Oxfordshire County Council Equality Policy 2012-2017

Fair Access to Services; Equal Life Chances

How the County Council ensures fairness and real choice in the delivery of services

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

What equality means to us

Equality, opportunity, local choice.

These values inform how Oxfordshire County Council delivers services to the people of Oxfordshire. Both the Cabinet and management team are united in their commitment to ensure that everyone in Oxfordshire has the opportunity to share in a thriving Oxfordshire.

The new equality policy brings together many years of work in developing fairer and more accessible services. It represents the county council's continuing commitment to customer service and local choice. No single approach to delivering services can be expected to meet everyone's needs. Effective services should be flexible, responsive and designed around the diversity of interests that their customers have.

The purpose of the policy is also to establish a change of approach, based on the principles of transparency about how our services are performing, clarity about what action we are taking and the involvement of users, community groups or staff in the solution. We are also committed to making equalities integral to everything we do, ensuring it seen as part of everyone's business and a way of helping us deliver excellent outcomes for individuals and communities. The document has been developed in line with the objectives of our Corporate Plan and sits alongside published information on the county council's performance.

The county council promotes equality though the broad range of public services that it delivers. Oxfordshire County Council is responsible for providing many key local services and employs over 20,000 people to deliver them. Each year the council manages over £900 million of public money in the provision of these services on behalf of Oxfordshire's 650,000 people. This includes schools, social services, the fire service, roads, libraries and the museums service, trading standards, land use, transport planning and waste management. Ensuring that such diverse services are responsive to the needs of individuals and communities is a key challenge that this policy aims to tackle.

Councillor Kieron Mallon
Cabinet Member for Police & Policy Coordination

Joanna Simons CBE
Chief Executive

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1.0   Introduction

1.1. The purpose of this policy is to set out how the Council is approaching its responsibilities for ensuring that all residents in Oxfordshire have fair access to services and equal life chances. It also demonstrates how the Council is meeting the requirements placed on public bodies under the Equality Act 2010.

1.2 Our approach to equalities is based around addressing four key objectives:

- Understanding the needs of individuals and communities
- Providing accessible, local and personalised services
- Supporting thriving and cohesive communities
- Promoting a culture of fairness in employment and service delivery

1.3 This policy is supported by a document that sets out how we are meeting each of these key issues in terms of current performance, focusing particularly on how we meet the needs of people who share protected equality characteristics. The supporting evidence does not include everything the Council is doing, but highlights the key areas of success and, where necessary, where action is being taken to improve outcomes. The supporting information is available at: **www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/equality-and-cohesion**.

1.4 The following information has been used to inform this policy:

- The number of people with different protected characteristics who access and use services in different ways.

- Customer satisfaction levels and informal feedback from service users with different protected characteristics, and results of consultations.
- Complaints about discrimination and complaints from people with different protected characteristics.
- Details of policies and programmes that have been put in place to ensure high equality standards or address equality concerns in service delivery.

1.5 Monitoring and reporting on these areas enables us to analyse the information to see if there are differences between protected characteristics and investigate the processes which have resulted in these differences, taking action as necessary to try and remove barriers and promote equality for all groups.

The Equality Act 2010

1.6 As a public body, Oxfordshire County Council recognises the requirement to give due regard to the three main aims of the Equality Duty, and 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.

1.7 The Public Sector Equality Duty replaces the previous public sector equality duties for disability, ethnicity and gender and covers the following protected characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership (but only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination)
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality
- Religion or belief – this includes lack of belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

1.8 The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public bodies to consider how the decisions that they make, and the services they deliver, affect people who share different protected characteristics and publish information to demonstrate that they have done this. In addition the Council is also required to set specific, measurable equality objectives and publish these, along with an equality policy.

1.9 The Council is also required to publish information to demonstrate it has considered how its activities as an employer affect people who share different protected characteristics. This is available at: **http://www.oxfordshire. gov.uk/cms/content/fairness-and-equality-work**

Human Rights Act

1.10 The Human Rights Act requires public bodies to have regard to the human rights set out in the European Convention, and to ensure that the human rights of all members of the community are respected in all that they do. Human rights are based on core principles like dignity, fairness, equality, respect and autonomy.

