

OFFICERS REPORT**SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Submitting Councillor: Anjalee de Silva

MOTION

That Council:

1. *notes the Victorian Auditor-General's recent report "Sexual Harassment in Local Government" and its key findings that:*
 - *councils are not providing workplaces that are free from sexual harassment;*
 - *more than one in four survey respondents said that they had experienced workplace sexual harassment in the last 12 months, including 30% of Councillors, 30% of women, 48% of LGBTQIA+ respondents, and 41% of respondents with a disability;*
 - *councils rarely engage staff in meaningful conversations about sexual harassment and its drivers; and*
 - *sexual harassment was found to be more prevalent in metropolitan councils;*
2. *accepts the recommendations of the Auditor-General contained in the report;*
3. *acknowledges the work that Officers have already completed in response to the recommendations of the Auditor-General contained in the report, including a gap analysis in relation to current policies and processes; and*
4. *requests that Officers provide recommendations to Council on potential further improvements to its policies and processes, with a view to Council:*
 - a. *further providing a workplace with zero tolerance for sexual harassment and appropriate redress for victims of sexual harassment; and*
 - b. *seeking to be an exemplar Council in this area, so that Council's focus and response on sexual harassment in local government is consistent with best practice standards across the local government sector and amongst Australian workplaces more generally; and*
5. *conveys its broad and unwavering commitment to continuing to support any measures recommended by Officers to address sexual harassment on the workplace.*

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no Budget implications to this motion

IMPACT ON INTERNAL RESOURCES

There is a moderate impact on internal resources to prepare a report to Council which provides comprehensive details of the work undertaken to date in this area to address Item 4 of the motion.

COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICIES

This motion is supported by and consistent with:

Bullying & Harassment Policy
Code of Conduct
Equal Opportunity Policy
Formal Grievance Policy

RELEVANCE TO WORK ALREADY UNDERTAKEN BY OFFICERS OR COMMITTEES

A full review of the Auditor General's report and recommendations was undertaken by the People & Culture division following the release of the report in December 2020. The findings and recommendations were considered with regard to current council policies and procedures as they pertain to the City of Monash workforce, and a detailed gap analysis was undertaken.

Minor areas of strengthening were undertaken, including a formal roll-out of refreshed Grievance policies and procedures.

These findings and actions have been covered in more detail in papers presented to the Audit & Risk Committee.

On the matter of addressing Sexual Harassment more broadly, there has been an ongoing focus on this jointly between People & Culture and the Community Services Division in recent years, including initiatives such as the VEOHRC Raise It! Project.

Monash Council was a pilot site in 2018-2019 in the Victorian Equal Opportunity Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) pilot program 'Raise it: Conversations about sexual harassment and workplace equality'. Council identified 'Champions' from across the organization to drive implementation of the pilot program with the conversation starter toolkits.

The 'Raise it' pilot program focused on building managers and employees' knowledge, skills and confidence to have safe and healthy conversations about the key topics:

- Sexual harassment prevention and response
- Requesting flexible work
- Requesting and planning parental leave or adjustments for pregnancy

The conversation starter toolkits are available to all staff.

Council has also been part of a longitudinal research project with Melbourne University which explored a number of indicators for respectful relations and work life balance. This project has informed a number of strategies including preventing sexual harassment and incivility in the workplace with the last survey taking place in April 2021.

Council Officers consider the recommendations of the Auditor General's report to reflect best practice standards across the local government sector, and the Raise It! Program under the VEOHRC to reflect best practice amongst Australian workplaces more generally. Given the detailed review and gap analysis of policies and procedures recently undertaken against these standards and the minor policy amendments our existing framework should see us an exemplar council in this area. We do note, however, that the work undertaken by People and Culture had a primary focus on the Council Workforce.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Broadly related matters are currently highly visible in the public domain including but not limited to the 'March 4 Justice' campaign.

This visibility provides an opportunity for messaging in line with the findings and recommendations of the Auditor General's report to be further reinforced.