

Recruit, retain, repeat – how Hampshire championed staff development



The challenge

Recruitment, retention and building the capabilities of staff in bus teams has been an ongoing challenge for many local authorities.

Staff development in Hampshire County Council (HCC) has been a key driver of success in building an effective and resilient bus team, and a good foundation for delivering bus service improvements in Hampshire over many years.

Action taken

HCC is committed to boosting recruitment and retention efforts as they believe that building a skilful and experienced team helps to improve and deliver smooth bus services.

Maximising the value of BSIP funding

Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) capacity funding from DfT has been used to create additional or enhanced posts across the team. Roles include: Public Transport Strategy Officers, Team Leaders, Data Analysts and Public Transport Officers.

Utilising staff skills

Knowledgeable staff were seconded to produce the BSIP and EP Plan and Scheme. One secondee was then recruited into the new “Team Leader” role (supported by DfT capacity funding), helping to ensure continuity of relationships with bus operators.

A joint EP Officer was appointed between HCC and Southampton City Council, focusing on the shared travel to work area rather than administrative local authority area.

Leveraging political support

Due to strong political support for buses in Hampshire (which we accept might not be as strong in other areas), the council has been able to retain a sizable team through several rounds of budget cuts. They have also benefitted from a strong focus on staff development and lifelong learning.

Despite increasing pressures on budgets, significant investment has been made in developing people so that HCC are better equipped for the future, effectively investing their way out of the problem.

Evaluating and analysing

In addition to staff resources, Hampshire have also procured new journey time analysis and mapping software. This software will enable existing public transport staff to develop their knowledge on producing public transport accessibility maps and data, rather than use external consultants, further saving money and boosting internal expertise.



Outcomes

Building relationships for the long-run – increasing and retaining internal capacity means that operators and officers can build on existing relationships and officers are able to offer greater support to operators as they are familiar with key personnel and local challenges. This has included contributing to bus driver recruitment by advising on career fairs and investing in marketing recruitment which drives and promotes the sector.

Upskilling helps prioritise stakeholder engagement – upskilling in-house staff has made it possible to carry out greater engagement with a range of stakeholders, including with District Councils and neighbouring LTAs. This has included running focus groups with bus users, through HCC's Hampshire Perspectives panel of residents asking about perceptions of bus travel and their priorities for investing in bus stop infrastructure.

Sharing resources contributes to sustainable bus improvement work – the appointment of a shared EP Officer has led to the creation of a more seamless offer for passengers who work within strategic corridors shared with neighbouring authorities. The additional staff resources have also helped HCC promote the important role played by local bus services amongst senior decision-makers within the local authority. This creates a virtuous circle: work carried out by a well-resourced bus team generates effective bus interventions, which is highlighted to the decision makers in the council. This shows the valuable role of that team and helps to secure its ongoing work.



Lessons Learnt

Consider tailoring engagement methods to bus operators – operators have small teams who need to work in partnership with several local transport authorities to help support their EPs. As a result, the time of bus operators is often stretched. It is therefore key to consider bespoke methods which can be used to engage with smaller operators. This engagement, as well as involving operators as early as possible in any initiative, helps to build positive and honest relationships that help to smooth the inevitable difficult discussions. A shared EP officer with a neighbouring authority can also help deal with operator issues that cut across authority boundaries.

Recognising how to implement continuity – being able to deploy the same staff who worked on the BSIP to then produce and deliver the EP Plan and Scheme has been well-received by local bus operators. Their existing knowledge and experience massively sped up the process.



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Do you have best practice you would like to share with the bus community?

Contact bcoe@ciht.org.uk.