1.11 The Human Rights Act is not just about preventing public authorities from taking certain actions. It also requires them to take proactive steps to prevent breaches of human rights from happening in the first place, no matter who or what is causing the harm. The Act seeks to respect all individuals' rights, including the right to effectively take part in decisions made by public authorities and to get fair and equal services from public authorities.

1.12 All children and young people up to the age of 18 years have rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Some groups of children and young people – for example those living away from home, and young disabled people – have additional rights to make sure they are treated fairly and their needs are met.

1.13 The purpose of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by disabled people

1.14 Local authorities must consider human rights when making decisions and determining policies. This can be of particular value in underpinning a range of policy and practice developments, and in safeguarding vital services, particularly for the most vulnerable groups. It can also help to determine proportionate action, especially where the interests of different parties conflict.

2.0 Equality of Opportunity – Our Ambition

2.1 Oxfordshire County Council is committed to making Oxfordshire a fair and equal place in which to live, work and visit.

2.2 We aim to ensure that our staff are equipped with the knowledge and skills to meet the diverse needs of customers, that our services are accessible and to encourage supportive and cohesive communities through our service delivery.

General Statement of Effectiveness

2.3 **In general, Oxfordshire County Council considers that it performs well in meeting the requirements of the Equality Duty.** This is based on the range of evidence contained in this document and the supporting information, which demonstrates the wide range of actions being taken across service areas to avoid discrimination and harassment, advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations.

2.4 The Council has a raised awareness of the impact of our policies, practices and decisions on people with different protected characteristics. This enables us to make informed decisions about policies and practices which are based on evidence about the impact of our activities on equality, and have due regard to the aims of the general equality duty by ensuring that staff have appropriate information for decision-making.

2.5 We regularly assess whether we are discriminating unlawfully when carrying out any of our functions, and benchmark our performance and processes against those of similar organisations nationally and locally. We also consider taking steps to meet the needs of staff and service users who share relevant protected characteristics where appropriate, based on evidence and assessment of performance.

2.6 However, as demonstrated elsewhere in this document there are a number of specific areas where we need to take action to improve our performance, and to improve outcomes for people who share protected characteristics. These areas form the basis of the key equality objectives for the Council, and the priorities for action we have identified.

What we are seeking to achieve

2.7 In achieving our ambition, we have identified four key equality issues for the Council, and these will guide our approach:

- Objective 1- Understanding the needs of individuals and communities

- Objective 2 -Providing accessible, local and personalised services

- Objective 3 - Supporting thriving and cohesive communities

- Objective 4 - Promoting a culture of fairness in employment and service delivery

2.8 These key equality objectives align closely with the Council's overall strategic objectives, as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan. This helps to ensure that our work on equality and diversity is embedded within service planning delivery rather than being seen as separate, and supports our commitment to making equalities integral to everything we do.

2.9 For each key objective we have identified a number of actions will be taking to build on current achievements and address areas where improvement is needed in our performance. Progress in delivering these actions will be monitored as part of the Council's overall performance management framework to further reinforce the 'mainstreaming' of our approach to equality and diversity.

3.0 Objective 1 - Understanding the needs of individuals and communities

3.1 This objective is focused on how we understand the needs of the people and communities of Oxfordshire, including the wide range of consultation and engagement arrangements we already have in place. The objectives that follow focus on how we use this better understanding of need to plan services in response to the needs we have identified.

3.2 Over the next twenty years Oxfordshire is expected to continue to become more ethnically diverse, and to have a higher proportion of older people and people with disabilities. Everyone will rightly expect to be treated fairly, and will demand services that are appropriate for their needs.

3.3 The Council already collects a significant amount of data about the accessibility of our services and how our customers are using them. We also engage with service users and interested groups to discuss their needs and how well we meet them, and will continue to do so. This helps us to understand the areas where we are meeting people's needs effectively so we can build on these, and identify where we need to do more to reduce inequality and promote better outcomes.

