

Neurodiversity Pledge and Action Plan Children's and Adult Services 2025/26



Coventry City Council

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● What is the Neurodiversity Pledge for Social Work Employers?

The pledge has been created by a group of neurodivergent social workers with the involvement of the Social Workers Union (SWU). The Special Interest Group (SIG) for Neurodivergent Social Workers and professionals within social care is also supported by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW).

It encourages social work employers to pledge to raise awareness and acceptance of neurodiversity among the workforce through a focus on promoting appropriate training and delivering opportunities for knowledge development. It asks that employers commit to creating a culture of appreciation, celebration and belonging and make sustainable changes to ensure the workplace is neuro-inclusive.

Each organisation that signs the pledge must:

- Identify a minimum of two named individuals who will support the pledge within the organisation. One must be a strategic lead, one must be a neurodivergent social worker
- Commit to maintain a “champion” role
- Provide evidence of commitment to the pledge including evaluation of impact

This Neurodiversity pledge has been developed to include all our staff working in both Children’s and Adult Services.

● Why are Coventry Children’s and Adult Services signing up to the Pledge?

At the moment there is a patchy picture of acceptance for neurodivergent social workers, those with conditions – or neurotypes – such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia or obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD).

Whilst neurotypes such as Dyslexia, Autism, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia, and ADHD are defined as “Protected Characteristics” under the Equality Act (2010), not everyone identifies as disabled. People choose to define themselves using different language, for example, “Neurodivergent” or “Neurodiverse.” Respect for people’s right to identify is important as the language and understanding about neurodiversity evolves. Many workplaces generalise disability and are unwittingly designed in ways which do not support neurodiverse people’s ability to thrive and add value. Some individuals will navigate these workplaces by hiding signs of their neurodiversity. Masking or camouflaging different thinking can be exhausting, placing an immense pressure on a person’s mental and physical health.

The picture within Coventry is unclear with informal feedback from neurodivergent social workers stating there is a lack of awareness and understanding from some team managers, a lack of support from occupational health within reasonable timescales, action plans being used when presenting issues are relating to a lack of support provision, difficulty in implementing reasonable adjustments and workspaces that are not considerate of neurodivergence. There have also been some positive reports of understanding and supportive colleagues and managers going above and beyond to support employees.

It is therefore essential that a better understanding of the experiences of neurodivergent social workers is gained and that these experiences are considered in planning for and implementing any recommended changes.

● Our Workforce – Some Key Facts



● Our Neurodiversity Pledge and Action Plan

To recognise the contribution neurodivergent workers, bring to their roles and commit to act towards a neuro-inclusive workplace, we have identified what we are doing in support and what we plan to do over the coming year.

As part of our Pledge, we have identified two named individuals who will support the pledge within the organisation from both Children's and Adult Services. One in each service is a strategic lead and one is a neurodivergent social worker. We also commit to maintain a "champion" role and through this Action Plan provide evidence of our commitment to the pledge including the evaluation of impact.

We have identified a Senior Director to be our Neurodiversity Pledge sponsor Barry Hastie Director for Finance and Resources.

"By signing the Neurodiversity pledge, the council is committing to valuing and embracing neurodiversity, creating a more inclusive, respectful and understanding working environment that will benefit both our staff and the communities we serve. Signing the pledge not only aligns with important social work values like anti-oppressive practice and advocacy, it also supports our One Coventry values and our goal of becoming a more equitable and psychologically safe organisation for all." Barry Hastie

Louise Shorthouse who is supporting the pledge as a neurodivergent social worker shared her story;

"I was a 'problem child'. The message that I would never achieve or reach my full potential was given throughout my education, which I internalised. I was permanently excluded from school and in trouble with the police, and I then spent my early adulthood believing that I was just not good enough for anything I attempted. This was a core belief that fed into years of anxiety, depression, an eating disorder and difficult relationships. Still, it was never suggested that this may have been something a little more complex than a personality trait."

"I qualified as a Social Worker in 2013 and worked in a fast paced child protection environment which I now reflect and see was a huge source of dopamine which kept me focussed and motivated. As I have progressed in my career, and with the joys of fluctuating hormones as I age, my symptoms began to become more difficult to mask and manage."

"I had a late diagnosis of ADHD at 40, and of Autism and Sensory Processing Disorder at 41. I have faced my own difficulties in my social work career development and progression as a result of some of my symptoms and have come to mask and manage well, which have at times been a real struggle."

