

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CORPORATE SUB COMMITTEE OF POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE 9 APRIL 2002

WORK-LIFE BALANCE PROJECT STAFF ATTITUDE SURVEY

Report by Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To inform the Sub-Committee of employee feedback from the Staff Attitude Survey (Oct 2001) and Work-Life Balance Project .
- 1.2 To recommend proposed development of employment policies in response to the employee feedback, earlier work undertaken by the Senior Staff Management Team and the Council's Personnel staff.
- 1.3 To agree a common approach to managing and communicating the feedback information.

2. Background Information

- 2.1 The Sub-Committee at its meeting on 25 February 2002 considered an initial report on the Council's Work-Life balance project. The report also referred to the employee attitude survey conducted in October 2001.
- 2.2 It is well established that organisations who recognise that their people need a life outside work are more likely to attract and retain key skills. The advantages of ensuring that employees have sufficient time for a fulfilling life outside work are clear. Some proven benefits of committing to and implementing a robust Work-Life Balance strategy include:
 - Improved responsiveness and flexibility of service to users
 - Enhanced enthusiasm, motivation and loyalty to the organisation
 - Reduced absenteeism and stress-related illness
 - Increased attractiveness as an employer enabling attraction and retention of scarce and valuable skills
 - Improved productivity and quality of service, as a result of the above benefits leading to an improvement in performance
- 2.3 The Senior Staff Management Team at their special meeting on 14 December 2001 agreed that a Work-Life Balance Vision statement framed around the Council's Commitment Statement should be prepared. It was also agreed that a number of tasks be pursued in partnership with Andersen UK i.e.
 - a) preparation of vision statement/policy position
 - b) development of communications strategy

- c) review and development of related employment policies with an emphasis on the overall approach to Work Life benefiting both employees and Council's service delivery

The Vision Statement shown at Appendix 1 was subsequently agreed at the Senior Staff Management Team meeting on 7 January 2002 and approved by the Sub Committee on 25 January.

- 2.4 The Employee Attitude Survey which measured employees' attitudes to many employment and operational issues also focussed on their attitude to Work-Life Balance. This latter emphasis was part of the Council's participation in the Government's Work-Life Balance Challenge fund which had secured £55,000 of external consultancy support. The survey work has been supported by information gleaned from voluntary Employee Focus groups, the Senior Staff Management Team meeting and early policy development work by the Personnel function in response to the various groups' views.

3. Information

- 3.1 This report provides collective information from the employee attitude survey. The Sub Committee is invited to consider the undernoted recommendations as to how the information should be best communicated. The Senior Staff Management Team have agreed that individual services will review and compare the collective feedback information with the responses from their employees and to then make their own arrangements to communicate within their department.

3.2 Appendices

- Appendix 1 provides the earlier agreed Vision Statement
- Appendix 2 provides the Executive Summary from the Andersen UK report on the first two phases of our Work-Life Balance project.
- Appendix 3 Employee Attitude Survey (General Questions and WLB Questions - Summary of findings)

4. Work-Life Balance Policy and Practice Recommendations

- 4.1 The Senior Staff Management Team meeting have agreed a series of actions which not only take the project to the next stage but also identify the key areas of related development for the Council's employment policies.

These Recommendations include development of policies and procedures in the following areas which were also identified as priorities by employees:-

- a) Flexible Working
 - b) Career Breaks
 - c) Homeworking
 - d) Study Leave
 - e) Review and updating of existing WLB policies
- 4.2 Subject to the Sub-Committee's approval, Directors have been asked to identify appropriate 'pilot' workgroups or service areas to introduce the new arrangements.

4.3 After reviewing the Council's existing WLB policies Andersen UK confirmed that with some minor update to supporting administration documents these policies represented best practice and what the government wanted organisations to achieve as a result of its Challenge fund support.

5. Communication

5.1 Recognising that employees have identified Communications as a key issue for them, the senior Staff Management Team have approved the basis for an Employee Communications strategy which should ensure a consistent flow of information across the Council.

5.2 In terms of Communicating survey results to employees, it is recommended that the summary of the results should be made available to all members of staff across the Council. One or a combination of the following feedback channels are recommended to communicate survey findings throughout the Council

- a) Report to Corporate Sub-Committee
- b) Presentation to departmental managers and subsequent team briefings and incorporation of any actions and action plans.
- c) Publish findings in Council publications/newsletters, Intranet (A draft article for the March edition of Eastwords is currently being prepared)
- d) Trade Union briefings
- e) Feedback to the Volunteer Employees who participated in the Focus groups
- f) Presentation to First Tier and Departmental/Service JCC forums

Since the results of the survey are a significant volume of largely quantitative data, it is recommended that in addition to communicating any statistical results, a summary of findings is made available to staff. This should also include an indication of the proposed action to be taken both corporately and at departmental levels to demonstrate council and senior management support for the survey results.

