

# **Oxfordshire County Council Equality Policy 2012-2017**

## **Fair Access to Services; Equal Life Chances**

How the County Council ensures fairness and real choice in the delivery of services

## **What equality means to us**

*Equality, opportunity, local choice.*

These values inform how Oxfordshire County Council delivers services to the people of Oxfordshire. Both the Cabinet and management team are united in their commitment to ensure that everyone in Oxfordshire has the opportunity to share in a thriving Oxfordshire.

The new equality policy brings together many years of work in developing fairer and more accessible services. It represents the county council's continuing commitment to customer service and local choice. No single approach to delivering services can be expected to meet everyone's needs. Effective services should be flexible, responsive and designed around the diversity of interests that their customers have.

The purpose of the policy is also to establish a change of approach, based on the principles of transparency about how our services are performing, clarity about what action we are taking and the involvement of users, community groups or staff in the solution. We are also committed to making equalities integral to everything we do, ensuring it seen as part of everyone's business and a way of helping us deliver excellent outcomes for individuals and communities. The document has been developed in line with the objectives of our Corporate Plan and sits alongside published information on the county council's performance.

The county council promotes equality through the broad range of public services that it delivers. Oxfordshire County Council is responsible for providing many key local services and employs over 20,000 people to deliver them. Each year the council manages over £900 million of public money in the provision of these services on behalf of Oxfordshire's 650,000 people. This includes schools, social services, the fire service, roads, libraries and the museums service, trading standards, land use, transport planning and waste management. Ensuring that such diverse services are responsive to the needs of individuals and communities is a key challenge that this policy aims to tackle.

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## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. The purpose of this policy is to set out how the Council is approaching its responsibilities for ensuring that all residents in Oxfordshire have fair access to services and equal life chances. It also demonstrates how the Council is meeting the requirements placed on public bodies under the Equality Act 2010.
- 1.2 Our approach to equalities is based around addressing four key objectives:
- Understanding the needs of individuals and communities
  - Providing accessible, local and personalised services
  - Supporting thriving and cohesive communities
  - Promoting a culture of fairness in employment and service delivery
- 1.3 This policy is supported by a document that sets out how we are meeting each of these key issues in terms of current performance, focusing particularly on how we meet the needs of people who share protected equality characteristics. The supporting evidence does not include everything the Council is doing, but highlights the key areas of success and, where necessary, where action is being taken to improve outcomes. The supporting information is available at: [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/equality-and-cohesion](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/equality-and-cohesion).
- 1.4 The following information has been used to inform this policy:
- The number of people with different protected characteristics who access and use services in different ways.
  - Customer satisfaction levels and informal feedback from service users with different protected characteristics, and results of consultations.
  - Complaints about discrimination and complaints from people with different protected characteristics.
  - Details of policies and programmes that have been put in place to ensure high equality standards or address equality concerns in service delivery.
- 1.5 Monitoring and reporting on these areas enables us to analyse the information to see if there are differences between protected characteristics and investigate the processes which have resulted in these differences, taking action as necessary to try and remove barriers and promote equality for all groups.

### **The Equality Act 2010**

- 1.6 As a public body, Oxfordshire County Council recognises the requirement to give due regard to the three main aims of the Equality Duty, and the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic, and those who do not.

1.7 The Public Sector Equality Duty replaces the previous public sector equality duties for disability, ethnicity and gender and covers the following protected characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership (but only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination)
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality
- Religion or belief – this includes lack of belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

1.8 The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public bodies to consider how the decisions that they make, and the services they deliver, affect people who share different protected characteristics and publish information to demonstrate that they have done this. In addition the Council is also required to set specific, measurable equality objectives and publish these, along with an equality policy.

1.9 The Council is also required to publish information to demonstrate it has considered how its activities as an employer affect people who share different protected characteristics. This is available at:  
<http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/fairness-and-equality-work>

## **Human Rights Act**

1.10 The Human Rights Act requires public bodies to have regard to the human rights set out in the European Convention, and to ensure that the human rights of all members of the community are respected in all that they do. Human rights are based on core principles like dignity, fairness, equality, respect and autonomy.

1.11 The Human Rights Act is not just about preventing public authorities from taking certain actions. It also requires them to take proactive steps to prevent breaches of human rights from happening in the first place, no matter who or what is causing the harm. The Act seeks to respect all individuals' rights, including the right to effectively take part in decisions made by public authorities and to get fair and equal services from public authorities.

