

Internal inclusion comm's campaign

A number of inclusion events and activities for staff are coordinated throughout the year.

These have included 'lunch and learn' awareness sessions; bring, cook and share cooking events; interviews with staff, and display boards in the civic centre café.

The staff survey asks a question about how inclusive it feels working for Hillingdon – the response for 2025 increased by 4% from the previous year.

Staff have also shared directly that they value the activities and this contributes to their wellbeing at work.

Feedback from a Black History Month cooking event:

"I attended the Black History Month Cook-off, and it was a fantastic experience. We formed small groups to prepare African and Caribbean-inspired dishes, filling the room with amazing aromas and lively conversation. Afterwards, we all gathered around the table to share our meals, discuss the origins of each dish, and learn more about the cultures and countries they represented. It was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate diversity, connect with others, and deepen our appreciation of different cultural traditions."

Staff networks

2025 saw the launch of the third staff network – the Neurodiversity Network.

The Neurodiversity Network has been established in response to growing interest from colleagues seeking a space to connect, share experiences, and raise awareness around neurodivergence. It joins existing networks – including the LGBTQ+ and Race Equality groups – which continue to play an important role in promoting inclusion, representation, and belonging across the organisation.

Vicky Trott, Inclusion and Wellbeing Manager, has been working with **Sophia Abdel, Senior Autism Specialist Advisory Teacher**, on several initiatives to raise awareness of neurodiversity, and following numerous requests from staff, they are setting up the new Neurodiversity Staff Network.

Sophia tells us more about why setting up this specific network is so important: "During the past five years, the terms 'neurodiversity' and 'neurodivergence' have become increasingly common in our everyday language – particularly in education and inclusion spaces. But what do these terms actually mean?"

“Neurodiversity refers to the natural variations in the way people think, process information, interact with others, and experience the world. These differences influence how individuals learn, communicate, and behave. Crucially, neurodiversity doesn’t suggest that one way of being is better than another – it simply acknowledges that there are many ways of being.

“Conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, and Tourette’s syndrome are just some of those that fall under the neurodiversity umbrella. Current estimates suggest that 15 to 20 per cent of the UK population is neurodivergent.

“As our understanding of neurodiversity grows, so too does representation, awareness, and acceptance. While we’ve made progress, there’s still a long way to go. As society becomes more inclusive and celebrates the identities of minority groups, it’s vital that neurodivergent individuals are recognised and valued too.

“That’s why we are creating the Neurodiversity Network Group – an inclusive, welcoming space for anyone who identifies as neurodivergent (with or without a formal diagnosis), as well as parents, carers, and allies. Our aim is to provide a supportive environment where people can share experiences, feel a sense of belonging, and work together to shape and influence policy in Hillingdon.”

Matthew Wallbridge, Chief Operating Officer, says: “Corporate Management Team and I are pleased to see the launch of our Neurodiversity Staff Network. These networks play an essential role in building an inclusive culture, and colleagues are encouraged to attend meetings during work hours, as long as service delivery to residents is maintained.

“I look forward to watching the network grow into a valuable space of support, awareness and positive change.”

Project Search

On Thursday 10 July 2025, the Council Chamber at the Civic Centre was filled with celebration as 12 Project SEARCH interns from both the council and Hillingdon Hospital marked the end of their internship year in a heartfelt graduation ceremony.

The event welcomed around 70 guests, including friends, family, mentors and placement supervisors who had supported the interns throughout their journey. Guests of honour included Cllr Susan O’Brien, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education; Sandra Taylor, Corporate Director for Adult Social Care and Health and Dan Kennedy, Corporate Director of Homes and Communities with certificates presented by the Mayor of Hillingdon, Councillor Philip Corthorne.

During the past year, interns have worked across various departments within the council and at the hospital, gaining real-world experience and achieving an employability qualification. As they graduate, they now begin their next chapter of job searching and attending interviews for paid employment. Each graduate will also receive up to nine months of ongoing support to help them find the right job opportunity.

One of the graduates, **Audine Wythe**, said: “I feel excited and happy to have graduated today and have passed this important step. I’m looking forward to the future and putting what I’ve learnt into practice.”

Harry Sheriff added: “My experience at the council has been fantastic. I’ve really enjoyed all of my placements but especially working alongside the Repairs team. I’m really happy with the new professional skills I’ve learnt.”

Stuart Smith, Work Inclusion Partnerships Manager, shared his thoughts on the day: “Each graduation reminds us why Project SEARCH matters. Watching these young people evolve over the year – gaining confidence, learning new skills, and now stepping into the world of work – is genuinely inspiring.

“We’re incredibly proud of every intern and equally grateful to the staff who welcomed them and guided them throughout.”

In recognition of their vital role, staff from both the Civic Centre and Hillingdon Hospital were presented with special awards for their outstanding support and mentoring during the past year

About Project SEARCH

Project SEARCH offers supported internships for young people aged 17 to 24 with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The programme helps interns develop valuable workplace skills in real roles, with placements across sectors, including retail, hospitality, administration, maintenance and repairs, media and culture, banqueting and events and green spaces