

HCC Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022: Workforce



#making inclusion part of our DNA



Foreword

Hertfordshire County Council is committed to making inclusion part of our DNA. We strive to positively promote diversity and inclusion within our workforce and across the delivery of our services.

We want everyone at work, regardless of their race, background, identity or circumstances to have a sense of belonging to the organisation. We want all employees to feel valued, accepted and supported to succeed at work and reach their full potential. It is also important that we have a workforce which reflects the communities that we serve.

Legislation around the nine protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, maternity and pregnancy, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation places public duties on Hertfordshire County Council with which we must comply. However, we want to strive to go beyond this to ensure that our practice in diversity and inclusion is embedded in everything we do.

Following the horrendous news and images from America of the death of George Floyd and the subsequent reactions it is even

more important to re-state our commitment to all elements of Diversity and Inclusion. This embodies not just a determination to condemn racism where we see it, but to develop and maintain a proactive anti-racist approach within our Council.

We recognise that all people are individual, and that their needs can be complex and varied. For the benefits of diversity to be felt we want an environment where differences of thought and outlook are not only respected but are expected and valued. Feeling included is good for us as individuals. It is good for teams and it is good for the people and communities that we serve. This strategy demonstrates our wholehearted commitment to continued action in tackling inequality and championing diversity and inclusion throughout the Council.

This is just the beginning of our journey together and I am committed to making

this much more than just a strategy document – we need to work together to agree the actions necessary to embed diversity and inclusion considerations as part of our DNA – an integral part of everything we do within the Council.



Owen Mapley
Chief Executive

Contents

Foreword	2
Contents	3
Introduction	4
Priorities	5
A Sense of Belonging	7
Data	7
Staff Networks	7
Governance	7
Governance Structure	8
Inclusion Activities	10
Principles & Practice	12
Joining	13
Working	15
Learning	17
Reward	19
Leaving	21
Working Together	22

#making inclusion
part of our DNA



Introduction

Hertfordshire County Council is determined to take action to ensure that our belief in equality of opportunity, diversity, and inclusion is integral to everything we do. It will inform every area of activity; from the way we provide services to the way we employ our staff. We know that a diverse and inclusive workforce representative of the people of Hertfordshire helps to promote the Council as an employer of choice and deliver services that meet the needs of citizens across the county.

In order to embed diversity and inclusion in all that we do we have closely linked our Diversity & Inclusion Strategy to our [People Strategy](#). We also have a number of supporting policies, structures and processes in place which underpin the strategy.

These include:

- The Strategic Management Board (SMB)
- The Diversity and Inclusion Board
- [Departmental Equality Action Groups](#)
- [Staff Networks](#)
- [Wellbeing Support](#)
- [Mental Health First Aiders](#)
- [Confidential Advisers](#) (Harassment and Bullying support)
- Grievance (including Harassment and Bullying) Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Reasonable Adjustments Policy
- Maternity and Family Leave Policy
- Flexible Working Policy
- Values and Behaviours
- Performance Management and Development Scheme (PMDS)
- Equality Impact Assessment Guidance and Toolkit

To deliver the [Council's Corporate Plan](#) we need a committed and valued workforce which embeds the Council's Values and Behaviours and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in everything we do. We want everyone to feel included. The Council is proud to support a diverse range of staff and needs to continue to attract and retain from a wide range of backgrounds. Our workforce profile tells us that we are making progress in some areas, for example increasing the number of Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) employees, and employees with a disability. We need to go further than this to ensure that there is diversity at all levels of the organisation and the same sense of belonging and the ability to progress is seen by all employees regardless of their race or background.

Priorities

Based on our workforce data we know that we need to prioritise diversity and inclusion actions to increase the number of:

- BAME employees progressing into senior posts
- Women progressing into senior posts
- Employees comfortable to share that they have a disability and for these individuals to feel supported and engaged at work
- Employees across the organisation who are aged under 25
- Employees across the organisation who feel a strong sense of belonging

We are committed to achieving this ambition over the next two years and will develop the necessary targeted action plans across the Council. However, we need the support and ideas of our staff to do this. We will therefore carry out research with those who work for the organisation to understand these issues further.

