

SUBJECT: EMPLOYEE SURVEY

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of the results of the 'Your Views Count' 2010 Employee Survey.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Since 2004, the Authority has undertaken employee surveys with Opinion Research Services (ORS) based in Swansea. This company is the preferred supplier of consultation services to the Fire Services Consultation Association (FSCA) and enables the benefit of benchmarking between fire and rescue authorities.
- 2.2 In 2009, following concerns regarding the value for money of previous survey provision the Chief Fire Officer decided to develop a bespoke employee survey, presenting the opportunity to develop one survey (replacing the previous employee survey and cultural audit) that met all organisational needs, eliminating previous duplication and tailored to individual roles. In addition, external benchmarking is no longer as valuable as it was in the past and the focus is now on benchmarking against our own previous performance.
- 2.3 In December 2009 Echo-U, an independent market research company based in Newcastle was awarded the contract.

3. DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 A bespoke survey presents the opportunity to adopt an alternative approach to involve various staff groups in the design and development of the survey including the identification of relevant questions to ensure the survey was appropriate, credible and pertinent:
- The Staff Consultation Task and Finish group was formed to improve staff consultation as recommended in the Staff Communications Strategy and the employee survey was the main focus for the group. Personnel (representing all functions of the Service) also acted as advocates for staff consultation issues, discussed topics for inclusion in the survey with colleagues at their locations and reported back to the group.
 - Focus groups were held with two watches, one in Newcastle and one in Sunderland to establish the delivery method, communication, format and content of the survey. A similar focus group was held in Service Headquarters.

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

- The Deputy Chief Officer and Area Manager, Human Resource were also consulted regarding the strategic requirements of the survey.
 - Department Heads and Service Delivery Managers were emailed with a request to discuss the survey at team meetings and feedback regarding topics and issues that staff would like to see included.
 - The survey was also discussed at the Strategic Communications Group.
- 3.2 It was clear that the bespoke survey needed to incorporate necessary questions from the previous ORS surveys to enable benchmarking. In order to address criticism of previous surveys 70% of the questions were core, i.e. asked to all and 30% tailored to individual roles. In addition, there was a clear path through the questions enabling relevant follow up questions to be asked in response to previous answers.
- 3.3 In order to achieve this in the most cost effective way the survey was conducted online. Feedback from focus groups with watches (during the development of the internal communication strategy) suggested that there had been a definite shift of culture regarding electronic communication mechanisms with most staff using a PC and the intranet as part of their job that would support the introduction of an electronic survey. Online surveys are also easier to analyse and therefore more cost effective to conduct.
- 3.4 Staff were consulted in advance regarding the format (to confirm they would be generally content with an online survey) and the content of the survey in the belief that this tailored, fit for purpose approach would have a positive impact upon response rates.
- 3.5 Feedback from these groups also confirmed that staff were content with an online format -ironically headquarters based staff (focus group) were the only ones that raised concern regarding the online format of the survey for operational staff. The watch based operational staff consulted welcomed the electronic approach. In addition, feedback identified that the main concern was confidentiality issues. Station based staff were concerned regarding privacy for completing the survey online in the main station office.
- 3.6 Acting on this information, a communication plan was produced for the survey setting out the target audiences, key messages and communication mechanisms to promote the survey. It included a briefing session for middle managers, a managers' pack and a question and answer factsheet to address the issues already raised by staff in the earlier focus groups. It also included a poster, Chief Fire Officer's Bulletin, Team Talk article, dedicated intranet pages and reminders.

4. RESPONSE

- 4.1 The overall return rate was 38%, with Echo-U advising that this is an acceptable return rate for a public sector organisation. The results have been weighted to ensure they are representative of the operational / corporate mix however the change this presents is negligible.

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

4.2 The response rate was monitored for each location and this ranged between 11.3% and 72.3%. Stations generally registered a lower response than other locations and interestingly, those stations that registered the higher response rates (stations 24 and 50) were directly involved in the development of the survey. Further research to increase the response rate will be undertaken prior to the next bi-annual survey.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 The survey results are presented under five headings reflecting the different sections of the survey. When reviewing the results, Members may wish to note that in the 2010 survey there was no neutral option *i.e. neither satisfied nor dissatisfied* due to the fact that 39% of respondents selected this option in the 2007 employee survey.

5.2 Your job

Overall, 87% of those who completed the survey are satisfied with their current role compared to 65% in 2007 and 54% in 2005. The area where the majority (98%) are satisfied is in their shift system / working pattern.

