

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

**SCRUTINY OF THE 2013 STAFF SURVEY - REPORT OF THE CORPORATE
SCRUTINY PANEL**

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To consider the report of the Corporate Scrutiny Panel in relation to Scrutiny of the 2013 Staff Survey.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 At its meeting on 13 March 2014, the Corporate Scrutiny Panel approved its draft report on Scrutiny of the 2013 Staff Survey.
- 2.2 The report was referred to Cabinet for consideration of the recommendations with a view to the preparation of an action plan.
- 2.3 Further to the headline results of the survey, which were positive in many areas, but uncovered some areas of improvement, the Corporate Scrutiny Panel decided that it was not sufficient to simply monitor the proposed officer response, but concluded that a more in-depth exercise was needed to get behind the headline results, understand how and why the survey was carried out, and what action is to be taken on the survey findings. This was to be a very short scrutiny overview and was explored over three meetings, interviewing key internal officers from within the council.

The scrutiny panel agreed to focus on a number of key issues. These were –

- To investigate how the questionnaire is presented to employees, and the format of the questions.
- To explore the results from the 2012 survey, and compare these to the survey results from 2010.
- To explore the actions taken once the survey results have been received.

- To make conclusions and recommendations to the council's Cabinet

A copy of the Scrutiny Panel's report is attached to this report

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 There are no options associated with this report.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

4.1 There may be some resource implications associated with the recommendations when they are implemented.

5. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

5.1 Not applicable in relation to this current report.

6. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DECLARED

6.1 The scrutiny panel consulted as appropriate during its review and are included within its report

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 That the report and recommendations be approved and adopted.

7.2 That the relevant members and officers prepare an action plan in response to the recommendations of the report for submission to a future meeting of Cabinet.

DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND RESOURCES

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Background papers used in the preparation of this report - Nil

CORPORATE SCRUTINY PANEL
SCRUTINY OF THE 2012 EMPLOYEE SURVEY
OCTOBER 2013

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FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

North Lincolnshire Council, like many large employers, invites its staff to participate in a staff survey. The Council offers colleagues participation in this every two years.

As a panel we feel that the way the council engages with its staff is important and therefore, it is equally important that we get the employee survey right from start to finish. Employee feedback is a useful source of grass root opinion and we need to ensure that employees feel that participation in the survey process is worthwhile, with action taken by way of follow up.

It was pleasing to see from the results that employee's views with regards to the council were predominantly positive indicating they are motivated to go that extra mile, and that provision of a quality service to customers is the most important to them.

In late October the Chief Executive cascaded to all staff that the Council has retained its 'Investor in People' status (appendix 3). This was a great achievement and recognition of the commitment from staff at all levels to doing a great job coupled with a genuine commitment to provide a good service to the wider community.

This report sets out the Corporate Scrutiny Panel's recommendations to improve employee understanding, perception and follow up work relating to the employee survey carried out in 2012, and any subsequent future surveys that are to be carried out within North Lincolnshire Council.

I would like to thank the vice-chairman, other members of the panel, and all officers who contributed for their valuable input. This was a short review, but one that I believe includes recommendations that will improve communications and encourage further take up off employee surveys in the future.

Cllr David Robinson
Chairman of the Corporate Scrutiny Panel

BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW

North Lincolnshire Council conducts a staff survey every two years. The most recent was carried out in Autumn 2012, when North Lincolnshire Council commissioned BMG Research (details of which can be found in appendix 2) to undertake an organisation-wide survey of all employees. The survey was carried out by means of self-completion questionnaires, administered either electronically or via a paper questionnaire.

The headline results for the survey were published and sent to all members of staff via the Chief Executive in May 2013. Whilst the survey's results were positive in many areas, it also uncovered some areas for improvement. Therefore, the Corporate Scrutiny Panel decided that it was not sufficient to simply monitor the proposed officer response, but concluded that a more in-depth exercise was needed to get behind the headline results, understand how and why the survey was carried out, and what action is to be taken on the survey findings. This was to be a very short scrutiny overview and was explored over three meetings, interviewing key internal officers from within the council.

Scope of the Review

The scrutiny panel agreed to focus on a number of key issues. These were: -

- To investigate how the questionnaire is presented to employees, and the format of the questions.
- To explore the results from the 2012 survey, and compare these to the survey results from 2010.
- To explore the actions taken once the survey results have been received.
- To make conclusions and recommendations to the council's Cabinet.

FINDINGS

The following paragraphs are based on discussions held by the panel with relevant officers, with regards to the employee survey carried out in 2012, compared to the findings of the 2010 survey.

Introduction

As previously stated, North Lincolnshire Council commissioned BMG Research to undertake an organisation-wide survey of all employees in Autumn 2012. The survey was carried out by means of self-completion questionnaires, administered either electronically or via a paper version. The scrutiny panel was informed that the four main objectives in carrying out the survey were: -

- To measure current employee perceptions of working for the council and their level of engagement.
- To explore the key factors driving levels of satisfaction amongst staff.
- To identify variations in opinion across the council and the key demographic groups.
- To track changes in perceptions across time since the 2010 survey.

