

Disability and Well-being Report for North Somerset Council

July 2021





12% of our
workforce have a
disability

Introduction

This is the first formal report we have published to provide information about how we support disabled people at work.

We embrace diversity at North Somerset council and see it as being critical to our success. This is because we want to ensure we represent and understand our customers effectively, and we believe diversity will maximise the breadth of experience and skill we have, which will also improve our decision making.

Diversity is a key part of our vision for North Somerset, we have put fairness at the heart of our new vision for an "open, fair and greener North Somerset". We recognise that tackling inequality is critical to improving outcomes for all our residents and staff.

As a large employer in North Somerset we champion the importance of ensuring disabled people have what they need at work to enable them to do their jobs well. Approximately 12% of our workforce have a disability, ranging from mobility impairment or managing poor mental health, to those with hidden disabilities such as dyslexia and Crohns Disease. This is broadly similar to the working age disabled people percentage in North Somerset of 12.7%.

However, we recognise that disabled people face a much greater challenge in gaining employment. Recent data shows that 52.3% of disabled people were in employment, down from 54.1% a year previously compared to the employment rate for people who are not disabled, which was 81.1%, down from 82.2%. Reflecting on these statistics it is clear that there is a lot we need to do to ensure disabled people are given equal opportunity across all areas of employment.

Over the past five years we have seen a sustained increase in the number of disabled people who are supported to work with us, and we are committed to continue and strengthen that support.

As a Disability Confident Leader, we have committed to a positive action scheme and our commitments include:

- Ensuring our recruitment process is inclusive and accessible
- Communicating and promoting vacancies
- Offering an interview to disabled people, who meet the essential criteria for a job role
- Anticipating and providing reasonable adjustments as required
- Supporting existing employees who acquire a disability or long-term health condition, enabling them to stay in work
- We are also taking additional action to improve access to employment for disabled people. This includes offering work experience, apprenticeships and other development opportunities.



As a Disability Confident Leader, we are committed to helping other employers in the area to benefit from employing disabled people. We will use all opportunities we have to promote the importance of being 'Disability Confident' and to support disabled people into sustained employment.

We welcome the opportunity that this document brings to share the good work we have achieved as well as our future plans.

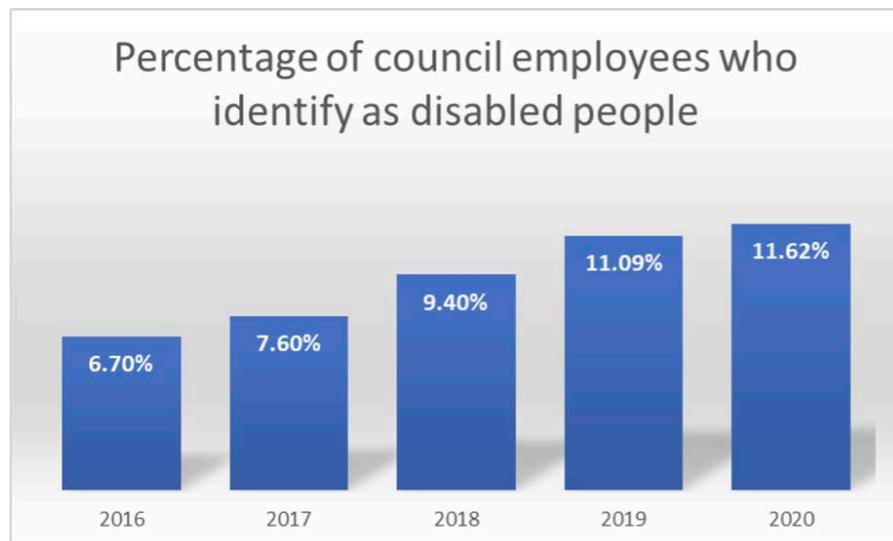
Jo Walker

Chief Executive Officer



What we know about our disabled staff

We know that the number of disabled staff we employ has consistently grown over the last five years.



When people apply for a job in the council they are asked “Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person?” If the applicant is appointed the answer to this information is held within the council’s HR system.

All employees can amend the answer to this question during their employment with the council, ensuring the data remains representative of our workforce. The data above is drawn from the council’s HR System and those who have answered ‘yes’ to the question above.

We also know that our disabled staff work across all grades of the council:

Grade	Percentage of all staff at grade	Percentage of disabled staff at grade
JG1 – 3	10.7%	5.5%
JG4 – 6	37.5%	40.2%
JG7 – JM1	28.2%	31.1%
JM2 – JM3	15.8%	17.1%
JM4 – JM7	6.8%	4.3%
JM8+	1.0%	1.8%

Whilst there is a good representation of disabled staff across most levels of our workforce we will continue to discuss career development and progression with our Disabled Staff Forum to ensure we are doing all we can to encourage disabled people to join the council and to progress.



