



Agenda Item: 8

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR HR AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

EMPLOYEE SURVEY OUTCOMES

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform Elected Members of the outcomes and associated actions for improvement arising from the 2013 survey of Nottinghamshire County Council's direct workforce.

Information and Advice

Background

2. Employee engagement strategies enable people to contribute effectively at work, recognising that this can only happen if they feel respected, involved, heard, well led and valued by those they work with.
3. As part of the Council's strategic commitment to effective employee engagement, in the summer of 2013, all employees of Nottinghamshire County Council had the opportunity to respond to an Employee Survey.
4. The survey was designed to achieve the following key objectives:
 - to obtain robust and reliable measures of employee engagement and attitudes towards a range of work related issues
 - to identify drivers of employee engagement
 - to track progress on key indicators since the last survey, conducted in 2008
 - to inform service reviews and assist in business planning, and
 - to assist in developing a 'one organisation' culture for the County Council.
5. All 9,697 employees within the organisation at the point of issue were given the opportunity to complete the survey, which was set up online with paper versions made available to front line employees without regular access to the internet.
6. The 2013 survey was undertaken against a background of significant and ongoing organisational change and should be viewed in the context that the size of the Council has reduced significantly since the previous survey which was undertaken in 2008 with a headcount reduction of over 3,000 during that period.

Methodology

7. The questions in the survey were based on those contained in the 2008 survey, updated as appropriate to provide a benchmark.

8. Additional specific questions in relation to health and well-being and communications were also added to reflect priority areas or areas where specific feedback was required to shape activity going forward.

9. The survey covered a range of issues associated with working for the County Council and was designed to measure employee engagement. Further more detailed analysis was also undertaken on the key drivers of employee engagement.

10. The responses were analysed using the same methodology as the previous survey in order to enable meaningful comparison, that is:

- levels of engagement were explored through the engagement index questions and the issues underlying employee engagement through a full set of attitudinal questions.
- a statistical analysis was also conducted to identify the issues with the biggest impact on employee engagement overall, known as key driver analysis.
- the results were also compared with benchmark norms in the public sector in a number of areas.

11. The use of these techniques supported the prioritisation of issues coming out of the survey by identifying those questions which have the strongest relationship with overall employee engagement.

Response rate

12. A total of 4,730 employees completed the survey, giving a response rate of **48.8%**. This is a 14 percentage point increase since 2008. Research has shown that response rates above **40%** in local authorities should be considered as better than average.

13. Given the sample size and confidence level there is a **95%** confidence rate that responses are representative of those that would be given by all employees, had each completed a questionnaire, to within +/-1.02% of the percentage reported.

14. A breakdown of the response rate by department is set out in the table below:

Department ¹	Absolute responses
Children, Families and Cultural Services	1780
Adult Social care, Health and Public protection	1206
Environment and Resources	1300
Planning, Policy and Corporate Services	336
Public Health	47
Not provided	67
Total	4,736*

**6 employees gave more than one department due to multiple employments, secondments etc.*

Outcomes – the results

15. The results were published on the Council's intranet in February 2014 via a series of "dashboards" which also set out the high level analysis and corporate actions identified to address negative feedback and effect improvement (**see appendix**).

16. The dashboards are grouped under the key themes used in the survey. That is your job, colleagues, communication, customers, training and career development, awards and rewards, management and leadership, work life balance and wellbeing, diversity, overall perceptions of the Council.

17. The number of respondents stating they felt positive, neutral or negative is indicated against each question in the survey and, where possible, the commentary includes a summary and the potential next steps for employees, senior managers and the Corporate Leadership Team in response to the issues raised.

18. Individual benchmarking scores have been highlighted in the results where relevant.

Key positive messages

19. Many positive messages were identified in relation to specific key questions in the following areas summarised below:

- **Job satisfaction:** 72% of NCC employees are satisfied with their job; this score is 5% above benchmark norms. However, levels of advocacy of the Council as a good place to work and levels of pride in working for the Council were lower.
- **Clarity of job role:** the highest scoring element of the survey relates to personal contribution and impact. This indicates that employees have a clear understanding of what is expected of them and how their work relates to wider service objectives which is in line with benchmark norms.
- **Flexibility and teamwork:** more than 80% of employees agree that they would consider changing the way that they do things to work more effectively and that the people they work with co-operate to get the work done. This is indicative of a collaborative and flexible workforce.
- **Line management:** a significant majority, 79% of NCC employees, agree that their line manager treats them with respect, 71% agree their line manager does a good job and 71% were able to talk to their manager if they felt under pressure. There was an increase of 6% from 2008 in the number of employees who felt their manager motivates and inspires them to be more effective. This is balanced with 4% decrease in the number of employees who felt that their manager used the Employee Performance and Development Review (EPDR) process effectively to manage performance and a 6% decrease in the number who felt they had the appropriate level of authority to undertake their role. Scores in relation to communication of views/ideas by line managers were positive overall.
- **Diversity:** this metric is an important factor in driving overall job satisfaction. A significant majority, 77% of employees, agree that the Council is an equal opportunities employer.

