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## Appendix 4: DCC Staff Networks Update September 2024

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### Durham County Council Staff Networks Update September 2024

- 1 We now have several staff networks, which include nearly 500 members in total. The networks are open to all staff (including allies) and include:
  - (a) lgbt+ and allies – 51 members
  - (b) Disability and allies – 65 members
  - (c) Carers – 71 members
  - (d) Menopause – 235 members
  - (e) Race, equality and diversity – 20 members
  - (f) Armed forces – 42 members
- 2 Our staff networks help influence the council to be more inclusive, through contributing to employment practices, service development, training, communications and awareness events. Our staff networks are open to all staff, who share similar characteristics and life experiences, as well as those who wish to be supportive allies, and help promote the work of the networks. They are safe places where people with shared identities and backgrounds can connect with colleagues to share experiences and provide mutual support.
- 3 The Director of Resources undertakes the role as leadership champion for the staff networks and meets with all network chairs bi-annually to discuss their agendas, provide the necessary ongoing support to progress their agendas and raise awareness of the work of staff network activity at a leadership level.
- 4 Each network has an intranet<sup>1</sup> and/or internet<sup>2</sup> presence to help actively promote the support available both internally and externally, important in attracting and retaining talent within the organisation. The Disability, Carers, and LGBT+ networks have intranet vlogs from their chairs. The networks have a specially designed poster using a cog theme, with a different coloured cog representing an individual network which is designed to demonstrate how all the cogs work together. Posters have been distributed to all council offices, depots and buildings and the electronic noticeboards have been updated to display the network poster. Regular articles about the networks appear in Buzz, Buzz weekly, and the intranet.

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<sup>1</sup> [Staff networks \(sharepoint.com\)](https://sharepoint.com)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.durham.gov.uk/staffnetworks>

- 5 The Disability, LGBT+, and Race and Equality network chairs' have attend Extended Management Team, Tier 4/Tier 5 meetings to talk about the work of their network, raise awareness and answer any questions from managers.
- 6 We have a dedicated page for equality and inclusion as part of the refreshed council Jobs and Careers webpage<sup>3</sup>, which highlights the support provided for our staff, including a link to the staff networks and information on how we commit to equality through being a Disability Confident Leader organisation, our work with the North East Rainbow Alliance, White Ribbon accreditation and support of the armed forces covenant.
- 7 Network chairs attend the meet the greet sessions for new staff and welcome sessions for apprentices and new social workers to raise the profile of the council as a respectful and inclusive employer and the support we offer. Information is also provided as part of the onboarding process. National Staff Network Day was recently promoted via an intranet article on 10 May to help raise awareness and has attracted new network members to the networks.

### ***Disability staff network***

- 8 To date the disability staff network has been involved with:
  - (a) Training and Awareness:
    - (i) Devised and developed neurodiversity staff and manager's guidance document and elearning module
    - (ii) Assisted with the development of a Deaf communication elearning module
    - (iii) Organised the delivery of the following awareness sessions; Autism, Dyslexia, Access to Work, Neurodiversity, Deaf Communications, BSL, Dyslexia and International Day of Disabled persons
    - (iv) Provided feedback on corporate courses; Climate Change and Customer Care, core EDI modules
  - (b) Establishment of a buddy scheme is a key achievement for the network. The scheme is available to all new members of staff, with a disability or health condition and run by volunteers from the network. Information about this peer support group is included in all appointment letters, as well as on the careers and job website. Early promotion ensures new employees can access support before they start work. For example, to ensure adjustments are in place prior to a start date, and most importantly, support in navigating access to work<sup>4</sup> funding (if eligible) as this process is lengthy and applications for new starters must be submitted within the first 6

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<sup>3</sup> [Equality, diversity and inclusion in our workforce - Durham County Council](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Access to Work: get support if you have a disability or health condition: What Access to Work is - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

weeks of employment to ensure the maximum amount of award is accessed or costs could fall to us as employer.