6. Trade Unions

6.1 The Trade Unions have been kept informed of the progress of the Employee Attitude Survey and Work-Life Balance project. The Head of Personnel also provided a summary of the information in this report and appendices to the Local Government Employees and Craftpersons' JCC on 21 March 2002. Further information will be provided to the Trade Union Convenors after the Sub-Committee's meeting and then wider briefings at departmental level will follow as Directors consider the information in detail.

7. Financial implications

7.1 The Work-Life Balance project is expected to enhance flexibility in the Council's working arrangements. It has been emphasised from the beginning of the project that the introduction

of any new employment policies will have to be of mutual benefit to the Council and employees.

- 7.2 Subject to Sub-Committee approval, the piloting of the proposed new policy areas will allow detailed costing of any financial implications. However, it will be a principle of the Work-Life Balance initiative that new working arrangements will not be introduced for employees or groups of employees unless they are at least self-financing.

8. Legal/Policy Implications

- 8.1 The Council, and Local Government in general, has prided itself on being a "good employer". Responding positively to employee feedback from the Attitude Survey and the Work-Life Balance project will further enhance the Council's employment policies. Positive developments in this area are considered to improve an employer's recruitment and retention profile.

9. Recommendations

The Sub-Committee is asked to;

- a) consider the information in this report and appendices;
- b) agree the proposed developments in Work-Life Balance related employment policies as detailed in para. 4.1 above;
- c) agree the proposed approach to managing and communicating the feedback information as detailed in para. 5.2 above; and
- d) ask the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources to provide a future update report on these matters.

Fiona Lees
Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources

Background Information/Previous Reports

1. Report to Corporate Sub-Committee of 25 January 2002
2. Work-Life Balance Report (February 2002). Copy available to members on request from the Head of Personnel

East Ayrshire Council and Work-Life Balance

Vision Statement

"We are determined that East Ayrshire will be a good Council to have working for you, and a good Council to work for".

The Council operates in an environment of increasing public expectation in which flexibility is key to delivering effective services to the citizens of East Ayrshire. At the same time, it is acknowledged that employees need to be able to balance work with their other interests. The Council recognises that employees are more productive if they are able to balance their work and personal lives effectively, thereby facilitating enhanced delivery of organisational objectives.

As part of its commitment to creating a culture which supports to work-life balance, the Council:

- Recognises that effective practices to promote work-life balance will benefit the Council and its employees
- Acknowledges that individuals at all stages of their lives work best when they are able to achieve an appropriate balance between work and other aspects of their lives
- Demonstrates leadership from the top of the organisation, managing by example
- Encourages its managers and employees to develop a partnership in assuming responsibility jointly to identify workable solutions
- Develops appropriate policies and practical responses that meet the specific needs of the Council and its employees
- Communicates positive commitment to work-life strategies to its employees

Executive Summary of Work-Life Balance Report (Prepared by Andersen UK)

Purpose of the Report

The report combines the output from the first two phases of the Council's DTI Challenge Fund Work-life Balance project, to provide a Work-Life Balance vision and objectives, some policy and practice recommendations and broad implementation recommendations. The vision applies to East Ayrshire Council and aims to provide a clear direction for the Council to work towards achieving a healthy Work-Life Balance within the Council.

Central to the vision and objectives are the operational requirements of the Council.

The vision and objectives have been formulated with reference to data collected from the attitude survey and diagnostic exercise including eight Work-Life Balance focus groups, targeting managers and staff from across the Council. Representatives were from the following areas: Admin and Clerical staff, Senior Officers, Teaching staff, Middle Management, Male Manual Workers and Female Manual Workers.

The focus groups were designed to determine the needs and thoughts of employees in relation to Work-Life Balance and the issues around achieving it in the Council.

The Diagnostic

The Council already has many policies in place to assist in attraction, recruitment and retention. However, the Senior Staff Management Team (SSMT) recognises and supports the need to review and revise existing Work-Life Balance policies and best practice and develop new policies at the Council to ensure it remains able to attract retain and motivate staff, and succeed in service delivery to the community.

The diagnostic exercise (an audit of current policies and practices at the Council) revealed amongst other things Work-Life Balance was an issue of significant importance for almost all individuals and that work, in some way, had a detrimental impact on a range of aspects of their personal lives. The apparent significance of Work-Life Balance for employees is encouraging as it plays an integral part in the vision of the Council:

"We are determined that the Council will be a good Council to have working for you, and a good Council to work for".

