

North Lanarkshire Council Report

Youth, Equalities and Empowerment Committee

approval noting

Ref LMcM/AC/EW

Date 26/08/19

Programme of Work (PO58) Disability Confident Leader – Employer Accreditation Programme

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Executive Summary

This report provides members with information on the progress made by the Council as a Disability Confident Leader. The Council will apply for reaccreditation in March 2020.

The purpose of the Disability Confident employer accreditation programme is to assist employers to recruit, develop and retain disabled people and those with long term health conditions. The Disability Confident Programme operates on three levels:-

Level 1 Disability Confident – Committed;

Level 2 – Disability Confident – Employer; and

Level 3 – Disability Confident Leader.

In March 2017, the Council was successful in achieving Disability Confident ‘Leader’ status, one of only two Scottish Local Authorities to do so.

Recommendations

The Youth, Equalities and Empowerment Committee is asked to note the content of the report.

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority All priorities

Ambition statement (23) Build a workforce for the future capable of delivering on our priorities and shared ambition

1. Background

1.1 Achieving Disability Confident Leader Accreditation

In November 2016, the Council began its journey as a Disability Confident Employer after several years of accreditation through the Positive about Disabled People scheme – also known as Double Tick.

The purpose of the Disability Confident employer accreditation programme is to assist employers to recruit, develop and retain disabled people and those with long term health conditions. The Disability Confident Programme operates on three levels:

Level 1 Disability Confident – Committed;

Level 2 – Disability Confident – Employer; and

Level 3 – Disability Confident Leader.

In March 2017, the Council was successful in achieving Disability Confident 'Leader' status, one of only two Scottish Local Authorities to do so. Being recognised as a 'Leader' involves fulfilling two set criteria - Challenged and Leadership, defined as follows:-

Challenged

We have delivered against all of the core actions of level 2 – getting the right people for our business and keeping and developing our people - and have had these independently validated.

Leadership

We are engaging with other local employers and employers in our supply chain to start the Disability Confident journey, provide mentoring and peer support for other employers, speak about Disability Confident at business events and provide work placements and trials to people seeking employment.

In March 2020 in order to be reaccredited as a Disability Confident Leader, the Council will require to submit a self-evaluation, and be assessed by an external organisation. This report details the work to date in relation to the Council's commitments; and ongoing work to ensure that the Council's status as a Disability Confident Leader is maintained.

2. Report

2.1 Disability Confident Leader Review

In November 2018, a working group was set up with a remit to review progress against the Council's commitments as a Disability Confident leader and to plan and take action where required.

Based on the Level 2 themes of; Getting the Right People for our Business and Keeping and Developing Our People, the working group identified some excellent progress. The following section of the report summarises aspects of progress.

2.2 **Getting the Right People for Our Business**

North Lanarkshire Council is:-

2.2.1 **Actively looking to attract and recruit disabled people by:-**

- displaying the Disability Confident logo on **all** job adverts, stating commitment to interview all disabled applicants who meet the essential criteria on every job advert;
- working closely with organisations such as Work Choice and Shaw Trust to provide opportunities for disabled people categorised as “furthest from work”;
- participating in job fairs to inform local employers and jobseekers of the practical support offered disabled people to gain and retain employment;
- working closely with Job Centre Plus to advertise jobs to disabled people’s groups and attract disabled applicants; and
- school visits programmes to promote the wide range of opportunities available.

2.2.2 **Providing a fully inclusive and accessible recruitment process by:-**

- providing job adverts in plain English and in different formats where required; and
- all recruiting managers require to complete Recruitment and Selection training which includes information on supporting disabled applicant, with a three-yearly e-learning refresher mandatory.

2.2.3 **Offering an interview to disabled people who meet the minimum criteria for the job.**

The application process includes a question regarding disability, applicants are asked to indicate whether they self-assess as disabled. An applicant can also provide further information at this stage to ensure sufficient information is available to help the recruiting manager put adjustments in place at interview to give the candidate an opportunity to demonstrate their suitability on an equal footing with those who do not share the protected characteristic.

