

Argyll and Bute Council

Internal Audit Report

June 2019

FINAL

Organisational Culture

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1. Executive Summary

Introduction

1. As part of the 2018/19 internal audit plan, approved by the Audit & Scrutiny Committee in March 2018, we have undertaken a review of Argyll and Bute Council's (the Council) Organisational Culture.
2. The review was conducted in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) with our conclusions based on a staff and elected member (members) survey, discussions with staff and the information available at the time the fieldwork was performed.
3. This is not a traditional audit in that there is no clear framework or best practice guidance against which the Council's culture can be assessed or benchmarked nor is it a review of compliance against existing controls and processes. Consequently this report, unlike usual audit reports, does not include an overall audit opinion, rather it provides a series of key messages for the Council's Strategic Management Team (SMT) to consider. The SMT have provided a response to those key messages (Appendix 1) and agreed a combined action plan bringing together the actions to address key messages highlighted in this report with those highlighted by the Council's 2019 employee survey.

Background

4. The Council's Corporate Plan 2017-2022 sets out the Council's vision, mission and agreed priorities and how they are to be delivered. The plan summarises how the Council will deliver these priorities including:
 - developing our positive organisational culture and remaining an employer of choice
 - ensuring our workforce have the skills knowledge and behaviours to support our vision now and in the future.
5. The Council's senior management have the prime responsibility for defining and analysing organisational culture by promoting and modelling the values and the behaviours they wish to see across the organisation. This includes developing a culture of learning from experience, developing the right behaviour, challenging inappropriate behaviours and ensuring systems and processes that produce desired behaviours are being embedded across the Council.
6. Organisations demonstrating a 'best practice' culture are not just articulating a set of values and behaviours; they are ensuring that those values and behaviours are integrated and applied consistently at all levels of the organisation.
7. There is no absolute agreement on the definition of organisational culture but it is commonly interpreted as "the way we do things around here". Issues attributable to sub-optimal organisational culture may include:
 - undesirable outcomes arising from inconsistent priorities
 - lack of, and inconsistent communication, reducing efficiency and effectiveness
 - adverse organisational reputation and staff morale
 - unwillingness or inability to deal with operational issues as they arise
 - the values/behaviours in use are not consistent with the espoused values/behaviours.

8. Due to their pervasive nature such issues may not be detected by systems of internal control. Neither will they necessarily be addressed as a result of organisational perceptions of what is considered to be the norm. As such it is important that staff and members operate in accordance with a set of values. The tone at the top of the Council should be consistent with these values with the same tone cascaded down to all staff.

Scope

9. As part of our review we considered a wide range of issues including whether:
- The Council has a set of meaningful values which are clearly communicated, underpin the overall ethical framework within which the Council operates, and are evidenced through current practice.
 - The Council and senior management set an appropriate 'tone at the top' providing strong and clear direction with processes in place to allow staff to confidently raise concerns and ideas or suggestions.
 - There is an established and effective staff performance development review process which is aligned to the delivery of the Council's business outcomes and confirms how the Council's values are reflected in job roles and staff development.
 - The Council demonstrates a commitment to staff and their development with training and development programmes in place that are aligned to job roles.
 - Staff feel they are valued, trusted, treated fairly and empowered and supported in their roles.
 - Staff surveys are regularly carried out with meaningful analysis undertaken to allow sufficient and appropriate management response.
 - There is constructive engagement between members and staff.

Staff and Member Surveys

10. As part of our review we conducted a staff survey and a member survey to gather a range of views on key questions based on the themes set out in exhibit 1. Both surveys were carried out in August 2018.

Exhibit 1 – Survey Themes

Staff Survey	Member Survey
Tone From The Top	Tone From The Top
My Manager	The Council
My Team	Engagement with Staff
Myself	
Working For the Council	
Engagement with Members	

11. Questions, phrased as statements, within each theme were designed to provide audit evidence to enable an assessment against each of the areas highlighted in paragraph 9. For each statement respondents were asked to confirm if they 'Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Neither Agreed or Disagreed (NA or D), Disagreed (D) or Strongly Disagreed (SD).
12. In addition each theme included a free text question which allowed respondents to offer additional feedback. Responses to free text questions ranged from single comments/suggestions for improvement to more extensive responses with multiple comments. These were analysed to identify recurring themes. Throughout the report, where recurring themes are referenced, the

number allocated to them relates to the number of times the theme was suggested rather than the number of respondents.

