

DAREBIN WOMEN'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Terms of Reference

1. Introduction and background

Darebin Women's Advisory Committee (DWAC) aims to contribute to Darebin City Council's aspiration of seeing gender equality become a lived reality. This implies addressing the barriers to women's participation in Darebin and the causes behind them, including poverty and violence, dis-enablers of equity. The committee supports Council's strong and sustained commitment to gender equity.

DWAC was initially established in 2009 as a way to:

- contribute to the development of a healthy and inclusive local democracy by acting as a conduit between women in Darebin and Council in a way that engaged and empowered women and
- enhance Council's capacity to explore and take account of women's issues across all of its services & activities.

With the *Equity and Inclusion Policy 2012-2017* and *Women's Equity Strategy 2012-2015* and related action plans, DWAC's role and format evolved to better support and influence this consolidation of Council's work in gender equity. This allows for streamlined input from DWAC into Council's work on gender equity and support to women's leadership, ultimately leading to better outcomes for all women in the Darebin community. Although the policies and strategies are set to evolve with the development of a new Council Plan 2017-2021, gender equity remains a key commitment for Council and a key guiding principle in all of its work.

2. Purpose and objectives of the Darebin Women's Advisory Committee

The purpose of DWAC is to advise Council on issues and barriers to equality affecting women in their diversity in the City of Darebin, notably by providing a gender lens on issues, policies, services or programs.

DWAC will also promote and advocate for gender equity and women's full and equal participation within the wider context of the Darebin community, and raise awareness about gender as a key social determinant that Council and community should take into account.

In that respect, DWAC's role revolves around the four key themes of advice, advocacy, action and accountability.

2.1. Policy context

DWAC supports Darebin City Council's long-standing promise to the community to:

“promote gender equity, prevent violence against women and support the right of women to engage and participate fully and equally in all aspects of community life”.

DWAC also supports Council’s commitment to operate in accordance with the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* and the *Victorian Equal Opportunities Act 2010*.

The aims and objectives of DWAC are underpinned by Council’s rights-based equity and inclusion principles, which mean that Council is committed:

Work with and for the Darebin community in a way that recognises and acts to change the multiple and complex ways in which discrimination and poverty create barriers that limit people’s rights and abilities to achieve their full potential and a life of dignity and well-being.

Finally, DWAC directly supports and contributes to the aim of Council’s policies, strategies and plans to “increase women’s participation, wellbeing and leadership in Darebin”.

2.2. Guiding Principles

The guiding principles of DWAC are grounded in a social inclusion and human rights based framework, affirming:

- That all women who live, work or study in Darebin have the right to equal access to services, projects and programs initiated by Darebin City Council and to participate in all aspects of community life,
- The right of all women in Darebin to live without fear of violence, discrimination or any form of social disadvantage,
- The need for continued awareness raising, advocacy and community-based action to address barriers to equality facing women in their diversity in Darebin.

2.3. Objectives

The objectives of Darebin’s Women’s Advisory Committee are:

- To provide **advice and guidance** on issues and barriers to equality affecting women in their diversity in the City of Darebin by:
 - supporting Council to develop and apply a ‘gender lens’ across all of its activities (including policy development, planning, advocacy & service delivery), notably through advice on Council’s policies, plans, program and service reviews, discussion papers, events & celebrations as required,
 - assisting Council to identify & remove barriers to women’s full and equal participation in the social, cultural, economic & political life of the city and advising on ways to strengthen the democratic participation of all women in Darebin,
 - providing advice on the implementation of gender equity principles, policies and plans where required.

- To **advocate for gender equity**, promote recognition of women's contributions to our community and enhance understanding about gender and barriers to equality facing women, including by supporting Council's strategic advocacy at the local, state & Federal levels.
- To provide **support in engaging Darebin women** and notably to provide Council and other local community-based service providers with an effective channel of communication to reach women by:
 - exploring and representing the concerns & aspirations of women in Darebin,
 - endeavouring to create two-way connections between Council & women in the community.
- To **contribute to the monitoring and evaluation** of Council policies, projects and services that impact or that may potentially impact women, notably by receiving progress reports on the implementation of gender equity policies and plans where appropriate.

3. Membership

DWAC comprises women who live, work or study in Darebin.

Membership will comprise of:

- At least one nominated female Darebin Councillor,
- One Council officer, and others as required, whose role supposes understanding the specific challenges and barriers to equality facing women and who can implement actions to address issues raised by the Committee,
- Up to twelve community members representing the diversity of Darebin women.

Apart from Councillor(s) and officers, the committee's membership should not exceed twelve.

With exception of casual staff, permanent Employees of Darebin City Council are ineligible to apply for membership.

3.1. Membership diversity

The committee should reflect the full diversity of Darebin women in terms of age, ability, Indigenous status, cultural and linguistic background, sexuality, sex characteristics and gender identity, education and income levels, employment status, carer role, etc. This will be a key consideration in the selection and recruitment of members. The Committee will seek to build and reflect diversity within membership and be inclusive in practice.

3.2. Reimbursement of members' expenditures

To allow diverse participation, and taking into account the multiple responsibilities women often have to juggle including carer's responsibilities, Council will support women's participation through provision of assistance for childcare as required.

Assistance with transport or other specific needs (interpreting, assistant support...) may also be provided.

Application for assistance should be made at the expression of interest stage (see 4.1 below), but can also be made at any time if changing circumstances mandate it.

