



# Wingecarribee Shire Council Wellbeing Survey



**Draft Report**  
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## Workplace Wellbeing Survey

During March – June 2016, CommuniCorp undertook a review of (psychological) wellbeing across the Wingecarribee Shire Council (WSC). The purpose of this review was to evaluate the extent to which various psychosocial factors in the workplace were supporting psychological well-being, so that the organisation can do more of what promotes well-being and make changes to those processes or practices which may be detracting from well-being.

The following phased and multi-format approach was undertaken to allow information to be gathered in a confidential manner through multiple channels from employees across various levels, roles and teams within Council. The review process comprised the following phases:-

- i. 22/3/16: Stakeholder briefing and scoping of review process
- ii. 21/4/16: Review of HR-related policies, procedures and metrics to identify the extent to which these supported well-being. A complete list of the documents reviewed is provided at Appendix A. Comments have been made on these documents and returned to Organisational Development.
- iii. 10 – 20/5/16: Workplace Wellbeing Index (WWI) administered both on-line and paper-form. The WWI measures seven dimensions that predict workplace wellbeing and which are strongly related to organisational performance. These are:-
  - Leadership structure
  - Workplace environment
  - Reward & Development
  - Collaboration
  - Workflow
  - Psychologically Safe Workplace
  - Social & Physical Wellness.

In addition to the standard WWI, three qualitative questions were added to provide further feedback about:-

- What does WSC as an organisation *do well?*
- What can WSC as an organisation *do better?*
- What are the biggest challenges facing WSC?

A total of two hundred and sixty-one [261] surveys were received. As such, the findings from this survey can be confidently considered as representative of the approximate four hundred [400] (or 360 FTE) employees.

- iv. 16/5/16 and 20/5/16: Eight [8] 1:1 interviews with key stakeholders who were able to provide a unique perspective on various factors associated with workplace wellbeing.
- v. 31/5/16 and 7/6/16: Four [4] focus groups with a total of fifty-four [54] participants who provided a representative cohort of employees from various roles and branches across the Council. These focus groups allowed the Facilitators to explore the key themes surfaced during earlier phases of the review process and gain participants' ideas on solutions to enhance wellbeing.
- vi. In addition, all focus group participants and Stakeholder Interviewees were asked:-
  - If they could change one thing that would significantly enhance their day-to-day experience of wellbeing at work, or that of their team, what would this one thing be?

## Interpretation of information contained herein

This report is based on an analysis of the data gathered from all the above methods.

It is important to note that this Wellbeing Survey was not an investigation but a standard review of the performance of various psychosocial factors across the Council, for the purposes of making recommendations for improvements to (psychological) wellbeing. ***As such, the findings are based on feedback provided by all employees and have not been verified as fact.*** However, importantly, only those themes which were reported by multiple people from multiple teams across multiple levels of the Council, have been reported. These are issues which appear to be impacting a significant number of people across the Council in a significant way and are not isolated in their reported occurrence or impact unless otherwise specified.

## Report scope

This report analyses and makes recommendations ***for WSC as a whole and focusses on the data related to the enhancement of wellbeing.***

Where particular 'hot spots' were identified, a deeper analysis of survey and focus group data was conducted. The quantitative results for these specific Branches or Teams are provided in Appendix B, whilst the qualitative results and recommendations for these areas are contained in the main body of the report.

## Interpreting the WWI Quantitative Results

We have presented the data in terms of percentage agreed to positively phrased statements. This does not mean that the balance of the respondents disagreed. For a substantial number of questions there was a significant percentage who were 'neutral' and on some items respondents answered 'I don't Know' or N/A'.

## Executive Summary

Overall this Wellbeing Survey reveals that the Council's capacity to positively impact wellbeing is emerging, having laid some solid foundations in the form of extensive policy and procedural work, training for managers in people and performance management, training for staff in bullying and harassment and organisational restructures to bring better alignment between staff and Council requirements. It is not surprising that whilst some key strengths emerged from this Survey, a number of opportunities for enhancing wellbeing were also identified, specifically around leadership, people management, change management, reward and development, communication and consultation.

## Key Strengths

- Majority of employees feel a strong personal alignment with the mission and values of the organisation
- Majority of employees reported high levels of support, guidance and approachability in relation to their *immediate* supervisor
- Within teams, there appears to be strong levels of support and comradery
- Most people feel highly motivated to do their job well

- The majority of people feel energised by the work they do
- The majority of people feel psychologically safe to carry out their work
- There is a low perceived risk of harassment or discrimination in the organisation
- Annual leave is taken regularly and accrual is actively managed at an organisational level
- Comprehensive suite of HR-related Policies and Procedures have been implemented in recent years for supporting people and performance
- More effective Performance Review and Appraisal process to be implemented soon
- Strong cohesion and respect amongst the Senior Executive team and by members of senior management towards the Executive
- Healthy appetite amongst the Senior Leadership team for enforcing a 'zero tolerance' approach to Inappropriate Workplace Behaviour and underperformance and high visibility surrounding this which has signalled culture change
- Emerging people leadership capability across management being supported by learning and development initiatives
- Strong awareness of, and commitment to, selecting for attitude
- A few high performing People Managers who promote accountability and wellbeing amongst their staff and provide a positive example to their peers
- Significant positive reduction in Workers Compensation premium which points to a capability which could be deployed for enhancing Psychological Safety and Wellbeing
- Strong Executive Commitment to promoting wellbeing across the Council and a business imperative, in the form of attracting and retaining talent, which heightens this commitment
- Prince 2 Project Management technology will provide a useful framework for implementing Wellbeing Initiatives

