

A photograph of a trade show booth. A man in a dark suit is looking at a folder held by a woman in a blue shirt. They are standing in front of a booth with a green and white banner that says "Be inspired". There are various brochures and a glass of orange juice on the table in front of them. The background shows other people and a modern building.

Case study

Central Bedfordshire

Creating a supportive environment where business leaders can focus on success

Business leaders and entrepreneurs are the experts in building successful companies. But in difficult times, effective local authority support can help them rise to challenges and maintain a competitive edge. Here's how it's done in Central Bedfordshire.

It goes without saying that business leaders are the real experts in their companies, markets and growth strategies. However, running businesses can be all-consuming, leaving too little time to understand the local ecosystem of services that can facilitate success – from recruitment and training to funding, exporting, improving sustainability, or finding the right accommodation.

The overall quality of the local business environment in which companies operate can also influence performance in critical ways, and effective, accessible support infrastructure is key.

It makes perfect sense, therefore, for forward-thinking councils to offer, or facilitate, local knowledge-based business support services, to help companies in their area prosper in the most favourable environment possible. Enlightened local authorities like Central Bedfordshire Council, recognise that supporting business success is a wise investment. The Council's Vision 2050 pledges that Central Bedfordshire will continue to be a great place for business – especially SMEs, and through their Economic Strategy, they further commit to 'supporting our businesses', because thriving companies are key drivers of the area's wealth, prosperity and ultimately quality of life for people with rewarding jobs.

This has never been more true than in the last few tumultuous years, during which council support helped Central Bedfordshire-based companies confront a series of unprecedented challenges.

Support in a crisis

From COVID-19 to international conflict to recession, businesses have been faced with multiple crises, making support from proactive local authorities like Central Bedfordshire Council more important than ever.

This article, therefore, will review just some of the support programmes Central Bedfordshire Council has been involved in over the last few challenging years. For entrepreneurs and business leaders established in Central Bedfordshire or considering the area for the first time, the aim is to illustrate ways in which the council may be able to assist, across focus areas that include strategic growth, efficiency and resilience, internationalisation, innovation, and decarbonisation.

The council want innovative businesses to grow and locate here, succeed commercially, and be ethical employers – even in difficult times.

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Making information accessible

Communication and the sharing of valuable knowledge is always important, and Central Bedfordshire Council make it their business to stay in touch with local entrepreneurs and business leaders – to keep them informed about relevant programmes, help them save time, and assist them in growing their companies.

Their online home, becentralbedfordshire.co.uk and it's a mine of information for entrepreneurs and business leaders seeking to access local business support or considering relocating to the area. The website is supported by regular social media feeds and a dedicated e-newsletter, 'Let's Talk Business', to maintain open and transparent channels of communication with the council.

Their content typically covers the following themes:

- Financing and funding opportunities
- Updates on key infrastructure or new developments
- Advice and information for businesses
- Networking events
- Awards and competitions
- Local business news
- Seminars, workshops and opportunities for one-to-one advice from experts.

Support from the council is delivered by their dedicated business account management team, which means that entrepreneurs and business leaders can benefit from a point of contact that's briefed and ready to assist with the most appropriate advice, guidance, and referrals.



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Support for small businesses

At a time when the COVID-19 pandemic was presenting SMEs with an unexpected range of unwanted challenges, Central Bedfordshire Council was quick to arrange a support package in conjunction with the not-for-profit Federation of Small Businesses (FSB).

Their funding enabled up to 120 smaller local firms to access free legal, tax and employment support, and general business advice, by becoming a member of the FSB.

This bold and proactive move helped to plug a gap, when Central Bedfordshire's smallest firms in particular were unable to access help from government support schemes.

Wider business support

The government's Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) provided Central Bedfordshire Council with further opportunity to help its local SMEs at a time of crisis.

The scheme targeted companies that had shown resilience throughout the pandemic and an ability to grow.

Central Bedfordshire Council worked with four local intermediaries to deliver a comprehensive business support programme.

This ground-breaking programme was one of the first and most comprehensive of its kind to launch across Bedfordshire, and other local authorities followed suit.



Service:

Cranfield University's Business Growth Programme (BGP)

Participant company:

Computair Ltd – software design for air movement/handling

[computair.com](https://www.computair.com)

"I'd like to say a big thank you to all the wonderful people at Cranfield that have delivered BGP to us. I now have an understanding of where the company is, where we need to go, and how to get there that I doubt I would ever have had otherwise. I am very grateful to Central Bedfordshire Council for providing the scholarship – I probably wouldn't have attended the programme without that funding. I am now certain that the benefit to our company will be far greater than the cost of the programme. The funding from Central Bedfordshire removed any doubt and hesitancy about going through the course and as you can tell, I am very glad I took the plunge".

Richard Phelan
Managing Director

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Central Bedfordshire Council's wider intermediary business support programme



Bedfordshire
Chamber of
Commerce

Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce

Project title:
Global trade support



Cranfield
School of
Management

Cranfield University

Project title:
Business growth programme
Essential management
Finance fundamentals
Ready for net zero growth
Net zero growth (top-up)



SEMLEP's
Growth Hub
Connected Business Support

SEMLEP

Project title:
Business support & mentoring
Innovation & recovery grant
Intensive investment readiness



University of
Bedfordshire

University of Bedfordshire

Project title:
Productivity programme – Lean Six Sigma

Case study

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Achieving sustainability

With increasing customer expectations for businesses to be far more environmentally conscious, forward-thinking entrepreneurs are quite clearly making sustainability a core value for new and existing ventures.

