



Staff Suggestion Schemes – Getting Started

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Key Points

An APSE network query asked for information on establishing a staff suggestion scheme / good ideas scheme. Many local authorities responded outlining schemes and others responded asking for more information on established schemes.

This briefing provides information on the schemes of respondents and provides a useful starting point for anyone looking to set up their own staff suggestion scheme.

The original query asked:

1. Does your authority operate a “Good Ideas Scheme” whereby staff can submit ideas to be considered for implementation?
2. If so, how does the scheme operate?
3. How are ideas evaluated? And how often?
4. Is there a funding pot available to support ideas which may require initial funding?
5. Is there a requirement for ideas to be self-funding?
6. Is there a “reward” for successful ideas?

1.0 Introduction

According to the National Audit Office central funding for local authorities fell by over 49% from 2010 onwards, equating to a 28.6% real-terms reduction in ‘spending power’.

Research by APSE and NPI finds that there is also heavy reliance on income to support frontline neighbourhoods’ services, which have lost billions in recent years but make-up to

a third of council budget expenditure. As a result of the levels of savings that local authorities are expected to achieve year on year, many have looked internally to their frontline staff for ideas on how services could be delivered for less, how they could be reimagined and generally how councils can continue to provide their residents with quality services.

A staff suggestion scheme or “good ideas scheme” is one of many potential tools available, and a good starting point for engaging with staff on service redesign. They will have the insight in their area of the council where there is waste, where there are opportunities that aren’t being taken advantage of and where small and big changes could make a massive difference in the delivery and quality of services.

We found through this network query that many local authorities did not have a scheme established and many expressed an interest and wanted insight into what other local authorities were doing with regards to staff suggestion schemes.

2.0 How do different schemes operate?

Responding councils had a number of different approaches to how their schemes operated including:

- An internal online application which can be submitted by name or anonymously, where a Head of Service is able to approve the idea or provide feedback if unsuccessful
- A 3 question form on staff intranet to submit a problem to be solved or an idea
- A staff engagement app where other staff can rate the suggestion, add comments, attach files and each idea submitter is kept in the loop about the progress on their idea
- A dedicated email address
- A physical suggestion box in a depot, which is regularly signposted during toolbox talks
- Many others had no official scheme, but instead had a general approach of empowering staff and making them aware that they can bring suggestions and

ideas to management teams, or other means of engagement such as involving staff panels in the development of council Service Improvement Plans.

Some local authorities are using one method above and others are using a range of collection methods so that no-one is discouraged by a particular type of collection method (e.g. someone who is less familiar with IT might prefer to be able to submit a note to a physical suggestion box than an online form). Some schemes ask for suggestions to fit specific service goals or council priorities, while others ask for suggestions on any topic. Many schemes allow their staff to submit ideas anonymously which is a good idea to ensure that employees aren't discouraged from suggesting potentially controversial but useful ideas that they may not feel comfortable putting their names against. Generally, scheme design should take into consideration how they can collect the widest amount of responses and ensure that no particular section of the workforce (e.g. lack of IT skill, personality type) is excluded in an unintended manner.

3.0 How are ideas evaluated?

There were several different approaches to the evaluation of ideas by responding councils such as:

- Ideas are evaluated by a senior management team, such as Heads of Service
- Ideas are evaluated by a panel of employees from across the Councils who are not managers
- Ideas are evaluated against a set of council priorities
- Ideas are evaluated based on measures such as cost and complexity, financial return on investment or links to wellbeing goals

Most of the approaches included a set amount of time for those responsible to respond to the original submitter of the idea, usually with feedback on why it will or won't be implemented. This ranged from around 10 working days to 8 weeks. Some schemes had the option for the management team to contact the original submitter to get more information or have a deeper discussion about their idea.

4.0 Is there a funding pot available to support ideas?

There were a mixture of responses to this question with some having a specific pot of funding to support ideas which would benefit from initial funding, and others who could access funding from service budgets or corporate funding if it was felt that this could be justified.

There was also generally no requirement for ideas to be self-funding, but where employees had ideas on how an idea could be self-funding this was welcomed.

5.0 Is there a reward for successful ideas?

Most of the schemes use internal recognition and celebrate the successes of successful idea submitters, but only few gave a financial reward for successful ideas (such as a payment of £25, or a £50 high street shopping voucher). One council noted that staff may be nominated for an award at their Awards Ceremony if an idea gains enough traction.

6.0 APSE Comment

APSE recommends having mechanisms for frontline local authority workers to submit suggestions for improvements to local government services. In tough financial times we need to harness the power / ideas of the people on the frontline to deliver and maintain quality public services. Whilst many will have systems in place such as one to ones and team briefings, to encourage a two way flow of ideas, additional concepts such as staff suggestion schemes can encourage much needed wider thinking in a time where local government needs as wide an array of thinking as possible on efficiency, innovation, income generation and commercialisation. The different approaches noted in this briefing show that many of our members have great systems in place for achieving this, and we thank them for sharing their experience and expertise through our APSE Network Query service with our members.

For councils at the beginning of this process looking to carry out more research and reading, APSE and IPPR North released a report in 2013 called '**Innovation on the Frontline: How engagement with the local government workforce can improve**

service deliver in austere times' that is available for free digitally on our website ([click here](#)) and contains many case study examples of success stories as a result of having implemented good staff suggestion and engagement schemes.

APSE has set up a COVID-19 Information Hub to deal with frontline service issues as they arise, ensuring greater resilience and learning between each other during this difficult time. You can access this hub by [clicking here](#) and you can also join our WhatsApp Support Network by [clicking here](#).

If you would like to submit an APSE Network Query on any topic and receive responses from your peers across different UK local authorities, please get in touch by clicking [here](#) or visiting our [Network Queries hub](#) on the APSE website.

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