



**solutions**

# **A short guide to interim management in local government**



# Introduction

With councils looking for as many ways to save money as possible, a recent APSE UK-wide survey has found that 64% of respondents have a recruitment freeze in place. Of this 87% say that the freeze applies to all grades across the council. When this is coupled with the large scale redundancies, estimated in the past six months to number around 14,000 amongst survey respondents alone, councils will have to look for new ways to address the staff shortages to avoid failing to meet service demand.

APSE anticipates that interim managers will provide one way to assist councils to find further efficiencies, redesign services and up-skill remaining staff. For council officers who have never used interims before this can seem like a large expense for what ostensibly is a temporary worker. However, APSE does not believe that an interim manager is the same as a temp; an interim should not simply fill a job vacancy, but should exceed the expectations of the council, undertake a multitude of responsibilities and projects, and leave a lasting legacy. Interim management can be an excellent way for local authorities to maintain the smooth running of a service when permanent recruitment is not immediately feasible.

In order to help council managers understand the what, why and how of interim management, APSE has written this practical guide, including case study examples. These are recent interim assignments that APSE has undertaken for local authorities, and they are designed to give you real life scenarios and outputs from assignments to make sure that you are more informed about interim management.

## What is APSE?

APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence) is a not for profit local government body working with over 300 councils throughout the UK. Promoting excellence in public services, APSE is the foremost specialist in local authority front line services, hosting a network for front line service providers in areas such as waste and refuse collection, parks and environmental services, leisure, school meals, cleaning, housing and building maintenance.

APSE provides services specifically designed for local authorities, such as benchmarking, interim management, consultancy, seminars, research, briefings and training.

# What is an interim manager?

APSE interim managers are experienced senior local government practitioners. We have both operational and strategic senior interim managers who will bring their expertise and experience to a local authority for a determined period of time.

Interim managers are experts within their field and are often over qualified as a result, entering into a situation and taking control immediately. They can provide a fresh perspective, implementing strategies through hands on delivery, whilst managing transition and accelerating change.

## How does it differ from consultancy?

An interim manager will work as part of the council and take responsibility for a range of projects as opposed to being commissioned for one consultancy project. This usually lasts for between three to six months and will be for a regular number of days each week.

The interim manager will work as part of the council team, managing and mentoring staff as well as finding efficiency savings and service improvements to leave the council with an up-skilled workforce.

## What should I look for in an interim?

1. **Experience** – interim managers should have recent experience in local government and in the service area you want them to work in. You should consider whether this role needs operational and/or strategic expertise.
2. **Additional skills** – think what skills would complement the role, for example negotiation, coaching or project management.
3. **Flexibility** – consider whether you want someone who is happy to take on additional roles and adjust their brief regularly.
4. **Support** – you should consider what back-up the interim manager has, either in the form of a critical friend to explore ideas with, or to provide cover if he/she has to leave unexpectedly.
5. **Rate and expenses** – ask for an estimate of expenses, or preferably an inclusive rate, so that you don't get any surprises in the way of high costs.

# Scottish Borders Council

## 3 x 6 month assignments

## Catering and Cleaning Services

The Catering and Cleaning Services were facing a number of pressures and considerable change over the coming year with a transfer into the new Facilities, Property and Asset Management Division.

At the same time a full best value review of the Catering and Cleaning Services had been commissioned and this was being undertaken by APSE. At this early stage a number of strategic and operational pressures had already been highlighted, so in view of all these operational changes a decision was taken to appoint an interim manager to provide stability, direction and leadership through this period of change.

### Key issues

- **Best value review management support and implementation**
- **Unresolved operational pressures**
- **Organisational restructure underway**
- **Management team unhappy and de-motivated**
- **Serious working relationship problems**

### Key outcomes achieved

- **Service improvement plans developed and introduced**
- **Operational pressures resolved**
- **New organisational structure**
- **Improved working relationships and staff motivation**

### Methodology

The first task was to rebuild working relationships with the key people in the council and this was achieved with very positive outcomes. The interim manager acted as a change agent, challenging established practices and providing expertise, support and leadership.

