

Review of Oxfordshire County Council's Race Equality Scheme 2002-2005

1. Introduction

Our first Race Equality Scheme (RES) was published in 2002 and covered a 3 year period. We revised and republished our Scheme in March 2005 as part of a statutory review of our functions and policies. This gave us the opportunity to review our progress in promoting race equality and to review the approach we have taken to date.

This report highlights the lessons we have learnt over the previous three years. It explains the adjustments we have made to our approach. Good practice and examples of the service improvements that have been made as a result of our Race Equality Scheme are highlighted.

2. Our strategic approach to race equality.

The initial Race Equality Scheme has significantly raised the profile of race equality within the authority. It has provided a platform for developing the Council's wider work on equality issues, most notably the agreement of our Comprehensive Equality Policy in March 2004.

Updating and revising the Race Equality Scheme has enabled us to incorporate the lessons we have learnt in implementing the previous scheme and to review the approach we have taken. For example, from the first scheme it is clear that we need to ensure that race equality is clearly embedded in service and business planning. We have ensured that our activities arising from adoption of the Equality Standard for Local Government and the development of our Social Inclusion Strategy are aligned with the requirements of our Race Equality Scheme. Consequently, as of 1 April 2005 we have adopted a united process for assessing impact on grounds of race, gender and disability.

3. Assessing our functions and policies for relevance to the duty to promote race equality

Under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 we are required to list our functions and policies that are relevant to our duty to promote race equality. This list should be reviewed at least every three years. By undertaking this review we have been able to update the list of functions and policies included in the first scheme to ensure that it is properly and fully reflective of the Council and our business. This has allowed for changes over the course of the last three years and the introduction and identification of new functions/policies. We have also revised, where necessary, the prioritisation of some functions and policies where our experience from the first scheme has shown the original prioritisation to be no longer appropriate.

Since publishing our first scheme we have worked towards ensuring that all new functions and policies are screened and assessed in terms of race equality prior to being adopted. We are aiming for this to be embraced as standard practice as part of the development of new functions and policies.

4. Monitoring, reviewing and assessing our functions and policies for their impact on race equality.

4.1. Equality Impact Assessment Review Process

Our functions and policies are assessed through an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) review process. These reviews are undertaken to ensure that none of our functions / policies have a detrimental or adverse impact on people of any particular racial or ethnic groups, or if they do to reduce and then eliminate this adverse impact.

Our Equality Impact Assessment process and guidance has been revised in accordance with feedback received during the first scheme. We have also used the Commission for Racial Equality's non-statutory guide for public authorities and step-by-step guide to impact assessments. Our new guidance sets out clearly our process and includes, for example, questions to enable the completing officer to consider the research and evidence relevant to the function or policy in question, how to deal with any adverse impact and arrangements for the monitoring of policies post implementation.

Outcomes of the assessments undertaken as part of our first Race Equality Scheme are highlighted later in this report.

4.2. Monitoring Systems

From the first scheme it is clear that we need to ensure that adequate monitoring systems are in place across all our directorates. Some impact assessments undertaken during the first Race Equality Scheme identified a lack of detailed monitoring data. As an outcome of the impact assessment process, officers were tasked with putting systems in place to rectify this. We are using the Commission for Racial Equality's guide to ethnic monitoring for public authorities to inform the improvements we are making to our monitoring arrangements. As a result, the quality and quantity of data and monitoring activity undertaken during our second scheme should improve significantly.

5. Meeting the Employment Specific Duties

5.1. Monitoring Employment Procedures and Practice

The County Council is a long standing member of the Oxfordshire Employers Race Equality Network (OEREN). The Network aims to share best practice and take actions to promote good race relations. In March 2005 the County Council helped to organise the first ever race equality awards ceremony in Oxfordshire. A wide range of nominations were received from the BME community. The Social & Health Care directorate of Oxfordshire County Council won the category for large employer for their work supporting BME staff.

Under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 we are required to monitor by reference to racial groups a number of key employment issues. These include, staff in post, applicants for employment, and staff that are involved in grievance procedures. Reports have been produced annually to provide updates on key employment issues. Information from these monitoring reports has been used to inform policy and decision making and to assist the Council in meeting the need to positively promote race equality.

5.2. Ethnic Monitoring Data

During the course of the first scheme we have improved the quality and availability of the data which we have collected. There remain some concerns, such as surrounding the detailed information needed from larger schools within the county, which we will aim to address through our revised scheme.

Although the numbers of staff with no ethnicity declared is declining there is still need for further action. From the Equal Pay Audit undertaken in March 2005, we have recognised that some targeted action should be undertaken to encourage employees in the lower grades to declare their ethnicity.

New arrangements for applying to jobs with the Council have also caused us to review how we capture details of ethnicity from candidates. In particular, the launch of an online jobs application system in October 2004 has seen a substantial rise in the number of applicants for vacancies.