This proportion marks a 4 percentage point improvement on the results seen in the 2008 survey. **74%** of employees agree the Council respects individual differences; this is in line with the results seen in 2008. A significant majority of employees, **78%**, state that no element of their personal profile has had an adverse effect on their career with the County Council. **67%** of employees agree that they are treated with fairness and respect by NCC. This proportion has risen by 3 percentage points since 2008.

- **Communications:** To understand whether they feel listened to, employees were asked about the way in which they are able to give feedback on their opinions and suggestions. **38%** of employees indicate that they have the opportunity to contribute their views before changes are made that affect their job, the same proportion agree that they feel there is an effective way to submit their ideas for improvements, 6% above benchmark norms. Views were apparently polarised as another **36%** of employees disagree that they have the opportunity to contribute their views on changes and **24%** disagree that there are effective ways to submit ideas for improvements. **65%** of employees indicate that their manager does a good job of keeping them informed about matters that affect them, while **51%** agree the Council does a good job of keeping them informed, only **19%** disagree this is the case.
- **Communication channels:** Employees were also asked to indicate to what extent the various channels of internal communication keep them informed of what is happening in the Council: **69%** agree that the intranet keeps them fully informed, an 8 percentage point increase on the proportion who agreed in the 2008 survey, **53%** agree the Chief Executive's intranet bulletin keeps them fully informed, **44%** agree that the "Team Talk" monthly update of departmental, service specific and strategic information keeps them informed and **35%** agree that "Frontline" staff magazine keeps them up to date. Employees were also asked to indicate which channels they have regular access or exposure to: **87%** indicate that they have access to the Council's intranet and **71%** indicate that the intranet helps them do their job. **74%** have regular team meetings. **74%** regularly use a PC or mobile device to use the internet outside of work and **51%** state that they discuss Team Talk at their team meetings

20. The full detail is contained in the dashboards in the attached **appendix**.

Areas for improvement

21. Specific areas for improvement were also highlighted as summarised below:

- **The Council's vision:** **54%** of employees agree that they understand the vision, **29%** indicate that they neither agree nor disagree that they understand it and **17%** actively disagree. Only **16%** of employees agree that the Council's vision has made them feel more valued, **51%** neither agree nor disagree and **34%** indicate that they disagree. However **66%** of employees feel committed to the organisation's goals; representing a 5 percentage point increase since 2008.
- **Managing change:** **22%** of employees agree that NCC manages change effectively which represents a 4 percentage point increase since 2008. During a period of significant change this provides a platform from which to build. However, the proportion that disagree this is the case outweighs those that agree, as **38%** disagree change is well managed. Scores in this area were below benchmark norms.

- **Training and Development:** The perceived fall in the extent to which personal development and progression is supported within the Council is the most significant negative shift since the 2008 survey. Employee satisfaction with training in their current roles has dropped 15 percentage points, satisfaction with support to develop their careers has dropped 14 percentage points and agreement that employees have a real opportunity to improve their skills has dropped 13 percentage points.

The integrated learning and development budget for the Council will have been reduced by over £3m by the 31st March 2014 which will have inevitably impacted on the scores in this area. This has resulted in a significant reduction in the amount of classroom based training and a move towards e-learning and self-directed learning in order to maintain a range of development opportunities for employees at all levels. A move towards encouraging greater personal responsibility amongst employees for their own learning and development may also have contributed to these scores. Resources have also been shifted towards training for frontline employees.

While a majority of employees, **71%**, still intend to be working for the County Council in 12 months' time, the survey data highlights that employees are feeling more pressure, and are less positive about their personal development and career progression, with an associated risk in relation to workforce retention. It is therefore crucial that employees remain clearly aware of how their contribution not only benefits their team, but also the wider Council and are supported in their personal development.

- **Senior management:** Perceptions of senior management are below benchmark norms; with **40%** of employees agreeing that they are sufficiently visible in the County Council. This proportion has improved by 5 percentage points since 2008. Only **29%** of employees agree that senior management are open and honest in their communication with staff and provide effective leadership. Although these indicators feature in the least positive scoring areas, they have all seen some positive gains since 2008. **29%** agree that senior management allow staff to make changes to the way they have done things in order to work more effectively and this proportion is in line with **28%** result seen in 2008.
- **Work life balance:** The ability of employees to balance their work with their personal life is an important factor in driving overall job satisfaction. **71%** of employees agree that if they feel under pressure they are able to discuss it with their line manager. **66%** feel they are able to strike the right balance between their work and home life. However, this marks a 4 percentage point drop compared to the 2008 results. The proportion of employees who agree they have the resources to complete their work effectively has dropped from **57%** in 2008 to **47%** in 2013. **55%** of employees agree that they are comfortable with the pressure they are under in their role. This represents a fall of 6 percentage points since 2008. Overall this indicates a workforce that feels more stretched than they were 5 years ago. This needs to be set in the context of levels of absence due to stress which have fallen and are below national averages.

