



Equalities Committee
7 April 2016

Report from Mildred Phillips
HR Director

Report Title: Brent Council's policies, programmes and initiatives supporting employees and applicants with disabilities

1.0 Summary

Brent Council is committed to having a diverse workforce that is representative of the equalities profile of its communities, and has legal duties to advance equality of opportunity for disabled people and to make reasonable adjustments to its workplace practices and environment.

In December 2015 Brent was awarded with the Department for Work and Pensions Disability Confident Employer status, which demonstrates the Council's commitment to ensuring that its facilities, services, working environment and employment practices are accessible and inclusive to people with disabilities.

Brent is a disability positive employer and a member of the Positive about disabled people scheme awarded by the Job Centre Plus with the Two Ticks symbol. In March 2016 the council successfully retained its Two Ticks accreditation showing its commitment to disability inclusion and good employment and recruitment practices.

However, the council recognises that there is still a lot to be done and works hard to promote disability inclusion and minimise barriers facing disabled employees and applicants, in partnership with organisations such as Remploy, the Business Disability Forum (BDF) and enei.

2.0 Recommendations

The Equalities Committee is asked to note the policies, programmes and new initiatives supporting employees and applicants with disabilities.

3.0 Detail

In line with best practice the council has implemented a comprehensive support package of policies, initiatives and programmes that are either directly or indirectly benefitting disabled employees. Some of these are listed below (non-exhaustive list):

3.1 Attendance, stress management and supervision policies

The Attendance policy requires managers to complete return to work interviews for their employees, and clearly outlines the specific provisions around absences due to an employee's disability or long term health conditions to ensure that employees are treated fairly.

A revised Stress policy supported by relevant training was introduced in January 2015. The new policy clearly sets out the health risks to Brent staff in relation to stress, including workplace stress, and the roles and responsibilities of managers and staff in preventing and managing stress and its effects.

Additionally, the Supervision guidelines require managers to hold regular one-to-one meetings with their staff and proactively encourage discussions about their staff health and wellbeing.

3.2 Reasonable / workplace adjustments

The council's Guidance refreshed in June 2015 and training on workplace adjustments enable managers to effectively carry out their role in creating an open and supportive environment for staff with disabilities and those with long or short term health conditions.

The guidance provides managers with information on how to deal with reasonable adjustments requests and gives practical examples of types of reasonable adjustments. The guidance also contains an Access to Work factsheet and a Workplace Adjustments form, along with relevant contact details (e.g. Occupational Health, EAP service).

Brent is a member of the Business Disability Forum (BDF) and staff can register with their Brent email addresses to access useful BDF resources. Line managers can also contact the BDF free and confidential Advice Service to answer any queries about disability and workplace adjustments on 020 7403 3020 or advice@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk

3.3 Flexible Working policy

The Flexible Working provision is highly praised by Brent staff and can also be applied as a reasonable adjustment for employees who require changes to their working patterns due to disability, long or short terms health conditions.

According to the Flexible Working survey, undertaken in February 2015 and completed by 724 employees from across all council departments, 82 per cent of respondents benefit from one or more of the available flexible working arrangements and the majority feel that the council gets the best out of them. The proportion of respondents with disabilities / long-term health conditions (9.3 per cent) was representative of the disability profile of the workforce (10 per cent).

3.4 Employee Assistance Programme

The confidential Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is available to all staff and their families. The EAP provides a free 24/7 helpline for employees and their families to access advice on legal matters, counselling and practical support on emotional wellbeing. The service also offers health and wellbeing webinars and useful guidelines for employees to access online.

3.5 Occupational Health service

The in-house Occupational Health (OH) service is available to staff who have been referred to OH by their managers or by Human Resources. The OH Adviser provides support to staff with a wide range of health conditions and/or disabilities, including Mental Health and Eating Disorders.

3.6 Council's Health and Wellbeing programme

In August 2014 Brent Council signed up to the London Healthy Workplace Charter, an assessment framework that provides standards to promote employee health and wellbeing. By October 2014, the council was awarded the Achievement level of the Charter and is now working towards the highest Excellent level.

