



## HOW WE WORKED WITH DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL TO REDUCE ABSENCE AND IMPLEMENT CONSISTENT PROCESSES

### KEY DETAILS:

Employees Covered: **740**

Service Type: **Nurse-led**

Absence Reduction: **19%**

“Working with FirstCare has felt like a true partnership.”

**Anne Stunell**

HR & Organisational  
Development Manager at  
Dacorum Borough Council

Dacorum Borough Council employs around 740 people in northwest Hertfordshire. Earlier this year, it moved to The Forum, a purpose-built town centre hub, and delivers a diverse range of services including refuse collection and recycling, planning, revenues and benefits, supported housing, front line services and children’s playgrounds.

The local authority has regenerated the centre of Hemel Hempstead as part of its £30 million Hemel Evolution programme. This has included work in the Old Town, making it a modern, accessible and attractive setting for a new generation of visitors to enjoy while preserving its historic character.

The council is also committed to providing further improvements including new homes and investing in local business.

### **Inconsistencies in absence reporting led to the Council’s decision to outsource its absence management**

The council has a commitment to create a fitter and healthier workforce, by analysing sickness trends, current health and wellbeing trends to determine how to be healthier through creating a wellness strategy.

Prior to FirstCare’s involvement, it already had a bespoke HR system, which included a sickness absence module. The system had limitations on management information and self-service.

However, inconsistencies across departments and increases in absence – combined with a lack of meaningful reports – led to the decision to outsource to FirstCare and utilise its nurse-led approach.

“FirstCare delivers quality and consistency. With everything in one place and a high level of support, nothing is ever unachievable or too much trouble.”

### **Anne Stunell**

HR & Organisational  
Development Manager at  
Dacorum Borough Council



## 19% REDUCTION

Overall reduction rates

### **Our nurse-led service fitted in with the Council's wider vision to tackle absence**

Anne Stunell, Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager at Dacorum Borough Council, researched a number of options and was sceptical about implementing a new programme. However, she was referred to FirstCare by neighbouring Watford Borough Council.

She explains that our nurse-led service – where employees can seek the advice of registered nurses – was a big draw: “Bringing FirstCare on board is just one of the measures we’ve taken to dramatically reduce absence. Its nurse-led service and comprehensive range of reporting and monitoring tools played a central role in the council’s decision.”

We’ve been able to integrate with the council’s existing tools, and complement its wider policies that include:

- Monthly reviews of sickness cases.
- Training for managers.
- Wellness initiatives.
- Incentives for no / low sickness absence.
- An employee assistance programme.
- Monthly reviews of sickness absence by sickness scrutiny group.
- 50 mental health first aiders at different levels across the organisation.
- Occupational health.

On-going involvement of the trade unions – Unite and Unison – is also a key feature.

### **The Council and FirstCare worked in partnerships with the Unions**

Right from the start, it was clear that we “offered the full package”. Anne elaborates: “Nothing was too much hassle, even after making various changes, and having to experiment a little. And, although the whole process was hard work, FirstCare made sure it all ran smoothly.”

Information from Unison and Unite has been heavily included, even in the FAQs that were created. As a result, everything the council sent to employees included the unions’ branding, which was vital in securing buy-in from the wider team.

We provided training for all relevant staff and even FirstCare COO James Arquette got involved in the project to ensure everything went well. Anne said: “Working with FirstCare has felt like a true partnership.”

### **Since implementation in August 2015, we’ve reduced absence by 19%**

Year on year, the council’s absence target is 8 days lost per full time employee (or equivalent). Since working with us, the council has been able to reduce its absence figure from 10.3 days to 8.3 days.

Short term  
DLPE

54%  
reduction

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Overall, we’ve helped the council achieve a 19% reduction when analysing absence rates as a whole. What’s more, long-term absence rates have been reduced by 26% and short term absences attributed to such as Gastroenteritis have seen a massive reduction of 54% in Days Lost Per Employee.

### **There have also been improvements in Return To Work (RTW) compliance and consistency**

What’s more, while there’s still some work to do in this area, the council has been able to hit its RTW compliance target of 95% on a number of occasions, though this figure is more commonly in the region of 85%.

Also, there is now consistency across the whole organisation as everything is being drawn into one form.

Anne said that there’s also a higher level of consistency during the RTW process due to bespoke RTW interviews tailored to the sickness absence reason. She added: “The new system makes the return to work process much more meaningful. And managers now have the opportunity to talk to returning employees about the responsibility to be at work and what support they may need.”

Anne did, however, concede they could be doing more to make better use of the monthly reporting and intended to do so in the future.

### **The council is looking forward to continue to reduce absence and leverage the benefits of comprehensive absence reporting**

As a result of the collaboration – which has support from councillors, directors and management team – previously high levels of absence have been significantly reduced.

Anne sees the council’s relationship with us as on-going and one that will only increase in value as we all continually work at keeping the absence rate down.

She has already recommended our service to organisations in both the private and public sector.

Anne said: “FirstCare delivers quality and consistency. With everything in one place and an incredibly high level of support, nothing is ever unachievable or too much trouble.”

**FirstCare**

Absence Management Solutions

**To find out more about how our service could help your organisation reduce absence rates and achieve consistency, get in touch.**

**Call us on 03454 565 730 or email [info@firstcare.eu](mailto:info@firstcare.eu)**



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