

My Ref: T: Scrutiny/PRAP/Comm Papers/Correspondence

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Councillor Graham Hinchey,  
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Dear Councillor Hinchey,

**Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee: 6 October 2015  
Employee Survey and Employee Engagement**

Thank you for attending Committee on 6 October 2015 to present the Council's work on the Employee Survey and the wider Employee Engagement agenda. Members felt the contribution of all officers accompanying you, including the four staff ambassadors, was clear, informative and honest. I will be grateful if you can pass on my appreciation to Philip Lenz and his officers Katie Richards and Helen Witham, and to staff ambassadors Theo Callender, Lorraine Gilmore, Julie Reed and Tye Whithear, for giving up their time to attend the meeting.

As Chair I have been asked to pass on the Members' comments and observations raised during discussion at the Way Forward. First, they have asked me to convey their opinion that from the wide range of views presented, there is clear evidence of improvement underway in the conduct and arrangements for the Employee Survey, and on the efforts made to widen communication and general engagement of employees. This appears to be paying dividends in a number of areas.

So, in general terms we are broadly content with the strategic approach and practical implementation of the work, the benchmarking activity undertaken and the pains taken to widen consultation and engagement with employees.

As you are aware, our role is that of a critical friend, and Members shared a number of suggestions based on the evidence presented at the meeting, designed to further stretch improvement. I hope that these comments will be useful to you and officers in further optimising performance on this agenda.

## **EMPLOYEE SURVEY**

Members were initially keen to test what methodology lay behind your choice of questions within the survey. They understood why you have chosen to reduce the number of questions, and your wish to take the “pulse” of the organisation on a number of issues intrinsic to the Workforce Strategy at a time of change.

The risk behind this approach is that you do not receive a rich data set of information on the issues beneath the headline, to give granularity in interpreting and designing improvement actions in response to the findings. We understand that through your officers’ efforts, led directly by the Chief Executive, you now have a whole new set of opportunities for qualitative follow up with Ambassadors, Cardiff Manager Forum and other employee engagement to dig beneath the headline, and we urge you to ensure that you go beyond relying on the headline figures.

It is encouraging to note that the Ambassadors are being given a key role in designing the Corporate Commitments, and we will be interested to return to this topic when analysing a future round of quarterly performance, to see what is changing on the ground within Directorates as an outcome from this work.

Results seem to have improved in three ways in 2015: levels of completion; the wealth of free text comments and suggestions for improvement; and the scores themselves. This is to be commended. But had these first two welcome outcomes not been delivered, Members wondered whether strategic lessons could be learnt from the results themselves. We were not sure whether there had been much forecasting or developing expectations of targets for improvement, or what those targets would look like. Perhaps you could consider this when planning your next iteration – for instance how far should the percentages increase, what might constrain this, and what might good look like?

Members remained sceptical of the value of asking if employees would recommend the Council as an employer to a friend. Although somewhat encouraged that the results of this question have marginally increased since it was last asked in 2013, it is difficult to discern what conclusions to draw from the 0.36% increase. Unless your

follow on work clearly uncovers key findings from the way employees have responded to this headline question that can be translated into compelling actions to improve staff morale, we do not see much value in its continuation in future surveys.

Members understand the practical value of deriving mean scores from responses to each of the questions as a communication tool within the organisation, but would be disappointed if efforts were not invested to consider the range of answers to each question. In particular, where detailed analysis of responses showed a measurable number of employees diverging from the mean (particularly to the more negative ends of the scoring spectrum) particular effort should be invested in exploring how to address this negativity, its causes and potential solution.

A Member asked about how the organisation was planning to engage the significant number of school-based staff who were not included in this survey. The Committee recognise the different employment relationship of schools staff and the need for more specific relevant questions to this staff group, but want the organisation to be able to run an organisation-wide survey and compare as far as possible the results of this significant segment of the City's workforce alongside that of the existing respondent sample. We urge you to do all you can to avoid a two tier data set, which would feel like a wasted opportunity.

Members understand the rationale for the "confidential", anonymised approach taken in encouraging honesty and openness in the answers provided. They did feel however, that a potential trick had been missed in not offering employees who provided specific suggestions for improvement the chance to have an individual response from the Chief Executive – perhaps you could consider this next time around. It will now be important to communicate widely across the workforce to ensure that employees who made suggestions can see that their suggestion is being considered, and how that consideration is turning into improvement.

The Committee welcomed Philip Lenz' offer to share the suggestions received with this Committee, and will be grateful if this could be provided to Paul Keeping as soon as available.

## STAFF AMBASSADORS

Members gathered from the valued contributions of the four Staff Ambassadors that:

- The engagement around this Staff Survey was the best they had encountered. The quality of engagement is improving, employees are opening up and are more trusting that their views will be listened to.
- The survey is just one tool of engagement, and there is a need to drill down to a greater level of detail in interpreting the survey results and understanding employee perspectives.
- Staff on the front line may not be noticing the improvements as much as centrally-based staff. There is still a perception of “them” and “us”, and that messages about improvement need to be tailored to the individual job roles of front line employees (particularly if they are part time or specialised staff).
- Communication was definitely improving at a corporate level, and there were signs of improvement at a Directorate level, but it was at the Team and individual line management level where the messages were being lost, or not being correctly applied.
- At the start of the Ambassador Programme, it was clear that some Directorates were more effective at communicating with their employees than others. Initially, for instance in Highways there were few staff ambassadors, and employees needed to rely on ambassadors based in other Directorates for their information. This is now changing, with consistency emerging.
- PPDRs are much more widely and consistently undertaken. The focus now needs to shift onto the quality of the reviews, the clarity of performance objectives and the usefulness of the reviews to prompt meaningful development plans.
- It might be useful for Members to spend more time directly meeting employees to hear their views.

These are generally positive views, and even the negative comments give you the opportunity to build improvements into your engagement work. We will be pleased to receive the list of Ambassadors, indicating which Directorate they work for, which you said you could provide to Paul Keeping for distribution to Members.

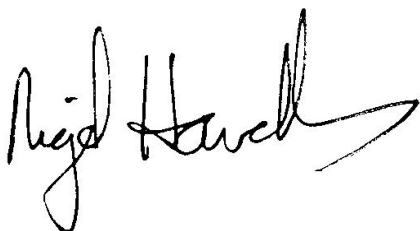
*To re-cap, the Committee will be pleased to receive:*

- the list of employees suggestions received through the Survey.
- The list of Staff Ambassadors, broken down by Directorate.

Please can you arrange for this to be sent to Paul Keeping when available.

Finally, on behalf of the Committee, I wish to thank you and the officers for your continued support for the internal challenge of important issues that can improve the quality of services the Council is delivering to its customers.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nigel Howells', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**COUNCILLOR NIGEL HOWELLS  
CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

cc

Members of the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee ;  
Philip Lenz, Chief Human Resources Officer  
Joanne Watkins, Cabinet Business Manager;  
Matt Swindell, Principal Administrative Officer  
Katie Richards, Human Resources  
Helen Witham, Corporate Communications and Media  
Staff Ambassadors: Theo Callender, Lorraine Gilmore, Julie Reed and Tye Whithear