

Media Release

The Hon Shaun Leane MLC
Minister for Local Government
Minister for Suburban Development
Minister for Veterans



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REVIEW TO EXAMINE CULTURAL ISSUES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Respect, integrity and trust across local councils will be strengthened through a wide-ranging review of cultural issues backed by the Andrews Labor Government.

Speaking at the Australian Local Government Women's Association Victoria Branch annual conference, Minister for Local Government Shaun Leane today announced Local Government Victoria would commission a review and discussion paper to start a conversation about behaviour and culture on councils.

The discussion paper will look into the history of the culture in local government and ways to promote a more positive and inclusive work environment, ensure fairer and more equal representation of community views, and build public trust.

In particular, it will consider ways to make local government a more welcoming and safe environment for women, following a Victorian Auditor-General's Office report that found more than one in four councillors and council staff had experienced sexual harassment in the past 12 months.

The review will be undertaken by a research institute, academic or person with appropriate skills and experience from the sector, and a discussion paper published for feedback.

A series of workshops with the local government sector will follow, with the final report due to be published in the last quarter of 2021.

The Labor Government has introduced new laws to ensure the highest standards of integrity in local councils, including appropriate, respectful behaviour among councillors. The *Local Government Act 2020* has introduced stronger Standards of Conduct for councils, clearly defining sexual harassment as serious misconduct.

The Act also includes a suite of provisions to improve integrity in local government, including improved gift policies, tighter controls on the use of private council meetings and new rules covering conflicts of interest.

Minister Leane also announced further support for women in local government, increasing the government's support for the Australian Local Government Women's Association mentoring program to \$41,000.

The funding will support 60 new women councillors in this term of council and provide opportunities for leaders in the sector to be trained as mentors.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Local Government Shaun Leane

"The vast majority of councils and councillors do a fantastic job for their communities, but there have been examples of poor behaviour and bad governance in recent times – not just in Victoria but across the country."

"I strongly believe that by working together we can improve the culture overall. Our goal should be to put out a clear message that, as a sector, we won't accept poor behaviour."

Quote attributable to Minister for Women Gabrielle Williams

"This review starts a conversation about cultural change in local government. It's important that our representative intuitions are inclusive and reflect the communities they serve."

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