

WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1. Purpose

To provide the Minister's State/Local Government Forum with information about the work being undertaken to improve women's participation in Local Government.

2. Background

2.1 Women in Local Government Working Group

The Local Government Association State Executive (in November 2007) and the Minister's State/Local Government Forum (in December 2007) endorsed the formation of a Working Group on Women in Local Government to examine issues and to identify strategies and projects to improve women's participation in Local Government, both as elected members and in senior management positions.

The December 2007 Forum paper provided an outline of issues associated with women's participation in Local Government, such as the slow progress of women officers in Local Government to senior decision-making positions. This issue is of particular relevance given the skills shortages faced by Local Government. The paper identified that currently 26.6% of Local Government elected members in South Australia are women. Of South Australia's 68 councils, two Chief Executive Officers are female (Walkerville and Kangaroo Island) and women hold approximately 16% of senior management positions in councils.

The December paper also noted that Target 6.23 of *South Australia's Strategic Plan* is addressing similar issues. The Target is aimed at increasing women's participation in executive positions within the State Government. State work in this area is likely to be of benefit to the Women in Local Government Working Group.

The Forum asked to be kept informed of work being undertaken by the Women in Local Government Working Group (refer Discussion at 3. below).

2.2 Other related initiatives

There have been some other related initiatives put in place to address the under representation of women in Local Government, as follows:

2.2.1 National

The December Forum, noted that the Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA) has established a National Steering Committee to provide leadership to advance the findings of *The Way Forward*, a national report released in mid 2007.

The Way Forward identified that while there has been some progress in furthering women's participation, more needs to be done to achieve greater representation of women as elected members and the advancement of women in senior management positions in Local Government. It identified that along with being representative of the

population as a whole, there are issues associated with the current and future skills shortages being faced across the board. *The Way Forward* has been distributed to all Australian councils.

Chaired by the President of ALGWA, the National Steering Committee first met in October 2007 (by teleconference). At the meeting members agreed to gather national data held on women's participation and representation in Local Government. It is intended that this will provide base line national data on women's participation in Local Government for all States and Territories. Work on data collection and design is progressing in readiness for data gathering, post Queensland elections.

The next meeting of the National Steering Committee is scheduled for April 2008.

2.2.2 Good Practice Guide – Women in Local Government

The Local Government Managers Association (SA Branch) has secured funding from the Local Government Research and Development Scheme to produce a showcase of good practice examples of current efforts, experiences and approaches that support women officers in South Australian councils.

The LGMA (SA) convened the first meeting of the Steering Committee on 22 February 2008, with representation from the State Government (through the Office for State/Local Government Relations and Office for Women), Local Government Association, and the Australian Local Government Women's Association (SA).

The project is specifically focused on exploring action associated with women officers employed by councils. As part of the project, a survey of councils is being conducted to enquire about any steps that councils may have taken to pursue the action goals set out in *The Way Forward*. In responding to the survey, councils are encouraged to convene a focus group of women employees to comment on the survey questions. The survey also invites case study examples.

The next meeting of the Steering Group is scheduled for 5 June. As the project progresses, the information gathered will be available to the Women in Local Government Working Group, to assist the work of this group. The showcase is scheduled for completion August/September 2008.

2.2.3 Leadership Excellence Awards 2008

Through the Local Government Managers Association (SA Branch), the State Government (through the Office for Women) is this year sponsoring an *Award for Excellence in Advancing the Status of Women in Local Government*.

Each year the LGMA (SA) promotes a number of Award categories for professionals working within Local Government. The Awards are designed to encourage recognition of quality leadership within SA Local Government. All Awards are being announced on 18 April.

3. Discussion

Women in Local Government Working Group

At the December meeting, the Forum agreed to keep informed of work being undertaken to investigate and address issues of women's participation in Local Government by the Women in Local Government Working Group.

3.1 Establishment

3.1.1 Terms of Reference

State and LGA officers developed draft terms of reference, based on discussions at the December Forum meeting. The draft was considered at the first meeting of the Working Group, and, between the Minister for State/Local Government Relations and the President of the Local Government Association at the meeting on 18 March. The LGA State Executive endorsed the Terms of Reference at its meeting on Thursday 20 March and these are attached – Attachment A.

The December meeting of the Forum agreed that membership should be gender balanced. "At least one member should be a man, and one a women" is in the Terms of Reference. This is a standard provision that reflects State legislation.

However, it was noted by the Working Group at its first meeting that, with the exception of Mayor Steve Perryman, all those who expressed an interest, and were nominated to, the Group were women. While a group focussed on this topic may be of more immediate interest to women, the Working Group recognised that the participation of men would be crucial for effective progress of the issues, particularly given the fact that men largely hold senior management positions in Local Government.

Accordingly, the Working Group agreed that there should be a strong focus on engaging men in developing its work plan and in strategic processes and projects that are pursued.

Also, at the 18 March 2008 meeting between the Minister for State/Local Government Relations and the President of the Local Government Association, it was agreed that the LGA invite a current Chief Executive Officer of a large metropolitan council to be on the Working Group.

3.1.2 Composition

Attached is a list of members of the Working Group on Women in Local Government (Attachment B). The Executive Director, Local Government Association, chairs the Group.

3.2 Activities and Plan of Action

3.2.1 Workshop

The LGA organised a workshop on 6 March (prior to the first meeting of the Working Group) to inform deliberations of the Working Group. Fifteen

participants attended the workshop. Participants were Working Group members and senior council representatives with an interest in women in Local Government, the Office for State/Local Government Relations, and the President, ALGWA SA Branch.

Two key directions were flagged by attendees at the workshop under the working titles – (1) Mentoring; and (2) Working Conditions – and were discussed, for both elected members and senior officers. The information from the workshop is being used to formulate the Working Group's Work Program.

3.2.2 First meeting

The first meeting of the joint Working Group was held on 13 March 2008.

Three initial priority areas for action have emerged:

- (1) Explore and establish a common definition for "senior management positions" to determine gender at senior levels. This deals with what are the indicators of "senior levels", for example, decision-making capacity, part of the management team, qualification, staff reporting relationships, Award classification, as well as clarifying any distinction between interpretation of "senior" in country and in/or between metropolitan councils. This work will examine and take account of the situation where some councils, those with smaller populations, may regard positions below the Senior Officer classification structure in the Municipal Officers Award as "senior" given the nature of the duties undertaken and associated responsibility and/or delegations.
- (2) Statistics, bringing current information together and any further survey work that might be needed. The survey work currently being conducted under the Local Government Managers Association (SA Branch) project will inform this work. One aspect of the survey is to gain information about the extent to which council's have, or are, incorporating aspects of "*The Way Forward*" into their organisation/policies. It will also consider the data held by the SA Local Government Grants Commission.
- (3) Develop a work program for the Working Group to get a sense of the size of the task, establishing timeframes, resources for tackling the assigned work. As a result of the workshop discussions, the Working Party is suggesting a split of consideration of the issues into elected members, and staffing. This is likely to make the Work Program more manageable.

The next meeting of the Working Group is scheduled for 15 May 2008.

4. Recommendations

That the Minister's State/Local Government Forum:

- 1. Note the work being undertaken to investigate and address issues of women's participation in Local Government;**
- 2. Note the attached final terms of reference; and**
- 3. Note that the Forum will continue to receive an update on work being undertaken by the Women in Local Government Working Group.**