The key themes emerging from the diagnostic exercise fall into a number of categories namely:

- **Communication, Commitment and Education** -whilst awareness of Work-Life Balance has been raised, significantly more work needs to be done to improve understanding of Work-Life Balance policies and there is a perception of lack of commitment to and appreciation of the value and benefits of Work-Life Balance. Lack of communication was highlighted as a key barrier to achieving a healthy Work-Life Balance in the Council.
- **Flexi-time** - the current scheme is too rigid and does not cover all departments in the Council. A balance between flexibility and matching requirements of roles, departments and of the Council itself is needed.

- **Culture and ways of working:**

- > Individuals overworked
- > Long hours culture
- > Too much inefficient paperwork and bureaucracy
- > Resources -inadequate resources were highlighted as the primary barrier to achieving Work-Life Balance in the Council

- **Application of Work-Life Balance Policy and Practice across the Council** - inconsistency in respect of the application of Work-Life Balance arrangements across the Council was highlighted as a key issue

- **Management Attitudes** -Managers expressed the opinion that it should be within their discretion to take responsibility for evaluating individual circumstances and needs around flexible working, whilst weighing these up against the team and department objectives and requirements. Therefore the Council needs to communicate to the staff that the employees are not immediately entitled to flexible working arrangements. All operational considerations, have to be taken account of e.g. impact on cost, service delivery, resources, rest of team i.e. it has to be right for the Council *and* the employee. The Council must also ensure that employees perceive that the Council and management support Work- Life Balance policies in practice as well.

Work-Life Balance, Vision and Objectives

The benefits to the organisation and employees of achieving Work-Life Balance are clear and it is evidently something employees want and need. The strategic direction and vision for Work-Life Balance needs to be responsive to both the organisational context and operational requirements as well as the needs of employees. A number of the core strategic objectives for the Council have potential Work-Life Balance implications. A commitment to addressing Work-Life Balance at a strategic level has been made through the Council's core vision.

We are determined that the Council will be a good Council to have working for you, and a good Council to work for"

The Council operates in an increasingly competitive environment in which flexibility is key to delivering effective services to the citizens of East Ayrshire Council. At the same time, employees need to be able to balance work with their other interests. The Council recognises this, thereby facilitating enhanced delivery of organisational objectives.

As part of its commitment to creating a culture which supports work-life balance, the Council currently:

- Recognises that effective practices to promote Work-Life Balance will benefit the Council and its employees
- Acknowledges that individuals at all stages of their lives work best when they are able to achieve an appropriate balance between work and other aspects of their lives
- Demonstrates leadership from the top of the organisation and encourages managers to lead by example
- Encourages its managers and employees to develop a partnership in assuming joint responsibility to discuss workable solutions to Work-Life Balance
- Develops appropriate policies and practical responses that meet the specific needs of the Council and its employees
- Communicates its commitment to Work-Life Strategies to all its employees

There is now a need for further consultation to ensure the vision and policy recommendations meet the needs of all employees and enable them to achieve a healthy Work-Life Balance and provide an improved customer service.

Existing Work-Life Balance Arrangements

A number of policies are currently in place that contribute towards employees' positive image of the Council as a good employer, and go towards employees achieving healthy Work-Life Balance. Based on the diagnostic output it is clear a commendable amount of Work-Life Balance policy exists at the Council. This is a very strong basis on which to build upon, by responding positively to the employee feedback from within the employee attitude survey and focus groups.

Given that such a comprehensive array of policies exists, the Council can leverage this by better communicating this to its employees in order that they can realise the full benefits of existing Work-Life Balance policy.

This project is concerned with reviewing this policy against best practice, employees needs and the Council's needs, thereby updating and filling in any gaps by developing new policies as appropriate.

General Questions - Summary of Findings

The Council's Aims and Objectives

Overall employees seemed clear about the direction the Council is taking at present.

Internal Communications

Employees believe internal communications to be of inconsistent quality .

The majority of respondents disagreed with the effectiveness of internal communications and the openness of the Council with its employees.

Currently employees find informal communications (such as face to face) more effective than formal mechanisms. This could result in distortion of the original meaning of this information. The Council should consider future review and improvement of communication mechanisms.

The Culture of the Council

Employees expressed concern over the lack of positive atmosphere in the Council, and support from management and leadership across the Council.

There is a culture of celebrating Council success over personal success.

Health and Safety is seen to be taken seriously, as is equal opportunities.

Current stress levels are generally deemed unacceptable across the Council.

