
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

21 January 2020

Cabinet

Title:	Our Voice Employee Survey
Purpose:	To provide Cabinet with an update on the results of the recent employee survey.
Recommendation:	That Cabinet notes the key findings and next steps of the 2019 Our Voice survey.


1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In September 2019, a new employee survey, 'Our Voice', was issued to all Council employees. This survey combined three surveys previously issued to employees on the topics of engagement, stress and healthy working lives, with the addition of a new element around health and safety culture. The aim of the Our Voice survey was to gain a holistic picture of how employees view the Council by focusing on a number of areas, whilst also reducing the number of surveys that employees are invited to complete.
- 1.2 The survey closed in October and the Council-wide findings have now been analysed. Managers have copies of the findings for their teams and are currently sharing these to identify further areas for improvement in their own teams.
- 1.3 Some of the positive findings from the survey included:
- Participation levels increased with 46.2% of employees responding, compared to 35.5% in 2015;
 - The positive employee engagement level was broadly maintained at 70.7%;
 - People like the job that they are doing and the difference they make to the community;
 - People highlighted colleagues / staff they work with as a positive;
 - High awareness of health and safety issues and Livewell physical activity initiatives was shown.
- 1.4 Findings from the survey also identify areas for improvement, including:
- Workload levels and how workload is managed;
 - Supporting employees with incidents in the workplace;
 - More awareness of and access to Healthy Working Lives initiatives.

- 1.5 This report summarises the key findings, as well as providing information on trends where these are available.

2. Background

Approach

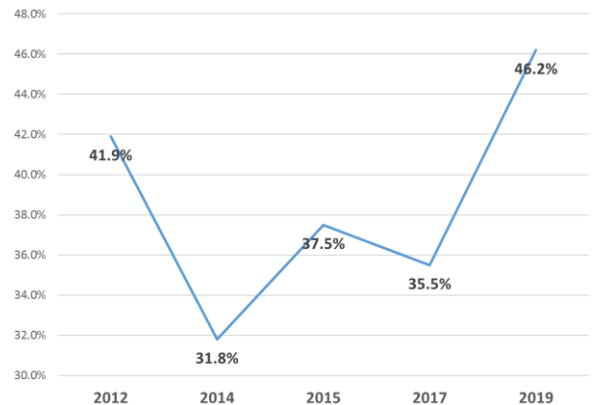
- 2.1 Surveys on three different topics have been issued to all Council employees in recent years, focusing on their perceptions of working in the Council:
- **Employee Engagement Survey:** incorporating questions measuring engagement levels and employees' perceptions on a range of topics.
 - **Stress Survey:** to determine any risks within teams and the Council in relation to the six Management Standards, i.e. Demands, Control, Support, Relationships, Role, and Change.
 - **Healthy Working Lives:** this survey is a key requirement to maintain Gold accreditation of the National Healthy Working Lives (HWL) programme.
- 2.2 In addition to the above surveys, a further survey in relation to Health & Safety Culture had also been planned for 2019.
- 2.3 To reduce the number of surveys issued to employees, these surveys were combined into one employee survey, called '**Our Voice**'. The question set from all four surveys was reviewed to remove duplication and streamline the survey.
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- 2.4 The resulting questionnaire was issued to all permanent and temporary employees in September 2019 via either a link to an online survey or a paper copy. Various marketing methods were used to encourage employees to participate. The survey remained open for four weeks.
- 2.5 The results for the 2019 Our Voice survey were published on 18 November 2019. A summary of the Council-wide responses to all questions was made available on the Our Voice Sharepoint site, Connects and Glow to make this accessible to all employees. Hard copies are also available in those areas where employees do not have access to computers. Managers were also provided with the findings for the teams that they are responsible for on the Our Voice Sharepoint site.
- 2.6 Key findings, trends and improvements achieved are explored further in section 3 where these can be determined. It should be noted however that as this is the first combined survey and the question set has been altered from previous surveys, trends and improvements can mainly only be established for the employee engagement section.

