

CABINET – 22 MAY 2018

EQUALITY POLICY AND STRATEGY 2018 - 2022

Report by the Assistant Chief Executive

Introduction

1. The Equality Policy 2018-2022 sets out how the Council is approaching its responsibilities for ensuring that the principles of equality, diversity, fairness and inclusion are applied to our own workforce and the services we commission and deliver to residents. It demonstrates how the Council is meeting the requirements placed on public bodies under the Equality Act 2010, including setting eight objectives for the next four years. The objectives will be achieved through an annual action plan that will be monitored quarterly as part of the Council's performance monitoring arrangements.

Requirements of the Equality Act 2010

2. The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on public bodies to give due regard to the need to:
 - (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic, and those who do not
3. The Act identifies nine 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
4. The Duty places three specific responsibilities on the Council. Firstly the Council must consider how the decisions it makes and services it delivers affect people who share different protected characteristics, Oxfordshire County Council achieves this by assessing potential impacts through a Service and Community Impact Assessment (SCIA) that is proportionate to the significance of the change. Secondly the Council must annually publish information to

demonstrate compliance with the general equality duty including information relating to people with protected characteristics, Oxfordshire County Council achieves this by annually publishing an equalities data briefing and including information in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. Finally, the Council must publish an equality policy and specific measurable equality objectives at least every four years, this strategy represents this requirement.

Equality Policy and Strategy 2018 - 2022

5. A detailed report has been produced that evidences how the Council is currently performing, the objectives that have been developed and the equalities profile of our communities. The Council undertook a self-assessment using the Local Government Association Equality Framework. Performance could be assessed as 'Developing', 'Achieving' or 'Excellent'.
6. The assessment against the five performance areas was as follows:
 - (a) Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment – Achieving
 - (b) Knowing your communities – Achieving
 - (c) Involving your communities – Achieving
 - (d) Responsive services and customer care – Developing
 - (e) A skilled and committed workforce – Achieving
7. Through the self-assessment and public consultation, the Council has identified areas where we are currently performing well, including areas of excellent practice. We have also identified areas where the Council needs to make improvements and these have been developed into eight objectives:

Objective 1: It is important that we know who are 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 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 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 will improve the quality of the data we collect about our residents and service users to 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

Objective 5: We want to make sure that our public buildings are accessible to all our residents and staff. We will review access to buildings we maintain to ensure that they are as accessible as possible

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

Objective 7: We will improve the diversity of our workforce so it better reflects the diversity of our communities

Objective 8: 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.

8. Each objective has actions associated with them that will be monitored quarterly and refreshed annually. The full Policy is attached as Annexe 1 to this report.

Consultation

9. The Council undertook a six week public consultation exercise between 29 January – 11 March 2018. The Council used a range of methods to gather people's feedback including:
 - An online and hardcopy survey that received 20 responses
 - Letters to over 80 organisations and people in Oxfordshire including an offer to meet with interested parties
 - Adverts in Talking Health and the Patient Involvement newsletters to advertise the consultation
 - Information in 43 public libraries
 - A focus group meeting with My Life My Choice
10. Generally, respondents thought the objectives were admirable. Feedback from our consultation told us that the demographic make-up of our workforce; collecting better feedback; ensuring that our commissioned services know about the equalities duty and ensuring our buildings are as physically accessible as possible were all particularly important to people in Oxfordshire.
11. The most notable change that the Council made as a result of the public consultation was the amalgamation of our workforce objectives in relation to gender, Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) representation and employees under the age of 25 into a single objective. This decision will allow us to take a holistic approach to identifying the barriers that exist for people in applying to work for the Council. The Council will still ensure that it considers individual protected characteristics as part of this objective and will actively seek to understand intersectionality so that we can address any barriers.
12. Respondents also suggested that we needed to make our objectives SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time Specific) so we modified our objectives to achieve this. A detailed summary of the consultation feedback can be found in Annexe 2 of this report.

13. In addition to the public consultation, the Performance Scrutiny Committee considered the draft strategy at their meeting on 4 January 2018. The Committee noted that the policy should aim to ensure diversity through all levels of the workforce.

Action Plan 2018-19

14. The overarching theme for this year's action plan is in relation to evidence gathering, particularly in relation to making our workforce more reflective of our community. The Council has identified where gaps exist in our workforce representation and will now work towards understanding the barriers that exist to put targeted work in place to address them.
15. The Council will also work towards gathering more evidence about its customers to ensure that the new digital systems that are put in place as part of the Fit for the Future programme do not create unnecessary barriers for those with protected characteristics.
16. The Council will also be reviewing the physical accessibility of our buildings as this was highlighted as an issue of concern through the public consultation exercise. The action plan for 2018-19 can be found on page 16 of Annexe 1.

Monitoring and Governance

17. The Cabinet Member for Local Communities will have overall responsibility for ensuring that we achieve our equalities objectives. Feedback from the public consultation made it clear that monitoring and governance arrangements were important to include in the new Policy. The action plan has identified lead senior council officers who will take on responsibility for the actions. Quarterly monitoring information will be provided and this will be tied to the overall Performance Monitoring Framework. A working group drawn from across the Council will set the objectives for the subsequent three years of the strategy.
18. The Performance Scrutiny Committee will consider the strategy at their meeting on 5 July 2018 to inform discussions that the Committee will have in relation to the Council workforce and the diversity of the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service workforce.

Financial and Staff Implications

19. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. However there may be financial implications arising from the delivery of some of the actions against the objectives in the Equality Policy 2018-2022. These will be met from within existing budgets.
20. Objectives within the Equality Policy 2018-2022 will mean that the Council will work towards creating a workforce that is reflective of the wider Oxfordshire community.

Equalities Implications

21. The Equality Policy 2018-2022 is intended to have a positive impact on all groups that share protected characteristics as defined in the Act. A full Service and Community Impact Assessment (SCIA) that details how the implications have been considered is attached at Annexe 3 of this report.

Risk Management

22. The Equalities Policy encourages all decisions makers to consider the effects of their decisions on those who may be more vulnerable in our communities and in particular those with protected characteristics. This helps the Council to mitigate against the risk of inequality of opportunity. A Service and Community Impact Assessment (SCIA) has been prepared for the Equalities Policy and all decisions undertaken by the Council will undertake an equalities assessment that is appropriate and proportional to the decision being taken.
23. The Equality Act 2010 places a statutory duty on the Council to produce an Equalities Policy at least once every four years, by producing and agreeing this Policy we are contributing towards the requirements under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

RECOMMENDATION

24. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to approve the Equality Policy and Strategy 2018 – 2022.**

MAGGIE SCOTT

Assistant Chief Executive

Background papers: None

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May 2018