



***THIS LEADER
CAN...***

***...MAKE A DIFFERENCE
ON EQUALITIES***



Dawn Reeves &
Fran Collingham

First paperback edition published in Great Britain in 2018 by Shared Press

Published by Shared Press
www.sharedpress.co.uk

Copyright © Dawn Reeves 2018

The right of Dawn Reeves has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, transmitted, or stored in a retrieval system, in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher.

All characters in the flash fiction in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Illustrations: Angie Noviello (www.angienoviello.com)
Design and layout: James Warren (jamz.warren@gmail.com)

THIS LEADER CAN...

...MAKE A DIFFERENCE ON EQUALITIES

True stories about
diversity and leadership in
public service.

**By Dawn Reeves
& Fran Collingham**

Contents

Foreword: This Leader Does – Jo Miller	2
Introduction	4
Empower	6
We need to talk about it – Jerry Hutchinson	8
IT makes the difference – Sandra Taylor	10
Act up – Niall Bolger	12
Just press on – Sara Roach	14
Brand awareness – Shokat Lal	16
Micro Stories	18
Don't just do it, showcase it – Mary Morrissey	20
Show 'em your wallpaper! – Chris West	22
Learning to breathe – Anonymous	24
Is it better to be good or lucky? – Anonymous	26
Energise	28
Engage, equip, empower, embed – Jackie Addison	30
Belonging to the chain gang – Jennifer Taylor	32
Unconscious bias – Dawn Reeves	34
Generating energy – Jessica Crowe	36
When is silence support? – Anonymous	38
Micro stories	40
Drop the ego and learn – Helen Grantham	42
Best and worst in people – Anonymous	44
The tree that bends – Anne-Louise Clark	46
Diversity and the bottom line – Piali Das Gupta	48
Recruitment: right and wrong – Anonymous	50
Engage	52
Vulnerability and strength – Piali Das Gupta	54
A quieter consensus – Graham Smith	56
Setting the tone – Shokat Lal	58
The heart of the matter – Manjeet Gill	60
Micro stories	62
Living in a nightmare – Mazhar Mohammed	64
I think we got it wrong – Anonymous	66
It's about the place – Stephen Gaskell	68
Managing the grey – Becky Shaw	70
Top ten tips for diversity	72
This Leader Can book club questions	74
Acknowledgements	76

*IT'S ABOUT CONNECTIONS
AND A STORY THAT'S
AUTHENTIC*

We all belong to many tribes. And whatever tribe you're from you have a responsibility to connect with other tribes. It's about connections and a story that's authentic. My roots in Liverpool, my love for my football team and the way I talk about this part of my life is important for making connections.

When I became Deputy Chief Executive at Bradford one of my first visits was to a local mosque and my first words were, "I'm the newest immigrant in the room, I've used my passport to cross the Pennines from Liverpool and I'm learning the Yorkshire language here." People listening understood how I felt – my story made the right connections for them.

If leadership is about inspiring others then people have to know what makes you tick and what your story is. That's not about sharing everything; you have to keep some stuff private. I'm very open on Twitter but don't share the names of my kids on there, for instance, although it's very clear what's important to me, what I stand for and what I care about.

You can only know people by knowing their story, a story that shows their value set, what motivates them and inspires them. Be open and authentic about yourself and your tribes, connect with other tribes and support them to connect with each other. And then you build truly diverse organisations where people trust and understand each other.

If people question the need for creating a story because, in their view, it makes us less authentic, I just think about Jurgen Klopp. He wants his team to win, so he uses different tactics to succeed. That's the way to do it.

Jo Miller is Chief Executive at Doncaster Council and Solace President from 2016 to 2018.

*YOU CAN ONLY KNOW PEOPLE BY
KNOWING THEIR STORY*



INTRODUCTION...

**AROUND THE BUSY
CONFERENCE HALL THERE
ARE MOSTLY WHITE
MIDDLE-AGED MEN
GETTING COFFEE,
BROWSING THE STALLS
AND CATCHING UP WITH
OLD MATES**


Could we get under the skin on diversity and inclusion, tell the stories, see the situation through different lenses?

We'd need people's experiences of leadership, the tough, hostile bits – and the quiet satisfaction of getting on and doing a good job despite the challenges

Just shows how far we still have to go...

Yes, it's like you don't see what's really going on until you see the sector's leaders in one place





And the organisational barriers people still face in their work and the ways organisations are doing things differently to get it right

And the work we do with our diverse communities; how often we get it wrong and how – sometimes – we get it brilliantly right

It's clear many people here are ready to take a stand and call out the behaviours, processes and attitudes that shouldn't – but do – still exist

So could we shine a light in an area that's too much in the shadows? Support new conversations? Help leaders to step up? To crack on?

There's only one way to find out...

READ ON AND SEE...

**Dawn Reeves
Fran Collingham**

CHAPTER 1 EMPOWER

Individual – personal stories about how equalities and diversity have an impact on work and life

Key themes

Empower yourselves and others, be confident and fearless, challenge others, call out discrimination, see opportunities everywhere, bring others with you, unconscious bias, shift your mindset

MY CONCERN IS THAT WITH DISABILITY, JUST GETTING A JOB IS SEEN AS THE ULTIMATE GLASS CEILING

When asked, I've always said no, I'm not disabled, I've got a slight limp because I had polio as a child. I never used to declare it on application forms for jobs, and usually got them. When I first started to, because I thought I should, I didn't get past a preliminary telephone interview, although I met all the criteria. I was just told the leader didn't want someone from a district council. Declaring my disability has never led to a job.

I wondered how many chief executives had a visible disability. I couldn't think of any and I've been a chief executive for 23 years and I've probably come across thousands of chief executive colleagues in that time.

Increasingly, I feel I have to put my head above the parapet on this - I'm a pale male doing a top management job with something to say! I've never highlighted my disability and haven't focused on it during my career but over the past ten years it's become more of an issue; I get tired more easily, stairs without handrails are impossible, it's hard to get down to London for meetings.

Senior level disability is rarely mentioned in equality and diversity reports. It's not built into the way a local authority thinks - putting up some wheelchair ramps isn't the answer.

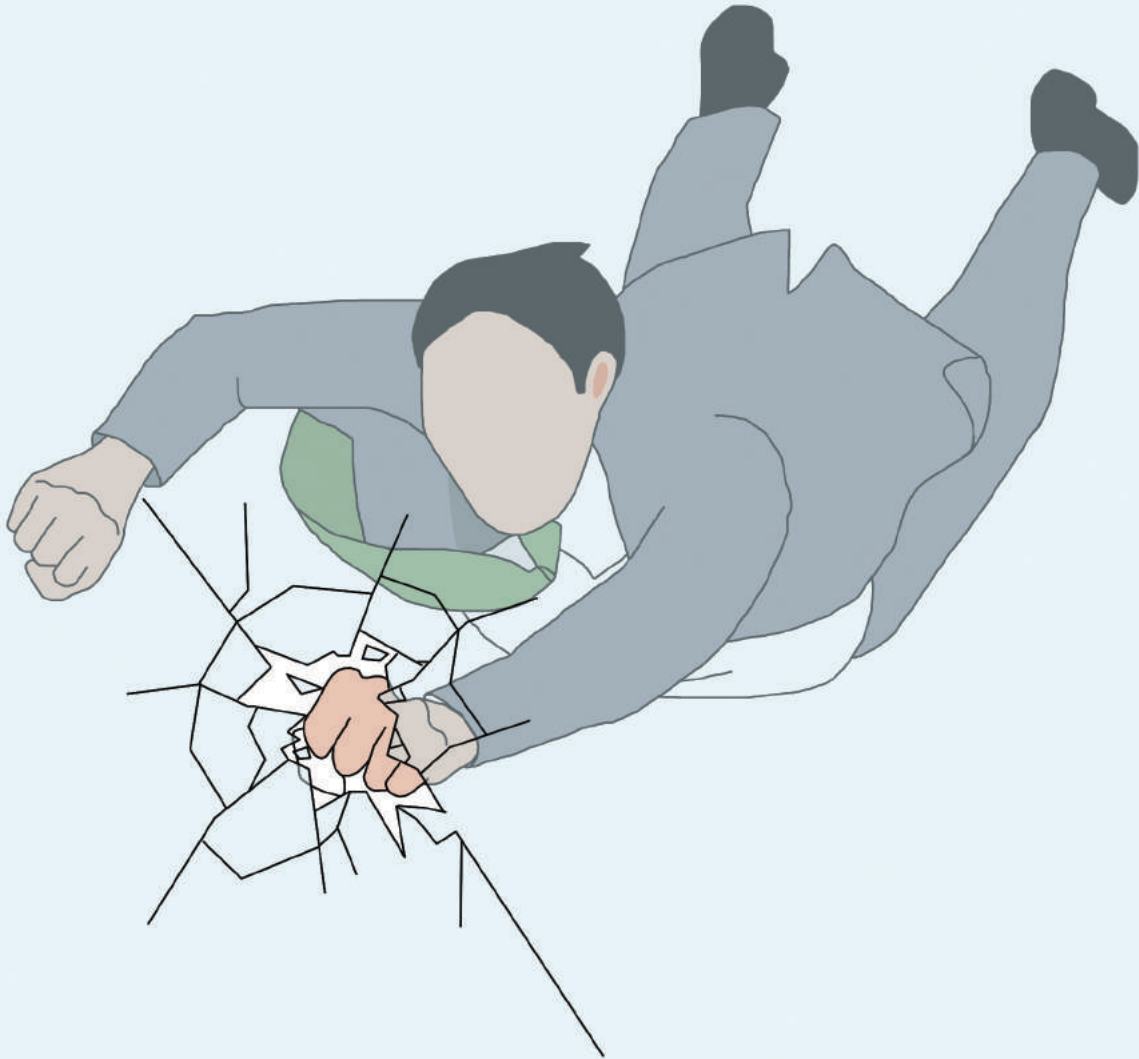
Is there a subliminal assumption that people with a physical disability might need more time off? My sickness record is fairly unblemished. My concern is that with disability, just getting a job is seen as the ultimate glass ceiling.

I think employers shouldn't ask about disability until someone's got the job, then you can ask what's needed. Maybe senior managers with a disability should be on diversity panels?

The Paralympics in 2012 made a big difference in mainstreaming disability, but we need to talk about it in the public sector.

Jerry Hutchinson is Chief Executive at North Warwickshire Borough Council

*SENIOR LEVEL DISABILITY IS RARELY
MENTIONED IN EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY
REPORTS*



They're nerds in jogging trousers, aren't they?

That's too often the stereotype of IT professionals in the media. I'm determined to change that negative attitude to IT – that it's boring, geeky and not a great career.

Technology permeates our society, and our aspirations to enable improvement through the use of technology means it has never been more important to have a diverse and skilled workforce. All leaders need to be digital leaders, the whole workforce needs to be digitally enabled and we all need to see technology as simply a means to an end – helping us to do things better and better things.

We've done a lot in Dudley to encourage and support women in our IT service. It's centralised, so there's lots more flexibility around different roles, ranging from highly specialised technical roles through to business technology roles requiring people focused skills. There are also opportunities to work flexibly including part-time

working, agile working and some home working. I think flexibility is very important in supporting women in their career.

Currently 36% of our IT workforce is female, which is twice the national average for the UK technology sector. A number of my managers are women, and all play a really important role for the service. It's a priority for me to support and develop all staff who want to be managers, so there's a lot of focus on that in my service. The training budget is one budget I will not cut, whatever else happens.

Positive women role models in IT are important, too, particularly as so many girls don't think it's the career for them, and I'm proud that next year I will be president of SOCITM (Society of Information Technology Management). During my presidency, I'll be focusing on leadership, diversity and skills.

Sandra Taylor is Head of Digital and ICT Services at Dudley Council.

