



Decision Maker	Employment Committee 19 th February 2013
Subject	Internal communications: recent activity and future focus
Report by:	Head of Customer , Community and Democratic Services
Wards Affected	n/a
Key decision (over 250k)	n/a

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to inform Members and:

- to provide context around improvements in the Employee Opinion Survey (EOS) results in relation to internal communications
- to outline improvements made to internal communications since 2010
- to outline the proposed future focus for internal communications

2. Recommendations

- that Members note information in the report
- that Members note the proposed future direction of travel (section 8.1) and support the measures relating to improving staff understanding of the council as a democratic organisation (section 8.1.5)

3. Executive summary

An internal communications strategy (2010-2012) was developed with a clear aim to improve how well-informed and engaged employees feel.

The strategy set out a more consistent, focused and strategic approach to internal communications (detailed in section 6); delivery of the strategy was enabled by the appointment of an internal communications officer in September 2011, and the development of a range of new and improved tools, which enable consistent, targeted and measurable two-way communications (detailed in section 7). Since the strategy was implemented in early 2010, staff engagement levels have improved (detailed in the accompanying EOS report and summarised in section 5 below).

The future focus for internal communications is to build on these successes and develop a number of key areas (detailed in section 8).

4. Internal communications and employee engagement

The Government white paper 'Engaging for success: enhancing performance through employee engagement' ¹ was published in 2009, building on reports from the LGA and Mori that argue increased staff engagement leads to improved productivity, better customer service and advocacy, improved financial performance, and increased employee retention.

These sources cite internal communications as a key element in driving employee engagement, contributing to all areas of engagement (which are detailed in the accompanying EOS report), but particularly relevant to 'line of sight' (how staff roles contribute to broader objectives), 'work environment' (day-to-day operational), and 'operating culture' (vision and values). It is clear, strategically-led, clear and consistent internal communications does more than give employees operational information, it helps create engaged and motivated employees, improving awareness of and commitment to shared goals and aspirations, supporting the organisation as it meets its challenges and delivers change.

5. The improving results

The EOS results show overall engagement is high (at an engagement score of 713/1000) and scores relevant to internal communications have either remained high or measurably improved since the last EOS in 2010 (and since the implementation of the 2010-12 internal communications strategy). Line of sight is now at 157/200 (up nine points), work environment stands at 147/200, and operating environment is now at 137/200 (up 12 points). Key internal communications performance indicators are also up, including:

I feel well informed about the council	54% (up 6% on 2010)
I am proud to work for the council	62% (up 10% on 2010)
The council gives me the opportunity to contribute my views and suggestions	60% (up 24% on 2010)
I know where to get the information I need to do my job effectively	84% (not asked in 2010)

¹ Engaging for success: enhancing performance through employee engagement, A report to Government, by David MacLeod Nita Clarke, BIS 2009

6. A strategic approach to internal communications

To deliver improvements to engagement scores and internal communications performance indicators, a clear and strategic approach has been taken to internal communications, based on research and insight.

Through the EOS and regular Pulse surveys (introduced as part of improvements to internal communications in 2011 to regularly take the 'Pulse' of the organisation and track progress), feedback from staff was used to identify key areas for internal communications. Staff told us they didn't feel actively committed to the council's goals (corporate priorities), with a large number of staff indicating indifference. Staff also indicated that they felt there was a lack of visible leadership in the organisation. As a result, internal communications has focussed on the following areas:

6.1. Informing and engaging staff in organisational goals and priorities

Internal communications supported the development of a new articulation of the organisation's priorities, including a shared goal, refreshed set of guiding principles and new ways of working. The elements work together to ensure employees understand the council's direction, how their roles contribute to overall aims, and how they are expected to work and behave. The new goal - working together to shape the great waterfront city - is linked to the council's key priority around regeneration, and is further supported by a focus on celebrating our successes in this area.

A range of communications has been deployed to embed the new goal, guiding principles and ways of working. In order to ensure engagement, managers ran workshops as part of their team meetings, encouraging staff to articulate how they contribute to the shared goal. The contributions have been shared on intraLINK and will be used in future staff communications, ensuring a clear staff voice. A similar approach will be used to embed the ways of working before the new PDR cycle starts.

6.2. Supporting a transforming council

Internal communications around the council's 'Shaping our future' transformation programme has focused both on helping staff to understand why and how the council is changing so they feel able to support that change, and on actively driving transformation by encouraging staff to work more efficiently/follow new processes.

As well as 'cascade' presentations delivered to all staff by their managers (starting with the chief executive and moving through the council), face-to-face Q&A sessions with the chief executive, and information on intraLINK, staff regularly receive transformation updates through team brief and the fortnightly staff e-bulletin.

6.3. Visible leadership

Promoting the council's commitment to a great waterfront city and helping to address issues around a perceived lack of visible leadership, internal communications has consistently shared both the council's aspirations around the economic development for the city, and how we are delivering on these aspirations. Promoting news about major developments and funding successes in team brief, staff bulletins and via intraLINK has helped staff understand what the council is doing to drive economic development in the city.

In addition to ensuring a clear direction of travel is communicated effectively to staff, internal communications has also introduced tools that increase direct communication between staff and the chief executive/directors, including intraLINK blog-style feature 'director's chair' which engages staff in online debate, and face-to-face transformation Q&A sessions.

