap' mean?*)

The NGSC operates under an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement with a “Pay Banding System” that ensures fair and equal pay for all employees. It ensures that all employees working in the same position, regardless of gender, age, religion, race etc, are paid at the same rate. This means that an overall current gender pay differential, across the organisation, in basic terms, does not exist.

However, due to the rate of female to male employees working in Part Time and Casual positions there are discrepancies that arise in the overall earning rates of women compared to men. The percentage of women holding part time and casual positions is far greater than men. Whilst this does affect their earning capacity it is mainly aligned to the type of job or duty performed. An example of this is the casual and part time nature of home care workers where the positions are mainly filled by females. Of the 53 Part Time employees in the NGSC, 49 of those are female. Of the 38 Casual employees, 29 are female.

Overall, males within the organisation earn a higher annual average salary than that of females. As indicated, this is due to the participation of females in certain part time and casual positions. It may also be due to the choices that women make regarding their employment status. Whatever the case, the NGSC does not have the current data or information to make a definitive finding on this issue. Actions in this plan will be aimed at attaining more information and data on the reasons for this imbalance and any initiatives that could be undertaken to address it.

### **Review of Policies and Practices**

The Gender Equality Audit revealed that the NGSC provides a significant number of Policies, Procedures, Practices and Facilities associated with equity and wellbeing. A few of the significant ones are:

- An onsite breastfeeding room and associated Breastfeeding Procedure. This assistance to new mothers is also enshrined in the current Enterprise Agreement.
- A Flexible Work Practice and Procedure, allowing several flexible work practice options for employees to request in providing work arrangements that may be better suited to their personal circumstances.
- An Equal Opportunity, Harassment and Bullying Policy and Grievance Procedure. The organisation is wholly committed to the principles of providing a workplace free from all forms of discrimination and harassment including bullying, racial and religious vilification. This policy and procedure apply to any work-related activities including work related social functions. They also apply to work performed both on and off Council premises and to the delivery of all Council services.
- Variable leave options, with procedures outlining applications for and use of personal leave, annual leave, long service leave, family violence leave, gender transition leave, IVF leave and parental leave. All these leave types are also enshrined in the current Enterprise Award.
- An Employee Assistance Program which offers employees physical and mental services to ensure they are assisted in remaining fit and healthy for work. Amongst other things this Program offers confidential counselling to all employees free of charge. Employees can use this service to discuss a range of issues related to work or personal life.

Whilst only a few of the most relevant Policies and Procedures are listed in this document, there are a significant number of other related processes. In general, most of the examined material was up to date and appropriate. Some of the Procedures on grievances and workplace conflict do need “modernising” and this will be the subject of an Action Item in this Plan.

### **Recruitment, Retention and Succession Planning**

The NGSC has recently implemented a new Recruitment Policy and Procedures that seek to ensure gender neutral recruitment practices. The Procedure refers to the Equal Employment Opportunity

legislation and allows the hiring Manager to actively participate during the recruitment and onboarding of new employees.

Internal vacancies are advertised to all staff, through various means, ensuring that all have equal access to relevant information. External vacancies are advertised through various internal platforms, as well as on the Council's website, social media and recognised state and national job advertising agencies. Some external positions are advertised more widely based on need. This ensures that all suitably qualified applicants have fair and equitable access to Council's employment information and opportunities.

The NGSC also has a formal Higher Duties Procedure intended to broaden the experience base of staff and facilitate greater flexibility within the organisation. Managers/Supervisors assess the duties to be performed and the period of higher duty appointment to ensure that the conditions of appointment and application is fair and equitable. In circumstances where an additional payment is warranted, the employee will be paid a higher duties allowance in accordance with the Enterprise Award. All employees have equal access to the opportunities offered under this procedure.

To date, training and development on Gender Equality has tended to be ad hoc. However, Council has recently purchased a new Learning and Development Platform which offers a wide range of Equality Courses/Programs. Council has also recently agreed on a new Enterprise Agreement (EA) which contains requirements for compulsory training against increment progression. The Learning and Development Platform and new EA will be used to deliver increased and consistent training on gender equality and this will be the subject of an Action Item in this Plan.

