

PLACE FOR ALL

EQUALITY

DIVERSITY

INCLUSION

“ My journey in highway maintenance. ”

Kully Boden, Service Manager



EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Sharing personal stories and perspectives to foster inclusivity in the workplace

I'm Kully Boden – Service Manager for Highway Maintenance at Derby City Council.

I left school at sixteen and my parents told me to 'get a job!' I joined the council, because a local authority job at the time was seen as respectable (and it still is). I joined the County Surveyors Department at Derbyshire County Council in 1990, which was a team predominantly of white men with white hair! My very first observation was a team which seemed to be comprised of 'pale, stale males' and ex-coppers seeing out their careers, writing lots of letters saying 'no' to various things! As a 5ft Asian girl, I had to ask whether this was the place for me?

I was provided some really good training opportunities and was placed on a career development scheme which gave me a rounded experience of local government working. I joined Derby City Council in 1997, as part of Local Government Reorganisation. I've been at Derby now almost 27 years and have gained a whole breadth of experience, qualifications and career opportunities. In my entire career pathway, I have only applied for a handful of jobs. Right from the beginning, the support in the workplace, in particular from strong female mentors, meant I was given opportunities to develop my skill sets and build my resilience. The emphasis was always on developing my potential and not 'ticking the box' or to show 'equal opportunities to the brown girl'.

I worked on local transport policy and programme development, before moving to highways maintenance where, broadly, I have remained. Since 2020, I have had overall responsibility for the frontline workforce. I don't feel my skin colour has ever stood in the way of my career, although I am aware of comments more recently made from some teams. Some harassment is on the back of misconceptions or ignorance of my ethnic background, which is disappointing, but not surprising. I don't let it get me down.

As an Asian woman in highways, I am still a rarity, but I understand that by doing well, I can have a significant impact on female colleagues and those from a black and ethnic minority background. Growing up, my parents seldom congratulated me on my efforts or said 'well done' in any of my academic or professional achievements. This was difficult to deal with and meant that with most of my successes I struggled to accept it as anything more than 'business as usual'. I cannot be the only one who has that background or who has parents from a generation where celebrating accomplishments wasn't the foremost emotion. My leadership qualifications have helped me understand how important the impact of celebrating success is and being proud of who I have become. I try and instil this with my team.

To address succession planning, I have grabbed the challenge of developing

PLACE FOR ALL

EQUALITY

DIVERSITY

INCLUSION

“ My journey
in highway
maintenance. ”

Kully Boden, Service Manager



the next generation of highways people. I really try to guide and mentor young people and encourage them to create and operate a service that they can be proud of. This is my turn to give something back. I am still ambitious and curious to see how the industry develops with future generations of highway managers.

Kully Boden
Service Manager for Highway
Maintenance, Derby City Council