

Disability and long-term health condition awareness scheme

A disability awareness scheme launched by Bedfordshire Police, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire Constabularies (BCH) to employ and retain individuals with disabilities and long-term health conditions.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Diversity and inclusion Leadership, development and learning Organisation including workforce
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Key details

Partners	Police Community safety partnership Government department Health services Local authority
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2018
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Communities General public Workforce

Aim

The aim of the disability confident leader scheme is to provide a diverse and supportive workplace by:

- implementing tailored workplace adjustments
- equipping human resource (HR) teams and interview/promotion panels with inclusive training
- delivering mandatory workshops for supervisors

The overall aim of the initiative is to:

- recognise and promote the skills, knowledge, and potential of disabled employees
- provide fair promotion and assessment practices for the whole workforce
- enhance accessibility such as improving accessibility for virtual meetings

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the disability confident leader scheme are to:

- increase awareness and understanding among colleagues about disabilities
- strengthen disability inclusion initiatives within the forces
- improve the support available for various disabilities
- reduce barriers that individuals with disabilities face in employment
- reduce staff turnover

Description

The disability confident scheme is a UK government initiative designed to help employers attract, recruit, and retain individuals with disabilities or long-term health conditions.

BCH have implemented the scheme across the forces. To become Disability Confident the forces had to pass the following levels:

- level one – disability confident committed
- level two – disability confident employer
- level three – disability confident leader

Each stage has a three-year limit between achieving the next status.

The three BCH police chief constables have committed to meeting the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to optimise the support, employment, and career development opportunities for individuals with disabilities as well as long-term health condition. This commitment extends to every stage of recruitment, from attraction to retention and progression. BCH is one of six forces who have achieved disability confident leader status to date.

Resources

BCH chief officers have agreed to ensure the implementation and upkeep of being a disability confident leader. As part of this, funded services are required. This includes mandatory training and specialist provision to ensure that the workforce is supported in terms of disability and long-term health conditions.

Exemplary training and development, talent management, HR, wellbeing services, ICT and accessibility provision is imperative to actively attract, recruit, retain and develop disabled people.

Lived experiences

Lived experience is a key element of BCH's disability confident self-submission. First-hand accounts from disabled staff help raise awareness, inform decision-making and improve support structures within the organisation.

The forces created written case studies to provide an insight into the real-life challenges and successes of disabled employees in the workplace.

Disability Confident board

The disability confident board is a forum held to discuss disability-related issues, best practice, queries, training, and concerns. The board acts independently and is chaired by the tri-force chief superintendent. The decisions are then reported to the BCH diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) board, chaired by the deputy chief constable. The following stakeholders attend:

- colleagues with disabilities and long-term conditions
- disability networks
- disability support groups
- disability resources centre
- BCH inclusion manager
- BCH workplace adjustment and inclusivity advisor
- DEI leads
- HR, including policymakers/reviewers
- line managers, specifically targeted with emails to ensure they understand disability issues and their responsibilities around these issues
- Jobcentre Plus (part of DWP)
- Deaf awareness group
- police link officers for deaf people (PLOD)
- wellbeing services
- change champions
- neurodiversity champions
- delivery management officer for accessibility
- BCH communications

Actions taken

To collect a more precise figure for protected characteristics, BCH took part in the national 'safe to say' campaign. This aims to reduce the number of individuals selecting the 'prefer not to say' option when providing their personal data, by raising awareness of why their data is essential to the organisation. This has become especially important following COVID-19 when it comes to offering critical support to all staff categorised as 'vulnerable'.

Similarly, the language used in monitoring forms and advertisements is being updated to help staff feel more comfortable speaking about their long-term condition and sharing their data positively.

All policies, recruitment processes, and job adverts are equality impact assessed (EIA) and analysed. This ensures that equal opportunities are given to all applicants. BCH internal and external stakeholders are asked to evaluate the EIA and provide feedback where the necessary changes are made and implemented.

Data management

Workforce data is essential to progress through the disability confident assessment levels. The BCH data management team is responsible for handling, organising, and maintaining an organisation's data to ensure its accuracy, accessibility, and security. The team supports decision-making and ensuring compliance with data protection regulations is optimal. They also examine methods for efficient and transparent data reporting. This is to prevent disparities and disproportionality in recruitment, retention and development, including promotion processes.

Workplace adjustment and policy

BCH created a reasonable adjustment and inclusivity advisor role to cater for the needs of its workforce. The purpose of the role is to:

- contribute to achieving the vision, purpose, and values of BCH by ensuring organisational understanding of how to identify and implement reasonable adjustments
- encourage the adoption of good practice to support people to do their job well

All adjustments are recorded in a personal workplace adjustment agreement (or passport), ensuring accessibility from the recruitment stage and through employment.

