



## **Delivering training in budget restricted times**

By George Cassavetti

With local authorities' budgets tightening and the need for cost-cutting apparent, it would be easy to assume that training budgets would be one of the first things to be cut. If a local authority has already adopted Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) and has Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) and back office staff trained and in place, there would seem little need for further training. However, the opposite is true. Continuous professional development helps to build the confidence and professionalism of a workforce and increases staff retention. Training also does not have to be an expensive commodity as there are a number of methods available to help keep costs down.

Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act (TMA) 2004 places an emphasis on both staff training and continuous professional development with the operational guidance introduced by the Department for Transport (DfT) in March 2008 stating that:

“Authorities should make sure that all civil enforcement officers (CEOs), back office staff, supervisors and managers are trained to provide accurate, fair and consistent enforcement.”

Consistency, accuracy and fairness are all important to help improve the public image of the parking industry. Frontline staff are the face of each local authority's parking services and it is important that they receive sufficient training to ensure that they can carry out their role effectively. However, accredited training such as City and Guilds 1889 Award for Civil Enforcement Officers or 1916 Award in Notice Processing should not be viewed as the only training necessary for staff to be capable of carrying out their role. Training should never be considered a 'one-off', something that is only necessary for new staff.

Training is there for the recipients and needs to be structured to encourage staff to develop in their role and strive for success. A CEO or Notice Processor who feels that they are being supported in their job and are provided with the training they need, will build in confidence. A structured training plan throughout a CEO or Notice Processor's career will also increase staff retention. Providing a clear training route through different levels and skills helps to keep staff motivated as there is a clear line of progression within the role. It is this confidence and ability to retain staff for long periods of time that helps a local authority to achieve fairness and consistency in parking enforcement.



As an example, Southampton council's front line parking team boasts a very low staff turnover – some 3% over the past five years – due to the organisation's continuous training programme, which provides CEOs with all the support they require.

Each CEO is given a comprehensive manual at their induction, containing detailed information about each contravention code and the actions to be taken. They receive 3-4 weeks training before going out on the street, followed by Periodical Skills Audit Assessments.

“The induction process is important for any new CEO, and a training supervisor will work closely with the officer to attain a full knowledge of the statutory contravention regulations and identify any problems,” explains Southampton City Council Parking Manager, Ken Byng. “This means we can develop individual training plans to resolve any issues, which is good for the CEO and also ensures consistency and fairness for the public. Regular skills audits are carried out with all CEOs each year to ensure that they continue to provide a high standard of service delivery“.

But how do you achieve continuous professional development like this in these times of austerity measures? There are a number of ways to reduce the costs involved:

## **1. Delivery Methods**

Although there is no substitute for the face-to-face support and shared experiences of classroom learning, results can still be achieved through a mixture of approaches; for example, using a 'blended' mix of classroom learning and e-learning. This is an advantage in these financially constrained times as blended learning means delegates complete their course at a faster pace. The City and Guilds 1916 Award in Notice Processing can be achieved through blended learning which means that delegates complete the training in four days compared to six days thus reducing both the cost of the course and the amount of time staff are away from their duties.

## **2. Quality**

An obvious one maybe, but it is important that the training the council purchases is up to the highest standard. There is no excuse for training to be dull – your training provider should work hard to really engage the delegates in learning tasks. If the training experience is



enjoyable, supportive and varied, people will learn much better. The more delegates learn, the less the training has to be repeated and the less it is going to cost the council. It helps to build up a long-term relationship with your training provider so he/she really gets to know your organisation, its people and aims over a period of time and can tailor the very best solutions

### **3. Resource sharing**

The Traffic Management Act (TMA) emphasises the value of cross-boundary partnerships across parking policy and training. This helps to provide consistency in enforcement but also neighbouring local authorities can benefit from sharing the costs and management of training courses.

This approach has been taken by ten London councils who have joined forces to undergo notice processing training. Notice Processors from each council travelled to the London Borough of Hillingdon to undergo Alpha Parking's Institute of Leadership and Management Notice Processing course.

"This cross boundary training is a first for notice processing. It meets the practical needs of the Councils involved, provides an opportunity for benchmarking and supplies continuous professional development that is consistent for everyone involved," says London Borough of Hillingdon's Parking Administration Manager, Angela O'Shea.

The training days were shared with the other local authorities in London thus reducing the number of staff from each council taking the qualification at a time. This meant that there was no drop in service as the notice processing office from each council stayed open as usual, but also meant that each course was always full and the cost was shared between them all. The same London council's are now looking at using this initiative to provide the City and Guilds 1916 Award in Notice Processing to their staff.

Training is extremely important if local authorities want to provide consistent enforcement to the public. It is also important for staff to feel confident in their role and that the job they do is appreciated. It also does not have to be a great expense. There are many methods available to local authorities to reduce the costs and time involved. The important thing to remember is that an underprepared or unhappy workforce does not produce efficient enforcement and could cost the council more in the long run.



## The Training Plan

City and Guilds, Institute of Leadership and Management and National Vocational Qualifications are all available to members of the parking industry. These, however, are not the only courses that staff should consider taking. There are a number of other courses that, although not accredited, will provide further knowledge and skills to staff whether they work within the back office or on-street.

Here is an example of a possible training route within the Parking Industry:



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