- 1.12 All children and young people up to the age of 18 years have rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Some groups of children and young people – for example those living away from home, and young disabled people – have additional rights to make sure they are treated fairly and their needs are met.
- 1.13 The purpose of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by disabled people
- 1.14 Local authorities must consider human rights when making decisions and determining policies. This can be of particular value in underpinning a range of policy and practice developments, and in safeguarding vital services, particularly for the most vulnerable groups. It can also help to determine proportionate action, especially where the interests of different parties conflict.

## 2.0 Equality of Opportunity – Our Ambition

- 2.1 Oxfordshire County Council is committed to making Oxfordshire a fair and equal place in which to live, work and visit.
- 2.2 We aim to ensure that our staff are equipped with the knowledge and skills to meet the diverse needs of customers, that our services are accessible and to encourage supportive and cohesive communities through our service delivery.

### General Statement of Effectiveness

- 2.3 **In general, Oxfordshire County Council considers that it performs well in meeting the requirements of the Equality Duty.** This is based on the range of evidence contained in this document and the supporting information, which demonstrates the wide range of actions being taken across service areas to avoid discrimination and harassment, advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations.
- 2.4 The Council has a raised awareness of the impact of our policies, practices and decisions on people with different protected characteristics. This enables us to make informed decisions about policies and practices which are based on evidence about the impact of our activities on equality, and have due regard to the aims of the general equality duty by ensuring that staff have appropriate information for decision-making.
- 2.5 We regularly assess whether we are discriminating unlawfully when carrying out any of our functions, and benchmark our performance and processes against those of similar organisations nationally and locally. We also consider taking steps to meet the needs of staff and service users who share relevant protected characteristics where appropriate, based on evidence and assessment of performance.
- 2.6 However, as demonstrated elsewhere in this document there are a number of specific areas where we need to take action to improve our performance, and to improve outcomes for people who share protected characteristics. These areas form the basis of the key equality objectives for the Council, and the priorities for action we have identified.

### What we are seeking to achieve

- 2.7 In achieving our ambition, we have identified four key equality issues for the Council, and these will guide our approach:
  - Objective 1- Understanding the needs of individuals and communities
  - Objective 2 -Providing accessible, local and personalised services

- Objective 3 - Supporting thriving and cohesive communities
- Objective 4 - Promoting a culture of fairness in employment and service delivery

2.8 These key equality objectives align closely with the Council's overall strategic objectives, as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan. This helps to ensure that our work on equality and diversity is embedded within service planning delivery rather than being seen as separate, and supports our commitment to making equalities integral to everything we do.

**3.0** For each key objective we have identified a number of actions will be taking to build on current achievements and address areas where improvement is needed in our performance. Progress in delivering these actions will be monitored as part of the Council's overall performance management framework to further reinforce the 'mainstreaming' of our approach to equality and diversity.



## **2.0 Objective 1 - Understanding the needs of individuals and communities**

- 2.1 This objective is focused on how we understand the needs of the people and communities of Oxfordshire, including the wide range of consultation and engagement arrangements we already have in place. The objectives that follow focus on how we use this better understanding of need to plan services in response to the needs we have identified.
- 2.2 Over the next twenty years Oxfordshire is expected to continue to become more ethnically diverse, and to have a higher proportion of older people and people with disabilities. Everyone will rightly expect to be treated fairly, and will demand services that are appropriate for their needs.
- 2.3 The Council already collects a significant amount of data about the accessibility of our services and how our customers are using them. We also engage with service users and interested groups to discuss their needs and how well we meet them, and will continue to do so. This helps us to understand the areas where we are meeting people's needs effectively so we can build on these, and identify where we need to do more to reduce inequality and promote better outcomes.
- 2.4 We recognise that we can do more to use the data that we hold already more effectively to inform service planning and decision-making. We have also identified a number of areas where we hold very little data, or where the data we hold is out of date, and will seek to address this. This will be addressed in part through updating key evidence bases such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, and through analysis of the outcomes of the Census 2011 when published later this year.
- 2.5 We will also continue to monitor and analyse our performance in key service areas to understand how well we are addressing areas for improvement we have identified, such as narrowing the gap in educational attainment or in levels of satisfaction with adult social care between different groups.