Disability Confident 'offer an interview' scheme

BCH are accredited Disability Confident employers and chief officers have endorsed the 'offer an interview' scheme as a form of positive action, which encourages applications from candidates with disabilities and long-term conditions. The scheme ensures that anyone with a disability or health condition who meets the minimum requirement of a role is offered an interview.

A HR consultant is allocated to each case, and a post learning review is conducted. Any feedback or recommendations are passed on which could include any further training that is required. The 'offer an interview' scheme is now embedded in the recruitment process for BCH as a minimum requirement. This helps to create an uplift in awareness and an understanding of the scheme and its benefits to the workforce in increasing diversity.

Dyslexia assessment

BCH has rolled out a dyslexia assessor programme to support individuals in the workforce who may not have a diagnosis of dyslexia or be aware that they have dyslexia. 36 assessors have been trained across the three forces. They attend induction days for new recruits and new starters to offer assessments. For current officers and staff, a self-referral scheme is embedded, where individuals can submit and be assigned for an assessment.

Once assessments have been completed, a workplace assessment report is then completed by the assessor, who will detail the recommended workplace adjustments that would help the individual to manage their dyslexia. There is then a line of contact between dyslexic individual and the assessor, so adjustments can be reviewed. To date, BCH has assessed over 1,600 new recruits and existing colleagues. BCH is looking to develop its in-house neurodiversity programme to provide the services necessary to assist its workforce.

Specialist provision and training

BCH evidenced specialist provision across its forces to support its colleagues with disabilities, long-term conditions, and mental health. This includes training provision for officers and staff at induction and through their work-life journey.

The BCH talent management team have been training HR, supervisors, first-line managers, and senior officers in mandatory disability awareness training, which now forms part of their portfolios.

The following workshops are offered:

- disability awareness training
- being an inclusive manager
- valuing difference

BCH also deliver non-mandatory workshops which enhance and support the mandatory training.

These workshops include:

- giving and receiving feedback
- holding effective one-to-ones
- courageous conversations
- objective setting and measuring performance
- managing team wellbeing
- managing remote teams

Neurodiversity awareness

BCH continues to develop awareness around neurodiversity with training and webinars from external organisations and the support of the National Police Autism Association, Lexxic and other resources to support the workforce.

Line managers and supervisors are provided with awareness training to support staff in their work-life journey and to ensure workplace adjustments are implemented.

Deaf awareness

BCH has improved support to staff who are deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing (HoH). This includes the creation and implementation of deaf awareness training, British Sign Language (BSL) training, and providing police link officers for deaf people (PLODs) who offer information and advice.

PLODs across the three forces:

- provide information and support
- use their skills to assist in enquiries
- do not provide interpreting for evidential procedures

BCH has created a deaf awareness workshop to educate the workforce and support colleagues, especially through the change from in-person to virtual training, meetings, and communication. The training package includes:

- familiarising staff with the deaf community
- appropriate terminology
- what disability means in the context of deafness
- why we need to know more and understand more about deafness
- The Equality Act 2010
- discrimination
- workplace adjustments and assistive technology

Mentorship scheme

A mentorship scheme has been implemented whereby staff with disabilities, long-term physical health and/or mental health conditions can:

- access support from talent management and positive action teams
- prepare for an adjusted fitness test
- attend a ride along with officers or specific teams
- prepare for the appropriate promotions board

Overall impact

- the 'safe to say' campaign has increased reporting from staff completing their personal information and disclosing protected characteristics, this enables the three forces to ensure that they are putting the appropriate support in for staff with protected characteristics.
- workplace adjustment, particularly during the interview process, has had a positive impact; applicants have reported that measures, such as viewing interview questions beforehand, have enabled them to perform at their best
- BCH has ensured that all staff in HR and line managers undertake the disability confident training to increase their awareness of issues faced by staff, with disabilities or long-term health conditions

Learning

- It is important to utilise staff on limited duties or redeployment. This enables line managers and HR to support and retain their staff through ill health or changes in condition. There should be a focus on upskilling and retraining to give both the employee and organisation a wider breadth of knowledge.
- It is essential to have strong leadership across the forces to support the development of processes and policies that underpin the Disability Confident Level 3 accreditation.
- Direction from a senior level is important as there is a need to ensure disability issues are being prioritised at a force level as part of the wider DEI agenda.
- The leadership structure and governance must be sustainable, and everyone involved must be committed to delivering change over the long term. It is vital to maintain this consistency in leadership and direction, particularly to uphold the Disability Confident accreditation.
- It is important to have consistency and continuity among those identified as senior force allies and champions.
- The disability support groups have an integral part for developing and implementing change plans. Often this work is done outside working hours by members of the groups, based on their good will, passion and determination. The three forces are encouraged to release working time for members of support groups to dedicate to this work.
- Consistent workforce data collection is crucial in identifying and challenging any disproportionality, gaps within training, development, or promotion.

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