### **Employee consultation**

Council's main form of employee consultation is through a formally established Consultative Committee. The purpose of the committee is to provide a forum for constructive communication and consultation between management and employees. The Consultative Committee is made up of 13 representatives. Three (3) from the Senior Leadership Team, 5 union representatives and 5 employee representatives. The committee meets quarterly, or more often if required, to discuss matters and issues raised by employees regarding organisation policies, procedures and/or practices. Minutes of the committee meeting are distributed to all employees through Microsoft Teams.

Employees are also given the opportunity to provide formal feedback to the organisation in their annual performance review process. The review is a two-way communication process, devised to give supervisors and employees the opportunity to discuss ways in which management can assist staff to achieve targets/objectives, identify required training and allow for individual comment from both parties.

Consultation is also available for any permanent employee leaving the organisation in a formal exit interview. Employees are given the opportunity to discuss the reason/s as to why they are leaving and identify any negative factors/patterns that need to be addressed to improve the employment environment and reduce staff turnover.

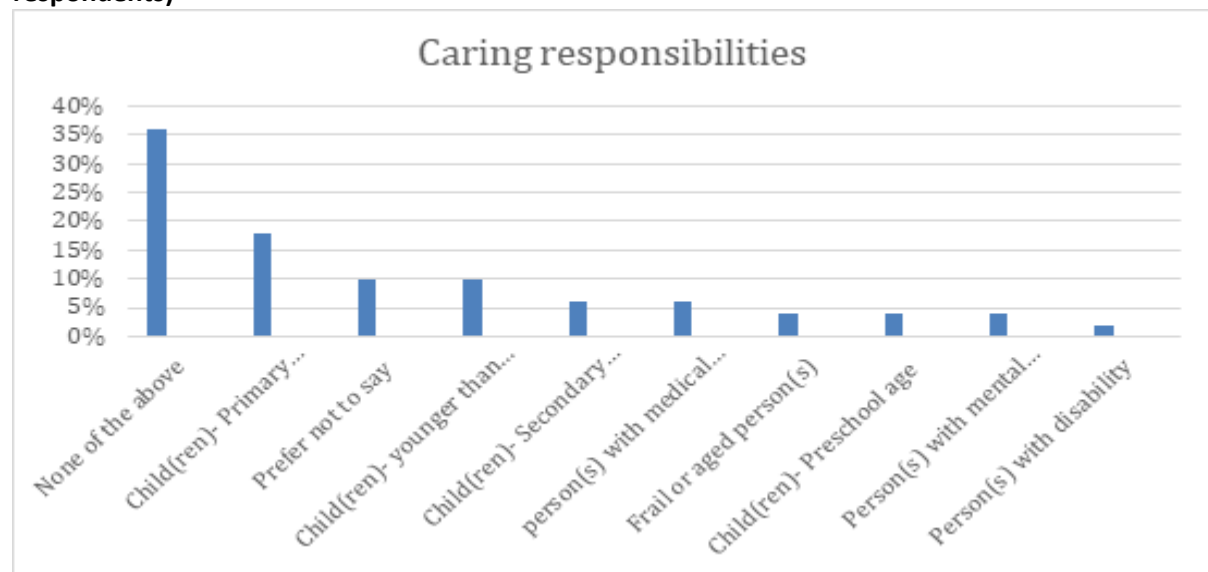
In general, there are number of different avenues that both seek and allow input from employees. During this audit it was identified that the Exit Interview Procedure could be conducted more formally and independently and this will be the subject of an Action Item in this Plan.

