

Introduction of the Staff Network

The Career Advancement Network (CAN) formerly known as Early Careers Network (ECN) is a platform designed to empower staff members in the organisation to excel in their careers. CAN is a comprehensive network that aims to connect individuals across the council, providing them with invaluable resources, opportunities, and support to advance their careers at all grades. The network offers a range of services, including mentoring, skill-building workshops, job postings, and networking events. We have a focus on fostering, sharing knowledge and aiming to create a vibrant community that assists staff members to be the best they can.

Co-Chairs: Sasha Walton and Rob Clayton

Date: 31/01/2024

Success Stories

- A **new steering group and co-chair** have been created after nearly two years with limited capacity at leadership level. The steering Group has now expanded to five members.
- A **new CLT sponsor** is in place with Mariana Pexton, Director of Strategy and Resources having quarterly input into the network's activities and providing support and guidance as required.
- Since the refreshed chairing and steering group has been established the network is **refreshing its approach** and looking to deliver **career progression sessions in partnership with Reed recruitment agency** which will look to deliver support with Interview techniques/preparation, CV development, finding the right role, career development and applications.
- We have featured in one of the **CEOs staff update emails** advertising the re-branding of the network and raising awareness of its existence to **attract new members and re-establish the network with colleagues**.

Priorities for 24/25

The network is looking to re-establish itself following a period in which it had limited capacity. A key element of this will be organising and running both specifically designed events and more generic and informal sessions throughout 2024/25, some initial plans are as follows:

- Involvement in the new Aspiring Leaders Programme with a view to providing support to the 16 participants with **career advice and preparation** and specific session on **decision making and political awareness**.
- Initial contact with services to **design and deliver bespoke career support** that meets the needs of services and can help staff advance and progress their careers.
- Plans to relaunch and rebadge coffee morning and informal network meetings as **Be Your Best sessions** in line with the overall training programme being delivered by the Council.
- Completing the **re-branding of the network** and updating our online presence

More generally, the network strongly welcomes the interest of scrutiny in this area of the Council's work, there has been undeniable progress in how the Council has incorporated EDI into its people management strategies in recent years. We hope to support the themes set out in the Being Your Best Organisational Plan and support career advancement and progression for colleagues that will contribute to delivery of the aims set out in the Best City Ambition.

Challenges for 2024/25

Whilst the network has increased capacity there will still be challenges in terms of available time to develop and deliver the network's agenda which could be a limiting factor in delivery of all the network's ambitions.

Introduction of the Staff Network

The Healthy Minds Staff Network is a peer-to-peer support network for people either with mental ill health or people wanting to know more about how to support someone with mental ill health.

We present different sessions twice a month on teams giving information out on different issues that can affect your mental health for example: sleep and mental health, financial strain, and your mental health.

We also have a Facebook group with 359 members.

Chair: Helen Saunders

Date:22/01/2024

Success Stories – where the Staff Network is doing well and making good progress.

We recently started a Men's mental health talking group called Simons Space at Leeds building services. Which has been very popular with the men at this service. There is also a Womens mental health talking group that has also been successful at Leeds building services.

We also held a mental health first aiders conference on the 20th of December 2023 in the civic hall we had brilliant speakers including:

- Vanessa Wenham (our freedom to speak up guardian)
- Darren Crowe (financial challenges and mental health)
- Emma Jaye (Deputy Head of Hr)
- Ian Cawthorne (Occupational health manager)
- Paul Wilkes (Andy Mans Club)
- Javed Bobat (Mental health trainer independent)
- Tom Riordan (chief executive)
- Lindsey Harvey (healthy minds looking after you)
- Lauren Turnbull (public health)

This was a brilliant conference and people took away a lot of information.

We also work with different agencies(external) and different people across the council to be able to deliver the sessions that we do monthly.

We also have a How You Are feeling session that runs every Wednesday 11am till 12pm these are fantastic sessions where we have a brilliant group of people talking about different topics each week e.g., how you are feeling around stress, how you are feeling about work. These sessions bring people together and get them talking to people that they wouldn't usually talk to. People have said these sessions are a lifeline for them and I have regular people coming to this as well as new people.

