
Report To: Policy and Resources Committee

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**Report By: Head of Organisational Development,
H R and Communications**

Report No: HR/04/13/LF

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Subject: Employee Survey Focus Groups

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to highlight the points that have emerged from focus groups carried out with employees.

2.0 SUMMARY

2.1 An employee survey was carried out in spring 2012 and reported to the Policy and Resources Committee in August 2012. One of the follow up actions was to undertake focus group research to further investigate some of the points that came out of the survey. This report fulfils that remit.

2.2 Three focus groups were carried out in October 2012 and they consisted of the following groups of employee:

- Frontline employees that are not desk based
- Team leaders / supervisors
- Service managers

2.3 Each of the three focus groups discussed slightly different points regarding working for the Council. Frontline staff discussed a variety of points relating generally to working for the Council. Team leaders / supervisors discussed training, development and recognition. The managers' focus group looked at points to do with communication.

2.4 The following key points emerged from the focus groups:

- Working for the Council – all employees said the Council was a good place to work and they were satisfied with the terms and conditions.
- Communication - this is an area that could be improved, especially relating to how corporate decision making is communicated and the methods of communication that are used.
- Performance appraisals - a lack of awareness and a lack of understanding of the benefits of performance appraisals were key points, along with a perception that it is a tick box exercise.
- Training - access to training and awareness of the training courses that are available is a particular issue for frontline employees.

2.5 The rest of this report provides further detail of the points that emerged from the focus groups, along with proposals to address the points raised.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that Committee:

- a. Note the feedback given from employees that took part in the focus groups
- b. Agree that the proposals outlined in sections 5.2, 6.2 and 7.2 of this report are implemented.

4.0 POSITIVE FEEDBACK

4.1 The purpose of carrying out the focus groups was to identify areas for improvement. However, the following positive feedback about the Council as a place to work, not only emerged from the employee survey, but was also made by participants in the focus groups:

Frontline staff made the following comments:

- Most frontline staff thought the Council was a good place to work and that the pay they receive for the job they do was “not bad”. They also said that they have good hours of employment and good terms and conditions.
- The majority of participants in the focus group thought that staff morale was good / not bad.
- Staff in general said their working environment was good or of a suitable standard. Employees who work in an office said the conditions were good. For example, it was stated that the Customer Service Centre is a bright and airy place to work and that the customers like it as well. Employees who are not desk based such as road sweepers or gardeners said that in general they had the right type of equipment to do their job properly.

Team leaders / supervisors made the following comments:

- Team leaders and supervisors said that the Council is a good place to work, the terms and working conditions are good and they like the Council's family friendly policies and flexible working.
- The size of the Council allows team leaders and supervisors to get to know people in their service or other services quite quickly. This allows them to develop good working relationships with people and allows them to do their job more effectively and efficiently.

Service managers made the following comments:

- Managers are generally of the opinion that the Council is a good place to work.
- The terms and conditions are good, as are the variety of family friendly policies available.
- Service managers said that they thought the Council provides good quality services to the people of Inverclyde and this had improved in recent years. The group said this is still the case despite the requirement to make significant savings across all services.

5.0 COMMUNICATION

5.1 Frontline employees and service managers discussed communications and their feedback is outlined below. Please note that communication was not discussed at the focus group held with team leaders / supervisors.

The following points were raised by frontline employees:

1. Communication with managers is an area that could be improved in order to ensure that views and opinions of staff are taken on board.
2. Communication is minimal and the Council uses ICON instead of directly communicating with employees.

3. Frontline staff would like to see a package of communication methods introduced, for example, the internet/intranet, team meetings, briefing notes and a staff newsletter. The CMT should note that the CHCP currently produce an employee newsletter through the NHS.

The following points were raised by service managers:

4. There are very few formal meetings where communication and the sharing of information is the main focus of the meeting. Communication is often a by-product of other meetings.
5. It was suggested that it would be useful to have an interactive staff forum for discussion between managers and employees.
6. The concept of having a team talk briefing was thought to be useful.
7. Another suggestion was that informal means of communication should be developed. For example, social events and networking activities at lunch time or in the evening and opportunities to meet colleagues from other services.
8. Service managers believe there is a requirement to develop various methods of communication channels throughout the Council.
9. The cascading down of information is an area that could be improved.
10. Most managers thought that all levels of senior management should interact directly with staff on the front line on a regular basis.
11. Service managers would like to receive more strategic information regarding the issues that are affecting the Council as a whole. For example, budgetary settlements from central government or decisions that Elected Members are taking on the future delivery of services.

5.2 How will we address these points?

- Introduce an employee newsletter. There would be cost implications of introducing an employee newsletter and a report will be prepared for the CMT.
- Ensure that Heads of Service cascade information from the CMT and Directorate Management Teams throughout their services and where possible introduce team briefings.
- Explore other methods of communication with employees that could be introduced, for example, text messaging, instant messaging, video conferencing and pre-recorded messages.
- Investigate creating an interactive staff forum on ICON to enable employees to make suggestions and share views and ideas. Glasgow City Council has implemented an interactive employee forum and this will be looked at as a possible solution.
- Employees could be invited to attend lunch time talks / debates given by external business professionals on specific public sector issues. This would not only provide an opportunity for learning but would also help employees to network with colleagues in other services.