13. For the purposes of the survey 'Senior Management' was defined as the Chief Executive, Executive Directors and Heads of Service and 'My Manager' was defined as the respondents direct line manager including headteachers in schools.
14. There were 453 responses to the staff survey. Exhibit 2 illustrates the extent to which responses were received from staff across all the Council directorates. Council staff who work for the Health & Social Care Partnership (HSCP) were excluded from the survey as the HSCP are developing their own values. Note that all questions in the survey were optional so whilst there were a total of 453 staff responses the number of responses to individual questions will vary.

Exhibit 2 – Staff Survey Responses

Directorate	Responses	% of Total
Chief Executive's Unit	30	7%
Development & Infrastructure	103	23%
Customer Services (Not Education)	135	30%
Education	68	15%
Rather Not Say	104	22%
Question Not Completed	13	3%
Total	453	

15. Of the Council's 36 elected members, 17 responded to the member survey with those responses covering all four of the Council's administrative areas.

2. Key Findings

16. Exhibit 3 sets out the key issues identified during the planning phase of the audit and a summary of the areas for focus identified by the fieldwork phase. There is some overlap/repetition in the areas for focus due to some key themes identified being pertinent to more than one issue.

Exhibit 3 – Areas for Focus

	Issue	Areas for Focus
1	The Council has a set of meaningful values which are clearly communicated, underpin the overall ethical framework within which the Council operates and are evidenced through current practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed the new Council values into operational working practices. • Continue to raise awareness of the new values. • Communications team to be represented on the Culture Steering Group (CSG).
2	The Council and senior management set an appropriate 'tone at the top' providing strong and clear direction with processes in place to allow staff to confidently raise concerns and ideas or suggestions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication from senior management. • Clearer information on direction of travel. • Visibility and location of senior management. • Support and encouragement for staff. • Commitment to service improvement. • Promote the staff suggestion scheme (see paragraph 26).

	Issue	Areas for Focus
3	There is an established and effective staff performance development review process which is aligned to the delivery of the Council's business outcomes and confirms how the Council's values are reflected in job roles and staff development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater clarity over senior management's expectations of the revised performance review and development (PRD) process. • Engagement with services to determine how PRDs can be delivered where managers have a large number of staff to line manage.
4	The Council demonstrates a commitment to staff and their development with training and development programmes in place that are aligned to job roles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and addressing staff concerns. • Encouraging and supporting innovation. • Communication with staff and wider stakeholders. • Staff development, recruitment and retention.
5	Staff feel they are valued, trusted, treated fairly and empowered and supported in their roles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and staff engagement. • Visibility of line management. • Consistent application of policies. • Support and encouragement for staff. • Empowerment. • Teamworking. • Recognition of good performance.
6	Staff surveys are regularly carried out with meaningful analysis undertaken to allow sufficient and appropriate management response.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve staff survey feedback and evidence action being taken to address issues. • Consider the cost/benefit of conducting exit interviews.
7	There is constructive engagement between members and staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the different roles of members and staff. • Engagement between staff and members. • Consistent use of existing member query process.

3. Detailed Findings

The Council has a set of meaningful values which are clearly communicated, underpin the overall ethical framework within which the Council operates and are evidenced through current practice.

17. The Council's CSG was established in 2016, meets on a quarterly basis (approximately) and is chaired by the Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure. It comprises a cross section of staff. The overall purpose of the CSG is to support the development of a positive organisational culture across the organisation. CSG minutes are reported to the SMT which provides senior management with oversight over progress.
18. The CSG is in the process of refreshing its membership. Communicating key messages and the output of CSG activity to staff is a key part of developing the Council's culture and we would recommend that the CSG works with the Communications Team to achieve this. This is reinforced by the fact that the CSG issued their first newsletter in February 2018 with no further newsletters being published since. We would also recommend that the CSG work programme aligns with relevant corporate work plans e.g. HR work plan, staff survey timetable. This will allow the CSG to give cognisance to the issues highlighted in this report and the findings of the

Council's recently completed staff survey. This would help provide greater focus for the CSG's work and help ensure their activity is developed in conjunction with colleagues in Human Resources and Organisational Development and Communications.

19. The CSG terms of reference set out their key areas of focus with one being '*To agree proposed corporate values.*' To facilitate this, additional questions were added to the 2016 employee survey to consult staff on their views on the Council's values and the aspirations of staff for the reputation and vision of the Council of the future. The CSG used the feedback from this survey to inform the development of new Council values (the four Cs) which were launched in 2018. These are set out in exhibit 4.