3.4 We recognise that we can do more to use the data that we hold already more effectively to inform service planning and decision-making. We have also identified a number of areas where we hold very little data, or where the data we hold is out of date, and will seek to address this. This will be addressed in part through updating key evidence bases such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, and through analysis of the outcomes of the Census 2011 when published later this year.

3.5 We will also continue to monitor and analyse our performance in key service areas to understand how well we are addressing areas for improvement we have identified, such as narrowing the gap in educational attainment or in levels of satisfaction with adult social care between different groups.

Priorities for Action - we will:

1a) Investigate why levels of satisfaction with services that are generally high are variable between different groups, for example by running focus groups with adult social care service users.

1b) Ensure that Oxfordshire Voice Citizens' Panel, our resident's panel, is broadly representative of the makeup of the county by increasing the number of people who share some of the protected characteristics to ensure it is balanced to reflect age, gender, ethnicity and disability.

1c) Implement our new Strategy for Education to improve educational outcomes for all young people. In particular, we will take action to close unacceptable gaps in attainment levels between children from different backgrounds and who share protected characteristics (for example looked after children, some black and minority ethnic groups, and some children with special educational needs).

1d) Provide information and support to vulnerable adults so that more people who use services report that they feel safer each year.

1e) Ask older people and people with a disability who we work with if we can pass on their details to other services and organisations, including the Fire and Rescue Service who will be able to undertake Fire Risk Assessments in their homes.

4.0 Objective 2 – Providing accessible, local and personalised services

4.1 This objective, and those that follow, is focused on how the Council responds to the needs of the people and communities of Oxfordshire.

4.2 Customer choice is at the heart of the county council's approach. We want county council services to be flexible, local and developed around the diversity of individual needs. For example, we have created a new Early Intervention Service, specifically designed to reflect our understanding of the needs of our children and young people and based around seven locality 'hubs' in those areas of the county where there is most need.

4.3 We are developing a joint approach to commissioning adult, community and children's services. This will ensure our approach focuses on local circumstances and is able to meet the needs of vulnerable people irrespective of whether they share protected characteristics or not, including those living in rural areas where isolation and access to services can be particular issues.

4.4 The county council is also radically transforming the way it delivers adult social care services, increasing the number of people with personalised budgets that provide choice about how to spend money on their care. We also continue to implement strategies to improve educational attainment, to protect and safeguard the most vulnerable groups in the county, and support carers of all ages.

4.5 We aim to ensure our physical assets (eg roads, buses, public buildings and reception areas) maintain high standards of accessibility for all residents, and leading on the roll out of superfast broadband in Oxfordshire to improve access to online services (especially in rural areas).

4.6 Through the Oxfordshire Online project we have an emphasis on making more services available online, and making online services more accessible to all. However we also recognise that this is not suitable for everyone, and will continue to make our publications available in alternative formats and languages where requested, and to develop our customer services in response to feedback.

Priorities for Action - we will:

2a) Maintain our focus on preventing the need for more specialist services through early identification of problems and early intervention in adult and children's services.

2b) Analyse the number of children from minority ethnic backgrounds on child protection plans. The findings will be used to develop plans to address any over representation identified, and to learn from where the number of young people from certain groups on child protection plans is lower than might be expected.

2c) Map the dispersal of young carers around the County to see if there are any geographical clusters or patterns, with a view to understanding why this occurs and what action is needed to address issues that cause it.

2d) Change the way day services for older people are provided, maintaining services in major towns, but focusing on community initiatives and local decision-making about how best to support older people in their community.

2e) Focus on giving people choice in the way they lead their lives and how they secure the services they need to support them. We will increase each year the proportion of people who receive a direct payment which allows them to secure the services they need to support them.

2f) Support older people, and people with a disability to live in their own home for longer by:

o Providing more support to help older people increase their ability to cope so that more of them can return home and stay there after hospital discharge

o Increasing the number of hours of long term support made available to clients

o Devolving budgets to local area managers so that they are specifically able to address the needs of their locality

o increasing the availability of extra care housing and assistive technology

o continuing to provide information and support to carers.

2g) Work with business network providers to develop and implement a strategy for the roll out of super-fast broadband across the county, to improve access to online services.