*LITTLE DID SOPHIE KNOW THAT SHE COULD
HAVE A GREAT CAREER IN IT!*

*THIS IS SOOOO
BORING...*



MY IDENTITY IS CORE TO HOW I PRACTISE LEADERSHIP

As far as I know I'm the only out gay Chief

Executive. I describe myself as a bit of a stropky bastard – a gay working-class lad from the Welsh valleys, with a bit of Irish in me. I was always different. I started work in local government in the 1980s when attitudes to LGBTQ+ communities were very different. I was an activist, involved in campaigns and I worked for the age of consent to be equalised. I learned to stand up for myself, to be proud. In those days, at the Gay Pride march, there would be police lining the streets with riot shields, it was hostile and threatening – a world away from where we are now.

My identity is core to how I practise leadership. Our values are about inclusion and equality for all our diverse communities, so we performance manage it and we call it out when we see action that is discriminatory. It's our responsibility to recognise how our own judgements affect

the decisions we make. And it's about our expectations of each other as human beings, seeing the richness and benefits of our differences.

In my career I've been actively discriminated against, not been promoted, excluded from certain projects, from conversations. I've never been part of the pale, male, stale informal networks, the places that reinforce that sense of entitlement.

It's still shocking that in 2018 we're still having to stand up against homophobia, racism and sexism. And we are. We've got a long way to go on BAME issues. I'm trying to make the space for those who are coming through the ranks to be themselves, to break down barriers and create opportunities. It goes back to social justice, to our values.

Niall Bolger is Chief Executive at Sutton Council

*I'M TRYING TO
MAKE THE SPACE
FOR THOSE
COMING
THROUGH THE
RANKS TO BE
THEMSELVES*



***I'VE ALWAYS FOUND MY OFFER IS
MORE EASILY TRANSLATED IF YOU MEET
ME AND TALK TO ME***

I started as a typist in

housing and environmental services and was there for four years. Through hard work, lots of support, people believing in me and the opportunity to prove myself I ended up as deputy director of the directorate, managing some of the people I used to do the typing for. I knew this would never be easy, some found it easier than others and I can't underestimate how much tact and patience it took getting to the point where they all respected the fact that I was now their manager. Not sure why it was so difficult – because I used to do their typing or because I was a woman. Probably both!

Working your way up through the same organisation can be challenging. What I discovered was that external validation is really important to get inside validation; people outside the organisation initially appreciated me more than council colleagues. I didn't have much confidence in myself to start with but my manager at the time believed in me, saw my potential and made sure others knew about the work I was doing.

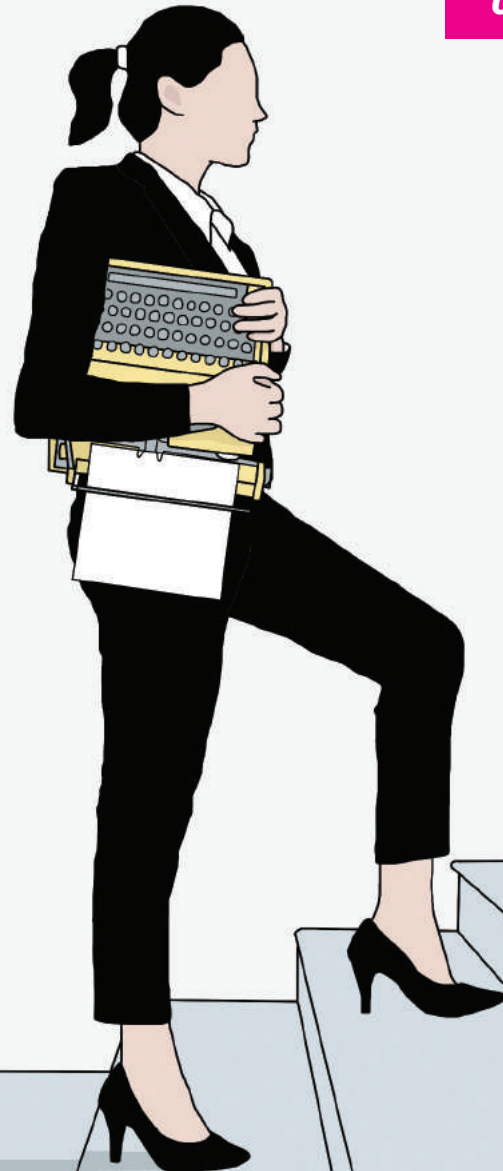
My job – initially in community safety – involved working with lots of outside partners and I've always found that easy. I work hard, create respectful and sustainable relationships and I know a little about a lot so politicians, in particular, rely on me to get things sorted for them. I try to make sure people need me more than I need them.

I've always found my offer is more easily translated if you meet me and talk to me. I spent decades at the same place, working my way up and I don't have a CV with university degrees and lots of higher qualifications; I'm probably not so impressive on paper.

At the same time as all of this I was bringing up six children – all under ten years old at one stage – so I was ruthless about spending eight hours a day and no more in the office. Time management is key!

Sara Roach, former Deputy Director at Coventry City Council is now an independent consultant.

*PEOPLE OUTSIDE THE ORGANISATION
VALUED ME MORE THAN MY COUNCIL
COLLEAGUES*



*THE BLUNT TRUTH IS THAT SKILLS
AND COMPETENCIES WILL ONLY
GET YOU SO FAR*

When I was at Coventry

I always found it really curious that 30% of our population was BAME but there were only two or three of us in the top 100 managers at the council.

But when you're in leadership you have to ask yourself how you can make your workforce more diverse. It has to start at the top, both in representation and action. And while targets help set a bar they are meaningless without identified and tracked action plans and innovative ideas. It's about how we grow talent, what the organisations that sit around councils, like local government support bodies, are doing and the role of recruitment agencies when appointing to our most senior roles.

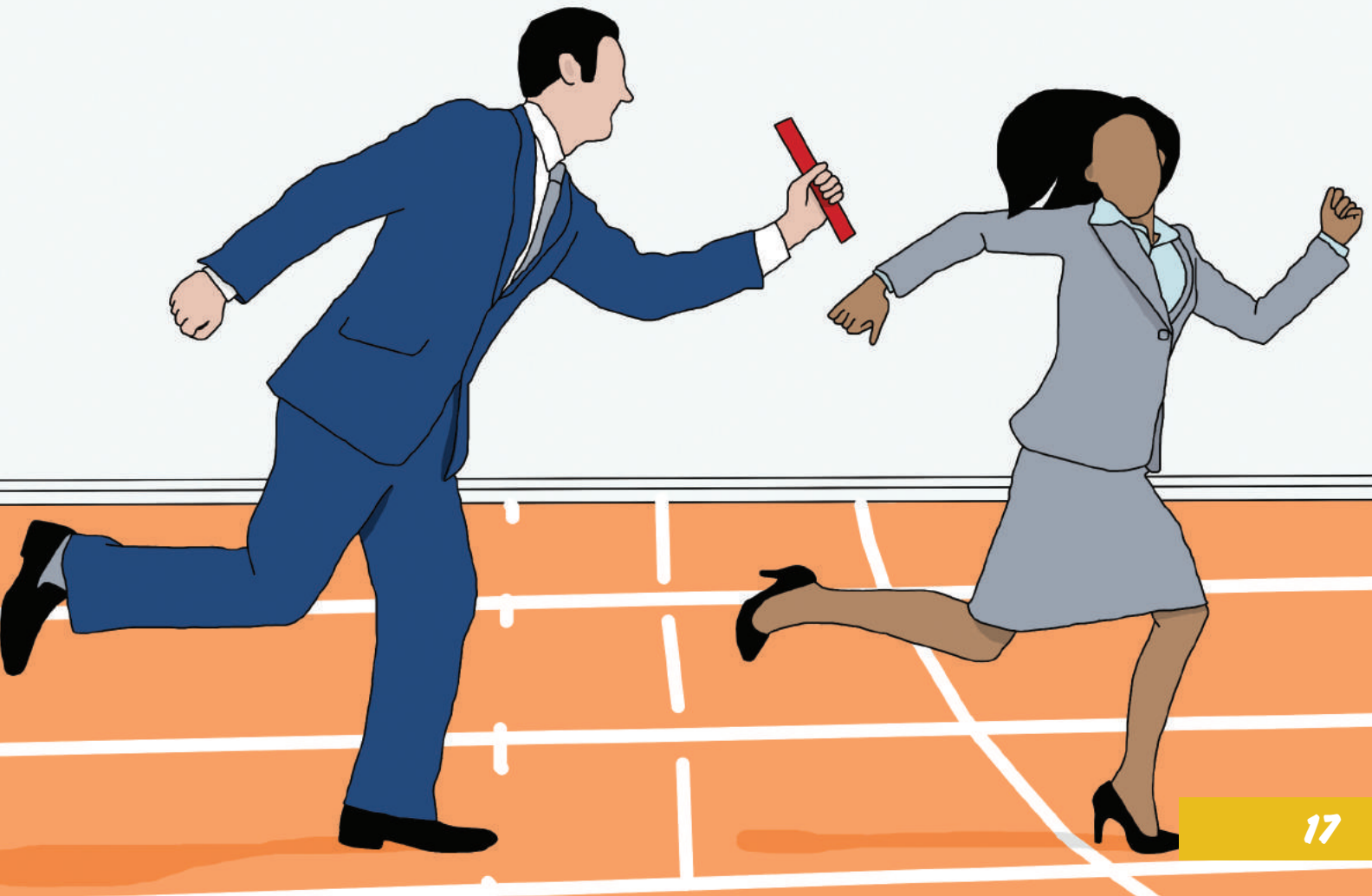
These are incredibly influential with a big role in deciding who goes in front of executive teams and member panels. We should be challenging them to make sure their databases and pool of candidates are diverse and the processes make the most of the talent we have.

The blunt truth is that skills and competencies will only get you so far and for senior leadership roles it is about fit as much as your skills. If you want to move on, you have to develop a brand, network, build outcome-focused relationships and adapt to the challenges of a place at a given moment in time. Your own positioning and profile is essential. A good mentor and coach can help with this and take you to the places you need to be; I was told I was bad at networking as I tended to stay at my desk, but I needed to do more to get my next job.

The best leaders recognise ability and let it grow. They encourage you to raise your profile and step into the spotlight. They enable, empower, inspire and support you to do more. Actually, I think I've grown the most when I've had a woman manager.

Shokat Lal is Assistant Chief Executive at Rotherham Council

*THE BEST LEADERS RECOGNISE ABILITY
AND LET IT GROW*



EQUAL PAY?...

“ The hall was full and the mood was tense.

Single status was affecting everyone in the organisation and people were unhappy. As the meeting got underway the binmen turned up, still in their big boots and hi-vis jackets and stood at the back of the hall, arms folded.

Lots of admin staff were faced with losing money when the pay protection period ended and one after another they stood up and ripped into the chief executive and the senior managers there. Until an angry man stood up.

“It’s one thing for them,” he said, gesturing at the rows of mainly women admin staff, “I’ve got a family to support and a mortgage to pay.

“But they’re only working for pin money, to buy extras.
It’s not the same for them.”

And the mood changed. Management versus the rest? Women versus men? ”

THIS ISN'T RIGHT...

“ We’re the butt of everyone’s jokes, of course,
us Jehovah’s Witnesses. That’s okay, we’re used to that. But

I know people think I’m mean when I don’t contribute to the collections for people’s birthdays and don’t take part in the office Christmas do. You can feel isolated; so much of office life is focused on these special days when there’s cake and jolliness and I’m not joining in.

Still, I think my boss sees the advantages of having me around. He certainly expects me to work Christmas Eve and in those quiet days between Christmas and New Year because I don’t celebrate Christmas. Well, that’s all very well, but my children are off then like everyone else and I’d quite like to spend time with them. But when we do the office rota for Christmas I know people resent me taking time off. ”

DIVERSITY IS DIFFERENT...

“ I’ve got a mild form of cerebral palsy – it just affects the right side of my body and looking at me you’d probably just notice my twisted wrist and hand. When I went to university I used to tell people my arm had been injured in a car accident.