### **Key Opportunities for Development**

- Enhance Senior Leadership visibility and follower engagement
- Clarify the roles, responsibilities, delegations of authority and decision-making across all levels of management to ensure every manager is clear on the scope of their role and empowered and motivated to provide responsive and coordinated support to the people below them.
- Review remuneration levels and practices to ensure these are market-competitive, both non-monetary and monetary incentives can be provided for effort or outcomes achieved in a transparent, consistent and equitable way, and that there is pay equity across Council i.e. people doing the same job are being paid the same. This will require a revision of Position Descriptions to ensure they accurately reflect jobs being done.
- Continue to build People and Performance Management capability across all tiers of management
- Continue to take a zero tolerance approach to bullying and other Inappropriate Workplace Behaviours and build capability across all staff and managers to support this approach



- Ensure people managers have the requisite skills to facilitate an effective Performance Review and Planning discussion appropriate to their team cohort.
- Ensure People Managers have an incentive to engage meaningfully in the new Performance Appraisal and Review process by providing a measure of such as part of their KPIs'
- Review the current criteria for accessing learning and development to ensure it allows for staff to build new capabilities which can help with their promotion or move into another role within Council.
- Provide clarification to all staff across Council regarding roles and functions within the new structure so all staff, and especially Customer Service Officers, feel more confident to navigate this
- Provide clarification to all staff regarding their role and responsibilities, and lines of reporting and support.
- Implement a Master Operational plan, which Councillors sign off on, and place this on the Council website so that both Councillors and residents can be referred to this in relation to any enquiries or requests they may have. This will minimise stress and significant disruption to work flow caused by these and reduce enquiries the Customer Service team send through to various teams
- Implement evidence-based selection practices to ensure best job-person fit, especially to achieve more people and interpersonal capability in roles with people management or customer interaction requirements.
- Review current Recruitment practices to ensure they are attracting the right people, providing people with a realistic preview of the job, and packaging both remuneration and non-monetary offerings associated with working with the Council in a positive and targeted way
- Provide a more diverse range of informal reward and recognition options which People Managers have the authority and flexibility to assign on a merit-basis, in consultation with their direct Manager.
- Provide more consistent access to flexible working arrangements, especially working remotely which may help with retention.
- Greater focus on building the necessary and sufficient capabilities for creating a psychologically safe and healthy workplace is warranted if wellbeing is to be optimised. (See Appendix C for Necessary and Sufficient Capabilities).
- Consider providing physical resources to those areas/teams/roles identified in this report where physical and psychological safety risks exist due to their absence
- Review Change Management Practices to ensure this incorporate sufficient rigour around communication and consultation, as well as support for both exiting and remaining staff where relevant.
- Consider implementing an over-arching Psychological Health and Safety policy which integrates all initiatives that promote psychological safety and wellbeing and provide a strategic plan against which to monitor the effectiveness of these various initiatives. The Project Management methodology currently being implemented could be used to manage this initiative.

## Combined Results from WWI Survey, Focus Groups & Stakeholder Interviews - WSC

What follows below are summary analyses of each of the seven factors explored in the WWI for WSC as a whole.

### Organisational Leadership Structure

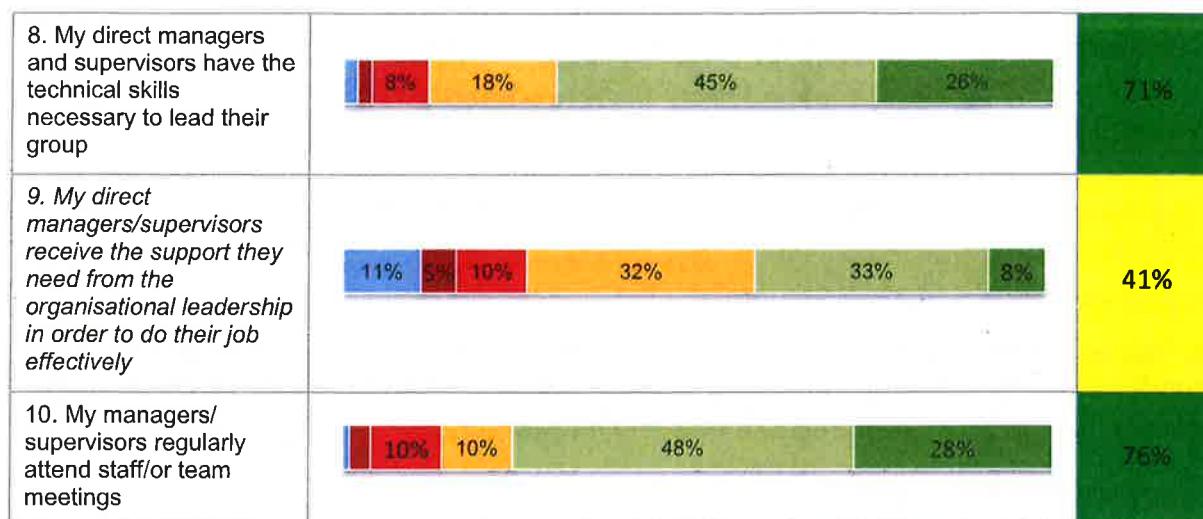
The **Organisational Leadership Structure** factor looks at issues concerned with psychological support coming from management, such as vision and role clarity, feedback, ability to resolve problems, the quality of leadership and their communication.

#### WWI Quantitative Survey results

Level of Agreement Colour Code	0-39% Agreement	40-69% Agreement	70-100% Agreement
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*NB: italicised items had 'Don't Know or N/A' responses above the 10% threshold. Responses <5% are unlabelled.*

<b>Organisational Leadership Structure</b>	Don't Know	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Level of Agreement
1. I am personally aligned to this organisation's stated mission and values	6%	11%		59%		24%	83%
2. There is regular and clear communication between my managers/supervisors and my team members on organisational matters	5%	14%	20%		46%	16%	62%
3. My manager provides me with clarity around my role, including my responsibilities and productivity expectations		13%	21%		42%	21%	63%
4. My direct managers/supervisors have good leadership and coaching skills		16%	19%		40%	21%	61%
5. My direct managers/supervisors provide me with regular feedback on my performance	5%	16%	23%		37%	18%	55%
6. My direct managers are readily available and approachable if I have any workplace concerns	5%	14%		46%		33%	79%
7. Any problems experienced in our work team are handled quickly and effectively	7%	16%	22%		36%	17%	53%



### Survey Analysis

Overall, it would appear that *Leadership structure* is generally supporting well-being, with strong alignment to organisational mission and values (83% agreeable) and high levels of support coming from their direct manager/supervisor's approachability (79% agreeable), direct manager/supervisor attendance at staff/team meetings (76% agreeable), and the technical skills their direct manager/supervisor brings to their role (71% agreeable).

