

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Chief Executive

Council : 25 November 2009

Subject: Employee Survey 2009

1 Introduction

1.1 This report provides a summary of the 2009 Employee Survey results and recommends steps to address the outcomes.

2 Background

2.1 In early 2007, and as part of its commitment to demonstrate Best Value, the Council undertook an employee survey in an effort to gain feedback on staff perception of working life within the Council. 28% of employees responded to the survey, conducted by IBP Research. The results highlighted a number of significant challenges for the Council in addressing issues affecting the culture of the organisation and staff morale.

2.2 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.

2.3 The action plan aimed to address areas such as improving organisational communication, facilitating leadership and management development, developing positive management practice and behaviour, and implementing a policy and procedure for dignity at work scenarios. New policies have been developed to improve internal communication and Dignity at Work and are currently being implemented across the Council. Development work is still ongoing in most areas and is being incorporated within a strategic program of organisational culture change.

2.4 As part of the action plan, Council agreed to undertake a further survey within 18 months to 2 years with the key purpose of assessing the impact of any change. This took place during June 2009 through the issue of a survey questionnaire broadly similar to the previous version enabling a comparison between results.

2.5 Three broad aims were 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 staff perception since the 2007 survey.

3 Main issues

- 3.1** A report explaining the results and recommendations has been prepared by the external consultants IBP Research (Appendix A). Reports have been generated for each department and these have been passed to each Executive Director.

Response rate

- 3.2** The survey was posted to all employees at home and the opportunity to complete the survey on-line or via a phone-line was also provided. A target response rate of 30% was expected. Despite significant promotion through wage slips, email, the Senior Manager Network and core brief process, and staff being granted paid time to complete the survey, a lower response rate of 26% was achieved. Whilst this figure is considered a suitable sample size it is a disappointing return.
- 3.3** Over 92% of respondents indicated they worked within a base, with the most popular being either an office or school. Only 4% indicated they worked in a care home or depot suggesting that a high number of our remote and manual workers did not complete the survey, despite this being highlighted as a key audience that Council wanted to reach. This is a large proportion of the workforce and as such feedback may not be entirely representative of the total workforce.

Key outcomes

- 3.4** Overall the survey results illustrate an improving picture for the Council with positive points emerging in most areas. However the Council's baseline is relatively low in many areas and, whilst there is an upward trend, the overall results in key areas such leadership, staff feeling valued and overall staff morale still remain low.
- 3.5** Ratings for most of the tangible factors of working at West Dunbartonshire Council (such as job security, pay and working environment) continue to be rated positively. There still remains high importance on results relating to conditions of service however staff are placing more weight on intangible factors such as 'feeling valued' and 'feeling you make a difference'. Whilst it's encouraging that staff place greater emphasis on these, such aspects are deeply embedded in our culture and will require greater effort and action to create a positive change.
- 3.6** The following areas remain highly positive and illustrate modest to strong improvement:
- Staff enjoy their day-to-day work (91%) and the people they work with are very supportive of each other (85%)
 - Staff feel well informed about changes (58%)
 - Team meetings are now the most common method of receiving information (61%) and have overtaken 'the grapevine'

- Staff feel consulted

3.7 The following areas are symptomatic of the key improvement areas:

- Staff don't feel valued by the Council and recognised for the work they do (43%)
- Consultation is considered rarely genuine
- Leadership has improved (albeit from a relatively low baseline) however staff still do not perceive there is strong and visible leadership from Councillors (16%) and Senior Managers (35%)
- A high proportion of staff are aware of the Council's aims and objectives (69%) and understand how they can contribute to these (62%) however this result is declining
- Morale within the council is still perceived as low (only 25% feel morale is good)
- The poor public perception of the Council; only 28% feel it is perceived positively by the local communities and 39% feel the media reflects fairly the good work done

3.8 In addition the survey illustrates an increase in staff who have personally experienced offensive behaviour as defined within the Dignity at Work policy and the most common source of this behaviour is between line managers and employees. Best practice evidence demonstrates that the introduction of such policies can signal an increase in reported incidents at its initial inception but would be expected to diminish as it embeds further. This theory will require further exploration and corroboration to establish the rationale behind this increased result.

