



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Statutory Notices for the 21st Century

Invitation to express an interest in becoming a pilot

Archived

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Note:

A Frequently Asked Questions document is being sent to all local authority and newspaper chief executives. It can also be requested by emailing:

statutorynoticepilots@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Questions may also be sent to this email address.

Ministerial foreward

“In any healthy local democracy people need to know what their councils are doing, and be able effectively to hold them to account. This is why we have put councils at the forefront of publishing key information and have opened up council meetings to new rights to film, tweet and blog.

Any effectively operating local democracy also needs a flourishing local independent press. The Government is determined to preserve the vibrancy and diversity of our local press. This is why the Government has been taking steps so that local press does not face unfair competition from taxpayer-funded council newspapers.

Statutory notices are an important means for ensuring that the public is kept informed of decisions by their council which may affect their quality of life, local amenity or their property. This is especially the case in relation to issues, such as planning applications, where there is a limited period for the public to respond.

The vast majority of statutory notices originate from years when the printed word was our only source of information. How we consume information has drastically changed with advances in technology. Statutory notices need to change too. But, so far there has been a sterile debate based on a binary choice of the total retention or total abolition of requirements to publish notices in local newspapers.

We are thus inviting councils, newspapers and others to pilot innovative ways of improving statutory notices. We want these pilots to understand better what the public want, push the boundaries of how statutory notices can be better published and marketed, and show the case for change. They must explore how we change statutory notices so that they reach more people, are easier to read, give greater visibility and transparency to big issues and reduce costs in a sustainable way. And, they should show how we can exploit innovation and new ways of working.

We look forward to seeing some exciting and innovative pilots which enable the public to be better informed about local decisions which may affect their daily lives and which make a genuine and lasting contribution to the debate about how to change statutory notices whilst maintaining a strong and independent local press.”

Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP

Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

What do I need to know?

Introduction

1. We invite local authorities, newspapers and others to express an interest in becoming a pilot to test a range of innovative ways to improve statutory notices whilst supporting local press. The pilots will provide evidence about what the public wants to be or should be informed about, how they want to be informed and what works and does not work in meeting the public's need. This document sets out the details you need to know to be able to submit an Expression of Interest by **5pm on 28 January 2015** sent to statutorynoticepilots@communities.gsi.gov.uk.

What are the objectives for the pilots?

2. We want the pilots to test a range of new innovative approaches to publishing and marketing statutory notices which:
 - increases accessibility – the ease of reading and understanding notices
 - increases reach – the demand for and use of notices by the public, particularly marginalised groups, so that important information reaches as many affected by it as possible
 - increases the visibility, transparency and accountability for big and sometimes controversial issues and decisions
 - reduces costs in a sustainable way, and
 - secures a robust evidence base e.g. about what the public wants, costs, prices and volumes, the costs and benefits of alternative approaches etc.

What can I include in my pilot?

3. The existing legal framework for statutory notices will remain in place during the pilots – new approaches to publishing and marketing statutory notices will need to be tested in parallel with complying with existing publication requirements.
4. There will need to be a sufficient volume and/or breadth of statutory notices in the pilot areas, over the period of the pilot, to be able to fully test new approaches to publishing and marketing the notices. As long as this is the case, there are no restrictions on which statutory notices you include in your proposals. You may, for example, include all statutory notices published by one or more local authorities in the pilot area, a subset of these covering a specific issue (e.g. planning) or focus on notices required to be published by other public bodies or business.

5. There are no restrictions on the new innovative ideas that might be tested by the pilots. The pilots could explore, for example, using digital advertising, social media, location-specific mobile technology and the pooling of statutory notices. A fuller list of some of the ideas that have been suggested by local government and the newspaper industry can be found at annex A.

Who can become a pilot?

6. There is no restriction on who may submit an Expression of Interest in becoming a pilot. We encourage Expressions of Interest from local authorities, newspapers, marketing, advertising and technology companies, community groups and community activists etc. However, it is likely that a pilot will need the co-operation of a number of partners to be successful, particularly the local authorities and newspapers within the pilot area. Therefore, Expressions of Interest are more likely to be successful and accepted as a pilot where there is close collaboration between a number of partners.

Will I receive any funding for my pilot?

