

**COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE**



**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE**

**RETAINED RECOGNITION REVIEW  
REPORT**

**for  
Cherwell District Council  
20 January 2009**

**Prepared by  
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**Investors in People Assessor**

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**APPENDIX B: Copy of Retaining Recognition Review Plan – June 2008 approved by Panel and actioned by the Council**

## 1. Introduction

During 2006-07, the Council underwent a period of significant change due to a combination of internal and external factors resulting in a root and branch re-structure of service areas.

One outcome of the re-structuring was the creation of a new Extended Management Team. This comprised the Chief Executive, Strategic Directors and Service Heads supported by a new structure of Service Managers.

The above changes and resulting turmoil impacted on the 2008 Post Recognition Review leaving two areas of further improvement needed prior to confirmation of Recognition.

Areas to be addressed linked to added rigour being brought to feelings of value and recognition at times of change and uncertainty. Coupled with this, the Assessor was seeking additional evidence that actions being taken by the Extended Management Team were encouraging increased ownership and input to the key decision-making process.

The evidence that follows incorporates evidence to demonstrate that actions taken by the Council during the six month interim period have resulted in the improvements sought by their Investor in People Assessor.

At Appendix B of this report is a copy of the Council's Retaining Recognition Plan together with their planned actions. This has been included as the Assessor understands that a new Investor in People Recognition Panel will review this recommendation as the panel that approved the original Plan is not currently available.

## 2. Strengths

Sound evidence of an organisation poised for 'best in class' service delivery. The perception of the wider community is of a modern, forward-looking team, one that has thrown off the previous mantle of an organisation steeped in procedure and tradition...***"that could simply not see the wood for the trees."***

The Review found a highly professional wider management team demonstrating a mix of styles and traits found in other high performing organisations.

Strategic planning is forward looking with improved collaboration resulting in the creation of an increasing 'line of sight' between the priorities of the Council, teams within it and individuals.

Notable is the focus placed on ensuring that the reviewed and refreshed Human Resources Strategy is aligned fully with the needs of the Council. Adding rigour and thus resource is the recruitment of a highly experienced Learning and Development Manager who joined the Council one week

before commencement of the Post Recognition Review.

Sound evidence was found of high standards for service delivery and for how leaders, managers and staff should act and behave in the refreshed and forward-looking environment.

Commendable amounts of learning and development continue to take place, much of which has been aligned with the many job role changes that have taken place in the Council.

Despite feeling bruised and uncertain, staff in the Council demonstrated true commitment to ensuring that the Council is successful, that it meets its aims and aspirations and that it achieves the 'Outstanding' status it seeks. ***“There’s certainly light at the end of the tunnel now.”***

Significant levels of support were found in the Leader of the Council in terms of providing support, encouragement and guidance when needed to the Chief Executive who in turn is building a team with significant business acumen. ***“Change is always hard but this Council needed to change and change is bringing opportunity for many staff.”***

### **3. Areas for continuous improvement**

#### **All Indicators refer:**

It is suggested that the process of communication be monitored over the coming year. Many enhancements have been made all of which are raising morale in the Council. Ideas of improvement that have helped other organisations include:-

- Encouraging Strategic Directors to host monthly informal lunch sessions with groups of staff from their Service Area. To ensure equity, date of joining the Council or alphabetical initial of surname could be used. Groups selected on the above basis could rotate over the year and could join their Strategic Director in an informal 'getting to know' you session; this way every member of staff, would over a 12 or 18 month period, have the chance to meet with their Head of Service.
- Encouraging Strategic Directors to – as a matter of form – timetable in their attendance at a Service Team meeting on a quarterly or six monthly basis.
- Ensuring that the 'Core Values' being currently designed include a two-way contract in terms of communication; e.g. 'What You Can Expect of Your Manager in terms of Communication' and 'What Your Manager can Expect of You in terms of Communication'. To make this effective, bring measures of this two-way contract in to the Appraisal process, which is currently under review.

### **Indicators 4 and 5 refer:**

Work is currently under way in the Council linked to the creation of a set of 'Core Values' This is being created on the back of the Leadership and Management Training Programme which has operated over the past 18 months.

The value of this work cannot be sufficiently stressed, as this is the way in which the consistency in terms of how managers manage will be found.

The theme of the next steps approach to leadership and management is Performance Management and whilst the Council has, for many years, operated an Appraisal process, added value will be found from the creation of a process that looks at the core values. This process should include ensuring a clear line of sight between what the Council requires of its managers and the objectives they have set for themselves. The process can then be used to monitor and evaluate the impact that effective leadership/management is having on performance of the Service Delivery.

Organisations seeking to measure the effectiveness of leaders/managers include creating a set of measures similar to those shown below:-

- ◇ **Stakeholder Measures**
- ◇ **Efficiency Measures**
- ◇ **Effectiveness Measures**
- ◇ **Financial Measures**
- ◇ **Environment Measures**
- ◇ **Control & Compliance Measures**

### *Customer Impressions*

- ◇ Customer Satisfaction Questionnaires (ideally using comparative analysis).
- ◇ Satisfaction Cards and Comments Books (Tell Us).
- ◇ Service Improvement interviews (critical exploration of issues and opportunities).
- ◇ Increase in business from existing customers.
- ◇ New business referrals.

### *Customer Service*

- ◇ Customer access times.
- ◇ Ease of contact and response levels.
- ◇ Reduced delivery or waiting times.
- ◇ Availability (e.g. percentage of customers on-line).
- ◇ Choice & range.

### *Employees*

- ◇ Staff turnover.
- ◇ Average length of service.
- ◇ Sickness days.
- ◇ Cost of sickness (actual and opportunity cost).
- ◇ People survey results.
- ◇ Cost of recruitment.
- ◇ Cost of training (e.g. relative to turnover).
- ◇ Training expenditure per person.
- ◇ Number and percentage of qualified people.

