

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

23 October 2023

Working Well Survey 2022



Report of Corporate Management Team

Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources

Electoral division(s) affected:

None

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (COSMB) with:
 - a) an overview of the Council's survey results from the Working Well Survey undertaken between 10 October and 7 November 2022;
 - b) the identified key priority areas and proposed actions / initiatives following the Working Well Survey results.

Executive Summary

2. The working well survey was conducted to collect information about the views of employees on workplace wellbeing issues including mental health, engagement and communications. It included a set of questions recommended by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) around workplace stress management standards and questions from the council's previous annual survey on internal communications.
3. The HSE stress management standards related results are extremely positive with virtually all areas showing DCC in the 80th percentile. Staff related satisfaction results from the survey are good and this demonstrates the initiatives, support and focus on good leadership is making a difference to how our staff feel about working for the Council.
4. As with any survey, whilst the results are positive, there are some areas identified which scored slightly lower which we would aim to improve on as set out below:

- Clarity of the council's vision and priorities (including service priorities)
 - Internal communications and engagement
 - Senior management demands
 - Awareness of staff networks
 - Employee benefits package and awareness
5. This report also provides feedback from the various employee groups which have been consulted and engaged, together with an outline of the agreed actions and initiatives from the working well survey undertaken between 10 October and 7 November 2022.

Recommendation(s)

6. COSMB is asked to note the contents of this report.

Background

7. The working well survey was undertaken between 10 October and 7 November 2022. The survey asked employees views upon:
 - family friendly policies and practices and flexible working
 - working conditions including control, demands, relationships, role and support
 - communication channel effectiveness
 - information, training, knowledge and awareness
 - willingness to speak up for the council
 - ideas for improving internal communications and making the council a better place to work
 - council benefits and networks
8. The HSE survey questions were used as a like for like benchmark against the 2017 survey outcomes.

Methodology

9. The survey was promoted electronically via email, the intranet and various employee communication publications.
10. In addition, hard copies were distributed to establishments including depots, leisure centres and social care establishments to engage employees who do not have access to electronic means of communications.

Response

11. A total of 3,052 responses were received (3,033 electronically and 19 via hard copies).
12. This represents 35.6% of employees in the survey population of 8,570 as per table 1 below:

Employee distribution across service groupings	Total
Adult and Health Services	915
Children & Young Peoples Services	1,839
Corporate Affairs	1
Neighbourhoods and Climate Change	1,552
Regeneration, Economy and Growth	2,421
Resources	1,842

Employee distribution across service groupings	Total
Grand Total	8,570

13. The response rate was 3.8% points lower than the equivalent survey undertaken in Spring 2017, which achieved a response rate of 39.4% (3,702 returns – 3,382 electronic and 320 hard copies).
14. Of the total number of respondents, 13% of respondents came from AHS, 24% from CYPS, 13% from Neighbourhoods, 20% from REG and 30% from RES.

Summary of findings

15. Overall, the findings are broadly positive, and the survey response rate is high, particularly within the context of the amount of organisational change there has been since the last comparative survey in 2017.
16. Combining responses where people said ‘always and ‘mostly’, indicates that (2017 percentage in brackets):
 - 83% (89%) have sufficient information to work effectively;
 - 91% (93%) knew what was expected of them in their role;
 - 70% (77%) feel free to express their views to managers;
 - 65% (61%) have a meeting at least once a month;
 - 73% (75%) would speak highly of the council outside of work.