When I started teaching I got used to children asking what was wrong with my arm and became more comfortable about explaining it.

My girlfriend and I spent eighteen months in Vietnam teaching and there, once again, I used to tell people I’d been injured in a car accident. It wasn’t because I was embarrassed about my disability – it’s part of who I am and I’m not angry about it these days – but it was such a culturally different place Vietnamese people simply couldn’t understand how someone with a condition like cerebral palsy could do a well-respected job like teaching.

It’s a reminder of how differently diversity is treated. We need to keep educating people and not make assumptions that everyone gets it. ”

ASSUMPTIONS...

“ Our usually amiable colleague was ratty and snapped at us in the meeting. Afterwards, talking to someone, I said I thought they were grumpy because it was Ramadan and they wouldn’t have eaten that day.

A couple of days later my boss called me out for the remark. He thought I was being culturally insensitive – just because our colleague was Asian didn’t mean I should assume they were Muslim.

Our colleague was a Muslim. He might have been ratty because he was hungry, or he might have been ratty for a million other reasons. ”

You know what, I can only think of one incident where it was clear I was dealing with men with a negative attitude to women. A female colleague and I had to meet two male colleagues to discuss a repairs procurement contract.

They obviously thought, oh, they don't know anything about this, we'll outfox them. They didn't have a clue about our technical understanding of the issue, that I was a quantity surveyor and my colleague was a building surveyor. Well, we blew them out of the water. You could tell they were leaving the meeting thinking, how dare these young women know more about this than us?

I was brought up on a council estate and my hardworking Irish mum and dad and my family have always supported me. Perhaps that's why it's never been a problem for me, running frontline services that are traditionally male dominated. I don't apologise for who I am and I've never

thought of myself as less able than any man; gender simply isn't an issue for me on the frontline.

I like sport and I'm happy to banter with the guys down the depot at five in the morning about my football club. We connect on that level and with that comes trust and respect. I spend time with them; going out with the bins shouldn't be a one-off stunt, but a regular thing.

But I know this isn't everyone's experience and senior leaders need to tell stories about opening doors, making a difference. I used to go to schools to talk to girls about careers in construction. If we want to change we need to do more than just do our job. We have to showcase it, too.

Mary Morrissey is Strategic Director for Environment, Housing and Regeneration at Sutton Council.

***YOU COULD TELL THEY WERE LEAVING
THE MEETING THINKING, HOW DARE
THESE YOUNG WOMEN KNOW MORE
ABOUT THIS THAN US?***

*I DON'T APOLOGISE FOR WHO I AM AND
I'VE NEVER THOUGHT OF MYSELF AS LESS
ABLE THAN ANY MAN*



I would never be complacent about the need to push hard on diversity issues – figures for the

gender pay gap across our economy are enough to make that case compelling. But my career at a senior level is a story of working with talented and effective women colleagues, from whom I have learned an enormous amount and to whom I owe an awful lot.

As I approach the final phase of my career, I realise I am probably from the first generation where this is likely to have been the case. Let's hope this becomes the norm.

My first senior job was in a large council housing department led by an authoritarian director. It was his three female assistant directors who taught me how to operate at that level; all went on to be successful chief executives.

My next job was as assistant director for a female chief education officer. As one of her strategies for stamping her personality on her role, she redecorated her office. When she needed to summon someone for a

particularly heavyweight meeting, she would say with a smile; "I'll have them in and show them my wallpaper" – many obstreperous senior colleagues sat in the reception area looking very nervous at the prospect. Her vision and leadership were accompanied by an infectious passion for improving the lives of children and young people.

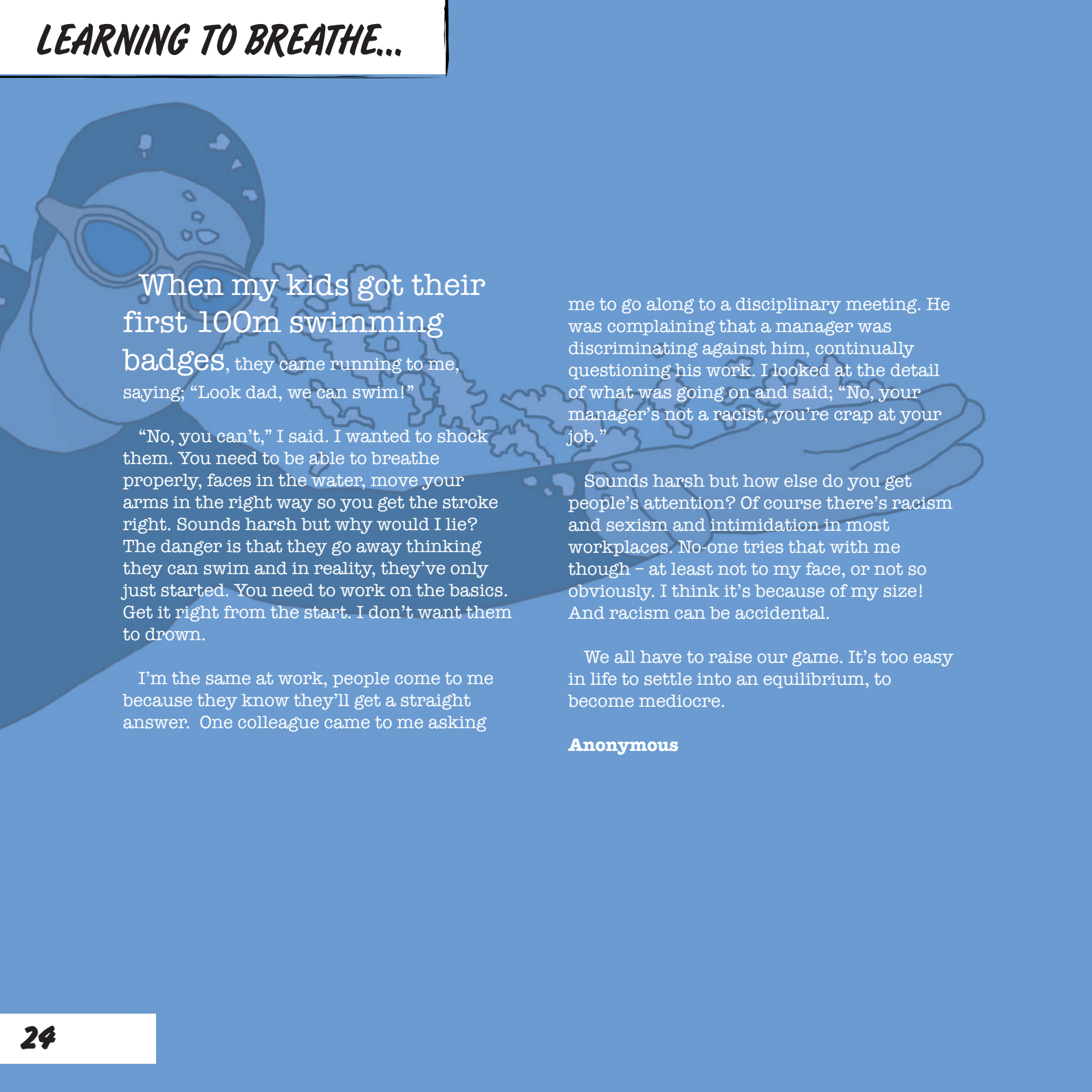
I then became director of finance for a woman chief executive who was a whirlwind force for change and improvement, with a truly scary grip of detail and massive courage in overcoming barriers to progress and confronting bad behaviour and negative culture. She is passionate about creating a level playing field for women and has supported many women both individually and collectively to reach their potential. She did that for me, too.

I am shaped by and grateful for the experience of working with these and other fantastic colleagues. The influence of women in senior roles has further to go, but it is out there loud and clear already. And it's not just in the decor.

Chris West is a former council finance director, now an independent consultant

*THE INFLUENCE OF WOMEN IN SENIOR
ROLES HAS FURTHER TO GO, BUT IT IS OUT
THERE LOUD AND CLEAR*





When my kids got their first 100m swimming badges, they came running to me, saying; “Look dad, we can swim!”

“No, you can’t,” I said. I wanted to shock them. You need to be able to breathe properly, faces in the water, move your arms in the right way so you get the stroke right. Sounds harsh but why would I lie? The danger is that they go away thinking they can swim and in reality, they’ve only just started. You need to work on the basics. Get it right from the start. I don’t want them to drown.

I’m the same at work, people come to me because they know they’ll get a straight answer. One colleague came to me asking

me to go along to a disciplinary meeting. He was complaining that a manager was discriminating against him, continually questioning his work. I looked at the detail of what was going on and said; “No, your manager’s not a racist, you’re crap at your job.”

Sounds harsh but how else do you get people’s attention? Of course there’s racism and sexism and intimidation in most workplaces. No-one tries that with me though – at least not to my face, or not so obviously. I think it’s because of my size! And racism can be accidental.

We all have to raise our game. It’s too easy in life to settle into an equilibrium, to become mediocre.

Anonymous

*WE ALL HAVE TO RAISE OUR GAME. IT'S
TOO EASY IN LIFE TO SETTLE INTO AN
EQUILIBRIUM*



IS IT BETTER TO BE GOOD OR TO BE LUCKY?...

***I WAS SACKED
BECAUSE I
WOULDN'T LIE***

The saying goes, if you're good you don't need to be lucky. But that's not

my experience. Especially if you're relatively young and female.

I'd been at the council for six years, working my way up and managing the audit team. I was asked to apply for a deputy 151 post, and although I raised my own concerns about my lack of experience, I was assured I'd be supported to develop into the role.

Shortly after I took the job on, my boss left and a shared services agreement was put in place. Our new 151 officer was in the council only one day a week.

I was thrown in at the deep end. My team did some great things including a new procurement strategy, an asset review, and best practice work on the medium term

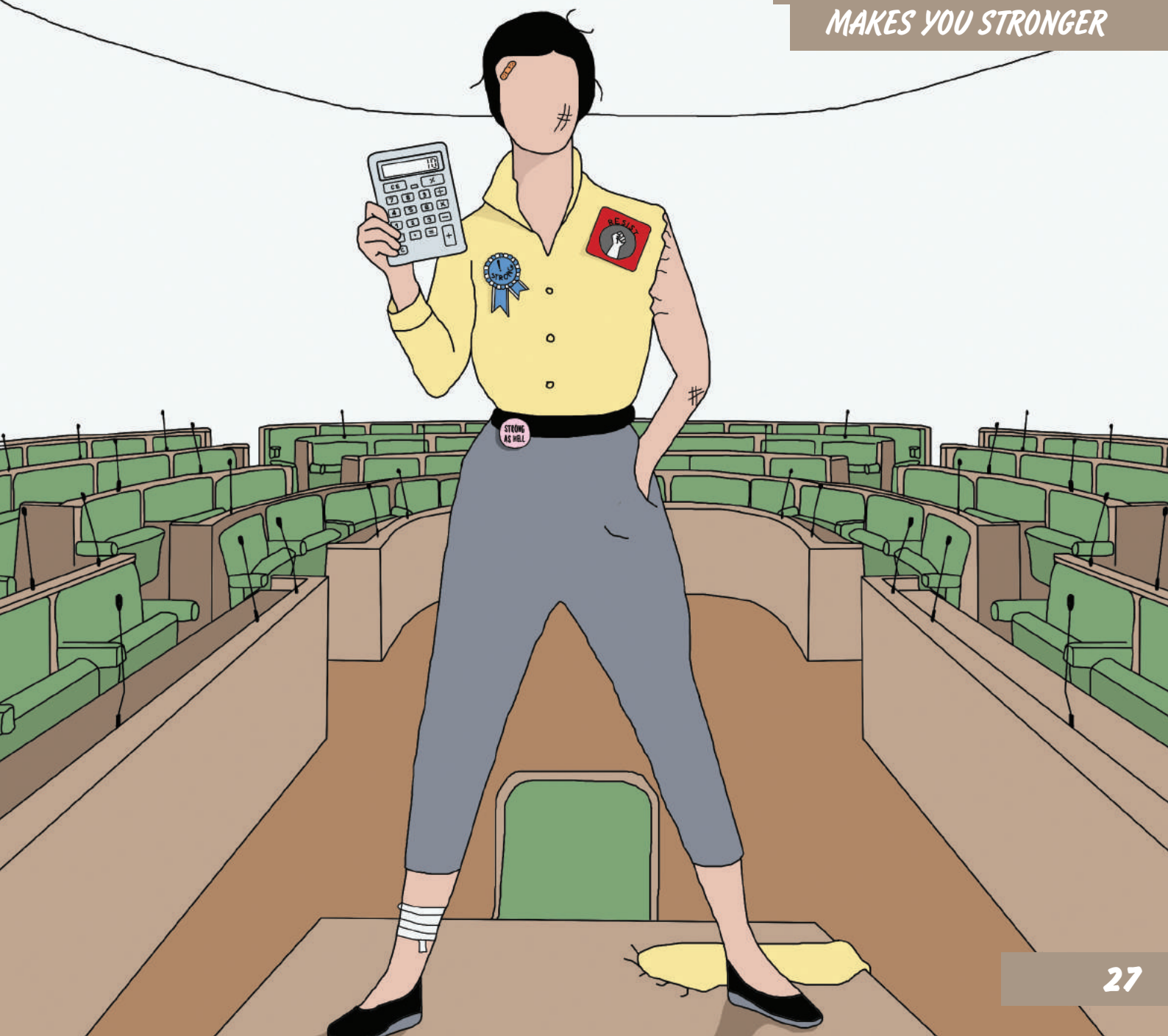
financial strategy. All of this was forgotten when I refused to sign off a savings estimate that I thought was unrealistic. I hadn't realised I'd committed career suicide. The chief executive and the leader acted quickly to remove me from my post saying they had lost confidence in me and the relationship was unworkable.