(c) HR support includes:

- (i) Advised on approach to new ways of working / hybrid working.
- (ii) Recruitment and selection: detailed discussions were held in relation to current processes (advertising, job applicant information- person spec, application, interview process, induction) and understanding where there are barriers. This led to inclusion being 'built into the process' from the start; improved lead officer training, training on neurodiversity, more information on our jobs page and jobs north east, improved reasonable adjustment solutions and the adoption of the disability buddy scheme.
- (iii) Advised on the attendance management policy update.
- (iv) Supported re-accreditation of disability confident leader level.

(d) Other work:

- (i) Involved in the meet and greet sessions, as well as apprentice and social work induction.
- (ii) Involvement of office accommodation project to ensure accessible and inclusive environments – feedback on approach to office parking, Pre-visit to Corten House to feedback on access, request for access audit of walking routes to council offices.

9 Action plans going forward (2024-5) include:

- (a) Wellbeing activity session for network members (October)
- (b) Looking to organise a session on visual impairment also a joint networks event for International Day of Disabled Persons (December).
- (c) Working with 'The Story' to advise on access and inclusion.
- (d) Linking with culture, sport and leisure, to help develop social and sport activities for the staff network and also improvements to leisure centres.
- (e) Assist in development of reasonable adjustment guidance and elearning module for managers and staff.

### ***LGBT+ staff network***

10 To date the LGBT+ staff network has been involved with:

- (a) Training and Awareness:
  - (i) Devised and developed the LGBT+ awareness elearning module, which so far approx. 800 staff have completed.
  - (ii) Organised the delivery of a number of awareness raising sessions inc. LGBT+ History month, IDAHOBIT and trans day of remembrance. Training including LGBT awareness and gender reassignment delivered by Humankind and Stonewall.
  - (iii) Arranged for Tier 4/5 managers to be briefed on the new transitioning at work guidance as supported by a speaker with lived experience of being trans.
- (b) HR support includes:
  - (i) The introduction of pronouns on signatures, optional for staff.
  - (ii) Advised on HR policy updates and associated equality impact assessments.
  - (iii) Development of the transitioning at work guidance document.
- (c) Other work:
  - (i) Volunteers from the network help at Durham Pride.
  - (ii) Assist the Gala with cultural events in relation to Pride month.
  - (iii) Ron Hogg memorial trophy – a team took part in the football event which supports Durham Pride.

11 Action plans going forward (2024-5) include:

- (a) Promote hate crime awareness week (October).
- (b) Promote domestic abuse awareness week (November).
- (c) Develop allies initiative.
- (d) Support employee wellbeing initiatives e.g. world mental health day.
- (e) Promote LGBT+ History Month (February).
- (f) Promote Durham Pride UK and support the event via volunteering (May).

### ***Carers staff network***

12 To date the carers staff network has been involved with:

- (a) Training and events:

- (i) Supported Dementia Action Week and promoted the Making a Difference in Dementia Care event.
  - (ii) Carers Week – awareness raising around support available/Buzz articles etc/Press articles etc.
  - (iii) Managers Lunch and Learn session – training session to raise awareness of carers in the workplace
  - (iv) World Mental Health – the network supported the awareness raising event.
- (b) Policy/Advice:
- (i) Care in Later Life Project – carers asked for their views and feedback on this project.
  - (ii) Training Survey – carers asked what training would help them as carers.
  - (iii) HR consulted the network on the draft Parental Leave and Carers Leave policies, also the final Carer's Leave Policy.
  - (iv) Carers were consulted on the Council's Carers Plan on a Page – now published.
  - (v) Carers provided feedback on the Council Plan 2024-28.
  - (vi) Carers shared views on the national All Party Parliamentary Group on Carers regarding the development of a Government National Carers Strategy.