### *Suppliers/External Contractors*

- ◇ Supplier appraisal (for new suppliers)
- ◇ Vendor rating (existing suppliers)
- ◇ Levels of training.
- ◇ Possession of quality standards.
- ◇ Top supplier awards and achievements.

To ensure this process is totally effective, agreed measures should be brought into the revamped Appraisal process which ideally could be re-named the Performance Management System.

### **Areas of Improvement of a General Nature**

It could be helpful to use **liP Interactive**. This is a free, online business support tool that is designed to help identify strengths and development areas against the Investors in People Standard, and has links to free information and resources including a library with many guides, examples and templates that can be downloaded and customised. This includes advice on areas such as Strategic Planning, Effective Management, Developing People, Culture and Communication, and Managing Performance, which link directly to the Investors in People Standard. Visit [www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/interactive](http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/interactive) to register and use this service.

It could be helpful to visit Quality South East's website on a regular basis to maintain a view of the developments around the Investors in People Standard and for details of **workshops and events** across the region. Visit [www.qse.org.uk](http://www.qse.org.uk) for more information.

Check if any of the **Health & Safety** information available on the HSE website could be useful in maintaining both compliance and staff awareness. The Cherwell District Council Health & Safety Representative might consider if there are any issues that should be addressed. Visit [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) for more information.

Useful sources for defining **Leadership and Management** capabilities include the Institute of Leadership and Management. Visit [www.management-standards.org](http://www.management-standards.org) and [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk) for general business information and links to the DTI Inspirational Leadership Index.

Perhaps consider interactive training packages to continue to develop the **IT skills and knowledge** of your staff. Try [www.learnndirect.co.uk](http://www.learnndirect.co.uk) for ideas: a good number of these courses are either free or reasonably priced.

## **6. Conclusion**

Following the Post Retaining Recognition visit, the Assessor is pleased to confirm that evidence provided by the Council demonstrates that it meets the principles and indicators of the Investor in People Standard.

As a result, the Assessor suggested to the Investor in Recognition Panel that it considers the evidence contained in this report, noting the significant change through which the Council continues to go and endorses the recommendation that Cherwell District Council meets the Investor in People Standard and thus retains its Recognition status.

Feedback from the Chair of the Recognition Panel included sending congratulations to all those involved in successfully re-gaining the Investor in People Standard and all good wishes for moving forward.

Thanks are sent to the Learning and Development Manager for his help in planning the visit and to all concerned for their politeness and professionalism.

The Council should be commended on its determination to continuously improve.

Signed: *Irene Banham*

**Investors in People Assessor**

Date: 20 January 2009

## **APPENDIX: Summary of findings against each Principle and Indicator of the Investor in People Standard**

### **Developing strategies to improve the performance of the organisation.**

*An Investor in People develops effective strategies to improve the performance of the organisation through its people.*

#### **1. A strategy for improving the performance of the organisation is clearly defined and understood.**

The Cherwell District Council's Strategic Planning Framework is comprehensive and incorporates the key themes of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy with a linked Community Plan taking the longer-term vision for Cherwell. This then leads onto a Corporate Plan indicating medium term strategies and priorities, which ultimately lead to the creation of annual Service Plans setting the scene in terms of objectives, key actions and targets for each of the Service Areas, which via an Annual Performance Review system, captures individual staff objectives.

Clear and concise measures are included as part of the Strategic Planning Process. For example:-

- Increase satisfaction levels with the local area as a place to live.
- Reduce levels of crime by 5% as shown guided by the Home Office crime indicators and achieve a perception of feeling safe in Cherwell by 80% of residents.
- Adopting a Customer Access Strategy setting out how services can be delivered to all sectors of the Cherwell population.

The Council has retained a series of BVIs (Best Value Indicators) for 2008/09. These were extensive and publicly displayed and include:-

X% of new homes on previously developed land

X% tonnage of waste recycled

X% of invoices paid on time

X% of appeals against refusals upheld

***“We are working towards being in the upper quartile of all local authorities on the overall customer satisfaction with the Council.”***

***“The Chief Executive delivers regular Power Point updates on how the Council is progressing and issues linked to accommodation changes***



***and the re-structuring that has taken place.”***

***“These lead to a cascade process where Council-wide messages are added to at Service Area level.”***

***“CMT meetings last for half a day, twice a year and there’s good business done at these. We work to clear terms of reference and a joint agenda.”***

The Council recognises various Trade Unions. Interviewees commented on the low membership that exists noting that other avenues are available to encourage people to be involved in some element of shaping the future of the Council. Formal and informal TU/Management meetings take place, these are minuted, actioned and shared with all staff irrespective of whether they are members of a Trade Union or not.

Managers and staff commented on how relationships between themselves and the representatives of Trade Unions were working well noting that one particular area in which Representatives were heavily involved was moving away from Performance Related Pay. ***“This could have been very difficult but we worked together to get a solution that best suited the Council and members.”***

***“As Representatives we are fully aware of the pending Job Evaluation exercise that is coming up and in some way we worked with the Council to get a bit of an extension before embarking on this process to avoid too much change too quickly for staff.”***

***“We all know that the Council has been through a period of rapid and fundamental change that has transformed the way we do business and the results are a dramatic improvement.”***

The Executive Management Team meets monthly with staff from across the Council being invited to attend to provide updates on projects they are involved in.

What makes strategic planning a strength is the amount of involvement and collaboration that takes place in that:-

- The Chief Executive and her team of Directors hold regular full-staff briefing sessions on issues facing the Council. Notable and commendable is that these are held at various locations within the Council giving staff every opportunity to attend and not necessarily in their own area. ***“We issue the dates so that people can dip into the one that best suits.”***

- Heads of Service involve their direct reports in terms of setting and agreeing high-level priorities for their Area using monthly Service Performance Reviews to highlight areas in need of improvement. ***“We also use annual Away Days to carry out SWOTs to ensure real ownership exists.”***
- Members of the wider management team engage their teams in reflecting on Service Plans before they are issued to gain buy in and this leads to a clear line of sight between priorities for the Council, Service Areas and those for individuals.