## **The People Matters Survey**

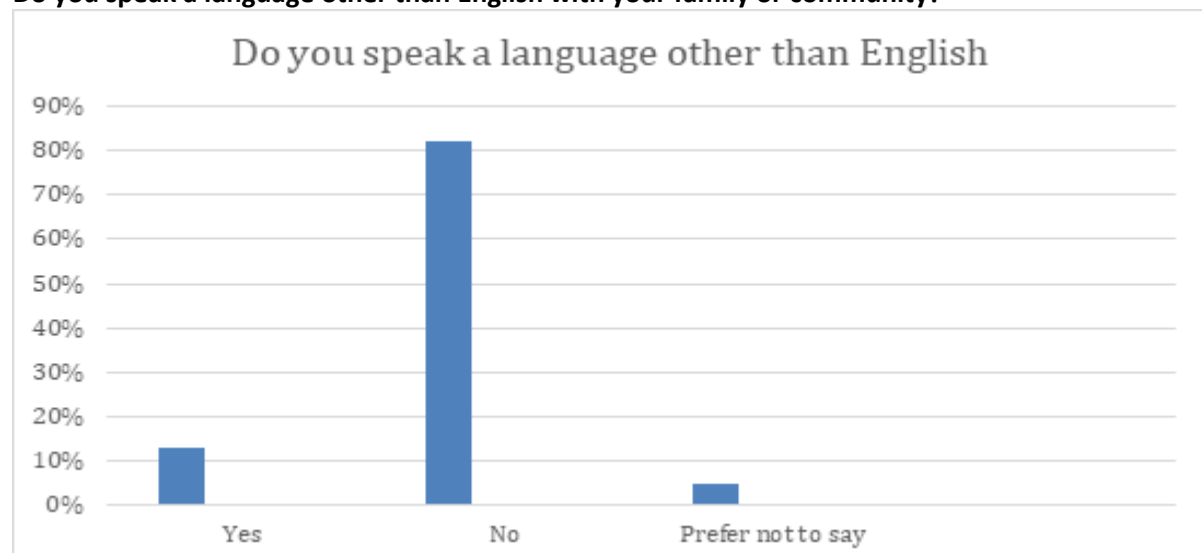
NGSC employees are frequently invited to take part in the People Matters Survey conducted by the Victorian State Government. The most recent survey conducted within Council was administered by the Gender Equality Commission. Although only a minority of staff members took part in the survey, Council had an overall participation rate of 33%, which was higher than the average overall state participation rate. That said, it is thought that the findings are worth producing for the purpose of identifying any issues that may need addressing.

The following graphs are presented outlining the answers to set questions and are reasonably self-explanatory:

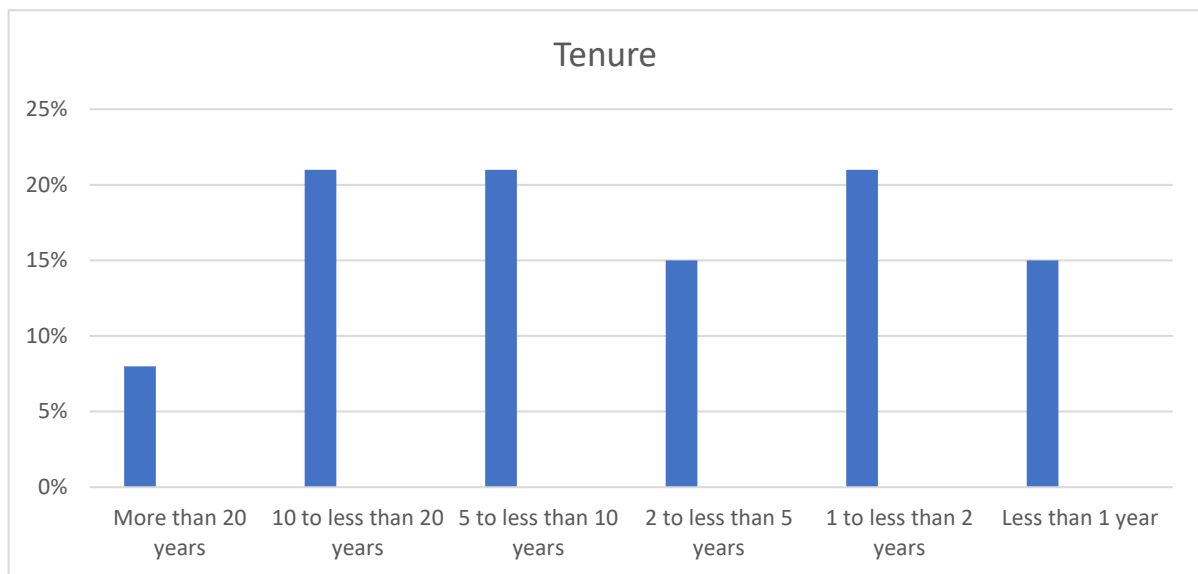
### **Employees with Caring Responsibilities (Respondents could pick all that applied - Percentage of all respondents)**



