



# Reinventing recruitment for a more sustainable future

**Local government has shown it can move faster and better when the bureaucracy is stripped away and decision-making is made at the local level. Manny Sandhu sets out a plan with a powerful purpose**

Over five weeks ago a few individuals sat in a Microsoft Teams video call – in the midst of a then growing COVID-19 epidemic – and begun planning what would be a series of three recruitment campaigns. Campaigns with the potential to reinvent the way we recruit employees who deliver vital adult social care to our most vulnerable citizens.

Five weeks later, our digital marketing and social media has been viewed by hundreds and thousands of people, we have had thousands of click throughs to our recruitment microsites and hundreds of people applying for roles.

Our #ComeBackToCare, #StepUpNow and #TimeToCare campaigns were in response to the first difficult weeks of the crisis, as adult social care teams were coming under huge amount of pressure to deliver an emergency response and continue to protect older and disabled adults across the region.

To use that fashionable word, it has been an 'unprecedented' collaboration between the improvement body West Midlands Employers (WME), the West Midlands branch of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), the 14 West Midlands Councils with adult social services provisions, and a virtual army of colleagues, digital marketers, ICT specialists and PR people in the region.

Our work was initially aimed at attracting former social workers (and related professions) back into council work in the Midlands, then at final year social work students who had a willingness to support and a hunger for experience, and last week we launched our final campaign to attract social care staff of all kinds into the independent care sector.

Candidates are being placed as we speak with their local council or have joined a new talent bank of candidates with experience, expertise and commitment to support care commissioners and

providers in the medium to long-term.

It has been a wild but satisfying experience and has already thrown up a huge number of significant lessons, questions and challenges as we move from crisis to emergency to what we all know has to be a new way of working:

First, it is clearer than it has ever been that if we didn't have regional bodies such as West Midlands Employers, we would have to invent them. Local councils acting locally and simultaneously providing leadership in their communities is paramount.

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We have had local government's support and the result has been a fast, intelligence-led and flexible response that has been greater than the sum of its parts.

But this is not just an issue of the role of regional bodies, it is a question of where the power and responsibility needs to lie in dealing with the issues that face us as a region and a country.

Our recruitment campaigns have been entirely local responses to a local need. Local government has shown it can move faster and better when the bureaucracy is stripped away and decision-making is made at the local level in real time and responding to the reality on the ground.

This is not a sterile local versus national argument. To deal with some of the major issues we face – from COVID-19 to social inequality – local communities and councils need to work

with national government and institutions. Yet the success of our work in the West Midlands has shown that our response to what our citizens need must be locally-managed and nationally supported, not the other way around.

Third, I am pleased to say our campaigns continue to be successful, but the short-term gains and "just getting through the emergency" are not enough.

Led by the traditional but no less important, public service values of community, collaboration and voluntary effort we have recruited, created and mobilised a community workforce, many of whom we clap on our doorsteps every Thursday.

How can we harness that community power and the COVID-19 spirit and build structures around it that ensure we are recruiting and retaining the right people to deliver our public services into the future and way beyond the current crisis?

We cannot row back to business as usual when the last coronavirus patient gets discharged from hospital or recovers in their care home.

Fourth, we need to talk about data. There are a lot of fine words about how our work has to be informed by evidence and insight and how big data can transform how we deliver for residents. At times our campaigns struggled with getting the live evaluation we needed to drive necessary changes in our approach and targeting.

We all know there is an industry of data collection locally, regionally and nationally but we are nowhere near where we should be in sharing one version of the truth on which to base intelligent decisions on shaping and managing our workforce to deal with fast-changing demands.

Our partners in ADASS West Midlands led by its chair and interim acting chief executive at Shropshire Council, Andy Begley, are doing some great work in this area through Shropshire's Bridge project and the wider West Midlands social care data and technology collaboration.

As Andy says: 'Even before we were hit by the COVID-19 emergency, we faced a difficult and fragile future for the provision of social care and health. We face a huge challenge to shape the social care and health market, predict and prevent demand and better utilise our resources, including our workforce.'

'At the heart of this is collecting, managing, and analysing huge data sets in real time and visualising it in a way that can inform intelligent decisions about how we respond to local and regional needs.'

As we look back over the last few weeks there is a relief that we have got through this by the skin of our teeth by lots of hard work, grit and imagination. We have a sense of genuine optimism here in the West Midlands that there is a different and better way to recruit and manage our public service workforce.

There is no doubt a new respect for the work of public servants and those previously invisible people who care for our most vulnerable friends and neighbours. And we have established new relationships and important conversations between councils, with communities and with the private sector.

Now let's do some good. ■

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