

Cherwell District Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

7 October 2020

Including Everyone. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Framework

Report of Corporate Director for Customers and Organisational Development

This report is public.

Purpose of report

This paper for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee outlines the joint approach to equalities, diversity and inclusion being taken by Cherwell District Council in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council.

1.0 Recommendations

1.1 Overview and Scrutiny are **RECOMMENDED** to:

- a) **Comment on the draft policy document;**
- b) **Make suggestions for its associated action plan, which will be recommended to Executive for agreement by on 2 November 2020;**
- c) **Advise on an effective performance monitoring approach for the policy.**

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 Cherwell District Council takes its obligations and commitments to equalities, diversity and inclusion very seriously. An update of the council's equality policy has been undertaken in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council to align approaches in a new joint policy, which is called 'Including Everyone: Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Framework'.
- 2.2 The legislative framework for this work sits within the Equality Act (2010) which states that public bodies, including Councils need to take extra steps to stop discrimination: this is known as the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 2.3 This report highlights the need for change, describes the process to update the policy and describes what we want to be different as a result of the work.

3.0 Background and key issues

The need for change

- 3.1 Recent events have highlighted serious inequalities within our communities, from the Black Lives Matters protests to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a disproportionate impact on BAME communities. Moreover, the recently published Director of Public Health Annual Report has shone a spotlight on the significant impact of economic inequality on people's health, wellbeing and life expectancy across the area.
- 3.2 Some of the inequalities which have been highlighted include:
- In Cherwell, the average salary is lower than that for the whole county and the average life expectancy is marginally lower than the Oxfordshire average.
 - Cherwell has three of Oxfordshire's most deprived wards. They are within the 20% most deprived in England. Life expectancy is lower than the county average in these areas.
 - Cherwell's population is ageing. The 85+ population is predicted to increase by 88% by 2037.
 - In 2019, 9.9% of children in the district were living in low income families.
 - Men earn on average £6,200 more than women for the same role in the Cherwell area.
 - The Office for National Statistics has reported figures that show black males and females are 1.9 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than the white ethnic group. Males of Bangladeshi and Pakistani ethnicity are 1.8 times more likely to die; for females, odds of death are reduced to 1.6 times more likely.
 - In the 2011 census, 92.17% of Cherwell's residents were white and our 3 most deprived wards have a higher Black, Asian and ethnic minority population than the overall district average.
 - From the 2011 census we know 20,072 people were living with a long-term illness or disability in Cherwell and our 2019 data shows that we had 13,254 unpaid carers in Cherwell.
 - In 2019, the number of Cherwell adults diagnosed with depression was 16,534.
- 3.3 The diversity in our communities is a strength and does not result in disadvantage by itself. The examples given here demonstrate the need to tackle inequalities because not everyone living in the district currently has the same life opportunities. A fully inclusive approach to growth and economic development is critical to our helping everyone to achieve their potential and allowing everyone to contribute to the greatest extent possible. Updating our approach to equalities, diversity and inclusion seeks to promote and support a more inclusive workplace, services and communities.

Updating the policy

- 3.4 It is important to update equality policies to ensure they remain current. This update has taken the form of the development of a revised equality, diversity and inclusion framework in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council. This is in-line with our partnership working commitment to joint policy development. It reflects the

commitment of both councils to listen to and learn from their communities and take sustained action in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests and the inequalities highlighted by COVID-19.

3.5 The framework was developed by reviewing the OCC and CDC equality policies to align the objectives and approach within them. Engagement with approximately 50 staff across both councils was then undertaken to better understand the lived experiences of staff and capture their suggestions for actions we need to take to improve. Staff highlighted the following in discussion groups:

- **Discomfort:** Leaders need to hear uncomfortable messages about inequalities.
- **Learning Together:** Learning about inclusion issues, unlearning previous assumptions and training emerged as a key theme from the discussion groups. There is a key role in helping foster inclusive behaviours in young people.
- **Role of senior leaders:** Senior leaders need to demonstrate buy-in and be part of the conversation, making sure underrepresented voices are heard at all levels of the organisation.
- **Inclusion is everyone's business:** Everyone needs to be part of the conversation, not just those with lived experience or an interest.
- **Language is important:** We need to adopt a language that recognises and celebrates diversity.
- **Tackling microaggression:** Staff reported that it is often unintentional behaviour/comments that cause harm.
- **Representation matters:** Employees want to see greater levels of diversity across all levels of the Council, particularly at senior levels.
- **Role of middle management:** There are particular training and development needs for those in middle management. They have an important role in hearing issues from more junior members of staff and escalating this to more senior staff.
- **Awareness raising:** People need to know where to go for help should they need it. Managers need to have a better understanding of the issues people face and empathise with them. In addition, the council needs to promote equalities and inclusion across the organisation.