As a result, members of staff could easily explain the objectives of their team and the organisation at a level that is appropriate to their role, placing their objectives and thus contribution into perspective including:-

***“I deal with the Choice Based Lettings System so work to timescales by ensuring that I get properties onto the website. This helps the Council meet its KPIs in this area.”***

***“Patrolling the streets which is all part of making Cherwell a safer place to live.”***

***“Dealing with customers face to face and wrapping up enquiries within an agreed timescale.”***

## **2. Learning and development is planned to achieve the organisation’s objectives.**

The Post Recognition Review identified that the Council has adopted a top down and bottom up blended approach to learning and development. Council-wide priorities included Leadership and Management Development acknowledging that managers are crucial to the continued success of the Council.

***“The super One Stop Shop at Bodicote House (Head Office) lends itself to delivering high quality customer service. It’s been a big investment and our Customer Services Team are really meeting expectations. A priority for us was Customer Care and Equality Training for this team.”***

**Other examples of learning and development priorities linked to aims of the Council include:-**

**Aim: To provide a framework of national and local governance.**

**Learning and Development Priorities to include:** Induction, The Role of the Councillor, Code of Conduct, Local Government Finance and Local and

National Frameworks.

**Aim: Customer Care and Equalities:**

**Learning and Development Priorities:** Enhancing the Customer Experience, Conflict Management, Call Handling, Influencing Skills and Equality and Diversity.

Linking to Indicator 8 below, learning and development is well planned and is effective and could be seen to link to the strategic needs of the Council.

Heads of Service and their direct reports who in turn line manage others provided sound examples of planned learning and development for their teams citing:-

- **Human Resources** team which exists 'to help enable the full and competitive delivery of the Council's services through the development and delivery of a clear HR Strategy that ensures workforce alignment with strategic priorities'. Learning and development priorities included re-aligning the team's approach to how HR Managers work in partnership with Heads of Service through **widening their understanding of business and commercial issues** faced by each service through a culture of sharing and learning. ***"We give advice and guidance to Service areas which includes updates on key legislation. Maintaining this level of awareness for them is crucial."***
- The Customer Service and IT team which exists 'to explore ways to deliver improved Council-wide services at reduced costs' ensure learning and development includes **broadening their understanding in mobile telephony and maximising the investment in new technology by developing and implementing a corporate GIS Strategy and Action Plan.**

Notable within the Council, is the sharing of knowledge and skills within and, increasingly across, each of the Service Areas. This is commendable.

As can be seen from Areas for Continuous Development, there remains room for improvement in terms of evaluating the Council's investment in all aspects of learning and development. Currently, evaluation methodologies include:-

- Using the Annual (and interim) Appraisal Performance Process.
- Using the Service Performance Reviews to note performance improvement including review of KPIs and BVIs.
- Observation and shadowing to test out new knowledge.
- Using one-to-one feedback sessions between the trainee and their line manager and evaluation forms immediately following the development

activity.

Whilst plans are in place to centralise the Council's Training Budget, currently Training Budgets are devolved to Service Areas as each Head of Service is required to manage all aspects of their Area.

Staff within the Council have access to at least an annual and recently improved Performance Appraisal and this is the main mechanism used to encourage staff to reflect on their development needs prior to their confidential discussion with their line manager.

***“We also discuss training at Team Performance Reviews and even Team Meetings.”***

***“Training opportunities are frequently discussed around the desk on a daily basis.”***

Many examples were provided to demonstrate planned learning and development including:-

- Using the training packages that accompany the various new systems introduced across the Council. ***“This is tailored training as we learn it at our desk so work on our own data rather than hypothetical data in a classroom.”***
- Being part of the broader management development lunch time sessions on key issues such as Recruitment and Selection, Sickness Absence and Performance Appraisals. ***“When you are first promoted, these sessions give you not only the skills but also the templates and tools. HR put a lot of templates and guides on the Intranet.”***

***“We do our own NVQs in Benefits, these are called Acorn and they are run jointly with another authority plus they lead to a BTEC in Homelessness.”***

***“Self development for me linked to managing change and dealing with difficult people. HR helped with this.”***

***“The Corporate Induction Programme gives people an immediate feel for the complexity of working for a District Council.”***

### **3. Strategies for managing people are designed to promote equality of opportunity in the development of the organisation's people.**

Members of the Senior Team described strategies they have put in place to create an environment where everyone is encouraged to contribute ideas to improve their own and other people's performance. ***“Recognising our staff features in our Improvement Strategy as we realise they are the only asset we really have.”***

Strategies include every member of staff having access to:-

- Two-way communication.
- Feedback on their performance via the annual Performance Appraisal process.
- Monthly, quarterly – certainly regular – one-to-one bilateral sessions with their line manager.
- Flexible working hours.
- Learning and development linked to job role and career aspirations.

CDC takes into account the different needs of staff in terms of the support indicating that the emerging culture of the Council focuses on inclusiveness for the Community it serves and also its people.

***“Equality and diversity is meaningful in the Council. We try to be user friendly and family friendly in terms of being flexible and supportive.”***

Equality of access emerged as a strength in that not only were no issues of inequality found but this was supplemented by a range of examples provided by Heads of Service and the wider management team in terms of how they remained flexible in order to support their team. They commented on how:-

- They encouraged flexible start and finish times for all, noting that as long as adequate cover was provided at all times; staff were trusted in terms of arrival and departure times.
- They actively encouraged and supported requests for part time working demonstrating high levels of trust when team members had a need to leave the office to deal with a personal issue.
- They made sure innovation came into discussions looking at how best an individual development need could be met.