3.9 Of those respondents who experienced some form of offensive behaviour, only 11% used the Dignity at Work reporting procedure with the main reason cited as 'nothing would happen' by 63%.

Departmental results

3.10 Results for each department illustrate a similar improvement pattern with the Chief Executive's department achieving the best ratings and HEED portraying the poorest ratings. The results for HEED will likely have been affected by the high proportion of the workforce who did not complete the survey.

Next steps

3.11 Within the 2007 survey process, IBP undertook additional staff focus group sessions to examine specific issues arising from the survey. Whilst there is merit in focus groups, staff have already engaged in a similar process through the organisational culture diagnostics and examined the same issues that have emerged through the survey. There is little to gain in initiating further focus group sessions, particularly since staff are yet to be informed on the proposed organisational change programme resulting from the feedback provided within these sessions, and this may reinforce the perception that consultation isn't genuine.

3.12 Many of the 2009 recommendations correlate and build on the development work implemented in response to the 2007 survey results however the emphasis will need to shift towards strengthening implementation and embedding key frameworks through support for managers and establishing good management practice and new ways of working. This includes:

- Wider roll-out of management development programmes
- Introduction of structured leadership development
- Embedding of the internal communication strategy
- Development and implementation of a revised PDP process
- Strengthening of the Dignity at Work policy and procedure

3.13 Many of the issues highlighted within the survey results correspond with the outcomes of the organisational culture diagnostics and will be positively influenced by the above initiatives. A suggested approach to addressing organisational culture change is currently being developed through the Best Value Culture group and will address the results and recommendations generated by the staff survey and incorporated within the overall cultural change programme.

3.14 It is critical that a communication plan is developed to facilitate staff learning about the staff survey results, test the steps being taken to increase the pace of change and bring about the required improvements, and engage staff in the organisation's change programme. This won't be undertaken in isolation and will form part of a wider communication plan around the cultural change programme and the new Best Value Improvement Plan, rather than be seen as three distinct pieces of work. Communication plans will involve Elected Members and the Trade Unions.

4 Personnel issues

4.1 Addressing the outcomes and key issues of the staff survey will be crucial in driving forward our improvement plans and facilitating a positive impact on staff morale.

5 Financial implications

5.1 There are no direct financial implications in relation to following up the employee survey outcomes. Additional financial support has been highlighted in connection with the organisational culture programme to secure external support and assistance to progress the key strands within this initiative.

6 Risk Analysis

6.1 The Council has expressed a commitment to addressing the culture within the organisation and improving staff morale as a key part of its improvement plan. If the organisation is to significantly improve and deliver the requirements of Best Value then it must continue to progress and facilitate improvement in a range of people management practices and behaviours.

6.2 It's essential the outcomes of the survey are communicated back to staff with a clear indication of the broad improvement plan that will be implemented to address the key issues. Staff have strongly expressed the perception that their views, ideas, and suggestions are rarely taken on board and this presents an ideal opportunity to develop staff confidence and demonstrate a commitment to the consultative process through the provision of feedback.

7 Conclusions and officer's recommendations

7.1 The results from the 2009 survey show an incremental improvement in staff perception of working life within the Council and there is a good level of awareness of new policies such as the Dignity at Work and Internal Communication Strategy.

7.2 Intangible factors such as feeling valued and low staff morale remain a concern.

7.3 Many of the development areas resemble the outcomes of the organisational culture diagnostics and development of these should be integrated as part of the improvement and organisational cultural change programme.

7.4 Council are asked to:

- i. Provide any feedback on the staff survey outcomes.
- ii. Agree to integrate the emerging key issues and recommendations as part of the organisational cultural change programme.
- iii. Agree to a wide communication strategy to feed back the survey results to staff.

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Date: 12 November 2009

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Appendix: Employee Survey report 2009

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: None