Ongoing challenges and priorities for 24/25

Ongoing challenges for me would be reducing stigma and discrimination in relation to mental health. The priority is to try and stamp this out through training and information. It's also about leaders creating a culture where people feel comfortable talking openly about things, we are so fortunate that Tom sets that culture right from the top.

Although getting to the frontline colleagues is a challenge, we can do it, but we do need the support of the services to help achieve our goals. We have different Facebook page. However, we understand that not all our frontline colleagues access these pages for one reason or another so we simply cannot rely on this form of communication. We still must acknowledge there is a digital divide when it comes to accessing and receiving information.

There are working groups within the frontline services who can and do share information but in order to raise the profile and for colleagues to truly understand not only the issues but to have a knowledge of the support available – requires more work.

Only when the issues are given the time and the platform to be discussed and knowledge shared can we make a positive change.

We know this is a lot easier said than done due to the hours worked, shifts and even the very nature of their role means colleagues who are off-line are difficult to bring together to discuss these issues – but if we never do, we never will.

This year our focus will be looking at addiction and what we can do to support. I have Forward Leeds coming in to do a healthy minds session on addiction and what services they offer. I will also link up with the mental health action group who have active Leeds, public health, adults who are all involved. Also, to link up with public health and see what healthy minds and public health can work together on.



Introduction of the Carers Staff Network

The carers staff Network was initially established as a virtual network in 2016/17 to be the voice of carers. The staff network supports council colleagues who alongside being employed have caring responsibilities for family members or relatives who are dependent on them for day-to-day needs they cannot do for themselves. Dependants can include those with physical or mental health needs, long term medical conditions and other reasons such as substance misuse. The network is led by Mej Chaudhry and has evolved to deliver support through a range of mechanisms. As part of the network there also is an established subgroup called Carers Super Families aimed specifically at colleagues with children, of any age, with additional needs and long-term medical conditions. Although clear similarities with the needs of wider carers this group supports specifically the unique circumstances and journey of carers/families who receive either short or lifelong diagnosis for their children.

Lead: Mej Chaudhry, Date: January 2024

Success Stories – where the Staff Network is doing well and making good progress.

Over the past year the network has worked hard to increase awareness of carers in the organisation, to understand their experiences whilst creating a wider appreciated of the challenges they face, and to provide the support they require. Increased engagement has been evident from carers and from managers wanting to better equip themselves to support their staff. Support and raising awareness have been achieved through various mechanisms throughout the year.

- Delivered Care, share and chat sessions on a range of carer related topics such as dealing with bereavement, carers and managing finances, supporting carers of Dementia sufferers and Power of attorney/Trusts for carers etc.
- Hosted key date events celebrating and raising awareness e.g., Carers Right Days, Carers Week and National Inclusion week.
- Provided individual support through Carers Facebook page, chat sessions and 121 calls.
- Support the formation of other smaller localised carer support groups,
- Lived experience shared by network members to raise awareness and understanding across the council of being a carer in the workplace, work life/balance, challenges faced, and support received including contributing to EDI videos.
- Attendance at council wide and directorate meetings/events including staff network collaboration, e.g., Healthy Minds session.
- Worked in partnership with the Carers Employers Forum/ Carers Leeds. Collaborating to support other Leeds employers to improve the experience of carers in the workplace.
- Prepared draft documentation and related evidence for the Carers Confident Accreditation which is anticipated for submission next financial year.

- Held focus groups/workshops in partnership with DAWN and Healthy Minds, supported by supported by LCC's Intelligent and Policy team to inform a joint survey to be circulated in Spring. Focus on carers, mental health and disabled colleagues.
- Carers Super Families has gone from strength to strength including regular guest speaker slots from the NHS, internal Children & Families Directorate colleagues and wider charities/support groups.
- Have undertaken a localised survey to inform next steps for the group in 2024.
- Involved with wider statutory parent carer forum now established in Leeds including corporate review of support to SEND families/EHCPs.
- Working in partnership with LCC/HR through consultation on employment policies/processes such as Grievance, recruitment, service reviews, LCC EDI plan, as well as external facing consultations by the council and other bodies such as the city square scheme, transport and carers leave.

