Proposed actions to improve staff morale

Report summary:

Committee will recall that a Health and Safety Executive approved survey was undertaken of all staff during February of this year. This was carried out following comments made and concerns expressed at the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee when members were considering the draft budget proposals and the draft service plans for the 2021/2022 financial year. In total 329 officers responded representing a 67% response rate.

The findings of this survey were presented to this Committee on 4 March 2021. Strategic and Service Leads have since worked with their teams to discuss the results and develop action plans to work on any issues raised regarding operational matters. The action plans form part of an ongoing work plan to address and where necessary revisit issues raised through the survey results. This report outlines the issues raised in the action plans.

It is intended that the same Health and Safety Executive approved questionnaire will be distributed to staff during October/November and this will allow for a comparison position to be established and also an assessment of the extent to which the concerns raised have been addressed.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget   Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework   Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

(1) That the Scrutiny Committee consider the suggested actions as set out in this report.

Reason for recommendation:

There were results of significant concern in the survey of staff. Further investigation by Service and Strategic Leads has resulted in an action plan being created for each council service, which will improve upon these areas of concern over the coming months. Through this process issues have been raised which require the attention and action of Elected Members.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply)**:**
☐ Climate Action and Emergencies
☐ Coast, Country and Environment
☒ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
☐ Culture, Tourism, Leisure and Sport
☐ Democracy and Transparency
☐ Economy and Assets
☐ Finance

☐ Strategic Planning
☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities

Equalities impact Low Impact

Currently low impact. Any actions taken / not taking action on issues could have a high equalities impact and may require impact assessments.

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk; Currently low risk, any actions taken / not taking action on issues could be high risk and may need risk assessments.

Links to background information
- Report to Scrutiny Committee on 4 March 2021:
https://democracy.eastdevon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=148&MId=1479&Ver=4

Link to Council Plan:

Priorities (check which apply)

☐ Outstanding Place and Environment
☐ Outstanding Homes and Communities
☐ Outstanding Economic Growth, Productivity, and Prosperity
☒ Outstanding Council and Council Services

Report in full

1. **Background**

1.1 EDDC has traditionally been an organisation where staff morale has been high. In September 2019 EDDC was described as an organisation with a 'strong track record of successful delivery'; 'strong financial management'; 'high quality services' and a 'hardworking and committed workforce.' (source: LGA Peer Review - https://eastdevon.gov.uk/papers/cabinet/271119bpcabinetpeerreviewfinalreportsept2019.pdf). Committee should note that we are due a follow up review from an LGA team. This follow up review will reflect on what has happened in the Council since the 2019 report.

1.2 In January 2020 the Council achieved Platinum Investors in People status which is the highest status achievable. Previous to that the Council had been at Gold level (the previous highest status) for some 6 years. The IIP report has previously been circulated to the Committee (east-devon-district-council-review-2020-platinum-report-ac.pdf). In the context of this report the following extract is apposite: 'You…provide effective people management and development in order to achieve high levels of engagement, which has in turn delivered higher levels of performance overall and has enabled you to drive your ambition forward 'to be an outstanding and well run council which provides great services and outstanding opportunities for East Devon – now and for future generations'' This was further endorsed by people's passion around levels of service and support given to their residents, the community they serve and a genuine desire for EDDC to succeed, which I found inspirational. The encouraging high levels of involvement through working groups and team discussions during 1-2-1's and SMT/SMT+ meetings, is something which is highly appreciated by people across the business'.

1.3 In June 2020 a staff survey was carried out to ascertain how the organisation had fared during the first part of the pandemic. The results were considered by managers and a range

of responses introduced to ensure that as best we could, the concerns that were being raised were addressed. Noticeable in terms of the comments were an increase in workloads and the practical impact of working from home. Overall the feeling of staff was that we had adapted well to the pandemic but there were matters that required ongoing monitoring and careful consideration.

1.4 In February 2021, a Health and Safety Executive approved questionnaire was sent out to all staff. In total 329 officers responded, representing a 67% response rate.

The results of this survey confirmed that in terms of the H&SE stress factors the highest scoring returns were in respect of role, peer support and relationships. This confirmed some of the factors noted in the IIP report and was a positive result reflecting the inherent strength within our teams. In terms of inappropriate behaviour however, it was noticeable that although 83% stated they were never bullied at work, 6% of respondents stated they were sometimes bullied at work and 11% stated they were seldom bullied. The fact that 17% have given a qualified answer was considered to be significant due to the nature of the question. Also, in terms of not being subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour, although 62% of respondents stated they were never subject to personal harassment at work, 38% stated they were seldom, sometimes, often or always subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour. This was also significant due to the nature of the question.