3. Proposals

Response Rate

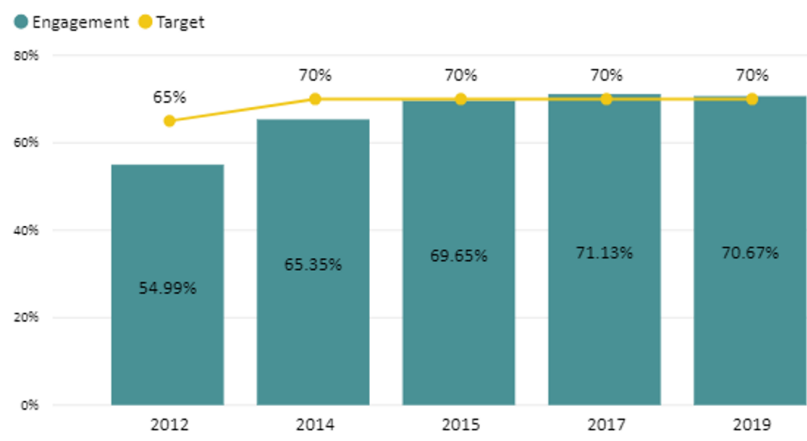
3.1 In total, 3,182 employees completed the survey, 46.2% of the total workforce of 6,881 as at 16 September.

3.2 In comparison to previous Employee Engagement Surveys, this was the highest response rate achieved – as seen on the chart on the right. The response rate was also much higher than achieved in the last Healthy Working Lives survey (19%).



Key findings – Employee Engagement

3.3 The 2019 responses largely maintained the overall level of employee engagement achieved in the previous survey at 70.7%. As this is based on a higher response rate than that achieved in previous years, this is a positive trend.



3.4 The main themes in relation to areas of **strength** continued the trend from previous years:

- **Clarity and purpose of job role:** Respondents commented on enjoying their job and the feeling of helping the community and making a difference and being very positive about working for the Council;
- **Teamwork:** Points raised highlighted the importance of teams working together to serve our community better and that our teams regularly demonstrate our staff values of Focus, Passion and Inspiration;
- **Effective Relationships:** Every employee engagement survey conducted has highlighted the relationships between colleagues as a strength of working for the Council.

3.5 Two additional strengths were identified from the 2019 survey, potentially due to the change in question set:

- **Support available and received** from colleagues and managers;
- **Flexible Working:** having the flexibility to adapt circumstances to suit personal needs, utilising flexi time and achieving a good work life balance.

3.6 Three of the main themes for **improvement** identified from the 2019 survey continue the trend from previous surveys. A summary of action taken since the 2017 survey for each of these themes is explained below:

3.6.1 Workload / Workload management:

The questions in relation to workload and workload management changed in the 2019 question set to include the equivalent questions from the previous stress survey, so a direct comparison is not possible. However, the questions and comments in both the 2017 and 2019 surveys highlighted workload demands and how these are managed as an area for improvement.

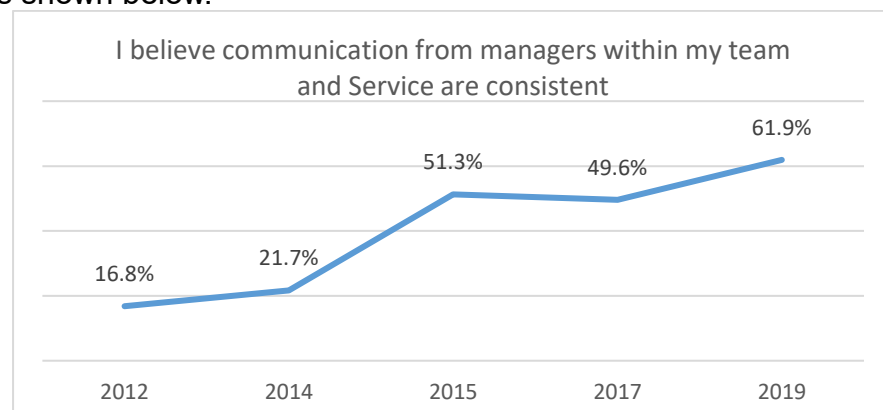
Since the 2017 survey, some of the actions taken to address this issue are:

- Clarifying roles and responsibilities within teams has been a key task for a number of directorates, whether as a result of filling long-term vacant positions, or reviewing roles as part of organisational restructures, or as part of upskilling teams to allow them to perform more varied tasks;
- Using existing policies and procedures to support individuals' circumstances, such as work life balance requests, flexible working, working from home, including introduction of 'hot desks' to facilitate agile working.
- Workload levels are monitored through a variety of means, including regular 1-2-1s and working groups have also been set up in some areas to review workload levels (e.g. teaching). Supervision procedure within the Partnership is also being reviewed to include greater focus on workload management.

