

Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

South Oxfordshire & Vale of White Horse District Councils

“We aspire to create an environment where everybody belongs and has a voice that will be heard. We will embrace our differences, the unique talents, beliefs, backgrounds, and abilities of all our staff and residents. Together we will make a positive difference.”

Introduction

The councils are committed to working with our staff and communities to create an inclusive, fair, safe, and accessible environment, where everyone has the opportunity to succeed and thrive.

This strategy sets out the councils’ approach and vision to equality, diversity, and inclusion by proactively engaging with our internal teams, community groups and residents to understand current challenges to inform decisions and work towards ensuring our services are truly inclusive and meet the needs of everyone.

What do we mean by equality, diversity, and inclusion?

The councils have a public sector equality duty arising from the Equality Act which means we have a legal duty to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Protected characteristics according to the Act are as follows: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

In addition to the public sector equality duty there is commitment from both councils to ensure our communities and services are inclusive to all. This Strategy supports that ambition.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion can mean different things to different people based on their lived experience. We recognise that physical ability, gender identity, mental capacity, literacy level, education, economic status, personality, communication style, financial situation, approaches to life and work and other factors can make it harder for people to access the support they need, to feel included and shape service provision appropriately.

By understanding, supporting, and embracing these differences, we aspire to create an environment which promotes respect for and understanding of everyone.

What will we do?

In order to achieve our vision for equality, diversity and inclusion, we will:

- Expand our knowledge and understanding of our communities to establish who the residents and businesses that we service are, understand details of their concerns and identify where there are any service delivery gaps
- Carry out Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) across our services and policies to ensure that these are inclusive as possible and in accordance with the law
- Work both internally and with outside partners to be leaders in our communities for promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion, through understanding the underlying causes and symptoms of inequality and working in collaboration with internal teams, voluntary groups, local access groups and the wider community to address identified issues
- Create Diversity and Social Campaign Calendars for both councils to help us to celebrate the diverse nature of our districts. The calendars display dates for a wide range of religious festivals, commemoration, and awareness days that we'll publicly observe and promote that reflect our diverse communities and the priorities set out in our Corporate Plans.

How will we achieve our aims?

In order to obtain relevant information and sustain our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion, the councils will:

- Review policies to ensure they are robust, up to date and relevant
- Identify and support a team of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion champions within the councils to establish a partnership network
- Develop a suite of training modules for staff and members, enabling them to recognise how they can make a difference and understand who to go to for additional support
- Engage with teams across the councils and outside agencies to collate equalities data, which will be used to inform future equality, diversity, and inclusion initiatives across all areas of the councils
- Create an environment and culture where people can engage and ask questions without fear of retribution

We are committed to using the Equalities Framework for Local Government (EFLG) and will use this as a foundation to work towards meeting our aspirations for equality, diversity and inclusion.

The EFLG framework consists of four categories:

1. Understanding and Working with your Communities
2. Leadership and Organisational Commitment
3. Responsive Services and Customer Care
4. Diverse and Engaged Workforce

The EFLG rates each category as Developing, Achieving or Excellent. The overall aim of our strategy is to first reach and then sustain excellent status in all areas.

The councils will be expected to use this understanding to demonstrate 'due regard' for the public sector equality duty.

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Action Plan

The councils have developed an action plan which sets out the councils' commitment and actions to creating diverse and inclusive services to our communities.

This plan captures all actions relating to equality, diversity, and inclusion across both councils in support of this strategy. Lead Owners are shown below but the nature of the activities will require the support of a variety of service areas across the councils.

EFLG category	What we need to do	How we will achieve this	Measures of success	Owner(s)	Status
Knowing our Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build and strengthen relationships with the communities we serve to understand their needs and improve the services we provide - Obtain and analyse community equality data to ensure all services across the councils are inclusive and accessible to all - Ensure that community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mapping of minority, vulnerable and hard to reach groups and organisations that work with and represent them. - Obtain data from outside sources (e.g., Office for National Statistics) to enable the councils to understand which areas of the districts may benefit from additional support. - Obtain 2021 census information to ensure the councils' reports are up to date and current - Equalities Officer (EO) to identify and become a member of various groups, including, but not limited to, access groups, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have up to date and clear data in relation to residents needs - Recommendations in place resulting in improved services to residents and community groups 	People & Culture Policy & Programmes People & Culture	-