There is a high-level belief that managers are genuinely committed to making sure staff have appropriate and fair access to the support they need and there is equality of opportunity for them to learn and develop which will improve their performance. ***“We have a mature Equal Opportunities in Employment Policy which demonstrates our commitment to treating all staff in a fair and equal manner.”***

Managers commented on how their staff are encouraged to make use of a range of opportunities for them to develop including using e-learning at their desk when working through ECDL rather than attend evening classes. In addition, they commented on being guided to choose between following an NVQ approach to learning or using guided distance learning as their preference.

The Review identified how a blend of opportunities are provided designed to meet the time constraints, commitments and learning styles of individuals including putting all customer service staff through the same basic training module and then tailoring follow up sessions based on the needs of individuals.

***“At the Service Depot we’ve introduced NVQs in Waste Management so at last we can gain a qualification.”***

***“Cherwell also has an Age Discrimination Policy and if you want to, you can work beyond retirement. It applies to anyone.”***

***“If I miss a meeting, the notes will always come my way.”***

Increasingly the environment in the Council is one of encouraging staff to take ownership for their role and their performance. Staff confidence has been shaken during the turmoil of change through which the Council has gone.

However, interviewees commented on how they are encouraged to reflect on how best they can adapt processes and systems and indeed introduce a new process to help them to perform more effectively in their job role.

***“I re-designed our database, broadening the fields so that we could put more key information into each field. The entire team benefited from this.”***

***“Our systems were too inflexible so we changed our approach and now people are telling us our approach is more pragmatic.”***

***“We brought two teams together and gave the group the task of picking out the best practice in each team for sharing.”***

#### **4. The capabilities managers need to lead, manage and develop people effectively are clearly defined and understood.**

CDC has for some time used a Management Competency Framework, which over the past year has been used to underpin the Leadership for Excellence Training through which the Extended Management Team has progressed. Notably this is an area of focus for the Council as it evolves a set of Core Values.

The CDC Competency Framework currently includes:-

- Delivering results.
- Delivering customer satisfaction.
- **Delivering with others** e.g. people with diverse talents work together to achieve a shared goal.
- **Leading people** e.g. people have a clear sense of direction and feel valued.
- Delivering personally.
- **Communicating and Influencing** e.g. messages are clear, persuasive and consistent.

***“CMT and Heads of Service have recently completed their development programme and now the next tier is going through a similar – but not the same – development programme.”***

As part of the Post Recognition Review, the Assessor attended a variety of ‘live’ meetings including one session of the ILM accredited Management Development Programme where some five Team Leaders were attending a crucial session on ‘Dealing with Change’ and understanding the process through which themselves and their staff would go.

Managers described what was expected of them including supporting their staff and helping them to perform to their potential; providing constructive feedback at least annually to each member of their team and bringing learning and development opportunities to the attention of their team and helping make them happen.

***“It’s my role as a Team Leader to manage the performance of my team; their success is my success.”***

When asking members of staff what they could expect from their Managers they quoted:-

- Being treated with respect.
- Being treated in a fair and equitable manner.
- Being encouraged to grow in their job role.
- Being listened to.
- Being supported on training courses.
- Being part of an open and transparent communication process.

- Being in receipt of regular and constructive feedback on their performance.

The Assessor found pockets of exceedingly good practice, including the Council's approach to the Excellence in Leadership programme. However, interviewees at all levels commented on how there appeared to be a plethora of management development sessions taking place but that they lacked coherence.

**Taking action to improve the performance of the organisation.**  
*An Investor in People takes effective action to improve the performance of the organisation through its people.*

## **5. Managers are effective in leading, managing and developing people.**

Despite the need for increased clarification in terms of defining the knowledge, skills and behaviours required of managers, management effectiveness is considered to be a strength. The added rigour suggested will bring managers in the Council into line with those noted as 'best in class' within the business community.

Leaders and those with line management responsibility described how they:-

- Bring staff into the planning process in terms of setting priorities for the Service to which they belong.
- Show an interest in their staff noting them as individuals and "certainly not" as job holders or just being members of their team.
- Arrange a schedule of team meetings well in advance so that staff have every chance of attending despite being part time or having other demands on their time.
- Adopt an open style of communication designed to maximise the opportunity for staff to give their input.
- Conduct meaningful one-to-one sessions leading to a comprehensive end of year Performance Review.
- Bring learning and development to the attention of their staff noting their preferred style and taking note of their working patterns.
- Encourage staff to shadow each other and colleagues in different teams as part of broadening the scope of people's knowledge and understanding.

Being effective in terms of leading and managing staff, managers commented on how they ensured that every member of staff had some access to regular feedback on their performance and how they personally made sure that they used the Performance Review process to the full. This included noting high performers and rewarding this accordingly and never ducking performance judged to be below par.



As mentioned elsewhere in this report, there was a strong belief from staff that they would receive the support they needed.

The performance feedback process requires that everyone has at least a formal, Annual Review with his or her line manager. However, interviewees added that this process was supplemented with monthly/quarterly one-to-one sessions. Interviewees also commented on how both success and under-performance was noted.

Notable is that managers do not duck issues linked to under performance commenting that as the Council strives to raise its standards even higher everyone's contribution needs to be of a high standard.

***“We deliberately take time out as a team to discuss issues trying to avert problems.”***

***“I’ve given one of my team an external coach to help her step up to the challenge of promotion.”***

Interviewees commented on the effectiveness of their line manager adding that they:-

- Encourage them to take calculated risks knowing they will get the support they need if they make a poor judgement call.
- Demonstrate a broad range of knowledge and willingly share this with them.
- Keep them well informed so that they operate with confidence when dealing with a member of the public.
- Listen and encourage them to challenge the status quo to see where improvements can be made.

They confirmed the rigour that accompanied the Annual Performance Appraisal process, how they are given time to prepare, how they are encouraged to collect a wide range of evidence to demonstrate their past performance and to come up with meaningful and realistic targets for the coming year.