The implementation of the training events module of our Management Information System began to 'go live' in April 2005. Consequently the quality of information on the recipients of training should improve as we are no longer reliant on the information that directorates have managed to gather on local systems. As part of the ongoing development of our Management Information System we hope to be able to develop reporting to better monitor training received and training requested. Progress towards this will be supported through an Action Plan detailing actions to be undertaken in light of the production of our most recent Employment Specific Duties report in June 2005.

5.3. Overview of the ethnic profile of Oxfordshire County Council's workforce

From our last report, covering the period 1st April 2004 to 31st March 2005, we saw an increase in the number of BME employees and better representation of different racial groups within the council's workforce, even though there has been a slight increase in the number of BME staff leaving. The recorded cases of grievances and disciplinary proceedings are broadly representative of the workforce. From our analysis of the work undertaken on the equal pay audit of all staff in grades 1-18 who come under the NJC 'Green Book' terms and conditions of service, there was no significant difference in the likelihood of people from a BME background being down-graded than white colleagues as a result of job evaluation.

There is good representation of BME candidates to non-schools based vacancies being shortlisted and appointed though this trend is not repeated for schools based vacancies. Measures such as a new house-style for recruiting advertising, which was launched in December 2004, targeted recruitment advertising in minority group publications and circulation of vacancies appearing in The Post, the Council's newsletter for staff and Councillors, to minority community groups have all helped to attract candidates to non-schools based roles. By following this lead, the numbers of BME candidates applying, short-listed and appointed for school-based vacancies might also be increased.

6. Informing and training staff on race equality issues

We have developed a manager's handbook for the Council. This provides a single point of reference for issues likely to be encountered in the day-to-day work of our managers. The handbook includes detailed information on our commitment to promoting equality and social inclusion. The development needs of all staff are assessed at least twice a year during appraisals. This enables us to ensure that individual training needs on equality issues are met.

During the last scheme we developed a workbook for staff on promoting good race relations. This workbook was specifically produced in response to our Race Equality Scheme in order to provide practical advice and strategies for staff to respond positively to the duty to promote race equality and the recommendations of the Stephen Lawrence

Inquiry Report. Our Social & Health Care and Learning & Culture directorates both continue to use the workbook to train staff in promoting good race relations. The feedback from those staff that have used it has been very positive.

Also during the previous scheme the Environment & Economy directorate piloted equality and diversity training that initially focused on the legal requirements (through ACAS). This was followed up with a session for managers on confronting prejudice. The feedback from both courses was mixed so other potential ways of training on a more corporate basis have been explored by Human Resources Talent Management.

A framework for the way in which Human Resources Talent Management will support learning and development for diversity across the Council has been developed. Our Customer Service Team is currently working on the development of a Customer Service NVQ which will include a module on equality and diversity. We recognise that there will be different training requirements dependant on the roles our staff fulfil and hence we are developing a range of specialist training to support the NVQ programme. Taster sessions run in the lead-up to the delivery of NVQ training are being considered for use as corporate induction materials. This will ensure that all new employees, as part of their induction, are made aware of our Comprehensive Equality Policy and Race Equality Scheme. In March 2005 we produced a Guide to Culture and Faiths in Oxfordshire. This Guide is intended to inform our staff on the main aspects of major cultures and faiths in the County and will contribute significantly to the promotion of good race relations in Oxfordshire.

Guidance and briefings have been provided to staff responsible for managing and delivering the Council's Race Equality Scheme. These have included awareness of the statutory requirements and their implications, the contents of the scheme itself and how the equality impact assessment reviews are to be undertaken. Development opportunities on the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the duty to promote race equality have been provided to Councillors and will continue to be included in the training and development programme for our elected members, as appropriate.

7. Access to information and services

Through reviewing our functions and policies in relation to the duty to promote race equality, we have improved the quality of the services that we deliver and worked to ensure that these meet the needs of people from our diverse communities.

Examples of the improvements to services that have been made to better meet the need to promote race equality are highlighted below by directorate. Also highlighted are good practice measures identified as already in place and the steps we have taken to tackle a lack of equality of opportunity and any adverse impact.

7.1. Chief Executive's Office

Democratic Services assessment of access to information on the decision-making process identified the need to raise awareness of the facilities that are available to enable those whose first language is not English to engage with decision makers. Means suggested for doing this included more clearly promoting the availability of interpreters and signposting in other languages on the Council's website to provide better access to information. Leaflets explaining the public's rights to attend meetings, address them and present petitions will have a statement in other languages providing routes for further information, interpretation and translation.

