

Report to: Personnel Committee



Date of Meeting 22/03/22

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Report re Staff HSE Survey

Report summary:

We have recently concluded a second survey of staff utilising the recommended Health & Safety Executive questionnaire and this report summarises the results and highlights areas of work for the Committee to consider. The survey was carried out during November & December 2021. Some 345 staff filled in the questionnaire representing a 68% response rate (cf 67% for the first survey)

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

That having regard to the results of the second survey the Committee endorses the work done to date on addressing the areas of concerns and also recommends that a further survey is undertaken later this calendar year.

Reason for recommendation:

To recognise the Council's legal obligations as an employer and to ensure that the Council maintains its reputation as a good employer.

Officer: Mark Williams CEO

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

Equalities impact Low Impact

The consultation was made available online to all EDDC employees with paper copies available on request. The consultation in itself has a low equalities impact but any proposals/recommendations emerging as a result, or not taking action on issues, may require impact assessments and may have high equalities impact(s).

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk; Currently low risk, any emerging proposals/recommendations/not taking action on issues could be high risk and may need risk assessments

Links to background information See attached appendices and references to previous Committee reports

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
 - A greener East Devon
 - A resilient economy
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Report in full

1. Background

1.1 Members will recall that this Committee was newly constituted as an initiative endorsed by Council at its most recent Annual Meeting. This followed, inter alia, a report taken to the Scrutiny Committee on the 4th March 2021 where I reported on the results of the first staff survey undertaken utilising the standard HSE methodology. At that meeting, the Scrutiny Committee resolved as follows:

- That the Chief Executive was thanked for his report.
- That the Chief Executive undertake a follow up staff survey at a suitable future point.
- That the Chief Executive discusses this survey data with the staff representatives and to feedback to the Portfolio Holder for Council and Corporate Co-ordination the outcome and actions resulting from the engagement to form an action plan.
- That the Chief Executive, Members of the SMT and the Portfolio Holder for Council and Corporate Co-ordination discuss this survey data, and any other relevant information, and identify what actions are necessary to address the four key broad sets of issues identified within this report at Appendix 3 –
 - (i) Workload, staffing shortages/vacancies and management support for staff;
 - (ii) Home working and staff isolation;
 - (iii) Member conduct with staff;
 - (iv) Staff communications.
- That the Chief Executive updates this Committee in light of the completion of the above four recommendations

1.2 Following that meeting of the Scrutiny Committee considerable work has been undertaken by members and officers to address the broad set of issues identified in the initial report. Without wishing to list all of the initiatives I can report to Committee that there has been a broad acceptance of the need to address the issues raised at that time and a consistent focus on the need to restore high staff morale and the importance of EDDC being perceived as an employer of choice. Priorities to address recruitment and retention and other challenges were also agreed by Committee in September 2021. Set against this however have been ongoing issues and pressures generated by the external environment; whether it be the COVID situation; increasing workloads and customer expectation; increasing inflation; pay/recruitment/retention pressures and an uncertain future, all of which have had and continue to have an impact on staff wellbeing and morale.

2. Staff Survey Results

2.1 The HSE survey has a standard methodology which, when used consistently, allows for a comparison picture to be built up over time. The Appendix to this report provides a detailed analysis of the latest survey results but the following is a summary of the key data:

Our three highest scoring of the workplace stressors recognised by the Health and Safety Executive were the same three as in the Jan / Feb 2021 survey:

A high score is positive. The most positive score that can be given is 5, and the least positive score is 1.

1. Role - 4.34 (4.34)
2. Relationships - 4.18 (4.08)
3. Peer support - 4.11 (4.08)

Within these stressors these were the 5 areas that scored most highly (in order with the highest scoring at the top). There have been no significant changes in these scores from the January / February 2021 results, and the five stressors that scored most highly are the same as in Jan / Feb 2021, although the order of the list has changed slightly.

1. Not being subject to bullying at work – 4.73 (4.77). Although 83% stated they were never bullied at work, 6% of respondents stated they were sometimes bullied at work, 11% stated they were seldom bullied, and 1% stated they were always bullied. These results remain significant due to the nature of the question. In the Jan / Feb 2021 results 83% stated they were never bullied at work, 11% stated they were seldom bullied and 6% stated they were sometimes bullied.
2. Not being subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour - 4.45 (4.4) Although 65% of respondents stated they were never subject to personal harassment at work, 35% stated they were seldom, sometimes, often or always subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour, which is still significant due to the nature of the question. In the Jan / Feb 2021 results 62% 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 is not a statistically significant change).
3. Knowing how to get their job done - 4.44 (4.41)
4. Being clear what's expected of them at work - 4.43 (4.40)
5. Being clear what their duties and responsibilities are. 4.41 (4.41)

If we look at all questions from the stressors, the areas with the highest scores remain the same as the list above.

