

# **Staff and Pensions Committee**

## **Employee Engagement**

8 March 2021

### **Recommendation(s)**

1. That the Committee notes this update on employee engagement during 2020-2021 and celebrates the progress that has taken place through the pandemic, particularly around our approach to staff wellbeing and engagement.

### **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 Prior to the pandemic, the approach for employee engagement included an annual Your Say Survey. Over the last year we have taken a different approach to employee engagement in recognition of the professional and personal challenges presented to our people during the pandemic and our need for more regular insight and feedback. Corporate Board has undertaken regular broadcasts for staff from the start of the pandemic and we have completed more regular check-ins and have focussed on wellbeing, understanding what support is required and obtaining views on the new ways of working.
- 1.2 Engagement surveys provide us with key information about the views of our people, how they are feeling and are also used to inform some of our Key Business Measures (KBMs) and indicators.
- 1.3 This report provides a review of the check-in process to date and details the increases in employee engagement during this difficult time.
- 1.4 Each of the check-in surveys have been themed and have provided valuable feedback on how our people are feeling and their views and suggestions on certain topics/ issues.
- 1.5 Response rate for the check-ins has fluctuated over the year, between 34% and 46%, but averaging out at around 45%, which is consistent with Your Say surveys in the past. This is an increase on the response rate that we have traditionally seen to the annual staff survey.
- 1.6 How our people are feeling has steadily declined over the year from 88% feeling ok or better down to 82% in our latest survey, which although concerning, is not surprising, and is in line with broader national trends.
- 1.7 In combining the responses to several key questions, we produce an employee engagement score. This employee engagement score has increased by 6% to 76% during the last year, which given the context, is a

positive result and recognises the importance that we have placed on employee engagement throughout the pandemic.

- 1.8 The results from each of the check-ins have been shared across the Council in the form of headline infographics and more detailed reports. The infographics have been attached as appendices for information.

## **2. Financial Implications**

- 2.1 None

## **3. Environmental Implications**

- 3.1 None

## **4. Supporting Information**

### **4.1 Check in 1 - April 2020**

Focus: How people are feeling and what support they require to continue to work during the pandemic.

Highlight Results:

- 46% response rate
- 88% feeling ok or better
- 87% adapting to new ways of working and 83% have access to the systems and the technology to work from home
- The support from colleagues and the more informal social contact were most important to wellbeing.
- Most were working from home and generally felt well supported and positive about our new ways of working, and felt our technology was holding up well and helping them to stay connected.
- Our people told us that they have learnt a lot of new skills by adapting to the new ways of working and they wanted to share this with colleagues across the organisation to continue this learning.
- The role of our leaders was identified as key to supporting our people during this time, both from direct line managers and valuing the live broadcasts from senior leaders with the opportunity to ask questions.
- The survey told us that awareness of support services was not consistent across the council.

Actions:

- Developed a series of communication and training/learning campaigns to build confidence, knowledge and behaviours to enable our people to work from home safely and effectively.

- Developed a range of resources and development to support managers with leading in a virtual world, including a Thrive at work toolkit to support people with their wellbeing.
- Skills to Thrive sessions delivered to T3 managers.
- Regularly promoted wellbeing support available to our people.
- Continued with live broadcasts from senior leaders.
- Provided option for people to request to be contacted by a Listening Mate (for confidential support) in subsequent check-in surveys.
- Supporting Staff Yammer group was created to encourage informal and social interactions between colleagues across the organisation, and also promote wellbeing support.

#### 4.2 Check in 2 - July 2020

Focus: how our people are feeling and their mental health; what has worked well and what have been the challenges during the COVID response, and; suggestions for areas to focus on during recovery.

##### Highlight Results:

- 45% response rate
- 83% feeling ok or better
- The mental health of our people was slightly below the average score of the general population.
- Our people reported the things that are working well when working from home/working more flexibly, technology, Corporate Board briefings, positive support from managers and colleagues, quicker decision making and less bureaucracy.
- Our people reported the challenges to be lack of face-to-face interaction both for work and socially, isolation, juggling working from home with caring responsibilities, access to equipment, workload and work/life balance.
- Our people suggested the focus for recovery could be prioritising those finding it difficult to work from home to return to the office safely for part of the week; consider making agile working more permanent and support staff to work safely from home; make buildings safe to work in and rationalise our property portfolio; build on innovation that is underway; prioritise services for vulnerable and reinstate home visits safely.

##### Actions:

- Suggestion provided to the Recovery project for consideration.
- Continued to share guidance and tips on how to enhance home working to create a healthy working environment that supports wellbeing, including sharing wellbeing support and information in W4W, promoting Employee Assistance Programme.
- Updated Individual Wellness Plans to reflect remote working.

- Personal resilience course redesigned and made available online.
- Continued with senior leadership live briefings.
- Continued to build content and learning resources around using M365 to help balance home and work life.
- Redesigned Coronavirus intranet pages based on user testing with a group of our people and created an FAQ section to help with regular queries.
- Contacted managers of staff without easy access to information electronically to explore what would help with this.