13 Current and upcoming work includes:

- (a) Working towards gaining Carer Friendly Employer Award (agreed to progress at BHAW meeting).
- (b) Supporting Dementia Action Week awareness raising. Scheduled a session with Alzheimer's Society.
- (c) How to support Carers in the workplace sessions arranged.
- (d) Continuing representation of carers in every Better Health at Work meeting.
- (e) Supporting national carer campaigns: Carers Week (June), Carers Rights Day (Nov), Young Carers Day (March)
- (f) Support employee wellbeing initiatives e.g. world mental health day.
- (g) Promote training available to members of the network via County Durham Care Academy and Durham County Carers Support.

### ***Menopause staff network***

14 To date activity of the menopause network includes:

(a) Training and awareness events:

- (i) Jacqui McBurnie NENC ICB Menopause lead founder and former chair of the NHS England menopause network has delivered a couple of lunch and learn sessions this year. Presentations on the menopause and menopause champions as well as question and answer sessions, which the group have found very helpful.
- (ii) Supported the development of an e-learning module 'An insight into the Menopause'.
- (iii) Women's health checks, carried out by Wellbeing for Life, which a number of the group have attended.
- (iv) Raising awareness on World Menopause Day, and involvement in Mental Health Awareness Day and Week.

15 Current and upcoming work includes:

- (a) British Standards Institute (BSI) for Menstruation, Menstrual health and menopause in the workplace.
- (b) Promotion and events to mark world menopause day (18 October)

### ***Race and equality and diversity staff network***

16 To date activities include:

(a) Training and awareness:

- (i) Promotion of Black History Month and Windrush Day.
- (ii) Arranged the delivery of cultural sensitivity practice sessions for service managers and staff within CYPS.
- (iii) Working with senior CYPS and AHS managers to secure more funding for training and resources to help better educate staff and families on issues of diversity.
- (iv) Working with New College Durham on decolonising the curriculum for their students and plan to be involved in sessions on anti-racism for the college.

(b) The network has helped to set up and participated in the north east black and global majority regional network. Each local authority provides an update on the

challenges and successes that they are addressing with regards to challenging racism and discrimination. It is an opportunity for members to share resources, access events and network with other members. This approach is especially valuable to the race network due to low numbers of minority ethnic staff working for the council, meaning they need to reach out and connect more externally.

(c) The network quickly mobilised to provide valuable and essential support for all members during and since the summer riots which have hugely impacted Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. This included providing a weekly drop in safe space meeting and supporting council managers in ensuring safe workplaces and working practice for staff through the update of risk assessments and adherence to lone working policies.

17 Action plans going forward (2024-5) include:

(a) Attend leadership and management briefings to talk about work of the staff network and lived experiences.

(b) Black History Month activity: Produce article for staff magazine to promote work of the network and encourage wider membership, also, external public events at Durham Gala, libraries and The Story.

(c) Support HR with the Workplace Race Equality Standard (WRES), develop and monitor the WRES improvement plan.

(d) Support development of 3<sup>rd</sup> party harassment processes linked to zero tolerance of abuse of staff from service users, clients and customers.

### ***Armed forces staff network***

18 To date activity of the armed forces network includes:

(a) The Gold Award accreditation of the MOD employer recognition scheme was completed and presented in February 2024.

(b) There was a drop in active participation in the network and a staff survey was sent out in March, which resulted in a change to the meeting with a less formal agenda.

(c) The network has discussed and advised on the new Veterans mobility fund, how to gain a Veterans Card and pupil premium in schools for armed forces children.

(d) Advised on a simplified guaranteed interview scheme for veterans to remove some of the time limits.

(e) Events include:

(i) Previously involved in Armed Forces Day – 29<sup>th</sup> June

(ii) Involvement in Pride in Armed Forces and community days

19 Action plans going forward (2024-5) include:

(a) Collaborate with other staff networks to grow, share information and ideas and learn from one another.

(b) Review and refresh current armed forces staff network intranet and internet pages to ensure it is fit for purpose, inclusive and relevant.

(c) Explore collaboration with the DCC Armed Forces Champion to look at hosting a charity event for the Armed Forces Staff Network.

(d) Host a session to be delivered by one of the Adult Cadet Volunteers, ensuring that the network understands the wider connections and purpose of the Group.