Employing disabled staff at North Somerset

As a council we are proud of the support we offer to our disabled staff, this includes:

- **Disability Leave**, this scheme recognises that disabled staff may need to be absent from work for disability-related reasons.
- **Disabled Staff Forum**, which enables staff to meet, network and support each other and to act as a consultation point for the council on matters affecting disabled staff and service users.
- **ICT service for disabled people**, which provides direct access to a local engineer who is experienced in assistive technology.
- Provision of **reasonable adjustments**, examples include adaptive software or a change to working patterns.
- **Employee Assistance Programme**, providing a range of support including specialist information and advice and telephone counselling.
- **Information and advice** from the Inclusion and Corporate Development, Human Resources and Health and Safety Teams.
- Our main **offices are accessible**, including provision of accessible parking, accessible toilets on all floors and open plan areas.
- We provide **equality and diversity training** for all staff, with a focused session on Inclusive Management Development – Supporting Disabled People at work for our managers.

Engaging with disabled staff across the organisation

Our Disabled Staff Forum is a long-established group that meets every quarter, the group is an important consultation group where key issues including IT developments, the provision of facilities in our offices and the council's HR policies are discussed.

The results of our annual staff survey and pulse survey are also shared with the Disabled Staff Forum, where we work together to identify areas for improvement.

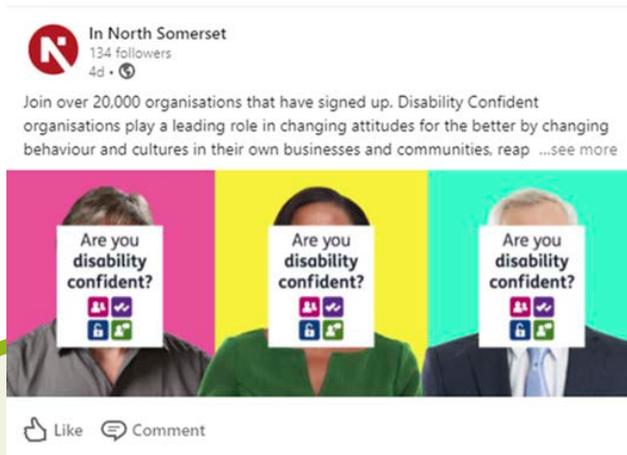
Our 2020 Staff Survey reported the highest levels of satisfaction across all measures. However, despite the gap narrowing we still have a gap in the difference in scores between disabled staff and the all staff figure across a range of measures. We continue to work with and support our disabled staff to do all that we can close the gap further.



Notable results from the 2020 Staff Survey indicate:

- Disabled staff satisfaction increased from 46% in 2018 to 70% and dissatisfaction down from 27% to 10% in the way the council is run.
- An improvement in several of the questions that are asked as an indication of the level of 'stress' in the organisation was also seen:
 - 66% of disabled staff feel able to cope with the amount of work they have to do (this is an increase from 52% in 2018)
 - 63% of disabled staff feel they have achievable deadlines (this is an increase from 54% in 2018)
 - 79% of disabled staff feel that their line manager encourages them at work (this is an increase from 75% in 2018)
- 82% of disabled staff feel that the council is committed to treating staff fairly, regardless of race, sexuality, religion, age, gender, disability or any other aspect of diversity.
- 73% of disabled staff feel the council is committed to ensuring equality in the development of all staff.

81% of disabled staff think that their manager treats staff fairly, regardless of race, sexuality, religion, age, gender, disability or any other aspect of diversity



What we know about the well-being of our staff

In 2020 we asked all staff questions about their well-being (as a part of our annual staff survey) as our starting point for collecting information about their well-being.

Our 2020 survey found that:

- 76% of our staff agreed that the council supports their physical well-being (84% of Disabled staff)
- 81% of staff agreed that the council supports their mental well-being and 73% were comfortable talking about their mental health at work. (87% and 67% for Disabled Staff)

The pandemic has had a significant impact on our staff, with the majority having to rapidly change the way they work to ensure that the residents of North Somerset continued to receive essential services. For some working from home has been a positive experience but for others this has been a real challenge and resulted in increased isolation and other social difficulties.

Throughout the pandemic the messages from our chief executive have been clear, staff well-being is of paramount importance. We must work together to ensure that our well-being remains a high priority.

Frequent messages about keeping well have been shared across the chief executive weekly messages and staff newsletter.

Guidance on how to keep well has also been produced and shared with staff. These messages have been also enhanced by regular resilience training available for our staff and all staff seminars where the focus has been wholly on well-being.

As we move to a position of a 'new normal', in a world where we are living alongside COVID, we continue to offer flexibility, reasonable adjustments and support to our staff when they need it.