3.6.2 Communication / Consultation:

The effectiveness of communications from management has been highlighted as an area for improvement in every engagement survey and remains the area that receives a high level of comments from respondents.

However, the responses have shown a positive trend since the initial survey in 2012, as shown below.



Since the 2017 survey, some of the actions taken to address this issue are:

- Expanding use of existing methods to encourage effective communications, e.g. use of new and existing staff groups to share information, use of information emails and newsletters, TV Screens, staff suggestion schemes (including a new version providing a link on all desktops), Development days and meetings.;
- Cross-team meetings, for example 'stand-ups' and 'meetups' have been introduced and/or extended to improve collaborative working and to share information and knowledge;
- Use of digital methods of engaging and communicating has been extended, including Office 365, Twitter.

3.6.3 Feeling Valued / Recognition: Slightly contradictory information was received in relation to this. In both 2017 and 2019, a large number of comments were received that feeling valued or recognition given to contribution made, needed to improve. However, the specific question '*I am given constructive feedback on the work I do*' received a fairly high level of positive responses.

Since the 2017 survey, some of the actions taken to address this issue are:

- Recognition events are in place to recognise achievements and the format of these have been reviewed to ensure they remain effective;
- Focusing recognition on engagement and conversations as ways to recognise contribution, using methods such as team building activities, highlighting of achievements via newsletters, team meetings, briefings from Chief Officers, etc.;
- A pilot 'Attendance Reward Scheme' for all staff within HSCP to recognise full attendance.

3.7 Two additional areas for improvement have been identified that were not main themes for improvement for the 2017 survey. Therefore, a summary of activity undertaken since the 2017 is not available for these areas:

3.7.1 Approach to change: The questions in the 2019 survey in relation to management of change were different than the 2017 survey, reflecting areas from the previous stress survey. In line with communications / consultation mentioned above, opportunities to participate in the change process and being clear on how changes will work in practice were highlighted as less positive.

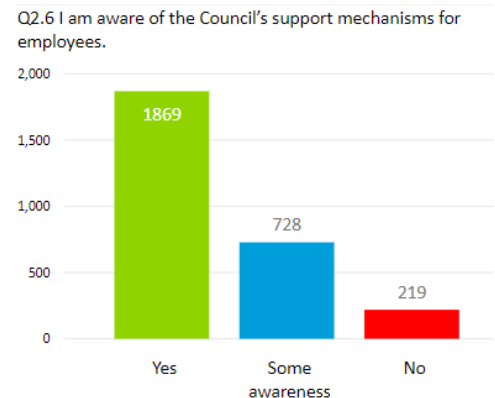
3.7.2 Work life balance / Flexible working: Although this has been identified as an area of strength as detailed above, the opportunities for flexible working and work life balance has also been highlighted as an area for improvement. This is potentially in line with workload levels noted earlier, which have an impact on employees' work life balance. It may be seen as an area for improvement in some specific Services, where it is perceived that there is less opportunity for flexible working and flexi time due to the nature of the services delivered.

Key findings – Health & Safety Culture

3.8 This section of the Our Voice survey focused on the Health & Safety culture within the Council. As this is the first year that the questions within this section of the survey have been asked, no comparisons can be made with previous years' findings.

3.9 Overall, the findings from this section of the survey were positive. The majority of questions had a high level of responses that agreed and strongly agreed. Some of the **strengths** identified within this section include:

- A high awareness of Health and Safety issues - as can be seen in the chart;
- Understanding of the importance of reporting incidents and near misses;
- Awareness of workplace risk assessments carried out;
- Managers' commitment to addressing health & safety concerns.



3.10 The areas for **improvement** identified include:

- Further work to raise awareness of the impact of negative behaviours in the workplace around health and safety and the methods available to address and support these;
- Greater awareness of Service Safety representatives;
- Other feedback in specific areas related to:
 - Further work around toolbox talks and safety briefings and additional health and safety training;
 - The provision of relevant equipment and personal protective equipment (PPE).

