



LGA case study template

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Local authority: Oxford City Council

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Case study title:

Developing the Oxford City Council's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) strategy: an inclusive approach to understanding complex inequalities in our communities

Case study synopsis (100 words):

Oxford City Council developed a comprehensive 4-strand EDI strategy based on [Equalities Framework for Local Government](#), the Council's key corporate priorities (inclusive economy, affordable housing, thriving communities, and tackle climate change) and systematic analysis of conversations and focus groups with communities and partners. It aims to go beyond performing our Public Sector Duty (Equality Act 2010) and embed inclusive practices such as 'doing with, not to our communities', mindful learning, and diversify how we measure impact. In doing so, we are empowering communities, partners, and staff to work with us to shape a unique relationship based on transparency, visibility, reciprocity, person and community driven action, and empathetic understanding.

The challenge:

The Oxford City Council has always championed inclusion and valued the diversity in Oxford. However, over the years it has become clear that the city of Oxford is full of contradictions. One such contradiction, driving the development and workings of our strategy is the fact that even though Oxford's economy is thriving and resilient, there are grave and persistent systemic inequalities, disproportionately and adversely impacting certain areas, communities, and people, especially some minoritised groups.

Oxford is the second most unequal city in the U.K. Average house prices in Oxford are over £500,000, 17.3 times the average earnings. After housing costs, 1 in 4 children live below the poverty line. These figures depict troubling economic inequalities. But not everyone is experiencing these inequalities uniformly, especially amongst minoritised groups. The 2021 census reports that 17% of its residents self-identified as non-British. There has been a notable increase in residents self-identifying as Pakistani, followed by Indian and

Chinese. This diversity brings cultural richness, varied skills and unique practices and perspectives. However, ethnic minorities in Britain also experience significant disadvantages. According to the Runnymede Trust, on average, ethnic minority households have less wealth than the White British household. Alarming, 46% of ethnic minority children in Britain are living in poverty. Consequently, it is likely that minoritised household in Oxford also face multiple barriers that needs wholistic, joint-up and targeted attention.

Based on some insights and data we identified three challenges. First, persistent disproportional growth within Oxford indicated to us that there were complex systemic issues at play. Despite existing statistics, it was unclear how our communities and people were encountering, responding, and managing social barriers to opportunities. Second, we needed to get a better understanding of what the Council could do better or different to support and bring about long-term sustainable inclusive change by embracing city's diversity and community networks. Finally, how do we measure impact of our policies, decisions made and work with communities.

The solution:

With significant gaps in our understanding on how people and communities manage inequalities, how to measure the impact our work to build on our strengths and learn how to do things better; we launched an inclusive engagement and analysis programme to capture voices from various communities in 2020.

First, an initial focus groups was held to help inform the development of key areas of work. Second, a linked consultation process began to embed equalities within the 2021 council grant review process. Third, as a series of learning sessions focussed on different aspects of the issues raised in the focus groups and consultations. Finally, via meetings of the Equalities Steering Group which governed the drafting of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and associated Equalities Impact Assessment. The initial scoping of the impact of the strategy was done via online focus groups, which were attended by a cross-section of members, officers, equalities ambassadors, and community leaders with relevant protected characteristics and lived experience. Key community representatives included— Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and Race Advisory Group (14th September 2020); Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women and Talent Development (15th September 2020); Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicity and Faith (16th September 2020); Age, Mental Health and Shielding (18th September 2020); and LGBTQIA+ (25th September 2020).

In addition to series of external consultations we also included voices of 50 diverse staff members across the Council. Weekly learning sessions were held to gather feedback from attendees with a focus on aspects of equalities including Anti-racism; Dyslexia and Neuro-diverse learning; Food Poverty; The Toll of the Pandemic on Children and Young People; Health Impact

Assessments. These learning sessions were attended by locality staff and officers from a range of service areas, partners such as social landlords, community groups, alongside other speakers. The invite list includes over 120 people who would self-select the sessions they attended according to their expertise, area of interest and continuous professional development.

The approach to including the voices of our communities were systematic and widespread. The goal was to provide various avenues for individuals to engage and contribute in safe spaces to have challenging but critical conversations.

The impact (including cost savings/income generated if applicable):

Four key impacts have been noted; first, we recognised the latent power of community groups and staff networks in mobilising resources in unique and relevant ways and how we can support communities through our work. Second, we are developing close working partnerships with key stakeholders such as Faith Leaders and Culture Partnership. These partnerships are becoming a bustling ecosystem of critical information, knowledge, and suggestions. Third, the establishment of the Equalities Steering Group not only informs policies and processes through the lens of equality but is also instrumental in bringing about a wider cultural change within the Council. Finally, and most crucially, key themes around housing, community grant funding, siloed communities, communities' access to money, racism, access, and lack of safe spaces were identified as key actions to take.

How is the new approach being sustained?

To ensure that our work stays aligned to needs of our communities and community voices are fully included in our decision making, we are focusing on a leadership ethos that stresses— equality is everyone's business, and no one person can bring about systemic change in isolation. To foster this ethos, we established the Equalities Steering Group (ESG) chaired by the Executive Director for Communities and People Members. Each quarter the ESG updates the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and the Council leaders. Members represent every service area within the council, council companies, and the Union. In addition to managing projects, the ESG is a safe space where members can learn from each other's expertise and lived experiences. Members hold each other accountable, challenge assumptions, eliminate barriers, and ensure that equalities work is integrated across the council. Two full-time EDI specialists (Workforce EDI Specialist and Communities EDI Lead) were hired to support and provide expertise in ongoing EDI work within and outside the council.

Our Inclusive leadership ethos is most visible in the launch of the Anti-Racism Charter, not just as a response to political and community sentiments after the tragic loss of George Floyd, but to address issues raised in the consultation around institutional racism and increase in hate crime in Oxford. We are the UK's first city to bring together definitions of Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and Anti-black racism in one place to hold ourselves accountable and have difficult conversations. Supported and ratified by leaders, stakeholders, and residents,

we aim to “help build a city, free of racism, and that advances equality of opportunity”.

Lessons learned:

We are still learning from this piece of work, however, the biggest lessons that we have learnt so far is that we must champion and prioritize lived experiences, adopting simplicity in our work and communication style to understand and engage inclusively with our residents, communities, and staff, and become comfortable with constant change and learn and respond strategically to the needs and experiences of our residents and communities.

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Links to relevant documents:

- 1) [Oxford City Council Strategy 2020-2024](#)
- 2) [Oxford City Council Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy](#)
 - a. [Full Equality Impact Assessment](#), Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, Cabinet Report, 2nd March 2022.
- 3) [Oxford Population Statistics](#) (Census 2021)
- 4) [Thriving Communities Strategy](#) 2023-2027
 - a. [Full Equality Impact Assessment](#), Thriving Community Strategy- Cabinet Report, 5th December 2022.
- 5) [Oxford City’s Anti-racism Charter](#) (9th August 2019)

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