

STAFF SURVEY JOINT SCRUTINY TASK GROUP REPORT

JUNE/JULY 2017

Membership: **Bromsgrove District Council –**
Councillor Steve Colella (Chairman)
Councillor Caroline Spencer
Councillor Shirley Webb

Redditch Borough Council –
Councillor Jane Potter (Vice Chairman)
Councillor Tom Baker-Price
Councillor Jenny Wheeler

1. Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to confirm the findings of the Staff Survey Task Group to date and to redefine the scope in view of the suggested recommendations.

The Group must now change its focus and needs to move on from its assessment of the 2016 Staff Survey and the Performance Board's work programme. The Task Group has made every effort to drill down to get to the bottom of why there was a perceived low response to completing the survey but feels that this has now become outdated and overtaken by new Performance Board work streams.

The Task Group needs to now concentrate its work on ensuring that the next survey is fit for purpose, well defined, focused and that the outputs are robust in order that clear corporate and performance indicators can be developed. This in turn will ensure that the two authorities are performing efficiently and effectively to the highest levels of service. To support this outcome it must support initiatives that will ensure staff are supported, motivated and focused and that their wellbeing is a major contribution to making both Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils amongst the best performing authorities in the country.

The recommendations made by this Task Group are focused on ensuring that the preparation for the next survey (scheduled for autumn 2017) is designed and delivered based on the areas of improvement established from the work of this group.

It is proposed that a Lead Councillor for Supporting Staff be appointed to attend staff briefings with the Chief Executive Officer to show that Members are there to support staff and want to hear their views as well as ensuring that 'lessons learnt' from previous surveys are not ignored.

Through this recommendation it will reinforce the point that staff had a key role to play in supporting the Council to become more efficient, especially in the light of the challenging targets set in the Council's Financial Efficiency Plans.

The outcomes from the next and subsequent surveys must help support the most effective use of resources as well as being the platform from which staff morale and wellbeing become an integral part of improved performance across the authority.

The role of the Chief Executive and Performance Board will be a primary focus for change, building on the emerging corporate work streams. The enhanced and Member supported staff surveys will add value and focus to corporate actions.

During the life of this Task Group a number of important issues were identified that will also form additional recommendations from this interim report. These include the identified need to establish a well-founded and regular two-way performance management system that incorporates targets and objectives; a review of the quality of management information and the quality and purpose of the Dashboard system.

I would like to thank the Democratic Services' officers for their hard work and dedication to this task group and to officers and Executive Team for their support and help over the last year. I would like also to thank fellow Bromsgrove Councillors as well as Redditch Borough Councillors in what has been the first joint Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group across both authorities.

Cllr Steve Colella
Chairman

2. Recommendations

The Overview and Scrutiny Board/Committee is asked to recommend:

- a) That a member of the Overview and Scrutiny function be appointed to the role of Lead Councillor for Supporting Staff.
- b) The Lead Councillor for Supporting Staff and the relevant Portfolio Holder from each Council assist in the formulation of all future staff surveys and attend staff briefings.
- c) A quarterly update on the Programme Board's Action Plan be received by the Overview and Scrutiny Board/Committee.
- d) The Performance Scrutiny (RBC) and Measures Dashboard (BDC) Working Groups' terms of reference are updated to include an area covering performance management processes, performance target and objective setting across both authorities. (It is envisaged that this would be achieved through joint meetings being held on a regular basis.)

3. Introduction, and Background Information

For the first time, Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils have worked together to carry out a joint scrutiny task group. The Staff Survey was an area which Bromsgrove Members had considered on a number of occasions in previous years, with it first considering it back in 2013. Following receipt of the results of the second survey at its meeting in 19th September 2016 Members agreed, that as little progress appeared to have been made on a number of areas of concern, it was something which needed further investigation and would be suitable for joint scrutiny as the majority of staff were part of a shared service.

