

# WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

## Report by the Chief Executive

Council: 25 February 2009

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**Subject: The Employee Survey 2009**

### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1** This report outlines the timeline and scope of the 2009 follow-up Employee Survey.

### **2. Background**

- 2.1** The Best Value Audit of West Dunbartonshire Council set out recommendations for organisational improvement in the following areas:

- Leadership of the Council – officers and members
- Member and Officer relations
- Transparency and openness of decision making
- Staff morale
- Bullying and harassment

This was evidenced from a number of sources including a Staff Survey conducted by Audit Scotland in 2006, with a response rate of 17.4%.

- 2.2** The first stage of the Council's response to the audit report was to conduct their own Employee Survey in May 2007, which examined working life at the Council and considered the issues raised by Audit Scotland. 28% of employees responded to the 2007 Survey.
- 2.3** The Survey, conducted by IBP Research, highlighted a number of significant challenges for the Council in addressing issues affecting the culture of the organisation and staff morale.
- 2.4** The Survey recommendations formed the basis of an Employee Survey Action Plan, initially taken forward by the Employee Survey Working Group, and latterly by the Organisational Development Work Group within the Best Value Improvement Framework.

- 2.5** The Employee Survey Action Plan was approved by Council on May 28, 2008 and progress has been monitored through the Best Value Improvement Plan and regular reports to Council. Council further agreed that a follow-up staff survey would be conducted in early 2009 to assess the impact of the Action Plan on staff motivation and attitudes to working life within the Council.
- 2.6** The Organisational Development Work Group commissioned IBP Research to carry out the follow up research programme in December 2008 and has agreed the scope and timeline of the follow up Survey. The follow-up questionnaire will ensure that all relevant issues are addressed and that appropriate comparisons can be made with the 2007 survey.
- 2.7** Three broad aims have been established for the 2009 Employee Survey:
- To evaluate employee perceptions and engagement in the organisation.
  - To evaluate the current position benchmarked against other public sector organisations.
  - To assess changes in perception since the 2007 survey.
- 2.8** Within the context of the above overall aims, there are a number of more specific objectives:
- Establish the extent to which employees feel better at their work today
  - Help refine the Action Plan
  - Identify issues still important to employees
  - Identify new issues requiring attention
  - Identify the extent to which these issues impact on working lives
  - Provide the Council with baseline data that can be used to demonstrate improvement over time
  - Provide evidence for Audit Scotland Follow Up Review
  - Complement and support Culture Web Activity

### **3. Main Issues**

- 3.1** The proposal for the follow-up Employee Survey was presented to the Senior Management Network meeting in January 2009 and Managers were tasked with identifying ways to improve the response rate to the Survey. A number of issues were raised, primarily around staff perceptions relating to the confidentiality of the Survey and concern that individual responses could be traced. As a result, a number of recommendations have been proposed and agreed with IBP Research to maximise response rates and reassure employees:
- Frontline employees will be given paid time to complete the 2009 Survey.

- Employees will receive a personal letter from the Director of IBP to confirm the confidentiality of the survey and to provide a guarantee that individual information will not be made available to the Council.
- A Communication Plan will be implemented in March 2009 in the lead up to the Employee Survey to ensure that all employees are aware of the purpose of the follow-up Survey and how their data will be used.
- Managers will provide support to remote work groups to aid completion of the questionnaires.
- The follow-up Survey will be shorter in length and will not require employees to answer personal information such as age, sex, religion or sexual orientation. Instead the Survey will focus solely on employee perceptions of Cultural Change linked to the 2007 Survey.
- The survey will be issued by post to all employees at their home address, along with a cover letter and Reply Paid envelope. IBP will manage the questionnaire mailing on behalf of the Council and responses will be returned direct to IBP. The Council will not have access to raw data.
- An online survey form will also be hosted on IBP's website and will be an alternative method by which individuals will be able to take part in the survey.
- Respondents will also be given the opportunity to contact IBP by telephone in order to complete the survey.

**3.2** It was originally anticipated that the findings of the follow-up Survey could be presented to Audit Scotland as part of their next follow up review; however the timing of this Audit Scotland review has been brought forward from summer 2009 to March 2009, with Audit Scotland arriving on site on March 16th. This means that the results of the follow up Survey will not be available to Audit Scotland during the Review. Evidence of the preparation and scope of the Survey will be provided instead.