Ongoing challenges and priorities for 24/25

As a network our key challenge is not having sufficient members to help deliver the work of the carers staff network which primarily falls on a few. This however is understandable due to the pressures of the work environment and work/ life balance for carers. Priorities and areas of focus for the network going forward are: -

- To expand the size of the core delivery group of the Carers Staff Network
- Establish carer ambassadors, wider support.
- Encourage localised subgroups; for example, Leeds Building Service's early talks about starting a neurodiversity carer group.
- Continue collaborating with HR/EDI team to help deliver carer related elements on the draft action plan following the 2023 the staff survey results, e.g., career progression, support and awareness.
- Continue collaborating with DAWN, Healthy Minds, and Carer Super families on the implementation of a specific survey for carers and disabled colleagues in 2024, as well as any follow-up initiatives that may be necessary.
- Improve the carers staff network's engagement with non-ICT users.
- Support/consult HR with changes to policies and employment provisions pertaining to flexible working hours and new carers leave will take effect in April 2024.
- Raise awareness of upcoming legal changes regarding carers leave and flexible working hours.
- Take forward Super Family survey feedback including promotion to non-ICT users and influencing any corporate direction with support to parent carers.
- **Continue to raise awareness and visibility of carers, continue to be their voice.**



Introduction of the Staff Network

The Disability and Wellbeing network has approximately 180 members and is led by Terry Pycroft who is the Network Chair. Maisie Roberts is the Vice-Chair of the network. Linked to DAWN, is the Healthy Minds Network.

Chair: Terry Pycroft

Date: 29.01.2024

Success Stories – where we the Staff Network is doing well and making good progress.

This year has been one of our most successful years. We have a lively membership of colleagues who regularly attend our weekly 'cuppa and chat' meetings every Friday that provide a support network for our members as well as 6 weekly DAWN meetings where we consult on key disability and wellbeing issues across the city. On top of this, we have:

- Launched our DAWN Awareness Ambassador Network. DAWN awareness ambassadors bring their lived experiences to raise awareness and understanding across the council – they act as subject matter experts on their disability and support others navigating their own disability.
- Set up our DAWN Teams Channel, which connects all our network members and provides a platform for them to network, seek advice and share their experiences.
- Ran a series of awareness sessions throughout the year, run by network members, sharing their lived experiences on their disability. This included awareness sessions on autism, ADHD, functional neurological disorder, diabetes, osteoporosis, chronic fatigue, and much more.
- Celebrated and put on special events on disability awareness during National Inclusion and International Day for Disabled People (December 3rd), Disability History Month (November/December) and Disability Pride Month July).
- Led a campaign on Invisible Disabilities within the Council, to raise awareness of different invisible disabilities, dispel any myths and stereotypes around invisible disabilities and to highlight the importance of not assuming someone's identity just by looking at them.
- We are working towards publishing lived experience guides to support managers in the organisation to raise their awareness and understanding of specific disabilities. At the beginning of February, we are launching the ME/Chronic Fatigue Guide for Managers and at the beginning of April we will be launching the Neurodiversity Guide for Managers during Autism Acceptance Week. These guides provide an overview of these conditions, suggest reasonable adjustments, and provide lived experience accounts from Council colleagues.
- We held a survey workshop event with the Healthy Minds, Super Families and Carers Network in June 2023. We consulted network members on important themes that were affecting them at work with the Council's intelligence and policy team. The workshop has led us to develop a "deep dive" survey that will be launched in Spring 2024 and will record disabled colleagues as well as carers views around those specific themes.

- We established key links with external organisations such as Microsoft and Network Rail. Microsoft have been supporting us with accessibility issues and we consulted on Network Rail's recent plans for Morley Train station.
- We consulted on accessibility and inclusion issues for internal council projects, including the Town Hall, Christmas Market, Light Night, the City Square scheme, Leeds City Bikes, the A660 scheme.
- Members contributed and consulted towards to the Council's mandatory EDI training package for managers, with members sharing their lived experiences via EDI training videos that were shown in the training.

