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## WHY LEWISHAM COUNCIL BELIEVES IN THE POWER OF THE CROWD WHEN IT COMES TO BRIGHT IDEAS

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Lewisham Council's Transformation and Development Officer, Joseph Badman, explains how they are aiming to save £95M over the next four years using idea crowdsourcing among staff and potentially residents.

No-one in the public sector can be in the dark about what a challenge the past four or five years have been, having to do more with much, much less. There are a number of ways in which local councils have approached making inroads on the enormous cost savings we are all required to make. One of the initiatives that we've been working on is turning to our employees for ideas – after all, who would really know how to go about streamlining the way they work and approach to service delivery, than the people that are actually doing it?

### **The rise of crowdsourcing**

The concept of crowdsourcing goes back centuries, but the modern definition was first used by Jeff Howe in the article "The Rise of Crowdsourcing", published by Wired Magazine in June 2006. "Simply defined, crowdsourcing represents the act of a company or institution taking a function once performed by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined (and generally large) network of people in the form of an open call". Since then, it has become a significant business trend in both the private and public sectors.

There is strength in numbers when it comes to crowdsourcing. The concept of wisdom of the crowd states that a large group of diverse people can make better decisions, and display more intelligence than any smaller collection of experts. Its rise in use in the public sector has undoubtedly coincided with the cuts that local councils have been forced to make since 2010. A collective 'two heads are better than one' approach has been applied, and while crowdsourcing has been used by parts of the public sector to help with policy development and the consultation process, at Lewisham we are using it to realise cost savings.

### **We.Create**

When we were made aware of the need to save £95M over the next four years, we knew immediately that to achieve this would require some powerful ideas. We also knew that it was unrealistic to expect senior management to come up with all of those ideas and that a range of different perspectives would be required.

Innovative ideas can come from anywhere within an organisation and it is for precisely this reason that we launched We.Create.

We.Create is a new platform that launched in March 2014 that looks to tap into the creativity and enthusiasm of our staff. It is based on Wazoku's Idea Spotlight, a Software-as-a-Service that allows organisations to create internal or external communities for ideas, innovation, feedback and insight. We want to capture those different

perspectives and in doing so also help shape the future of the council, improving the way we work and the services we deliver to Lewisham's 275,900 residents. We believe that our employees are the richest source of informed ideas and fresh thinking available to us, as we embark on this cost-saving journey.

It works like this. The Lewisham Future Board meets every week to oversee the current savings programme. From here they run reviews in We.Create related to specific service areas and also across services. Staff can then submit ideas in response to the reviews into Lewisham We.Create, where they will be reviewed and assessed. These ideas will then feed directly into the decisions made by the board.

Ideas come from all across the council, as we were keen to enable a large group of people with different perspectives to address the council's challenges, even if they don't relate directly to their service area. Challenges that we have run so far this year have included ways in which we can encourage residents online and how the council can generate fresh income streams.

### **Results so far**

We have been delighted with the engagement and contributions that Lewisham Council employees have shown so far. We've had around 650 people so far make an active contribution, which is more than one-third of our desk-based staff. Our initial target was to get 25 per cent of desk-based staff involved, so to have exceeded that in a matter of months is gratifying. This includes 110 ideas submitted, more than 400 comments relating to those ideas and more than 4,000 views as people navigate their way around We.Create.

These levels of engagement are highly impressive. Putting responsibility for such an important task in the hands of our staff is we believe, incredibly empowering. It sends employees a clear sign that we value and prize their input and the fact we have given them a platform like We.Create to make their contributions, is further evidence of our belief in them.

And some of these ideas are already making an impact. In isolation, some of them might not feel significant, but taken together they add great value. One idea highlighted how there were forms on our website for services that weren't available online.

This meant residents had to print and post the relevant forms, which in turn took time and man-hours to process. This has been addressed and those services have been brought online.

Big data is a topic that comes up a lot and one idea on We.Create has taken us in a very interesting direction. We are currently working with a major technology company (free of charge I might add) to develop something that will use big data to predict social care issues – addressing issues before they arise can be a major cost saving.

### **We.Create in the future**

While We.Create is currently only available to Lewisham Council employees, we haven't ruled out the possibility of involving residents too at some stage. Just as our employees have valuable contributions to make, so do the people that live and reside in Lewisham and it would be wonderful to be able to utilise that thought power.

Saving £95M is no small undertaking and we are realistic about what can be achieved. But turning to the power of the crowd could be the best idea of all. Our role as a council is partly to help people and communities improve the quality of their lives and we're excited by the prospect of seeing ideas to achieve this emerge.

The author is CEO at Lewisham Council. Lewisham's We.Create platform is based on Wazoku's Idea Spotlight solution.