Some of the areas which staff rated as less supportive of well-being included:- extent to which their direct manager/supervisor receives the support they need from organisational leadership to do their job effectively (41% agreeable), speed and effectiveness with which problems experienced in their work team are handled (53% agreeable), and regularity of performance feedback from their direct manager/supervisor (55%). Whilst these results are in the neutral range (levels of agreement between 40% and 69%), they still indicate that there is work to be done to enhance direct manager capability and delegation of authority to resolve problems at the team level if well-being is to be better supported.

The weakest result in this factor relates to perceptions of support for managers/supervisors from the organisational leadership. Whilst there certainly appears to be pockets of optimism and confidence in the new Executive team, especially from amongst Senior Managers, most staff see Senior Leadership as faceless and middle managers as unnecessarily obstructive and or ineffectual when it comes to supporting their manager to do their job.

These themes, along with the others highlighted in the quantitative data above were also represented in the survey's qualitative responses, Focus Groups and Stakeholder Interviews.

### Qualitative findings from Focus groups, Stakeholder interviews & WWI survey

#### *Supervisors viewed positively*

Generally, most staff felt more connected and invested in their immediate supervisors/team leaders than with the manager for their area/team as the former is more in touch with the day-to-day operations in their area. One typical comment: *"Our Supervisor is fine, but there's a distance between management and the workers."*

Supervisors were also typically seen as the go-to person for psychological support or help and as someone doing their best to advocate for the team's needs with management.



### **Middle Management – Poor communication and support to levels below**

Some areas, such as the management of Assets, Resource Recovery Centre, Parks and Design and Construction were highlighted for their effective and supportive people management.

Unfortunately, this level of support and people capability from management appeared to be the exception. Many staff perceived the level of communication and support from their manager as generally quite poor, inadequate or non-existent.

*"I feel as though management are always in meetings yet we seem to get no information, feedback or involvement. Yet we are the people carrying out the work."*

*"I see no support or communication between staff and upper management"*

*"My supervisor comes to team meetings. My manager has not been to any of our meetings for a couple of years. I struggle to understand what direction management is taking in my area."*

Those respondents who did perceive their Manager as more supportive or understanding, said that these Managers appeared limited in their ability to provide more guidance or resources by severe workloads, a lack of authority to make decisions, or by their ability to influence the decision-makers above them.

*"My group manager has been supportive and that's great. But just from how much work he has on his plate, his ability to support me in the way I need to be supported, I feel like I'm flying solo. He just doesn't have the time, and I can't approach him for resources"*

*"Consulting [at the] executive level is ok - they can make decisions on directions & actions. But at the level of managers, it all falls apart"*

*"My branch manager's really good. Lots of respect, trust, autonomy. He tries to be fair across the board in decisions. But he has difficulty managing his time – lots of HR and higher-up requests, and he gets jammed"*

*"My direct manager endeavours to make himself available but has an overload of delegated work from the next level of management up"*

Particularly, the Planning Group Manager and Group Manager corporate community were noted as having very high workloads and excessively large portfolios.

### **Poor resolution of workplace issues**

Whilst there was a general consensus that immediate Supervisors and Team Leaders will mostly try to resolve workplace issues, it appears that more than often they do not have the delegated authority or skills (e.g. people skills) to do so and if they request input from their manager, a resolution rarely occurs so problems escalate and staff feel unsupported.

*"There is absolutely no support on pressing workplace matters from middle management apart from the odd simple and trivial matters. Because of lack of middle management support, issues raised (either workplace related or other) need to be escalated to top management for advice and support, however this proves to be useless."*

*"There are ongoing issues I have reported to Management over the past years that relate to the organisation breaching legislation; these issues are either ignored or not taken serious"*

*"Too many issues drag on before there is resolution ... It is often small issues that grow into big time wasters because the issues isn't resolved efficiently and effectively."*

Furthermore, when staff do approach management to resolve issues in the workplace, managers tend to **prioritise the requests of senior management or the executive** due to political implications or logistics limitations. This can create a reactive style of management, where:-

- *"increasingly more urgent requests are cascaded down the line"*
- *"matters are taken completely out of the hands of staff to be dealt with by senior management only to be returned to staff after the urgency has passed, at which point they are often left to fix the problem created by the poor solution developed by senior management"*
- *"urgent or important workplace matters which impact staff only, and lack the political profile or urgency from executive, are not dealt with"*

### **Poor visibility of, and trust in, senior management**

Combined with middle management's lack of time and reactive approach, many staff felt **a lack of trust and relationships with managers/higher-ups** inhibited them from discussing workplace issues with them. In addition, some felt they may be personally at risk for raising issues.

*"Out of my crew, there'd be no one who had any faith in going in to the office & saying something [regarding workloads, getting more staff or resources, etc.]"*

*"If you point out 'this isn't working well', that isn't received well"*

*"You put yourself on the line, but there's little support. Nothing is actually done. I've been identified as the source of a complaint, and I'm [then] targeted for a rebuttal"*

*"There is a very big us and them culture and many feel belittled by those higher up."*

Numerous voices noted that higher-up management are not seen or heard from and that the organisation direction and strategy was 'faceless', with little sense of where direction was coming from.

Whilst many acknowledged that the senior executive team were extremely busy, and often get caught up in dealing with high profile, political matters, they also expressed a strong desire to have a better sense of their leaders as people, what they stood for and where they were taking them.

Redundancies particularly seemed to have been handled in a way that has created wide-spread distrust of senior management.

