

STAFF SUGGESTION SCHEME

Summary

In March 2016, the Chief Officer Summit Group received an evaluation report on the Staff Suggestion Scheme pilot and agreed:

- i. That the use of the Hunchbuzz software would not be extended, and
- ii. That a new Opportunity Outline would be developed, potentially by a group of the City Corporation's Graduate Trainees, to investigate alternative methods for capturing feedback and suggestions from staff, including face-to-face methods, and the potential for building a scheme that would:
 - reduce or spread more evenly the resource requirements of scheme administration and Chief Officer/senior manager involvement;
 - replicate the advantages of Hunchbuzz into the redevelopment of the Intranet, and
 - empower staff to link up with colleagues across the City Corporation to take forward their suggestions.

Evaluation Report

Background

1. The Staff Suggestion Scheme was relaunched in July 2015, for a three-month pilot using Hunchbuzz software on the Intranet to submit, record and publicise suggestions. Prior to the relaunch, meetings were held with the City Police to examine their system for recording and responding to suggestions.
2. The first stage of the pilot ran from July to September with the objective of collecting ideas from staff via the online system. This was to test whether the use of an online system would make any difference in terms of engagement in such a scheme.
3. The second stage of the pilot was to run the ideas collected in the first stage through a governance process involving an Ideas Board chaired by the Deputy Town Clerk. This process aimed to ensure that ideas were properly considered by departments, to monitor progress of ideas as they are developed, and to report on what impact the Suggestion Scheme is having on the organisation in terms of driving innovation. Chief Officers were asked to provide an initial response to each idea before consideration by the Board.
4. Following the end of the pilot period, the suppliers of Hunchbuzz quoted the following rates for extended use of the software:
 - i. for a further 12 months: c.£1,999/month (total c. £24,000)
 - ii. for a further 24 months: £1,600/month (total £37,400)

Evaluation

Hunchbuzz software platform

5. The Hunchbuzz software chosen for the pilot is designed to encourage, capture and recognise new ideas and suggestions from staff. Technically, the software worked well: single sign-on was enabled; staff were able to view/comment on suggestions made by colleagues; and participation and two-way communication across departments was encouraged.
6. A survey was sent to staff who had registered to use Hunchbuzz, with the following headline results (based on c.100 responses):
 - 74% agreed that it was important to them to be able to submit ideas for consideration by senior officers.
 - 48% said that having an online platform encouraged them to post ideas.
7. The three features of the online platform that respondents felt added most value were (in order): to see other people's ideas; to vote on other people's ideas; and to comment on and contribute to other people's ideas. The main issue arising from the open ended survey questions was the need for improved feedback, both generally and on specific ideas, and to be able to see the end result of successful suggestions ("you said, we did").

Idea generation

8. Ideas were invited under the following themes:
 - Engaging wellbeing initiatives
 - De-jargoning the workplace
 - Making better use of Guildhall Yard
 - Simplifying the way we work
 - Saving money on energy
9. Eighty-four suggestions were generated, far in excess of the number being submitted under the previous arrangements (two or three per quarter). A number of these (roughly 16%) were staff using the system to make comments ("venting"), rather than submit ideas. The majority of ideas submitted (c.67%) were department specific, rather than cross-cutting. (NB: the previous restriction on staff making suggestions in respect of their own department was lifted for this pilot.)

Administration

10. The generation of so many ideas over a short period created a significant administrative workload: sorting and submitting ideas to Chief Officers for comment; chasing responses; updating the system; preparing papers for the Ideas Board meetings; following-up after Ideas Board.
11. The pilot also reinforced the main issue with the previous system, which was that suggestions often fell down at departmental level with some colleagues either failing to reply, or giving very loose reasons why suggestions could not be taken

forward. This contributed to the sense amongst staff that suggestions were not taken seriously or just disappeared.

Ideas Board

12. The Ideas Board met twice to review Chief Officer responses. The Board provided a valuable “sense check” to the ideas suggested, but also requires a level of resourcing for preparation and follow-up.

Conclusions and Issues to be addressed

13. The relaunched staff suggestion scheme, using the software platform, significantly increased the number of suggestions made, demonstrating that there is a demand for a means by which staff can direct comments/venting and make suggestions for improvements, etc. where these can be acknowledged and resolved with minimal resource input.
14. There also needs to be a route for taking well thought-out ideas through to completion. This needs to be end-to-end, simple, and easy to resource. The suggested routes would be for:
 - Departmental ideas to be discussed at the relevant Departmental Management Team/Senior Leadership Team – ideally though encouraging staff to communicate directly with their line managers/Chief Officers, and
 - Cross-cutting ideas to be referred to the relevant Chief Officer Steering/Delivery Group.
15. However, the pilot has shown that the software cannot address the behavioural issues of the previous scheme, and that any scheme will not succeed without the buy-in of Chief Officers and their senior managers. As a result, it is doubtful whether this pilot system has significantly improved the experience for staff making suggestions.

Next steps

- The ideas suggested during the pilot are being pursued with departments.
- The Customer Services Delivery Group is being asked to consider the prioritisation and resourcing of work on a new Opportunity Outline, as agreed by the Summit Group.
- The outline will encompass the wider issues of staff engagement, and address the lessons learned by this pilot (as above), and also from the collection of staff suggestions as part of the Service Based Review process.
- As part of this process, a further meeting has been held with the City of London Police, to discuss their Staff Suggestion Scheme, in particular the methodology for engaging staff and ensuring suggestions were taken forward. A discussion was also held around how the City of London and City of London Police can work together and share best practice with regard to their respective suggestion schemes.
- A visit has also been made to the London Borough of Croydon to discuss their staff suggestion scheme and develop a better understanding of best practice elsewhere.