



**EQUALITY**

**DIVERSITY**

**INCLUSION**

# PLACE FOR ALL



**WE OPEN THE WAY**

# ADEPT

Association of Directors of  
Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport



# PLACE FOR ALL

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“ My journey in the highways industry. ”



## EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Sharing personal stories and perspectives to foster inclusivity in the workplace

### INTRODUCTION

In recognition of LGBT+ History month, and in partnership with Colas, the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT) launched a series of posts on equality, diversity and inclusion, bringing personal stories, perspectives and experiences to life.

We don't always stop and think about the different ways our colleagues experience their working lives. Recognising those differences and providing a welcoming and inclusive culture, one that provides opportunities and goes beyond policy into everyday practice, must be at the heart of our workplace environments.

There is plenty of research to show how organisations benefit from having diverse voices at the heart of our teams. Reflecting the communities we serve is vital if we are to understand how the impacts of our decisions will affect different groups.

There are real world consequences to a lack of representation. Crash test dummies based on the average male body are used to test vehicle safety, with the first female dummy only developed in Sweden in 2022. A 2011 study from the University of Virginia, found that women are 47% more likely to be seriously injured in a car crash.

As well as leading to better decision making and innovation, greater inclusivity has also been shown to improve staff retention. Local authorities across the country are struggling to recruit and retain skilled employees as well as attract young people. Being proud of our values and communicating them effectively, making our workplaces respectful of different experiences and cultures can only strengthen us and the wider sectors we operate in.

We can only attract people if they know what we do, what we can offer and how they will be accepted, supported and valued. To do that, we also need to understand how they experience working for us.

Although it is changing, place services are an area where the more traditional sectors of highways, planning and waste have led to a poorer gender balance and a less diverse workforce. We need to get the message out that our careers are interesting and rewarding, and that our workplaces are accepting and supportive, but to do that we need to reach beyond how we have always done things.

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Not only that, when we talk about the preventative role of place, we mean how we contribute to delivering better outcomes for people across public health, adult social care and children’s services. If we don’t understand the experiences of our communities, how can we create effective policies, shape new approaches, design successful schemes or deliver impactful services that really do make a difference?

That’s why we have created this campaign with Colas, who have been working hard on their own diversity strategy. We know we are not going to reach all the people we want to work for us, but we can reach you - the team leaders, managers and directors who are part of making a that difference.

It’s also why we thought we’d make this campaign a bit different and introduce you to a wide range of people working in local government, or for Colas, who have been happy to share their personal experiences.

We all miss out when we recruit only from one pool of talent or when projects are poorly designed, or decisions constrained by how we have always done things. We’d like to thank everyone who has contributed their stories to this campaign, and we hope they gave you plenty of food for thought.

With Colas, ADEPT has also been working on a series of tools and resources to help local authorities who are struggling with recruitment and staff retention across the sector. Find out more here: [www.adeptnet.org.uk/workforce](http://www.adeptnet.org.uk/workforce).

**Anthony Payne**  
President, ADEPT

**Donna Hitchcock**  
Executive Director HR, Colas Ltd

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“ My journey in the highways industry.”

Amy Durrant, Senior Asset Management Technician



## EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

### Sharing personal stories and perspectives to foster inclusivity in the workplace

I'd like to share the journey that brought me into the highways industry and to shed light on the challenges and triumphs I encountered along the way.

As a young woman stepping into a traditionally male-dominated field, I found myself facing biases and stereotypes that initially questioned my capabilities, particularly with me coming from an administrative background. But my determination and expertise eventually earned me the respect of my peers, proving the value of my contribution to the industry.

Mentors played a crucial role in my journey. My then line manager encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone and pursue roles as a highway inspector. This support was pivotal in shaping my career. Additionally, my current line manager provided invaluable guidance, emphasising the importance of having mentors who recognise potential and offer direction.

For young women aspiring to join the highways industry, I recommend considering apprenticeships as a solid entry point. Apprenticeships provide hands-on experience and training, allowing individuals to gain practical skills while also receiving guidance and mentorship from experienced professionals.

It is important for aspiring women in the highways industry to focus on specific job roles rather than being deterred by the industry's male-dominated nature. By identifying and pursuing roles that align with their interests and strengths, young women can carve out their niche within the industry. It's worth noting that job roles in highways can vary significantly, even within the same industry or company. Each role has its own set of responsibilities, required skills, and career paths.

Addressing perceptions about the industry is key to attracting diverse talent. Highlighting success stories of women excelling in various roles and improving visibility can demonstrate that this field is open to everyone, as it really is an exciting industry to work for.

Encouraging gender diversity is vital. In my department, there was a point where female inspectors outnumbered males, showcasing the impact of encouragement and support. The industry needs to continue this trend to achieve gender equality.

One significant misconception I encountered is the belief that technical knowledge, like fixing potholes, is a prerequisite for leadership roles. Instead, a robust skill set, and a foundation of knowledge gained through training are essential.

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Management Technician



This journey underscores the importance of breaking gender barriers and fostering inclusivity in the highways industry. To attract and retain more female talent, the industry needs to highlight its diverse opportunities and create an environment where everyone can thrive, irrespective of gender. Gender diversity in this sector is not just a vision but a tangible possibility, as demonstrated by the experiences I've shared.

**Amy Durrant**  
**Senior Asset Management Technician,**  
**Derby City Council**



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“A day in my life.”

Chitra Nadarajah, Head of Climate Change and Environmental Strategy



## EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

### Sharing personal stories and perspectives to foster inclusivity in the workplace

Death by a Thousand Cuts - it isn't the most original heading, but this is the only way I could think to describe my everyday experience as a woman of colour. I'm Chitra Nadarajah and I work for Hampshire County Council.

This isn't about any one incident that happened but about what I am thinking in everyday situations, how that affects me and how most of it is hidden to everyone around me. To help illustrate what I mean I thought a theoretical "day in the life" would help.

I wake up at 6am and take myself off to my personal training session, where somehow my trainer ends up telling me that I am the only person of colour he trains, and that he had not realised that until now. First tick for the day - not necessarily negative but just odd - just me? Really?

I head home, get ready for work and take the bus into town. It's pretty empty when I get on but slowly starts to fill up and yet the seat next to me remains vacant, with some people choosing to stand. And of course, my thoughts start to go to why that might be - I am the only person of colour on the bus, could that be a reason? Today the bus driver was very friendly but there have been mornings when they have been grouchy - why do I immediately start to wonder if it is personal and if it is about my colour...?

I have meetings all morning and head into the conference room for the first one. I have worked here for over two decades so I am in a very familiar place. Nonetheless, I soon realise that yet again I will be the only person of colour in the room. It doesn't affect my

behaviour, and nothing is said that makes me feel uncomfortable, but it's a feeling of being alone - again. No big drama but just a feeling that isn't great.

My experience at work, also inevitably, is influenced by how seriously I feel that EDI is being taken. I have to admit that it feels like it has dropped down the agenda for so many local authorities now they are faced with extremely pressing and serious issues around budgets. We all know that EDI should be embedded in best practice like health and safety. But I fear that across local government, opportunities to increase the diversity of the workforce are being missed, making it harder to see diversity at the most senior levels. We all know that there are serious consequences to this such as the danger of a single mindset for decision-making and reduced organisational effectiveness and success. All these thoughts circulate every day when I am faced with yet another meeting with an obvious lack of diversity.

So, with that heavy morning complete, I decide to walk into town to get some lunch. I love Winchester and have lived here for many years, but as often happens I find myself looking at the people who walk past me - searching for diversity, for someone who looks like me and I don't see it. I pop into an expensive boutique and everyone is very chatty and offering help. I know I am breathing easier because of it, because I am always expecting something less welcoming. Not because I regularly experience anything less than welcoming but because it is now an embedded fear.

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To give an example, a woman walking down a dark road on her own will be on edge and alert to the possibility of something bad happening – most likely this isn't because this has happened to her in the past but because it happens. That's what being a woman of colour feels like everywhere all the time – to me at least – and only really in the last 8-10 years.

I have lived in the UK for 35 years and was never this hyper aware or concerned about my colour until things started to change. Brexit was definitely a major factor. Since then, what you read and see on social media, the news, everywhere, makes it difficult to not think about it all the time. My daughter who is now almost 18 has experienced an unbelievable amount of racism from her classmates and even her teachers. The response from her schools has been woefully inadequate and, in some cases, they have even suggested that my daughter may have done something to instigate it. A 15 year old instigating racism.

Later that day, my daughter and I decide to head into London for a few hours. We catch an 8pm train home. A drunk man sits at our table and makes a comment about “Chinese people” taking over the country. We decide to move to another seat only to be confronted by another drunk man yelling that I am not from this country. No one says anything.

Later that night I am reading the news headlines on my phone. I make the mistake of reading the comments at the end of a news article and see the “woke” agenda repeatedly mentioned. Then it's the screaming headlines about the crazy people saying the countryside is racist – how ridiculous and yet another example of the woke agenda going too far. I read that and I know that I do not feel comfortable in the Hampshire

countryside – I love it – but am I at ease? No, Do I still go for walks? Yes, but very rarely on my own.

It's the possibility that the people that you see writing those comments in newspapers or online is the person that you're sat next to on the bus, or train, in a shop or even worse in your office. And that the possibility is increased a hundredfold now in my head.

So, what is this all for? I am not asking for sympathy or to be treated with kid gloves. I am only trying to bring some of the less talked about impacts to light, in the hope that this helps someone walk into a room right now and have a bit more empathy and understanding of what other people might be feeling. It's not always the big things that we need to step up for, be the ally, call someone out. It's also just having that low level constant awareness that this might be how someone is feeling, not because anyone has said anything, not because anyone's done anything, but just because this is how it is.

**Chitra Nadarajah**  
Head of Climate Change and Environmental Strategy, Hampshire County Council



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“ My journey across the public sector. ”

Dave Smith, Access Officer



## EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

### Sharing personal stories and perspectives to foster inclusivity in the workplace

One of the positive things I have found working for public services is there is a greater chance to have better opportunities to be yourself.

I am registered blind and have dyslexia. From age 9 I attended a boarding school for children who were blind/visually impaired where they could provide the right kind of learning environment to support my learning.

I was born with my disability. Growing up as a disabled person in the 70's and 80's was more challenging than today as we didn't have the protection of the Equality Act, or similar legislation.

In those days, there was little support once you left school. I started working by joining the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) and spent 15 months learning IT and general office skills. My first job was working for an engineering company. Under a government scheme, the employer was part-paid to employ disabled people. My work included operating a large grinding machine which wasn't very suitable for someone with my level of sight loss.

Employment law also lagged, and I often faced workplace discrimination relating to my disability. The view at the time seemed to be that a 'normal' job wasn't possible for someone with my kind of accessibility needs.

So, I decided I needed to educate myself. I thought 'I'm going to learn my employment rights so that I can understand how to challenge the discrimination.' The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) came into effect in 1995 on the back of protests. I joined a union, UNISON and became an activist. Their training gave me the skills I needed to help myself as well as other disabled people.

Attitudes have been changing over the years of course. One police force I worked for had only 23 out of 10,000 employees identified as having a disability. When I left, the number was 1,000, many of which were living with PTSD which was better understood by the end of the 2020's.

In 2004, I joined West Sussex County Council within the EDI department and learnt my trade. I was made redundant after six years when the EDI team was closed due to 'austerity'. The councils stated that 'we don't need a central EDI team anymore because each department needs to do EDI itself!'

In 2012, I worked for a number of police forces and started to understand and implement Reasonable Adjustment Management Processes (RAMP). These are reasonable adjustments for disabled employees, and I was proud to have a positive impact on over 300 staff. These processes have now been copied and adopted across multiple locations.

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In 2022, I was approached by York City Council who notified me of their new role of Access Officer where I now work. This was created as an outcome of a City Centre Access Plan to improve accessibility in the city, including the re-introduction of blue badge parking. I am enjoying my new life in York, working with dedicated people both internally and externally to improve the lived experiences of disabled people.

We need to increase the education and awareness of the general public in this area. I have developed personally due to working in public services where I have had better career progression, as they look at what you can bring to the role and not your disability.

However, we are quite not there yet. With my trade union hat on, there are others who still struggle to be identified for the skills they have and who have not had such positive outcomes.

Having said all that, a diverse and inclusive workplace, irrespective of your particular protected characteristic, is a more effective, productive and representative one. We still need to continue to do more to improve the diversity of our workforces so they embody the communities we represent.

I do wonder what I would be doing if I did not have a disability - the fact that I cannot drive has had a significant impact on the number of roles I could have applied for. However, I am where I am because of my disability, and this has motivated and helped me progress in life. Attending a boarding school for the visually impaired and then moving into public service has helped me grow and be more determined.

**Dave Smith**  
**Access Officer, Customer & Communities**  
**UNISON - Diversity Coordinator - York**  
**City Branch**

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“ My journey in public sector management.”

Jade Jones, Head of Commercial & Business Improvement



## EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

### Sharing personal stories and perspectives to foster inclusivity in the workplace

I'm Jade Jones and I'm Head of Commercial and Business Improvement for Central Bedfordshire Council. I'm dyslexic and dyspraxic and until now, this isn't something I have openly shared.

There is a lot of shame and stigma about being neurodivergent. That is why I've decided to stand up and show young people coming through you can be both different and successful.

I've been very lucky because the form my dyslexia takes doesn't affect most things at work, and while anyone who has tried to decipher my handwriting will know that it is pretty illegible, I am thankful that for work I can type, and use spellcheck!

Still, spellcheck is not always a success, it does not alert you to the fact you have perfectly spelt a completely different word. Over the years I have learned to slow down and double check documents and always get a second pair of eyes on anything that is being published. I also know that because I process information in a different way, I need to write everything down to keep on track.

When it comes to dyspraxia, it affects my coordination and balance. It doesn't impact on work because I'm not using heavy machinery or tools, but I am not going to go ice-skating any time soon and you definitely wouldn't see me on Strictly!

The most challenging thing for me is noise. I love being in the office and I'm an extrovert, so I'm happy when I'm working with people, but I'm glad we don't have office phones anymore because multiple phones ringing cuts through me like a knife. I struggle to

work in loud environments, and I can't focus if anyone is playing music.

There are positives too. Neurodivergence helps you see problems in a different way. That often means I come up with innovative solutions at work, which has helped with my career.

I've always felt different in many ways. As a scholarship kid from a working-class background, I grew up in a culture where 'A' is acceptable and 'B' is bad, so I felt I had to strive for perfection. Because I had these additional challenges I went out of my way to compensate for them: to get a first class degree, to get a master's with distinction.

But it was hard. Now I've got children myself, I am not sure it's what I would want for them. I want them to be happy, to focus on being kind and being a force for good in the world. I think the challenges I faced might have made me a bit headstrong and a bit too focussed on being the best. I internalised the stigma and needed to prove to myself I was worthy.

When I started my career on the National Graduate Development Programme in Middlesbrough I didn't tell anyone at work I was dyslexic and throughout my career I have continued to stay mostly quiet. But representation matters. It's only by being seen that other people will say: "Okay, I could do that".

At Central Bedfordshire Council I am proud of the work we do on equality, diversity and inclusion and I am happy I've been able to make sure people who come forward as dyslexic get the right support including specialist equipment to enable them to do their best work.

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Jade Jones, Head of Commercial & Business Improvement



Although I work in a supportive environment, local government still has room to improve, and a lot depends on individual managers and their perceptions. For the first time last year I took a formal exam without extra time. I could have asked for extra time, but I didn't, because the tutor had made a number of disparaging remarks about the idea.

Afterwards, I was pleased I passed such a hard exam, but I also felt annoyed with myself for not requesting the extra time. It was because the tutor's words took me right back to school and being made fun of because I went to the lunchtime additional needs class. Despite being a top student, getting those A grades and appearing outwardly confident, I have never truly had the confidence to match.

It really matters how leaders approach these issues, it only takes one manager to make an offhand comment and it sets people back. That often happens not because people mean to be cruel or derogatory, they might just speak in an offhand way without understanding the impact of their words. It goes the other way too, if you say something nice to someone who is having a bad time it can change their entire day, and they might be thinking about it weeks later.

So I've made it a bit of a resolution this year to stand up and be counted. It's only by sharing your experiences that people go 'Oh, okay, it's not just me'. It's not just about neurodivergence, it's also about sexism or any other kind of injustice.

I've had great opportunities. I did an internship with the Department for Education when I was at university because of my dyslexia and dyspraxia and that was the kickstart to my whole career.

Because I got that, it then encouraged me to apply for the local government graduate scheme and things have snowballed from there. I've done my master's in public sector management and I went on to be first a project manager, then a team leader before becoming head of business improvement, and then head of commercial and business improvement, where I am at the moment.

You develop in confidence as you go, but we all have worries, the imposter syndrome, the nagging feeling that we aren't really any good. I was at the ADEPT LDP course, and the delegates shared their personal stories and challenges. I just thought, isn't it great when you take off the mask? Because everyone has this perception of what a leader should be. They should be calm, strong and powerful and never get flustered. But I think if you have nerves, it shows passion and that you care about something.

By having people with a different mindset, people whose brains work in a different way, you get great ideas and how can that be a bad thing? Having more differences, different backgrounds, energies and ideas can only help drive innovation and change.

I'm really nervous about talking about this, but I have got to do it.

I'll always be dyslexic. It's always going to be part of me. So we just crack on.

**Jade Jones**  
Head of Commercial and Business Improvement, Central Bedfordshire Council



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“ My journey in project management. ”

Janelle Raeburn, Project Manager



## EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

### Sharing personal stories and perspectives to foster inclusivity in the workplace

I'm Janelle Raeburn, a 'freelance' Senior Project Manager currently working at Islington Council and with Sports Logistics Agency Ki-Nitro Collective Ltd. I have had a wide range of different experiences and roles but in each, I have always strived to champion minorities and especially, but not exclusively, young black women. My passion as a leader is to bring people into a 'new space' or place of work that they previously didn't think could access.

My career pathway led me into Project Management, mostly in the events space (major sports events, award shows, fashion shows, to name a few). For me, confidence is important in all aspects of life including the professional arena. From my time as Miss Jamaica UK, before entering the corporate world, I gained confidence and networking skills which have stood me in good stead and set me up for onward success as a leader.

When I started working in a corporate environment, there seemed to be a bias against 'non-traditional' backgrounds that in all honesty I did not anticipate when I left university. My first full time role after graduating from was with London Underground as a management graduate trainee. After completing a 2-year programme of short-term placements around the business, my first main role was as a Duty Train Manager overseeing the day-to-day management of train

operators in a train depot. Within the management team there were 15 men and two women and, among the c.150 train operators, there was a 90% bias towards white men. Initially, it was challenging to be a young female graduate. In the 'I've been here man and boy' culture at the time; I felt I had to leave my femininity at the door, wear trousers and no make-up. I did this because I wanted the focus to be on the job and not on me and over time, I gained credibility and respect.

The management team I was part of were very supportive and being mentored helped me become a strong team player and manager. I felt it was important that I learned the technical elements of the role or else it would be difficult to tell experienced train operators what to do as their manager. At that time, 'micro-aggressions' were pervasive, especially against women of colour. I let some things go but I had to confront a particular train operator when he persistently refused to follow my instructions pertaining to his role; I held my nerve, stood up for myself and he didn't try to test my resolve ever again. I learned about keeping a calm head in a tough operational world!

I moved to a head office planning role but due to a culture of unconscious bias and again being a minority in my team, I felt very alone. My team was white male dominated and I was one of only two people of colour. Naively

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Janelle Raeburn, Project Manager



when I embarked on this role, I thought everything would be ok and I would be judged and rewarded on my merit, but I soon realised this was not the case. I was overlooked for promotion a few times despite my clear talent for delivering high quality work and when I was subjected to sexual harassment I once again felt so alone. Thankfully there was a female member of my team who advocated for and supported me. This made me realise I had a duty to advocate for others. It's not about one person, it's about all of us, so I started to get more involved with activist groups and talking to my peers.

When I saw there was no scope for progression in this role, despite my great work, I decided to leave the organisation and seek other opportunities elsewhere. One thing was for sure though I was confident in my capabilities, my value and my worth.

Coming to Islington, I started as a contractor, after being headhunted

to help drive a delayed project to completion. I performed well and haven't looked back. Staff are professional and the council is a great place to work but there can still be problems and more still needs to be done to make people feel comfortable and included. People need to be able to show up in the workplace as their true authentic selves; this is a key element of organisational productivity and success. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) is not a tick box exercise it's an essential ingredient in this modern world that makes organisations, as well as their people, thrive!

Change starts with self. I have a duty to stand up and speak out if something is wrong. I want to leave a trail to make it easier for others to follow. No-one is an island and we each have a responsibility to be the change we want to see.

**Janelle Raeburn**  
**Project Manager, Ki-Nitro Collective**



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“ My journey into employment. ”

Josh Edmundson, Highways Civils Operative



## EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Sharing personal stories and perspectives to foster inclusivity in the workplace

### What was most helpful/useful about Reintegration to Employment?

The work placement was a better taste of reality than an interview, I got the chance to understand what it's really like working on site and had more opportunity to see what it would be like. I had no experience so I wouldn't have been able to answer interview questions, it would have been scary, and I get a bad stutter when I'm nervous so I wouldn't have passed. I was working part time in takeaways before. It wasn't going anywhere, and the money was bad, but I wouldn't have applied to a job with Colas if I'd seen it because I had no experience.

### What difference has it made to how you feel about work, future career and future prospects?

My manager says I've come a long way and am getting good at seeing what needs to be done before I'm told now and doing tasks well. There's loads I want to try. When I've done my driving license, I want to train to drive the 360 and do my digger tickets, and eventually I want to be a supervisor on site. I prefer civils to tarmac as there's more to learn but it's great that I've had chance to experience lots of different things and decide what I want to do. I'm working on a Copenhagen roundabout now banging in kerbs, everywhere we work we find old tramlines and cobbles, it's interesting. I like history

- I like learning at work, applying that to my college work and then applying what I learn at college to my work. I struggle with hands on, paper-type studying because I struggle to write, and numbers can get jumbled too. Learning on the job is perfect for me and I'd like to help other care leavers. Everyone knows the highest crime rate is amongst care leavers because there aren't a lot of real opportunities with good employers who will be flexible and understanding. It's hard when you've got nobody to help and no back up at all - a lot of the time you're just alone with your thoughts. It's good for other staff too - helping young people from care - because it helps teach staff to be kind, responsible, and look out for others.

### Was there anything you found challenging/difficult?

Time management is something a lot of young people in care struggle with, and mental health. It's hard growing up alone without family to teach you how to be in a routine and do stuff you're not used to doing. Growing up on your own damages your mental health. I found it a challenge getting into a routine and making sure I stayed in it. It's good for your mental health to have a job and a routine of get up, go to work, come home tired, relax, sleep well - and have money to do the things you enjoy.

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## Are there particular challenges for young people who are care experienced and did the scheme help with these?

The banter on site could be a challenge. Employers need to be careful that people know where to draw the line - some people could switch and snap if the banter goes too far. A lot of people in care have mental health issues and stress in their lives that other young people don't have like housing, and bills, and loneliness. Most 18-year-olds are home with Mum and Dad. We're on our own without support managing a home, earning money, just doing everything by yourself.

## How could employers/managers better support/understand young people who are care-experienced?

Be patient and flexible. Things went badly for me with my housing recently. I moved to Bradford to be with my birth family, and it went badly so I had to move out, and now I'm in temporary housing waiting for my own place. I really went downhill, personally and at work. It was a really hard time but my manager and a workmate (also came in through RtE scheme, referred from Growing Rooms) really supported me. I'm not going to lie, it was hard at first living alone and getting my bills sorted out and everything, without any family to help but my leaving care worker still supports me, and I'm all sorted now. I'm looking forward to getting my own place and getting settled properly.

Giving lots of help is also important. Young people in care can miss a lot of school and move schools a lot, so don't have as much chance to learn. My manager and workmate are so good to me and spend a lot of time teaching me stuff and going over things again and again. They are always here to help, and I know I can always ask for help when I need it. The right people to manage and supervise is important - people with the patience to listen and find out the cause if things are going downhill. My manager always says you spend more time with your colleagues than your family and you have to care for each other, for me that's been so important.

An end of shift debrief is a good idea, just have a coffee and a chat about the day. Just so there's a chance to chat if anything is worrying you.

## What did you enjoy most about your experience/the scheme?

The flexibility is good. I did the paid work placement then went into a full-time job. I hadn't worked full time before and found it really tiring coming in to such a physical job, but the flexibility in the scheme meant I knew I could ask to reduce my hours if I found it too much. As I was turning 18, I knew I would be leaving my foster family and wasn't sure what I would be doing next. Having flexibility and support from my employer and colleagues made it less stressful when I went through a bad time with my birth family. The care I have from the people

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Josh Edmundson, Highways Civils Operative



I work with is really important to me. Learning to manage time and money has been important. Being here has taught me a lot - opportunities like this make you know you can be at rock bottom and still widen your chances and your life. If you're inspired to be great you can be great.

**Do you think the scheme helps care experienced young people to recognise what they have to offer?**

Yes, because it takes away the parts that would have put me off like the interview. I want to get involved with supporting other care leavers and would like to

develop an on-site training facility for care experienced young people to come to site and do civils experience days. I think there's loads of opportunities for young people like me, they just don't know about them. There's a lot of people who would do well and just need some help to get into jobs. My boss said "it's been worth every minute invested in me and by giving me a chance, Colas has got a real diamond."

**Josh Edmundson**  
**Highways Civils Operative**  
**Colas Ltd**

# PLACE FOR ALL

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“ 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



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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**

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“ My journey in supporting women through the menopause.”

Sally Leech, Director



## EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

### Sharing personal stories and perspectives to foster inclusivity in the workplace

Sally Leech from Menopause in the Workplace talks about the impact menopause can have.

Thankfully, understanding of the menopause has shifted dramatically in the last few years. But still, the impact it has on many people's lives and their ability to perform their jobs as they would want can be devastating. This doesn't need to be the case as there is so much that can be done to manage and support people through menopause.

That's why I'm so glad to be contributing to ADEPT's work with Colas and that support for anyone experiencing menopause symptoms is being recognised as essential by place directors. From my experience, even the smallest changes can make so much difference.

What happened to a friend of mine is just one shocking story and how her life was completely shattered until she was correctly diagnosed is staggering. She became very withdrawn, even from her family. She had to stop work, lost her job and then had to move house. Diagnosed with depression, she was thought to have had a mental breakdown and spent time in hospital. It took finally seeing a hormone specialist before she got the right treatment and came back to being the person she was. That was incredible to see, but what she went through to get there was heartbreaking

At the time I was working as a personal trainer and women's health coach, focused on pre and postnatal care and even I didn't have a clue how to help her, there was so little information. That's when I became determined to learn. And a few years later I joined Henpicked: Menopause in the Workplace, making a real difference to the lived experience of people at work.

Everyone needs to know about menopause, half of the population experiences this first-hand and others through their relationships with a partner, family member, friend or colleague. People of all backgrounds and identities can experience menopause and other aspects of their identities such as disability, neurodivergence, gender identity and cultural difference, may impact how people experience menopause and may add additional barriers in accessing support. Menopause is a subject for everyone.

When I'm asked by employers where to start, it always comes down to two words for me: awareness and understanding.

**Sally Leech**  
**Director, Henpicked: Menopause in the Workplace**



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“ My journey in conservation.”

Tayler Davies,  
Built Environmental Officer



## EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

### Sharing personal stories and perspectives to foster inclusivity in the workplace

My role is within the conservation and design team in Cheshire West & Chester Council. I come from an architectural background and am used to working on construction sites and historic buildings which tends to mean working with older people, usually men in their 50's and 60's.

Whilst it's not my preference, I adapt myself (I 'act up') to fit in. 'Acting up' means that I tone down what I wear. I would normally wear some pretty 'out there' clothes like brightly coloured shirts, baggy trousers, and chunky-soled boots but I don't want to stand out because I think they'll listen to me more that way.

I'm young for the job I do and feel I have to tone it down a bit to be taken seriously, especially with the people I interface with. Previously, in private practice, I've been told to dress in a certain way (more corporate and conservative) for a particular client.

I've worked for the council for two years now and was in private practice before that. I would love to see more diversity in my field but (building) conservation is an 'old man's game.' In fact, I don't know anyone under the age of thirty in conservation and very few women! There are more women in the ecology side of things, but conservation is allied to construction and tends to be more male dominated. There are more women in consulting outfits, writing reports and

less site-based - it seems to be something about site work that puts them off.

I'm a big guy (6' 4") and not feminine looking but I still hear the slurs on site, masked as banter. It's disappointing but I'm used to it, sadly. I hear that expression that something is 'gay' meaning it's bad or, at least, has a negative connotation. I think it's just how people are programmed or what remains as acceptable, especially for older generations.

Younger generations are more aware of appropriate language and what is, and is not, acceptable. The LGBTQIA+ community is now more significant - in scale and influence. As soon as anyone knows I'm from that community, they stop the 'banter.' Perhaps I should introduce myself as 'gay' up front!

It's definitely an education thing but a lot of people are scared about making a mistake in what they say. There is an emphasis on pronouns; which ones you relate to. I use 'he/him' pronouns on my email signature to help and encourage others, for example a someone who may use 'they/them,' pronouns to identify themselves which is a good thing. Everyone should be clear on their pronouns; not to force people to disclose them but to encourage the conversation. The council is a welcoming place and what you find is that if one person does it, others follow.

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Built Environmental Officer



These things, like my rainbow lanyard, act as little ‘cues’ so that people don’t have to say anything. Thankfully, I’ve never really experienced any serious negative harassment but the ‘old boys club’ can still be out of touch on these matters. It’s not the LGBT group that has to do the learning! Sometimes, it’s easy to dismiss minor ‘aggressions’ but it can put people off joining an industry, for example.

That’s why I love working for Cheshire West & Chester Council. It’s a positive, inclusive place where an effort has been made through securing the Navajo Merseyside & Cheshire LGBTIQA+

Charter Mark showing their commitment to understand the LGBT community and understand any needs they have. I am also a member of the LGBTQ+ Networking Group which aims to unite LGBTQ+ members of staff and allies, to support each other and create a positive working environment. People worry too much about offending in what they say but we all slip up now and again – just accept when you’re wrong and keep moving forward!

**Tayler Davies**  
**Built Environmental Officer,**  
**Cheshire West & Chester Council**

# PLACE FOR ALL

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“ My journey in transport planning. ”

Victoria Vernon, Transport Planner



## EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

### Sharing personal stories and perspectives to foster inclusivity in the workplace

I'm Victoria Vernon and I'm a transport planner for Leicestershire County Council (LCC). My role is to review planning applications against their impact on the highways network.

I'm quite unique, having four different types of neurodivergence – dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD-C and autism spectrum disorder. The sporadic nature of the first three and the very linear nature of autism means I already deal with some internal conflict before I even start thinking about the outside world!

School was awful and I faced a lot of bullying and discrimination. I stayed on for AS levels but decided I would sit my exams and not go back. I applied successfully for a university nursing course, but when they wanted me to defer for a year because of my age, I started temping with Wimpey Homes. Their design team wanted me for a trainee post, so I stayed and worked my way up to become an architectural technologist. I had a real flair for structural calculations and Computer Aided Design.

Later, I decided that I wanted to become someone who shapes the world they live in, so I took a pay cut and started as a planning technician at Sport England. Because I'd shown so much interest, they found some budget to put me through university on a day release where I was awarded the Royal Town Planning Institute Award for Outstanding Achievement, came top in my class and finished with a very good first. When I wanted to carry on, they helped me with my Masters, which I got with distinction.

Becoming a transport planner for LCC in 2019 was a leap, but I love to learn. I can look at a location plan, our mapping system, google, elevations, floor plans and the way my mind works, it will layer everything together and make a 3D walk-through in my mind. So instead of seeing just all the different drawings, my brain puts them all together to build a virtual walk through. I can even see the vehicles moving around.

Hyperfocus, which is symptom of my neurodivergence, is a wonderful thing. If I've got a lot going on, I can drill down into one subject. I have that focus and ways of thinking that a lot of other people don't have. The downside comes when it's time to stop. I have to be careful as it can take over and I forget to eat and take breaks. Team members often step in here and make sure I'm eating. Sometimes I just can't put things down and I can't relax or sleep.

Sudden changes can be difficult – changes in lighting can be really painful, loud noises and fire alarm tests go straight through me. Smells, tastes, foods – I can really like something one day and the next, no chance. Even I can't work it out. I can find textures impossible too. I'm also hyposensitive when it comes to pain which can be a problem with the clumsiness that comes with dyspraxia. I had a broken wrist once and didn't realise it until my mum persuaded me to go to hospital. I might know something feels wrong, but if it doesn't look wrong and I don't feel the pain, I can shrug it off.

Building trusting relationships that allow me to open up is really important. When I was

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“ My journey in transport planning. ”

Victoria Vernon, Transport Planner



masking in previous jobs, I was frequently ill. I spent so much time hiding everything I would get home with sensory overload. That could mean a shut down or migraines and losing all my down time trying to repair. I could get severe migraines four times a week. In Leicestershire, I've had the confidence to open up. As a result, I've been granted the flexibility to do my job the best way for me, and they would much rather I did that because the alternative can mean lost time. It's to everyone's benefit as I'm really good at my job!

One of the hardest things to go through is the reasonable adjustment process. A lot of it is done through the Government's Access to Work, which means undertaking various assessments after which they give you a big list of equipment. There can be an expectation that this process puts everything in place, but of course, it doesn't. There can be compatibility issues with tech and the limited training you get can mean you don't get the best out of it. I have a lot of good things in place that fall outside reasonable adjustments and often work better. There's the flexibility, and I have a traffic light system which helps the team understand how I am each day and enables them to know how to approach me.

I still worry about what people might think of me - that I can't do my job - but not having to mask has taken a huge weight off my shoulders. Opening up has been one of my hardest decisions, but also one of the best I've ever made. As people gain understanding, they see when I'm genuinely struggling and I get a lot more respect. That's why opening up and sharing insight into how my brain works differently is so important. I've found it's not a liability, it can be a real asset if people work with me.

I've done training sessions, awareness days and Big Conversations and took part in a team managers' away day. I became a Diversity Champion and part of a group of like-minded people who all have a passion for equality, getting rid of discrimination and who want everybody to feel safe at work. We're there if people need support. We want to highlight that by having conversations, raising awareness and gaining understanding, people can actually change their views.

LCC have been brilliant. They've still got a way to go - I think that's true anywhere - but they listen and take action where needed. They've also given me more confidence than anywhere else. They've given me a voice and a platform which has come from me putting myself out there, standing up, and saying I struggle with these things and see real changes be made as a result. We now have a neurodiversity champion and an ICT champion to help with reasonable adjustments.

Neurodiversity is one of those subjects that's still quite taboo and hard for people to talk about as it can leave you feeling quite vulnerable. I'd like everyone to understand there are no wrong questions. It's ok to ask, just don't expect us to always have the answer. I can talk about different aspects of my neurodivergence, why they are issues and how things get set off, but I can't explain why. My brain works differently, it's just how I am.

**Victoria Vernon**  
Transport Planner, Leicestershire County Council



# PLACE FOR ALL

The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT) is the voice of place directors in local authorities.

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Place directors are at the very heart of place-shaping, delivering universal services and leading partnerships to support their local environment, economy and communities. Place directors deliver solutions locally.

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