### **Poor support, communication and alignment between middle and upper management**

There is a broadly held view that there is poor communication and alignment in priorities and direction between middle and upper management, with middle management often saying one thing only to have upper management say or do another.

*"My supervisor is possibly the most dedicated employee I have ever worked alongside, and sometimes I see this colleague let down by sub-standard management, communication and leadership in other branches"*

*"The lack of communication between middle and top management is poor and top management do not understand exactly the roles of professional staff of this organization."*

*"The next level of management (one up from my direct manager) is into blame and has low to no people management skills."*

### ***Reactive, Chain of Command approach from upper/middle management to lower management and staff***

Accentuating this perceived divide between staff/lower management and middle to senior management is what many referred to as the '**Chain of Command**' approach which appears to involve upper management pushing responsibility for things going wrong down the line (i.e. "finding scapegoats"), becoming more directive with subordinates and removing them from normal lines of input or consultation without explanation.

*"The management style is a 'chain of command' system which does not work for an organisation of this nature. Council's professional staff are as qualified and experienced as management and staff deserve not to be treated like soldiers."*

*[There is a] "culture of ensuring senior management have someone to blame if things go wrong .."*

*"Compared to the organization's I have previously come from, the chain of command and feedback is shocking. Plus, the back up from higher than our command structure is non-existent and slow"*

This Chain of Command approach appears to be heightened when high profile matters, such as those instigated by Councillors, are raised. These occur approximately once per week and can take anywhere from a few hours to days to resolve, and require all attention and resources to be urgently diverted to their resolution. Unfortunately, this urgency cascades down the 'line of command', and according to feedback, often results in middle managers being taken completely away from business as usual to focus on the matter and staff with relevant expertise being excluded from the resolution process which they find frustrating and distressing as they are ultimately responsible for implementing the solution which is sometimes or ineffective.

*"Sometimes an issue "becomes a political hot-potato, [and then it's] taken out of your control, but you're still held accountable. ... there's no trust in our ability to do our job."*

Keeping staff appraised of and/or involved in designing the solution when such matters arise, is critical to their well-being as it not only shows a respect for their expertise, but helps reduce the stress and anxiety which comes from being held responsible for something that was created outside of your authority.

#### ***Role confusion***

In addition, many staff, especially supervisors and team leaders, explained that even when they did wish to raise issues over work with management, they were often confused over who manages what aspects of their job or specific areas. They also ventured that this confusion went both ways i.e. that management, especially senior management, were also unclear about what the day-to-day work actually entailed for areas under them. They attributed some of this role confusion to recent organisational change and restructure.

*"Sometimes it can be hard to speak to leaders because you don't know who manages what aspect of your role. You don't know who to send it up to."*

*"Higher up management doesn't understand what it is we do. We go directly to the DGM, rather than the manager, for issues/obligations."*

#### ***Poor people and performance management skills***

It was the exception when staff reported having a supervisor or manager with good people skills, and even rarer to hear of managers who had both the appetite and skills to take on underperformance. A

reliable source estimated that there were 2 – 3 Managers who they would rate as strong people managers, and the rest were *"spending more time on building stuff rather than finding people and saying thank you"*. They also noted that there were 6 – 8 Managers and mid-level Managers on Performance Improvement Plans for people management and that these were being provided with on-the-job coaching and training.

Staff and stakeholders supported this theme, reporting that most people managers were in their positions because of their technical skills and that unfortunately these were the skills they gravitated towards using, especially when people problems arose. That is, they would go 'building things' rather than dealing with the people issue.

*"A lot of the managers don't seem to have the guts to manage. People are too afraid and want to be everyone's friend. Handling underperformance, managing conflict, etc. ... It's too much like mates, not enough like managers"*

*Managers & supervisors aren't trained to manage underperformance. "If someone is performance managed properly, it shouldn't escalate. But bosses are afraid of having an incident report filed against them."*

It is understood that people management responsibilities are built into the new Performance Appraisal process and that there is targeted learning and development being offered to build people manager capabilities in managing performance and having difficult conversations.

#### ***Lack of feedback and support***

A significant number of participants, mostly from indoor/office-based roles, explained that they rarely receive feedback from their manager or supervisor, and that this leads to confusion, low morale and resentment at times, especially when things go wrong because they have inadvertently gone off track due to an absence of feedback.

*"Due to the lack of support and positive feedback, morale is low and psychological effect is high in an already stressful environment."*

*"I feel that I do not get enough direction from my manager as to what is expected from me. I tend to make-up my work tasks myself. I like to achieve things in my day to day job but sometimes feel that I am going around in circles."*

*"I am often unclear as to what my work goals are and feel I make them up myself."*

*"There is no clarity with my role and I am receiving very little feedback in general"*

*"Sufficient time has not been regularly allocated to me by my supervisor to discuss elements of my role and therefore things have not been done. It is unfortunate to be told I haven't done something I was not aware I needed to do. At times, I have felt totally unguided and alone."*

A few participants during the focus groups gave quite sad accounts of inadequate or a complete lack of acknowledgement for outstanding achievements which were even noted by external agencies.

#### ***Poor Manager job fit***

There is a widely held view that many Managers not only lack the requisite people skills to do their job but that they have also been relegated responsibilities, as part of the restructure, which they have no passion for or experience in.

*"There are some managers here who, because we've had so many restructures, they're not working in areas of expertise or passion. They might have no interest in certain responsibilities they've been lumped with."*

**Poor communication and collaboration**

Focus group responses in particular indicated that generally staff feel there is inadequate communication both within their team as well as from management at all levels on organisational matters and that rumours often surfaced well before any formal communications if the latter did occur

*"Communication is not always forthcoming often information comes via rumors and not directly. "*

*"At the moment we do not have any team meetings and there is little or no effective communication between team members and supervisor."*

There was a desire for more follow-ups, replies, some idea of progress on projects and timeframes when working across areas and departments. There was some sense that 'internal customers' from within the WSC needing work done by other areas were valued less than 'externals'. Numerous and frequent 'roadblocks' were noted in needing to work collaboratively in a heavily siloed environment.