"There is more that can be done by means of education and support to enable those with struggles to meet their full potential here in Coventry and I am so glad to have the opportunity to be a part of that. I believe it is important to value every member of staff, and our workplaces should be psychologically safe spaces for neurodivergent social workers to be their authentic selves."

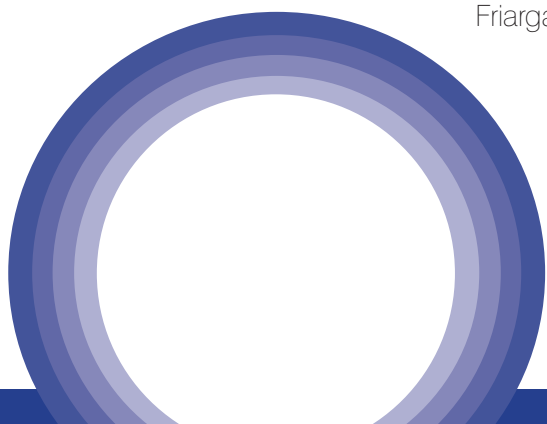
"We need to challenge the stigma around neurodiversity and celebrate the skills neurodivergent individuals can bring to the social work profession."



● What are we doing, what have we achieved (our initial assessment)

- Coventry City Council is recognised as a **Disability Confident Leader**
- The Council is a member of the **employers network for equality and inclusion**
- Disability Inclusion training that is mandatory for all line managers and includes neurodiversity. We have resources including a webinar on the **D&I Learning homepage** and all colleagues have access to a **neurodiversity hub** which includes articles, videos, case studies and written guides
- The Council commenced Neurodiversity Training for managers in February 2025 **Neurodiversity for managers – Intranet**
- A Social Worker in Throughcare attended the Second Annual Autism at work Conference 2024 run by the Institute of Government and Public Policy <https://igpp.org.uk/event/Autism-at-Work-Conference-2024/agenda>. She has then delivered sessions to the Throughcare workforce on Autism in the Workplace
- Children's services have established a neurodiversity and disability subgroup, one of 3 subgroups focusing on diversity and inclusion
- Children's and Adults services subscribe to knowledge and learning resources
 - CareKnowledge ran a webinar titled Autism in the Workplace in November 2024. There were 15 Coventry practitioners in attendance at this webinar. This can be watched or listened to by members of CareKnowledge [here](#)
 - Research in Practice have a number of resources [here](#) which include video learning resources on Supporting neurodivergent practitioners in your social care organisation
 - Community Care Inform held a webinar in March 2025 focusing on inclusive work environments for neurodivergent social workers. **Webinar: creating an inclusive work environment for neurodivergent social workers - Adults**
- A Mental Health Wellbeing Clinic via the Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team runs every day of the week and is available to all staff on a self-referral basis or through their manager. The Wellbeing Practitioner also has access to external resources for neurodivergent support.

<https://intranet.coventry.gov.uk/occupational-health-counselling/mental-health-wellbeing-clinic>
- The Council have published a comprehensive **Diversity and Inclusion Calendar** which highlights key dates through the year and includes Neurodiversity
- The Council have a corporate **Disabled Employee Network** that meet regularly
- Workplace Accessibility Guides are available for The Council House and Friargate



● What are we planning to do (our commitments)?

- To communicate and engage on the pledge and Action Plan across Children's and Adult Services
- Monitor the progress of our pledge commitment by publishing a progress update as part of the wider annual Workforce Diversity and Inclusion report, as per the actions set in the **Workforce Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2025-2028**
- To share stories and experiences of neurodivergent staff, positive and negative to raise understanding, awareness and learning across our services
- To seek opportunities for specific disability surveys and culture and inclusion engagement questions in wider employee surveys to seek to further understand experiences
- Establish forums and staff networks for neurodivergent staff, including opportunities to become Neurodiversity champions (Coventry & Warwickshire Integrated Care System)
- Use feedback from neurodivergent workers to help develop workplace policy and practice in Children's and Adults to ensure it is neuro-inclusive
- To ensure that existing policies and procedures do not disadvantage neurodivergent social workers from participation in the workplace, making use of Equality Impact Assessments
- To review job adverts templates and interviews, to ensure they are worded and conducted in a way that is inclusive of neurodivergent candidates, as part of the inclusive recruitment toolkit
- Ensure use of reasonable adjustments in the workplace include any needs of neurodivergent workers. To provide practical examples of application and overview of what's available, as part of 'Personal Adjustment Passport' training
- Give due consideration to neurodiversity workers when managing capability and disciplinary processes
- Ensure digital accessibility of information produced by Children's and Adults Services, taking into digital services guidance
- To ensure access to neurodiversity training for frontline staff to explore the impact of neurodiversity on individuals and consider how different communication needs and executive functioning can require workers to apply additional curiosity to their practice
- Have zero tolerance of behaviours that are prejudicial towards neurodiversity and promotion of the existing process to report concerns including the 'I have a concern' intranet page, while new/improved reporting methods are being developed

