

# **Cherwell District Council**

## **Executive**

**23 June 2014**

<p><b>Equalities Self Assessment and Action Plan for 2013/14</b></p>
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### **Report of Head of Transformation**

This report is public

#### **Purpose of report**

To review the completion of the annual Self Assessment undertaken by the Council against the Achieving Standard under the Equality Framework for Local Government.

#### **1.0 Recommendations**

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To consider the evidence and information submitted in the Council's Self Assessment against the 'Achieving Standard' under the Equality Framework for Local Government.
- 1.2 To agree the equalities action plan for 2014/15 noting the areas of good practice upon which it builds and the areas for development that it addresses.

#### **2.0 Introduction**

- 2.1 This report presents Cherwell District Council's equalities self-assessment, refreshed Action Plan and three year rolling Equality Impact Assessment Plan. The equalities self-assessment is updated annually and sets out the organisation's strengths and areas for development. The self assessment forms part of the Council's approach to equalities which seeks to ensure that excellent customer service, fair access to local services and support to vulnerable people is part of all we do.
- 2.2 Executive first reviewed an equalities assessment during 2010/2011 and took the decision not to go for an external peer assessment. However, the Council remains committed to equalities and reports its performance on a quarterly basis against its equalities plan, through the annual self-assessment, via equalities impact assessments and annual reporting to Executive.

### 3.0 Report Details

- 3.1 This evidence based self-assessment of the council's equalities performance has been prepared by the Corporate Policy Officer and the Corporate Equality Steering Group. This is an officer only group and it is essential that the assessment is subject to an independent review and challenge by Members of the Council.
- 3.2 Such an objective review is essential if we are to ensure that we have self-assessed Cherwell District Council at the correct level and to highlight areas of weakness to allow continued improvement to address issues of equality and customer access. Furthermore Executive is asked to ensure that the general approach taken to equalities is relevant and meets the Council's wider objectives. The self assessment is attached as appendix 1.
- 3.2 A summary of equalities strengths and areas for development is included in the table below:

<b>Equalities and Customer Access</b>	
Performance Strengths	Areas for Development
<p>Connecting Community Events – Within the Brighter Future project Cherwell District Council provides innovative Community Engagement and Consultation events called 'Connecting Communities' This year Cherwell District Council received recognition for this work by being nominated and shortlisted for an LGA (Local Government Association) award for Community Involvement.</p>	<p>During 2013/2014 Cherwell District Council planned to engage with local LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) community groups as historically this work has been focused in Oxford City. Limited work has been done in this area. Links have been created with a local youth group called TOPAZ but engagement has been limited. Further research to be conducted during 2014/2015</p>
<p>For the last 3 years Cherwell District Council has created an in house corporate training programme for all staff to increase our knowledge with the objective of improving the communities' level of service when accessing our services. The modular approach allows for Cherwell District Council's diverse workforce and how Equality and Diversity may impact upon their daily roles. This also includes a condensed Fair and Aware training E-Learning module programme which is used to help assist new employees during their probation period and also as a refresher for all employees. This year the Corporate Policy Officer and Democratic services commissioned additional Fair and Aware training for Members which will be presented during 2014/2015?</p>	<p>This is highlighted as a potential risk area. Fair and Aware Training has been an area of strength for Cherwell District Council equality performance over the last 2 years but during 2014/2015 this training will cease to exist and will only be available via the e-learning module. The Corporate Policy Officer will monitor the impact of this change.</p>

<p>Working in partnership with the Cherwell Local Strategic Partnership, Cherwell District Council and HMP Bullingdon Prison to support prisoners who are nearing the end of their sentence to gain valuable employment skills. Cherwell District Council recruited one volunteer with the Bicester Street Wardens one day a week and is now looking to expand this project wider throughout the Council.</p>	<p>2011 Census Data at present is at top level only and will during the next 12 months be drilled down into specific areas. 'Charts of the Month' currently provided to the Performance &amp; Insight Team will be made available to all service areas to help support in service area improvement and planning and community engagement.</p>
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3.3 The Council aims to ensure its approach to equalities is meaningful and locally relevant. Its work draws on the findings of the self-assessment and is pulled together into a single action plan. The refreshed action plan for 2014/15 is attached as appendix 2. It is grounded in a clear understanding of the district and the corporate equality plan is based on five objectives, each supported by a number of local priorities.