The two lowest scoring (and therefore most negative) of the workplace stressors recognised by the H&SE were in regard to demand and change. In particular, officers reported that they were having to work intensively; having to work very fast; having to neglect some tasks because of having too much to do; different groups demanding things that are hard to combine; not having a choice in deciding what to do at work; and not always being consulted about change at work; and when changes are made at work, not being clear about how they will work in practice. When the results were split by teams and all the stressors were taken into account, the teams that were a priority for further assessment were Housing, Streetscene and Planning. The teams that had the highest average scores overall were HR/OD, Countryside and Economy.

2. Action Plans

Following the Health and Safety Executive questionnaire, all services within the council were engaged in follow up work. Strategic and Service Leads have worked with their teams to discuss the results and develop action plans to work on any issues raised. They will continue to work on these over the coming months and will regularly report back to their teams on progress. Committee should note that there have been reports to Cabinet addressing capacity and other issues directly related to staff morale so there is an evolving picture with a number of initiatives and actions being pursued concurrently.

The lists of issues and suggested actions for the consideration of Committee have been split according to the Health and Safety Executive list of 7 stressors, which relate back to the questions asked in the survey that was completed by staff. More information on these questions can be found in the previous report to this Committee: https://democracy.eastdevon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=148&MId=1479&Ver=4

These stressors are:

- Demand
- Change
- Control
- Management Support

- Peer Support
- Relationships
- Role

As the Committee look through the tables of issues and suggested actions it can be seen that 'demand' is a big influencer of issues throughout the stressors. Not only did council services state that demand itself was a significant stressor, multiple services stated that demand was also having a significant negative impact on the other stressors of:

- Control
- Management Support
- Peer Support

There are also areas of concern throughout the stressors which result in the repeated suggested actions of:

- Having a clear, realistic and affordable council plan.
- Strata related actions such as a review sufficiency of current resource allocation to IT, considering whether software and IT systems reflect best of breed / modern expectations and possibly having more capacity within Strata?
- Further Member training, and a change in certain Member behaviours.

2.1 DEMANDS

Service(s) included in this response.	Issue	Suggested action(s)
- Governance and Licensing - Planning and Development - Housing Service - Housing and Environment DMT - Benefits, Revenues, Customer Services, Fraud and Compliance -Environmental Health and Car Parks - Streetscene - Place, Asset and Commercialisation - Countryside and Leisure - Growth, Development and Prosperity	A lack of enough staff resources to do the work due to: *Not all services listed had all these issues, but all had a lack of staff resources to do the work for one or more of the reasons below.* - Increases in workload, some but not all due to Coronavirus, backlogs of normal work, increased workloads in other teams having a knock on effect. - More complex workload. - We need to create new roles to carry out the work that's being asked of us. - High staff turnover. - Staff being off on sick leave / other leave. - Staff leaving and not being replaced. - Not being able to attract professional, experienced staff to take up / stay in posts. - The recruitment process is often delayed, and takes too long. - Increased and unrealistic expectations from customers. - Poor staff morale affecting productivity.	Increased capacity: - Review staffing levels and recruit extra, suitable staff where necessary. - Recruit more suitable, knowledgeable temporary staff to cover sick leave / other leave / work on backlog. Change in policy: - Review council's existing pay and reward policy and assess whether council is still a median payer. - Speed up the recruitment process, / review the Recruitment Policy. - Have a realistic and clear Council Plan that staff can work towards to help prioritise what they should and should not be spending time on. What can staff say 'no' to. - Recognise that there's been a change in working practices due to Covid. Where that has been beneficial to workloads, have policies to keep it in place. - Cut back on non-statutory services where possible. Change in behaviour: - Members to play their part in making sure customer demands and expectations are also realistic. - Recognise need for ongoing Code of Conduct training and re-enforcement of good Member behaviours.
-Streetscene -Governance and Licensing -Planning and Development	Inefficient IT systems: *Not all services listed had all these issues, but all had issues with inefficient IT systems for one or more of the reasons below.*	Increased capacity: Review sufficiency of current resource allocation to IT.