A total of 2,136 responses were received, giving a good response rate of 60%, slightly down on the 63% response rate received in 2010. The panel questioned the reasons why employees might not complete the survey, and was informed some possible examples might be that some remote workers may find it inconvenient, some may have felt that it was a waste of time, others may not have understood the questions, or there may have been concerns around confidentiality. Others may have had other work priorities that they chose to focus on.

Key findings

The 2013 survey results indicated some key findings and it was interesting for the panel to see that the most positive scoring areas related to how employees felt about their own job, what they need to do a good job, how they will go that extra mile to do a good job, and the fact

that they can discuss any issues with their line managers. These figures are generally in line with the 2010 results and are summarised below : -

- 95% of employees know what they need to do a good job,
- 90% of employees discussed performance with their manager in their last appraisal,
- 89% of employees go that extra mile at work when required,
- 87% of employees are clear about what they are trying to achieve in their job,
- 86% of employees can talk to their manager about things that affect them at work.

The panel was encouraged that a willingness amongst staff to 'go the extra mile' is one of the most highly rated statements across the survey, which links well to elements of employee engagement and the 'strive' element that shows employees want to do the best for the authority and the local population.

However, when looking at the lowest scoring areas there are particular issues with regards to employees believing that no action will be taken on the survey results, which may explain the perception that some felt that there is no point in completing the questionnaire.

The scrutiny panel was informed that the survey results gave the council's leadership and service managers an indication of 'hot spots' for further investigation and action.

From the results presented to the panel, 69% of the workforce was satisfied with their job, which is above the BMG Research's public sector benchmark of 67%.

Within the section of the questionnaire that covered 'you and your job,' at least half of the respondents gave a positive response for the majority of the issues. However, although a number of statements were above the public sector benchmark, the proportion of employees expressing a positive opinion has fallen since 2010.

Possibly the biggest concern to the panel during this short scrutiny overview was the response to the statement 'morale is high where I work'. This had the highest level of disagreement across all statements within the survey. It was also one of the lowest performing areas in the 2010 survey indicating to the panel that this should be an area of priority for Directors, Assistant Directors and Line Managers.

Employees' view of the council was generally positive in terms of employees knowing what the council's priorities are and understanding how their role contributes to achieving them. However, employees were less likely to agree that the council has an open and honest culture. This is another result that has decreased since the 2010 survey, and one which again could be resolved by service management through team meetings and the sharing of information.

Communication

This was an issue the panel paid particular attention to, not only on the results of the survey, but also on communication of the survey through its distribution to employees, the guidance attached to it, and how the results were disseminated to employees once received and analysed.

The members of the panel were pleased to learn that employees were generally positive with regards to communication within their individual teams, but were far less positive about communication across the authority and between different teams. Employees who work outdoors or in a vehicle were particularly critical of communication methods. Once again the panel thought that steps could be taken to address this via team meetings and during staff appraisals.

BMG Research did suggest that the council 'may wish to conduct further analysis into the clarity of communication to staff' given the fall in positive responses around information being easy to understand. (This figure had fallen from 76% in 2010 to 59% in 2013).

The Corporate Scrutiny Panel agree that the way the council communicates with its staff is clearly of huge importance and that it is fundamental to ensuring that staff feel that they are part of the process of change. In this context, it was encouraging to the panel that the responses were generally positive with regards to their team and their work specifically. It was felt however that once these surveys are completed, staff need to be made aware of the actions that are/have been taken as a result.

Senior Management/Line Management

When comparing results from the 2010 survey, it was clear that employees' views of senior management had become less defined over time. More than any other section within the survey, there were a large number of neutral responses.

BMG Research suggest that 'the relatively large proportion of employees that state 'neither agree or disagree' suggests that they are not informed enough about the leadership of the council to make a decision'. It may also be unclear whether the question applies to the political leadership, or the council's senior officers, or both.

In contrast to the response with regard to senior management, perceptions of line managers are clearly very positive and have remained relatively stable since 2010 with at least three-fifths of employees agreeing with each statement. It was particularly positive to see that 86% felt that they could approach their managers and talk about things that affected their work. Line management within the council is a particular strength with measures relating to line managers representing some of the most highly rated questions within the survey, it is also an area where North Lincolnshire Council outperforms other councils when compared to benchmarking data.

Despite this, only 65% agreed that managers regularly provided feedback, suggesting that improvements need to be made around encouraging two way communications and the flow of information.

Interviews

Several fact finding interviews were carried out as part of this review with the Director of Policy and Resources and responsible officers. All witnesses indicated that the survey was extremely valuable in giving feedback to the council's leadership and individual managers, and that it also gave employees the opportunity to have their say. They informed the panel that the survey results were still in the early stages of being analysed, but they felt that the trends of the 2013 results were broadly in-line with those from the 2010 survey.

The witnesses reported that the next stages after the full analysis is completed would be to focus on the council-wide and service area results. The analysis would be presented to the various Senior Management Teams, who in turn would disseminate this information

down to their respective teams. It would then be for managers to discuss the service specific results with employees and put together action plans to address and improve any issues that scored poorly within their service areas. The panel was also reassured that action plans would continue to be monitored through Quality Performance Reviews.