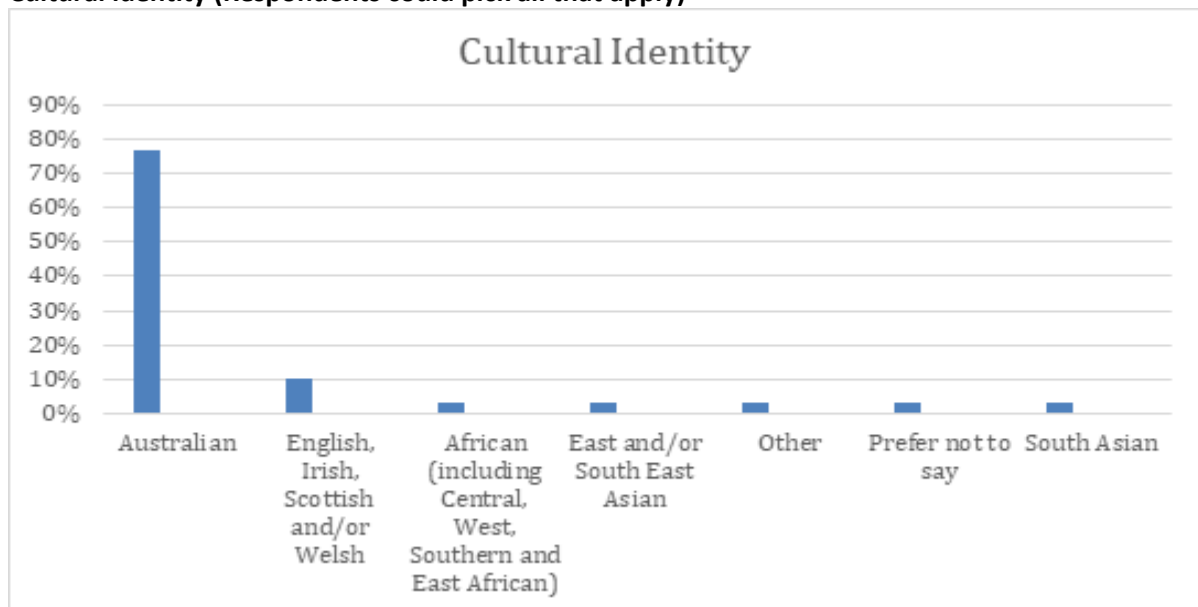
### **Do you speak a language other than English with your family or community?**



