

CABINET

19 November 2024

Including Everyone Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Framework: 2025 – 2029

Report by Executive Director of Resources

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to
 - a) Agree to adopt the refreshed Including Everyone Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion framework, 2025-2029.
 - b) Endorse the data-led approach to implementing the new Including Everyone framework through corporate key performance indicators (KPIs).

Executive Summary

2. Oxfordshire boasts a rich diversity of residents from different ethnic groups, cultures and nations, which brings a richness to local communities and the economy; however there are also stark inequalities to address. In meeting the council's Public Sector Equality Duty, the refreshed Including Everyone framework aims to realign Oxfordshire County Council's Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) goals with its broader strategic priorities.
3. This updated framework (Annex 1) is based on insight drawn from in-depth community engagement and illustrates the council's inclusion work through a range of case studies, emphasising the importance of listening to lived experience and intersectionality to drive meaningful change. It also highlights the need for visible senior leadership in fostering inclusivity and psychological safety.
4. A key change is how the framework will be implemented and integrated into the council's service planning, with key performance indicators (KPIs) to track progress. Six KPIs have been developed, which cover the following areas:
 - Workforce diversity
 - Inclusivity competency in the workforce
 - Leadership inclusivity impact
 - Service accessibility and responsiveness
 - Effectiveness of inclusive engagement
 - Community and partner inclusion

5. The KPIs and operational progress towards them will be overseen and monitored by the council management team (CMT) and will be reported bi-annually through the Business Management and Monitoring Reports to Cabinet.

Background

6. The Equality Act (2010) requires local authorities to publish equality objectives at least every four years to comply with the public sector equality duty. As the previous Including Everyone framework was published in 2020, the council must publish an updated framework by the end of 2024.
7. The refresh of the framework gives the opportunity to realign the council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) goals with the broader strategic priorities and reconsider how the framework can be used to drive meaningful change. It has also brought the opportunity to engage directly with local residents and communities and incorporate their feedback and priorities into the new framework.
8. Since COVID-19, the cost of living crisis has led to further inequalities in Oxfordshire, with the most deprived areas experiencing higher rates of child poverty, fuel poverty and food poverty than the England average. Socioeconomic inequalities lead to poorer health outcomes and life expectancy – the difference in life expectancy between Oxfordshire's most and least deprived areas is around 11 years for males and around 12 years for females.
9. The refreshed Including Everyone framework builds upon the need to address inequalities, but takes it further, with clearer alignment with strategic priorities, organisation-wide implementation and bolder action with measurable objectives.

Reflections Since Including Everyone 2020

10. Many lessons have been learned since the publication of Including Everyone 2020. Many communities and colleagues still experience marginalisation and inequalities. The cost of living and socio-economic disadvantage have heightened inequalities and worsened health and other outcomes. While the council is committed to tackling racism and discrimination, as demonstrated by its commitments to achieve the RACE Equality Code accreditation, there is more to do. The council also recognises the importance of visible senior leadership in championing equalities and inclusion.
11. These lessons, as well as extensive consultation with colleagues, networks, communities and individual residents, have shaped this refreshed Including Everyone framework. Richer datasets have informed not only the framework itself, but how progress towards the framework's ambitions will be measured.

12. This refreshed framework has taken an 'always learning' approach, by listening to colleagues and different communities from across Oxfordshire to understand where the council needs to do better to drive meaningful inclusion for all. By listening to lived experience, and combining it with new data, this new framework is strengthened, with more emphasis on action and driving change.

Going further with Inclusion

13. The council already has a good track record of going beyond its legal equality duty by considering groups and communities beyond the protected characteristics of the Equality Act. For example, the council considers the impact of its decisions on rural communities, armed forces communities, areas of deprivation and carers.
14. The new Including Everyone framework goes further, recognising the council's commitment to considering future generations in decision-making, as well as refugees and asylum seekers by becoming a Council of Sanctuary. The new framework also includes reference to the socioeconomic duty and consideration of residents experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.
15. Including Everyone recognises the importance of lived experience and understanding intersectionality. It also strengthens the role of leaders in fostering inclusivity and psychological safety, and makes clear the responsibilities and role of leaders and managers in upholding inclusion commitments.
16. To bring this Including Everyone to life, the new framework includes real-life case studies of recent and current work that demonstrates how the council's inclusion ambitions can be realised. Examples such as the work to become a Council of Sanctuary or achieve RACE Equality Code accreditation illustrate how to 'do' as well as 'say' inclusion.

