

Employee Surveys 2014

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Argyll and Bute Council is facing a period of change. To maximise effectiveness in delivering the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) over the next 10 years, the Council will have to continue to transform. This will mean ongoing change for our employees and we as an organisation must support them and prepare them to meet the challenges ahead.

This report provides the Policy and Resources Committee with the findings of various employee engagement activities undertaken throughout 2014 including surveys, focus groups and roadshows. Surveys are used as a method of employee engagement which allow us to form an understanding of our employees and their views on the Council as their employer, outlining areas which are important to them as well as providing information to allow us to make the improvements that are needed to meet the workforce challenges of the future and deliver for success.

The key findings are:

- Overall an improving trend in a wide range of factors from the 2009 and 2012 surveys
- Management development continues to be a priority
- Communication is improving, but needs to be better
- Employees are finding it increasingly difficult to manage their workload
- Employees wish to be involved more in the change process
- Our levels of response to engagement are average and we need to increase this

The action plan prepared from the information which we have gathered will inform our strategic approach to organisational change and development ensuring that our organisation and our workforce are aligned to the delivery of the SOA.

The recommendations are as follows:

- Note the importance of addressing employee engagement issues to ensure organisational resilience and success for the future;

- Note the content and findings of the report;
- Agree the development of a Corporate Action Plan;
- Agree that further analysis of detailed service and location information, including free text should be carried out;
- Note that a new Employee Engagement Strategy will be brought to Committee in March 2015

Employee Surveys 2014

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1.1 To maximise effectiveness in delivering the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) over the next 10 years, the Council will have to continue to transform. This will mean ongoing change for our employees and we as an organisation must support them and prepare them to meet the challenges ahead.
- 2.1.2 This transformation will be underpinned by the principles established in the HR and OD Strategy that, to deliver quality services, the council must have the right people with the right skills, attitudes and behaviours; in the right place at the right time for the right cost. In order to provide best value in the services we deliver the Council will rely on high performing teams who are engaged and empowered to provide vital services to our communities.
- 2.1.3 Employee engagement is critical to organisational success and it has been evidenced widely (*Engage for Success 2014, Nail the Evidence 2012, Robertson Cooper 2010, Soane et al 2013*) that organisations with high levels of employee engagement are more productive, demonstrate higher levels of performance, have lower levels of absence and have greater resilience to change.
- 2.1.4 The use of surveys as a form of employee engagement has allowed us to form an understanding of our employees and their views on the Council as their employer. This has allowed us to focus on areas which are important to them as well as providing information to allow us to continue to meet the challenges of the future. We know that to meet the challenges of the future, we will need to build on the development of skills, attitudes and behaviours, while responding quickly to changing needs and new opportunities. The engagement activities carried out will inform our strategic approach to organisational change and development ensuring that our workforce efforts are aligned to the delivery of excellent Council services and building resilience in our organisation.

2.2 Employee Engagement 2014

2.2.1 In 2014, the council carried out a number of employee engagement activities as part of the process of gathering evidence to improve our approach to organisational development.

The activities carried out have been:

- Stress Audit and focus groups
- Short survey on employee morale
- Employee survey
- Strategic Management Team Roadshows

2.2.2 The key findings from these engagement activities are:

- Overall there are general improvements from 2009 and 2012 employee surveys;
- Employees have an interesting job (91% up from 88%), they get support for colleagues (88% up from 86%), they are treated with respect by colleagues (87% up from 86%) and enjoy their work (85% up from 82%)
- They are aware of council plans, with awareness of the Improvement Plan (78% up from 73%) and team plans (73% up from 55%) showing greatest improvement
- Employees are not as aware of the Single Outcome Agreement
- Awareness of methods of communication and where to find information about their work has improved
- Employees are increasingly finding it difficult to cope with the amount of work they are expected to do;
- Employees want more and better communication with their managers and more information on council decisions affecting their services;
- For those that have them, high value is placed on team meetings;
- Employees want more empowerment and control over their areas of work;
- Employees want to be involved earlier in change processes and to be able to feed in their views to management
- Morale is considered low by 42% who responded to the stress audit, which is comparable with organisations of a similar size;
- There are high levels of interest in receiving more information on health and wellbeing;
- The levels of response are average for the size of the organisation;
- Levels of engagement vary significantly amongst staff groups with low levels of male responses and low levels of responses from manual worker groups.