**Uncertainty on WSC vision, mission statements and values**

Whilst the quantitative results reveal a high level of commitment to the Council's mission and values, it would seem from qualitative responses that this is focused on a more generalised commitment to serve the community. A strong sense of pride, loyalty and commitment to the Council and the work it does for the community was evident throughout the focus groups and qualitative survey results, however many staff complained about the lack of a clear vision and cohesive, coordinated leadership from the executive level down to help them deliver on this vision. They explained that the community appears to know where it wants to go, but that senior leadership have yet to articulate a clear vision for how Council will get them there.

There appears to be a genuine appetite for more clarity and certainty around future direction and a desire to feel a greater sense of pride and personal connection to this.

*"the council's mission and in particular the organizational values are not very well published around the Council staff buildings"*

*"Organisational information such as vision, operational plans are not typically discussed with the team."*

**Specific hot-spots in branches/teams/roles**

The management of Water and Sewer appeared to be problematic and this Branch was associated with a number of quite significant performance issues. The Reviewer understands that a comprehensive program of support and intervention has been implemented by Organisational Development to address the issues within this Branch and would welcome further discussion of the matter.



## Workplace Environment

The **Workplace Environment** factor looks at issues concerned with organisational culture, civility and respect in the workplace, as well as job recruitment, fit and design.

### WWI Quantitative Survey results

Workplace Environment	Don't Know	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Level of Agreement
11. I believe this organisation has effective hiring processes that select the best person for the job	5%	5%	12%	36%	35%	8%	43%
12. I believe promotion decisions consider employees' interpersonal/ emotional abilities not just their technical skills	12%	6%	12%	33%	33%	5%	38%
13. I believe my work area will restructure within the next 12 months	21%	10%	29%	29%	9%		14% Disagree
14. I believe this organisation will undergo significant changes in the next 12 months	15%	6%	30%	36%	11%		8% Disagree
15. I believe this organisation finds it easy to fill positions	10%	8%	29%	31%	19%		23%
16. I would describe this organisation's culture as characterized by trust, honesty and fairness	8%	17%	35%	32%	6%		38%
17. I believe there is very little risk of either harassment, discrimination or violence in this organisation	5%	16%	29%	40%	8%		48%
18. I consider this is a very safe organisation to work in both from a physical as well as psychological perspective	5%	15%	25%	46%	7%		53%

## Survey Analysis

The results in this factor indicate significant areas of concern about the workplace environment. Again, this can be understood in terms of the recent history of WSC, including restructures and redundancies. These latter points will be drawn out more in the qualitative sections of this report.

We would also indicate that items 13 (*I believe my work area will restructure within the next 12 months*) and 14 (*I believe this organisation will undergo significant changes in the next 12 months*), although 'red', are not necessarily matters of concern. Whilst there is a perception that there could be more changes in the near future and workplace change is a known psychosocial risk factor, if handled well, it may lead to positive wellbeing outcomes. That is, WSC respondents were generally accepting and supportive of the need for change but explained that their well-being would be better supported if they were provided with more information about the reasons for change and if there was greater transparency about how decisions are made. Handled poorly, change is a definite risk.

About half of the employees reported that they felt little risk of harassment, discrimination or violence in the organisation (48% agreement), but about half could not endorse that statement. That is unacceptably high. In addition, less than half (38%) would describe the organisation's culture as characterised by trust, honesty and fairness.

In relation to selection, less than half of respondents (38%) felt that promotion decisions *did* consider the interpersonal and emotional skills required to do the job and only 43% endorsed the statement that the organisation has effective hiring processes that select the best person for the job. Qualitative data showed numerous references to perceived nepotism, lack of transparency, inconsistency and favouring of technical skills over people skills when it comes to recruitment and selection practices.

Together, these scores and qualitative data reflect an unacceptably high risk to well-being posed by the quality of interpersonal relationships and the skills of those promoted to enforce appropriate behaviours.

Further in relation to hiring, only about one quarter of staff (23%) believe that the Council finds it easy to fill positions, which is reflective of reality for some roles. It is worth noting that if a significant proportion of staff believe the corollary – that *the Council find it hard to fill positions* – as in this case (47%), this has the potential to reduce existing staff's sense of pride and esteem in belonging to a 'select' employer and possibly sends the message to some that Council is so 'desperate' to keep staff, that it may accommodate underperformance and poor behaviours. Hence, why Council's current strong stance on managing out poor behaviour and selecting for attitude and people skills versus 'bums on seats' is so critical and should be promoted.

On a positive note, more than half of the respondents (53%) did consider the organisation a very safe organisation to work in both from a physical and psychological perspective.

The above themes are confirmed and expanded upon in the findings from qualitative survey responses, focus groups, stakeholder interviews.

## **Qualitative findings from Focus groups, Stakeholder interviews & WWI survey**

### **Workplace culture**

Within teams, there generally appears to be strong relationships which support wellbeing. Numerous respondents from across the entire organisation spoke positively of the relationships and interactions they have with their co-workers and colleagues on a day-to-day basis.

*"We've got a really good team. We get along really well. We kind of work together. You want to come to work."*

There were some exceptions to this healthy culture/relationships noted *between* teams, most notably between Water and Sewer and in the unhelpful responses provided by some parts of Development and Ranger services towards the Customer Service team (See Collaboration Factor for more detail).

There were also some isolated but significant cases of people managers engaging in behaviours which actively eroded well-being.

*"I believe that there are coordinators or managers in place that ... often play on the emotions and relationships of their staff members. They do not build on a happy work environment and are happy for their staff to be miserable and guessing whether they are safe in their positions"*

*"Our group manager undermines his staff regularly through unnecessary reworking and scope changing and by insisting he has things done his way. This results in great frustration, anxiety and stress and demoralizes his staff."*

*"Culture of blaming others, no disclosures made when issues occur which leads to rumors and disjointed workforce"*

*"There are some staff at co-ordinator levels who are directly and opening antagonistic towards other staff / branches and their roles and responsibilities, purely due to their own prejudiced personal views and values. These staff, I believe, lack essential interpersonal / emotional abilities required for their positions."*

Quantitative data showed that less than half (38%) would describe the organisation's culture as characterised by trust, honesty and fairness. The Reviewer suspects that this perception is largely due to the way recruitment and promotion practices are perceived, including recent restructuring and redundancies.

