**Chairs of Equality Staff Networks Group**

**Thursday 30 January 2025**

**Microsoft Teams**

**Attendees:**

Cal Boal Newcastle City Council   
Errasmus Agha Newcastle City Council  
Victoria Perkins Northumberland County Council   
Amanda Baxtrem Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council   
Jane Garnet (Chair) Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council  
Adam Harland Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council   
Ali Haver (Minutes) Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council   
Angela Roper Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council   
Lisa Robinson Sunderland City Council   
Yvonne Cheung Sunderland City Council

**Apologies**

Raymond Addai Durham County Council  
Claire Holt Durham County Council   
Michael Shannon Durham County Council   
Rachel Armstrong North East Combined Authority  
Mick Brodie NEREO  
Lee Cawkwell Newcastle City Council   
Louise Crosby Newcastle City Council   
Charlotte Haswell Newcastle City Council   
Saziso Ndlovu Newcastle City Council   
Maud Webster Newcastle City Council  
Rebecca Brown North Tyneside Council  
Suzanne Duncan North Tyneside Council   
Julie Stewart Northumberland County Council  
Susan Clennell South Tyneside Council   
Rachel Hoff Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council   
Caites Nendick Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Rachel McKnight Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council  
Jane Hibberd Sunderland City Council

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| **1** | **Welcome and introductions.** |
|  | The Chair of the meeting asked for a round of introductions. |
| **2** | **Minutes of the last meeting** |
|  | The minutes from the last meeting on 24 October 2024 were accepted as a correct record. |
| **3** | **Matters arising** |
|  | There were no matters arising. |
| **4** | **Volunteer for Co-Chair** |
|  | The Chair invited attendees to volunteer to be Co-Chair of the meeting.  Members were advised that most of the administration work for the meeting is undertaken by NEREO. The Chair’s role involves a small amount of liaison with NEREO to arrange dates of meetings and to set the agenda. The main part of the role was to Chair the meeting.  Cal Boal (Newcastle City Council) volunteered to be Co-Chair but explained that she was currently on a short-term contract. |
| **5** | **Confirmation of Minute Taker** |
|  | Members were advised that Ali Haver had agreed to be minute taker for the meetings. |
| **6** | **Wider groups opinions on EDI accreditation** |
|  | This item was deferred to the next meeting.  A question around experience of disability confident accreditation was raised.  Redcar & Cleveland advised that they have leader status.  Sunderland advised that they have recently been granted level 2 status.  Northumberland advised that they are accredited but could not confirm the level of accreditation.  It was agreed that this discussion would be picked up at the next meeting. |
| **7** | **Accessing members with no email access** |
|  | Cal Boal had raised this topic as she had recently been appointed Co-Chair of the Disabilities Network at Newcastle City Council and had high level of awareness from her ordinary job role that a large proportion of staff (approximately 50%) did not have a corporate email address, or did not have frequent access to a computer or other device to access their emails. On top of this, Cal was aware that for many staff, time was an issue when it came to accessing emails. Cal asked what other networks do to reach staff without email access.  Sunderland City Council were currently going through a process of making sure that all their staff were digitally active which meant that things such as annual leave requests and submission of overtime claims had to take place electronically. As part of the implementation, staff were going out around the council to demonstrate how certain software worked. There was an appreciation that not all staff had corporate phones, or access to emails, therefore work had been done to encourage staff to use personal phones.  For those staff who had no access to email, there was a reliance on managers sharing information and messages at toolbox talks.  Northumberland County Council had provided every member of staff with an email address around 2 years ago. There was an awareness that despite all staff having been provided with an email address, not all used it. As Northumberland Council covers a large geographical area, it was important to ensure that events were not always confined to a single area of the county. They had utilised existing events, such as the flu bus to promote their EDI network to frontline staff, by having an EDI representative present to talk to staff and share the word.  As with most other organisations, Northumberland used newsletters to share information. These were electronic newsletters, however where opportunities arose, printed versions were handed out to frontline staff. Posters were used at sites which still had noticeboards and display areas.  It was felt that word of mouth was still the best way to get messages out to staff.  Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council advised that all employees have access to a RCBC email accent and work had been done to encourage staff to access corporate email addresses on personal phones, where corporate phones and access to computers was restricted. Digital display screens were present in depot buildings, where information messages were played on a loop for frontline workers.  Redcar and Cleveland had a closed staff only Facebook group which was used to share messages and promote events. Again, newsletters were used to share information about the EDI groups including the dates and times of upcoming meetings.  A discussion took place surrounding the willingness and reluctance of staff to provide information surrounding disabilities, diversity, and other protected characteristics. It was felt that staff believed that providing this information could make them more vulnerable in the workplace. It was evident that data held on the number of employees with certain characteristic was inaccurate due to this reluctance.  A suggestion was made to use the Government Notify service to contact frontline staff by text message, if data protection rules would allow, to share messages to frontline staff. Each service could send up to 10,000 text messages for free annually. |
| **8** | **Usage of term ‘Global Majority’ instead of ‘Ethnic Minority’** |
|  | This item was deferred to the next meeting. |
| **9** | **New initiatives and information sharing** |
|  | The Chair invited attendees to share any new initiatives, ideas, or other information their networks had been working on.  Newcastle City Council held a network event annually, which saw all members of their network groups, and other people such as the Leader of the council come together to discuss what they had been working on and share ideas. Some of their EDI groups used MS Teams channels to share information, however members of some groups didn’t want others to now that they were part of the group.  Newcastle Council had been working with their trade unions to conduct research into whether employees with a disability had declared it to the employer. This lead to questions such as what is a disability whether a person with a disability considers themselves to have one etc.  Northumberland Council have an equalities monitoring function within their HR system, however most of the workforce hadn’t filled the information in. The EDI network at Northumberland have developed a video, which stemmed from asking individuals to write a few words on white boards to describe themselves. The video was to highlight how everyone is different and has different perceptions of themselves.  Northumberland explained that they were Race Equality Trailblazers, which had been achieved through an organisation called Race Equality Matters. Attendees were advised that the organisation offered a lot of free resources which included webinars. One of the initiatives they had invited staff to join in with was #mynameis which prompts employees to include a phonetic spelling of their name so that others can pronounce it.  Northumberland had investigated accreditation for being an autism inclusive employer, however the cost for that was very high, so it had not been actioned. However, they were currently working towards accreditation as a menopause friendly employer.  Northumberland had a ‘time to talk’ event scheduled for 6 February 2025 and were holding a staff network day on 14 May 2025.  Redcar & Cleveland were also holding a staff networks day event on 14 May. They had also developed an EDI calendar of events, which included all promotions and events each network was pledging to support over the year.  Work around the release of a Reasonable Adjustments Passport was underway and the Parent and Carers Group were also looking to develop a Carers Passport.  Sunderland City Council were in the process of relaunching their staff networks. They had a launch date event planned for 19th February 2025 and hoped this would encourage staff to participate. Sunderland had tried to encourage all staff to provide equalities data but explained that a large number of staff did not want to share that information with their employer. |
| **10** | **AOB** |
|  | There was no other business. |
| **11** | **Date of the next meeting** |
|  | TBC – likely to be March 2025 |