2.2.4 **Flexible when assessing people so disabled job applicants have the best opportunity to demonstrate that they can do the job.**

Providing working interviews when appropriate to allow disabled applicants to demonstrate the competencies required for a post. This is common practice in service areas such as North Lanarkshire Industries, where applicants who are unable to fully express their potential and skills at formal interview are given the opportunity to demonstrate the skills required to undertake a particular role

2.2.5 **Making reasonable adjustments as required.**

Training is available to all line-managers on Disability Awareness and reasonable adjustments. Complementing this is a Reasonable Adjustments Protocol which has been introduced to provide disabled employees and managers with a standardised approach to negotiating and accessing reasonable adjustments.

2.2.6 Encouraging our suppliers and partner firms to be Disability Confident

- **Project Ability** – The programme provides a 52 week place and training concept for people with disabilities to gain valuable work experience and skills within NLC and its ALEO partners. Throughout the programme the person is supported by a job coach to actively seek and apply for employment opportunities within the Local Authority or externally with local employers. During the programme the candidates also gain an employability award.
- The Council's partners, suppliers and providers are made aware of their responsibility for the Public Sector Equality duty when delivering services on the Council's behalf - including the commitment to Disability Confident. For example, arms-length organisations such as Culture and Leisure NL publish this commitment when advertising vacancies.
- The Council's employability programme has encouraged and supported a local construction firm to employ 2 disabled young people.
- The Supported Enterprise Service has hosted a local employers event in partnership with the Department of Work and Pensions to promote Disability Confident and a small number of local employers have signed up to become Disability Confident – Committed. A larger scale event is being planned for later in 2019.

2.2.7 Ensuring employees have sufficient disability equality awareness

Training is made available to all staff on Disability Awareness – there are 2 different versions of this, the first is aimed at line-managers to outline their responsibilities when managing disabled employees and ensure they understand the duty to consider reasonable adjustments, the second is aimed at all other staff to ensure that they understand the needs of disabled colleagues. A raft of information is provided on the Council's Intranet which provides up to date information for both disabled employees and their managers.

In addition to the above, the Council also provide disabled people with a range of options to get into work, for example; work experience, Foundation Apprenticeships and work trials, as well as paid employment through mainstream employment, Modern Apprenticeship and Graduate Development Programmes.

2.2.8 Keeping and Developing Our People

Promoting a culture of being Disability Confident through:-

- wide range of supportive policies and procedures – Dignity at Work, Equality and Diversity in Employment, Reasonable adjustment protocol, Recruitment, Smarter Working etc.;
- commitment to working to the Social Model of Disability;
- Employee Equality Forum work to engage with services and organising events on disability issues;
- positive messages and communications publicised through the Supported Enterprise Service; and
- a raft of training which aims to advance understanding and equality for disabled people including most recently an e-learning module on unconscious bias.

Supporting employees to manage their disabilities or health conditions

- a number of support mechanisms are in place including; access to Occupational Health, Employee Counselling, Flexible Work Patterns, Home Working, the protocol for requesting reasonable adjustments;
- Work Well NL is a digital one stop shop for health and wellbeing information with links to services and initiatives as well as health related policies and procedures; and
- employees who have been supported into work have access to the ongoing support of a job coach. This ensures regular monitoring meetings that encourage the employee, job coach and employer to discuss issues and identify adjustments and supports.

Ensuring there are no barriers to the development and progression of disabled employees

- the PRD process is inclusive and all employees are encouraged to identify their development needs;
- when invited to training all employees are asked to indicate whether they require additional support. Suitable venues, support materials etc. are made available accordingly; and
- promotion rates for disabled employees are monitored to ensure no disparities between progression rates of disabled and non-disabled employees.

Ensuring managers are aware of how they can support employees who are sick or absent from work.

- the Council's managing attendance process is clearly set out in our Managing Attendance Policy, Guidance and FAQs and these are made available to all managers and employees through our internal intranet. Additional training is provided to ensure managers undertake the process effectively and can communicate this to employees. We include a number of "keeping in touch" milestones within the policy;
- support plans, including phased returns to work, alternative duties, and reasonable adjustments are considered on return from all long-term absences. Regular checkpoints occur during the initial weeks of an employee's return to work to discuss progress, effect on their health and wellbeing and discuss ongoing support.