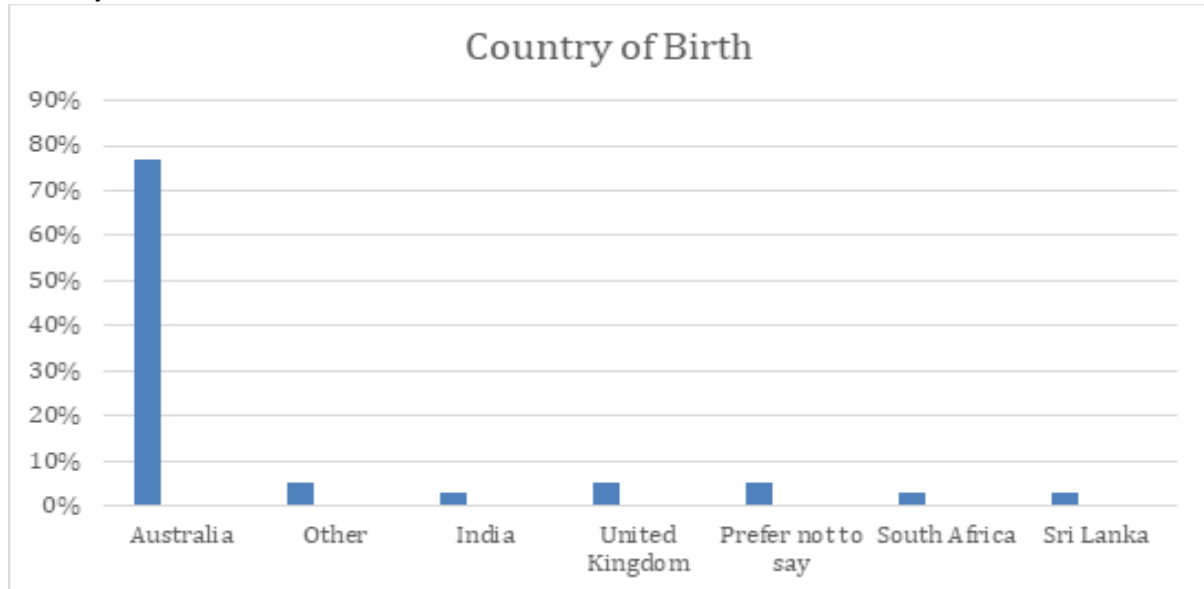
## Tenure



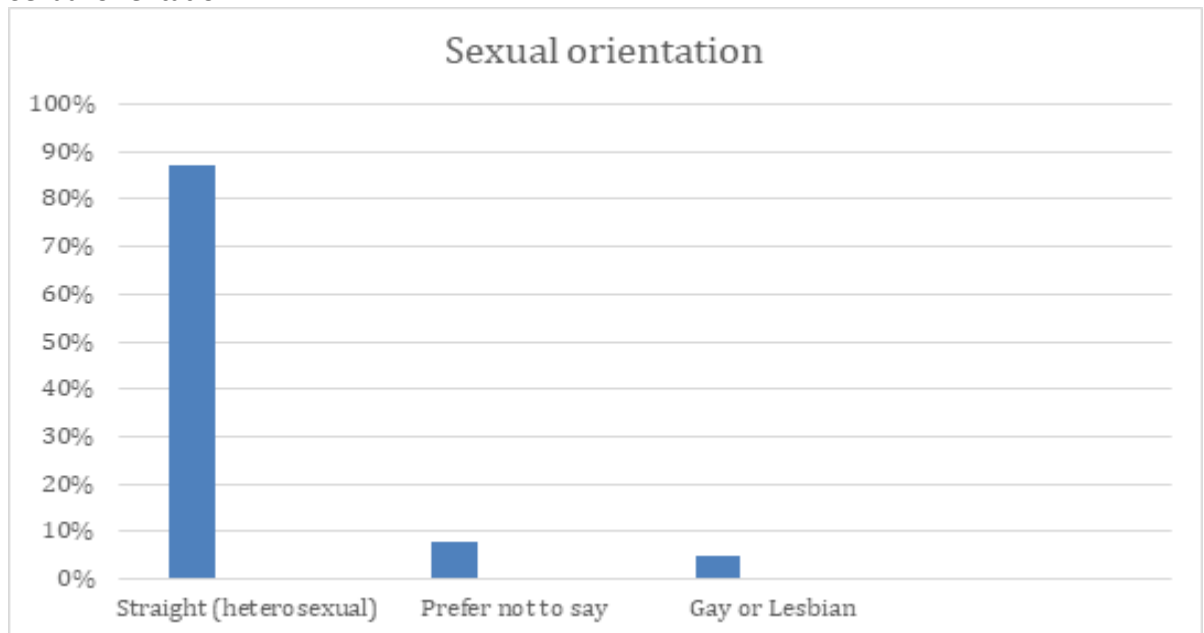
## Cultural identity (Respondents could pick all that apply)



