

CASE STUDY

How Bradford Council created a new culture of performance management

Like many UK public authorities, Bradford Metropolitan District Council was being asked to do more with less. In response, it embarked on a sweeping programme of cultural transformation – to boost its line managers' confidence, and reduce the costs associated with underperforming employees.




How do you continue to serve one of the UK's largest districts by population, while working towards ambitious targets for cost reduction? It's a challenge Bradford Metropolitan District Council has chosen to tackle head-on – not least by creating a new culture of sensitive but effective performance management.

As Kerry Pelkowski, Senior HR Business Partner at the Council explains:

"In times past, the public sector has probably been viewed as having a certain level of tolerance for underperformance – in larger organisations there can be more places for poor performers to hide, and managers have sometimes lacked the skills or confidence they need to hold difficult conversations, and address performance issues effectively."

"But now, through the course of significant workforce reductions – the result of national austerity – the negative effects of such cultures have become more apparent, and less tenable."

The Council's bold solution was to invest in management training – exactly the kind of area normally cut in austere times.

 We need a modern workforce that operates in an efficient way. That means getting the best out of people, helping them to realise their potential, and aligning their work to the goals of the organisation.

Simon Jenkins, Corporate HR Manager,
Bradford Council


Tailored training, based on real insight

AdviserPlus worked with the Council to analyse two years' worth of management information (MI), creating a compelling case for investment – and the blueprint for its brave new strategy.

The Council found:

- 37% of absence cases related to mental health, with managers lacking confidence in holding sensitive conversations
- Managers tended to avoid issues that aren't 'black and white'
- Protracted cases were negatively impacting all involved
- There was a disconnect between the number of absences requiring proactive management and the number of absence cases opened

Its new strategy would see the Council invest in its managers at every level – to boost their confidence and engagement, develop their leadership capabilities, and empower them to sensitively raise and resolve performance issues before they have a chance to escalate.

 The MI AdviserPlus provided really helped us prove that performance management was an area we needed to address, and drive this message home with management teams at every level.

Simon Jenkins, Corporate HR Manager,
Bradford Council

We helped Kerry and her team develop and implement a highly tailored, three-stage training programme:

1. **Pre-course eLearning**
2. **Face-to-face workshops**
3. **Proactive follow-up calls**

The Council also invested in its mental health resources – from an online mental health toolkit, to a series of ‘Managing Mental Health in the Workplace’ workshops for 100 staff across the business.

The feedback from the sessions has been excellent – very, very positive. Our managers have appreciated the fact that it’s very practical and very hands-on.

Kerry Pelkowski, Senior HR Business Partner, Bradford Council

Make your line managers the front line of HR

At AdviserPlus, our experts and technology have one goal: to help your managers manage better.

The result? Engaged people, lower HR costs, and improved business performance. Let’s talk.

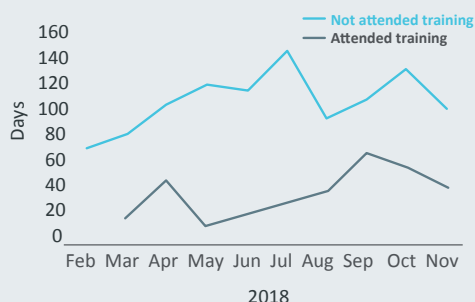
Delivering on every objective

Bradford Metropolitan District Council’s decision to invest in management training has had a dramatic impact, helping to reduce process times and costs, while improving employee experience and untying the hands of its HR professionals.

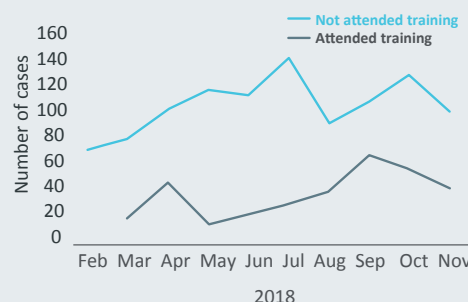
The success of its bold, data-driven response to the pressures of austerity should be an inspiration for the wider local government HR community.

Here are just a few of the metrics that have improved since training was delivered...

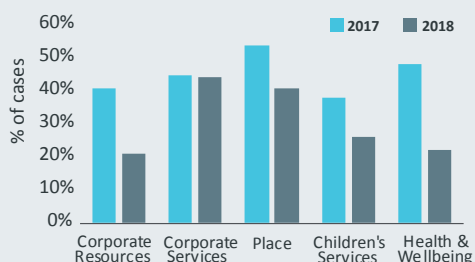
DISCIPLINARY CASE DURATION REDUCED BY 66%



GRIEVANCE CASE DURATION REDUCED BY 60%



FEWER SHORT TERM ABSENCE CASES RESULT IN FORMAL ACTION



OPEN PERFORMANCE CASES PLUMMETED AFTER TRAINING



The Council’s managers, as they apply their new skills in the field, have also reported seeing better outcomes. Here are just two of their stories:

A principal manager’s story

When a Principal Manager at Bradford Council noticed that there was an issue regarding the performance of a member of her team, she was able to put her management training into practice.



For example, she didn’t automatically act on the assumption that his below-par work was due to a lack of training, unwillingness or laziness. Taking the time to sit down with him and talk about his work, he revealed he was going through a stressful relationship breakdown, and hadn’t realised this was impacting his day-to-day role.

By listening and empathising, the employee’s manager was able to offer emotional support in the form of an occupational health referral, followed by weekly counselling. While his personal situation hasn’t changed substantially, his manager is already seeing a marked improvement in his attitude and responsiveness at work.

A service manager’s story

One of Bradford Council’s Service Managers was alerted to the low attendance of a member of staff, who had been in and out of formal attendance processes for years.



In line with the mental health awareness training he had received, the manager encouraged the member of staff to discuss the issues she faced in a supportive environment. Instead of creating another unsustainable improvement plan, they devised a flexible working arrangement to help her manage the stress and anxiety she was feeling as a result of external pressures.

Following a three-month trial, the employee reported feeling happier – and fell below the corporate sickness trigger point for the first time in a number of years.