I was sacked because I wouldn't lie. I don't believe I would have been treated like that if I'd been a man. If I was naïve and inexperienced, I was also being penalised for their decision to put me in that position and not to support me.

I survived but it was so tough. My assessment of the savings turned out to be correct, my husband and son came with me to sit in the public gallery at the following council budget meeting. But at the time I thought I'd never work again. I refer to another saying these days: what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

Anonymous

*WHAT DOESN'T KILL YOU
MAKES YOU STRONGER*



CHAPTER 2 ENERGISE

Organisational stories – energise your organisation, diversity and equality in organisations, organisational attitudes

Key themes

Learning across the board is vital, shift the system, shine a light on policies, don't leave the practice and implementation to chance

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY AREN'T DOWN TO HR AND OD; WE ALL HAVE A PART TO PLAY

It's rare that a chief executive will turn up to an inclusion event,

welcome everyone, research the speakers himself and stay to the end. But ours did. People really noticed that and the message that equality and diversity aren't down to HR and OD; we all have a part to play, we (and I) can do more.

I got involved in one of the children's takeover days designed to improve our corporate parenting and grandparenting. Tajmeel took over chairing my meetings for the day. This certainly wasn't a passive shadowing opportunity – I was due to meet an insurance company who are expanding into the area and would be increasing their workforce by around 400 people. I wanted to know how we could help each other and discuss potential apprenticeships.

Tajmeel's questions shifted the debate, he was confident and bright and made me think in more depth about the voice of young people. He asked the insurance

company manager; "What's your offer for young people like me?"

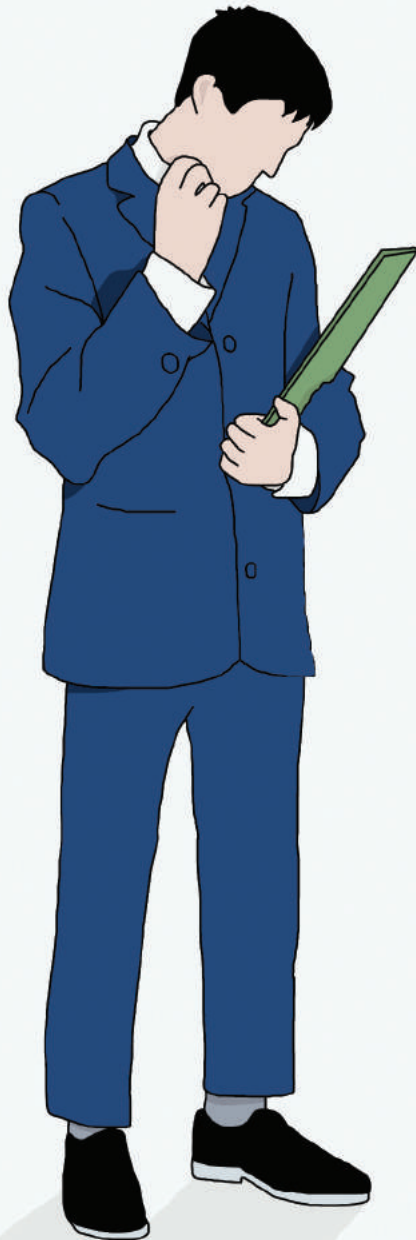
At the end of the day he said, "I'd never thought about working for the council, that it could be a career. I literally thought you just did the bins." Which was brilliant, especially as he learned we don't actually do the bins, they're outsourced.

I always think about the *so what* and that actions speak louder than words. I went to meet with the headteacher at Halifax High School to talk about apprenticeships. They hadn't collaborated with the council before, although they're the second biggest employer in the borough. We also invited young care leavers onto one of the panels for the interview for our director of children's services post. It's about changing perspectives, voice and influence.

The strapline of our inclusion event was - engage, equip, empower, embed. There was a real buzz about it. It'll stay with me.

Jackie Addison is Head of HR and OD at Calderdale Council

*IT'S ABOUT CHANGING PERSPECTIVES,
VOICE AND INFLUENCE*



***WE FEEL LIKE WE'RE WEARING
THE ROBES, CHAINS OR SUITS
BUT THEY DON'T QUITE FIT***

My career has taken me to plenty of town halls -

councils I've worked for or with - and they've all had at least one thing in common; that gallery of gilt-framed portraits of past leaders and mayors, all dressed up in their robes and chains. It's part of our heritage, a reminder of our democratic accountability and the people who represent and serve the local community. It's the stuff I love about local government.

But these galleries often have another thing in common; they display mostly portraits of men, white and over the age of 50. And while you can't tell their social class from a portrait, all that pomp and ceremony must seem remote to many. These galleries are rarely fully representative of the local population or the workforce that serves it.

Does that matter? We know diverse experiences and perspectives can lead to better decisions. But there's another thing. Early on in my career, a councillor (male,

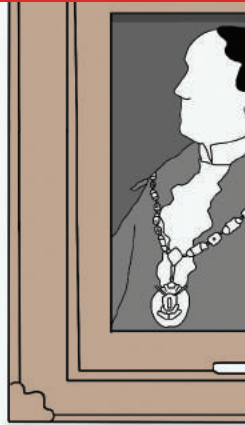
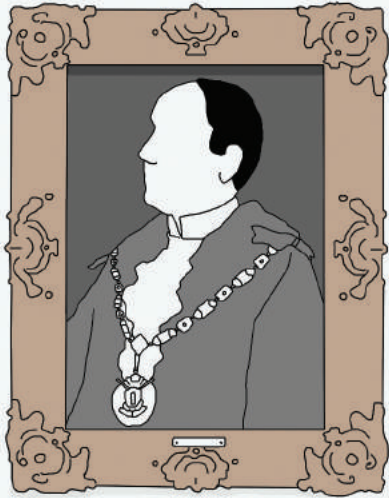
white and over 50, as it happens) told me, "You can't be what you can't see". He pointed out that the council we were visiting was led by an entirely male top team, something I hadn't noticed or had perhaps accepted as the norm. In all those galleries of politicians and meetings with chief officers, I hadn't seen much diversity yet.

More recently, my team has been talking a lot about imposter syndrome; that unwarranted feeling that you're inadequate, a fraud, and will soon get caught out. It can dig its claws into the best of us and I've been wondering whether it's in part linked to representation. Whether we feel like we're wearing the robes, chains or suits but they don't quite fit. They don't feel like ours.

Until we see something different in the gallery, perhaps it'll always feel like that?

Jennifer Taylor is lead commissioner for public health at Gloucestershire County Council

***"YOU CAN'T BE WHAT
YOU CAN'T SEE"***



Her:

I was thinking about asking Sarah to chair the new income maximisation group. She's like I was at that stage of my career, outgrowing her role, ready for the next challenge.

Narrator:

That's like-me bias.

Him:

Hmmm. Let's put a spec together for it. We need a range of skills and we want to make the right choice, development opportunities like this are rare these days.

Her:

Yes, Sarah generated a million pounds worth of savings on the asset review.

Narrator:

The halo effect – Sarah did one really good thing and that's all she can see. And it's confirmation bias, she's just putting forward evidence to support her own prejudice.

Her:

I just have a good feeling about this.

Narrator:

Can't recognise her own triggers, once she gets an idea in her head, there's no stopping her.

Her:

And everyone loves Sarah... the chief exec would love Sarah to take this on.

Narrator:

And this is called conformity bias. She doesn't want to go against what the rest of the organisation thinks.

Her:

We can't afford to waste time on a lengthy process...

Him:

Yes, but we don't want to make a snap decision.

Her:

...and we could do with a million pounds.

Narrator:

Anchor bias. She's back on that first piece of information again.

Him:

Could we just...

Her:

And if there are any difficult charging issues, Sarah's got an honest face, good teeth to front up any press interviews...

Narrator (sighing heavily):

Beauty bias. Why do we bother?

Her:

Right, sorted! We're on fire.

Dawn Reeves

WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT THE MENOPAUSE

Two things that our women's network spontaneously told us:

The toilets are disgusting. Okay, it's not strategic but fair enough, that's a basic thing we need to get right.

We need to talk about the menopause. It should've been blindingly obvious; we've got an ageing, largely female workforce. But until we refreshed our staff networks, as an organisation we hadn't heard it. I'm the champion for the women's network so we organised an open meeting, provided a space to talk about the menopause and 47 women turned up. It felt like an important moment. There was a real sense of pent up frustration in the organisation and because we created space for women to speak up, we have been able to start thinking through what we can do together.

Our workplace stats on diversity aren't great. We're hopeful that the work we've done in refreshing our staff networks will make a difference long term. Short term,

there's already new energy in the system. The women's network is lively and interesting, it shone a light on our flexible working policies. The policies are fine, they said, but the implementation is patchy, and in some cases non-existent. It meant some jobs were becoming untenable for colleagues with caring responsibilities.

For me it's about living our values. The disgusting toilets issue is not really about the toilets; it's about leaders listening to and valuing women's voices and experience.

Recently we invited an external eye on our recruitment and the language we use in job ads. Now there's less talk of the big and bold, we are ambitious but we're also more subtle, keen to not put women off and to recognise nuance and complexity. We need to think differently about leadership to get and to keep dynamic women.

Jessica Crowe is Assistant Director of Customers Commissioning and Governance at Sutton Council.

***FOR ME IT'S ABOUT LIVING
OUR VALUES. WE SAY WE'RE
LISTENING, BUT ARE WE?***



**WELL, AT LEAST I DIDN'T
AGREE WITH HIM, HE SAID**

When there's a new chief executive there's always a ripple effect, a new approach

that brings change is expected. And I recognise that it's needed. Restructures are a factor of life, savings are a necessity. To me it's always been about how the process is carried out not the fact that it's happening. So, when our new chief executive announced the review and my job was put at risk, I was okay with it. Or I would've been if it hadn't become so toxic.

The executive board decided to take out four head of service jobs and we all felt bullied and disrespected throughout the process. It wasn't what the chief executive said or did as much as the way he said it and how the restructure was implemented. The message was clear, it was his way or the highway.

