

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	PC/24/10
MEETING	PEOPLE COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	18 OCTOBER 2024
SUBJECT OF REPORT	PEOPLE SURVEY UPDATE
LEAD OFFICER	ACFO TAYLOR, DIRECTOR OF SERVICE DELIVERY
RECOMMENDATIONS	<i>That the report be noted.</i>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	The People Survey was carried out between April and June of this year. It is the second year of doing this staff survey. This paper provides the results and next steps in using the feedback to drive improvements in the organisation.
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	None
EQUALITY RISKS AND BENEFITS ANALYSIS	An initial assessment has not identified any equality issues emanating from this report.
APPENDICES	None.
BACKGROUND PAPERS	None.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. The Service held a People Survey between April and June 2024, to gather insight from our workforce (including volunteers) about how they feel within their role at Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service.
- 1.2. This is the second full People Survey the Service has carried out, following on from 2023's full survey

2. **RESPONDENTS**

- 2.1. The survey gave people a confidential space to give feedback and gained 797 responses, which represents 44% of the workforce, and similar response rate to 2023.
- 2.2. This number of responses is above the industry-recognised confidence rating of 95% confidence with a 2.5% margin of error.
- 2.3. The survey asked people to select their role. This question was multiple choice as it was recognised that many of our workforce have multiple roles:

	Number of people in Service	Primary role selection	Secondary role selection	Total selected this role	Response rate
On-call firefighters	1101	212	142	354	32%
Wholetime firefighters	374	302	28	330	88%
Support staff	340	247	41	288	85%
Control	30	15	4	19	60%

- 2.4. The response rate for on-call firefighters remains lowest at 32%. Based on 1,101 on-call firefighters, to meet the industry standard confidence level of 95% with 5% margin of error we'd need 285 respondents so meet this threshold.
- 2.5. The bigger impact comes when looking at smaller departments. For Fire Control to meet the same confidence rating there would need to be 28 responses. 18 responses gives an 80% confidence level with a 10% margin of error.

3. **OVERALL FINDINGS**

- 3.1. The recommendation score for the Service as a whole has increased by one per cent to 59% agreement. Other fire and rescue services, which People Insight - who provide the analysis platform for the survey - work with have seen a decline overall, although remain a higher scoring than Devon and Somerset at an average of 63%.

- 3.2. The recommendation score for support staff increased to 65% from 48% last year. Conversely, the agreement for wholetime firefighters reduced to 50% this year compared with 59% last year. On-call firefighters also saw a decrease in agreement, 59% this year compared with 69% last year.
- 3.3. There is a correlation between departments where actions have been recorded and shared and an increase in agreement (see table below).
- 3.4. Decision making and feeling listened to are some of the key themes emerging from the free text responses for the Service as a whole.
- 3.5. Fewer respondents have said that they have witnessed or experienced bullying and harassment in the past twelve months, 13% this year compared with 22% last year.
- 3.6. Of the people who have witnessed or experienced bullying or harassment, fewer people have reported this year. Of those who did report it, 24% said they were updated about the outcome, and 19% agreed that they had seen an improvement since reporting the instance.
- 3.7. Trust in leadership has declined, with 19% of wholetime firefighters answering in agreement that they trust our leadership team to make decisions that support them and their colleagues. This changes to 29% of on-call firefighters and 50% of support staff.
- 3.8. There remains a large difference between how respondents see our values demonstrated by line managers compared with the Extended Leadership Team.

4. KEY AREAS OF FOCUS

- 4.1. The Extended Leadership Team (ELT) agreed on five areas of focus in the 2023 survey. The following analysis is divided into those areas, namely:
 - Inclusion of thought;
 - Bullying and harassment including reporting;
 - Trust in leadership;
 - Support staff; and
 - Working well together.

- 4.2. These areas of focus from the survey are set out in more depth in the next section.

5. INCLUSION OF THOUGHT

- 5.1. Opinions and ideas being valued and receiving feedback on input is an area highlighted by the responses. Questions which indicated this include:
 - 'I will be asked for my opinion to give input before decisions and made' (38% agreement, 31% disagreement)

- 'I feel my ideas and opinions are valued and I have the opportunity to share them' (59% agreement, 18% disagreement).

5.2. There has been little to no change in agreement for either of these questions compared with the previous year.

5.3. Decision making, listening and acting on feedback are key themes coming from the free text responses.

"Quite a few occasions in recent years where feedback from people at my level has been ignored - only to then find the decision that was made was wrong and needs to be unpicked."

"I understand the requirement to save money and become more efficient across the service. However, I feel that all projects start with the end product already in mind and sold as this is something "you" could do. Rather than set out the objectives for the project and let good people run with it, making people feel included and valued as they really are contributing."

6. **BULLYING AND HARASSMENT, INCLUDING REPORTING**

6.1. The survey asked whether respondents have witnessed or experienced bullying or harassment in the last 12 months.

6.2. In 2023, 68% answered no, 10% prefer not to say and 22% said yes. This has improved in 2024 to 78% answering no, 13% yes and 9% prefer not to say.

6.3. The proportion of people reporting instances of bullying and harassment has decreased, despite a higher number agreeing that they know how to report behaviour. Of the people who had witnessed or experienced bullying or harassment, 55% said they had reported it this year, compared with 62% last year.

6.4. The question about whether the outcome was satisfactory was changed this year to find out whether people had received an outcome, and whether they saw an improvement since reporting the instance.

6.5. 19% of people who reported bullying or harassment stated that there had been an improvement since reporting it, and 24% said that they had received an update.

7. **TRUST IN LEADERSHIP**

7.1. The question 'I trust our leadership team to make decisions that support me and my colleagues' has seen a year-on-year decrease.

