

Equality Policy 2018 – 2022 Consultation Feedback Report

1. Introduction

This report has been produced following the end of the Draft Equality Policy and Objectives 2018 – 2022 Consultation. The consultation took place from 29 January to 11 March 2018.

We would like to thank everyone who has given us feedback by attending a focus group meeting, or by completing a questionnaire on our online consultation portal or by hard copy, or who has contacted us directly by phone or by letter.

1.1 Why was this consultation needed?

Oxfordshire County Council is committed to the principles of equality, diversity, fairness and inclusion both in terms of our own workforce and with respect to the services we commission and deliver for local residents. In line with our responsibilities under the Equality Act we are developing a new Equality Policy as our current one is due for review.

1.2 How did we tell people about the consultation?

- We emailed a covering letter to over 80 organisations and people in Oxfordshire
- We shared information with organisations and communities including My Life My Choice
- We used social media where appropriate and the consultation was 'Yammered' to staff via our intranet pages
- There was information about the consultation and the request to invite the consultation team to local events where appropriate, on the Oxfordshire County Council online consultation portal and intranet, with weblinks signposting to the online questionnaire
- The Talking Health and Patient Involvement newsletters helped to advertise the consultation by directing people to the Oxfordshire County Council online portal
- We asked the 43 libraries to display information advertising the consultation

1.3 How did we get people's feedback?

We used a range of methods to get people's feedback including:

- The online survey (hard copy surveys were provided on request) which received 20 responses, including a detailed response from Oxford City Council

- One focus group meeting at the Jam Factory in Oxford with My Life My Choice members
- In addition to the 20 responses via the online consultation portal, we received an email, a telephone response, and a letter

2. Overview of Feedback

The consultation comprised a questionnaire of 5 questions.

Question 1: Please choose 3 objectives only that should be our priority.

We asked respondents to pick 3 objectives that they felt should be our priorities. All of these areas are important and will form part of our strategy but we wanted respondents to think about what they saw as the most important areas of focus.

Highest priority	
Objective 7	We will improve the balance of gender in our workforce, particularly in services where a group is under-represented
Objective 8	We will increase the representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic employees in the workforce.
Objective 10	We will improve how we support our employees with disabilities so they can be fully involved in the workplace, access career development opportunities and be successful at work
Medium priority	
Objective 2	We want to know what people think about the services we provide, so we will ask for feedback on our services to make sure we can take your views into account in future and our services meet everyone's needs.
Objective 6	Some of our services are provided by other agencies or organisations. We will make sure they know about our commitment to the equality duty, the protected characteristics and their role in helping us meet our objectives
Lower priority	
Objective 3	We will improve access to our public website and other digital services we provide to make sure all residents are able to access the information they need as easily as possible.
Objective 4	We want to make sure that our public buildings are accessible to all our residents and staff and so we will carry out a review to check this.
Objective 1	It is important that we know who our customers are and so we will ask you to tell us more about you when you contact our customer service centre and/or our complaints team
Objective 9	We will increase the number of people under 25 employed in the Council's workforce.
Objective 5	We will improve the quality of the data we collect about our

	<p>residents and service users and make sure it is as current as possible. This will help us to respond better to the differing needs of our communities when planning and designing services.</p>
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People thought all the objectives were admirable, including the My Life My Choice focus group. One response stated that choosing 3 at the expense of the others was a challenge. Another, that there are so many more than 3 objectives that are vitally important. ‘All necessary and overdue’. People said it was quite hard to choose only THREE objectives.

The feedback told us that the demographic make-up of our workforce is important to people in Oxfordshire with the top three objectives chosen being around the balance of gender in our organisation, the representation of BAME employees and the way we support our employees with disabilities.

Other key themes that are important to the public are: collecting better feedback and ensuring our commissioned services know about the equality duty and our commitment to it. It is also important that our services, our information and our buildings are accessible.

These key themes will help us ensure our action plan is robust in the areas of greatest importance.

Question 2: Do you have any comments on the other objectives?