I talked to our director about my concerns and he agreed the chief executive's style and attitude were out of order and that he hadn't challenged him. "Well, at least I didn't agree with him," he said, as if that made it okay. "When is silence support?" I asked. It was awful.

I decided not to put my head above the parapet, and to leave with dignity. But I feel ashamed about it. I've been carrying around this sick feeling. I know it's not my fault, that he's the bully, but it makes me feel complicit somehow, like I'm no better than the directors who won't speak up.

I've stayed professional and supported my staff throughout but I'm happy to be leaving. I'm looking forward to new opportunities, to learning again and to using my energy in a positive environment.

Anonymous



*IT'S NOT MY FAULT, HE'S THE
BULLY, BUT IT MAKES ME FEEL
COMPLICIT*

NOT QUITE THERE...

“ The boss was very smug about the report on diversity in the organisation. The top management team of directors and assistant directors was pretty strong on balance with a nearly even gender split.

Good for us. Although, when I went through the names, it struck me these powerful, senior women managers had one thing in common. They either didn't have children or their children were grown up and they didn't have caring responsibilities. The day that the ranks are filled with senior women managers with a school run to organise, a carol concert to attend in the early afternoon and an unexpected day's leave because they have a poorly child at home.... that's when we'll have proper equality. ”

SOMETHING TO GIVE...

“ They think I'm applying because I've got one last big job in me, one of the councillors said as much. I tried not to take offence but it was a bit like they were doing me a favour, like I'm a has been and the world belongs to the young, fresh leaders. Maybe it does, but I'm looking for interesting opportunities where I can learn and grow.

I feel torn, I'm committed to local government and have lots to give, but I could equally move on to a new sector. And not everyone wants to be a portfolio worker. Let's have succession planning for the people with most potential, not just the young. ”

NO UNDERSTANDING...

“ A London council was restructuring and decided to hold an assessment centre style activity in early July. Several Muslim employees and managers suggested that it was summer and Ramadan and some would be fasting.

They asked for the process to be delayed by just a week or two until fasting ended. Management refused, saying “We all miss lunch some days.” ”

IT'S A NECESSITY...

“ I was really pleased for one of my team when she told me she was expecting. I kept the realities of managing the situation to myself. It would mean three people down to two, so a third more work that would need to be picked up. Because of austerity we can't afford to pay for maternity cover. It makes me angry that has become the norm. I worry about negative attitudes to women who get pregnant, it's wrong but it's there.

Equality isn't a luxury that goes out of the window in hard times. I always argue for the capacity we need and try not to suck it up without making the case. It might make me unpopular with senior management, but we shouldn't pretend this is okay. ”

THERE'S MUCH MORE DIVERSITY IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

I worked in the private sector in the food manufacturing industry for years – now that's a male-

dominated industry – and managed the people stuff. But I wanted to make a difference and moved into local government and discovered it was wonderful to work with women; there's much more diversity in the public sector than the private sector. But we're still not good enough and we still need to do more.

I think co-mentoring works well, looking for people with cultural differences and then shadowing each other. Good mentoring is about dropping the ego and knowing that you can learn as much from your mentee as you can teach them, so you need to spend time in their workplace, finding out what they do as well as them getting the opportunity to shadow and learn from you.

Let's help our younger employees with talent pipelines, let's look at flexibility; I've left jobs because I couldn't get the flexibility I needed at the time. How do we deal with

things like having to be on call all the time if you're in a senior role?

Trust in your own leadership and ask, where can I help the most? And it's important to be trusted in return; my chief executive trusted me to manage IT in the council although it wasn't my specialist area.

I'm currently a non-executive director on an NHS board. The whole board is female and I'm conscious that there's a danger we'll have too much of a common understanding about issues, that it needs more diversity and we could, in fact, be intimidating for men. But it's lovely working with inspirational, motivated women!

There's something still not right about how we recruit for diversity in the public sector. We've got to think differently, take more risks, involve elected members differently. We have to change the way we do things – from application forms to mentoring – if we're to enable our best people to become managers and leaders.

Helen Grantham is an independent consultant

*TRUST IN YOUR OWN LEADERSHIP AND
ASK, WHERE CAN I HELP THE MOST?*



THE SYSTEM COULDN'T COPE WITH DIFFERENCE

My heart flipped when the chief executive announced that his priority for the

coming year was to work with me on a major transformation project. I had only just discovered I was pregnant with my second child and wasn't ready to tell anyone until I'd had a scan. When I told the boss his reaction was awful – he actually used the word “disappointed.” In fact, he barely spoke to me again. Although I had support from colleagues who reminded me that this should be a joyous time, it was really stressful. His reaction was personal but there was an institutional aspect to it, the system couldn't cope.

While I was on maternity leave and breastfeeding my third child, the organisation carried out a massive restructure and I had to attend a two day assessment centre. All the dread and negative feelings came back, I felt unprepared, fearful of the result, that ranks would be closed, that my career would be over.

Luckily, I was wrong. The executive director who offered me the job said I was clearly the best candidate, that the department would work something out and there was time for them to plan. He was great, and it was really liberating. I thought if I don't live this, change my own attitude and practice as a parent in the workplace, I'm doing a disservice to others. This time I wouldn't feel under pressure to act as if this wonderful, major, totally normal life event hadn't happened. And I wasn't prepared to act like a supermum either. I conducted myself as a professional and an authentic human being.

On one of the keep in touch days I took my baby into work, not to show everyone, but because I was breastfeeding, I didn't make a big deal about it and no-one else did either. I'm always thinking about how we make space for diversity.

Anonymous

An illustration of a woman with long brown hair, wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt and black pants, standing and presenting. She holds a blue pen in her right hand and gestures with her left. To her left is a whiteboard with a grid of lines. In the foreground, a yellow table holds two laptops, a smartphone, a ruler, and a protractor. A person's hand is visible on the left side of the table. On the right, the back of a person's head and shoulder are visible, looking towards the presenter. An orange text box is in the upper right corner.

***I CONDUCTED MYSELF AS A
PROFESSIONAL AND AN AUTHENTIC
HUMAN BEING***

*I'VE BEEN TOLD BY MEN I
BEND TOO MUCH*

Men have said that I'm not directive enough. I was advised never to admit I was in the wrong. To me that can be divisive, it lacks humility and it's not authentic. I prefer to bring out what people have in common, to nurture respect in teams. It's a fundamental part of my leadership approach.

The organisation recognises that I'm good with people, I'm good at building capacity and confidence and it works. I know I made an impact with a member of my team who was reserved and used to staying in the background. I spotted her potential and with support, she went on to apply for a larger and more complex role and surprised herself when she got it. That was rewarding.

I've also been told by men that I bend too much, that they couldn't do it. Or wouldn't. They weren't prepared to take on that emotional work that leaders must do to be a 21st century public servant. They were

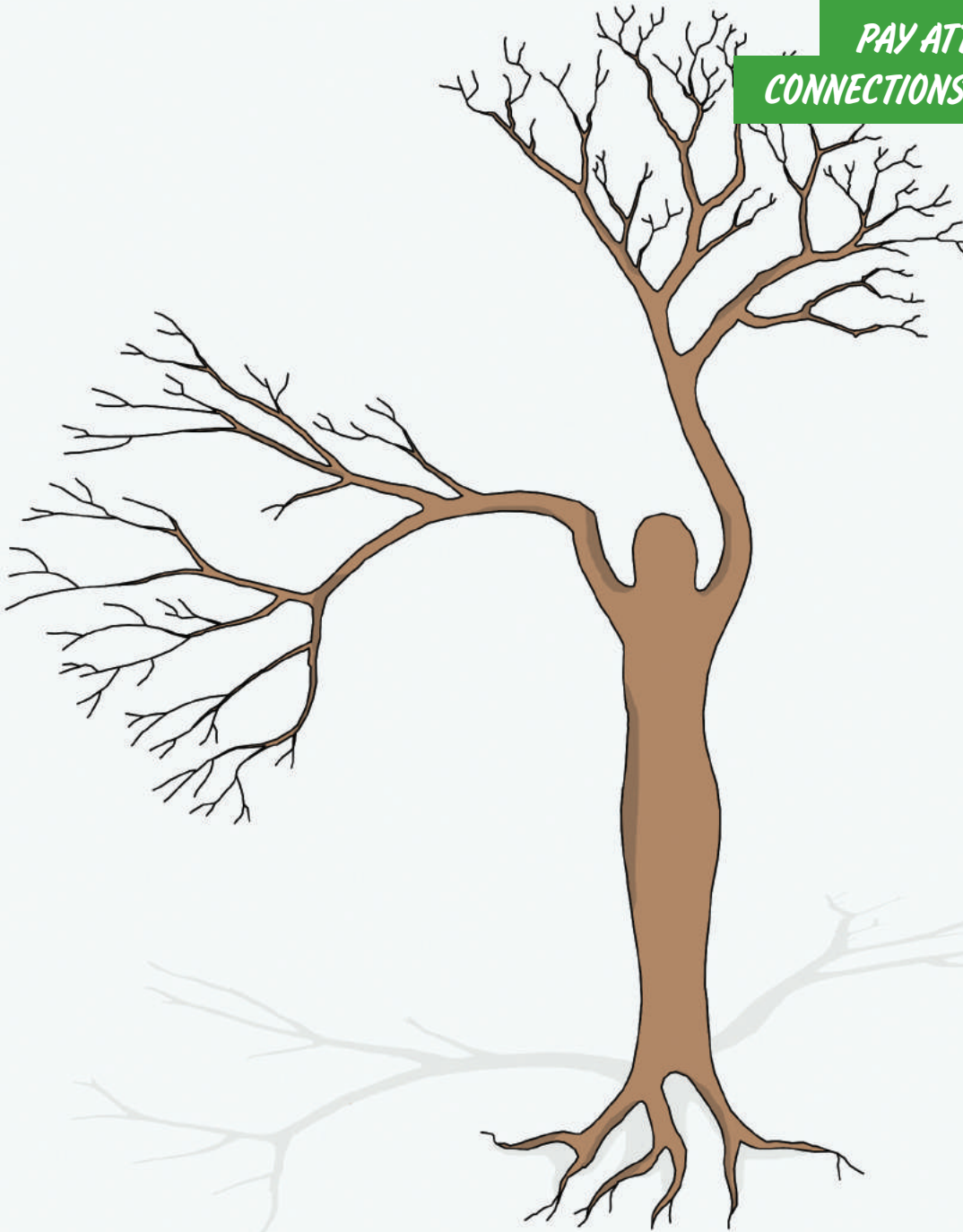
happy to let me do it for them. The tree that bends doesn't break, the saying goes... well, one or two colleagues were leaning heavily on that tree. I was expected to take the weight, to put down the roots of trust and mutual respect that created an environment where people could grow.

They'd leaned on me to do the nurturing, and yeah, I thought, you let me. Reflecting back on the situation, I realised I'd created a dependency.

There are still gendered responses in the workplace. I've learned from that experience to notice what happens in these sorts of situations and balance that with support for women who need validation in the workplace. I always could do what's traditionally thought of as the tough stuff but it's situational, isn't it? I pay attention to enabling connections and collaboration.

Anne-Louise Clark is Senior Consultant at FutureGov

*PAY ATTENTION TO ENABLING
CONNECTIONS AND COLLABORATION*



***I THINK WE NEED TO DISCUSS
ACTIVELY THE LEVERS WE
HAVE TO MAKE CHANGE***

Equalities isn't just about the makeup of our workforce.

It's about the way we do business and the outcomes we help to secure. In local government I think we still make this a values-based discussion, which is, of course, the right starting point. But frankly it's probably not going to convince the sceptics or the complacent, so we may want to take a page out of the private sector's book and address how equalities helps deliver our bottom line.

I sit on a new diversity and inclusion advisory group for the property sector and am struck by how much their discussions are informed by a recognition that the long-term viability of the industry is at stake. They're talking about it not because it's "nice to do" but because they're not sure they'll survive without promoting diversity as they won't get the innovation, talent and customer intelligence they need.