5.3 Paragraph 5.2 above provides solutions identified from some of the issues raised at the Employee Focus Groups but where appropriate these outcomes will be submitted to the CMT

for consideration.

6.0 PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS

6.1 Performance appraisal is an approved Council policy and is essential for any organisation. For employees, appraisals are entering into the second year of operation and are not yet fully embedded, this may take another year. The feedback from the focus groups provides an early indication of areas we need to consider and we have taken these comments on board. Future employee surveys will give a better indication of the effectiveness of performance appraisals.

6.2 Performance appraisals were discussed by frontline staff and team leaders.

The following points were raised by frontline staff:

1. Performance appraisals are perceived as a tick box exercise and it was suggested that some sort of reward or incentive should be associated with a good grade in an appraisal.
2. Frontline staff would like to receive information about how the outcomes from performance appraisals are used.
3. Lack of praise was an issue raised. Staff would like to receive more regular positive comments to reinforce that they are doing a good job.

The following points were raised by team leaders / supervisors:

4. Team leaders and supervisors said that performance appraisals work well, but scoring takes away from the appraisal itself.
5. It was suggested that all employees, not just officers who carry out appraisals, should be invited to attend a briefing session about appraisals in order to explain why they are being rolled out and their purpose.
6. Several team leaders commented on the fact that there are frontline supervisors carrying out appraisals that don't have the skills to undertake them.
7. Although there is a policy in place to deal with poor performance, the process can be long, convoluted and difficult.
8. Most team leaders / supervisors admitted that they don't praise staff enough.

6.3 How will we address these points?

- Remarketing the benefits of performance appraisals will help to address the poor perception for those employees who do not see the value in having performance appraisals. Additional training for officers carrying out appraisals is ongoing.
- Service Managers have a role to play in cascading information about performance appraisals to employees and HR will continue to support Service Managers in this role.
- HR provides briefing sessions on performance appraisals and will do this for any service that makes a request.
- HR will continue to offer advice and support as required regarding incidences of performance, the management of which can be difficult. However, the continuing introduction and embedding of performance appraisals should help to address this

issue and managers should register for training (face to face and on line) and continue to liaise with HR.

- Team leaders / supervisors suggested that there should be more recognition that says thanks for doing a good job. For example, a dress down Friday. We will try and encourage managers to recognise employees' efforts. The Council has an employee awards scheme which helps in this area.

7.0 TRAINING

7.1 Training was discussed by both frontline employees and team leaders.

The following points were raised by frontline employees:

1. Access to training is a particular problem for frontline employees.
2. A record is not kept of the courses that employees attend and the dates they attend them on. This can result in employees missing out on refresher courses and in qualifications lapsing.
3. Several participants in the focus group said that front line employees don't know what qualifications they need in order to progress.

The following points were raised by team leaders / supervisors:

4. Lack of funding for external training places.
5. It was suggested that the Council should contribute towards the cost of professional qualifications, especially if it is a requirement for the job.

7.2 How will we address these points?

- Develop a policy for allocating training time per employee during working hours. There is also a need to develop guidelines for managers on this. There is a budget implication of providing employees with training during working hours and any such development would require agreement by the Corporate Management Team.
- HR and ICT will continue to explore the value of kiosks (stand alone computers placed in the workplace for use of by employees whose role means that they do not have ready access to a computer).
- The roll out of portable training devices will help to make it easier for employees to undertake training courses. It means that employees will be able to carry out training out with the formal training route. Portable training devices are being introduced from April 2013.
- The Council's HR21 system has the capability of providing a training database and this will be introduced in the future.
- Raise awareness and re-market the training courses available through e-learning.
- A new corporate training suite with e-learning facilities will open in Port Glasgow at the end of this year and this will make it easier for employees to undertake e-learning courses as a designated area will be provided for e learning courses.
- Employee appraisals will provide an opportunity for all employees to identify appropriate training to assist them in their development.

8.0 POLICY DOCUMENTS

8.1 Frontline staff told us that they would like policy documents such as the SOA to be broken down into areas that are relevant for each service and then interpreted with regard to specific jobs.

Frontline staff also provided feedback that they receive very little information about departmental plans and developments.

8.2 How will we address these points?

- Case studies will be published on ICON to demonstrate how specific jobs contribute to the achievement of the SOA.
- Performance appraisals contain information about key policy documents such as the SOA and help employees to understand how they contribute to the Council's strategic outcomes.
- Feedback on departmental plans should be provided through management meetings.

9.0 IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Finance

Two proposals within this report have cost implications:

- The introduction of an employee newsletter.
- The provision of training during working hours.

9.2 Human Resources

None

9.3 Legal

None

9.4 Equality and Diversity

None

9.5 Repopulation

None

10.0 CONSULTATION

10.1 Feedback from front line staff, team leaders/ supervisors and service managers informed this report.

10.2 This report will be issued to all employees who participated in the focus groups.