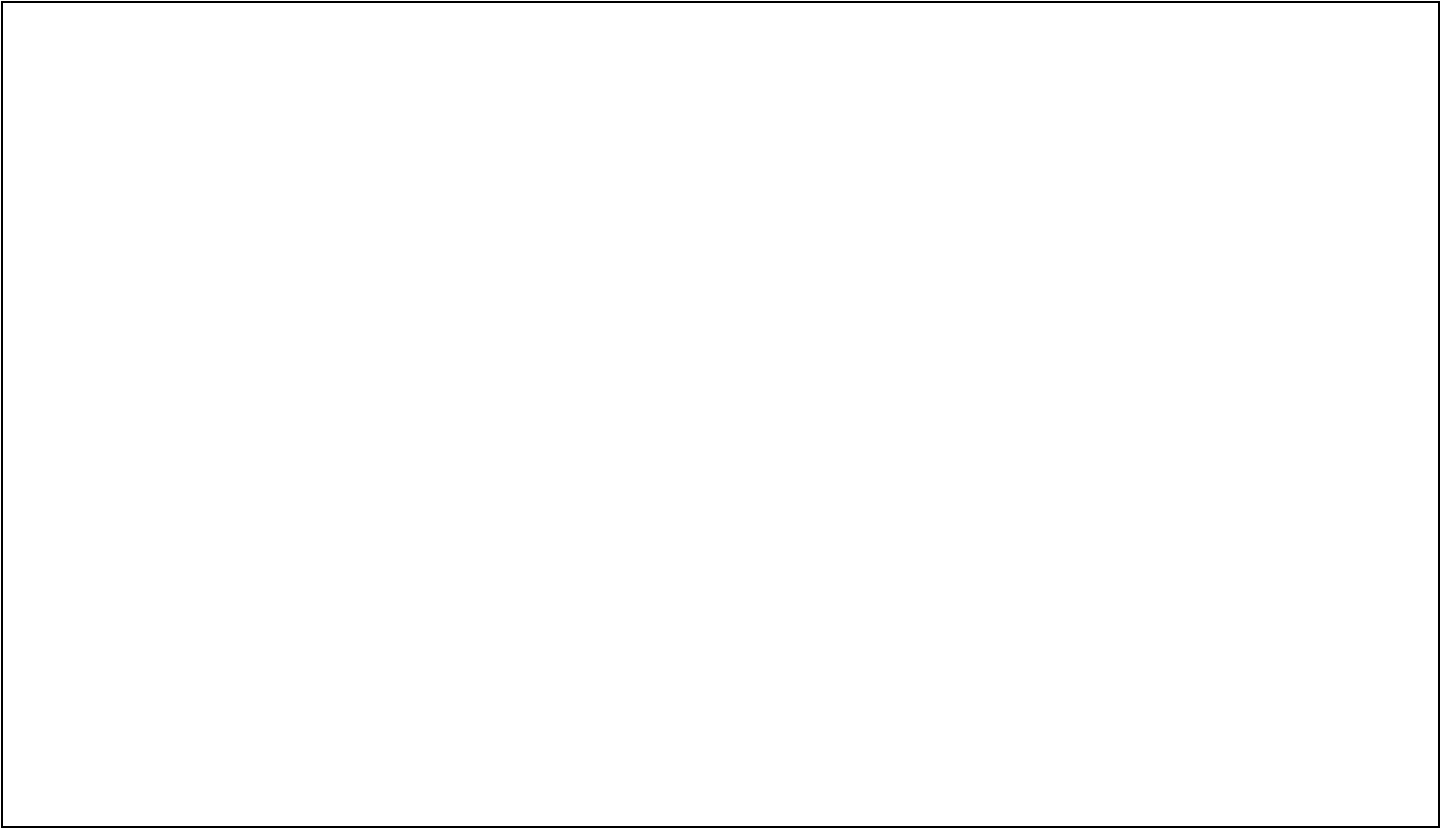
Ongoing challenges and priorities for 24/25

As a network, we have faced several issues that have affected our members.

