Report of: Strategy & Review Business Manager

To: Executive Board

Date: 18th December 2006   **Item No**:

Title of Report : Oxford City Council Social Inclusion Audit

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present to the Executive Board the findings of the social inclusion audit

Key decision: No

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Caroline van Zyl

Scrutiny Responsibility: Community Scrutiny

Ward(s) affected: All

Report Approved by
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Caroline van Zyl
Legal: Jeremy Thomas
Finance: Andy Collett

Policy Framework: The Oxford Plan through meeting the following priorities: reduce inequalities through social inclusion; reduce and prevent crime and anti-social behaviour; ensuring better, more efficient services

Recommendation(s):

1. To note and comment upon the social inclusion audit findings, including policy statements and recommendations.
2. To endorse the audit findings as a statement of how the Council will address social inclusion through the services covered by the scope of this report.

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1. The purpose of the social inclusion audit is to link the high-level priorities identified in the Social Inclusion Strategy to the Council's existing service delivery. The result, appended to this report, is an overview of our current activity to address these issues alongside some recommendations for further developments. It is hoped that this report will be a useful resource for both Members and Officers in service planning and budget setting to achieve our corporate priority to 'reduce inequalities through social inclusion'.

Scope of the audit

2. Clearly many different organisations, public, private and voluntary, contribute to promoting social inclusion in Oxford. Whilst the Council recognises this, this report looks at Oxford City Council's contribution only. However many of the services covered by the audit are delivered in close coordination with partner agencies.

3. The audit work has focussed on services and initiatives that are targeted on particular groups of people, rather than the core, mainstream Council services. Given that strategies are already agreed and being implemented in the fields of homelessness and community safety, these areas have largely been excluded – though some community safety services have been included where they cross over with other issues. It also excludes community and voluntary organisations with grant funding, as these are being covered by the ongoing review of support to community and voluntary organisations.

4. The audit has been the subject of wide involvement and consultation. It has been overseen by a cross-Unit steering group and presented at each of the six Area Committees. There have been discussions with Officers whose services are affected by these proposals. Consultation with the public has been achieved through analysis of recent consultation exercises and questions included in the Talkback questionnaire distributed during July and August 2006. In addition to this, a brief review of research and good practice guidance has been undertaken.

Key findings

5. The recommendations are structured around four key target groups: people on low incomes, children and young people, deprivation in geographic areas and excluded black and minority ethnic people. Some work on services for older people will follow this report. Each section contains a policy statement on what the Council will do to contribute to better outcomes for that group, along with recommendations about how this work can be developed further.

6. There are four key priorities for further action identified in this report:
   - Promotion of work to target people on low incomes, including families, older people and people from black and minority ethnic

groups. This includes developing a scheme to proactively promote all existing schemes, increasing the resource available to benefits take-up campaigns and developing an Affordable Warmth Strategy

- To continue to support affordable play activities, sports, leisure and cultural activities for all, and through these address other issues including health and community safety
- Continue to provide support to vulnerable families where it links to the Council's core responsibilities – this includes family support and domestic violence work
- Develop an improved understanding of how the Council can promote community cohesion across all its services

Resource implications

7. The policy statements and recommendations have been made in order to advise upon the future prioritisation of resources. There are a number of routes available for addressing resource implications identified in this report:
   - Using the findings to direct service priorities within existing budgets
   - Using the recommendations to inform the prospectus for grants to community and voluntary organisations
   - Exploring joint funding of services with partner agencies where responsibilities are shared
   - Using the recommendations to inform budget decisions in the Council's annual budget-setting process
   - Area Committees may wish to consider these recommendations in addressing local issues through their revenue budgets

Comments from Area Committees

8. Each of the six Area Committees were given a brief presentation of the social inclusion audit findings during October and November 2006. In broad terms the findings were received with interest and support from the Committees. A number of specific points were raised, including:

   - Whilst there were some comments that the Indices of Deprivation provide a useful resource and show that Oxford has deprivation comparable on a national scale, there was concern raised about some of the limitations of the data. In particular this related to the arbitrary nature of some of the geographical boundaries drawn by the Super Output Areas and the concern that some smaller pockets of deprivation are not identified by the data. There were suggestions that due to these limitations the Indices of Deprivation should not be used in isolation to allocate resources.

   - Varying views were expressed about further resourcing to benefits take-up campaigns. At one Committee questions were raised over whether an increased budget could genuinely result in better

outcomes. At another Committee support was given for prioritising this.

- Concern was expressed that the family support and domestic violence work is subject to time-limited funding.

- It was suggested that the relatively limited impact that a District Council can have in addressing social inclusion strengthens the case for Oxford having a unitary authority.

Strategic Management Board 7th November 2006

9. The Strategic Management Board agreed to endorse the report, noting its usefulness in informing the budget process.

Area Chairs meeting 22nd November 2006

10. The Area Chairs meeting of 22nd November discussed how the social inclusion revenue budget allocation to Area Committees should be allocated in future years. It is currently allocated to the 42 (i.e. half) most deprived Super Output Areas. At the meeting support was expressed for changing the allocation to the 17 Super Output Areas identified in the Social Inclusion Strategy, whilst noting that the core revenue budgets of each Committee can also be used to support social inclusion work.

Comments from Community Scrutiny Committee 23rd November 2006

11. The findings of the social inclusion audit were presented to the Community Scrutiny Committee at the 23rd November meeting. There was lengthy discussion of the recommendations in the report (see appended minutes). The committee agreed to approve the report and also made a number of recommendations, some of which are discussed here:

(1) *Recommendation to alter wording of recommendation to provide a ring fenced budget for ongoing benefits take-up campaigns from 'ought to be provided' to 'should be provided'.*

The report wording has been strengthened as suggested.

(3) *Recommendation to ask officers to consult with SEEDA re making a European Social Fund application next year.*

It is suggested that Officers make some initial investigations, including consulting with SEEDA, to evaluate whether Oxford is likely to be eligible for receipt of European Social Fund monies.

(4) *Recommendation that all new Council policies should be 'social inclusion proofed'.*

It is important that all Council policies take into account the impact on social inclusion, as there is otherwise a risk that the Council's actions in one part of the organisation countermand efforts in another. However it could be argued that this is also the case for a number of other issues, including community safety, environmental impact and housing. It may be cumbersome for report authors to address all these issues in each report that it is presented to Members.

Thus it is suggested that Officers are encouraged to consider social inclusion impacts and address these explicitly where appropriate, with advice and information provided by Officers from Strategy & Review when requested. Members may also wish to ask for assessments of the social inclusion impact of proposed new policies.

12. The Committee also discussed how the Council should approach the allocation of resources to deprived areas, particularly with regard to the concerns raised at Area Committees over the use of the Indices of Deprivation. The Committee reached a broad consensus (see appended minutes), agreeing that the main emphasis in resource allocation should be on the 17 Super Output Areas but that there also ought to be regard to addressing need in smaller pockets of deprivation.

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Background papers:

ord City Council Social Inclusion Strategy 2006