Employees and their workplace

17. The workplace mental health and wellbeing section included a set of 35 questions recommended by the HSE to create a database for analysis with their management standards analysis tool. This enabled a categorized benchmarking comparison with other organisations around stress factors. The results were split into the following possible action categories:
 - Doing very well - need to maintain performance (top 20%)
 - Good, but need for improvement (above average)
 - Clear need for improvement (below average)
 - Urgent action needed (bottom 20%)
18. The stress factors with results achieved in brackets were:
 - Demands (doing very well)
 - Control (good but needs improvement)

- Managers' support (doing very well)
 - Peer support (doing very well)
 - Relationships (doing very well)
 - Role (doing very well)
 - Change (doing very well)
19. This has shown improvement across the board on the 2017 HSE results.
20. Within the demands stress factor, most areas were doing very well, with the exception of the following which are all good, but needing improvement:
- Ability to combine different groups of work
 - Requirement to work intensively
 - Requirement to work fast
21. All of the sections of the control stress factor were good. The section relating to work time being flexible was doing very well.
22. All of the sections of the manager's support stress factor were doing very well with the exception of encouragement from the line manager, which featured as a lower score.
23. All of the sections of the peer support, relationship and change stress factors were doing very well.
24. Within the role stress factor, most areas were doing very well, with the exception of the following:
- Clarity of goals and objectives for the department (good, but could be improved);
 - Understanding of how their work fits into the overall aim of the council (need for improvement).

Usefulness of communications channels/methods

25. The council uses many different channels or tools to communicate with employees, and it is vital to assess the effectiveness of these channels. An assessment can also be used to identify the best methods to get priority messages across to employees.
26. Listed below are the channels and tools which over four in five of respondents rated as either being 'very' or 'fairly' useful as sources of information and communications with the percentage results:
- 90% Intranet;

- 88% Verbal team briefings;
 - 82% Chief Executive's monthly update.
27. Of the channels and tools listed only CMT Roadshows (40%) and notice boards (39%) had under half rating as very or fairly useful.
28. Other areas of useful sources of information suggested included team meetings (19 responses) and emails (from the authority/service – 16 responses).
29. The survey included two questions on social media to:
- assess the general usage of social media amongst our respondents and;
 - identify the types of social media used by employees to follow the council.
30. 78% (1,892) of respondents indicated that they used social media (69% from 2017 survey). Below, is a summary of social media channels, and the extent to which these respondents followed DCC's newsfeeds and posts (2017 percentage in brackets):
- Facebook 89% (37%)
 - Twitter 26% (14%)
 - Instagram 25% (5%)
 - LinkedIn 18% (5%)
 - YouTube 15% (6%)

Awareness and experience of corporate initiatives

31. The survey indicated varying levels of awareness and experience amongst employees in relation to corporate engagement initiatives.
32. There is a high degree of employee awareness and experience of communication tools through the Intranet, with all three of the Bulletin Board, Dear John and the Intranet discussion board having 84-85% awareness.
33. Awareness of CMT Vlogs is at 68%, however use is only at 17%.
34. Since it was launched in 2012, awareness of the Inspiring People Awards, the council's employee recognition scheme, has increased from 39% (2012) to 86%. This rise can be attributed to increased usage

and ongoing promotion which has now been embedded into the council's culture. Although the general awareness of the staff awards has increased, the actual usage of the scheme has decreased by 16% compared to last year.

35. Suggestions to improve the way we communicate internally included to improve the Intranet (54 responses), more face-to-face communication (largely relating to senior management/roadshows – 47 responses) and for communications to be prompt/timely (44 responses).
36. Awareness of the health and financial information and advice provided by the council all are around the same level, with around two thirds of respondents aware of each of them.
37. Several aspects of the benefits available to staff were disappointingly low (note there is no direct comparator with the previous survey as this was a new question for the 2022 survey):
 - Only 42% aware of all the benefits available;
 - 34% feeling that benefits are easy to access;
 - Under one in three (32%) satisfied with the range of benefits available.
38. The employee benefits valued the most were:
 - Holidays and annual leave (94%);
 - Flexible working (89%);
 - Pensions scheme and optional additional contributions (87%).

