



**AUSTRALIAN LOCAL
GOVERNMENT WOMEN'S
ASSOCIATION**
VICTORIAN BRANCH

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Women Stepping Out of Local Government Reflections from Female Councillors who retired at 2020 Elections

ALGWA Vic research shows that 70% of women Councillors who did not re-stand in 2020 had experienced bullying, harassment, abuse and gender stereotyping.

The research showed poor culture and conduct in local government negatively impacted the ability of women Councillors to participate in decision-making.

The Victorian branch of the Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA Vic) surveyed 30 (41%) women who stepped down from councils at the 2020 elections, capturing the value-add to their communities, their accumulated knowledge and experience, but also revealing that many (70%) experienced bullying, harassment, abuse and gender stereotyping over their years of service.

"Sadly, it is no surprise to most women in local government that poor conduct, and a culture that enables it, is often part of our lived experience, but the evidence has been anecdotal," said ALGWA Vic President, Cr Kylie Spears, "Our research provides valuable insights into the experiences female Councillors; the good, the bad and sometimes, the ugly."

The research shows that on a percentage basis, women did not retire at a greater rate than men in 2020, but of the respondents, almost half (13/30) had only served one four-year term. ALGWA Vic believes this finding needs further investigating.

"Supporting more women to stand and get elected to local government is important. Equally important is examining what might need to change to maximise the retention of female Councillors," said Cr Spears. "I commend the Minister for Local Government's commitment to the forthcoming Cultural Review of local government; our research will be a valuable contribution."

The retiring women expressed high levels of satisfaction with their contribution and achievements across the diverse landscape of local government. Skill development and experience gained in service were highly valued, but also demonstrates the loss of talent when they step down. More than half of the participating women (18) had graduated from the Australian Institute of Company Directors, putting them in the pipeline for potential Board appointments.

The research was borne out of ALGWA Vic Committee member Sandra Wilson's personal decision to step down after eight years at Hobsons Bay City Council.

"Deciding not to re-stand wasn't easy because serving a community you love, providing strategic leadership and delivering positive outcomes is a rewarding privilege, but the downside can take a toll," she said. "I believed the reflections of retiring female Councillors would help inform ALGWA's advocacy. This research shows that women give a lot, gain a lot and cop a lot in local government, and these experiences should count for something."

The research concludes with 14 recommendations themed under health and wellbeing; behaviour and conduct; culture; professional development pre and post-retirement; exit support and recognition; and men's and gender diverse Councillor perspectives.