

CABINET - 13 OCTOBER 2020

INCLUDING EVERYONE. EQUALITIES, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION FRAMEWORK

Report by Corporate Director for Customers and Organisational Development,

RECOMMENDATION

1. This paper for Cabinet outlines the joint approach to equalities, diversity and inclusion being taken by Oxfordshire County Council in partnership with Cherwell District Council. Cabinet are **RECOMMENDED** to:
 - (a) **AGREE** the Including Everyone, Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Framework, as contained within Annex 1;
 - (b) **DELEGATE** to the Corporate Director for Customers and Organisational Development, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Local Communities, consideration of any amendments proposed through the decision-making process at Cherwell District Council;
 - (c) **AGREE** the initial Including Everyone, Action Plan, as contained within Annex 2.

Executive Summary

2. Oxfordshire County Council takes its obligations and commitments to equalities, diversity and inclusion very seriously. We have a long history of working on this agenda; taking actions beyond the statutory requirement contained within the Equality Act (2010). Now is the time to take our commitment to a new level. We need to identify and dismantle the structures that limit opportunities for many of our residents because of their race, disability, age, religion, sex, sexual orientation, rural location, caring responsibilities, armed forces background or deprivation, (or a combination of these characteristics).
3. This 2020 annual update of the Council's equality policy has taken an innovative partnership approach with Cherwell District Council. It has also sought to respond to the serious inequalities highlighted by the Oxfordshire 2019/20 Director of Public Health Report (see background documents), the unprecedented socio-economic crisis created by COVID-19, and the global calls for justice by the Black Lives Matter movement. These issues have starkly highlighted the extent to which injustice, inequality and discrimination persist within our society.
4. As one of the county's major employers, we want to lead by example and as local leaders, to take action to shape inclusive communities. By putting communities and collaboration upfront, our work with our residents and partners will ensure that the whole county is championing inclusion. We also want to take

action to cultivate an inclusive workplace where diverse backgrounds and perspectives are valued. This will help drive inclusive services and the best outcomes for the communities we serve.

5. This report highlights the case for change, describes the process to update the Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) equalities, diversity and inclusion policy and sets out what will be different as a result of the work. It concludes by recommending that Cabinet approve the 'Including Everyone' framework and associated action plan.

Background and key issues

The case for change

6. Recent events have highlighted serious inequalities within our communities; from the Black Lives Matters protests to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a disproportionate impact on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. Moreover, the 2019-2020 Director of Public Health Annual Report has shone a spotlight on the significant impact of economic inequality on people's health, wellbeing and life expectancy across Oxfordshire.
7. The events of recent months demonstrate the extent to which inequalities still exist, so despite our best efforts in the past, we now need to go much further. Some of the inequalities which we know exist in Oxfordshire include that:
 - Those in the least deprived areas of Oxfordshire live on average 13.7 years longer than those living in the most deprived areas.
 - According to the 2019 Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), there were a total of 11,990 children in poverty in Oxfordshire. That is about 10% of children. Four areas of Oxfordshire were in the most deprived nationally.
 - In the Oxfordshire area, men earn on average £6,800 more than women.
 - As of 1 April 2019, there were 1,701 adults receiving long term social care for learning disabilities in Oxfordshire from Oxfordshire County Council Adult Social Care services. A learning disability can affect the way a person understands information and how they communicate. This means they can have difficulty in understanding new or complex information, learning new skills or coping independently.
 - In 2011, there were 61,100 unpaid carers in Oxfordshire; who we know are more likely to report feelings of stress and financial difficulties. The number of carers is reported to have risen by 30% through the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - A recent study by the Office of National Statistics found that black men and women in Britain were 1.9 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than their white counterparts.
8. The diversity in our communities is a strength and does not result in disadvantage by itself. The examples given here demonstrate the need to tackle

inequalities because not everyone living in Oxfordshire currently has the same life opportunities. We want to see meaningful, real change in the figures outlined above. We know this change won't be easy and some of it will take a long and sustained focus to change, but we must re-double our efforts so that everyone can benefit. We will need to think about how our council and other public services work, so that they focus on those experiencing inequalities.

9. A fully inclusive approach to growth and economic development is critical to our ambition of delivering a Thriving Oxfordshire for all residents, helping everyone to achieve their potential and allowing everyone to contribute to the greatest extent possible.

