

Executive

Progress on Developing and Delivering the Equalities Work Programme

1 March 2010

Report of Chief Executive and Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide an overview of achievements relating to our equalities work in 2009/2010 and outline the work programme for 2010/2011.

This report is public

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended to:

- (1) Agree the refreshed equalities scheme and the three year equality impact assessment programme (Annexes A and B).
- (2) Agree the Corporate Equality Action Plan for 2009-2012 (Annex C).
- (3) Agree the proposals to seek equality accreditation from the Improvement and Department Agency (IDeA) in November 2010.
- (4) Note the equality achievements made during 2009/2010.

Executive Summary

Introduction

- 1.1 This is the annual update report regarding the progress on developing and delivering the equalities work programme for Cherwell. The report outlines both the challenges and achievements made throughout the year and also provides information regarding Cherwell's IDeA Inspection under the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) which will take place during 2010/2011.
- 1.2 Over the last two years improving our approach to access and equalities has been a priority for Cherwell District Council. Throughout 2009 we have built upon our achievements and sustained progress. Examples include:

Usability testing of the website 35 people with a wide range of disabilities

have tested our website. Their findings are being developed into an action plan for improvement.

Improving Customer Access the complete re-development of our three former cash offices into one stop shops has allowed us to put in place:

- All service access on ground floor, no steps
- Wheelchair access
- Hearing loop at all service points
- Language Line is available and used for face to face visitors and telephone callers
- Leaflets are available in large print, Braille, audio tape and alternative languages
- Assistance for those with literacy problems with the completion of application forms or accessing services
- Office space in the One Stop Shops for the CAB and Housing Associations to hold surgeries to enable residents to access information and advice that we ourselves cannot provide in detail.

Environmental Health. We have run food protection road shows aimed at the over 60's to address food safety. The aim was to give advice on food storage and handling and the main topic is listeria as the number of cases in this age group has doubled since 2001.

Asian youth integration project. This involved working with the Asian youth forum to integrate a group of young people who wanted to play sport but found it hard to join new groups in the area. We already run an open access project at North Oxfordshire Academy for all young people aged 11yrs+ and the integration project worked with the Asian youth forum to merge the two groups and now we have a wider and more diverse group of young people accessing a safe and positive initiative.

Engaging young people. Every year we celebrate local democracy in the district by taking local councillors into schools to meet young people and hear about the issues that young people are facing in their area. We now have two youth councils that represent Banbury and Bicester and we are currently setting up a Kidlington Youth Forum. The Youth Councils comment on major issues affecting our towns and next year we hope to set up a rural youth council. Two students from Cherwell represent North Oxfordshire as UK Youth Parliament leads.

Working with economic migrants. We are one of a group of partners who took part in successful bid for the Migration Impact Fund grant. The aim of the project is support migrants; to promote access to training and appropriate services. It supports provision of English ESOL classes and raises migrant's awareness of local services.

- 1.3 Our equalities work programme for 2010/11 includes improved consultation with members of the local community, focusing on issues around deprivation in key areas in the district, continuing to streamline our equalities scheme and processes, introducing a new corporate modular equality training course for all staff and preparing for an assessment of our equalities performance in November 2010. Annex C outlines our Corporate Equalities Action plan for

the next three years.

Proposals

- 1.4 This report outlines key proposals for the Executive to consider. These proposals will help us demonstrate that our equalities work is focused and improves outcomes for local people. They are:
- To agree the Corporate Equality Action Plan; this action plan brings together our long term equalities objectives for the district across all equalities strands. The plan encompasses issues around deprivation and building strong and cohesive communities, both key priorities included within the Corporate Improvement Plan for 2010/10 (Annex C).
 - To agree that Cherwell District Council undergoes an inspection for the 'Achieving' status under the new Local Government Framework. This assessment will provide a health check on our equalities work.
 - To agree a Single Equality Scheme comprising of the Corporate Equality Action Plan, Equality Policies and the Equality Impact Assessment Programme, driven by equalities legislation. This scheme includes issues around deprivation, reflecting the new equalities duties (Annexes A and B).
 - To improve our equalities performance monitoring by using a Corporate Equality Scorecard, this will help us continue to demonstrate achievement in this area.

Conclusion

- 1.5 Cherwell District Council has continued to improve its approach to equalities. During 2009/10 we have improved our understanding of the Cherwell community enabling us to focus our equalities and access work on the needs of all sections of the community. Our work programme for 2010/11 builds on this community knowledge and aims to further improve access to services across the district for all communities.

