

Division(s): ALL

**Performance Scrutiny Committee  
10 September 2020**

**Including Everyone.  
Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Framework**

**Report by Corporate Director for Customers and Organisational Development**

**RECOMMENDATION**

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to:**
  - a) **comment on the draft policy document and make suggestions for its associated action plan, which will be recommended to Cabinet for agreement by Cabinet on the 13th of October 2020; and**
  - b) **advise on and schedule an effective performance monitoring approach for the policy.**

**Executive Summary**

2. Oxfordshire County Council takes its obligations and commitments to equalities, diversity and inclusion very seriously. The annual update of the council's equality policy has been undertaken in partnership with Cherwell District Council to align approaches in a new joint policy, which is called 'Including Everyone: Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Framework.
3. The legislative framework for this work sits within the Equality Act (2010) which states that public bodies, including Councils need to take extra steps to stop discrimination: this is known as the Public Sector Equality Duty.
4. This report highlights the need for change, describes the process to update the policy and describes what we want to be different as a result of the work.

**Background and key issues**

*The need for change*

5. 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 BAME communities. Moreover, the recently published 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.

6. Some of the inequalities which have been highlighted include:
  - Life expectancy between the most and least deprived wards in Oxfordshire is 13.7 years
  - In 2020, 10% of children across the county live in low-income families; that is almost 12,000 children living in poverty
  - Men earn on average £6,800 more than women in the Oxfordshire area.
  - 89,800 people live with a long-term illness or disability in Oxfordshire (2011).
  - In 2011, there were 61,100 unpaid carers in Oxfordshire
  - 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.
7. 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. 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. Ultimately, a fully inclusive Oxfordshire will help to deliver better life chances for all. Updating our approach to equalities, diversity and inclusion seeks to promote and support a more inclusive workplace, services and communities.

### *Updating the policy*

8. The OCC equality policy is updated annually to ensure it remains current. This year's update has taken the form of a joint equality, diversity and inclusion framework, in-line with our partnership working commitment to policy development and procedure alignment and prompted by 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.
9. The framework 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 then undertaken 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.
  - **Learning Together:** Learning about inclusion issues, unlearning previous assumptions and training emerged as a key theme from the discussion groups. There is a key role 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.

- **Inclusion is everyone's business:** Everyone needs to be part of the conversation, not just those with lived experience or an interest.
  - **Language is important:** We need to adopt a 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. They 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 empathise with them. In addition, the council needs to promote equalities and inclusion across the organisation.
10. The themes that emerged from the discussion groups, together with a data pack about equalities in our communities and the HR equalities data held by the Council, were used to inform the drafting of a new joint framework, called 'Including Everyone'. This is attached in Annex A.
11. Throughout August, an engagement exercise 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 building blocks to allow us to better go out and engage communities as we develop our approach.
12. The feedback from this exercise told us:
- The joint approach is welcomed.
  - Broad agreement with the vision, which could be strengthened with 'leading by example' or 'continually learning'.
  - Broad agreement with the principles, which need to be reflected in management in both organisations to ensure they are realised.
  - 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 would 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 reported to be causing concern for staff by blocking participation or being discriminatory themselves
  - Actions need to include training and evaluation of staff (especially managers) on equalities, diversity and inclusion.
13. This feedback will shape the final policy, which is planned for a decision in the autumn. The policy will be accompanied by individual action plans for each organisation to take account of the unique circumstances and actions needed in each council.

### *What will be different*

14. The updating of a policy will not deliver change alone; the new framework sets out a vision and structure for organising our work to improve equalities, diversity and inclusion within the workplace, services and communities.
15. The action plans will be key to achieving the goals and commitments set within the framework. The actions will seek to make a shift in people's lived experiences of inclusion. This means having a measurable impact, for example, on the following:
- 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 different backgrounds being paid the same for the same roles they carry out
  - Those with disabilities, learning difficulties, mental health issues or caring responsibilities being supported to have equal educational, health and economic opportunities

### **Next steps**

16. The timeline for next steps is as follows.
- i. Cherwell District Council, Overview and Scrutiny Committee. 13 October 2020
  - ii. Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet, 13 October 2020
  - iii. Cherwell District Council Executive, 2 November 2020
17. Planning is underway for wider public engagement across the county and the district on tackling inequalities. This will launch in the autumn and will include engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, partners and residents.

### **Implications**

18. **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.** This work will revise and update the council's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion. The work will seek to

strengthen the approach and therefore enhance the council's commitment to all of the protected characteristics contained within the Equality Act 2010.

19. **Resources.** The activity highlighted in this report has been delivered within the existing budgets and with existing staff resource.

## **Supporting documents**

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

CLAIRE TAYLOR

Corporate Director for Customers and Organisational Development

Contact Officer: Sam Shepherd, Policy Team Leader  
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