

# **Cherwell District Council**

## **Executive**

**2 November 2020**

### **Including Everyone. Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Framework**

#### **Report of Corporate Director for Customers and Organisational Development**

This report is public

#### **Purpose of report**

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

#### **1.0 Recommendations**

The meeting is recommended to:

- 1.1 Agree the Including Everyone, Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Framework (Appendix 1).
- 1.2 Agree the initial Including Everyone, Action Plan (Appendix 2).

#### **2.0 Introduction**

- 2.1 Cherwell District Council takes its obligations and commitments to equalities, diversity and inclusion very seriously. We recognise the importance of this agenda; taking action to meet the statutory requirements contained within the Equality Act (2010) and now is the time to take our commitment to a new level. We need to identify and dismantle the structures that limit opportunities for many of our residents because of their race, disability, age, religion, sex, sexual orientation, rural location, caring responsibilities, armed forces background or deprivation, (or a combination of these characteristics).
- 2.2 This update of the Council's equality policy has taken an innovative partnership approach with Oxfordshire County Council. It has also sought to respond to the serious inequalities highlighted by the Oxfordshire 2019/20 Director of Public Health Report (see background documents), the unprecedented socio-economic crisis created by COVID-19, and the global calls for justice by the Black Lives Matter movement. These issues have starkly highlighted the extent to which injustice, inequality and discrimination persist within our society.

- 2.3 As a major local employer, we want to lead by example and as local leaders, to take action to shape inclusive communities. By putting communities and collaboration upfront, our work with our residents and partners will ensure everyone is championing inclusion. We also want to cultivate an increasingly inclusive workplace where diverse backgrounds and perspectives are valued. This will help drive inclusive services and the best outcomes for the communities we serve.
- 2.4 This report highlights the case for change, describes the process to update the Cherwell District Council (CDC) equalities, diversity and inclusion policy and sets out what will be different as a result of the work. It concludes by recommending that Executive approve the 'Including Everyone' framework and associated action plan.

### **3.0 Background and key issues**

#### **The case 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 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. Moreover, the 2019-2020 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 county, including Cherwell.
- 3.2 The events of recent months demonstrate the extent to which inequalities still exist, so despite our best efforts in the past, we now need to go much further. Some of the inequalities which we know that:
- 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. Our 2019 data shows that we had 13,254 unpaid carers in Cherwell; who we know are more likely to report feelings of stress and financial difficulties. The number of carers is reported to have risen by 30% through the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - 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 Cherwell currently has the same life opportunities. We want to see meaningful, real change in the figures outlined above. We know this change won't be easy and some of it will take a long and sustained focus to have impact, but we must re-double our efforts so that everyone can benefit. We will need to review how our council and other public services work, so that they enhance their focus on those experiencing inequalities.

### **Updating the policy**

3.4 Our approach to equalities, diversity and inclusion needs to deliver immediate action as well as addressing systemic inequalities. We must change how we work so that we see the reality of every-day disparity; involving people in the design and delivery of our services and in the decisions that matter to them.

3.5 To deliver our renewed approach, we used this update as an opportunity to collaborate in line with our agreed partnership working commitment with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC). We have delivered a joint equality, diversity and inclusion framework that 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.

3.6 The framework was developed by reviewing the CDC and OCC equalities policies to align the objectives and approach within them. Engagement with approximately 50 staff across both councils was undertaken to as part of the first phase of developing the approach 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.
- **Inclusion is everyone's business:** Everyone needs to be part of the conversation, not just those with lived experience or an interest.
- **Learning Together:** Learning about inclusion issues, unlearning previous assumptions and training emerged as key themes from the discussion groups. There is also a key role for us as an organisation 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.
- **Language is important:** We need to adopt 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. Managers 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 to empathise with them. In addition, the council needs to promote equalities and inclusion across the organisation.

3.7 The themes that emerged from the discussion groups, together with a data pack (see Appendix 3) on equalities in our communities was used to inform the drafting of the joint framework, called 'Including Everyone'. This is attached as Appendix 1.

3.8 Throughout August, a second phase of 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 we need to be in a position to positively engage communities as we further develop our approach. The total number of staff responses to engagement over phases one and two was more than 160.

3.9 The feedback from this exercise told us that

- The joint approach is welcomed;
- There is broad agreement with the vision, which could be strengthened with 'leading by example' or 'continually learning';
- There is broad agreement with the principles, which need to be reflected in management in both organisations to ensure they are realised;
- There is 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 will help the framework be less 'top down' and more 'bottom up';
- HR data needs to be published with 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 causing concern for some staff by blocking participation or being discriminatory themselves;

- Actions need to include training and evaluation of staff (especially managers) on equalities, diversity and inclusion.

3.10 On 7 October, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a draft of the Including Everyone Framework. The committee scrutinised the data which sits behind the framework and fed back the following points:

- The work on Including Everyone is welcome and supported.
- There is a need to cascade the work beyond the Council, to help ensure we are sector leaders on the agenda.
- We need to take specific action on ensuring the Polish community within Banbury can feel more included; this could include translation of information into Polish.
- Work to tackle deprivation is key to helping tackle inequalities.
- In exploring barriers for underrepresented groups in our workforces, we could explore anonymised job applications.
- That digital inclusivity and community integration of non-English speakers be included in the associated action plan.

### **Including Everyone**

3.11 The document at Appendix 1 is the final product of the above engagement and feedback. We had detailed, frank and sobering engagement with staff members, who are equally members of our communities. We had more than 160 responses from people giving us their views on what we should be tackling, how we should be tackling it and what we need to learn as we do.

3.12 “Including Everyone” sets our vision to lead the field in equalities, diversity and inclusion. It spells out what our goals and commitments are around delivering inclusive communities, services and workplace. Including Everyone is built upon principles which we believe will guide us over the short, medium and long term.