***“I’ve never enjoyed my job so much.”***

***“X is a brilliant manager.”***

***“Approachable and yet will show the big stick if need be. We know we are safe with her.”***

***“X tries to keep us engaged and interested and she knows when we perform best.”***

## 6. People's contribution to the organisation is recognised and valued.

It is acknowledged that the Council's success depends largely on the time and effort and ideas that people put into helping it achieve its objectives. Furthermore, there is a concerted effort demonstrated by the Extended Management Team in terms of helping people to feel valued and appreciated for their contribution.

This is an area that has seen significant improvement over the past six months. Good practice improvements included:-

- The operation of a 'Back to the Floor' programme which notably is about to be re-run and will provide members of staff with the chance to spend time shadowing members of the Corporate Management Team. ***"I shadowed a member of staff in Environmental Health. It opened my eyes to the skills held by staff as an incident arose which was professionally tackled and handled on the spot." "One of the Directors ended up making the tea and serving this to staff."***
- Weekly messages from the Chief Executive which provide user friendly updates on issues facing the Council... ***"These let me know our CE is human and carries a tremendous amount on her shoulders."***
- A Management Conference which brought members of the Corporate Management Team and the Extended Management Team together for brainstorming/networking sessions.... ***"These were designed to engage managers across the business who were feeling uncertain after so much change." "I was able to go back to my team and give them a realistic update on what the Council is planning now. This included such things as reflecting on the impact of Job Evaluation which the Council goes through in the next few months."***
- An annual luncheon to celebrate achievements throughout the year.

Managers explained that recognition is formal and informal with verbal and written (email) thanks, together with opportunities for people to join in with social activities and be part of high level projects which cut across the Council. ***"The Christmas message from the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council meant a lot to me and my team."***

***"The CE and Leader of the Council have a programme of visiting the various sites. This has raised both their profiles. The Leader of the Council has a terrific sense of humour and people warmed to him."***

They also commented on how they themselves receive thanks from members of the CMT linked to achievement of their own objectives and how they then ensure that their staff know how they personally have contributed to these achievements.

Clarity of job roles combined with the skills needed for the job enabled

interviewees to describe the contribution they make and how they know they make a positive difference.

***“We now have easier access to the CMT. The CE said she was disappointed that no one has responded to her weekly emails, so now I write regularly.”***

***“The ‘Changing Places’ (some called it Changing Rooms) newsletter gave us regular updates in terms of office moves, desk layout and how this would impact on staff. Most of us are now in an open planned environment. At first it was distracting but now I see people walking through and it’s good.”***

***“It used to be like a hotel. You could arrive in the morning, go along your corridor and not see anybody. It’s not like that now.”***

***“We’ve been offered NVQs in Waste Management. Now that’s good.”***

## **7. People are encouraged to take ownership and responsibility by being involved in decision-making.**

Discussions with the middle and junior management team identified how they promoted a sense of ownership and responsibility by encouraging people to be involved in decision-making.

This is the second area of improvement that has taken place during the past six months. At the time of the June 2008 Post Recognition Review, the Council was poised to enhance ways in which it engaged with members of the wider management team noting that.... ***“The result of the June Review gave us the impetus to bring these changes forward.”***

Enhancements to encourage staff at all levels to take ownership and responsibility by being involved in the decision-making process included involving managers in the design of a ‘next steps’ leadership/management programme with focus being placed on the softer skills needed in order to be effective as managers.

In addition, an ongoing revamp is taking place of the Appraisal process. This will include quarterly bilateral sessions between individuals and their line manager, clarification of a line of sight between objectives for the Council, those for each Service Area arriving at desk level giving staff the full picture so that they can become more engaged in making decisions in terms of how they can improve their performance.

***“Detailed feedback is being presented on staff survey responses to show that we are being listened to.”***

***“The Chairman’s tour has been re-started giving staff at almost every site the chance to ask direct, strategic questions and make suggestions to the Chairman and CE; they came armed with boxes of chocolates to share with us too.”***

Managers commented on how being part of a Trade Union was encouraged and that whilst TU membership was relatively low but meaningful, there were in theory many other opportunities to be part of the decision-making process.

***“As TU Reps we’re involved in the accommodation project and planning how to get involved in the Job Evaluation project coming up in September.”***

***“I (TU representative) have a real feeling of inclusion.”***

Staff commented on how they were feeling more involved noting suggestions such as:-

- Being part of the decision-making process in terms of the ‘next steps’ leadership/management programme. ***“We have been brought into the strategic thinking process with HR.”***
- Attending the Management Conference with fellow managers and using syndicate sessions to highlight the softer skills they believed they needed in order to fully support their staff during the coming Job Evaluation process.

***“The new Learning & Development Manager has had an impact on us as managers. He works with us to facilitate cross-department training which is breaking down barriers that previously had been there for years.”***

***“Training is now more focused. It ticks all the boxes for me and my team yet gives us a choice and we decide which will be best.”***

***“Our manager gave us responsibility for deciding on a workable annual leave rota. We have to provide 24/7 cover but its noted that we also have a life. He trusts us to make it work without adversely affecting service delivery.”***

***“I took the decision to apply to become a Buddy to new staff in our area. This was taken on board and I was given training on this.”***

## **8. People learn and develop effectively.**

As mentioned elsewhere and despite the need to tighten up on the evaluation of learning and development, training is effective in the Council and there is considerable evidence of staff being promoted as a result of increased knowledge and ability.

Managers described how they make sure people's learning and development needs are met including making full use of the annual Performance Appraisal Process and supplementing this with regular one-to-one sessions used to monitor performance and the ways in which staff training is helping with this.

They added that Service Performance Reviews and team meetings are used to meet development needs through shared events, e.g. updates on the new Housing Act Legislation.

***“At the back of each Appraisal there is a Personal Development Plan, we note these and then send the back page off to HR who takes a collective view and arranges corporate style development sessions.”***

Discussions with staff demonstrated a significant amount of meaningful learning and development taking place. They described how their learning and development needs had been met, what they had learnt and how they had applied this to their role.