### ***Recruitment practices – inconsistent, ineffective and lacking in transparency***

Dissatisfaction in relation to Council recruitment and selection practices was one of the most consistent and passionate themes raised throughout the qualitative data with many complaining of:- an over-emphasis on technical versus people and interpersonal skills in people manager roles, perceived nepotism, lack of transparency, over-subjectivity, an over-reliance on qualifications rather than demonstrated capabilities, inconsistency over time-frames and hiring requirements, problems navigating the on-line application process and inadequacy of recruitment practices to attract the right employees.

- ***Over-emphasis on technical vs people skills for people manager roles***

Whilst stakeholder interviews revealed that there is a commitment to focus more on attitude and interpersonal skills in future selection practices, it appears that Council is still developing its approach to doing so and that, in many cases, technical skills are still being prioritised over people or interpersonal skills and demonstrated capabilities.

*"I have seen some positions filled and found that whilst the person might have good technical skills, in some instances the interpersonal skills are poor"*

*"In my experience I don't believe that all positions are filled with the correct people, in particular – management. Lack of leadership organisation, knowledge, direction."*

*"interpersonal/emotional abilities not always considered, emphasis on technical"*

- **Nepotism and lack of transparency in selection**

*"Jobs are supposed to be posted and advertised, yet sometimes you'll hear of a new role that was created out of nowhere, gifted out of nowhere. Try to explain it at least so we don't feel ripped off. Very unfair after a stressful restructure."*

*"It's still who you know over what you know"*

*"Obvious advancement via nepotistic tendencies is ongoing point of discussion by staff within assets. Support and guidance appears based on friendships/extended family relationships not skills, capacity and attitude"*

*"There are time when positions become available and are given to specific persons without being advertised either internally or externally."*

- **Inconsistency over time-frames and hiring requirements**

There appeared a level of inconsistency in terms of hiring requirements. Some participants had noticed certain positions may be filled very quickly, depending upon the financial clout and managerial 'pull' of the work area and leader.

*"It seems to be quite inconsistent. Seems sometimes new staff are appearing quite quickly in parts of the organisation"*

*"I think the recruitment process is horrible. It's inconsistent. We might wait months to get an ad up, asked to find the money ourselves to get it up; but then you see an ad for a job that opened last week up already"*

- **Over-subjective**

When managers were asked about their approach to selection, it appears that there is significant variation across this and that there is very little use of evidence-based techniques which reliably predict on-the-job performance such as Behavioural Descriptive Interviewing, Work Sample Tasks and Structured Referee Interviews designed around job-specific critical success factors, including psychological job demands.

*"This organisation has been very subjective in its recruitment processes. People have been promoted way beyond their capabilities."*

- **Over-emphasis on qualifications versus demonstrated capabilities – both technical and interpersonal**

*"Recruiting people based on certificates and ticking all boxes can lend itself to missing out common sense and experience. Not everyone needs a degree !!!"*

*Hiring seems to not consider motivation & work ethic, familiarity with the council & systems, 'people skills' (except for Customer Service) etc. Rather, it seems to be based on more procedural/academic qualification checklists."*

*"Someone with a Cert 3 from an employment agency who's never been in a [operations/outdoor work role] will walk in, while someone who's been working within the council for years and has hands-on experience with similar technology & roles is passed over. This creates tension between staff."*

*"A lot of people go through the motions to get the job, but can't handle working [in this outdoor environment]."*



- **Lengthy and difficult hiring process**

Uniformly, WSC is seen very ineffective in getting good people into roles. Many reported excessive paperwork, endless sign-offs, excessive process to get in new staff. Some mentioned that often administrative requirements seemed grossly unnecessary for the nature of the job. Many positions remain unfilled for months on end while the advertising process goes on.

*"I was approved, they had my paperwork, fitted up with uniforms, and it still took 3 months"*

*"I've seen jobs advertised 3 times, because they just can't anyone"*

*"Hiring processes seem very slow, especially actually starting the process, then being able to attract suitable candidates."*

- **Online process in particular is an issue**

*"recruitment process lengthy, outdated, difficult to navigate from a prospective employee perspective (online not very user friendly and other options not offered) and very time consuming for ... section responsible for recruitment process"*

*"The website is hard to navigate and extremely confusing [in regards to applying]"*

*"online application process is not user friendly, if you are computer savvy it is very time consuming, if you have no knowledge of computers, well you are up the creek"*

- **Difficulty attracting staff**

*"Organisational factors were regarded as impacting the organisation's ability to attract enough good applicants for positions."*

*"Not many good candidates are attracted due to the organisation's reputation for instability, frequent restructures, poor staff treatment and out of control political interference. It is unsafe in terms of psychological harm."*

### **Restructures and Redundancies**

The recent restructure and redundancies within the highly visible Customer Service team and in other parts of the organisation have been largely viewed as targeted and 'shadowy' in the way they were carried out, creating high levels of anxiety, resentment and distress for some staff, and a low-level fear and job insecurity for many others. It also further eroded the level of trust between staff and management

- **Redundancies perceived as targeted**

*"Redundancies have been poorly handled and appear to have targeted older workers or workers that have stood up for themselves. The organization has lost a lot of corporate memory as a result ... There is point scoring and bullying amongst some managers with the community being given less priority in decision making."*

*"In my time at council I have seen many staff come and go, and over and over again primary reason for leaving is disputes with management."*

- **Inadequate communication and consultation with staff over restructure**

*"I feel there is no trust and fairness at all restructures are done with no input from staff on the ground and are all quite secretive. there are areas that could and do suffer from psychological issues things take so long to get done and decisions are never made which puts a stain on people."*



*"I believe we are always restructuring for the sake of the latest ideas. There is no clear communication about the functional changes, just org charts which doesn't explain what has changed if you work here."*

*"All in all what I've witnessed is a lack of communication until the changes are upon us. Often the 'consultation' we receive is more advisory than consultation."*

- ***Dramatic exiting practices leading to distress, deep sadness, grief and a hyper-vigilance to signs of termination***

There were reports of people being 'walked from the building' without enough (or any) warning.

