

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2023-28 (DRAFT)

Listening to our workforce



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1. Introduction

We strive to make Medway Council the best place to work; a place where our workforce feels valued, recognised, their wellbeing cared for, rewarded fairly, and listened to. A place where our values and priorities set the tone of what we are about, and attract the qualities we are looking for in our employees.

Our talented workforce is our greatest asset. Our employee engagement survey tells us our employees care about the future of the council and want to make a positive impact on society. They want the organisation to succeed and to bring their knowledge, skills, and experience to help make this happen. We are committed to giving our workforce every opportunity to make their contribution count.

This strategy is a key step in our employee engagement journey and through its implementation show our workforce their voices are being heard, their ideas and suggestions are being considered, and they are contributing to making a positive difference for:

- the organisation,
- their colleagues,
- the people we all serve; the community of Medway.

2. The employee engagement survey and key priorities

We ran an Employee Engagement Survey in September 2022 – 58% of the workforce responded (with a margin of error of +/- 1.8%). While overall employee satisfaction in a number of important work-related areas showed a slight improvement, the results highlighted some areas that need further work. The Corporate Management Team have considered these concerns and highlighted the following areas for review and improvement:

- *The Our Ways of Working Policy (OWOW)*
- Employee communications and engagement
- Reward and recognition processes:
- Mental health and wellbeing support
- Bullying and harassment processes
- Core Values.

Priority one: *The Our Ways of Working (OWOW) Policy*

We have embraced new ways of working by creating four new work styles - not only to support achieving our aims through innovation and the use of new technology, but also to support our workforce by offering more flexibility in how they live their lives.

76 % of respondents agreed flexible working was a positive benefit of working for the council; 75 % agreed it supported a good balance between work and home life and 48 % agreed their productivity and performance levels had increased since before the pandemic.

These figures indicate there is considerable satisfaction with the new ways of working in terms of supporting both work and home life.

As with all policies, regular reviews are necessary. A review will be undertaken to ensure the OWOW policy is working effectively for both the council, as it continues its journey, and the workforce in terms of fairness of application. The review will also include analysis to see if any particular workstyle is having a positive (or adverse) effect in any key workplace areas such as employee wellbeing, communication and engagement, learning and development, team dynamics etc.

Priority two: Employee communications and engagement

We understand that through effective communication and engagement we can take our workforce with us on our journey.

We want our workforce to be kept up to date on our plans, our successes, our celebrations, and our challenges. We want them to identify with our values, feel connected to their workplace, and feel a sense of belonging by understanding how they contribute to our wider purpose. And we want them to have a say and contribute to how we achieve our successes and face those challenges.

We have already made progress on widening our internal communications and engagement channels - the use of new technology has helped us connect and collaborate more effectively. Using Microsoft Teams for meetings, workshops and drop-in sessions enables us to feedback on news and seek employee views instantly; the use of video enables our senior managers to be seen and heard when there are important messages to convey.

Our survey results tell us there is still some work to be done, and we acknowledge this. We strive to:

- build upon the 50% who said they felt a strong personal attachment to the council;
- to increase the 62 % who felt they had enough opportunities to tell us what they think,
- to increase the 39% who felt leadership engagement was good,
- and increase the 45 % who said they felt well informed.

We are a complex and diverse organisation and recognise there is no one-size-fits-all communication or engagement tool for us. We will continually review and build upon our current channels to ensure they are fit-for-purpose and effective. We will use a variety of tools for collaboration both digital and face-to-face ensuring the workforce is timely kept informed of plans and progress and have ample opportunities to have their voice heard about matters that affect them and are important to them.

Priority three: Reward and Recognition

We want our staff to feel rewarded fairly, have a clear career path and progression; and are recognised and valued. The staff survey showed the Medpay policy does not fulfil those aims, with less than 30% of those who responded to the survey feeling satisfied with the current total pay and reward package.

Pay and career progression.

The survey results indicated pay and reward was the highest area of dissatisfaction amongst respondents. It is a priority for the council to address this and the current review of our pay system aims for greater pay consistency across the council; providing clear routes for career progression and enabling staff to develop and move through their pay range fairly.

Employee benefits.

Complementing the new pay and progression scheme will be the enhancement of our employee benefits offer. We currently have a wide range of employee benefits, but survey results indicate that whilst there's a good awareness of the benefits on offer, usage is disappointingly low.