Managers were also supported through coaching and mentoring on a one to one basis. Regular management meetings were established and operational action plans put in place with clear targets and objectives. Motivating the management team meant involving them in the whole review process. The team felt that some of the outcomes from the best value review matched their own views so this afforded some confidence in and credibility about the whole process. They felt de-motivated about the uncertainty for the future and their unhappiness with the current

structure of their organisation.

Staff recruitment had created operational pressures but the best value review identified low staff turnover so service managers reviewed their staffing contingency arrangements for covering staff absences and vacancies and took direct control of the situation. Discussions also took place with Human Resource Management to ensure the employment processes were as efficient as possible and service staff were encouraged to give as much notice as possible.

An organisation restructure took place separating the catering and cleaning services and two new service managers were appointed reporting to the new Head of Facilities, Property and Asset Management. Outcomes and results from the best value review were integrated into each of the service improvement plans which had five key objectives:

1. Customer service and customer care
2. Organisational structure and people development
3. Strategic decision making (pricing policy and service provision)
4. Operational priorities (financial and management systems, cashless, menu planning and nutrition, performance and benchmarking)
5. Communications and relationship management

Scottish Borders Council was invited by the Education Minister at the Scottish Government to take part in a free school meals pilot. This required very close working with colleagues in Education and Lifelong Learning. The management team, catering staff and all the support staff came together to make the project a great success which dramatically improved the division's reputation and working relationships.

### **Feedback received from the council**

*"The undoubted successes were your initial challenge to the managers, the rigour of the APSE review and then the free school meals pilot - all tackled absolutely head-on and with remarkably successful results."*

# Introducing....

## Vivianne Buller, APSE interim manager



### **Key service areas:**

**Catering and Cleaning Services**

### **Experience**

She is a specialist in providing the challenge and strategic guidance to inspire and support changing the delivery of services. She has a proven record as a manager with over 35 years working for City and Shire councils and was formerly a senior manager for a shire council's multi- service organisation which included a strategic role to facilitate service improvements across a wide range of services.

Some examples of previous projects for clients who were reviewing services and required new solutions have been:

- Change management and the transformation of catering and cleaning services
- Using performance data to drive continuous improvement to create better services and operational efficiencies.
- Food in schools reviews and service development planning
- Sustainable food procurement and the whole school approach to food

With her passion for school food and recognition of how it helps to support children's development, Vivianne was National Chairman of the Local Authority Caterers Association (LACA Ltd).

## Why APSE?

As a local government organisation we have unprecedented hands on experience and knowledge of the sector. We do not simply place an interim manager in a local authority; we support them throughout the placement with our unrivalled sector knowledge.

This support is essential to helping interim managers succeed and provide exceptional value for money to the authority. Paying for an interim manager in this economic climate is a big investment, and you are right to expect the best return for your money. APSE will work with the interim manager to make sure that this is being achieved from project start to finish.

APSE is an **ethical** organisation offering interim management solutions. We are owned by our members, which are local authorities across the UK. APSE is not-for-profit, meaning that we genuinely are looking for the best deal for local authorities, rather than answering to shareholders.

All our interim managers are **experienced practitioners** with extensive knowledge of their service area. They **are supported through the APSE network** with access to seminars, advisory groups and briefings for up-to-date knowledge of key issues and good practice in the field. We have a dedicated Principal Adviser resource for all the various service areas, meaning that our project knowledge is based on cutting edge local government thinking.

We have 12 years of **benchmarking data** through our Performance Networks service, and our experience in using this to undertake baseline assessments of services is unavailable to others.

We offer **good value for money**. In most projects, our fees are more than recovered by the first year savings through the implementation of our proposed strategies and recommendations. We have a **proven** track record with 100% of clients surveyed this year rating the completed project as excellent or good.

# Calderdale Borough Council

## 12 month assignment

## Safer Cleaner Greener Services

Following a senior management review and the realignment of a number of services a new service division was formed – ‘Safer Cleaner Services’. The former head of service was no longer in post and the service did not have a service manager in position.

