

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	14 th March 2017
Report:	Head of Strategic Human Resources
Subject/Title:	Reassurance Project
Portfolio Holder:	Deputy Leader – Cllr David Brown

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 Cheshire East Council is committed to promoting staff engagement and wellbeing. Establishing and maintaining an engaged and motivated workforce that is able to meet future challenges and deliver high quality services to our residents remains at the heart of our Council's success.
- 1.2 A cross party working group was established in May 2016 to provide assurance that the wellbeing of staff is aligned to best practice and organisational values. This report provides the outcome of this work and seeks Cabinet's endorsement.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 That Cabinet note the outcome of the Reassurance Project as recommended by Staffing Committee.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 In December 2015, the Deputy Leader, Councillor D Brown announced that Cheshire East Council would establish a cross party body to ensure that staff have the right to speak out on matters concerning them.
- 3.2 At a meeting of Staffing Committee on 29th February 2016, it was agreed to establish a working group, whose purpose would be to provide assurance that the wellbeing of Staff and Members of Cheshire East Council was aligned to best practice and our organisational values.
- 3.3 It was proposed that the working group be established to review existing HR policies which impact upon reassurance to ensure that they operate cohesively and meet legislative requirements. Feedback would be sought from Staff and Members in respect of agreed policies and procedures. The membership would consist of a Chair, six Elected Members on a 3:1:1:1 basis plus a Trade Union representative.

3.4 At the meeting of Staffing Committee on 21st April 2016, it was agreed that Chair of the Staffing Committee, Councillor B Moran, would be Chair of the Reassurance Working Group.

4.0 The Reassurance Working Group

4.1 The inaugural meeting of the working group took place on 16th May 2016 to agree the terms of reference and to scope the work programme (attached at Appendix 1). It was also agreed that North West Employers would be commissioned to independently review all 'in scope' policies.

4.2 Meetings took place on 11th August and 2nd September 2016 to seek Member feedback and receive progress updates including a presentation by North West Employers on the policy review.

4.3 At the September meeting, Members agreed to await the findings of the staff survey to determine the impact on the Reassurance Project. Receipt of the staff survey results in October informed the final meeting on 3rd November 2016 where terms of reference for the staff interviews and focus groups were agreed. Quarterly updates against progress have subsequently been provided to Staffing Committee and the sponsor, Councillor D Brown.

5.0 Methodology

5.1 The five stages of the review were as follows: -

- A desk based exercise to review the Council's policies and procedures, conducted independently by North West Employers;
- Independent research by North West Employers to ensure best practice was being followed;
- Working Group consideration of whether staff survey results inform the review;
- Quick wins identified and implemented; and
- Interviews and focus group with staff and views sought of Elected Members through the Working Group

5.2 Scope of policies and procedures to be reviewed: -

- Grievance
- Bullying/Harassment
- Equality
- Disciplinary
- Code of Conduct
- Whistle Blowing
- Complaints

6.0 Outcomes

All objectives within the Terms of Reference were addressed and outcomes are detailed below.

6.1 Review of Policies and Procedures

North West Employers conducted an independent review of all 'in scope' HR policies and procedures to ensure they are updated in line with legislative requirements. In addition, research was undertaken to identify good practice, which could be adopted by the Council. Following the review, North West Employers presented their findings to the working group confirming that the Council's policies and procedures were legally compliant and all operated cohesively. Recommendations for minor changes to add clarity and tighten existing arrangements were suggested and accepted by the working group. Furthermore, confirmation was received that all policies and procedures were in line with other Local Authorities and adhered to ACAS good practice.

6.2 Staff Survey

The staff survey was undertaken during June and July 2016 with 3750 staff invited to take part. The response rate was much improved on the 2014 survey, with an increase from 45% to 59% and increased engagement rates across the organisation. This provided the working group with an opportunity to gain real time feedback on staff perceptions in relation to bullying and harassment across the organisation. A key strength identified from the survey results was that the majority of staff reported that they believe Fairness, Respect and Negative Behaviours are not a concern for them in the workplace. The questions and results to support this are shown below.

