Oxfordshire County Council

SOCIAL INCLUSION STRATEGY
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What we mean by social inclusion

Social inclusion is the process by which efforts are made to ensure that everyone, regardless of their experiences and circumstances, can achieve their potential in life. To achieve inclusion income and employment are necessary but not sufficient. An inclusive society is also characterised by a striving for reduced inequality, a balance between individuals' rights and duties and increased social cohesion. (Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion).

We have adopted this definition in recognition of the essential links between equality, social inclusion and community cohesion activities and the need to balance citizens’ rights and responsibilities. We understand that social exclusion can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown.

What social inclusion means in Oxfordshire

Overall, Oxfordshire is an affluent county with low levels of social exclusion compared with England as a whole. Unemployment, poverty, poor health, poor housing and crime are all significantly below the national average. Equally, there are areas across Oxfordshire with significantly higher levels of social exclusion than the county and England as a whole.

The Oxfordshire in Detail report, produced as part of the County Council’s social inclusion indicators project, draws together information from a wide range of sources to provide a detailed factual representation of social exclusion in the county.

Key measures for achieving social inclusion

We have adopted the following key measures for achieving social inclusion: -

- Improved educational achievement and opportunities for young people.
- Improved employment prospects.
- Improved health and social care.
- Reduced crime and fear of crime.
- Improved physical environment and housing.
- Improved transport links.

These measures integrate with our vision, objectives and values to ensure fairness for all in Oxfordshire.
✓ Our vision for Oxfordshire

We will deliver prosperity and security for the people of Oxfordshire by improving the quality of life and environment for those living and working in the county.

We will measure our success by continuous improvement in our services. We will do this through effective partnership with the public, our communities, voluntary and business organisations and by seeking greater benefit for the Council Tax payer.

Our key aims are to deliver low taxes, real choice and value for money in all that we do.

✓ Corporate objectives

Our corporate objectives define the principles we follow throughout our strategic planning process.

Our objectives are: Low taxes, real choice, value for money.

These objectives form the cornerstone of our approach to service delivery. In particular, we are committed to low tax by reducing year-on-year the annual increase in council tax. This commitment is incorporated in the projections in our medium-term financial plan.

We are dedicated to providing real choice in our services whether this is through choices for our customers at the point of use or by providing alternative solutions which best suit the differing circumstances of the various parts of our diverse county.

We are committed to delivering value for money to our council tax payers and service users. We will achieve this by finding new ways of delivering services, by tackling waste and inefficiency and by ensuring we provide cost-effective support services to reduce expenditure and maximise the resources available for front-line service delivery. To do this we will need to be less risk averse and aim for high quality understanding of the risks and rewards that underpin our decisions and actions.

✓ Our values

Our values are integral to our behaviours in pursuing our objectives. They are:

Customer focus
Honesty
One team
Involvement
Can-do
Efficient and effective
Our values form an acronym to ensure they are easily remembered by all and reinforce our commitment to provide ‘real choice’. We have set out below how these values guide our work.

**Customer Focus**
This means we are accessible, accountable, courteous and efficient; we understand and represent the needs of the people and communities that we serve and we enable them to influence the services we deliver and how we deliver them and to value local government.

**Honesty**
This means we work with integrity and professionalism, promise only what we can deliver, recognise where performance needs to be improved, and work to create trust.

**One Team**
This means we work collectively as a County Council, putting the needs of our customers as a whole above political, professional or other interests. It means we value our staff and enable them to develop and perform to the best of their abilities; we recognise that our staff and councillors are key to delivering excellent services and we seek to build pride in working for Oxfordshire County Council.

**Involvement**
This means we involve our communities, our stakeholders and our staff in shaping our services. We work actively in partnership with others to achieve common goals.

**Can-do**
This means we look for solutions to problems rather than viewing difficulties as obstacles to what we want to achieve.

**Efficient and Effective**
This means we aim to obtain the very best service outcomes for our citizens from the resources we spend. It means we strive to find new and better ways of delivering services to our communities.

✔️ **How we are promoting social inclusion**

**Corporate Core**
We encourage and facilitate participation in the County Council’s democratic and decision-making processes by all sections of our community and offer advice, guidance, and research in support of scrutiny reviews. We provide leadership, management, evaluation and strategic co-ordination of equality, social inclusion and community cohesion initiatives at the corporate level. Our customer service strategy incorporates social inclusion service standards. We ensure a positive representation of the county’s diversity in all publicity and advise and support consultation and community engagement initiatives. We co-ordinate the Oxfordshire Partnership, bringing together people from key organisations to develop and deliver our Community Strategy. We also design
the legal framework for social inclusion initiatives such as supporting people to live at home and key worker housing.

**Children, Young People & Families**

We give children a better start in life through increased access to good quality foundation stage learning, by improving the quality of education in our schools and by raising levels of educational achievement. Targeted initiatives identify and support vulnerable students, young people at risk and children in care to improve attendance and attainment levels and reduce exclusions. We deliver community learning opportunities, increase community involvement through extended community schools and ICT centres and provide a range of targeted and mainstream youth service provision. We identify vulnerable children and young people, including those we look after, helping them to fulfil their potential by improving their social, educational and emotional wellbeing.