Valuing and listening to feedback from disabled employees

- the Employee Equality Forum provides a platform for disabled employees to discuss issues and provide feedback on current and future Council initiatives including, policy, access, opportunities for consultation etc;
- individual services consult with the EEF on specific service issues and where it can use the information to inform service change and delivery; and
- the PRD conversation and team meetings are also platforms employees can utilise for raising issues.

Reviewing the Disability Confident employer self-assessment.

The Working Group was set up specifically for the purpose of reviewing progress. Members of the group include disabled employees ensuring a fair and balanced approach to the review and assessment.

2.3 What We Still Need To Do

2.3.1 Areas for Action

As well as reviewing progress against the commitments, the Working Group considered areas where more needed to be done. Five particular areas were highlighted for action within Phase 1 - January to August 2019 - of a two-phased approach. These are detailed below.

Of particular concern is the high percentage of employees who do not record on MySelf under the disability category, 82.3% (11901 employees). This therefore doesn't present a clear indication of the percentage of disabled employees that the Council has - the most recent figure being 1.75%. This is disproportionately low in comparison to our local population who make up the majority of the Council's workforce.

Knowing who our employees are is crucial in order for the Council to:-

- support them appropriately;
- demonstrate that the Council is representative of the people it serves; and
- be known as an employer of choice through embracing diversity in all its forms.

However, disability is not the only characteristic where self-recording is low.

If disabled employees are not recording on MySelf, does this also mean that there are disabled employees who are not seeking the support they are entitled to by not telling their line-manager?

The working group considered potential reasons as to why employees may not self-record, including that they:-

- may not understand why we need to know;
- may not trust how their personal information will be used;
- may think it will be used against them; and/or
- may not see any benefits of recording.

The following Key Actions are in place.

Action 1 - Develop a Disability Confident Leader campaign to promote and demonstrate our commitments and encourage openness from our employees around disabilities or conditions they may have.

Action 1 Progress

Preparations are underway, as part of a drip-feed approach, to begin a Disability Leader Campaign starting in the new academic year in August 2019.

Using the strapline 'Are you Disability Confident?' disabled employees will participate in a poster campaign to highlight how reasonable adjustments, Access to Work, and importantly their line managers support, has enabled them to work and stay in work.

This campaign will continue with videos, blogs, roadshows etc taking place throughout the coming months and years.

Access to Work is a Government Programme supporting disabled people to take up or remain in work. When applied for within 6 weeks of starting a new job – or within 6 weeks of acquiring a disability – Access to Work will provide up to 100% of costs for reasonable adjustments. This has obvious significance to the Council if a disabled employee doesn't disclose - or a line manager doesn't know about the programme - and misses the 6 week deadline as it would then be incumbent upon the Council to provide and fund any adjustments.

Access to Work has become known, in some circles, as the Department of Work and Pensions best kept secret. If disabled people do not know about Access to Work and how it can support them they may be prevented from applying for some jobs in the first place.

With such low numbers of disabled employees working for us, that we know of, promoting Access to Work for current and future employees may support both the recruitment process and the self-recording on MySelf.

Action 2 - Promote Access to work to support the recruitment process

Action 2 Progress

- Access to Work is now promoted on the Council's website.
- In the autumn of 2019 a seminar will take place for line-managers and other interested officers on Access to Work and reasonable adjustments.

The Council wants to be an employer of choice and it is crucial that disabled people including prospective disabled employees are able to readily find out how the Council supports disabled people. The Council's website is a key way of communicating the messages that the Council wants to get across and can be presented in one accessible place.

Action 3 - Develop the NL website to promote Disability Confident Leader and signpost all relevant policies, materials and resources in a joined up way.

Action 3 Progress

The website now has a section called [promoting equality for disabled people](#) with the friendly URL disabilityconfident. It contains sections on:-

- Access to Work
- Disability Confident Scheme
- Accessible Policies, resources and procedures for disabled employees
- The Social Model of Disability
- AccessAble
- Support for disabled employees; and
- Supporting your mental health

Like all Local Authorities in Scotland My Job Scotland is the recruitment portal where applications for all Council vacancies are completed on-line. For some groups of people this can be a barrier to applying to work with us and in order that our employment opportunities are accessible to all the Council needs to provide ways for applications to be provided and submitted in alternative formats.