- 2024 33% agreement and 36% disagreement, with 31% neutral.
- 2023 43% agreement and 39% disagreement, with 28% neutral.
- 2021 (Covid-themed survey) 56% answered in agreement.

- 7.2. The largest change has come from wholetime firefighters, of whom 19% answered in agreement.
- 7.3. Senior management (defined clearly as Service Leadership Team and Executive Board) demonstrating our Service values is consistently lower than line managers displaying the values, with honesty and working together being the least favourable responses.
- 7.4. Free text responses show comments about values and culture and employee voice.
- “I really appreciate the work culture here and the ease with which we can engage in discussions with senior management.”
- “Possibly due to the size of the organisation, I feel that the logic behind making (and often delaying) decisions is not always communicated in a timely or effective manner.”
- “A year ago, I was concerned that although the majority of the Service held our core values dear, the senior leadership team treated them more like guidelines. Recently things seem better although I remain slightly sceptical. Of particular concern, I have not seen an acknowledgment that trust was poor and perhaps it might have been caused by previous poor behaviour. Overall, the Service has an exemplary culture, if we are to retain it, the SLT must demonstrate their commitment.”

8. SUPPORT STAFF

- 8.1. Support staff recommendation scores have increased from 48% in 2023 to 65% in 2024. The largest change has been about ability to focus on the bigger picture (20% more agreement), and about understanding how to progress in the Service (17% more agreement).
- 8.2. Comments from support staff show people proud to work for the Service, but also affected by high workloads, and some changes the Service has proposed.
- “Overall, I feel proud, honoured and privileged to work for the Service. I still smile every time someone asks me what i do for a living. We are not perfect. But I feel we are trying to be the best we can be, and are always striving to improve. I am immensely proud to work for DSFRS.”
- “I really value my team and my manager as well as a number of colleagues across the service but almost everyone I speak to is overwhelmed and constantly in back-to-back meetings and feeling like they cannot meet their goals or proactively deliver to the standard they would like.”
- 8.3. Good scores for current leadership so far, but the handling of the review of my department has made me a little cautious.

9. WORKING WELL TOGETHER

- 9.1. The average responses for each theme of the People Survey show that 'ways of working' has the lowest agreement, and highest disagreement rates.
- 9.2. Within this section, the question 'I feel that different parts of the Service are working well together' has a disagreement score of 32% and agreement of 37%, compared with 31% disagreement and 42% agreement last year.
- 9.3. Free text comments highlight systems and processes, tools and equipment, employee voice and cross-function communication as key themes.

"Interdepartmental working is improving but I do think there is still scope to improve this. For example, information sharing between departments does take place but greater emphasis and communication on what is priority info and how best to share it could still improve."

"There isn't enough joined up understanding of the work done by departments or the various projects going on in the Service and the impact of this on other departments/wider service/partnership. Sometimes decisions are made which are irreversible or require a lot of work to unpick because impacts haven't been identified or opinions of the right people are sought too late"

"It's really difficult to work cross-functionally due to conflicting priorities and staff often already been too overloaded to work on priorities for other departments."

10. ACTION PLANNING

- 10.1. Following the analysis of the results, the Extended Leadership Team (ELT) has met twice to look at improvement areas.
- 10.2. Based on the results provided, we have renamed the first topic area from 'inclusion of thought' to employee voice.
- 10.3. The Service also added an extra area of focus, called 'people impact'. This is in recognition of the feedback around how people are affected by change in the organisation and how we can lessen the impact of change.
- 10.4. ELT added desired outcomes against each of the topic area. A member of the Executive Board will take overall ownership of a topic area, with department heads responsible for actions that support the outcomes.
- 10.5. In most cases, given feedback about high workloads across the organisation, the actions will be about what we can do differently, rather than adding more work.

10.6. The outcomes are:

Theme	Outcome	Key actions
Employee voice	People feel confident that their views are heard, considered, and are given an honest response.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clearer engagement plans for change - Further development and embedding of feedback process to close the feedback loop - Clearly articulate how feedback has been listened to
Trust in leadership	People have trust in leaders at all levels, feel connected to them and have confidence in the management and direction of the Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create stability at Executive Board level - Clearly articulate strategy and direction - Establish consistent leadership practices - Implement professional standards - Development for how leaders can consistently engage and deliver messages
Handling of bullying and harassment	A culture where bullying and harassment is not tolerated, rarely experienced, and any issues are taken seriously and managed appropriately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Look at appropriate feedback around case outcomes - Explore how we assure ourselves around case management - Management training around core skills. - Further embed the Speak Up Guardians
Working well together	Departments that work collaboratively towards shared goals and outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint department planning on future priorities - Service Leadership Team collective priority setting - Better stakeholder engagement planning for pieces of work. - Building better connections and understanding between teams

Theme	Outcome	Key actions
Support staff	An environment where support staff feel included, supported to be at their best, and have clear development and progression opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving progression and development by opening up development sessions to support staff - Improving training and development opportunities - Reinstating professional membership payments where required as part of role and responsibility
People impact	People feel empowered and part of the Service, its future and any changes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Robust change management plans - People Impact Assessments frequently reviewed through change process - Being clear on influence people have over change - Genuine listening facilitated by trained professionals. - Keeping to agreed messages, being aware of the impact of mixed messaging.

11. **CONCLUSION**

- 11.1. The People Survey is now fully established as a valuable listening exercise. People are feeling able and safe to give honest feedback.
- 11.2. The responsibility of the leadership team is to use this feedback to reinforce what is working well and look to put actions in place on areas identified for feedback.
- 11.3. The results of these will be evaluated in future People Surveys.

ACFO GERALD TAYLOR
Director of Service Delivery