The need to revise the corporate complaints policy was identified by the Corporate Complaints Service as part of their review. The review flagged up insufficient targeting of publicity about the scheme to ethnic minority groups and relatively low usage of the complaints procedure by ethnic minorities. Revision of the policy should enable greater incorporation of procedures designed to improve access for ethnic minorities. This should have the effect of improving good race relations between ethnic minority groups and the Council. It should also increase the level of feedback on the quality of our services from ethnic minority customers.

The Communications and Marketing Unit will look to assist other directorates in their communications with the community. This will be done by helping services to identify more opportunities to promote equality in their communications. The Unit will also work with the Customer Service Team to display images that promote and strengthen good race relations throughout the public areas of County Council buildings.

A review of social inclusion work led to the development and adoption of a corporate Social Inclusion Strategy in October 2004. This effectively links promoting equality and social inclusion with increased social cohesion. The Oxfordshire in Detail Report draws together data to provide a detailed factual representation of social exclusion in the county.

7.2. Community Safety

Following their review, the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service will continue to expand the availability of translated fire safety information. The review highlighted the work the Fire Service has done, and continues to do, to develop relationships with the communities they serve by which to understand their needs and requirements. The support they have given to refugees and asylum seekers has created good ambassadors for the service, who reflect their positive experiences of the Council as an employer and service provider within their communities. In addition, risk data is being used to target fire safety initiatives at vulnerable groups thus promoting equality of access to fire prevention initiatives.

The impact assessment of Emergency Planning has shown that the diverse needs of the community during emergencies within their Evacuation and Rest Centre Procedures have been considered. For example, all provisions for interpreters / faith rooms and dietary requirements are catered for within the plans.

The review of the Static Traveller Site Licence Agreement drew attention to the establishment of meetings between council officers and members and representatives of residents on the sites. Through these meetings any issues arising, possibly as a result of existing policies or their involvement in the review / development of policies, will be addressed. To improve the management of these sites the management of Traveller site provision has also been transferred from an outside provider to the County Council.

The Safer Communities Unit is taking the positive step, under the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership Strategy to train staff in recognising, reporting and monitoring racial incidents and increasing the number of reporting centres. These measures should help to instil greater confidence among BME communities in reporting racial incidents. This work will be carefully managed to address perceptions of the lack of progress in tackling racial discrimination and insufficient attention to promoting good race relations between people from different racial groups which could arise.

The Youth Offending Service promotes equality of opportunity for all young people in the youth justice system through ensuring equal access to all community based programmes, within a criminal justice setting. Assessment of this Service highlighted the work they undertake with people who have committed hate crimes and how they work to rehabilitate these young people. The Service also employs a worker to work specifically with young asylum seekers.

7.3. Environment & Economy

Following their review, Oxfordshire Registration Service sought to improve the provision of information for ethnic minorities by providing all leaflets community languages and to amend electronic and paper forms that use the terms Christian Name and Surname to First Name and Family Name. Possible adaptations to service provision identified for further investigation include the potential to hold non-statutory civil ceremonies in restaurants and other public buildings. This would help to meet the needs of the Chinese community where traditionally the celebration of a baby's birth is held in a restaurant. They have also sought to be flexible with the service that has been offered, such as by providing an emergency call out number for Muslim deaths that occur over a weekend.

The Better Ways to School initiative, run by Transport Services, encourages parents and children to use sustainable modes on the journey to school. It provides guidance to schools for the development of School Travel Plans. The need to ensure that such guidance is sensitive to the needs of different groups in society is highlighted through the review, recognising that some groups may prefer to travel to school by car for cultural reasons or for fear of their safety or bullying.

Through a review of the Trading Standards service further opportunities have been identified to improve the quality and access of the service to people from different ethnic groups. The need to promote aspects of the service, such as consumer education and advice, within ethnic minority groups was identified and a review undertaken to assess whether any further measures can be identified through which to further break down language and communication barriers.

The Strategic Policy and Economic Development Team looks to develop policies and implement projects that improve the economic and environmental well being of people in Oxfordshire. As part of their review they recognised that the choice of how they allocate funding and choice of what policy areas to develop and the content of these policies can shape services in ways that affect groups differently. The potential for differential impact on some ethnic groups is being actively pursued through the development of a more coherent sustainable communities strategy. The Team is also looking to develop a more transparent basis for allocating project funds.

7.4. Learning & Culture

Following review of acquisition policies, the need to develop an active programme of acquiring collections to illustrate the culture and heritage of ethnic minority groups in Oxfordshire was identified. This will help to better meet the needs of minority groups, to promote inclusion and improve community relations. This might involve engagement with minority communities in order to research and identify items to be considered for the collections and consultation with minority groups to consider how museums and heritage services should research, document and record their communities. This increase in dialogue, even if it does not lead to further acquisitions, will help to promote a respect for different cultures and identities and through that better race relations.