7. A small and finite amount of funding is available to support the pilots. There is no cap on the level of funding that can be requested for an individual pilot, however, there is limited scope to consider requests for large sums of funding. The funding is available to contribute towards the set-up of the pilots and such items as:
 - dedicated staff time to ensure the successful project management and delivery of a pilot
 - smallscale survey work or focus groups to establish what the public want
 - technical support from specialist companies/organisations to help develop the innovative approach(es) being tested in the pilot, and
 - any additional costs from publishing statutory notices through a pilot as well as in newspapers under existing requirements.
8. Final funding decisions rest with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and there is no guarantee of funding. Funding will only be provided where he is satisfied that in his opinion, your Expression of Interest meets the assessment criteria set out later in this document. However, meeting the criteria is not a guarantee of funding as he will want to ensure a balance across the pilots as set out above.
9. We will look to send formal grant funding letters, and pay grant to successful areas to enable the quick set-up of the pilots, by 4 March 2015, having conducted any necessary due diligence.

10. Where the lead partner for a pilot is a local authority, payment will be approved and made via the issue of a grant determination under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 – your section 151 officer should endorse your proposals.
11. Where the lead partner for a pilot is not a local authority but the pilot involves one or more local authorities, we suggest that one of the local authorities acts as ‘banker’ for the pilot and payment will be approved and made to it via the issue of a grant determination under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003. The authority’s section 151 officer should endorse the proposals.
12. Where a pilot does not include a local authority, we will look to make a grant payment to the lead partner under Section 36A of the Local Government Act 2004. Conditions may be applied to the use of the grant. The organisation’s chief officer should endorse the proposals.

When will the pilots run?

13. The period of the pilots will be March 2015 to the end of August 2015. You will need to be able to run your proposed pilot in this timeframe. This is a condition of being a pilot - your Expression of Interest needs to clearly demonstrate that you can meet it.

Can my existing project be the basis of a pilot?

14. The pilots are about new additional activity rather than activity that is already underway or would have progressed anyway - we cannot apply funding retrospectively. Additionality might be a completely new project (e.g. developing and testing a completely new approach) or a new extension to an existing project (e.g. testing a current approach at a greater scale than has been done before or extending the specification of an existing approach). We would still like to maintain contact with organisations that already have projects underway to see how their projects progress. If you email statutorynoticepilots@communities.gsi.gov.uk with some details, we will make contact with you outside of the pilot process.

Is my interest in becoming a pilot confidential?

15. The Department for Communities and Local Government will use its best endeavours to hold confidential any information provided in a submitted Expression of Interest, subject to our obligations under law, including the Freedom of Information Act 2000. If you consider that any information in your Expression of Interest should not be disclosed because of its sensitivity then this should be stated with the reason for considering it to be sensitive. We will then consult with you in considering any request received under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 before replying to such a request.

What is in a good Expression of Interest?

16. Your Expression of Interest will be assessed against the following criteria:

- innovation and effectiveness (higher weighting than some of the other criteria)
- partnership
- impact (higher weighting than some of the other criteria)
- deliverability, and
- funding.

<p>Innovation and effectiveness</p>	<p>Central to the pilots - we want them to test new innovative approaches to publishing and marketing statutory notices which utilise advancing technology and opportunities presented by the internet and social media whilst enabling support for local press. We will consider how your proposals meet our objectives about accessibility, reach, visibility and cost (as set out in paragraph 2).</p> <p>Expressions of Interest will have a greater chance of being successful and accepted as a pilot where there is a clear rationale for why the proposed approaches might make a real difference. We are also keen to hear about approaches which add real value to the public, for example, through the development of applications which immediately enable them to respond to a statutory notice e.g. to object to an alcohol license application, or planning application etc. You may also identify if your proposals could be replicated elsewhere and so operated at scale, if they prove to be successful, and how you would collect evidence during the pilot to demonstrate this.</p>
<p>Partnership</p>	<p>We think that it is likely, given the timetable, that a pilot will need the co-operation of a number of partners to be successful, particularly the local authorities and newspapers within the pilot area. Expressions of Interest are more likely to be successful and accepted as a pilot where the close collaboration of a number of partners is at the heart of the proposed pilot. You should set out in your Expression of Interest the contribution each partner will bring to the pilot and give some brief evidence of previous successful partnership working.</p>

