

REPORT TITLE: UPDATE ON EMPLOYEE ATTITUDE SURVEY AND RELATED MATTERS

10 NOVEMBER 2022

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: CLLR MARGOT POWER – CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND VALUE

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WARD(S): ALL

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to present the results of the Employee Attitude Survey (EAS) which took place in June 2022 to the Audit and Governance (A&G) Committee. The results have been published on the HR intranet site and shared with colleagues via an article in City Voice in early October.

There has been opportunity for the EAS results to be considered by the Cabinet Member, the Executive Leadership Board (ELB), Unison and the Staff Forum. Recommendations for action arising from these discussions are shown below.

This report also updates the committee on related matters.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That HR work on a revised appraisal form which more clearly links to council objectives and the council's values (for implementation in April 2023).
2. That HR support managers with training on appraisals and that the experience and effectiveness of the appraisal meetings be reviewed by seeking feedback from staff and managers.
3. That additional focus be given to the understanding of the council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy.
4. That the well-established meetings between HR and the recognised trade union continue in order to support organisational development and effectively

manage organisational change.

5. That a survey of staff attitudes be undertaken at least every 12 months

IMPLICATIONS:1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

The engagement and performance of the Council's workforce is critical to the delivery of all outcomes set out in the Council Plan.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None. The survey was undertaken 'in-house' so no additional budget was required and there are no financial implications from the proposed recommendations

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

None.

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

Employees are critical to the delivery of the council's services and priorities and monitoring and reporting on employee attitudes enables enhanced employee engagement and performance.

5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

None.

6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

The results have been discussed by senior management, the Portfolio Holder, Unison and the Staff Forum. Colleagues have been made aware of the results of the EAS through an article in City Voice and further opportunity to discuss the results with managers and team leaders will follow.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

None.

8 PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

This was an internal survey. An equality impact assessment was completed and indicated the survey did not impact on any group with protected characteristics.

9 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This raw data from individual employees was subject to the council's data protection controls. The results published are anonymised and therefore can have no impact on an individual's privacy rights under data protection law.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
Financial Exposure <i>Low employee engagement leading to high staff turnover and increased recruitment and agency costs.</i>	Ongoing employee attitude and engagement monitoring to enable early identification and remedial action to avoid retention difficulties.	Promotion of the council as an employer of choice.
Exposure to challenge <i>Spend of public money on an internal survey.</i>	Survey conducted in-house to minimise cost.	Positive results from survey can be used in recruitment materials.
Reputation <i>Failure to deliver public services and the Council Plan due to reduced workforce capacity, leading to public criticism and/or adverse local media coverage.</i>	Ongoing employee attitude and engagement monitoring to enable early identification and remedial action where retention difficulties could impact on the Council's ability to deliver public services and the Council Plan.	Identify and implement targeted employment initiatives and actions to increase employee engagement and minimise staff turnover. Promote the council as an employer of choice.
Achievement of outcome <i>Low employee engagement leading to poor performance and high recruitment & retention difficulties.</i>	Annual employee attitude survey to monitor trends and identify and address potential issues.	Early identification of emerging negative attitudes to inform timely initiatives and actions to avoid these becoming business critical.

11 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

- 11.1 The Council currently has 431 staff (headcount) and has routinely undertaken staff surveys in different forms. This Employee Attitude Survey was conducted internally over a 4 week period (13 June to 8 July 2022) and achieved a participation rate of 67% which is considered good by industry standards.
- 11.2 The survey was hosted on 'Citizen Space, a digital platform widely used across the public sector for the design, publication, management and analysis of consultation activity. All staff received a link to the survey via their work email address and were able to complete the survey during working time. HR would have provided the survey in an alternative format where requested.
- 11.3 The survey asked employees to consider 14 statements and indicate if they strongly agree; agree; neither agree or disagree; disagree; or strongly disagree. One of the features of the results is the number of employees who 'strongly agree' with statements. However, for convenience this report will

combine the 'strongly agree' and 'agree' to give the percentage of positive comments.

A summary of the results is attached at Appendix 1.

- 11.4 In all internal staff surveys, colleagues are asked to indicate which service area they work in. This allows results to be viewed by service area to see if one area has significantly different results (or levels of participation) to the average for the council. However, for the 2022 survey, the participation rates and responses were similar for all service areas.
- 11.5 The council has historically undertaken in depth biennial staff surveys. The last survey was conducted in 2018 during a period of organisational change. At that time greater demographic data was requested but this carries the risk that employees might suspect that their individual results are not anonymous and confidential. Adding too many 'tell me about you' questions can increase this risk and reduce the participation rate. On balance, there was considered to be limited added value to ask for additional personal data for a temperature check survey.
- 11.6 A summary of the key headlines is provided below:
- High participation rate by industry standards at 67%.
 - Employee engagement is high as indicated by scores above 60% for statements about enjoying working for the council, pride in the council and recommending the council as a good place to work.
 - The majority of staff intend to remain with the council and expected turnover is within healthy levels.
 - Staff are being provided with the equipment and the training and development they need to perform their roles.
 - Staff positively scored the council's commitment to equality and health and safety.
 - The positive culture at the council as indicated by high scores for staff wellbeing, performance and team working.
 - Employees generally understand the top priorities for the council and for their service areas.
- 11.7 The statements in the survey can be grouped together under the headings: **employee engagement, a good working environment; the working relationships that allow employees to perform effectively; and how involved employees feel in the priorities of their service and the council as a whole.**
- Employee engagement***
- 11.8 The statements about enjoying working for the council; pride in the council; and recommending the council as a good place to work are based on a concept called "employee engagement". Employee engagement is high when most employees willingly engage in discretionary effort at work. This means 'going the extra mile' for colleagues and/or customers because they

want to rather than because they feel forced to do so.