Updating the policy

10. Our approach to equalities, diversity and inclusion needs to deliver immediate action yet simultaneously address systemic inequalities. We must change how we work so that we see the reality of every-day disparity; involving people in the design and delivery of our services but also in decisions that matter to them.
11. To deliver our renewed approach, we used the 2020 annual update as an opportunity to collaborate in line with our agreed partnership working commitment with Cherwell District Council (CDC). We have delivered a joint equality, diversity and inclusion framework that reflects the commitment of both councils to listen to and learn from their communities and take sustained action in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests and the inequalities highlighted by COVID-19.
12. The framework, called 'Including Everyone', is attached as Annex 1. It was developed by reviewing the OCC and CDC equalities policies to align the sentiments within them. Engagement with approximately 50 staff across both councils was undertaken to as part of the first phase of developing the approach to better understand the lived experiences of staff and capture their suggestions for actions we need to take to improve. Staff highlighted the following in discussion groups:
 - **Discomfort:** Leaders need to hear uncomfortable messages about inequalities.
 - **Inclusion is everyone's business:** Everyone needs to be part of the conversation, not just those with lived experience or an interest.
 - **Learning Together:** Learning about inclusion issues, unlearning previous assumptions and training emerged as key themes from the discussion groups. There is also a key role for us as an organisation in helping foster inclusive behaviours in young people.
 - **Role of senior leaders:** Senior leaders need to demonstrate buy-in and be part of the conversation, making sure underrepresented voices are heard at all levels of the organisation.
 - **Language is important:** We need to adopt language that recognises and celebrates diversity.

- **Tackling microaggression:** Staff reported that it is often unintentional behaviour/comments that cause harm.
 - **Representation matters:** Employees want to see greater levels of diversity across all levels of the Council, particularly at senior levels.
 - **Role of middle management:** There are particular training and development needs for those in middle management. Managers have an important role in hearing issues from more junior members of staff and escalating this to more senior staff.
 - **Awareness raising:** People need to know where to go for help should they need it. Managers need to have a better understanding of the issues people face and to empathise with them. In addition, the council needs to promote equalities and inclusion across the organisation.
13. The themes that emerged from the discussion groups, together with a data pack (see Annex 3) on equalities in our communities and the published HR equalities data (see background documents) held by the Council, were used to inform a draft version of the framework.
14. Throughout August, a second phase of engagement was undertaken with staff across both councils to gather feedback on the draft policy framework. More than 70 responses were gathered through an online exercise and more than 40 staff attended an open session to discuss their views on the document. The purpose of engaging in this way with staff is to put in place the building blocks we need to be in a position to positively engage communities as we further develop our approach. The total number of staff responses to engagement over phases one and two was more than 160.
15. The feedback from this exercise told us that
- The joint approach is welcomed;
 - There is broad agreement with the vision, which could be strengthened with 'leading by example' or 'continually learning';
 - There is broad agreement with the principles, which need to be reflected in management in both organisations to ensure they are realised;
 - There is broad agreement with the goals and commitments, but they need to be followed with action;
 - An inclusive workplace needs to have a strong emphasis on training and evaluation of managers;
 - Inclusive service delivery needs to take account of those who are digitally excluded;
 - Inclusive communities should be the first strand of work and include neighbourhood initiatives; this will help the framework be less 'top down' and more 'bottom up';
 - HR data needs to be published with this work;

- A wider cultural shift is needed across the two organisations and there needs to be more diversity in senior leadership;
 - The work needs to be visibly 'led by example' from senior managers and councillors;
 - Managers (often team/middle) are causing concern for some staff by blocking participation or being discriminatory themselves;
 - Actions need to include training and evaluation of staff (especially managers) on equalities, diversity and inclusion.
16. On 9 September, the Performance Scrutiny Committee considered a draft of the Including Everyone Framework. The committee scrutinised the data which sits behind the framework and fed back the following points:
- That a clear separation is needed between the council as an employer and as a service provider.
 - That it needs to be clear where people can take complaints.
 - That attention needs to continue on rural deprivation given that 51% of the county's population lives in a rural setting.
 - That we need to ensure that those who are not skilled with computers are still catered for.
 - That there is a need for a councillor champion.
 - That the Council is an influencer, for example with schools where there can be unconscious discrimination in out-of-school activities (which are often unaffordable for some families).
 - That similarly, there can be issues accessing day centres and transport in general for those with mobility impairments.