The actions from this will be embedded into our corporate and departmental action plans.



Tendai Murowe, Service Manager



As a newly appointed Head of Quality Assurance in Children's Services I have been reflecting on my journey and the things that have helped me to develop within HCC. Hertfordshire is a great county to work for. I have been lucky enough to meet the most amazing managers and leaders, ones who are open, encouraging and supportive.

I have been working in Hertfordshire as a Service Manager in Children's Services since July 2015, having worked for a number of years in Essex prior to that. When I first arrived, my ears were ringing with warnings from well-meaning people about the lack of opportunities for career development in Hertfordshire. As I became familiar with the organisation, I realised that there were lots of opportunities. I needed to be a self-starter, to know what I wanted to do and take advantage of this. Having a manager who encouraged and coached me to be creative, innovative and push boundaries as well as to develop and stretch my skills really helped. This made me reflect on the value for the organisation in giving all workers opportunities to develop and excel.

I was supported through my PMDS to identify my learning needs and joined the apprenticeship program to undertake my MBA while at work. Although the apprenticeship programme is extremely demanding, I have been fully supported to attend and achieve.

I have come to realise that in order to be successful you have to be confident, motivated and willing to take up new opportunities when they come up. Some of the services offered by Hertfordshire County Council such as coaching can be crucial. Coaching has really been a fantastic tool and I highly recommend it for any aspiring leaders. Further, I also have a workplace mentor, another service provided for free by HCC through the HR function. They are fantastic for helping you to navigate the workplace and introducing you to the right people.

If you want to make an impact in your area of work, Hertfordshire County Council is great for that, with a leadership that is always looking for fresh ideas to provide excellent services. It has not always been smooth sailing, but it is important in those times to make use of the support that is available to you both at home and at workplace.

A Sense of Belonging

We want all employees to feel they can be themselves at work. Feeling included is good for us as individuals but is also good for teams and the people and communities we serve.

Our goal is to be an employer where everyone feels able to bring their whole self to work and to perform at their best. We encourage openness, honesty, challenge and innovation.

Data

We encourage employees to disclose their equality information so that we are well informed about the make up of the workforce.

We want employees to feel comfortable in doing so with the reassurance that this is recorded in confidence.

Staff Networks

Our Staff Networks provide us with insight into the employee experience of inclusion at HCC. They not only provide support for employees but a collective voice to help us improve our policies and ways of working. Their visibility ensures other employees with the same protected characteristic feel encouraged to be open about their identity at work.