**Social & Community Services**

Most of our work is focused on promoting social inclusion. We provide home support, assessment services, support to disabled adults, domiciliary care, respite through day and residential care and support to older people. We aim to increase the numbers of disabled and older people who are helped to live at home within their local communities, rather than being admitted to residential care. We promote choice through community participation and partnerships with statutory and voluntary organisations that promote independence and community integration. Lives are enriched and communities strengthened by bringing people together through participation in our cultural services, including use of our libraries, arts and heritage services and by increasing the involvement and engagement of disadvantaged and socially excluded groups. We also provide a Language Service, that breaks down the barriers that exist between County Council services and some members of our ethnic minority communities, through written translation, face-to-face interpretation, audio tape recording and video voice-overs in a comprehensive range of languages.

**Environment & Economy**

We promote countywide economic prosperity by supporting programmes addressing the needs of urban, market town and rural areas and problems such as insufficient affordable housing. Our Local Transport Plan addresses the need to enable poorer urban groups to access employment and older rural groups to access services. We also manage pollution and waste problems so that they do not increase social exclusion. We use our data observatory to facilitate on-going discussions with our citizens about their problems, priorities and participation in our services.

**Community Safety**

Risks to socially excluded groups are managed through prevention, protection and intervention. Our prevention activities are targeted at those who are most vulnerable, who receive priority attention. Emergency response standards are reviewed to ensure that higher risk groups receive timely and appropriate support when required. We address unfair trading practices and provide services to support gypsies and travellers. We have also developed initiatives to create positive relationships with people considered as harder to reach or influence, with the aim of engaging them to promote safer communities, including assisting the integration of refugees and asylum seekers.
✓ Our strategic approach

Oxfordshire County Council makes the following commitments:

- We will continue to develop a greater understanding of the nature, extent, locality and patterns of social exclusion across Oxfordshire.
- We will continue to identify ways in which socially excluded people can be better served, including the balance between mainstreaming and targeted service provision.
- We will continue to identify, challenge and remove barriers to promoting equality and social inclusion.
- We will continue to identify how we can prevent social exclusion in Oxfordshire, both directly and in partnership with others.
- We will continue to identify good practice and develop and promote it widely, internally and as a community leader.
- We will identify how the County Council’s resources and partnership arrangements can be focused more effectively to improve equality and social inclusion.
- We will identify how and when we can involve communities in decision-making and ensure that our consultation activities adopt a community engagement approach that involves "harder to reach" groups.

As a major provider and procurer of services

Our services have a significant impact on the well-being of more than 630,000 local residents. We are fully committed to developing and providing relevant, appropriate and accessible services that meet the needs of all sections of our diverse population. We ensure that services are provided as close to the point of delivery as appropriate and will continue to remove any barriers to participation. We use monitoring, consultation and community engagement methods to ensure that the needs and requirements of socially excluded service users are properly addressed, as involvement by these groups is essential in ensuring that services remain responsive and accessible to all.

As the largest employer in Oxfordshire

We acknowledge our social responsibilities, the need to provide all staff with excellent conditions of employment, the need to eliminate discrimination and the importance of tackling low pay. When recruiting and selecting employees, we take all reasonable steps to bring vacancies to the attention of socially excluded and under-represented groups to ensure that we become as fully representative of our local population as possible. We provide learning and development opportunities for our 19,500 employees to ensure that they can fulfil their potential and fully contribute as local citizens to a cohesive society. We also support relevant local equality and social inclusion partnerships.

As a partner and as a community leader

We will continue to highlight the needs and requirements of people facing social exclusion and take a strategic lead in promoting equality and social inclusion. Particular emphasis will be paid to ensuring the application of our equality and social inclusion policies to the Oxfordshire Community Strategy and the Oxfordshire Compact with the voluntary sector.
✓ Business plans, data analysis and monitoring

We will ensure that our corporate commitment to the promotion of equality and social inclusion is actioned appropriately, including clear incorporation within all Directorate and Business Plans. We will demonstrate that the promotion of equality and social inclusion is central to our value base and ensure that Oxfordshire Plan priorities continue to fully address this.

We are utilising the strategic social inclusion initiatives developed through our social inclusion indicators project, such as the Oxfordshire in Detail report and our people centred impact assessment framework, as mechanisms for identifying and evaluating progress, together with other relevant performance indicators. This demonstrates a clear factual basis for social inclusion work.

This is also supported through the implementation of our prioritised corporate social inclusion action plan, with specific timetabled outputs, that enables us to measure the real difference being made. We will adopt a community engagement approach to all consultation carried out on the action plan and publish regular social inclusion performance reports.

✓ Governance and implementation

There is clear accountability and responsibility for social inclusion at the top of the County Council and this issue has the high standing and profile within the organisation that it deserves.

In addition to the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Policy Co-ordination’s constitutional role as portfolio holder for equality and social inclusion, a member of the County Council’s Management Team is also accountable for ensuring that social inclusion requirements are effectively actioned, implemented and fulfilled in practice and mainstreamed throughout the delivery of the County Council’s objectives and priorities.

The operational implementation of equality and social inclusion activities by our Directorates will continue to be overseen on behalf of the County Council’s Management Team by a small, high level and focused cross-directorate officer group, with delegated authority and a strategic council-wide overview.

The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Policy Co-ordination will continue to chair our Social Inclusion Reference Group, which involves local voluntary organisations operating in this field and County Councillors.
Alternative formats of this publication can be made available on request. These include other languages, large print, Braille, audiocassette, computer disk or email.

Social Inclusion Strategy
Revised strategy agreed by Cabinet Member Decision on 6 March 2007

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