- 11.9 Research published by MacLeod and Clarke ('Engaging for Success') showed that organisations with high employee engagement also enjoyed high levels of performance and profitability and lower levels of sickness and grievances. Therefore, it is good news that the council scored highly on these statements: 79% positive response for "*I enjoy working at the council*"; 61% positive response for "*I would recommend the council as a great place to work to my family and friends*"; and, 71% positive response for "*I am proud to work for the council*".
- 11.10 The public sector faces considerable challenges in attracting and retaining staff and the results of the key question about retention was encouraging. Unhappy employees are likely to be looking for other jobs and don't intend to stay with their current employer for longer than necessary which is why most employee attitude surveys will have a statement about employee intentions in this area.

The good news for the council is that 69% of employees gave a positive response to "*I will still be working at the council in 12 months' time*". Just under 10% of employees do not see themselves working for the council in 12 months' time; which is understandable as around 10% is considered a healthy level of turnover for any organisation.

Working Environment

- 11.11 Turning to a good working environment, the policies that an employee might expect to see in a modern high performing organisation are training and development; equality and diversity; health and safety; and provision of good quality equipment.
- 11.12 A positive response rate of 71% was recorded for "*I am able to get the training and development I need at work*", However, 12% disagreed and HR will encourage line managers to respond to requests from their employees for development in a timely manner (even if the answer is no for valid reasons).
- 11.13 "*The council is committed to ensuring equality at work for all its employees*" received a 69% positive response. However 23% were unsure and 'neither agreed nor disagreed' which suggests that the council's policy and actions on equality, diversity and inclusion could usefully receive more publicity.
- 11.14 The appointment of a dedicated Corporate Health and Safety Adviser is having a positive impact with a 67% positive response to "*the council takes the health and safety of its employees seriously*". The corporate health and safety group also ensures risk assessments and other policies are reviewed, provides opportunity for key messages to be disseminated and concerns raised.
- 11.15 The council ensured employees had the right equipment for working from home during the pandemic and adjustments have been made to in office equipment as colleagues return to the office on a hybrid arrangement. The employees' response to "*I have the equipment I need to be successful in my work*" is encouraging at 73% positive.

Working relationships

- 11.16 Turning next to the working relationships that allow employees to perform effectively, the HR literature shows that people are motivated to do their very best work if they have good working relationships with their colleagues and especially their line manager.
- 11.17 *“My manager cares about me as a person”* might possibly be the most important question in the whole survey. The positive response of 86% is worth breaking down into ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ as it is such a fantastic response from employees. 45% of employees strongly agree; and another 41% agree with this statement. This highlights the positive culture at the council where the well-being of employees is regularly discussed by managers.
- 11.18 A parallel statement is *“my line manager gives me regular feedback on my performance at work”*. This received a 77% positive response from employees.
- 11.19 The other dimension of satisfaction at work is the working relationships employees enjoy with their colleagues. The positive response for *“The colleagues in my team are supportive and friendly”* was very high at 94%, with 56% strongly agreeing with this statement. In light of the separation of teams by the pandemic this a very pleasing result.

Council and service priorities

- 11.20 Turning finally to how involved employees feel in the priorities of their service and the council as a whole: employees need to understand what the organisation is trying to achieve; how they fit into that journey; and notice the communications that keep them informed of progress.
- 11.21 72% of employees responded positively to *“I understand the top priorities of Winchester City Council”* and 92% responded positively to *“I understand the key objectives of my service”*. It is not unusual for employees to know and care more about their immediate objectives than the higher priorities of the overall organisation.
- 11.22 The final statement to consider is *“I would say that changes at work are communicated to employees quickly and clearly”*. Compared to the rest of the survey this statement received a low positive response of 44% and a 24% negative response (the remainder were ‘neither agree nor disagree’).
- 11.23 Employees rated the level and frequency of communications from senior managers higher during the pandemic than before Covid-19. All staff briefings, team meetings and 121s have continued to be held regularly as they were during lockdown, however, it is acknowledged that confirmation of return to the office working arrangements was unavoidably delayed due to the sudden re-emergence of infection and it may be this delay which has reduced the scores. Further discussion with the Staff Forum and Unison will take place to establish which, if any, areas need to be addressed to further staff engagement.
- 11.24 The survey also included a free text section to provide employees with the opportunity to add any comments they wished to make and a summary of the

comments received is attached at Appendix 2. Some matters are specific and are being addressed on an individual level.

12. RELATED MATTERS

12.1 Members on the A&G committee asked HR for an overview of the benefits the council offers to attract candidates to jobs at the council.

12.2 The benefits offered to employees at WCC are as follows

- Employer paid health care cash plan scheme.
- Cycle to Work and Green Car Benefit salary sacrifice schemes
- Up to 32 days annual leave per year (more than the Green Book minimum).
- Flexible working arrangements.
- Hybrid Working Policy allowing most employees to work from home for up to 50% of their working hours.
- Up to 13 days additional flexi leave per year (subject to operational requirements) where the employee has built up enough hours.
- Option to voluntarily buy up to five days additional annual leave.
- Free park and ride scheme for all employees.
- Membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme.
- Confidential Employee Advice and Support Programme.
- Employee retail and shopping discounts.
- Season Ticket loans.
- Excellent central location.
- Support for continuous professional development.

12.3 A full review of the employment package on offer for job roles, informed by extensive benchmarking against neighbouring authorities, was undertaken in 2018/19. This included a full review of salaries and grades and employee benefits in addition to salary.

12.4 One of the key employee benefits to be introduced at that time was an employer paid health care cash plan. The health plan provides cash back on a range of everyday health care treatments, encouraging employees to proactively manage their health and wellbeing. It also offers an employee counselling line and on-line health and wellbeing resources.

12.5 The health plan is a voluntary benefit and not routinely offered by other councils. It is particularly salient given the current cost of living crisis and at a time when preventative treatments be easily foregone or unexpected health care costs could have significant financial impact. Anecdotal evidence shows this this is a highly valued employee benefit.