Exhibit 4 – The Four Cs

CORPORATE VALUES			
CARING	COMMITTED	CREATIVE	COLLABORATIVE
<p>We care about our citizens, partners and each other. We treat everyone with dignity and respect and are accountable for what we do. We listen to our communities. When things go wrong we take action to put it right</p>	<p>Ours is a Council that is committed to putting values at the heart of our efforts to make a positive difference every day to people's lives. We take pride in our responsibility to provide a safe working environment and to make available appropriate opportunities for professional development and growth for all employees.</p>	<p>We are responsive to our citizens and our environment and we embrace change to ensure we continually deliver the best results for our area.</p>	<p>We know that when we work together we can achieve the best for our area. We are open, honest and transparent in our communication. We involve and work with communities, each other and our partners where possible to share knowledge, resources and assets.</p>

20. The values have been communicated to staff over a period of time using the Council HUB, newsletters, articles in Cascade and blogs. Communications have included descriptions of each value and practical examples from staff on what they mean to them in their Council roles. However awareness of the values amongst staff could be improved if a more structured implementation plan, including a communication plan, was established. Some strategies employed by other organisations when rolling out new values have included:
- embedding values into performance review and recruitment processes (see paragraph 36)
 - embedding the values into the staff induction process
 - advertising the values on pens, lanyards and posters and via standardised desktop images and screensavers
 - aligning staff awards to values.
21. The CSG will need to continue to raise awareness of the values if they are to become embedded in routine operational practice. This will be helped by the values becoming embedded in the Council's PRD process which it is intended will be implemented by March 2020. This is discussed further at paragraphs 33-39.
22. As the new values have only been implemented in the last 12 months it is too early to assess the extent to which they are evidenced through current practice. However there is evidence that the Council are committed to developing and improving the Council's culture and making progress to embed the values in the overarching strategic vision for the Council by incorporating them in

the Council's Corporate Plan, with further work required to embed them in the everyday practice of managers and staff.

The Council and senior management set an appropriate 'tone at the top' providing strong and clear direction with processes in place to allow staff to confidently raise concerns and ideas or suggestions.

23. Exhibit 5 provides a summary of staff responses to the four 'Tone from the Top' statements about senior management.

Exhibit 5 – Staff Survey - Tone from the Top

Question	Responses	SA or A	NA or D	D or SD
Senior management provide and communicate a clear direction of travel for the Council	446	40%	30%	30%
Senior management communicate sufficiently about employee successes and challenges	449	38%	33%	29%
Senior management are visible and approachable	446	34%	22%	44%
Senior management encourage ideas and suggestions from staff	443	38%	35%	27%

24. Overall it can be seen that there is a mixed response. For three of the four questions a higher proportion were broadly positive in their response however it is evident staff feel senior management visibility and communication are areas for improvement. In particular 44% disagree or strongly disagree that senior management are visible and approachable. To some extent this is to be expected due to the geographical spread of the Council's offices.
25. 188 staff members, in addition to completing the four questions in exhibit 5 also completed a free-text question '*Is there anything you feel senior management could do differently to make a positive contribution to the Council's culture?*' An analysis of the comments identified three overarching themes as set out in exhibit 6.

Exhibit 6 – Key Themes for Improvement – Senior Management

Theme 1 – Communication / Interaction (128 Comments)	
Overall Message	Specific Suggestions
Respondents expressed a wish for senior management to interact more with staff, both in a casual, approachable, face to face manner and more formally, through team meetings and/or briefings. There were a number of comments which, without making specific suggestions, highlighted a wish for more information about decision-making processes and outcomes and more frequent and clear communication about the Council's direction of travel and changes at a Council wide and service level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periodic opportunity for staff to meet senior management to discuss the Council's direction and challenges. • Expand the use of the predominantly well received Chief Executive blog to other members of the SMT. • Senior management should make time for slots on team meetings to engage directly with staff and seek their input. • Periodic service newsletters in a standard format which report on issues such as performance, new starters, leavers, changes to service delivery etc.

Theme 2 – Visibility / Physical Location (66 Comments)	
Overall Message	Specific Suggestions
Respondents made a large number of references to never seeing senior management, a need for them to be more visible to staff, and to the barriers establishing an open culture and effective relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building periodic visits to other Council offices and schools into work schedules. Senior management to engage more closely with teams.
Theme 3 – Supportive (38 Comments)	
Overall Message	Specific Suggestions
A number of respondents felt they would benefit from senior management doing more to recognise success, publicise positive messages and promote staff feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create and promote a staff suggestion scheme and publicise action being taken as a consequence (see paragraph 26).