22. The full detail is also contained in the dashboards in the **appendix**.

Indicators of Employee Engagement

23. The level of employee engagement within Nottinghamshire County Council has remained consistent between 2008 and 2013 with an overall engagement score of **60%** which is 1 percentage point ahead of the 2008 score.

24. Analysis of the key drivers of employee engagement, measured through the attitudinal questions in the questionnaire, suggests that key priorities for the County Council moving forward are to:

- reassure employees that action will be taken in response to this survey;
- ensure employees feel they have an effective way of submitting ideas to improve things;
- ensure employees feel they are given the opportunity to improve their skills;
- ensure employees feel supported in developing their careers; and
- ensure employees feel that senior management are providing effective leadership

25. The survey data suggests that there are firm foundations from which employee engagement can be further enhanced, including positive views and effective relationships with line managers and about information flow throughout the organisation.

26. The survey results show that the most engaged area, based on the engagement index, is Public Health followed by Children, Families and Cultural Services; Planning, Policy and Corporate Services; Adult Social Care, Health and Public Protection with the lowest score being the Environment and Resources department. Information is being provided to departments on an individual basis so that the results can be examined in more detail and more targeted action developed in specific areas.

Action Plan – the response

27. The survey indicated that **37%** of employees were uncertain about whether action will be taken on the feedback from this survey and only **35%** believe that action will be taken.

28. Communicating the context of the survey, the results and the planned measures to be taken in response to it has addressed this perception by providing a tangible, visible, example of where senior managers engage with and act upon feedback from the wider workforce.

29. In order to ensure a One Council approach the survey outcomes were discussed at the Corporate Leadership Team in August 2013 and it was agreed that a corporate action plan be produced.

30. The results of the survey have subsequently been used to inform this action plan and specific actions are highlighted against each area of questioning in the dashboards as set out in the **appendix**.

31. Priorities for building on the positive indicators to further enhance employee engagement and deliver identified improvements are already being developed and include:

- Ensuring that training schedules and career progression pathways are clearly documented, promoted and understood for employees and that the EPDR process is effectively utilised by all managers.

- Investing further in senior management development, starting with the Leadership Development Programme for Team Managers, commencing in 2014 which follows on from the programme for Group Managers delivered during 2013, and launching a corporate coaching scheme.
- Refreshing the Council's employment package linked to the wider skills agenda.
- Using the feedback on wellbeing, work life balance, stress and support for employees to undertake their roles (including perceptions about the adequacy of resources), to inform and progress ongoing work with the trade unions in relation to these issues. This includes developing a revised employee health and wellbeing action plan which will be accredited against the gold level Wellbeing at Work award.
- Developing career pathways and retraining opportunities for employees in order to meet the Council's future skill needs and retain their continued employment where appropriate.
- Developing new and improved communication channels and information flow throughout the organisation in a way in which employees have said they prefer to communicate.
- Reviewing the functionality of the NCC intranet site to assist effective employee communication.

32. Employees will be given the opportunity to get involved in developing the detail of the actions for improvement through both the "Eureka" online employee ideas scheme and focus groups. The current Eureka challenge arising from the survey has a focus on support for personal career development and progression, which was one of the most negative areas of feedback from the survey.

33. Individual departmental data will also be made available to departments for them to identify areas of specific local action in addition to the corporate actions.

34. It is anticipated that the identified actions will enable the Council to demonstrate that it has listened to employee feedback, responded, recognised the importance of an appropriately skilled and experience workforce and the need to develop and retain employees whilst operating in the context of a significantly reduced financial envelope.

35. The indicators of employee engagement arising from the survey will inform the development of the Council's Workforce Strategy for 2014-18 and the impact of the specific actions identified will be measured in the next corporate employee survey.

Other Options Considered

36. No other options were considered.

Reasons for Recommendations

37. The recommendations in this report will enable Members to consider the specific feedback from the County Council's 2013 employee survey, the actions identified to address specific areas for improvement and the general level of current employee engagement.

Statutory and Policy Implications

38. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Human Resources Implications

39. The recognised trades unions were informed of the findings from the 2013 corporate Employee Survey through the Central Joint Consultative and Negotiating Panel (CJCNP) in September 2013 and are in agreement with the high level actions proposed in response.

40. The trade unions were also involved in the development of the corporate actions set out in the **appendix** of this report through the various working groups that are sub groups of CJCNP. This indicated that an area of particular interest for the trades unions is the responses in relation to wellbeing, work life balance, stress and the support for employees in undertaking their roles, including perceptions in relation to adequacy of resources.

Financial implications

41. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 1) Note the results of the survey that have been communicated to employees via a series of dashboards set out in the **appendix** to this report
- 2) Note the corporate actions that will be undertaken in response to the employee feedback received
- 3) Agree to receive a progress update on the delivery of actions for improvement at a future meeting of this Committee.

Marjorie Toward
Service Director HR and Customer Service

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Claire Gollin, Group Manager HR,
claire.gollin@nottsgov.uk

Constitutional Comments (KK 27/02/14)

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

Financial Comments (SEM 28/02/14)

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

Background Papers and Published Documents

None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All