12.6 A number of changes to annual leave were also introduced at that time:

- Annual leave allowances were benchmarked/reviewed and increased.
- Christmas closure, part covered by annual leave. The council operates an emergency out of office service and senior managers

are on-call during this time.

- 'Core' hours were removed to enable staff to maximise work/life balance although there is a requirement for all teams to cover full 'normal' office hours.

12.7 The benefits available to employees clearly demonstrates the council's commitment to, and investment in, employee wellbeing and to making the council an 'employer of choice'. However, it is important the council continues to be competitive on pay compared to other local councils. Initial benchmarking has indicated the council is broadly comparable to other district councils, although for some specific roles it is less competitive. With current economic pressures affecting many of our residents, further work to understand our market position will be undertaken.

13. NEXT STEPS

- 13.1 Overall the council has received positive feedback as an employer and offers a strong range of benefits. However, there is no room for complacency and a continuous dialogue with staff is essential to ensure everyone feels part of the council team.
- 13.2 To assist with this, a refresh of the appraisal form will be undertaken and support given to managers to ensure that the pivotal annual conversations with staff are beneficial in identifying key areas of activity over the coming year and in identifying training and development needs to ensure staff have the skills they need to perform their roles. Managers will continue to be encouraged to supplement this with regular 1 to 1s throughout the year.
- 13.3 A strong and positive relationship exists with the Union and regular meetings will continue. As not all staff are members of Unison, the Staff Forum provides a useful sounding board for all staff to raise issues.
- 13.4 Further focus needs to be given to the equality, diversity and inclusiveness agenda and this will be incorporated into the work being led by Cllr Becker in her role as Cabinet Member for Inclusion and Engagement. Attention will also be given to ensuring equality in the council's internal processes.
- 13.5 As previously mentioned in 11.23, further discussion with the Staff Forum and Unison will take place to establish which, if any, areas need to be addressed to further staff engagement.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

AG079 Workforce Report 2021/22, 29 June 2022

Other Background Documents:-

None

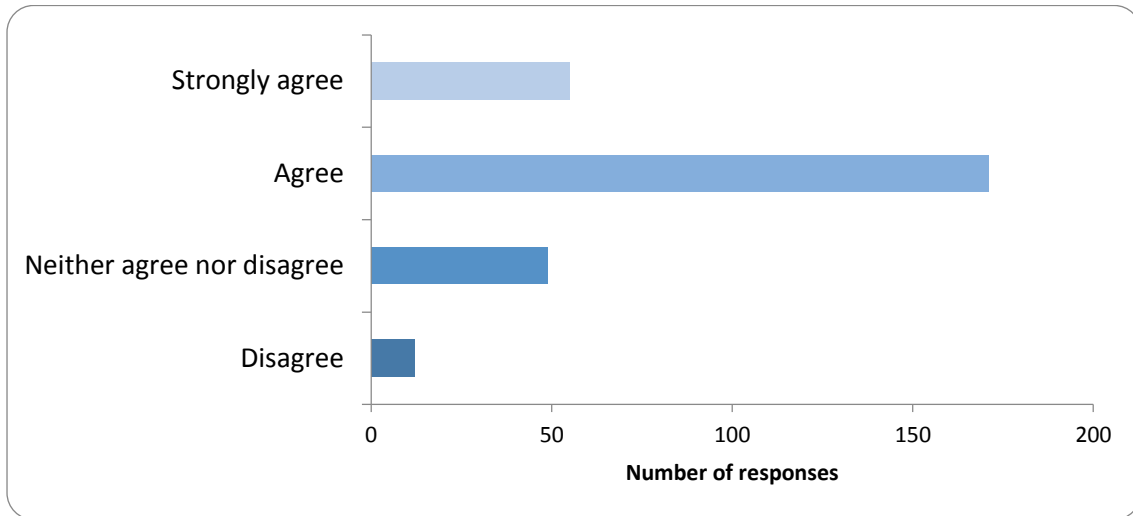
APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Employee Attitude Survey June 2022 – summary of results

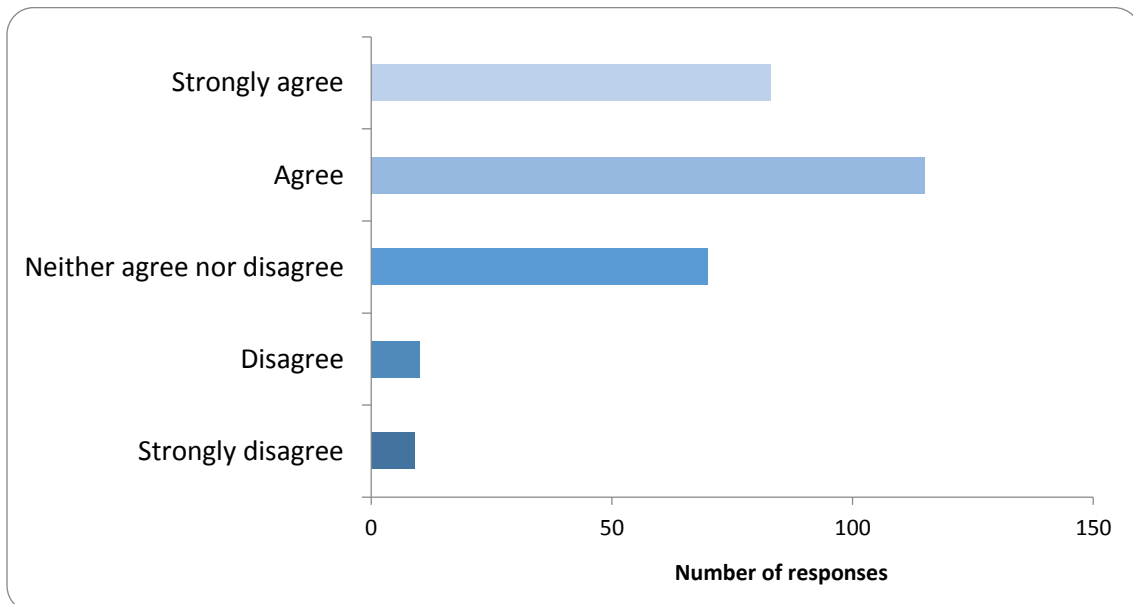
Appendix 2 - Summary of employee comments added to survey response