Fairness, Respect and Negative Behaviours	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Q57. Where I work Bullying is not an issue	81%	9%	10%
Q58. Where I work Discrimination is not an issue	87%	8%	5%
Q59. I am treated with respect by my manager	88%	7%	5%
Q59. I am treated with respect by the people I work with	90%	7%	3%
Q60. I feel the Council values and celebrates the diversity of its employees	58%	33%	9%

Bullying is never acceptable and will not be tolerated if it is found within Cheshire East Council. We take the issue very seriously

With reference to Q57, "Where I work, Bullying is not an issue". This baseline result is taken seriously, however, is not untypical when compared with other organisations. The Working Group considered there is scope for further training and development for staff and managers relating to fairness and respect to reduce negative behaviours in the workplace.

6.3 Quick Wins

Whilst the response rate to the survey and the results shown above are positive it was acknowledged that 41% of employees did not complete the survey. Therefore, the Reassurance Working Group commissioned Survey Solutions to undertake some additional work inviting 500 employees from areas with a lower response rate to take part in focus groups and/or one to one telephone interviews. The interviews and focus groups took place during the first week in December 2016. The overall response rate for those invited to take part was 3.8% of which a significant number of employees had completed the original survey. A total of 16 employees requested a one to one interview and three employees attended a focus group.

6.4 Results from one to one interviews and staff focus groups

Although the response rate (3.8%) to participate in the interviews/focus groups is low, it is encouraging to note that the findings reflect those within the main survey. The findings from Survey Solutions are as follows: -

- The Council policies and procedures currently in place help to ensure that the staff are treated fairly;
- Diversity within the Council has improved with opportunities available for staff from different backgrounds and with different abilities;
- The flexible working policy is seen as a positive element that influenced staff perception of fairness; and
- People did not report experiencing negative behaviour where they work within the Council although it was acknowledged that there may have been isolated incidents.

6.5 Additional feedback from staff - Exit Interviews

All staff leaving the Council are provided with the opportunity to attend an exit interview with their “grandparent” manager. The exit interview process has been invigorated and promoted to line managers by HR delivery staff, reinforcing the importance of encouraging staff to provide feedback on their time working for Cheshire East Council.

7.0 Next Steps

7.1 Both corporate and local actions plans have been agreed to address findings from the staff survey and are being implemented to address areas for improvement. This includes initiatives such as the introduction of employee forums to enable staff to raise issues of concern.

7.2 Progress against delivery of all staff survey action plans will continue to be tracked by the recently formed Staff Survey Governance Group which is chaired by the Chief Operating Officer; membership includes Officers, Members and Trade Union representation.

- 7.3 Further work is taking place through the Staff Survey Governance Group to promote the Council's responsibilities to ensure all staff and members are aware of reporting procedures should they wish to raise a matter of concern or a complaint.
- 7.4 That the appropriate HR Policies and Procedures will be updated by March 2017.
- 7.5 Appropriate training and development will be made available for all staff to reinforce fairness and respect to reduce negative behaviours in the workplace.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 That the work of Staffing Committee provides re-assurance that the wellbeing of staff is aligned to best practice and values and has increased confidence that appropriate HR processes are in place for staff to speak out on matters of concern. Further training will be made available to all staff to reinforce these key messages.

9.0 Wards Affected

- 9.1 Not applicable.

10.0 Local Ward Members

- 10.1 Not applicable.

11.0 Policy Implications

- 11.1 Policy changes highlighted through this review will be taken through the appropriate approval route for formal approval by the Portfolio Holder.

12.0 Implications for Rural Communities

- 12.1 Not applicable.

13.0 Financial Implications

- 13.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

14.0 Legal Implications

- 14.1 There are no direct legal implications associated with this report. However, failure to treat staff with dignity and respect would increase allegations of bullying and harassment, which may in turn see increased litigation.

15.0 Risk Management

15.1 Failure to adequately address reassurance issues may impact staff confidence and engagement and ultimately upon the reputation of Cheshire East Council.

16.0 Access to Information

16.1 The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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