**3.3** The 2009 Employee Survey is part of a wider programme of engagement with employees. A number of feedback mechanisms, including the 2007 Employee Survey outcomes, have indicated the culture within West Dunbartonshire Council does not support the delivery of services, or meet the aspirations of the Council in terms of providing Best Value. In response, the Organisational Development Workgroup has recently completed a programme of in-depth qualitative research on organisational culture within West Dunbartonshire Council. This activity was outlined to the Improvement & Efficiency Executive on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2008.

**3.4** The Culture Web research was conducted in January 2009 by external consultants Change Navigators and involved 8 half-day diagnostic workshops with 150 employees (frontline employees, supervisors and middle managers). The workshops were used to identify the present culture within the Council and how this impacts on organisational change and staff morale. Additionally the research identifies the steps that are required to be taken to ensure that a

meaningful change in culture can be achieved to support the successful implementation of the activities outlined within the Employee Survey Action Plan.

- 3.5** The results of the Culture Web Activity and recommendations are currently being communicated to Senior Management and will be made available to Elected Members through dedicated briefing sessions in March and April. The results and the proposals for cultural change will be further tested with Employees through the 2009 Survey. The Culture Web results and recommendations will be made available to the Audit Scotland during their follow up Review.
- 3.6** In addition to testing the results and solutions of the Cultural Web Activity, the 2009 Survey will cover the same broad headings as the 2007 Survey:
- Working at West Dunbartonshire Council
  - Training and Development
  - Communications and Consultation
  - Leadership, Management and Council Performance
  - Dignity at Work
  - Equalities and Diversity
  - Health at Work
  - Overall Views of the Council.
- 3.7** The 2009 Survey has been designed following a review of Staff Surveys carried out by other Scottish Councils to allow West Dunbartonshire Council to benchmark survey results.
- 3.8** The 2009 Survey will also include a targeted programme of six employee focus groups. This will address two broad themes:
- Exploration of some of the key findings from the quantitative survey so that the underlying reasons for these findings are better understood.
  - Development of potential solutions to the issues identified, which will be cross-referenced to the survey themes.
- 3.9** The Survey field work will roll-out from week 1 in April, in line with the date of the 2007 Survey, to ensure consistency. It is anticipated that an Interim Report will be presented to the Organisational Development Work Group at the end of May. The outcomes of the focus groups will then be incorporated in a revised Final Report to be reported to Senior Management and Elected Members in June 2009.

**3.10** Based on previous experience, it is anticipated that a response rate in the region of 30% should be achievable. This equates to an approximate response of 1,950 questionnaires. For indicative purposes, a random sample of 1,950 from a population of 6,500 provides an overall confidence interval of +/-1.86%.

**4.** Personnel Issues

**4.1** There are no personnel issues.

## **5. Financial Implications**

**5.1** The cost of the Employee Survey (£13,500) was agreed by Council on May 28, 2008. This cost will be met within the existing Best Value Improvement budget.

## **6. Risk Analysis**

**6.1** There is no requirement to carry out a risk assessment, however failure to carry out the follow-up Employee Survey could potentially result in damage to the Council's reputation:

- The Council will have failed to assess the awareness and impact of ongoing Action Plans to improve morale and motivation within its workforce. If no improvement is being made then current processes have to be altered and new ways of reaching employees identified. Failure to do so could potentially result in lower morale, higher absence levels and increased grievances against the Council.
- Audit Scotland has identified cultural change as a priority area for the Council. The Council's progress in this area will be reviewed at the next follow up review and reported by the Accounts Commission. The Council must be able to demonstrate that it is monitoring progress in relation to its Action Plans. Failure to do so could potentially damage the reputation of the Council locally and nationally.

## **7. Conclusions**

**7.1** The follow-up Employee Survey is part of a wider programme of employee engagement to assess the impact of Improvement Plans and the cultural change required to support such programs.

**7.2** Due to the timing of the Audit Scotland Follow Up Review, the results of the quantitative follow-up Survey will not be available to Audit Scotland, however the qualitative results of the Culture Web Activity will be presented.

**7.3** The 2009 Survey will measure the impact of the implementation of the Employee Survey Action Plan on the working lives of employees and provide quantitative data on the success of these plans in terms of influencing staff morale.

**7.4** The Survey field work will commence in April 2009 and a Report on the findings will be available from June 2009.

## **8. Recommendations**

**8.1** Council are asked to note the content of this report and the scope and timeline of the 2009 Employee Survey.

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**David McMillan**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Date: 18 February 2009**

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**Background Papers:** Report on Employee Survey Actions Group – Council, 28 May, 2008

Report on Organisational Culture Change ‘Cultural Web Framework’ – Improvement & Efficiency Executive: 5<sup>th</sup> December 2008

**Wards Affected:** All