

# Equality and Diversity

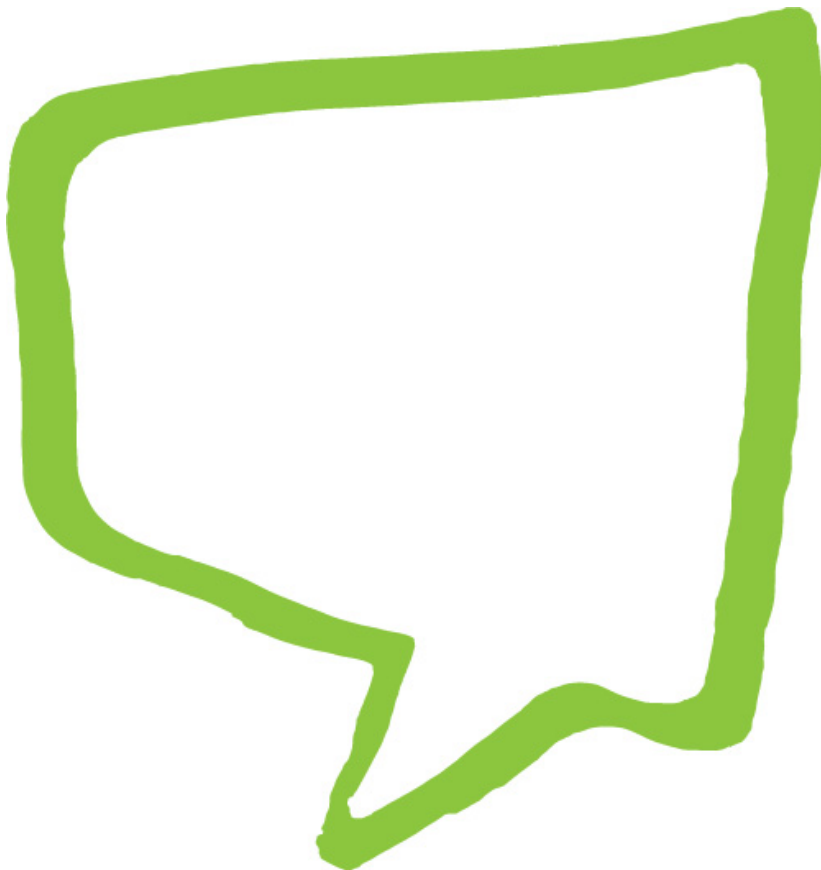
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Oxford City Council

Audit 2008/09

August 2009



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## Status of our reports

The Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies issued by the Audit Commission explains the respective responsibilities of auditors and of the audited body. Reports prepared by appointed auditors are addressed to non-executive directors/members or officers. They are prepared for the sole use of the audited body. Auditors accept no responsibility to:

- any director/member or officer in their individual capacity; or
  - any third party.
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# Summary report

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## Introduction

- 1 This document reports on the Audit Commission's review of Oxford City Council's approach to equality and diversity. It assesses the Council's current performance and makes recommendations for improvement.
- 2 We carried out the review because in our Annual Audit and Inspection Letter of March 2008 we identified the need for the Council to accelerate its work on diversity. Although the Council has a track record of promoting social inclusion in the community, it needed to do more corporately to maximise its overall impact on equality and diversity and progress against standards.
- 3 Our audit was undertaken in the early part of 2009 and the draft report produced in May 2009. The Council was aware of the issues in this area and was taking action to address these before, during and after our audit. Therefore the Council's position was moving quickly, so whilst finalising this report we have reflected actions that the Council has taken since the audit visit and in some cases what the Council is aiming to achieve from these. These actions have not yet been audited and we will review these when we follow up progress against the recommendations in this report, (likely to be February to April 2010).
- 4 Equality and diversity are important elements of all Audit Commission assessment and inspection activity. These findings will inform the appointed auditor's 2008/09 value for money opinion and assessment of the Council's use of resources. The Council's progress with the recommendations will be taken into account in its organisational assessment in autumn 2009. These frameworks place increasing emphasis on the delivery of strategic, community-orientated outcomes, particularly for those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable.
- 5 A successful approach to equalities and diversity is important for all councils because it results in:
  - better services and information which are accessible to everyone;
  - a higher quality of life for all and more understanding of different lifestyles between communities leading to improvements in community cohesion;
  - freedom from discrimination and disadvantage for local people and for staff;
  - recognition that people need to be treated differently in order to be treated fairly;
  - a mixed workforce which reflects the local population, respects and values difference; and
  - better understanding of customer needs and aspirations

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## Background

- 6** Oxford City Council's corporate priorities address equality and diversity. Its Corporate Plan 2008 to 2011 sets out the Council's vision of 'building a world-class city for everyone'. It includes the specific aim to develop stronger and more inclusive communities, including by:
- reducing inequality and improving the lives of the most vulnerable members of our society;
  - supporting the development of strong, cohesive communities where diversity is valued and communities can come together through local cultural, recreational and sports activities; and
  - supporting social and economic regeneration, particularly in deprived neighbourhoods.
- 7** These aims are important, as the Council has increasing responsibility for community leadership, including in partnership, as well as for local services. Oxford City is a major tourist and cultural destination with an increasingly diverse population. It has the third highest minority ethnic population in the south-east and the highest proportion of students in England and Wales. The city faces severe pressures on its housing stock, with large concentrations of homes in multiple occupation and significant numbers of homeless and other vulnerable groups. Some areas of the city suffer multiple levels of deprivation - low skills, low incomes, and high levels of crime.

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## Audit approach

- 8** This assessment comprised a review of documentation, interviews and discussion of our draft report and findings. Appendix 1 provides more detail on the audit approach. Appendix 2 details our key lines of enquiry.

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## Main conclusions

- 9** The Council has achieved real improvements for vulnerable communities over the last five years, with a range of physical, economic and social projects. Leadership is effective in promoting equalities and diversity externally. It provides long term financial support to voluntary groups to build capacity and there are positive examples of engagement with the local community which work well. The Council promotes community cohesion and gives commitment and support to events in the City which help the understanding and engagement of differing sectors of the community.
- 10** Social integration works well across the city and the percentage of people who think that people from a different background get on well is high. However, there are key longstanding challenges in the parts of the city that have high levels of deprivation, low social mobility and educational attainment. The leadership of the Council are clear that multiple deprivation in specific locations is its greatest challenge.

## Summary report

- 11** Improvement in the Council's strategic approach to equality and diversity is evident, moving from a low base of attainment in this area. The new corporate plan 2008 to 2011 incorporates specific themes that focus on vulnerable people and disadvantaged communities. Good baseline knowledge about the community is used to influence strategic planning and service delivery.
- 12** Overall, the way in which the Council reports and manages performance is adequate, but there are some important gaps in regard to equalities and diversity. An equalities board has been established to challenge progress across the Council, additional financial resources have been applied to equality and diversity and increased awareness of the importance of these subjects is evident. The Council recognises that it needs to do more on equalities and diversity and has undertaken more action since our audit visit. For instance, equalities targets are now required to be included in all service transformation plans.
- 13** There are gaps in equalities procedures and practice. This is reflected in the Council's low level of achievement against the Local Government Equality Standard where it is still at level one, the basic level. There are gaps in the strategic approach to equalities and diversity and in particular the approach that ensures that service delivery is consistent. Gaps are present in human resources and workforce activities. Policies and strategies are not yet in place to support equalities and diversity in the workplace. The Council is aware of these issues and has taken steps to improve and achieve better outcomes. It has developed detailed plans and is working through its policies to achieve change. Some procedures are improving. Service planning has improved with a greater emphasis on equalities and diversity and a good procurement strategy is in place.
- 14** Overall, customer satisfaction with services is mixed. The Council has taken action to make services more accessible but it needs to improve the information that it holds about the customer experience to ensure that it can identify and remove any barriers to improvement.

# Recommendations

- 15** In order to address the areas for further improvement identified in the detailed report we recommend that the Council should do the following. Appendix 3 sets out the action the Council intends to take to address these recommendations.
- 16** These recommendations have been discussed with the Council's senior managers and will be reported to the Council's audit and governance committee in June 2009.

Recommendations	
<b>R1</b>	<p>Improve the customer experience and outcomes by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• finalising and implementing the Council's customer contact strategy;</li> <li>• ensuring that clear arrangements are further developed through the Council's procurement arrangements to monitor, evaluate and control contractors and suppliers in regard to equalities and diversity;</li> <li>• implement plans to review and improve customer service standards and monitor against them in all services; and</li> <li>• improve the complaints policy and procedure and evaluate and monitor complaints on a regular basis against relevant equality strands.</li> </ul>
<b>R2</b>	<p>Improve understanding of community and customer needs by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• using complaints and feedback from customers to identify improvements;</li> <li>• finalising and implementing the Council's consultation strategy; and</li> <li>• evaluating the outcomes from the Council's investment in capacity building with the voluntary sector and reporting these outcomes publicly.</li> </ul>
<b>R3</b>	<p>Improve the strategic approach to equality and diversity by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monitoring strategic equality and diversity plans regularly;</li> <li>• ensuring that the new Corporate Equality scheme is well publicised and available; and</li> <li>• ensuring that the Council is compliant with the Commission for Racial Equality<sup>1</sup>'s code of practice in racial equality in housing.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Organisation now succeeded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

## Recommendations

### Recommendation

**R4** Improve the approach to workforce planning and HR by:

- improving the baseline knowledge about the workforce against the six equality strands;
- ensuring that gaps in workforce planning are addressed rapidly;
- reviewing current HR policies and procedures, including implementation of a fair employment and equal pay policy;
- improving the selection and recruitment process to attract a wider group of appropriately qualified applicants; and
- developing staff networks to support minority groups and to inform policy development.

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# Detailed report

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## Report structure

**17** This report addresses the following seven themes that help achieve an effective approach to equality and diversity.

- Leadership.
- Engagement, consultation and cohesion.
- Procurement and VFM.
- Performance management, reporting and communications.
- Customer experience.
- Policies processes and legislation.
- Workforce and human resources (HR).

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## Leadership

### Summary

**18** Overall, the Council is demonstrating good and improved leadership in promoting equalities and diversity. Equalities and diversity are higher profile. For example, the Council's new corporate plan 2008 to 2011 incorporates specific themes that focus on vulnerable people and disadvantaged communities. The leadership of the Council are clear that multiple deprivation in specific locations is its greatest challenge. Equalities sections are included in service planning. There are gaps in the strategic approach to equalities and diversity and in particular the approach that ensures that service delivery is consistent. The Council has a low level of achievement against the Local Government Equalities Standard. The Council now needs to ensure that all managers across the organisation are working with their teams to achieve understanding and commitment at all levels and in all services.



## Detailed report

**19** During discussions on the draft report it was clear that the Council is aware that it has some way to go to achieve a well established corporate approach to equalities and diversity and to improve its current low level of achievement against the Local Government Equalities Standard. The Council has told us it is addressing this through the following. Corporate policies and procedures have recently been reviewed and a new comprehensive corporate equality scheme was agreed by full council in August 2008. This clearly sets out legal duties and responsibilities. Equalities sections are included in all service transformation plans. A programme of equality impact assessments has been agreed. The Council has agreed an interim customer contact strategy and is making progress towards rolling out a customer relationship management system across the Council. The Council needs to continue to make substantial progress with these actions to be sure that it is addressing gaps in service provision. We will review these areas as part of our follow up review against the recommendations in this report.

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## Findings

- 20** The relationship between strategic plans and frontline actions is not strong. The Council's low level of achievement against the Local Government Equalities Standard is a key weakness and reflects the gaps in equalities and diversity procedures and practice. Level one is the lowest level of the standard.
- 21** The Council demonstrates active leadership and commitment through involvement in external events. It engages at a senior level with the third sector and provides long term funding commitments. This helps to build community empowerment and ensure projects are sustainable for the benefit of local communities.
- 22** Integration of plans between the Council and other bodies is working well. The sustainable communities strategy has inequality themes running through it, for example, in regard to health inequalities and community cohesion. Effective working is in place with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in producing plans which seek to address inequalities.
- 23** The Council understands the challenges to community cohesion and social inclusion. The leadership of the Council are clear that multiple deprivation in specific locations is its greatest challenge. Generally social inclusion works well across the City, with sustainable and settled communities. Some estates present long term systemic challenges, with substantive numbers of residents in low paid or no employment coupled with low skill levels, a lack of affordable housing, higher crime rates and a lack of social mobility. Risks to these communities are increased through budgetary pressures exacerbated by the current economic downturn. The Council is aware of these challenges and is responding through its service planning and prioritisation processes.

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## Engagement, consultation and cohesion

### Summary

**24** Overall the Council consults well with local communities and promotes community cohesion with generally well established arrangements in place. It makes effective use of formal feedback arrangements through its Citizens Panel 'Talkback', Citizens Juries, and area committee arrangements. However gaps exist in the overall strategic consultation framework and whilst the Council is using feedback as highlighted below they are not making full use of real time information about service quality to inform improvements. The Council has been working on improvements in this area during and since our audit work. In their response to the report they have highlighted the following actions that we will review as part of our follow up work. Annual consultation plans are used to co-ordinate and monitor consultation across the Council and ensure results from consultation are used to inform service improvements. The consultation officers group which is made up of a representative from each of the service areas ensures that results of consultation are used to make real changes in their service areas. The corporate consultation strategy is being revised.

