

Item 3.4

International Women's Day 2023

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Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

To mark this International Women's Day, I would like to reflect on the progress we have made at the City as a proud champion of women's participation and leadership, and what more needs to be done to achieve gender equality.

Leading the way

As the first female popularly elected Lord Mayor, and after many years battling patriarchal party politicians, I wanted to make sure the City of Sydney was an organisation that attracted, supported and retained talented women. So, along with our exceptional Chief Executive Officer Monica Barone, we set about change.

We became the first local government organisation to monitor and publicly report on gender pay equity and we introduced new family friendly policies for women and men.

For six years in a row, we have defied Australian trends with a pay gap in favour of women. Our 2022 gender pay gap was 5.3 per cent in favour of women. The main reason for this is the leadership profile of our organisation. In 2021:

- 70 per cent of our Council were female;
- 55 per cent of our Executive team including our Chief Executive Officer were female;
- 53 per cent of our senior managers were female; and
- 50 per cent of our section managers were female.

By promoting the City as an employer of choice for women and by addressing conscious and unconscious gender bias, the City's workforce composition has become more gender balanced. The number of women employed by the City of Sydney has grown substantially from 29 per cent in 2005 to 42.7 per cent in 2022.

Women shouldn't be penalised by lower superannuation benefits at retirement when caring for children interrupts their careers. City of Sydney staff can access 52 weeks of parental leave – 18 weeks on full pay (or 36 weeks at half pay) and 34 weeks of unpaid leave – with superannuation paid for this entire period. Partners also receive four weeks paid partner leave.

Though we were ahead of the times when we introduced 18 weeks paid parental leave and four weeks paid partner leave, the time has come to consider whether we can extend these even further. We know that the first six months of a newborn's life are crucial to their future wellbeing, and yet we don't give parents the support they need to ensure they are able to care for their children as they would like throughout that period. This must change.

The City was one of the first organisations to gain White Ribbon workplace accreditation, and to offer paid domestic and family violence leave. We also have an active Women's Staff Network, support for breastfeeding women and mentoring programs.

Of course, women have many other identities which we also strive to support. The City has initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, staff who identify as LGBTQIA+ and staff with a disability.

What more needs to be done

Though we have come along way when it comes addressing gender equality, there is still a long way to go.

Pay

Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) data shows that Australia has a gender pay gap of 13.3 per cent in favour of men across the private and public sectors. This means that, on average, men earn \$253 more than women each week. According to the WGEA, it will take another 26 years for Australian women to reach pay parity with men if we progress at the same pace.

Housing

Women over 55 are the fastest growing group of homeless people in Australia. Reasons for this include having taken time out of the workforce to care for children, lower levels of superannuation, lower pay rates, and domestic and family violence.

In 2016, the City invested \$1.5 million in a HammondCare facility in Darlinghurst. This facility houses 42 older people who were at risk of homelessness, and includes a floor just for women which caters for survivors of domestic and family violence. More broadly, the City has built almost 1,500 affordable housing units, and has 600 more affordable homes in the pipeline and 700 more affordable homes planned for the future.

But the City cannot address Sydney's housing affordability crisis on its own. The State Government is primarily responsible for social and affordable housing and – with 58,000 households on the social housing waiting list – it must build more social housing across the city, without selling off existing stock. It must also reduce the age at which people are given priority for housing from 80 to 55 years, in line with the lived experiences of older women.

Leadership

Australia has made great strides when it comes to the number of women on government boards, with 51 per cent of positions held by women, and 41 per cent of Chair and Deputy Chair positions held by women. However, when it comes to the boards of ASX200 companies, 36 per cent of positions are held by women and a mere 11 per cent of Chair positions are held by women. We also know that a small number of very well-educated white women hold a disproportionate number of these positions, and much more work needs to be done to reflect our diversity.