#### 4.3 Check in 3 - August/September 2020

Focus: How people are feeling, and those working from home to understand their productivity and what they miss most about being in the office.

##### Highlight Results:

- 34% response rate
- 85% feeling ok or better
- 86% felt productivity was the same or greater while working from home, 11% not as productive, and 3% were not working from home.
- Our people reported the benefits of working from home and positive impact on their productivity; having less distractions at home compared to the office; having a better work/life balance, and; not having to commute or struggle to find parking.
- Some reported that they felt isolated and less motivated when working from home and felt the need to always be available.
- Many expressed a preference to combine home and office working when we return to normal after the pandemic.
- The top three things our people missed most about working in the office were social interaction, face to face collaboration and learning from others.
- The top three things our people missed least from working in the office were commuting, having quiet time to focus, and access to personal files and equipment.

##### Actions:

- Results were shared with Recovery and Workspace Redesign project for consideration.
- Loneliness spot check completed in October 2020 to explore further how we can support our people with feelings of loneliness.
- Continued to promote wellbeing support.
- Continued to promote Supporting Staff Yammer group to encourage informal social interactions between colleagues.
- Created and shared guidance on how to spot the signs that someone may not be okay in a virtual world.

- Continued with senior leadership live briefings.

#### 4.4 Check in 4 – November/December 2020

Focus: How our people are feeling and Your Say questions relating to employee engagement, wellbeing and access to learning and development opportunities. Results are available to Management Tier 3 level.

##### Highlight Results:

- 46% response rate.
- 82% feeling ok or better, with 33% saying that their wellbeing has declined.
- 76% engagement score, a 6% increase on the previous year and all engagement questions either stayed the same or saw an increase on the 2019 results.
- 86% believe wellbeing is promoted at work, an increase of 14%.
- 84% of our people believe WCC is a good employer an increase of 9% and 81% are proud to work for WCC an increase of 8%.
- When asked what would improve working for Warwickshire County Council the following themes were identified:
  - Adopt agile working principles, choice of work location, ground-up decision making, better communication in and between teams.
  - Reduction in workload and less demand, increase in staffing resource, better staff retention and faster recruitment, absence management.
  - Better communication and support from managers, better and more confident decision making, management time spent on managing rather than on admin/HR responsibilities.

##### Actions:

- Share and celebrate the results with our people through an interactive dashboard and other communication methods and encourage our managers to have conversations at a team level regarding:
  - How we can continue to support people with their wellbeing
  - What we have learnt from 2020 and what can do to further improve our engagement score.
- Link the results with the priority activities in the Our People Strategy and ensure the feedback is built into the ongoing work programme, particularly concerning Sustainable and Resilient Workforce, Agile Working, High performance culture, Employer Value Proposition and leadership. Where results are not being covered by the priority activities, we will consider how these can be covered in future work programmes.
- HROD will cross reference with other metrics to shape and inform programmes of work and to provide bespoke support where it is needed
- Report to be taken to the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group to discuss priority actions relating to demographics, being treated with fairness and respect and bullying and harassment.

- Supporting Staff Change Hub are using results to shape and inform work on supporting our people with their wellbeing.

#### 4.5 Thrive Health Needs Assessment

As a result of the decline in how our people are feeling and in order to achieve Bronze Accreditation for the West Midlands Combined Authority Thrive at Work Programme, we are currently asking colleagues to complete the Thrive Health Needs Assessment. The assessment has a number of questions about wellbeing and will provide a detailed report to enable us to develop a wellbeing action plan. The survey closed on the 26<sup>th</sup> February and we await the findings.

## 5. Next steps

- 5.1 The check in approach will be continued over the coming months with the following focus:

Check in 5	8-26 March 2021	High Performing Culture
Check in 6	June	Leadership
Check in 7	September	Our People

- 5.2 In line with the Our People Strategy, employee engagement is a priority activity. Scoping our long-term approach to engagement is currently underway and will be agreed in the coming months.

## Appendices

Appendix 1 – Check-in 1 infographic.

Appendix 2 – Check-in 2 infographic.

Appendix 3 – Check-in 3 infographic.

Appendix 4 – Check-in 4 Infographic.

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Local Member(s): n/a

Other members: n/a



## Appendix 2

### Staff wellbeing check-in 2 July 2020



WCC staff continue to work in very changed circumstances and we are committed to checking in with you on a regular basis.

Check-in 2 launched in July focusing on wellbeing and recovery.

#### Who responded

*April's figures brackets*

**2,066** (2,101)  
responses =  
response rate

**45%** (46%)

**55%** (51%)  
identified as  
key workers

**90%** (89%)  
working from home



#### How are you feeling?

*April's figures brackets*

**83%** (88%)  
feeling generally  
positive

**17%** (12%)  
finding things  
harder

Feeling ok  
or better

Finding things  
harder

(rating 3-5)

(rating 1-2)



#### Worked well during Covid-19 response

- Working from home/working more flexibly
- Technology
- Corporate Board briefings
- Positive support from managers and colleagues
- Quicker decision making and less bureaucracy

#### Challenges during Covid-19 response

- Lack of face to face interaction both for work and socially
- Isolation
- Juggling working from home with caring responsibilities
- Access to equipment
- Workload and work/life balance

#### Mental wellbeing scale

We used the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale.

