	Performance and Finance Select Committee 8th September 2009 **Report from** **Director of Business Transformation**
For Information	

Report Title: Staff Survey 2008/9 - Action Plan Update

1.0   Summary

1.1   This report reviews progress on implementation of the 2008/9 Staff Survey Action Plan, highlighting achievements and work in progress. It will be appreciated that for many of the initiatives the full impact and realisation of the benefits will become more evident over time.

2.0   Recommendations

2.1   This report is for information only.

3.0   Detail

3.1   Background

The staff survey is a valuable tool in assessing levels of employee engagement across the council and there is much empirical evidence to suggest that those organisations with high levels of employee engagement are also those where performance is highest. Engaged employees are better motivated, have less absence and are more productive. It therefore makes sense that not only should we conduct an annual survey but we should highlight the key areas for development, develop an action pan and feed back to staff.

3.2   General Findings

Scores were generally in line with the results of the 2007 survey. There are 35 benchmarkable questions and Brent Council scored above average on 15 questions, within the benchmark average on a further 16 questions and below the benchmark on only 4 questions. The overall engagement score for Brent council has improved significantly and is now 77% (66% previously).

3.2.2   Headline areas of strong performance

- Good relationships within teams, driven by effective and supportive line management;

- Employees work seen as related to the goals and objectives of the Council with staff willing to go the 'extra mile';

- Training seen as a strength for the Council, resulting in improvements and performance;

- Council perceived to be largely in line with equal opportunities values and staff are treated with fairness and respect.

3.2.3   Headline areas for improvement

- Respondents do not feel they have the opportunity for bottom up communication;

- Limited communication around career opportunities and promotion decisions;

- Appraisals could reflect performance more accurately;

- Reporting of perceived discrimination is low;

- Visibility of senior managers has decreased;

- Working hours need to be monitored in order to maintain work life balance.

3.2.4   Key Driver Analysis

As with the 2007 survey a 'key driver analysis' has been undertaken. Key driver analysis is a statistical technique which groups questions in order to measure levels of employee engagement. Employee engagement is a measure that goes beyond satisfaction levels to explore employees' willingness to and ability to invest their personal effort into the success of the organisation. Out of eight key factors identified, the consultants ORC International have highlighted two areas where the council should focus improvement. These are 'professional development' and 'senor management, change and cooperation'. Within these factors, the key questions with the highest impact on engagement and where action needs to be focussed are:

- I am confident about my career opportunities at Brent Council;

- I believe action will be taken on problems identified in the survey;

- My performance has improved as a result of the skills I have developed over the past year;

- There are good working relationships and support between departments that have to work together.

3.1.5   Staff Survey Action Plan

The above questions have formed the basis for this year's corporate action plan and will support much of the work to be undertaken over the next year in line with the Improvement and Efficiency Strategy. In addition, the area of 'visibility of senior managers' has also been incorporated into the action plan, as whilst this is not an area highlighted by the key driver analysis, visible leadership will be of significant importance during the One Council Transformation Programme.

A different approach to action planning has been adopted this year following feedback that the 2008 action plan was too complex. In view of this, the "You said" and "Our pledge" method has been used focussing on the question areas above supported by a more in-depth action plan accessible to staff (See Appendix 'A' and 'B'). It is anticipated that such an approach will make the actions clear, easy to understand and to communicate progress against the plan back to staff. Feedback from the Improving Brent seminar has been utilised in the formulation of the corporate action plan.

4.0   Detail

Progress on implementation of the Action Plan is set out under each of the main headings below. The initiatives cited reflect the work that is being carried out at a strategic level but it also contain examples of work being undertaken at a departmental or unit level. Whilst a comprehensive account of initiatives is given, it is not an exhaustive account of work being undertaken at a local level:

4.1   Career Development:

- A review of the pay and grading arrangements for Brent will begin during 2009 and will include the development and introduction of a range of generic job descriptions framed around generic job families, which will enable the workforce to be more flexible and responsive to changing demands. It will also enable the Council to develop further career pathway arrangements and as such support staff to better manage their own careers.

- Workforce development plans have now been agreed for all departments identifying the workforce needs for the future and how these will be meet over the coming years including succession and talent management initiatives.

- All staff should have their career aspirations and development needs highlighted during their appraisal with actions and timescales agreed. A number of focus groups held with staff recently as part of a review of the current appraisal system indicate that this is happening in about 78% of cases.

- All career development opportunities are published across the council on the intranet and a revised recruitment policy will be introduced in the autumn which will enhance career development opportunities for council

staff. The transformation agenda has also increased the opportunity for staff to develop their skills through secondments e.g. BEST which supports departmental service reviews and more locally staff are being given the opportunity to join project teams to review and enhance service delivery thereby enhancing their own skill set and their future career opportunities.

- A review around the funding arrangements of professional development and relevant qualifications has taken place to address the different approaches taken across the council. A paper will be taken to CMT in the autumn.

- Housing and Community Care support staff who wish to train as social workers with work placements and some assistance towards fees. The One Stop Service have increased the opportunity for staff to shadow staff in other areas to not only increase understanding of different service area roles but to enhance and develop individual's skills.