Including Everyone

17. The document in Annex 1 is the product of the above engagement and feedback. We had detailed, frank and sobering engagement with staff members, who are equally members of our communities. We had more than 160 responses from people giving us their views on what we should be tackling, how we should be tackling it and what we need to learn as we do.
18. "Including Everyone" sets our vision to lead the field in equalities, diversity and inclusion. It spells out what our goals and commitments are around delivering inclusive communities, services and workplace. Including Everyone is built upon principles which we believe will guide us over the short, medium and long term.
19. The Council's commitment (8 September) to make Oxfordshire an anti-racist county has given a clear public signal of how seriously we are taking our vision. This 'reset' moment creates an opportunity for a 'new normal' in terms of how we progress our equality agenda and so we are organising our approach with communities upfront so we can make inclusion everyone's business.

20. As a major service provider, how we understand our residents and customer needs is essential to meeting those needs. Listening and learning will help us remove the seen and unseen barriers and design inclusive services. We will be bold and open to having conversations to understand how our services can help address persistent inequalities.
21. We believe that Oxfordshire County Council should take a lead as an employer. Our workforce is our biggest asset; we need to protect, understand and treasure our staff who are people in their own right, and who also help us reach those residents, families and communities we serve. While it may take time for us to ensure our organisation is as diverse as the communities we service, we will ensure every opportunity is taken to become a more diverse and inclusive organisation.
22. The goals and commitments we set out in Including Everyone help us in organising our work. The policy becomes 'live' through action plans; one for OCC and a separate one for CDC to take account of the unique circumstances and actions needed in each council.

Action planning

23. Turning our vision, goals and commitments into reality needed a robust approach to action planning. We listened to staff, learned from the Local Government Association Equalities Framework (see background documents) and learned from best practice examples around the country. The wealth of ideas and examples generated were then prioritised and focused to determine the key actions that fit most closely with our principles.
24. We have begun implementing an initial 'Including Everyone Action Plan' (in Annex 2). We will continue to refine and challenge this plan through our ongoing listening and learning as we move forward with actions that seek to make a shift in people's lived experiences. The nature of the work and the approach will mean the action plan will be a live document. We will engage across the organisation, and with partners and residents, as we continue to develop measures to monitor progress.
25. Progress on the policy and Action Plan will be measured and monitored through the internal Inclusion Steering Group, reported through the monthly Business Management Report and scrutinised accordingly to ensure we have challenge in achieving outcomes. We will produce an Annual Equalities report for Cabinet to be reviewed by Performance Scrutiny, to provide assurance on progress.

What will be different

26. The updating of a policy will not deliver change in itself but the new framework sets the structure and the action plan that will be key to achieving change. The framework seeks to have a measurable impact, for example, on the following long-term outcomes:
- Narrowing the life expectancy gap between the most and least deprived wards in Oxfordshire
 - Fewer children living in poverty. Those children from deprived or diverse backgrounds have equal opportunities to achieve
 - Men and women, and those from diverse Black Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, being paid the same for carrying out the same roles
 - Those with disabilities, learning difficulties, mental health issues or caring responsibilities being supported to have equal educational, health and economic opportunities

Next steps

27. The policy framework is due for consideration at the Cherwell District Council Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 7 October and any comments that may impact on the joint policy will be reported to Cabinet.
28. Following OCC Cabinet, the joint policy will be subject to decision making by the Cherwell District Council Executive on 2 November. This report therefore includes the recommendation that the consideration of any further changes proposed during this decision-making period are delegated to the Corporate Director for Customers and Organisational Development, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Local Communities.
29. In the meantime, actions will continue to be implemented and further work will be undertaken to refine delivery.
30. Following agreement by OCC Cabinet and CDC Executive, we will launch public engagement through both County and Cherwell mechanisms. This will include engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, partners and residents.

Implications

31. **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.** The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) established both a general and specific duty for public bodies such as the Council. In summary, those subject to the equality duty must, in the exercise of their function, have due regard to:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act,
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not,
 - Foster good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not.
32. The Including Everyone, Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Framework being a central component of the Council's strategy of delivery compliance with overriding Equality Act 2010 obligations.
33. **Resources.** The activity highlighted in this report has been delivered within the existing budgets and with existing staff resource.

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Supporting documents

ANNEX 1: Including Everyone document. Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Framework.

ANNEX 2: Including Everyone Initial Action Plan

ANNEX 3: Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Data Pack

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