2.2.3 This report summarises the key findings of these engagement activities and sets out the highlight areas for improvement and action which will be developed in the Corporate Employee Survey Action Plan.

2.2.4 Further and more detailed analysis will be carried out on the totality of the data collected and specific improvement actions will be identified.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Policy and Resources Committee:

- i. Note the importance of addressing employee engagement issues to ensure organisational resilience and success for the future;
- ii. Note the content and findings of the report;
- iii. Agree the development of a Corporate Employee Survey Action Plan;
- iv. Agree that further analysis of detailed service and location information, including free text should be carried out;
- v. Note that a new Employee Engagement Strategy will be brought to Committee in March 2015

4.0 DETAIL

4.0.1 The following surveys have been undertaken to help the Council gain a better understanding of the range of issues that contribute to employees' level of satisfaction with their working life. The use of surveys are important because it is one of the ways that employees working in all departments and in different locations can express their views on our Council – what we do well and where we need to improve. It also tells us something about how they, our employees, see our Council and the value they place on the work we do together. In order to maximise the response rate and reach all employees, the surveys were issued in electronic and in hard copy, sent directly to employees' homes. Response rates to surveys are an indicator of employee engagement and our response rates were average for the size and type of our organisation.

4.0.2 The Employee Survey and Stress Audits were undertaken by external companies which operate in strict confidence to encourage the greatest possible openness. Open feedback in a secure or anonymous environment is vital to identifying the real issues that we have to address.

4.0.3 In addition, a series of Roadshows and Focus Groups were run to allow us to engage further with employees in an open space which allowed for more fluid

feedback. This also gave hard to reach employees the opportunity to ensure that their voice was heard.

4.0.4 Further focus groups and engagement activities based on the more detailed analysis will be carried out for specific groups and areas.

4.1 Stress Audit

4.1.1 As part of our wellbeing agenda the Council is committed to providing a safe and healthy work experience for all employees. One priority within the scope of the wellbeing agenda is to tackle stress at work. In May 2014 a Stress Audit was issued to all employees of the Council. The survey was based on the Health & Safety Executive's Management Standards Indicator Tool for work related stress.

4.1.2 The purpose of the survey was to capture information of how stress and pressure at work was impacting on staff across the Council and identify areas for action given that stress accounted for almost a quarter of the Council's sickness absence in 2012/13. Over 1400 responses to the survey were received providing a response rate of 26%.

4.1.3 Following analysis of the information received the following actions were undertaken:

- Our findings were generally in line with other organisations of a similar size;
- Focus groups were held to allow employees to explore in more detail the key themes that came out of the survey data, feedback from the sessions is provided below;
- Corporate Stress Audit Action Plan prepared.

4.1.4 Stress Audit Focus Groups

The data from the Audit highlighted where there were positives and negatives from the employees' perspective. Benchmarking against other similar organisations which had completed the Work Positive survey tool indicated that the Council's findings were comparable to similar organisations in most areas.

4.1.5 Positives identified from the survey included a high proportion of staff who felt

- they have the skills to do their job (85%)
- they know how to go about getting the job done (94%)
- have a say over the way they work (70%)
- have adequate equipment to do their job (68%)

4.1.6 The survey provided the opportunity for respondents to provide free text responses indicating areas of pressure for them and over 2000 were received. Coupled with the survey data. Initial analysis of these responses outlined that there was a perception that morale in the organisation was relatively low and allowed key themes to be identified as potential areas for future action and improvement. These included:

- Managing demands in terms of workload- a sense of having to do more with less resource
- Management Support
- Communication and Consultation about change
- Relationships and conflict at work

