

REPORT TO: POLICY COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: EMPLOYEE OPINION SURVEY PHASE TWO: FOCUS GROUPS

BY: HEAD OF PERSONNEL SERVICES

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 The Committee is asked to note the results from the Focus Groups which constitute Phase Two of the Employee Opinion Survey project.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section A (35) of the Council's Administrative Scheme relating to the welfare policies and practices of the Council.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **It is recommended that the Committee note the outcomes of the focus groups as reported by *employ^s surveys* (Appendix A which is located in the Members Lounge) when considered in conjunction with this report.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Policy and Resources Committee on 14 December, 2005 (para 9 of the minute refers agreed to engage an external contractor to undertake a survey of all employees. Following a tendering process, EmployeeSurveys was appointed to design and undertake the survey. The Policy and Resources Committee of 26 April, 2006 (para 16 of the minute refers) noted the proposed timetable for the work.
- 3.2 The survey was undertaken in September, 2006, with all responses treated as confidential. The Council received an anonymised analysis summarising responses. The results were presented to CMT for the whole Council and departmental reports were provided to each Director.
- 3.3 Although there were many positive aspects to the survey findings, there were also many areas for improvement based on comparisons with *employesurvey's* database of survey results. This was not unexpected given the difficult environment at the time with Single Status and the fact that this was the first survey.
- 3.4 /

3.4 It was also identified that it is important to follow up on the results, clearly identifying and committing to the action that will be taken particularly when considering that one of the clear views from the survey was the lack of confidence from employees that the Council will follow through on the results of the survey. Therefore, the original approval was for a full survey every two years and a smaller scale exercise in each intervening year.

3.5 A report was presented to the Policy and Resources Committee to agree the actions to be taken based on the survey results. The recommended areas for attention were:

3.5.1 ERDPS/Appraisal: By October, 2007, review the current ERDP/Appraisal schemes and methods for their implementation to ensure wider and more consistent application to all employees

Measure of success to be 10% improvement in 2008 survey results.

3.5.2 Internal Communications and Information: Review internal communications to ensure appropriate medium used for purpose and consistent messages are reinforced in all communications. Develop an internal communications and engagement strategy taking account of the existing arrangements. Target date of October, 2007 to introduce revisions and strategy if required.

Measure of success to be an increase in employees not relying on the grapevine for information to the norm of 45% by the next survey.

3.5.3 Visibility of Senior Management: Each CMT member should arrange 2 visits per year to operational areas of their service and should select a further two projects per year related to operational matters that they will support within their service area.

Each member of CMT will write an article for the employee newsletter, profiling themselves and/or aspects of their service, one to appear in each newsletter.

CMT will also pilot a 'Talking Moray' roadshow during 2007 where employees can meet the Directors and discuss key Council issues.

Measure of success will be completion of the above actions and improvement responses to questions relating to senior management in future survey.

3.6 As well as the above noted actions, each Department was required to create an Action Plan tailored to the specific service needs of their Sections. An assessment of the action plans has shown that some work is still required.

3.7 Corporate and Departmental Actions taken so far are summarised in **Appendix B** (attached).

4. PHASE TWO : FOCUS GROUPS

- 4.1 Phase 2 took place on 24 and 25 January 2008, 15 months on from the original survey in order to assess progress made in key areas and re-align the planned actions to ensure the required improvements. The Interim Survey took the form of 16 focus groups of up to 10 employees in each group and was facilitated by Chris McGivern, *employeeSurveys* and from resources within Personnel Services. Of the 220 plus employees invited to the focus groups, 87 attended. This highlighted a reluctance on the part of many employees to participate in an opportunity to provide their views on a number of key issues for the Council.
- 4.2 Considering the key improvement areas highlighted in the 2006 survey, the Focus Groups considered:
- Internal Communications – consideration of the current situation and feedback on work in progress to improve communications such as the Communications Strategy and proposed employee “handbook”.
 - ERDP – the extent to which is now being used and could be improved.
 - The Moray Council as a “Good Employer” – impact of recent initiatives such as employees benefits and healthy working lives, consideration of flexible working and other ideas to enhance the Council as an employer of choice.
- 4.3 To give the work focus and provide for comparison with the original results, the focus groups centred around the questions from the original questionnaire but the discussion was restricted to these questions alone.
- 4.4 With regard to attendance, a random cross-section of employees was selected from a number of locations across the Council. Each focus group lasted approximately 1 hour.

5. OUTCOME OF FOCUS GROUPS

- 5.1 An overview of the positive feedback from the focus groups highlights that Moray Council continues to be seen by many as a good place to work and that communications have shown some signs of improvement.
- 5.2 Recollections of the 2006 survey were limited although the majority of participants did say they had taken part. A small proportion of people recalled the results being posted on the Council's intranet and a report with a positive 'spin' appearing in the local press. Some staff received feedback from the original survey in team meetings but few referred to the summary leaflet sent to all staff and posted on the Intranet.
- 5.3 /