● How will we know that these commitments and actions have been achieved?

Our Adults and Children's Workforce Boards will have oversight of our pledge and commitments, and these will be included as part of action plans associated with workforce strategies.

A steering group for the pledge and commitments will oversee the pledge, its actions, monitoring and its annual review.

● Summary and Next Steps

The Neurodiversity Pledge and Action Plan will be monitored over the next 12-month period with updates presented to the Adults and Children's Workforce Boards, quarterly in the first year.

Adults and Children's Practice Forums, Let's Talk sessions, staff surveys and engagement with staff networks or other groups will receive and provide feedback on the action plan and developments during the year.

This plan to be received and endorsed by the Disabled Employee Network (DEN), Trade Unions, Children's and Adults Senior Management Teams and Workforce Boards and Councils Diversity and Inclusion Board.

We will review and publish an updated plan for 2026/27.

● Further Advice, Information, Resources and Key Contacts

If you are a neurodivergent worker, these are some of the routes to access support

Raising concerns. Speak to your manager, a peer or colleague and take a look at the Council's 'I have a concern' intranet page

<https://intranet.coventry.gov.uk/legal-services/i-concern/3>

Occupational Health and Reasonable Adjustments

For support around reasonable adjustments and Mental Health wellbeing you can be referred into Occupational health. Our health advisors can assess how to make your work environment and job more accessible through recommendations for reasonable adjustments, additional tools, and software. (RD1 form). Additionally, you can access support from our Counsellors and Mental Health practitioner, to explore difficulties and strategies to help you feel at your best.

RD1 - <https://intranet.coventry.gov.uk/occupational-health-counselling/health-assessments>

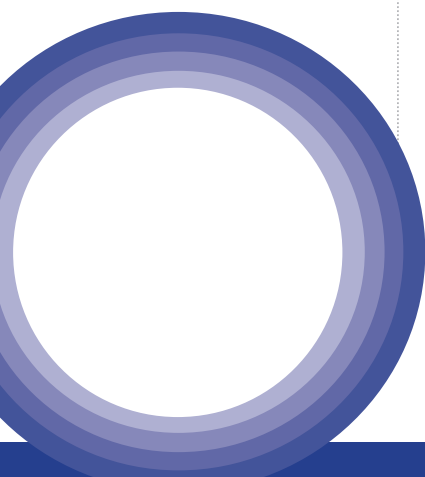
RD2 - <https://intranet.coventry.gov.uk/occupational-health-counselling/mental-health-support-counselling-referral>

Employee Assistance Programme

<https://intranet.coventry.gov.uk/myrewards-1/employee-assistance-programme>

How to join Disabled Employee Network (DEN)

<https://intranet.coventry.gov.uk/diversity-inclusion/disabled-employee-network>



Access to Work

In addition to the support available as part of the reasonable adjustments process, employees can also obtain advice and guidance, and potential funding for reasonable adjustments through the Department for Work and Pensions' support programme Access to Work. Access to Work can offer assistance based on your needs, which may include a grant to help cover the costs of practical support in the workplace. As part of the eligibility criteria for Access to Work, employees must have spoken to their employer before they apply for Access to Work. Doing this will ensure that workplace assessments can be facilitated where required, and any additional support Access to Work can provide will complement or enhance any reasonable adjustments currently in place, and that relevant information related to adjustments is shared where appropriate

<https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

Supporting Information and Resources

- National Autistic Society - <https://www.autism.org.uk/>
- Autism Independent - <https://autismuk.com/>
- Neurodiversity UK - <https://neurodiversityuk.co.uk/>
- ADHD UK - <https://adhd.uk.co.uk/>