CONCLUSIONS

Over the past few years there has been growing interest in the concept of employee engagement and the impact that this can have on an organisation's success and the health and well-being of its employees. This is why the panel felt it was important to look at methods of engaging with our employees, testing whether this was being done in the best way, and whether the council was acting upon what employees were telling them.

The scrutiny panel believes that effective engagement goes to the heart of the workplace relationship between employee and employer, and can be key to unlocking productivity and transforming the working lives of many people. It is vital that this survey is conducted effectively, as how the workplace performs determines to a large extent whether organisations succeed. This is why it is worthwhile to ensure that all correspondence to employees is sent out in a clear, constructive manner with sufficient guidelines, safeguards and explanations for each question area. This will then allow for constructive feedback to be given, and for appropriate action to be taken.

It was evident from the work on this review that, in-line with the 2010 survey results, there were clear positives and negatives throughout.

An increased perception of the value of survey participation could be achieved by giving regular feedback, with employees having more of an understanding of what follow up work has been carried out, and actions that have been taken as a result of what they have told us.

Communication is very important and employees need to know what is happening within their working environment, and also within the wider council.

Over the years the survey has received good response rates of around 60%. The scrutiny panel felt that in order to increase this rate, areas to be considered for use in future surveys should include accompanying easy-to-read guidelines, easy access to the questionnaire, especially for remote workers etc, and further assurances regarding the confidentiality of the survey responses. As the 2013 survey showed that only a quarter of respondents believed that action would be taken from the findings of the survey, it is vitally important that all staff see actions being taken and implemented as a result of them completing the survey.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The final recommendations of the scrutiny panel are summarised below:-

Recommendation 1

That, for future surveys, clear accompanying guidelines should be produced for all employees. Guidelines should clearly explain to each respondent who their Assistant Director, manager or team leader is, as it appears that some employees are not always clear exactly who is referred to in certain questions.

Recommendation 2

Confidentiality also needs to be emphasised more, in particular the issue around the anonymity of data in responses, and it should be made more explicit that steps have been taken within the methodology to ensure that results with fewer than 10 respondents will not be reported. The panel also believes that the guidelines should clearly explain the process for the collection of the results, reiterating that if e-mails are sent to chase up non-respondents then this doesn't mean that the employee and their responses can be identified.

Recommendation 3

That appropriate steps be taken to raise employee awareness of the survey outcomes across the whole of the authority. Employees need to be assured of the reasons for carrying out these surveys, and they also need to be reassured that action will be taken on the results. This should be driven by Directors/Assistant Directors and Line Managers.

Recommendation 4

That the survey results be 'Directorate driven', and a 'You say we did' model should be used. Team meetings, posters and focus groups within service areas, can all help to promote an environment where staff can see that actions are being implemented, and their responses are being acted upon.

APPENDIX 1

Membership of the Corporate Scrutiny Panel

Councillor Robinson (Chairman)

Councillor Wilson (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Jawaid MBE

Councillor P.Vickers

Councillor Wardle

The panel conducted a number of evidence gathering sessions, speaking to officers from within the council.

The panel would like to thank them for their valued input and attendance. They also received and considered a range of written evidence from the 2010 and 2012 employee surveys.

APPENDIX 2

*** BMG Research**

Established in 1988 with over 20 years experience, BMG is one of the largest independent agencies around, who have established a strong reputation for delivering high quality research and consultancy.

Their business is about understanding people; because they matter. Finding out what they really need; from the type of information they use to the type of services they require. In short, finding out about the kind of world people want to live and work in tomorrow.

BMG serves both the social public sector and the commercial private sector, providing market and customer insight which is vital in the development of plans, the support of campaigns and the evaluation of performance.

With a state-of-the-art contact centre; their own trained and managed field force; and over 100 researchers, executives and account managers, BMG has the capacity to take on and deliver volume and high value, within the strictest of deadlines.

APPENDIX 3

COUNCIL RETAINS INVESTOR IN PEOPLE STATUS (21 October 2013 announcement)

Following a week of assessment, I am pleased to announce that we meet the IIP standard. We have improved in all areas across the council since our last assessment.

Our assessor Jeff Law, found much greater uniformity in our staff practices, acknowledged the difficult climate in which we are working, and applauded the work done to make sure we have a clear vision and purpose.

He reported sound leadership and management practices. He felt our training programmes and competencies have led to greater levels of engagement and effective team working.

More importantly, Jeff said that 'we have a real commitment to deliver for the customer' and commented on the 'phenomenal teamwork' and 'discretionary effort' put in by you, our employees.

Despite the difficult financial climate in which we are working, there is a lot of evidence that the council has continued to develop staff, not least through our induction and apprenticeship schemes.

That said none of us can rest on our laurels. I know from the top of the organisation we need to be more visible and this is something the directors and I will be working on. There are also pockets where the good practices highlighted were not as evident.

When I receive Jeff's final report, I give you my commitment; we will work on the areas where weaknesses exist, and we will also seek to further consolidate our real strengths.

My thanks go to you all in helping secure this achievement.

Simon Driver
Chief Executive