In the public sector, we may not be profit driven but we are very much about securing value for money. When our workforce reflects our residents, it enhances the chances that we have the breadth of

thinking we need to make the best decisions and target our spending most effectively. But I worry that a decade of austerity has meant that we have become less, rather than more, diverse as we reduce staff numbers, abolish management posts and cease creating opportunities for progression.

I think we need to discuss actively the levers we have to make change. For instance, if funding constraints mean a hiring freeze, is there more we could be doing to give people from different backgrounds the sort of experiences that will help them take the next career step? It likely means thinking about diversity across a whole system, not just within the council.

The challenge and opportunity then become to foster leadership talent that belongs to the whole place, not individual organisations. There are places in the UK that are starting to promote diversity in leadership within the wider civic arena and seeing promising results. I really believe that this has to be the future.

Piali Das Gupta is Head of Policy at Solace



*IT MEANS THINKING ABOUT DIVERSITY
ACROSS A WHOLE SYSTEM, NOT JUST
WITHIN THE COUNCIL*

A male chief executive, a pretty dominant character,

is retiring after many years and the word is that these are big shoes to fill. There are four male candidates, two who are serving chief executives, one white, one black - and a woman, the step-up candidate.

We worked hard with the members to understand their ambitions, it's a growth area, regeneration is important - but they don't consider themselves risk takers. We had time and didn't rush, that was useful.

At the technical interview the woman told the panel what she wasn't good at. I see that a lot, female candidates giving a clear view of the gaps in their CV. And no surprise, the men come in and present more or less the same information - but differently. They are

on the front foot, acting as if it's dragon's den, bit of bluster maybe. But to members the picture is clearer; it's easier to see them in the post.

In this case, it also helped that the leader was happy to engage. His warmth and openness helped the candidates relax so they could give their best. After surviving the first round, the panel went on to appoint the woman.

Some organisations surprise you. They don't shout about it but you quickly get the clear sense they are straightforward and honest. They have good ethics and practices and there's a much better chance that they will appoint the best candidate whoever that is. Equality is in their DNA.

**SOME ORGANISATIONS
SURPRISE YOU**

SOMETIMES THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES THAT TICK ALL THE BOXES STILL HAVE THESE POCKETS OF UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Three people are on the shortlist

for an assistant director role. Two women and a man. All three are good candidates. One of the women identifies as a lesbian. Her application is really good – clear and evidence based. In the first round of interviews it's clear the director favours the man, it was like a mirror image. "I've checked him out already," he said. They came from the same area of town.

Then, late in the process, the male applicant calls to say he's pulling out. The director, clearly gutted, suggests we stop the process. But there was lots of interest in the post, we shortlisted down to three and we still had two well qualified candidates. He's reluctant, but it's hard to argue, so I convince them to press on.

The first woman doesn't do so well at interview but the other candidate is fantastic and the panel agrees to make the offer. Our director nods unenthusiastically,

he knows to keep his prejudices to himself. The candidate is delighted, but there seems to be a lot of to-ing and fro-ing over the contract. The director sees an opportunity to stop the process again. "It's outrageous," he says, and appeals to the chief executive. I make the case that redoing a perfectly sound process will cost the authority thousands, compared to a few hundred quid uplift.

That director provides an example of the kind of cunning, crafty tactics you don't want to see; doing everything he could not to appoint the woman. But the panel stood firm, she did the job for many years and really delivered for the authority. I've no doubt she'll make a chief executive one day.

Sometimes the local authorities that tick all the boxes, have the badges and look good on paper, still have these pockets of unconscious bias.

Anonymous

CHAPTER 3 ENGAGE

Connect with community – working with diverse communities, diversity in service needs, diverse views cohesion and inclusion, engaging with members

Key themes

Recognising what's important for communities, brokering solutions, making space for different voices, checking on barriers in systems

When I first started as Assistant Chief Executive at Birmingham City Council,

I didn't realise what my appointment signified to a lot of our staff and residents in the city.

It only became apparent to me when I was invited to speak at a conference organised by a grass roots charity. I figured that they probably couldn't get the chief executive and that I would do as a substitute, but no. They wanted me to give the keynote speech because they saw more of themselves in me than they normally did in senior leaders. It was symbolically important to see a woman from a BAME background on the senior management team of the council. Me being there signalled the intention to do things differently, not to hire the same sorts of people and to open new conversations about change.

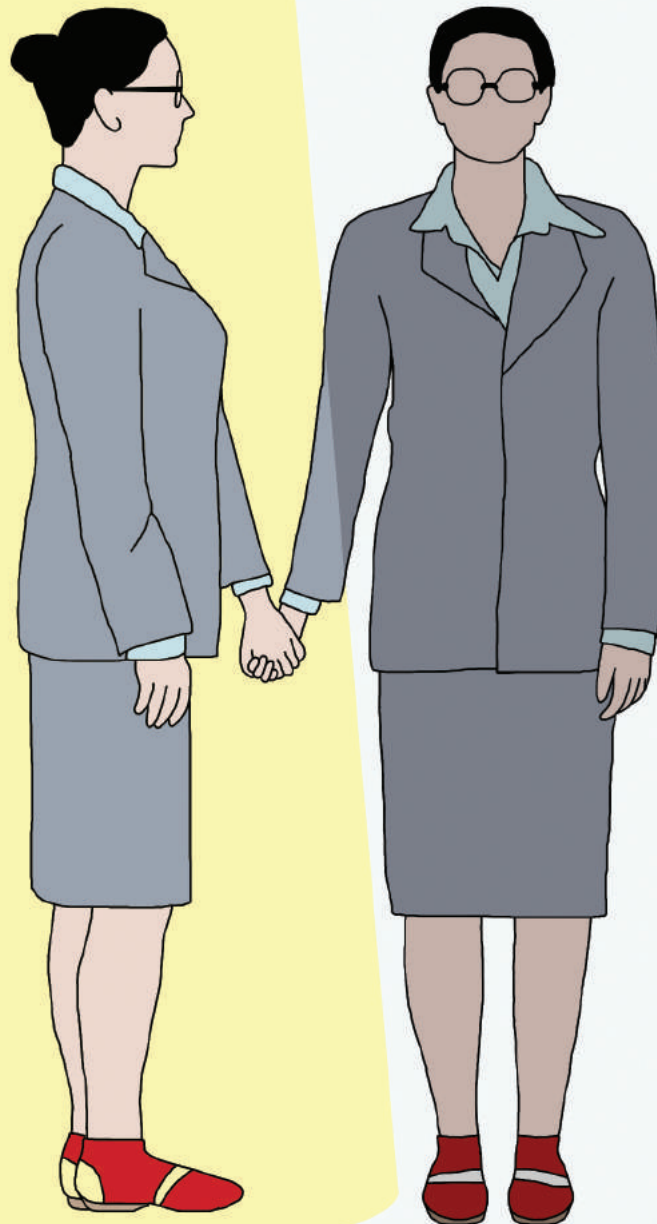
ME BEING THERE SIGNALLED THE INTENTION TO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY

I worried greatly about not living up to expectations. I had a lot to learn, both about my role and about the city, and wasn't sure how much I personally would be able to contribute to the change people wanted to see. I was shown a lot of goodwill, but I also got put through my paces. When I spoke at events about diversity and inclusion, it was often put to me quite forcefully that it wasn't enough to have a couple of brown faces on the senior leadership team. They wanted to see diversity translated into policy and funding decisions, like a focus in our public health work on conditions that have a higher incidence in BAME populations, such as sickle cell anaemia.

I have nagging guilt that I left that role without having fully delivered. But I do believe that I helped the council build back some of the trust that had been lost over the years by being honest about my limitations and open about my thinking process. One of my biggest lessons was that being prepared to show vulnerability can be a strength.

Piali Das Gupta is Head of Policy at Solace

*BEING PREPARED TO SHOW
VULNERABILITY CAN BE A STRENGTH*



WE LISTENED BETTER, EMPATHISED AND FULLY ENGAGED

The banging on the side of the minibus was loud and intimidating. My team was threatened. It wasn't the miner's strike in the 1980s, it was a group set up to save the affluent market town of Romsey from the planners. From me and my colleagues.

It's a story of managing economic difference. A well-off group of residents with knowledge, resources and entitlement, determined to stop the building of some affordable homes in their backyard. A common enough tale for planners; where the main antagonists refuse to see any justification for change and rational arguments about housing need mean nothing. It looks like we're the problem when our aim is to create long term solutions for all our communities.

It's been a long haul to turn the situation around. We had to do the logical things of barrister proofing our case and working

through the process rigorously with inspectors in mind. But what made the difference was learning to tell our story better and setting out a stronger vision. We listened better, empathised and fully engaged those who opposed us.

There's always a continuum of views. In the centre - between no and yes - it's possible to generate more understanding. We talked about the people involved, about what affordable homes looked like in leafy Hampshire. There are plenty of families with kids who have no chance of getting on the housing ladder locally and that issue resonates across income groups.

The opposition has now become partners in getting the best for Romsey. They are part of a shared process and help support what the planners and council want to achieve.

Graham Smith is Head of Planning at Test Valley Council

*BETWEEN NO AND YES IT'S POSSIBLE TO
GENERATE MORE UNDERSTANDING*



IF THE PUBLIC SECTOR DOESN'T LEAD ON THIS, WHO WILL?

Making the business case for diversity?

Without naming any particular council there are many current high profile examples where there have been significant organisational failings and you can see what can happen when your workforce doesn't represent your communities.

Rotherham became disconnected from the communities it served and although there were other issues at play at the council, a factor was that disconnect. You can see this in the public reports about what happened in Rotherham – a sexist, bullying culture within the organisation, a culture of denial that meant the children were not believed. Subsequently so much has been done around regaining trust with communities through Rotherham's Building Stronger Communities strategy.

But if the public sector doesn't lead on this who will? We have to set the tone in the town, city or county we represent and of course people relate better to an organisation if they see themselves in it.

Connecting with local people has never been more vital. The very nature of what we do is about serving our communities – all our communities. If you don't know parts of your population how can you serve them?

The real power of community engagement is around effective co-production, working in true partnership with authorities providing services. We have no hope of doing that and of making our communities better places for our residents if people don't trust us. How can they connect with us if they don't relate to us?

Shokat Lal is Assistant Chief Executive at Rotherham Council

*CONNECTING WITH LOCAL PEOPLE HAS
NEVER BEEN MORE VITAL*



KEEP THE PASSION AND WORK WITH OUR POLITICIANS ON DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY

Keep the passion and work with our politicians on diversity and equality, that's what leaders can do.

The piece of work I'm most proud of tackled gun crime after two fatal shootings and supported a community who felt no-one cared. I was determined to persuade our council leader and some of the entrenched institutions in the city to take a new approach to what had been characterised as black on black violence.

I had to be tenacious and creative to come up with something that changed the debate. We did a lot of work in small groups, talking to people that wouldn't normally have spoken to us suits. We used local peers to open up new conversations. The leader connected with that and was passionate about supporting the community to do what made sense to them.

We organised an amazing demonstration of support for the families and communities involved. I felt that whatever our situation, whether we were black, white, young, old, a vulnerable mother on drugs or an ex-offender, we shared in the grief, the loss of "our" children. It shifted attitudes, agencies saw real people and were more committed to shift the way we worked.

That example was more than ten years ago and I worry that race diversity is not on the agenda now.

It's too easy to destroy the spark at the top of our organisations. We get lost in managing the politics, the focus is on elections or on which politicians are holding sway. It's tricky when majorities are narrow and the appointment to cabinet positions isn't always about the best person for the job. But working with politicians is the way to change things, to tap into a shared energy, officers and members, to make a difference to those in need.

Manjeet Gill is Interim Chief Executive at Wokingham Borough Council

*IT'S TOO EASY TO DESTROY THE SPARK AT
THE TOP OF OUR ORGANISATIONS*



BE AWARE...