### **Priorities for Action - we will:**

- 1a) Investigate why levels of satisfaction with services that are generally high are variable between different groups, for example by running focus groups with adult social care service users.
- 1b) Ensure that Oxfordshire Voice Citizens' Panel, our resident's panel, is broadly representative of the makeup of the county by increasing the

number of people who share some of the protected characteristics to ensure it is balanced to reflect age, gender, ethnicity and disability.

- 1c) Implement our new Strategy for Education to improve educational outcomes for all young people. In particular, we will take action to close unacceptable gaps in attainment levels between children from different backgrounds and who share protected characteristics (for example looked after children, some black and minority ethnic groups, and some children with special educational needs).
- 1d) Provide information and support to vulnerable adults so that more people who use services report that they feel safer each year.
- 1e) Ask older people and people with a disability who we work with if we can pass on their details to other services and organisations, including the Fire and Rescue Service who will be able to undertake Fire Risk Assessments in their homes.

## **3.0 Objective 2 – Providing accessible, local and personalised services**

- 3.1 This objective, and those that follow, is focused on how the Council responds to the needs of the people and communities of Oxfordshire.
- 3.2 Customer choice is at the heart of the county council's approach. We want county council services to be flexible, local and developed around the diversity of individual needs. For example, we have created a new Early Intervention Service, specifically designed to reflect our understanding of the needs of our children and young people and based around seven locality 'hubs' in those areas of the county where there is most need.
- 3.3 We are developing a joint approach to commissioning adult, community and children's services. This will ensure our approach focuses on local circumstances and is able to meet the needs of vulnerable people irrespective of whether they share protected characteristics or not, including those living in rural areas where isolation and access to services can be particular issues.
- 3.4 The county council is also radically transforming the way it delivers adult social care services, increasing the number of people with personalised budgets that provide choice about how to spend money on their care. We also continue to implement strategies to improve educational attainment, to protect and safeguard the most vulnerable groups in the county, and support carers of all ages.
- 3.5 We aim to ensure our physical assets (eg roads, buses, public buildings and reception areas) maintain high standards of accessibility for all residents, and leading on the roll out of superfast broadband in Oxfordshire to improve access to online services (especially in rural areas).
- 3.6 Through the Oxfordshire Online project we have an emphasis on making more services available online, and making online services more accessible to all. However we also recognise that this is not suitable for everyone, and will continue to make our publications available in alternative formats and languages where requested, and to develop our customer services in response to feedback.

### **Priorities for Action - we will:**

- 2a) Maintain our focus on preventing the need for more specialist services through early identification of problems and early intervention in adult and children's services.
- 2b) Analyse the number of children from minority ethnic backgrounds on child protection plans. The findings will be used to develop plans to address any over representation identified, and to learn from where the number of

young people from certain groups on child protection plans is lower than might be expected.

- 2c) Map the dispersal of young carers around the County to see if there are any geographical clusters or patterns, with a view to understanding why this occurs and what action is needed to address issues that cause it.
- 2d) Change the way day services for older people are provided, maintaining services in major towns, but focusing on community initiatives and local decision-making about how best to support older people in their community.
- 2e) Focus on giving people choice in the way they lead their lives and how they secure the services they need to support them. We will increase each year the proportion of people who receive a direct payment which allows them to secure the services they need to support them.
- 2f) Support older people, and people with a disability to live in their own home for longer by:
  - Providing more support to help older people increase their ability to cope so that more of them can return home and stay there after hospital discharge
  - Increasing the number of hours of long term support made available to clients
  - Devolving budgets to local area managers so that they are specifically able to address the needs of their locality
  - increasing the availability of extra care housing and assistive technology
  - continuing to provide information and support to carers.
- 2g) Work with business network providers to develop and implement a strategy for the roll out of super-fast broadband across the county, to improve access to online services for all.
- 2h) Enable all Adult Learning tutors to integrate equality and diversity into their teaching – content and classroom management – in order to ensure inclusivity for all learners
- 2i) Continue to develop improved accessibility routes on the public rights of way network.
- 2j) Provide training to Highways & Transport staff involved in policy and design to ensure they understand the constraints faced by customers with a disability using our services, and have regard to these constraints in service design and delivery.

