

# 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 when exercising our functions in order to:
  - eliminate any potential for unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
  - advance equality of opportunity in service delivery and employment between people who share a protected characteristic<sup>1</sup> and those who do not
  - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not<sup>2</sup>.

### **We are committed to meeting our specific duties to<sup>3</sup>:**

2. Prepare one or more equality objectives that are specific and measurable to meet any of the general duties, no later than 6 April 2012 and at subsequent intervals no greater than four years.
3. Publish information relating to our employees and people who are affected by our policies and practices<sup>4</sup> to demonstrate compliance with the general duty, no later than 31 December 2011 and at subsequent intervals no greater than one year.

### **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 Convention 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 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 corporate priorities to 'provide equality of access to our

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Subject to final government approval – expected July 2011

<sup>4</sup> Particularly relating to people who share a relevant protected characteristic

services' (South) and to 'optimise access to our services' (Vale); and our commitment to delivering against the Equality Framework for Local Government.

## **ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF SERVICE AND EMPLOYMENT DESIGN**

6. In order to ensure service and employment opportunities the councils' provide and the policies or strategies they write do not discriminate, advance equality of opportunity, foster good relations between different groups of people and take account of human rights, we carry out a rolling program of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs). The councils' use satisfaction and service user data to inform our assessments and consult relevant affected stakeholders. Action plans and the development of equality objectives address any need to improve access and uptake for specific groups.
7. The councils' are committed to considering the impact budget decisions have on vulnerable groups and publish the results of these assessments. We also consider the impact of any changes to service design through our 'Fit for the Future Program' and have processes in place to ensure equalities is considered in our cabinet/executive reports.

## **COLLECTING MONITORING DATA TO UNDERSTAND OUR COMMUNITIES**

### **Service user data**

8. The councils' routinely collect equality monitoring data through our corporate consultation<sup>5</sup> with service users. Many service teams also collect monitoring data and feedback is used to inform EIAs and service planning. We will address gaps in our data collection relating to the new equality strands<sup>6</sup> where it is appropriate to do so during the EIA process and these actions will form part of the relevant service team's action plan.

### **Equality mapping project<sup>7</sup>**

9. We are working with other partners on equality mapping, to develop a single resource for public services to be able to access information about diversity and inequality in Oxfordshire in order to better understand the communities we serve.

### **Employment data**

10. We monitor performance by equality strand across a number of aspects of employment and training.<sup>8</sup> These indicators help us ensure our employment practices are accessible for potential and current employees, according to race, disability, gender and age. Staff are also encouraged to provide information relating to their sexuality, religion or belief and carer status.

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<sup>5</sup> citizens panels (south & vale), annual residents survey (south), place survey (south & vale)

<sup>6</sup> gender reassignment, sexual orientation, religion or belief, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity

<sup>7</sup> Oxfordshire county council lead

<sup>8</sup> 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.

## **WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP TO TACKLE PREJUDICE AND REDUCE COMMUNITY TENSIONS**

11. The councils' work in partnership to improve community cohesion and reduce tensions by supporting the South and Vale Independent Advisory Group. We are key partners of HALT<sup>9</sup> and Oxfordshire Mantra, who aim to challenge and eliminate all forms of hate crimes and incidents, through providing a comprehensive system of reporting and recording of hate crime and incidents.

## **CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT**

12. The councils' use a variety of methods to consult and engage with members of the public. In addition to our citizen's panels, we hold specific workshops with our disability and ethnicity panels as part of the EIA process or to inform strategy, policy or service delivery.  
We also belong to a number of partnerships<sup>10</sup> to improve our engagement and consultation opportunities with equality groups.

## **USING PROCUREMENT TO ADVANCE EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY**

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

- 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**

14. 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.  
All staff attend mandatory equality training and relevant staff attend human rights and disability awareness training. We also offer equalities training to all councillors.

## **COMMITMENT TO THE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

15. We are committed to achieving the requirements of the Equality Framework for Local government in order to mainstream equalities in everything we do, and have set a target to be 'Achieving' councils in accordance with the Framework.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Homophobic awareness liaison team

<sup>10</sup> HALT, Vale disability access group, Didcot access group, Embrace (race equality)

<sup>11</sup> Levels of framework – 'developing' 'achieving' 'excellent'

## HUMAN RESOURCES POLICIES

16. The councils' have a separate Equal Opportunities in Employment Policy and a number of other policies that ensure fair and equal treatment of staff who share a protected characteristic e.g. dignity at work, recruitment and selection, parental and carers leave.

## MONITORING COMPLAINTS

17. Both 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

18. 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 Equalities Policy.
19. Our scrutiny committees are responsible for monitoring the progress we make on promoting equality through an annual update report.
20. 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.
21. In addition, some members of staff have specific responsibilities with regards to this policy:
  - accountability for our Corporate Equality Policy rests with the strategic director for corporate strategy
  - the shared equalities officer is responsible for coordinating, and monitoring progress on our equalities programme and for reviewing this policy.
22. The policy will be reviewed in three years time (July 2014) or as the result of new legislation.

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