

**REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR - CUSTOMERS, GOVERNANCE AND
EMPLOYEES****WORKFORCE CHECK-IN SURVEY UPDATE****Purpose of the Report**

1. To inform Elected Members of findings of workforce check-in survey undertaken in April 2021 and to seek approval for further detailed analysis of findings to be undertaken to develop a focussed action plan.

Information

2. The Council took the decision to ask all office-based employees who could work from home to do so from Monday 16 March 2020 and closed all its buildings to the public from 24 March 2020. As reported in previous committee reports, the Council's workforce has responded positively to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many have been flexible in altering their duties, working hours and where they work from to ensure the Council can continue to deliver critical services to its most vulnerable residents.
3. The Covid pandemic has presented many challenges in how key workforce messages are communicated to different audiences. Some, such as the initial directive to work from home in March 2020, were necessarily instructive. However, over the course of the last 15 months, there have been opportunities to engage more collaboratively with our workforce and seek their views which has helped shape our response and will further inform the future of work as we edge towards recovery and beyond.
4. In the early stages of the pandemic, it was considered important to capture the mood of how individual employees were feeling as part of our ongoing engagement with them. An employee well-being survey was therefore undertaken in late May 2020 to "check-in" and get feedback on how employees were feeling and identify what further support they required to continue delivering services during the Covid emergency.
5. The survey closed on 26 May 2020 with 2,761 responses received. This represented approximately 40% of the Council's workforce. 95% of employees who completed the survey responded positively to questions in relation to the Council's overall response to COVID-19; how the Council's overall response related to their role and how well informed they felt by their line manager. Satisfaction levels in relation to communication with and support from managers and employees were around 90%. There was 80% satisfaction level with wellbeing information

and support and having the tools to do their job. Overall, 75% were satisfied with their health, safety and wellbeing whilst working during the pandemic.

6. The valuable intelligence gathered as a result of this exercise has enabled us to:
 - Shape a Workforce Resilience and Recovery Strategy and associated Action Plan, which were approved by Personnel Committee in November 2020. The strategy set out to define the “new normal” for the Council’s workforce and to address how the Council’s future workforce would be developed and supported to respond positively and flexibly to the new challenges emerging as we respond to the second phase and recovery from the pandemic.
 - Refresh the employee health and wellbeing action plan in September 2020 to include new measures directly linked to the Covid-19 situation and fill any gaps in our provision. This enabled us to support our employees’ wellbeing and resilience and organisational resilience as we respond to the second phase and recovery from the pandemic.
7. It was agreed as part of Workforce Resilience and Recovery Action Plan that further surveys, alongside other tools such as the webinars and question and answer sessions would be used to gather additional information from a wide cross section of the Council’s workforce.
8. As part of this, a series of virtual Question and Answer sessions have been instigated, enabling the Chief Executive and Corporate Leadership Team members to engage directly with employees. To date, two events have taken place, one with an invited audience drawn from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic employees to address specific issues and the second was an open event to discuss the culture of the organisation and to understand our employees’ experiences of what it is like to work for Nottinghamshire County Council. These events are ongoing and future subjects will include recognition, development and engagement. The feedback from these events has been positive and employees have welcomed the opportunity to discuss key issues with senior leaders of the organisation.
9. As part of our ongoing engagement with staff, a second workforce “check-in” survey was undertaken in April 2021. A full summary of the survey findings is attached as Appendix 1. In total, 2,248 responses were received. This represents approximately 30% of the Council’s workforce. The survey focussed on workforce wellbeing and future working arrangements and thinking forwards to when restrictions around work bases are lifted.

Workforce wellbeing

10. The findings of the survey indicate that 77% employees feel satisfied with their health, safety and wellbeing at work and in particular feel able to talk regularly with their manager about their workload and any stress related issues. This shows satisfaction level has increased by 2% since the last survey in May 2020. Many employees commented positively about the support that they have received over the last year, although some have felt pressures with their workload and have struggled to switch off from work.
11. 73% of those surveyed reported feeling able to maintain a healthy work/life balance. Comments made by employees in respect of work/life balance suggest that many employees who have moved to home working over the last year have seen an improvement due to the

flexibility, lack of commute and greater time for themselves, whilst others have found it more difficult to maintain a boundary between work and home due to the lack of separation.