## **4.0 Objective 3 - Supporting thriving and cohesive communities**

- 4.1 The county council has been working to get closer to the communities we serve, understand the challenges they face and make sure our services are working together as effectively as possible. Our Closer to Communities Strategy recognises the importance of the council showing community leadership, and ensures officers and councillors work together with partners and communities at a local level to share information and meet needs.
- 4.2 The county council is also committed to empowering communities to do things for themselves, including identifying and/or responding when public sector may not be able to continue to provide a service. We believe that supporting communities to take on this challenge, as we have done with youth provision and other community activities through the Big Society Fund, will lead to better quality services that local residents feel that are truly theirs and reflect the needs of all those in their community.
- 4.3 There is a significant military presence in Oxfordshire, which brings a number of specific challenges. Oxfordshire was the first local authority to pledge support to the Community Covenant in June 2011, and our Military Civilian Partnership has been working on a number of key themes to address areas such as school admissions and attainment for children from service families, health care and employment and skills for service leavers
- 4.4 As part of the countywide work to improve community safety, the county council is committed to working with its partners and suppliers to protect individuals, in the community and on our premises, where they have been targeted because of their characteristics. We have worked with schools, advice centres and care homes to prevent bullying, harassment or abuse. We have also launched a hate-crime reporting service to enable people to report incidents to a wide range of different local agencies other than the police and receive support from organisations with the appropriate expertise.

### **Priorities for Action - we will:**

- 3a) Continue to work in partnership to improve the quality of life in the most deprived areas of the county. This will include promoting better engagement in education, employment and training; supporting the vulnerable and those with multiple and enduring problems; promoting healthy lifestyles and reducing health inequalities; reducing and mitigating the effects of child poverty.
- 3b) Continue to provide a Big Society Fund that will support local communities and organisations who wish to identify local priorities and do things for themselves about issues that matter to them. We will also review expressions of interest,

applications and funding patterns from 2011/12 and work with community groups to raise awareness and encourage access to the Fund.

3c) Continue to work closely with our military partners to maximise the value obtained from the pupil premium by focusing on specific needs of children from armed forces families, and ensure schools have appropriate information to support these children.

3d) Continue to work closely with military partners to ensure we maximise the support we offer to carers of vulnerable people. We will ensure that we provide more information and support to carers around military bases and ensure that we support developments such as good neighbours' schemes by military bases.

3e) Raise awareness of the MANTRA (Multi-Agency Network for Tackling Racially Aggravated Harassment) service. We will also increase the number of agencies and venues people can use to report incidents of and concerns about hate crime, including in rural areas.

## **5.0 Objective 4 - Promoting a culture of fairness in employment and service delivery**

- 5.1 The County Council is committed to ensuring equality of access, fairness and consideration to all of our staff and potential future staff, and in the delivery of services to the people and communities of Oxfordshire.
- 5.2 The council's Dignity at Work policy states all employees will have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, to promote equality of opportunity and to promote good relations between different groups., There are a range of learning and development opportunities to ensure staff are aware of this commitment and their responsibilities, including the 'Respect for People' electronic learning package that must be completed as part of induction for new employees.
- 5.3 We review our policies and practices to ensure they are appropriate and are implemented effectively to enable individuals to work to the best of their abilities and protect them from discrimination and harassment. The council is working with union partners to develop staff forums to listen to how different groups of staff think practices can be improved. We also recognise there may be barriers to applying for jobs at the council that are beyond the control of the applicant, and have made changes to our recruitment policies to help ensure we get the best possible staff for any given role regardless of their circumstances.
- 5.4 As well as the services we provide directly, our commitment to equality of opportunity extends to services delivered on our behalf through contracts and commissioning, and through services linked closely to the council such as schools and the Fire and Rescue Service. It also includes working with our partners to ensure the same high standards apply across those that we commission services from, whether they are public, private or voluntary sector organisations.

### **Priorities for Action - we will:**

- 4a) Ensure all managers and Councillors are aware of their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010, and encourage all employees to access learning and development opportunities to increase their awareness and understanding of equality and diversity issues.
- 4b) Ensure equality and diversity is integrated into the culture of the Customer Service Centre by embedding it within the behaviour and attitudes of staff, as well as the routine policies, procedures and practices of the service.