Family friendly and flexible working

39. Over three quarters of respondents (77%) agreed their working time can be flexible (72% from 2017 survey). Further to this, 71% agreed that the council tried its best to help agree working arrangements to suit employee's needs (70% from 2017 survey).
40. Suggestions on how flexible ways of working could be further improved included the requirement of the homeworking/in-office requirements, to increase flexibility of hours (core, start/finish times) and to allow full-time home working.
41. The implementation of the new ways of working policy (which includes the revised hybrid working model and applications for permanent homeworking) was launched on 7 November 2022. The responses from the working well survey referencing the rigidity of the home/office

requirements may not be a true reflection of feedback given when the survey was undertaken, applications for permanent homeworking and the revised 2:3 hybrid model was not effective at that time; however, communications were issued on the new ways of working in advance of the survey on 28 September 2022.

Knowledge about vision and priorities

42. Since 2013 we have asked questions about respondents' knowledge of the council's vision and priorities, as well as those of their service grouping. The question was phrased as a three-point scale: 'a lot'; 'a little' and 'nothing'.
43. Where it concerns knowledge about the council's vision and priorities, 94% of respondents had some knowledge (41% 'a lot' plus 53% 'a little'). (92% from 2017 survey, 36% 'a lot' plus 56% 'a little').
44. Respondents seemed to know more about their service grouping's priorities (53% 'a lot') when compared with knowledge on the overall vision and priorities of the council (51% from 2017 survey).
45. Respondents are very informed of the values and behaviours with 97% with some level of awareness (60% 'a lot' plus 37% 'a little').

Informed to do work

46. Having sufficient information and resources is important for employees in order to work effectively, and when asked, 83% of respondents said they 'always' and 'mostly' have sufficient information to do their work. 79% said they 'always' and 'mostly' have sufficient resources to do their work. This appears to be falling from 2017 with 89% having sufficient information and resources (and compared to 90% in 2014).
47. An additional indicator which can be viewed in tandem with the information employees have at their disposal, is their ability to know what is expected of them in their role. A high percentage (91%) of respondents indicated they knew what was expected of them ('always' – 48%; 'mostly' - 43%). (90% from 2017 survey, 'always' 47%; 'mostly' 43%).

Management support

48. Questions to gather information on the relationship between managers and their teams have been included to assess the extent to which employees feel supported by their managers. Whilst there has been a fall in the points since the 2017 survey the results are still positive

- free to express their views to managers – 70% (2017 – 77%);
 - encouraged to think and work differently by trying new ways of working – 57% (2017 – 64%).
49. Team meetings are an important method of communication as they facilitate interaction and feedback between managers and their teams. 65% (2017 – 61%) of respondents indicated that they attended at least one meeting per month ('always', 'mostly') where they are provided with information about the council.
50. Suggestions on how employees could be enabled to work more effectively/smarter included to increase staff/reduce workload (156 responses), Improve management (training for managing people WFH/people management – 120 responses).

Advocacy

51. When asked what the likelihood was of employees speaking highly of the council outside of work, 74% (if 'sometimes' is included, this figure rises to 92%) of respondents said that they would. (67% from 2017 survey; if 'sometimes' is included – 89%).
52. When asked what the likelihood was of employees recommending the council as a place to work, 71% (if 'sometimes' is included, this figure rises to 90%) of respondents said that they would. (62% from 2017 survey; if 'sometimes' is included – 85%).

Employee development, training and PDRs

53. With regard to responses relating to whether or not respondents had access to training and development opportunities at work, 81% (81% - 2017) of respondents indicated that they have had such opportunities over the last year.
54. Where employees did not have access the most common reasons behind it were that they had no time/workload was too high (98 responses); and that relevant/role related training was not available (88 responses).
55. Regarding PDRs, 80% of employees reported that they have had a PDR during the last year (90% from 2017 survey). 70% said they received useful feedback during their last PDR (79% from 2017 survey).

56. Three quarters of respondents take responsibility for their own learning and development (always or mostly). Under half (49%) saw the learning and development opportunities in the last year helping them improve their performance.

