

Scrutiny Committee – 5th October 2010

13. Results of Staff Survey

Executive Portfolio Holder: Jo Roundell Greene – Economic & Organisational Development
Chief Executive: Mark Williams
Assistant Director: Ian Clarke – Assistant Director-Legal & Corporate Services
Lead Officer: Ian Clarke – Assistant Director-Legal & Corporate Services
Contact Details: ian.clarke@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01935) 462184

Purpose of the Report

To advise members of the outcome of the recent staff survey and seek views on how any issues revealed by it should be addressed (if at all).

Action Required

- (1) Note the outcomes of the survey.
- (2) Consider the proposed suggestions contained in the report to address the issues raised by the survey.
- (3) Agree to carry out another survey in 6 months time using the same statements to assess impact of implemented measures.

Background

Members will recall that at their meeting on the 11th May 2010 when considering the Strategic Development and Improvement Plan they suggested that the frequency of collection and analysis of staff satisfaction should be increased to six-monthly rather than annually. This was because members felt that the changes that were being proposed as a consequence of the partnership with East Devon District Council could impact upon staff morale and this would need to be both monitored and any action taken in relation to the outcome in a timely manner. It would benefit both the organisation and staff if, during times of potential change to how services are delivered and how the organisation is managed, a more regular impact analysis is carried out.

Organisations cannot do anything in relation to matters they don't know about and so the "knowing" is the first stage in the process. It is then for the organisation to decide what it does with that information.

The Scrutiny Manager was provided with details of the questions to be asked in the survey to ensure that they actually addressed the issues that members had raised.

The Survey Results

The survey was carried out via Insite (the online staff notice board) with a request that managers made hard copies available to those members of staff who did not have access to a PC. Staff were given over two weeks to complete the survey. Overall 108 responses were received which represents response rate of about 14% of the total number of all staff employed by this council. Whilst this result may be disappointing about a proposed change that will have far reaching effects on both councils, it is a significant enough of a response to be statistically valid.

Staff were broadly asked whether they agreed or disagreed with 6 statements. These are set out below with a brief comment on the results. The full survey report including any comments received are attached to this report.

1. **The Council is doing a good job of keeping me informed about matters that affect me particularly in relation to the partnership with East Devon District Council.**
Whilst over 50% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement there was just less than 50% who either disagreed or essentially remained to be convinced.
2. **I understand why SSDC and EDDC are sharing a Chief Executive and are working towards sharing managers and joining up services.**
Nearly 90% either agree or strongly agree with this statement. This is a very strong result on the face of it but is somewhat undermined by some of the comments that have been made by the 30+% of the staff who provided additional overall comments some of which relate to the lack of information about how deep the proposed integration will be going.
3. **I know where to find information about the work of the Joint Integration Committee and in relation to sharing services.**
Again a good response in terms of the numbers of staff who know where to go to get information. Over 75% is a strong result but there would still appear to be some underlying issues about how the information is being presented.
4. **I am aware of the budget issues facing the council and the potential impact of any likely future budget cuts.**
Reassuringly, the result here was that almost 75% of staff who responded agreed with this comment. Arguably this is a key part of the message. The “why” we are doing something needs to be given prominence so people properly understand the nature and extent of the issues that are being faced by both organisations.
5. **I feel I can influence or contribute towards the joint working initiative with EDDC.**
It is disappointing that over 50% feel they cannot either influence or contribute towards the joint working initiative. Getting staff involved early on so they can help shape the outcome means that it is easier to both sell and implement change. Whilst it may be that time constraints have impacted upon the possibility of greater staff involvement, it is an area that needs to be addressed in a structured way going forward.
6. **Overall, taking everything into account, I am satisfied with communication with staff at SSDC.**
This result, whilst over 50%, is not a ringing endorsement of the how the current communication with staff is being perceived. It is clear from this that some additional work needs to be done.
7. **Any other comments**
A number of issues have been revealed by the additional comments that would not have been revealed by the responses to the six statements. These seem to revolve around issues about whether SSDC is perceived to be an equal partner or the “poor relation” to EDDC. It reveals a lack of clarity over the extent of the joint working and that it seems to be happening without staff generally being involved.

Overall it is suggested that the outcome doesn't reveal significant or fundamental issues. It does however clearly demonstrate that there are areas where the council “could do better”. There needs to be a consistency of message across both organisations and the timing of information changes needs to be co-ordinated. This will ensure all staff in both SSDC and EDDC get the same message at the same time. There are concerns about how SSDC is

being perceived both here, at EDDC and externally. Any suggestions of take-over, whilst clearly nonsensical, must nevertheless be robustly dealt with. There should be clear SSDC focussed leadership; the fact that the councils are working in partnership doesn't mean that there is no need to have people looking after each other's interests as well. Members will no doubt be concerned about suggestions that EDDC staff and interests will be favoured in the new structures. There is a need to restate the open and transparent nature of the process and also reflect that EDDC officers may similarly feel that SSDC's interests may be favoured as a counter to the fact that the Chief Executive is an EDDC officer! Whilst there is only so much one can do in relation to comments such as these, it is vital that both members and officers in both organisations are clear about the fact that this is a partnership of equals between two sovereign authorities who have quite distinctive and separate personalities. This partnership-working proposal is about saving money and protecting frontline services; it is not about creating a single new council out of two existing ones.

However a clear message needs to be given again to staff and previous messages revisited to ensure there is absolute clarity over the purpose and the means. The information on Insite should start with an overall introductory summary of the proposal or plans. This should be the first thing people read every time they access the joint working section of the website to constantly reinforce the message. The budget context driving why we are doing this could again perhaps be re-stated so staff can see and fully appreciate the scale of the issues being faced and also the consequences of not pursuing this partnership initiative.

Finally, it is the role of all managers to ensure their staff are aware of the current position and are involved and encouraged to shaping the way forward. They may need to be reminded of this responsibility. Finally, whilst the organisation can make the information available to staff and remind them it is available, they do have a responsibility themselves to access the information and follow up with their manager if they need further information or clarification.

The survey results provide useful baseline information. It is suggested that it would be worthwhile repeating the same survey in 6 months time to see what impact has been on the results of carrying out the suggestion actions contained in this report.

Financial Implications

Any that there may be can be met from within existing budgets.

Corporate Priority Implications

There are no implications directly resulting from this report or any actions that it proposes.

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)

There are no implications directly resulting from this report or any actions that it proposes.

Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no implications directly resulting from this report or any actions that it proposes.

Background Papers: SSDC Staff Survey July 2010
