

**WRS BOARD**  
**21<sup>st</sup> June 2018**

**WRS Staff Survey Results**

**Recommendation**

That members note the report

**Introduction**

Historically one of the performance indicators reported to members has been the satisfaction of staff working at WRS. This has previously been generated by an in-house survey and has yielded various results over the years but has generally shown reasonable levels of satisfaction with working for the organisation. The internal survey has also helped us to identify a number of ways to support staff in certain areas, by responding to feedback in the survey where it was appropriate.

This year, Redditch and Bromsgrove chose to employ an external consultancy (Martin Reddington Associates,) to undertake its staff survey and the Chief Executive offered WRS the facility as the staff are all Bromsgrove employees. The Head of Service at WRS felt that this would be an opportunity to try something different and to get a professional analysis of the results. The service had limited influence over the questions being asked as there is a set framework that the consultancy uses. Hence, one cannot directly compare these results with previous ones. However, having an independent review ensures no unintended bias in the results can be reported, so on balance it was felt that this exercise could helpfully replace the normal performance indicator at least for this year.

**Report**

The framework used by the consultancy is called The Employment Deal Diagnostic (TEDD,) and treats the relationship between the employee and employer as a transaction or deal. The consultant states in their report that:

“The following results show employees’ perception of various elements that play a part in the employment deal. These cover:

- the balance of the employment deal for the organisation as a whole and for Worcestershire Regulatory Services,
- the quality of the conversations that are taking place for the



organisation as a whole and between managers and individuals. The report also highlights the way in which employees describe the organisation in their own words.”

From the results, the report aims to help managers identify potential ways to improve the relationship, which should yield improvements in performance.

The consultancy’s review model focused on 6 areas with each aspect of the model being scored and rated Red, Yellow or Green, with the scores/ colours defined as:

- (50 or less) Red: Relatively poor score/outcome – a clear signal to take steps to improve
- (51–74) Yellow: Moderate score/outcome – capable of improvement
- (75 +) Green: Good score/outcome to be celebrated

The six aspects covered in the questionnaires are outlined below with their actual colour rating and score:

- The Balance of the Deal (Yellow score, -16,)
- Conversation Practice (Yellow score, 72,)
- Workplace Tensions (Yellow score, 66,)
- Job Pressure (Yellow score, 72,)
- Organisational Personality (Green score, 47.\*)
- Overall Satisfaction (Yellow score, 59)

\*NB: for the Organisational Personality score in relation to how directive the organisation is, low was deemed good, hence for this aspect the score below 50 is a positive thing.

## **Interpretation**

### **1. Balance of the Deal**

This looks to balance off the Employer’s contribution to the relationship (employee’s psychological contract with the employer, organisational support offered,) as perceived by staff against the Employees contribution (engagement with their job, perceived capability, engagement with the organisation.) A score of -16 suggests a slight bias in favour of the employer and provides a good basis on which to build. The analyst clearly indicates that excessive positive or negative scores need to be avoided as both lead to inefficiency and increases in cost. The score for WRS suggests that some improvements on the employer side may need to be offered to provide slightly more balance. Options to support this are discussed further in this report with a focus on staff perceptions of resources and line manager support.

### **2. Conversation Practice**

Conversational practice scores for WRS are at the high end of the moderate range. This suggests that, generally, WRS staff are engaging in good, high quality and performance-focused conversations with their line managers, which provide solutions to their normal



problems in the workplace.

Comments would suggest, however, that this is not a universal finding, so steps will need to be taken to improve performance where this is not happening. Hence, more focus on the line manager relationship will be needed as this can help to enhance these scores going forward. This aspect has been discussed within the Management Team and noted, with Senior Practitioners and Managers accepting that they need to find ways of being more available to staff where and when support is necessary. The analysis indicates that it is also the quality of interactions that matters, so some focus also needs to be made on helping to find practical solutions with staff.

Whilst we want to avoid a culture of “presenteeism,” we do need to ensure staff feel they have someone to speak to when issues arise and that they will feel they have support in resolving them. With this in mind, it may be that staff need to accept that a telephone conversation with their manager may need to be the short term fix to a problem ahead of a longer face to face discussion at a later date.

### **3. Workplace Tensions**

The analyst indicates that, in this survey, the tension of having to do “more-with-less” is expressed via comments regarding the disparity between customer demands or expectations and the reality of what can be delivered with the available resources. The score is toward the higher end of the moderate range, suggesting that this tension is challenging and if allowed to rise unchecked could lead to harmful effects on wellbeing and performance. Examples quoted by the staff include:

*“The biggest tensions are often linked to the debate on whether the service has sufficient resources or whether we need to change our approach to the day job,” and*

*“Demand exceeding (reduced) capacity.”*

This highlights the capacity issues that we have raised with members and officers of the Board before. The positive response of allowing managers to re-invest income and of invest-to-save recruitments, where income is likely to support additional posts in the medium term, should help to hold these tensions or hopefully reduce them.

### **4. Job Pressure**

The analyst accepts that job pressure can make a positive contribution towards performance levels and that it can help to maintain motivation and inspire employees to be innovative in the face of challenges. The job pressure score is currently at the upper end of the moderate range. The analyst raises concerns that increasing job pressure may begin to manifest itself in a number of negative ways with the potential for performance to deteriorate. They state that this is already evident in



some of the data with the following quote being a not uncommon sentiment,

*“...pressure of an ever-increasing workload and the daily feelings of being unable to cope”.*

The analyst recommends that management finds a way to demonstrate its recognition of the intense pressure staff experience. Given that managers are already aware of this and do tell staff routinely that we understand, it is difficult to see beyond further communication, what can be done to ease this pressure. The use of invest to save approaches bringing in additional capacity may help ease this tension as well as the workplace tensions mentioned above.

### **5. Organisational Personality**

This has been given a green by the analysis, particularly in relation to the organisation not being overly directive hence giving staff the space to act in a professional manner.

Other descriptions of the service such as conversational, innovative, capable, trustworthy and supportive are all scoring in the moderate range (60-68,) matching other aspects of the profile. This is positive and should help to identify areas to improve the collective communication between managers and staff.

### **6. Satisfaction**

This is the perceived measure of the score for the Employer contribution in the “balance of the deal.” At 59, it is one of the lower scores. In relation to the first element of this (the Psychological Contract,) the analysis suggests that staff’s role autonomy (i.e. their ability to make decisions for themselves,) is making a positive contribution to this score, however, further work needs to be done on what it describes as the perceived “obligations and promises” from the employer and also there appears to be significant variance in reported perceptions of line manager relationships.

For the first area (obligations and promises,) they talk about IT equipment and other materials to do the job, yet the quote they cite from staff (“Increasing demands from partner councils and insufficient resources available to properly meet these,”) almost certainly relates to staffing resources. There has seldom been a time where we have decided not to purchase materials or equipment to support staff in their work. Hopefully the invest-to-save approach to new staff capacity already mentioned and an increased recognition of the pressure staff are under will begin to improve this.

The variation in line manager performance is more concerning and will be discussed in more detail by the management team going forward at their monthly meetings. We will look to ensure all staff feel supported and this has already been included in the PDRs for all managers and Senior Practitioners.



### **Key Drivers to Performance**

In the final part of the report, the analyst uses a statistical technique known as Key Driver Analysis (KDA) to help focus on those features of the employment relationship that have the greatest impact on how employees contribute at work. The analyst identifies the specific questions from the questionnaires relating to these aspects and the free text comments made by officers in relation to them.

These scores are all in the moderate zone (61-73,) which the analyst regards as very positive given the impacts of change that the staff have been through over the years since the service was created and the levels of associated resource changes. It does, however, highlight the risk that further falls in these scores are likely to be reflected in worsening performance and increasing sickness levels.

Some positive steps have been identified already in this report that may improve scores in these areas. Ironically given that Systems Thinking has led to a significant reduction in the numbers of process control systems, the lowest score in this section related to the question "Compliance with internal procedures often makes it difficult to do things better." We will look at this going forward as to whether it is the processes or the lack of detailed guidance that officers find a hindrance.

### **Conclusion**

The survey was undertaken by over 50% of the staff, so whilst it is below the level that we would like, it is likely to be representative of both experience and feelings across the service. The analyst has provided independent evidence to support the assertions made by managers around the impacts of current workloads on staff. It suggests that whilst performance is probably currently good, there are signs that further pressures and the lack of recognition of the existing pressures may result in a worsening of performance in the future.

Having said this, the report remains positive and the scores are mainly in the moderate range (60-74,) indicating that work can be done to improve things. Some of the suggested responses from managers include:

- Recognition by managers and partners of the pressures on staff and their positive performance in the circumstances,
- The use where possible of steps to reduce those pressures or at least to not add to them by following invest-to-save principles rather than assuming more can be done with less or the same,
- Continuing to review processes to ensure that they provide the right supporting mechanisms and do not hinder performance.
- Continuing to review processes for marginal efficiencies that can reduce the burdens on staff,



- Ensuring managers are available in the right way and at the times when their staff need support,
- Improving the engagement of managers with their staff and the performance of some in relation to the focus of their conversations around performance,

These steps would begin to demonstrate to staff that partners (including their employing authority,) appreciate the pressures they are under and are taking what steps they can in the current financial climate to support them. At the same time, managers and Senior Practitioners need to find ways to enhance the day to day support of staff and provide systems that will help to reduce the feeling of pressure created by workloads that are well beyond the historical experience of those working in these professions.

### **Financial Implications**

Whilst there are no specific financial implications, the report does highlight that reduced performance inevitably leads to greater costs on the organisation and from there to the partners.

### **Sustainability**

The report suggests that its methodology helps to identify staffing issues that might impact on the sustainability of services. Whilst it is currently on a sustainable footing, the pressures identified have the potential to undermine some aspects of service delivery and risk the long-term sustainability of the service.

### **Contact Points**

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### **Background Papers**

Appendix 1: Martin Reddington Associates Report on WRS