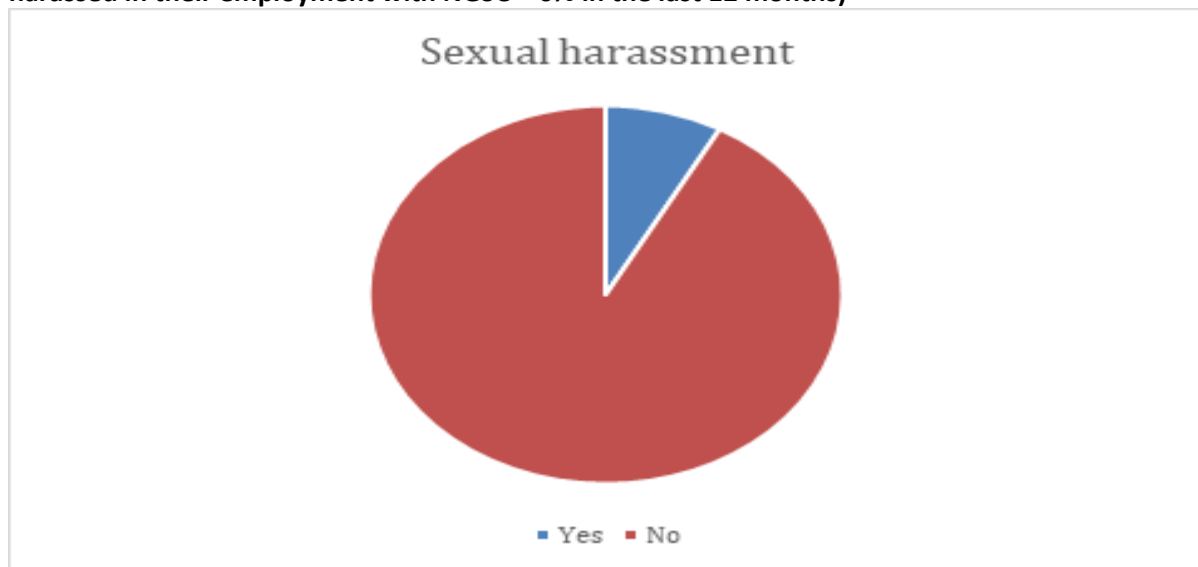
### Country of Birth



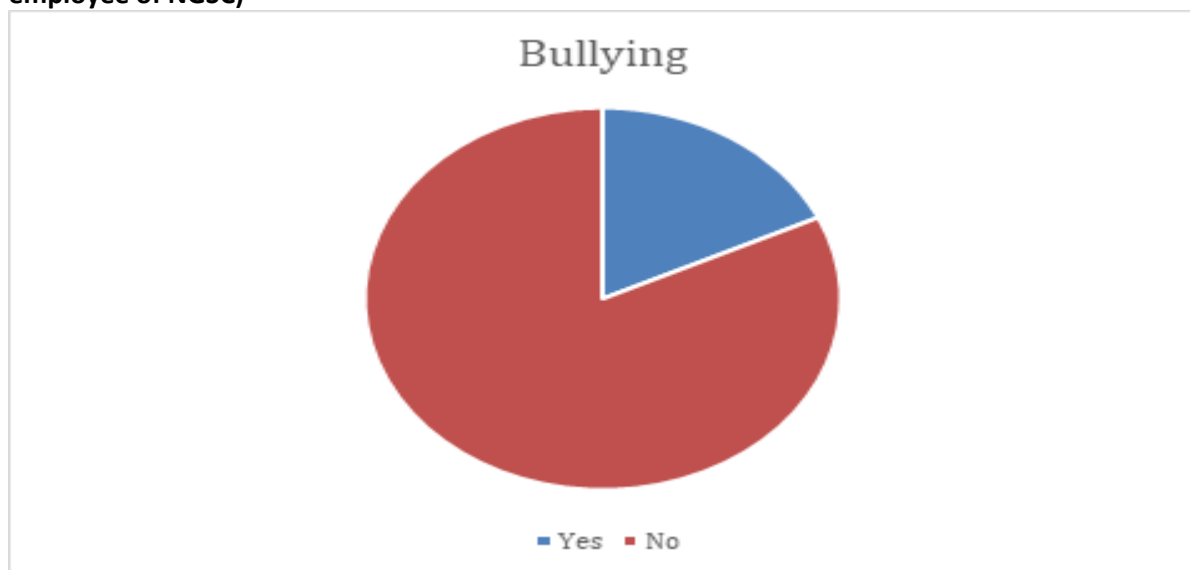
### Sexual orientation



**Respondents who have experienced sexual harassment (8% indicated that they had been sexually harassed in their employment with NGSC – 0% in the last 12 months)**