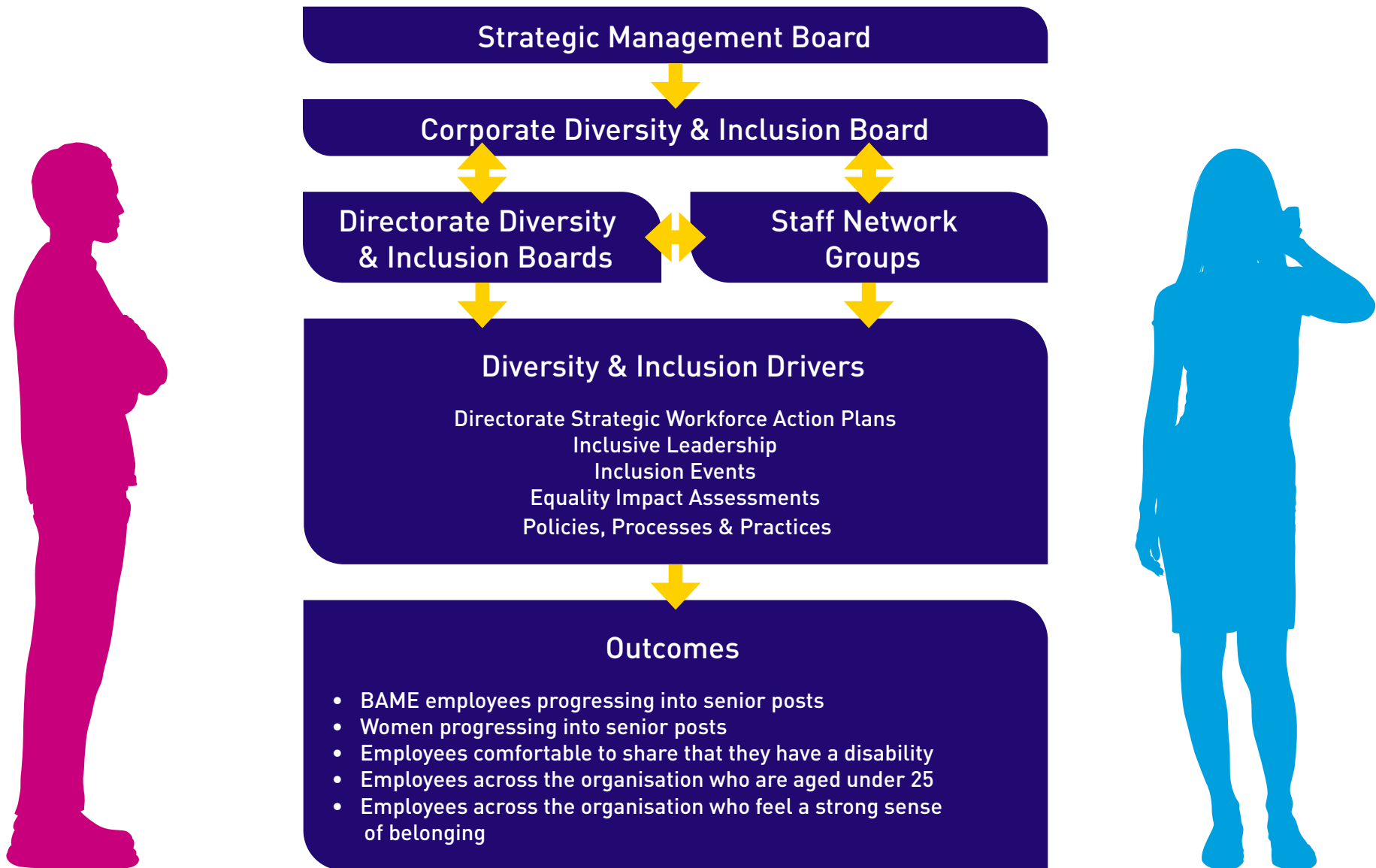
Governance

We are all responsible for making inclusion part of our DNA through all our activities and interactions at work. However, it is necessary to ensure that all specified diversity and inclusion workforce actions are carried out and as such the following are responsible for the governance of this: Senior Management Board (SMB); the Diversity and Inclusion Board; and the service directorate's Equality Action Groups (EAGs). We also encourage our Staff Networks to advocate this strategy and support and challenge in equal measure where appropriate.

#making inclusion
part of our DNA



Governance Structure



**Sam Johnson,
Integrated Care
Programme Team -
Staff Networks**



Joining the Black & Asian Minority Ethnic Support group was recommended by my colleague and I immediately saw the opportunity to grow and expand my network. It was a good starting place to speak to colleagues who were able to advise, learn about/from their journey or simply to just say “hi” and engage in conversations that one could relate to. The group meetings have a relaxed environment and the atmosphere is one where conversation and opinions are encouraged to be voiced regardless of subject matter.

This would be my first time to join such a staff group within any organisation and I was really encouraged that HCC see this as a priority and support this group wherever necessary. Whilst I see this group as an opportunity to grow my own network and understand how each department is contributing to the organisation’s strategic vision and how I can implement the knowledge gained from these meetings; I believe the group can contribute to the council’s equality and diversity related aspirations by its unique blend of people from different backgrounds, cultures and religion. The group provides that level of familiarity and could act as ‘initial ice breaker’ for new employees and also for those not so new.

There is huge potential for informal advice and guidance from group members with different seniority levels. Also, at times one just needs someone to converse with in a language familiar to them to express how they really feel and this group might be a great starting place. I believe that this group is best placed to provide support to its members and develop relationships both in the workplace and outside of work environment. For example, I’m part of a small group who meets every two to three months with the objective to enjoy good food and discuss, inspire and encourage each other to progress in their respective careers.”