	• Current IT systems / Global Desktop / software aren't working properly. This needs to be fixed. • Need new, more efficient software to decrease workload on staff.	• Consider whether software and IT systems reflect best of breed / modern expectations. • More capacity within Strata?
-Streetscene -Governance and Licensing -Housing and Environment DMT -Organisational Development - Place, Asset and Commercialisation -Countryside and Leisure	Demands due to Members have increased significantly: *Not all services listed had all these issues, but all had issues with this for one or more of the reasons below.* • Members not re-enforcing preferred communication channels. • Members not supporting performance standards when responding to the public. • Members contacting staff and wanting immediate responses. • Pressure applied by Members on staff to do what is asked immediately and not respecting existing workloads. • Some Members seeking to micro-manage officers/ projects / reports with resulting increase in workload and undermining of officer confidence and morale.	Change in policy: • Have a realistic and clear Council Plan that staff can work towards to help prioritise what they should and should not be spending time on. What can staff say 'no' to. • Review interaction between CSC and service departments to ensure optimum engagement with customer. Change in behaviour: • Further training for Members around who is responsible for what, who to contact with their requests and how. In addition, training in how councils are split into operational and strategic. • Make sure Member demands and expectations are realistic, and, if relevant, are reported to the right place / person in the most efficient way. • Members to not micro-manage projects / reports.
-Countryside and Leisure -Planning and Development	Childcare issues due to the Coronavirus pandemic put undue pressure on staff.	Change in policy: • Review the relevant policy taking childcare issues into account.

2.2 CHANGE

Service(s) included in this response.	Issue	Suggested action(s)
-Streetscene -Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services, Fraud and Compliance - Place, Asset and Commercialisation	The email method often used to communicate council changes doesn't always work for us: *Not all services listed had all these issues, but all had issues with this for one or more of the reasons below.* • No time to read long emails / newsletters. • Need a strategy to make sure everyone engages with the communication. • Bigger changes need to be discussed in a group.	Change in behaviour: • Review methods of how bigger changes are communicated to staff. For example use videos, paper, virtual / face to face meetings, phone calls as well as email.
-Housing and Environment DMT -Planning and Development	There is a lack of a sense of purpose and direction, Members aren't clear on Council direction/haven't set a clear agenda/overly focused on criticism of Council.	Change in policy: • Have a realistic and clear / affordable Council Plan that can guide where change happens.
-Countryside and Leisure -Housing and Environment DMT	Current IT systems and support make change more difficult: *Not all services listed had all these issues, but all had issues with this for one or more of the reasons below.* • Global Desktop isn't a stable platform for Zoom / Video meetings to discuss change. • Wifi at satellite sites doesn't work well, makes discussing change difficult. • IT support not keeping pace with changing service demands.	Increased capacity: • Review sufficiency of current resource allocation to IT. • Consider whether software and IT systems reflect best of breed / modern expectations. • More capacity within Strata?

2.3 CONTROL

Service(s) included in this response.	Issue	Suggested action(s)
-Streetscene -Organisational Development -Governance and Licensing -Planning and Development -Growth, Development and Prosperity	There needs to be a plan for the future of flexible working.	Change in policy: • Carry out staff survey on working from home and revise flexible working policy / Worksmart to take account of views raised.
-Streetscene - Place, Asset and Commercialisation -Environmental Health and Car Parks -Housing and Environment DMT -Financial Services -Governance and Licensing	Demand is too high to allow me control: *Not all services listed had all these issues, but all had issues with this for one or more of the reasons below.* • Demand is so high we can't always take a break when needed. • Demand from certain Members needs to be planned more fully to consider workload, capacity and budget. • Lack of control of types of / volume of working coming in. • Demand can't be switched off. • Too many competing priorities, nothing is de-prioritised.	See DEMAND section of this report and it's suggested actions.
-Housing and Environment DMT	Greater direction from and involvement in operational matters by Members leads to staff having a lack of control, choice and confidence.	Change in behaviour: • Improve relationships, communications and engagement with Members. • Further training for Members around how councils are split into operational and strategic / how the best councils operate.
-Governance and Licensing	Not enough breaks in meetings involving Members, and those that happen aren't long enough.	Change in behaviour: • More, longer breaks in meetings.