Examples included:-

- A wide range of staff who are working through ECDL all of whom commented on how they now know how to manage their email folders; create Council-style letters and forms and use spreadsheets extensively.
- Fire Safety Course – ***“Did the 999 course. I feel more prepared for an emergency.”***
- Dealing with Difficult Situations – ***“Customers can get agitated and upset so you have to know how to calm them down and then you can help them.”***
- Attendance on a formal Contract Management Course which was so good that the Council is now bringing the trainer in house to deliver to a group of staff.

People who were new to the Council, and those new to a role, described how their induction had helped them to perform effectively. The Review included a focus group with new staff and also meetings with several staff who had been promoted or had changed roles. Examples to demonstrate the effectiveness of this process included:-

- A highly energising Corporate Induction.
- A tailored Service Area Induction.
- A programme of observations and meetings with key players.
- Meetings with external agencies.
- Excellent line management support.
- Visits to various sites including a tour around the Council.
- Structured learning and development linked to the needs of the job.
- A process that led from Probation naturally into performance review.

***“A really very good Induction. Quickly got the shape of the Council and understood some of the politics that come with working in local government.”***

***“Genuinely good boss who keeps me informed.”***

***“I’m as happy as Larry in my new job.”***

Staff who had changed role also commented on how they had an Induction to their new role and where possible a handover took place. The key element that every member of staff mentioned was the on tap support irrespective of role and how Induction seemed to just phase out to be replaced by an Appraisal process.

**Evaluating the impact on the performance of the organisation.**

*An Investor in People can demonstrate the impact of its investment in people on the performance of the organisation.*

**9. Investment in people improves the performance of the organisation.**

CDC makes a significant investment in learning and development; it invests heavily in all forms of resources and notes the direct costs which is in the region of £X000 per Service Area and also takes note of the subsistence costs.

As can be seen from the areas of development covered in the Executive Summary of this report, this is an area that will benefit from improvement.

Resources include making use of:-

- Courses offered across the Council by the in-house training team.
- IT courses offered by the IT team.
- External experts either brought in to deliver in-house training or through external training events.
- Conferences/Seminars offered by a range of Professional Bodies.

Linking to Indicator 2 above, each Head of Service holds a Training Budget which they monitor in line with all other expenditure. As such, there was a good awareness of the cost of training in all areas and the benefits including Customer Services training using the One Stop Concept showed true value for money as on its busiest day, the Customer Service Unit answered X% of calls within the targeted timeframe. Additionally, the investment in the EMT Management Development Programme has resulted in an empowered team who are making their own high level decisions. A team whose negotiation skills have seen significant improvement resulting in considerable cross-service working where previously, Service Areas were noted as ‘silos’ and a team who are seeing increased vfm (value for money) reviews.

Gradually, CDC is using the evaluation of its investment to develop and improve its strategy with examples being provided by a wide range of staff including changes in removing the separate Planning Reception, which created the need for members of the CSU team to gain the basics of planning so that they could deal with initial queries. The resources used included the Planning Management Team who are going through strategies in terms of the flow of the Planning Process followed by short bite sized sessions delivered by Planning Officers using a Planning Screen.

Notable within the Council is how the senior and also wider management team seek to ensure that they use their evaluation process to develop their strategy for improving the overall performance of the Council. Examples were many and includes a comprehensive review of the Performance Appraisal process which, linking to the Management and Leadership Development Programme (below), has for the senior team included 360 degree feedback and reflection. They also include the design and creation of a Management and Leadership Development Programme to provide managers with the knowledge and skills they needed to meet the improvement agenda set by the Council.

***“We’ve improved our approach to cascading objectives too and look to see a Golden Thread running through the Council.”***

Examples of organisation, team and individual performance improvements as a result of support for learning and development included:-

| <b>Activity</b>                                 | <b>Improvement to Individual Performance</b>  | <b>Improvement to Team Performance</b>   | <b>Improvement to Council Performance</b>  |
|---|---|--|--|
| Leadership and Management Development Programme | <b><i>“For me it was all about developing some shared values and understanding my peers.”</i></b> | <b><i>“As a senior team we are gelling as a team; people say they see less conflict and this is having a positive cascade effect on our direct reports.”</i></b> | <b><i>“Empowered to make Council-wide decisions; increased awareness of performance and performance issues and how as a team we can tackle them, all of which have increased our vfm scoring.”</i></b> |
| Customer Friendly Writing Course                | <b><i>“Being able to write succinct and yet user friendly reports and letters.”</i></b>           | Established the use of ‘plain English’ writing in the Customer Services Team.  | Establishing standardisation of reports/letters across the Council resulting in the avoidance  |

|                                    |     |   |  |
|------------------------------------|-----|---|--|
|                                    |     |   | of complaints and mis-understandings.  |
| Diversity Works across the Council | the | <b><i>“Understanding the Best Value Performance Indicators and how to avoid using the wrong language or taking inappropriate action.”</i></b> | <b><i>“Similar language used within teams coupled with greater understanding of linked legislation means that we feel we operate on firmer ground in terms of Equality and Diversity.”</i></b> |
|                                    |     |   | The Council is reducing its risk of being seen as discriminatory and is thus reducing its risk of liability.   |

See Indicator 10 below for further examples of improvements.

#### **10. Improvements are continually made to the way people are managed and developed.**

As mentioned above, the Council seeks to continuously improve knowing that it cannot stand still if it wants to remain in the upper quartile of high performers.

In the past two years the Council has been through significant turmoil and change; indeed change was viewed as endemic in all areas of the Council. Notable is that the Change Management Programme, through which the Council has gone, has been focused on turning the performance of the Council around so that all aspects of service delivery could see performance improvement.