4.1.7 While the survey itself was useful in identifying broad areas for further investigation it did not provide sufficient detail around what could be done to improve. Focus groups were set up in each of the Council's main areas to allow a more detailed look into these areas with a view to teasing out how we could change/ improve to better meet the expectations of our employees. Employees in each area were invited to attend focus groups which were split into specific staff groups as follows:

- Managers
- Administrative Staff
- Elementary Occupations
- Professionals
- Para Professionals/ Technical

4.1.8 The focus groups covered a number of areas including demands, communication, flexibility, support and relationships at work. It was evident from the focus groups that employees are keen to contribute their views and would like more opportunity to do so. The overarching theme which has emerged from the focus groups and has been evident throughout the other engagement activity that has been undertaken is that employees feel the need for greater support from management and there is a desire for more open, honest two way dialogue between employees and managers.

4.1.9 As was outlined in the survey data, issues around workload and demands in the context of decreasing resources were raised in the focus group discussions. However some employees linked these back to management suggesting employees may be more able to cope with demands if managers were more realistic about timescales particularly where approval is required by two or three levels of management or alternatively by giving employees the control to make some local or team level decisions without requiring approval.

4.1.10 There were positive comments around flexibility with some employees recognising the positive contribution of IT such as Video Conferencing and home working and the ability to work flexible hours. There was some desire expressed to see the hours of the flexi time scheme expanded to increase this flexibility. There were also some comments around issues with IT systems and it was acknowledged that the level of flexibility afforded to staff varied across services and teams.

4.1.11 The focus groups provided employees with the opportunity to think about what the Council as their employer could do to improve with regards to some of the issues that were brought up during the course of the discussions and some excellent suggestions were put forward and a number of these will be picked up in the Corporate Employee Action Plan. A summary of the suggestions are outlined below:

- Culture change (around expectation to work outwith hours)
- Joint Management and Staff Forum for discussion of issues
- Review of flexi time scheme
- Regular line manager meetings
- Improve PRD process and equality of access for all staff
- Develop an “App” for the hub to allow improved access
- Listen to staff ideas
- Train staff in making better use of the Hub
- Compulsory training for managers to include
 - Effective Communications (particularly where they manage geographically dispersed teams)
 - Recognising, challenging and dealing with conflict at work as it occurs
 - Stress Competencies

4.2 Morale Survey

4.2.1 A short morale survey was undertaken in June 2014 as outlined in the Audit Scotland Action plan requirement. The purpose of this survey was to specifically look at morale issues on the back of feedback received from both Audit Scotland and the Stress Survey.

4.2.2 The survey explicitly asked questions related to how happy employees were in their jobs and what morale was like as well as giving the opportunity for free text feedback. Although the response rate was low, the findings were in line with those contained within the Stress Survey.

4.2.3 Following detailed analysis of the information it was confirmed in the findings that there was a strong correlation between employees feeling positive about their job and feeling morale of their section was positive, to those who felt

negative about their job and also felt negative about morale within their section and, the underlying cause related to management and workload. These conclusions highlighted the need to further look at how the Council could improve the management practice and employee workload issues, which were also prevalent within the Stress Audit and the Employee Survey and thereafter prepare a detailed action plan to address the issues raised.

4.3 Employee Survey

4.3.1 Following on from the 2012 employee survey IBP were again selected through a tender exercise to carry out an employee survey. The survey had 1363 responses equating to 30% of the workforce, though this is down slightly from the 33% response rate of the 2012 survey, it is within the range of response rates achieved by other Local Authorities.

4.3.2 The 2014 survey was broadly the same as the 2012 with some additional questions relating to Healthy working lives and Gaelic. The benefit of consistent questions is that analysis of trends can be made in comparison to previous surveys.

4.3.3 The Key findings of the survey were:

- The ratings in the You and Your Work section have remained reasonably consistent with the 2012 survey.
- There are modest improvements in the extent to which people have had training and development in comparison to the 2012 survey.
- Some, though not all, of the communications indicators are showing modest improvement – typically a few percentage points though a 9% improvement in relation to team briefings.
- Awareness of the Hub has increased from 78% to 90%.
- General views of the Council as an employer are up very slightly.
- Continuation in peoples' priorities for improvement – training and development, consultation, communication.
- 21% would like to learn some Gaelic phrases to communicate with customers.
- High level of support for continued Christmas closure - 78%.