Employee Attitude Survey June 2022 – summary of results

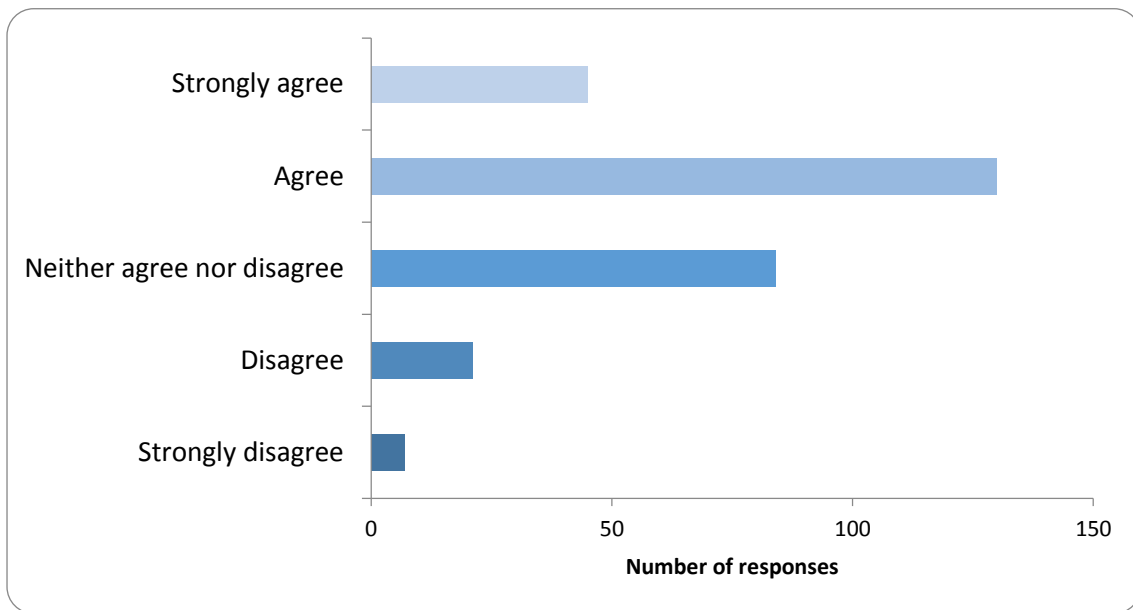
1: I enjoy my work at the council:



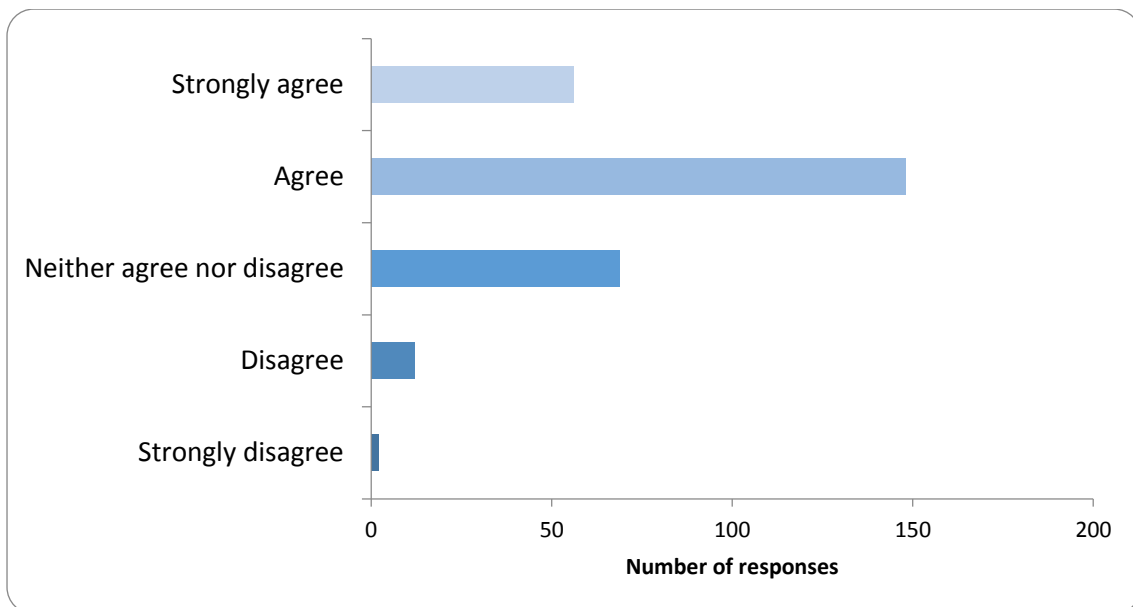
2: I will still be working at the council in 12 months' time:



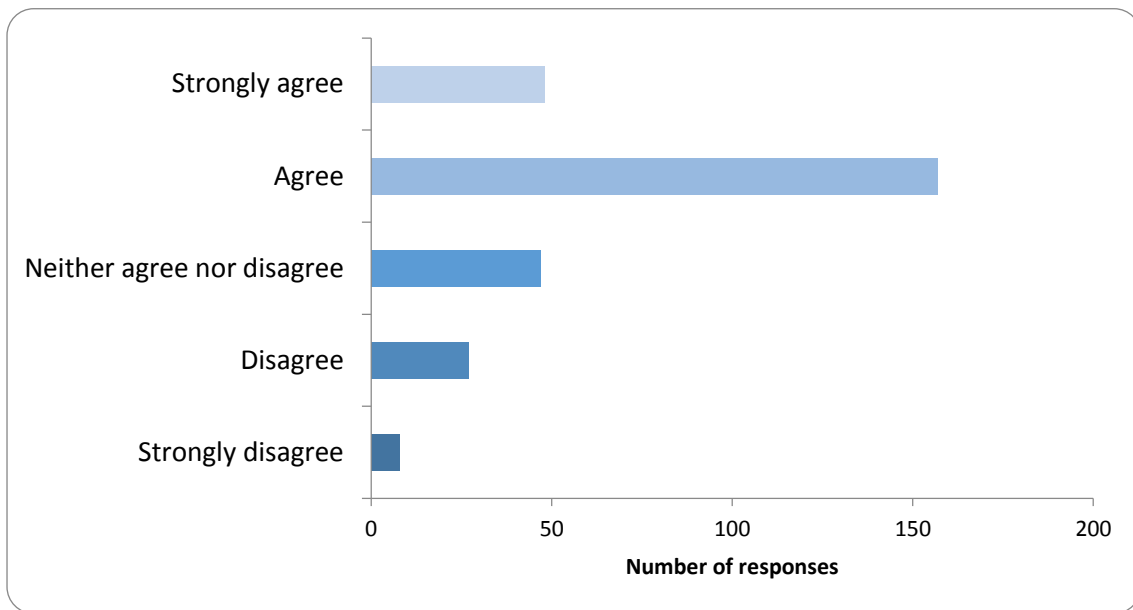
3: I would recommend the council as a great place to work to my family and friends:



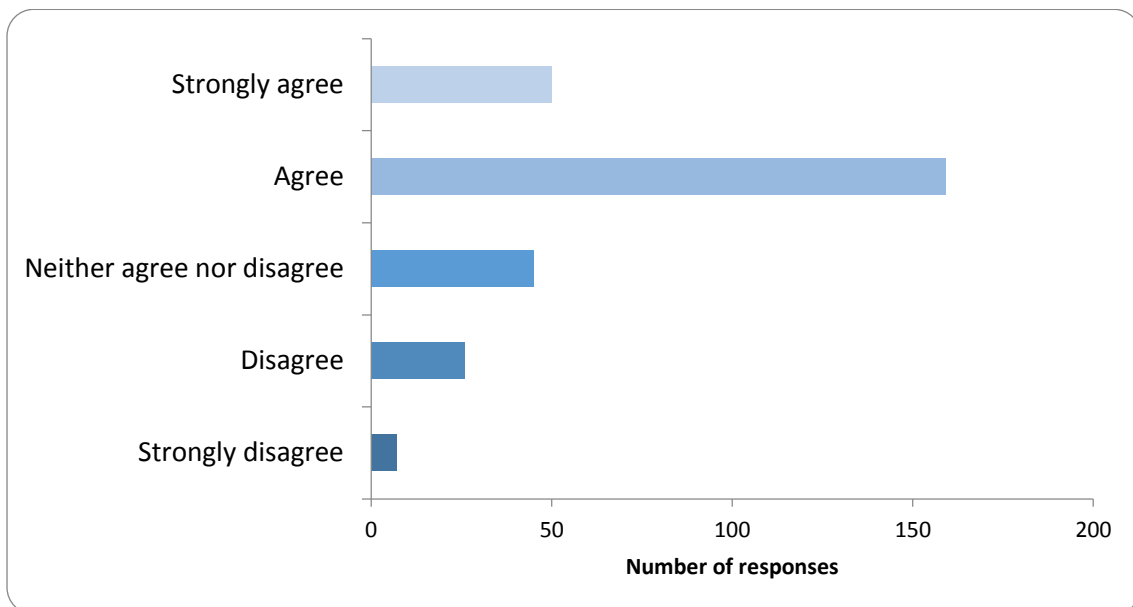
4: I am proud to work for the council:



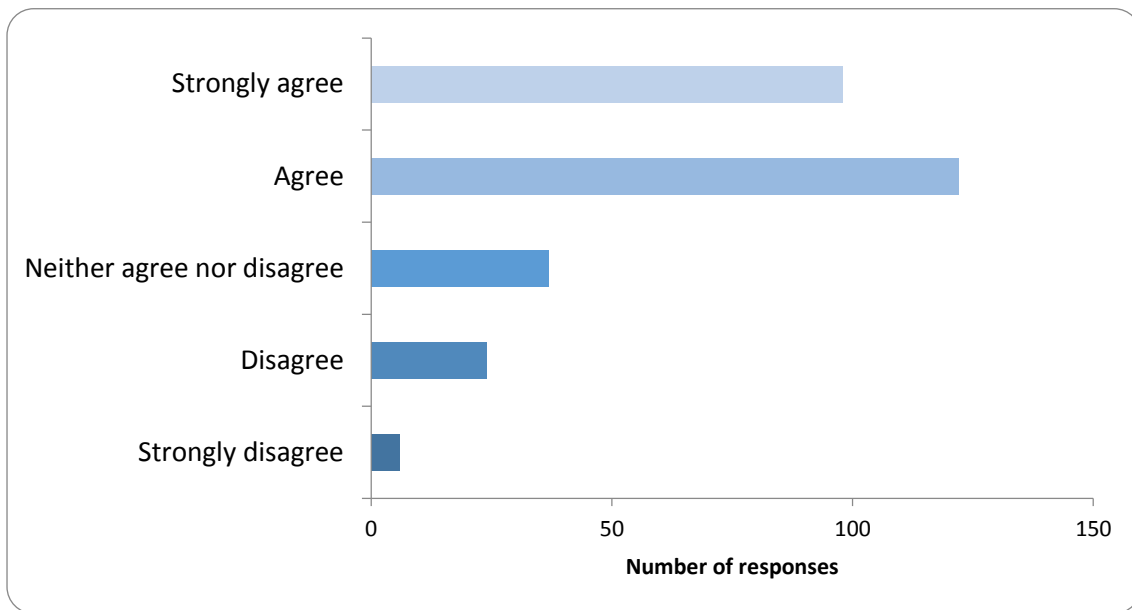
5: I am able to get the training and development I need to be successful at work:



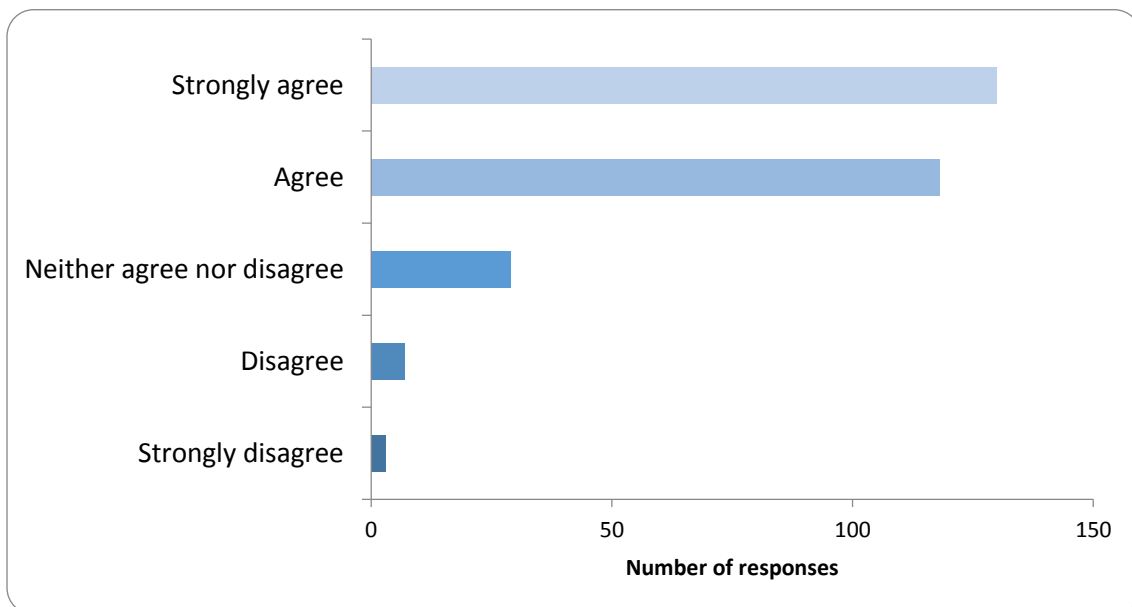
6: I have the equipment I need to be successful at my work:



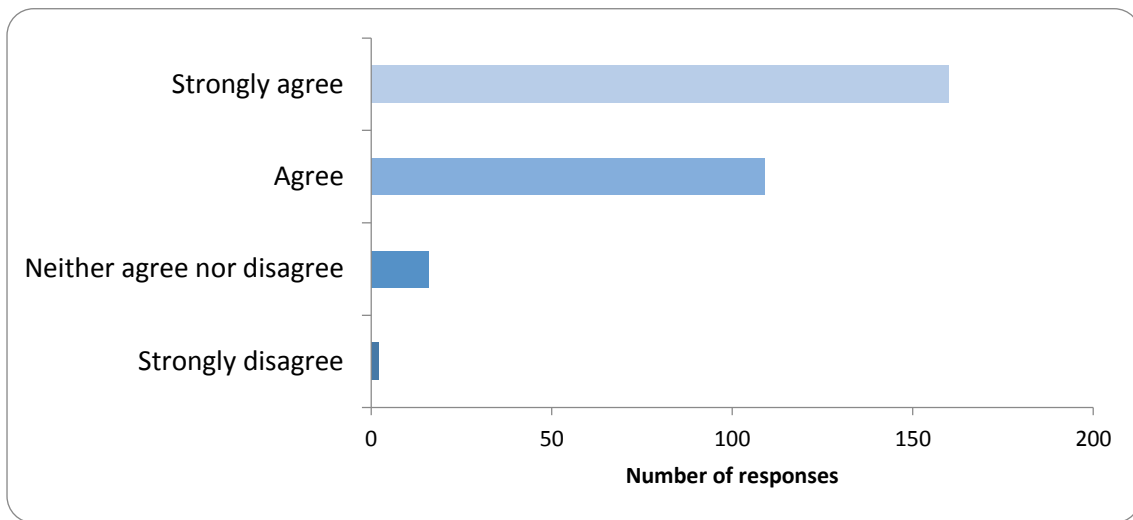
7: My line manager gives me regular feedback on my performance at work:



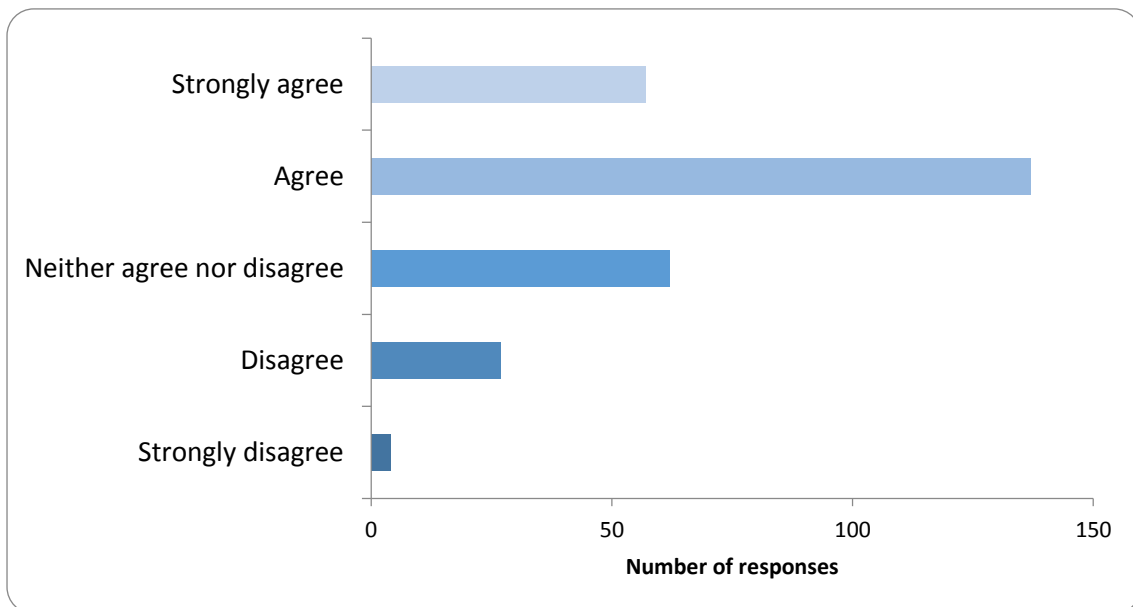
8: My line manager cares about me as a person:



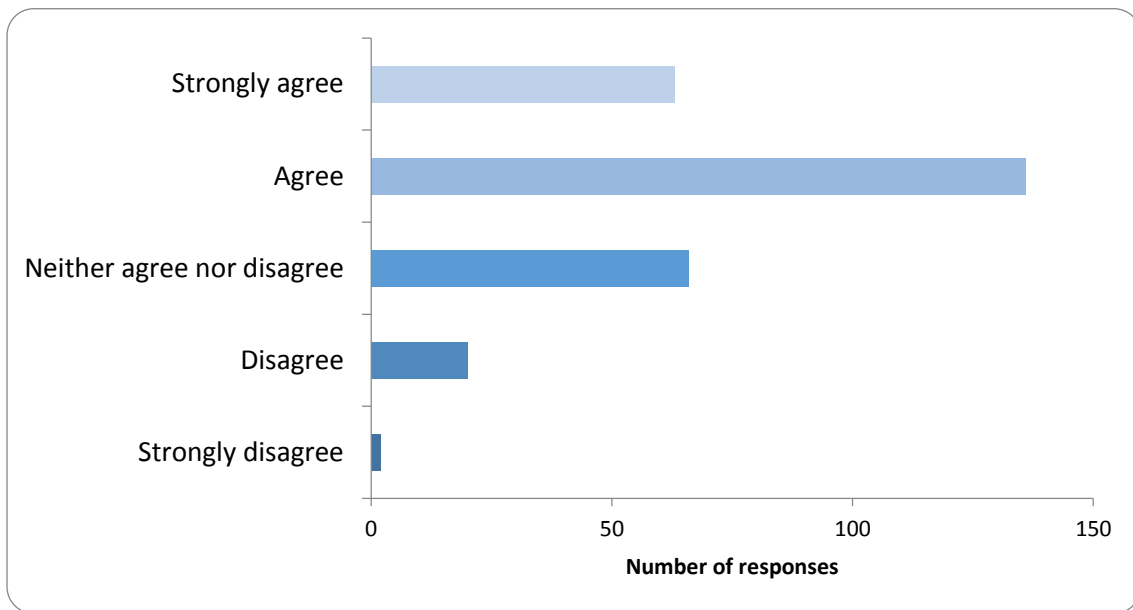
9: The colleagues in my team are supportive and friendly:



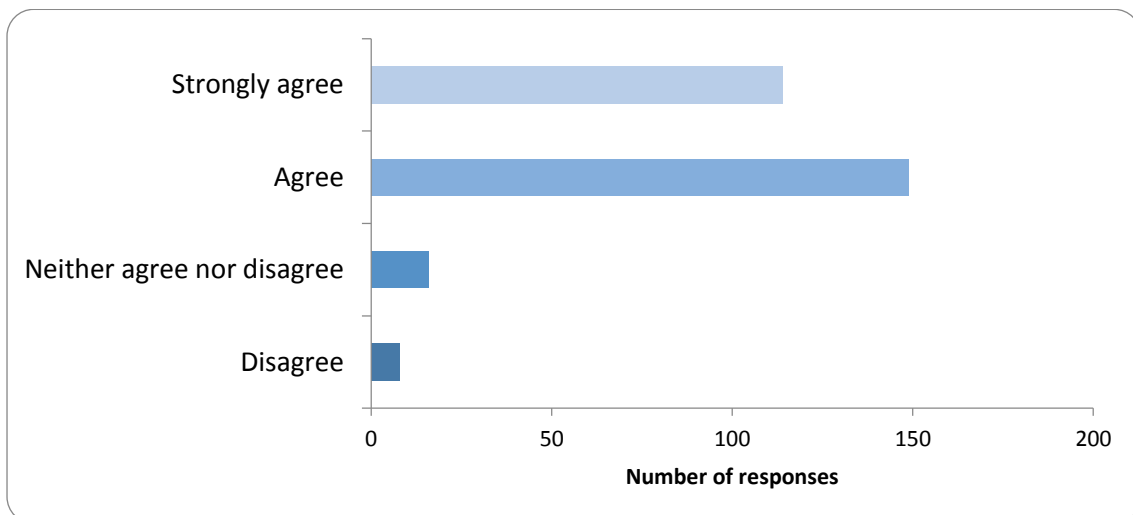
10: The council takes the health and well-being of its employees seriously:



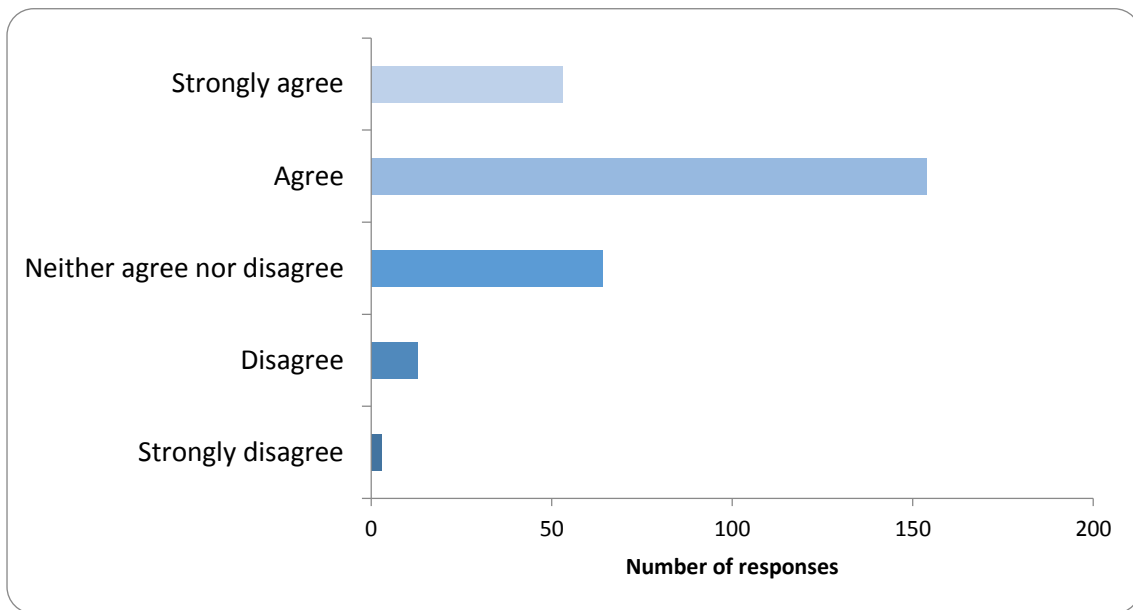
11: The council is committed to ensuring equality at work for all its employees:



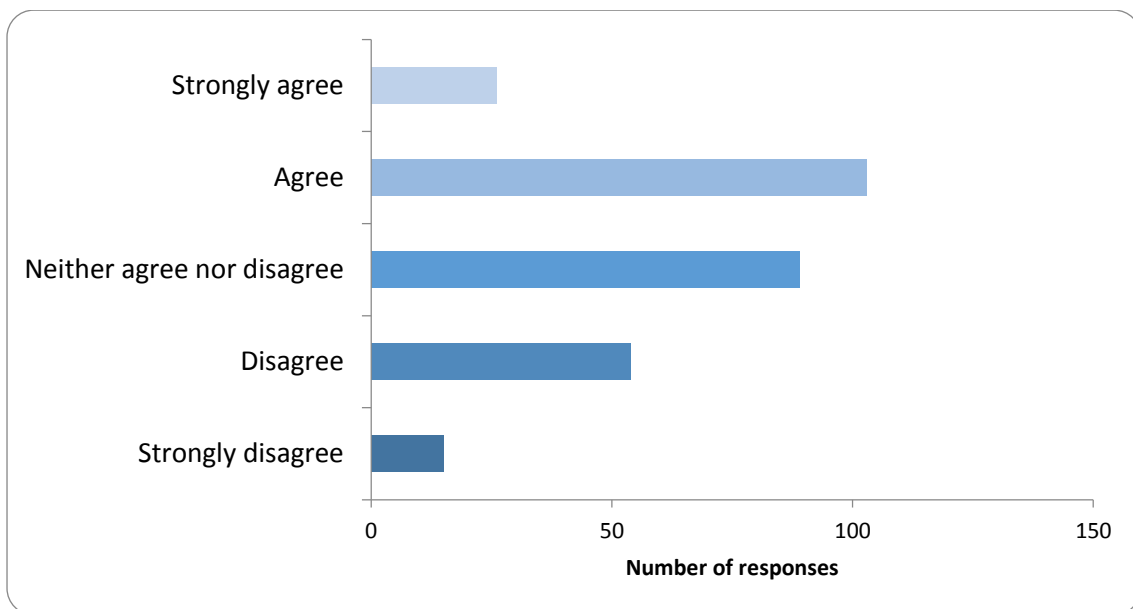
12: I understand the key objectives of my service:



13: I understand the top priorities for Winchester City Council:



14: I would say that changes at work are communicated to employees quickly and clearly:



Appendix 2**Summary of employee comments added to survey response**

287 employees completed the survey.

82 employees took the time to add a written comment.

All the written comments have been examined in detail by HR.

The text of the comments sometimes allow the respondent to be identified and for this reason they are not published in full in this report.

31% of employees providing a comment wanted to take the opportunity to suggest ways in which the work they do, or their working environment, could be improved. These comments have been discussed by HR and managers in general terms.

The main points were:

- more rooms for MS Teams meetings;
- that steps should be taken to stop wasting time on vexatious complainants;
- that the council is too risk adverse;
- ideas for more communications between services;
- need for more storage space;
- use new IT apps to help communications;
- need fewer emails and more phone calls;
- make decisions more swiftly;
- remove duplication in processes

45% of employees providing a comments wanted to say that while they were generally content with their working lives there were some aspects that could be improved. The main issues were:

- they missed having their own desk and storage areas at work;
- pay should be higher;
- their team is not fully staffed;
- managers are not always consistent;
- communications could be better;
- they wanted to work from home all of their time in future;
- they don't get on with all their work colleagues

16% of employees providing a comment wanted to articulate their unhappiness with an aspect of their working lives. There were a variety of issues, some already known to HR.

8% of employees providing a comment wanted to send in positive comments like: "great organisation to work for".