- 4c) Undertake a full review of existing equality and diversity policies to ensure they remain in line with best practice and meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.
- 4d) Continue to encourage people from diverse backgrounds to apply for roles at the council, and do more to increase awareness of the support available to staff and guidance for managers to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made where appropriate.
- 4e) Investigate the reasons for the lower levels of young workers employed by the council, and continue to expand the number of apprenticeship opportunities to create entry level posts.
- 4f) Identify opportunities to work with others to deliver services that improve outcomes for groups with protected characteristics more effectively and develop innovative approaches to common issues, whether through formal partnership arrangements or more informal collaborative arrangements.
- 4g) Ensure that where services are being restructured there is a well-managed approach to diversity, including completion of Service and Community Impact Assessments to ensure that under-represented groups are not disproportionately affected in the resulting staff reductions. Statistics for redundancy will also need to be closely monitored.



## 6.0 Service and Community Impact Assessments

- 6.1 The Equality Act 2010 requires all public authorities to assess the impact of their policies on communities. In this context, 'policies' is a general term that could include strategies, projects or contracts. The assessment has five parts: gather information, engagement, analysis, objective setting and review.
- 6.2 In Oxfordshire County Council, this process is termed Service and Community Impact Assessments (SCIA). A SCIA is intended to ensure policies meet the diverse needs of our customers. We assess the impact of decisions on any relevant community, but with particular emphasis on groups that share protected characteristics.
- 6.3 All policies undergo an initial assessment that is proportionate to the significance of the change and the potential impact. Assessments are available to Councillors when making a decision on whether to agree a new policy or not. Any significant decisions have a full assessment, demonstrating the data and research that has been used, feedback from consultations with affected groups and an action plan to mitigate any impacts. Partners, staff or stakeholders are involved to check the assumptions match the experience on-the-ground.
- 6.4 Each year, an initial assessment is produced on the potential impact of the cross-cutting issues in the overall Council budget. This year, it also covers the Medium Term Corporate Plan and the capital programme, to ensure there is a consistent and considered assessment of the potential impacts across the whole of the Council's service and resource planning process.
- 6.5 Once a decision is made the assessments are updated and then reviewed on a regular basis over the implementation of the project or policy or contract to ensure that the initial assessments were accurate, and that the impact of any changes in approach and learning from implementation are included.
- 6.6 Completed Service and Community Impact Assessments are published on the public website at: [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/equality-and-cohesion](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/equality-and-cohesion)

## 7.0 Monitoring and Governance

- 7.1 To help ensure that our work on equalities and diversity is embedded within service planning delivery, responsibility will rest with Directorate Leadership Teams. Issues will then be escalated and reported as appropriate to the County Council Management Team and Cabinet, as part of the Council's quarterly performance monitoring and risk management arrangements. This document and the supporting information will be updated annually to reflect performance, and progress in implementing the actions we have identified will be reported to the relevant Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and the Council.
- 7.2 We will also continue to engage with a wide range of stakeholders from within and outside the Council to help us assess how successfully we are meeting the needs of the people and communities of Oxfordshire. We will continue to publish information about our performance, the outcomes of Service and Community Impact Assessments, new policies and proposals for changes in service delivery on our website. We will continue to seek feedback and comment on our plans and our performance, and consult both formally and informally with key stakeholders to inform our service planning and inform our decision-making.

## 8.0 More information

More information about our work can be found in the following documents and links:

- The Council Plan ([www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/corporateplan](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/corporateplan))
- Directorate business strategies ([www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/businessstrategies](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/businessstrategies))
- The Council website (<http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/equality-and-cohesion>)
- Children and Young People's Plan (<http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/children-and-young-peoples-plan-2010-2013>)
- Walk the Talk? (<http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/fire-service-recruitment-information-women-and-ethnic-minorities>)
- Equality Duty in Employment Report, 2011 (<http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/fairness-and-equality-work>)

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اشكال بديلة لهذا المنشور موجودة حسب الطلب. هذه تشمل لغات مختلفة و الطبعة البارزة وطريقة بريل و اشربة كاست و اقراص الحاسوب او البريد الالكتروني.

Arabic

আপনি যদি অনুরোধ করেন তাহলে এই পুস্তিকাটি বিকল্প ছাঁদে, যেমন, অন্য কোনও ভাষায়, বড় হরফে, ব্রেইলে, অডিও-ক্যাসেটে, কমপিউটারের ডিস্কে বা ইমেলের মাধ্যমে পেতে পারেন।

Bengali

“本刊物備有其他的格式可供索取。這些包括有其他語言版，大字版，盲人用版，錄音帶版，電腦磁碟版或電子郵件版。”

