

# CONFIDENTIAL REPORT

City of Ballarat

## **GOVERNANCE & CULTURE REVIEW**

This Review gathered individual views and professional insights, as well as firsthand information about how employees and volunteers ‘experienced’ their workplaces. Collected in a private and de-identified manner, the material gathered during the process also provides a snapshot of the climate, current mindsets, organisational alignment and the work environment.

22 JANUARY 2021

**SUSAN HALLIDAY AM**  
Halliday’s Business Insights Pty Ltd  
susanhalliday@bigpond.com

# CONTENTS PAGE

Executive Summary	03
Introduction	05
Workforce Perspectives	08
Of Value	13
Council Employment Generally ?	13
Specific Job ?	15
Rating Job Satisfaction	18
Occupational Health & Safety	18
The Workplace	22
Culture	31
Professional Development	35
Fair Treatment	36
Governance	38
Decision Making	44
Leadership	45
Concern For Yourself & Others	53
Conflict & Tension	54
Wary, Unnerved, Unsettled or Very Uncomfortable ?	57
Conclusion	60

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This City of Ballarat (CoB) Governance and Culture Review process has been conducted to engage directly with employees and volunteers about matters of key significance to the organisation and all who are party to its operational activity. It was designed to gather individual views and professional insights, as well as firsthand information about how employees and volunteers '*experienced*' their workplace prior to the drafting of the 2021 Action Plan.

A total of 265 interviewees were involved and have been heard. Deemed essential that the 2021 Action Plan be informed by tapping into the knowledge, perspectives and work-related experiences of employees and volunteers, this initiative has provided fundamental information about a cross section of core topics of interest.

The 2021 Action Plan supersedes report recommendations. The Action Plan comprises four quadrants. Initiatives sitting within each quadrant harness and draw from the positive material shared during this Review process and simultaneously address areas of concern that surfaced, in relation to governance, culture, conduct, safety, communication, leadership and management, decision making, staff wellbeing, the need to embed the concept of continuous learning and a generic acknowledgement of the importance of professional growth, while ultimately aiming to ensure CoB is positioned and widely identified as an employer of choice.

It is noted upfront that this Review report will be confronting and troubling for some. It will be concerning if not shocking new information for others, and there will those who read it and consider that content has been omitted or understated, and resulted in insufficient exposure. It is important to note that diagnostic and workplace assessment processes seek to detect and shed light on the nature of organisational dynamics and climate, as well as critical workplace constructs. Benchmark standards associated with sound contemporary practice as well as precedented definitions of professionalism, exemplar workplace policies, employment law and other relevant legislative frameworks form the parameters for the collection and assessment of information.

The gathering of information draws on an individual's personal and professional standards, and their understanding of what dignity, respect and self-worth feels like in a workplace. Context and firsthand information also play key roles when it comes to understanding how people '*experience*' their environments and when personal and professional expectations are met, exceeded or not met. While reality belongs to the individual interviewee and they have a right to voice it, the quantum of the exercise provides checks and balances, as does content that surfaces in patterns and volume.

People contributed to the Review process knowing that it was anonymous and that circumstances and examples provided to flesh out issues, would be de-identified. It was clear that language would be sanitised and names would be removed. It was also clear that the Review process was not a mechanism to table allegations about an individual or progress a specific workplace complaint. During the time of the Review process there were a number of other formal inquiries underway into specific situations. They tracked along separately adhering to their own required process.

The opportunity to share information and contribute to shaping the future has been considered valuable by a significant number of contributors. Some came to talk about positive experiences, others about the need for critical improvements, and there were those who sought to share information they had not previously shared. A number articulated that they were keen to help inform a change process as they wished to stay at CoB for an extended period of time.

Content relates to past and current (i.e. 2020) experiences. People who live and breathe the environment at all different levels understand its value, its benefits, its idiosyncrasies and its cracks and pressure points. Not surprisingly this process has identified that unresolved issues remain for some, and that closure is sought by a variety of people.

When a process seeks open and honest contributions and provides sufficient protection for people to engage, the result can be overwhelming when condensed into a report. However, it is a report such as this that provides the necessary platform to legitimately and honestly take stock, and to reset in a manner that is informed and supportive of the lifeblood of the organisation. In doing so it is important to operate with the mindset that every individual has the right to feel comfortable and safe in their workplace, as well as supported in a manner that is conducive to them achieving their potential. While there are employees who have not personally experienced unacceptable behaviour, it is the responsibility of the employer to take the necessary steps to ensure that no-one does.

Many felt CoB should take steps to ensure employees at all levels and volunteers were heard in a comprehensive and continual way. People were wanting to know that their experiences were believed, absorbed and utilised. Given that every individual has their own set of circumstances, many who shared their circumstances (be they positive or negative) felt that no matter what their role, they had a contribution to make to the future of CoB. Some were specific about how that contribution could improve or strengthen workplace practice, organisational dynamics and CoB outcomes given their own knowledge and experience. Some considered that they had been listened to and their views respected by senior officers in the past, a number felt this was not reflective of their experience.

Contributions have resulted in a range of informative statistics, as well as frank and unwavering critique of personal experiences, culture, leadership and direct observations. It is worthy of full consideration that of the 265 participants, around 40% said that they would not recommend CoB as an employer. It is telling that 184 of the 265 interviewees had considered leaving CoB, and that a significant number had taken relevant action. The fact that discussion of fair treatment had 43% saying YES they were treated fairly, 42% saying that they were treated fairly SOMETIMES, and 15% saying NO they were not treated fairly is deserving of attention.

Of note was the extensive care and consideration people showed for colleagues at all levels, during the process. When asked, of the 265 a total of 172 said they had concerns for others in the workplace. While 138 of the 265 said that they had concerns for themselves in the workplace.

Thanks should be extended to all contributors. For some it was comfortable and conversational, for others it raised content that was heartfelt and at times particularly upsetting, and indeed for a number it took courage to engage in the manner that they did.

While not all of the information gathered during the Review process is recorded in this report, there is generic coverage of all matters within the four quadrants of the Action Plan. The development of the 2021 Action Plan and the potential organisational gains for CoB, the workforce and the community are substantial from this point onwards.

# INTRODUCTION

This City of Ballarat (CoB) Governance and Culture Review process has been conducted to engage directly with employees and volunteers about matters of key significance to the organisation and all who are party to its operational activity. The initiative was specifically designed to gather individual views and professional insights, as well as firsthand information about how employees at all levels and volunteers *'experienced'* their workplace, prior to the drafting of the 2021 Action Plan. Collected in a private and de-identified manner, the material gathered has provided a snapshot of the climate and current mindsets. It has also highlighted the extent to which people align with the organisation and the nature of various work environments.

Deemed essential that the 2021 Action Plan be informed by tapping into the knowledge, perspectives and work-related experiences of employees and volunteers, this initiative has provided fundamental information about a cross section of core topics of interest, including:

- areas in need of reform;
- the extent and nature of cultural change;
- management and leadership transformation opportunities;
- the importance of establishing standards of individual accountability;
- the need to conceptually embrace and embed a continuous learning mindset; and
- the necessity to advance a comprehensive and professionally mature understanding of governance (that is CoB specific and common to all) ensuring people are versed in how it relates to Council objectives, strategies, plans, project undertakings, relationships and deliverables, as well as everyday tasks at a grassroots level.

In total 265 employees and volunteers participated in the Governance and Culture Review process. Of the 265, all up 102 people (to be known as the *102 cohort*) were involved in detailed one-on-one online TEAMS interviews. These structured interviews spanned 20 questions. The other 163 people who engaged via survey were asked 14 of the same 20 questions that were survey suitable.

Around two-thirds of the 102 cohort were selected at random and importantly were representative of a wide selection of people from different CoB departments and hierarchical levels. Drawing from a pool of permanents, casuals and volunteers this group included people from senior and junior levels, as well as discipline / vocation specialists, of mixed gender / backgrounds.

The original Review plan was for 60 to 65 detailed face-to-face private interviews. Subsequent Covid-19 restrictions required that private interviews be progressed online via TEAMS instead of in person. Interest in the initiative was high. Many people asked to be added to the one-on-one list of private interviewees. In the end 102 in-depth interviews were done by TEAMS, and an additional 163 people keen to engage completed the online survey. The 163 were self-selected.

Not included in the 265 head count were two additional staff who were happy to engage and provide detail about a specific issue (a different issue for each person) that required firsthand validation in support of content submitted by a number of interviewees.

Other information of potential interest to CoB surfaced during this process as information about the Review travelled to the broader community. A number of contractors and community members who had historic views about governance and culture initiated direct contact. They were provided with an opportunity to share their information via email and phone. Some of this material is to be dealt with separately by CoB. Prior to the commencement of the process Councillors were informed that they were welcome to make contact to discuss any governance or cultural issues relevant to the

operational activity of the organisation. Three Councillors made contact and shared their insights and experiences with respect to areas of specific relevance to the Review.

Each online TEAMS interview (102 cohort) was scheduled for an hour; 21 interviews ran beyond the hour – with 10 running to 90 minutes. All up 8 people were involved in follow-up calls to finalise content, raise something new, or to touch base having decided post interview that they wanted to talk about a further example or concern (that was sometimes particularly sensitive). Some members of the 102 cohort attended their online interviews with detailed notes and indicated that they had considered at length, prior to their interview, what they wished to share.

With reference to the full set of 265 interviewees, it is noteworthy that people aired both positive and negative experiences, and did so in detail. People also contributed ideas for potential improvements and shared what they valued about their CoB employment, and their specific jobs. The nature of questions posed during TEAMS interviews and in the survey ensured that any matter an employee or volunteer deemed relevant and wanted to raise, was welcomed.

Many members of the 102 cohort spoke about the importance of an opportunity to share their views in private and anonymously. Considered proactive, astute and respectful, it was shared on numerous occasions that the Review had messaged to people that there was a genuine interest in what employees and volunteers thought, and had experienced. In summary it is fair to say that a significant number expressed that (irrespective of role or employment status) that the opportunity to engage was a form of acknowledgement. Some added that for the first time, or the first time in a long time, they felt worthy of CoB attention and effort. A range of people from different areas indicated that they had never been asked for their personal views before. Quite a said that they would have not been comfortable discussing their work-related experiences in the past, or would not risk making a complaint as their environment was not conducive.

Several noted that while they had information of concern, or wrong doing over past years, that they hadn't spoken up about it to an auditor, investigator, manager or executive. Several people said that in such circumstances that they had stuck to the questions asked of them or requested material, and did not offer up additional content as they assessed it was safer not to do so. When detailing personal experiences 15 of the 102 cohort started by saying *"I have never told anyone this before"*

Contributors expressed various emotions including happiness and enjoyment when discussing job satisfaction and work friendships. Some aired appreciation for their immediate supervisor /manager/ senior manager, and the nature of their community engagement. Excitement, passion and contentment also surfaced in relation to a range of different roles. Simultaneously there were some who aired confusion, frustration, impatience, anger and general disappointment in CoB and leadership team members. Others said they felt a sense of worthlessness and defeated due to the treatment they said they had personally endured. Some spoke about feeling affronted and belittled, others said they were aggrieved about being stereotyped, pigeon-holed or isolated in the workplace. Additionally a number shared sentiment that spanned annoyance, feeling upset, disbelief, offence, dismay, hurt, grief, shock, loathing and resentment when expressing what it had felt like at times to be in their shoes at work.

It was evident however that a significant number across the full set of 265 interviewees held CoB in reasonable regard as an employing entity. Predominantly this was because of the purpose of the entity. Much of what was reportedly experienced as negative related to *people* and *actions* (or lack of action at various levels). A general sense of pride emerged when it came to spending your working hours associated with an organisation of community significance – this sentiment tended most often to be associated with working for a Council given its purpose and outreach, not necessarily working with CoB uniquely. That said a number lived locally and had a particular interest in CoB

A reasonable number of the 102 cohort believed that their own teams and areas had good reputations internally; far fewer considered the reputation of CoB was tracking well externally, despite on-going good work that was often seen to be ignored by the local press, and the community. In both situations a range of examples were provided to demonstrate how people pegged 'reputational status' internally and externally as they personally experienced and understood it.

Many felt CoB could take steps to ensure that people at all levels were heard, and positioned to contribute to improving operational practice and outcomes based on employee and volunteer knowledge and experience. While some considered that they were listened to and respected by senior officers, a larger number felt this was not reflective of their experiences.

It is worthy of note that around 8% from the 102 cohort said that while the Review seemed like a worthwhile exercise, that they were of the view that nothing much would change. Further, it appeared that some longer term employees felt that they had seen it all before, noting concerns associated with historic patterns of limited action when there were clear and timely opportunities to make improvements, and to deal with people at all levels who did not operate in the best interests of CoB.

People contributed to the Review process knowing that it was anonymous and that circumstances and examples that were provided to flesh out issues, would be de-identified. It was clear that language would be sanitised and names would be removed from examples utilised. Information circulated about the Review process made it clear that where appropriate information would be recorded in themes and trends and that the nature of the issues and experiences raised would be party to an assessment in order to inform the 2021 Action Plan.

It was also made clear in information about the Review process from the outset, that the Review process was not a mechanism to table allegations about an individual or progress a specific workplace complaint. Where the names of people surfaced (in both positive and negative scenarios) the issues and points of interest were extracted and names and specific areas were discarded for the purposes of drafting of this Report. On occasion where a historic, live or new matter of concern surfaced people were reminded of the appropriate CoB options available to them, and where they could access support.

During the Review process there were a number of formal inquiries underway into specific situations. They tracked along separately adhering to their own required formal process. That said there were issues that were of relevance to the Review process generically and information was gathered under that auspice.

Diagnostic and workplace assessment processes detect and shed light on the nature of organisational dynamics and climate, as well as critical workplace constructs such as governance, leadership, culture, communication, safety and conduct. Benchmark standards associated with sound contemporary practice as well as precedented definitions of professionalism, exemplar workplace policies, employment law and other relevant legislative frameworks form the parameters for the collection and assessment of information.

The gathering of information about personal views, ideas and encounters draws on an individual's personal and professional standards, and their understanding of what dignity, respect and self-worth feels like in a workplace. Context and firsthand information also play key roles when it comes to understanding how people 'experience' their environments and when personal and professional expectations are met, exceeded or not met. While reality belongs to the individual interviewee the quantum of the exercise provides checks and balances, as does content that surfaces in patterns and volume.

# WORKFORCE PERSPECTIVES

This Review report commences with information from three key questions that cover off on workforce perspectives. A fundamental starting point, this data provides a discerning backdrop for the remainder of the report. The insights that stem from the answers to these three questions also do much to inform future deliberations about workforce strategies, retention and the opportunity to work towards ensuring and presenting CoB as an employer of choice when drafting the 2021 Action Plan.

Moving beyond culture, morale and job satisfaction, the negative impacts associated with local press and social media, discontent pertaining to certain areas of management and governance shortfalls, a total of 265 staff and volunteers weighed up their personal feelings and provided core information about their private employment related decisions. These decisions and what sits behind them is of collective significance to CoB moving forward.

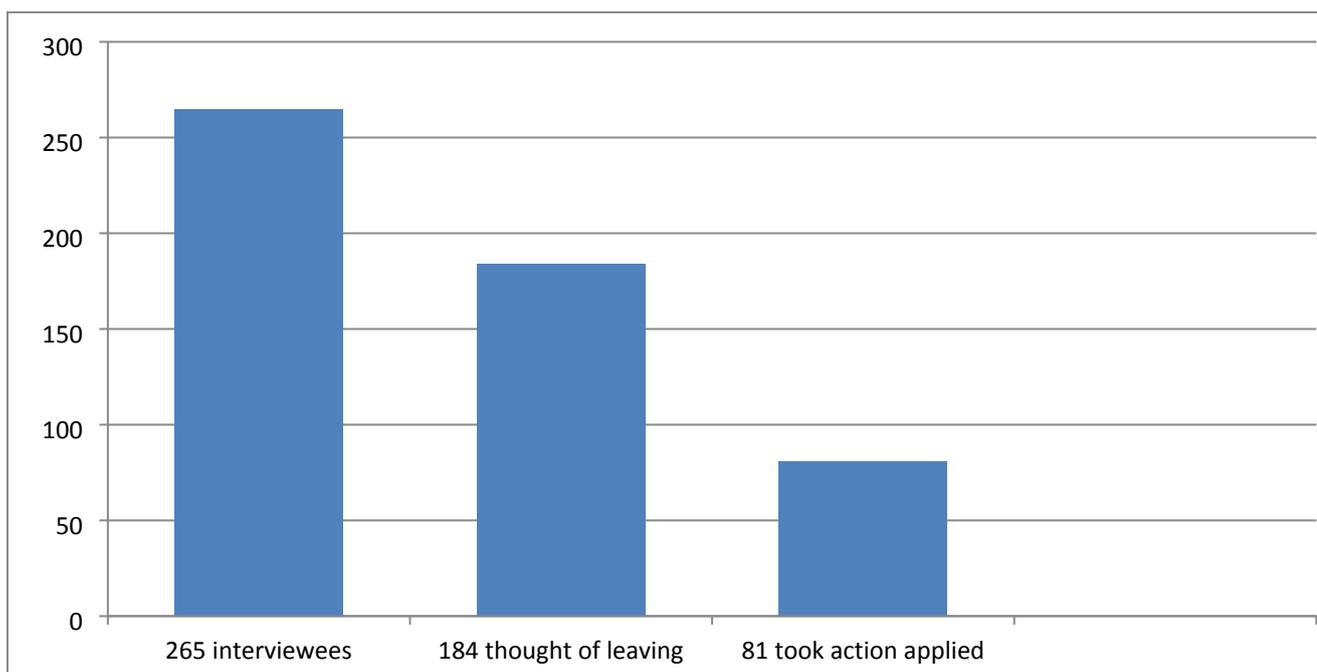
The questions were answered during August, September and early October 2020. The timing is relevant. The fact that structural and personnel changes were reasonably clear, and the fact that people had settled into their Covid-19 way of working should not be dismissed, rather taken into account contextually, when reviewing the information.

## **Q1 Have you considered leaving the Council ?**

All 265 interviewees were asked this question. For those who answered YES, the follow-up question went to the level of commitment attached to the individual's thoughts about leaving, and the person was asked whether or not they had taken action and actually applied for another job.

Of the 102 cohort a couple of people had been approached (or head-hunted) to leave CoB to join another entity. For them the questions were asked similarly (i.e. did they actually consider the opportunity? and if YES, did they apply for the role or attend an interview that was set up after they had been approached?). Those who were leaving due to retirement were not counted as a YES.

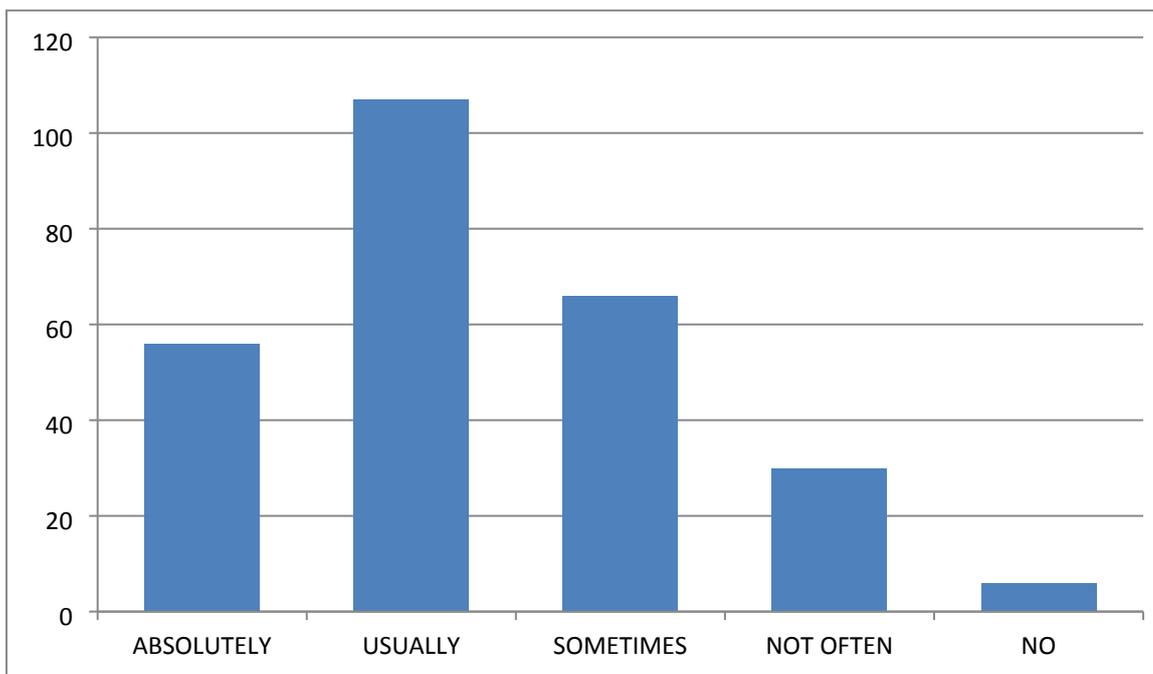
Of 265 interviewees, 184 had considered leaving CoB. A total of 81 of the 265 had taken action and applied for an external opportunity.