The authority wished to rapidly move the new service forward and a number of key improvements were required to be introduced as part of the change programme. The authority determined that the best way forward would be to introduce an experienced interim manager with a proven record of success in delivering improvements to these service areas who could ‘hit the ground running’ introducing the necessary changes in a seamless manner.

### Key issues

- **The authority had recently undertaken a job evaluation exercise and this resulted in many front line staff within these services feeling de-motivated.**
- **The authority wished to drastically improve its Street Cleansing service and enhance its NI 195 scores.**
- **It wished the new service to become much more customer focused, responsive to their needs, and to reflect the Localism and Liveability agendas.**

### Key outcomes achieved

- **Improved communications and a much more customer driven service.**
- **A more holistic multi-skilled service more responsive to the public’s needs.**
- **Front line staff moved from a demoralised unproductive unit to a highly efficient and effective resource.**
- **A transport and plant renewals programme was introduced resulting in significant levels of new equipment being procured.**
- **Greater public/service partner awareness of their responsibilities in relation to caring for the environment.**
- **Within weeks of the new service being introduced the NI195 detritus score improved from 25% to 5% and litter from 6% to 2%.**
- **All the above was achieved within the council’s budget.**

### Methodology

A fundamental review was undertaken to assess the current strengths and weaknesses of the services. An operational and budget review was undertaken to establish current working practices and overall efficiency and value for money. Links to other service partners were fully examined and workshops were held to

explore how better communications and corporate working improvements could be achieved across all service areas. Trade Union representatives were engaged and consulted and regular meetings were convened with front line staff to advise them of any proposals that were being put forward. Members were fully engaged from the outset of the review to gauge their views of, and aspirations for, the new service. Further to this a number of presentations and reports were prepared for various Scrutiny Committees and the Cabinet to highlight the options that were available and to present a number of recommendations for their approval.

Throughout this process employees were actively engaged within the service to contribute their ideas of what needed to be improved. This was followed by a number of challenge events which helped employees locate the services in comparison to best practice, and also identify options of how these services could be improved. These challenge events proved extremely useful in ensuring employees were fully aware of what needed to be done and that the vast majority of them signed up to the overall change programme.

Following this a detailed improvement programme was prepared and key actions were linked to individual/team annual performance reviews. Front line staff jobs were redesigned and subjected to another evaluation. A highly successful 3Es campaign was launched. A new area management structure was introduced to reflect the localism agenda and create direct links to the community and service partners at a local level. A comprehensive training programme was introduced to facilitate the multi-skilled approach the service has adopted.

The new service was seamlessly introduced and a number of significant improvements to service delivery were achieved.

### **Feedback received from the authority**

*“It is extremely pleasing to note that these changes have already delivered major improvements in service delivery and many complimentary remarks have been received by the council from the community and various stakeholder groups. Peter’s expertise in this area helped the authority to move through this process in a highly professional manner. It was evident from the feedback from members that the numerous reports and presentations presented by Peter were very well received and highly commended, and all the recommendations that were put forward were agreed.”*

### **What are the 3Es?**

*The 3 Es are Education, Engagement and Enforcement. This is something the interim manager has introduced in many of his assignments. It in essence is trying to get councils to be more proactive in how they can care for their environment in a consistent and cohesive manner, involving a number of services.*

## **Introducing....**

### **Peter Connell, APSE interim manager**



#### **Key service areas:**

**All former CCT Services, including building maintenance, organisational development, change management, performance management, strategic planning, ALMO formation, liveability/ safer cleaner greener agenda, industrial relations**

#### **Experience**

A former Strategic Director with a wide range of experience gained in a unitary authority and with a track record of nationally recognised performance and service improvement. A professional with highly developed interpersonal skills coupled with a flair for solving complex problems requiring innovation, tact and diplomacy. A highly motivated, dynamic individual with proven management capacity who has successfully chaired a significant number of corporate working groups covering a whole range of cross-cutting/thematic areas delivering transformational change and major improvements for the Members, authority colleagues, and customers.