	<p>members are liaised / consulted with in the event of changes to services provided by the councils</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand how our communities prefer to interact with us and work with key stakeholders across the councils to improve communication methods to our residents. 	<p>community groups, age awareness groups, LGBTQ+ groups, religious groups and schools and colleges, to promote equality and diversity within our communities and gauge a better understanding of issues and practices within Oxfordshire.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with relevant teams (e.g., Assisted Waste Collections, Technical Services, Environmental Health, Customer Services etc.) to obtain resident feedback using surveys in relation to council services, helping us gain an understanding of community needs. Agree a process with Customer Services to ensure any equality concerns are addressed with the EO to ensure satisfactory outcome - Once data been compiled work with internal and external partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive feedback from surveys 	<p>Customer Services</p> <p>People & Culture</p>	
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		organisations (such as voluntary groups) to understand specific needs and any barriers faced.			
Involving our communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Our communities are informed and know how to contribute to council decision-making processes, where applicable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equality Officer to work with teams across the councils (e.g., Active Communities, Community Safety, Planning), to understand what services / activities and events are being offered to residents ensuring accessibility and inclusion to all. Consultations / Engagement practices are reviewed. Advertising important information on community notice boards and in libraires, which should give residents options and formats to see these documents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation improves and is inclusive and preferably representative of the local communities - Consultations and engagement more representative 	<p>People & Culture</p> <p>Comms & Engm't</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -
Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that the councils' commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion are clear and expectations are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review / develop a comprehensive equality, diversity and inclusion strategy that spans across all areas of the councils - Review and communicate the importance of Equality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of EIAs completed increase - All staff have completed equality courses. - Maintain Disability Confident employer status 	<p>People & Culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -

	<p>clearly understood across the councils</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop and review a suite of policies to promote equalities, diversity and inclusion - Develop recruitment and HR practices (including training) that are fair and accessible to all - Embrace the diversity of the councils' staff and communities which encourages open conversation to understand differences and a safe space for collaborative working so that 	<p>Impact Assessments to all staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review HR policies / processes to ensure that all opportunities and processes are inclusive and accessible to all - Equality Officer to set up a pool of diversity and inclusion champions to promote and support equalities vision across the councils (including members and the wider community) - Celebrate Diversity through Art offer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diversity & inclusion champions recruited, trained, and attend regular updates to be led by the Equality Officer and Human Resources. - Increased number of diverse staff appointed - Annual Diversity Day 		
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	services and processes are inclusive and representative				
Responsive services and customer care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that all members of the community can access the councils' services, facilities and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that equality, diversity, and inclusion is embedded within the councils' policies and procedures (using the champions) - Work with internal communications and Strategic HR to develop a training module for staff who are responsible for the creation of public documents to go on our websites, so these are accessible to all, including Easy Read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Documents / publications and services are in line with government guidelines - Staff to complete Internal training modules - Improved residents' satisfaction surveys, resulting in improved customer experience and reduction in complaints - All staff aware of procedures to access Translation service where applicable. 	<p>People & Culture</p> <p>Comms & Engm't</p> <p>Customer Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -
A skilled and committed workforce	Ensure that all councillors and members of staff are aware of their responsibilities and are properly informed and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure equalities, diversity and inclusion training is available as part of the new starter induction process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All staff and councillors have completed internal training on equalities, diversity, and inclusion. 	People & Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -

	<p>trained, enabling them to provide the best support and guidance possible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhance existing recruitment practices to maximise inclusion - Ensure staff have the skills and knowledge to respond efficiently to residents' enquiries - Develop further / advanced training - Enable staff and councillors to have the skills and knowledge to ensure that the needs of diverse and vulnerable groups are considered in both the development and delivery of services, by working with Strategic HR to develop a range of training covering equality / diversity / inclusion (e.g., unconscious bias / neurodiversity) 			
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Relevant policies and documents to support the above:

- Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
- Equalities in Employment Policy
- Gender Pay Gap report
- Pay Policy
- HR Employee Equalities report
- Corporate Equality Action Plan reporting – every 4 years

- Surveys / analysis and recommendations on equalities, diversity, and inclusion reporting as detailed in action plan

Alternative formats

Please do not hesitate to contact Lynne Mitchell (Equalities Officer) via email lynne.mitchell@southandvale.gov.uk if you would like this document in an alternative format.

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