- 5.3 Several main themes emerged from the focus groups. Council-wide themes such as Shared Services and Single Status were discussed in some groups (mainly Central Services). Communication as a general issue was raised, but also with particular reference to the senior management profile, team briefings, the Intranet/Council website and Connect. ERDPs, training and development, working conditions and the work-life balance were all issues that were raised by participants.
- 5.4 Focus group participants were also invited to give their views on the production of an employee handbook (both paper and electronic versions) and Connections – a communication strategy. Unfortunately it was difficult to gauge reaction to the communications strategy as the name was linked closely with Connect which attracted negative comments.
- 5.5 Department specific feedback was encouraged and the following provides a summary:

Within Educational Services feedback centred around 6 main issues:

- Communication – some improvements had been seen
- Relationships – mixed views varying between ‘approachable’ senior management to ‘senior staff don’t know them’.
- Quality Improvement Officers – again, mixed views from ‘excellent’ to ‘never visits’.
- The role of the Department: advocate/facilitator v policy enforcer
- Job insecurity – particularly among temporary contracts
- IT – concerns over cost of even minor installations of hardware of software changes when there are tight limits on spend in schools for other (more important) reasons.

Feedback from within Environmental Services centred around:

- 2006 Employee Opinion Survey – generally positive feedback
- Communication – mixed responses from ‘regular’ meetings to being ‘kept in the dark’
- Lack of cohesion/collaboration in schools – referring to the ‘them and us’ culture between schools staff and catering and cleaning staff

Feedback from within Community Services covered the following issues:

- The Council as an employer – ‘supportive’ and ‘good wages’
- Recall of 2006 Employee Opinion Survey – reasonable apart from Homecarers
- Communication generally – feeling that communications had improved
- Team Briefs – concerns raised about an over-reliance on emails
- Management style – positive comments regarding regular supervision
- Training – no particular issues with training apart from the lack of budget

Comments from F&ICT, L&C and C/E centred on the following points:

- Pay – mixed responses from good for 'IT for the North of Scotland' to pay leading to 'lots of turnover' from Finance
- Communication – regular quarterly meetings were popular and communications were better from CMT to DMT
- ERDPs – not 'happening in all areas'
- Training – available but limited due to lack of money.

6.0 Focus Group Report Conclusions and Implications

6.1 The conclusions from the focus group reported by *employeesurveys* are that:

- The 2006 survey and follow-up seems to have had limited impact
- Single Status has dented the reputation of the Council and its Senior Managers internally
- Yet many people continue to enjoy working for the Council
- Communication is improving but not consistently
- CMT/Senior Management visibility has improved but could be used to raise morale more effectively
- ERDPs have made good progress but there is still room for some improvement
- Feedback on training is positive but budget constraints are seen to restrict access to training in some areas
- Feedback on the proposed employee handbook is positive which suggests continuing with this development
- The 'Connections' communication strategy is right in principle and should continue to be developed

6.2 The implications from these conclusions as reported by *employeesurveys* are that:

- More effective communication is required before during and after surveys with more emphasis on feedback
- Work should continue on developing more personal (face-to-face) communications with more emphasis on the value placed on the contribution of all staff
- Development of improved quality of working life where possible
- Develop and implement 'Connections' communication strategy (with possible name change)
- CMT and Senior Management Visibility should continue to be increased, with commitment to a series of face-to-face communications with key messages clarified well in advance
- Steps to be taken to ensure ERDPs used Council-wide with follow-up in the Winter 2008 survey
- Development of more in-house training and longer term staff development
- Explore ways of improving effectiveness of training spend
- Development of employee handbook
- Departmental review and update of original survey action plans
- Progress monitored and reviewed in late Autumn of 2008 with follow-up survey of all staff

7. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

- (a) **Corporate Development Plan/Community Plan/Service Improvement Plan** – The actions from the survey should assist the council in its aim of being a “good employer”. Improved employee morale and motivation should also lead to improved service delivery.
- (b) **Policy and Legal** - None
- (c) **Resources (Financial, Risks, Staffing and Property)** - the workload associated with the follow-up survey in late Autumn, 2008 will be accommodated within Personnel Services. However, there are also a number of actions to be taken forward by CMT and senior managers. The cost of the follow-up survey is contained within the budget allocated. Costs arising from any developments with the Communications strategy will be absorbed from within the existing Communications budget. There is potential for more effective use of training budgets although this has not been identified at this point.
- (d) **Consultations** - The trade unions have been provided with a copy of the Consultant’s report and a copy of this report. Departments have been consulted and have provided further information on actions taken so far which has been incorporated into Appendix B.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 **Appendix B and the focus groups' feedback show that work on the actions to address the issues from the original survey is slower and less focussed than originally planned which will impact on the improvements it set out to achieve. This needs to be addressed and the Interim Survey provided an opportunity to take stock and re-align the actions to ensure the improvements are delivered for 2008. The Interim Survey, in the form of Focus Groups, highlighted although some of the actions identified from the original survey have been either completed or started, there are actions required at both corporate and departmental level to support corporate work and tackle any department specific issues.**
- 8.2 **It is important to make good progress with the outstanding actions identified from the Interim Survey to demonstrate the Council’s commitment to addressing the issues from staff, particularly as employees doubted this in the original survey.**

Author of Report: Frances Garrow, Project Officer
Background Papers: September 2006 Employee Survey
(http://intranet.moray.gov.uk/internal/Personnel/employee_survey.htm)
Ref: FG/I:\Reports\Policy\Employee Opinion Survey Phase Two Focus Groups 04-04-08.doc