We received feedback that not all the objectives are ‘SMART’ (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time Specific) which could mean that some are difficult to measure. We will review our objectives in light of this comment.

One person commented that having an awareness of the Oxfordshire demographic is important. This is the reason we collect information on our residents and want to improve the quality of that information. However, another response received was that ‘I don’t particularly like being asked a whole load of personal questions when I access a service, whatever the reason’. We will make sure we balance these opposing viewpoints when developing our action plan.

Accessibility was highlighted as an important issue and our public website and Council buildings are the key areas of focus here.

We received feedback that the workforce objectives need to commit to supporting all underrepresented groups, including LGBT. We understand that we need to ensure this does not become positive discrimination however we are committed to removing barriers for these groups, and increasing the numbers of applications we receive from our residents with protected characteristics.

It is important to note that the importance of gender equality in terms of pay and seniority was identified by a number of responses.

Question 3: Is there anything else we should include in our objectives?

One person responded that we should treat all the people we come into contact with, with respect and dignity. We will make sure this is reflected in our policy introduction as this is one of our key principles.

Equal pay and the gender pay gap was raised again in this section. This is a national issue and this feedback will be given to our Human Resources (HR) department.

This question also elicited responses about making sure all underrepresented groups are supported and protected from abuse, discrimination and hate crime. We are signed up as a Stonewall Diversity Champion, however, this is a theme that can be identified throughout the responses and will be fed back to HR for action.

The importance of good access was highlighted under this question in line with the responses to question 1.

Preventing discrimination based on class/income and deprivation is something that is considered in our Oxfordshire County Council Service and Community Impact Assessments (SCIA). Although this is not a protected characteristic the Council do consider the socio-economic impact of changes to services during the planning stage. We also collect a wealth of information on this area in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment which is used in service planning and design.

Question 4: Do you have any other comments on the draft Equality Policy?

We are grateful for the positive comments in this section that the new policy is welcomed. We are committed to embedding principles of equality, fairness, diversity and inclusion across all our work.

We received constructive feedback on the layout and structure of the policy document, including helpful points on how to better describe the content and making the document easier to navigate. These comments will be taken on board in redrafting the final version of the policy document.

We note that more detail about the self-assessment framework would be appreciated and this can be addressed in the final version of the document.

One response was that: 'The ten objectives seem reasonable and sensible – though, of course, the biggest challenge is not so much formulating the objectives as making sure they are adhered to in practice.' Another commented that 'we have to be able to deliver on it'. We agree and want to make sure the monitoring and governance in this policy is robust, with a particular emphasis on implementing key actions against each of the objectives.

Question 5: Is there anything else you wish to tell us regarding our commitment to equality?

My Life My Choice agreed in their discussions that 'equality' is not the same as 'fairness' and that, in their opinion it is more important to be fair to all.

'Provide robust equality impact assessments and not tokenistic tick box ones' – This will be put forward for inclusion in our SCIA guidance.

We had some positive statements here: 'I believe the Council is genuinely committed to equality, diversity and inclusion and I support that commitment' and 'in general this seems like a very good and thorough policy'. Thank you for these comments.

However, we agree with the comment that we must 'not pay lip service to this. Make sure your decision makers are from a diverse background with diverse experiences and ideas'. We are strongly committed to improving the diversity of our workforce and recognise that there is still more work to do on this issue.

We note the comments in this section about the questions we ask when collecting data, in particular regarding gender. We will continue to take any national guidance into consideration on this matter.

3. Next Steps

We will consider the feedback received from the consultation and review our draft policy. We will then make any changes required to the policy document, action plan and monitoring. The final version will be taken to Cabinet for approval in May 2018.

The final version of the document will be shared on our public website.

Our Action Plan will be monitored by the Cabinet on a quarterly basis and an annual report produced, which will be published. The Action Plan will be updated annually to reflect progress being made against our objectives.

The Human Resources department will continue to publish their Equality in Employment Report annually and put that report on our public website.

4. Further Information:

For further information about this consultation please contact the Policy and Performance Team, 2nd Floor, County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND or telephone 07990 367851.

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