- A key issue that has emerged strongly has been the **poor understanding of reasonable adjustments in the organisation**. DAWN members have told us about cases where managers: did not know how to support them; denied their request for reasonable adjustments to be considered; did not put their agreed reasonable adjustments in place; did not follow guidance from Occupational Health; decided their adjustments for them without consulting them; and removed their reasonable adjustments without consultation.
- The Network believes language matters. We would advocate replacing the term reasonable adjustments with workplace adjustments. This will discourage managers from questioning what is reasonable or defining what is reasonable based on service needs rather than the needs of the disabled person. There should be a presumption that managers say "yes" to reasonable requests for support. Managers have attended mandatory EDI training this year, but as a Network we believe we need to go further and provide more in-depth training and policy on workplace adjustments, which sets out our legal duty of care under the Equality Act 2010 both as managers and as an employer. This will ensure disabled colleagues are properly supported.
- Fairness is not about treating everyone the same: it is about treating people according to their needs. According to our members, some of our managers do not yet seem to have this awareness. To put this into practice, the Council should adopt a more flexible approach in line with the Flexible Working Policy and Supporting Staff at Work Charter. Both documents encourage managers to treat colleagues according to their needs. More detailed guidance around how to facilitate conversations around disability would be welcomed so that managers are able to put workplace adjustments in place: the guidance should emphasise that the disabled person is the expert on their own disability and that listening to the disabled person is key to supporting them in a meaningful way. The Network believes the Council should adopt an overarching disability policy, which would define what is required to ensure disabled colleagues have the appropriate support and inform managers what is required as part of their duty of care. We also feel that the existing reasonable adjustment passport needs to be re-promoted and cascaded across all parts of the organisation. Currently reasonable adjustment passports are not saved centrally, which has meant that disabled colleagues' passports have not always been honoured. Reasonable adjustments should be reviewed regularly – at least once every 12 months – taking into account colleagues' changing needs.
- A key issue that the Network has also faced is the **growing number of disabled colleagues in the performance management and sickness system**. Disabled people within our workforce have long faced stigma, discrimination, and disadvantage. Greater flexibility is required around phased returns and the attendance and performance process to ensure that disabled colleagues are not unfairly disadvantaged through these processes. We have noticed as a Network that the number of members going through this process has grown over the last year. Adopting an overarching disability policy would ensure that a fair, consistent, and transparent approach is delivered by our managers and HR. Too often disabled colleagues feel they are on their own in an isolated position where they are labelled as failing either because of their attendance or performance has been judged unfairly. In this

situation, disabled people internalise their experiences and blame themselves for their circumstances rather than the organisation, which in many cases has failed in the support given to them.

- Linked to this, **a consistent approach to reasonable adjustments in the recruitment and selection process is still needed.** Network members have reported that they have not been provided with adjustments despite declaring their disability and asking for adjustments. To remove as many barriers as possible for disabled colleagues, there are a whole range of adjustments that could be revolutionary in terms of making our recruitment process more accessible and equitable, and increasing the level of representation of disabled people in the Council. Reforming these processes would also recognise the value that all disabled people can bring to more senior roles. For example, a clear and blanket policy of providing interview questions to everyone who applies for a job at the Council, would dispel manager confusion over the current guidance. Members report that recruiting managers are still cautious, confused, or even opposed to providing these sorts of simple adjustments. Having a dedicated person in HR with a good understanding and knowledge base on disability to oversee reasonable adjustment requests in the recruitment process would also dispel some of the confusion around this.
- We also **need to encourage more disabled people to join the Council.** We are not representative of the city in terms of the number of disabled people we employ. Currently 6% of our workforce is disabled, compared to 18% in Leeds. A simple scheme to encourage this is the Supported Internship programme, which the Employment and Skills service is currently leading. We should also look to implement job trials. The rules around positive action allow us to target disabled people in the recruitment process, which is not permitted for any other protected group.
- **Career progression is a key issue affecting network members.** We have noticed that many members, who have the ambition to progress, are stuck in entry-level roles and the representation of disabled people at more senior levels within the organisation remains poor. More targeted positive action development initiatives, targeted at disabled people, combined with a talent pool that recognises people's strengths would help with both internal recruitment and flexible redeployment. By recognising everyone's individual talents and skills, we could utilise our workforce more flexibly and dynamically to meet the changing demands of our Council.





Introduction of the Staff Network

The LGBT+ Staff Network was the 4th Staff Network formed in Leeds City Council, with the first iteration set up back in 2008. The current model of the network was reformed in 2015 by Rob Wilson after a period of time where the network had not met.

The Staff Network is open to anyone who identifies as being LGBT+ or is an ally of the community. We exist to create an area where the community and allies can be together in safe spaces and work to improve the lived experience of LGBT+ staff within the Council. The chair is supported by a Steering Group made up of staff members from areas across the Council.