4.2   Training and Appraisals:

- All members of staff should now have an appraisal with clear development objectives linked to unit objectives. The focus groups mentioned above again indicate that for those staff who have received appraisals, 95% of them have development opportunities linked to unit objectives. The council is still developing a system for capturing the numbers of staff who have had an appraisal which will be introduced later in the year to enhance management information around appraisals and the monitoring thereof.

- An in-depth evaluation of priority learning and development interventions has been undertaken and the findings will be published following completion of the final report. A comprehensive evaluation process and tools have also been developed to support Learning and Development staff , key stakeholders, and managers in the process of evaluation

- All managers are required to meet with their staff to help them make sure their learning is put into practice in the work place following a learning event. Whilst there is no empirical evidence to support this, the pledge clearly reinforces this expectation of managers and there are a number of examples across the council to suggest that this is indeed happening. For example, in Children and Families the line manager of one member of staff who undertook risk management training has seen a significant improvement in performance, has asked the individual to train the rest of the team and used her documentation for other team members. Recent training attended by One Stop Shop and Revenues and Benefits staff in the principles of Lean process re-engineering have also been successfully applied with the support of managers in their service delivery review.

- The L and D training programme has been specifically designed to reflect the development needs of the organisation and individual's to meet the council's strategic objectives following consultation with key stakeholders across the council

4.3   Partnership Working and reduction in contact numbers

- A project is underway to identify and reduce the number of contact points across the council for both internal and external customers. A single point of contact (SPOC) has already been introduced for general Human Resources enquiries to enhance the accessibility of information around people issues. The initial evaluation of the initiative suggests that this, together with the introduction of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on the HR website, has reduced the need for departmental teams to answer basic queries thereby enabling them to focus more on leading and supporting departmental priorities. The initiative has also enhanced partnership working between HR and the People Centre resulting in a more cohesive HR service to customers.

- Focus groups are currently being held with staff across the council to develop a core set of values that will support the One Council Transformation Programme.

- A number of One Council reviews and transformation programmes have encouraged partnership working between the different departments. For example, Revenue and Benefits have been working closely with the One Stop Service, forming a multidisciplinary team, to critically review and improve the service it provides to customers.

- In the Regeneration Unit the three 'central' teams have relocated into a single, open plan office space. The teams worked together to design the space, and integrated team meetings now promote a better understanding of roles and responsibilities

4.4   Visibility of senior managers and communication

- Lunches with the Chief Executive have been introduced together with a blog. Both initiatives were introduced to improve access to the Chief Executive and enhance two way communications, especially for those staff who may not usually have contact with the chief executive. Initial feedback suggests that both initiatives have been well received by staff and by the Chief Executive himself. These provide both an additional method of engaging with staff, help us identify some of their key issues and also enable the chief executive to reinforce key messages during the Transformation Programme.

- The majority of departments now have a staff consultation panel or hold regular meetings with staff. Housing and Community Care for example, have extended membership of their Departmental Leadership Group to fourth tier managers, doubling the numbers of staff who meet with senior managers to hear updates, be involved in consultation and the decision making process around strategic issues. Within Environment and Culture all assistant directors and above now regularly attend team meetings.

- Brent Brief was introduced earlier in the year and contains information about issues of relevance and importance to all council staff. This has included information about pay settlements, changes to policies and

procedures and the council being recognised for its achievements. All managers across the council must share the contents with their teams and seek feedback as appropriate. Formal channels have been developed to enable staff to ask questions or make suggestions.

- The council has recently appointed an internal communications manager to undertake a review of internal communications and the development of an internal communications strategy to ensure all staff fully understand Brent's One Council change programme.

- Feedback to staff on actions taken following the staff survey have been included in a number of publications for staff in September.

- Chief Executive and CMT are visiting service units to encourage two way feedback and engender greater consultation.

- The Improving Brent seminars are to be reviewed as part of the One Council change programme.

- The new Fairness at Work Policy was introduced in the autumn of 2008 which encourages staff to raise issues in the workplace informally and a network of Fairness at Work Information Guides (FIGs) have been established to provide a support mechanism for staff raising issues. To support the informal resolution of issues a number of mediators have been selected, trained and accredited. This scheme was launched in the spring of 2009 and since this there has been a significant reduction in the number of formal grievances across the council with more informal resolution of issues.

5.0 Summary

5.1 A considerable amount of work has already been undertaken and other initiatives have been started to address the areas of concern highlighted in the staff survey. Employee engagement is high on the council's agenda and is seen as a vital component for securing the commitment and improved performance of our staff during the transformation programme. The introduction of the role of internal communications manager reinforces the commitment of the council to ensuring that our staff are involved and engaged in delivering the One Council agenda.

The 2009 staff survey is currently being finalised and will take place during the autumn with feedback and action planning sessions being diarised for early 2010.

6.0 Recommendation

6.1 This report is for information.

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 None

8.0   Legal Implications

8.1   None

9.0   Diversity Implications

9.1   Any issues arising from the survey are identified and addressed within the actions highlighted above with Impact Assessments undertaken as appropriate.

10.0   Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

10.1   Any staffing implications are being addressed under the various initiatives.

Background Papers

Staff Survey Action Plan 2008/9

Contact Officers

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