

Scrutiny Committee

24 August 2011



Report of Head of Corporate Strategy

Author: Cheryl Reeves

Telephone: 01235 540324

Textphone: 18001 01235 540324

E-mail: Cheryl.reeves@southandvale.gov.uk

Cabinet member responsible: Matthew Barber

Tel: 01235 540391

E-mail: matthew.barber@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

To: Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 24 August 2011

Report no. 17/11

Annual equality and diversity update

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides the annual update of progress on the council's equality and diversity work. It outlines the progress the council has made in delivering its Corporate Equality Action Plan (CEAP) during 2010/11, to ensure that we are providing accessible services and employment opportunities to everyone in line with current legislation and the Equality Framework for Local Government.
2. The committee is asked to note the progress made.

Strategic Objectives

3. Our work on equality and diversity links to our strategic objective of managing our business effectively and is fundamental to achieving our corporate priority to optimism access to its services.

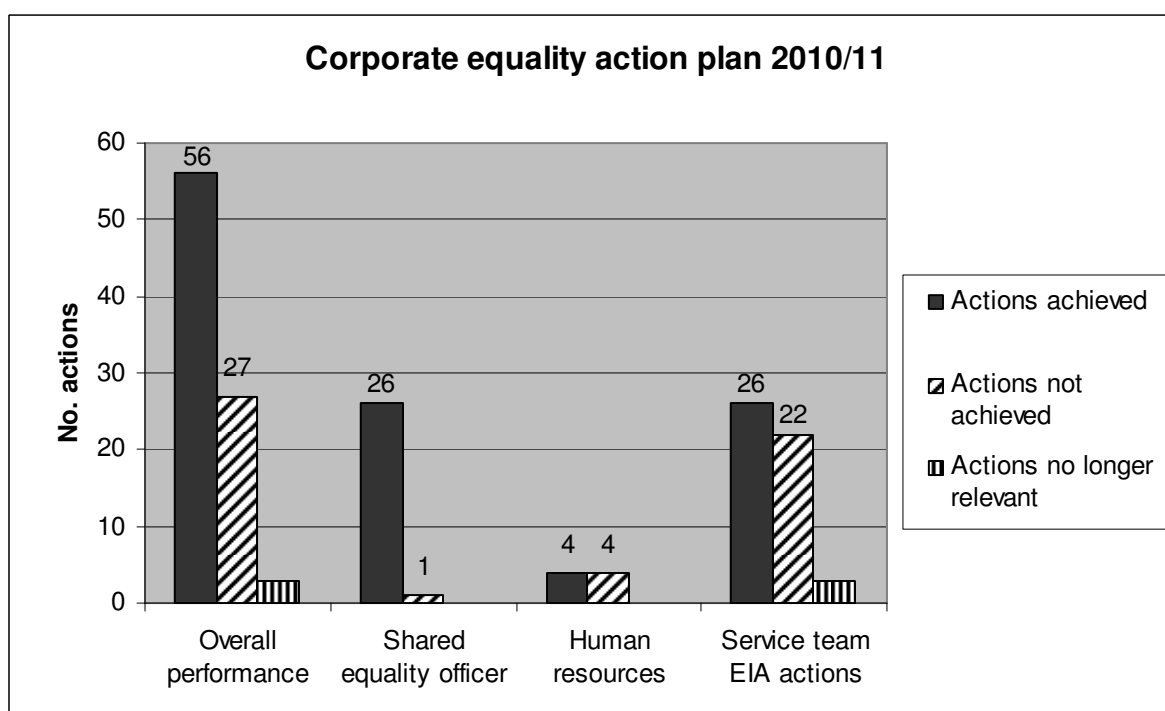
Background

4. The CEAP is a three year plan and aims to deliver the commitments we set out in our Equality and Diversity Scheme 2008 - 2011. It is reviewed and updated annually to take into account the changing needs of our residents, staff, councillors and partners. The CEAP for 2010/11 was the final year of the Plan.
5. It also brings together the main activities we need to carry out in order to meet our legal duties. In summary, current legislation requires us 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 characteristic¹ and those who do not
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not².

