

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Sustainable Barnsley Workstream
DATE:	Tuesday 6 June 2023
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present

Councillors Ennis OBE (Chair), Bellamy, Booker, Christmas, Denton, Eastwood, Fielding, Hayward, Lodge, Moore, Morrell, Murray, O'Donoghue, Osborne, Sheard, Smith, Tattersall, Webster and A. Wray

64 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

No apologies for absence were received in accordance with Regulation 7 (6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

65 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

Councillor Tattersall declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Member of the Berneslai Homes Board and also as a Disabilities Champion at BMBC.

Councillor Lodge declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Member with family that work within the authority.

Councillor Osborne declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Member of the Berneslai Homes Board.

Councillor Sheard declared a non-pecuniary interest as a public Member of the Hospital Board.

66 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th April were received.

67 Employee Survey 2022

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

- Sarah Norman – Chief Executive, Barnsley Council
- Michael Potter, Service Director, Business Intelligence, Human Resources & Communications, Barnsley Council

- Phil Quinn, Head of Service, Human Resources & Organisational Development, Barnsley Council
- Cllr Robin Franklin, Cabinet Spokesperson, Core Services

M Potter presented the results of the Employee Survey 2022 to the Committee and highlighted the plans in place to address responses raised by staff.

The survey ran throughout September 2022 and closed in the first week of October, the questions were focused on the three main themes surrounding the People Strategy:

- Leadership, Values & Culture
- Maximising Capacity & Capability
- Employee Experience

In total there were 1,913 responses which equated to a 59% overall response rate, this was deemed as very good and only slightly lower than previous rates for the full surveys (2019 – 64% and 2017 – 61%).

A breakdown of response results in each directorate is highlighted below:

- Core – 70.7%
- Public Health and Communities – 56%
- Place Health & Adult Social Care – 55.5%
- Children’s Services – 53.3%
- Growth and Sustainability – 45.3%

The feedback relating to Leadership, Values & Culture was overall very positive with 45.1% of employees either agreeing or strongly agreeing that the Senior Management Team provided effective leadership.

With regards to Maximising Capacity & Capability 70.2% of staff felt encouraged and supported by their manager with regards to new skill development and 65.8% felt that they had opportunities to learn new skills within the Council. Again, positive feedback was shown around questions relating to effective discussions with managers around performance with 70.1% of employees agreeing those conversations took place regularly.

Finally, when focusing on the Employee Experience, the survey asked what the single best thing was about working for the Council, the 1,450 responses were coded from their raw form into the emerging themes below:

- 31.72% stated the best thing was the team – this included co-workers, managers and leaders.
- Almost 25% highlighted that flexibility was essential – mainly in relation to flexible working, flexi time scheme and working from home.
- 19.1% said that the employee benefits, pensions, leave entitlements, rates of pay and sick pay were among the best factors.

- Culture, staff development and location were also cited, however to a much lesser extent.

M Potter continued that in February 2023 a dashboard of the full survey results was made available to all employees. This was the first time that full transparency of the results had been provided, enabling anyone to view the results of any area across the Council. This important improvement tied in with the ongoing work around employee engagement, demonstrating values of Trust and Excellence and allowing colleagues to compare the results in their area with those of other services, business units and the wider Council.

Business Unit Action Plans were also produced in April 2023 and submitted centrally to the HR & OD Team for review. Additionally, employees across the council were asked to volunteer for the Employee Experience Group to champion engagement activities and address key themes highlighted in the survey. There are hopes that the group will work alongside directorates to aid action plan development and consider key topics including change, health and wellbeing, work-life balance and communications.

Members raised concerns around the list of questions being shared and that some staff may be reluctant to provide their personal information for fear of the consequences. P Quinn responded, explaining that the survey was completely anonymous and that teams across the Council had briefings around the results being aggregated for anonymity. Holistically the question was based around culture, which the Council is seeking to improve and make sure staff feel comfortable providing feedback without worrying there may be a detrimental impact if they raise concerns.

In response to questioning around the high refusal rate of some survey questions (such as sexuality), officers explained that there were some concerns around staff in the organisation not wanting to be identified. P Quinn continued that these types of questions relate to organisational culture, and it would be helpful if the team knew that staff would prefer not to be put into specific categories rather than leaving fields blank.

Further discussion took place and Members queried whether it was possible to see how the information was broken down as a whole. Officers explained that in terms of the survey and data collection it was possible and further communications could be put in place if required.

Members expressed their concerns over the 59% response rate and asked what was being done to engage staff. P Quinn responded that when benchmarking the BMBC survey with other authorities, 59% was very good. However, in terms of the 40% non-completion the current survey was being used as a starting point to develop new ideas. Work with business units to develop action plans and collaborate with all staff was underway and deemed essential to ensure wider engagement is prioritised.

S Norman added that the response rate was also lower where staff were not regularly using the network meaning those employees were not logging on or using computers as part of their everyday role. It was much more difficult to reach those members of staff in comparison to office-based roles. Ongoing work is being done with the Service Director of Environment and Transport to see how this could be improved.

Officers responded to questioning around the timings of the surveys explaining that they would usually take place on a 2-yearly cycle but during the pandemic it wasn't possible due to the requirement of significant resources. Pulse surveys were shared with staff in that time period which focused specifically on staff wellbeing. Members added that although there were challenges with delivering surveys on a regular basis it may be a false economy continuing as they have done in previous years.