26. A number of responses made suggestions relating to the need for an incentivised suggestion scheme despite the Council having one which is detailed on the HUB. This suggests a need for the scheme to be better promoted and for its visibility on the HUB to be improved. It was further noted that the submission process requires a word document to be downloaded, populated and then e-mailed to a specific address. Staff may be more inclined to use the scheme if submission was a quicker process using a web based form.
27. Exhibit 7 provides a summary of member responses to three statements about senior management.

Exhibit 7 –Member Survey - Tone from the Top

Question	Responses	SA or A	NA or D	D or SD
Senior management encourage and support innovative thinking	17	41%	47%	12%
Senior management communicate sufficiently about employee successes and challenges	17	71%	17%	12%
Senior management are visible and approachable	17	82%	6%	12%

28. Overall members have responded positively although two indicated that senior management could be more visible, supportive and better encourage innovative thinking.
29. A total of eight responses were received from members to the free-text question '*Is there anything you feel senior management could do differently to make a positive contribution to the Council's culture?*' The majority of comments were broadly consistent with the staff free-text responses highlighting the need for better communication and engagement (with greater focus on member engagement), and seeking and accepting constructive feedback.
30. Members were also asked for their views on the Council as an organisation in relation to service delivery, support of members and engagement with external partners. Exhibit 8 provides a summary of their responses.

Exhibit 8 – Member Survey – The Council

Question	Responses	SA or A	NA or	D or
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			D	SD
The Council demonstrates a commitment to improving the quality of service delivery	17	59%	24%	17%
The Council provides appropriate support to members to allow them to perform their role	17	65%	12%	23%
The Council engages constructively with external partners to deliver services	17	59%	18%	23%

31. Overall members have responded positively although four would welcome more support to perform their role and more constructive engagement with external partners.
32. A total of seven responses were received from members to the free-text question '*Do you have any suggestions about how the Council can enhance its reputation with stakeholders?*' The only recurring theme within the comments centred on a need for the Council to ensure it works in partnership with members and external partners to deliver shared objectives.

There is an established and effective staff performance development review process which is aligned to the delivery of the Council's business outcomes and confirms how the Council's values are reflected in job roles and staff development.

33. The Council's PRD process is based on a competency framework which is aligned to the Council's previous values. The seven categories in the framework are:

- Customer Focussed
- Working with Others
- Delivering Results
- Creativity and Innovation
- Embracing and Delivering Change
- Delivering Quality Through Decision Making
- Leadership

34. Within each category are a range of competencies classified as either level 1 (All Staff), Level 2 (Line Managers), Level 3 (Senior Managers) or Level 4 (Leaders).
35. Currently PRDs are only carried out for administrative, professional, technical and clerical (APT&C) staff thus excluding a number of roles such as cleaners, caterers and many roles within the roads & amenities service. Approximately 55% of council roles are covered by the current PRD process and the SMT are committed to ensuring the PRD process can be applied to all staff. Of those services currently completing PRDs the overall 2018/19 completion rate was 79% (an improvement on the 2017/18 rate of 57%) with this further broken down as per exhibit 9.

Exhibit 9 – 2018/19 PRD Completion Rates

	Employees	PRDs Completed	% PRDs Completed
Total	3,001	2,385	79%
Chief Executive's Unit	51	49	96%
Community Services	1,680	1,350	80%
Customer Services	357	347	97%
Development & infrastructure	410	381	93%
HSCP	503	258	51%

Source: Pyramid Performance System

36. Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR&OD) are currently working on a project to revise the PRD process. Work to redesign the competencies to align them with the new values has been completed however this won't be implemented until the March 2020 PRD process. Further work is underway to consider how to embed the values in the Council's recruitment process.
37. However the element of the project to ensure the PRD process can be applied to all staff is currently on hold as further clarity is required over the purpose of PRDs and how they can be delivered operationally. For example there needs to be greater clarity over the extent to which the process finds a balance between being a performance review and a development tool and how much it should focus on behavioural issues as well as performance.
38. There also needs to be further consideration of how PRDs can be delivered in services where a manager has line manager responsibility for a large number of staff. For example, in areas such as road workers, refuse collectors and cleaning, managers can be line managing as many as 300 staff meaning it isn't practical to conduct PRD meetings on an annual basis. Further engagement with these services is required to establish how they can deliver PRDs in a manner which is not excessively resource intensive.
39. These key questions need to be addressed before the new PRD process is finalised to ensure a process is implemented which is both practical and meets the expectations of the SMT.

The Council demonstrates a commitment to staff and their development with training and development programmes in place that are aligned to job roles.