***“Cherwell’s One Stop Shop approach to customer service is being hailed as a model of good practice.”***

Members of the senior and wider management team commented on how they have introduced, reviewed and or refreshed all of the Council’s strategies for managing and developing people resulting in:-

- An organisation structure that now operates with clarity with a new Extended Management Team made up of the Chief Executive, Strategic Directors and Service Heads. This includes some 22 people and is supported by a new Service Management Team. ***“Truly delegating operational aspects to the drivers of continuous improvement.”***



- A cascade communication process showing a golden thread linking the needs of the Council to Service Areas moving down to individual desk level.
- A development culture that is notably moving away from a 'Training Course' Culture to one of 'ongoing development'. ***“A learning environment is how we want our staff to view Cherwell.”***
- A competency framework linked to enhanced service delivery.
- A process of Individual Performance Management as a result of the enhanced Appraisal system which encourages full ownership.

The above are but a few of the many improvements that have been introduced in the Council.

Examples of improvements cited by staff included:-

- Introducing structured one-to-one sessions to supplement the annual Performance Appraisal process.
- Making extensive use of internal and external mentors for newcomers or those changing roles.
- Introducing weekly email updates on performance improvements in the Council.
- Increased focus placed on discussing training and development at team meetings.
- Introducing a full and structured competency framework.
- Adding a three-month follow up on learning and development in some areas of the Council.
- Benchmarking with other Authorities and arranging shared learning sessions.



**COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE**

*Cherwell District Council*

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE ACTION PLAN**

**June 2008**

## APPENDIX B

### *Cherwell District Council*

## **INVESTORS IN PEOPLE ACTION PLAN**

**June 2008**

Our Investors in People Review took place during week commencing 16 June 2008.

Due to an extended period of significant change in the run up to our 2008 Post Recognition Review, our Investors in People Assessor found that not all parts of the Standard continue to be met. Two Indicators of the Investor in People Standard were not fully met and these linked to the culture of the Council which had not fully been able to embrace the amount and speed of change required.

This action plan has been put together in response to those findings, and demonstrates the full commitment of the organisation to return to the Standard. It details the actions to be taken for each indicator 'not met' to bring us back to the requirements of the Standard.

We understand that our ability to retain our recognition status while working through the action plan is at the discretion of the Quality South East Investors in People Recognition Panel, and that the Panel will only grant 'Retaining Recognition' status if it is satisfied that we remain fully committed to achieving the Standard once more, subject to a time-bound and robust action plan as detailed below.

We understand that we have a maximum of two years from the date of our last review to return to the Standard, but we should aim to return to the Standard more quickly if possible. Our Assessor has indicated that she firmly believes that the Council will be fully back to Standard within one year and we have agreed that she should return on 13 November 2008 for an interim check and then in June 2009 to conclude the process.

We do understand that as a condition of granting 'Retaining Recognition' status, the Panel may require the Assessor to return at an earlier date to monitor our progress and give a report to the Panel.

We submit this action plan to the Recognition Panel for its consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary Harpley'. The signature is stylized with a large 'M' and 'H' and a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Mary Harpley  
Chief Executive  
July 2008

**Indicator 6: People contribution to the organisation is recognised and valued:****Requirement for this indicator:**

An organisation's success largely depends on the time, effort and ideas that its people put into helping it to achieve its objectives. To make that kind of effort, people need to feel that what they do make a difference and are appreciated by their manager.

The assessor is looking to see that there is a culture of measuring individual performance so managers are able to understand the contribution people make. Secondly, there must be evidence that managers let people know how much they value their input to the organisation. Because of this, people will feel valued for making a positive difference and be able to give examples of how they personally feel valued and that they make a difference.

**Current situation – as found by the assessor:**

| <b>Relevant Evidence Requirement</b>   | <b>As found by the Assessor</b>   | <b>Action to be Taken and person responsible for ensuring that the action takes place</b>   | <b>Planned Completion Date</b>                                | <b>Expected outcome (How we will know the action has been successful)</b>  |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| 6.1 Managers can give examples of how they recognise and value people's individual contribution to the organisation. | Managers commented on how the Performance Appraisal process is used to acknowledge the jobs that people do. However, due to uncertainty still felt by many members of the middle and wider management team themselves comments like "We are all in the same boat and feel uncertain in terms of feeling fully part of the new structure" and "The CMT and even EMT seem to be out of touch with us" demonstrate that a culture of valuing is not yet consistent | Develop a recognition strategy to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ An annual celebrating success event such as a lunch hosted by the Chief Executive [HR]</li> <li>▪ Develop policy and budget for 'players player' or similar, determined by DMTs [CSM]</li> <li>▪ Encourage participation in national awards and events such as the LGC Challenge and PFA [Service Heads]</li> <li>▪ Develop a programme of</li> </ul> | Spring 2009<br><br>Oct 2008<br><br>On-going<br><br>April 2009 | <b>Consistency will exist in terms of how managers acknowledge the contributions of their staff.</b><br><b>Clarity will exist in terms of what is expected of managers in the Council in respect of valuing staff and letting them know their contribution is acknowledged.</b><br><b>Managers will be actively involved in raising the profile of the Council in terms of participation in National Events. They (managers) will be able to see the difference they make and will</b> |