3.13 On 20 July, the Council committed to consider an engagement exercise with Black Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and individuals to listen to their experience of life in our District and to bring back recommendations to Scrutiny and the Executive for consideration. This gives a clear public signal of how seriously we are taking our vision. The adoption of a new framework creates an opportunity for a ‘new normal’ in terms of how we progress our equality agenda and so we are organising our approach with communities upfront so we can make inclusion everyone’s business.

3.14 As a major service provider, how we understand our residents and customer needs is essential to meeting those needs. Listening and learning will help us remove the seen and unseen barriers and design inclusive services. We will be bold and open to having conversations to understand how our services can help address persistent inequalities.

3.15 We believe that Cherwell District Council should take a lead as an employer. Our workforce is our biggest asset; we need to protect, understand and treasure our staff as individuals who also help us reach those residents and communities we serve. While it may take time for us to ensure our organisation is as diverse as the

communities we serve, we will ensure every opportunity is taken to become a more diverse and inclusive organisation.

- 3.16 The goals and commitments we set out in Including Everyone help us in organising our work. The policy becomes 'live' through action plans; one for CDC and a separate one for OCC to take account of the unique circumstances and actions needed in each council.

### **Action planning**

- 3.17 Turning our vision, goals and commitments into reality needed a robust approach to action planning. We listened to staff, learned from the Local Government Association Equalities Framework (see background documents) and learned from best practice examples around the country. The wealth of ideas and examples generated were then prioritised and focused to determine the key actions that fit most closely with our principles.
- 3.18 We have begun implementing an initial 'Including Everyone Action Plan' (Appendix 2). We will continue to refine and challenge this plan through our ongoing listening and learning as we move forward with actions that seek to make a shift in people's lived experiences. The nature of the work and the approach will mean the action plan will be a live document. We will engage across the organisation, and with partners and residents, as we continue to develop measures to monitor progress.
- 3.19 Progress on the policy and Action Plan will be measured and monitored through the internal Inclusion Steering Group, reported through the monthly Business Management Report and scrutinised accordingly to ensure we hold ourselves to account in achieving outcomes. We will produce an Annual Equalities report for Cabinet to be reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny, to provide assurance on progress.

### **What will be different**

- 3.20 The updating of a policy will not deliver change in itself but the new framework sets the structure and the action plan that will be key to achieving change. The framework seeks to have a measurable impact, for example, on the following long-term outcomes:
- Narrowing the life expectancy gap between the most and least deprived wards in Oxfordshire and Cherwell
  - Fewer children living in poverty. Those children from deprived or diverse backgrounds have equal opportunities to achieve
  - Men and women, and those from diverse Black Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, being paid the same for carrying out the same roles
  - Those with disabilities, learning difficulties, mental health issues or caring responsibilities being supported to have equal educational, health and economic opportunities

## **4.0 Next steps**

- 4.1 Following CDC Executive, the joint policy and actions will continue to be implemented and further work will be undertaken to refine delivery. We will also launch public engagement through both Cherwell and County Council mechanisms. This will include engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, partners and residents.

## **5.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations**

- 5.1 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'.
- 5.2 This 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.

## **6.0 Consultation**

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

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

- 7.1 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.

## **8.0 Implications**

### **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 8.1 There are no direct finance and resources implications of this report and the updated framework has been delivered within existing resources. However, as services consider their budget and business plans and how they will address the approach

set-out within the framework, they will need to fully consider and incorporate any finance and resource implications within approved budgets.

Comments checked by:

Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance, [michael.furness@cherwell-dc.gov.uk](mailto:michael.furness@cherwell-dc.gov.uk)

### **Legal Implications**

- 8.2 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, [richard.hawtin@cherwell-dc.gov.uk](mailto:richard.hawtin@cherwell-dc.gov.uk)

### **Risk Implications**

- 8.3 Ensuring that the Council has an up-to-date Equality, Diversity and Inclusion framework is a key step in minimising the risk of harm or disadvantage to individuals or groups and minimises the risk to the council of challenge to its decisions or ways of working. The framework will also be evidenced within service plans supporting the overarching corporate priorities of the business plan. These risks will be managed as part of the operational risk register within this service area and escalated as and when necessary to the leadership risk register.

Comments checked by:

Louise Tustian, Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes, [Louise.tustian@cherwell-dc.gov.uk](mailto:Louise.tustian@cherwell-dc.gov.uk)

### **Equality and Diversity**

- 8.4 The revised framework revises and updates the council's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion, thereby strengthening the council's position with respect to equality and diversity. The associated action plan has identified where specific steps need to be taken to reduce the risk of differential impact on groups with protected characteristics. The report sets out the steps that will be taken to monitor delivery and impact.

Comments checked by:

Robin Rogers, Head of Strategy, [robin.rogers@cherwell-dc.gov.uk](mailto:robin.rogers@cherwell-dc.gov.uk)

## **9.0 Decision Information**

### **Key Decision**

**Financial Threshold Met: No**

**Community Impact Threshold Met:** Yes

**Wards Affected**

All

**Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework**

This underpins all of the CDC Business Plan 2020-21

**Lead Councillor**

Cllr Ian Corkin, Lead Member for Customers and Transformation

**Document Information**

**Appendix number and title**

- Appendix 1 Including Everyone. Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Framework.
- Appendix 2 Initial Action Plan
- Appendix 3 Data Pack

**Background papers**

None

**Reference papers**

- 2019/2020 Director of Public Health Annual Report  
<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/public-health/PublicHealthAnnualReportMay2020.pdf>
- Local Government Association Equality Framework:  
<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Equality%20Framework%20For%20Local%20Government%202020.pdf>

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