ESSEX POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY
Essex County Fire & Rescue Service

Meeting	Service Leadership Team	Agenda no.	7j
	Performance and Resources Board		
Meeting dates	15 February 2022		
	23 February 2022		
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Subject	Annual Staff Engagement Survey - 2022		
Type of Report:	Decision		
Action Point No.		For Publication	Yes/No

RECOMMENDATIONS

Approval is sought on an approach to seeking and acting on feedback according to the cultural commitment in the People Strategy: Make sure employees feel safe and valued, encouraged to speak up, and listened to.

Of the options proposed below, one of two are recommended:

- Option 1a – Annual survey facilitated by People Insights, followed up by planned workplace sessions
- Option 2 - Replace the annual survey with regular pulse surveys and site visits

The benefits and disbenefits of each are outlined in the options and analysis section below.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are committed to demonstrating a clear approach to capturing qualitative and quantitative feedback about our culture. This includes listening and responding to feedback in our approach so that we adapt and improve to ensure the credibility and value from the activity.

Previously the Service-wide surveys have adopted a snap-shot approach to gathering feedback via an on-line tool, which has required significant investment and reminders to achieve the levels of completion required to be statistically significant.

Perception that the survey can identify individuals due to the demographic information requested remains widespread – despite assurances that the responses were confidential. Although completion rates have increased year on year, we are told that this has deterred some people from taking part of from stating their views honestly and openly.

BACKGROUND

The MacLeod Review of employee engagement ("Engaging for Success" 2009) identified a key enabler of engagement and increased performance as "Voice– an effective and empowered employee voice. Employees views are sought out, listened to and employees see that their opinions make a difference."

We have run employee voice surveys since 2015; the last in 2019 showing significant increases both in participation and engagement, demonstrating that actions being taken were making a difference. A summary of this feedback and resulting actions is shown in appendix 1.

OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS

Proposal 1 – Continue with the annual engagement survey approach with some modifications to assure confidentiality and increase value

Benefits of this approach	Disadvantages of this approach
The ability to measure longitudinal changes and trends through using the same question-set and approach in subsequent years.	Our employees tell us they do not feel "heard" via an 'anonymous' online survey and need repeated reminders to complete it.
The process and application are known and familiar	A high number of people "Prefer not to say" indicating a lack of trust in the confidentiality of the approach.
The supplier is known to us and has a good track record of delivering a quality product.	We have a danger of 'survey fatigue' and we cannot necessarily predict when HMICFRS will issue further surveys, which have over the last few years required us to reschedule our own survey to accommodate.
	There is a lack of understanding at all levels of the Service on "Who" the responses are aimed at, and therefore who should subsequently take ownership of the resulting action plans. Many people reported that they responded about "The Service" as a whole but could not necessarily articulate who "The Service" was, although some people reported that "The Service" meant the SLT.
	Subsequently, clear actions as a result of the survey have been difficult to evidence back to those who took part in the survey.

To address the disadvantages listed above, the following proposal (1a) could be considered:

- Remove the detailed demographic data capture so that the confidence in confidentiality is assured
- Follow up engagement through planned workplace sessions to ensure the qualitative view of the responses is obtained

o   Feedback from review sessions indicated a clear preference to discuss feedback directly with management (SLT, ELT, Group managers and Lead HR), on a team basis, via planned station and department visits
o   Previous face-to-face approaches "Professional Inclusive Workplaces" in 2018 generated good engagement with colleagues and was credited in supporting a turn-round from stations concerned. This teams-based approach allowed local concerns to be swiftly identified and acted on and would additionally provide an open forum to engage with the survey feedback.

Proposal 1a (cont.). – follow up of annual survey with planned workplace sessions

Benefits of this approach	Disadvantages of this approach	Mitigation
Employees feel "heard" and able to talk about the issue that concern them.	Resource heavy - site visits.	Spread visits through the year Utilise SLT, ELT, Group Managers and HR Leads all to be programmed in to cover all stations and departments
Those who "prefer not to say" due to lack of trust in the system can raise issues in person instead	There is a dependency on a clear timetable of visits unaffected by any HMICFRS surveys.	Centrally collate feedback on SharePoint site. Regular review meeting to assign to owners, and regular feedback loops in place
Is open and transparent – builds trust and identifies clear owners	Requires manual collation of feedback and subsequent two-way feedback at each department and station	Regular review and reporting against the central action plan. Barriers to be identified and reported to ELT, for clarity on how these can be removed.
Develops a better work environment – includes the local issues that people value, as well as Service level feedback.	Requires clear assignment of ownership and progress tracking via central action plan. Are issues raised aligned to business plans?	Regular reporting, and escalation routes. Ensure stakeholders are consulted on timelines before dates are communicated back
Builds trust - visibility and delivering on promises	Risk of dis-engagement if no action seen as a result	Regular review meetings of assigned actions with Media team involvement

In terms of additional resource required for Proposal 1a this would require all SLT, ELT, Group Managers and Lead HR to commit to covering every department and watch between them, approximately 115 groups, although by grouping neighbouring On-Call stations together (e.g., Tiptree and Tollesbury) this would reduce this to approximately 90 separate visits. Based on a group of ~32 facilitators this would require around three visits per person. This would also require a project co-ordinator.

Proposal 2 – Option to replace the annual survey with regular pulse surveys and site visits

There is potential to replace the annual survey with more frequent mini pulse surveys, which would allow a swifter and more focussed response to the feedback, potentially increasing trust and value in the process.