Refreshed Approach to Implementation and Reporting

17. To strengthen inclusion outcomes and drive meaningful change, the council is moving to a more data-led corporate approach of monitoring progress through the use of corporate key performance indicators (KPIs).
18. This approach will ensure corporate alignment with inclusion commitments across the organisation, and all services will need to consider how they will contribute to the organisation's progress in achieving these KPIs.
19. These KPI measures and the ambitions of Including Everyone will be better integrated through business and service planning. This will ensure that all service areas and decision-makers prioritise inclusion, not only in what they

do, but also in how services are delivered. These measures will also support planning for the future and adapting to change.

Six KPIs have been developed, which cover the following areas:

- (a) Workforce diversity
 - (1) How the council's workforce reflects the diversity of Oxfordshire communities
 - (2) Recruitment and retention of colleagues, and tracking applicant and talent diversity
- (b) Inclusivity competency in the workforce
 - (1) Skills assessments
 - (2) Training uptake
- (c) Leadership inclusivity impact
 - (1) 360-degree feedback of leaders on inclusive behaviours
 - (2) How psychologically safe employees feel in the organisation to be their authentic selves.
- (d) Service accessibility & responsiveness
 - (1) Compliance with enhanced accessibility standards
 - (2) Availability and clarity of service information
 - (3) Effectiveness of redirecting customers to appropriate services.
- (e) Effectiveness of inclusive engagement
 - (1) Diversity of consultation and engagement participants
 - (2) Implementation of resident-led improvements
 - (3) Resident satisfaction with engagement
- (f) Community and partner inclusion
 - (1) Inclusivity of partner community initiatives
 - (2) Inclusivity of partner organisations

20. The detailed measures for each KPI are in development. They will be reported bi-annually from the start of 2025/26 through the Business Management and Monitoring Report to Cabinet.

21. Each council service will consider how they can meet the corporate KPIs and what activity to undertake to work towards them.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

22. A number of existing policies and priorities align with this work, and work will continue to ensure that the relevant programmes and projects remain aligned to the Including Everyone framework. Examples include:

- (a) People and Culture Strategy
- (b) Future Generations
- (c) Council of Sanctuary
- (d) Social Value Policy

23. Including Everyone directly contributes to the council's vision of making Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county, supporting the strategic priority to tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire.

24. In addition, it contributes to a number of other strategic priorities, including:
- (a) Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents
 - (b) Support carers and the social care system
 - (c) Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential
 - (d) Play our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy.

Financial Implications

25. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report or the framework, however the new framework may influence the prioritisation of future work in relation to equalities, diversity and inclusion. Resource already exists within the policy team to lead on implementation of the framework.

Comments checked by:

Drew Hodgson, Strategic Finance Business Partner – Resources
Drew.hodgson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

26. This work fulfils the council's public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010. There are no other legal implications associated with this report.

Comments checked by:

Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Staff Implications

27. This work has no direct staffing implications. Resource for implementing this framework comes under existing allocations for a Senior Policy Officer for Equalities.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

28. As the nature of this work centres around inclusion and is guided by the public sector equality duty, equalities have been considered from the beginning of this work throughout engagement, development and design processes. This work is intended to have positive impacts on those with protected characteristics and other underrepresented communities.

Risk Management

29. There are no risks anticipated with this report or implementation of the new framework. There is reputational risk in not prioritising inclusion work, as well as legal risk if the council fails to fulfil its public sector equality duty.

Consultations and Engagement

30. Extensive external and internal consultation took place in developing the updated framework. This included consultation with the council's colleague networks, an online public survey hosted on Let's Talk Oxfordshire, and interviews and focus groups with a range of different groups and communities, including:
 - (a) Faith communities
 - (b) Older people
 - (c) LGBTQ+ people
 - (d) Vulnerable migrants
 - (e) Women
 - (f) People with a disability
 - (g) People with learning difficulties and neurodivergence
 - (h) Young people
31. A summary of this engagement activity is attached in Annex 2.
32. In addition, the council's Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group has been consulted and feedback into the framework multiple times throughout its development.

LORNA BAXTER
Executive Director of Resources

Annex: Annex 1: Including Everyone framework
 Annex 2: Consultation and Engagement Report

Background papers: Nil

Contact Officer: Tannah Collier, Policy Officer
 07872805604
 Tannah.collier@oxfordshire.gov.uk

 Jamie Kavanagh, Senior Policy Officer (Equalities)
 Jamie.kavanagh@oxfordshire.gov.uk

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