London Borough of Bromley

PART ONE - PUBLIC

Decision Maker:	**LOCAL JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**
Date:	**24 February 2021**
Decision Type:	Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

Title:	**COVID-19 STAFF WELLBEING SURVEY**
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Chief Officer:	Charles Obazuaye, Director of Human Resources and Customer Services
Ward:	All Wards

1. Reason for report

    This report provides a written update on the rollout of the COVID-19 Staff Wellbeing Survey in May 2020 and the follow-up survey in February 2021.

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2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

    Members are requested to note the report.

3.   COMMENTARY

Introduction

3.01 As an organisation, we know that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on our staff, many of whom have been asked to adapt their ways of working entirely, take on new roles often outside of their normal field of expertise, and to go above and beyond to support our residents and service users in Bromley.

3.02 A staff wellbeing survey was rolled out in May 2020, where we asked colleagues to feed back on their experience of working remotely during the COVID-19 crisis; the quality, frequency and effectiveness of our internal and external communications approach; and what more the Council could be doing to support our staff now and in the medium to longer term.

3.03 The survey was completed anonymously with the understanding that no individual responses that could identify a member of staff would be shared with senior managers.

3.04 The survey was composed of 27 questions divided into the following key sections/themes:
- **Contextual questions** – department; age group; managerial responsibilities; whether a staff member is a Bromley resident or living outside of the borough
- **Communications** – preferences regarding the frequency and most effective forms of communication and engagement, as well as content that colleagues would like to read in our internal and external communications
- **Working from home** – frequency of working from home, ability to work effectively at home, whether staff had suitable technology to work remotely, experience of performing new COVID-19 related tasks
- **Health and wellbeing offer** – steps colleagues have taken to take care of their physical and mental health; and potential anxieties or concerns for staff, their colleagues, family and friends during the COVID-19 crisis
- **Council support services** - knowledge and use of the Employee Assistance Programme and the Occupational Health Service
- **Training opportunities** for both managers and staff
- **Return to office work approach** – what needs to be in place for staff to feel safe and supported in returning to the office environment
- **Suggestions** – how can the Council help tackle COVID-19 in our local area and how can the Council better support staff
- **Lessons for the future** – how can the Council maintain effective new practices that have been introduced during the COVID-19 crisis.

Key findings from COVID-19 Staff Wellbeing Survey - May 2020

3.05 The staff survey was sent out to the LBB All Officers mailing list on 11 May and was open until 27 May.

3.06 The headline findings from the staff survey are as below:

- 975 members of staff completed the survey with 858 complete responses. The average completion time per respondent was 15 minutes, indicating a thoughtful and serious level of engagement
- The Chief Executive's department had the best departmental response rate at 77%, followed by the People's department at 53% and the Place department at 47%.

3.07 The response rate across all age groups was broadly reflective of the Council's workforce profile. Managers formed 26.4% of respondents, which is broadly reflective of the managerial workforce and shows good management engagement. 54.6% of respondents live in Bromley, which is in line with the Council's workforce profile

3.08 The key findings for the questions regarding the Council's communications were:
- A very positive response (over 70% of staff) regarding the current level, detail, and frequency of internal communications from the Chief Executive, Directors and managers
- Staff predominantly use our internal communications tools (email briefings, team meetings/briefings and discussions with line managers) as their main sources of information rather than external or personal communications channels i.e. local media or WhatsApp
- Staff would most like to hear about our recovery planning work and arrangements for exiting lockdown, remote working support and guidance, and updates regarding our local response to COVID-19

3.09 The key findings for the questions regarding the Council's working remotely arrangements were:
- Over 93% of staff work from home all or most of the time. Only 3% stated they do not work from home, when they are performing essential roles in the office or working out in the community
- Over 75% of respondents noted that they had a suitable place to work from home and over 77% have the technology they need to work effectively from home
- 69% of respondents are able to flexibly accommodate other responsibilities at home
- 66.3% of respondents (584) agreed they were just as effective in their role as before COVID-19
- 36.8% of respondents (328 people) confirmed they had taken on new tasks to support the organisation, although many respondents use the 'Other' category to note that they feel their day-to-day work has significantly changed to accommodate new tasks even if they have not been redeployed
- Over 86% of respondents are proud of their work to support the COVID-19 response
- 9.83% of respondents have responded with concerns that their new role may have exposed them to new risks.
- 78.6% of respondents (687 people) feel that their current workload is reasonable and 23% of respondents (200 people) felt that they could do more to tackle COVID-19.
- 48.3% of respondents (420 people) noted that their home/work life balance has improved as a result of working remotely. However, a significant number of respondents worried about their screen time and their mental health.

3.10 The key findings for the questions regarding health and wellbeing were:
- Staff are engaging in a range of activities to promote good mental and physical health and wellbeing

- Staff worried about their own physical and mental health and wellbeing and that of their families and colleagues, to their personal safety and financial situation.
- Staff have a range of caring responsibilities, including children, relatives, partners, older adult children, pets, neighbours and as volunteers in their local communities
- Despite good awareness of the Council's support services, there has been low take-up of the Employee Assistance Programme (only 36 respondents) and the Occupational Health Service (only 96 respondents)

3.11 The key findings for the questions regarding the Council's training opportunities were:
- The most popular training topics for managers included 'Returning to Work', 'Staying Safe at Work' and 'Leadership and Resilience in Turbulent Times'. Managers were also interested in some generic training for all staff, including 'Wellbeing: looking after yourself in isolation', 'Resilience Coaching' and 'Loss and Bereavement Awareness'
- 65.5% of respondents were overall favourable to online group activities, including team lunches and fitness classes
- Some respondents also have creative ideas for promoting health and wellbeing and connecting with colleagues, including quizzes, skills swaps, online meditation and yoga classes, book clubs etc.

3.11 The key findings for the questions regarding the Council's approach to managing the crisis, post-lockdown recovery, returning to work and suggestions for the future, were:
- Over 86% of respondents are proud to work for the Council during the COVID-19 crisis and 84% would speak positively about the work of the Council to friends and family
- Over 41% would like to know what they could do personally to support local charity and voluntary organisations affected by the crisis
- In order of priority, staff would like to see 'Deep cleaning of the offices', 'Adequate spacing of desks', 'Hand sanitiser stations' and 'Office working guidance' alongside a return to the office environment
- Staff also provided a range of suggestions to the Council on how to tackle COVID-19, including a rota for people based in the Civic Centre and other sites; flexibility for staff with childcare responsibilities; use of Microsoft Teams/web-based platform for multi-agency meetings; and extra support, advice and guidance to BAME colleagues
- When asked what more the Council could be doing to support staff, respondents suggested listening to staff and their needs; clarity for staff who fall into vulnerable risk groups; provision of PPE and face masks; IT and laptop rollout; managers being more understanding; and more flexibility in working arrangements
- In terms of longer term changes after the COVID-19 crisis, staff wanted to see more ongoing engagement with staff through regular communications and surveys; maintain home working opportunities and promote flexible, remote and agile working; more empathy and kindness from managers; more interdisciplinary working across teams; more volunteering opportunities; and more virtual meetings with professionals.

Actions from Staff Survey findings

3.12 Following the delivery of the first Staff Survey in May 2020, a Staff Survey Working Group was established with divisional representation from all services, to oversee the delivery of quick

wins and improvements to address the key findings, as well as the development of local departmental and divisional staff surveys.

3.13 The key quick wins delivered from May 2020 onwards included:

3.14 **Communication**
   a) All managers instructed to have a team meeting and/or 'touch base' with all of their staff at least monthly
   b) Regular reporting on progress of the restarted IT roll out programme to staff
   c) Promote free car parking offer of staff who need to come into the Civic Centre
   d) Promoting the importance of culture change through the REAL values staff seminars on the Council's organisational values for staff: Respect, Empower, Ambition and Learn
   e) Regular communications and engagement to reassure staff who are struggling at home around the likely timescales for the implementation of the phased return to the workplace, as feelings of loneliness and isolation are not necessarily linked to issues of flexibility around home working.

3.15 **Health & Wellbeing**

   a) Reinforce the message to all staff that working from home is the default position
   b) Ensure all staff have access to the equipment they need to make working from home safe and comfortable – highlight that a list of 'essential equipment' / 'basic accessories' for all staff is being drawn up.
   c) Relaunch/re-promotion of the new Employee Assistance Programme via a webinar and highlight that staff can self-refer
   d) Promote informal methods for team catch-ups /get-togethers via video to prevent feelings of isolation among staff
   e) Using a 'signature sign-off' to promote flexible working that could be adopted more widely e.g. "*I sometimes send emails out of standard business hours for my own convenience. Please do not feel you need to respond outside of your working hours.*"

3.16 **Training & Development**

   a) Identify and promote a 'mental health support' training package for immediate roll out
   b) Encouraging staff to engage regarding their physical and mental wellbeing, with the introduction of 'Wellbeing Wednesdays and Fridays' each week
   c) Workforce Development to roll out the 'It's Okay' campaign covering a wide range of issues around personal health, wellbeing and development needs, time management, safe return to work, remote/home working, compassionate leadership, managing conflict, home/work balance, trauma, financial wellbeing

3.17 A series of medium to long-term actions have also been overseen by the Staff Survey Working Group:

   1. Repeat the full Council-wide staff survey: Planning for this, including reviewing questions, was completed by December 2020 with a view to delivering the new survey in January/February 2021

2. Developing our longer term 'offer to staff' – establishing 'what more' staff need to make their home working environment more comfortable in the future and the best way to provide what is required e.g. desks, chairs, laptop stands etc.

3. Ensure that the Health and Wellbeing Programme remains an embedded feature for staff over the long term.

3.18   Each division also developed their own local action plans and have rolled out a range of activities including staff surgeries, departmental conferences, local divisional surveys, and more direct engagement with Chief Officers and senior managers.

Follow up staff survey - February 2021

3.19   A follow-up survey for early 2021 was developed and tested by a control group of colleagues from the Staff Survey Working Group, the Trade Unions and Dep Representatives to ensure that the survey was a manageable length and thus lead to a high response rate, while also covering the key objectives of the survey.

3.20   In addition to the key areas in the first survey, the second staff survey (in Appendix 1) covers the following topics:
- The experiences of new starter who have joined the organisation during COVID-19
- The views and experiences of staff regarding long-term remote/office working during COVID-19
- The impact of our equality and inclusion training and support
- Preferences around remote working in the future
- The effectiveness of the IT transformation programme
- The impact of COVID-19 support work on staff wellbeing.

3.21   The follow-up staff survey was rolled out on Monday 1 February and will be open until Friday 19 February, although this is subject to review depending on the response rate. Regular communications to staff, via the Chief Executive's weekly email and the Transforming Bromley newsletter, will be used to drive engagement.