



CASE STUDY

Powys County Council:
improving employer brand
and candidate experience.

Powys County Council is a Welsh Unitary Authority with 73 elected councillors. A relatively young operation, it was first created as a County Council in 1974, before merging with its constituent district councils to become a Unitary Authority in 1996. The Council employs around 8,000 employees working in many locations across Powys in numerous roles ranging from refuse collector to social worker, to teacher and highway engineer.

A long standing, valued customer of MidlandHR since 1989, Powys County Council migrated through MidlandHR's successive HR and payroll solutions. The Council currently operates the latest web-based solution, iTrent, the single platform for HR, payroll, talent management and workforce planning.

The Council is one of MidlandHR's most advanced and innovative customers, highly respected by other councils and commercial organisations. All iTrent modules have been implemented, from core HR and Payroll, to Absence, Learning, Development, Self-Service and Web Recruitment.



Forming part of the Council's Corporate Improvement Plan, the People Strategy is based on a vision increasingly shared by many organisations today – to shift the core focus of HR and payroll away from workforce administrative support, towards the development of strategies to optimise the workforce and drive organisational performance.

The objectives identified were to:

- Understand existing workforce skills & capabilities & identify future skills required
- Identify the most appropriate means of closing gaps between current & future capabilities
- Implement a consistent approach to workforce planning & development
- Ensure resources & people are used most effectively across the organisation
- Enable Service Managers to plan & develop resources in the most cost effective way

Filtering into HR's objectives, Recruitment was a key component of the Council's People Strategy and improvements in this area would help achieve the business goals and key benefits identified. Previously, both manual applications and those received on the legacy system, were manually keyed into iTrent Recruitment, proving very labour intensive. Additionally, all information provided to recruitment managers was paper-based, which again was very time consuming. Having reviewed its recruitment processes, the Council needed to develop a more robust, centralised recruitment website. It needed to be cost effective and deliver the correct information sought by prospective employees needing to make an informed decision about Powys County Council as their employer of choice

Sue Harris, transactions and systems manager at Powys County Council explains: "Earlier surveys confirmed that candidates were abandoning their applications, contributing to low applicant

figures. It became clear that we had to improve candidate experience as well as perceptions of Powys County Council as an employer of choice.

"Furthermore, the Council's website, publications and correspondence are closely monitored by the Welsh Language Board, and to meet its statutory requirements, all external systems and communications needed to be bi-lingual. With vacancies that are 'Welsh Essential' however, we can only accept Welsh applications. Hence, Web Recruitment would need to comply with this. During early stages of engagement with MidlandHR, it was agreed that they would develop a Welsh language version of the website."

The recruitment project comprised five distinct phases of which four have been implemented successfully. These included two Web Recruitment phases – one internal, the other external – the implementation of the bi-lingual recruitment site, as well as bi-lingual online recruitment including application forms. The fifth and final phase will be automating managers' recruitment processing through Manager Self-Service

Improving web recruitment

To be perceived as an employer of choice the Council needed to define what this meant. It was agreed that Powys should be presented as:

- A great place to live and work with a good work-life balance
- Caring and progressive
- A frontrunner in adopting new technologies and ways of working
- A provider of a range of development opportunities with clear career pathways

Before starting the implementation, the recruitment team researched best practice for recruitment websites. To enhance the website (www.powys.gov.uk), the format was revised, including ample information about Wales and Powys as a place to live and work. Providing this range of information became a direct measure

of attracting talent and improving perceptions of the Council as an employer of choice.

More information was included about Powys County Council as an employer, including a 'Guidance' section and 'Frequently Asked Questions'. Maps to the Authority's main offices were included to assist candidates in finding the interview location, as well as a 'Contact Us' section to ensure any outstanding queries are answered. All this information works together to create a rich, user-friendly and easily accessible online candidate pack.

A major review of job roles was undertaken to ensure that each was clearly defined when advertised, with clear and concise job descriptions and person specifications attached to each position. The Council can now refine application forms to target audience by attaching the required application form to the associated vacancy, thereby refining the employer brand specifically to job type.

Whereas previously candidates could only search by Schools and Non Schools, they can now search by type of position such as Adult Care or Catering for example. This has resulted in excellent search facilities that have greatly enhanced candidates' experience. This work has also embraced the necessary changes to ensure the Authority meets the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) requirements.

Within the application forms, links to various documents have been included to assist applicants throughout the process. Examples of these document links include the Disability Policy, Safer Recruitment Applicant Information, and a list of suggested referees for those that have been self employed. This means that applicants do not need to leave the form to access further information relating to the section they are completing. Due to poor broadband coverage in some areas of Powys,

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paper application forms remain available for candidates that can't apply online to download forms.

Progress evaluation

Following feedback from online surveys, Web Recruitment has greatly enhanced applicants' experience of applying for a position with Powys County Council. A particularly pleasing element for applicants is iTrent's ability to save the application at any given point, allowing the applicant to return to the form at any time rather than be constrained to completing it in one session. Other areas of positive feedback include:

- The facility for Welsh applicants to search for jobs & read supporting recruitment information in their first language
- The fact that some information, like personal information, is retained within the applicant database removing the need to re-enter information when making further applications
- Historical applications being saved under 'My Applications' with an option for the applicant to print the completed application
- The ability to attach numerous documents to the supporting information section of the application form
- Easily editable fields such as telephone number, referees etc

Changes to the online application forms incorporate ISA guidelines surrounding specific questions to be answered by applicants applying for 'regulated' and 'controlled' positions.

“External evaluation of the site was one of our identified measures of success,” says Harris. “Positive comments surrounding the new information resources were received by reviewers from the Society Information of Technology Managers (SOCITM) in its Better Connected 2010 report. Another identified

measure of success was the increase in the number of web applicants which was achieved almost immediately. In April 2009 the ratio of applicants to requisitions was 3:1 and 11 months later had increased to 4:1.

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All records relating to Recruitment are now stored in one central source. From here, reports are run and managers receive consistent application form reports that are clearer and easier to read, making short listing much more efficient.

The Future

“In line with project plans, Powys County Council will continue to roll out a new recruitment admin process to all managers. Managers will be able to conduct the admin recruitment process themselves with direct access to the system right up to offer stage. By accessing Manager Self-Service online, line managers can complete activities such as viewing applicants and application forms; short list applicants inclusive of short listing assessment form; entering new dates and times and candidate assessment forms, to making offers. This will ensure further efficiencies are realised through reductions in expenditure coming from stationary and postage costs, the recruitment team, and managers' time.

“Contracts will continue to be issued by the central recruitment team. These new processes will enable the Council to fully meet – and possibly exceed – the potential savings identified at the start of the project,” concludes Harris.

Organisational objectives

- Successfully implement the Corporate Improvement Plan
- Understand existing & future workforce skills & capabilities

HR objectives

- Attract & retain talent in Powys
- Enhance the candidate experience
- Welsh Language Board compliance
- Operating cost reduction
- Enable strategic decision making

Solution

MidlandHR's iTrent solution using:

- Web Recruitment
- Manager Self-Service

Results

- Enhanced workforce performance (right people, right role, right time)
- Council now an employer of choice
- Welsh Language Board & ISA compliance
- Improved management information
- Strategic decision making using predictive tools
- Improved workforce flexibility
- Targeted needs based training
- Reduced operating costs - **time saving of 37% equating to a saving of £116,572**

Time savings breakdown:

- BPU process – 100%
- Application and short-list process – 72%
- Application request process – 50%
- Advertising process – 51%
- Interview & appointment – 37%
- Payroll – 29%
- After appointment – 26%
- Leaver process – 25%

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