*"People have been walked out of the building [without explanation]. I get that it doesn't need to be communicated everywhere, but even within your team this will happen."*

*"We'd like to know at least why people are walked out of the building – was it a breach of the code of conduct? What warranted this?"*

Over the last 6 months, Rangers have apparently been used to remove people from the building upon termination, and asked to go to their houses to remove car keys and mobile phones. This is a significant area of concern because not only does this practice place these Rangers in the highly conflicted dual relationship of being both a peer and an enforcer with their colleagues, but many staff during the focus groups noted that they now feel quite anxious when they see one of these Rangers entering their work area as they anticipate being "next" [to be walked off the premises].

One respondent explained that she could not log onto her email account a few weeks ago and immediately panicked, assuming that she had been terminated as she had heard this is what happened to others just before they were terminated.

*"Last Thursday – I came in and was locked out of my computer, and I immediately assumed I'd been let go." Participant was relieved when her manager showed up to help.*

An apparent lack of communication around who is going, when and a sensitive explanation as to why, in addition to the options for farewelling staff and supporting all parties during the transition, seems to have contributed significantly to the distress experienced by staff as their colleagues were let go.

*"That has been very secretive. No communication. No 'this person is gone, here's what happened'. Managers might get an email, where it should be all-staff."*

*"There were staff made redundant last year who'd been here for 20 years. There was an email that went out, but didn't even mention the 20+ people that had been let go. People were crying, not really clear on what was going on"*

In addition, there has been poor interconnectivity between branches since staff have left because of the lack of communication over these staff changes

*"You go to see someone in an area, and suddenly, they're not there anymore."*

*You forward a customer enquiry through to a person and their email bounces or you are told they no longer work here"*

### Psychological impact of redundancies and restructures

In addition to the psychological impact of the dramatic exiting practices, some expressed deep sadness and even grief at not being able to say goodbye to long-time colleagues and associates and a reluctance to speak.

*"In the last 12 months over 25 people have lost their jobs. All staff fear they'll be next. "*

*"[Staff are] Not even a chance to say goodbye. Has all the work they've done not been valued at all? They might not even want a morning tea or whatever, but it feels now like it wouldn't be allowed."*

Many expressed a further erosion of trust in management and fear for their own job security

*"Having an extremely changeable workforce can lead to people being very cautious and a tendency to hold back in being helpful due to fear of change or loss of job. "*

*"I believe there have been many staff psychologically affected by the redundancies and made to feel insecure. It is challenged the trust in management."*





*"Due to recent history (e.g. restructures, staff redundancies etc.) trust is not good."*

### Reward and Development

The **Reward and Development** factor looks at issues concerned with the opportunities for growth and development of employees within a workplace and the level of recognition and reward given to employees.

#### WWI Quantitative Survey Results

Reward & Development	Don't Know	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Level of Agreement
19. I believe that this organisation effectively fills vacancies through internal promotions	14%	12%		37%	29%	5%	34%
20. I believe this organisation has an effective employee performance review and appraisal system	5%	12%	27%	28%	23%	5%	28%
21. I believe this organisation pays its staff fairly	6%	18%		32%	35%		39%
22. I believe this organisation provides employees with effective non-monetary rewards (e.g., time off, better shifts, preferred task selection)	4%	10%	18%	29%	32%	7%	39%

23. This organisation celebrates achieving milestones		40%
24. I believe I have adequate access to training and development opportunities appropriate for my role within the organisation		56%
25. I believe new employees receive adequate mentoring and support to allow them to do their role		48%
26. I believe that my training and development opportunities are equal to those available for all staff within this organisation		44%

### Survey Analysis

The more positive results identified in this factor were:- respondents felt that there was adequate access to training and development opportunities *appropriate for their role* within the organisation (53% agreement) and that new employees receive adequate mentoring and support to allow them to do their role (48%).

This factor however, again indicates significant areas which detract from well-being, specifically around the way it remunerates and provides non-monetary rewards to its staff (only 39% agreeing that these were fair or effective), appraises and reviews performance (only 28% agreeing this is effective), and the way it fills vacancies through internal promotions (34% agreeing this is done effectively).

Although scoring in the neutral range, the fact that only 40% endorsed the organisation as celebrating milestones achieved and 44% believe that their training and development opportunities are equal to those available for all staff in the organisation, do point to the themes of inequitable and inadequate development and recognition opportunities which surfaced in the qualitative results.

It appears that there is much room for improvement in WSC's reward and development practices, especially if it is to meet the objectives of its Workforce Management Plan 2015 - 2025.

### Qualitative findings from Focus groups, Stakeholder interviews & WWI survey

#### ***Inadequate remuneration compared to Other Councils/market rate***

Illustrative Quote: "The salaries in this organisation are low compared with similar or equivalent roles in other local government organisations and state government. There is little opportunity to progress through the salary increments within a level, which creates a lot of frustration within the organisation"

There was much discussion on pay rates being inadequate at certain levels of Council. Some described senior management pay rates as being around "where it should be, but people under (this level) are paid below other council standards."

*"Council staff are underpaid compared to other councils and market rates."*

Some noted that others have left for different councils with better remuneration rates.

