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Bedford Borough Council
An Ofsted seal of approval: How Idox worked with the Council to deliver an engaging, co-produced Local Offer website

Challenge:
Using Ofsted feedback to make changes for the better
When The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) undertook a special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) inspection of the Bedford Borough local area in 2018, its Local Offer website was placed firmly in the spotlight. At that time, the team used an in-house system and while it had more than 1000 services listed, it was unfortunately not deemed fit-for-purpose. So much so, the local community was either unaware of its presence or unable to find what they needed despite its wealth of content.

With a clear mandate therefore to improve the Local Offer provision and specific Ofsted targets to meet, the Council was motivated to find an experienced partner to help deliver a more sophisticated and professional system – and quickly. The team was also responsible for ensuring the website was:

- co-produced with children and young people with SEND, their parents, carers and professionals
- accessible and easy to use
- widely recognised across the community as a useful service

Solution:
Partnering with Idox to build a relevant and user-friendly Local Offer
Keen to choose the right provider, the Council embarked on a series of focus groups with families and professionals from a variety of services across the local area to test other Local Offers and refine their requirements.

"Finding the right partner was essential for us", explained Chris Morris, Bedford Borough Council's SEND Manager. "We chose three Local Offer websites and asked service users to test them out, telling us what they liked and didn't like. This was a really useful exercise – especially as the one we thought we liked the look of internally, wasn't rated highly at all when it was put to use by focus group participants.

> "The ease-of-use is excellent and it does exactly what we need it to – it's simple on the backend but can be easily searched from the frontend."

Chris Morris
SEND Manager
Bedford Borough Council

"The Local Offer designed by Idox generated excellent feedback – young people and carers really liked how it was presented and found it easy to use, so we were confident they were the partners for us. There's real joy in being able to commission something truly co-produced with those who will actually be using it."

While a project of this size would typically take six months, Idox worked closely with the Council to get it up and running in just six weeks – thereby meeting the target that was set at the start.

As the Council's previous Local Offer was over-populated, navigation issues made it difficult to use. A clear advantage of the Idox system is its simplicity at the backend, yet the ability for users to find what they need quickly with its colourful, easy-to-access categories, age bands and search function.

Chris commented: "Following Ofsted's feedback, co-producing our Local Offer was at the heart of the whole project. We launched with an emphasis on wanting to build it with them – not just for them – and invited organisations to get in touch to be listed. With the right system in place, we were able to shape our Local Offer gradually with services we knew families wanted there.

Outcome:
Increased engagement and positive Ofsted feedback

The Council now has more than 600 services listed and has experienced a significant upturn in users, site and page visits compared to its previous Local Offer. Number of users on the website has seen a 30% year-on-year increase, page views have accelerated by 230% and users are staying on average four times longer.

One of the most rewarding results however came after Ofsted and the CQC's most recent SEND inspection with the lead Ofsted inspector commending the 'new, more interactive and relevant' Local Offer website. The officer highlighted how it is more 'reflective of the aspirations and interests' of children and young people with SEND.

Chris said: "Parents see it as their responsibility too, so it's rewarding to see how engaged everyone is with it. In fact, it's become so much more than a website. If young people tell us something is missing, we can identify the relevant information and upload it quickly – so it's ever-evolving in partnership with those that are using it."

Parent feedback has also been extremely positive about its role in the community. One parent said: "I think this site will be something that we can really use in Bedford Borough and it will help a lot of families out there that are trying to find their way through this maze that is SEND."

Another has found it instrumental having only been in the area for two years: "It has helped me to know where to take my son. It's brilliant – it's what I've been looking for."

"The lead inspector was able to see the transformation we'd made and how responsive the new Local Offer website is, demonstrating our 'you said, we did' approach to this project."

Chris Morris
SEND Manager
Bedford Borough Council

Future:

A system that grows in line with Council and community needs

Since launching their Local Offer website, the Council has developed the channel further and is continuing to plan improvements and next steps. Bedford's school improvement service has implemented a dedicated resource bank for schools, and a specific members area within the Local Offer for those schools that have bought back the service. Bedford Borough has also integrated a Care Leavers Local Offer channel outlining the support and services available to young people leaving care and preparing for adulthood.

Looking to the future, Chris concluded: "Parents told us they wanted a tool to help them identify Personal Assistants (PAs). We've been looking at incorporating this to allow professionals to leave their contact details, meaning the Local Offer website can also act as a hub to support families in finding PAs with the right qualifications, making it even more useful as a family-centred, information resource."

"Now we have the right system in place that can grow and expand, we're really passionate about it. We also created a video to introduce the new website, which really sets the tone for what it's about and the role we see it playing."

Chris Morris
SEND Manager
Bedford Borough Council

Call us now on 0333 011 1200 or email marketing@idoxgroup.com for more information about Idox's family information services and Local Offer websites.

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