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### Findings

- 25** The Council's consultation arrangements with the community are well established. It makes effective use of the Citizens Panel 'Talkback', Citizens Juries and area committee meetings in giving feedback to the Council from the communities which it serves. However a sound strategic framework is not supporting some effective front line work. Therefore although the Council consults communities on needs and issues it is not so good at joining up activities with strategies. Consultation is done in partnership with other agencies, for example, the Police, but there are challenges that remain in acting on information and community priorities strategically. The Council has highlighted the following actions in response to these issues. The regeneration framework has been shaped via consultation with community groups and participation at local level has been key. The Citizens Panel is also used regularly to gather views to help the Council develop its strategies and policies. The results of consultation undertaken in partnership with the police have been used to develop action plans and priorities for neighbourhood policing teams, which shows how feedback is collated into action.
- 26** The Council is aware of a wide range of issues affecting vulnerable people and is working to improve them through the sustainable community and other strategies. This is important, as some groups of vulnerable people are disadvantaged in the area. For example; performance information in 2007/08 shows there are high numbers of people living in temporary accommodation and non urgent housing repairs take a long time, leading to a poorer quality of life for people on low incomes. However, the figure for people living in temporary accommodation has improved from previous years and the Council is a regional champion for dealing with issues relating to the use of temporary accommodation and homelessness.

## Detailed report

- 27** There is a high level of social integration in place within Oxford City with little polarisation of communities. The percentage of people who think that people from a different background get on well together is in the best 25 per cent compared to other similar areas. The Council uses good baseline information about changes taking place within the area and recognises the need for a good evidence base covering economic and environmental factors. The Council actively supports a range of external events which are well received and promote understanding between people of differing backgrounds. Cultural services contribute well to community cohesion through arts, grant funding and community centres. These activities are often centred in deprived areas and are effective in reaching marginalised groups.
- 28** The Council promotes community cohesion well. For example, it collaborates well with the police to prevent violent extremism. Street wardens are deployed on estates with profound inequalities such as a 15 year gap in life expectancy. The Council's commitment to responding effectively to harassment domestic violence (DV) and hate crimes is strong, and it has been achieving some good outcomes. A domestic violence co-ordinator is employed at the city council and ongoing funding is provided for a rape crisis centre, and to a hate crime multi agency group. This provides a framework of prevention tools and actions to address the needs of vulnerable sectors of the community.
- 29** Good baseline knowledge about the community is used to influence strategic planning and service delivery. The Council is playing an active role in ensuring that an up to date research base is in place. A Council officer chairs the County wide data observatory which has been used to inform for example, the Council's housing strategy. Knowledge about the community is seen by Councillors as being good. Regular reporting of trends and demographics, with good links into the community to detect changes are apparent, for example, around asylum seekers and migrant workers.

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## Procurement and VFM

### Summary

- 30** The Council has good relationships with the local voluntary sector and shows a strong commitment to supporting it. Councillors and senior managers have taken the decision to continue the sector's funding. They increased the level of financial investment in 2008/09, as part of a clear strategic approach to support its community and voluntary partnerships. They are clear that the Council needs to provide for a sustainable third sector and voluntary groups, in order to deliver its strategic priorities, and the issue has been high on councillors' agendas. This active approach to commissioning demonstrates good understanding of the role of local partnerships in contributing to the Council's value for money.

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## Findings

- 31** The Council's commissioning has a strong focus on local sustainability. It has also taken some difficult and clear decisions over the potential for tensions within its procurement and tendering process. The Council has a good procurement strategy, which provides the framework for obtaining services. In the case of the local voluntary sector, the Council has taken legal advice and modified some of the tendering requirements partly to make them less burdensome on small groups and partly to encourage local suppliers. This is supporting local relationships, and shows the Council is mindful of a significant national issue about competitive tendering. It will be important for the Council to monitor this closely and keep abreast of the legal issues involved.
- 32** The Council builds equality and diversity categories into its procurement arrangements, they monitor achievement of these and penalty payments apply to contractors who do not achieve the targets set. The Council undertakes to help suppliers develop their approach to equality issues and monitors improvements through contract review meetings. The corporate equalities policy forms an appendix to all tenders. The procurement team holds tendering workshops (three held in the last year) aimed at smaller local suppliers and cover equalities requirements and guidance on where they can get specialist advice if needed. Feedback to unsuccessful tenderers on equalities and diversity issues has resulted in improvements in suppliers procedures in these areas.
- 33** The Council monitors the grants that it provides to the voluntary sector and identifies the numbers of groups that have benefited from the grants process. However, the ability of the Council to demonstrate that engagement with the voluntary sector is providing value for money needs to be improved by a more formal evaluation of outcomes. The Council does not publicise outcomes effectively and needs to do so. For example; it does not produce an annual public report on outcomes from its considerable investment of around £1.6 million per annum in community capacity building. Internal reporting of outcomes does take place and provides adequate control of the grants process. The lack of external reporting of outcomes is a missed opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of engagement.