<p>Impact</p>	<p>Central to the pilots – we want the pilots to secure evidence about how the new approaches that have been tested meet our objectives set out in paragraph 2. This includes securing robust and reliable evidence from the pilots about things like what the public want, overall and unit costs and volumes for statutory notices and the costs and benefits of alternative approaches.</p> <p>You will need to be able to baseline the current position, so as to demonstrate the costs, savings and benefits of the alternative approaches you wish to test. Your Expression of Interest should, therefore, set out what evidence you will capture as part of the pilot and how you will robustly capture and analyse it.</p> <p>Throughout the pilot, we would want you to work with the Department so that we can be assured that there is rigour in how the data is collected and how it is analysed, to secure the best evidence possible so that the pilots do make a genuine and lasting contribution to the debate about statutory notices.</p>
<p>Deliverability</p>	<p>The pilots need to commence in March 2015 and be completed by the end of August 2015 with a robust evidence base. You will need to demonstrate how you can meet this challenge and what steps you will take to ensure that your pilot will be delivered on time. You might also outline examples of previous challenging projects that you and your partners have delivered successfully.</p>
<p>Funding</p>	<p>You do not have to request funding to be able to submit an Expression of Interest to become a pilot. Even if you do not require funding, you will still benefit from working with other pilot areas and the Department to draw on their knowledge, skills and connections to help to successfully complete your pilot with a robust evidence base.</p> <p>Where you do want to make a request for funding, your Expression of Interest should set out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how much funding you require from the Department to support the set-up of your pilot • how the Department’s funding will be used (i.e. what it will buy) and, • the total cost of your pilot (i.e. if you will be leveraging in additional resources to support the pilot). <p>When considering Expressions of Interest we will seek to assess whether your funding request is consistent and proportionate for your proposals. We will also want to understand the potential long-term value for money of your proposals – you should try and provide some evidence about the potential long-term savings and benefits of your proposals.</p>

What is the process for applying?

Expressions of Interest in becoming a pilot should be sent by **5pm on Wednesday 28 January 2015**. The attached short form should be completed and sent to:

statutorynoticepilots@communities.gsi.gov.uk

17. The pilots will start in March 2015. The timetable we intend to follow to achieve this is:

23 December 2014	Invitation to express an interest issued
Week of 12 January 2015	Information event (subject to level of interest)
Week of 19 January 2015	Information event (subject to level of interest)
5pm 28 January 2015	Deadline for Expressions of Interest
By 11 February 2015	Assessment of Expressions of Interest completed
By 25 February 2015	Areas informed about decisions on their Expression of Interest
By 4 March 2015	Due diligence completed, formal grant funding letter sent to pilot areas and grants paid to support the quick set-up of pilots
Week of 9 March 2015	Kick-off event for pilot areas
By 30 April 2015	We will aim to provide written feedback to areas whose Expression of Interest was not successful

18. We may invite an independent person and officials from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Local Government Association and News Media Association to assist in the evaluation of Expressions of Interest. You will need to meet the assessment criteria set out earlier but when finalising recommendations for the Secretary of State we will also consider the overall number and nature of Expressions of Interest to achieve an appropriate balance across the pilots of:

- different types of local authority
- urban and rural areas
- different innovative approaches being tested by the pilots
- different media groups, and
- funding across the pilot areas.

19. If you have any questions, then please email them through to:

statutorynoticepilots@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Annex A: Potential innovative approaches

Local authorities and the newspaper industry have suggested a number of ways in which statutory notices might be improved:

- Developing abbreviated notices
- Using cheaper and standardised format
- Putting notices into plain English so that they can be easily read
- Presenting notices in visually appealing formats e.g. maps for road closures
- Single web based portals where a wide range of notices can be pooled, covering many local authority areas
- Sending notices to mobile phones (for those who register for the service)
- Using email alerts targeted on people based on the vicinity of their ward or postcode
- Using digital media, social media (e.g. Facebook) to publish notices
- Using social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Tumblr etc.) to alert local people a statutory notice that has been issued in print or on a website
- Issuing hyper-local notices and letters to tell people about a decision that will affect them in their area
- Attracting technology companies to develop applications that take the material in notices, adds value and presents it to users in an innovative and engaging way or enables the public to immediately respond to a notice e.g. to object to an alcohol license application, or planning application etc
- Attracting and linking advertising to statutory notices to help fund the costs
- Investigating innovative pricing structures e.g. fixed monthly fees, fixed unit prices for a notice, local authorities collectively negotiating better advertising rates (the majority of local newspapers are owned by half a dozen large media groups), and
- Increasing competition e.g. some evidence that community groups want to be able to bid to publish statutory notices, ensuring local authorities tender for publishing contracts rather than maintain the status quo etc.