## Q2 Do you feel connected to ( a part of ) the Council?

All 265 interviewees were asked this question. The following positions were identified

ABSOLUTELY	56
USUALLY	107
SOMETIMES	66
NOT OFTEN	30
NO	06



### ABSOLUTELY

Members of the 102 cohort who provided additional detail about nominating ABSOLUTELY as their answer, provided very similar information. Two strong themes underpinned this answer; the first was *wide ranging interaction with lots of different people*, and the second was *good communication*. A sample of comments follow. Identifying details and specific examples have been removed.

- it's because I have strong relationships and I'm actually seen as a good resource by others
- I need the linkages personally and I like to interact and really enjoy being part of the place
- it's due to the nature of my role and the fact that I work across the organisation
- I stay connected due to my job; I know what's going on; always welcome no matter where I go
- I didn't used to, but I do now as things have changed of late, and I tell people where I work now
- I deal with lots of different areas and lots of different people that I get on with
- given I wear a uniform and I really enjoy my job it has to be 'absolutely'
- it's the nature of my role; I am in the community and I'm recognised as being from the Council and people welcome that, and the services offered
- I feel at home and totally connected to the organisation
- 100% - CoB is a part of me ... love being here
- I have contact across the whole organisation and I'm always listened to, and people recognise my contributions, and are interested in what I have to say

## USUALLY

The largest group from the 265 (i.e. 107 interviewees) responded with USUALLY. Of interest was that a number from the 102 cohort indicated that the changed work situation due to Covid-19 had dropped them back from 'absolutely' to 'usually'. A strong theme that surfaced as key to maintaining connection was *regular interaction with a range of different people*. A second theme was that people felt a part of the organisation due to the *community serving nature of the roles undertaken*.

There was a distinct leaning towards people in a variety of service and support roles answering USUALLY. Many said they had a great job that was of benefit to the community (directly or indirectly) and that they enjoyed the company of the people they worked with. Highlighted was the importance of recognition for what the incumbent actually did for the community – such recognition lead to heightened CoB connection. Genuine team collaboration, good communication and a supportive boss featured repeatedly when people in the 102 cohort detailed why they said USUALLY.

A few spoke about the need to defend themselves and their role externally, and when in that situation they certainly felt connected to CoB, but not always in a good way. It was shared by some in this group that once you understood how Council operated and you had determined where and how you fitted in, that if the people around you were okay that it could be both a comfortable and an accommodating workplace.

A small number of people stated that they had selected USUALLY rather than ABSOLUTELY because there were times when they were not feeling sufficiently informed and had found out about things (that they felt they were entitled to know) via the local press, social media or someone other than their direct manager, which was considered unfortunate and unfair.

People involved in developing or mentoring others indicated that these activities and the nature of such direct responsibility made them feel connected to the organisation and valued.

## SOMETIMES

A quarter of the interviewees answered SOMETIMES. A range of different scenarios were unpacked as people in the 102 cohort explained their answer. Some raised that it was about the people, personalities and egos, and that feeling a part of the organisation could be determined by who you were working with, or how well or poorly you were treated by people in other areas. Certain areas were repeatedly highlighted as being unwelcoming. It was noted several times that some who were comfortable with silos that had evolved and at times had been fostered, seemed unwilling to disengage and become more collegiate (i.e. one unified entity) as expected under new leadership.

When housed in environments not part of the corporate picture or depot, it was the case that some felt isolated and disconnected despite loving their jobs. Descriptors like feeling 'different' and 'left-out' and 'less relevant' were used when people talked about being in a satellite /non corporate area. A theme of *limited access to core personnel* also led to a feeling of being less connected.

Covid-19 implications were certainly of relevance amongst this group, with the selection of SOMETIMES accompanied at times by information about how the supervisor / manager was (or was not) coping, and the resultant impact on individual team members. While a small number raised the considerate and consistent efforts of a couple of particular supervisors / managers during Covid-19 which people had greatly appreciated, it was found that generally working from home had resulted in people feeling less connected than they had previously. Some new employees indicated it was hard to feel connected when a Covid-19 type of work-life was the majority of your experience.

## NOT OFTEN and NO

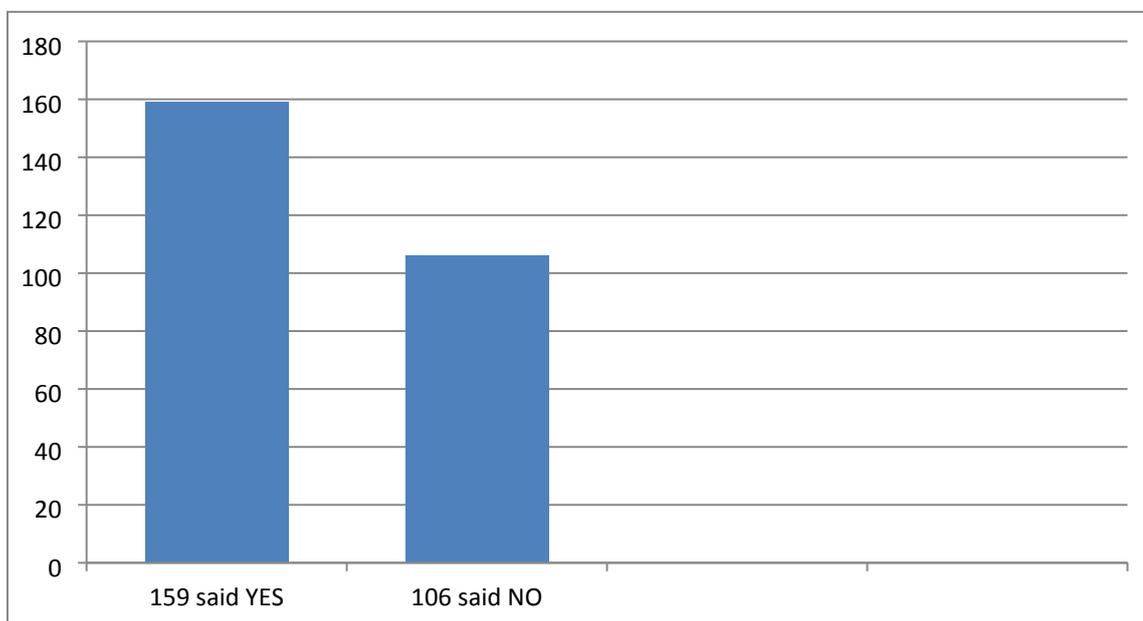
The combined NOT OFTEN and NO categories amounted to 36 people of the 265. Detailed information provided by those who sat in these categories from the 102 cohort was concerning. For example it was shared that sometimes to sit outside the organisation mentally and to distance oneself was a way to survive, a similar comment noted that to protect yourself you had to find a way to disassociate. A few people said they chose not to tell people where they worked.

It was expressed that the way in which new people were treated in certain areas was troubling and that length of service and where you came from counted (i.e. whether local or not seemed to be very important – albeit for no good reason or merit based perspective). Insufficient communication and separation from corporate environments resulted in a couple of people nominating NOT OFTEN.

Isolation, feeling bullied and less favourable treatment also resulted in people answering NOT OFTEN or NO. It is noted that there were people classified as permanent, casual and volunteer who nominated NOT OFTEN or NO. It was shared a few times that the vision and values of the organisation did not seem to transfer operationally into certain areas of CoB and people therefore did not feel a connection to the ‘type of organisation’ that was promoted or heard about elsewhere.

### Q3 *Would you recommend others work at the Council ?*

Of 265 participants, 106 answered NO (40%) and 159 said YES (60%). While many people loved what they did, the point was often made that CoB felt like an ‘employer of necessity’ rather than an ‘employer of choice’. Of the people who said YES within the 102 cohort, 31 actually qualified their answer with words to the effect of *I would recommend CoB as an employer now* and shared that recent changes and the Interim CEO’s communicative style, transparent approach and level of interest in staff welfare had resulted in a YES, rather than a NO answer to this question.



Given the conversations people said they had with external parties and potential employees it was clear that there were two distinct communication flows. People talked about the sort of information they shared with professional contacts, friends, family and others known to them in the community and beyond (both other regions and Melbourne). While some information was positive, a significant amount was deleterious with the potential to deny CoB good job applicants.

Listed under YES and NO are summarised comments from the 102 cohort, deemed of interest.

## YES

- the money is good and the benefits and flexibility are great compared to other environments
- perspective is important - employment is limited in the region and things are changing at CoB
- it depends on the area but generally I would say yes given things are starting to look up
- as the organisation is on notice and things have to improve, I'd say yes from here on
- I would say yes after the Council elections
- generally a good supportive place, where OHS and culture is starting to improve
- the answer is yes if they need a job as a safety-net, it is a place where you can grow and the money is reasonable, the trade-off is you just have to put up with all of the other bad stuff
- you have to be a *glass half full* rather than a *glass half empty* person for me to recommend it
- yes - there's enough good people in this organisation to make it work
- there are diverse roles, interesting work, some opportunities, plus secure money, so yes
- yes, as management level jobs are good and there are lots of good people here
- my answer is yes but that's from this point in time onwards – not before
- I suppose it's a yes, however it would have to be somebody who had initiative and resilience
- the answer is yes; it's a great place to work - every job and every workplace has its problems
- I'd suggest other people agree to volunteer here - it is what you make it
- for somebody starting out it's a good opportunity; you'd get some grounding, I'd recommend
- I'd recommend given it's the people that really count and generally they're fine at lower levels
- I'd say yes but it's important to keep your eyes wide open and always watch your back
- it would be a yes if it was in a service delivery area where people are truly invested in their roles and developing programs that help and service the community directly
- if going to an area where staff are driven / do the right thing it's great – I'd say yes cautiously
- I have encouraged people to apply for work here and I have recommended CoB as a good employer but I do so carefully and with knowledge of their skills and experience
- absolutely yes – wouldn't hesitate (multiple response)

## NO

- things would have to change an awful lot before I recommended CoB as an employer
- it's stressful and I would not recommend CoB to anyone - I would encourage them to utilise their expertise elsewhere
- no way, and that would be the answer even for somebody I didn't like
- too many hidden agendas - how do you explain what it's really like on the inside - I'd say NO
- I'd suggest people speak to a range of people who've worked here to make an assessment and ask questions around management / leadership as part of their own inquiry – NO
- there are people who work here who are apathetic and laid-back - that approach can be really debilitating for others so it'd depend on the person
- I would suggest NO would be my answer to casuals given how casuals are treated
- I'd say no – no, and again NO
- the answer is no - there are industrial and HR issues ... there are lots of things swept under the carpet by all different people who keep their jobs - it'll take a long time to get better
- if you want to work in local Council, I'd suggest there are other Councils that are more likely to provide good experience and satisfaction – I'd not recommend CoB
- no - nobody needs to walk into a culture like this one
- my recommendation would be that they look at other places where people understand good practice, show respect and follow organisational values
- the answer is NO given the detriment to my mental health – wouldn't like to see others suffer
- ethically I couldn't recommend Council - it can be cushy for some, and this is the place to find bastions of sexism, racism and other discriminatory views ( it's 'a club' in pockets) - so why would I recommend it ? ... I'd say try somewhere that operates in this century.

## OF VALUE

All 265 interviewees were asked what they valued generally about their CoB employment. While the responses were mixed, people were largely able to focus on something positive, providing particularly useful insights into why people felt a purposeful alignment with CoB. Generally people could identify at least one thing they valued even if they were disgruntled or aggrieved. Others nominated a range of things.

The following collection of views speak to a considerable and important level of commitment to the organisation as a local government entity. It is noteworthy that similar information surfaced from a cross section of CoB departments. Further similar information was offered up by employees and volunteers, and simultaneously from a full range of hierarchical levels workforce wide.

### ***What do you value about your employment with Council generally ?***

The largest number responded that the people they worked with, and the personal and professional relationships that they had developed were of most value when it came to their CoB employment. A majority also identified that it was the type of work undertaken for the community that made their CoB employment of key value to them. Over half of the 265 talked about valuing the opportunity to give back, the nature of public engagement, working to make Ballarat a better and more friendly place, involvement in community based projects and avenues to support those in the community who were in need, be it directly or in a support based capacity.

Stability of employment, a job in a difficult economic climate, fulltime employment, long-term employment, workplace conditions and steady interesting work featured repeatedly. Many also indicated that they valued flexibility, superannuation and good wages. Several noted that the organisation was large enough to be able to provide growth opportunities for people.

High standards established and adhered to for the community were valued, with some noting that stakeholder interests were genuinely taken into account by Council. Others emphasised that they valued the opportunity to partake in the shaping of the future city and the well-being of the community. Quite a few said they valued the opportunity to be engaged in work that left a legacy.

Answers to the question cited by individuals (i.e. only mentioned by one person) included appreciating the structure / rules that existed, having an operational framework that was clear and understood, and the existence of processes and practices to raise and help solve work issues.

Several people spoke about valuing functions that helped to ensure a greener environment and a greener city, and cultural institutions / infrastructure of which to be proud.

A few spoke about valuing training, a workplace where there were some different opportunities for advancement and the level of management support they got. These were items however that a much larger number emphasised as examples of what was lacking, noting during discussions that such things would be of value if employees were positioned equally / fairly to experience them.

A number talked about valuing an organisation that was inclusive and supportive of staff and there were many references to recent months, with people talking about how they had valued the support extended to them in a difficult and unique Covid-19 situation. That said there were others who shared contrasting views about a lack of inclusivity and a lack of Covid-19 related support.

Just being employed in local government specifically, was valued by quite a large number, with many saying that they knew the aim of a Council was to do the right thing and operate in the public

interest whilst ensuring fair and proper process as they served the community at large (this position was often put noting the wrongs of individuals not of the collective).

Some expressed that they valued the trusted and privileged position they were in given their employment and the ability to utilise their skills and experience while working in an area of personal interest / passion, and being involved in meaningful work that added value.

In addition to the summary above, a sample of diverse comments from employees and volunteers that surfaced in discussions and via the survey have been listed for consideration. Specific details and particulars have been removed.

- there is a level of respect generally for people and there are some really good people here
- with the Interim CEO things have shaped up well and working for this CEO means that we are being listened to, and I value that as it means we have a more positive future at CoB
- I value this Review and that other inquiries are taking place; CEO is serious about change
- I value the professional networks I now have above all else
- it's important to me to make a contribution to the community in which I live and I understand, and that I work in an area where I have knowledge and familiarity – this is what I value
- I value that there is HR support and a range of career opportunities
- I value that the organisation is increasingly inclusive of diverse groups and Aboriginals
- that the voice of First Nations people is acknowledged and being heard
- I value that diversity in the community is being recognised more and more by Council – it can still improve but there are ways to engage through our work irrespective of difference
- I believe and value that there is a proactive and positive attitude at council that advocates for the community and takes seriously the opportunity to shape the future
- I value being asked my opinion by this Review - I have not previously been asked what I think despite having been with the organisation for a few years
- I value that local government is a good place to be and it has the capacity to deal with mistakes when they're made and allow people to learn from them – they don't automatically sack you - ultimately there is an interest in doing the right thing for staff and the community
- I value that there's been action after the Ombudsman's report and that there is an interest in getting things right and trying to ensure good leadership
- I value being able to say what I honestly think in a private interview, and that someone is interested in listening to me
- as a volunteer I value that I have an opportunity to learn and provide a service to people
- I value that people are starting to talk about respect again in a way that is genuine
- I value that it is a reasonably safe environment to be working in – improvement is needed but OHS is on the radar more now
- talented people are energised and working for the good of the community and want to be in a local council - this is what I value everyday
- I value that youth are being recognised as having a useful voice,
- I value that it's not an environment where everybody is clock watching and there is a level of trust amongst our immediate team
- people have high expectations most often, and do what it takes to ensure good outcomes for the community; I value the legitimate and genuine reason that many want to be here
- I value that currently people are keen to support staff, and are being creative to get them through a difficult Covid-19 period
- I value that loyalty still has a place in some parts of the organisation
- I value the fact that there is a lot of knowledge and good corporate history amongst staff

- I value that the organisation is being honest with itself and staff, and it has recognised the need to improve culture and call out bad conduct no matter how senior the offending party
- I value that there is a level of integrity amongst some people I work with and that they are dedicated and committed, I know this is not the case for all, but there are some who remain 'salt of the earth' and have helped others through really hard times over the past few years
- I value that this is an organisation that has the opportunity to thrive with the right leadership and I'm feeling comfortable about the future
- not a lot that I value about the organisation – don't have an answer (multiple response)
- I belong to a recognisable constructive organisation that helps people, animals and visitors
- council has been extremely flexible which has made it a dream place to work during pregnancy and with children
- I value the chance to collaborate with people on a diverse set of projects
- I value quality staff, the team, and good managers (multiple response)
- during my time here I have been well supported during health issues
- I want to value everything about my employment with Council and generally I do
- I find this a difficult question to answer
- non ageist in my part of the workplace
- I value and have appreciated having a flexible casual role
- I value the ability and capacity to deliver projects, and being well resourced
- I value being a part of providing and delivering amazing facilities, services and programs
- protection, conservation and enhancement of our built and natural environment to help create a better City for our future is what I value
- I value the idea that we exist for the benefit of the community
- I value honesty - being transparent so you feel supported and valued
- I value the knowledge that plenty of work at CoB will always be available

### ***What do you value about your specific job ?***

There were 265 who answered this question. The vast majority could identify particular aspects of their specific job that they valued. A large amount of positive information was submitted and compiled in relation to this question. Generically the information provides a solid platform to progress discussion around job satisfaction across CoB and how it can positively impact culture. This is particularly the case when other variables of concern are appropriately managed. Despite the wealth of positive information and the fact that many people could articulate that there was much to value about their individual roles, staff assessments pertaining to culture were often left wanting during discussions.

It was a common theme that culture put a dampener on levels of job satisfaction. Indeed it was clear from detailed discussions with the 102 cohort that around 70% felt that while there was satisfaction and value associated with specific jobs, that work related circumstances often tainted the picture. These circumstances for individuals from all different areas included inappropriate behaviour of peers and more senior officers, difficulty with supervisor styles, senior management antics that impacted people in lower levels of the hierarchy, communication, lack of transparency, inconsistent process, limited resources and excessive workloads that were categorised by many as 'ignored' by management despite clear knowledge. For some poor conduct by members of the public (which employees and volunteers had to generally tolerate/manage) also reportedly tainted what people valued about their specific roles and job satisfaction.

A number of people spoke about areas of CoB that had been dissuaded (or in some cases pretty much banned) from working in a collegiate fashion with other areas due to management factions and divides. A range of people from different areas noted that despite change the impact of past

divisions were still sometimes felt down through operational lines. There was a level of resentment and frustration about how this had played out and in turn the lingering impacts. A variety of people shared that they believed that there were former senior officers who were still having a say in CoB workings due to their close personal relationships at employee and Councillor level.

Of the 102 cohort a significant number raised that their Position Description did not match what they did – and had not done so for a long time. A number spoke about failed attempts to address the situation, and detailed the blocks and barriers they experienced at both unit level and at HR. Several people raised somewhat irately that they did their boss's job and got paid far less. These types of circumstances were aired when people were asked about what they valued and they went straight to explaining what devalued their specific job when answering the question.

A number talked about their belief that they had a better skill set and more contemporary experience than their boss and it became a hindrance as the boss did not cope well with the situation, resulting in discomfort and in some cases reprisal. Others aired that they did the same job as colleagues (in the same or a different department) and there was a marked lack of wage parity. These were further examples of what was seen to devalue a specific role.

The opportunity for CoB to harness the positive criteria and resultant sentiment associated with why people value their roles awaits. Much of the content associated with what people value speaks to purpose, whilst simultaneously demonstrating commitment to deliverables for stakeholders. The information gathered under the auspice of this question (and the question prior) evidences the existence of well laid foundations for an improved culture.