Inclusion Activities

HCC has celebrated diversity and inclusion with a number of events including:

- National Inclusion Week Event
- LGBT History Month
- International Women's Day
- Autism Awareness Week
- Islam Awareness during Ramadan
- Assistive Technology Empathy Lab



- Menopause Focus Groups
- Carers Week
- Black History Month
- International Day of Persons with Disabilities
- BAME Christmas 'Bring and Share' Event
- Herts Fire and Rescue at Herts Pride

These events bring together colleagues with varied experiences which help generate insights – raising awareness and valuing the diversity we have in the organisation. They also show our commitment to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment. We will ensure these events continue and will encourage employees to celebrate with us by running their own events at various sites across our organisation.

**Alex Davies,
Administrator –
Educating Others
About Non-binary**



I had felt for a long time that I didn't fit in with the gender I was assigned at birth, but I didn't have an answer to what did suit me. I wondered for a while if I was supposed to be a boy, except that wasn't right either. However, when I found out about non-binary genders online it finally clicked. It was a difficult experience, especially as I was suffering heavily with depression at the time.

A majority of people had not heard of non-binary, which meant coming out also meant educating people at the same time. Granted not everyone understood and even now people are still unaware that gender other than male and female exist. I then changed my name to something gender neutral which was probably the hardest part of coming out, although easier for people to understand than my gender! It was a difficult time yet I do not regret it.

HCC have valued the different perspectives I can bring to the organisation and I have been involved in improving our Supporting

Transgender Employees policy by ensuring it is inclusive of staff who identify as non-binary. I'm a big fan of this policy, it's really important to raise awareness of the non-binary community and promote the importance of respecting and using the pronouns that people prefer to use. My preferred pronouns are 'they and them' and I have added these to my email signature to let colleagues and customers know my preferences. Following my suggestion, the Council have now included details in our corporate email signature guidance about the option of adding preferred pronouns in support non-binary colleagues.

Principles & Practice

To deliver this strategy we need commitment from everyone in making inclusion part of our DNA. The Council is proud of its diverse workforce and is ambitious to achieve a fully inclusive organisation where everyone feels comfortable to be themselves at work and in our communities.

The Diversity and Inclusion Strategy compliments the People Strategy and follows the same structure in terms of setting out our diversity and inclusion actions in line with the employee life cycle.



#making inclusion
part of our DNA





In a highly competitive job market place, it is vital that the Council is an employer of choice and builds a diverse and engaged workforce. People applying for jobs, work placements or volunteering at Hertfordshire County Council should be provided equality of opportunity in all aspects of recruitment and selection and any barriers to inclusion should be removed.

HCC will ensure this happens by:

- Advertising jobs openly, making sure that they draw the attention of a wide range of applicants
- Ensuring that the application and selection process is inclusive and accessible for everyone
- Using non-discriminatory job criteria and following a fair and transparent selection process
- Ensuring reasonable adjustments are made to premises or 'provisions, criteria or practice' for disabled candidates
- Where interviews are appropriate for selection, using structured interview questions to ensure candidates are objectively assessed on their ability and competence rather than on their personality and characteristics
- Considering applications from people seeking to work flexibly, part time or job share
- Taking lawful positive action to achieve a workforce that reflects our wider community at all levels

**#making inclusion
part of our DNA**



Sass Pledger, Assistant Director, Property – Flexible Working



I had been in my current role at Cambridgeshire County Council for 10 years, and whilst in the job I had built strong relationships, over the years, with my line managers. Strong enough that when I returned to work after having my second child I felt that I could ask for a flexible working arrangement, working full time hours over four days. This was agreed.

As time passed and I wanted to look to my future, and career advancement, and I did so with reservations. As a working mother, with care commitments, I did not want to risk unsettling the established routine I had formed for a chance to progress my career. I was a mother first, and my daughter's disability meant that I needed (and would always choose) to be with her three days a week.

I decided that I would look at opportunities but would only move to a new employer if I could ensure that I could keep the same work arrangements. At the time it felt like this would be incredibly challenging to achieve, and as a care giver I would need to compromise or forgo advancing my career.