Key findings – Healthy Working Lives

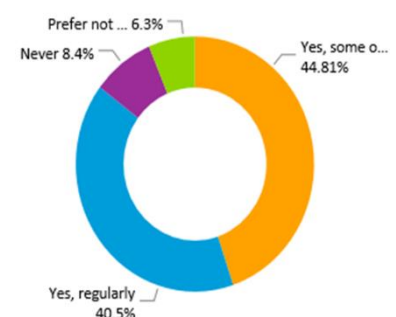
3.11 The Healthy Working Lives programme supports national and public health priorities around physical activity, healthy eating and mental health. With 77% of Council employees living in the local area, improving our employees' health and wellbeing also contributes to the wellbeing of the local community.

3.12 Combining the Healthy Working Lives into the Our Voice survey had a positive impact in terms of the response rate: The 46.2% response rate in 2019 was 27% higher than that achieved previously (19% in 2015).

3.13 The key areas of **strength** identified were:

- High levels of awareness of Livewell physical activity initiatives;
- A large proportion of respondents participate in at least moderate levels of physical activity, as can be seen on the chart on the right;
- The level of respondents that eat 5 or more fruit / vegetables per day is above the Scottish average of 20%;
- Nearly half of respondents drink within the daily recommended limits;
- The majority of respondents would be comfortable opening up a conversation with a colleague about their mental health and want a better understanding of mental wellbeing.

Q3.1 Do you participate in moderate or physical activity at least 150 minutes or more each week?



3.14 The key areas for **improvement** identified were:

- Although a high level of respondents was aware of Livewell initiatives, participation in these was less positive. This may be due to type of activities / initiatives, locations, working patterns, or communication around these. It may also be partly due to people undertaking activities outwith the Livewell programme;
- Nearly half of respondents felt that the Council understands what factors impact on mental health and wellbeing and that the Council supports mental health and wellbeing at work and further work is required around these areas;
- A large number of the comments within this section of the survey related to stress, a lot of which were related to workload levels as noted earlier in the report;
- Although only 12.6% of total responses, respondents stated that they are exposed to passive smoking or vapour from electronic cigarettes, the majority of locations for these were building entrance / access points, followed by clients/home visits and yards/open spaces, much of which is in contravention of the Council's Smoking Policy.

Cascading findings and Improvement Planning

3.15 Managers are now sharing findings with team members and identifying areas for improvement relevant to their team. Support has been provided to Managers via:

- Managers' Briefings
- Guidance documents
- Guidance videos

3.16 Services are progressing improvement actions that are relevant to the Council-wide themes identified, as well as any additional areas identified within their own teams. These actions will be identified through discussions with Senior Management Teams, Managers and Employees, using methods which are suitable to the Service. This activity will be supported by Performance Representatives within Services.

3.17 In addition, the Corporate Health and Safety group and Livewell group will explore the relevant sections of the survey, identifying and progressing improvement activities relevant to these areas.

3.18 Improvement activity will be monitored within individual Services, sharing updates on progress via team operational plan updates, or using other suitable means. To share best practice and further monitor improvement activity, a series of 'We asked, you said, we did' case studies will be prepared during the Summer of 2020. These will be based on improvement activity undertaken within Services in relation to the key themes identified within this report.

3.19 The Cabinet is asked to note the key findings and next steps of the 2019 Our Voice survey.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

4.1 None.

Human Resources

4.2 Services will progress improvement activity following the 2019 Our Voice survey in conjunction with managers and employees.

Legal

4.3 None.

Equality/Socio-economic

4.4 None.

Environmental and Sustainability

4.5 None.

Key Priorities

4.6 This report directly supports the Council priorities:

- Aspiring Communities:
 - North Ayrshire's residents and communities enjoy good life-long health and well-being.
- A Council for the Future:
 - A valued workforce that delivers high quality services;
 - A powerful and respected voice.

Community Wealth Building

4.7 None.

5. Consultation

5.1 The Chief Officer Leadership Team has been consulted at all stages of the Our Voice survey. The key findings from the survey have also been discussed and the approach to progress these have been agreed.

5.2 The Our Voice survey is a collaborative project, involving Organisational Development and Health & Safety teams within People and Transformation and the Health Improvement and Equalities Officer within Democratic Services.

5.3 The Our Voice survey has been discussed with a long-standing Cross Service Working Group. The group have been consulted throughout the planning and implementation of

the survey. The actions to cascade the findings and identify improvement activity has also been discussed with this group.

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Background Papers

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