What people valued about their specific roles was often similar despite the variety of roles. Heated and emotive comments at times accompanied a list of what was valued as people felt torn. There were those who identified up front and in turn voiced the need to actively balance the good with the not so good parts of their CoB work-life. Many of the comments below were aired repeatedly. Details that identify and specific examples, have been removed from the sample of individual comments people shared when noting what they valued about their specific jobs.

- my tasks are always diverse
- I get lots of support
- I have an opportunity to step up and make improvements
- I value my relationships with team members and immediate boss
- the nature of my tasks - I love what I'm doing
- I value that I see projects come to fruition and know that I was a part of it
- I get paid well for doing something I really like (multiple response)
- as a volunteer I get to make a difference to my community and I love sharing information
- so many different experiences and I get to build relationships with all different types of people
- I love working with children and hearing the stories I'm always keen to go to work
- my job is exactly what I want to do it's a great career opportunity to grow
- always learning new skills
- I help people in the community
- I have a level of autonomy
- it challenges me and I get to use my head and my expertise
- I have some influence, and I understand what people are trying to do and I enjoy helping them navigate the process to get things done
- I love my job because it makes a difference
- there's not a lot I like or value about my job (multiple response)
- everything is transparent now and we have strength on our side to do the right thing
- my job is creative and I feel like it is a huge honour to work in the arts area

- I help people in emergency situations when they're in the most need
- I'm not very happy in my job but it pays – I value the money
- I like the mentoring and coaching that goes along with the job
- my job is really flexible and it's stable and I quite like coming to work
- doing the planning and strategy and I like that I'm trusted to do it
- I can use my knowledge to help other people grow and foster talent
- talking to the business community and big picture projects
- I value people know me and what I'm good at
- it's really interesting work, it's well paid and it's enjoyable when I'm not micromanaged
- good job with clear processes
- my work with seniors is fulfilling and challenging
- working with disadvantaged families; it's very satisfying to support them and make a difference
- I value my job because it makes sure that my life is liveable given that I earn a decent wage
- not that interested in my job it's something I have to do
- I like the technical nature, challenges and problem-solving in my job
- I enjoy working with the community and welcome their interest in animals
- I work with the community and feel a part of the change process as we lead change
- I value that the challenges of my job have taught me a lot
- I'm passionate about our city so I value engaging with people who are interested
- team leader, my team, that everybody gets on and team leader is hands off unless needed
- the job is stable and I have multiple skills to offer and I value that what I put in I get back
- important leadership role as a female
- value the nature of my work, the work is always good and I never get bored
- rewarding providing community service and influencing thinking about how to improve Ballarat
- I value that I help make a difference to the environment and City for future generations
- young people are not always taken seriously so in my job I value that I have an opportunity to promote and advocate for them
- my job is very focused on delivery
- I value my job is about big projects, real outcomes, utilisation of resources and feeling pride
- I value that we are empowered to explore new ideas and present them
- I value the opportunity to build relationships and learn from others in the organisation
- I value my job allows me to understand all the different things that CoB does - far from boring
- I value that as a team we are encouraged to be pragmatic and do more than tick the boxes
- my job is my passion - how wonderful to get paid for what you love doing
- I do what I do because I know how to do it, but it's boring
- there have been changes so I value I'll be able to do my job in a transparent way
- given recent changes there'll be some license to revisit the role; looking forward to this given past constraints for reasons that were neither justifiable or reasonable
- I value that I'm pretty much my own boss and I'm trusted to get on with things as I see fit
- I value the opportunities to always learn and challenge myself
- I value the pleasure of seeing the completion of a project and the benefit to the community
- using my skills to complete community works and a team that cares for quality outcomes
- whilst it doesn't come often, the ability to make lasting improvements and evolve my role
- respectful colleagues
- transparency and flexible working hours
- I value I'm often challenged to think outside of my comfort zone; I enjoy the problem solving
- paid employment (multiple response)

## RATING JOB SATISFACTION

All 265 interviewees were asked to rate their job satisfaction out of 10, with 10 being the highest, and 1 being the lowest possible rating. There were 9 people who rated their job satisfaction at a 10. There were 3 people who rated their job satisfaction at a 1. The collective average was 6.

## OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

There were those who felt OHS standards were high within their environment, and other interviewees (from a range of different areas) who indicated that the approach to OHS was reasonable but at times relaxed. A smaller group aired explicit concerns with a level of firmness.

While it is important to note that the views, observations and experiences shared are those of individuals, the following areas surfaced repeatedly albeit at different points throughout the Review process (including content in relation to governance, culture, situations that unnerved or unsettled people, areas of tension, and situations where people had concerns for themselves or others). Scenarios where people considered heightened awareness would be advantageous included

- ensuring incident reports were completed for all issues in all locations,
- recognising harm / mental health issues as legitimate OHS scenarios when the circumstances were bullying, abuse, violence, stalking, attribute based harassment and sexual harassment
- increased levels of inquiry when employees and volunteers raised pending / potential risks
- roadworks, the lake, camping ground, water ways, and animal related work
- new / remedial building and construction works
- facilities and maintenance of infrastructure,
- heavy equipment use, maintenance and training,
- botanical and tree related works, and
- product / chemical usage.

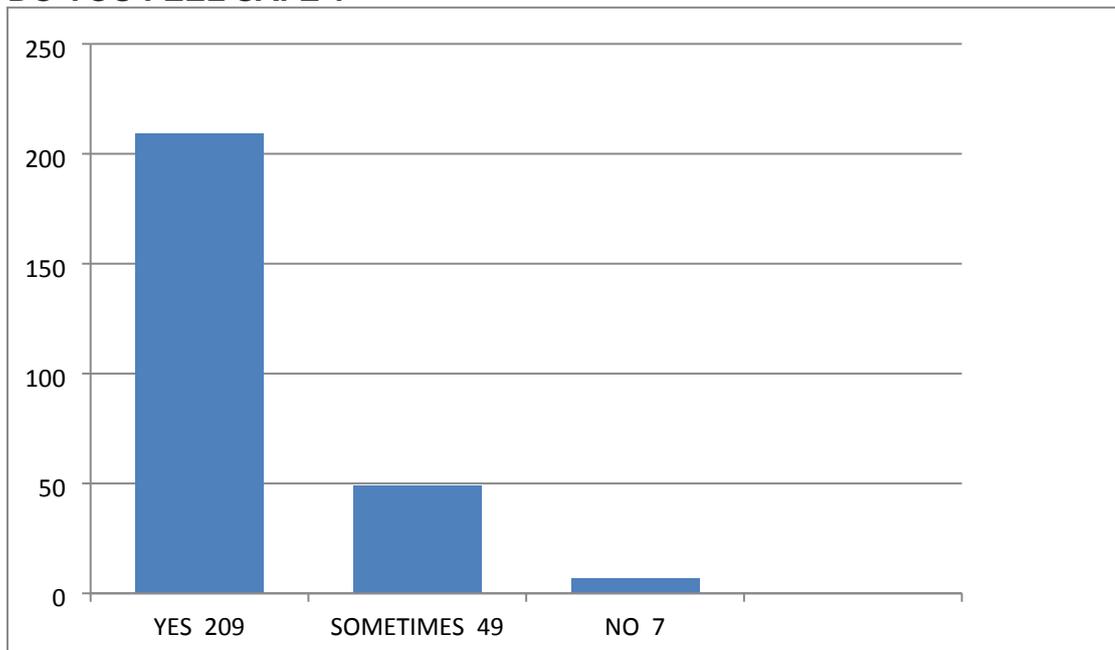
People spoke to a dynamic, or attitude, or approach, or management disinterest in different areas that had in their view resulted in insufficient attention being paid to the obligation of both assessing *potential* risk, and at times dealing with *existing* risk. It was raised in relation to several employment environments that the usual way forward was a sense of *we'll deal with it if something happens* as opposed to a pre-emptive methodology and a proactive stance.

In contrast people working with children, youth, families, the elderly and community stakeholders more often cited positive, informed and proactive approaches to risk and OHS. There were also heightened levels of comfort when it came to supervisory and management degrees of support and action in circumstances of concern.

Some provided historic situations of concern to show the degree of consistent and repeated effort needed for an issue to be recognised / taken seriously when it was expected that there would have been immediate acknowledgement and timely action to remedy the situation. It is important to note that several recent examples were also provided to show improvement in approach, and increased interest in OHS more generally, in a few areas. People said that they were feeling more confident about raising potential risks and existing concerns, given the clear OHS expectations articulated by the Interim CEO.

Bullying and sexual harassment surfaced on a number of occasions; people did not necessarily align related physical / psychological harm with OHS. A number sought to highlight their concern that mental health when negatively impacted at work was an OHS issue but not necessarily dealt with as such. It was noted by some that CoB needed to more readily classify such detriment and hold people accountable for conduct that resulted in any form of harm in every CoB environment.

## DO YOU FEEL SAFE ?



**YES 209 (79%)    SOMETIMES 49 (18.5%)    NO 7 (2.5%)**

The question *do you feel safe?* was answered by a total of 265 people.

The sum of 163 people answered this question via the workplace survey, and 102 people answered the question during private online TEAMS interviews adding additional information. The concept of 'safe' was left to individual interviewees to apply / interpret as they deemed appropriate given their own roles, responsibilities and experiences. It is noted that quite a few who raised workplace concerns of significance throughout the process, did not link them to safety per se, and hence did not say that they felt unsafe in this section.

### Detailed Information from the 102 Cohort

How the workplace and work-related environments (inclusive of Covid-19 circumstances) were *experienced* and why people felt either safe or unsafe was captured in detail during interviews with the 102 cohort. While safety was interpreted in relation to physical and psychological situations some people made linkages to governance, rules, fairness, management support and consistent process when articulating what was essential if safety was to be realised.

There was consistency in the information provided when it came to areas of concern. Discussion about safety earmarked it as crucial that CoB act to ensure it be prioritised by everyone (from Councillor through to volunteer) with increased and consistent action being taken to ensure the concept was embedded firmly into the organisation's DNA. One contributor stated "*it should be as inherent as breathing and people should be saying it's how we do things around here*". Further themes that emerged were *a safe environment was considered an obligatory offering for a local government employer*, as well as something for which *everyone needed to demonstrate more personal and professional accountability*.

### 102 Cohort - YES

A number who answered YES did so specifically noting that the question was being asked after recent structural changes, and that over very recent times there had been some action taken to acknowledge (and in some cases alleviate) concerns about safety and welfare. The YES for some related to a view that past unsafe treatment that they had directly or indirectly experienced, or observed colleagues experience, was less likely moving forward given people's behaviour and

practices of concern had been identified as unacceptable. Accordingly, a number answered YES adding “*I do feel safe now*”

The following points provide a summary of experiences of those who answered YES. Details relating to specific areas and examples have been removed.

- people listen to OHS concerns and respond well in my area
- community members we deal with in our area are usually respectful so staff feel safe
- I feel safe all of the time at work
- more recently, since the Interim CEO arrived, the environment has been safer for me and colleagues
- of late people are more willing to raise problems and the mechanisms that exist to protect people are actually being used
- strong leaders are now in place which has provided protection for vulnerable staff
- good OHS practice and a strong focus on the wellbeing of staff of late since the arrival of a new CEO and better (more reasonable) series of Covid-19 responses / options
- never had an issue
- comfortable that there is always someone to talk to about OHS concerns in my area
- team interactions are supportive, and people always look out for each other in our area
- people are not on edge in the same way that they were prior to recent changes
- staff I’m with are skilled and have good knowledge of how to manage issues that risk welfare and safety
- now the Ombudsman’s report has been released people feel safer;
- it is clear to us internally that bad behavior will be / is currently being addressed
- people on the ground know how to look after their safety in areas where due to the nature of our work OHS can be a concern; this is due to staff skill, and the protocols in place - we feel safe

## **102 Cohort - SOMETIMES**

People from different areas answered that there were times when they didn’t feel safe. Examples covered a range of situations that individuals claimed negatively impacted both physical and psychological safety. Some in this group had multiple examples of why they felt unsafe. Examples have been grouped by theme (as per emphasis / impact shared by contributors) and de-identified.

### Issues associated with employee psychological health and welfare

- staff are not always disciplined for poor behaviour and that places others at risk
- sometimes people are scared to speak up
- there is a danger of being undermined and targeted when you speak up
- the impact of increased workloads due to roles not being filled for reasons that were unfair and unreasonable (i.e. political decisions made beyond the relevant area)
- sexist comments that stereotype women in an on-going way and the gender / role assumptions (e.g. *admin girl* or *more interested in family*) that undermine and limit career opportunities
- repeat internal offenders and aggressive members of the public not dealt with
- limited support for staff dealing with rude and aggressive customers

### Physical safety

- sometimes locking up an environment by yourself has risks / security issues
- not everybody followed the Covid-19 requirements
- people not reporting OHS concerns
- venues that are open on the weekend having to deal with intoxicated and drug affected people
- when OHS requirements / checks are cut back to save money

### Inappropriate / unacceptable conduct of concern

- wellbeing and safety are discussed yet there remains middle level managers and supervisors who are blockers; they fail to do the right thing because it seems not to suit them
- work functions where there is alcohol and behaviour is unacceptable
- bullying behaviour from peers / supervisors / managers at all levels/ Councillors
- being undermined and my boss taking credit for my work
- fear of interrogation and unfair questioning for minor errors
- anxiety due to Councillor interaction with lower level staff
- having people on edge/feel like you're walking on eggshells as a way of controlling staff
- being told that you work for the CEO and not for the community
- being chastised when you ask questions about tasks that were not aligned to the CoB strategy or form part of an agreed / approved work program
- being yelled at by one Councillor
- unfair and unrealistic demands made by Councillors that negatively impact staff
- as change takes place there are active 'land grabbers' undermining jobs and 'territory' of others
- men who do not 'call out' other men for bad behaviour (be it that they ignore it, or just don't get it which is indicative of systemic gender problems at CoB, or they house the same bias)
- workplace complaints that are not dealt with appropriately as privacy is breached
- workplace complaints that result in some form of retribution - often subtle
- raising a compliant where there is no action, or no feedback given to the complainant
- absenteeism and poor performance not managed to the detriment of others in the team

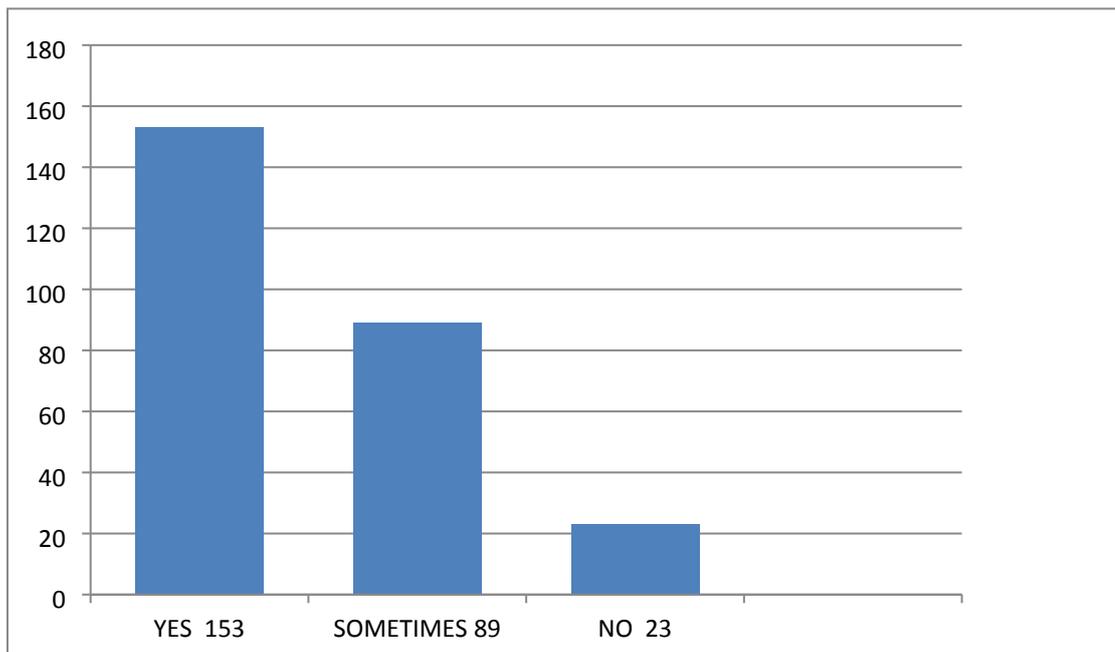
### **102 Cohort - NO**

A few people stipulated an absolute NO and indicated that it was an intense and onerous sense of feeling unsafe that had underpinned their response. Points raised included the following. It is noted some interviewees spoke to several areas of concern. Examples have been de-identified.

- sexual harassment
- nothing happened with an HR investigation – let down; had no answers
- professional and personal vulnerability when issues are raised that challenge a senior person
- bullying and abuse
- ongoing payback and detriment for speaking up
- uniforms and lanyards attract negative interaction from the community
- being the fall guy (with on-going consequences) for a senior person who did the wrong thing
- unsafe equipment

# THE WORKPLACE

## DO YOU FEEL TRUSTED ?



**YES 153 (58%)    SOMETIMES 89 (33.5%)    NO 23 (8.5%)**

The question *do you feel trusted ?* was answered by a total of 265 people.

The sum of 163 people answered this question via the workplace survey, and 102 people answered the question during private online TEAMS interviews adding additional information. Answers were provided based on the personal and professional opinions of interviewees given their firsthand experiences.

### Detailed Information from the 102 Cohort

Interviewees discussed personal and professional trust, and the implications of a lack of trust. Discussions generally spanned two-three years. A lot of positive information was shared. The degree of trust, friendship and support within immediate teams was consistently raised and became a predominant feature throughout discussions related to most areas. It out-weighted the level of trust in CoB leadership. It was also the trust, friendship and support in immediate teams that appeared to operate as the glue that kept people engaged and able to move beyond difficult situations. Quite a few people from a range of areas shared that it was their immediate team members, peers from other areas, mentors and in some cases the grassroots line supervision that they relied upon in preference to / in the absence of senior leadership. That said, a couple of middle level managers surfaced repeatedly as examples of people who were trusted, well respected and held in high regard.

Discussions about trust were also informed by Covid-19 circumstances and for a number included the level to which they felt trusted working from home. Some said that they experienced bosses 'checking up' on them excessively, with a few raising the need to complete excessive documentation to show that they were actually spending their time 'working' from home. This was particularly the case during the earlier Covid-19 months. Such CoB requirements and the nature of certain management action was seen to relate directly to a lack of trust of lower level workers. Micromanagement and suspicion about work practices at home appeared to lessen as the 2020 year progressed and working from home requirements became an on-going necessity for CoB.

Many comments shared in relation to trust related to skilled and experienced staff operating at several hierarchical levels feeling like they were not professionally trusted; it was a strong common theme. Repeatedly it was raised from different departments that specialist professional knowledge and judgement did not seem to be valued, and it didn't feel like it was always considered viable or sufficient by senior management or Councillors. Staff from different departments also voiced that they believed at times that if a senior officer or Councillor didn't like the answer or opinion provided, that they considered it legitimate and necessary to *shop* elsewhere in order that the answer or opinion that was sought, could be found. Sometimes staff believed *answer or opinion shopping* was the result of the senior officer or Councillor not having a solid grasp of the complexities of what was being considered or requested. People said they felt negatively impacted, insulted and affronted.

A number linked these specific issues and their firsthand experiences to insufficient governance and noted the way in which scenarios like this played out was detrimental to individuals and culture. People challenged how *answer or opinion shopping* to please someone important could be seen as reasonable in a local government entity. People said these types of experiences over past few had resulted in diminished self-worth and professional frustration. Raised also were concerns people had for the community given the nature of ultimate decisions made, and the cost of actions that stemmed from *answer or opinion shopping*. Some spoke specifically about how such circumstances influenced their decision to look for employment elsewhere. That said, a number within the 102 cohort answered the question noting management and structural changes, a Council election and the fact that governance was publicly on the CoB agenda, gave them a degree of hope for the future.

## **102 Cohort - YES**

The following points provide insights into the experiences of people who answered YES. Examples have been de-identified and summarised.