4.3.4 To explore the common themes in comparison to the stress audit and morale survey the area focussed on for analysis is **My Job** the comparisons from Employee Survey 2012 are shown in the table below:

Table One: Comparison with 2012 Survey on areas of highest agreement and disagreement:

Areas of strong agreement	2012	2014	Change
Having an interesting job	88%	91%	+3%
Getting support from colleagues	86%	88%	+2%
Being treated with respect by colleagues	86%	87%	+1%
Enjoying their work	82%	85%	+3%
Being clear about their duties	83%	83%	0%
Being treated with respect by line manager/supervisor	80%	83%	+3%
Areas of strong disagreement			
Being able to cope with amount of work they are expected to do	17%	25%	+8%
Receiving regular constructive feedback on their job	26%	25%	-1%
Having authority to make decisions needed to do their job properly	15%	16%	+1%
Line manager/supervisor ensuring support needed to do job well	12%	14%	+2%
Feeling work contribution is recognised	13%	14%	+1%

4.4 SMT Roadshow Events – November 2014

4.4.1 Employee engagement events were held in 6 locations across Argyll and Bute; Oban, Lochgilphead, Campbeltown, Helensburgh, Rothesay and Dunoon.

4.4.2 A cross section of employees from each area were invited to attend 2 hour sessions which featured a short presentation from the SMT followed by smaller focus group sessions where employees were asked to talk about the following:

- If they feel empowered at work (e.g. do they feel they are given the right support to do their job well)
- What people like about working for the Council,
- What people like about living in Argyll and Bute,
- What type of employer people want the Council to be; and
- Whether there is anything they would like to know more about that wasn't covered at the event.

4.4.3 In general, the events has been positive, employees on the whole feel empowered at work, they are happy with the level of communications they receive (excluding manual workers) and feel that the Council is a good employer (good Terms and Conditions – flexitime, holidays) and that living in Argyll and Bute offers a good quality of life. However there is scope for

improvement and specific actions have been identified, a number of which are listed below:

- Lync – More training required on functionality and etiquette
- Marketing of Argyll and Bute – different campaigns for different areas and different groups e.g. school leavers, young professionals, families
- Cascade Communications – more information on financial outlook
- Argyll and Bute Council as an employer – employees want us to be caring, supportive, transparent, use less consultants, offer more career progression opportunities and have a senior management team that are engaged at all levels of the organisation.

4.5 Common Themes across the Surveys

- 4.5.1 There are strong positives from the data gathered across the surveys. There is a general view that staff enjoy their work, with the Employee Survey showing an increase from 82 to 85% of staff who enjoy their job. The Employee Survey also demonstrates a modest positive trend in most indicators which is encouraging. As is an increase from 86% in 2012 to 90% of employees knowing what standards are expected of their work and believing that what they do is important to Council success up to 79% from 75%.
- 4.5.2 This links back to the Stress Audit where 85% of employees stated that they were clear of what was expected of them at work, whereas 78% stated that they understood how their work fitted into the overall aims of the organisation.
- 4.5.3 Having specifically assessed the levels of and trend in staff morale there is a strong correlation between the three surveys which shows that job satisfaction is high across all surveys. In the Stress Survey staff reinforce that they have the skills to do their job and know how to go about getting their job done; the morale survey outlined 60% of staff who were neutral to very happy in their job and the Employee Survey showed a slight improvement from 2012 figures in job satisfaction overall.
- 4.5.4 The Employee Survey included a number of questions which were asked earlier in the year in the Stress Survey and a slight improvement has been identified in the following areas:

Table Two: Survey Response Comparison- Improvements

Question	Stress Survey	Employee Survey
Respect from other employees	64%	87%
Supportive feedback from manager	34%	49%
Clear of what is expected at work	85%	90%

