

# PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

## Equality and Diversity – Disability Equality

9<sup>th</sup> March 2023

### Report of the Projects Delivery Lead

#### PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform the committee regarding progress of Disability Equality Initiatives and planned work.

This report is public.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That Committee notes the progress made regarding disability equality initiatives and plans for further development work.

##### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Equality Act 2010 provides legislative protection for those with a disability noting it as a protected characteristic and placing a responsibility on employers to make reasonable adjustments for disability both prior to employment at the recruitment and selection stages, and during employment itself.
- 1.2 The council's Equality and Diversity Policy in operation also states that we will tackle any inequality arising from several protected characteristics, one of which is disability. It also states, in line with legislation, that we will ensure that recruitment and selection is carried out fairly and effectively and that we will make reasonable adjustments in line with our legal duties.
- 1.3 The council has also operated a guaranteed interview scheme for those who meet the essential criteria for a role for several years. This is part of our commitment to the Department for Works and Pensions 'Two Ticks' Disability Scheme which was replaced by the Disability Confident Scheme in November of 2016. There are three levels to this scheme, committed, employer and leader. The council is currently at Disability Confident Level 1 - Committed which means that we have signed up to several commitments with regards to both our recruitment and employment practices.

##### 2.0 Information on our progress on Disability Equality Matters

###### 2.1 Disability and Carers Network

- 2.1.1 In March of 2021 the Council established a disability and carers network comprising of those who have a disability themselves and those who care for someone with a disability or health condition.
- 2.1.2 The creation of the disability and carers network has provided the Council as an employer with a group of staff who regularly give ideas on how we can improve and develop our offer as an employer for this protected group. This group have discussed topics and have

led on the development of several of the initiatives below with support from HR allies and the Wellbeing and Inclusion Co Ordinator in implementing them.

- 2.1.3 It has also provided the staff involved with a valued group of likeminded individuals who have similar experiences. The group provides support to each other and allows staff with this protected characteristic to raise and discuss issues that are relevant to the group.

## **2.2 Hidden Disabilities**

- 2.2.1 During the pandemic the council promoted the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Lanyard Scheme amongst its own employees and lanyards can be made available for staff by contacting the Staff Wellbeing and Inclusion Group. The scheme aims to make invisible disabilities visible telling other staff that the wearer might need help with some work activities, more time or understanding.
- 2.2.2 Information and learning has also been made available on the Council's learning zone (e-learning platform) on unconscious bias, autism awareness as well as our generic equality and diversity course. Signposting support and awareness raising information have been added to the wellbeing and inclusion intranet pages.

## **2.3 Access Audit Checklists**

- 2.3.1 As part of the working environment workstream of the councils 'working well' project the disability and carers network were consulted regarding key themes and issues relating to new office spaces and the introduction of more hybrid working for disabled staff.
- 2.3.2 Following on from this the network supported the councils Asset Manager with the creation of access audit checklists and assisted with the assessment of office spaces using these.
- 2.3.3 These checklists form part of the Asset Management Strategy and Asset Review that have recently taken place to ensure any changes to building usage consider the relevant access issues.

## **2.4 Disability Passports**

- 2.4.1 The network have drafted and trialled a disability passport scheme which has now been rolled out to all staff across the council. The disability passport is designed for colleagues, who have a long-term health condition, mental health condition, neurodiversity or disability/learning disability or difficulty, to help them access the support they may need in the workplace.
- 2.4.2 The passport aims to support colleagues to manage their health at work and remove obstacles in communicating their condition as they change role, department/team, or directorate throughout their career at the Council, hence the term 'passport'. It also can be of assistance when an employee's line manager changes.
- 2.4.3 The passport will assist the council and its staff in assessing where reasonable adjustments are requested and required and keeping a record of these in line with our commitments to disability equality and in compliance with employment legislation.

## **3.0 Future Plans to develop our commitment to disabled applicants and employees**

### **3.1 Disability Confident Award Progression**

- 3.1.1 In order to further publicise and develop our commitment we are seeking to increase the level of Disability Confident membership to Level 2 Disability Confident Employer in the year 2023/24.

- 3.1.2 We have been working with another current Level 2 Employer organisation, University of Morecambe Bay Hospitals Trust who are mentoring us on the process as part of their own application for Leader level 3 status.
- 3.1.3 As part of this process so far, we have better publicised our guaranteed interview scheme on our website and have included wording in our adverts which makes clearer our commitment to disability confident and fair recruitment and employment practices. The disability passport scheme is also an initiative which will support our progression with the Disability Confident Level 2 award.

### **3.2 Development of a Disability Employment Policy**

- 3.2.1 To start to bring together some of our responsibilities specific to disability, the initiatives we have introduced and to formalise the way in which disabilities should be considered and managed at the council it is proposed to develop in the next 12 months a Disability Employment Policy.
- 3.2.2 When drafted the policy will be consulted on with trade unions and members at JCC and be brought to Personnel Committee for approval.

### **3.3 Customer Facing Support for the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme**

Further to our own promotion of the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower scheme amongst our staff we are looking to also make clear to our customers that we support the scheme as a council.

In 2022/23 a customer facing trial took place of the scheme at Salt Ayre Leisure Centre which proved to be very popular with customers and led to our staff having a clearer understanding of those who may need more help when they are visiting our premises.

It is proposed now to roll out our support of the scheme at all our customer facing areas advertising it via posters, signage and staff badges in 2023/24.

### **4.0 Conclusion**

- 4.1 Over the past 24 months the council has progressed its commitment to disability equality through the introduction of a staff network, promotion of the hidden disability sunflower scheme, the introduction of disability passport scheme and through access audits of our facilities.
- 4.2 Planned work for 2023/24 includes progression of our commitment to the Disability Confident scheme, looking to achieve Level 2 Employer status, a new disability employment policy in conjunction with this commitment and promotion of our support of the hidden disability sunflower scheme at customer facing venues.

<b>CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT (including Health &amp; Safety, Equality &amp; Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing):</b>
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The content of this report refers to our duty as an employer to meet the requirements of the Equality Act and to ensure equality of opportunity for disabled applicants and staff. The initiatives contained are intended to have a positive impact on our commitment to disability equality and to allow us to set best practice examples to other employers in the district.
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<b>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</b>
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There are no legal implications arising from this report. The work by the Council on disability
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equality initiatives is in accordance with the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty (under the Equality Act 2010).

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

#### **OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, such as Human Resources, Information Services, Property, Open Spaces:**

There are no resource implications arising from this report.

#### **SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no comments

#### **MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**Contact Officer:** Clare Brown

**Telephone:** 01524 582039

**E-mail:** [cbrown@lancaster.gov.uk](mailto:cbrown@lancaster.gov.uk)