- I do feel trusted to do my job, allocated tasks and follow up (multiple response)
- I'm trusted to get things right and to a high standard, and this is acknowledged by my boss
- in the team and unit I feel trusted; it is my experience that people feel comfortable and trust each other's judgment in my area
- my advice is sought and listened to
- I have the professional freedom to do my job as I see fit
- I'm trusted with private information and to access confidential material (multiple response)
- I am asked for my expertise, and my feedback as I give correct answers (multiple response)
- I am asked to perform higher duties as I am trusted and respected by colleagues
- people come to me for the correct answers because they trust my professional expertise
- it has been indicated to me that I do not place the organisation at risk as I am trusted
- I am trusted to make decisions independently
- I am honest, and therefore trusted; and my professional and personal judgement is often sought
- I've been trusted to manage very difficult and sensitive situations
- I am trusted to work across all levels of the organisation
- I am trusted to work with the community as the voice of the organisation
- I am trusted to work in a professional capacity with children
- my judgement in relation to OHS is trusted

## **102 Cohort - SOMETIMES**

These points provide insights into the individual views and experiences of those who answered SOMETIMES. The vast majority offered up an explanation about why they didn't always feel trusted. Details about specific scenarios have been removed. A significant number aired personal and

professional frustration and a level of dismay associated with the feeling of not being trusted. Some were insulted and felt disenfranchised, others voiced a sense of “I’ve given up on this”.

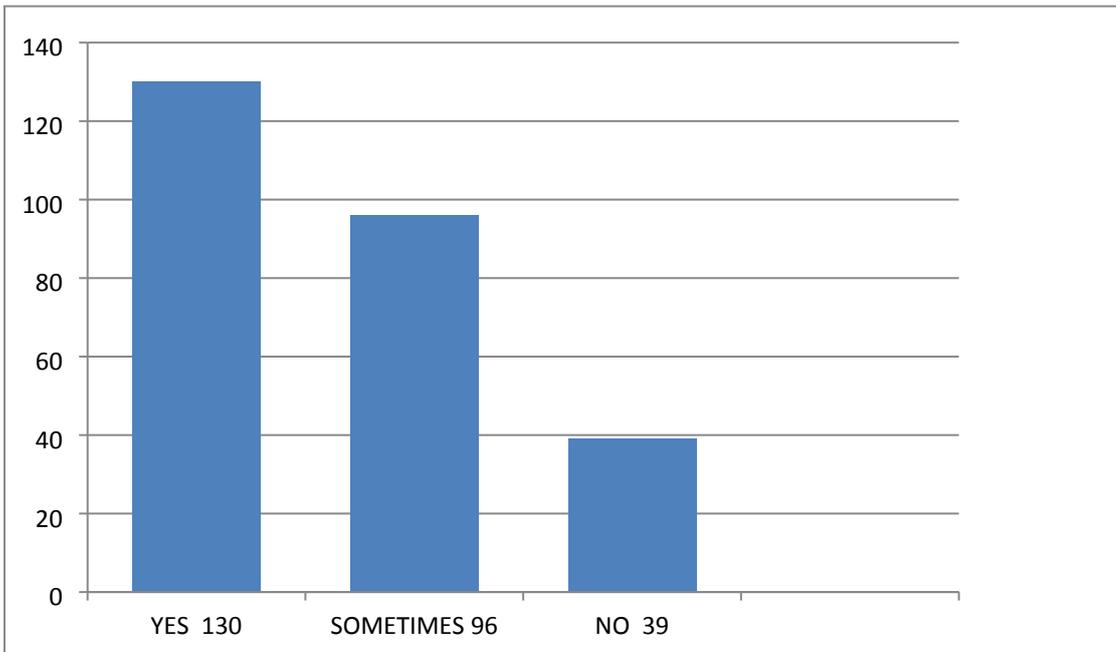
- your manager trusts you but the other department that is also involved in the project is skeptical and this impacts you negatively
- old school mindsets linger - staff automatically don't trust bosses
- the style of management at senior levels indicates clearly that staff are not trusted
- as a manager I know managers aren't trusted to stand up for, and support staff
- micromanagement, despite being well paid, shows lack of trust (multiple response)
- senior managers want factual reports altered when you are the expert in the area and they have limited knowledge – no trust
- a skilled and experienced person provides advice, a more senior person progresses it but does not understand the issues and cannot answer the questions at Councillor or executive level, but the staff member is not trusted to be present or to answer the direct / critical questions
- legitimate expertise not acknowledged, and you are undermined to serve a personal agenda
- rumour and gossip undermines staff, and these are not shut down by managers – sometimes they are spread by managers; this ruins trust in staff who are the subject of the rumour / gossip
- unlike my experience with other workplaces, we are not encouraged, not trusted by the boss
- biases inform people rather than real experience, and experts like me are not trusted
- conveniently not all ideas / expertise are heard as we are not trusted to contribute
- constantly checking up on me to see I'm working
- people are required to report daily on everything they are doing
- not listened to when it doesn't suit the boss, despite expertise (multiple response)
- at Councillor level non experts are progressing matters; the work of experts is ignored or misrepresented or has a different emphasis applied, sometimes purposefully
- teams in different areas have been blatantly encouraged not to trust each other
- length of service and tenure determines trust which is unreasonable, unfair, not based on merit
- people don't know what you actually do but they have an opinion that holds weight and share it
- people don't trust each other to keep information confidential
- Councillors don't seem to trust staff (impacts staff reputations) staff don't trust some Councillors

## **102 Cohort - NO**

The following is a sample of the type of information people who answered NO provided. Details about specific scenarios have been removed. A number said that they were unsure how to regain trust given unfair damage done at their expense, some of which was said to relate to poor management. People shared feelings of irritation, frustration and a sense that the situation that they had faced for a period of time was a lost cause or irrevocable due to other unwilling parties.

- expertise not acknowledged (multiple response)
- not the 'right' answer as not what Councillors want to hear so expertise is undermined
- boss didn't give us all the facts, so when a decision is made based on staff input it isn't as good as it could be - most unfair; cannot trust the process or the boss; employees then look bad
- micromanaged (multiple response)
- staff treated like children (multiple response)
- information misrepresented by boss to suit what the former CEO and Councillors wanted to hear; seems the information providers (staff) are not trusted
- relevant people left out of conversations to sure up an outcome senior people want – means staff are not trusted or there needs to be a way to get around credible staff expertise
- no consultation when appropriate – dictatorial approach; not trusted to provide sound input
- new people are always suspect / not trusted – it's ridiculous that length of service not expertise, skill or knowledge result in professional trust – demoralising

## DO YOU FEEL SUPPORTED ?



**YES 130 (49%)    SOMETIMES 96 (36%)    NO 39 (15%)**

The question *do you feel supported ?* was answered by a total of 265 people.

The sum of 163 people answered this question via the workplace survey, and 102 people answered the question during private online TEAMS interviews adding additional information.

### Detailed Information from the 102 Cohort

How the workplace and work-related environments (inclusive of Covid-19 circumstances) were *experienced* and why people felt either supported or unsupported was captured in detail during interviews with the 102 cohort. There was a level of consistency in the information provided by members of the 102 cohort when it came to discussing the elements that led to feeling supported.

A significant number (from senior management down) said that they felt things had been improving of late. Additionally for some the nature of interaction and level of care extended during the Covid-19 period was also factored into their answers given their individual circumstances and positive examples of support. Five people spoke specifically about being unhappy with how the Covid-19 situation had played out for them personally and how they felt unsupported and disadvantaged due to CoB decisions, and treatment, role changes without consultation, and a lack of designated work.

A small number indicated that they believed that they had received less support over recent times given personnel and structural changes. A few stated specifically that they were very unhappy about personnel changes in 2020 and the loss of corporate knowledge.

### 102 Cohort - YES

The following points provide insights into the experiences of those who answered YES. A strong sense of appreciation and gratitude was voiced by the majority in this group, and some noted how hard their boss worked to ensure support. A smaller number indicated that they were supported as per their expectations and that the support they experienced should be automatically forthcoming as it should be normal for an employer and it was in CoB's best interests to provide such support.

- my boss gets back to me
- I get help when I need it
- good guidance; my questions are always answered
- my ideas are welcome, and people are happy to discuss initiative
- my progress in the organisation is supported and if I need help it is there
- flexibility is available from the supervisor
- my colleagues and my supervisor are great – lots of support
- good support around parental leave
- manager is supportive to the extent that the organisation will provide resources
- things are better now, and I feel supported since recent management changes
- yes I'm supported by the team (but not necessarily by CoB) but it's still a yes answer
- I feel empowered and supported now since changes; it's an improvement on how I used to feel
- I feel supported by the organisation and management, but not by Councillors
- yes now, but not before over past few years (multiple response)
- I feel supported as there is a more strategic clear approach from the top down
- yes as bad behaviour is being challenged / addressed now since changes (multiple response)
- things are getting better, I feel more supported than I have for a long time
- 100% since the Interim CEO arrived
- my team gets what is needed, and support from all of the departments we need to deal with

## **102 Cohort - SOMETIMES**

The following points provide insights into the experiences of those who answered SOMETIMES. Details about specific scenarios have been removed. A significant number aired frustration, a smaller number indicated that professionally they felt disappointment and at times a sense of loss. A few spoke about feeling resentful; some were irritated that their boss didn't seem to understand what they did and therefore the boss was a hindrance when it came to making work progress.

Determinations about lack of support were voiced by a number, with accountability and blame directed towards some in the ranks of senior management, HR and Councillors. Operationally it was said that senior management had in the past made it hard for immediate supervisors to be supportive at times due to how they were treated; staff empathy for immediate supervisors surfaced in quite a few environments. Some provided examples of management conduct and decisions that were said to unfairly impede and limit the support extended to staff (as times contrary to employee entitlements).

- supported sometimes by immediate colleagues/peers, but not always (multiple response)
- not always by my supervisor who does not understand the dynamics on the ground
- not always, given that people don't understand my job and what is required in my area
- due to poor communication in my area support is intermittent
- support is forthcoming sometimes when you ask for it
- we are left to our own devices, and are not well understood, so support is limited
- supervisor does not have the skillset to support us when support is needed
- sometimes, but there are flip flops, and changes of decisions which are unhelpful; some of this is related to the Councillors' decision making
- not always even when you put yourself forward, you are not supported to grow and learn
- not supported given the large workload; it continues to grow and we don't get help
- the manager supports us but we feel the Councillors don't
- often not supported with a continuous high workload (multiple response)

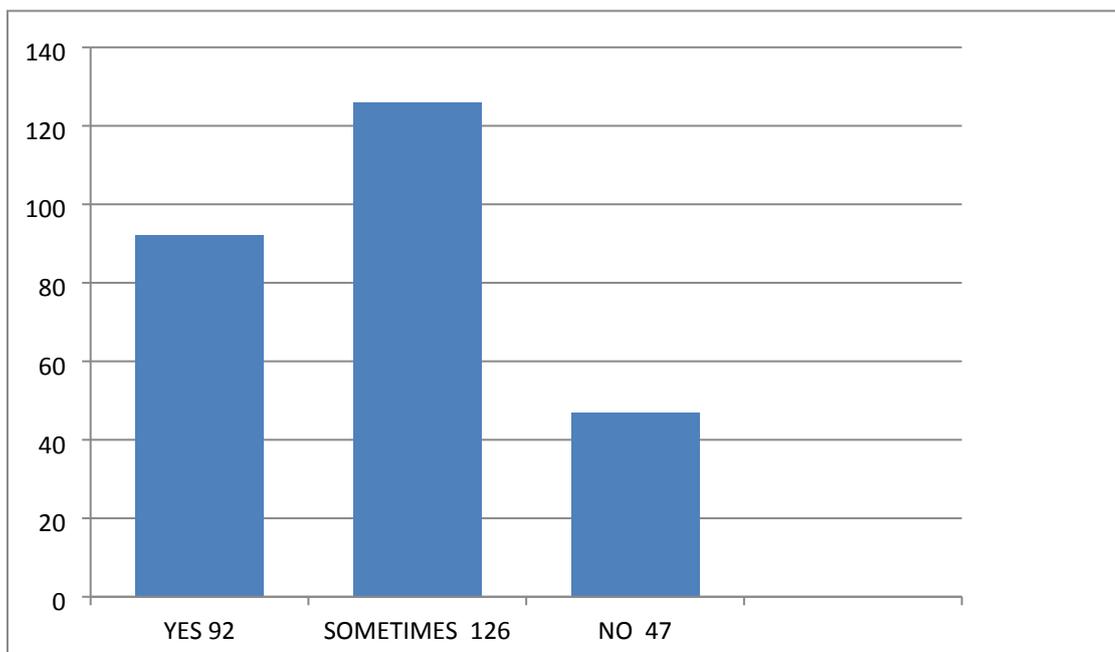
- my supervisor is supportive but support is more limited at CoB as you move up the ladder
- seems to be a lack of vision from senior management down, results in limited support
- it is hit and miss, depending on what type of support is needed
- not always trusted professionally so not always offered support to do things
- support from HR officers is not consistent when you need it
- supported by some people in the hierarchy, but not all – depends on their personal agenda
- you may get the nod to do something but you should not always assume that you will get support on the journey, in my experience that support is inconsistent
- my manager is a problem and does not always advocate for staff
- good ideas are sometimes supported, but not the people who offer up the ideas

## 102 Cohort - NO

The following summarised points provide information about why people answered NO. Details about specific scenarios have been removed. A number indicated that they had given up and didn't think things would ever improve, while others shared that they felt exasperated, overwhelmed, let down and at times used, or exploited.

- when there are complaints / issues people are not properly supported (relevant to complainant and respondent) including process and communication issues when people are stood down
- we are not listened to; there are blocks / barriers and personal agendas that override support for staff here in my area
- I feel my area is not supported by the organisation, nor by management (multiple response)
- Councillor behaviour is not supportive of staff, Councillors are heard to blame staff
- you cannot raise issues, there is payback and victimisation, but not support
- not supported given the workload which is always high / impossible and wears people down
- our boss is generally not supportive – no matter what the issue there's no support
- boss is insecure and as a result is not supportive of staff in my area
- boss is not supportive as the boss is threatened by staff with better knowledge
- supervisors aren't supportive, and say they don't want to know what your work problems are
- interest and ideas on how things can be improved are not welcome or supported at all
- the management is unpredictable and self-interested and just not supportive of staff
- management not supportive of people at lower levels (multiple response)
- management not supportive of OHS concerns raised in my area
- not supported, and asked questions in an undermining way - passive aggressive supervisor
- not empowered or supported to complete tasks
- lots of box ticking, no true support to do our jobs comprehensively

## DO YOU FEEL INFORMED ?



**YES 92 (35%)    SOMETIMES 126 (47.5%)    NO 47 (17.5%)**

The question *do you feel informed ?* was answered by a total of 265 people.

The sum of 163 people answered this question via the workplace survey, and 102 people answered the question during private online TEAMS interviews adding additional information..

### **Detailed Information from the 102 Cohort**

Answers were provided based on individual experiences and personal assessments of what information should be provided and within what timeframe. Timeliness (or a lack thereof) was of key relevance and surfaced regularly during discussions. The question provided detailed information about communication flow, quality and quantity as well as how it impacted performance and culture.

How information was used to control people surfaced as problematic in several areas. Dissatisfaction with information being withheld as people weren't thought to be senior enough or important enough was voiced on multiple occasions with staff then saying they found out from other employees who were trusted or treated differently by their managers. Some employees and volunteers stated they were informed by the local press or non-work social media before the information of relevance to them was shared by the organisation or manager.

Discussions revealed people disliked that communication could be superficial or vague; and 'spin' was unwelcome. Culturally some indicated that there was a sense of a façade, in so much as it looked like staff were being kept informed over the past few years, when in reality information lacked substance and very little information about what was really happening moved beyond upper management. There was a significant number in the 102 cohort who stated that they had seen some improvement since the Interim CEO had arrived, and that with personnel changes different styles of communication had emerged. People noted the Interim CEO modelled a communication style that was upfront. Seen to be willing to engage regularly, demonstrating the consistency and transparency that people expected, it was also noted by a significant number that it was welcomed that the Interim CEO was visible and personable no matter what your role or status.

People aired concern about false information that seemed to circulate very quickly; as well as the level of engagement in rumour and gossip. It was raised that some people were known for ‘trading’ in information, and others for blocking information at various levels of the organisation. The nature of what was seen as or labelled as ‘political games’ unnerved some and irritated others.

Issues associated with the transfer of information and people feeling informed also touched on Covid-19 circumstances. It is important to note that the experiences detailed were generally not Covid-19 impacted and far more reflective of ‘business as usual’ covering people’s broader experiences with communication and how informed or uninformed they felt. That said it was noted by a few that the Covid-19 situation had been seen to lessen the level of gossip in a few areas.

There was consistency in the elements that led to people feeling informed or otherwise. Improved communication patterns across all levels were considered an absolute necessity by many, if there was to be cultural improvement. Many saw communication as integrally linked to governance, sound leadership and a good culture.

### **102 Cohort - YES**

The following summarised points provide insights into the individual experiences of those who answered YES. The information and examples have been de-identified.

- regular team meetings (multiple response)
- first-hand information that is accurate and timely
- things have really improved of late (multiple response)
- information from top down seems to be consistent with my new boss
- good email updates (multiple response)
- good team communication on a daily basis
- bigger picture not always clear at first, but our management is now trying to source information and things are much better than before
- team and divisional meetings – its good
- sometimes there is an overwhelming amount of information, but we are currently getting what we need and it is not ‘fluff and bubble’
- hard to know what you don’t know, but we feel we are now well informed in our area
- getting comprehensive information given the nature of my job
- feel as informed as I need to be
- things have improved and staff are more able to work across different areas compared to the past when they were literally told not to communicate with people in other areas because of senior management conflict and factions
- much better with Interim CEO; good and regular now (multiple response)
- good now, things have changed and we are more informed by senior management

### **102 Cohort - SOMETIMES**

The following points provide insights into the experiences of those who answered SOMETIMES. Many offered up an explanation about why they didn’t always feel informed. Details about specific scenarios have been removed. A significant number in this group aired frustration, despair, and a sense of feeling let down by CoB, management and colleagues from other areas.

- team meetings not regular (multiple response)
- information is not always accurate and you have to probe
- we are told after it is in the local press or raised by community member
- still being treated like mushrooms; we read about things in the press before we’re told

- we as paid staff found out some important CoB Covid-19 information from the volunteers
- we'll hear about things when announced to the public, that's unfair and disrespectful
- supervisor tries to share but we know the supervisor is not always told the full story by manager
- just takes ages for the right information to get to you and sometimes it's too late
- communication from the top down is still lacking although it is slowly improving
- gaps between what the department head knows and what we actually get told despite the fact that we are supposed to be doing the related work
- there is lots of room for improvement when it comes to people being well informed
- not updated regularly, and we deal with the public which is difficult and embarrassing
- expected to know things on the front line so that we can provide information to the community but the problem is we're not told what it is that we need to know
- don't feel well informed because we often don't understand the decisions that have been made - there's a lack of consultation and a lack of utilisation of our expertise
- interim CEO is doing a good job but there are still information gaps,
- written communication needs to be improved in my area
- a lack of transfer of information when not in corporate area- people have expectations that you have knowledge and you don't have it - not helpful that managers don't share
- more information needs to be shared between satellite and corporate environments
- seems our supervisor's life is easier if they don't have to talk to us much so we are always trying to find out work information that others already know
- mixed messages around communication and how well informed we should be; some areas are kept up-to-date, others are starved – it speaks to the behaviour /style of some managers - hard when 2 areas meet up to work together; and 1 group is in the dark, it feels bad and undervalued

## **102 Cohort - NO**

These points provide information about why people answered NO. Specific details have been removed. People voiced anger and frustration, and said poor communication affected productivity and performance. Not keeping people well informed was deemed harmful. Those sticking to the principle of 'tell people as little as possible' were identified as supervisors/ managers failing to show respect and engender trust; and were named as people not following the Interim CEO's example.

- we're told things are getting better, but they are not; we're still not getting accurate information
- in my area there is a feeling of being left out, given other areas get information we don't
- supervisor tells us as little as possible / kept in the dark as it suits management in our area
- we are told "you don't need to know" when we ask reasonable work-related questions
- there are still people in the hierarchy who use information to control and maintain power
- information is blocked at the third level of management
- in our area all communication is filtered by middle management and we are drip fed
- if we question things, we are given no information, contractors get the work and information
- we are not informed about jobs or opportunities available internally - that is hidden
- supervisor regularly admits that they forgot to share things they should have
- middle manager likes to keep us in the dark; it's about power/control; they find it humorous
- told nothing - embarrassing; the community sometimes tells us what we need to know
- we assume things are going well but we are never given information to confirm or deny
- we make our own decisions because we are not as well informed, as we should be
- some supervisors / managers lack experience and expertise around the importance of communication - we are seen as annoying when we ask for information that we need to work
- I have to find ways of getting my own information informally given situation
- we are told things are getting better but we are not experiencing this and there is limited cross referencing of information – the silos are still operating

## CULTURE

All 265 interviewees were asked to rate the culture as they experienced it out of 10, with 10 being the highest, and 1 being the lowest possible rating. There were 5 people who rated the culture at 10. There were 7 people who rated the culture at a 1. The collective average was 5½.