# Nottingham City Council

12 month assignment

Director of Environmental Services

This post became vacant due to the previous post holder moving to become Chief Executive at another authority. It was determined that an independent view was required of the current management structure in the directorate. Hence an interim post was commissioned, which required a highly experienced individual able to conduct a strategic review of the senior management structure and the current alignment of services. The interim manager also needed to undertake the duties and responsibilities of the post on a day to day basis.

## Key issues needing to be addressed

- **A senior management review needed to be undertaken as a matter of urgency.**
- **Improvements to the present levels of street cleansing service delivery.**
- **A review of corporate working on issues relating to caring for the environment and the liveability agenda.**
- **Review of waste management strategy to enable further long term options to be considered in line with the council's budget process.**
- **Prepare a strategic improvement plan for the services, taking into account the significant budgetary pressures the council was facing.**
- **Financial management within the service needed to be strengthened to enable value for money exercises to be undertaken on a continual basis.**

## Key outcomes achieved

- **The revised structure was incorporated.**
- **The post of Director was advertised and filled on a permanent basis.**
- **An efficient and effective street cleansing operation.**
- **Cross departmental working and synergy which benefits the whole council.**

## Methodology

A review of the structure was undertaken to consider if the current alignment of services within the directorate should be changed and if the post of Director should be advertised. A number of options were considered and the proposals were approved. This was undertaken via interviews and group discussions coupled with a comprehensive resource analysis which identified the levels of resources and key responsibilities of the senior management team.

A detailed operational review was undertaken of all street cleansing activities which examined both quality and efficiency measures and links to other service partners. Street cleaning operations were changed to ensure the quality of the service was

consistently delivered across the whole city and efficiencies were identified and delivered.

The waste management strategy was reviewed and a set of options was prepared for the consideration of senior Cabinet members. A financial appraisal of these options needed to be incorporated into the report to ensure any recommendations made could demonstrate value for money and link to the council overall budget. Financial management systems within the service area were examined and a series of workshops were introduced to strengthen staff understanding of the budgetary procedures and identify cost efficiencies.

A highly effective 3Es campaign was designed and launched to ensure members of the community and other service partners knew of their responsibilities in caring for the public realm. This resulted in the introduction of voluntary codes of conduct being accepted by many local businesses to reduce the amount of litter emanating from their businesses.

Corporate and cross departmental working was analysed and strengthened in relation to a more holistic approach to managing the public realm. It was recognised that improvements to the cleanliness of the city required improved corporate working across a number of service areas such as grounds maintenance, environmental health, community safety, waste management, community development, enforcement, and education. Therefore a senior management 'public realm' group was formed to ensure a more coordinated cohesive approach was adopted by all.

Through a series of meetings with senior members of the council, greater awareness was formed on the need for the city council to consider the maintenance of the public realm at a much more corporate level. This led to a better recognition of the impact that many other services could make not only on the cleanliness of the city but the liveability agenda as a whole.