A topic proposal and a brief joint scrutiny protocol were considered by the Bromsgrove Overview and Scrutiny Board at its 31st October 2016 meeting. Following the agreement of the Board the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Cllr Colella attended the Redditch Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting putting forward its proposals. The Redditch Committee supported the proposal and the joint Scrutiny Task Group was formed. As it was the first time joint working had been carried out both Overview and Scrutiny functions agreed that the membership would be taken from the main committees on this occasion. The first meeting of the Staff Survey Joint Scrutiny Task Group took place on 22nd November 2016.

4. Observations

A number of observations have been made by the Group which they would like to note. The Group acknowledge the importance of carrying out joint scrutiny, but are concerned that in this case due to the nature of the subject being scrutinised and the timescale for setting up the Group itself (from when the subject was considered by the Bromsgrove Overview and Scrutiny Board to the first meeting of the Group over 8 weeks had elapsed), together with the work that was being put in place to address the issues raised in the staff survey have not made it an easy subject to consider.

As is highlighted in the detail within various points in section 4 below, the work of the Programme Board, which was set up to address those issues, has progressed at such a pace that the Task Group Members were unable to have significant influence or input into that work, although it should be noted its concerns over a number of the actions being taken were raised with the Chief Executive and supporting officers. It has also made it clear to those officers for the need to increase the number of respondents to any future staff surveys. After much deliberation the Task Group feel that little can be gained from continuing to look at the previous results, but can make recommendations which will ensure Members involvement in any future surveys at the earliest stage, that being at the creation of the survey through to the completion and analysis stages of it.

5. Terms of Reference

For ease of reference, this report will comment on different areas within the Terms of Reference (attached at Appendix 1) in order to show that the Group has considered and addressed, where possible, those areas which were initially highlighted by Members as in need of a more detailed investigation.

Scrutiny of the Survey Results

The Task Group found it difficult to come to many firm conclusions from the outputs of the survey. The Group were informed that these outputs had been grouped to form 3 main work streams (Organisational Culture, People Management and Meeting our Customers' Needs) led by the Performance Board (which had been set up following the Staff Survey to address the outcomes of it) made up of Kevin Dicks, Sue Hanley, Deb Poole and Amanda Singleton. The Group looked at the results of the survey and also the Performance Board's work stream and discussed with officers the actions that were being taken.

The Group felt that it can make a positive contribution to future surveys taking a 'lessons learnt approach' and through the creation of a Lead Councillor for Supporting Staff role. This would be a member of the Overview and Scrutiny function, who would be seen to support staff by supporting the Chief Executive at staff briefings and being available to talk to staff who may wish to share their views. By providing a more "hands on" approach this would enable Members to see and hear at first hand the views of staff and also take part in discussions around issues which may be identified within future surveys.

Scrutiny of the survey process and quality of the survey and the low response rate and implications

The Task Group felt that the process was widely promoted giving staff time to complete the survey, sending regular reminders and offering support where necessary. However, it was agreed that the quality and quantity of the questions was too broad and lacked the necessary range and type of responses that would allow robust analysis and give a true picture of staff views.

Whilst the Group felt that the 25% response rate was low, based on own work life experiences, Officers felt that it was a reasonable return. The Group remained unhappy with the low response rate and the implications that certain groups will have been over represented and others under represented, thus, resulting in biased results. Equally the Group thought Performance Board Work streams were therefore being put in place in response to issues raised by a minority of staff rather than the majority.

The Group therefore agreed that it was imperative that the Overview and Scrutiny function be involved in the creation of any future surveys, which would allow for a different perspective to be given. This also shows that the Group's views have been heard and officers understand that Members are keen to ensure that the staff are both listened to and understood. Officers are aware of the concerns raised around the response rate and will work with Members to increase the participation rate in future surveys.

Whilst the Group were unhappy with the low response rate and the implications from this (Members were concerned that actions were being put in place in response to issues raised by a minority of staff rather than the majority) after lengthy discussions it was agreed that their efforts would be better spent in ensuring that future surveys received a much higher return rate.