Extensive discussions about culture with the 102 cohort revealed that a majority (but not all) felt a stronger alignment, and a more trusted connection to their immediate team and their immediate team leader / supervisor / co-ordinator, and actively differentiated voicing less of an attachment to their department (be it their former department or the department resulting from the recent restructure). It is this immediate attachment that influenced responses to culture in the first instance, in fact a large number said if they were rating the culture of their immediate team only (and could block out the other areas and work people that they needed to engage with) then the rating would be higher. Further, a significant number said that they were proud to be a part of their immediate team, and felt immediate colleagues went out of their way to ensure a good culture. This was certainly not the case for all teams with some people (a significantly smaller number) sharing the exact opposite experience.

Of the 102 cohort 22 people stated that the figure they provided to rate culture had increased compared to a rating they'd have given in 2019 and early 2020. For example people said *"it's 6 now but it would've been 4 a few months ago"* – the difference was most often 1 or 2 points. There were three reasons that emerged - recent personnel changes, the communication style and the reform agenda mapped by the Interim CEO, and the way in which Covid-19 had played out for some staff.

It is worthy of note that Covid-19 restrictions had reportedly strengthened bonds for a number of teams; a diverse range of employees stated that they were enjoying and appreciating being *"within a bubble"* (to summarise by quoting one interviewee). Not having normal contact with a wider selection of people and being outside the physical space had lessened unhelpful chatter and removed people from the politics and negative impacts associated with the broader CoB culture.

Some considered Covid-19 a *"bad-culture circuit breaker"* (to quote another employee). A selection of people from different areas expressed relief and at times glee when it came to being able to *"leave a lot of the bad stuff back in the office."* People unpacked how the organisation could grind you down and noted various ways in which this overwhelming feeling diminished culture. Interviewees shared that they were *"treated like a child"* or *"just felt like a number not a person"* or *"needed to come up for air given being at work was oppressive"* and *"didn't really fit in as multiculturalism was still something CoB had not quite figured out yet despite lip-service"* when covering off on benefits associated with being external to their normal CoB physical space.

Discussions with the 102 cohort evidenced a range of perspectives about what culture actually referred to; there was some distinctive common ground. One position that emerged repeatedly was that culture could be assessed when you looked at how an organisation officially *wanted* people to behave and then compared it to how people were actually *allowed* to behave, with the emphasis being on the allowed behaviour falling short of what was reasonable, respectful or detailed in behavioural policies.

Reflecting a few said some managers would project that things were tracking okay culturally, but it was a false picture - *"it's as if people are trying to talk themselves into it being the case"* said one; another noted *"if you scratch the surface the reality and the toxicity becomes apparent."*

A solid number touched on their being pockets of inclusivity that helped with culture, yet in turn some said rather extreme contrasts continued to surface in various CoB environments where there appeared to be *"limited understanding of how a sound 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace functions"* (to quote a seasoned professional). A few people talked about Ballarat doing *"a lot of trying but not quite getting it right"* when it came to achieving status as a contemporary, up-to-date regional city. Some people

talked about a Council and a wider community that still seemed to be “*shackled to the past*” or “*stagnating*” or “*unable to take the last few necessary steps forward*” or “*just a bit lost*” and “*suffering from repeat mistakes*” while “*struggling to cement its modern identity.*” The point being that contextually for some this was reflected in and continuing to feed Council culture.

Of interest was the tangible point that surfaced on several occasions when employees and volunteers discussed an inappropriate focus on anyone “*different*” or people who were not long-term residents of the Ballarat region. A few shared that they felt that CoB culture more broadly was obstructed by people’s personal bias and the nature of language used including inappropriate references to women generally as well as women in non-traditional roles, people from diverse backgrounds, the way in which sexuality and gender identity were referenced, and how inclusivity did not seem automatic “*it’s as if you have to earn it*” and “*inclusivity maybe, but it comes with a label.*” The fallout of such circumstances was offered up as examples of cultural “*blemishes*”.

The most common responses when describing culture spanned “*how the majority of people act*” and “*how people are allowed to act*” with some significant highlighting of what was modelled by those in supervisory, management, executive and Councillor roles. Also raised repeatedly was that culture was “*a way of thinking*” and “*how people interacted when comfortable*” or had let their guard down, as well as it’s all about “*how people treated each other.*”

While some did not expand beyond the concept of collective behaviour, others fleshed out the concept of workplace culture making explicit links to what they personally experienced. To summarise the majority saw the culture as depleted and in need of attention, while a smaller number were very clear about it being deleterious and punitive.

Some spoke about negative personal impacts, naming offending parties at various levels. Others described patterns of unchallenged bad behaviour and ways in which such behaviour was fostered or rewarded, with people replicating the accepted standard of bad behaviour with little thought, or to avoid untoward attention from a powerful or networked offending party. The bad behaviour seen to negatively impact culture and tarnish workplace dynamics included offensive gossip, disrespectful behaviour, purposeful behaviour that was abusive, and threatening conduct that set out to control, belittle and embarrass. Additionally people shared personal experiences and described behaviour that had diminished their self-worth, damaged their self-esteem and undermined their professional confidence, as well as the sound credible reputations of a range of colleagues.

The common position was that CoB culture (big-picture) needed to improve significantly and promptly, and that this needed to happen in a way that was nurturing and mindful of what people had been unfairly exposed to internally and externally. Councillor behaviour as a leadership group, as well as in relation to staff and stakeholder interaction was seen as important when it came to establishing cultural standards. When discussing current culture, Councillor conduct was positioned as predictive and party to messaging acceptable standards for all. The CEO and all managers were seen to have a crucial role in rebuilding the culture ensuring appropriate role modelling and messaging, and the courage to call-out those (including their peers and Councillors) who strayed. Some talked about how Councillors conducted themselves and the associated consequences of giving others clear permission to behave in the same way, and that to do so was fine in the workplace. There were both positive and negative scenarios referenced.

Of particular interest were the following comments about how culture was understood. These answers surfaced when people were asked what culture meant and how it was experienced. At the outset it should be noted that some 8 people in the 102 cohort responded by saying that they didn’t really know or couldn’t explain culture. One said “*it’s a term that’s used a lot and means different things to different people – but I have no definition*”

In summary a solid number identified culture as a an ever-evolving or living thing that comprised behaviours, attitudes, characteristics and personalities. These things were seen to set an overall tone, determine dynamics, and map how to approach the work and all manner of interactions. The majority indicated that they'd experienced culture playing a powerful role when it came to assessing work and employment satisfaction levels, the nature of professional relationships, and contributing to the possibility of career longevity / progression as an employee or volunteer at CoB.

Some articulated that it was because of culture that they stuck to themselves and had as little as possible to do with a boss or others at work. A few particularly sad and debilitating examples were shared. Stories evidenced people both present and looking on, but doing anything to help a colleague under negative verbal or physical impact / encounter. Other stories had peers saying that they could not risk stepping-in as they didn't want to be the next in line for the same treatment.

Seen to be a mix of commitment and values led by leadership from Councillors down, punctuated by daily interactions, the collective picture of what culture at CoB should be emerged as a combination of professional respect, behaviour and attitudes that contributed to the emotional climate and framed all relational engagement. Some fleshed out the relevance and existence of unspoken and unwritten protocols that bonded people, or alternatively created division and tore people down when the protocols were ignored, sullied, or exploited for personal gain.

These sample comments from all levels of CoB span individual views about the concept of culture

- it is how people fit in with each other and how they support each other
- a good culture is where you walk in and take note of how you're greeted and it's an environment with no bullying and you are not made to feel inadequate
- a good culture is where you are always comfortable and happy and safe
- culture is about how you feel in the organisation; how you relate to the values and the people
- culture is your physical and psychological environment
- it's the grand total of beliefs and attitudes of the people and your organisation irrespective of rank and it's how and why (or why it doesn't) all fit together
- culture is just about the way we do things and how we behave; you'll either be happy and enjoy it or unhappy and hate it
- culture is about the honesty and integrity in coming to work and behaving in a way that maintains the status quo between people
- it's how you communicate and get along, with leadership demonstrating the expectations
- it's about treatment, which leads to morale levels – culture is how happy you are
- morale is a symptom of culture and it is an indicator of how things are going - if people have values and put people first morale will be high and the culture will be good; if they don't it'll be an unsettling workplace and the culture will be bad
- it's the sum of how the whole organisation is going - everybody has a role to play and when management is dictatorial or people behave badly those roles have an impact on the culture
- culture is about behaviour and it is created and led from the top; if a director throws a tantrum, speaks to people badly, or takes sides unfairly, it'll show up in the culture (i.e. how people feel)
- culture informs you about if you can trust people or if you need to watch your back
- is the combination of all personal behaviour which then becomes a single voice that declares the health of the organisation
- it's valuing people and at the same time operating in line with the organisational values
- it's how we are visible and judged as a group of employees
- it's a measure about how likely we are to extend a hand and offer support of others
- culture is specific to an organisation; it speaks to the health of relationships and how power imbalances are managed, given we are all here for the same purpose and equal as humans

- it's how the machine works; is it oiled? do the pieces fit together? or does the machine fail or work at a lower capacity because people are doing their own thing in their own way with disregard for anyone else and the rules that should apply to all
- is about our values and treating people the way that we would like to be treated
- culture is our approach, our attitude, our understanding of difference and respect for others
- culture is how we think, act and treat people; it can improve or get worse - it is a living evolving thing; as it's about each of us we all have a continual role to ensure it's as good as it can be
- it is interaction, honesty, transparency, rules and influence - it's how people react and the decisions we make when we think of ourselves as a whole team rather than as individuals
- culture is something that builds people into a team, and teams into a group, and into a department, and into an effective and inclusive organisation ( or it breaks at these points )
- culture is about unified leadership presenting a single position and encouraging all to understand that we have a similar purpose and the same rules to follow
- it's how we do things, how we process information, and why we take the time to care for others
- it's about how we respond to each other and why we respond to each other, and the sense of comfort that comes when we get those two things right
- atmosphere, reliability and trust
- if you listen, and every door is genuinely open you'll have a good culture; at the point where people have other priorities or place themselves at the centre of the universe the culture suffers
- culture is based on teamwork at all levels, and these teams build in size to include everyone (or not) it is the willingness to do this that becomes that keeps the teams together
- culture is how the organisation deals with people and how people deal with the organisation
- it's individuals coming together to think as a group, to serve the group and the organisation given that they should have common goals
- from top-down it relates to values and morals, acting in good faith and sticking to your word, good conduct and leading by positive example - when it doesn't happen the culture becomes problematic and people are disadvantaged because the right tone is not set
- culture is the true picture of CoB – what it's really like inside, as opposed to what it promotes or pretends to be - it gives you a look at the undertones, morale and people's loyalty
- it is a shared belief system, a common way of doing things and a safety net given that a good culture is one that is supportive and friendly
- when you understand the workplace and what the parameters are, you'll feel the culture
- it's how things flow and how people are treated when they're not putting on a show - it's about the reality of the workplace
- culture is the fabric of CoB and a means of measuring contribution that is genuine and inclusive
- culture is the unwritten way of how we work together and treat each other - it's about accountability and responsibility and the systems that guide us in a way that ensures we are safe and valued; it's culture that determines if you are an employer people choose to stay with
- it's the vibe, and the ethical leadership from top down that shapes the vibe
- it's a joint sense of belonging and contributing, and then the nature of the response you get
- it's about inclusion and recognising everyone has an opinion and everyone has a right to be heard and treated equally, and not judged in a manner that isolates or disenfranchises
- culture is a reflection of how the organisation and its leadership are tracking - a poor culture requires those who are running the organisation to have a good look in the mirror
- it is about dignity and respect, people engaging in good faith, and managers wanting to develop others rather than exert unnecessary control and treat staff like mushrooms

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

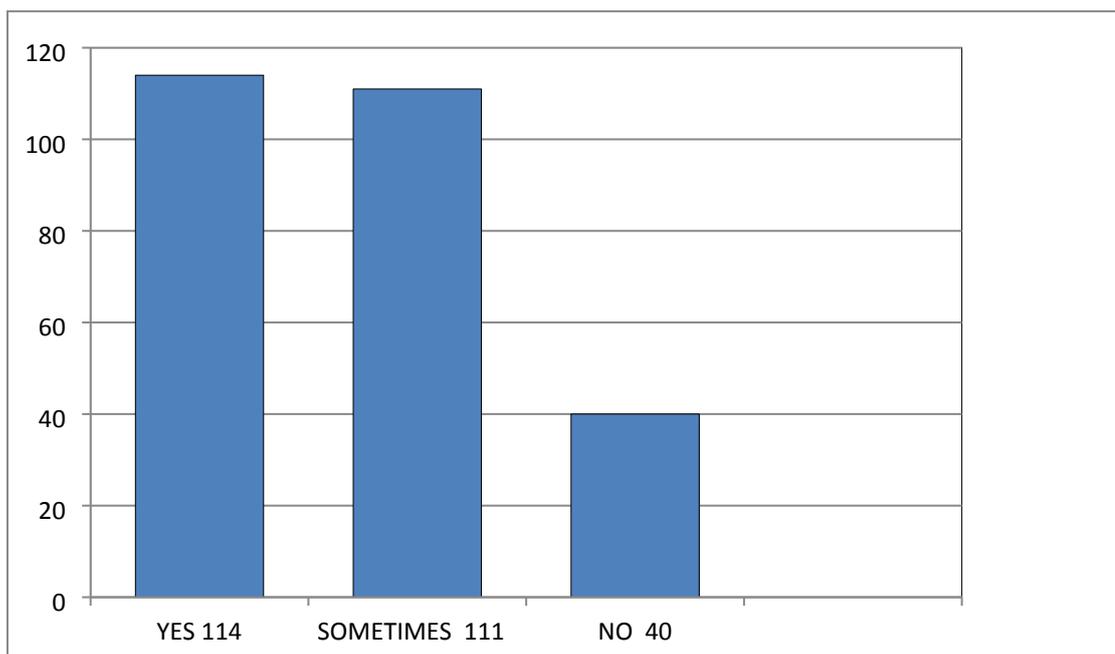
A consistent theme surfacing throughout the Review was an interest in professional development with many saying it was rarely offered and the opportunities were very limited. While various types of compliance training were seen as necessary for all, and available, many sought advancements through continuous learning scenarios that were professional or vocational (discipline based) but concluded the opportunities they sought, requested or expected didn't really exist. Some people based their expectations on experiences with other employers including Councils. A few reported negative experiences when it came to a lack of management support in relation to their own efforts to grow their professional knowledge and undertake further study externally. There was a sense of disappointment and disbelief (newer employees) when professional development and workplace training were not offered or seen to be supported.

The 'gender' training that many were required to attend was repeatedly raised, and it was clear that it had elevated many different emotions; there was some significant pushback about the nature of the training during a number of interviews for a variety of reasons. A situation that stood out as being in need of a remedial response that was objective and inclusive of all difference, discussions with members of the 102 cohort resulted in people saying that it was okay, it helped impart essential messages in an environment where thinking and behaviour from the last century was still considered reasonable, or it was quite good. Others said it missed the mark, it was really bad, it targeted / pigeon holed / alienated good men, it was offensive to some women and some men, it was simplistic and unsophisticated given the complexities of real life, it proved to be divisive and unhelpfully stereotypical in relation to men, women, sexuality and gender identity .

There was a strong interest in a commitment being made by CoB that led to a program of knowledge growth being established as part of a comprehensive workforce strategy, and in time it evidencing continuous improvement by embedding and fostering the concept of *continuous learning for all*. Seen also to be of particular value with respect to improving culture and governance, a few raised the appropriateness of Council holding a CEO accountable for achieving such milestones in relation to continuous improvement through workforce training and an embedded continuous learning agenda. A wide range of people raised that CoB should be like other Councils, government and private sector employers and place a weight on the importance of professional development and continuous learning so it becomes a normal part of *how we do business* at CoB.

# FAIR TREATMENT

## ARE YOU TREATED FAIRLY ?



**YES 114 (43%)    SOMETIMES 111 (42%)    NO 40 (15%)**

The question *are you treated fairly ?* was answered by a total of 265 people.

The sum of 163 people answered this question via the workplace survey, and 102 people answered the question during private online TEAMS interviews adding additional information. Employee and volunteer answers were provided based on the personal and professional opinions of interviewees given their firsthand experiences.

### Detailed Information from the 102 Cohort

How the workplace and work-related environments (inclusive of Covid-19 circumstances) were *experienced* and why people felt they had been treated fairly or otherwise was captured in detail during interviews with the 102 cohort. There were many different examples that emerged in relation to both fair and unfair treatment that people said they had experienced. A number of the matters raised fell under the broad umbrella of employment law and regulation. These examples at times spoke to the vulnerability of certain employees and the potential exposure of CoB with respect to various jurisdictions, including privacy, human rights and equal opportunity, industrial relations, OHS and other laws and regulations relevant to the activities and modus operandi of CoB. Importantly examples also identified key areas for emphasis in workplace policies and procedures under current review, and highlighted areas for tailored emphasis and updating.

### YES

The following selection of scenarios provide insights into the experiences of those who answered YES. Details that identify people and situations have been removed.

- now I do feel treated fairly given recent changes (multiple response)
- due to a new boss / change of senior management, I do (multiple response)

- my complaint was investigated and resolved (multiple response)
- yes; roles have been advertised and personal relationships haven't been the basis for decisions
- equal access to training was offered to the entire team
- overtime fairly is distributed
- rosters are fair
- paternity leave flexibility was available as per entitlements
- maternity leave flexibility was available without having to do battle
- part time options were available as is legally required in my circumstances

## **SOMETIMES**

A significant number of people answered SOMETIMES. The specific details for various situations shared have been removed. Key points have been summarised to show the areas of concern and discontent in relation to unfair treatment.

- team members are treated differently due to personal likes and dislikes of the boss
- merit not always applied during internal recruitment and secondment
- secondments just given to some people and not advertised
- people overlooked for opportunities if they are not part of the right club
- favouritism is historic – it continues and it's about who knows who in the zoo
- some people are more entitled to information than others – no consistency
- vested interests in different stakeholders leads to unfair treatment
- manager took out frustrations on me when I insisted on transparency
- staff in 1 area directed not to speak to staff in another area due to senior management conflict
- senior staff transferring information /gossip and rumours to the detriment of junior staff
- caught in the middle of the delivery of a pet project of a Councillor - not all went to plan, and the more junior staff were blamed
- EFT removed (no good reason) when people left, others bore the workload (multiple response)
- managers do not stand up for staff when having to manage unprofessional behaviour of Councillors at events and when they speak to staff poorly
- stereotypes based on youth and gender impact opportunities for young people
- double standards evident courtesy of boys' network
- reduced / flexible hours for some and not others
- factions at senior management level compromised more junior staff and made them vulnerable
- Councillors more interested in some areas and totally disinterested in others; affects staff
- difficult staff member (too hard basket for boss) so situation not managed
- exclusion if you are not in the manager's favorite group
- being sworn at and called totally inappropriate names / sexist slurs / sexual language
- micromanagement unfair due to not be trusted despite expertise (multiple response)
- workload – can take three months to get a temp in – just feel overloaded all the time
- constructive criticism not always welcome at 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> level management; there are reprisals
- PD's do not show what people actually do, therefore not paid accordingly
- no transparency - same jobs are paid differently as they're in different departments
- bullying and intimidation / being yelled at and abused
- allowance for working outdoors only available for some and not others

## **NO**

Specific details associated with why a NO answer was given have been removed from examples provided by members of the 102 cohort. Key points have been summarised and reflect a level of risk for employees, volunteers, witnesses and CoB when associated with reported experiences.

- racism and related difference
- sexism - mood of the boss determines the climate for the day towards women
- sexist / gender specific treatment
- sexual harassment
- being yelled at, and abused, in front of others
- inappropriate physical contact
- professionally impacted / disadvantaged by manager's personal bias against women
- not listened to, despite expertise and then required to support an alternative decision of manager, which was wrong
- people rewarded if they tow the line – excluded if you don't tow the line
- unfair rostering – refusing flexibility for some and using a system of work to punish certain people who made requests, that others also make and were granted - bullying
- same job – different money (multiple response)
- asked to do job without skill / experience or training (multiple response)
- stood down with no evidence and no answers as to why - poor process
- no feedback at end of HR process (multiple response)
- formal complaint never resolved

## GOVERNANCE

While there is not one conclusive definition of governance, it is generally agreed it encompasses the system by which an organisation is controlled and operates, and the mechanisms by which it, and its people, are held to account. Whether people like it or not it should apply to every person engaged by the organisation, irrespective of their form of engagement (i.e., permanent employee, casual worker, contractor, consultant, volunteer, honorary role, a committee member and Councillor) and it spans a range of core professional responsibilities including ethics, risk assessment and risk management, applicable legislative frameworks and compliance, security and administration.