The Staff Network also works closely with the LGBT+ Hub, the Council's outward facing engagement body, and the Equality Teams (in Human Resources and Communities, Housing and Environment) to ensure there is consistency in LGBT+ inclusion in the city and in the Council.

Chair: Kat Denvir (she/her)

Date: 17.01.24

Success Stories – where the Staff Network is doing well and making good progress.

- Membership to the LGBT Staff Network has increased nearly 12% since February 2023.
- The network facilitates a 'talking space' (playfully named 'The Tea') in Teams. This meets weekly and is open to all staff to check in with each other, discuss contemporary issues, to share stories and recommendations and for seeking support and advice.
- Members of the network led on delivering a well-attended LGBT+ Inclusion training session for National Inclusion Week and delivered a Trans Voices session created by trans and non-binary staff at the request of a directorate.
- Worked collaboratively with Children's Services on their updated Gender Identity policy following system changes to Mosaic and delivered training sessions to over 150 workers within the service.
- Lead on updating our Teams infrastructure with new functionality that allows for staff to record their pronouns if they chose to.
- Co-led on Leeds City Council's Pride activities including running the Community Marketplace and having over 100 staff present in the Leeds Pride Parade.
- There has been continued posting of blog writings highlighting national Visibility Days. Staff members are encouraged to submit and collaborate on content that is available on Insite, SharePoint, and through our newsletter. Last year we wrote 12 blogs highlighting 20 LGBT+ figures from a variety of backgrounds and over 20 pieces of LGBT+ media for people to check out over the year.
- We worked in collaboration with our colleagues in Human Resources and the Equality Team to produce the 2024 Stonewall Workplace Equality Index to benchmark how we're doing as an organisation and employer in embedding LGBT+ inclusion.

Ongoing challenges and priorities for 24/25

One of the most significant challenges faced by the LGBT+ Staff Network, which also directly impacts service delivery in the Council, is the ongoing climate of hostility and politicisation of our identities. This is not purely a perceived view by members of the network but mirrored in data about the increase on hate crime figures perpetrated against the LGBT+ community (particularly trans people), the lack of a ban on conversion therapy and national policy proposals that directly impact LGBT+ people, particularly young people.

The second significant challenge directly relates to the first. Because of the political sensitivity of our identities, there has been what is felt to be an organisational hesitation to engage with the network or with LGBT+ issues because of fears of getting it wrong or fears of challenge. We acknowledge that the organisation continues to be under significant pressure in terms of capacity, staffing and budget but we have seen active and proactive engagement on other equality related agendas and want to see more equitable engagement by the whole organisation on all protected characteristics.

The third challenge relates to the lack of shared ownership in terms of LGBT+ inclusion in the organisation. The Staff Network or the Equality Team currently “hold the ring” on the majority of LGBT+ events in the organisation, and the expectation is for them to continue to own this, particularly from an internal corporate perspective. We do acknowledge that there are areas of this Council who are proactively engaged and doing excellent work – but it is not consistent across all directorates. It would be our challenge back to the organisation to become more proactive in engaging with corporate events, which the network would be happy to be engaged with, advertised, and be involved where capacity allows.

Our priorities for 24/25 are:

- Work in collaboration with the Staff Network Partnership (the body for all the Staff Network Leads) to progress our objectives on Allyship and Ambassadors.
- Expand our “Talking Spaces” initiative, which are staff-run spaces. By the end of 2024, we want to have a Lesbian, a Gay, a Bi, a Trans and Non-binary and a Neurodivergent talking space set up and running regularly.
- Run an organisational survey during Q1 2024 that identifies improvements the Network could make to our running but also areas that LGBT+ people or allies identify as a priority for progress.
- Continue to produce content for the variety of Visibility Days for our community including LGBT+ History Month, Leeds Pride, Trans Day of Visibility, Lesbian Day of Visibility, Bi Visibility Day and more.
- Create a formal action plan with workstreams that the network can progress and workstreams that the wider organisation needs to own, aligning to the Race Action Plan and the Disability Action Plan.
- Work as a more formal “critical friend” to the organisation to ensure that LGBT+ inclusion is being considered as part of their internal running as well as in the service delivery.