2h) Enable all Adult Learning tutors to integrate equality and diversity into their teaching – content and classroom management – in order to ensure inclusivity for all learners

2i) Continue to develop improved accessibility routes on the public rights of way network.

2j) Provide training to Highways & Transport staff involved in policy and design to ensure they understand the constraints faced by customers with a disability using our services, and have regard to these constraints in service design and delivery.

5.0 Objective 3 - Supporting thriving and cohesive communities

5.1 The county council has been working to get closer to the communities we serve, understand the challenges they face and make sure our services are working together as effectively as possible. Our Closer to Communities Strategy recognises the importance of the council showing community leadership, and ensures officers and councillors work together with partners and communities at a local level to share information and meet needs.

5.2 The county council is also committed to empowering communities to do things for themselves, including identifying and/or responding when public sector may not be able to continue to provide a service. We believe that supporting communities to take on this challenge, as we have done with youth provision and other community activities through the Big Society Fund, will lead to better quality services that local residents feel that are truly theirs and reflect the needs of all those in their community.

5.3 There is a significant military presence in Oxfordshire, which brings a number of specific challenges. Oxfordshire was the first local authority to pledge support to the Community Covenant in June 2011, and our Military Civilian Partnership has been working on a number of key themes to address areas such as school admissions and attainment for children from service families, health care and employment and skills for service leavers

5.4 As part of the countywide work to improve community safety, the county council is committed to working with its partners and suppliers to protect individuals, in the community and on our premises, where they have been targeted because of their characteristics. We have worked with schools, advice centres and care homes to prevent bullying, harassment or abuse. We have also launched a hate-crime reporting service to enable people to report incidents to a wide range of different local agencies other than the police and receive support from organisations with the appropriate expertise.

Priorities for Action - we will:

3a) Continue to work in partnership to improve the quality of life in the most deprived areas of the county. This will include promoting better engagement in education, employment and training; supporting the vulnerable and those with multiple and enduring problems; promoting healthy lifestyles and reducing health inequalities; reducing and mitigating the effects of child poverty.

3b) Continue to provide a Big Society Fund that will support local communities and organisations who wish to identify local priorities and do things for themselves about issues that matter to them. We will also review expressions of interest, applications and funding patterns from 2011/12 and work with community groups to raise awareness and encourage access to the Fund.

3c) Continue to work closely with our military partners to maximise the value obtained from the pupil premium by focusing on specific needs of children from armed forces families, and ensure schools have appropriate information to support these children.

3d) Continue to work closely with military partners to ensure we maximise the support we offer to carers of vulnerable people. We will ensure that we provide more information and support to carers around military bases and ensure that we support developments such as good neighbours' schemes by military bases.

3e) Raise awareness of the MANTRA (Multi-Agency Network for Tackling Racially Aggravated Harassment) service. We will also increase the number of agencies and venues people can use to report incidents of and concerns about hate crime, including in rural areas.

6.0 Objective 4 - Promoting a culture of fairness in employment and service delivery

6.1 The County Council is committed to ensuring equality of access, fairness and consideration to all of our staff and potential future staff, and in the delivery of services to the people and communities of Oxfordshire.

6.2 The council's Dignity at Work policy states all employees will have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, to promote equality of opportunity and to promote good relations between different groups., There are a range of learning and development opportunities to ensure staff are aware of this commitment and their responsibilities, including the 'Respect for People' electronic learning package that must be completed as part of induction for new employees.

6.3 We review our policies and practices to ensure they are appropriate and are implemented effectively to enable individuals to work to the best of their abilities and protect them from discrimination and harassment. The council is working with union partners to develop staff forums to listen to how different groups of staff think practices can be improved. We also recognise there may be barriers to applying for jobs at the council that are beyond the control of the applicant, and have made changes to our recruitment policies to help ensure we get the best possible staff for any given role regardless of their circumstances.