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## Performance management, reporting and communications

### Summary

- 34** Overall, the way in which the Council reports and manages performance is adequate, and improving steadily as seen by the development of 'performance matters', but there are some important gaps in regard to equalities and diversity. Service plans being developed for 2009/10 now have to contain an equalities section, with measurable targets, which is a step forward. However, there are gaps in measuring how well the needs of customers are being met and weaknesses in the complaints policy and systems.

### Findings

- 35** The Council's performance management is adequate and improving steadily under some new monitoring systems but there are key gaps in relation to equalities and diversity. New requirements have been put in place to ensure that each service transformation plan for 2009/10 will need to have an equalities section with measurable targets. The Council has also introduced peer challenge across services. This is a positive feature designed to give greater coordination of the approach to equalities and diversity in cross cutting areas.
- 36** The Council has taken a number of steps that are helping develop a more coordinated approach to equalities. It has committed more resources to it in 2008/09. It is also championing equalities across the organisation by setting up an equalities board, which includes representation from unions, councillors and most service areas. This board has carried out a gap analysis against the Audit Commission's key lines of enquiry for diversity in housing management, and used this to challenge its performance. The Council has also retained the best value indicators relating to diversity and equality and it has also indicated that it will be developing further indicators to measure the success of the corporate equality scheme. This will ensure that the Council has measures in place to assess progress and to respond to adverse trends.
- 37** The Council was not monitoring and enforcing compliance with customer service standards across the piece at the time of our audit and performance information on customer services was not consistently available. The Council's complaints system and policy is being updated, and trends need to be identified and monitoring against all equality strands included. This reduces the Council's understanding of customer needs. Since our audit visit the 'performance matters' system has been further developed. Performance information on customer services is monitored within the services and has also been monitored for the last eighteen months on a monthly basis at a corporate level by the corporate performance board. The use of customer service standards is due to be revised as part of the customer contact strategy. Complaints reports have been going to the standards committee on a regular basis for around five years, however the Council is planning to review its management of complaints as part of the roll out of the customer relationship management system with the aim of improving its understanding of customer needs.
- 38** The Council is not monitoring service-level objectives and equality impact assessments effectively. Partly, this is because it has not developed the tools and initiatives with which to measure success of equalities and diversity. The Council's new service transformation plans are now setting new equalities and diversity targets but plans for robust monitoring arrangements had not yet been implemented at the time of our audit. The Council now monitors service level objectives through the Corvu system and is planning to include equalities and diversity objectives in this process.

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## Customer experience

### Summary

- 39** Overall, customer satisfaction with services is mixed. The Council has taken action to make services more accessible but it needs to improve the information that it holds about the customer experience to ensure that it can identify and remove any barriers to improvement.

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### Findings

- 40** Customer satisfaction with council services is mixed. Satisfaction with face to face and telephone contact in revenues and benefits is high. National data for 2006/07 showed residents were satisfied with cultural services, except for sports and leisure. Housing estates are well maintained and 84 per cent of council buildings are accessible to disabled people. Mystery shopping takes place in some services and enables the Council to make improvements based on customer feedback. Overall, the Council needs to improve the information that it holds about the customer experience to ensure that it can identify and remove any barriers to improvement.
- 41** The Council has taken action to make its services more accessible. The Council has recently introduced a 'click to listen' feature on its website enabling service users to hear the content of web pages. Regular user testing, including through Shaw Trust, ensures that the website is accessible. Language line is available for translation services. The Council needs to regularly assess this to ensure it meets current needs as well as offering value for money.

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## Policies processes and legislation

### Summary

- 42** Overall, recent improvements in corporate policies and procedures are supporting the Council's approach to equalities and diversity. Service transformation plans for 2009/10 are helping to integrate equalities with service improvement and equalities impact assessments are being carried out over a three year time frame. However, these improvements now need to be embedded across the Council to link with other plans and strategies. The housing service has not carried out a formal assessment with the CRE code of practice for racial equality in housing which is a weakness, but they are planning to do so to address this issue.