Overall performance in delivering the 2010/11 CEAP

6. We have made good progress during 2010/11 towards the completion of our CEAP. The following table shows the overall performance across the council, the performance of the shared equalities officer, HR team and completed equality impact assessment (EIAs) service team actions. The vast majority of outstanding actions relate to service team EIA's, discussions are being held with the relevant heads of service to ensure those actions are completed in 2011/12.



7. A copy of the plan, annotated with progress notes is available as a background paper and key achievements during the year are outlined below.

Preparing for the Equality Act 2010

8. In order to ensure the council was ready to implement the requirements of the Act we:

- produced a briefing note on the main implications of the Act and provided guidance and codes of practice to relevant staff, contractors and HR

¹ 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

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

- carried out consultation with residents, stakeholders and councillors to check what else, if anything, we need to do to make sure services are delivered fairly to service users and employees protected by the Act
- produced a draft harmonised equality policy which cabinet approved in July 2011.

Advancing equality of opportunity

9. During 2010/11 we continued to engage with local residents who may face barriers when trying to access council services during 2010/11:

SUPPORTING THE VALE DISABILITY ACCESS GROUP

10. During the past 12 months, we have continued to support the Vale Disability Access Group, in partnership with Sovereign Vale. The group consists of vale residents who either have a disability or care for a disabled relative or friend. They meet on a quarterly basis to increase their awareness about council and housing association services and give feed back on our services in terms of disability equality.
11. During 2010/11 the group received presentations about the new waste service, and the accessibility of seating in council parks. They also had the opportunity to provide feedback on EIAs, the budget and the polling station review.
12. We continued our community leadership role in helping the group to carry out an access review of shops in Bury Street Abingdon. Group members carried out the mystery shop visits looking specifically at: ease of access to the shops, accessibility once inside and staff knowledge of services provided for people with mobility, hearing, visual or speech problems. 24 out of 31 shops assessed were considered 'disability friendly'. Those businesses that were not, received constructive feedback about how they could improve access.

WORKING WITH THE EMBRACE PARTNERSHIP

13. During 2010/11, we continued to engage with people from ethnic minorities in the district via the Embrace partnership. Embrace involves a range of agencies from the public and voluntary sectors that work together to find ways of getting service information out to people from different cultures and hearing their views.
14. In the past 12 months, the partners have delivered a number of initiatives across southern Oxfordshire, including:
 - building links with organisations supporting ethnic minority residents in southern Oxfordshire, through regular meetings
 - producing a quarterly newsletter to organisations supporting ethnic minority residents in southern Oxfordshire and our ethnicity panel.

Mainstreaming equality

15. Mainstreaming equality is key to advancing equality of opportunity and removing the potential for discrimination. We recognise that this also applies to partnerships and

have produced online guidance in response to a request from the Oxfordshire partnership.³

16. During the year we also developed guidance for risk champions on how to consider equality issues within their risk registers and updated the pre qualification questionnaire paperwork (pqq's) for major procurements.⁴ In addition we have included equality considerations in; contract documentation for the Citizens Panel and Abbey Meadows contract, strategic intelligence assessment, sexual entertainment venue licensing report, office accommodation and the joint Licensing Policy for the Licensing Act 2003.

Internal audit of the corporate equalities work

17. During the year internal audit carried out a review of the corporate equalities work and reported satisfactory assurance. The audit looked at the councils' policies, procedures and processes to ensure we are compliant with the Equality Framework for Local Government and the Equality Act 2010, equalities training, and access to all buildings run by the council and car parks.

Equality impact assessments

18. We have a legal duty to review all of our services, new policies and strategies to ensure that they remain accessible to all. These reviews are called EIAs. Teams use EIAs to develop action plans to help address any barriers to accessing services⁵, advance equality of opportunity and consider the need to foster good relations between different groups of people. Action plans are monitored through the corporate performance management system.
19. During 2010/11 we completed 12 EIAs⁶, 11 of these were joint assessments with South Oxfordshire District Council. In addition we carried out EIA's on the Vale budget cut proposals and designed a template for assessing the impact of reducing funding to organisations mid year.
20. Consultation is an important part of these reviews. In addition to using service satisfaction and usage data, we consult the Vale Disability Access Group, the ethnicity panel and the vales internal advisory group when relevant⁷. This year we developed this group to include staff representing South Oxfordshire District Council, as the majority of assessments are now joint.
21. Teams made progress during the year in completing their EIA action plans. Some of these improvements are:
- included articles about flooding in the Embrace key messages sheet
 - updated the councils website to include access information for council parks
 - provided information to Vale Disability Access group and other organisations about grants and services that are available to help people in fuel poverty
 - added google translate and our text phone number to the councils website