### **Feedback received from the authority**

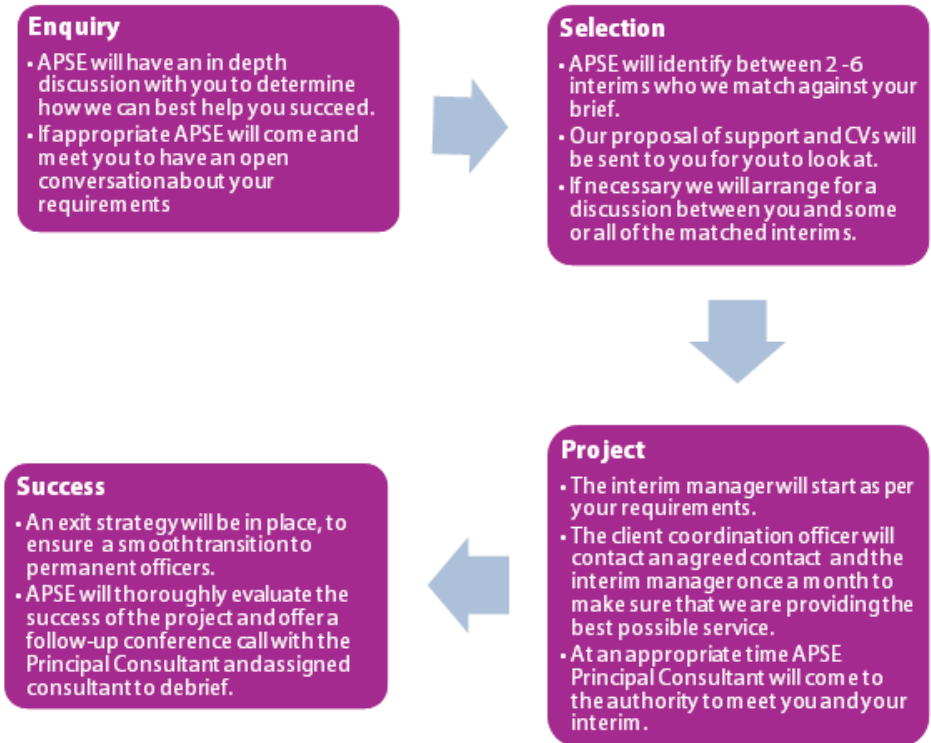
*"Made a major contribution in his leadership of Environmental Services during his period in Nottingham. He has helped me to identify significant long term change requirements and during his period put in place a number of key improvements."*

*"During his time with us, he led a detailed critique of how we delivered our cleansing services in Nottingham. He delivered an improvement plan and his plan has provided us with the kick start we needed for our city to start the journey from a clean city to the cleanest city in the country."*

# Sample process

At APSE we pride ourselves on responding quickly and effectively to all interim requests. APSE understands the local government interim market; we are the foremost specialist in local authority front line services. This is seen in our quick interpretation and grasp of your interim manager requirements, meaning that we can quickly pinpoint what you will need to succeed.

Below is a diagram which shows the assignment process from first enquiry to successful conclusion. Selection to start date can take as little as five days to quickly help your authority achieve results.



**Below is detailed the process that APSE used to source an interim manager recently for a Northern Metropolitan Borough Council – Waste Services Manager:**

1. **Enquiry:** APSE was approached by the client to provide an interim Environment and Waste Services Manager to cover the post holder's maternity leave on Tuesday.
2. **Brief:** APSE arranged a convenient time to speak to the client on Wednesday, to create a comprehensive brief.
3. **Selection:** APSE matched suitable interims from our detailed database to provide the best candidates to the authority. APSE had an in depth discussion with all to negotiate the best rate for the authority, and to check availability.
4. **Selection:** On Friday APSE provided the authority with five experienced candidates, along with a proposal for interim support.
5. **Interview:** The authority decided that they would like to speak to two of the APSE interim managers and a time was set for interview. In this case the interims were asked to prepare a presentation to show how their experience would benefit the authority.
6. **Success:** An APSE interim was chosen and a start date was decided which allowed for a handover period.

*Since starting, the APSE interim has been involved in a number of projects, as well as managing the waste strategy team. This has included the following*

- ***Writing and then using the extreme weather plan during the snow in winter 2010.***
- ***Reviewing the waste and recycling action plan.***
- ***Rectifying a £0.25 million overspend.***
- ***Identifying a potential £160,000 extra savings.***
- ***Reviewing recycling performance and recommending future areas which should be addressed.***

# Bath & North East Somerset Council

**2 periods of 8 months each**

**Environmental Services: Policy & Projects**

The Divisional Director was seeking support in developing and implementing strategic options in accordance with legislation, the council's vision, values and other objectives. The brief specified that the council required a Strategic Project Manager who would be responsible for managing future projects/planning/policy across the Neighbourhoods, Highways and Transport and Waste Divisions reporting directly to the Head of Environment. This included specific support to project manage a joint procurement with North Somerset Council (NSC) for the Highways Maintenance contract.