3.3. Role of members

DWAC members will fulfil their role by:

- Providing input, views and advice on the implementation of strategies, policies and plans related to gender equity,
- Providing advice to Council on the development of a broad array of new policies and strategies using a gender lens and highlighting potential barriers to equality for women,
- Assisting in shaping and promoting a range of projects, notably Council's celebrations of International Women's Day,
- Facilitating Council's engagement with the community and assisting Council to connect with Darebin women and to take into account and balance the different perspectives and requirements of Darebin's diverse women.

4. Terms and method of nomination

4.1. Method of nomination

Nomination for the appointment of members of DWAC will be called through an expression of interest process. The process will be advertised widely through appropriate promotion (including a public notice in local newspapers, promotion on Council's website...) and by communication to women's organisations and other community groups.

- All appointments will be determined by Council and endorsed at a Council meeting.
- If a member does not attend at least two (2 i.e. half of the minimum number of meetings to be held) meetings per year without prior notification being given, their position may be considered vacant.
- Irrespective of the reason for it, if a vacancy occurs it will be filled at the discretion of Council and made effective through a letter signed by Council's Chief Executive. Members nominated to fill a vacancy are appointed for the remainder of the term of current members only.

4.2. Terms of appointment

Appointments to the Committee will be for a period of two years, except when arising through a vacancy. Three months prior to the end of this term, a new expression of interest will be invited (as per the process outlined in 4.1. above). Current members will have the option to reapply for a further two years (once only).

5. Meetings and procedures

The Darebin Women's Advisory Committee will meet at Council's offices a minimum of four (4) times a year, with the possibility to organise additional meetings as required.

Dates and times of the meetings will be determined by Council, taking into consideration members' constraints and the need to allow participation from a wide range of women across the municipality. Assistance with attendance might be offered (see 3.2. above) to allow diversity in participants.

5.1. Chairperson

A Councillor (s), appointed at the yearly statutory meeting, chairs the Committee or, in her absence, the Councillor appointed as proxy. In the absence of Councillors at the meeting, the Committee members will determine to appoint a Chair for the purposes of conducting the meeting.

The responsibilities of the Chair include:

- Guiding the meeting according to the agenda and time available,
- Facilitating fruitful discussions, with care not to enter into operational matters and ensuring members understand these are outside of the scope of the committee,
- Assisting members to abide by the Code of conduct (see 5.4. below), including by taking action in case of breaches,
- Reviewing and approving minutes before distribution as needed,
- Where appropriate, updating Council on the progress and discussions of DWAC, e.g. through Councillors' reports at Council meetings.

5.2. Officer support

An officer from the Equity and Diversity Unit of Darebin City Council will take responsibility for providing executive support to the Committee including provision of meeting agendas and minutes.

Committee agendas will be forwarded to DWAC members by email no later than one week (five working days) before a scheduled meeting.

Minutes will be provided to Committee members no later than two weeks (ten working days) after a scheduled meeting, including details of proceedings and clearly expressed resolutions (where applicable), and including relevant documentation as attachments where necessary.

Records of agendas and minutes will be maintained in accordance with *Public Records Act* requirements.

5.3. Recommendations to Council

The role of the Darebin Women's Advisory Committee is to provide **advice** to Council. As such it does not have any decision-making powers.

Where the committee wishes to make recommendations to Council, a consensus of all members present will be sought.

In the absence of such consensus, and provided there is a **quorum of at least half of the members** (apart from Councillor(s)/Chair and officer(s)) present at the meeting, the recommendation will be put to a vote with the majority recommendation being endorsed as the committee's. Officers can never take part in the vote. In the event of a tie, the Chair may exercise a casting vote.

It is up to the supporting officer to follow up on the Committee's recommendation, including deciding on the most appropriate means to report back on it to Council or internal departments.

The Committee **does not have an operational role and may not direct Council staff** in the performance of their duties.

5.4. Conduct of Committee members

Members will:

- act honestly and treat others with respect. Failure to do so will be dealt with by the Chair as appropriate.
- Exercise reasonable care and diligence.
- Not make improper use of their position or make improper use of information acquired because of their position.

Where there is a requirement for confidentiality, this is to be noted in the minutes if the matter arises during a meeting, or made clear to members if arising in communication outside of a meeting (e.g. provision of a draft policy ahead of a meeting, for discussion and feedback at the meeting), and addressed accordingly.

Members must disclose a conflict of interest in relation to any matter the Committee is concerned with or that the committee will, or is likely to, consider or discuss. The conflict of interest, including the nature of the relevant interest, must be disclosed before the matter is considered and must be recorded in the minutes.

Members of the Committee are **not authorised to speak to the media or make public statements on behalf of the Committee (and much less Council)**, unless the member is a Councillor. In that case, any engagement with the media will be in accordance with Council's standard media and communications policy.

Members are authorised to disclose, and encouraged to share with fellow community members, general information such as objectives of the Committee, membership procedures, list of activities and information in regard to any issues that have already been previously dealt with and approved in the Committee's discussions.

Members must ensure that new issues raised by the public or community are brought back to the Committee for consideration before any public information or response is provided in relation to the issue.

6. Monitoring and evaluation

Operations of DWAC will be evaluated annually via a number of methods (including reflective self-evaluation of the Committee) to ensure that the Committee is achieving its objectives. Results of the evaluation will be reported in a biannual progress report submitted to Council detailing the Committee's activities and achievements.

The Terms of Reference for the Committee are to be reviewed annually no later than October (prior to the statutory meeting) and any changes are to be endorsed by Council.