How We Work

The majority of respondents are clear about ways of working within the Council, especially in terms of job definitions, responsibilities and performance standards.

Opinion as to whether departments within the Council work well together is divided.

The majority of respondents believe there is duplication of effort between departments.

How I Work

Generally there was very positive feedback from this section, especially in terms of understanding customer needs and knowledge of expected standards.

The main areas of disagreement were related to levels of stress and the level of fair and competitive remuneration.

Being Part of the Council

In general results suggest employees feel very positive about their role within the organisation.

Most employees feel appreciated by the Council. 8% of employees who returned the survey strongly feel the Council undervalues them.

Taking Decisions

Most employees are clear about who has responsibility for taking decisions.

Work Life Balance Questions - Summary of Findings

Work has some negative impact on various areas of personal life

Overall the main area cited for work regularly impacting individuals lives are: emotional well being (43%), physical well being (38%), enjoying a social life/pursuing other interests (34%), spouse/partner relationship (32%). Lower down the scale came studying (25%), caring for children (24%), caring for relatives/dependants (17%) and preparation for retirement (14%).

How easy is it to achieve a Work-Life Balance at the Council?

The survey findings indicate that 40% of all respondents find it difficult to achieve a Work-Life Balance at the Council, compared to only 24% who do not.

Long hours and the Council

Overall 41% of all respondents see working long hours at the Council as common practice, compared to 25% whom disagreed.

Awareness and Communication of Work-Life Balance Policies

The survey results highlight a significant lack of awareness of current policies across the Council (35%).

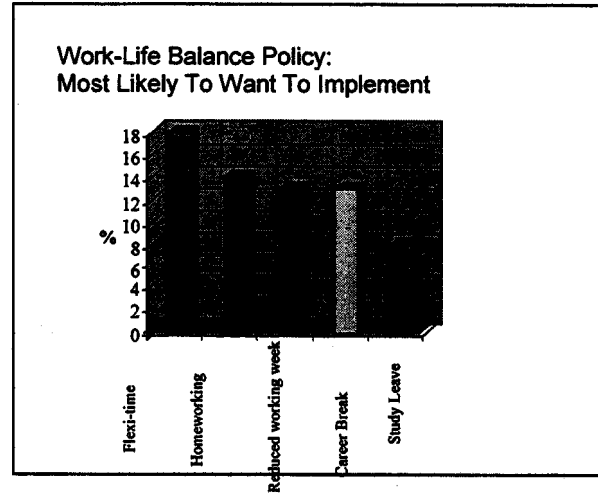
43% of respondents are not satisfied with the level of communication in respect of Work-Life Balance policies.

There are also issues around the opportunity of taking advantage of Work-Life Balance policies, with only 14% of respondents finding it easy to sign up for Work-Life Balance policies"

What are our employees preferred Work-Life Balance options?

Top 5 most desired Work-Life Balance options:

- Discretionary Flexi-time
- Home / Remote Working
- Reduced Working Week
- Career breaks / Sabbaticals
- Study Leave

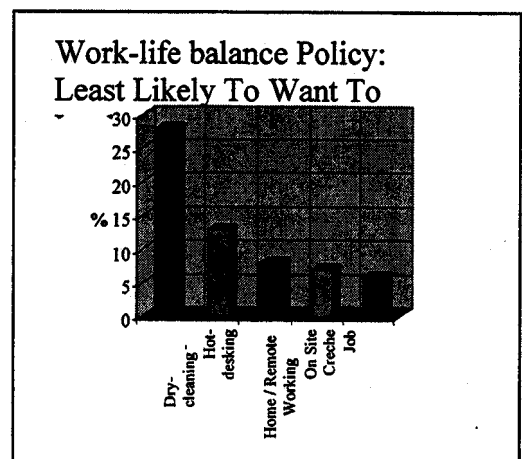


The options that received medium level of support were:

- Annualised hours
- Rosters / Shifts
- Discount for local leisure facilities
- Carer's leave
- Health, Education and Awareness schemes

Top 5 least desired Work-Life Balance options:

- Dry Cleaning
- Hot Desking
- Home / Remote Working
- On Site Creche / Nursery
- Job Sharing



Given the high percentage of female workers at the Council (70%) it is surprising that commonly held views don't seem to be reflected in the survey results, with policies such as 'more information about childcare, children's holiday play-schemes' and extended maternity leave being less popular than Flexitime or Home/Remote working policies.

What are the barriers to achieving Work-Life Balance at the Council?