On the ground, governance involves relationships between staff, management, the CEO and Councillors, and all stakeholders (e.g., the community, state government, NFP partners etc). Governance provides a structure through which a strategic plan / objectives are set, and the means by which objectives are realised and performance monitoring measures are determined. A framework of rules, relationships, systems and processes within and by which authority is exercised and controlled, good governance amounts to those in control being held to account in a fair, transparent and ethical manner, whilst ever mindful of the public interest.

The majority of the 102 cohort had a conceptual and contextual understanding of governance albeit limited in a significant number of cases. That said, separate from this 'majority' group there were around 15% of the 102 cohort who struggled to share a basic idea / definition, and of that small group some made the following comments "*don't really know*" and "*I've heard of it but I can't tell you*" and "*it's a department but I don't really know what they do.*" Given that in practice at a grassroots level the operational activity of every person needs to feed into a governance framework, there is some critical work for CoB to progress. Some were unable to align the concept with what it was that they did and how it applied to their tasks or their team's or respective department's undertakings.

When people were able to identify and define governance (to a greater or lesser degree) the following explanations surfaced quite regularly. The content is generally sound and provides ample material to tailor a 'Governance Information Program' for all at CoB moving forward.

- rules that we all understand, that everyone must follow, including adherence to all laws and best practice operationally; to apply to all activity, contracts, employment ( multiple response)
- the criteria that we need to look to, when working to ensure that everything is done properly
- it's a central point, it's consistency - it's about the same message and us all on the same page,
- it's evidence that we all know what the right thing actually is
- it is good leadership based on structure and rules that we're all expected to adhere to
- managers that lead well, communicate well and demonstrate how to do the right thing
- it is about proactively optimising staff effort to ensure policy and processes are followed
- means we achieve in the public interest by doing things the right way, and by being compliant
- it means we have systems in place to follow and an environment that is receptive to, rather than punishing of, people when they raise concerns about poor governance
- it is about internal controls to ensure efficient and effective process
- it is about doing things appropriately in line with CoB values and understanding that CoB has to be holding the line and be strict about implementation
- all we do is transparent, can pass the pub test / press test so community feels trust, experiences professionalism and is comfortable CoB is following through on approved (established) projects
- simply doing the right thing for staff, Council, community and doing it so there's no cover-ups
- it's about less bad press and really good policies and everyone understanding where the money has been spent rather than starting with questions about where it has been hidden or wasted
- it's not about Councillors getting their own way and excessive spending that risks the reputation of CoB and all the people associated – it is all about a way to stop this from continuing to happen
- it's about being professional grown-ups, who take responsibility for what's on their plate, and do so in a way that is consultative, communicative and transparent – it is devoid of personal agendas and egos, and always operating in the community's interest
- it is following rules and processes as we go about our work for the community (I was told firmly that I worked for the CEO not the community – that's not governance )
- effort to ensure everybody understands how their job and every task fits into the bigger picture, and people knowing the right way to undertake a job and tasks mindful of personal accountability
- tools and mechanisms that underpin sound decision-making and hold people accountable
- you can see governance when you can see people are responsible and personally committed to doing the right thing for the right reasons
- it's the way we keep an eye on everything; how we ensure CoB is running the way it should be
- leadership, good direction, tough decisions and taking action when necessary calling out everything that falls short ( it is not project overspends and Councillor interference)
- it's what we achieve when we all do the right thing together
- it's another word for transparency
- it is the cornerstone of local government – it's a process for every decision made at all levels
- all about people above me overseeing work practices
- governance is about doing things a certain way even though you personally might not agree to how the organisation is following the rules
- it is about how we steer the ship, the tools at hand being used properly, and achieving what we need to achieve without exposing anyone or CoB to unnecessary risk
- performing duties in a genuine and thorough way so that if scrutinised it can be shown that there were no shortcuts and no personal agendas / political games
- governance is to show a unified position from top down
- processes to link all jobs into strategy and the values, it builds and informs culture
- it's ruling with an iron fist; can be problematic as it doesn't take into account individual or particular circumstances that can lead to unhappiness due to red tape, and when people act to get a real outcome there's an unfair backlash as things weren't done by all the excessive rules
- governance means that you can't blow out someone else's candle to make your own shine
- governance works to limit risk and do best practice

- is often just red-tape and having to track through layers of process and discussion; can be unnecessary bureaucracy if a simple answer is known and easily progressed in half the time
- it's work being done without the unnecessary management crap, egos and the spin
- personal boundaries and working in a healthy way understanding there are consequences when rules and regulations are ignored
- governance is about guidance; it is the serious side of doing business and it must be demonstrated from top down for it to be understood and taken seriously
- it is the operational framework that the present and the future activity of Council must sit within; it is what we owe tax payers and ratepayers and it should be more important than the people who run departments, the Councillors, and those who think they are very important
- no shifty staff, no egos running the show, making sure people inside / outside are not ripped off
- it is something in CoB that few people have a thorough understanding of - they think they adhere to policy but they don't identify all conflicts of interest, they take shortcuts and make excuses
- it's something people in higher jobs need to know about, but not people in the lower level jobs
- it is security, currency of practice in all disciplines, accuracy, trust, checks and balances, transparency, effective communication, evaluation and people telling the truth
- governance can be summed up with the words professional, probity, and accountability

## **EXAMPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE**

Encouragingly a large number of people could provide examples of good governance that they had witnessed, or had experienced, or had been party to due to the nature of their work. Examples spoke to officers raising concerns about process that hadn't been fully adhered to (when in fact they could have ignored the situation) and a wide range of administrative functions including people ensuring forms were filled in accurately, that necessary permissions were in place for a variety of situations, and that precautions were taken to protect the privacy of community members.

Sound 'people focussed' examples surfaced from areas that dealt with children, youth, families, the elderly and attendance at cultural institutions, functions and the Aquatic Centre. Often smaller and individual examples that related to safety, legislative and administrative procedures, many examples reflected critical steps to keep accurate account of daily activity and follow established processes and protocols that people understood, and for which they stated they took personal responsibility.

Other examples people provided included invoices that were done correctly, correspondence that had no mistakes, and the fact that people took the time to proof read material prior to distribution. Understanding and adhering to one's own responsibilities as they relate to employment law and OHS was seen as good governance. Ensuring appropriate privacy measures are taken with community memberships at the Aquatic Centre, thorough planning and risk assessments for event management, regular review and management of botanical / tree related activity, and a proper payment mechanism for an author talk at the Library were all offered up as clear-cut good examples.

Annual audits where feedback is provided and the process is transparent was seen as good governance. Active involvement in procurement and the way in which people step-by-step moved through what was required of them was seen as good governance. Financial examples included appropriate use of purchase cards and clarity around what appropriate use actually amounted to, and compliance with budgets. Financial work being done in a transparent way and in a manner that relevant parties in the relevant areas could understand (or could get help to understand) was a recent example offered up. A further example was that financial undertakings were appropriately recorded so that processes were clear and open to scrutiny from all relevant parties. A few said the Governance and Culture Review was an example of good governance as it provided a platform for the collection of firsthand information without conflict or pre-screening by management.

The implementation of a gift register was cited as good governance, as was the establishment of a steering committee for a major project and people insisting that notes be taken for each meeting, and that there was always an agenda. A range of HR processes were offered up as examples given that the information was clear, and the process was consistently applied. Policy and process reviews that were consultative and happy to engage with those who had expertise and grassroots experience were seen as examples of good governance, as was having a risk register, and a team who understood risk management and what it was to regularly assess risk as part of daily activity.

Security checks and certain procedures associated with technology and IT were deemed to be examples of good governance, as was the way in which children were cared for and the way in which people understood their duty of care given their responsibilities as carers. Ensuring current/up-to-date professional knowledge was considered good governance, as was attention to detail in relation to food related policies that were very strict with regards to child health and food safety.

In recent times Councillors being requested to disengage from operational activity was seen as good governance by employees. People being able to identify conflicts of interest, potential conflicts of interest and perceived conflicts of interest, and then acting accordingly to minimise risk was seen as good governance. Community consultation and absorbing information from the community that resulted in altered plans to ensure a compromise, was experienced as good governance. A tender process where every step was transparent and appropriate was offered up as an experience of good governance. Group understanding /oversight of a procurement process and the way in which it was explained was detailed as an experience of as good governance. The fact that people were given an opportunity to put their hand up and apply for an acting role rather than it just being handed to someone who always got the acting role was seen as an experience of good governance.

While contentious in some areas, an emphasis on staff understanding systemic discrimination and the implications of historic sexism, was seen as good governance given that CoB programs were run and a wide range of people were required to attend. The proper management of FOI requests, leadership that the Interim CEO had shown by consulting staff about the proposed new structure, and the virtual Council meetings resulting in community involvement were also provided by interviewees as examples of good governance from their personal and professional perspectives.

A contributor shared an example where a project involved open dialogue with Councillors and senior staff about issues and how best to approach them, and the risks (which were clearly defined) and in turn a structure was put in place to be followed, and people had an opportunity and an established pathway to raise concerns without reprisal because the structure was comprehensive.

After some initial upset had been managed, the on-going management of Covid-19 in a range of areas (but not all) and the nature of contact to ensure people were tracking along okay was viewed as party to good governance. The Ombudsman's report was cited as an example of good governance, as were resultant actions taken at CoB to follow-up issues after the report was published. Contractors being well informed of all CoB requirements and being held to account, as well as CoB Inductions (given the timeliness and areas of coverage at the outset of one's employment) were also offered up as examples of good governance personally experienced.

One employee said that a manager who understands governance is someone who can go from A to Z on a project and is happy to discuss any part of it, tackling rather than avoiding issues. *"I have experienced some managers who can operate with that sense of totality and leadership; they follow up where there are gaps and achieve the type of outcome we should have if all of the steps that are detailed in a genuine plan are followed."*

## A NEED FOR HEIGHTENED GOVERNANCE

Discussions with the 102 cohort resulted in examples of situations where people felt there was a need for heightened governance. Current situations were tabled, and a selection of examples that could be categorised as historic where also referenced noting insufficient governance and lessons to be learned. Situations varied from lists at functions where people's details were collected and were visible to other attendees, to tree / botanical progress, through to public works where costs exceeded predictions, and situations that resulted in reputational damage, financial loss, and community disappointment such as M-Pavilion. There were those who felt heightened governance also had a role to play in ensuring Councillors were fully and accurately informed by people with the appropriate / specialist expertise, and others who felt heightened governance had a role to play when it came to limiting ad hoc or emotional decisions, pet projects and Councillor engagement at an operational level that employees said they had experienced over previous years.

Under the auspice of opportunities to improve governance, concerns were raised about internal appointments and secondments that were not advertised. Other examples observed or experienced included failure to follow process when signatures were needed, failure to fully proof read material, and concerns about the loss of good job candidates due to excessively long recruitment processes. From an administrative perspective people said that certain correspondence that was outgoing was not always saved properly and there were times where paperwork could not be found. There were examples of Position Descriptions not matching what people said they actually did, Acting-roles not being rotated (always assigned to the same person) and a view that at times jobs were 'created' for people to deal with difficult issues and particular staff. A series of IT systems and security issues surfaced with people saying that they felt sound governance required increased levels of transparency, cross organisation discussion, increased testing and planning, to achieve the best possible outcomes for CoB and to ensure that the left hand knew what the right hand was doing.

Quite a few interviewees noted that they wore two hats and while it was acknowledged that it was important to separate one's personal and professional lives, that it was not easy to forget that they were both employees and ratepayers. For a variety of governance related reasons people raised the Latrobe Street Saleyards, the Fernery at the Botanical Gardens, the Tourist Information Centre, the Ballarat Aquatic and Lifestyle Centre, the Bridge Mall Traders, Smarter Parking, the cost and fallout associated with Ballarat Way Of Working (BWOW), a structure built that exceeded established costs with unsuitable physical elements that required remedy, and the Gatekeepers Cottage. Respective concerns about governance came from different areas in relation to different knowledge and experiences. In each situation it was considered that heightened governance would have minimised the issues relevant to the individual scenarios. It was put that over the years there were times it was known that costs would exceed 'predicted' costs and that approaches from the start were optimistic if not unrealistic, yet people acted surprised when things went the way they did. Concerns were raised about decisions thought to be made on emotion in the absence of brutally honest assessments in order to progress or placate. The vulnerability associated with raising related issues was felt, and in turn feared by staff, who also reflected upon experiences and observations of insufficient levels of project management and risk assessment that concerned them.

Employees watched when costs moved beyond budgets and wondered where the money came from, noting simultaneously that roles were sometimes removed, or not filled in areas of large workload when a peer left, which was disheartening and stressful. With regards to governance and its application to workforce a few people raised that it seemed unreasonable that some could remain in a role for decades suggesting that to allow this was not good for the incumbent or the organisation. The comments weren't ageist in approach, rather questioning a lack of professional development and means by which to motivate and succession plan. It was put that professional development was a governance related issue that a manager needed to manage. Some argued a lack of professional development and growth limited governance application opportunities and understanding.

How relationships played out between Councillors and staff at committee meetings and functions, inadequate levels of disclosure, poor leadership resulting in a lack of transparency, decisions deemed unethical by staff, expenditure on incorrect material / product / systems, inappropriate conversations with community members, social media commentary and non-adherence to established process were the types of situations employees and volunteers said they had experienced or observed personally, and in turn categorised as examples of where more robust governance had a role to play. Other examples included questions about what sat behind the purchase and sale of equipment, and why contractors were hired. Additionally, the minimum hours for part-time contracts were not actually stated (and few hours were worked) yet casuals in the same environment were given hours out-numbering those extended to the people on the part-time contracts. Being told by a manager to do things differently to what was known to be required by the staff doing the actual work, was problematic; and was seen as an example of flawed governance via several people from different areas who spoke about feeling professionally compromised and vulnerable. Projects for which the rationale was categorised by staff as questionable and *“ego based ideas and decisions that key people embraced with a lack of accountability”* resonated as a common theme of concern during discussions about governance. In the past, Councillor’s use of purchasing cards for non-designated items and the expense associated with people staying back after functions were cited by employees at various levels as examples of the result of insufficient governance.

It was the view of a variety of staff that politics at senior management levels had unfairly impacted staff and contaminated governance responsibilities. With particular reference to such politics, factional antics and jostling for power, it was shared by staff that ripple effects were felt throughout the organisation impacting culture, the nature of colleague relationships, performance, professional trust, communication, deliverables and ultimately Council reputation. Many said that as employees it appeared to them that at Councillor level it sometimes seemed to be more about getting your own way and winning, then following an established process and working together to ensure the best of outcomes for the community as the absolute priority. There were a range of views expressed in relation to governance and employees more generally also; these are best summed up by saying that it was felt that not everyone had a solid and common understanding of what employment as a ‘public officer’ meant and required in totality, and in turn this limited governance on the ground.

Planning and development gaps, industrial relations, line managers not understanding procedural fairness, inconsistent information from HR, inconsistent management of volunteers, senior officers seen to set aside governance principles when it suited their personal agendas, and people failing to wear masks and fully adhere to Covid-19 rules were amongst an array of examples shared when people spoke about inadequate governance. It was also raised that performance and behavioural concerns were not dealt with by certain managers due personal networks and relationships and this in the eyes of some was ultimately a governance issue. Limited or superficial understandings of contemporary conflict of interest obligations and how this played out with people not disclosing, or excusing situations, was deemed a governance issue by witnesses and those who issue challenged.

More robust governance was considered essential in situations where some areas didn’t have team or group meetings, where meetings were held without agendas and minutes, social media use, and where there weren’t clear protocols about community engagement (in any capacity from Councillor through to casual employee and volunteer). With specific reference to Council committees, it was felt that there was an inconsistent set of protocols and staff sometimes felt undermined due to a lack of structure, inadequate management support and the nature of Councillor involvement ... *“governance was lacking when a Councillor tried to interfere in the process. I watched and the Councillor was not pulled up – I was told that ‘the council could do what the council wanted to do’ when I raised legitimate concerns. It is not like this at other Councils.”* It was also stated that managers were not always as honest as they could be with Councillors, and that there had been staff who leaked information or broke ranks and went to Councillors about operational matters.

## DECISION MAKING

The 102 cohort was asked about the nature of decision making as they experienced it in their individual environments. With respect to operational activity there was a wide range of scenarios shared that commenced with consultative approaches and inclusive attitudes, and people genuinely feeling that they were being listened to. This was seen to reflect good governance.

About half of the 102 cohort talked about their involvement in shaping certain decisions via examples, and how they came to understand through such encouragement and practice that they had a true role to play that evidenced their value. This conversation often linked directly to their sense of alignment with CoB and dovetailed with their views in relation to feeling connected to the organisation and being a legitimate part of CoB's advancement of objectives (in their own area and department) and fulfilling community responsibilities more broadly.

A concerning number spoke about being shut out when they had crucial expertise and should be consulted. Employees expressed that this grassroots practice made people feel irrelevant and frustrated, when it could have empowered people and bonded the team, whilst simultaneously fueling a positive culture and demonstrating professional trust. Situations where there was no invitation for contributions (when it could have been appropriate to do so) were provided from various areas. A few gave examples of how they had experienced a manager who would purposefully ask some in the area for their views, but not others, ensuring that those who weren't asked knew that the others had been asked. This manipulative style of management was said to be used to punish and keep people on edge.

Some spoke about divide and conquer mindsets at work; it was a power-play they said they had experienced as a means of control. Employees noted that decision making was one instrument in the tool kit when it came to a supervisor / manager and senior management achieving goals professionally or in an unhealthy way that left a trail of walking wounded. People offered up both commendable and unfortunate personal experiences in this regard.

There were those who said being set aside from opportunities to provide an opinion and never consulted when they should or could have been, was symptomatic of the style of supervision that was most comfortable with *"keeping the workers in the dark."* It was raised by a number that treating people like mushrooms formed part of the *"you'll just do as I tell you"* approach to work that some across management ranks relied upon, and reportedly had been seen to foster in others.

Some spoke of experiencing self-serving approaches to decision making (i.e. it was advantageous not to engage people including senior specialists as it could avoid input that spoke to the contrary to a particular decision that had already been made behind the scenes, and hence any effort was a façade). A significant number talked about having seen and challenged (often to their detriment) decisions that if publicly scrutinised would not fare well. It was expressed by some that distrust, resentment and a lack of respect had resulted for them from certain types of decision making that they had observed or experienced. A few noted the way in which things panned out left them feeling undervalued, used, exploited and in turn blamed when things did not work out well.

In relation to Councillor decision making, a number of people raised that over past years they had felt concerned that accurate content was filtered or mis-represented by senior officers who engaged at that level, for purposes that were either predetermined, or as the result of the senior officer not fully understanding the complexities of the matter at hand. Several people provided past examples where non-experts could not answer Councillor questions. Some voiced a specific concern for Councillors in this regard, given those who attempted to answer questions could do so with the wrong emphasis or insufficient accuracy. This annoyed and burdened employees who were employed as discipline based experts, and in turn people at lower levels, who said they could provide accurate emphasis and answers, to the benefit of all, if given the opportunity.

## LEADERSHIP

Leadership was of particular interest to interviewees, and surfaced as directly relevant for people when talking about good governance. It was a priority for a large number of people when contemplating where the organisation should focus its effort when determining key areas for improvement. While referenced in various ways in many of the 163 survey responses, a specific leadership question was asked of the 102 cohort and detailed discussions followed.

There was a selection of people who said they had worked with very good leaders over the years at CoB; they were people they respected and people they had learnt a lot from. Some provided particular examples of where they had witnessed certain Councillors show good leadership that engendered positive community and staff responses. Some interviewees spoke about positive leadership in their current environments. A few also noted that they were aware other CoB colleagues in other areas were not experiencing the same support, and considered this unfortunate.

In general leaders were seen as people who had the capacity and willingness to make sound informed decisions – large and small, in a considered and timely way. Transparency and good communication featured repeatedly when people said what they expected in relation to leadership. Role modelling CoB values and behavioural policies also emerged as areas of key focus.

Information provided during the Review spoke to 'leadership' that was experienced as divisive and at times unethical. People said they felt related negative impacts over recent years. This information was shared by people at all levels within the hierarchy, from across a diverse selection of areas. A few employees and volunteers said they felt personally let-down and disappointed professionally.