In 2018, I found a great job at Hertfordshire County Council as the Assistant Director for Property and decided to apply. I was successful. During the interview progress I was very nervous about asking to retain

the work pattern that I had established, particularly as HCC didn't know me, and we would all have to work on trust. I was relieved and thrilled that this ask was met positively both by my new line manager, and HR. This meant that I didn't need to compromise as a working mother – I could have that work/home balance that I needed.

Hertfordshire County Council has been true to its word and I have re-established my routine with them (with a little tweaking). This small concession from my employer has meant the world to me as it allows me to continue to support my daughter, and family, and develop myself professionally. I am really pleased also that the Council is adopting and supporting flexible working across the authority, and managers are recognising the value of flexibility to them, and their staff. We have made a huge amount of progress in dispelling the misconception that if someone is not visible in the office, they can't be delivering. The more we can get managers to work in this way, the more we can collectively influence the culture of our organisation in a positive way. I know from experience both as a flexible worker, and in supporting my team to work flexibly, that enabling people to work in this way helps them to achieve more at work, and at home.



To create a committed, diverse and inclusive workforce it is essential that colleagues are engaged, listened to, and know that their contribution is valued. It is also crucial that employees are able to work in a safe environment that is free from discrimination, harassment and bullying.

The Council fully supports our Staff Networks and encourages them to use their voice to raise any concerns about, or ideas on how to make, the workplace more inclusive. We are also committed to a zero-tolerance policy on discrimination, bullying and harassment and provide Confidential Advisors to support any employees who may need it, along with our Employee Assistance Programme.

The Council requires a flexible, engaged and inclusive workforce and recognises that the needs of our employees may change during their working life. We will therefore support them through SmartWorking, where possible, to achieve a reasonable work life balance in line with the needs of service delivery.

HCC will ensure this happens by:

- Promoting and supporting inclusion initiatives and programmes
- Supporting Staff Networks
- Making all Council policies fair and non-discriminatory
- Providing flexible working and SmartWorking opportunities where possible to ensure that individuals strike a balance between their home and work priorities
- Providing the Leave Policy which sets out the numerous options to support employees to manage their work life balance. In addition to annual leave employees have access to Pregnancy Leave, Disability Leave, Carers Leave, Emergency Leave, Leave for Religious Festivals and Compassionate Leave. HCC will consider sympathetically all requests under its miscellaneous leave policy
- Providing the Maternity and Family Leave policy and Shared Parental Leave policy which sets out the provisions for expectant and new parents
- Providing Confidential Advisors and First Aiders who are also trained in Mental Health First Aid
- Providing the Employee Assistance Programme
- Making Reasonable Adjustments for employees with disabilities where necessary to ensure that services and employment opportunities are fully accessible to them
- Fully engaging with staff and trade unions on any change programmes
- Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments where appropriate
- Using workforce data to inform our policies and work practices

Rob Bacon, Co-Chair LGBT+ staff Network – LGBT+ Allies Scheme



The LGBT+ Allies Scheme was developed by Hertfordshire County Council's LGBT+ Staff Group and has attracted over 500 supporters in just four months, fostering a more open and supportive working environment.

The staff group was initially hoping to attract between 100 to 200 allies, but by December registrations had surpassed 500.

An 'ally' is a worker who pledges to be a visible supporter and advocate for LGBT+ co-workers by wearing a noticeable rainbow-coloured staff ID lanyard, helping to create a more inclusive and supportive working environment.

Allies complete a simple registration form and once signed up, receive their rainbow lanyard and badge, which they are encouraged to wear at work.

Explaining the already popular scheme, Co-Chair of the LGBT+ staff network group, Rob Bacon said "Allies are not expected to

be experts on sexuality and gender – just be happy to make a commitment to be a visible presence in the workplace. This helps ensure that staff and service users feel safe to be themselves, without fear of judgement.

"The impact on service users from participating social workers has been great; just one example was a member of staff who wore the lanyard and the service user said they immediately felt more comfortable talking to her. Allies tell us the lanyards give them an opportunity to open up discussions with others, so the scheme is definitely helping to break down barriers.

