

Bedford Borough Council

Case Study



The number of children looked after by local authorities in England is the **highest** it has been in the past generation. However, local authorities are struggling to meet the demands of their services due to financial constraints and difficulties recruiting and retaining workers. Since 2010 local authorities have seen their overall spending power **reduced by 28.6%**.

A **report** to the House of Commons noted the high turnover and low retention rate of those working in children's social care, with statistics highlighting that the existing system was not working well.

This, combined with the budgetary pressures and seemingly ever-increasing demands on the sector is leading to what Adam Pemberton of Barnardo's described as '**a perfect storm**', with the children paying the price.

Facing this national backdrop, Bedford Borough Council's Children's Services sought out a solution to their own challenge of recruiting and retaining high quality social workers - not only to buck the wider trend but critically, to ensure that the children in Bedford Borough's care received consistent, high-quality support when they need it the most.

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Key highlights



52% agency staff reduced to less than 10% in the first 6 months.



Agency spend reduced by £1.5m in the first 12 months of the project.



Significant improvement to candidate experiences - attracting a higher quality workforce.



Greater consistency in social work - translating to increasingly positive experiences for children in Bedford Borough's care.

Where the journey began

Due to difficulties attracting and retaining talent, Bedford Borough Council relied on agency staff, making up 52% of their social care workforce - a common story throughout the UK. There was a significant churn, where agency staff would come, go, then leave. This lack of continuity in service left the children with no friendly, familiar face when at their most vulnerable.

Bedford Borough wanted a high quality, committed workforce. With the help and expertise of Guidant Global's dedicated account team, headed up by Selena Ayling, Bedford Borough were able to create a workforce development strategy to meet this demand - ensuring that children under Bedford Borough's care received the best possible service available, and ultimately helping them to have the best start in life.

Challenges to be met

- Bedford Borough, like many local authorities is tackling the challenge of retaining a high-quality permanent workforce. They needed to make themselves attractive to potential new employees in order to attract ambitious and dynamic talent.
- The key priority was to ensure that children receive consistent, high quality support when they need it the most.
- The council recognised the need to improve candidate experience and talent attraction - while safeguarding the Council's employer brand.
- There was a high reliance on agencies - previously 52% of the social workers were agency staff and due to the low retention rate, there was no continuity of service. This was failing the children and needed to be addressed.



The journey so far

The key focus for Guidant was to work in partnership with the Children's Services department to ensure that the proposal being made was agreed by the portfolio holders and the chief executive. It was important to provide evidence so that a strong case could be made, so the Council would accept the proposal to realign the budget in order to facilitate the changes needed.

Market intelligence

Bedford Borough Council, like many local authorities have to tackle the challenges of getting plans approved, with complex process to be adhered to.

With Guidant's extensive expertise with local authorities we were able to provide a statistical market data report spanning England, Scotland and Wales. This was the evidence that the Bedford Borough team needed to present to the portfolio holders and council members to build support and ensure that the proposal was passed. The executive of the council approved a priority to recruit and retain an awesome workforce.

Temporary resourcing spend reduction

The partnership resulted in an agency spend reduction of £1.5m in the first 12 months, an impressive 43% reduction. This spend reduction means resources can be redirected to helping children, rather than being spent on agency fees.

Candidate experience

As part of the transformation of Children's Services, Bedford Borough wanted to redefine the world of social work and find passionate people who could help them to deliver on this vision.

Guidant worked in partnership with the Children's Services department on strategies to develop programmes to increase the appeal of working in this sector to attract a highly skilled workforce -improving the consistency in care provided to those most vulnerable.

The result? An employee value proposition which defines the Council's employer brand values, now embedded in the candidates' journey- in the initial contact and throughout the onboarding process.

Employer value proposition

When employees were asked about their motivations to work in local government, having an ethical ethos as well as a good work/life balance were recurrent answers.

It has been shown that there is the need to improve the perception of working for local authorities. In collaboration with the Bedford Borough team we were able to show what the market was looking for, and come up with a strong offering, which is important for attracting the talented workforce of the future.

Bedford Borough have achieved this all-important ethos. Ofsted have recognised, through focused visits, that Bedford Borough has a well-motivated workforce with increased staffing stability.

Children seeing the benefit

The development of this new strategy has had a direct impact on the children of Bedford Borough. They are seeing real benefits from this improved consistency in social workers, and the care they have received has improved.

This has been reflected in the regular qualitative and statistical analysis, by Ofsted, which clearly shows significant performance improvement in Bedford Borough. The support and improvement in Bedford Borough Children's Services is led by a directly elected Mayor and Lead Member for Children's Services offering clear direction to the Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services. All four work closely together to deliver effective service improvement which improves outcomes for Children, Young People and their Families.

The future

We are delighted that our work with Bedford Borough's Children's Services department has had a meaningful impact on the lives of many children. Bedford Borough are committed to excellence in practice through a values led, relationship based, systemic practice approach and ethos with the voice of the children at the centre of continuous improvement.

We look forward to continuing our journey and further assisting the Children's Services department in improving the lives of children in the Bedford Borough area.

The Guidant partnership continues to go from strength-to-strength and we have a further three projects planned to help deliver and strive for better recruitment practice across the council.

In summary

Guidant Global's partnership with Bedford Borough Council continues to go from strength to strength, and provide numerous year-on-year operational benefits.

Not only has the partnership resulted in cost savings, but it has directly improved the outcomes for children - the main motivation of the Children's Services department.

Both parties are exceptionally proud of everything that we have achieved together, making a real difference to the Children, Young People and their Families within the Bedford Borough area.

#ABetterWay

Our relationship with Bedford Borough has not just been about reducing costs, but rather doing what is right for Bedford Borough Council so they can improve the lives of vulnerable children. A true example of our **#ABetterWay** ethos.

What the client says

|| *The achievement of recruiting high quality social workers is incredible as are the cost savings.*

Most importantly the children are starting to see the benefit. The feedback we are getting from families and children is overwhelming positive, mainly because of the high-quality workforce we have. Our Social Workers get up in the morning to make a difference to the lives of children, that's why we do what we do. I am pleased that we now have the knowledge that on a daily basis our wonderful social workers are out there making a difference to the lives of children.

It makes me feel proud that we have such a strong team of social workers, and such strong partners in Guidant. It makes me full of hope for the future, and the knowledge that we can continue to make a difference. ||

**Cllr Valentine - Portfolio holder
for Children's Services**