Investigation into model surveys and consider the criteria of the previous survey and lessons learnt

It was found to be difficult to do comparisons with other Councils in respect of the survey content. Members acknowledged that it was important to have some comparative data and therefore understood the need for the most recent survey to be along the same lines as those issued in 2013.

However, with such a variety of services being provided it was difficult to ask the same questions of everyone, as these were not always relevant to some areas and therefore it was suggested that future surveys may be better placed if they were tailored to particular areas e.g. separating frontline and customer facing services from enabling services.

The questions for each of these services would be more effective if they were specific to each of those areas. There should also be an opportunity to either add a note or to say “sometimes” rather than having to give a clear “yes” or “no”.

Consider how to increase the response rates in future

The Task Group found that because the Programme Board had already started to introduce work streams from the survey it was difficult for the Group to also pinpoint actions from it.

It was therefore agreed that it was essential for the Group to concentrate its efforts in supporting officers to ensure that the response rate to future surveys was increased, the range and quality of questions were conducive to extracting a balanced view across the service and ensuring that the questions were been tailored to meet the roles and responsibilities of each service provision.

The Programme Board Action Plan had already considered how to move this forward and individual Heads of Service had put forward suggestions on how to encourage and support staff in completing the next survey. The role of the Lead Councillor for Supporting Staff and the involvement of the Overview and Scrutiny functions will also play an important role in reassuring staff that they are listened to and actions are taken and ensure that there is an increase in both the number of surveys completed and the quality of the responses.

Consider the merits of the questions both in terms of desired outputs and the number of questions

The resulting work streams were discussed and the Group agreed that both the Cultural Referendum and the Meeting Customer Need survey appeared to be a knee jerk reaction to some of the results in the original survey. Members were not clear as to how the two surveys linked back to the findings of the original survey and were again concerned that this reaction was to responses from a minority of staff and may not represent the general view of the staff.

As detailed in the relevant section of the topic proposal headings, Officers need to ensure that any future survey content is formulated to get the maximum information that can be used in a constructive way and that does not necessitate further surveys being sent out. The Group agreed that both the Cultural Referendum and the Meeting Customer Need survey appeared to be a knee jerk reaction to some of the results in the original survey.

Bench mark survey with other similar organisations and marque organisation

As detailed and discussed, in several earlier sections, it is equally difficult to bench mark the survey against that of any other authority due to the individual needs of residents in different parts of the country and the different ways in which services are being provided these days. Whilst other authorities will discuss such a survey in general terms there is a reluctance to share any detail around staff responses.

Establish reasons for the low response rates

Without speaking to members of staff as to why they had not completed the survey the Group had made the assumption that this was due to a number of issues; there was apathy amongst staff based on no visible actions being taken from previous surveys, the delay in receiving published survey results, a feeling that the survey “does not apply to them” or staff did not have time to complete the surveys.

Anecdotally the Group established that the low response rates were also caused by the length of the survey, the structure of the response options as well as having few staff low literacy and IT skills.

Members were advised that all these issues would be addressed through each Head of Service creating an Action Plan on how they would deal with the low response rates for their individual teams in the future. Again, the Group agreed that it was the responsibility of the Overview and Scrutiny functions to ensure that these are addressed for any future surveys, through support and monitoring.

6. Lead Member for Staff

Following its final meeting when the recommendations and content of this report were discussed the Task Group agreed that it may be useful to include a little more detail around how they envisaged the Lead Councillor for Supporting Staff role working as it was not a type of role which had been considered before. Officers reminded Members that within the Audit, Governance and Standards function there were a number of roles to which Members were appointed as “champions” risk management been one in particular. Members envisaged that the main role of the Lead Councillor for Supporting Staff would be to attend staff briefings and assist officers with the formulation of future staff surveys. They could potentially act as a feedback mechanism in respect of the monitoring of the Performance Board Action Plan by the Overview and Scrutiny Board/Committee. The aim would be to show staff that Members whose role it was to act as a critical friend were ensuring that staff surveys were being responded to in an appropriate manner.

