

'THE BIG LISTEN' – EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Report to Performance, Finance and Customer Focus Overview and
Scrutiny Committee

INTRODUCTION

The council conducted its employee engagement survey 'The Big Listen' in June/July this year. This reports shares the headline findings with the Scrutiny Committee and shares the approach to be adopted in addressing the findings.

BACKGROUND

As a council, we strive to achieve the objectives set out in our People Strategy, namely:

- Everyone feels welcome
- Aspire to be the best
- Attract and keep the right people
- Be well led

An engagement survey tool allows us to gauge the valuable views of our workforce, to then be able to address areas for improvement and areas of best practice in certain parts of the council. We want to improve, learn and grow.

To encourage greater participation and reaffirm anonymity, the council commissioned an external supplier to undertake the survey. A mixed method approach was adopted, with employees able to complete the survey online or the provision of paper copies for the frontline workforce.

As part of our approach to engaging with staff, we have an ongoing listening programme where staff are able to give their views, so we get a picture of what is going well and we can see what areas we need to improve.

Every two years we ask staff to share their views through an engagement survey, and this continued through the COVID-19 pandemic with our temperature check wellbeing pulse surveys, our staff virtual Question and Answer programme and more recently through the Big Ideas suggestion scheme.

This summer we asked staff through our Big Listen staff survey what we are doing well, what can we learn from, and how can we grow in the future.

We have now received the results from the external provider and we want to share the results with you, explain what the next steps will be and importantly how you will be involved in the process.

FINDINGS - What the Big Listen told us – the headlines

Setting the scene

Over half (51%) of Plymouth City Council's workforce participated in the 2022 'The Big Listen' staff survey.

With 1,252 responses, the staff survey results provide a robust measure of the workforce's

perceptions of where the council is performing well and where it could improve. It is particularly encouraging to see a high response rate among those provided with a paper copy of the survey.

When considering these findings, it must be done so within the context of:

- The global pandemic and its impacts on individuals, communities, businesses and public sector organisations.
- Budgetary constraints within the public sector.
- Dealing with the tragedies in Plymouth.
- The challenges of cost of living and inflation.
- Limited benchmarking available from other local authorities due to timing (before or during pandemic). This survey was undertaken post COVID.
- Structural changes since 2018.

Please note that there were variations in the feedback according to directorate. the corporate headline results are:

Positive Insights

In 2022, the level of engagement is 71%, which is encouraging taking into account the backdrop outlined to the left. Two thirds of staff feel proud to work for the council, and almost seven in ten agree the council is a good employer.

Satisfaction with the working environment is where the largest improvement has been made. Staff do support their colleagues not to take risks with their health, safety and wellbeing at work (the highest positive scoring question in 2022 at 92%).

They are clear what their duties and responsibilities are (87% agreeing to this). This contributes to making them satisfied with their working environment (73% agree) which is the strongest improvement this year compared to 2018 (+5% points).

Almost two thirds (65%) say they get the development or training they need to do their job safely, and 81% know where to access support to manage their wellbeing should they need it.

It is also encouraging to note that 82% of staff feel treated with fairness, respect and without discrimination.

Areas to explore

There are areas where the council can improve, particularly with regards to vertical and horizontal communication (less than half of respondents (46%) agree that they are kept well informed about the council's plans and progress, and an almost equal proportion (49%) feel that the council is effective at communicating with employees). Communication is an area for attention for staff in 2022.

All questions but one (I am clear what is expected of me at work) in this section see an agreement score below 50%. Change management is singled out by respondents, amongst whom only 23% agree it is done well. Together with 34% of staff respectively saying that senior management provide a clear vision for the future of the council and provide effective leadership, the fact that only 44% think that work does not impact negatively on their mental health, can have an impact on their overall motivation.

The full report is attached at appendix A

Next Steps

Following previous staff surveys, action plans have been developed, but this process can be considered transactional – ‘You said – We did’. It is important that the workforce is engaged in the response and finding solutions. We are going to adopt a different approach to responding to the survey. At the start of 2023 we are going to set up a series of collaborative groups in each directorate. Groups will be led by new Staff Engagement Champions and they will explore those areas where we need to improve, learn and grow. We want to:

- Explore **current perceptions** of engagement and communications – teasing out more detail from the employee survey results.
- Explore **experiences** of engagement and communications – where is the best practice and what is going well, what tools we currently use, what channels are most preferred and why?
- Explore **solutions** - how staff engagement and communications should be managed, both now and in the future (what would staff like to see done differently and what role both staff and managers should play in the future of the council?).

Champions will then feedback directly to Team Plymouth their ideas and solutions and collaborate on a way forward. Evaluating as we go to make sure that real change is achieved.

Full support and relevant training will be provided to the groups and Staff Engagement Champions.

BE INVOLVED

Whilst the programme is still being developed, if staff are interested in being involved, either as a Champion, or on a collaborative group they can register their interest by submitting a form or by having a conversation with their manager.

We will work with staff who work on the front-line, or don't have access to IT to ensure that they have the opportunity to take part and make their voices heard.