People raised that the circumstances that had surfaced in 2020 and in the Ombudsman's Report had at times placed them in a very difficult position personally outside of the organisation, when members of the community took them to task over Council decisions, poor leadership and senior management conduct. People shared how it felt to have to defend themselves, the sound endeavours of CoB, and their colleagues who worked really hard and did the right thing. People talked about how issues associated with past leadership had caused them frustration, distress and embarrassment.

Opinions about the nature of good leadership differed little. Some said every employee had the capacity to demonstrate leadership, and should. Others aligned leadership directly with supervisory, management, executive and Councillor roles. There was common ground when focusing on specific criterion that underpinned good leadership, and some said that they experienced these regularly.

A number of people spoke about how good leadership needed to directly link an organisation's vision, mission, approved plans / strategies and values to what actually took place on the ground; and that a sign of good leadership was that everyone could articulate how their job and what they actually did fitted into the picture. Subsequently there was some discussion about there being a lack of clarity in this regard in some departments, and how from top down both conduct and leadership style needed to mirror community expectations and the public assertions of CoB and Councillors.

Examples were offered up to highlight positive examples of senior management and Councillor leadership as well as examples of conduct that was not considered in the same light. The nature of these examples had employees and volunteers using key words to describe their experiences. For example in the first instance people used descriptors like ethical, inspiring, current, fair, informed, attentive, supportive, intelligent, credible and consultative. When describing alternative experiences words like unethical, bias, abusive and bullying behaviour, unfair, out-of-touch, opportunistic, exploitative and wrong were used.

People considered disrespectful senior management and Councillor behaviour that went unchecked extended permission to others within CoB to behaviour in the same way. Employees indicated that they were astute to the messaging, and expressed admiration and respect for those in senior management and Councillor ranks who did model good leadership.

When unpacking leadership patterns, people discussed why they felt doing everything necessary to please or placate Councillors was not an example of sound leadership. The progression of outcomes that did not necessarily align with agreed CoB strategies, plans or approved funding troubled a number of employees. When these situations were seen to arise staff generally categorised it as poor leadership on the part of senior management.

While there was a strong emphasis on the importance of leading by positive example from top-down there was also a number who believed that no matter what your CoB role or level within the hierarchy, that you had an opportunity to lead by positive example. There was extensive discussion around leadership and the way in which it underpinned, and in turn could ensure good governance. The extension of this discussion for a number was that if everyone engaged in a conscious way mindful of a personal responsibility to lead by good example that good governance should become second nature. An additional benefit several people raised was that there would be far less reluctance on the part of employees and volunteers to raise matters of workplace concern.

There was significant interest in growing an understanding about the link between good leadership and good governance, and many people indicated that they felt CoB should be emphasising how everybody had a leadership role to play as the organisation reshaped its thinking and practice in relation to governance. It was also frequently raised that as CoB moves forward and works towards improving culture, the importance placed on the need for all to lead by positive example should not be underestimated or undervalued, as it would ultimately improve professional trust and culture.

Some within the 102 cohort expressed dismay and frustration about the leadership they experienced in their own area. Circumstances where people felt the leadership was ineffective, limited in its reach, non-communicative and out of touch with the work done on the ground was experienced as demotivating and unfair. Some critiqued their 'leaders' and detailed how their focus at times seemed to be misaligned considering the purpose of CoB work and approved work programs, noting that personal agendas took a level of precedence.

Those who felt they generally experienced good leadership in their immediate area described it solid, consistent, inspirational, transparent, honest, caring, supportive, communicative, ethical and steadfast – this collection of people said they felt respected and valued, as well as comfortable to ask for help and raise concerns. Some shared that the leadership style and the genuine commitment to the work and community they witnessed, was a key reason why they wanted stay at CoB.

A large number of people indicated that transparent leadership seemed to be on the Interim CEO's agenda and that they were feeling confident that there would be an emphasis placed on leadership in 2021. It was noted by quite a few however that there were those in the organisation whose mindsets and behaviour needed to alter significantly in relation to leadership, and further that superficial change was something to be wary of, as people believed that they had spotted it and did not feel comfortable with what seemed like complete switches in management style.

Importantly people wanted CoB to take note of what good leadership looked like as it moved forward, ensuring it was informed by the circumstances of recent years. Beyond textbook approaches to leadership people talked about learning from CoB mistakes and tailoring development in the area of leadership, mindful of employee views and experiences. Interviewees said leadership needed to be sophisticated and intuitive enough to accommodate the damage done culturally, and to remedy the dynamics and ingrained levels of distrust.

Interviewees were keen for leadership to be incorporated in the 2021 Action Plan. Additionally, the way in which staff were communicated with, mentored, and supported to undertake their work, as well as protected, were seen as important elements for consideration when mapping the type of leadership needed at CoB moving forward. Of note are a sample of comments shared by 102 cohort interviewees. They have been de-identified.

- I only trust my manager to a degree as my confidence has been broken and my privacy breached.
- my experiences have been different to others, I'm happy with the leadership I experience
- leadership I experience tends to be aspirational, far from functional, little is actually achieved
- I've been asked by people in leadership positions to do things that staff really should not have to do for 'leaders' - I'm not a private resource or second wife
- I have experienced and learnt a lot from those who lead in my unit – very happy
- placed in a difficult position by someone in a senior leadership role, I took some action that was wrong that I was asked to take by the leader - I assessed it as necessary to take the action if I wanted to keep my job given the power and inadvertent threats
- I know there are leaders who have utilised Council money inappropriately over the years but I was never in a position to do anything about this and didn't share the information
- there've been times when managers take it on the chin to protect junior staff from Councillors and senior management - this is good leadership, but it's also unfair that they have to be a buffer
- it's unfortunate that some of my experiences have taught me not to trust people in more senior roles, these are (former and current) leaders – sadly I have also watched others 'burn' because they attempted to do the right thing, and upset a senior leader's agenda or personal plan
- my immediate manager is very caring and supportive; a great enabler - but unfortunately the leadership my boss has experienced is neither collaborative nor straightforward
- people have lived the experience of being pitted against each other by senior 'leaders' on purpose so that they can build or strengthen their faction and power base
- one of the reasons I enjoy my job is because of the leadership I experience from my manager (3<sup>rd</sup> management level) - this person is someone you can look up to and trust. I'm so pleased that I'm still working with them. I feel very sorry for colleagues who I have seen stressed and upset
- a good CEO / leader is somebody who is visible, who engages in a way that is genuine, and a person who is willing to listen (no matter what the situation is); so far the interim CEO is demonstrating these characteristics; people are sharing their positive experiences which is good
- there has been some sound leadership around Covid-19 of late although things got off to a rocky start that was unpalatable and unnecessarily stressful for some people
- there's a lot of repair work to do; a strong visible leader who understands state and local government is needed; they must also gauge and call out poor Councillor conduct
- I can provide good examples of leadership I've experienced over past years, and when I think about it these examples have ensured good governance and adherence to process
- I've experienced good leadership via an open-door policy that was real; the boss recognised if you needed help and supported you; this person manages bad behaviour rather than ignores it.
- I've worked in other councils and I would have to say that the leadership experience directly and indirectly here is the worst I've ever come across
- my work life has taken me into all sectors, and there are real issues here - it's sad that the CoB senior leadership group has done so much damage over recent years – it failed employees and the community, and brought the whole organisation into disrepute
- I have had several supervisors and managers who I consider to be good leaders while working at CoB however I have watched some other people be victimised and suffer quite a lot because of the bad behaviour of their managers who are not good leaders
- I've learned all the things *not to do* in order to be a good leader while working at CoB

- I watched over the years as people who wanted to do the right thing become increasingly more vulnerable, as leaders in their own right they have become more invisible because of that vulnerability and the powerbase operating in opposition to them
- I've experienced great leadership where the person who oversees us has taken the time to develop and train us - we are all quite different but there are no favourites and we are told if there is something that is not working well, in a timely way, and supported to fix it
- the model of leadership the interim CEO demonstrates is foreign to certain people who are currently employed - and it makes them uncomfortable; it is likely that they're going to have some difficulty changing the way they think and act, but they're undercover and in hiding at the moment
- I've seen good leadership in the Covid-19 period including a level of flexibility and understanding, as well as support that has been necessary for us to continue our work to the best of our ability; our team will be better off for it in 2021; boss rose to match the issues the pandemic dished up
- I think I saw my supervisor step up and become a true leader because of Covid-19; this has been encouraging but I also think the supervisor feels more confident, and braver because of recent senior management changes
- I have experienced good leadership and I'm very pleased that my boss is staying with the Council as this is encouraging and will mean that I do not think about leaving

## **GOOD LEADERSHIP QUALITIES LISTED BY EMPLOYEES & VOLUNTEERS**

The opportunity to gather the qualities, characteristics and skills employees and volunteers considered relevant to good leadership was progressed via a specific question put to the 102 cohort. Material shared in survey results when specifically relevant to good leadership has also been added. This information is a sound basis for a tailored approach to Leadership in the 2021 Action Plan

### **APPROACH**

- Right intentions
- Not there for self-gain & personal agendas / not overly politically
- Not a "yes" man or woman.
- What you see is what you get
- Stands by their decisions
- Enables & facilitates team members to do their best
- Logical, practical & fair
- Always willing to consult
- Does not engage in factions & whispers / gossip
- Will take a public stand
- Compassionate & empathetic
- True to themselves, stands up for what they believe in
- No need to be a war hero
- No need to be bossy or dictatorial
- Aspirational, & also demonstrates strength & courage when needed
- Does not shift blame or play political games/mind games

### **WELFARE & SAFETY**

- Engenders a culture of safety
- Checks on the health of staff
- Recognises when people need support & acts appropriately
- Recognises when people work really hard & when people need to drop back (for a bit) from a lengthy stressful period
- Stands by you in tough times & brings people together in tough times

## COMMUNICATION

- Good communicator at all levels of hierarchy
- Consistent content & information for all
- Transparent, does not hold information back to use as a control mechanism
- Good / active / effective listener
- Good concise writing skills
- Communicates promptly in an inclusive & consultative way
- Does not use “put downs” or sarcasm when engaging in difficult circumstances
- Promotes the importance of consistent communication & encourages everybody to be open & sharing in a timely way
- Regular updates & team meetings are prioritised so all have timely first-hand information
- Willing to discuss issues in a transparent & fair way
- Clear articulation of organisation needs & expectations
- Emphasises the need for consultation & makes it a reality

## GOOD GOVERNANCE

- Knows the rules & obeys the rules
- Encourages & rewards appropriate conduct
- Does not blame others
- Legitimate interest in their work & community they are serving, & acts accordingly
- Effective use of Council money & has a professional conscience in this regard
- Does not exploit power or relationships
- Does not breach privacy; understands the boundaries where people “don’t need to know”
- Polices & procedures always followed / understands good governance & makes it a priority that is evident at all times
- Follows the rules processes & policies & requires others to do so

## ENGENDERS TRUST

- Keeps their word
- Considered / neutral / impartial
- Does the right thing
- Known for giving good advice
- People want to work with this person because they lead from behind rather than banging the drum out front
- Shows gratitude & appreciation
- Is mindful they have responsibility for the people they oversee
- Fair & equitable treatment
- When communicating the written, verbal & body language is in sync; you trust content
- Genuine open-door policy
- Does not micromanage
- Up for the debate & will ensure everybody has a say
- Encourages others at all levels to be leaders too
- Shares knowledge willingly
- Assists in a way that is genuine
- Clear goals underpinned by the values of the organisation
- Diplomatic & ensures all issues are managed fairly & according to process (procedurally fair)
- Does not take shortcuts to suit self
- Sets the tone on a daily basis, willing to reign in any behavior that could upset the group

## MANNER & RESPECT

- Has vision & acts to bring out the best in people
- Approachable no matter what the issue
- Provides an environment to speak up /raise concerns without fear of reprisal
- Open, honest & transparent approach towards all people
- Calls out bad behavior without fear or bias
- Motivates people through action
- Leads by example
- Ethical, with clear professional boundaries that are consistent, & known to others
- Shows courage & humility
- Language is always appropriate not demeaning, sexist, ageist or racist.
- Knows where the line in the sand is, when it comes to jokes & banter & has no hesitation in reminding people or addressing behavior that offends others
- A professional / personal conscience that shapes how they act, & the work outcomes sought
- Personable & genuine in all work related approaches
- Guides you & respects you simultaneously

## MENTORING & DEVELOPING OTHERS

- A boss, a mentor and a teacher in one
- Comfortable with coaching & mentoring recognising that the needs of individuals will not be the same, or met in the same way
- Ensures people have the tools & resources to do their jobs
- Empathetic with genuine insight into the staff they oversee
- Has vision & is astute to people's potential
- Supports staff by giving them what they need to succeed
- Corrects & teaches at the same time
- Prioritises the developing of staff and encourages people to understand what they don't know in a way that motivates rather than isolates or intimidates
- Supports training & personal & professional development
- Recognises when someone is good at a job, that there are opportunities for progression rather than saying "you are really good at it, so we want you to stay there" (happens to women)
- Gives good advice based on expertise, minus the personal agendas
- Inclusive, pragmatic & always happy to engage & share knowledge
- Is comfortable stretching themselves & others & recognises that people make mistakes without it being the 'end of the world' as there is capacity to turn mistakes into learning experiences
- Legitimately invested in the growth & support of every staff member
- Understands they are only as good as the people they are mentoring & taking on the journey

## SUPPORTIVE

- Trusts his/her workers
- Stands up for workers they oversee / is an advocate for staff
- Collegiate in good & bad times
- Does not allow a team member to be singled out to their detriment
- Is a buffer when it comes to other managers taking a shot at the team
- Encourages people to speak up about concerns & follows through while ensuring there is no fear of, or real victimisation when people do so
- Understands how culture grows & how it impacts the work environment
- Ensures staff are not drowning in difficult / pressure filled times; gets in & does job with you
- Empowers, recognises & supports when you are struggling, as a part of everyday practice

## PROFESSIONAL MATURITY

- Engages well at all levels of the hierarchy
- Is visible to all levels of hierarchy
- Is respectful & sensitive to difference/diversity
- Actively grows a good culture based on mutual trust & respect
- Creates & maintains a friendly & comfortable environment where people want to work
- Has a plan that aligns to the bigger picture & details this information clearly for all
- Knows what to bring to the table & when, & does so with tact, compassion & empathy
- Does not have to be the technical expert rather the people enabler who understands the importance of initiative
- Transparent & can take criticism - does not see it as a personal attack
- Puts hand up to take on things that others actively avoid when action is needed
- Strong substance, no need to compliment self continuously
- Does not misrepresent the organisation, or speak or act on behalf of it inappropriately
- Is selfless & does not compete or diminish others self-worth to be productive
- Does not need the soap box as people seek him/her out for advice
- Is willing to reflect on history/past experience as part of a decision-making process

## RESPONSIVE & RELIABLE

- Is responsive & provides timely advice & assistance
- Is well known for getting back to people
- Understands what 'delay' looks like & the impact it can have on different people & how they do their jobs, & acts accordingly to minimise unnecessary delay
- Will look into & investigate a matter to ensure there is a resolution rather than letting things fester, or assuming they will sort themselves out
- Engages with people at all levels; not dismissive of people based on personal likes or dislikes
- Is respected & admired for how they operate, manage and lead
- It shows that they work for the whole organization, not just one part of it
- Known for doing what they can to defuse / limit destructive behavior & break down silos
- Awards & rewards based on merit, aptitude & skill
- Can be relied on to have thought through possible problems & risks
- Actively seeks to manage inequity rather than showing disinterest when it is challenging, & other departments are being unhelpful
- Guidance & advice always forthcoming
- Does not engage in nepotism & favouritism & addresses any concerns in this regard
- Strives to ensure a balanced environment and is not afraid to ask a lot of people in difficult times – but always supportive & allows for some down time
- Not afraid to speak up including with the hierarchy

## MESSAGING & CHARACTER

- Decisive & will make the hard decisions / reliable decision maker
- Projects a sense of "don't worry we can fix it"
- Understands accountability & is willing to hold people accountable
- Open & honest when tackling an issue
- Has integrity & credibility; not arrogant
- Good role model in paid & unpaid hours
- Does not lead by committee & is willing to make decisions
- Impartial/no favouritism
- Does not discriminate based on personal likes & dislikes

## STAFF ENGAGEMENT

- Recognises skill and expertise of more junior staff (doesn't dismiss due to being junior)
- Challenges you & provides constructive critique
- Brings out the best in people and consultative whenever possible
- Understands flexibility & how it can be utilised in everybody's interests
- Willing to challenge people so everyone benefits
- Drives the team by being his/her best self
- Ensures acknowledgement and praise when due
- Does not take credit for other people's work – acknowledges people who deserve credit
- Always puts at the fore how things could be done better in a supportive/helpful way
- Strives to keep people in the loop & has timely discussions to seek input prior to decisions
- Looks after staff while encouraging continuous improvement
- Good knowledge of the jobs he/she oversees; not afraid to ask questions to make sure a well informed position is put to Councillors or ELT - seeks and relies on "firsthand" information
- Respects you by providing constructive feedback without diminishing self-esteem / self-worth

## SKILL

- Technically good but has people management skills as their priority, & is promoted to a role because of good people management skills
- A good knowledge of the area that is contemporary, relevant, sufficiently detailed with a sound understanding of associated risks
- Strong capacity to delegate
- Can multi-task
- Innovative
- Problem solving capacity
- Intuitive & can see when people are not coping
- Collaborative & the ability to provide clear information about what we need to achieve, why, & in what time frame
- Proven ability to identify & remove impediments to team progress & achieving outcomes
- Driven by strategy & adheres to predetermined goals rather than whims & personal bias
- Is clear about expectations of team members & follows up regularly with people in a way that ensures people don't feel chastised or threatened
- Recognises potential
- Good "soft" skills
- Understands his/her own strengths, & gaps, & is willing to draw from the expertise of others without feeling threatened to deal with gaps
- Clear focus & understands that they are there to achieve outcomes for the community & recognises that that is the real priority
- High calibre, good knowledge, intelligent & worthy of respect
- Thinks about risk, & plan B, intuitively

## TAKES STEPS FORWARD ACTING IN INTERESTS OF ORGANISATION & STAFF

- Deals with performance issues & does not let poor performance of one person impact others
- Acts in order to bring out the best in people
- Asks for help in solving problems & does not pretend to know when they don't know
- Fosters, & responds to innovative ideas & is not threatened by keen & capable staff
- Ensures everything you do is in line with organisational & that alignment is clear to everyone
- Deals well with hostile & poorly behaved colleagues / mediates on cue
- Brings people together rather than divide, conquer & control
- Remedies negative behavior in a way that recognises the offending party has rights

## STYLE

- Walks the talk
- Leads by example
- Does not deal with issues by sweeping them under the carpet, ignoring or excusing
- Understands his/her messaging (e.g., emails at 6am on Sunday for mundane things)
- It's clear how we do things is not about them (no ego trips)
- Takes the team on the journey ensuring consistent contributions
- Builds relationships through honesty ensuring confidentiality for all
- Shows sound judgment
- Not into facades / not two faced – open & frank with all
- Choices made with best interests of community & staff at heart (not personal agenda)
- Appreciative of inputs even if not utilised
- More about responsibility & outcomes, & less about power
- Understands the difference between being friendly & not being close friends with staff
- Calm & confident in times that are stressful
- Does not cut down the tall poppies rather continues to foster
- Comfortable in their own skin & willing to step back & watch others succeed
- Not a fanatic / measured - not zealous
- Does not self-promote
- Frank, open & just in their approach to everything relevant to their work
- Does not rely on assumptions or entertain gossip

## CONCERNS FOR YOURSELF OR OTHERS

All 265 interviewees were asked if they had **concerns for themselves** at the time of the interview or completion of the survey. A total of 138 said YES and 127 said NO. While many of the concerns listed were of a personal / sensitive work-related nature, it is noted that content did vary greatly, for example from employment stability, terms and conditions, mental health, high workloads and role clarity, through to leadership changes, poor treatment in the workplace, unresolved conflict tension and anxiety and Covid-19 related circumstances.

All 265 were also asked if they **had concerns for others** and 172 answered YES and 93 answered NO. Again many of the examples shared were of a personal / sensitive work-related nature, and often mirrored the concerns people had for themselves. That said there was a run of different examples that referenced things including safety, unfair treatment on return from various types of leave, diversity and inclusion issues, harassment and bullying that had been witnessed, lack of willingness to make a complaint, people stuck in the middle of political or adversarial situations, people who had stepped-up in recent difficult times, and people who were seen to be potentially vulnerable given they were leading parts of the change program when not all employees were thought to be genuinely on board.