7. Conclusions and Future Plans

As the Programme Board and the three supporting work streams appear to have addressed the main issues raised in the most recent staff survey, the Group believe it is now the role of the Overview and Scrutiny functions to ensure that these actions are monitored through their meetings and those responsible are held to account, in order to ensure that staff morale is improved and support is put in place where needed and that the actions do not slip.

Through the Lead Councillor for Supporting Staff role Members will support the Chief Executive in reassuring staff that management want to hear their view and are there to support them. Staff had a key role to play in supporting the Council to become efficient. Moving forward the Councils face a number of challenges and need staff to be on board in order to tackle these. There are a number of areas which the Group feel need further discussion, work or clarification to ensure that the Councils move forward.

Staff

- Targets/Measures – clarity over what format these will take. It is acknowledged that the aim remains the same; to achieve the goals of the Councils.
- Ensure that 1-2-1s and Team meetings are taking place and that the communication and aim of a team is clear at all levels. There must be interaction within each team to ensure that the Councils' key messages are clear to everyone.
- Performance –v- Attendance. If people have a clear aim of what they need to achieve they will be more focused and positive in their outlook.

Council

- Corporate Dashboard – Both Dashboard Working Groups and the External Auditors (at BDC's most recent Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meeting) have raised this as not being up to date or accessible, particularly to Members. This needs to be addressed and fit for purpose.
- Strategic Purposes – Members questioned whether these were still fit for purpose. It was noted that each Council had very different demographics and Members felt that this needed to be recognised within those strategic purposes. Do these need to be realigned with each Council?
- Both the Strategic Purposes and the Council Plans for each Council need to have targets and deliverables clearly set out within them, with a strategic vision being underpinned by portfolio targets.

8. Supporting Documentation

Appendix 1 – Topic Proposals

Appendix 2 – Summary of Meetings



OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY TOPIC PROPOSAL

This form can be used for either a Task Group or a Short Sharp Review topic proposal.

Completed forms should be returned to scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk – Democratic Services, Bromsgrove District Council.

Name of Proposer: Cllr Steve Colella	
Tel No: 07758 739901	Email:s.coella@bromsgrove.gov.uk
Date: 21 st September 2016	

<p>Title of Proposed Topic</p> <p>(including specific subject areas to be investigate)</p>	<p>Scrutiny into the Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Council 2016 staff survey.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny of the survey results (Qualitative and Quantitative) and the underlying issues identified. • Scrutiny of the survey process and quality of survey • Investigations into the low response rate and implications • Investigation in to model surveys • Consider the criteria of the previous survey and lesson learned for future surveys. • The work of the Programme Board which is to be chaired by the Chief Executive. • The work to be carried out in respect of the three corporate work streams which have been established and headed up by key officers.
<p>Background to the Proposal</p> <p>(Including reasons why this topic should be investigated)</p>	<p>Following a presentation of the 2016 Staff survey to the Overview and Scrutiny Board (19th September 2016) concerns were raised in respect of the low response rate, the implications and possible reasons for such a disappointing outcome.</p>

<p>and evidence to support the need for the investigation.)</p>	<p>As this was a shared survey and the majority of services are shared with Redditch Borough Council it was suggested that it would be an ideal opportunity to carry out a piece of joint working with the RBC Overview & Scrutiny Committee, as the findings of the review could have implications for both Councils.</p>			
<p>Links to national, regional and local priorities</p> <p>(including the Council's strategic purposes)</p>	<p>The importance of conducting robust and regular staff surveys is to demonstrate that the organisation values the voice of its employees, at every level and is responsive to any changes that the results may highlight.</p> <p>Therefore the links are directly related to efficiency of the organisation, staff moral and effective service delivery.</p> <p>In order to achieve the Councils' strategic purposes we need to ensure that staff are motivated and operating in the appropriate culture to meet these objectives.</p>			
<p>Possible Key Objectives</p> <p>(these should be SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider how to increase the response rates in future. • Consider the merits of the questions both in terms of desired outputs and number of questions. • Establish reason for the low response rates • Bench mark survey with other similar organisations and marque organisations • To make Recommendations to the Bromsgrove Overview and Scrutiny Board and Redditch Overview and Scrutiny Committee. 			
<p>Anticipated Timescale for completion of the work.</p>	<p>November 2016 – February 2017</p>			
<p>Would it be appropriate to hold a Short Sharp Inquiry or a Task Group? (please tick relevant box)</p>	<p><u>Task Group</u></p>	<p>yes</p>	<p>Short Sharp Inquiry</p>	