We aim to ensure our employee benefits are valued by staff and are attractive to those looking to work at the council. Looking forward, we'll develop creative ways to promote our employee benefits offer with a view to increasing current usage levels and researching (through employee

engagement activity) the benefits individuals would value. A focus will be on providing employee benefits with a positive impact on financial, physical, and mental wellbeing for our staff, together with those that support our climate response.

Recognition

We understand the importance of recognising the valuable contribution our employees make. Showing appreciation for a job well done is a core behaviour the council expects from its managers, and recognition and appreciation is encouraged between colleagues.

The annual Make a Difference Awards is our way of saying thank you corporately to colleagues who go over and above with nominees sought council-wide from colleagues, leadership teams, Members and the community. The survey results indicate there is also a desire for a wider spread of recognition at a local level. Suggestions include verbal and written recognition from a director, or a service-specific award for a job well done.

We want to ensure our workforce feel recognised for their contribution and will make changes locally to achieve this.

Career development

The council is developing The Complete Medway Manager Course to equip our leaders, experienced managers and new managers with the skills and expected behaviours required of a Medway Manager. We want our managers to thrive in their roles supporting teams and services. Managers play a crucial part in the running of the organisation and are responsible for leading colleagues towards our vision and strategic priorities. Leadership and management development plays an important role in this, and the new training suite will help achieve this goal in setting a good standard for all our managers and leaders. The strategy action plan sets key timescales for this development.

Priority four: Mental health and wellbeing

Supporting good mental health and wellbeing amongst our workforce is a key objective for us. We want to ensure we get our level of support right by providing the appropriate tools and help to managers and employees.

In the staff survey, 57 % of respondents described their mental health as good and 33 % described it as 'OK'. Free text comments from individuals indicated this was a key area of concern for them. Issues such as loneliness, isolation and disconnect from their teams were raised, together with financial worries and concerns for their physical wellbeing.

A cross-professional working group will be set up to review current processes, support, and resources and develop initiatives to support employees and managers.

Priority five: Bullying and harassment.

Bullying and harassment in any of its forms is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. The council has a Grievance and Harassment Procedure that defines unacceptable behaviours and how employees can report concerns.

The survey results highlight that in some instances our staff did not report or feel confident to report perceived instances of bullying or harassment. Any employee who believes they are subject to bullying or harassment, or discrimination of any kind must feel confident to report it without fear of reprisals and be confident their complaint will be taken seriously and dealt with accordingly.

Equally, we want all employees to understand and be respectful of how their behaviours impact others either directly or unknowingly.

A review of practice will be undertaken to ensure the appropriate provisions and processes are in place to:

- increase confidence in the reporting process, and
- ensure all employees understand their personal responsibility under the Equality Act 2010 and consider the effect of their actions on others.

Priority six: The Core Values

Our Core Values support our vision, they shape our culture and reflect what we value in terms of our strategic priorities and our ethical values. We want our employees to resonate with our values and we want to hear from job seekers who hold our values as important to them.

Our Core Values are being reviewed. We will develop an effective communication and stakeholder engagement plan to embed the new values and shape our culture going forward .

3) Employee Value Proposition (EVP) (Our People Promise)

Our 'People Promise' (see appendix one) highlights some of the key benefits the council offers. It shows to employees, job seekers and the outside world our part of 'the deal' on offer between the council, as an employer and it's workforce. It focuses on our values, our benefits, our key aims and other aspects of our work environment.

Key to the success of our 'promise' is to only offer what we can deliver, and we measure the EVP is a true reflection through the employee engagement survey. The People Promise will be reviewed and measured as we move forward on our journey adapting to the council's values and priorities as they develop and change.

4) Measurement of success

An action plan is attached as appendix two. The main vehicle for measuring the effectiveness of the action plan will be regular Employee Engagement surveys. This will be supplemented by ad hoc engagement activity at both a corporate and local level. Some actions will see a speedy impact, and some will take longer as culture change takes time to embed.

5) Communication

A communication plan will be developed to update the workforce on progress of this strategy. The draft infographic (appendix three) corresponds with the action plan and will be shared with staff to highlight the commitments made by our leadership team. Regular updates will be shared with the workforce on progress.

6) Summary

The staff survey is our key driver for positive change, and this strategy is ambitious - but achievable. We acknowledge that we are on our employee engagement journey, but we are committed to go forward together by listening to employee views, reviewing how we do things, and making positive change.