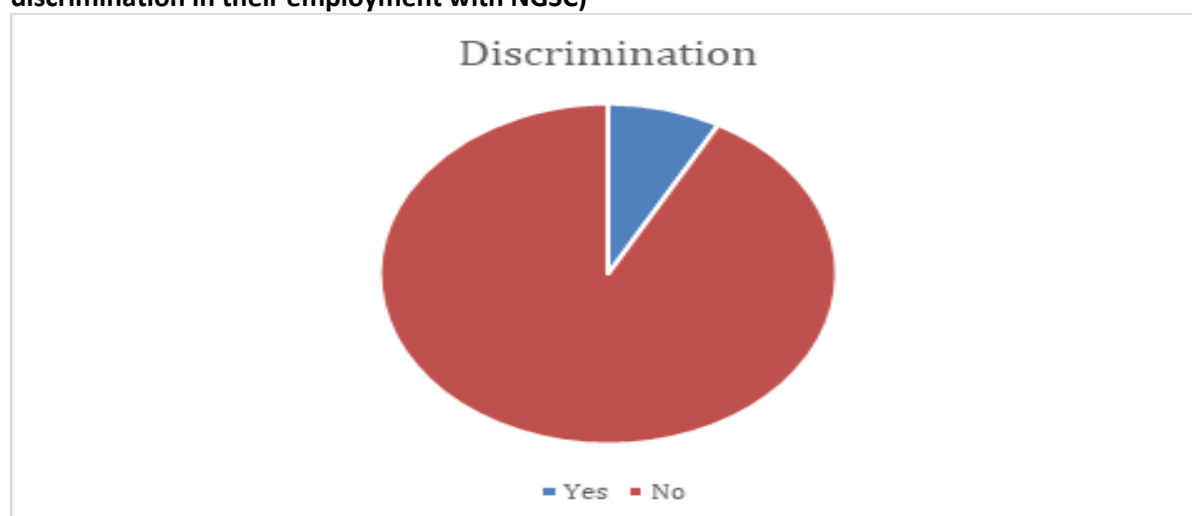


**Respondents who have experienced bullying (18% indicated that they had been bullied whilst an employee of NGSC)**





**Respondents who have experience discrimination (8% indicated that they had experienced discrimination in their employment with NGSC)**



As already discussed, whilst these findings do not represent a majority of Council employees, they can be useful in determining trends or issues that may need addressing. In general, the following conclusions are made from this survey:

- In line with the average older age of the NGSC workforce, many respondents do not have carer responsibilities. However, there are still a significant number of employees who undertake carer responsibilities.
- Four respondents speak a language other than English at home or in their community. This is well below the state averages.
- 10 Respondents have a country of birth and/or identify as non-Australian. This is a small but increasing number compared to previous surveys.
- Certain cohorts in Council do not have a lengthy tenure and this may be of a concern both for establishment and maintenance of culture and succession planning.
- There are small but significant numbers of employees who have experienced discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment.

Whilst some of these outcomes are inconclusive it is important to note that the NGSC has values that do not tolerate discrimination or harassment. To ensure Council lives these values it is important that either increasing awareness of complaints or survey participation need to be further promoted to achieve those aims and this will be the subject of an Action Item in this Plan.

## Conclusion

Whilst this document is intended to identify contemporary issues and future opportunities for creating and ensuring gender equality it is not intended to be all encompassing. Nor is it meant to be a completed document and it should be continuously re-examined as an ongoing process to ensure continuous improvement. As such this Plan should be revisited regularly with a view to matching the contemporary issues in the NGSC.