Benefits	Disadvantages	Mitigation
Ability to check in and react more quickly – pace of change	This option will require more administration, and ongoing management (e.g., communications, action plans)	Allocate increased resource to survey management
Ability to plot trends in a timely way, measure effectiveness of actions, and link improvements to specific actions more readily – increasing sense of "being heard"	The risk of survey fatigue if offered to entire Service at multiple times throughout year

Increased cost of use | Use a subset of questions upon a single Theme, issued each Quarter. This would enable a focus on the Theme involved and enable improved action planning and communication against the broad theme e.g., "Working relationships" or "Fairness" |

Other Considerations

Identify routes to measure embedding of Code of Ethics

The NFCC Core Code of Ethics has now been launched within ECFRS, providing a framework to support consistent and professional behaviour, and HMICFRS are expected to refer to the Code of Ethics in their inspections.

It is recognised that the current question set does not map easily onto the Ethical Principles without amendment, for example our current question set does not reflect the Community focus ("We put the interests of the public, the community, and service users first").

Options

1. Maintain current question set (24 questions plus free text)
2. Expand questions to include 1-2 questions about each of the 5 principles. (30-34 questions)
3. Amend the question-set to better align with Code of Ethics, retaining language where appropriate (approx. 28 questions)
4. Replace question set completely with ones aligned to new code of ethics
5. Use a combination of anonymised question-set and site visits to gather qualitative feedback

The length of the survey and inclusion of the new scope would indicate that Option 3 is the optimal solution to assess the inclusion of the Core Code of Ethics into our Ways of Working

Timeline for design and implementation to be agreed dependent on preferred route.

RISKS AND MITIGATIONS

The survey is a control measure against SRR150019. The employee survey is an enabler for our employees to feel safe and valued, encouraged to speak up, and listened to. There is a risk that employees do not feel that the survey approach addresses these needs. To mitigate this, extensive feedback has been sought from all levels of the organisation and used to create the proposals as above.

LINKS TO FIRE AND RESCUE PLAN

The employee survey is noted in the People Strategy and contributes to the positive culture described within the Fire and Rescue Plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Use of an externally provided online survey tool is likely to cost more than the previous survey at £7,100. It is anticipated that a quarterly survey will entail more cost, however Insights have indicated that this will not be quadrupled. More detailed costings will be provided once the preferred proposal is identified.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None associated with this report.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

None associated with this report.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

We have considered whether individuals with protected characteristics will be disadvantaged as a consequence of the actions being taken. Due regard has also been given to whether there is impact on each of the following protected groups as defined within the Equality Act 2010:

Race	n	Religion or belief	n
Sex	n	Gender reassignment	n
Age	n	Pregnancy & maternity	n
Disability	n	Marriage and Civil Partnership	n
Sexual orientation	n		

*The survey will be offered to all employees regardless of whether they are currently in the workplace or not.
The Core Code of Ethics Fire Standard has been fully considered and incorporated into the proposals outlined in this paper.

HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

It is an employer's duty to protect the health, safety, and welfare of their employee's wellbeing – this provides an opportunity to identify and respond to workplace stressors that impact on mental health and wellbeing.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

There has been workforce engagement as detailed above, following selection of preferred proposal, extensive engagement will be undertaken with employees via The Shout, 60 second briefings; with managers via Manager Briefing, and shared with all our representative bodies. Additionally, there will be focussed engagement with On-Call via OCLO's.

FUTURE PLANS

This action links to ongoing delivery of our People Strategy Action Plan.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AND APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – 2019 Staff feedback and action

Appendix 1 - 2019 feedback and action

The most significant increases in reported perceptions were that;
1. People are treated fairly
2. ECFRS promotes a culture of openness and transparency
3. SLT provides a clear vision of our overall direction

The area of lowest responses was:
1. "Senior managers do what they say they are going to do" (35% agree, 38% don't know, 27% disagree)
2. "I have seen action being taken as a result of the previous staff engagement survey" (26% agree, 45% don't know, 29% disagree)

In Response to these points:
- Senior Managers: Station Managers and Group Managers increased their presence across stations and SLT visits were timetabled across stations and watches.
- Action taken as a result of the survey (December 2020):

2.1 **January - March 2021**
- Clear ask to ELT to engage with information. This was via a review session; direct access provided to the reporting tool to enable them to view, analyse, filter, and download their own information; provision of various "how to" guides and action planning templates and coaching offered
- Lead HR partners upskilled to access the reporting tool and enable them to support creation of action plans
- Managers Briefing - Highlights shared with a clear request for managers to download, analyse and share the reports with their employees

Focus Groups were scheduled to deep dive into issues, however despite extensive chasing there was minimal interest in attending workshops due to the impact of COVID on remote working and workloads, and difficulties accessing Teams at that time.

2.2 **April - September 2021**
- Group Managers led review sessions with operational colleagues which identified actions to resolve issues, including increasing manager visibility and access with On-Call colleagues, access to operational training opportunities and importance of 'closing the loop' (ensuring people are updated on outcomes of items raised).
- Prevention and Protection teams' feedback was directly used to inform subsequent re-organisation and re-structure of departmental activities.
- Engaged with Communications Team and Managers/leaders with the greatest improvements to understand and share their journeys. There was however reluctance to be 'singled out' for what they saw as fundamental good management.

2.3 **October- December 2021**
- Two ELT sessions were held to address the strategic level issues raised with ELT members committing to acting on feedback.

The feedback from the ELT sessions was that the most direct way to demonstrate 'listening to feedback' was to revise the survey approach because:
1. 16% of colleagues responded as "Prefer not to say" with a high number of comments concerned a lack of trust in anonymity.

- Feedback from stations has been consistently that an anonymous survey does not enable them to feel 'heard'.
- The number of surveys recently has led to a degree of survey fatigue (HMI launched 2 further surveys through 2019 and 2021)