When staff were asked for comments on their answers, the most common positive comments were:

1. My Manager / team leader is supportive.
2. Colleagues / my team are supportive.

2.2 Our two lowest scoring of the workplace stressors recognised by the Health and Safety Executive were the following. These two stressors were also the two lowest in the Jan / Feb 2021 survey and their scores have not significantly changed.

A low score is negative. The most positive score that can be given is 5, and the least positive score is 1.

1. Demand - 3.34. (3.29)
2. Change - 3.54. (3.5)

Within these two stressors the areas that had the lowest scores were the following (in order with the most significant concern at the top). These top six have not changed, and the order has not changed since the results in Jan / Feb 2021, there have also been no significant changes in the scores.

1. Having to work intensively - 2.44 (2.39). 51% of respondents said they often or always have to work intensively, only 8% said this seldom or never applies to them.
2. Having to work very fast - 2.76 (2.74). 83% of respondents said they sometimes, often or always have to work very fast.
3. Having to neglect some tasks because of having too much to do - 3.09 (3.03). 66% of respondents said they sometimes, often or always have to neglect some tasks because of having too much to do.
4. Different groups demanding things that are hard to combine - 3.17 (3.15).
5. Not being consulted about change at work - 3.34 (3.29).
6. When changes are made at work, not being clear about how they will work in practice - 3.51

If we look at all questions from the stressors, the areas of most concern are (in order with the most significant concern at the top) were slightly different to the list above. The stressors, and order of the list below is the same as in the previous survey and there has been no significant change in the scores.

1. Having to work intensively. 2.44 (2.39).
2. Having to work very fast. 2.76 (2.74).
3. Having to neglect some tasks because of having too much to do. 3.09 (3.03).
4. Different groups demanding things that are hard to combine. 3.17 (3.15).
5. Not having a choice in deciding what to do at work. 3.22 (3.25).
6. Not always being consulted about change at work. 3.34 (3.29).

When staff were asked for comments on their answers, the most common comments were:

1. Our already large workload has increased significantly recently / My / my team's workload is overwhelming / too large.
2. Council teams don't; communicate / work together / answer each other's emails / respect each other / support each other.
3. My Manager isn't supporting me / listening / sorting issues / replying to emails.
4. We need more staff / previous staff or managers have left and not been replaced.
5. Do more to retain good and experienced staff.
6. I feel too isolated working from home (from my team / other people). I want to return to the office.
7. There is a lack of performance / behaviour management of staff / colleagues.

3.0 Conclusion/Changes since January / February 2021

3.1 In terms of the results to the questions, although there has not been a significant change overall since the January / February 2021 survey there has been an improvement in the following areas:

- Slightly more people feel they are given supportive feedback on the work they do.
- Slightly less people feel there is anger or friction between colleagues.
- Slightly less people feel that relationships at work are strained.

- In terms of the results of the stressors there have been some improvements in 'Manager's Support' and 'Relationships'.

3.2 Mindful of the concerns raised in the first survey, it can be said that although the results of the bullying and personal harassment questions have not significantly changed, the nature of the concern has. The first survey highlighted considerable concern that the traditional good relationships between members and officers were under challenge. The second survey suggests greater concern linked to unacceptable customer behaviour. Although there is some reference to Councillor behaviour the responses would suggest that staff recognise the work that has gone into this area and that the issue has been/is being addressed. There is a residual concern and hope that the recent good work is maintained and does not revert.

3.3 As reported to Committee in January 2022, sickness absence rates were slightly higher than at the same time in 2021 (0.82 FTE average days lost in January 2022 compared to 0.79 FTE days lost in January 2021) but this is not a significant increase and there does not appear to be any direct correlation between the staff survey results and absence rates. However, we will continue to keep absence under review. The next People Data report will be reported to Committee in April.

3.4 The key issues to address going forward are those of work demand and the perception amongst staff that the Council's pay rates are not competitive. Members will be aware that through the new budget and also the independent Reward Review these issues are being addressed (along with other work to support recruitment and retention, as set out in the September 2021 Committee report). Going forward we must ensure we continue to work as one Council where there is a collective responsibility to address the concerns raised in the survey. Our Worksmart policy is currently being reviewed and we are placing increased emphasis on our 'Happy, Healthy, Here' programme. We also have to consider whether to renew our IIP accreditation as this has been our primary indicator in terms of visibly demonstrating our commitment to being an employer of choice.

Financial implications:

Issues with staff morale, retention and recruitment will have financial implications on the Council, but there are no direct financial implications identified from the recommendations in the report

Legal implications:

The Council as employer will want to assure itself that it is providing an appropriate working environment which minimises the risks of employment based legal claims being made against it.