"The allies group shows Hertfordshire as a progressive county council that values equality and diversity and its workforce."



Equality of opportunity is a core principle of the Council and we want all of our employees to be able to learn and acquire new skills and knowledge. In particular, we are keen for all of our staff, regardless of background, to have the opportunity to progress and for the Council to have a diverse talent pipeline which is reflective of the diversity within our workforce and communities. It is also important that our leaders are knowledgeable in the importance of an inclusive environment and how to create it; and that they lead by example through inclusive leadership.

HCC will ensure this happens by:

- Managers holding Career Progression and Personal Development discussions
- Inclusive Leadership Development
- Unconscious Bias Training
- Reverse Mentoring and Sponsorship
- Providing learning which is relevant to organisational need and with flexibility to assign resources to meet needs
- Providing fair and equitable access to opportunities where all colleagues at every level can take part
- Creating, and contributing to, a shared knowledge environment
- Education and apprenticeships
- Ensuring that where employees with disabilities undertake training and development, appropriate arrangements are made as necessary to ensure that all opportunities are equally accessible
- Giving consideration to flexible working patterns when reviewing training needs to ensure that opportunities are equally accessible



**Felix Gilding,
Commissioning
& Service
Development
Manager -
Neuro-Diversity**



I've worked at HCC for three years, having started as a Graduate Management Trainee straight out of Oxford University. In this relatively short space of time I've worked across 4 of the council's departments (Adult Care, Environment, Resources and most recently Children's Services), police, education and the NHS. Whether it's managing the road network, helping elderly people safely return home from hospital or keeping children safe, HCC has it all!

This would be an exciting, if challenging, journey for any employee - not least for someone like myself who is 'neuro-diverse' (i.e. someone whose brain does not function in a 'typical' way). Soon after starting life at HCC, I was diagnosed with autism and obsessive compulsive personality disorder ('OCPD'). Simply put, this means that I interpret the world differently to others - from social cues to sensing heat or sound - and I'm automatically compelled to act, especially to do something that is deemed morally 'right'.

Work environments can potentially pose problems 'for people like me', only 32% of autistic adults were in paid work and 1 in 3 experience severe mental health difficulties. However I've found HCC to be a good workplace as a neuro-diverse employee. What strikes me is the kindness and understanding of its staff, it's a culture of face-to-face catch-ups, collaborative working and pastoral support. This translates into tangible action, especially the ability to work

from home and the roll-out/immense take-up of mental health first aid.

Starting my career at HCC has enabled me to learn so much about myself and others. It has helped me value how my brain works by providing me opportunities to make positive changes happen. It's also helped me tremendously to develop my social skills as I meet new colleagues all time - you can build a network of people who you trust. Fundamentally my role at HCC has helped me grow into my Autistic/OCPD identity. It is great to see our senior leadership starting to fully realise that HCC has a hidden asset in its employees who are neurologically different, much like other leading public sector agencies like GCHQ!

That said, there are still many things that HCC can do to become more neuro-diverse. We can further adapt our recruitment processes via alternative interview formats. We also need to consolidate on the interest in neuro-diversity expressed by managers and senior leaders through guidance on neuro-diversity. Lastly, we need to sustain our training and awareness drive, be it national inclusion week or our mental health first aid offer. Fundamentally, HCC can count itself as a neuro-diverse friendly employer thanks to its inherent values of integrity, collaboration and kindness. The challenge now is how HCC can fully embrace the opportunities offered by becoming a neuro-diverse workplace.



The Council are committed to the Wellbeing of our staff and ensuring that they are rewarded fairly and feel their work is valued. To achieve this, we will work with Staff Networks and conduct a full review of the existing pay and reward structures (Future Workforce Project) to ensure that the approach to reward is:

- Fair and transparent
- Market relevant
- Understood by the workforce
- Simplified by the concept of job families – providing simplified broad role profiles and Job titles to enable a more flexible and agile workforce
- Continued development of a competitive reward package including Wellbeing initiatives and programmes

**#making inclusion
part of our DNA**



Ross McLean, Senior Campaigns Officer – Introducing Free Hearing Tests



I've worked at Hertfordshire County Council for almost 5 years in a variety of different roles, but notably went through their graduate scheme in 2016. As part of the graduate scheme I was sponsored to complete my master's degree in Leadership and Management in Public Services, and I chose to dedicate my dissertation to the experience of hearing loss in the workplace.