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|  | across the Council.  | soft skills development for line managers at all levels, to complement the Leading for Excellence programme [L&D Manager]  |  | <b>realise that effective management and valued staff is crucial to the success of the Council. Managers will be demonstrating the softer skills aligned with the sharper skills required of them.</b>   |
| 6.2<br>People can describe how they contribute to the organisation's success and believe they make a positive difference to its performance. | Job roles were clear and people confirmed how the Appraisal process is being consistently used to note roles and responsibility. However, morale remains at a low ebb in several areas of the Council, particularly in the HO areas. There is a view that CMT and EMT are not fully listening to their concerns. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Review appraisal process to ensure we clearly define what meets and what exceeds expectations [L&amp;D Manager]</li> <li>▪ Run an annual management conference to include all members of EMT and SMT to work on, and cascade, corporate issues [HR]</li> <li>▪ Run 'back to the floor' days to provide opportunity for CMT to work with front-line staff</li> <li>▪ Run Inside Cherwell campaign to raise the profile of new management groups and respective responsibilities [Comms]</li> <li>▪ Use staff consultation group for policy review and involvement in decision</li> </ul> | <p>April 2009</p> <p>Oct 2009</p> <p>Oct 2009</p> <p>Sept 2009 onwards</p> <p>Underway and on-going (monthly)</p> <p>Sept 2009</p> | <p><b>Staff will be aware that their performance is being truly monitored and acknowledged as part of the Council's Performance Management system.</b></p> <p><b>Because Managers will come together on an annual basis to share good practice, people will be assured of consistency in terms of recognising and rewarding good performance.</b></p> <p><b>People will have easy access to the CMT and will be in a position to receive acknowledgement directly from CMT.</b></p> <p><b>Staff will have more of a voice as Representatives will be in a stronger position to raise issues of concern knowing that they (Representatives) have direct</b></p> |

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|---|--|--|---|---|
|   |  | <p>making [HR]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop more formal recognition approach through new HR Strategy [HR]</li> <li>▪ Extend the Internal Review team and programme of Internal Reviews to support and help embed changes.</li> </ul> | <p>Sept and on-going (training scheduled for October)</p> | <p><b>access to senior managers.</b></p> <p><b>The number of staff who are trained as Internal Reviewers will mean that more staff will be actively involved in supporting the Council in terms of using the Investor in People framework for continuous improvement.</b></p> |
| <p>6.3<br/>People can describe how their contribution to the organisation is recognised and valued.</p> | <p>Primarily this was through being able to describe their role. There remains uncertainty as changes and improved support mechanisms are not being felt by staff in a consistent way.</p> |  |   | <p>.As above</p>  |

**Indicator 7. People are encouraged to take ownership and responsibility by being involved in decision-making.**

**Requirement for this indicator:**

Common characteristics of high performance organisations are effective employee involvement and empowerment that enables them to have a greater role in the decision-making process.

Managers need to explain how they encourage people to be involved in the decision-making process, on an individual basis or through representative groups. They also need to demonstrate how they encourage people to take ownership and responsibility for decisions



made. People need to be able to describe how they are involved in decision-making at a level appropriate to their role, and how they are encouraged to take ownership and responsibility for decisions that affect the performance of the organisation.

**Current situation – as found by the assessor:**

| Relevant Evidence Requirement   |   | Actions to be Taken and person responsible for ensuring that the action takes place  | Planned Completion Date  | Expected outcome (How we will know the action has been successful)  |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| <p>7.1<br/>Managers can describe how they promote a sense of ownership and responsibility by encouraging people to be involved in decision-making, both individually and through representative groups if they exist.</p> | <p>Discussions with the wider management team described how they promoted a sense of ownership and responsibility by encouraging people to be involved in decision-making, both individually and through representative groups, where they exist.</p> <p>They described how being part of a Trade Union was encouraged but that TU membership was relatively low but meaningful as the Representatives were helpful and kept their members fully informed. <b><i>“As TU Reps we’re involved in the accommodation project and planning how to get involved in the Job Evaluation project</i></b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Build in structured staff involvement opportunities to the service and financial planning processes [IT]</li> <li>▪ CMT to regularly attend team meetings, cascade etc. [CMT]</li> <li>▪ Ensure time is made available for meetings, training, involvement in team and corporate planning [HR]</li> <li>▪ Expand use and role of staff consultation group (above)</li> <li>▪ TU membership and role to be supported and developed [HR/TU]</li> <li>▪ Ensure detailed feedback on all questions/comments to demonstrate listening/response on all</li> </ul> | <p>Underway and on-going</p> <p>Underway and on-going<br/>October 2009</p> <p>Underway and on-going<br/>April 2009</p> | <p><b>Managers in the Council will be actively involved in strategic planning for the Council and their Service.</b></p> <p><b>As a result, they will be better informed and will be in a position to engage their team members in issues of a strategic nature.</b></p> <p><b>As members of CMT will ‘guest’ at their meetings, managers will be seen to be the decision-makers by their staff and will note the support they are receiving from CMT.</b></p> <p><b>Increased ownership and thus confidence will be felt across the Council and managers and Representatives will receive comprehensive responses to questions they raise.</b></p> |

|  |  |   |  |   |
|--|--|---|--|---|
|  | <b><i>coming up in September.”</i></b>   | issues [EMT]  |  |   |
| 7.2<br>People can describe how they are encouraged to be involved in decision-making that affects the performance of individuals, teams and the organisation at a level that is appropriate to their role. | Interviewees commented on feeling uncertain in some respects as they are not yet being able to fully commit to the way forward. <b><i>“I so want to move on but there seems to be some unrest amongst the more junior managers as many say they are in the same boat as us.”</i></b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Extend soft skills development programme below SMT [L&amp;D]</li> <li>▪ Develop corporate values and commitments statements [HR]</li> <li>▪ Service and financial planning involvement (above)</li> <li>▪ Continue to develop the role of SMT as part of the leadership of the organisation through management conference and L&amp;D programme</li> </ul> | <p>April 2009</p> <p>April 2009</p> <p>October 2008 and on-going</p> | <p><b>People will be in a position to take ownership; their managers will feel confident, informed and involved and thus they too will be more aware.</b></p> <p><b>People will see and note the values of the Council, which will include ‘delegation’; ‘empowerment’ and ‘involvement’.</b></p> |
| 7.3<br>People can describe how they are encouraged to take ownership and responsibility for decisions  | <b>As above.</b>   |   |  | <p><b>The Performance Management process, team meetings and easy access to CMT will encourage people to put ideas forward for change, which will improve their performance.</b></p> <p><b>A culture of openness, involvement and encouragement will mean they feel confident.</b></p>             |

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| that affect the performance of themselves, teams and the organisation at a level that is appropriate to their role. |  |  |  |  |
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