40. Exhibit 10 provides a summary of staff responses to the five 'Working for the Council' survey questions.

Exhibit 10 – Staff Survey – Working for the Council

Question	Responses	SA or A	NA or D	D or SD
The Council demonstrates a commitment to improving the quality of service delivery	447	51%	31%	18%
Feedback from staff surveys is communicated effectively and in a timely manner	446	37%	40%	23%
The Council acts upon the feedback received via staff surveys	440	18%	55%	27%
The Council's culture supports the idea of being a learning organisation so I am not scared to try and fail	440	35%	35%	30%
Flexible working policies are applied appropriately taking into account the requirements of the service	444	60%	23%	17%

41. This indicates that there is scope for improvement in terms of communicating the output of staff surveys and evidencing action taken to address them. Whilst just over a half of respondents agree the Council is committed to improving service delivery it is notable that only a third feel they are supported to try innovative ideas without fear of failure.
42. 147 of respondents, in addition to completing the five questions in exhibit 10 also completed a free-text question 'Do you have any suggestions about how the Council can improve its reputation as an employer?' An analysis of the comments identified three overarching themes as set out in exhibit 11.

Exhibit 11 – Key Themes for Improvement – Working for the Council

Theme 1 – Leadership & Delivery (69 Comments)	
Overall Message	Specific Suggestions
<p>There was a strong sense amongst respondents that the Council would be a better employer if there was better staff and wider stakeholder communication, greater appreciation of work and home pressures, and if expectations were more realistic in light of reducing resources.</p> <p>There was also a recurring theme of staff wanting greater focus on service delivery, less bureaucracy and for innovative thinking to be encouraged and supported.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area workshops with staff, members, community councillors and other stakeholders to communicate key issues budget/resource pressures. • More flexible working, hot-desking and homeworking with relevant HR policies applied consistently. • Managers to engage personally and collectively with staff and provide constructive feedback. • Develop an incentive scheme to encourage innovative thinking (see paragraph 26).
Theme 2 – Staff Development & Reward (43 Comments)	
Overall Message	Specific Suggestions
<p>More focus on staff development through provision of suitable training, service specific qualifications and a more supportive culture of internal development was a common theme in responses.</p> <p>Staff rewards and a need to improve recruitment, especially of younger people, and retention also featured heavily although there was recognition that the financial pressures faced by the Council mean the scope for pay increase is limited.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and publicise ‘case studies’ of people whose careers have developed in the Council for potential recruits to see (see paragraph 43). • Showcase young people who work for the Council to demonstrate to school leavers that the Council is a viable career path (see paragraph 43). • Review staff retention to identify pressure points and root causes for staff leaving and consider strategies to address these causes (see paragraph 45). • Create more career routes and development opportunities for junior staff including opportunities for staff to shadow more experienced colleagues. • Consider providing a tangible form for rewarding excellent performance (see paragraph 44).
Theme 3 – Consistency (23 Comments)	
Overall Message	Specific Suggestions
<p>An overriding message in response to this question, and other free type questions in the survey, was that staff want Council HR policies to be applied equally and consistently. In particular this related to perceived inconsistencies in the way the Council’s flexi time, home working, compressed hours and holiday policies are being applied. There was, however, some feedback that excessive home working has a detrimental impact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertise the flexible working policy so staff are more aware of what they are entitled to. • Remove core hour requirement for posts with no practical need for those periods to be resourced. • Approval of regular home working must consider impact on output and other staff. • Inform managers of the benefits of flexible working.

on staff who work core hours.	
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43. The creation of case studies and showcasing of young people who work for the Council are initiatives that the Council has already implemented. That staff have suggested them provides evidence they need to be better promoted, in particular via the Council's social media channels.
44. The Council have an employee excellence and recognition awards ceremony on an annual basis where nominees and award winners are recognised for their efforts and performance over the year.
45. The Council's exit process is currently being reviewed. The current process is that an exit questionnaire is sent to leavers after they have left the Council and there is a low return rate. Consideration is being given to converting this to an online survey which would be made available to a staff member before they leave. Consideration could also be given to conducting exit interviews which may provide richer feedback however this benefit would need to be assessed against the additional resource requirement.

Staff feel they are valued, trusted, treated fairly and empowered and supported in their roles.

46. Exhibit 12 provides a summary of staff responses to the five 'My Manager' survey questions. These questions specifically referred to the respondent's line of management including headteachers in schools.