P Quinn explained that current research was steering organisations in the direction of shorter and more regular questionnaires instead of whole scale organisation research. This method would produce immediate responses and reduces the resources needed which could be a solution.

Members were reassured that inclusivity is a top priority for the authority. P Quinn informed Members that the Equality and Diversity team had now moved directly under the Chief Executive, this area of work had been under development for a number of years however every employee has a responsibility for equality and diversity. P Quinn continued that on a minor level inclusivity relates to the accessibility of buildings.

A new employee recently started work with the Council and it had been a fantastic opportunity to see what could be done to meet their needs and make the transition as smooth as possible. One of the main aims is to make Barnsley Council an employer of choice and show people that they can have a successful career regardless of their disability.

The conversation turned to mental health and the high number of people suffering with anxiety or depression, Members asked what the Council plans to do to support those individuals. Officers announced that the Council had received the Gold Well at Work award and it was a fantastic testament for the work and the varied range of programmes available to employees. One essential factor for success is great line management and the conversations managers can have with their staff to ask if they are okay or need additional support. The Employee Experience Group will hopefully assist with this, and regular feedback can be used to track progress.

Further discussion took place around equality and diversity and the problems trans and non-binary employees may face in the workplace. P Quinn explained that he chaired the Council's Proud Network and there will be an upcoming trans awareness

session being brought to employees as part of Pride month. This will also include one of the Council's trans employees telling their own story.

A key line of enquiry was around social media and the abuse some council employees may face in their day-to-day roles. Members asked if there was any correlation between the type of work and sickness, officers explained that there were a range of varied interventions that were in place when dealing with mental health. Currently, there is focus on a piece of work surrounding trauma informed support and having the correct intervention and support in place for all staff.

M Potter added that there is not a correlation between the two factors. It had been noted that the Comms Team had very low sickness rates, but they had the correct tools in place to enable them to step away if necessary.

Additionally, the Contact Centre Team previously had a high rate of sickness however now the correct steps are in place - it is hard finding a correlation as staff have the right support in place. P Quinn stated that resilience was essential and having the right tools and techniques in place.

Questioning arose around the systems in place for employees with personal problems that may affect their ability to work. P Quinn responded, highlighting the employee assistance programme available to staff 24/7 with a variety of tools and counsellors which support both staff and their family members on a range of topics (not just work-related issues).

A discussion took place around the investment into Council buildings and asked officers if they felt that the investment had been worthwhile. Officers explained that the investment had been fantastic during the pandemic for smart working. Additionally, Level 1 in Westgate is now very different to the other floors – this went down very well with staff. A 12-month review was undertaken, from these findings the other floorplates are undergoing adaption.

Members expressed concern over the high percentage of employees stating that they would leave the authority in the next 12 months and asked how the figure could be reduced. Officers reassured members explaining that it was a new question added to the survey, however there were no problems to report in terms of turnover and retention.

Discussions took place around the topic of performance reviews, officers stated there was a 70% completion rate of PDRs across the council, it would be near impossible to get 100% due to sickness, maternity leave, etc. Emerging data shows that the idea of performance reviews is quite outdated, sitting down after 6- or 12-month periods is often too long. Managers are being encouraged to have more regular feedback conversations with their team and become more agile, this will enable prompt responses to any concerns and praise at the appropriate time rather than months

later. One aim is for the conversations to be led by the individual rather than management it is both important and beneficial for the individual to have the talking space rather than it being a box ticking exercise. Further work on the PDR process is planned for 2023/24.

Members discussed communication methods and asked officers if they deemed it appropriate for staff to review corporate communications for 30 minutes each week as advised. P Quinn explained that a one size fits all approach would not work in this case, the reasoning behind the 30-minute message was to reassure staff that it is okay to take time out of the day to view corporate messages. Additionally, the implementation of Let's Talk sessions over the years has been successful in terms of providing updates to staff and allow a direct line of questioning.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) Witnesses be thanked for their attendance and that the report be noted.
- (ii) Officers investigate the reasons why some employees didn't respond to the survey
- (iii) Officers investigate the possibility of, and options for, conducting more frequent surveys/engagement activity

68 Exclusion of the Public and Press

RESOLVED that the public and press be excluded from this meeting during consideration of the items so marked because of the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by the specific paragraphs of Part I of the Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended, subject to the public interest test.

69 Cyber Security

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

- Dave Robinson – Service Director Customer, Information & Digital Services, Barnsley Council
- Sara Hydon – Head of Service Design & Compliance Manager, Barnsley Council
- Simon Marshall – Governance & Compliance Manager, Barnsley Council
- Shaun Waddington – Security & Information Specialist, Barnsley Council
- Rob Winter – Attending in his capacity as Data Protection Officer
- Cllr Robin Franklin – Cabinet Spokesperson, Core Services

Members were invited to consider a cover report addressing cyber security risks and the resilience required to prevent a cyber-attack.

S Marshall & S Hydon provided Members with an update on the work done with regards to Cyber Security. Following the introduction from witnesses, a full and frank

discussion took place to understand the policies and processes for cyber security, including those relating to a cyber-attack; training and development for employees and elected members; the management of risks and assets, including finances; and the results of recent reviews and audits, including how Barnsley compares to other local authorities.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) Witnesses be thanked for their attendance and that the report be noted
- (ii) Officers provide additional development sessions as discussed in the session
- (iii) Officers ensure that processes for removing obsolete information is robust and adhered to

Chair