

To: Cabinet
Date: 16 March 2022
Report of: The Head of Community Services
Title of Report: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

Summary and recommendations

Purpose of report: The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy demonstrates how Oxford City Council will continue to meet the [public sector Equality Duty](#) to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between Oxford's citizens.

Key decision: Yes

Cabinet Member: Councillor Shaista Aziz, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities

Corporate Priority: Thriving Communities

Policy Framework: Council Strategy 2020-24

Recommendation(s): That Cabinet resolves to:

1. Endorse the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.
2. Review the activities in the strategy when new insights or data (such as the census) become available to ensure our work remains evidence led.

Appendices

Appendix 1	Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix 2	Risk Register
Appendix 3	The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

Introduction and background

1. Oxford City Council is committed to building a fairer, greener city in which everyone can thrive. To support flourishing communities, the Council is focused on ensuring our services, investments, and policy-making are designed to address Oxford's social and financial inequalities.
2. Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are together a key focus for all our work. EDI is a core part of all our policies and partnerships for our residents, staff and elected members.
3. Our Corporate Strategy sets the four key priorities for the Council, EDI is at the heart of why we undertake this work.
 - ❖ **Priority 1: Enable an inclusive economy**, in which wealth is distributed across our communities and where all residents can share the benefits of growth.
 - ❖ **Priority 2: Deliver more, affordable housing** to address Oxford's housing crisis where existing homes are unaffordable for many and demand for good quality homes outstrips what is available.
 - ❖ **Priority 3: Support thriving communities**, to help ensure everyone is able to play a full part in the life of our city.
 - ❖ **Priority 4: Pursue a zero-carbon Oxford**, acting on the clear message from Oxford's Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change to continue to take a lead in reducing emissions and increasing biodiversity.

Context

4. Oxford is a wealthy city but has stark inequalities. For example, 10 out of 83 neighbourhoods are amongst the 20% most deprived in England, and one is in the most deprived 10%.
5. 22% of adults have no or low educational qualifications, and the 2018 schools census data showed 32% of children did not have English as a first language. One in six residents has a primary language other than English¹. Oxford is one of the most diverse cities in the UK, with 28% of the population born outside the UK.
6. Based on Indices of Deprivation 2019² (after adjusting for housing costs), 29% of children in Oxford live below the poverty line. According to the Indices of Deprivation, child poverty rates have reduced in the most deprived neighbourhoods, but six Oxford neighbourhoods still have child poverty rates over 30%.
7. Men in the most deprived areas live 15 years less on average than those who live in the least deprived areas. The Centre for Cities 2020³ data cites Oxford as the 2nd most unequal city in the UK, while the Demos-PwC Good Growth for Cities report consistently places Oxford as the number one city in the UK.⁴
8. The effects of the pandemic have not been felt equally across the population. Research has shown that some groups, especially those that already experienced inequality, have suffered the most. The [latest government reporting](#) shows that those from Black and Asian heritage, and those in higher deprivation, suffered significant health inequalities and higher mortality rates. Research from the [Institute of Fiscal Studies in 2021](#) indicated that the pandemic had also caused

¹ https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20131/population/463/first_or_preferred_language

² [Indices_of_Deprivation_2019_Oxford_Report_word_version_v3.pdf](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20131/population/463/indices_of_deprivation_2019_oxford_report_word_version_v3.pdf) at oxford.gov.uk

³ <https://www.centreforcities.org/city/oxford/>

⁴ <https://www.pwc.co.uk/industries/government-public-sector/good-growth.html>

more income inequality, more inequalities in education and skills, and more intergenerational inequalities.

9. Michael Marmot's report, "[Build Back Fairer: The COVID-19 Review](#)" shows the scale of the challenge we face. The report says *"there is an urgent need to do things differently, to build a society based on the principles of social justice; to reduce inequalities of income and wealth; to build a wellbeing economy that puts the achievement of health and wellbeing, rather than narrow economic goals."*

Our approach

10. [The Equality Act 2010](#) is the legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. This Act is the prime legislative basis under which this strategy operates. The Act includes the [public sector Equality Duty](#) that requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:
 - ❖ Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
 - ❖ Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - ❖ Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
11. Oxford City Council has taken a robust and transparent approach to meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty and has adopted [The Equality Framework for Local Government](#). The framework encourages a focus on local issues and problems, prompts learning from and spreading good practice. All of which is very much in line with the Council's approach.
12. The framework has four improvement modules, these are:
 - i. Understanding and Working with Communities
 - ii. Leadership and Organisational Commitment
 - iii. Responsive Services and Customer Care
 - iv. Diverse and Engaged Workforce
13. The Council already incorporates these cross-cutting themes into our work, and is committed to further action to put these at the heart of all we do. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy provides the Council's priorities and actions for each of the four areas of the framework.
14. The Diverse and Engaged Workforce strand incorporates the Workforce Equalities Report that Cabinet agreed in December 2021.

Consultation

15. Much of the Council's work involves increasing our understanding of communities and inequalities. In the lead up to drafting this strategy, we held 14 focus groups with around 100 people with a range of protected characteristics.
16. The Council has also just finished an in-depth consultation to inform its grants review - this included ten focus group discussions attended by people with lived experience of different protected characteristics, homelessness and intersectionality.

17. Alongside this, three focus groups were undertaken in November 2021 to review the Council's anti-racism charter.
18. Over the pandemic period, the Council had established locality support teams. This work has helped create a greater understanding and deeper level of trust with people and communities.
19. These community connections, focus groups and our daily conversations with citizens have provided valuable insights for developing the strategy.

Governance

20. The City Council has an equalities steering group chaired by the Executive Director for Communities and People. This is an advisory group with insight into lived experience and council service delivery that will inform our policy-making and service delivery and help strengthen our own approach to equalities within the workplace.
21. To strengthen oversight, accountability, and challenge at the senior level, the Equalities Steering group will present quarterly to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) of service directors and the Leaders Group of Cabinet Members.
22. In addition, the Scrutiny Officer is working on a set of proposals to improve member oversight and challenge relating to equalities issues via the Scrutiny function.

Financial Implications

23. There are no direct financial implications. Our approach is to embed equality, diversity and inclusion into everything we do.

Legal Implications

24. [The Equality Act 2010](#) includes a [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. Compliance with the general equality duty is a legal obligation.
25. A public authority has to demonstrate that it had regard to the impact of its proposed policy on equality.

Level of Risk

26. A full review of risk has been undertaken, which is reflected in Appendix 2.

Equalities Impact

27. Equalities considerations have been continually undertaken, the Equalities Impact Assessment is included as Appendix 1.

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