Appendix one: Employee Value Proposition / 'Our People Promise'



Appendix two: Action plan

	Priority	Action	Who
1	Our Ways of Working Policy	Review the OWOW policy to include an analysis by workstyle of key workplace functions.	HR
2	Improve employee communications and engagement	Continually review and build upon current channels to ensure they are fit-for-purpose and effective. Use a variety of tools for collaboration both digital and face-to-face ensuring the workforce is timely kept informed of plans and progress and have ample opportunities to have their voice heard.	CMT, DMT, IC, HR
	Pay and career progression	Complete the Medpay review including the career progression scheme.	HR
	Employee benefits	Implement new employee benefits to build on our offer and promote current benefits to increase awareness and usage. New benefits will focus on supporting employee financial, mental and physical wellbeing, and climate response.	HR, IC
	Recognition	Consider employee preferences for recognition at both corporate and directorate level with a view to implementing recognition schemes that are welcomed and valued by employees.	CMT, DMT, HR, IC
3d	Career development	Develop the Complete Medway Manager course and deliver at least eight cohorts by September 2024. We will have evaluated and reviewed the training suite by April 2025.	HR
4	Improve mental health and wellbeing	Set up a working group to review current processes and support mechanisms for staff suffering from mental ill-health and review support and resources for managers.	HR, IC, PH
5	Address bullying & harassment concerns	Undertake a review of process to ensure provisions and processes are in place to increase confidence in the reporting process, and ensure all employees understand their personal responsibility under the Equality Act 2010, and consider the effect of their actions on others.	HR
6	Improve understanding of Core Values	Develop an effective communication and stakeholder engagement plan to embed the new values and shape our culture going forward.	HR, IC
7	Employee Value Proposition (EVP)	Continue to develop elements of our EVP and regularly engage with the workforce to measure accuracy. Update the People Promise with new core values once agreed.	HR
8	Measurement and review	Measure and review the effectiveness of this action plan using related questions within future Employee Engagement Surveys and other ad hoc engagement activity.	HR

REWARD, RECOGNITION AND CAREER PROGRESSION

YOU TOLD US

You want to be recognised in your service for a job well done.

You're aware of the employee benefits but you do not often use them.



28% Satisfied with total pay & reward package

44% Agree there are opportunities to develop their career here

WE COMMIT TO:

- Implementing a new pay and career progression scheme
- Providing more local recognition schemes
- Reviewing our employee benefits offer

OUR WAYS OF WORKING POLICY

YOU TOLD US

92% Of managers say their team is productive

92% Of managers say they are able to effectively communicate with their team

77% Of people say it supports a good work-life balance



However:

- Some think it's unfairly applied
- Some don't understand the four work styles
- We want to check if it's having an adverse effect on wellbeing

WE COMMIT TO:

Undertake a review to address employee concerns to:

- Reduce uncertainty
- Check for fairness in use across the organisation
- Review any impact on employee wellbeing

OUR CORE VALUES

We will review and develop the Core Values, and develop an action plan to embed them into our way of life.

Employee Engagement Strategy 2023-2028

Listening to you & taking action



EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS

YOU TOLD US

61% Believe they have enough opportunities to tell us what they think

84% Want to hear about council plans and progress

45% Say they feel well informed



WE COMMIT TO:

Review current internal communications channels to:

- Be fit for purpose
- Make full use of digital systems.
- Provide a mix of two-way communication channels to make sure all staff have a voice

SUPPORTING YOUR MIND HEALTH AND WELLBEING

YOU TOLD US

61% Get the wellbeing support they need working here

57% Described their mental health as good

48% Had feelings of loneliness during each week

69% Of managers felt well supported to manage staff experiencing mental health issues



WE COMMIT TO:

- Review support for those experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing
- Develop collaboration opportunities for staff feeling lonely at work
- Develop regular activities to support colleagues
- Provide managers with the skills they need to support staff experiencing poor mental health

ENGAGING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT

YOU TOLD US

39% Say their directorate management team act on staff feedback

49% Agree directorate management teams are sufficiently visible, 46% agree they are sufficiently accessible

39% Rated 2-way communication between Corporate Management Team and staff as good



WE COMMIT TO:

Work to improve senior leadership visibility, accessibility, and engagement at both corporate and directorate level.



WE'LL WORK TO IMPROVE HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT WORKING HERE

62% Are proud to tell others they work here

62% Would recommend the council as a place to work

49% Say the council motivates them to do the best in their job

46% Say the council motivates them to help it achieve its objectives

79% Care about the future of the council

50% Feel a strong personal attachment to the council