## Version Control

Date	Review Date	Version	Author
November 2021	November 2022	1.1 Foundational Plan required by legislation	Alexander Baldwin (Welfare Officer) & Daryl Clifton (Manager People and Culture)

## Appendix “A”

### The Action Plan

#### Introduction

In 2020, the Victorian State Government passed the Gender Equality Act which is designed to improve workplace gender equality in the Victorian public sector, universities and local councils. The Act commenced on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2021 and required defined entities to:

- Take positive action towards achieving workplace gender equality, and
- To consider and promote gender equality in their policies, programs and services.

This foundational Action Plan has been produced from research undertaken across and within the Northern Grampians Shire and Shire Council. It addresses identified issues and attempts to ensure that the Council has commenced a journey to ensure that gender equality is part of and a consideration in all aspects of business and community engagement.

#### Purpose

The purpose of this foundational plan is to improve the gender equality in and for Northern Grampians Shire Council employees.

#### Consultation

The Northern Grampians Shire Council has consulted with a range of employees within the organisation, regarding this Gender Equality Action Plan. The Executive Leadership Team, Senior Leadership Team and the Consultative Committee have been included in each stage of the development of the plan.

#### Vision:

The Northern Grampians Shire Council has a vision to provide all Victorians with fair and equal access and opportunity to services and to treat all as equal in society. We would like to be recognised as a leading organisation and employer of choice for a gender equitable workplace that reflects the community we serve.

#### Mission:

The Northern Grampians Shire Council mission is to provide the highest quality service to our community, as well as our staff. We also intend to provide our staff with a gender inclusive culture and grow our organisations diversity.

#### Case for Change:

Values	The Northern Grampians Shire Council recognises that gender equality is a human right and is a shared responsibility. We understand that Gender Equality brings significant benefits to the Victorian Community and acknowledge that gender inequality may be compounded by other forms of intersectional disadvantage and discrimination.
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<b>Benefit</b>	The Northern Grampians Shire Council will experience many benefits with a gender equal workplace. Equality, diversity, and inclusion will add value to our organisation, as we will see improved productivity, a more diverse view on all programs, policies and procedures and an improved organisation reputation.
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### Measures to achieve better Gender Equality

<b>Goals</b>	<b>An inclusive staff culture that demonstrates gender equality.</b>	<b>Diversity in leadership positions.</b>	<b>Improved platform for reporting sexual harassment/ violence</b>	<b>Improved strategies for data collection</b>
<b>Strategic Actions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Implement compulsory Gender Equality Training through the NGSC Learning and Development Hub in line with the Annual Appraisal Process.</li> <li>2. Implement advancement strategies such as mentoring and scholarship opportunities that ensure gender equality.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop and implement Senior Leadership Team (SLT) KPIs that ensure leaders are measured on their implementation of gender equality measures in the management of their teams.</li> <li>2. Ensure, where appropriate, that leadership training includes gender equality discussions and activities.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Re-examine and implement an improved NGSC EO, Bullying and Harassment Policy and Grievance Procedure.</li> <li>2. Through various forums, conduct awareness training on the revised NGSC Bullying and Harassment Policy and Grievance Procedure.</li> <li>3. Review and improve the NGSC Exit Procedure to ensure data is captured on gender equality specific issues.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Set up more formal systems to gather employee/gender specific data at Recruitment and Induction.</li> <li>2. Actively encourage increased participation in People Matters and gender specific surveys.</li> <li>3. Take active steps to attain more complete data on the reasons for female part time and casual participation in the NGSC workforce.</li> </ol>

<b>Measures</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 100% of employees undertake set training by 31/7/2022.</li> <li>2. Number of opportunities sought and obtained.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. KPIs set and achieved for 2022/23 financial year.</li> <li>2. Number of training opportunities identified, and discussions/activities undertaken by 31/12/2022.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Policy and Procedure reviewed and implemented by 30/6/2022.</li> <li>2. Deliver to at least 3 different forums before 30/6/2022. Number of sessions delivered.</li> <li>3. Review and implement the improved Exit Procedure and set up a system to record the data from these interviews by 30/6/2022.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. System established with recording processes in place by 30/6/2022.</li> <li>2. Number of initiatives undertaken over the 2022 calendar year.</li> <li>3. Survey conducted and reported/acted on by 30/6/2022.</li> </ol>
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