Employees are positive in their attitude towards their job, again this has increased since 2007 (figures in brackets):

- 94% feel valued by colleagues (80%)
- 92% find their work is interesting (81%)
- 91% feel they have the equipment to do their job correctly (71%)
- 88% feel valued by the public (63%)
- 87% are encouraged to take responsibility (67%)

The elements of their jobs that least / most satisfy staff are as follows:

	Most Satisfying	Least Satisfying
Operational / Control	Dealing with emergency incidents (46%) Working as part of a team (26%) Shift System / Working pattern (25%)	ADC/Promotion/ Development opportunities (27%) Targets (22%) Use of Jargon (20%)
Corporate	Flexible working (22%) Working as part of a team (12%) Variety of work (9%)	Duplication of work (35%) Salary (12%) Promotion / development opportunities (10%)

With regard to personal development; 90% of employees have a PDP at least once a year with 5% never receiving one. 73% disagree that the ADC is effective. Reasons given for this include "it is more suited to corporate candidates" and "too lengthy a process".

5.3 Your Fire and Rescue Service

There have been significant improvements to employee perception of culture within the Service demonstrated by the number of those who agreed to the following statements compared to the 2007 results:

The Service:	2010	2007
Consults staff on FRS plans	69%	24%
Is honest	71%	29%
Recognises good work	68%	34%
Encourages training and personal development	88%	60%
Provides clear leadership	80%	37%

The two statements that were disagreed with the most and showed little improvement since 2007 were:

The Service:	2010	2007
Minimises bureaucracy	62%	64%
Deals effectively with poor performers	48%	52%

Employees are positive regarding their attitude towards their work; 88% are treated fairly, 87% are encouraged to take responsibility and 92% find their work interesting. Despite this 45% disagree that they are listened to and 33% disagree that they are valued as an employee however both of these improved since 2007 where they scored 51% and 59% respectively.

5.4 Communication

The top three ways staff receive most of their information about the Service are as follows and this also directly reflects how staff prefer to receive information:

1. Intranet
2. Email
3. Team/Watch meetings

36% of employees think communication has improved in the last three years with a further 40% who felt that communications have stayed the same. 65% of employees feel that there are enough opportunities for them to express their views. This has increased from 24% in 2007.

69% of employees said they attended team meetings at least once a month. This has decreased from 76% in 2007. However there are still 10% who never attend team meetings.

Employees view their managers positively. 91% say their managers inform them of changes that affect them and 83% are asked for their views. 93% are treated with respect compared to 78% in 2007 and 69% in 2005.

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Strategic Management Team members are viewed less positively with 51% of employees disagreeing that SMT understand issues affecting employees jobs and 56% disagreeing that SMT are interested in what employees think and feel about work. Both of these have improved since 2007 where both scores were 58%.

5.5 Serving the Community

90% of employees say they feel that they understand the Authority's goals for the future and 87% agree that the Authority is responding well to external major changes within the Fire and Rescue Service.

5.6 Value for Money

93% of employees agree that the Authority should be seeking efficiency savings and they demonstrated a good understanding of the term 'Value for Money' by ranking 3 statements from a list of 15 options. The top three selected were:

- Providing the best services for the lowest cost
- Not wasting money
- Achieving the same for less money

6. AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

6.1 The following areas are those that have been highlighted within the report as areas that continue to concern employees. The Chief Fire Officer is developing an improvement / action plan to deal with these issues:

- ADC / Promotion / Development opportunities
- Dealing with poor performers
- Minimising bureaucracy

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no direct financial implications however projects introduced to address areas for improvement and key issues may have a financial impact.

8 RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1 A risk assessment has been undertaken to ensure that the risk to the Authority has been minimised as far as practicable. The assessment has considered an appropriate balance between risk and control ; the realisation of efficiencies; the most appropriate use of limited resources; and a comprehensive evaluation of the benefits. The risk to the authority has been assessed as low utilising the standard risk matrix based on control measures being in place. The complete risk assessment is available on request from the Chief Fire Officer.

9. EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

9.1 A full Equality Impact Assessment was completed prior to this survey taking place and no issues were identified.

Creating the Safest Community

10. HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no health and safety implications by virtue of this report.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 Members are recommended to:

- a) Note the contents of this report;
- b) Consider areas for improvement; and
- c) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The undermentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

- Employee Survey Report 2010