Council qualities

57. Of the aspects that employees find make Durham County Council a good place to work, the most common reasons given were flexibility or flexible/hybrid working (459 responses), colleagues (320 responses) and a caring/supportive employer (128 responses).
58. Of the changes employees would make to improve the council as a place to work the most common improvements would be to improve pay (163 responses), to increase staff/lower workload (105 responses) and to increase flexibility/ability to work from home (101 responses).

Volunteering

59. Analysis on volunteering indicated that 26% of employees volunteer in some capacity at the moment. Of those that don't volunteer, 65% said they don't have enough time and if the council was to provide time-off, 60% of those not volunteering at the moment said they would be more inclined to do so (note there is no direct comparator with the previous survey as this was a new question for the 2022 survey).
60. An Employer Supported Volunteering Scheme is currently being considered with proposed implementation and roll-out to employees from Spring 2024.

Employee Engagement

Service Management Teams

61. Consultation with each Service Management Team was undertaken across May – June 2023 on their own service groupings working well results.
62. Feedback in general was very positive and consistent with the corporate picture and summary.
63. Individual results have been issued direct to Heads of Service for each service and their management team to review and consider their results from a service perspective and develop local action plans (with support from HR Business Leads) where relevant.

Strategic Managers

64. An engagement session on the results of working well survey took place as part of the strategic manager briefing session on 25 May 2023. Their feedback has been noted and incorporated into the overall action plan.

Tier 5 Managers

65. Over 300 Tier 5 Managers were briefed on the high-level results at manager briefing sessions on 3 and 10 July 2023. Their feedback has been noted and incorporated into the overall action plan.

Health Advocates

66. An engagement session on the results of the working well survey also took place with the Health Advocates on 28 June 2023 as a group of staff representatives.
67. As part of this session, Public Health facilitated a focus group discussion on the role of the advocates and their purpose which identified the need to revisit what is on offer in terms of wellbeing for the workforce and develop a plan to re-enforce through regular communications and managers awareness.

Staff Network Chairs

68. The Head of HR and Employee Services briefed the six network chairs on the high-level results and the proposed key areas on 30 June 2023, which was well received.
69. An action from the meeting was to look at the disaggregation of the survey results by protected characteristic where possible. This helps us to understand any differences in responses between different groups of staff e.g. disabled/non-disabled staff, LGBT staff, minority ethnic staff etc. This exercise has been carried out with the results to be shared with the Staff Network Chairs in due course.

Trade Unions

70. The high-level results were shared with Trade Unions on 3 May 2023. The unions will play an active role in the actions to be taken forward.

Areas identified for improvement

71. As with any survey undertaken, there will be areas identified for further improvement and intervention. The following five themes have been

identified which will be regularly monitored and reviewed as part of the Employee Better Health at Work Group.

Key Action	Leads	Survey Results
Clarity of the council's vision and priorities (including service priorities)	Head of Corporate Affairs Head of HR & Employee Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 41% know a lot about the council's vision and priorities • 53% know a lot about their service grouping's priorities • 60% know a lot about the council values and behaviours
Internal communications and engagement	Head of Corporate Affairs Head of HR & Employee Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the communication channels and tools available, CMT Roadshows (40%) and notice boards (39%) had under half rating as 'very' or 'fairly useful'. • Other areas of useful sources of information included team meetings and emails (from the authority / service)
Senior management demands	Head of HR & Employee Services Corporate Health & Safety Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The results of the survey highlighted issues around senior management demands. These results were similar to when the survey was last completed in 2017. The results indicated that whilst demand is high, senior managers do have a good level of control.
Awareness of staff networks	Head of Corporate Affairs Head of HR & Employee Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of staff networks is between 20-30%
Improve and promote employee benefits	Head of HR & Employee Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 42% are aware of all the benefits available • 56% know where they can find more information on employee benefits • 34% find employee benefits easy to access

Key Action	Leads	Survey Results
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 32% are satisfied with the range of employee benefits that the council offers

