

CABINET – 13 MAY 2014

EQUALITY POLICY: ACTION PLAN FOR 2014/15

Report by Head of Policy

Introduction

1. Oxfordshire County Council is committed to making Oxfordshire a fair and equal place in which to live, work and visit. We want our services to effectively meet the needs of all local residents, including those in rural areas and areas of deprivation. We also 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.
2. In 2012 we launched our *Equality Policy* setting out how we aim to achieve this goal, as well as meet our obligations under the Equality Act 2010. In January 2013 we published our first annual update on our progress. Both documents can be read here:
<http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/equality-and-cohesion>
Good progress has been made on the objectives in 2013/14 and a second annual update is included in this report in Annex 2.
3. As we are two years into the four year policy, it is timely to refresh the actions against which we are measuring our progress, to ensure that we are reflecting the work of all our service areas and the priorities of the council, as set out in the latest Corporate Plan and directorate Business Strategies. These new actions are the focus of Annex 1.
4. Annex 3 presents some key data about the Oxfordshire population, taken from the 2011 Census and categorised by protected characteristics. It also provides information about some of the data we collate about service users and potential service users. The council is required to show it has an adequate evidence base for its decision making.

Background

5. The Equality Act 2010 sets out nine protected characteristics which, taken together, include everybody in the country. We all share some or all of these characteristics and it is an offence to use any of them as an excuse to treat people unfairly. These protected characteristics are:
 - Age
 - Disability
 - Gender reassignment
 - Marriage and civil partnership
 - Pregnancy and maternity

- Race, including ethnic or national origins, colour, or nationality
 - Religion or belief, including the lack thereof.
 - Sex
 - Sexual orientation
6. The Act places specific obligations on public bodies. Section 149 sets out the Public Sector Equality Duty. Under this duty, all public bodies, including Oxfordshire County Council must have due regard to 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.
7. 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. At Oxfordshire County Council we use Service and Community Impact Assessments (SCIAs) to review the potential impact of new and updated policies and service delivery decisions on groups that share the nine protected characteristics and on rural communities and areas of deprivation. The SCIAs produced as part of the 2013/14 budget setting process can be found on Oxfordshire County Council's website here:
<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/service-and-community-impact-assessments-scias>
 - 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> .
 - To set specific, measurable equality objectives and publish these, along with an equality policy. These are set out below. We have to report at least annually on our progress, and we have to revise our objectives every four years. In our *Equality Policy 2012-17*, we set ourselves the following objectives:
 1. Understanding the needs of individuals and communities
 2. Providing accessible, local and personalised services, including to rural areas and areas of deprivation
 3. Supporting thriving and cohesive communities
 4. Promoting a culture of fairness in employment and service delivery
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 and supports our commitment to making equalities integral to everything we do.

Financial and Staff Implications

9. None

RECOMMENDATION

10. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to agree to the new Equality Policy Action Plan for 2014/15 (Annex 1)**

MAGGIE SCOTT
Head of Policy

Background papers: Oxfordshire County Council Equality Policy 2012-2017

Contact Officer: Alison Yates, Senior Policy Officer

May 2014