Action 4 - Develop a plan to provide applications in alternative formats and promote this on job adverts.

Action 4 Progress

- job alerts are sent direct to disabled peoples' organisations in North Lanarkshire;
- the Council has removed barriers for people to apply for jobs by offering alternative applications methods and a guaranteed interview to individuals who declare a disability; and
- a British Sign Language video has been produced for the front page of the Council's recruitment portal explaining what support is available to the Deaf BSL community to assist with the application process.

In 2017 /18 only 81.2% of pupils with Additional Support Needs (ASN) were participating post-school. The Scottish average was 90.4%. Positive action measures need to be taken in order to improve the outcomes for this group of young people to ensure they are enabled to reach their full potential. As the biggest employer in North Lanarkshire the Council has a clear role to play in changing this statistic as a Disability Confident Leader.

Action 5 - Promote working with NLC as an employer in ASN schools & offer work placements for young people to improve their employability outcomes.

Action 5 Progress

An employability event, organised by the Supported Enterprise Service for three of North Lanarkshire's Additional Support Needs schools, took place to showcase the range of vocational activities available for young people to support work experience and improve their employment opportunities. Over 40 pupils took part.

Furthermore, over 80 Council managers and leaders from across the council attended the event and signed a pledge to further support work experience opportunities for young people. The SES also made a commitment to continue to run events like this one to expand opportunities to include more young people.

Three of North Lanarkshire's additional support needs schools (ASN) have been working with New College Lanarkshire to broaden the post-school pathways. These have traditionally focused on hospitality and mechanics but are now incorporating horticulture, construction and retail. Greater focus on Developing the Young Workforce has strengthened the pathways and supported the curriculum to be geared towards positive post-school destinations.

The Pathways Mentoring Programme has recently launched with a promotional campaign to attract current Council employees to become mentors to young people facing barriers to employment.

2.4 Phase 2 – August 2019 – February 2020

As the Council nears completion of the first phase of the review, a project plan for Phase 2 improvement work is being developed. Areas of focus will include:-

- creating a mentoring framework to provide opportunities to support disabled people;
- developing easy to read recruitment adverts that use inclusive language;

- provide longer term work experience placements within NLC for ASN pupils as part of the curriculum
- working with our Community Planning Partners as future Disability Confident Leaders to develop pathways for success; and
- awareness raising for recruiting managers and the potential for areas of refreshed learning resources, mandatory and elective training modules so that they understand the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities and health conditions and are equipped and confident to deal with them.

2.5 Process for Re-Accreditation

In January 2020, the process of completing the Disability Confident Leader self-evaluation will begin, ready for submission to an external organisation (yet to be determined) for validation. The validation could be carried out by one of the following organisations:-

- a Disabled People's Organisation or Disabled Persons User led Organisation (DPULO);
- a recognised external accreditation body;
- an existing Disability Confident Leader; or
- other external challenge or recognition body.

The validation process will be completed in time for the renewal date of 2 March 2020. Thereafter a further report will be submitted to committee on the outcome.

3. Equality and Diversity

3.1 Fairer Scotland Duty

The report is for information purposes. The Disability Confident Leader accreditation programme assists the Council in meeting the requirements of the Fairer Scotland Duty.

3.2 Equality Impact Assessment

The report is for information purposes. The Disability Confident Leader accreditation programme assists the Council in meeting its equality duties.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Impact

None.

4.2 HR/Policy/Legislative Impact

The progress reported herein helps the Council meet its obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duties.

4.3 Environmental Impact

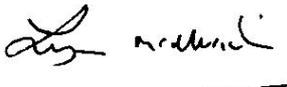
None.

4.4 Risk Impact

Progressing our organisational capability in being a Disability Confident Leader is aligned with managing our reputational risk by ensuring that we live up to external challenge on the accreditation we have been awarded.

5. Measures of success

5.1 The Council is successfully reaccredited a Disability Confident Leader



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