6.4 As well as the services we provide directly, our commitment to equality of opportunity extends to services delivered on our behalf through contract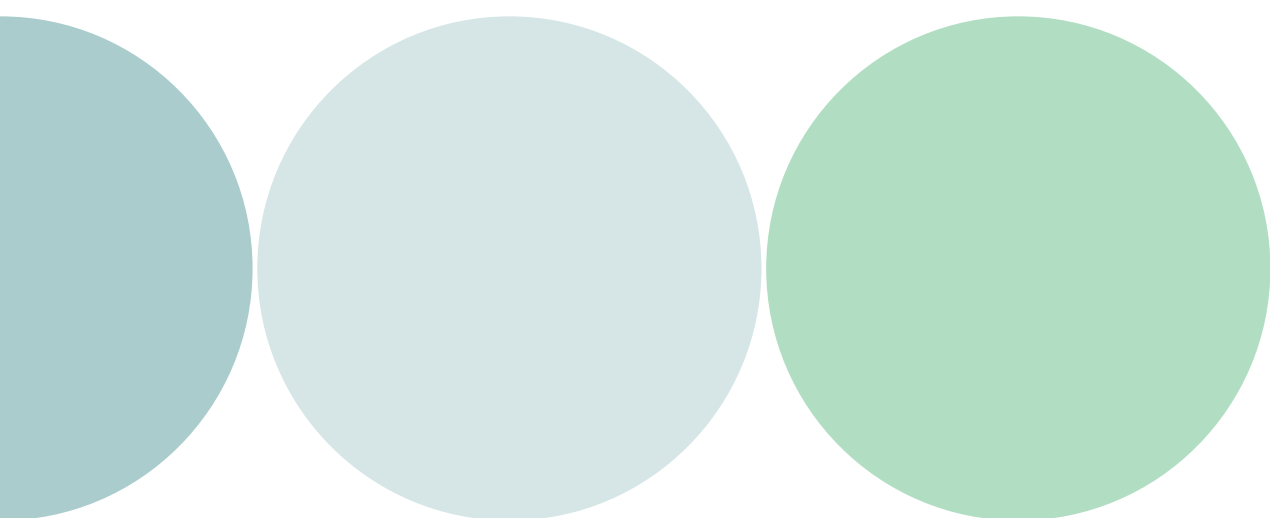s and commissioning, and through services linked closely to the council such as schools and the Fire and Rescue Service. It also includes working with our partners to ensure the same high standards apply across those that we commission services from, whether they are public, private or voluntary sector organisations.

Priorities for Action - we will:

4a) Ensure all managers and Councillors are aware of their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010, and encourage all employees to access learning and development opportunities to increase their awareness and understanding of equality and diversity issues.

4b) Ensure equality and diversity is integrated into the culture of the Customer Service Centre by embedding it within the behaviour and attitudes of staff, as well as the routine policies, procedures and practices of the service.

4c) Undertake a full review of existing equality and diversity policies to ensure they remain in line with best practice and meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

4d) Continue to encourage people from diverse backgrounds to apply for roles at the council, and do more to increase awareness of the support available to staff and guidance for managers to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made where appropriate.

4e) Investigate the reasons for the lower levels of young workers employed by the council, and continue to expand the number of apprenticeship opportunities to create entry level posts.

4f) Identify opportunities to work with others to deliver services that improve outcomes for groups with protected characteristics more effectively and develop innovative approaches to common issues, whether through formal partnership arrangements or more informal collaborative arrangements.

4g) Ensure that where services are being restructured there is a well-managed approach to diversity, including completion of Service and Community Impact Assessments to ensure that under-represented groups are not disproportionately affected in the resulting staff reductions. Statistics for redundancy will also need to be closely monitored.

7.0 Service and Community Impact Assessments

7.1 The Equality Act 2010 requires all public authorities to assess the impact of their policies on communities. In this context, 'policies' is a general term that could include strategies, projects or contracts. The assessment has five parts: gather information, engagement, analysis, objective setting and review.

7.2 In Oxfordshire County Council, this process is termed Service and Community Impact Assessments (SCIA). A SCIA is intended to ensure policies meet the diverse needs of our customers. We assess the impact of decisions on any relevant community, but with particular emphasis on groups that share protected characteristics.

