Neurodiversity Policy

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Introduction

The aim of this policy is to outline Meriden Parish Council's commitment to promoting equality and fairness, whilst recognising and celebrating the diversity that exists among our local communities. It will also outline the duties we must uphold and the corporate framework within which we operate.

This policy applies to workers and potential workers, who are neurodivergent, or who believe that they may be neurodivergent. It is also a document to give guidance to managers of neurodiverse staff.

The scope of this policy covers conditions including, but not limited to: autism spectrum conditions, Attention-Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia.

What is Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is an umbrella term that refers to the natural variation in the human brain and its functions. It acknowledges that every brain is unique and that these differences are not deficits but simply alternative ways of processing information, thinking, and interacting with the world. It highlights that people naturally think about things differently, and how everyone differs in their areas of strength and weakness. Many day to day tasks are designed in a 'neurotypical' way and therefore these may have an impact on someone who is 'neurodiverse'.

Neurodivergence includes a range of different neurological conditions, including but not limited to:

- Attention Deficit Disorders (ADD, ADHD)
- Autism
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Dyscalculia
- Dysgraphia
- Tourette's Syndrome

The Legal Framework

The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) consolidated over 100 pieces of equality and anti-discriminatory legislation which seeks to develop a common approach to dealing with unfair treatment and discrimination.

The Act put in place nine Protected Characteristics in order to prevent discrimination. The legal definition of a disability under the Equality Act 2010 is a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on a person's ability to do normal daily activities. Substantial is more than minor or trivial, for example it takes much longer than it usually would to complete a daily task. Long-term means 12 months or more. People with neurodivergent conditions may meet this definition of disability for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010. Normally, evidence is required from a diagnostic assessment to support the definition of a disability. An employee may be recognised as having a "hidden disability" and their employment rights are protected by the Equality Act 2010. Meriden Parish Council has a separate policy which covers Equality in greater depth; this can be found on the Council's website.

Principles of this Policy

- All workers deserve opportunities, encouragement and support to realise their full potential.
- A diversity of cognitive approaches is a source of great strength and value within a genuinely inclusive workplace.
- All reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that policies, practices and culture do not discriminate against neurodivergent people.
- Workers must not be subject to unfavourable treatment if they choose to disclose a neurodivergent condition.
- Each employee is unique and there can be a high degree of overlap between neurodivergent conditions. Consequently, any support needs must be identified and implemented on the basis of personal evaluation and individual consultation – not assumptions or stereotypes.

Neurodiverse Identification

Meriden Parish Council agrees to consider all requests for support for the purpose of obtaining a diagnosis within a timely fashion. Such support may be in the form of time off work to attend appointments and the provision of information.

It may be appropriate to explore on an informal basis first, using any free tools such as preliminary online screening before implementing a formal process. Reasonable adjustments, where provided, will continue throughout any informal or formal assessment processes.

As a Disability Confident Employer, the Council encourages applicants and employees to disclose neurodivergent conditions. It is also recognised that employees are under no legal or professional obligation to disclose a neurodivergent condition. However,

appropriate support can only be offered if the Council is made aware of the condition by the employee.

As Neurodivergent conditions are lifelong, the Council will accept previous assessments undertaken by appropriately qualified persons as sufficient evidence that an employee is neurodivergent.

Access to Work and Workplace Needs Assessments

The Council will take reasonable steps to assist employees with applications for Access to Work support and to facilitate Workplace Needs Assessments which may be conducted by Access to Work or independent consultants. It may also be recommended by the Council that the employee has a consultation with an Occupational Health provider to identify reasonable adjustments and support; this will be funded by Meriden Parish Council.

Supporting Our Employees

Neurodiverse employees may not choose to disclose their condition to their employer. This can present a difficulty if a manager is unaware of the employee's diagnosis as reasonable adjustments and support cannot be offered. Meriden Parish Council is an inclusive employer and would urge employees to disclose neurodivergences.

If an employee feels that they may have a learning difficulty such as dyslexia or dyscalculia, then the Chair of Council and / or Clerk should be contacted where a screening test can be arranged. Any contact made with Chair of Council and / or Clerk will be treated with sensitivity. An initial short screening test can be accessed via the British Dyslexia Organisation and this may help to provide some initial indication that an employee could have the condition. Further comprehensive screening can also be undertaken with the employee's consent, after which, any recommendations, equipment or reasonable adjustments will then be reviewed by the Council and implemented wherever possible to support the employee within their specific workplace environment.

Neurodivergent applicants who apply for roles at the Council will be treated fairly and will not be discriminated against. Applicants meeting the essential criteria will be invited to attend for interview and appropriate support will be offered to assist them through the process.

Reasonable Adjustments

Meriden Parish Council recognises Neurodiverse applicants and employees may require extra support in relation to their employment. The Council is committed to upholding its values on transparency, equality and innovation, and valuing its employees. Therefore, where reasonable adjustments are necessary, and can be accommodated, the Council will support these. Reasonable adjustments will be made on a case by case basis and will be agreed with line managers in relation to the employee's job role. These may include specific work related equipment, differently presented documents, documents in a larger font size or other recommended adjustments.

Guidance for Managers

Managers will be expected to:

- Support employees to obtain a diagnosis or assessment
- Encourage early disclosure within a genuinely supportive and inclusive environment.
- Work to eliminate barriers (including prejudice) that neurodivergent people can face in the workplace.
- Take reasonable steps to ensure that internal communications, training programmes, and testing requirements (such as to complete training courses) are accessible for neurodivergent workers.
- Raise awareness of neurodiversity in the workplace.
- Where practical, make documents available in a format suitable for the employee within corporate style guidance.
- Ensure any paperwork for meetings is provided to the employee within suitable timescales.

Managers will not be expected to micro-manage neurodiverse employees and it should be recognised that they will also have other employees to manage across their teams.

Managers will receive direct support from Chair of Council and / or the Clerk throughout the process and will ensure that the Manager is given clear guidance on Council Policy, reasonable adjustments and legislation. The Chair of Council and / or the Clerk may also arrange training where appropriate.

The Council will endeavour to make adjustments where reasonable and practical.

Neurodivergent Employees will be Encouraged to:

- Make the Chair of Council and / or the Clerk aware should they think they may be neurodiverse at the earliest opportunity.
- Use the mechanisms and processes available to identify suitable practical adjustments such as background colour for their PC – some people are affected by different colours so changing the background colour of the computer can help ease tired eyes and headaches.
- Plan their work – to save time and reduce stress, plan and map tasks for the working day.
- Ask their Manager to verbally relay any important information should they have a learning difficulty.
- Make their Manager aware of potential triggers that may cause a difficulty in order for these to be addressed.
- Use text-to-speech software – most office based employees work on computers; if it helps use text-to-speech software allowing access to an email or message and have it read to them.
- Be accountable and responsible for engaging with the process and support offered to them by their Manager and the Council. This includes utilising any reasonable adjustments, specialist software or equipment, coaching, training counselling provided.

Further Support

The following organisations can also be contacted for further support on Neurodiversity:

- Neurodiversity and Co-occurring difficulties - British Dyslexia Association – The British Dyslexia Association is committed to raising awareness and understanding of Neurodiversity conditions by offering a wide range of information to help families, professionals and Neurodiverse individuals.
- Home - The Dyslexia Association – The Dyslexia Association helps to raise awareness and provides support and services for dyslexic children and adults of all ages.
- National Autistic Society – The National Autistic Society is a UK charity that provides information, guidance and support to people with Autism.
- Access to Work – is a publicly funded employment support programme that aims to help more disabled people start or stay in work.