

There's no mileage in picking on the expenses of interims

Suggestions that interims should come from the local area in order for councils to avoid paying their expenses is short-sighted says Danny Hodgson

Duckhouses, moat repairs and garlic peelers have all brought the issue of spending taxpayers' money on expenses into sharp focus for local authorities and interims have felt the full force of the increased scrutiny.

Freedom of Information requests, local politics and eye-catching local newspaper headlines have created anxiety about expense payments, legitimate or otherwise.

There is no doubt that interims' expenses must be managed rigorously by local authorities, perhaps a little more than they have in the past. However, knee jerk reactions such as insisting interims come from the local area to avoid the whole conversation about 'expenses' can have an equally negative effect, dramatically limiting the pool of talent.

Why bother paying interims' expenses?

Good interims are often not restricted by geography, which has the huge benefit of providing a much wider pool of talent. If you insist on 'local' provision, then your choice can be dangerously narrow. Could you really rely on finding the best available children's safeguarding expert if you insist that they live locally and are available immediately? Interviewing interims from around the UK enables you to share best practice with other areas.

Interims with no connection to your region can bring objectivity and independence, which is critical to undertaking sensitive tasks like senior management restructures or making tough decisions on efficiencies. It's also much easier to use an interim as an unofficial 'mentor' if they have had no previous connections with your council.

How could you manage expenses more efficiently?

- Agree a fixed amount for expenses in advance to assist cost management
- Be clear from the outset what is covered and what isn't covered under the organisation's expenses policy
- For longer contracts of six months or more, consider a short term let with a local landlord. This is significantly cheaper than hotel bills and contributes directly to the local economy
- Consider part time working arrangements with



• Danny Hodgson

the interim manager to save on the cost of expenses. Depending on how far away they live, an interim manager working four days per week may potentially only need three nights accommodation

- Agree a reduced 'home working' rate if the interim mainly stays away but works from home a day a week
- Negotiate rates in advance with a local hotel and obtain a 'council rate', this can then be re-charged directly to the council on better payment terms
- Use existing council contracts and frameworks with local firms such as mini-cabs more effectively
- Encourage interims to book fixed or advanced rail tickets rather than 'open' fares.
- Explore accommodation options within the council's own housing stock or property portfolio

In our experience, interim managers are anxious to give the best value for money to their clients and will always be keen to agree sensible arrangements to cover living away from home costs right at the start of a process. Your own expenses policy for employees staying away is a good framework to work with.

At a time when no service can afford to make mistakes on their choice of interim manager, ensuring access to the widest pool of talent has never been more important. With a transparent and realistic approach to managing expenses, the right interim manager will still add tremendous value and save you much more than they cost.

*Danny Hodgson is head of interim leadership at GatenbySanderson.
danny.hodgson@gatenbysanderson.com 07834 869 198*