

EMPLOYEE OPINION SURVEY 2007

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES AND HUMAN RESOURCES

CABINET

20TH SEPTEMBER, 2007

Wards Affected

No Wards are affected.

Purpose

To note the contents of the Employee Opinion Survey report.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision.

Recommendation

THAT the Employee Opinion Survey report be noted.

Reasons

The Employee Opinion Survey is carried out annually, and this report is for information on the key findings of the 2007 Survey.

Considerations

1. The Employee Opinion Survey 2007 was run during July. This was to ensure that, as in 2006, the results could be used as part of the corporate planning process. 53% of employees completed the survey compared with 48% last year. This is well in excess of the 43% current average response rate for local government surveys (as identified by the Opinion Research Corporation). 28% returned the form electronically, compared with 21% in 2006 and 20% in 2005, when the electronic option was first introduced.
2. This year's responses in general, show marked improvements in the perception of employees over the areas covered by the survey questions. Work that the Council is doing to improve is clearly making a difference to what employees think. In most areas of the survey the message from employees is that things are getting better. Some of the improvements over the past year which may have led to the positive results, included:
 - Staff Review and Development (SRD) completion rate continues to improve – now the vast majority of employees have a review at least annually. The SRD process is firmly linked to the Council's performance management cycle. The Council achieved a 97% out-turn of SRD completion in 2007 (94% in 2006).

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
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- The continuing trend in improving the speed and efficiency of recruitment to Council posts by the introduction of the Council's Central Recruitment Centre in April 2006.
 - Actions that Directorates are taking to improve performance through people as part of the Council's commitment to the Investors in People standard - preliminary assessment against the Investors in People Standard takes place in October 2007.
 - The Council's commitment to achieving the Equality Standard in 2007/08; the positive impact of actions towards this is reflected in the Survey responses.
 - Updated leadership competencies for Council managers were introduced this year with Key Managers being assessed against them.
 - The Herefordshire Council values of 'Service with integrity, equity and empathy' were developed in consultation with employees, publicised and a programme to embed these, begun.
3. Actions taken during 2006-07 have clearly made a positive difference to employees, as responses to 13 survey questions this year are more positive than previously, with only one statement showing a significant negative shift: 36% of respondents this year disagree that action will be taken on the problems identified in this survey, which is higher than the level of disagreement on the same question in 2005, although lower than the 38% last year.
4. Examples of more positive responses are (organised here to reflect the themes of the Pay and Workforce Development Strategy):

Leadership

- Views about senior management have improved; all four relevant questions relating showed increased agreement. More people now feel valued by senior management; up from 44% in 2006 to 51%, and the proportion who feel that relations between senior management and employees are good has increased from 43% to 52% over the same period. There is also a marked rise in the numbers of people who feel that 'senior management is visible and approachable'. For the first time in the seven years of the survey, a majority of people (52%) feel that 'senior management's decision-making is fair'.
- There continues to be a large majority of respondents who feel valued by their line manager (80% this year) and who have a clear understanding of their job objectives and priorities (84% this year); both remaining relatively unchanged from previous years. Compared with last year, more people agreed, and fewer disagreed with the statement that 'I am encouraged to learn from things that don't work, and to share learning and best practice'.

Skills, learning and development

- Most respondents (77%) agree that they have adequate training for their job, the greatest level of agreement for that question yet recorded. Most are finding their staff review and development (SRD) meetings worthwhile (66%), continuing last year's upward trend. 50% of respondents stated that 'opportunities for development within the council are good', which represents a 5 percentage-point drop in disagreement since last year.

Organisation development

- There is a marked improvement in responses to questions in this section overall – generally, most of the questions show significant positive movement since last year. Over three-quarters of employees agree the council is good to work for - up from 69% last year to 76% now. More people feel the council is open, honest and accountable to all its customers (47%) and that the council takes into account the views and diverse needs of its customers (59%), than the proportions responding in 2005 and 2006.
- Agreement that 'plans, policies and processes are understandable' fell last year compared with 2005, but did rise from 48% in 2006 up to 54% this year. Perception of communications within service areas has changed little - currently 68% feel it works well. Disagreement with the statement that 'I am given enough information to enable me to understand why organisational change needs to happen' has fallen significantly. More employees (69%, compared with 65% last year) say they have 'the opportunity to ask questions about organisational change before, during, and after it has happened'.

Resourcing

- This year, more people are intending to be still working for the council in 12 months' time, up from 64% last year to 68% now. Views on the standards and targets in service areas remain unchanged with two thirds of respondents feeling they are achievable. Similarly the proportion who can meet the requirements of their job without working excessive hours has seen little change over the year, 55% agreeing now; a 1% gain since 2006.

Pay, reward and recognition

- There has been some improvement here. Around two thirds of respondents agree that they get recognition for a job well done; slightly higher than last year, and over three quarters get feedback on their progress from their immediate manager; much the same as last year. Agreement with the statement 'I am satisfied with the terms & conditions of my contract' improved from 63% to 69%, while disagreement fell from 30% to 25% correspondingly.

Employee wellbeing

- Views that people are treated fairly regardless of race, sexual orientation, age and position in the organisation are much the same as last year. The proportion who sometimes feel bullied or harassed by customers or service users has dipped a little from 34% to 33% over the year, while there has been little change in views of bullying or harassment from other sources in the same period.
- Respondents' morale maintains the positive trend, with 56% agreeing it is good in their work area compared with 55% last year, and 2005, when it was 43%. Fewer people disagreed this year with the sentiment that flexible working helps to 'avoid having problems' in meeting commitments either at work or at home.

Comparison with local government benchmark data (Opinion Research Corporation)

5. We compare favourably in terms of morale within the organisation, that employees have the resources needed to do their jobs properly and also that opportunities for flexible working allow people to avoid problems in meeting home and work commitments, health and safety, and the visibility of senior managers. Also, the Council's response rate of 53% this year is well in excess of the current average

response rate for local government, of 43%. Areas where the council does not compare well are: satisfaction with earnings, the intent to be working here in 12 months time and that employees can meet their job requirements without working excessive hours.

6. Given the 36% level of disagreement that actions will be taken as a result of the survey, it is important that action is taken and that it is communicated to employees as being one outcome from their feedback through the survey. This will be made clear from survey follow up in First Press and through employee involvement in service planning, for example. Clear links will also be made to the Investors in People (IiP) standard. This will be done by action planning against the standard with Directorates, the Corporate Management Board and Elected Members.

Financial Implications

None identified.

Risk Management

The Survey is a key management process, part of the Council's performance management. It contributes significantly to developing the Corporate Plan, Pay and Workforce Development Strategy and to shaping priorities for management action. If the Survey contents are not noted and publicised, employees may feel the Survey is not taken seriously and this may negatively impact motivation and performance.

Alternative Options

There are no alternative options.

Consultees

All non school-based employees were offered the opportunity to participate in the Survey. The Opinion Research Company is used (at no cost to the Council) for ideas in Survey construction, cross-fertilisation of improvement ideas with other Councils and to benchmark findings in key areas.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Comparison with ORC local government benchmarking data

Appendix 2 – Key differences in opinions from the 2006 and 2005 surveys

Background Papers

None identified.