

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CORPORATE SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE- 4 JUNE 2002

EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS

Report by Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek approval of the introduction of an Employee Communications policy.

2. Background

- 2.1 The recent employee attitude survey informed the Council of employee concerns about our communications processes. In summary, employees fed back that there was an inconsistent approach across the Council and even within individual departments organisational units.
- 2.2 The Chief Executive's Senior Staff Management Team have considered this feedback and concluded that whilst there are many examples of good practice in place across the Council there requires to be greater consistency in their application.
- 2.3 The objectives which support the recently agreed Work Life Balance vision statement include;

"Communicating the Council's commitment to Work-Life Balance to our employees".

3. Employee Communications

- 3.1 It is proposed that our Employee Communications policy include the following objectives:
- To encourage two way communications which is inclusive, straightforward and characterised by openness
 - To ensure that employees understand and are committed to Council policy and strategic direction
 - To provide channels for staff views to inform the development of the Council and its services
 - To improve internal awareness of expertise and activities
 - To facilitate the flow of information and knowledge (internal and external) through the Council
 - To help develop a culture that will realise the Council's, and individual employee's, aspirations
- 3.2 It is argued that successful communication is critical to engaging employees and unlocking the discretionary effort that is needed for organisations to be successful.

- 3.3** There is more likely to be a combined approach than any one method of communication, with various media being used according to the context and in the interests of maximum coverage or clarity of message. For expediency, it is expected that verbal communication through team briefings will be used where staff are located together whereas if staff are spread throughout the Council area (e.g. SSBU) then written communication media will be the norm.

However it is assumed that there will be an underlying objective of providing all employees with appropriate and relevant information regarding Council, Departmental and Organisational Units.

- 3.4** The importance of two way communications has to be recognised as is the need to keep any process easy to manage and administer, focussed on the Council's business interests, focussed on information sharing rather than negotiating and led by a reasonable time limit whilst still facilitating positive communication.
- 3.5** The views of the Council's JCC (Local Government Employees) were sought at their meeting of 22 May 2002 on the preferred shape of an Employee Communications policy. The Trade Union representatives welcomed the proposal but asked that the proposed policy recognise the communication needs of those employees who provide services on a decentralised basis, often remote from the core employment bases (e.g. Homecare, Catering/Cleaning).

4. Proposed approach to Employee Communications

- 4.1** In drafting the Policy Document the following principles are considered as essential;

- Keep it simple
- Retain the existing JCC structures which fulfil not only communication but consultation requirements with trade unions
- Retain existing Management Team Meetings
- Review, develop and commit to issuing Eastwords on a quarterly basis
- Introduce Quarterly Team Briefings

- 4.2** It is proposed that a Team Briefing model be introduced within a service of each department rather than across all services immediately. The target should be to review the initial experience and extend the final Team Briefing model as appropriate at 1 April 2003. It is recommended that the initial model be led by Corporate Development and Communications (Public Relations) and that Personnel Services (Training and Development) assist them in developing Team Briefers. In line with the Trade Unions observations, the pilot groups should involve a decentralised service.

5. Summary

- 5.1** Good communication can be achieved if the following basic requirements are met:

- a lead is given by top management
- all managers, including supervisors, are involved
- Trade Union representatives are involved and support the communication process
- communication is two-way and employees' views are genuinely considered

- communication is both systematic and regular.

6. Finance Implications

- 6.1** The Employee Communications Policy will be developed with a view to being delivered within existing resources.

7. Legal/Policy Implications

- 7.1** The development of an Employee Communications policy will ensure that employees are familiar at an early stage of developments which impact on their employment and area of service delivery at corporate, departmental and functional levels. The policy's development also demonstrate that the Council has considered the employees' feedback from the recent Attitude Survey and has taken early steps to respond positively to an area of concern.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1** The Sub Committee is asked to approve: -

- a) the recommended approach to developing an Employee Communications Policy;
- b) that the proposed approach be developed and piloted in one area of each of the Council's departments; and
- b) that the Director of Corporate Resources/Depute Chief Executive be asked to report back on the outcome of the pilot exercise.

Fiona Lees
Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources
May 2002

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Report to Corporate Sub Committee of 9 April 2002 on Employee Attitude Survey

Anyone wishing further information should contact Graham Haugh, Head of Personnel (01 563 576092).

AGENDA