There are a number of ways in which staff, including disabled employees, benefit from Brent's health and wellbeing programme, including:

- Inclusive health and fitness opportunities to encourage healthy lifestyles for staff
- Regular health and wellbeing days and an annual health and wellbeing fair which includes stalls from organisations such as Brent Mind, Diabetes UK, Community Action on Dementia, Stroke Organisation, Occupational Health
- Awareness raising campaigns on themes such as Mental Health, Eating Disorders, Dementia, etc

In its journey to Excellence, the Council will continue to provide disability inclusive practices and positive health and wellbeing initiatives.

3.7 Staff disability network

The network was established in November last year and is sponsored by Phil Porter, Strategic Director of Community and Wellbeing. Its role is to raise awareness of different types of disabilities / health conditions and to help remove barriers affecting disabled staff. Some of the priority areas identified by the staff disability network include: promoting the importance of staff disability self-disclosure, workplace adjustments, flexible working, Mental Health in the workplace.

However, the council recognises that there is still a lot to be done and works in partnership with organisations such as Remploy, the Business Disability Forum (BDF) and enei to further improve its recruitment and selection practices and increase employment opportunities for disabled people.

3.8 Selection and recruitment policy and process

Brent is a disability positive employer and a member of the Positive about disabled people scheme awarded by the Job Centre Plus with the Two Ticks symbol. All council vacancies and recruitment correspondence contain the Two Ticks symbol and a positive about disability statement to encouraging disabled people to apply for available vacancies.

The new recruitment system, Taleo, now monitors and reports on applicants' protected characteristics at long list, short list and interview stage. Disabled employees who cannot apply for a job via the system can apply for a job offline, and if they meet the minimum criteria for the post, they are invited for an interview.

As part of the recruitment process:

- HR advice note and pro-forma is emailed to recruitment panel prior to every shortlisting
- In addition to the Disability Confident e-module, hiring managers and members of the interview panels are also required to complete the e-module on Recruitment and Selection incorporating Unconscious Bias
- Hiring managers are required to set up a diverse recruitment panel to ensure the selection process is fair and unbiased
- Members of staff equality networks will be encouraged to complete the above and other relevant e-modules, and will be provided with the opportunity to take part in recruitment panels.

From April 2016 findings from exit interviews and equal pay audits will be reported to CMT on an annual basis to help inform workforce planning and retention strategies.

3.9 Work-based experience policy

The council provides a variety of paid and unpaid opportunities that offer valuable and relevant work placement opportunities, including work experience opportunities, internships, volunteering, apprenticeships and graduate placements, for the community.

The work-based experience policy is open to everyone but the council is particularly targeting people with disabilities such as learning disabilities and Mental Health needs.

3.10 Partnership working with Remploy to provide employment opportunities for local people with disabilities

At their last meeting members of the Diversity Reference Group approved the proposal for the Council to work with Remploy to identify and provide suitable employment opportunities for local people with disabilities.

Remploy will manage the identified opportunities on behalf of Brent Council, from start to finish, identifying any reasonable adjustments for the individual, pre and during employment or placement.

Process outline:

- Role specification hourly rate hours, shift patterns and location to be sent to Remploy Business Development Manager
- All vacancies received from Brent Council to be loaded onto Remploy's vacancy management system
- Vacancies to be cascaded to selected centres, with particular focus on Brent residents
- Remploy to shortlist and invite successful candidates to a pre-screen held at a Remploy office
- The list of Remploy selected candidates who have passed the pre-screen to be forwarded to the Brent hiring manager
- Remploy to liaise with the hiring manager to arrange interview slots and reasonable adjustments
- Hiring manager to ensure that the interview panel is diverse and that interviewers have completed the mandatory training (disability confident, unconscious bias) prior to the interviews
- Remploy to support the successful candidate and their employment advisor in completing any further documentation prior to start date
- Remploy to provide the employee with in-work support, where needed
- The HR and Equality teams to support the hiring manager with training, advice and guidance. Guidance and support is also available from Remploy.

Brent is in the process of agreeing the final recruitment and monitoring arrangements. Remploy will also support the Council in retaining disabled employees into employment.

Contact Officers:

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