## **Key issues needing to be addressed**

- **Contribute to the general development, management and review of the directorate, the services it provides and its staff.**
- **Project management of a joint procurement process with North Somerset Council to appoint a contractor for Highways Maintenance and Improvement Works.**

## **Key outcomes achieved**

- **Successful award of highways maintenance contracts by Bath & North Somerset Council and North Somerset Council on time and in accordance with EU procurement legislation.**
- **Improved team working, improved performance, greater awareness and preparedness for future issues.**
- **Programme to improve health and safety local arrangements in all services within the Environmental Services Division commenced.**

## **Methodology**

In the first instance APSE supplied a project manager to lead the joint procurement process to appoint a contractor for highways maintenance and improvement works. A two stage procurement process was used. Companies expressing an interest in the contract were required to complete a Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) which was evaluated and scored.

The APSE interim facilitated the collaboration between the councils in the following areas:

- Joint analysis of Prequalification Questionnaire responses
- Joint Invitation to Tender

- Joint analysis of the Tender Documentation

The procurement was successfully completed and contractors were appointed for 5 years with an option to extend for up to 4 years.

During his time in the assignment, the interim was able to assist the authority in a number of other ways. This included reviewing health and safety and establishing local arrangements. He also introduced monthly development days for the division's leadership community. These help to enable better communication between officers and to develop the talent that exists within the council.

Following this assignment, the interim was asked back to work in the waste collections team. This assignment had a different emphasis, and the interim reviewed the service to look at areas for improvement and culture change. He reviewed and implemented changes to improve management, performance, and health and safety.

In many assignments the interim will mentor a member of staff, either formally or informally, and this is a successful way of developing talent. In this assignment the interim mentored the Collections Manager.

He also prepared the project plan and commenced a project to renew the Vehicle Maintenance Contract.

### **Feedback received from the authority**

*"Experience and expertise were a real benefit in delivering projects despite challenging timescales."*

# Introducing....

## Rodney Cook, APSE interim manager



### Key service areas:

**Building Maintenance, Cleansing, Refuse Collection, Highways Maintenance, Grounds Maintenance, Parking Services and Vehicle Maintenance**

### Experience

A senior manager with 30 years experience of managing a range of services in Local Government. Key skills include: change management, project management, industrial relations, employee communications and consultation, political awareness, performance management, quality systems, improving organisations and increasing competitiveness, and delivery of quality services.

# FAQs

## **How much will it cost?**

It is important to strike a balance between price and quality, and APSE will do most of the hard work for you by agreeing the best rate possible and discounting those who are outside of your budget. We aim to give you a choice of rates alongside the relevant CVs, so that you can make the final decision. Rates are usually between £300 and £600 a day for an experienced local government interim manager.

APSE provides a guidance policy regarding expenses, asking interims to exercise restraint. In cases where we believe the expenses will be high (due to travel and overnight stays) APSE will provide an inclusive rate to the client, in order to maintain transparency and provide an open and honest service.

## **What if an interim leaves for a better offer?**

APSE has a policy of not offering new jobs to those already in placements. Unfortunately, occasionally an interim will leave an assignment for an offer from another provider. If this happens APSE has a wide pool of interim managers which we can turn to in order to avoid problems.

## **What if we want to offer the interim manager a permanent position?**

If during an assignment the interim manager has made such a successful impact that you would like to offer him/her a permanent position APSE does not charge any temp to perm fees. Our aim is to help the authority become the best it can be, and the best lasting impact APSE can make is to provide you with an invaluable officer.

## **How long will the selection process take?**

APSE aims to provide you with CVs within 48 hours of your enquiry. An interim could be in place within a week.

## **What if the assignment isn't working out?**

If your situation changes, through budget or staffing changes for example, you are able to end the assignment after speaking to APSE and the interim manager and agreeing a suitable exit strategy.

**Contact the interim management team at the  
APSE Manchester office on 0161 772 1810**

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**<http://www.apse.org.uk/interim.asp>**

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