### Findings

- 43** Corporate policies and procedures have recently been reviewed and a new comprehensive corporate equality scheme has been agreed. This clearly sets out legal duties and responsibilities. Policies support the Council's commitment to equality and diversity. The Council's new framework for service transformation plans requires each service to make specific plans for equalities, and to include measurable targets and an equalities impact assessment. However, the housing service has not carried out a formal assessment with the CRE code of practice for racial equality in housing but they are planning to do so to address this issue.
- 44** The Council is using equality impact assessments to improve its focus on how its services can become easier to use for a wide range of people but this is at a relatively early stage when compared with some other councils. It now has a three year rolling plan for completion to ensure that all services are covered. In some cases the Council has already used the process to develop improvements. For example, a database is being developed to profile planning applications to measure whether specific groups have a higher chance of refusal than others. Further progress will be important in ensuring that local people are not disadvantaged by the way the Council runs its services.

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### Workforce and human resources (HR)

#### Summary

- 45** Overall, the Council's HR is at an early stage in supporting progress in equalities and diversity. Key policies and strategies are not in place to ensure a consistent approach to attracting and retaining a diverse workforce which reflects the local population. The Council does not have enough information about the experience of its current workforce and does not have workforce plans to ensure future skills gaps are identified and filled. It does not have a full range of equality and diversity policies and practices in place to demonstrate an inclusive culture. The Council is aware of the issues to be addressed and is beginning a wide ranging review of HR policies and procedures, which it intends to implement in 2009. Positive consultation with staff through conferences has taken place to help with improvement in these areas, A comprehensive action plan has been agreed and the Council informs us that this is being progressed in line with timescales, with an objective to achieve level 5 of the Equalities Standard for Local Government by March 2011. This will include confirmation of robust baseline information and targeted positive action in 2009/10 to attract and retain a diverse workforce representative of the local population.

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## Findings

- 46** The Council does not yet have policies and strategies in place to support equality and diversity in the workplace. An equal pay policy is in draft form and there is no fair employment policy, workforce strategy or clear employment objectives. Although service transformation plans are beginning to provide a clear framework for services on equality and diversity, the Council recognises that without a comprehensive strategic approach, policy and practice will be inconsistent. As a result, a complete review of HR policies and procedures is underway and action plans have been agreed by the Council. Since our review both equal pay and fair employment policies are in draft form and a workforce plan is complete.
- 47** Individual performance management is not implemented effectively. Appraisals are not consistently regarded as vehicles for driving improvement by all staff and managers, and they are not consistently linked to action plans which support service and corporate objectives. However some appraisals do take place and identify training needs. Without a more comprehensive approach, the Council cannot be sure that it is providing value for money, as the connection between its strategies and actions is unclear. Since our review a new appraisal system has been developed following feedback from focus groups of over 140 staff in February and a new pilot scheme was running in June 2009. A key focus will be the link to service transformation plans and corporate objectives, and there is a learning and development budget available for staff development. The Council recognises the need to ensure that the appraisal objectives are achieved and employee performance managed in a more robust way and will make this incumbent on managers driven from the top down.
- 48** The Council's workforce does not currently reflect the local population. It is not meeting its own workforce targets for gender, disability or race. Compared to other councils, performance in 2007/08 was poor and deteriorating for the top 5 per cent earners who are disabled or BME. However these figures can be skewed by small numbers and a recent appointment will have improved these statistics. The Council monitors and reports regularly on its workforce profile, except by grade, but is not taking action as a result of this monitoring. This means it is not managing its own performance effectively, and cannot demonstrate that it is a role model for other local employers. Since our review an exercise has been completed to set smart targets around the Council workforce. Each target has been recast more realistically, providing achievable targets and enabling more focused positive action planned for 2009/10. The Council will be taking action as a result of its workforce monitoring and recognises its role as a community leader and role model for other local employers.