I acquired a severe/profound level of hearing loss after having bacterial meningitis at the age of 21, and since then it has always been a topic I am passionate about. For my dissertation I was able to interview 11 colleagues with hearing loss across the council to understand their experiences of what it is like to work in an office environment with a hearing loss. Significantly I was given the opportunity to feedback the results of this research to the organisation through Diversity Board, where I made several recommendations.

Top of my list was for the council to formally recognise hearing health as an important aspect of the employee health and wellbeing offer. Hearing loss affects 1 in 6 individuals

and has far reaching consequences, not only in terms of communicating with colleagues day to day, but in how we feel, with common side effects including low mood and feelings of isolation.

I was aware that the council offered help in the form of free eye tests for all colleagues as part of the internal reward scheme, HertsRewards, but noted there was no such recognition for employees with hearing loss. In fact, when I searched 'hearing' it would auto-correct to 'heating', something that I wanted to correct.

From an academic perspective, my research was the highest scoring dissertation in my University year group, but corporately, I was really pleased to see how responsive Diversity Board was to my recommendations, and within two weeks of my initial Board presentation, there was information and signposting guidance available on the staff intranet and HertsRewards, encouraging employees to book a free hearing test. It's a great example of how an organisation can learn from its employees and make positive change happen.

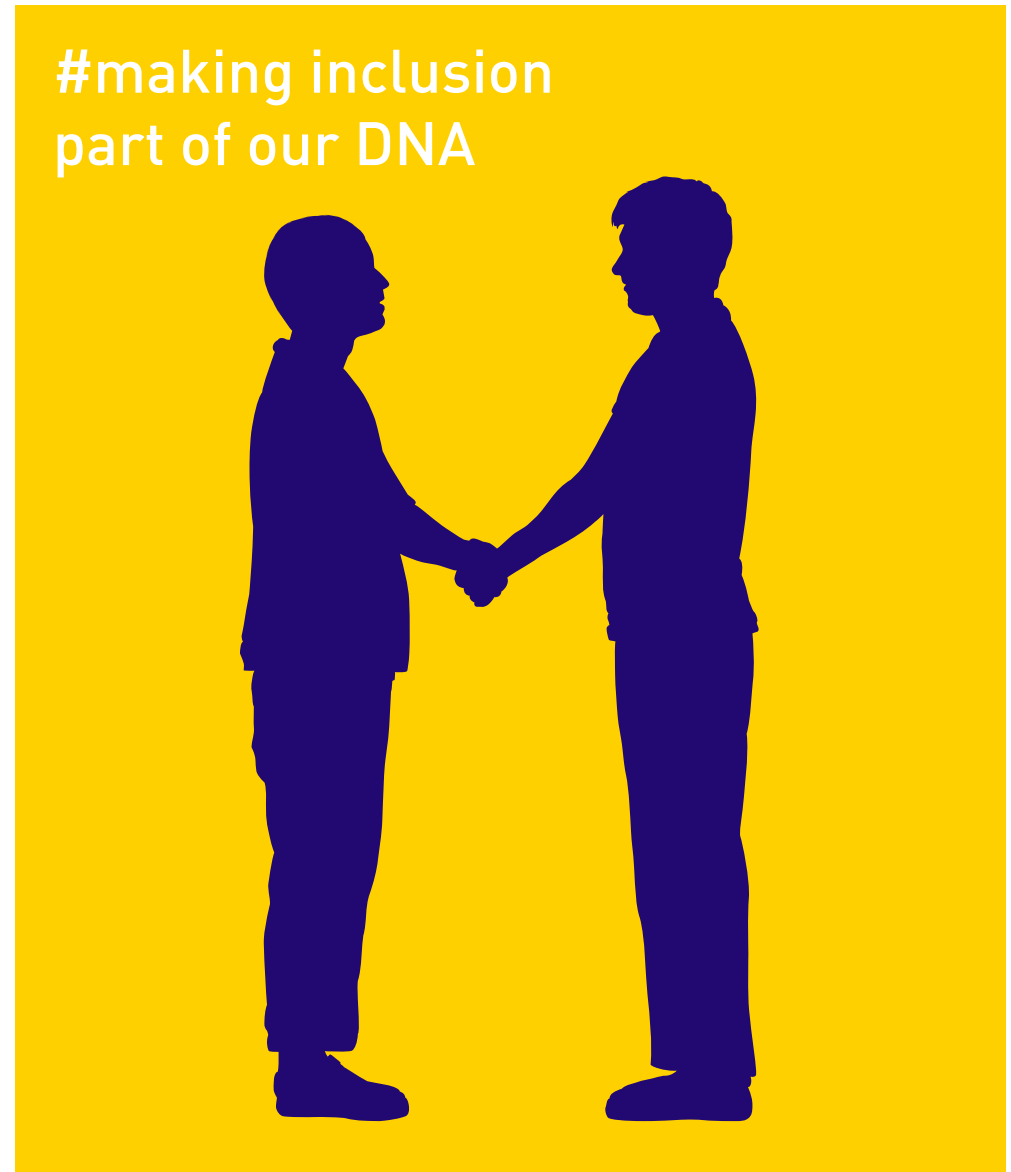


The Council analyses leaver information by the protected characteristics of the workforce and takes relevant action where necessary.

The Council aims to retain a diverse workforce to ensure that they are engaged and productive. However, it also acknowledges that in the constantly changing job market, movement of the workforce is inevitable and so welcomes any new opportunities that this creates. The Council will ensure that those leaving the organisation will be treated fairly and that staff turnover is monitored.

HCC will ensure this happens by:

- Implementing fair and transparent leaving processes
- Retention of staff through transparent and fair reward and development opportunities
- Carrying out objective succession planning
- Offering retirement opportunities and advice and support
- Assessing and analysing why people leave the organisation to inform future action