³ <http://www.oxfordshirepartnership.org.uk/wps/wcm/connect/occ/OxfordshirePartnership/Home/Equalities+in+partnerships/>

⁴ Further work now required to procurement documentation as a result of the Equality Act 2010

⁵ Due to race, disability, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age, pregnancy and maternity, marriage or civil partnership or rural isolation

⁶ EIAs -1 Vale only, 7 joint and 4 joint equality impact checks on policies

⁷ Staff who act as a critical friend to help their teams identify actions to advance equality of opportunity for disadvantaged groups

- increased the number of benefit surgeries in Wantage and Faringdon and encouraged people to report any changes in their circumstances through articles in the Embrace key messages sheet and Unvaled
- updated the growth bid proformas to include giving consideration to equality impact
- publicised council tax discounts available on the website
- improved lighting in Abingdon multi-story car park
- updated our parks satisfaction survey to collect information on the accessibility of the parks to inform the new grounds maintenance contract
- leisure contractors publicised the access to leisure scheme to encourage take up of the scheme.

Raising awareness about equality of opportunity

22. During 2010/11 the council has delivered a number of actions in the CEAP designed to increase people's understanding of diversity and its relevance to council business and wider community cohesion. For example we:

- scoped induction training for new councillors
- reviewed staff training needs and identified suitable training for inclusion in the corporate training program⁸
- ran a 'respecting difference' session at the youth forum
- arranged carers awareness training
- in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council we are producing briefing papers⁹ to help understand the communities we serve, identify inequalities and inform service delivery.

Ensuring equality of access for councillors and staff

23. The council wants to ensure that we are providing equality opportunities to staff and councillors. During 2010/11 we:

- included a positive statement about support for disabled councillors and welcoming candidates from all backgrounds in councillor nomination packs and advised political agents
- updated equalities information in the councillors' welcome pack
- produced our annual equality and diversity report regarding access to employment opportunities
- updated our job application forms to reflect the requirements of the Equality Act and produced a positive statement for job adverts welcoming applications from all sections of the community.

⁸ Mandatory full day equalities training, human rights and disability awareness training

⁹ Ethnicity and migration papers produced, community safety paper drafted

Tackling discrimination and harassment

24. During the year the council has been involved in the following partnerships which help to remove discrimination and harassment and encourage community cohesion:

OXFORDSHIRE HALT

25. HALT is a multi agency partnership which aims to challenge and eliminate all forms of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in the county and offer support to victims of such abuse. In the past year, the council has supported the partnership by:

- providing service information to festival goers at Oxford Pride
- managing the annual survey we carry out at Oxford Pride
- supported the partnership to run a mini campaign to encourage people to report verbal incidents.

OXFORDSHIRE MANTRA

26. The council has been an active member of the Oxfordshire Mantra strategic steering group during the year.

27. Oxfordshire Mantra is a multi agency partnership which aims to challenge and eliminate all forms of hate crimes and incidents. The partnership provides a comprehensive system of recording hate crime/incidents and provides support for both victims and witnesses.

Fostering good relations

CHALLENGING MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA GROUP

28. During the year the council has been a member of the challenging mental health stigma steering group¹⁰. The project provides grants for organisations across Oxfordshire to develop projects and or events¹¹ that will help to:

- increase public awareness of prejudice or discrimination against people who have experienced mental distress
- improve social contact between people with and without mental health problems.

PROMOTING RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

29. Increasing general understanding of cultures within the community can help foster good relations between people of different racial groups. We have promoted some of the key religious festivals in the council's local service point in Abingdon.

Conclusion

30. The council has made good progress during the year in advancing equality of opportunity, supporting projects to tackle discrimination, harassment and in fostering good relations. The committee is asked to note the progress made.

¹⁰ NHS Oxfordshire lead project

¹¹ In line with the national Time to Change Campaign

Background Papers

- Corporate Equality Action Plan