

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

5TH NOVEMBER 2009

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Management and Finance – Lead Cabinet Member - Councillor Laing

EMPLOYEE SURVEY 2008 / INVESTORS IN PEOPLE 2009 ACTION PLAN

1. Summary

The purpose of this report is to seek members endorsement to an action plan developed in response to the 2008 Employee Survey and the Investors in People Assessment 2009 findings and subsequent focus group discussions.

2. Recommendations

Approve the action plan outlined in **Appendix 1**

3. Reasons for the Recommendations

The Employee Survey is conducted every three years and counsels the opinions of staff who work for Stockton Borough Council. The last survey was in November 2008. A two stranded approach was adopted to the employee consultation exercise. Stage one was to conduct a short employee survey This was to be followed up by a series of focus groups which would pick up any issues identified through the survey results, look for greater understanding and provide potential solutions. The results of the questionnaire were extremely positive, showing a high degree of employee engagement whilst the focus groups provided some useful ideas for further improvement.

The Investors in People tool has long been acknowledged as an effective business improvement tool which enables organisations to improve performance in support of business objectives. It is a nationally recognised standard of good practice. The external assessment has been reviewed and is a tougher test than it was previously. The standard looks at how the organisation develops strategies to improve its performance, how it takes action and how it evaluates the impact of the actions on performance.

In July, Stockton Borough Council became the first local authority in the region to achieve a Silver Award at the higher level of the improved 'Investors in People' Assessment. The Council was also assessed under the new 'Health and Wellbeing' standards and was commended for its commitment and delivery against its Workforce Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Whilst a Silver Award demonstrates exceptional achievement by an organisation showing best practice in many areas, there were some developmental areas which would need to be addressed should the Council wish to achieve the Gold Award upon reassessment in 2012.

It is evident through the analysis of both sets of findings that there was a similarity of issues that could be addressed through the formulation of a single action plan. This report includes an action plan giving an overview of various activities that will address the issues raised in the Employee Survey and the IIP Assessment. Cabinet are asked to endorse the plan.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;
- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.

AGENDA ITEM

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DATE 5TH NOVEMBER 2009

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

EMPLOYEE SURVEY 2008 / INVESTORS IN PEOPLE 2009 ACTION PLAN

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to seek members endorsement to an action plan developed in response to the 2008 Employee Survey and the Investors in People Assessment 2009 findings and subsequent focus group discussions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To endorse / agree in principle to the action plan outlined in **Appendix 1**

DETAIL

Employee Survey

1. The Employee Survey is conducted every three years and counsels the opinions of staff who work for Stockton Borough Council. The last survey was in November 2008. A two stranded approach was adopted to the employee consultation exercise. Stage one was to conduct a short employee survey (using Keeping You in Touch and the intranet as the primary distribution methods). This was followed up by a series of focus groups which would pick up any issues identified through the survey results, look for greater understanding and provide potential solutions.
2. The survey was distributed to 4,657 employees for completion on a voluntary basis either electronically or by hard copy. An overall response rate of 40% was achieved with 1,840 surveys returned. This compares to a 30 % response rate in 2005. The results became available in April 2009. The results were very positive and showed a high degree of employee engagement. Initial work was also undertaken in the development of the survey to allow for benchmarking. Stockton were placed in the upper quartile for 15 comparable questions, against public, private and voluntary sector organisations in areas such as volume of work, ways of working, employee motivation, clear expectations of job role, information to do the job effectively, and Stockton being a good place to work
3. The key messages from the questionnaire were as follows:
 - 79.4% enjoy working for SBC
 - 77.9% consider SBC as a good place to work
 - 78.7% see themselves working for SCB in 12 months time
 - 73% would recommend it as a good place to work
 - 86.2% have good clear objectives for their job

- 85.2% are clear how their job contributes to the success of organisation.
 - 82.9% receive effective support from managers
 - 74.5% feel able to express concerns at work
4. The intended outcome of the focus groups was to provide comparable smart data alongside robust qualitative data that would explain any issues and how these could be addressed. Service managers would then be equipped with enough information to be able to develop and implement realistic action plans for improvement, tailored to their individual service needs and issues to be tackled at a corporate level could be identified and addressed. All service groups have had access to the information for their relevant areas as well as Council wide.
5. Subsequently the following focus groups were established:
- Staff groups
 - Managers group
 - Trade Unions

Survey Findings

There were three corporate areas where the survey suggested that there were significant variances between those staff that agreed with a line of questioning and those that didn't

- Communication issues
 - Learning and Development
 - Bullying and Harassment
6. Representatives of individual service areas, staff, managers and Trade Unions were invited to focus groups to enable the Council to gain a better understanding of the issues raised in the three areas identified, obtain suggestions for improvement and ensure that the actions taken to address the less positive staff responses were the correct ones.

The detailed focused group responses are reproduced at **(Appendix 2)**

Investors in People (IIP) Award

7. The Investors in People tool has long been acknowledged as an effective business improvement tool which enables organisations to improve performance in support of business objectives. It is a nationally recognised standard of good practice. The external assessment has been reviewed and is a tougher test than it was previously. The standard looks at how the organisation develops strategies to improve its performance, how it takes action and how it evaluates the impact of the actions on performance.
8. There are 10 criteria with a heavy emphasis on management capabilities to lead, manage and develop people. Importantly, it is no longer assessed via paper based evidence but relies upon employee interviews which measure how the standard is actually working in the workplace i.e. the true culture of the organisation.
9. A sample of 187 (3.9%) of the total staff employed were interviewed from across service areas and included members, managers, trade union representatives and a range of employees of all disciplines.
10. In July, Stockton Borough Council became the first local authority in the region to achieve a Silver Award at the higher level of the improved 'Investors in People' Assessment. The Council was also assessed under the new 'Health and Wellbeing' standards and was commended for its commitment and delivery against its Workforce Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

11. Whilst a Silver Award demonstrates exceptional achievement by an organisation showing best practice in many areas, there were some developmental areas which would need to be addressed should the Council wish to achieve the Gold Award upon reassessment in 2012.
12. The development areas for IIP were:
- More formalised planning in advance of training
 - Consideration of individual learning styles
 - Improve evaluation of training at individual and corporate levels
 - Consistent application of feedback of actions by managers
 - Develop a strategy that would identify recognition and reward
 - Formalise the work/life balance strategy in a policy
13. A report has been received from the external assessors and a summary of key strengths and areas for development for the organisation is attached. **(Appendix 3)**
14. Future action plans have been discussed with Assessment North East Ltd (the IIP Assessors) and this will help inform the People Strategy and Workforce Development plans over the next three years.

Employee Survey & Investors in People Action Plan

15. It is evident through the analysis of both sets of findings that there was a similarity of issues that could be addressed through the formulation of a single action plan.
16. Attached at **Appendix 1** is an action plan giving an overview of various activities that will address the issues raised in the employee Survey and the IIP Assessment. Cabinet are asked to endorse the plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications

RISK ASSESSMENT

This Employee Survey 2008 / Investors in People (IIP) 2009 Action Plan is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

The action plans contained in this report do not impact on the Sustainable Community Strategy

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This report has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment and has been judged to have a positive impact. No remedial actions are required.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

Consultation with the recognised Trade Unions is continuing

Name of Contact Officer: Julia Spittle
Post Title: Head of Human Resources
Telephone No. 01642 527016
Email Address: Julia.spittle@stockton.gov.uk

Background Papers None

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors: None

Property: None

Appendix 2

Focus Group Responses

Many staff were pleased to be included in the focus groups and considered it positive that the sessions were being held with staff. There were many areas where staff felt current arrangements worked well. Constructive suggestions were also made for possible areas for improvements. Notes have been made of all suggestions and comments arising from the focus groups. Detailed below is a summary of some of the areas identified as working well.

Communications

- EMT Newsletters and the Resources' 'Staff Newsletter' and 'Staff Forum' were identified as helping keep employees informed about matters that affect them.
- KYIT and Stockton News help keep employees informed quite generally.
- Customer feedback surveys, which are used across the Council help make employees aware of customer satisfaction levels.
- Organisational structure charts and informal networks between individuals facilitate good inter-departmental communication.
- Team meetings generally and the 'Staff Suggestions Box' in Regeneration make it possible for staff to make suggestions about improvements.

Learning and Development

- Career graded posts and good access to training opportunities help assure employees that they can learn new skills and develop new talents at work.
- Integrated Service Areas have delivered better training opportunities for staff. For example, employees involved in the ISAs are able to access NHS training, which helps them to do their job effectively and advance their careers within the Council.
- Short-term secondment opportunities such as those within CESC help employees to advance their career at the Council.
- Appraisal system and individual Personal Development Plans help ensure that employees receive the training they need to do their job effectively.

