

# Recruitment agency – optimising public contact recruitment

Working with an external recruitment agency and implementing an internal referral process to tackle challenges in the recruitment and retention of police staff in public contact roles, to increase staffing.

First published

19 June 2024

## Key details

<b>Does it work?</b>	Untested – new or innovative
<b>Focus</b>	Organisational
<b>Topic</b>	Organisation including workforce
<b>Organisation</b>	<a href="#">Bedfordshire Police</a>
<b>Contact</b>	Paula Walker, Public Contact Recruitment and Training Manager
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:paula.walker@beds.police.uk">paula.walker@beds.police.uk</a>
<b>Region</b>	Eastern
<b>Partners</b>	Police Private sector
<b>Stage of practice</b>	The practice is implemented.
<b>Start date</b>	October 2022
<b>Scale of initiative</b>	Local

## Key details

Target group	Workforce
--------------	-----------

## Aim

- Increase number of candidates applying for positions in public contact.
- Increase retention of staff within public contact.
- Address short term gaps in staffing.

## Intended outcome

- Effective recruitment and retention aimed to reduce the number of vacancies within the department.
- Increased performance within the control room such as reduced waiting times for callers.

## Description

### Background

Police contact centres are the engine room of any police force. To work effectively, the centre needs to be staffed effectively.

Bedfordshire Police public contact was struggling to recruit and retain staff within the public contact centre. Established staffing levels were well below the required level – attrition rates were increasing because of increased demand on existing staff. During the COVID-19 pandemic, staff burned out and left the organisation, meaning these staffing levels continued to drop. This led to an increased number of remaining staff experiencing high stress and more staff leaving to other roles. The high stress of staff was identified during conversations within the department, highlighting how under-staffing was contributing to the stress of colleagues.

The force had their own internal employment system, which was not attracting a high number or variety of applicants per campaign. The recruitment strategy was limited to adverts on the force website and there was no robust strategy associated with increasing recruitment of diverse demographics. The team responsible for recruitment at the time were three trainers and a head of

department, who had two other departments to lead. This meant there was not enough resource assigned to managing the recruitment and training process within the force.

## **The Public Contact Recruitment and Training Manager**

The team created a new role, Public Contact Recruitment and Training Manager, to provide structure throughout recruitment and training, managing the training calendar to ensure appropriate time is booked out for staff absorptions and training. This role was open to anyone to apply and was originally a temporary role. However, due to its success, the role has been made a permanent, full-time job.

## **Recruitment agency**

The force wanted to run five recruitment and training campaigns per year but needed more people to apply for the role. Therefore, the force decided to use a recruitment agent to reach a greater, more diverse range of people. The recruitment agency was recommended by someone within the organisation and was chosen to try something new as the market was saturated.

The recruitment agency was selected due to its reach on social media and access to recruitment and career websites, like CV library. The force was still using an old advert that had been used for several years. Working with the recruitment agency, this was reviewed and made more relevant and up to date to reflect the specific role being advertised. Every time the force run a new recruitment campaign, the team go through procurement to gain funding and use the recruitment agency.

At the same time a 'screening out' questionnaire was devised so that this filtered out any candidates during the first application that did not meet the criteria, such as lack of IT skills or no experience of working in high-pressured environment. The screening out questionnaire is developed based on the job role criteria provided by the recruitment team. Before the questionnaire is published, the recruitment team must sign it off to ensure it is appropriate for the role. This substantially cuts down the workload of the recruitment team as they do not have to go through this process themselves and limits their time processing unsuitable candidates.

The recruitment agency also assisted the force by developing short videos to be used on social media. Volunteers were sought from within public contact to speak about their roles and what it was like to work shifts. These short videos were also published on the force website and have proven to

be very effective in attracting talent to the force.

During the campaigns, the recruitment agency also provides weekly performance reports to demonstrate the success of job adverts, highlighting how much interest roles are receiving. This is sent to the Public Contact Recruitment and Training Manager to ensure consistent communication between partners. This is highlighted as beneficial when speaking to senior management as the team can provide figures on how well the advertisements are doing.

The recruitment agency leads on all the work including the surveys, videos and any other social media outputs but always ensure they have had sign off by the recruitment team within the force. Due to this, the recruitment agency substantially decreases the team's workload meaning they can use their time more effectively. These adverts are posted on the recruitment agency's social media and shared on the force website.

After screening, applications are uploaded to the recruitment agency's portal, and the force is given a client log in. Within this platform, the team are able to access applicants' CVs and information on why the recruitment agency believe they are a good fit for the role. There are also tools for members of the team to score the applications, assisting in the assessing of shortlisting applications.

## Refer a friend

The force also introduced a refer a friend scheme, whereby staff members who work within public contact could refer their friends and family for a role. On successful recruitment and completion of initial training, the referrer is rewarded with an honorarium payment of £150. Since the scheme was launched in April 2023 the force has seen over 20 referrals. The scheme was launched on the Public Contact Microsoft Teams channel and the application is processed through Microsoft Forms. There is currently a waiting list of individuals referred through this scheme. The force are getting an increased number of referrals, which they feel indicates how the environment within public contact has improved, as staff are recommending the organisation to their friends and families.

## Overall impact

### Recruitment agency and updated recruitment/assessment process

By reaching a different audience, the recruitment agent was able to attract an increased number of candidates who were the most diverse the force had seen. Applicants increased from approximately 50 per campaign to over 380 with the recruitment agency.

Retention has improved by 13% (between January–April 2023, 50% of those left the organisation altogether, compared to 37% in January-April 2024). This is seen as a positive within the force, as it keeps staff within the organisation and helps develop their career journeys. The quality of candidates has also improved.

As of April 2024, 50% of the leavers from public contact are moving within the organisation to take up roles of police officers and other police staff roles through progression.

## Refer a friend

Since the scheme was launched in April 2023 the force has seen over 20 referrals. There has been a consistent increase in the number of referrals – this has been seen by the force as a sign that staff are enjoying their work environment, since they have referred their families and friends to work in the same organisation/role.

## Learning

### Recruitment agency

- It is helpful to trial a recruitment agency prior to committing long-term. This way, the force can test how impactful their recruitment services are and evaluate whether it is worth the additional cost. Additionally, Bedfordshire Police identified that some recruitment agencies may offer a cheaper price for a trial of their services, meaning that enquiring for a trial may save money.
- The force also highlighted the importance of consistently evaluating the success of chosen recruitment agencies. Bedfordshire Police changed their provider in late 2023 due to underperformance. In December 2023 a new provider was commissioned and by the end of the campaign the force received over 380 applications, which was a greatly increased number than before. This demonstrates the importance of constant evaluation to ensure the agency is providing value for money.

## Refer a friend

- To increase referrals, it is helpful to advertise the scheme on Teams channels regularly to continue staff interest.
- It is important to clearly communicate the regulations of refer a friend, for example, stating that only those who successfully complete the recruitment and training process are eligible for rewards.

## Copyright

The copyright in this shared practice example is not owned or managed by the College of Policing and is therefore not available for re-use under the terms of the Non-Commercial College Licence. You will need to seek permission from the copyright owner to reproduce their works.

## Legal disclaimer

Disclaimer: The views, information or opinions expressed in this shared practice example are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or views of the College of Policing or the organisations involved.

## Tags

Police recruitment   Force control rooms