Chinese

प्रार्थना करने पर यह प्रकाशन दूसरे रूपों में प्राप्त किया जा सकता है। जिस में सम्मिलित है, दूसरी भाषाओं में, बड़े छापे में, ब्रेअल, सुनने की टेप पर, कम्प्यूटर की डिस्क पर या ई-मेल द्वारा।

Hindi

“ਇਹ ਪੁਸਤਕ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਕਰਨ ਤੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੈ। ਜਿਵੇਂ ਕਿ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ, ਵੱਡੇ ਛਾਪੇ ਤੇ, ਬ੍ਰੇਲ ਵਿਚ, ਸੁਣਨ ਵਾਲੀ ਟੇਪ ਤੇ, ਕੰਪਿਊਟਰ ਡਿਸਕ ਜਾਂ ਈ ਮੇਲ ਤੇ।”

Punjabi

“اس اشاعت کو تبادل اشكال میں درخواست کرنے پر حاصل کیا جاسکتا ہے۔ اس میں دوسری زبانیں، بڑا پرنٹ، بریل (جسے اندھے چھو کر پڑھ سکیں)، آڈیو کیسٹ، کمپیوٹر ڈسک یا ای میل شامل ہیں۔”

Urdu

Na życzenie publikacja jest dostępna w innych formatach. Do nich należą wersje w innych językach, drukowane dużą czcionką, alfabetem Braille'a, w wersji audio, na dysku komputerowym, lub jako email.

Polish

## **Annex 2: Summary of Consultation with Stakeholders**

1. This Annex sets out the key messages from consultation about the Draft Equality Policy 2012-17, which took place between 19 January and 2 March 2012 (a period of 6 weeks).

### **Written consultation**

2. Details of the written consultation including the draft policy document, supporting information and links to an online survey were placed on the council's intranet site and public website and promoted using home page features and headlines.
3. A wide range of stakeholders were informed about the consultation and invited to comment, including:
  - county council staff
  - county councillors
  - schools and universities
  - district, town and parish councils
  - public sector organisations such as Thames Valley Police, Primary Care Trust
  - military
  - voluntary, community and faith sector organisations and charities, including those representing people who share protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010.
4. In total, we received 10 responses to the online survey and two email responses. A copy of the consultation documents and a marked-up questionnaire are available on the council's consultation calendar at [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consultation](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consultation). A copy of the marked-up questionnaire giving the detailed comments will be placed in the councillors resource room.

### **Stakeholder workshop**

5. A stakeholder workshop took place on the morning of 17 February 2012, offering an opportunity to discuss the draft policy and comment in more detail as part of the consultation. A wide range of public, voluntary, community and faith sector organisations and charities were invited, along with some existing service users and in total 21 people attending the event.
6. The workshop was chaired by Peter Clark, Head of Law & Governance and included:
  - A presentation to provide a high level overview of the Equality Act and the council's approach to equalities
  - An open discussion on the aim and ambition presented in the Draft Equality Policy 2012-17 and on the four key issues it identified

- Round-table discussions focussing in detail on the priorities for action allocated to each of the four key issues. Each table was allocated two issues to explore in detail
  - A feedback session to share key messages from the round table discussions
7. A copy of the workshop agenda, the presentation given and the flip chart notes are available on the council's consultation calendar at [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consultation](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consultation). A copy of the detailed notes will be placed in the councillor's resource room.

### **Outcomes – High Level Feedback**

8. Overall, the outcomes of the consultation indicate there was broad support for the council's overall ambition for and approach to equalities. There were some objections expressed and the feedback also provided helpful suggestions for how the key issues might be delivered, including how the council might engage with and support communities.

### **Overall Themes**

- **Use of language in the policy document** such as use of specific terms e.g. customers and the need for clearer definitions e.g. how does the council define the term 'fairness'?
  - **The need for more greater clarification** including using examples, to help illustrate what is meant under each key issue
  - **More consideration of governance and accountability** especially external to the council including measurement, oversight, audit and challenge
  - **Further explanation on the council's approach to mainstreaming equalities**, including how the council's approach to policy implementation and how outreach, engagement, advocacy and service delivery will be balanced
  - **Manage expectations** of what can and cannot be achieved in current economic climate and associated constraints
9. The feedback also provided helpful, practical suggestions for how the key issues might be delivered including:
- learning from others
  - working in partnership
  - making use of existing data tools
  - signposting
  - investing in training
  - promoting funds options e.g. Big Society Fund
  - raising awareness of existing services
  - how the council might engage with and support communities and use a development approaches