Exhibit 12 –Staff Survey – My Manager

Question	Responses	SA or A	NA or D	D or SD
I have confidence in the leadership skills of my manager	448	69%	14%	17%
My manager treats me and my colleagues fairly and consistently	447	74%	11%	16%
My manager creates a culture where staff feel empowered and innovative ideas to improve service delivery are welcomed	442	66%	15%	19%
I am confident raising an issue with my manager and know it will be dealt with confidentially and sensitively	450	71%	13%	16%
My manager expresses their appreciation when I do a good job	446	74%	11%	14%

47. Overall this is a very positive response and demonstrates that staff feel their line manager provides leadership, treats them fairly, provides appropriate support and creates a positive working environment.
48. 128 of respondents, in addition to completing the five questions in exhibit 12 also completed a free-text question '*Is there anything you feel your manager could do differently to make a positive contribute to the Council's culture?*' An analysis of the comments identified three overarching themes as set out in exhibit 13. It is noticeable that there is clear overlap with some of the themes identified for senior management at exhibit 6.

Exhibit 13 – Key Themes for Improvement – Line Management

Theme 1 – Communication / Leadership (70 Comments)	
Overall Message	Specific Suggestions
<p>Respondents expressed a wish for line managers to provide more leadership and, in particular, greater consistency in the way staff are treated and the application of council policy and procedures.</p> <p>Respondents also highlighted a desire for more visibility and better communication / staff engagement to ensure relevant information is disseminated and the team feel engaged in the vision and delivery of services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange one to one meetings away from the usual workspace. • More regular team meetings. • Periodic visits to the 'shop floor' to speak to staff.
Theme 2 – Supportive (35 Comments)	
Overall Message	Specific Suggestions
<p>A number of respondents felt they would benefit from line managers being more supportive including not practising a 'blame culture', trusting and empowering staff, recognising success, publicising positive messages and promoting staff feedback.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and promote a staff suggestion scheme and publicise action being taken as a consequence (see paragraph 26).
Theme 3 – Positive Feedback (32 Comments)	
Overall Message	Specific Suggestions
<p>An encouraging number of respondents took the time to praise the work and commitment of their line managers commenting that they could operate at a higher level, and with greater effectiveness, if more resources were made available.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No specific suggestions.

49. Exhibit 14 provides a summary of staff responses to three 'My Team' survey questions. These questions were designed to explore the extent to which staff feel they operate in a team

Exhibit 14 – Staff Survey – My Team

Question	Responses	SA or A	NA or D	D or SD
My team have regular and constructive team meetings	445	62%	19%	19%
My team work collaboratively to deliver team and council objectives	443	76%	15%	9%
I am encouraged to contribute to and/or make suggestions at team meetings	445	73%	16%	11%

50. This is a very positive response and demonstrates that, predominantly, staff feel their respective teams work well together and team meetings are sufficiently regular and provide a good opportunity for constructive engagement.
51. 113 of respondents, in addition to completing the three questions in exhibit 14 also completed a free-text question *'Is there anything you feel your team could do differently to make a positive contribution to the Council's culture?'* An analysis of the comments identified two overarching themes as set out in exhibit 15.

Exhibit 15 - Key Themes for Improvement – My Team

Theme 1 – Teamworking (55 Comments)	
Overall Message	Specific Suggestions
Whilst the survey highlighted a positive view of teamworking within the Council there was a significant number of comments highlighting concerns about team meetings not taking place and teams who don't work well together or identify and work toward common goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There were no specific suggestions, just a number of comments from people who feel a lack of 'face to face' meeting with team members is detrimental to the overall team culture and ensuring the teams are working efficiently with clear and shared objectives.
Theme 2 – Supported and Valued (28 Comments)	
Overall Message	Specific Suggestions
Whilst the survey confirmed staff are encouraged to contribute to and make suggestions at team meetings a number of staff feel those suggestions are not valued by people higher up the Council hierarchy. There was also a sense of insufficient recognition for good performance. A number of respondents reflected that resource reductions mean teams can no longer deliver services at previous levels and the Council need to reinstate support or reduce expectations on service delivery and improvements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teams should be better sighted on Council objectives with a clearer understanding of how their team's work reflects and helps deliver these objectives. Identify 'quick and inexpensive wins' to help with team morale (i.e. lunch time walks, tea breaks etc.). Opportunities for teams to promote themselves and 'tell their story' to share successes, challenges and lessons learned with other teams.

