

Corporate Equality Policy

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

1. South Oxfordshire District Council and the Vale of White Horse District Council are committed to equality. We will have due regard to the general duty under the Equality Act 2010 when exercising our functions in order to:
 - eliminate any potential for unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
 - advance equality of opportunity in service delivery and employment between people who share a protected characteristic¹ and those who do not
 - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not².

We are committed to meeting our specific duties to:

2. Prepare one or more equality objectives every four years that are specific and measurable to meet any of the general duties (particularly in relation to groups)
3. Publish information annually relating to our employees and people who are affected by our policies and practices³ to demonstrate compliance with the general duty.

Human rights

4. The councils' are committed to meeting their legal duties under the Human Rights Act 1998 in service delivery and employment. When making decisions, developing policies or strategies, designing processes and practices we will ensure, so far as is possible, that they are compatible with the rights under the Convention of Human Rights. We will also ensure that when service users or employees secure the enjoyment of a Convention right they do so without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or

¹ A 'protected characteristic' under the Act is colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, disability, age, sex, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, religion, belief, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity

² Bullets two and three do not apply to the protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership

³ Particularly relating to people who share a relevant protected characteristic

social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

Overview

5. The councils' recognise this means ensuring that different people receive services, consultation and employment opportunities in a fair and equal way. The councils' therefore commit to recognising, accommodating and valuing diversity and human rights across South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse, and to incorporating this commitment into the planning and delivery of our services and functions. This is demonstrated through our commitment to delivering against the Equality Framework for Local Government, agreeing our equality objectives and this policy.

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF SERVICE AND EMPLOYMENT DESIGN

6. We carry out Equality Impact Checks (EICs) on new policies, strategies and significant changes to services, in order to ensure service and employment opportunities the councils' provide and the policies or strategies they have in place do not discriminate, and that they advance equality of opportunity, foster good relations between different groups of people and take account of human rights.
7. The councils' consider the impact that budget decisions have on vulnerable groups and publish the results of these assessments and take action to mitigate the impact. We also aim to ensure equalities is considered in our committee reports, service team projects and planning applications to ensure they pay due regard to the public sector equality duties.

COLLECTING MONITORING DATA TO UNDERSTAND OUR COMMUNITIES

Service user data

8. The councils' routinely collect equality monitoring data as part of our corporate consultation with service users. Many service teams also collect service user and satisfaction data, reviewing it annually to assess the ongoing impact of the way council services are provided for different groups. We then take action if appropriate to address any issues identified.

District data service

9. The councils', in partnership with the other Oxfordshire district councils fund a data analyst service. Highlighting trends, geographical and other variations in social, economic and environmental data, disseminating results from the Census 2011 and other major data resources such as the Indices of Deprivation. The data provided helps the councils' to better understand the demographics of communities we serve, using the information to help inform service delivery, policy and decision making.

Employment data

10. We monitor performance by protected characteristic across a number of aspects of employment and training.⁴ These indicators help us ensure our employment practices are accessible for potential and current employees, according to race, disability, gender and age, and that all staff have the same opportunities. Staff are also encouraged to provide information relating to their sexuality, religion or belief and carer status. This information along with any proposed action to improve access is published annually.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP TO TACKLE PREJUDICE AND SUPPORT COMMUNITIES

11. The councils' work in partnership to improve community cohesion and reduce tensions by supporting the South and Vale Community Safety Partnership's monthly Joint Agency Tasking and Co-ordination meetings.
12. We promote key religious festivals in the councils' reception, on the website, in the Embrace key messages sheet⁵ to increase understanding of cultures within the community.
13. We actively encourage and support members of the public to report hate incidents to Thames Valley Police or to relevant third party reporting services (e.g. Thames Valley Hate Crime Network⁶) if they do not wish to report to the police.
14. As members of the South and Vale Community Safety Partnership, the councils support projects that build community cohesion and break down

⁴ applications for employment, applicants short listed, staff in post, applications/approval for training, staff ceasing employment, workforce representation by job group, staff subject to/involved in disciplinary and grievance procedures

⁵ Information sheet sent to ethnic minority groups

⁶ Run by Milton Keynes Equality Council

barriers to reduce crime and the fear of crime. For example, the CSP has funded a project in South Abingdon to bring together younger and older people to develop shared goals for the local community.

15. We also provide support for Community Led and Neighbourhood Plans which help bring communities together.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

16. The councils' use a variety of methods to consult and engage with members of the public. In addition to our citizen's panels, we are able to hold specific workshops with our disability and ethnicity panels to inform strategy, policy or service delivery.

17. We also support and engage with local access groups⁷ to help ensure their needs are taken account of in the design of new developments, policies and service delivery, supporting them to encourage access improvements within their local community.

USING PROCUREMENT TO ADVANCE EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

18. We aim to ensure equality considerations are included at relevant stages of the procurement process through:

- equality requirements included within our procurement policy
- standard equality and diversity clauses in all major contracts, relevant contracts specifications and other tender documents
- review of contractor performance.

EQUALITIES TRAINING

19. The councils' are committed to ensuring that staff and councillors have the relevant skills and knowledge to ensure they do not discriminate against, harass or victimise customers or colleagues and seek ways to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not.

20. All staff attend mandatory equality training and relevant staff attend human rights training. We also offer an equalities briefing to all councillors which

⁷ Vale disability access group, Didcot access group, Wallingford and Goring access groups

focuses on how they can take account of the public sector equality duties within their role.

THE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

21. We are committed to achieving the requirements of the Equality Framework for Local government in order to mainstream equalities in everything we do. The councils are working at the 'Achieving' level of the Framework⁸.

HUMAN RESOURCES POLICIES

22. The councils' have a separate Equal Opportunities in Employment Policy which incorporates equal pay and dignity at work. We also have a number of other policies that ensure fair and equal treatment of staff who share a protected characteristic e.g. recruitment and selection, parental and carers leave and maternity, paternity and adoption.

MONITORING COMPLAINTS

23. The councils' monitor complaints that relate to potential discrimination and harassment and have processes in place to ensure that people with disabilities and limited English can access the process in a way that meets their needs.

HOW WE MONITOR AND REVIEW OUR POLICY

24. The councils' cabinet is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the planning and provision of our services meet the needs of our all our residents and employees and for approving our Corporate Equality Policy.

25. Our councillors and senior management board are responsible for monitoring the progress we make on promoting equality through an annual update report.

26. All our staff and councillors are encouraged to promote equality of opportunity in everything they do, ensure they eliminate all potential forms of discrimination and harassment and foster good relations between different groups of people.

⁸ Levels of the framework – 'developing' 'achieving' 'excellent'

27. In addition, some members of staff have specific responsibilities with regards to this policy:

- accountability for our Corporate Equality Policy rests with the chief executive
- the equalities officer is responsible for coordinating, and monitoring progress on our equalities programme and for reviewing this policy

28. The policy will be reviewed in three years' time or as the result of new legislation.

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