Sustainability is also a central pillar of Central Bedfordshire Council's own vision for the future, which includes, helping local businesses to contend with sustainability-related issues. To this end, the council is now providing funding to the Green Business Network (GBN), enabling local businesses to access the network's free support services.



Created more than 25 years ago, GBN is a membership organisation and, charity that helps businesses reduce their impact on the environment.

'Green Connectors', a new programme the council is supporting through GBN, is also creating a dynamic referral network for businesses involved in the provision of a wide-range of green solutions.

By bringing together like-minded businesses and assisting them in the reduction of energy usage, water consumption and waste, while increasing biodiversity and designing products more sustainably, such initiatives are helping to put environmental issues at the heart of entrepreneurial decision-making.



Service:

Cranfield University's Business Growth Programme (BGP)

Participant company:

Atheon Analytics – developers of supply chain data platforms and analytics

skuttrak.com

"Attending the BGP programme has been hugely valuable both for the organisation and for me personally. Taking time to step back and look at the business from a different perspective has helped to surface a number of issues which had been holding us back. Working through the four modules and applying the learnings to the business means we now have the confidence and conviction to follow through with these big decisions where in the past, they may have seemed too daunting. On a more personal level, the experience has been totally re-energising. I feel more engaged than ever with the business and can't wait to get going putting our plan into action".

Adam Booth

Product Director

Case study

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International trade

Following the UK's exit from the EU, doing business within Europe has changed significantly. To help local entrepreneurs ensure business continuity and maintain competitiveness, Central Bedfordshire Council provided free international trading workshops.

Delivered by Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce (BCoC) on the council's behalf, to businesses of all sizes, the free workshops covered key changes to import and export procedures, to help local businesses adapt in the new economic climate.



Service:

Chamber of Commerce – Global Trade Support

Participant company:

Willow Tree Distillery – artisan gin and visitor experiences

willowtreedistilling.co.uk

After being approached by European hypermarkets Mary Vincent, Willow Tree's founder, was keen to maximise this opportunity. Reaching out to the Chamber of Commerce, Mary was connected with the ARG Global Trade Support programme.

Mary explained that the advice was delivered through a one-to-one consultation, tailored exactly to her knowledge gaps and the company's specific requirements.

Although, at that point, the time wasn't right for Willow Tree Gin to consider international markets, they now have an action plan in place to achieve their global ambitions in the near future.

"We were advised to wait until our business had increased production levels and develop the market here in the UK first. This advice was helpful as it made us realise that we need to grow the business and secure production levels before looking at exports".

Mary Vincent

Founder of Willow Tree Gin

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Visitor economy

With its unique combination of breathtaking countryside, popular attractions, historic market towns and villages, as well as big city facilities close by, Central Bedfordshire has always had a thriving visitor economy. However, the sector was hit hard by the pandemic, and Central Bedfordshire Council was keen to step in and help.

Supported by BCoC and SEMLEP, 'Experience Bedfordshire' is the tourism and destination management organisation for Bedfordshire and is open to a wide-range of local businesses including hotels, restaurants and tourist attractions.



The council funded 'Experience Bedfordshire' membership for 65 visitor economy companies, helping them to raise their local, national and international profiles and boost their businesses as pandemic restrictions were lifted.



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The Future

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), has allocated Central Bedfordshire funding to enable them to deliver support to local businesses and entrepreneurs through to 2025. Support programmes will focus on the key challenges the council expects businesses to face and cover decarbonisation, export, innovation and generic business support through tailored advice/expertise, mentoring, training, and grants.

Change of course is inevitable. There will always be crises and new challenges we never expected. But equally, there will always be creative entrepreneurs and dynamic business leaders ready to rise to them.

Central Bedfordshire Council is committed to enabling the best possible business environment and working with local entrepreneurs and business leaders to rise to challenge, whatever they are, and whatever the economic climate.



Service:

Cranfield University's Business Growth Programme (BGP)

Participant company:

C&C Consulting – health & safety consulting services

ccconsulting.uk.com

"The BGP scholarship came at exactly the right time for me. Initially wanting to know more about marketing to help me launch our new health and safety software, BGP provided so much more essential business knowledge, an environment for discussion, debate, brainstorming and collaboration. Without attending the course, the prospect of launching the software was a daunting one. Four modules on, I'm on a revised path creating a new company to service a newly identified customer type".

Ruth Crothers

Director of Finance



Case study

Central Bedfordshire

essential

● design ● print ● embroidery

Service:

University of Bedfordshire, Productivity Programme - Lean Six Sigma training

Participant company:

Essential Embroidery Design – branded clothing and merchandise production

eed-uk.com

The challenge:

Essential Embroidery were looking to assess their work-flow processes to improve efficiency within their departments, including the warehouse.

The solution:

In addition to applying Lean tools within the company's day-to-day activities, the Lean Thinking course enabled the company to consider new methods and perspectives in developing robust solutions to improve productivity and work-flow.

"The course was informative, clear and the tutor took good care to make sure we all understood the concepts and ways of thinking".

Sandra Carr

Production & Operations Manager

To find out more about Central Bedfordshire as the ideal location for your advanced logistics business investment, contact our inward investment team at

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