“ I was taking an adoption case to the panel for approval. Social workers for the child and for the adopters were in agreement, all the relevant checks had been done and the long-term couple had experience of fostering with a neighbouring council. They were lovely and had children of their own. But I knew it was going to be difficult so I organised some training prior to the meeting for the councillors on the panel. The couple had been open and honest about their relationship.

They were non-monogamous and the male partner identified as bisexual. I hope the members learned something for future adoption cases because this one was turned down. Awareness-training is the first step. ”

PIONEERING...

“ We recently completed the Inclusive Employers, National Inclusion Standard which is a step-by-step tool for achieving inclusion in the workplace. The results from this have recently been confirmed and at Calderdale we have achieved ‘pioneer’ of the inclusion standard. That was great. And our elected members have chosen equalities and inclusivity as a scrutiny agenda item for this year.

We’ve already commenced some detailed work and we’ve been benchmarking the council against the Lloyds banking group (a major employer) and other local medium size businesses in the area. We want to banish diversity fatigue. ”

ON THE MARGINS...

“A lot of our staff still struggle to get their heads around targeting services where they are needed most, often this is seen to mean more resources going to our poorer, more diverse and vulnerable communities. Part of it is the dilemma of providing universal services – and at the same time targeted proportionality – which is hard, especially when members want universalism, they want to know what we’re doing in their ward. I go back to the Marmot Review, it spells out the rationale for why this matters. We need to keep inequalities front and centre otherwise we won’t narrow the gaps, or meet need and outcomes. Change stays on the margins.”

PLACE MATTERS...

“Where are the black women in senior leadership? And the black men? Yes, we know it’s a real problem, but I’m speaking geographically. In my career in school and children’s services leadership I’ve only worked in urban areas with diverse communities. I’m looking around for my next move and it won’t be to a rural or coastal area where multiculturalism isn’t just normal. I’m fine, I can cope with being the different one, but I don’t want to have to worry about my kids. It’s not just the council’s job to change attitudes, to be open and welcoming as a place, but there’s an important leadership job to be done. Brexit makes it even more important to reach out.”

Mostly we see things through one lens, one set of rules, working in the language and with the systems that we understand. It's only when you come across a story like mine that you realise that no-one's checking that our systems can deal with diversity.

My wife and I were out jogging when we saw him on a park bench. He wasn't dressed for a night sleeping rough and when we woke him to see if he was alright he jumped with shock – as though he was in a nightmare. When we heard his story we realised he was living in one.

He and his family had fled conflict and got to Italy where they were split up, his wife and children ending up here where they were taken in by a women's refuge. When the husband eventually got here too, he wasn't, of course, allowed in.

But some mistake, some administrative error, meant no-one was helping them. The authority wouldn't speak to us when we

tried to help, they would only deal directly with him, but he had no English. They wanted his National Insurance number!

I'm involved in a local charity that supports people with mental health issues and we did what we could – he's now staying in a flat but it's no solution and he's still apart from his family. He thought he was going somewhere safe, but I think he'd rather be in a war-torn country with his dignity intact.

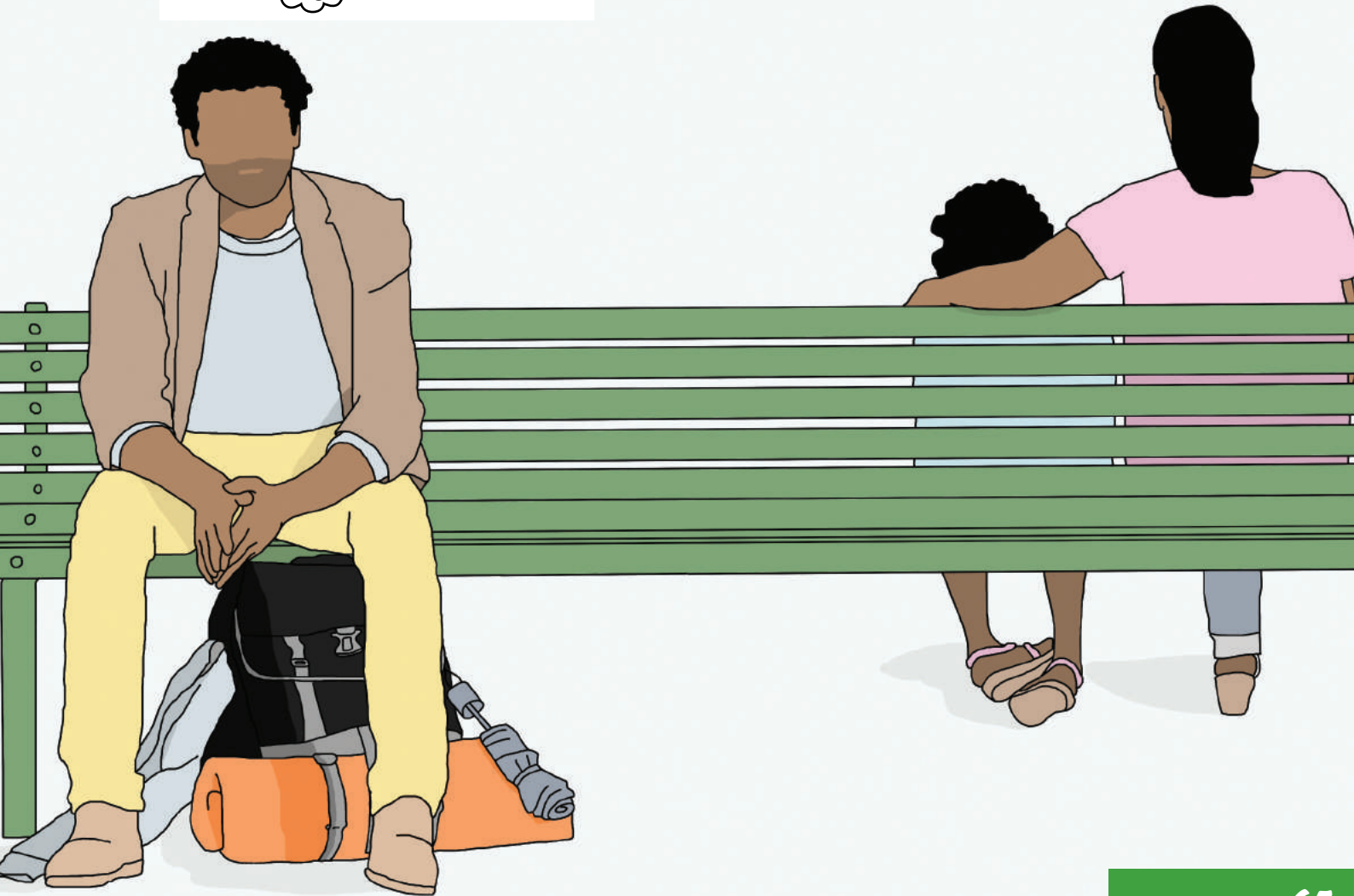
Where was the signposting? The emergency help? I've been totally frustrated by the experience. The community – my charity – has stepped in where agencies have failed to help. It just shows how important links in our communities are when people are in trouble and how local government can't always fill the gaps.

Mazhar Mohammed is a manager at Dudley Council

**NO-ONE'S CHECKING THAT OUR
SYSTEMS CAN DEAL WITH DIVERSITY**



*THE COMMUNITY HAS STEPPED
IN WHERE AGENCIES HAVE
FAILED TO HELP*



I THINK WE'VE GOT IT WRONG...

I HAD EXPECTED THE COUPLE TO BE DEFENSIVE AND CHALLENGING; WHAT I FOUND WAS A COUPLE WHO WERE REFLECTIVE AND ACCEPTING

It was a wet Monday morning. Steve and I were heading off on a two hour journey to visit a family who had made a complaint about religious discrimination.

How mortifying this was for me! I had spent the last 18 years challenging and changing the ethos of our adoption service to one of openness and acceptance.

We agreed to explain clearly to John and Mary our reasons for not accepting their application and hope they would be able to see these reasons were in no way discriminatory.

The tone of the email exchange had suggested that we were likely to receive a frosty reception. But as we drove up the long tree-lined drive we spotted John standing out in the rain in his wellies with an umbrella, waiting to escort us into a warm, homely kitchen where Mary had the kettle on.

I had expected the couple to be defensive and challenging; what I found was a couple who were reflective and accepting.

As the conversation flowed, I found myself questioning the decision not to proceed. The reason had been based on the couple as a particular resource. They may not have been the resource we first thought but a resource they were – and potentially a strong one.

My brain was processing the information and my gut feeling was kicking in. I looked at Steve who was clearly sharing my thoughts.

“John, Mary. I think we got it wrong. What do you think about resubmitting your application?”

John and Mary, a little shocked but delighted, agreed to proceed with their application. We left feeling happy that we had made the right decision for the council, for the couple and for any future children who may be placed.

Always be open to changing your mind – it is a sign of strength not weakness!

Anonymous

*ALWAYS BE OPEN TO CHANGING YOUR
MIND – IT IS A SIGN OF STRENGTH, NOT
WEAKNESS*



I've always been clear that for me being gay isn't an issue. If someone has a problem, it's their problem. What's important to the organisation is how well I do my job and what I bring to the role, not who I happen to sleep with.

In this part of London – well, possibly in most of London, really – diversity is just the usual thing. For our council it's important we celebrate our diverse communities. Events are a really good way of doing this. Whether it's Pride, Diwali or Black History Month, we want to say visibly that this is a place that embraces diversity. Our communities bring a richness and vibrancy which is recognised and valued.

We've also done work thinking through our services from diverse perspectives. In adult social care for example it's been recognised that our LGBTQ community, who are less likely to have kids, might not have the extended family around to support them as they get older. It's important we think about building resilience long term.

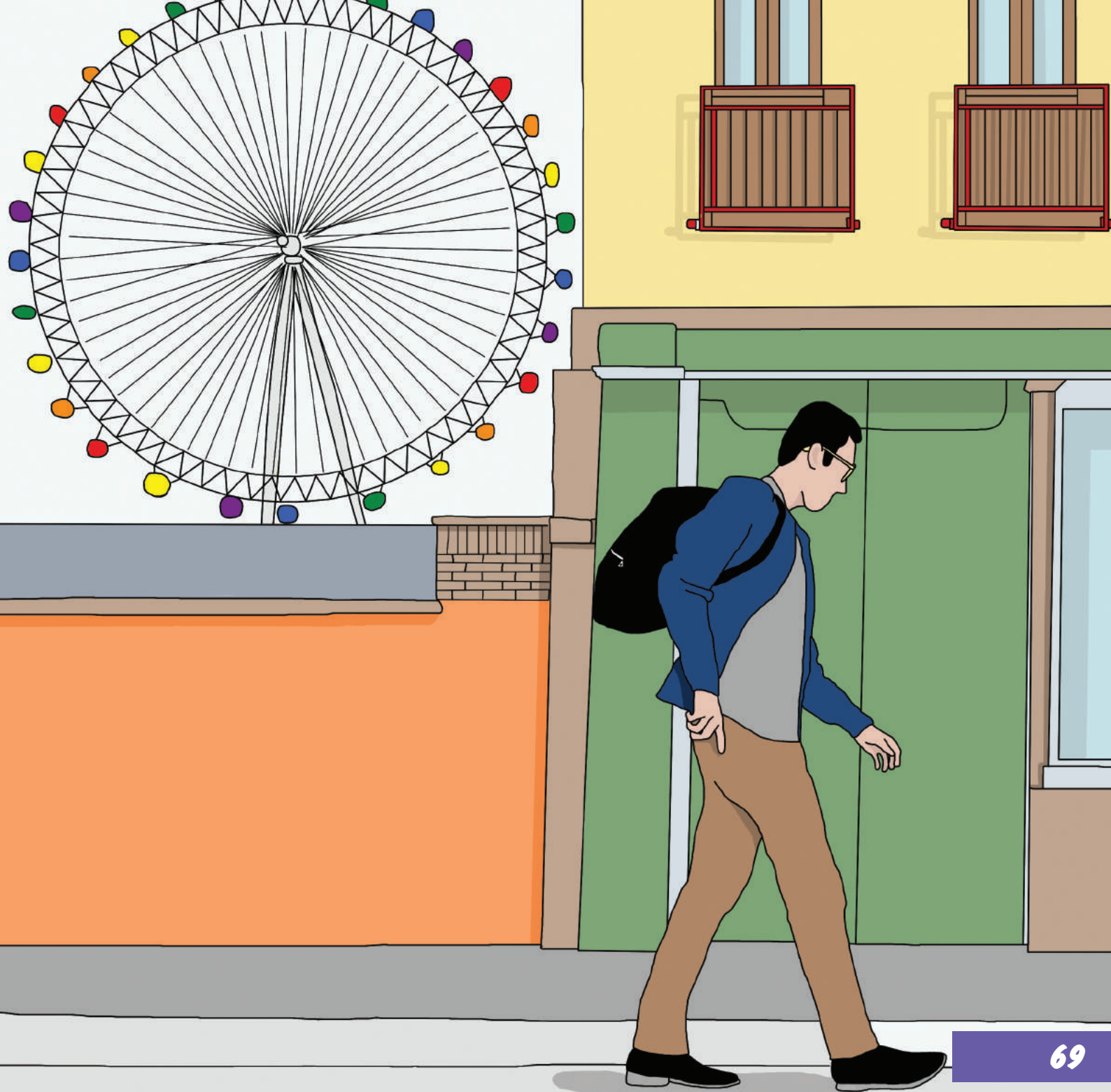
THE PUBLIC SECTOR NEEDS TO POSITION ITSELF AS OPEN TO THE BEST OF ALL DIVERSE TALENTS