3.6 The themes that emerged from the discussion groups, together with a supporting data pack (contained as Appendix 1) about equalities in our communities was used to inform the drafting of a joint framework, called 'Including Everyone'. This is attached as Appendix 2.

3.7 Throughout August, further engagement was undertaken with staff across both councils to gather feedback on the draft policy framework. More than 70 responses were gathered through an online exercise and more than 40 staff attended an open session to discuss their views on the document. The purpose of engaging in this way with staff is to put in place the building blocks that will allow us to positively engage communities as we develop our approach and detailed actions.

3.8 The feedback from this further exercise told us that:

- The joint approach is welcomed;
- There was broad agreement with the vision, which could be strengthened with 'leading by example' or 'continually learning';
- There was broad agreement with the principles, which need to be reflected in management in both organisations to ensure they are realised;
- There was broad agreement with the goals and commitments, but they need to be followed with action;
- An inclusive workplace needs to have a strong emphasis on training and evaluation of managers;
- Inclusive service delivery needs to take account of those who are digitally excluded;
- Inclusive communities should be the first strand of work and include neighbourhood initiatives; this would help the framework be less 'top down' and more 'bottom up';
- HR data needs to be published through this work;
- A wider cultural shift is needed across the two organisations and there needs to be more diversity in senior leadership;
- The work needs to be visibly 'led by example' from senior managers and councillors;
- Managers (often team/middle) are reported to be causing concern for staff by blocking participation or being discriminatory themselves;
- Actions need to include training and evaluation of staff (especially managers) on equalities, diversity and inclusion.

3.9 This feedback will shape the final policy, which is planned for a decision by the Cherwell Executive in November. The policy will be accompanied by individual action plans for each organisation to take account of the unique circumstances and actions needed in each council.

What will be different

3.10 The updating of a policy will not deliver change alone; the new framework sets out a vision and structure for organising our work to improve equalities, diversity and inclusion within the workplace, services and communities.

3.11 The action plans will be key to achieving the goals and commitments set within the framework. The actions will seek to make a shift in people's lived experiences of inclusion. This means having a measurable impact, for example, on the following:

- Narrowing the life expectancy gap between the most and least deprived wards in Oxfordshire
- Fewer children living in poverty. Those children from deprived or diverse backgrounds have equal opportunities to achieve
- Men and women and those from different backgrounds being paid the same for the same roles they carry out
- Those with disabilities, learning difficulties, mental health issues or caring responsibilities being supported to have equal educational, health and economic opportunities

4 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 The updating of the council's equality policy is a statutory requirement and this update has been undertaken in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council to align approaches. This is in line with the agreed principles of joint working. It also reflects upon the serious inequalities within our communities. The updated draft policy is named 'Including Everyone. Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Framework'.
- 4.2 This draft policy highlights the need for change and describes what we are seeking to tackle to create a more inclusive community, services and workplace in Cherwell. Overview and Scrutiny are invited to comment on the policy, actions and an effective performance monitoring approach for the policy.
- 4.3 Comments by Scrutiny will feed into the following timeline for next steps:
 - i. Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet, 13 October 2020
 - ii. Cherwell District Council Executive, 2 November 2020

5 Consultation

- 5.1 Consultation with staff and staff groups has been described ahead.
- 5.2 Planning is underway for wider public engagement across the district on tackling inequalities. This will launch after the updated policy is agreed and will include engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, partners and residents.

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: Not updating the policy.

This would not ensure that we fulfil our statutory obligations to have an up-to-date equalities framework.

Option 2: Updating the policy for Cherwell District Council only.

This would not be in line with the strategic partnership arrangement with Oxfordshire County Council. A shared approach with then separate action plans appropriate for both councils maximises the use of resources and aligns direction.

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 There are no direct implications of this report, which is making recommendations for comment only. Financial, resource, risk and equalities implications will be set out in the decision-making report for Executive on the 2nd of November 2020.

Comments checked by:
Robin Rogers, Head of Strategy, robin.rogers@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

- 7.2 This work will revise and update the council's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion, thereby strengthen the council's commitment to all of the protected characteristics contained within the Equality Act 2010.

Comments checked by:
Richard Hawtin, Team Leader – Non-contentious, Tel: 01295 221695, Email: richard.hawtin@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Risk Implications

- 7.3 There are no direct implications of this report, which is making recommendations for comment only. Financial, resource, risk and equalities implications will be set out in the decision-making report for Executive on the 2nd of November 2020.

Comments checked by:
Robin Rogers, Head of Strategy, robin.rogers@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Equality and Diversity

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8.0 Decision Information

Key Decision (Executive reports only; state N/A if not Executive report)

Financial Threshold Met: N/A

Community Impact Threshold Met: N/A

Wards Affected

All

This underpins all of the CDC Business Plan 2020-21

Document Information

Appendix number and title

- Appendix 1 Including Everyone Data Pack
- Appendix 2 DRAFT Including Everyone. Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Framework.

Background papers

None

Report Author and contact details

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