

## COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### NOTES FROM THE STAFF DISCUSSION SESSIONS ON IMPROVING STAFF MORALE AND WELLBEING

Thursday 7 November 2013

Epsom Town Hall

16 Members of staff participated, split into three groups. Each group discussed the following questions:

#### **Wellbeing**

- 1 Which are the most helpful ways that we support staff wellbeing at SCC?
- 2 How could it be improved?

#### **Morale**

- 1 Tell us how you feel about working for SCC.
- 2 Thinking about working for Surrey County Council, which of the following have you benefitted from:
  - Supportive and effective leadership and management
  - Empowering employees to take responsibility
  - Treating employees with respect
  - Providing regular employee recognition
  - Offering open and regular communication about factors important to employees
  - Providing feedback and coaching
  - Offering good employee benefits?
- 3 What would you like to see improved?

## Group 1 (Nick and Stephen)

### General Well-Being

- 24 hour Employee Assistance line is valued and appreciated
- Staff benefits (life assurance etc) are popular
- Team working was very successful with the opportunity to discuss issues with managers and colleagues.

### Morale:

- All staff said they loved their job and there was a great loyalty among colleagues
- Employees are treated with respect
- Clear pressures, which were increasing. Risk of 'burnout' of staff facing increasing demands.
- Staff feel that the public expect too much
- Delays in equipment being provided to staff such as laptops (laptops are assigned to people, not posts, so move with staff).
- Supportive line managers, but there were queries over effective feedback from suggestions
- Concern over the three year pay freeze
- Process of 'natural selection' – only those who are really dedicated will stay with the County Council.

### Ways to improve:

- Suggested a 'Team of the Year' award
- Staff communication should be multi-channel and not just rely on email and S-Net
- Better IT equipment was needed
- More competitive pay rates – overall pay frozen, but also no progression within grades. This results in people who are doing the same job as their colleagues (often over several years) receiving different rates of pay.
- It takes a long time to get on training courses for skills which are vital to the job, eg AIS. There should be a process where new starters are automatically booked to attend training in their first week.

## Group 2 (Eber)

### Helpful ways staff are supported:

- Supervision – pairing of junior and senior team members
- Team management – approachable line managers and received feedback
- Stable team with only small changes to personnel
- Phased return to work after long-term absence

### Improvements which could be made:

- Better contingency planning for times of sickness and absence to ensure there is sufficient cover

### Morale:

- “I love working for Surrey County Council”
- Public sector ethos of serving the community
- “I get support from my managers”
- Training is making a noticeable difference in Adult Social Care
- Reorganisation has brought uncertainty about jobs
- Concern about the fluctuating workload
- Difficult members of the public who are demanding more
- Work environment and location is important
- Issues of grading and pay – feel that the grading and pay does not reflect the role, though understand there are limits when working within the public sector
- Issues with extended work hours

### Recognition:

- Structure of teams may prevent recognition and advancement
- Praise is given when due
- Staff feel they can go beyond their role

### Ways to improve:

- Progression routes need to be improved
- Team away days – funding assistance and support
- Enabling groups to go on volunteering days

### Group 3 (Hazel)

#### Helpful ways staff are supported:

- Opportunities for team meetings and one-to-ones with managers if there are any concerns
- Professional and personal support with the ability to raise concerns
- Have a “voice” and an “ear”
- There is a feeling of being busy but it’s seen as a good thing
- Generally feel supported but there are peaks in workload during periods of staff sickness

#### Improvements which could be made:

- Pay rise
- Staff feel that extra work should be rewarded
- Needs to be an improvement in the time it takes for IT to answer the phone
- Office spaces with better climate control and air conditioning
- Conditions of workspaces which are not in the hubs need to be improved – some staff are being asked to work on kitchen worktops due to a lack of office space
- “More of the same” and “more for less” seems to be the direction of travel and there are potential risks
- Concerns that it takes too long to fix IT equipment, e.g. laptops

#### Morale:

- “I enjoy working for Surrey County Council”
- “Working in the community is rewarding”
- Opportunities to develop
- Not all colleagues are happy due to the management changes
- Uncertainty about “what happens next”
- Surrey County Council is an “employer” but not an “employer of choice” – a risk that people will choose to leave
- Constant reorganisation generates anxiety among staff

#### Recognition: Positive

- Supportive and effective leadership
- Empowering
- Treating employees with respect
- Providing recognition
- Open to regular communication
- Providing feedback and coaching
- Offering good employee benefits

#### Recognition: Negative

- Not receiving pay increase after being empowered
- Sometimes too much recognition can generate resentment among colleagues
- Would like to see an opportunity for car loans to be offered to staff be returned as it would enable employees to spend less time travelling to meetings and thus benefit the organisation

- No longer any away days being organised or any “little bonuses”

#### Feedback

- Staff felt it was good to talk and that Members were showing “that little bit of appreciation”.

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