Although progress is being made when it comes to women's representation in Australia's federal parliament and cabinet, the same is not true of our state parliament and cabinet. At a federal level, women make up 39 per cent of members of parliament, and 43 per cent of cabinet members. In NSW, these numbers drop to 33 per cent of parliamentarians and just 26 per cent of cabinet positions.

Domestic and family violence

Across Australia, one woman is still killed each week by a partner or ex-partner. And we know that this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to domestic and family violence incidents. In NSW, where reported cases of intimate partner assault have been steadily rising, we urgently need more resources for our overwhelmed courts, and more refuges for domestic and family violence survivors.

Migrant women face additional barriers when it comes to escaping domestic and family violence, including language barriers, a lack of family support and precarious visa statuses. These women must also receive the specialised assistance they need if we are to end domestic and family violence in Australia.

Healthcare

Bucking a long-term Australia-wide trend, teenage pregnancies are on the rise in 14 rural, regional and remote local government areas across NSW. It is imperative that all adolescents have access to the full spectrum of reproductive sexual health services regardless of where they live, as well as tailored support to continue their education should they have a baby before they complete high school.

Removal of children

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children now account for 44 per cent of children in out-of-home care in NSW, even though Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up around just 6 per cent of all Australian children. This means Aboriginal children are now 11 times more likely than non-Aboriginal children to be removed from their parents. For our Aboriginal communities and those of us who are still haunted by the testimonies of the Stolen Generations, these statistics are devastating.

Trans and gender-diverse people

Astoundingly, a person in NSW is still required to have sex affirmation surgery if they want to change their sex on their birth certificate. This is out of step with numerous jurisdictions around the world – including Australia – which recognise that a person may want the sex descriptor on their official documentation changed so that it reflects their chosen gender, and that whether that person has genital surgery or not is a personal matter that is entirely up to them.

Women in prison

Most women in prison have committed non-violent offences, and women in prison are more likely than men in prison to have experienced physical and sexual abuse, mental health issues, and drug and alcohol dependency. Two thirds of women in NSW prisons have at least one child under the age of 18, and one third of women in NSW prisons are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. At a cost of \$80,000 to imprison one person per year, and a recidivism rate of 50 per cent, we really have to ask ourselves if this is the best use of taxpayer's money when it comes to making our community safer.

The City of Sydney is a progressive organisation in a vibrant and dynamic city that celebrates diversity. On this International Women's Day, I ask that we to pay our respects to the women who fought so hard to achieve this, make sure we never let our guard down, and advocate for the ongoing changes we need to ensure future generations of women are able to enjoy all the opportunities they are entitled to.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to investigate extending paid parental leave, inclusive of adoption leave, at the City of Sydney, from 18 weeks to 26 weeks;
- (B) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to investigate extending paid partner leave at the City of Sydney from four weeks to six weeks; and
- (C) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to the Prime Minister, Federal Minister for Women, incoming NSW Premier and incoming NSW Minister for Women asking them to advance progress towards gender equality by:
 - (i) closing the gender pay gap;
 - (ii) dramatically increasing access to social and affordable housing, including by addressing the needs of women over 55;
 - (iii) increasing the proportion of women with different backgrounds on boards, in parliament and in cabinet;
 - (iv) eliminating domestic and family violence by ensuring all victim/survivors – regardless of their visa status – are eligible for income support, crisis payments, healthcare, crisis accommodation and legal advice;
 - (v) ensuring women and girls freely choose if and when they have children, including by making reproductive sexual health services available to all adolescents regardless of where they live;
 - (vi) allocating the resources needed to keep families together by addressing the underlying social and economic factors that lead to entrenched disadvantage, particularly among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women;
 - (vii) adopting a system of self-identification for the purposes of changing sex or gender descriptors on official documentation; and
 - (viii) reducing the number of women in prison by addressing the underlying causes of imprisonment, including by reallocating the vast sums of money spent on incarcerating traumatised, nonviolent women each year.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor