READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR HR AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

TO:	**PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**		
DATE:	**15 JULY 2021**		
TITLE:	**STAFF SURVEY 2021**		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	**CLLR RUTH MCEWAN**	**PORTFOLIO:**	**CORPORATE AND CONSUMER SERVICES**
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1.   PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT

1.1.   To present Personnel Committee with the results of the Staff Survey 2021. There is much to celebrate from the survey with many positive results and improvements compared to the last survey in 2019. There are also some areas where improvements are needed which cut across the whole organisation.   This report outlines four areas that will be focused on at a corporate level for improvement over the next year.

1.2   Appendices

Appendix 1 – Staff Survey 2021 results

2.   RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1.   **That the results of the Staff Survey 2021 in Appendix 1 and the four areas of corporate focus for the next year be noted.**

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1   The staff survey was open for four weeks from 29 March to 30 April 2021. It consisted of 45 questions grouped under seven areas, plus optional questions about the respondent (e.g. directorate, ethnicity, age range etc).

3.2   There were 1004 responses which represents 58% of the Council's workforce of approximately 1720 staff (excluding schools).   This is an increase from the 2019 survey which achieved a response rate of 51%.

3.3   Appendix 1[1] shows the responses to each question for all staff.

3.4   There are 21 questions where the results are very positive with more than 80% of staff strongly agreeing or agreeing. A few examples of these are:

Question	% who agree or strongly agree in 2021	% who agree or strongly agree in 2019 (if same question asked)
I make a valuable contribution to the success of the Council by doing my job	95%	93%
My line manager shows genuine interest in my wellbeing	89%	86%
I enjoy my job	87%	87%
I would still like to be working at the Council in a year's time	84%	78%
I know what the organisational values of Team Reading are	81%	69%

3.5   There are only four questions where 60% or less staff agree or strongly agree:

Question	% who agree or strongly agree in 2021	% who agree or strongly agree in 2019 (if same question asked)
I believe action will be taken as a result of this survey	60%	48%
I think my pay is fair given the responsibilities of my job	55%	56%

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[1] In Appendix 1, at the top of page 4, the first five questions are repeated which also appear on the bottom of page 3. This is due to a technical issue when downloading the results from the system used to analyse the results into PDF format.

Reading Borough Council works as one, where teams collaborate for the benefit of our customers	51%	Different question asked in 2019
I have experienced or seen bullying or harassment at work	34%	Different question asked in 2019

3.6 There were two supplementary questions for people who had raised bullying and harassment at work in the last two years:

I felt listened to and my concerns were taken seriously	Yes - 7%	No - 12%	Not answered – 81%
I felt sufficient action was taken	Yes – 5%	No – 13 %	Not answered – 82%

3.7 In addition to the quantitative results, there were three areas where staff could add 'free text' comments - about their job, their line management and overall comments. There were 966 comments made by 520 respondents which have been sorted into key themes and differentiated by whether the comment was negative (65% of all the comments were negative), positive (21%) or neutral (14%). A summary of the top ten positive and negative themes is included in Appendix 1. There is also a 'word cloud' of the themes which illustrates how frequently they were mentioned by respondents.

3.8 The topic most frequently mentioned in the comments was workload, followed by ICT and salary. There were also comments about appreciation and rewards and benefits which were broadly similar to the comments about salary. The table below shows a summary of the number of comments that were made about these areas, to illustrate how frequently they were mentioned. The Council has a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment, so the number of comments on this has also been included in the table.

Issue/recommended focus area	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total
Workload	142	27	4	**173**
ICT	132	22	2	**156**
Salary	97	20	3	**120**
Appreciation	48	34	10	**92**
Rewards & Benefits	22	8	0	**30**
Bullying & Harassment	25	0	0	**25**

3.9 The table below shows the success measures that were agreed by CMT following the 2019 staff survey, the outturn from the 2021 results and whether the trend is positive or negative:

Success measure agreed in 2019	2021 outturn	Trend
Increase response rate from 51% to 75% and less paper copies for staff with IT access as part of their work	58% response rate 3% of the surveys were paper copies compared to 25% in 2019.	⬆
100% of respondents agreeing "I believe action will be taken as a result of this survey" (2019: 48%)	60.2% This is an improvement compared to 2019 but not at the 100% target	⬆
Higher levels of work information provided by respondents. In 2019: • 12.8% did not state their directorate • 25% preferred not to say their gender or did not answer • 21.2% preferred not to say whether they consider themselves to have a disability or did not answer • 25.5% preferred not to say their ethnic group or did not answer	• 7.3% did not state their directorate • 14.3% preferred not to say their gender or did not answer • 15.4% preferred not to say whether they consider themselves to have a disability or did not answer • 18.3% preferred not to say their ethnic group or did not answer	⬆
23 questions (53%) have 70%+ agree or strongly agree – aim to maintain or increase this.	33 questions (73%) where 70%+ agree or strongly agree	⬆
6 questions (14%) have 50% or less agree or strongly agree – aim to raise this so all answers are 50%+	1 question (2%) where 50% or less agree or strongly agree	⬆
Improve scores for CMT leadership and visibility. 2019 scores: • I have confidence in CMT to lead the organisation – 45.3% • Leadership by the CMT is positive and supportive – 42.8% • I see enough of the Chief Exec – 32.9% • I see enough of the Exec Directors – 51%	• I have confidence in the leadership skills of Senior Leaders to lead my directorate – 62.2% • Leadership by the Senior Leaders is positive and supportive –61.1% • I feel I receive sufficient communication to carry out my work	Direct comparison not possible for the first two questions this year as they asked about Senior Leaders which is a broader group than CMT

	effectively from the Chief Exec – 75.3% • I feel I receive sufficient communication to carry out my work effectively from the Exec Directors – 62%	
Reduce number of people feeling bullied or harassed to zero.	34% said they have experienced or seen bullying or harassment at work in 2021 12% said they were subject to bullying or harassment at work in 2019	Direct comparison not possible as we asked a different question in 2019 "I am not subject to bullying or harassment at work"

4. PROPOSED CORPORATE THEMES TO BE PRIORITISED FROM THE 2021 RESULTS

4.1 As outlined above there is much to celebrate from the 2021 Staff Survey with many positive results and improvements compared to 2019. There are also some areas where improvements are needed which cut across the whole organisation. Looking at both the quantitative results and comments together, the Corporate Management Team (CMT) have agreed the following four areas of focus for the next 12 months:

- Workload and priorities
- ICT issues
- Behaviours
- Recognition[2]

4.2 Whilst action plans are still being worked up for each area, the following provides an indication of some of the activity which will be undertaken corporately in response to the survey:

Workload and priorities
- The new corporate plan will be used to give clarity on priorities.
- The Council's performance management process is being redesigned as part of the Team Reading Delivery Plan. This specifically includes incorporating behaviours and a quality assurance process into the appraisal process and upskilling managers in carrying out appraisals and 1:1 meetings, where workload and priorities are discussed with staff.
- There is an ongoing focus on staff wellbeing as part of the Team Reading Delivery Plan. This includes for example a monthly Wellbeing Newsletter

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[2] The theme of 'recognition' has been created by merging the comments about salary, appreciation and rewards and benefits into one priority area. See paragraph 3.8.

which is sent to all staff, practical tips on wellbeing and links to support services, including the Employee Assistant Programme (EAP) which is a confidential, independent service available 24/7 that provides a range of support, including counselling, for all staff.

ICT issues
- Performance data in relation to the new IT support contracts is being monitored and reviewed by the Digital Futures Board which has Assistant Director representatives from all Directorates and Brighter Futures for Children and is sponsored by the Deputy Chief Executive.
- The ICT team invited all staff to an online briefing and question and answer session on 30 June 2021 when they shared the latest updates and addressed staff comments and questions. About 250 staff attended the briefing.
- We have set up a new iTrent User Group with representatives from each directorate, to address the concerns raised about iTrent specifically.
- The ICT work programme will address a number of digital enabling issues as well as issues with legacy systems.

Behaviours
- The Council recently worked with Business in the Community (BITC) to audit our policies and practices around equality and inclusion in the workplace, which included five staff focus groups. The result is a report and recommendations which we are turning into an action plan. Many of these align with the issues raised around bullying and harassment in the staff survey, and we will integrate the issues raised in the staff survey into this action plan. The BITC report and action plan will be presented to Personnel Committee in November 2021.

Recognition
- Recognition is a workstream in the Team Reading Programme for 2021/22 and the comments from the survey will be used to build on this. It includes for example a proposal to hold a Team Reading Staff Awards ceremony to celebrate staff who have role-modelled the Team Reading values.

4.3 The Staff Survey will be repeated in April 2022 so that we can monitor trends and ensure that improvements in the four priority areas have been made.

5. COMMUNICATING THE RESULTS WITH STAFF

5.1 The results were shared with the Joint Trade Unions and discussed at the monthly Joint Trade Union Committee (JTUC) meeting on 16 June 2021, before they were shared with staff more widely. It was agreed that we would jointly review the four priority areas at the next four JTUC meetings to consider any further improvements that can be made in these areas. The next meeting is on 14 July 2021 when we will review behaviours and the results around bullying and harassment.

5.2 The results were shared with staff in an All Staff Information email on 18 June 2021 and are available to view on the intranet. They were also published in the Staff Newsletter which is sent in hard copy to staff in Environmental and Commercial

Services. In addition, the Chief Executive and the Assistant Director of HR and OD presented the results to staff in an online briefing on 2 July, followed by a question and answer session. The event was recorded for staff who were unable to attend on the day.

5.3   The results for each directorate and service area have been shared with Assistant Directors for with the expectation that they will share them with their team and address any service-level actions which may be needed in their area, such as further training for staff, restructures etc, as well as supporting the roll out of corporate initiatives under the four themes.

5.4   We have invited staff to give ideas and suggestions on how we can improve in the four priority areas by emailing the Team Reading inbox or asking their manager to do so on their behalf.

6.   CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

6.1   The Council's People Strategy aims to create an organisational culture that puts customers at the heart of service design and delivery, where we celebrate high performance, empower and enable people, and create an environment that promotes diversity and inclusion, continual improvement and greater collaboration across the Council. This helps to ensure a Council that is fit for the future.

7.   ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

7.1   Staff were encouraged to complete the survey online and were provided with support and assistance to do so where needed. This resulted in only 3% using a paper survey compared to 25% in 2019.

8.   COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

8.1   Not required for this report.

9.   EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1   Not required for this report.

10.   LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1   None.

11.   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1   None related directly to this report. There may be financial implication arising from actions to improve in the four areas (e.g. further training for staff) which will be met from within existing budgets.

12.   BACKGROUND PAPERS

People Strategy