This consists of 7 questions with 5 response options which produce an individual score. Scores can range from 7 – 35 with higher scores indicating positive mental wellbeing.

Average score for general adult population = **23.6**

##### WCC scores

WCC average score = **22.3**

- **15.4%** scored high (26-35)
- **16.2%** scored average-high (23.6 – 26)
- **28%** scored low-average (21.5 – 23.6)
- **39.3%** scored low (7 – 21.5)

#### Your suggested actions for recovery

- Prioritise those finding it difficult to work from home to return to the office safely for part of the week
- Consider making flexible working more permanent and support staff to work safely from home
- Make buildings safe to work in and rationalise our property portfolio
- Build on innovation that is underway
- Prioritise services for vulnerable and reinstate home visits safely

Look out for  
check-in 3 which  
will help us with our  
workplace redesign





## Appendix 3

### Staff wellbeing check-in 3

August/September 2020

WCC staff continue to work in very changed circumstances and we are committed to checking in with you on a regular basis.

Check-in 3 launched in August and as well as checking in on how people were feeling, asked questions about the workplace

#### Who responded

**1,548**

responses =

**34%**

response rate

**51%**

identified as  
key workers

**91%**

working from home

**61%**

normally based  
in Warwick

(Shire Hall, Barrack Street, Salford)



#### How are you feeling?

**85%**

Feeling ok  
or better

(rating 3-5)

**15%**

Finding things  
harder

(rating 1-2)



#### Productivity

We asked you to assess your productivity when you work from home

**86%** felt productivity was the same or greater while working from home

**11%** not as productive

**3%** not working from home



#### Your comments

Less distractions working from home

Benefits of not commuting or parking

Preference to combine home and office working

Feeling isolated and less motivated

Feeling need to always be available

Better work/life balance

#### Working away from the office

We asked you to estimate the amount of time you spend working away from the office pre-lockdown....

**27%** average time spent working away

We then asked you to estimate the amount of time you would like to spend working away from the office post-lockdown...

**64%** average time spent working away



#### What do you miss about being in the office?

##### Top three things you miss most

1. Social interaction
2. Face to face collaboration
3. Learning from others

##### Three things you miss the least

1. Commuting
2. Quiet time to focus
3. Access to personal files and equipment



**Look out for check in 4 in November!**



## Appendix 4

### Staff wellbeing check-in 4

November/December 2020

In this check-in survey as well as asking our usual wellbeing questions we also included some of the questions from the Your Say survey.

#### What's next?

- Results dashboard coming soon
- Results available to tier 3 level
- Resources available to support using the results with teams

#### Who responded

**2,182**  
responses

**46%**  
response rate



#### Wellbeing

##### How are you feeling?

**82%**  
feeling OK  
or better  
(rating 3-5)

**18%**  
finding  
things  
harder  
(rating 1-2)



#### Your say

##### Employee Engagement

**76%** ↑ **6%** from 2019

All Your Say question scores have stayed the same or increased since 2019

#### Why do you ask that?

This time we also asked you to provide some demographic information. This data is used to identify any actions that need to be taken to support our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Please be assured that your responses are anonymous, and this data is analysed separately from the survey responses meaning you can not be identified.

Has your wellbeing declined, improved or stayed the same over the last 6 months?

**54%** = stayed the same

**33%** = declined

**13%** = improved

Have you reached out for wellbeing help?

**77%**  
have not  
reached out

**23%**  
have reached out



Change  
from 2019

<b>86%</b>	Employee wellbeing is promoted at work	↑ <b>14%</b>
<b>84%</b>	WCC is a good employer	↑ <b>9%</b>
<b>82%</b>	I am treated with fairness and respect at work	↔ <b>0%</b>
<b>81%</b>	I am proud to work for WCC	↑ <b>8%</b>
<b>78%</b>	My manager encourages me to propose new ideas and to improve the quality of our services to our customers	↑ <b>1%</b>
<b>78%</b>	I have not experienced or witnessed any form of bullying or harassment at work in the last 12 months	↑ <b>5%</b>
<b>76%</b>	I can access learning and development needed to do my job	↑ <b>1%</b>
<b>68%</b>	I think it is safe to speak up and challenge the way things are done at work	↑ <b>6%</b>
<b>68%</b>	I believe that I have the opportunity for personal development and growth (whilst at work)	↑ <b>11%</b>

#### We asked you what would improve working for WCC?

##### These are some of the key themes:

- Adopt flexible working principles, choice of work location, ground-up decision making, better communication in and between teams.
- Reduction in workload and less demand, increase in staffing resource, better staff retention and faster recruitment, absence management.
- Better communication and support from managers, better and more confident decision making, management time spent on managing rather than on admin/HR responsibilities.