## **Annex 4: Service and Community Impact Assessment**



**Directorate Name: Chief Executive's Office**

### **Equality Policy 2012-2017**

#### ***Service and Community Impact Assessment***

**Lead Officer: Peter Clark**

#### **Purpose of the assessment**

This is an initial assessment of the potential impact of the new Equality Policy 2012-2017, with particular reference to groups of people who share protected characteristics. This assessment will be kept under review as the policy and actions it contains are implemented, and updated as necessary to ensure emerging risks are identified and appropriate mitigating action taken. Separate assessments will be undertaken on specific actions as appropriate, for example where they in themselves constitute a significant change in policy in their own right.

#### **Summary**

The Equality Policy 2012-2017 sets out how the Council is approaching its responsibilities for ensuring that all residents in Oxfordshire have fair access to services and equal life chances. It also demonstrates how the Council is meeting the requirements placed on public bodies under the Equality Act 2010, including setting equality objectives for the next four years.

A draft of the policy has been out for public consultation since January, and the final policy has been amended to reflect feedback from internal and external stakeholders. To fulfil our legislative requirements, the final policy will be published by 6th April 2012, and progress in implementing it will be monitored and reported as part of the council's overall performance management arrangements.

The policy establishes the intention to build on current practice and address areas that are identified as requiring improvement, with appropriate actions identified and plans to monitor their implementation.

Although the policy is intended to have a positive impact on outcomes for all individuals and groups who share protected characteristics, potential negative impacts are identified on customers, staff and providers. However these are mitigated by a range of actions, including the completion of service and community

impact assessments for individual actions and policies, training and briefing for staff, responsibility for equalities resting with Deputy Directors and Directorate Leadership teams, and standard contract procurement and monitoring practices.

## Introduction

Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 (“the 2010 Act”) imposes a duty on the Council to give due regard to three needs in exercising its functions. This proposal is such a function. The three needs are:

- the need to eliminate any conduct which is prohibited by or under the 2010 Act;
- the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who
- share any of the protected characteristics listed in section 149(7); and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

Complying with section 149 may involve treating some people more favourably than others, but only to the extent that that does not amount to conduct which is otherwise unlawful under the new Act.

The need to advance equality of opportunity involves having due regard to the need to:

- remove or minimise disadvantages which are connected to a relevant protected characteristic and which are suffered by persons who share that characteristic,
- take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and which are different from the needs other people, and encourage those who share a relevant characteristic to take part in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such people is disproportionately low.
- Steps to meet the needs of disabled people which are different from the needs of people who are not disabled include steps to take account of a person’s disabilities.

The need to foster good relations between different groups involves having due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

These protected characteristics are:

- Age (people of different age groups)
- Disability (e.g. physical or sensory impairments, long-term illnesses and conditions, hidden impairments such as a heart condition, frailty, learning disabilities or mental health problems)
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage/civil partnerships (but only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination)
- Pregnancy & Maternity
- Race (including ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality)

- Religion or belief (including lack of belief)
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

In addition to the characteristics above, the Council has also considered the effect of the proposals on particular communities (e.g. urban, rural, deprived).

## **Consultation with Stakeholders**

Public consultation on a draft of the Equality Policy 2012-2017 took place between 19 January and 2 March 2012 (a period of 6 weeks).

Details of the written consultation including the draft policy document, supporting information and links to an online survey were placed on the council's intranet site and public website and promoted using home page features and headlines.

Key stakeholders were also contacted directly and invited to comment, including all staff and Councillors; district, town and parish councils; other public sector organisations including Thames Valley Police, the Primary Care Trust, schools, universities and the military; voluntary, community and faith sector organisations and charities, including those representing people who share protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

A stakeholder workshop took place on 17 February 2012, offering an opportunity to discuss the draft policy and comment in more detail as part of the consultation. A wide range of public, voluntary, community and faith sector organisations and charities were invited, along with some existing service users.

In total 21 people attended the stakeholder workshop and 10 responses were received to the online consultation, with a further 2 responses sent by email.

Overall, the outcomes of the consultation indicate there was broad support for the council's overall ambition for and approach to equalities. There were some objections expressed about the use of language; the need for clarification and examples of current performance; more consideration of governance and accountability; further explanation of the council's approach to mainstreaming; and the need to manage expectations. The feedback also provided helpful suggestions for how the key issues might be delivered, including how the council might engage with and support communities.