The Race Equality Scheme process has also drawn attention to the need to consider race equality as part of exhibition planning. This has had an impact on exhibition programmes. Programming minority culture exhibitions, such as clothing made by Asian women in Oxford and Banbury and an exhibition of portraits of Asylum Seekers, will help to promote inclusion in the wider community and to promote better race relations.

The Library Service ensures equality of opportunity and good race relations by providing books, music and films in the languages of local ethnic groups and breaking down cultural barriers through promoting the culture of the various groups. The Library Service will continue to improve the range of promotional material in other languages and seek to undertake further consultation with BME communities.

The need to improve the speed of admission of asylum seekers to education provision was identified as change to be made following an impact assessment focusing on Raising Standards of Pupils' Attainment. To promote standards of attainment further additional funds have been allocated for asylum seekers. Support has been directed towards schools with large numbers of BME target pupils and a Senior Adviser and Education Officer have been recruited with specific responsibility for raising attainment of pupils at risk of underachieving. BME target groups have been identified as Bangladeshi, Pakistani and African-Caribbean pupils through research undertaken as part of the impact assessment process.

The review of the Principles and Procedures for Managing Exclusions from School did not identify any adverse impact to ethnic minority groups. However, it was noticed that BME pupils are more likely to be excluded. By periodic monitoring through analysis of individual school exclusions made at the end of the academic year it will be possible to identify those schools where there is an apparent over use of exclusion with pupils from ethnic minority groups.

Governor Services have highlighted in their review the need to increase the representation of black and minority ethnic governors on governing bodies. They have recognised that production of a leaflet on widening participation would help governing bodies develop recruitment strategies. Such a leaflet might also describe processes to be considered to ensure that new governors are welcomed, involved, trained and supported to ensure that they are retained.

7.5. Resources

The Translation and Interpretation Service has been reviewed through an independent assessment and consultation with service users, communities and employees working within the service. As part of the review the numbers and type of interpreters available to the Service have been assessed and languages available have been diversified to meet local need. The language and proficiency base of their interpreters has also been increased.

ICT Services have identified that as part of the implementation of electronic government assisted access may be required to help those whose first language is not English. Every effort will be made to ensure that E-Government systems will be designed in a way which makes them available to all, taking into account the requirements of different racial groups. Assistance in the use of the systems being implemented will be made available to all.

The review of the Procurement of Goods and Services by the Strategic Procurement Unit has highlighted arrangements already in place to ensure that all potential bidders to the County Council comply with all elements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. As part of this process each potential bidder will be asked to complete a Pre Qualification Questionnaire demonstrating satisfactory compliance under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

7.6. Social & Health Care

The Social & Health Care directorate employs ethnic minority community social workers who work with communities and marginalised individuals to reduce social exclusion and to help communities with self-development and capacity building. The review process identified opportunities to extend BME outreach workers to engage with BME carers. The service which provides information, support and help to carers is seeking to ensure that fully accessible information is available at carers' centres and other outlets and that access to translation services is in place. Feedback will also be sought from BME carers in respect to the appropriateness of carer services.

Many of the reviews undertaken in Social & Health Care identified the need to assess the level of employment of BME staff in relation to the population of Oxfordshire and to engage in the directorate's partnership arrangements with BME and other community groups to encourage greater participation in the planning and delivery of services. Service impact assessments which have picked up these points include Sensory Impairment, Home Support Service and Mental Health. The Mental Health Service is also looking to use monitoring data in order to inform the provision and targeting of the service. For example, by establishing and monitoring the use of Carers Service Grants by ethnic group this information can be used to address areas of inequality. The Home Support Service highlighted the need to plan for the future needs of an increasingly older ethnic population to be incorporated into business planning.

Following the assessment on Children and Families, work to complete the review of over-representation of BME children and young people on the Looked After system and on the Child Protection register will continue. Action Plans will be established on the outcome of this work. In relation to drugs and alcohol support for adults, the directorate is looking to work in partnership with addiction services to explore ways to improve contact and engagement with ethnic and disadvantaged groups. They will look to develop appropriate intervention strategies to reach traditionally hard to reach groups via consultation exercises with representatives of these groups.

8. Summary

Our first Race Equality Scheme was published in 2002 and covered a 3 year period. The initial scheme has been fundamental in raising the profile of race equality within the authority, through the systematic undertaking of race equality impact assessments, staff training and more general awareness raising. We have incorporated lessons learnt from the first scheme into our new scheme and associated work on equality and social inclusion.

Over seventy impact assessments have been undertaken as part of our initial Race Relations Scheme. By reviewing our functions and policies in relation to the duty to promote race equality, we have improved the quality of the services that we deliver and worked to ensure that these meet the needs of people from our diverse communities. By putting in place robust monitoring arrangements and repeating the impact assessments as

part of our second scheme we will continue to seek improvements to our functions and policies for all equality groups.