7. Improved internal communications tools

The 2010 EOS told us more than half of staff didn't feel well-informed about the council and even more felt they weren't given the chance to contribute their views and suggestions. The internal communications strategy set out a number of key improvements to the way staff are provided with information and given the opportunity to tell the council what they think.

7.1. Two-way communications

An informed employee voice is a key element of engagement and so internal communications has developed (or relaunched) a range of face-to-face communications such as chief executive-led Q&A sessions, regular 'third tier' manager forums, and staff briefings on topics like the City Centre Masterplan. A formal feedback loop is also a key feature of the 'cascade' presentations, which conclude with an opportunity for staff to ask questions and make comments. Most recently, the new goal was launched through a series of workshops specifically designed to encourage staff to articulate their contribution to the 'great waterfront city' so their voices can become part of the future communications.

Launched in early 2010, Marketplace has also contributed to the development of visible two-way communications through staff news and forums. The forums provide space for staff to express view and ask questions, which can then be responded to, and enables misconceptions to be identified and addressed.

The new staff e-bulletin features a regular 'consultations' slot, promoting staff awareness and participation in formal consultation activity.

A six-monthly employee 'Pulse' survey was also developed by internal communications in 2010, designed to regularly take the 'pulse' of the organisation and enable the progress of internal communications and engagement to be tracked.

7.2. Team brief

Following consultation with directors/managers in 2011, a new team brief was developed and launched in February 2012. Including information directly from the chief executive and directors, team brief is issued to managers to enable them to discuss council wide issues with staff as part of team meetings and briefings. Although a 'noticeboard' version is provided for a few services where operational issues mean regular face-to-face staff meetings or briefings are not possible, managers are encouraged to use team brief to seek staff views and answer their questions - further supporting two-way communications. As a result of team brief, 80% of staff now report hearing about council-wide issues at team meetings (Pulse 2012).

7.3. In the know

In the know, a fortnightly e-bulletin, was introduced February 2012, replacing Link, a printed staff magazine. Emailed to all online staff, In the know is short and scannable, with links to IntraLINK for more information. It quickly updates staff on business and transformation news as well as staff offers, current consultations and council successes. Like team brief, In the know is printed and put on noticeboards for staff who do not have email access. The most recent Pulse results showed that the bulletin has high penetration, with 75% of staff having remembered seeing it, and that a majority of those had found the information useful (62%).

7.4. IntraLINK

The effectiveness of intraLINK as an internal communications channel has significantly increased over the past 12 months, largely as a result of a focus on sharing information with staff before it is communicated to external audiences, making intraLINK stories more relevant to staff audiences, and cross-promoting intraLINK through other channels, including the staff e-bulletin. In October 2011, the top ten news stories each month received an average of 260 views per story. By October 2012, the top ten news stories each month were getting an average of 800 views per story.

8. Future focus

A new strategy is now being developed, which will set out how internal communications will continue to improve how informed and engaged staff feel, supporting the council as it changes.

Using staff insight from the EOS and Pulse survey we have identified a number of key themes for improvement outlined below. In addition, the council's corporate management board and third tier managers will be consulted as the new strategy is developed.

8.1. On-going strategic focus

8.1.1. The current areas of strategic focus (highlighted in section six) will be further developed as we continue to engage staff in the on-going transformation and embed the new 'working together to shape the great waterfront city' goal, guiding principles and ways of working. We will also develop strategic themes around:

8.1.2 Celebrating staff success, to ensure staff feel valued and recognised, building morale and improving our reputation internally (and externally by creating staff advocates for the council).

8.1.3 'Developing managers as key communicators', to build on developments like 'third tier managers forum' and team brief, providing managers with more tools to support the changing roles of managers and delivery of internal communications within services.

8.1.4 'Visibly responding to staff feedback', to build on the fact that staff feel able to contribute their views by actively showing the organisation is listening and responding.

8.1.5 'Improving staff understanding of the council as a democratic organisation' will address the fact that staff understanding of councillor role in decision making is not as high as it should be. Better online information for staff about how the council works and more frequent highlighting of council decisions will be supplemented by offering staff more opportunities to hear from and ask questions of Cabinet members (such as online and face-to-face staff Q&A sessions, and a 'director's chair' blog-style intraLINK slots for the Leader and Cabinet members).

8.1.6 'Helping the organisation manage and communicate change' will act on staff perception that we don't manage change well as an organisation. While the internal communication function is a small element of how staff experience change, we will investigate and drive improvements where we can, such as using staff channels to make change information more accessible, working with other services to share tools, advice and support to teams, and ensuring we share information in a more timely way so that affected staff find out first.

8.2. Developing internal communications tools

On-going development of tools will continue to be key to internal communications, ensuring targeted and effective methods of informing and engaging staff.

The staff intranet will be developed to support improved workforce performance as part of the council's transformation programme. Improvements will be made to communications with offline staff, focussing on service areas with high numbers of staff who don't have regular access to a PC.

The Employee Opinion Survey also tells us that while our overall informed ratings have increased, there are inconsistencies across the organisation. We will continue to work with services to understand their needs and challenges, supporting them to provide their staff with the information they need to perform their roles effectively.

9. Equality impact assessment (EIA)

An equality impact assessment is not required as the recommendations do not have a negative impact on any of the protected characteristics as described in the Equality Act 2010.

10. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from this Report

11. Head of finance's comments

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Signed Louise Wilders

Head of Customer, Community and Democratic Services

Appendices: Nil

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
Nil	