The policy has been updated and amended to reflect the outcomes of the consultation. In particular, more detail has been added under each objective to provide more explanation of what each means and why it is considered to be important. This includes more examples of what the council is already doing, providing a stronger link to the supporting information about our current performance that has already been published on the council website to demonstrate our compliance with the public sector equality duty (see

[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/equality-and-cohesion](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/equality-and-cohesion))



The four key equality objectives have also been amended slightly from the key issues published as part of the consultation document, to reflect feedback during the consultation period

**Impact on customers**

By definition, the Equality Policy 2012-2017 is intended to have a positive impact on outcomes for people who share protected characteristics, and in many cases for the wider communities of Oxfordshire as well. The policy and supporting information specifically identifies the need to fulfil the three key aims of the Equality Act 2010 and the public sector equality duties, and identifies issues related to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. It also identifies issues related to deprivation and rurality, and in all cases sets appropriate action where needed to improve outcomes for specific groups.

As such, there is unlikely to be any negative impact on particular groups as a direct result of the policy itself. However the implementation of specific actions will need to be closely monitored to ensure that, in positively impacting circumstances for one or more groups, there are not unintended negative impacts on others.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
The key equality objectives and priorities for action are not implemented, or do not have the desired positive impact	<p>Progress in implementing the objectives and actions will be monitored reviewed as part of the council's overall performance and risk management arrangements, and amended as appropriate / required</p> <p>Service users, individuals and communities who share protected characteristics, and representative organisations will be engaged in the development and implementation of actions as appropriate</p>
Implementing actions to have a positive impact on one or more groups who share protected characteristics has an unintended negative consequence on others	<p>Progress in implementing the objectives and actions will be monitored reviewed as part of the council's overall performance and risk management arrangements, and amended as appropriate / required</p> <p>All actions that represent a significant change in policy or are likely to impact on one or more groups of customers will undergo a Service and Community Impact Assessment, with appropriate mitigating actions identified and implemented</p>

## Impact on staff

The Equality Act 2010 requires all decision-makers to be aware of their responsibilities in relation to the aims of the Act, and all staff (and elected members) will need to be aware of the key equality objectives and actions identified with the Equality Policy 2012-2017. Staff will also be required to consider the potential impact of their own actions and decisions on people who share protected characteristics during the course of their 'everyday work', in keeping with the Council's approach to 'mainstreaming' equality and diversity work.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
Staff are not aware of the new policy, or their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010	A communications plan has been developed to help implement the new strategy, utilising a range of methods to raise awareness including intranet, CCMT core brief cascade and targeted briefing and training sessions
Mainstreaming equalities makes it 'no-one's business' rather than 'everyone's business'	Responsibility for the implementation of the Equalities Policy and ensuring high standards of equality and diversity practice rests with Deputy Directors and Directorate Leadership Teams.  Key equality objectives are closely aligned to corporate objectives, and priorities for action embedded within existing plans and strategies (including directorate business strategies).  Issues will be identified and escalated as appropriate as part of the council's overall performance and risk management process.
Staff do not feel confident considering or dealing with equality and diversity issues	A range of training and briefing opportunities will be delivered, including targeted sessions for specific services or areas / topics of concern

## Impact on providers

Public bodies are responsible for ensuring that any third parties which exercise functions on their behalf are capable of complying with the Equality Duty, are required to comply with it, and that they do so in practice. It is a duty that cannot be delegated. It is therefore important that all individuals and organisations providing services on behalf of the council are aware of their responsibilities under the Equality Act, equality duty, and the new Equality Policy.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
Any provider will be expected to uphold the same high standards of equality and diversity as the Council in furthering the aims of the Equality Act 2010 and specific public sector equality duty	There is a requirement that all organisations in receipt of council funding will adopt appropriate equalities policies, and ensure all staff are aware of their responsibilities in achieving the aims of the public sector equality duty. This requirement is made clear within procurement guidance and toolkits that are available to all staff, and is written into funding agreements and contracts awarded including monitoring arrangements. In the event of non-compliance appropriate action can be taken.

**Impact on other council services**

The Equality Policy 2012-2017 will apply to all council services, and in many cases will require changes in practice as a result of implanting actions identified within the policy and/or the review of other policies in line with the Equality Act 2010 and public sector equality duty.

However no risks specific to other council services have been identified, beyond those already considered above.