2.4 MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

Service(s) included in this response.	Issue	Suggested action(s)
-Environmental Health and Car Parks -Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services, Fraud and Compliance - Place, Asset and Commercialisation -Organisational Development -Governance and Licensing	Due to demand, the service can't provide proper management support: *Not all services listed had all these issues, but all had issues with this for one or more of the reasons below.* - Managers picking up extra workload so less time to manage staff properly / have 121s and PERs. Managers are too busy to manage people. - High turnover of management staff. - Not being able to successfully recruit to vacant / new management roles.	See DEMAND section of this report and it's suggested actions.
-Housing and Environment DMT	Current IT systems and support make it more difficult to receive and give management support. Global Desktop isn't a stable platform for Zoom / Video meetings.	Increased capacity: - Review sufficiency of current resource allocation to IT. - Consider whether software and IT systems reflect best of breed / modern expectations. - More capacity within Strata?
- Place, Asset and Commercialisation	Staff don't feel they've been properly recognised by Members for their commitment, dedication and results in very challenging working environments.	Change in behaviour: Consider training for Members on principles of motivation / effective relationships with people.

2.5 PEER SUPPORT

Service(s) included in this response.	Issue	Suggested action(s)
-Streetscene -Planning and Development -Housing and Environment DMT -Environmental Health and Car Parks	Peer support is suffering due to demand: *Not all services listed had all these issues, but all had issues with this for one or more of the reasons below.* • Other services and members of staff are now too busy and this impacts on the ability to support others. • If anyone is away from work it adds too much pressure to others. • Demoralised colleagues are struggling with demand.	See DEMAND section of this report and it's suggested actions.

2.6 RELATIONSHIPS

Service(s) included in this response.	Issue	Suggested action(s)
-Housing, Health and Environment DMT - Place, Asset and Commercialisation -Organisational Development -Planning and Development -Governance and Licensing -Streetscene	Unacceptable behaviour of some Members towards some staff: *Not all services listed had all these issues, but all had issues with this for one or more of the reasons below.* • Some Members are seriously mistreating some officers, bullying, intimidating, harassing and being disrespectful. • Some Members are fostering a blame / fear culture and not trusting some professional officers. • Constant negativity of some Members towards staff / the work. • Morale of some managers due to Members conduct has filtered down through teams. • Some Members of the new administration are difficult to work with and make staff feel unappreciated. • Some staff are fearful of emails from some Members. • Lack of understanding by Members of their role / procedures within the council. • The Administration expect us to say yes to everything, when we can't.	Change in policy: • Review / revise the Member / officer protocol. • Work with LGA and others to promote good behaviours and initiate appropriate interventions Change in behaviour: • Members to treat staff with respect, and apply the Code of Conduct. • Leading Members to stop creating a blame / fear culture and a culture where bullying is exhibited, encouraged and rewarded. • Further training for Members around their roles, council procedures and the Code of Conduct.
-Housing, Health and Environment DMT - Housing -Financial Services -Benefits, Revenues, Customer Services, Fraud and Compliance - Place, Asset and Commercialisation -Organisational Development -Planning and Development -Governance and Licensing	Working relationships between council services need to adapt to changed work practices: *Not all services listed had all these issues, but all had issues with this for one or more of the reasons below.* • How to help other teams succeed. • Ensuring the right balance between the internal and external customer. • Cross-team issues and tension between services due to workload.	Change in behaviour: • Whole organisation to work to a 'one council' ethos.

Service(s) included in this response.	Issue	Suggested action(s)
-Planning and Development	Member involvement and ownership has declined since the loss of Member Champions. These roles were particularly useful in supporting some areas.	Change in policy: • Consider re-instating Member Champions.

2.7 ROLE

Service(s) included in this response.	Issue	Suggested action(s)
-Planning and Development - Place, Asset and Commercialisation -Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services, Fraud and Compliance -Housing	We don't know what the council's priorities are: *Not all services listed had all these issues, but all had issues with this for one or more of the reasons below.* • We don't know what the corporate / Member's priorities are. • Unsure how we fit into the overall strategy of the council. • We need the direction of travel for EDDC as a whole to be communicated.	Change in policy: • Have a realistic, clear and affordable Council Plan that staff can work towards to help guide the roles of all staff within the council.

Financial implications:

There are no direct financial implication to be highlighted from the recommendation in the report. There are however actions identified that are likely to require additional resources particularly around pay and staffing levels, any proposals that will require additional budget will require a separate report for Cabinet and Council to consider

Legal implications:

There are no specific legal implications identified in the report requiring comment