Bullying and Harassment

- Management 'open door policy' helps employees express concerns they may have at work.
- Access to relevant information across the organisation helps assure employees that the organisation is fair and unbiased in its treatment of them.
- 'Dignity at Work' poster that was recently circulated helps assure employees that there is a policy.
- Receptionists feel they have the support they need should they be subjected to bullying / harassment by visitors to the organisation.

Areas for Consideration for Improvement

Communications

A full list of suggestions and comments made at the communications focus group will be shared with the Lead Officer for the Communications EIT Review. Detailed below are the key areas that require further discussion leading to action planning for improvements. It is proposed that the responsibility for the co-ordination of an action plan for this area be linked to the EIT Review of Communications and be assigned to the interim Head of Service for Communications:

- Postmaster Messages – use of / value
- Use of text as a means of communication
- Targeting of information to specific groups
- Newsletters
- Use of telephones/ voice mail/ hunt groups
- Increased use of E Mail.
- Introduction of Staff Suggestion Boxes/ scheme
- Face to face communications (STS model employed further down the organisation)
- Staff Forums

Learning and Development

Suggestions for areas for improvement from the Learning and Development focus groups are detailed below. It is proposed that those areas that relate to internal communications will be picked up for action by the interim Head of Service for Communications and that action planning for the remaining suggestions is co-ordinated by the Head of Human Resources.

- Appraisal process – consistency of delivery issues/ staff understanding value of appraisals.
- Induction – corporate directory of names & job titles, better induction pack and employee handbook
- Training of Agency Staff to the levels of SBC staff
- Opportunities for training for part time staff
- 360 Degree appraisals
- Secondment opportunities – could more jobs be advertised as secondments
- Job shadowing
- Career progression plans particularly necessary with flatter structures
- Succession Planning
- How are we dealing with issues around an aging workforce
- Communications around training, what is available.
- Publicising good news / success stories on staff
- Trainee programmes/ apprenticeships

Bullying and Harassment

Suggestions for areas for improvement from this focus group are detailed below. Again it is proposed that the communication issues are co-ordinated through the Head of Service for Communications and action planning for the residual issues be co-ordinated by the Head of Human Resources.

- Dignity at work. Communication issues and clarity of links to Bullying and Harassment. Dignity at work surgeries for staff to attend.
- Exit interviews to be conducted by impartial party.
- HR guidance/ policy guidance/ information on the intranet.
- Clearer guidance to make dealing with situations easier step by step guides
- More open communication and less informal chat
- More transparent recruitment process
- Training on understanding behaviour / personality types.
- Use KYIT to send out information
- Seek good practice from elsewhere
- Anonymous forms to complete to raise issues
- Online training
- Counselling officer to do talks
- Re- assurance on issues of confidentiality

Commercial in Confidence

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE
POST RECOGNITION REVIEW**

CORPORATE MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

KEY STRENGTHS AND AREAS OF GOOD PRACTICE

1. STRONG COMMITMENT TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

During interviews with people at every level, they were able to demonstrate their commitment to continually learn new skills, and in certain roles gain professional qualifications and apply this learning to their roles. In addition, there was also very strong evidence to confirm that they were looking to improve aspects of the organisation, both for now and in the future by the creation of various focus groups and staff forums.

2. CONSULTATION

The majority of staff were able to confirm that they were consulted at some stage during the business planning process, and as a result were very clear in relation to their objectives, their team's objectives and those of SBC. This excellent practice was also clearly embedded, as there were many examples provided confirming people were involved in discussions at team level on a day to day basis when decisions were being made.

3. HEALTH AND WELLBEING

A strong commitment to promote workplace health, safety and wellbeing, and this also included working within the community to improve the general welfare of the people living in the Borough.

4. COMMUNICATION

Communication across the organisation was considered to be very effective with many initiatives in place such as staff forums, extended management group meetings, setting the standard, newsletters, e-mails and daily bulletins etc.

5. PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK

A high level of feedback on staff performance through regular, effective appraisals and one-to-one meetings. Managers had also clearly recognised that giving feedback on a day to day basis was also part of their role and this was happening consistently across SBC.

6. GENERAL CULTURE

The culture at SBC was clearly one that included people working together to provide the best possible service, and people were happy, loyal, committed, motivated, enthusiastic and extremely proud of their accomplishments.

7. EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT

There was a high level of respect and trust for the Directors and Managers within the organisation.

8. EFFECTIVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Cost effective and innovative ways of learning new skills and sharing best practice were consistently available and encouraged.

9. CORE VALUES

The core Values are embedded across the organisation and fully reflected in employees approach to their roles.

10. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

There is a strong commitment to ensuring that the strategy and activities of the organisation fully support the needs of the community.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Indicator 2 Learning and development - Planning at an Individual Level

Mechanisms for the effective evaluation of an individual's development should be more formalised prior to training taking place. When planning development, consideration is already given as to what the expected learning outcome is, but, to further reinforce this excellent practice, the organisation may wish to consider the most appropriate means of measuring effectiveness in terms of performance improvement at the development planning stage.

Indicator 4 – Leadership and management

Managers at every level were able to describe the knowledge, skills and behaviour's required , to lead, manage and develop people effectively. However, a number of people were only able to explain these capabilities in their own compatible terms, therefore further clarification may be required.

Indicator 9 - Performance measurement

Whilst evaluation was taking place in each service area in relation to learning and development programmes and activities, from the evidence collected there appeared to be no process in place to enable the organisation to quantify how learning and development had improved the performance at organisational level. It therefore follows that as no overall evaluation had taken place then it is difficult to use the outcome to inform future strategy.

Indicator 10 – Continuous improvement

Linked to Indicator 9, further evaluation at strategic level would enable the Organisation to make additional informed improvements in the overall strategy for managing and developing people.

Your Choice Standards

Indicator 1 – Business strategy

Not all managers were able to describe the Key Performance Indicators used by SBC to improve its performance. As a result a number of people were also unclear, therefore, the organisation may wish to provide further clarification.

The original core values of SBC had been refreshed to further strengthen how the organisation intended to achieve its vision, however a number of people were unable to describe these values therefore further clarification may be necessary.

Indicator 2 – Learning and development

Learning styles had been considered by a number of managers when planning people's learning and development, however this was not consistent across SBC therefore further attention may be necessary during, for example, the appraisal process.

Indicator 3 – People management

Strategies had been developed to promote equality and diversity and people at every level were able to describe how these were promoted in the workplace.

There was however a view that BME groups were under represented and it was the intention of senior managers to take steps to address this for example through the recruitment and selection process.

Work-life balance had clearly been considered and to some degree was included in the Health and Wellbeing strategy, however there may be some value in defining a work-life balance policy to clarify initiatives and ensure consistency across SBC.

Giving constructive feedback was very well established across SBC in particular as part of the appraisal process. A number of managers had also been proactive in requesting feedback from their teams. The organisation may wish to extend this excellent practice across SBC.

Indicator 4 – Leadership and management

The Assessor would support the intentions of the Service to continue to build on the organisation's leadership and management capacity through the management and development programme. The programme could be utilised to take forward the manager's role in the Strategy.

Indicator 5 – Management effectiveness

Linked to Indicator 3, the organisation may wish to consider implementing a feedback mechanism, which would allow managers to be seen to be acting upon feedback, where appropriate.

Indicator 6 – Recognition and reward

During the assessment it was very apparent that people were being rewarded, and recognised for their contribution to the success of SBC. However, there was no formal reward and recognition policy in place and as a result there was inconsistency in understanding of what was available. Therefore further development is required in this area.

Indicator 8 – Learning and development

It was clear that learning and development had been shared within teams, and this was also starting to be extended across the organisation during team briefings forum and secondments.

However this was not the case in every area and the organisation may wish to extend this excellent practice across the wider organisation.

Indicator 10 – Continuous improvement

Whilst improvements were being made in terms of providing managers with the skills they needed, both for now and in the future with the further development of the management development programme, only a small number of managers were able to explain how they involved people in identifying improvements to the way they were managed and developed. This may be an area the organisation may wish to further develop.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

Based on the evidence collected during a period of intensive interviewing – the conclusion is that Stockton Borough Council continue to meet the Investors in People Standard and has achieved sufficient evidence requirements from Your Choice (109) to be awarded Silver Status (148 in all).

They are to be commended for their commitment to continuous improvement especially relating to the recent introduction of the Health and Wellbeing strategy which was clearly very much appreciated by all of the staff interviewed.

Further development will undoubtedly provide the consistency required and also provide the opportunity to fully evaluate the effectiveness.

The Assessors wish to record sincere thanks to all staff involved in this review for their co-operation, good humour, openness and frankness during their visit