- 49** The Council's recruitment does not support diversity principles. Improvements in the diversity of the workforce are not adequately supported by a strategic approach to recruitment and selection. Recruitment activities do not attract a wide enough group of candidates to address under representation. The Council does not actively promote employment of BME or LGBT people through its website or other recruitment activities. There are limited arrangements for flexible working which could help to attract a wider range of applicants. This means that some local people from minority groups are at a disadvantage, as potential employees, and that the Council is not able to draw on diverse employee views in developing its work. Since our review opportunities have been taken, such as recent meetings with Job Centre Plus to seek and gain re-accreditation for the disability Two Ticks Award and also to engage more fully with them in order to attract a more diverse pool of applicants. The Council recognises the need to ensure effective marketing of its flexible working options available to applicants and existing staff.
- 50** The Council lacks a strategic approach to learning and development. The Council has not yet developed a learning and development strategy. The training budget is not well managed and in 2008/09 was used before all training needs were met. There are some positive initiatives underway. For example the corporate induction programme includes equality and diversity as well as access and disability awareness. Six employees from generally under-represented groups have been selected to attend a coaching programme. Some innovative training using drama to improve awareness is well regarded and a joint training course between the Council and the Police demonstrated commitment from senior staff and councillors. However these initiatives are not sufficiently brought together to ensure that the Council attracts and retains a diverse workforce. Since our review the Council is developing its strategic approach to learning and development. A recent initiative has devolved much of the training budget back to departments whilst other funding is still retained centrally for corporate initiatives. The aim of this is to enable better management of the budget and provide a good level of resource to meet local needs as identified within appraisals. A compulsory comprehensive management development programme is underway with over 200 managers due to participate.
- 51** The Council is building a sound understanding of the workforce to help it build an inclusive culture. It has not carried out a staff survey since 2005. There are no staff networks for disabled, BME, LGBT or other groups which could feed into policy and practice. Levels of sickness absence were high and deteriorating in 2007/08 compared to other councils and the reasons for this are not clearly understood. Job evaluation is nearing completion to deal with anomalies of pay. Since our review the Council has used various consultation processes to improve its understanding of the workforce. These have included: regular meetings with trade union representatives, monthly equalities group meetings and focus groups asking for staff views on specific matters. The reasons for sickness absence are now understood and a drive on attendance management (informed by focus groups) has resulted in a new policy and training, the introduction of attendance Tsars who drive attendance management in service areas, a focus on long term sickness cases, and new reporting and monitoring processes. We will review the impacts of these improvements in our follow up review. To improve its understanding of the workforce the Council is planning to set up employee groups to monitor the six equality strands and these should be in place by September 2009.

**52** Workforce planning is at an early stage. There is no workforce strategy in place and there is no formal mission statement saying that the Council is seeking to represent the local community. The workforce is ageing and the Council does not have enough information about current and future workforce needs or likely occupational or skills shortages. Some employees think that talent management is not progressive enough to ensure that the business needs of the Council can be met through growing their own workforce. Overall, this means that the Council has a lot to do to develop its employment practices to meet local needs and help it deliver its priorities. Since our review the Council has developed its workforce strategy and is developing its understanding of the information available and what it needs to assess workforce requirements. The workforce strategy action plan is underway and meetings are ongoing with heads of service about workforce planning on the ground in their respective service areas.

# Appendix 1 – Audit approach

- 1 The work was split between two distinct but interrelated sets of activity. The first was a desk based research involving reviews of key documents relating to equalities and diversity, and the development of challenge questions based on lessons from the Commission's previous performance reviews. We sought to avoid duplicating outcomes from previous audit and inspection work, but to establish a framework to inform the new Use of Resources assessment and to make recommendations of areas where progress appears to be limited. This stage included a review of corporate documents and further detailed analysis of activities and services from an equality and diversity viewpoint.
- 2 The second phase of work involved telephone interviews with Council staff, councillors and stakeholders. The agenda and scope of these interviews were shaped by the initial document analysis and the emerging challenge questions.
- 3 The project stages were as follows.
  - An initial set-up meeting with the Council to agree the review scope and arrangements for conducting the work.
  - A review of documentation provided by the Council.
  - Telephone interviews.
  - A presentation of the findings of the review to the Council in the form of a draft report for comment.
  - Discussion and agreement of a prioritised action plan.
  - A final report.

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# Appendix 2 – Key lines of enquiry

- 1 In reporting how well Oxford City Council is improving its approach to diversity, equalities and community cohesion we structured our findings under the six headings of: leadership; engagement, consultation and cohesion; procurement and VFM; performance management, reporting and communications; customer experience; and policies processes and legislation; and workforce and human resources (HR).
- 2 In developing our report, we reviewed evidence about the following.
  - Community cohesion.
    - Information about new and changing communities.
    - Approach to gypsies and travellers, migrant workers and emerging communities.
    - Promoting understanding between different races or ethnic groups.
    - Intergenerational work.
    - Health inequalities.
  - Engagement with partners to understand community needs.
    - Voluntary sector.
    - Other agencies and statutory bodies.
  - Internal processes.
    - Progress with equality standard.
    - Progress with equality impact assessments.
    - Staff diversity profile.
    - Leadership in promoting equalities and diversity.
  - User feedback.
    - How complaints and feedback are used to improve services.
    - Involving disabled and vulnerable people in service design.
    - Customer satisfaction.
  - Performance management.
    - Councillor involvement in managing performance.
    - How performance is improving for minority and disadvantaged people.
  - Outcomes and impact of equalities systems and processes.