52. Exhibit 16 provides a summary of staff responses to two 'Myself' survey questions.

Exhibit 16 – Staff Survey – Myself

Question	Responses	SA or A	NA or D	D or SD
I am committed to helping my team deliver team and council objectives	447	97%	3%	0%
I am committed to helping ensure the Council is the best it can be	449	94%	5%	1%

53. This provided a very clear message that staff, on a personal level, feel they have a strong commitment to delivering both for their team and the Council.
54. 124 of respondents, in addition to completing the two questions in exhibit 16 also completed a free-text question *'Is there anything you feel you could do differently to make a positive*

contribution to the Council's culture?' An analysis of the comments identified two overarching themes as set out in exhibit 17.

Exhibit 17 – Key Themes for Improvement – Myself

Theme 1 – Improvement and Supporting Colleagues (41 Comments)	
Overall Message	Specific Suggestions
There was a degree of self-reflection amongst respondents with a number feeling they could be more positive and confident at work, and focus more on driving improvement and supporting colleagues.	<p>Rather than specific suggestions which could deliver improvements, comments tended to focus more on the behavioural change which would have a positive impact. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acknowledge there will be times when we try, fail and learn • focus on what has gone well instead of negatives • encourage staff to suggest improvements • participate in working/development groups • be proactive in sharing good news messages about the Council with the public • mentor colleagues to help their development • work more cooperatively across services • engage more with colleagues and teams to foster a greater sense of being one Council.
Theme 2 – Empowered (35 Comments)	
Overall Message	Specific Suggestions
In keeping with the results shown at exhibit 16 there was a sense that staff feel they are fully committed to delivering team and Council objectives. 27 responded that there was nothing more they could do to improve the Council's culture. However there was a recurring message that staff feel there is more they could do if they had more time and were empowered, trusted and supported to make decisions and be an impetus for change.	<p>Rather than specific suggestions about what individuals could do, the responses focused more on what people feel they needed to support them to contribute more. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • freedom to make decisions • ideas recognised and acted upon • assurance over contribution and value • acknowledgement and encouragement • job specific training and professional development • clearer expectations and personal objectives.

Staff surveys are regularly carried out with meaningful analysis undertaken to allow sufficient and appropriate management response.

55. A staff survey, seeking views on the Council, is undertaken approximately every two years. The last survey was carried out in 2016 and one was launched in March 2019. The 2016 survey was completed by 1,200 employees (approximately 25% of the Council workforce). The surveys are conducted and hosted by an independent contractor who also analyse the results on behalf of the Council. This ensures appropriate independence is built into the process.
56. The contractor provided a report to the Council on the 2016 survey results. This was a 28 page report which highlighted areas of good performance, areas requiring monitoring and areas for improvement. A presentation on the survey findings was given to the Council's Chief Officer Group in April 2017 which summarised the feedback and a '*You said it and We'll Do it*' summary

was made available to staff which highlighted actions the Council had committed to take to reflect the feedback.

57. However exhibit 10 illustrates that only 37% of respondents to the culture survey either agree or strongly agree that feedback on surveys is communicated effectively and in a timely manner and only 18% agree the Council acts on feedback received. This level of confidence in the Council's commitment to communicating and acting on feedback needs to be improved if staff are to feel their voice is important.
58. Analysis of the 2016 survey was used to inform the development of various things including the new Council values (see paragraphs 17-22), the Argyll and Bute Manager training course and the Council Communication, Marketing and Website Strategies 2018-2020.
59. A Health & Wellbeing survey was carried out in 2018 which collected the views of 1,233 employees. A summary of the output was communicated to staff and is readily available on the HUB.
60. The Council is currently developing a 'Health of the Organisation' report which will consider a range of aspects including sickness absence, staff turnover, reasons for staff leaving and performance to determine if there are any links between these aspects.
61. There is a recognition that more work is required to communicate with non APT&C staff and the Council's Communication & Engagement Group have developed a draft Employee Engagement Strategy which has a particular focus on staff who cannot readily access the Council IT systems.

There is constructive engagement between members and staff

62. Members and staff were asked a range of questions which focused on roles and responsibilities, levels of engagement and the quality of working relationships. Each group was asked four identical questions to allow a comparison of views with members asked a further question regarding the governance put in place by the Council to support staff/member relations.
63. Exhibit 18 provides a summary of the responses to the five questions. The number of responses column has been removed to make the table less cluttered. 17 members responded to all five questions and between 253 and 263 staff responded to the four they were asked.