**Richard Hall,
Head of Resourcing
and Development -
Work Life Balance**



I moved to Hertfordshire so my partner and I could set up home – it's a great place to live and work. As a member of the Senior Leadership Team in Human Resources and a father of two children, my work life and home life is extremely varied and busy! I also volunteer as an Assistant Leader at my son's Beaver Scout Group because I had heard that they were struggling to keep it going due to a shortage of leaders and helpers.

Getting the right work life balance is really important to me and I spoke to my line manager and we worked out a way that would allow me to finish work a bit earlier one day a week so that I can volunteer at the Beaver Group. Smart Working is also a real benefit to me as it means I can usually get to pick my children up or drop them off to school one day a week.

Having a good work life balance which enables me to spend quality time with my family, and give something back to the local community through my volunteering work, is invaluable to me and my family.

Working Together

Our goal is for everyone to feel able to bring their 'whole self' to work and to perform at their best. It is not just a moral or legal obligation to recognise and value diversity, it makes business sense too. Organisations that recognise the value of a diverse workforce and are inclusive have the widest possible pool of talent and competitive advantages. It can also reduce recruitment costs, sickness absence, underperformance, grievances, Employment Tribunals, and lost and wasted talent.

We want to be able to attract talent and then develop and retain the most diverse workforce possible. Openness, honesty, challenge and innovation are encouraged and valued.

Our Staff Networks are an invaluable source of insight into the employee experience at the Council. They play an important role in providing a safe space for employees to support each other and provide a collective voice for their group. We also welcome partnership working with our recognised Trade Unions.

For those employees who are not part of a Staff Network we will continue to carry out staff surveys and focus groups in order to gain information from our staff which will inform our workplans and policies.

We will continue to publish and analyse our workforce data providing us with the quantitative data we need to see how inclusive our organisation is and what further work we need to do.

Let's all work together to build on the fantastic diversity and inclusion activity already carried out at HCC and really make inclusion part of our DNA.



#making inclusion
part of our DNA