# Appendix 3 – Action plan

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
6	<p>R1 Improve the customer experience and outcomes by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>finalising and implementing the Council's customer contact strategy;</li> <li>ensuring that clear arrangements are further developed through the Council's procurement arrangements to monitor, evaluate and control contractors and suppliers in regard to equalities and diversity;</li> <li>implement plans to review and improve customer service standards and monitor against them in all services; and</li> <li>improve the complaints policy and procedure and evaluate and monitor complaints on a regular basis against relevant equality strands.</li> </ul>	2	<p>Peter McQuitty/ Helen Bishop</p> <p>Jane Lubbock</p> <p>Peter McQuitty Helen Bishop</p> <p>Mike Newman</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>The final Customer Contact Strategy is to be approved by City Executive Board in October 2009. Implementation of key strands in strategy</p> <p>A project brief for a Contract Management Monitoring System and has been prepared and is awaiting approval for funding. An Action Plan in place. Data uploaded and live.</p> <p>We will introduce corporate delivery standards for customer contact channels and service standards for all service areas.</p> <p>Currently carrying out BPI on complaints processes.</p> <p>Roll-out of new complaints system will take place as part of CRM project</p>	<p>October 2009</p> <p>May 2010</p> <p>September 2010</p> <p>January 2010 April 2010</p> <p>May 2010</p> <p>August 2009</p> <p>October - December 2009 May 2010</p>

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6	<p>R2 Improve understanding of community and customer needs by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• using complaints and ongoing feedback to identify improvements;</li> <li>• finalising and implementing the Council's consultation strategy; and</li> <li>• evaluating the outcomes from the Council's investment in capacity building with the voluntary sector and reporting these outcomes publicly.</li> </ul>	2	<p>Mike Newman</p> <p>Peter McQuitty</p> <p>Graham Stratford</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>We will introduce a corporate comments and complaints system that forms part of the performance framework</p> <p>An initial Impact Assessment is currently being undertaken.</p>	<p>May 2010</p> <p>October 2009</p> <p>March 2010</p>
6	<p>R3 Improve the strategic approach to equality and diversity by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establishing a clear action plan to improve the Council's position against the Local Government Equality Standard and the emerging Local Government Equality Framework;</li> <li>• monitoring strategic equality and diversity plans regularly;</li> <li>• ensuring that the new Corporate Equality scheme is well publicised and available; and</li> <li>• ensuring that the Council is compliant with the Commission for Racial Equality's code of housing.</li> </ul>	2	<p>Peter McQuitty</p> <p>Peter McQuitty</p> <p>Peter McQuitty</p> <p>Graham Stratford</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>An Action Plan is in place for 2009/10 An Action Plan is currently being developed for 2010/11</p> <p>Monitoring forms part of Performance Management Framework and is monitored on a monthly basis</p> <p>Steering group established and forms part of Corporate Equality Objectives 2009/10</p>	<p>On-going February 2010</p> <p>On-going</p> <p>On-going</p> <p>March 2010</p>

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7	<p>R4 Improve the approach to workforce planning and HR by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improving the baseline knowledge about the workforce against the six equality strands;</li> <li>ensuring that gaps in workforce planning are addressed rapidly;</li> <li>reviewing current HR policies and procedures, including implementation of a fair employment and equal pay policy;</li> <li>improving the selection and recruitment process to attract a wider group of appropriately qualified applicants; and</li> <li>developing staff networks to support minority groups and to inform policy development.</li> </ul>	3	<p>Simon Howick</p> <p>Simon Howick</p> <p>Simon Howick</p> <p>Simon Howick</p> <p>Simon Howick</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>Equalities Questionnaire completed and analysis to be undertaken</p> <p>Workforce Plan is complete and an action plan is being developed</p> <p>A review timetable is in place with a list of policies/procedures to be revised</p> <p>The recruitment and selection Policy is part of the policy review timetable</p>	<p>September 2009</p> <p>March 2010</p> <p>March 2010</p> <p>March 2010</p> <p>March 2010</p>

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# The Audit Commission

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