Exhibit 18 – Staff (S) / Member (EM) Engagement

Question	SA or A		NA or D		D or SD	
	S	EM	S	EM	S	EM
I understand the different roles and responsibilities of staff and members	67%	94%	18%	0%	15%	6%
Staff respond to member queries within a satisfactory timescale	60%	18%	36%	18%	4%	64%
Relationships between members and staff are professional and constructive	41%	82%	50%	12%	9%	6%
Staff / member relationships in Argyll and Bute have improved in the past five years	30%	44%	61%	50%	9%	6%
There is effective governance and processes in place to support positive staff / member relationships	N/A	71%	N/A	12%	N/A	17%

64. In exhibit 18 the three most significant differences between member and staff opinions are highlighted in red. In particular this highlights contrasting views on whether staff respond to member queries within what is perceived to be a satisfactory timescale and the extent to which

relationships between the two groups are considered to be constructive and professional. It also highlights that 90% either agree that relationships have improved, or express no opinion (it should be noted that not all members/employees responding will be in a position to compare with five years ago).

65. Significant work has been undertaken to improve the member Casebook experience in relation to Roads and Amenity (R&A) queries, which make up the overwhelming percentage of all queries. The new R&A control Hub is now managing all customer service functions, in particular through two dedicated customer liaison posts. The focus for Casebook is on improved, model responses in a format suitable for onward transmission and proactive briefings on topical issues such as winter maintenance. This has had a positive impact with very few member queries now breaching the first stage response timeframes and, on a monthly basis, more queries are being closed than opened, meaning any backlog is being cleared.
66. 49 staff, in addition to completing the questions in exhibit 18 also completed a free-text question *'Do you have any suggestions about how engagement and working relationships between members and staff could be improved?'* An analysis of the comments identified two overarching themes as set out in exhibit 19.

Exhibit 19 – Key Themes for Improvement – Staff / Member Engagement

Theme 1 – Member Engagement (27 Comments)	
Overall Message	Specific Suggestions
Staff felt it would be beneficial to improve the understanding of the different roles and the engagement between staff and members, in particular keep members up-to-date with the impact that budget cuts are having on staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for staff to engage with members to discuss service delivery and challenges. • Provide clear guidance and/or training on the roles and responsibilities of staff and members.
Theme 2 – Member Query Process (11 Comments)	
Overall Message	Specific Suggestions
Comments broadly recognised that there is a process in place to enable members to log and manage queries (Casebook); however, a number of respondents felt this process was not always adopted by members and that, too often, staff are being approached directly rather than the Casebook process being adopted. Full adoption of Casebook would also help reduce conflict between staff and members regarding response times as these are stipulated by the Casebook process and can be monitored.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage members to use Casebook for all queries rather than direct approaches to members to staff.

67. Seven members, in addition to completing the questions in exhibit 18 also completed the free-text question *'Do you have any suggestions about how engagement and working relationships between members and staff could be improved?'* The responses were largely consistent with the survey results at exhibit 18 and some of the staff comments in exhibit 19. In particular three members would welcome the opportunity for more engagement between members and staff to

create a sense of working as a team and three raised issues about the time taken to get responses to member queries.

Other Comments

68. Both surveys provided a free text question which asked *'Is there anything else you would like to say about the Council's culture which hasn't been covered in the survey questions?'* This question attracted responses from 70 staff and six members; however, predominantly the key themes within the responses had already been highlighted in the other survey questions. In particular there was further reinforcement of a desire to see:

- greater empowerment and support for staff (21 comments)
- more of a teamworking ethos (13 comments)
- recognition of increasing workloads and job pressures with more realistic expectations (10 comments)
- better communication between management and staff and also members and staff (9 comments).

Appendix 1 – SMT Response

These are extremely challenging times for everyone who works in local government. Councillors have to make difficult decisions and employees are delivering services with fewer and fewer resources.

In these circumstances, how we work together can make all the difference in helping us succeed where we need to, for our employees, for our residents and for our communities.

We wanted therefore to carry out this review to help us find ways in which we can continue to develop and maintain constructive working relationships, through the unprecedented change happening in local government.

The SMT welcomes this report and would like to thank everyone who took the time to complete the survey, offer their views and provide a number of constructive ideas for improvement. We have reviewed the identified areas of focus and agreed a series of actions which have been categorised as either:

- Quick Fix (implementation before 31 August 2019)
- Medium Term (implementation before 31 December 2019)
- Longer Term (implementation before 31 March 2020)

Each action has been allocated to a member of the SMT who has overall responsibility for its implementation. The SMT agreed to create a combined action plan which addresses the areas of focus from this review with the areas of focus identified by the Council's 2019 employee survey.

The SMT has asked internal audit to feedback on progress against this action plan using their standard follow up process through which they report to SMT on a monthly basis. They also report on follow up of action points to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee as a standard agenda item at each committee meeting.



Cleland Sneddon

Chief Executive, Argyll and Bute Council