Key Actions

Understanding of Council and Service Objectives

72. In order to address this area of the survey, a simplified strap line which can be used for the workforce will be developed to explain the “why we are here” which will link to the Council’s vision and corporate priorities.
73. This will be complimented by the development of an Employee Value Proposition Statement which will set out what is important about working for the Council, what we stand for, what we offer and what we expect of the workforce.
74. In addition, work is ongoing to develop a ‘Corporate Narrative’ which aims to ‘tell the story’ of the council, explaining our purpose, ambition and vision. A range of stakeholders will be consulted (LGA / Strategic Managers etc) with the final proposal being approved by Corporate Management Team in due course.
75. Both of the above will be regularly re-enforced through internal communications and be used in induction for new employees joining the Council.
76. At a service level, Managers need to ensure the workforce understand how they fit into service priorities through regular team briefings and PDRs / one to ones.
77. The Council’s Values and Behaviours Framework is to be re-launched as a reminder to managers and employees through the PDR process by way of a corporate objective to be included for all employees:

Live the council’s values of Outcome Focussed, People Focussed, Empowering and Innovative and embed these through our behaviours.

Awareness of Staff Networks

78. Work has commenced to raise awareness of the staff networks with attendance at EMT and Strategic Manager/Tier 5 manager sessions and a dedicated section on our staff intranet. This is being complimented by quarterly articles in Buzz and through internal communications and engagement and weaved into the induction for new employees.

79. The staff networks are also considering how they can assist in ensuring we build a more inclusive organisation, taking responsibility for some key objectives and initiatives.

Improve and promote the Benefits Offer

80. Work has already commenced in relation to employee benefits with information on all benefits available consolidated into one designated place on the new intranet for existing employees and the wider benefits of working for the council being linked via job adverts and induction.
81. A project has commenced and is well underway to improve the staff benefits offer which will continue.

Communications and Engagement - Staff Roadshows

82. Work has begun on regular new Chief Executive webinars. The sessions will keep staff up to date on key things affecting the council and allow staff to hear directly from the CE with his view on how the council aims to address the issues. The sessions will also provide staff the opportunity pose questions to the CE and other speakers.
83. The new format takes advantage of MS Teams and other new technologies and allows staff to easily take part no matter where they are working, in line with hybrid and other working practices.
84. The new webinars will replace the previous CMT roadshows, however, service-based roadshows will continue in line with local plans. Given the move to hybrid working, online webinars will help to minimise travel time, mileage claims and the emissions created by travelling to a roadshow, which in turn helps us achieve our climate change and environmental objectives.

Senior Management Demands

85. Proposals to address senior management demands highlighted in the working well survey is subject to further consideration and agreement by Corporate Management Team.

Future Surveys and Other Analysis

86. A further Workplace Health Needs Assessment is due to be conducted in 2024, as a requirement of the Better Health at Work Award. The results of this will complement the working well survey and again generate a focus on certain campaigns and support to take forward for the workforce.

87. The introduction of a 'Stay Survey' is currently being considered to gather insights into employee satisfaction, talent retention and turnover risk. Understanding why employees choose to stay at the council and what could entice them to leave the organisation, would help to inform strategies for retaining top talent.

Conclusion

88. In considering the results, it is important to acknowledge what has changed around us since 2017 such as the impact of Covid-19, life choices being made, ageing workforce, national recruitment challenges, unrest/industrial action across many sectors and poverty/cost of living crisis.

89. The above key corporate actions will enable the Council to continue:

- to monitor the impact of our workforce strategy interventions and wellbeing strategy and plans;
- to make wellbeing part of what we do through what is in place across the organisation.

Author(s)

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

NA

Finance

NA

Consultation

As set out in the report.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

As set out in the report.

Climate Change

NA

Human Rights

NA

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

3,052 employees completed the survey which represents an overall response rate of 35.6%.

Accommodation

None

Risk

NA

Procurement

None