

Encouraging the workforce to share and develop innovation

An annual process known as 'Dragons' Den Day' where officers and staff can propose and develop ideas for solutions to transform workforce and operational efficiency.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Leadership, development and learning Productivity
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Region	Eastern
Partners	Police Private sector
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	February 2023
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Workforce
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Aim

The aim of the initiative is to:

- provide a clear and inclusive pathway for ideas to be shared across the workforce
- provide a psychologically safe environment where the workforce can submit ideas without the fear of criticism, hierarchy or failure
- support the workforce with development of their ideas into practical real-world initiatives and policies
- provide guidance by utilising specialist teams, senior leaders and external partners to strengthen ideas
- embed a workplace culture of innovation, empowerment and continuous improvement
- demonstrate visible senior leadership support by reinforcing that ideas are taken seriously, supported and acted upon
- upskill the workforce in innovation, change and delivery skills
- develop participants' professional and personal skills, including presenting, influencing, collaboration and working with senior leaders
- create meaningful networking opportunities by fostering connections across roles, ranks and departments which would not usually collaborate

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the initiative are to:

- increase the number of ideas submitted by the workforce and the number of ideas progressed from submission to implementation
- improve the workforce's understanding of how ideas can be progressed through the development pipeline
- improve the workforce's presenting, influencing and planning skills
- improve the quality of submitted ideas
- improve confidence and psychological safety for the workforce

- reduce the number of informal or isolated development of ideas
- increase the involvement of past participants in future Dragon's Den cycles

Description

In 2023, Bedfordshire Police introduced an annual Dragons' Den event in response to the force's need to strengthen innovation capability and provide a safe space for the workforce to share their ideas. While ideas had been previously shared across the workforce, there was no consistent structure to support them from concept through to implementation. Dragons' Den has been designed to address this gap while reinforcing a culture of innovation, empowerment, collaboration and continuous improvement.

Planning process

The planning process focused on designing a robust and inclusive framework which could easily be replicated year-on-year and included:

- setting a clear entry criteria to enable the workforce to understand which ideas would be eligible
- developing guidance and templates which is stored on the force's intranet to support applicants through the process
- establishing a structured development phase to refine shortlisted ideas

Bedfordshire Police have considered governance to ensure ideas align with the force's priorities and national guidance. Throughout the process, the applicants are required to explain the issue, solution and the impact, where known.

Roles and teams

The delivery of Dragons' Den includes representatives from the following teams:

- innovation and business change function
- operation and enabling department
- senior leadership
- external partners from local businesses
- subject matter experts such as data, finance and legal

The cross functional involvement provides an insight into the quality of proposals and the credibility of the programme.

Implementation

Dragons' Den is delivered via the following stages:

- Individuals or teams are invited to submit ideas. The initiative is promoted at force events, through internal communication such as Viva engage and inputs from the Dragons' Den team in briefings and training sessions.
- Shortlisted ideas enter a development phase, where applicants receive guidance to strengthen problem definition, benefits articulation, feasibility and delivery planning.
- The shortlisted ideas are presented at a 'Dragons' Den Day' event to a panel. Each applicant is given a ten-minute slot to pitch their idea and receive questions from the panel. To date, the force has hosted the events at hotels where presentations are followed by a meal and networking.
- Following the event, approved ideas are either progressed to implementation or supported through alternative routes. Ideas which progress to implementation are supported by the business change team, who monitor the progress, successes and learning. Each year one finalist idea is selected as a priority project. All presented ideas are shared via Viva engage and the force's intranet.

Funding and senior management approval

The Dragons' Den day event is sponsored by external partners. Where proposed ideas require financial investment to proceed, the force assesses these on a case-by-case basis through appropriate funding routes and business cases. The cost of the planning and development of Dragons' Den is managed by the force's business change team.

Senior management engagement is required for the planning and implementation of the initiative, who have provided support to Dragons' Den through strategic oversight and decision making.

Overall impact

Dragons' Den has had a positive impact on the tangible delivery of ideas and supporting a culture of innovation within Bedfordshire Police. As a result of the initiative, multiple shortlisted ideas have progressed through structured development, governance consideration and delivery routes.

Shortlisted ideas have included:

- development of camera technology at crime scenes
- voice to text transcription for offender management teams
- property storage system changes
- early missing person search recording

The force has observed a noticeable positive shift in organisational culture since the implementation of the Dragons' Den initiative. There has been sustained engagement from across the workforce and feedback from applicants has revealed that individuals consistently feel supported, encouraged and value the psychologically safe environment.

The initiative has strengthened innovation capability; applicants have developed greater confidence and skills in areas such as problem definition, benefits articulation and navigating governance processes. These skills are subsequently applied to work beyond Dragons' Den, prompting stronger business cases and proposals.

Learning

- It is essential to have year-round focus and ownership. While the 'Dragons' Den Day' event is integral to the success of the initiative, impact is generated mostly through ongoing development, engagement and governance navigation. Dedicated co-ordination and sustained attention are key to ensuring that ideas progress past conception.
- It is important to secure senior management approval at the earliest opportunity. Visible sponsorship and clear agreement on how decisions will be made after Dragons' Den are essential to progress ideas into delivery. Where senior leaders are engaged and expectations are aligned, ideas move more confidently through governance and into implementation. This reinforces trust in the process and credibility with the workforce.
- The programme has also highlighted capacity challenges within key enabling functions, such as project support and IT. While specialist input is vital to shaping viable ideas, these teams often operate under significant pressure. Managing resource capacity requires prioritisation, planning and early engagement to balance innovation activity alongside core operational demand.
- Flexibility has proven essential throughout implementation. Ideas often emerge at different levels of maturity, with applicants having varying levels of availability and support. Teams often progress ideas at different speeds depending on complexity, resourcing and organisational priorities. By

adopting a flexible approach, this has enabled the initiative to remain inclusive while still maintaining appropriate challenge and governance.

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