**1. Fair Access and Customer Satisfaction**

- To ensure Cherwell District Council and our Partners treat the public fairly regardless of their background or way of life
- To improve our services to the older generation within the Cherwell district
- To ensure all our services both internal and external are accessible to all Equality Groups at a high standard

**2. Tackling Inequality and Deprivation**

- To break the cycle of deprivation within the district (Brighter Futures in Banbury Programme)

**3. Building Strong and Cohesive Communities**

- Promote integration between communities and groups through the use of sport, leisure, cultural activities and opportunities for community involvement

**4. Positive Engagement and Understanding**

- To continue to increase engagement and work with young people within the district
- Increase Cherwell's knowledge and understanding of the wider community to ensure we fulfil all residents' needs within our services
- Raise internal awareness of diversity within our community

**5. Demonstrating Our Commitment to Equality**

- Review and publicise all documentation in line with the government framework
- Review achieving standard to research and develop the improvement programme
- Ensure staff and services promote and embed equality into their work
- All EIA's and Equality documents to be reviewed by the Corporate Equality and Diversity Steering Group

- 3.4 In addition to the self assessment and the equalities action plan the Council also has a rolling plan of equality impact assessments. These assessments are undertaken when policies or services are subject to change that may have an impact on one or more groups of service users. The Council is keen to ensure it understands the impact of any changes and that no specific groups are disadvantaged. To support the process of impact assessment the Council consults with stakeholders including the voluntary sector, the disability and faith forums.

## **4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations**

- 4.1 Cherwell District Council has made significant progress delivering against the equalities agenda in recent years. This year the Council received the findings and recommendations following the Public Sector Equality Duty Review (PSED) and its impact upon the work of Corporate Equality Performance. The review arose from the Government's Red Tape Challenge and was established to examine whether the PSED is operating as intended. A key aim of the PSED was to sensitise public bodies to equality while addressing the bureaucracy associated with the previous duties on race, disability and gender.
- 4.2 Based on the conclusions drawn by the PSED Steering Group and suggestions for improvements raised by participants in the review, the PSED Steering Group developed nine recommendations split across different sectors with the clearest being:
- It is too early to make a final judgement about the impact of the PSED. Government should consider conducting a formal evaluation of the Duty in three years' time. This would enable the PSED to embed more thoroughly and should consider whether the Duty is an effective means of achieving the goal of sensitising public bodies to equality issues and what alternatives there might be. This work could also be informed by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) medium-term work on how the PSED and the more prescriptive specific duties operate in Scotland and Wales.

Cherwell District Council continues to adopt a proportionate to equality performance with meaningful and relevant Corporate Action Plans to support this work.

- 4.3 The self assessment identifies areas of strength and key developmental priorities and has been undertaken in line with a nationally agreed self-assessment model.
- 4.4 The updated action plan demonstrates how the Council will continue to deliver its equalities objectives over the coming year. Progress will be reported via the performance management framework on a quarterly basis.
- 4.5 The three year impact assessment rolling plan also provides assurance that the Council is mindful of policy change and seeks to understand and address the impacts of service and policy change where appropriate.

## **5.0 Consultation**

No specific consultation on this report is required.

## **6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection**

- 6.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: To note the report

Option 2: To request additional information on items within this report

## **7.0 Implications**

### **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 7.1 There are no financial implications

Comments checked by:

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### **Legal Implications**

- 7.2 The Council is legally obliged to comply with the public sector equality duty. Although the PSED has been reviewed this obligation remains in place although the review report recommends that public bodies should apply the duty in a proportionate way as opposed to taking a “gold plated” approach

Comments checked by:

Kevin Lane, Head of Law and Governance – 0300 0030107

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### **Risk Implications**

- 7.3 All risks are logged and monitored on the Corporate Risk Register and reported quarterly to the Audit Committee, any risks related to this area would be escalated as necessary.

Comments checked by:

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## **8.0 Decision Information**

### **Wards Affected**

All

### **Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework**

Corporate Plan and Equality Framework for local Government

## Lead Councillor

Councillor Barry Wood  
Leader of the Council

## Document Information

<b>Appendix No</b>	<b>Title</b>
Appendix 1	Equalities Self Assessment
Appendix 2	Corporate Equality Action Plan 2012 - 2015
Appendix 3	Equality Impact Assessment 3 Year Rolling Plan
<b>Background Papers</b>	
None	
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