## CONFLICT & TENSION

All 265 interviewees were asked if they experienced current conflict and tension in their environment, and if YES, what the circumstances were. A solid two thirds indicated that conflict and tension formed part of what they experienced under the auspice of work, either as an employee or volunteer.

A number expressed that people were feeling uncertain about a range of issues given the amount of change and the restructure, and that there was an on-going level of tension (albeit not unexpected or unreasonable) that related to that uncertainty. An encouraging number said that they were hopeful that things would settle post Covid-19 and into 2021. A smaller number aired particular concern and tension regarding a new CEO in 2021 and that things may change all over again.

Examples were at times linked to a lack of robust governance by people when sharing their experiences. Some managers seemed at odds with each other and it became apparent to staff that there was a lack of willingness to collaborate across business units for fear of losing funding or roles. It was the view of employees at various levels that the topic of who's budget was paying for what, appeared to often get in the way of having shared solutions, and conflict and tension resulted.

Inequity in staff bandings 5 - 8 compared to managers and executive managers was raised. It was said band 7 staff had more responsibilities, workload and staff management than some managers. It was also put that band 8 and below who were on contracts had to reapply when their contract expired yet manager / executive positions were not advertised when contracts expired which created tension between management and officers who were working equally as hard for the organisation.

Movement of managers to other teams when there was no position advertised was said to create tension and distrust. The question was asked ... *“does the work actually require a manager, or is it a team leader level but that staff member was paid higher so has to continue on at that manager level?”* Similarly secondments that were not seen to be advertised caused tension and scepticism.

Several spoke about how CoB employees were supposed to perform their roles impartially, showing no fear or favour as 'public officers' however tension and conflict resulted due to *“sycophant and ingratiating behaviour”* as one person put it, based on who is and isn't important in the scheme of things, with favouritism, networks, stereotyping, community status and public profile seen to impede impartial judgement, with conflict, tension, resentment and non-adherence to process said to result.

The way in which some decisions were made on EFT, projects, specific designs and work priorities was said to create conflict and tension. Poor culture and low morale in certain pockets of particular business units was said to cause tension and dysfunction. That said there were a wide range of areas where it was evident that this was not the case and things travelled rather smoothly with any issues being dealt with in a timely and thorough way. A number spoke to unclear responsibilities and priorities between similar roles being problematic and a lack of collaboration, that led to conflict and tension. A significant number noted personal efforts to resolve issues had been minimised or dismissed. People who claimed to be micromanaged said tension and conflict resulted. Gossiping and privacy breaches caused conflict and tension; this was particularly the case when supervisors / managers and senior management engaged in such behaviour, in turn messaging that it was okay to do so.

Around 20% of the 102 cohort said recent personnel changes across various levels had in their experience started to alleviate certain types of conflict and tension. People raised that employees knew senior managers had had heated arguments, and referencing their expectations in relation to sound leadership indicated that as employees they sought professional maturity .

Bullying, racism, sexism and sexual harassment, as well as abusive and threatening behaviour surfaced as issues that caused conflict and tension. A number talked about inappropriate comments and name calling that resulted in hurt and resentment. Some spoke about inappropriate social media use by staff and Councillors, and others felt the local press fuelled tension and conflict and CoB didn't do enough to promote the good stories and prevent the negative publicity.

Communication issues were deemed to be a key source of tension. A lack of cohesion, and a visible understanding that people belonged to one organisation were raised often in the context of poor communication, with the failure to share consistent timely information (so all can do their jobs equally well) being an issue. Communication issues exasperated many as competing priorities that had to be managed were juggled and people said they felt overwhelmed due to a lack of common direction.

Tension and conflict was said to surface when individual team members didn't listen to what other team members said or wanted. Dynamics were tested when managers were said to perceive individuals to be a threat or a problem rather than an opportunity when they questioned things. An issue that surfaced repeatedly was the subtle forms of bullying that played out and exclusion rather than inclusion, being accepted as the norm. Hostility between people that remained unresolved was repeatedly raised. Observers were also negatively affected, and people noted that the messaging was to be wary. A range of people raised that there were unresolved issues and scenarios that lacked closure which dwelled on people and limited trust and comfort to re-engage fully.

A number raised how often tension and conflict resulted from a lack of foresight and failure to be proactive, pre-emptive and astute, in so much as people were not seen to readily risk assess things as part of their normal practice in many areas of CoB. Then, when untoward things happened it appeared that people had never thought of it being a possibility and looked for someone to blame. It was pointed out that there was often a failure to have think about the "what ifs" and people didn't put contingencies in place. A selection of people reflected on those around them who resorted to a blinkered and unsophisticated (laid-back / whatever / not my issue / she'll be right) approach to work; said to span hierarchical levels and affect others who operated more judiciously, it caused tension. Some spoke about specific experiences and fallout associated with a manager's inability to think ahead / deal with foreseeable issues before they arose, and junior staff facing the consequences.

Diverse circumstances were offered up to demonstrate current tension and conflict; some were quite simplistic and relevant to immediate relationships and daily tasks, while others were far greater in scope and quite detailed with complex ramifications seen as unfortunate for CoB generally.

A sample of examples that people offered up follow. Specific details have been removed.

- team scapegoated publicly for other's actions in another area; we worked hard internally, under great stress, to keep the organisation honest and ensure good outcomes, very disappointing
- on-going connection with former leaders had them still guiding decisions and behaviour of some
- exclusion, inappropriate comments in front of others, lack of support and treated differently
- autocratic approach still evident; you don't get full story, but there's a small set already informed
- members of the new structure seen to strongly aligned to past leadership; people can't see it yet
- my work is not a vote winning role, so it's discounted at team meetings and little interest is shown
- there is a definite "them" and "us" between workers and managers
- under resourced teams which leads to the community not getting responses (positive or negative)
- change of senior managers resulted in competing strategies between unit managers
- unhappy people will not report things as they fear they will have their hours cut
- heightened appetite for change is now driving all teams to be busier than ever, causing tension
- acting managers / managers work around people who have the actual responsibility to resolve issues; they avoid or undermine them as it suits not to address certain people who may know more than they do and in turn question their actions
- managers not taking responsibility for their actions and forcing those they oversee to undertake substandard work to cover their mistakes
- equal opportunity not readily evident / lack of professional development
- team leader incites trouble through gossiping to casual staff about permanent staff
- unrelenting workload - this is a long term issue that needs to be addressed
- safety issues not addressed despite multiple attempts by workers doing the right thing

- limited respect for management, given insulting behaviour behind closed doors including how staff were talked about (related to people who had stayed after restructure)
- not trusting management to keep information confidential
- old guard dominate / belittle new people in a passive aggressive way; some can set you up to fall
- requests/pressure to perform beyond role to maintain good standing disadvantaged due to refusal
- less conflict and tension working from home, but I was really treated poorly before and having stood up for myself my hours were cut back for no reason, it was payback
- conflict between what I believe I can achieve versus what I have been limited to do
- supervisor not taking an interest in what I am trying to achieve (multiple response)
- lack of responsiveness to community members and staff (previous workplace we had an expectation to respond or acknowledge internal and external emails within 2 days)
- the distinct cultures in each Directorate - it has been almost tribal, it's not a CoB team
- when Council or Councillors are seen / portrayed as bullies or corrupt it reflects on all staff who have to defend themselves all of the time externally
- political conflict, where and when funds are made available outside of CoB current priorities
- tension when projects take resources away from more important infrastructure improvements
- colleagues leave due workload adding extra pressure to team, people continually changing
- team members concerned that a bully will return to their area causing tension
- high organisational service expectations to be met without sufficient capacity
- business units not acting appropriately with databases, then demand action be taken
- behaviour contrary to Privacy legislation, Code of Conduct, employee's PD and Council's policies
- person in job they don't have the experience to do and used as puppet by more senior officer
- manager not a 'people person' struggles with professional rapport with all team members,
- can feel tension within the workplace - again its back to the culture
- decision making heavily swayed by motivation to impress or appease Councillors and this has had implications on ability to prioritise and effectively deliver strategic planning projects
- Councillor requests can lead to poor treatment of staff in relation to project decisions
- restructure did not deal with all issues / problem people, and the politics continue
- inability for management to trust and support staff is a serious issue of double standards given what people now know about management - general feeling of betrayal and toxic negativity
- ignored by some, people are excluded, opinions not heard, professional experience not valued
- felt unsafe during Covid-19 due to inconsistent upholding of rules and guidelines and when trying to make things safer, by gentle reminders, it was received poorly; colleagues feel the same tension - seems to be a different set of rules for different people
- people say something, then if questioned they lie / deny it and consequently get away with it
- people organise external functions and talk about peers who are not invited
- regular tension / dissatisfaction at work, no consistency of support, staff often unsupported and unheard; requests for leave ignored, rosters not making sense (left off or in on wrong days) ask for supplies and don't get them, general unrest; people worried about colleagues
- tension and conflict between staff (does not impact me directly) but staff come to me for assistance or advice – this puts me in a hard position
- long awaited change promised this financial year, ground to a halt as manager departed
- lack of certainty and direction, have had agency staff filling roles
- machinery sold that CoB now needs to hire; tension/conflict due to careless short-term decisions
- uncertain prospects of new positions and people not certain of their futures
- uncertainty and tension as to the direction of the department and future goals
- lack of team leadership due to unfilled roles
- last EBA negotiations did not provide equitable pay rates to other like Councils for same jobs
- trust is not shared unless you agree to all management decisions
- uncomfortable voicing opinions; some mightn't like the opinion as it may or may not change what has historically been done; tension and conflict about hanging onto the past (for wrong reasons).

## **WARY, UNNERVED, UNSETTLED OR VERY UNCOMFORTABLE ?**

The question unpacked cultural sensitivities, identified areas for reflection and highlighted areas for a focus on governance. Answered by 265 people, there were many different circumstances and strong feelings aired. A number expressed deeply felt personal and professional fallout, or physical and mental health deterioration, and negative family impacts given their reported work-related experiences. Decisions to look for other employment often related to specific issues raised. That said a number were unable to identify something significant enough to answer the question.

While a run of people said engaging in the one-on-one interview for the Review had been cathartic, (noting they appreciated that CoB made work time available to do so) the fact that it was anonymous resulted in some feeling comfortable to share their whole story for the first time, feeling that the information may count for something. In answering amidst concern, reflection, tears, remorse, anger, irritation, resentment, disappointment and frustration, there was also a strong sense of hope expressed in relation to improved circumstances moving forward. People noted that the Interim CEO / a new CEO and Councillors were positioned to make a difference. Specific details have been removed from the examples listed, and content has to the extent possible been summarised and grouped. There is some overlap with content already recorded.

### **RECENT CHANGE**

- Ombudsman's report (multiple response)
- I see a lot of the management resignations as unnecessary
- I have only felt weary and unsettled in recent months, the Ombudsman report wasn't great, but what has happened since has left me very uncomfortable
- sudden changes in leadership /no previous directors applied for director roles
- some people who should have gone in the restructure have stayed
- there are those who still behave in the 'old way' and they have gone underground
- chatter associated with former senior officers still having management and Councillor

### **EXITING CoB**

- seeing really good employees leave due to CoB not being a preferred employer
- good people leaving as they cannot stand incompetent management / poor treatment from supervisors and managers, and have concerns about behaviour that some view as corrupt
- people have left CoB, and the organisation will not give any explanation
- fallout from the Ombudsman's report - seeing talented and committed people leave

### **GOVERNANCE**

- lack of governance – came to CoB as a large organisation and thought there'd be advanced systems, good governance and it'd be thriving; instead it has been secretive, non-collaborative and inadequate documentation - terrible decision to join CoB
- dealing with multiple stakeholder groups working against each other and having multiple reporting lines - poor governance in general
- leadership not always demonstrating CoB values
- Councillors should know what is happening via the CEO – what happened?
- see that people have a very limited understanding of individual accountability

## RECRUITMENT & PROMOTION

- phoned to put in an application and they get the job, BUT interviews are still conducted (waste of resources, money and time for other applicants) happens at all levels
- managers moving around and getting opportunities in different spaces without proper recruitment processes (multiple response)
- roles being created for managers
- CoB top heavy and level 3 managers are blockers / barriers – some are unnecessary
- lack of advancement opportunities, yet some are offered to staff minus fair/transparent process
- secondment extends time period, not opened up by advertisement - just rolls on 3 to 12 months
- people being put into high paying positions without due course (multiple response).
- unfairness when it comes to internal jobs / movement (multiple response)
- varying rules for recruitment; unfair and frustrating; appointments without ad (multiple response)
- position descriptions not accurate which disadvantages you when you apply internally
- I asked to do an acting role until the position was advertised; I was laughed at and told "you don't have the skills" it was given to someone else and I was asked to mentor that person

## ACCOUNTABILITY OF TEAMS & INDIVIDUALS

- staff handballing things to others and not doing their own jobs (multiple response)
- lack of accountability re non-responsiveness between teams (multiple response)
- no recognition for professional qualifications and managers advising you to undertake substandard works to get things done, and then pass the buck / blame the team members

## CULTURE

- lip service is the norm
- listening to everyone grumble about the same things; broken record wears you down over time
- misogyny; the ignorant and conditioned don't see it; doesn't suit people know (multiple answer)
- workload increases constantly but it's never addressed despite requests
- culture has instilled a large fear of failure, resulting in in-action and slower rate of progress; promising ideas have been blocked due to a fear of senior managers not liking them
- how people talk to each other is poor, as is how people seem to be looking after themselves first - I've never worked in an organisation like this ... everyone should be working together as a team for the benefit of the community and all staff; not what happens or what is fostered at CoB
- general lack of effort to fix workplace culture in my business unit, despite many surveys
- senior management giving express orders for actions that prevented me from supporting other business units to achieve their goals – awful situation to be in; also risky
- I've been wary about voicing concerns about decisions when there's little or no explanation as to why the answer was 'no' or about a changed procedure; a culture of shut up and put up
- being lied to by a senior officer and no-one thinking too much of it – accepted as okay / normal
- manager's tactic of giving 1 person many more tasks than others to make them want to leave instead of having a conversation directly with them about issues of concern – observed this..
- unit has been made to feel unwanted resulting in stress for the workers regarding to job security

## WORK PROCESSES & COMPLIANCE

- BWOW - wasted money on refurbishment and hot desking yet studies show it didn't result in productivity gains or improved staff wellbeing; very disruptive; not realistic (multiple response)
- too many audits becomes taxing and not enough personal care and support
- past fraud issues
- asked to shred paperwork that should have been kept (multiple response)
- external scrutiny of people we are supposed to trust – most unnerving (multiple response)
- in the past asked to submit inaccurate financial forecasts

## PURSUIT OF BoC OBJECTIVES

- senior managers manipulating / interfering with professional officer decisions believing they understand relevant legal responsibilities, work programs and all the risks - they undermine team morale and team professional integrity to protect their own or someone else's interests
- political infighting of Councillors; it is destructive for staff and community (multiple response)
- undeserved poor public perceptions of all at CoB due to management and Councillor conduct
- witnessed lack of respect shown to staff and the community by a Councillor
- have seen everything seem to hinge off silo budgets - losing sight of the big picture and what we are all here to do collectively
- leadership's need for speed, rather than accuracy /detail (multiple response)
- no strong clear common internal strategies on how to deliver public strategies

## TERMS, CONDITIONS & WELL BEING

- frustration, stress, anxiety, overwhelmed – CoB not interested in some staff (multiple response)
- mental health really tested by bad manager – now resolved but resulted in on-going anxiety
- abused, called names, sworn at, degraded in front of others (some of it anti-female)
- lack of work life balance and workplace flexibility only offered to some (multiple response)
- poor response regarding deceased staff member – upset staff
- our voice minimised in terms of safety to make someone look better; as long as managers were happy with each other it didn't matter about the people who were doing the work and at risk
- advised I needed a medical certificate to take a carers leave day off - found another way
- we have had several managers in the last 5 years – lack of consistency caused staff issues
- external investigations 'tarnished' us with the same brush as wrong doers (multiple response)

## INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

- work policies are deficient – no real protection for contemporary human rights
- conduct of some former senior officers towards staff was poor/questionable (multiple response)
- no recognition of professional qualifications and no equal opportunity for training / development
- observing senior officers bully staff and no-one willing to speak up
- HR not dealing with issues of bad behaviour in a consistent transparent way of detriment to me
- bullying of a team member allowed to continue as manager not equipped to deal with it
- employment medicals move beyond inherent role requirements (disability /age implications)
- sexism, sexual and racial harassment, limited understanding of disability (multiple response)
- managing fallout associated with direct appointment and staff backlash about new incumbent
- bullying of peers by bosses; countless numbers of people crying at work; mental health toll
- very unsettled with issues in my department over 18 months and no one wanted to hear about it
- bullied by the workers who've worked at CoB for a long time; length of service status is power

## MANAGEMENT & CROSS DEPARTMENT INTERACTIONS

- treated unfairly by manager / boss (multiple response)
- unnecessary confrontation with manager refusing to do part of their job others had to step in to help - frustrating stressful situation in front of stakeholders - rude and demanding manager
- not valued, numerous missed meetings as manager doesn't show (multiple response)
- supervisors / managers don't appear to have much of a clue compared to other Councils
- poor decisions made by members of former senior management team still having a bad impact
- insufficient communication; not worthy / too insignificant to be kept informed (multiple response)
- factions formed at senior levels encouraged poor behaviour down the ranks / performance
- senior leadership had favourites who got special treatment ahead of rest (multiple response)
- being exposed to (historic) management decisions
- spent significant amount of time on a project, manager made little effort to review or comment, despite multiple requests and booking meetings to review

- general lack of trust in other departments through fractured management relationships over long periods of time - let down by other departments through poorly managed and implemented projects with little or no consultation or communication (multiple response)
- personal relationships between boss and some team members not playing out fairly for others
- lack of leadership and leadership cohesion at senior levels is obvious to lower levels
- feeling you have to walk on eggshells around those integral to the success of your own area for fear of catching them in a bad mood or upsetting them
- experiences with the dishonesty of senior managers and being bullied by management
- under-valued, not listened to, harassed and abused at meetings by current employees
- in Covid-19 hours decreased but program still ran; had to prove why we needed normal hours
- an area of my work I do not feel particularly well supported in; manager does not have any visibility of it and very little investment in it; stuck in hard place, feel my manager doesn't care
- unachievable workloads making it difficult to deliver quality – manager won't help
- reluctance of management to make difficult decisions - would rather fly under the radar
- manager unwilling to share information; like something being hidden, exhausted, hard to do job
- substantial municipality growth, but fewer staff to deal with it; all tired and stressed,
- manager behaved unethically around procurement
- manager operates / makes decisions despite conflicts of interest
- told in the past not to offer up certain information to the auditor
- told I'd be given opportunity to fill higher roles, then opportunity to do so denied multiple times
- dealing with mindsets based on a pecking order mentality across CoB to get things done
- many years at CoB, only 3 years ago that I became concerned about my rights
- manager didn't know work/family law, I needed external party to show CoB I was right
- manager did investigation; did not adhere to procedural fairness; showed bias, lacked skill
- management will not stand up to a particular Councillor's operational involvement
- wanting contractors when managers can use staff or upskill staff is unfair (multiple response)
- hearing disrespectful things said about public / stakeholders families by managers was awful

## CONCLUSION

### Employee & Volunteer Choice Of Immediate Action For Improvement

All 265 interviewees were asked **if you had the power to change one significant thing overnight what it would be?** and this information has been used to draw the report to a close. The most common response by far related to people pinpointing culture (in various ways) as their immediate one-off change. A second rung of responses (similar in number) spoke in various ways to increasing the focus on CoB's main purpose, community services, leadership /management and workforce / HR support, terms and conditions.

The third rung of responses spoke to increased accountability and people working as one team, bedding down the new structure, eradicating poor behaviour, and no more politics. Similar numbers spoke to improved communication, improved performance (KPIs), managing under-performers and Covid-19 being over. Smaller numbers had an immediate action that related to decision making, increased career opportunities and professional development, improved systems, a safety focus, reviewing 3<sup>rd</sup> / 4<sup>th</sup> levels of management, time management and better press strategies to ensure the good work done by CoB was being discussed by the community and staff.

This Review was undertaken to inform the 2021 Action Plan and the areas of work determined for each of its four quadrants. While content will be confronting for some and new information for others, it is a collection of individual positions shared when people were asked to contribute in an open and frank manner to a significant program of change by way of direct and honest feedback.