

Scrutiny Review of Combatting Inequality – terms of reference

Background

At its meeting on 6 October, the Scrutiny Committee agreed to a proposal to establish a panel to review issues around inequality in Oxford. This panel would draw together and prioritise a number of different but related suggestions put forward by Councillors. The review panel was asked to meet to refine its terms of reference and report back to the Scrutiny Committee for approval. The following terms of reference were drafted by the panel before being agreed by the Scrutiny Committee on 10 November 2014.

Context

Oxford is a dynamic and successful city with relatively low long term employment. However, the cost of living is higher than almost anywhere else in the UK and this presents a number of challenges. Some areas of the City suffer multiple levels of deprivation, with low skills, low incomes and poor housing. The City also has significant numbers of homeless and other vulnerable groups. These challenges have been exacerbated by the effects of the economic downturn and by constrained public spending, and are expected to intensify in the years ahead.

Purpose of the Scrutiny Review

To review how the City Council contributes to combatting harmful social and economic inequality in Oxford, and whether there is more that could reasonably be done.

The central aims of the review are

- To understand the scale, reasons and impact of inequality in Oxford.
- To identify specific areas where the City Council can make the most difference in combatting inequality.
- To make deliverable, evidence-based recommendations that are co-produced with local citizens or stakeholders where possible.

Other aims include

- Identifying other studies that are currently taking place.
- Understanding the public sector equality role, how this is applied in practice and whether more could be done.
- Drawing on the views and experience of local professionals and non-statutory organisations.
- Seeking external expert perspectives that may challenge conventional thinking.
- Identifying gaps in provision or in partnership working where there are opportunities for the City Council to take a leadership role.
- Testing the claim that Oxford City Council does all it can to make Oxford a fairer, more equal place.

Out of scope

- Commissioning new academic or statistical research.
- Duplicating the work of other agencies such as Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and Oxfordshire County Council.

- Focusing on areas where the City Council currently has little influence e.g. Children's Centres.

Methodology

Evidence gathering methods include:

- Review of literature, policy documents and research data.
- Call for evidence.
- Evidence provided at public hearings and workshops.
- Undertaking site visits e.g. to a food bank, health centre etc.
- Considering what could be learnt from other local authorities.

Indicative timeline

October 2014
Panel terms of reference considered by Scrutiny Committee on 6 October. Panel members meet to agree area of focus and next steps. Terms of reference updated. Evidence gathering is planned.
November 2014
Review terms of reference considered by Scrutiny Committee on 10 November. Evidence gathering begins.
December 2014 - January 2015
Evidence gathering continues but the Finance Panel's Budget Scrutiny review takes priority.
February 2015
Final evidence gathering takes place. Panel meets to review evidence and identify recommendation areas. Report drafted around recommendation areas.
March 2015
Panel finalise report and recommendations. Report to Scrutiny Committee meeting on 23 March. Recommendations to City Executive Board on 1 April.