12. 77% of those who surveyed feel that they are a valued member of a team. Some employees reflected on missing face to face time with colleagues, both on a personal level and in terms of the ad hoc conversations that support with work. Employees are keen to see that moving forwards, they will have the opportunity to spend time with their team – some through regular face to face team meetings, some through collaborative working opportunities, and some through working alongside their colleagues in the office.
13. 56% employees reported that they feel the Council prioritises their wellbeing, with 61% feeling that the Council provides appropriate resources that enables them to care for their personal wellbeing. There has been a drop in the satisfaction level in terms of wellbeing information and support received by employees since the last survey. This suggests that we need to do more to raise awareness of the support available to employees, ensure that the support available continues to meet employees' needs and ensure that managers are encouraging employees to prioritise their wellbeing. We plan to hold engagement events with employees to better understand the reasons for and further develop our response to these findings.

Future Working Arrangements

14. The survey asked employees how they imagined themselves working in the future. Overall, 48% of employees responded see themselves as doing a blend of office and home working, 32% see themselves as being primarily home based, and 6% primarily office based, with 9% working in the community and the remainder in other settings. The percentage varies depending on the services that employees work in.
15. The survey also asked how employees are feeling about a potential return to some level of office-based working. Responses were evenly split between those who reported feeling positive or optimistic, those who reported feeling anxious or apprehensive, and those feeling mixed or neutral.
16. The survey gave employees the opportunity to identify what would support them to feel confident about their future working arrangements. The key themes identified were as follows:
- Employees want to be engaged in and kept informed about future changes to working arrangements. It is key that individual needs are taken into account.
 - Employees want to have the autonomy to work flexibly and to choose when and how to work whilst balancing service needs with their personal circumstances.
 - Employees want to be equipped to do their role effectively, whether from home or in the office. This includes equipment, consideration of financial support for home working and access to office space being coordinated so that employees can be confident they will be able to sit with their teams.
 - Employees want to know about the clear expectations around their working arrangements.
 - Safe working places – employees want assurance that work bases are Covid-secure.

Next Steps

17. Next steps include a more detailed analysis to be undertaken by the Council's Workforce Resilience and Recovery Group, the Smarter Working (Hybrid Working) programme team, and departmental leadership teams to understand what concerns, drives, motivates our employees in different service areas across the Council. It is unlikely that there will be a "one size fits all" solution. Therefore, further analysis will enable actions to be linked to existing workstreams and further focussed actions to be developed, where required.
18. In response to the survey findings, a series of frequently asked questions (FAQs) will be developed and published before the end of June. FAQs will also be used to raise awareness about information, advice and support available for employees to remain well and healthy in and outside of work. A calendar of future engagement opportunities will also be developed, so that employees understand how they can further contribute to shaping the way that the Council works in the future.

Other Options Considered

19. Ongoing engagement with our employees is critical for our success. In addition to online surveys, the Council will continue to adopt a range of tools to engage its workforce in developing its response to the ongoing pandemic and the future of work beyond the current situation. There is not one single initiative or response which will deliver this, so a multi-faceted, blended approach is the recommended way forward, using new technologies where appropriate, to ensure the Council's workforce is fully engaged in the development and ongoing improvement of our services.

Reason for Recommendation

20. It is vital that we do not lose the opportunity to take the learning from the current situation and use it to inform the future direction of the design and delivery of the Council's services. The Council's employees are integral to developing new ways of working and service delivery and as such understanding what they have valued in the emergency will be critical to moving forward positively as things begin to be more normalised.

Statutory and Policy Implications

21. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Data Protection and Information Governance

22. There is no personal information about named individuals contained within the body of the report.

Financial Implications

23. There are no direct financial implications arising from the content of this report.

Human Resources Implications

24. Employee communication and engagement are key tools to ensuring the Council has a committed, energetic and healthy workforce. Throughout the pandemic, we have continued to engage with the recognised trade unions and the self-managed groups. The opportunity to have direct discussions with employees as well as through their representatives and self-managed groups, provides invaluable insight into what the workforce feels about the Council as an employer and allows us to target resource and effort into addressing any emerging issues. This approach has been very positive and well received and has facilitated joint problem solving when issues have arisen.

Smarter Working Implications

25. Findings of the latest staff survey will inform the development of future vision for Smarter Working (Hybrid Working) which takes account of changes to working practices and staff culture since the COVID-19 Pandemic began.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Members:

- 1) Consider the findings of the latest workforce check-in survey undertaken in April 2021 and approve the actions as set out in paragraphs 17 and 18 of this report.

Marjorie Toward

Service Director – Customers, Governance and Employees

Chief Executive's Department

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Lucy Peel, Group Manager – Service Improvement, Children and Family Services on 0115 9773139 or lucy.peel@nottsc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments KK 16/06/21)

26. The proposals in this report are within the remit of the Personnel Committee.

Financial Comments (SES 16/06/21)

27. There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

HR Comments (JP 17/06/21)

28. Any HR implications are implicit within the report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All