Background Information

- 2.1 During 2009 a new and more challenging Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) was introduced. Under the old regime there were five levels of performance. The new scheme has three levels 'Developing', 'Achieving' or 'Excellent'. At present Cherwell District Council have self assessed at level 3 under the old framework. At their meeting in April 2009 Executive requested that officers prepare for an assessment under the new scheme.
- 2.2 Research into the new framework and some comparisons with other authorities for each of the 3 performance levels has been completed against the assessment guidance. This suggests that authorities meeting the old level 3 standard (Cherwell's current self assessment) should be able to demonstrate 'Achieving' status under the new standard. Significant evidence already exists to demonstrate our performance against the five new assessment criteria:
- Knowing your community: equality mapping
 - Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
 - Community engagement and satisfaction
 - Responsive services and customer care
 - Modern, diverse and reflective workforce

It is proposed that we should seek formal inspection under the new standard during November 2010 whereby we will be aspiring to gain accreditation of the 'Achieving' award. All services will be required to take part in the inspection and an Equality Steering Group made up of officers within the Council has been set up to assist with the delivery. A 'Path to Excellence' Project Plan has been developed to prepare for the inspection. This highlights month by month tasks which need to be undertaken. The cost of the inspection will be met within the Corporate Strategy, Performance and Partnerships team's existing budget.

- 2.3 A full review of our approach to equalities has taken place, led by the Equalities Officer with all Heads of Service contributing. This has provided extensive information as to how equalities impact each service. The review has resulted in a major streamlining of all Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) documentation and the creation of a new 3 year rolling EIA Programme (Annex A). In April 2010 a Corporate Equality Training Programme will also be launched which aims to ensure equalities and improving customer access are embedded into our daily work.
- 2.4 The new duties within the Equality Bill which take effect from April 2010 require Cherwell District Council to create a Single Equalities Scheme (Annex B), which includes a Corporate Equality Action Plan. (Annex C).

The proposed Corporate Equality Action Plan comprises 5 objectives with aims and actions underpinning them. Cherwell District Council's commitment is to 'Working to ensure equality, access and fairness in all we do' and the 5 objectives in the Corporate Equality Action Plan are; Fair Access and Customer Service, Tackling Inequality and Deprivation, Building Strong and Cohesive Communities, Positive Engagement and Understanding and

Demonstrating Our Commitment to Equality.

- 2.5 Cherwell District Council currently has a statutory duty to promote equalities. Under the new Equality Bill, there is a duty to consider socio-economic deprivation. Breaking the cycle of deprivation has already been identified as a key issue for Cherwell and is reflected in the new Sustainable Community Strategy. As such tackling deprivation will be at the centre of our approach to equalities, reflecting the key issues that face the district. Cherwell District Council has already taken the lead in this area by creating and leading a multi-agency deprivation project focusing on the areas of highest need in Banbury. This project will provide a wider approach to breaking the cycle of deprivation across the district.
- 2.6 To ensure our equalities work is focused on the needs of the Cherwell community and delivers clear outcomes from April 2010 an Equality Performance Scorecard will be created against all the objectives outlined in the Equality Action Plan and will be reported on and published quarterly. The Equalities Steering Group will be responsible for monitoring performance. In addition the corporate performance scorecard will include our performance in terms of our work to tackle deprivation.

Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options

- 3.1 This report provides an overview of our equalities performance and our work programme for the future. It considers the impact of the new Equality Framework for Local Government and, as requested by Executive in April 2009, it proposes a timeframe for the inspection.
- 3.2 This report also provides an overview of new equalities duties that are coming into effect and how Cherwell District Council is responding to these duties and reflecting them in our long term objectives.

The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendations is believed to be the best way forward

Option One	Agree recommendations as outlined above
Option Two	Executive to identify additional actions or changes to proposed timeframe and accreditation.

Consultations

Head of Service	Full equality department reviews completed.
Equalities Steering Group	The group has been consulted on all new and amended documentation
Good Practice Review	Equality & Diversity Officer completed research and good practice review prior to creating any new documentation.

Implications

Financial: There are no financial implications from this report.
Comments checked by Karen Curtain, Head of Finance
01295 221551

Legal: Actions identified meet the Equalities Framework.
Comments checked by Liz Howlett, Head of Legal &
Democratic 01295 221686

Risk Management: Failure to gain the 'Achieving accreditation may have an
impact on organisational performance and reputation.
Comments checked by Rosemary Watts, Risk &
Insurance Manager 01295 221566

Wards Affected

All

Corporate Plan Themes

All

Executive Portfolio

**Councillor Wood, Leader of the Council,
Portfolio Holder for Corporate Policy.**

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
Annex A Annex B Annex C	3 Year Rolling Equality Impact Assessment Programme Single Equality Scheme 3 Year Equality Action Plan
Background Papers	
'Equality Framework for Local Government' www.idea.gov.uk	
Report Author	Caroline French, Equality & Diversity Officer
Contact Information	01295 221586 caroline.french@cherwell-dc.gov.uk