Introduction of the Staff Network

Women's Voice provides a safe space for discussion and support on issues that affect women in the workplace. We provide a collective voice for women and take the lead in addressing issues that affect women in the workplace. Women's Voice has at its heart a belief that much of the help, support, and advice we all need from time to time is already out there among colleagues you just haven't met yet. We provide a mechanism to help women widen their networks and have ready access to more colleagues regardless of grade, where you work or what your job is.

Chair: Lydia Anchen

Date: 22/01/2024

Success Stories

- A **new chair** has been appointed after nearly two years without one and the **steering group** has been reconvened with a refreshed membership.
- **Network Ambassadors** are in place in different directorates, and we have a **Facebook group with over 1000 staff** which acts as mechanism for sharing information with women and a place for getting help and advice from other women.
- The work of the network is championed by our **CLT Lead** Julie Longworth, Director Children and Families and the **Lead Member for Women** Cllr Heselwood.
- We are making progress in work with **male allies** within the organisation.

Priorities for 24/25

The network held a successful International Women's Day and had several consultations with women about what they wanted from the network and how they could be involved. From this we have identified the following priorities:

1. **Women's Life Course:** Clearer strategies and policies around Women's life course, health, and wellbeing (not just menopause) are needed, and a better understanding on how these impact in the workplace.
2. **Career Development and Progression:** This includes access to coaching, mentoring, and training and development opportunities, and the impact for part time staff and those with caring responsibilities.
3. **Eradicating Sexism and misogyny:** Addressing sexism and misogyny in the working place and supporting women experiencing this. We would also like the Council to support a partnership approach looking at a campaign to make misogyny a hate crime.
4. **Benchmarking Leeds City Council:** We want the Council to benchmark themselves against other employers in relation to gender equality e.g., the Times top 50 employers.

As a network we acknowledge all the work that the organisation is doing on the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) agenda and what to ensure that this is benefiting all women in the workplace. We welcome the steps that the organisation is taking to enter the Times Top 50 Employers for Gender Equality. This assessment will help the organisation to highlight areas of good practice and areas that can be strengthened. It will identify specific actions that will add value to the organisational approach to EDI in relation to gender equality and provide the women's voice network with baseline indicators to inform our priorities.

Our ask of the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board is that you would review and assess the findings of the Times Top 50 Employers assessment when it is completed and monitor and review actions that will be taken by the organisation in response to the assessment.

Introduction of the Staff Network

The Race Equality Staff Network, formerly the BAME (Black Asian Minority Ethnic) Staff Network, is a network which aims to provide support to ethnically diverse colleagues and to improve the experiences of ethnically diverse colleagues in the workplace.

Chair: Hayley Lloyd-Henry & Carole Gentles

Date: 24 January 2024

Success Stories – where the Staff Network is doing well and making good progress.

(1) Network name change, move away from term BAME and using term ‘ethnically diverse’ to describe our members.

From November 2022–July 2023, the network consulted with its members in relation to the universally disliked term BAME, the use of which was also raised by ethnically diverse Councillors at Scrutiny in January 2021. The term was criticized as not offering any diversity or recognising the differences of staff or communities that are not white, by referencing all non-white persons as a homogenous group.

We led discussions at network meetings, consulted via email and used online voting systems, so we could get as wide a reach as possible for members to express their preferences, as to which terminology they felt reflected persons instead of BAME. We also worked with the organisation to embed the term ‘ethnically diverse’ as our preference in reports etc.

(2) The ongoing conversations around recruitment and progression– Task and Finish Group

Fair recruitment and staff progression has always been of great importance to our members. Ethnically diverse staff are not currently represented at every level within the organisation. We are under-represented at 19% of the total workforce (local ED population in Leeds is 27%) and there is a glass ceiling around PO2 level. This matter of staff progression was also highlighted in the Workforce Race Equality Standard Report completed in 2023.

We believe that changing the culture of who we recruit, and how we recruit, will lead to a more equitable workplace. The Recruitment T&F group, led by John Ebo, is an area where inspirational conversations take place around this agenda.

A cross sector of colleagues and staff network leads are discussing matters such as diverse panels, unconscious bias and positive action, and how this can be used to transform the workplace. We are also looking at quick wins so that these changes occur sooner rather than later.