OFFICE USE ONLY - TO BE COMPLETED WHEN THE TOPIC PROPOSAL IS ACCEPTED

Evidence	
Key documents, data, reports	
Possible Site Visits	
Is a general press release required asking for general comments/suggestions from the public?	
Is a period of public consultation required?	
Witnesses	
Officers	
Councillors (including Portfolio Holder)	
Any External Witnesses	

Potential Joint Working Arrangements

Membership: To be chaired by a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny function from the Council that proposed the topic.

Appoint a Vice Chairman (from the other Council).

6 Members made up of three from each Council. Each Member should be a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Board/ Committee on this occasion.

A Quorum of three be in place with at least one Member from each Council present.

Venue: alternate between each Council.

1. Verbal updates be given to the respective Overview and Scrutiny functions by the lead member with the final report being considered by both prior to it being considered at Cabinet / Executive.
2. Consultation with Portfolio Holders – both relevant Portfolio Holders should be invited to attend if considered appropriate.
3. The meetings will be private informal meetings as standard practice at both venues.

Summary of Meetings

Meeting 1 (22/11/16)

This initial meeting was used as an introduction into how the Group would work together as it was the first time that Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils had carried out joint scrutiny. The group looked at the terms of reference and discussed how best to approach its investigation.

Meeting 2 (07/12/16)

The Group interviewed the Head of Business Transformation and Organisational Development together with the Human Resources and Development Manager, looking in more detail at the results of the Staff Survey and the Cultural Referendum which was due to take place on 16th December, together with details around how the survey had been promoted, who decided the questions which were asked, whether the responses had provided the information that officers expected and actions which had arisen from the results. Members were keen to ensure that the Action Plan provided was monitored and the actions carried through to completion in a timely manner.

Members had also asked for additional information in respect of shared services as a number of Members had highlighted at the previous meeting that they were not clear on the arrangements and which areas were and were not shared.

Meeting 3 (06/02/17)

Members had been informed that a Programme Board had been established to ensure that the results of the Staff Survey were appropriately considered. Following analysis and discussion of the survey results the Programme Board agreed that the data would be considered at both Corporate and Service level. Three corporate work streams were established and headed up by key officers -, organisational culture, people management and meeting our customers' needs. (It was noted that Representatives from Human Resources, Organisational Development and the Trade Unions (Unison, GMB and UCATT) were also members of the Programme Board.)

At this meeting the Group interviewed the key officers involved in all of this work, the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Business Transformation and Organisational Development and the Head of Customer Access and Financial Support.

It was noted that at a service level Heads of Service had been provided with data for their own areas and had analysed this data and developed action plans with clear timescales to specifically address the three areas of greatest improvement/decline compared to the previous survey, whilst also focusing on any areas that they felt needed to be addressed within their services.

Detailed information was provided in respect of the thinking behind the Cultural Referendum (and the work of the Organisational Culture Work Stream) which had taken place, together with an update on the results and how and when these would be shared with staff and Members.

Members were also provided with the action plans which had been set up to ensure a number of areas picked up within the results of the Staff Survey were addressed in an appropriate and timely manner. Members were keen to ensure that this was monitored and feedback given regularly to both Members and staff to demonstrate that their concerns had been taken seriously and were being addressed.

Meeting 4 (22/02/17)

Members had asked, at the previous meeting, for information in respect of staff sickness absence and whilst this had been provided. There were a number of discrepancies which it was agreed would be addressed at the next meeting when the relevant officers would be invited.

The group took the opportunity to look at the Meeting Customer Needs survey, which was shortly to be issued to staff. Whilst Members understood the need to resolve some of the concerns raised by staff within the original survey, they were keen to ensure that staff were not inundated with different consultations which could lead to survey fatigue and an inclination not to continue to participate. Again, Members were also concerned that yet another survey would lead to further actions needing to be taken in addition to those which had been highlighted within the original survey.

Members discussed the detailed information which had been provided in respect of the Organisational Culture Work Stream which had been tabled at the previous meeting. The Group believed the papers provided were very academic and found it difficult to see how this could relate to the culture within the Council, being mindful of such a variety of areas within it. Members also questioned how the Council could make this work and measure it successfully. Members discussed whether the culture could be regarded as a result of current “management” practices and processes, for example target setting, task orientated objectives, rewards and recognition, budget costs and public perceptions. It was noted that culture within the work place was a matter which had been subject to extensive academic research and Members made reference to Kurt Lewin’s Change Model in particular. This model uses a principle of identifying the current culture, “unfreezing” it and “refreezing” it in order to make the changes necessary.

Meeting 5 (22/03/17)

The Head of Business Transformation and Organisational Development and the Human Resources and Development Manager attended this meeting to go through the staff sickness data. The Group were keen to explore whether there was any correlation between this and the results of the staff survey. It was agreed that it was difficult to make any link between the two and Members discussed in detail with officers the system of recording sickness and annual leave. The group was informed that this would be done in future through the introduction of a new HR21 system, which would also be able to draw down specific data on a “real time” basis. Although

it was acknowledged this would only be accurate if the system was used correctly and the data inputted regularly.

Members were also provided with details of actions being taken to increase the responses to future staff surveys. This was broken down into individual teams and showed Members that officers had considered a number of ways of address this and tailoring these to the needs of individuals where necessary.

Chairman's Meeting with Chief Executive (06/04/17)

The Task Group were keen not to duplicate any work which was already been undertaken by the Programme Board (or the supporting Work Streams) or to make recommendations or suggestions which related to work which was already underway. It was therefore agreed that it would be useful for the Chairman to meet with the Chief Executive (as lead officer of the Programme Board) to discuss the progress of the Task Group and to receive an update in respect of the Programme Board and the Work Streams, as it was clear from the information the Group had received most recently that a significant amount of work was already being carried out.

During those discussions it was established that a further staff survey needed to be done later in 2017 and would not follow the same format as the previous ones. It was further acknowledged that different areas had different needs and as such a standard, across the board approach would not be appropriate for all staff, as some areas would clearly have different objectives to work towards; one area of the Council was wholly customer focused and customer facing whilst the other was classed as enabling services, which supported those front facing services. For these reasons future surveys would need to recognise the objectives and aims of each service.

It was clear from speaking to the Chief Executive that the Performance Board had a lot of on-going work to do but had made a start. It was clear from the information provided that much of the Task Group's investigations were becoming out of date and superseded by further actions. For example, time has been spent by the Performance Board in looking at reasons why staff had not completed the survey.

From the information provided it was clear that the role of the Task Group was changing and that it could help support increasing the number of surveys completed, and move its focus from trying to find out why 75% didn't fill it in to ensuring that the numbers that completed the next one were increased. The Group could also take a role in monitoring the work of the Performance Board and the Work Streams to ensure that the work that has been discussed had actually been carried through.

The role of Lead Councillor for Supporting Staff was discussed which would include involvement in the preparation of the next survey and attend staff briefings with the Chief Executive to show that Members are there to support staff and want to hear their views.

Meeting 6 (26/06/17)

Members held one final meeting at which they discussed the report and recommendations and made a number of tweaks to the recommendations and report content. The Lead Councillor for Supporting Staff role was also discussed at some length as some Members' raised concerns around whether this was in fact something which should be picked up by the relevant Portfolio Holder rather than a member of the Overview and Scrutiny function.

It was agreed that the report would firstly be presented at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting at Bromsgrove due to be held on 22th August followed by the Redditch Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its September meeting.