

Report to Stronger Council Select Committee

Date of meeting: 20 July 2021

Portfolio: Corporate Services (Cllr D Sunger)

Subject: Beyond the Pandemic Employee Survey
(April-May 2021)

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- 1. The Committee are asked to consider the report and the accompanying video – (video to be shown at the meeting).**

Report

1. Throughout the pandemic we have supported our employees by focusing on their wellbeing and morale, making sure they are well equipped to provide our residents with vital public services and support our residents and the vulnerable when they have needed it most.
2. Our people have achieved so much in a difficult year, not only providing business as usual in support of our residents but assisting with other essential work on Project Shield and Highstreet recovery projects. We have completed an office refurbishment on time and on budget, improved productivity, and digitalisation for our residents, and we have vastly improved employee engagement and wellbeing.

Beyond the Pandemic Survey and Report

3. COVID-19 has changed our outlook about work and challenged our professional and personal assumptions about how, when and where we work giving us more time to evaluate and refocus on our work/life balance. Through the pandemic many of our employees have been working remotely - no longer reliant on a fixed desk, in a fixed building, working fixed hours.
4. Everyone has adapted to new ways of working and we have made this a huge success by quickly introducing new technologies and placing new levels of flexibility and trust in our employees to streamline processes, go digital and help to adapt and transform our services to the communities we serve.
5. We have learned that:
 - 5.1 Balancing choice with business needs** – effective flexible working benefits both employees and the Council, in agreement with line managers employees can work in a pattern that suits their needs, balancing personal choice with business needs.
 - 5.2 Collaborative working is key** – we can come together when we need to - whether this is in person (subject to Covid-19 restrictions) at the Civic Office or other locations (cafes, libraries etc) in the future or via Teams/Zoom, instant chat. We have a hybrid view of how we work.

5.3 Continuous challenge – our managers and employees have kept in regular contact through the pandemic, setting objectives and developing solutions to both personal (home schooling) and professional challenges.

5.4 Managed by performance – the ethos to effective flexible working is that ‘work is what you do – not where you do it’. It is based on the most effective operation of working tasks, hours, location and technology adopting a ‘work from anywhere’ outlook.

5.5 Connectivity everywhere – we are continuously improving our ICT digital solutions and processes.

5.6 Employee wellbeing and their family’s wellbeing come first – including access to private GP appointments, a great Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), Mental Health First Aider support and a dedicated Wellbeing Hub.

Empowering our employees to start challenging their thinking

6. In April 2021 we designed an employee survey that followed on from our 2020 employee wellbeing survey. This new survey was called ‘Our Ways of Working 2021-2022 Beyond the Pandemic’. When completing this survey, we encouraged employees to challenge their thinking, giving them the opportunity to give us valuable feedback and insight to help inform our plans for beyond the pandemic and help reshape our future ways of working for them and the organisation.
7. We asked employees to answer the survey questions with the future in mind beyond the pandemic, and how they would like to work. The survey took no more than 10 minutes and asked employees to complete a total of 42 short multiple choice/free text questions.
8. Part two of the survey was a selection of 8 travel questions to give further insight into how employees anticipated contributing to our organisational focus on sustainable and active modes of travel.
9. We want to continue our journey of change where EFDC is seen as a place of opportunity for all - empowering employees to challenge current work practices and introduce more effective flexible working to help deliver better services for our customers and the community. Effective Flexibility focuses on achieving the following benefits:
 - Increased productivity and improved service delivery
 - Focused on outcomes rather than outputs
 - Improved work-life balance and employee wellbeing
 - Improved reputation as employer
 - Making best use of our organisational assets
 - Reduced environmental footprint
10. The survey remained open until the 10 May 2021, it was not a compulsory survey, but employees were encouraged to play an active role in providing their thoughts and insight into Our Ways of Working 2021-2022 Beyond the Pandemic.

Results and Insights Summary

11. A very top-level summary of the ‘Beyond the Pandemic’ survey is provided below, along with a video presentation which will be played on the evening. There is also an additional excel document of the verbatim comments submitted to the questions asked, which has been shared with the Leadership team.
12. Overall the survey was well received with **292** employees completing this and giving us valuable feedback and insight into how employees are working now and how they want to

work in the future.

- **438** employees viewed the survey
- **356** employees started the survey
- **292** completed the survey (**82.02%** completion rate)

13. Some key highlights for consideration from the executive summary presentation are:

- **73%** agree that working from home is a positive experience.
- In the future, respondents would like to work from home/remotely: **66.1%** of their working time on average. For a full time employee this equates to 3 days a week at home/remotely and 2 days in the office.
- Benefits of working in a more effective, flexible way from home/remotely are: No commute (**80%**), Flexibility (**78%**), Productivity (**57%**), Reduced costs (**56%**), Time with family (**48%**), Improved health (**34%**).
- **93%** agree that they are clear about what they are expected to deliver when/if they were to work from home/remotely.
- Working with effective flexibility, what do you anticipate may be the main reasons for travelling into the Civic Offices in the future? Collaborative working groups – **63%** (this engagement and messaging seems to have landed well with our employees).
- To the question; What do you think are the biggest challenges of working from home/remotely?
 - **47%** Creating clear boundaries between work and other aspects of my life
 - **40%** Loneliness
 - **34%** Longer hours vs my typical office hours

14. The survey then moves into the particular questions relating to travel.

14.1 Car travel seems to be the current method used and future expectation of a high number of employees.

14.2 The Council is offering employees the chance to receive a free annual membership for the DaRT87 transport service

Actions from the Survey

- The survey video will be uploaded onto the intranet for anyone that may have missed the employee briefing on Tuesday 6th July.
- Line managers will discuss the results with their teams in more detail in their next Team Meetings allowing employees time to talk through as a team how new ways of working will work for them as an individual and the whole team.
- **12** out of **18** employees (that left verbatim comments) are working on their dining room table or in the kitchen/living room and consideration will be given to how EFDC can assist making working from home easier.
- Line Managers are now accountable to lead the change for how employees want to work going forward and how they will use the fantastic civic space to do this with an effective flexible mindset.
- The survey insight will further support and influence our people and travel plans.

Reason for decision:

The report is for consideration as it focusses on the survey responses, therefore no decisions are required at this stage.

Options considered and rejected:

Engagement with our employees is important at any time, more so over the past 18 months,

throughout Covid and beyond. Not engaging with our employees was not an option for the organisation.

Consultation undertaken:

The trade unions are aware of the pulse surveys taking place on a regular basis and the 'Beyond the Pandemic' Survey

Resource implications:

The survey was carried out within existing resources.

Legal and Governance Implications:

NA

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:

The Survey asked specific questions regarding the Council's Travel Plan.

Background Papers:

NA

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

Nor required

Equality:

As no decisions are required an Equality Impact Assessment is not required