We have strong, self-organised staff groups, including a women's network and a group for LGBTQ staff. They've got senior level support and had a series of high profile external speakers who live or work in the borough and bring expertise and new perspectives into our work.

I don't take any of this for granted, we're in a pretty settled place with our LGBTQ communities and I recognise that not all places are like this. And we aren't complacent, we don't want to suddenly find there are hidden ceilings. I'm a confident, down to earth northerner, I know it's not so easy when you're starting a career.

I think the public sector needs to position itself as open to the best of all diverse talents. It would be a real shame if we lose precious talent through discrimination. We need to keep up with our communities, to be vehicles for their success.

Stephen Gaskell is Head of Chief Executive's Office at the London Borough of Southwark



LEADERSHIP IS OFTEN ABOUT BEING IN THE GREY

Leadership is often about being in the grey, in the middle of what's clear cut and black and white, hearing everyone's voice, walking towards difficult issues and finding a way through.

I was a director at the county council when travellers set up an encampment on a road leading to some houses. It quickly became controversial – one of the homes was owned by a well-known local author and the MP demanded that we should remove the travellers. He used powerful, provocative language. There were calls for an open public meeting, feelings were running high and there was lots of pressure to do something quickly, mainly things we couldn't do.

I agreed to meet a small group of invited residents and had in the back of my mind my own experience; a group of travellers had camped outside our venue on the day of

my wedding, so of course I understood their concerns. That didn't mean I was on their side – I needed to hold that space in the middle where everyone was heard – but I did empathise with them.

People wanted and needed to be heard. In that meeting, and then meeting with the travellers and talking through the issues helped calm everything. It was important not to assume that the local authority held all the answers. In the end, we provided the support needed for the travellers and when they'd moved on, the council and community worked together to prevent further encampments. We also redoubled our efforts, got external funding and opened a new transit site.

The residents and travellers had very different views of the world – the kind of diversity you often find in rural areas. Holding that space in the middle so you can understand all views is crucial.

Becky Shaw is Chief Executive at East Sussex County Council

*HOLDING THAT SPACE IN THE MIDDLE SO
YOU CAN UNDERSTAND ALL VIEWS IS
CRUCIAL*



- 1.** Ask people both inside and outside your organisation what equality looks and feels like to them. There's a risk that if we only look at the issues through our own lens that we limit the possibilities and don't recognise some of the real barriers that people face.
- 2.** Shamelessly learn from what is working elsewhere, be it other places or other sectors. Although we want to tailor our approaches to our specific contexts, that doesn't mean that we have to start from scratch.
- 3.** Be ambitious but realistic about what "progress" means for your organisation. We will be at different starting points and setting objectives that we're unlikely to attain is more likely to undermine confidence than inspire change. Ideally, we should be setting out an ambitious vision with a practical strategy and achievable milestones along the way.
- 4.** Don't be afraid to ask questions. We sometimes fear appearing clumsy or ignorant when it comes to people's cultural or religious beliefs and how we should take them into account in our working relationship, such as if a colleague fasting during Ramadan needs any special considerations. When in doubt, just ask.
- 5.** Don't look away or stay silent when you come across behaviour that doesn't reflect your organisation's values. Leaders effectively promote what they condone.

6. Hold space for constructive disagreement but work towards creating middle ground. The role of leaders is not to stifle debate but to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to be heard and help people find a pragmatic middle way.

7. Kick imposter syndrome to the curb. Even if there are new skills or approaches that you need to learn to do your job that doesn't mean that you weren't the right choice. Often it's precisely being open to learning and taking on challenges that secured us the position.

8. Don't try to be "representative" or ask others to be. We all bring a mix of qualities, experience and perspectives and shouldn't be reduced to one element of our identity.

9. Watch out for unconscious biases, in yourselves, others and in our systems. Our brains take short cuts when we are busy and because some biases are unconscious they can be difficult to spot. Take a deep breath and reflect before making big decisions.

10. When your organisation is comfortable in its approach, sign up for an equalities badge (such as Inclusive Employers – others are available) it's an important signal to your staff, to others and to the world. Equalities matter and it's something to celebrate.

THIS LEADER CAN...

BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

For individuals

Understanding where you are and talking about it with your colleagues is critical to making change. We hope the stories will encourage leaders to take opportunities to shift thinking and challenge behaviours and processes that block progress. The questions here are offered as an invitation to help you move forward...

- What stories stand out or are most surprising? Notice your own reactions to the pieces – which ones resonate, which ones make you think I/we could do that (or more of that)? What are the key themes in the book? What inspires you?
- Which stories most reflect how you see yourself and others at work? Where are your strengths? Where might you need to make a shift?
- How could you develop the relationships with others that can open-up space and generate energy to meet the needs of your teams and the outcomes for people in your communities?
- What's your experience of taking a stand? What leadership behaviours are you modelling? How can you help show that other ways are possible?
- How will you make sure you continue to reflect and learn by personally developing and growing so that you know yourself, and your teams live the values and behaviours of your organisations? How open are you to hearing and engaging with feedback from others with different experiences?
- What are the stories you tell yourself about your work, how you do it and why it's important? What stories could you tell your colleagues, your friends, family and communities that build momentum towards change on diversity and inclusion?
- What next steps do you want to take? What if anything is stopping you from getting started? What can you do to change this?

For organisations

To make a difference our organisations also need to stand back and reflect. The stories have implications for managers at all levels, for long-term strategy and specific policy development. By sharing and discussing the stories collectively, you'll be able to see where there is most potential to make improvements.

- What are your organisation's most important mindsets, behaviours, culture, structures or powerful groups? Can you map them objectively? What sits behind these stories that impacts – positively or negatively – on how we tackle diversity? How honest and open are you about this?
- How can you set the expectation that everyone in the organisation needs to see equalities as their business? And how can you support colleagues to do this?
- How does your senior management team lead on equality? What is its style and culture? What conversations take place about equalities in your leadership teams?
- What are the stories about austerity and how it impacts on equalities? How do they compare with the stories in this book?
- What's your recipe for improving performance on equalities? There are many stories in the book that illustrate organisational and individual barriers being overcome. What are the dominant narratives in your organisation about what works in making change?
- How creative and courageous is your organisation in working with its partners on equality issues?

We hope the questions here will help you reflect on and strengthen your own practice, existing approaches and your organisation's ambition.

Acknowledgements

The original inspiration for this book came from Jo Miller and her drive during her presidency of Solace to raise the profile of women's equality in the workplace. As we discussed our ideas for a book on the subject with her and other Solace colleagues it quickly became apparent that the issue of equality and diversity was much more than an issue for women.

Thanks to them for their input, ideas and suggestions and everyone we talked to at the 2018 Solace summit – especially the Solace Springboarders, who freely shared their thoughts.

And a big thank you to everyone who shared a story with us
Solace – Society for Local Authority Chief Executives
Solace is the home of public service leadership. Making a difference on equalities is included in all our Solace programmes.

We can help you find the exact mix of ability and experience you need to build teams that can build the future. Great leadership never happens in a vacuum. The most successful teams and organisations focus on the effectiveness of all of their members, and continually reassess how well they're working to achieve shared goals. We're regularly retained by senior team leaders and those with corporate responsibility for change and organisational development, and our experience spans the full range of settings and contexts.

To find out more, go to: www.solace.org.uk

Stories that Matter

Shared Press is an independent publisher with a remit to share stories that engage with the sharp edges and messy boundaries of modern life; to give voice to new writers who care about ideas and innovation; and to inspire new creative conversations with readers. We focus on public life and public services.

About Dawn Reeves – Director

Dawn is a story activist, creative facilitator, public services expert and writer. A former director in a large public sector organisation, she now works with a range of clients looking for creative approaches to making change happen. Her energy and enthusiasm for this work come from a deep curiosity about the world and a drive to collaborate. She has written for the Guardian, and was the writer-in-residence at the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). Contact her via dawn@dawnreeves.com

About Fran Collingham – Writer and editor

Fran is a strategic communications advisor and LGA Associate working with councils and public sector organisations across the country. Until October 2016 she was assistant director of communications at Coventry City Council. She began her career as a journalist working on local and regional evening newspapers.

More from Shared Press

It's a small list, but it's perfectly formed and it's growing...

The threads that bind (coming 2019)

Town Hall – buildings, people and power (December 2018)

Boldly and Rightly – Public Service in Bexley (June 2018)

We Know What We Are – Thriller (November 2017)

Holding Up the Mirror – True stories of public service in a post-truth world (October 2017)

Under the skin – Stories about the culture of place for Grant Thornton LLP (October 2016)

Walk Tall – Being a 21st century public servant (May 2016)

Making Our Mark – (June 2015 plus global edition June 2016)

Change the Ending – Flash fiction (September 2014)

Hard Change – Thriller (March 2013)

www.sharedpress.co.uk





*I WANT TO
WORK HERE...*

EXCITING...

NOTES...

NOTES...

Unlocking innovation through diversity

It's long past time for us all to recognise that diversity in senior leadership positions, diversity – of race, gender, sexual orientation and more – will help build stronger and more resilient public services.

Inclusivity offers a wider range of perspectives and ideas, accelerating innovation and helping local government attract, engage and retain the talent they need.

It's time for all of us in leadership positions to place greater value on diversity to ensure inclusion and opportunity for all. Agilisys is keen to support organisations on this journey towards greater transparency and stronger performance.

Together we can all help challenge the norm in local government and encourage underrepresented groups to aim for the top.



Agilisys, an employee owned organisation, is one of the UK's fastest growing and innovative cloud and digital transformation specialists, enabling organisations to adopt technologies, platforms and processes that promote new ways of working. An established partner for both the public and private sector for nearly two decades, we have earned a strong reputation and hold deep domain expertise delivering change and innovation, particularly within local and central government.

We support our customers through a network of offices and centres of excellence throughout the UK, employing over 1,500 staff across the UK.

To find out more visit us at www.agilisys.co.uk

 @Agilisys  Agilisys



THIS LEADER CAN...

True stories about diversity and leadership in public service.

Empower yourself and others, energise your organisation and engage with diverse communities to meet their needs. These powerful and compelling personal stories show how leaders are making a difference, and where we still need to shift mindsets to achieve a step change on equalities and diversity.

