

To: Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee

Date: 26 March 2012

Report of: Simon Howick
Head of People and Equalities

Title of Report: Equalities & Diversity: Update report

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report:

The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the Councils recent external Peer review and successful accreditation at the “Achieving” level under the Equalities Framework for Local Government (EFLG) and to report on progress against equalities objectives for 2011/12.

Report approved by: Cllr Bob Price

Finance: Nigel Kennedy
Legal: Jeremy Thomas

Recommendation(s):

Members are asked to:

- 1. Note the successful Peer Review accreditation for the Council as an “Achieving” authority under the EFLG and the recommendations made by the Peer Review team to assist the Council to move towards “Excellence”**
- 2. Note the summary of equalities objectives for 2011/12**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Head of People & Equalities submitted positive progress reports on Equalities and Diversity to VAP Scrutiny in September and November 2010. A further report was presented in April 2011 that outlined the position of the Council in final preparation for an external Peer Review in October 2011 which was subsequently postponed until January 2012.
- 1.2 The Council's EFLG submission document (Appendix 1) presented the Council's evidence against the key areas and was tested by an external group of two expert equalities officers and one Councillor in a series of in depth interviews held over two days on site. Interviews included the Leader of the Council, Chief Executive, lead councillors, senior officers, middle managers, front-line staff and representatives from community groups.
- 1.3 The Peer team delivered a brief presentation of their findings at the end of the second day (Appendix 3). This confirmed that the Council had been successful in reaching the standards required for the "Achieving" level of the EFLG framework. It also introduced a summary of the respective areas of strength and those for which further consideration would be useful. A full report (Appendix 2) with more detailed feedback and recommendations has been analysed by the People & Equalities Head of Service and is currently being reviewed by the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive.

2. Summary of the EFLG Peer Review process and findings

- 2.1 The feedback report presented a recognisable picture of Oxford
- 2.1 The Council's key areas of strength were:
 - An ambitious and clear corporate vision around a "world class city for everyone" with strong executive leadership;
 - The Council has been innovative in looking for "economic headroom", additional earning capacity and moving into new areas of work to tackle inequalities;
 - Systematic data collection, analysis and benchmarking used to target services;
 - Councillors well connected with residents, with Area Forums as an "active citizenship" opportunity also attended by Directors and Heads of Service;
 - Oxfordshire Strategic Partnership;
 - Community and neighbourhood involvement at different levels across the city;
 - "Bending the spend" in service delivery;
 - Equalities a key part in new developments such as the competition pool;
 - Leadership of the Procurement Hub and procurement training sessions with potential suppliers;
 - Transparency around grant allocations;

- Involving relevant partners in planning discussions early on
- Interactive diversity training and staff involvement with scoping future training;
- Oxford Living Wage seen as groundbreaking;
- Active engagement of scrutiny process & commitment to use peer challenge to direct future work programmes; and
- Tackling educational inequalities and other new budget proposals will keep the momentum going

2.2 The report suggested the following areas as those for consideration:

- More effective cross service strategic working through the use of accurate & up-to-date information, e.g. tenant profile data/ vulnerable list;
- Consider the value an internal equalities group could bring to the strategic overview;
- Community involvement in EqlAs and ensuring that EqlAs sit at the start of the policy development process;
- How representative/ diverse are community representatives;
- Are we clear about our external equalities objectives;
- Working to attract and develop a more diverse workforce at all levels of responsibility; and
- All about consistency and the ability to measure outcomes

2.3 The Peer team added the following observations:

- Good narrative contained within the submission and Oxford Key Facts profile;
- E&D is built into the day-to-day service delivery and is normal for Oxford;
- Not frightened to get partners on board;
- Must continue to communicate & celebrate innovative practice at OCC;
- “Punching well above our weight”;
- Important to keep an eye on the “Achieving” journey documentation as we monitor progress towards “Excellence”;
- and
- Interviewees were refreshingly honest

3. Equality Objectives 2011/ 2012

3.1 As reported to the VAP Scrutiny Committee in April 2011, the Council focused on 10 key equalities objectives for 2011/2012 (Appendix 4) in service planning. This document includes an update from Heads of Service as at March 2012.

3.2 Progress against these respective objectives has been favourable and, the period at the end of March will be important in terms of drawing breath and scoping well defined objectives for 2012/ 2013 as part of the rolling action plan contained in the Corporate Equality Scheme 2012/ 2015.

4. Equality Actions 2012 - onwards

4.1 Following the peer review and in the context of the issues we face, the themes of the Council's equalities actions in the short to medium term (as will be outlined in the Corporate Equality Scheme Action Plan for 2012/13) will include themes around five broad objectives:

- Increasing the diversity of our workforce – e.g. targeting recruitment of apprentices at minority groups and applicants living and educated in the City;
- Promoting the Council as an employer of choice by further work going out to communities to understand and overcome any potential barriers to employment with us;
- Revamping the Equalities Impact Assessment process to move it to the first stages of developing policies, strategies and projects so that community impact is a key consideration early on;
- Doing more work to understand the profile of our service users and taking more targeted action as a result; and
- Working more with diverse community groups to address their needs

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are no additional financial implications arising from this report. Much of the work is done as business as usual or e.g. bespoke funding arrangements such as £50k budget provision on apprentices

6. Legal Implications

6.1 The Council needs to ensure it meets the Public Sector Equality Duty and this continues to be reflected in the Corporate Equality Scheme

7. Conclusion

7.1 Reaching the EFLG "Achieving" level is a great achievement for the Council but the work needs to continue so that the diverse needs of the community are reflected in day-to-day service delivery.

Name and contact details of author: Jarlath Brine

List of background papers:

Appendix 1: EFLG Submission Document

Appendix 2: EFLG Peer Review Feedback: Full Report

Appendix 3: EFLG On-site feedback presentation slides

Appendix 4: Equality Objectives 2011/ 2012 & Action Plan

Version number: 1