7.3 All policies undergo an initial assessment that is proportionate to the significance of the change and the potential impact. Assessments are available to Councillors when making a decision on whether to agree a new policy or not. Any significant decisions have a full assessment, demonstrating the data and research that has been used, feedback from consultations with affected groups and an action plan to mitigate any impacts. Partners, staff or stakeholders are involved to check the assumptions match the experience on-the-ground.

7.4 Each year, an initial assessment is produced on the potential impact of the cross-cutting issues in the overall Council budget. This year, it also covers the Medium Term Corporate Plan and the capital programme, to ensure there is a consistent and considered assessment of the potential impacts across the whole of the Council's service and resource planning process.

7.5 Once a decision is made the assessments are updated and then reviewed on a regular basis over the implementation of the project or policy or contract to ensure that the initial assessments were accurate, and that the impact of any changes in approach and learning from implementation are included.

7.6 Completed Service and Community Impact Assessments are published on the public website at: **www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/ public-site/equality-and-cohesion**

8.0 Monitoring and Governance

8.1 To help ensure that our work on equalities and diversity is embedded within service planning delivery, responsibility will rest with Directorate Leadership Teams. Issues will then be escalated and reported as appropriate to the County Council Management Team and Cabinet, as part of the Council's quarterly performance monitoring and risk management arrangements. This document and the supporting information will be updated annually to reflect performance, and progress in implementing the actions we have identified will be reported to the relevant Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and the Council.

8.2 We will also continue to engage with a wide range of stakeholders from within and outside the Council to help us assess how successfully we are meeting the needs of the people and communities of Oxfordshire. We will continue to publish information about our performance, the outcomes of Service and Community Impact Assessments, new policies and proposals for changes in service delivery on our website. We will continue to seek feedback and comment on our plans and our performance, and consult both formally and informally with key stakeholders to inform our service planning and inform our decision-making.

9.0 More information

More information about our work can be found in the following documents and links:

- The Council Plan (**www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/corporateplan**)

- Directorate business strategies (**www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ businessstrategies**)

- The Council website (**http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/ content/equality-and-cohesion**)

- Children and Young People's Plan (**http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/ content/children-and-young-peoples-plan-2010-2013**)

- Walk the Talk? (**http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ cms/content/fire-service-recruitment-information-women-and-ethnic-minorities**)

- Equality Duty in Employment Report, 2011 (**http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/ content/fairness-and-equality-work**)

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Arabic

আপনি যদি অনুরোধ করেন তাহলে এই পুস্তিকাটি বিকল্প ছাঁদে, যেমন, অন্য কোনও ভাষায়, বড় হরফে, ব্রেইলে, অডিও-ক্যাসেটে, কমপিউটারের ডিস্কে বা ইমেলের মারফত পেতে পারেন।

Bengali

"本刊物備有其他的格式可供索取。這些包括有其他語言版，大字版，盲人用版，錄音帶版，電腦磁碟版或電子郵件版。"

Chinese

प्रार्थना करने पर यह प्रकाशन दूसरे रूपों में प्राप्त किया जा सकता है। जिस में सम्मिलित है, दूसरी भाषाओं में, बड़े छापे में, ब्रेअल, सुनने की टेप पर, कम्प्यूटर की डिस्क पर या ई-मेल द्वारा।

Hindi

"ਇਹ ਪੁਸਤਕ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਕਰਨ ਤੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੈ । ਜਿਵੇਂ ਕਿ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ, ਵੱਡੇ ਛਾਪੇ ਤੇ, ਬ੍ਰੇਲ ਵਿਚ, ਸੁਣਨ ਵਾਲੀ ਟੇਪ ਤੇ, ਕੰਪਿਊਟਰ ਡਿਸਕ ਜਾਂ ਈ ਮੇਲ ਤੇ।"

Punjabi

"اس اشاعت کو متبادل اشکال میں درخواست کرنے پر حاصل کیا جاسکتا ہے۔ اس میں دوسری زبانیں، بڑا پرنٹ، بریل (جسے اندھے چھوکر پڑھ سکیں)، آڈیو کیسٹ، کمپیوٹرڈسک یا ای میل شامل ہیں۔"

Urdu

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Polish

Working for you

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk