

Hidden disabilities

Whilst some disabilities are immediately obvious there are a range of 'hidden' disabilities which is if the condition is not clearly apparent or visible.

The definition of disability for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010 is:

'a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his/her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'

So disabilities can include a wide range of medical conditions.

Hidden disabilities could include mental conditions such as depression and autism or learning difficulties such as dyslexia or dyspraxia. HIV/AIDS, cancer, multiple sclerosis (MS), epilepsy and diabetes are some examples of physical conditions which are categorised as 'hidden' disabilities as these are often not immediately obvious.

Someone may in fact have a mixture of such disabilities.

Many employees may not disclose their condition as they may be concerned that the organisation or their colleagues will focus on their disability rather than ability. This is even more likely if their condition is a mental health condition.

An employee may only make you aware of their disability if they are experiencing problems or require some support. Other occasions when you may become aware of this are in Performance Review and Development meetings or in the management of sickness absence.

As part of the Equality Act there is an obligation on an employer not only to prevent harassment and less favourable treatment but also to make reasonable adjustments due to disability – this could include improving access to work, alternative work equipment, altering patterns of work or the distribution of tasks. If an employee has highlighted a disability this may then involve discussion with the employee and the involvement of Occupational Health to explore possible solutions and improvements.

It is also part of good management practice in general to support all employees. You can request advice from HR upon becoming aware that a member of staff has a condition which may be a disability. Finding approaches to support employees with disabilities appropriately means yourself and the organisation are better placed to meet legal requirements and get the most from all staff.

This then means all employees, regardless of condition, can be supported and the Council as a whole can benefit from the abilities of all.