Respondents were asked to identify the key barriers that currently prevent people achieving an appropriate balance between their work and home lives. The following are the key restraining forces highlighted from the survey results (in order of priority):

- Inconsistent communication about the importance of Work-Life Balance to employees
- lack of management support for Work-life Balance
- Insufficient communication about content of Work-life Balance policies
- long hours culture
- Inconsistency in dealing with Work-Life Balance requests

What level of management support exists at the Council?

When respondents were asked what level of management support exists at the Council for Work- Life Balance, the results returned some conflicting messages. Employees were largely indifferent relating to whether their manager sets a good example of effective Work-life Balance. However the majority did not agree that Management styles were supportive of Work-life Balance practices/policies or that "Management deals with applications for Work-life Balance fairly and consistently"

However, most respondents agreed with the following statements: -

- "My manager is fully supportive of his/her team achieving a Work-Life Balance".
- "The working culture is such that I can discuss my needs in terms of balancing work and life openly".

Although it is clear a number of managers across the Council are perceived as supportive of Work-life Balance, the results in this section of the survey only serve to highlight the inconsistency in management style around Work-Life Balance, which appear to be inconducive to believing in achieving healthy Work-Life Balance across the Council.

Employees' Role

Most employees feel very positive about their role in the Council, and consider the Council to be a good employer. Many would recommend it to their friends. Overall employees seem clear about the direction the Council is taking at present. Employees believe they have a strong understanding of customer needs and the standard of performance expected of them. The Council's Work-Life Balance initiative as part of a greater vision is expected to benefit from employees understanding of the Council's objectives.

Communication

Employees believe internal communications to be inconsistent in quality, many also think there is an over-reliance on unofficial communication such as word-of-mouth. This has implications for the communication of a Work-Life Balance strategy, which must be applied consistently across the Council. Furthermore communication appears to manifest a difference in standards between departments.

Consistency in standards across the Council

Linked to the issue of communication, employees highlighted an inconsistency in the standard of Work-life Balance and its application between departments. While it is recognised operational functions / requirements differ, it is still possible to achieve consistency in basic application of Work-life Balance policy.

Leadership and change management

Employees have expressed concern over the lack of positive atmosphere in the Council and a lack of support and leadership. The implementation of Work-life Balance policy will require a positive attitude from management if it is to be successful.

Stress Management

Stress levels were repeatedly reported as being unacceptable, particularly in the Educational and Social Services functions. This tends to reflect national statistics in these areas.

FOCUS GROUPS -SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUPS

The key issues emerging from the focus groups fall into a number of categories namely: .

- Application of Work-Life Balance policy and practice across the Council
- Communication, Commitment and Education
- Flexi-time .Culture
- Management attitudes

The Focus groups of volunteer employees at all levels within the Council provided meaningful information which, in the main, endorsed the views of the Attitude Survey. Detailed responses from the groups are provided in the full report.

General Questions -Summary of Findings The Council's Aims and Objectives

The Council's Aims and Objectives

Overall employees seemed clear about the direction the Council is taking at present.

Members of the Homes and Technical Services department expressed a lack of knowledge about the Council's strategic plan.

Internal Communications

Employees believe internal communications to be of inconsistent quality.

The majority of respondents disagreed with the effectiveness of internal communications and the openness of the Council with its employees, particularly those in the Homes and Technical Services Department.

Currently employees find informal communications (such as face to face) more effective than formal mechanisms. This could result in distortion of the original meaning of this information. The Council should consider future review and improvement of communication mechanisms.

The Culture of the Council

Employees expressed concern over the lack of positive atmosphere in the Council, and support from management and leadership across the Council.

Current stress levels are generally deemed unacceptable across the Council.

There is a culture of celebrating Council success over personal success.

Health and Safety is seen to be taken seriously, as is equal opportunities.

How We Work

The majority of respondents are clear about ways of working within the Council, especially in terms of job definitions, responsibilities and performance standards.

Opinion as to whether departments within the Council work well together is divided.

The majority of respondents believe there is duplication of effort between departments.

How I Work

Generally there was very positive feedback from this section, especially in terms of understanding customer needs and knowledge of expected standards.

The main areas of disagreement were related to levels of stress and the level of fair and competitive remuneration.

Employees in Educational and Social Services reported the highest levels of unacceptable stress.

Being Part of the Council

In general results suggest employees feel very positive about their role within the organisation.

Most employees feel appreciated by the Council. 8% of employees who returned the survey strongly feel the Council undervalues them.

Taking Decisions

Most employees are clear about who has responsibility for taking decisions.

The results suggest employees in Development Services, Finance and Homes and Technical Services feel the process may however be overly bureaucratic.

AGENDA