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Employee Wellbeing



Providing training and support to help understand the impact of poor mental health at work

We understand that mental health matters and that mental health, just like physical health, can fluctuate on a spectrum of good to poor. For some staff their mental health can seriously limit their ability to cope with relationships, work and other aspects of daily life.

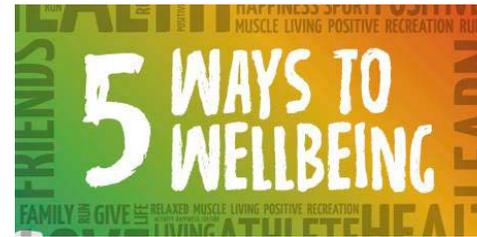
According to the mental health charity Mind, at any one time, at least **one in six workers are experiencing common mental health problems**, including anxiety and depression. It is therefore extremely important that we understand and raise awareness of mental health to allow us to foster an inclusive workforce and enable our staff to engage and perform well.

We share information and advice on mental health in several ways:

- We provide an **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)** to all staff. It provides a free, confidential and impartial service 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. The service includes the offer of confidential counselling either over the telephone or face to face. Whilst this service is confidential, we do know that around 17% of the calls that are received by our EAP provider are in relation to physical or mental health.



- The Council's **Leadership Delivery Team** regularly remind managers of their responsibility and to encourage a positive conversation with staff who may be experiencing poor mental health and the resources that are available to support this discussion and how this is particularly important in view of the pandemic.
- We have facilitated several **all staff seminars** focusing exclusively on mental well-being; looking after ourselves and others and a session looking at our resilience during difficult times.
- Long standing support for **Time to Change** and **Mental Health Awareness Week**. We have used these weeks as an opportunity to focus on conversations about mental health and the importance of well-being.
- Promoting **Employer's Workplace Mental Health Support Service** (including the service that is available specifically for apprentices), funded by the DWP and available to anyone who needs support in managing their mental health at work.
- Facilitating the **Connect 5 Programme** and other mental health related training in conjunction with public health the programme aims to develop the skills and confidence of staff to discuss mental health and well-being issues. This training is also available to anyone working with people who might experience poor mental health across North Somerset.
- Approximately 70 staff have participated in the **Mental Health First Aid programme**.



- Production and promotion of the **"5 ways of wellbeing"**. This provides guidance on simple actions we can all take to look after our own mental health.
- A wide range of face to face and online resources are available through the Health and Safety Team, including: - **e learning courses**; Stress Management for staff and managers and **Individual Resilience Training**
- Development of the council's **Stress Policy** and use of the HSE Stress Assessment Tool and individual stress risk assessments in our teams.
- In addition to the list above there is a range of information about the support that is available for staff on the council's **intranet**, and it is shared regularly through the staff newsletter and chief executive weekly message.

Championing others to become Disability Confident

We know we're not alone in our approach, it's great that here in North Somerset we have a network of enthusiastic businesses who are also keen to embrace diversity in their workforce and recognise the value in becoming high quality, inclusive employers through their recruitment processes and working practices.

As a Disability Confident Leader we are delighted to have been able to offer support to our local employers to encourage them on their journey to becoming Disability Confident.

This support has included

- one to one information and advice to individual organisations
- hosting a local employer network where the focus has been on encouraging others to become Disability Confident, we have held sessions on accessible recruitment and providing reasonable adjustments in the workplace
- sharing our 'Supporting Disabled People at Work' Guide which offers information about the legal requirements within the Equality Act, and also suggestions of reasonable adjustments to the recruitment and employment processes when working with Disabled people.
- hosting an employer conference in conjunction with Weston College to showcase the benefits of creating an inclusive culture within an organisation where the focus was on increasing the understanding of disability and making sure those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) have the opportunities to fulfil their potential and realise their aspirations
- promoting the advantages of being Disability Confident to local businesses through the Economic Development service.

We will also continue to share information about the support we provide for our disabled staff and encourage others to become Disability Confident through our social media channels.



Our next steps

While we have made significant progress, we will continue to work to improve the support and experience of our own staff and of those living in North Somerset. Therefore in 2021 we are planning on:

- Continuing our staff training programme to ensure a consistency of response to all our disabled staff across the organisation.
- Further considering a mental health survey for all staff to strengthen our understanding of their well-being.
- Continuing to develop innovative partnership opportunities to support disabled people across North Somerset into sustainable employment.
- Refreshing a local employer network to support those who wish to participate in the Disability Confident Scheme.
- Design and deliver an online conference with partners to promote awareness and best practice in supporting disabled people at work.
- Further enhancement of our HR reporting to enable more detailed reporting on areas such as recruitment and progression of disabled staff.





Disability Confident

This publication is available in large print,
Braille or audio formats on request.

Help is also available for people who require
council information in languages other than English.

Please contact 01934 427 222