- 4.5.5 The morale survey clearly identify that there was a strong correlation between staff feeling positive about their job and feeling the morale of their section was positive. Similarly staff who felt negative about their job and felt negative about the morale in their section.
- 4.5.6 Significantly the three key areas of concern highlighted across all surveys are that low morale is affected by perceived increase in workload and a lack of support/communication with managers. The employee survey highlights: being able to cope with the amount of work they are expected to do (25%), receiving regular constructive feedback on their work (25%), having the authority to make the decisions needed to do their job properly (16%), line manager / supervisor ensuring support need to do job well (14%), and feeling that work contribution is recognised (14%) as the main areas for action. These results very much reflect the morale survey and stress audit results.

Table Three: Survey Comparison- Areas for action

Question	Stress Survey	Morale Survey	Employee Survey
Employees able to cope with amount of work	32%	30%	25%
Where my post links to Council success	78%	Not asked	79%
Management seeking views about changes	26%	Not asked	30%
Management communicating effectively with employees	59%	30%	30%

4.5.7 A comparison of the 2012 Employee Survey with the 2014 Employee Survey stated that there has been little overall change although a few modest improvements are apparent in some areas that were previously less well rated. The following areas have been identified as an area for improvement in 2014 Employee Survey Action Plan.

Table Four – Key Areas targeted for Improvement 2012 Employee Survey Action Plan

Employee Survey – Highest disagreement:	2014 %	2012 %	Difference
My Job: Being able to cope with the amount of work expected	25%	17%	-8%
My Training: Having had the agreed training and development needed to do the job	18%	20%	-2%
Communication: management Communicating effectively with employees	30%	29%	-1%

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The information collated and analysed from the surveys has allowed us to form an understanding of our employees and their views on the Council as their employer, focussing on areas which are important to them as well as providing information to allow us to prepare to meet the challenges of the future.

5.2 The Employee Survey has allowed us to identify areas where we are improving and analyse trends from the previous survey which was completed in 2012. The Stress Audit was specifically carried out to identify pressure areas with a view to developing an action plan which would assist with mitigating stressors at work. The Morale survey and the SMT Roadshows have supported the views that have received through the comprehensive and independently carried out surveys.

- 5.3 A joint action plan will incorporate areas for improvement linked to analysis from all feedback received as detailed in section 3.
- 5.4 It should be noted that all the surveys mean nothing if it does not lead to action, so detailed feedback will now be carefully reviewed by topic and theme, but also by department, to produce a detailed action plan to make sure that we continue to improve.
- 5.5 Ensuring that these actions are delivered will contribute to improving our overall employee engagement, which will result in improved performance, lower absence and an organisation which is resilient to change and prepared for the future.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy: No issues directly from this paper, but some policies may require to be reviewed in light of the findings.
- 6.2 Financial : Realignment of communications, training, development to address the findings; further analysis of the collective data as well as carrying out further focus groups will be funded from the IHR Budget.
- 6.3 Legal: The council has a duty under the Health and Safety at work Act (1974) to provide a safe and healthy work environment. This duty includes taking action to mitigate the risk of work related stressors.
- 6.4 HR: Review of specific policies and procedures to support managers as well as additional roadshows. Engagement is essential to improving employee wellbeing and reducing absence.
- 6.5 Equalities: The stress audit and employee surveys were carried out in accordance with the council's equality duties. In order to ensure that as many employees as possible had access to the surveys, the stress audit and employee survey were provided in electronic and hard copy, which was sent to employees' home addresses.
- 6.6 Risk: Failure to communicate the results of the survey and implement action to mitigate workplace stressors where appropriate may risk a further reduction in staff morale. Failure to engage meaningfully with employees may result in inability to manage change effectively in the organisation.

6.7 Customer Service: Low levels of staff morale/ wellbeing have the potential to impact on the ability of employees to work to their full potential and may impact on the level of service received by our customers.

Douglas Hendry – Executive Director Customer Services

Policy Lead – Dick Walsh

For further information contact: Jane Fowler, Head of Improvement and HR,
01546 604466