

Meeting	<b>Scrutiny Committee for Audit and Best Value</b>
Date	<b>12 June 2007</b>
Title	<b>Peer Review Action Plan – ‘Tipping Points’</b>
By	<b>Director of Law and Personnel</b>
Purpose of Report	<b>To consider the observations made within the Corporate Peer Review relating to potential ‘tipping points’ and to outline the actions being taken across the organisation.</b>

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**RECOMMENDATION:** That the Committee note the action being taken in response to the Peer Review findings

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## **1. Financial Appraisal**

1.1 There are no additional financial implications arising from this report

## **2. Background**

2.1 At their meeting on 22 March 2007, the Scrutiny Committee received an update on the Peer Review Action Plan and requested further information on the progress being made in relation to item 10.10 of the Action Plan: *“Staff generally feel very pressurised, with the reduction in posts and consequent absorption of work by others bringing things close to tipping point.”*

## **3 Supporting Information**

3.1 The Peer Review Team’s observations about ‘tipping points’ were drawn from the comments of one or two staff they met in the focus groups. On this basis, the team highlighted the issue as something to be aware of in a few specific areas rather than as a significant or widespread problem for the organisation.

3.2 In order to verify the current position, evidence from departments has been obtained, alongside the key findings from the 2005 Staff Survey. In addition, information relating to the actions being taken across the organisation to address any areas identified as requiring improvement has also been collected.

## **4. Key findings from the 2005 Staff Survey**

4.1 The results of the 2005 Staff Survey were generally very positive, comparing favourably with the Work Foundation benchmarks, exceeding or meeting the local government median score. Areas where the Council scored particularly well included: communication between line managers and staff; communication between staff and line managers; effective appraisals and consultation.

4.2 A few areas were, however, highlighted for improvement, which can be summarised as:

- communication within teams and across and within departments
- issues about workloads
- career development opportunities

## **5. Other findings**

5.1 Information collected from departmental representatives and Unison representatives specifically in response to the Peer Review does not highlight any current, particular concerns relating to ‘tipping points’. There are one or two ‘expert areas’ where resources are very limited and skills scarce (e.g. pension expertise)

and there is a general consensus that, over the last 3 to 4 years, there has been a higher intensity of activity, increased workloads in some areas and associated narrowing of capacity. The latter issues are mainly as a consequence of the financial pressures on the Council, coupled with the growth in demand for our services. Some capacity issues also relate to particular peaks of work, for example, as caused by the impending Corporate Assessment/Joint Area Review. Clearly, these specific one-off projects make significant calls on limited internal resources, and our Management Capacity Reserve is particularly important in this respect and has been, and is being, used to cover such pressures and those arising from temporary skills shortage.

## **6 Actions taken across the organisation**

6.1 In response to the findings of the 2005 Staff Survey, corporate and departmental action plans were developed. Work on the areas identified has been on-going over the past 18 months and significant progress has been made.

6.2 A wide range of activities and actions have been undertaken, including:

- the introduction of alternative recruitment methods in order to address skills shortages and recruitment difficulties
- organisational commitment to Investor in People principles (our recent re-accreditation under a much harder test was a major success)
- succession planning and career grades/pathways
- investment in training such as the development of the innovation in leadership programme (the Peer Review was very complimentary about staff training and development)
- departmental communications initiatives
- support for change management where new systems and processes are implemented
- the appointment of an internal Communications Manager
- a reduction in sickness absence

6.3 Furthermore, the Reconciling Policy and Resources programme has provided a sound planning framework within which clear objectives and deliverables are set. A number of key projects have been funded from one-off monies through the Invest to Save fund and the Management Capacity Reserve, thereby providing additional resources.

## **7. Conclusion**

7.1 Whilst there are no current specific concerns in relation to 'tipping points,' as a County Council we are clear that the requirement to manage, deliver and address concerns about how hard people are working is key to preventing future issues. We are not complacent. Some pressures are inevitable, and difficult to avoid. It is important, however, to ensure pressures in a particular area are brought to the attention of senior management and do not become permanent, and that proper support is given to address them.

7.2 Work identified in the corporate and departmental business plans, especially in relation to internal communications, is ongoing and will continue. In addition, the 2007 Staff Survey, which is currently being developed, will be issued in September. This will enable us to assess the success of the actions undertaken to date as well as identify any further issues. Activities to address any such issues will then be incorporated into the existing corporate and departmental business plans.

ANDREW OGDEN

Director of Law & Personnel

Contact Officer: Mary Dunn, Project Officer, HR Strategy Tel: 01273/481196

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None