(3) Engaging with allies

In 2023 the network established an allies programme, which involved the development of a separate mailing list for allies, a half-day in person event at the Banqueting Suite in May and subsequent online events via teams.

The programme has demonstrated to the wider council and senior leadership the real strength and competency of us as a network and as a steering group of black females. The level of uptake has been high – there were over 120 attendees at the in-person event, and we have over 250 colleagues signed up to our allies mailing list. This demonstrates that there is a real desire to learn about anti-racist practice from many colleagues within the organisation.

(4) Delivering awareness sessions on a variety of culturally significant days and heritage months

The network has delivered over 36 events across 2022 and 2023, which included topics such as:

- Celebrating Leeds Black Lives with DJ Fluid for Black History Month;
- Adoption Experiences within the South Asian Community for South Asian Heritage Month;
- Addressing Anti-Muslim Prejudice for Islamophobia Awareness Month;
- Hearing the lived experience of a Gypsy colleague during Gypsy Roma Traveller Heritage Month;
- 'Lunch and Learn' session about the Jewish Festival of Purim;

The sessions help to build awareness of the broad range of cultures and communities within Leeds, both as a workforce and as a city. It also creates a space for colleagues to have conversations around challenging issues and to learn from differing perspectives.

(5) Establishing regular wellbeing 'coffee break' online sessions which take place every other Wednesday afternoon

We wanted to ensure that members have a space to communicate in an informal setting, to encourage peer-to-peer support and networking, and to be able to share any frustrations or concerns they may have in a safe space. We have a group of core members who offer to guide the conversation gently, and as co-chairs we identify any issues raised by members which may require signposting for additional support.

Ongoing challenges and priorities for 24/25:

The network's priorities are to continue to develop the initiatives set out at (2), (3) and (4) above and to work with the organisation to deliver on the work set out in the Race Equality Action Plan. Challenges for the network and for the organisation are listed below:

- (1) **A key challenge for the network is resources.** The network has recently lost its sole steering group member and so the responsibility for progressing the work of the network falls on the co-chairs alone. This is a big ask as we are volunteers with demanding day jobs. We also have concerns about succession, and who will continue the conversation when we resign.
- (2) **A key challenge for the organisation is the lack of success measures and indicators.** We are aware that the organisation has a data tool which sets out the representation within the organisation against protected characteristics, but more needs to be done in terms of other quantifiable metrics which we can use to benchmark progress. Without this, it will be difficult to assess year on year, if we are making progress towards achieving race equality.
- (3) **The network co-signed a Race Equality Action Plan with CLT in 2021.** This has largely been superseded by other developments regarding EDI, such as the Council's 5 EDI Priorities and the review into the Workforce Race Equality Standard. However, the network would like to ensure that the Action Plan remains a focus for the organisation and that the commitments made under the plan are delivered.
- (4) **A key challenge for the organisation is around representation.** Whilst the LCC workforce is around 17% ethnically diverse, it does not reflect the local population of Leeds which according to the 2021 census data is around 27%. The disparity is even greater at PO5 and above, which stands at 13% ethnically diverse. We do not feel this is an accurate reflection of the talent and ambition that exists amongst ethnically diverse staff. We are working closely with HR, on a T&F group which will look at how the organisation both recruits with inclusion and equality in mind, examining the entire process, including how we assure applicants, of our commitment to equality and inclusion. This will include better training for recruiters, making the process more diverse whilst increasing accountability along the way. We also want to see that development and progression is available to all staff within the workforce who desire to do so.
- (5) **Another key challenge for the organisation is around workplace culture.** Whilst we recognise the successful completion of training for all measures on EDI, we are still hearing reports of pockets of resistance to the agenda and instances of poor behaviours, which are not being resolved as quickly as we would like, and we reference the GPR completed in 2022. We call on the organisation to continue

to root this out poor behaviours and promote early conflict resolution and a 'speak up' culture, without detriment to those who voice concerns.

- (6) **Another challenge is engaging with digitally disconnected staff.** The Race Equality Action Plan 2021-23 identified this as an issue, and we have yet to see any substantial progress by the organisation on bridging this gap. Many of our members fall within this demographic.