*"Ask everyone in the morning, 'how many of you would leave for better coin?' and most probably would"*

### **Employee turnover perceived as related to remuneration**

*"Council's turnover rate is very high. Positions are hard to fill due to lower salary rates compared to other Councils. It is hard to retain good employees due to the slow progression through the salary system and funds not allocated for increases in salary steps."*

*"I have seen a huge turn-over of staff in the past 3 yrs - often for the same position."*

*"the turnover of staff is 18% at W.S.C. – That has got to say something."*

### **Pay Inequity within Council**

There were also various examples given where the same role appeared to be assigned different pay rates, simply due to changes over time in job descriptions and role titles. It was noted that older, out-dated position descriptions appear to have a higher pay rate for no particular reason. Whilst some acknowledged that WSC is not in a position to reduce the pay of some people to make it fairer to newer staff, they explained that newer staff are aware that they are being paid less for what appears to be the same work and feel frustrated and diminished by this.

*"I've found a job with an identical position description to mine, but a grade higher. ... [You don't think] 'why is that graded higher?' – it's more, 'why is mine graded lower?'"*

There was discussion that the Wyatt pay system is also very open to interpretation and potential manipulation in terms of how work is remunerated. Simply entering different titles, or checking boxes for qualifications online will see your pay grade go up and it was felt that sometimes this tool was used to deliberately create a certain remuneration level - either higher to attract a certain type of job applicant or lower to save money. This created a sense of inequity over access to fair pay for the same work/job.

In addition, where a staff member 'acts up' temporarily while a supervisor is away, that staff member receives the same base pay, even though the supervisor's role that they are filling is paid at a higher rate.

### **Pay wall**

Many noted that once an employee has reached Level 4 in the pay band, the motivation drains and performance reviews become meaningless. Many noted an attitude of "why bother meeting new expectations or taking on new responsibilities?"

*"Some people who are on the max don't give a shit. They do enough to get by, and know they're not going to leave."*

*"once on level 4 within the grade there is no moving forward, even though you are working to a high standard."*

*"I have topped my grade out and have had excellent performance appraisals for what they are worth and I have never been offered any monetary rewards."*

*"Capping at level four offers no incentive - people continue to do a good job because of their own personal values not because the organisation offers sincere thanks and congratulations."*

### ***Pay raises and promotions seem to be allocated 'randomly'***

A number of participants felt that discretion, recognition of good service, and manager referral/recommendation was not properly considered in who receives benefits. Rather, the system was described as a 'lottery'.

*"It's not distributed fairly – more about who hasn't had it for a while, not discretion or merit-based."*

*"The link between performance appraisals outcomes and the decision as to who receives a pay increase is unclear and appears to be arbitrary"*

*"Even if your supervisor recommends a pay increase for you, there seems to be no correlation with the managers taking that up."*

*"I've had situations where I've recommended one person in particular for a pay rise, and then it comes back and it's someone else. What happens to my input?"*

This was noted as creating tension and problems working interpersonally on occasion:

*"It causes conflict – one bloke will get it on one sight, and another won't. Well, why did he get it? There's these imbalances" - not matched to how hard people are working.*

### ***Limited opportunities to attend training***

There was a general consensus that opportunities to attend *any* training were extremely limited or non-existent, and that access to/approval of such training appeared to be contingent on who you know and to be preferentially allocated to management and team leaders via centralised decision-making, rather than based on any transparent or consistent criteria or local need.

*"training is limited and many opportunities are simply not available. "*

*"... some staff seem to get many opportunities while others don't, depending on their manager."*

*"in other more technical areas training appears based on reward/friendship as opposed to requirement for role, unsure why part time staff are approved training above full time staff."*

*"Even though training requests have been made numerous time they have all been rejected without justification."*

Some also explained that Managers will often try to keep staff in one area, and refuse training because they do not want to lose valuable staff.

### ***Inequitable access to training***

Staff from areas which were currently under-staffed (e.g. Customer Service) and/or experiencing very high work-loads also expressed frustration at the lack of opportunity to attend training because there was simply not enough staff to cover their absence whilst they attended.

### ***Very difficult to receive training for new capabilities***

There was a broad consensus that the Council would only approve training that enhances one's performance in their *current* job and would not provide training that could help with promotion or the ability to move to another role within Council. Many of these respondents, especially from Outdoor staff, described frustration that their attempts to progress beyond their current pay levels were being thwarted by this practice.



*"For staff to move up a level, they need to meet training requisites, e.g. Cert III in Water Operations. But maybe due to lack of funding, we haven't been offered these courses. Because they, for whatever reason don't tick the boxes to receive it, they aren't offered. They can't progress even though they want to."*

In short, a lack of training can mean people get 'stuck' at pay levels or experience

*"We're limited – no training, you just stay in your box, that's what you do."*

Some reported needing to move down work levels and pay brackets to get access to change and professional development.

### ***Lack of internal development and mobility***

*"A lot of us come from different areas. Because of your position descriptions, someone can't move across area like they used to." But if you know someone from another area who is proven reliable and knows the council systems, they just need a Cert 2, Cert 3. But instead, you get someone who has no practical skills, but does tick hiring boxes.*

*"They do hire people with a lot of skills and experience. But there's no flexibility to move between teams. There's no structure for people to move around."*

*"I've been working a job for 6 months, and you'd think they'd get me in, but they had to advertise externally"*

### ***Meaningless performance appraisal process***

Many felt that the previous performance review process in WSC was "a tokenistic HR exercise" that achieved very little in terms of actually rewarding or further developing careers, or serving the supervisor or employee in assisting with work.

*"Tick and flick – it's a quick, uninvolved process. No real feedback, no real positive outcome. You can list training and development you'd like, but it's ignored."*

*"Everyone across the organisation agrees it's a waste of time"*

*"The performance review is pathetic and most people don't want to do it & just sign with no input"*

Many saw the only value for this process being in determining if you received a pay increase so for those who had already achieved a level 4, it was meaningless as no further pay increment was possible.

*"Performance review system is useless if you have reached a level 4 in your grade, you cannot move up no matter how well you do."*

*"I'm at the highest level, so it's just a tick and flick, over and done"*

It was also brought to the attention of the Reviewer that apparently under the Award, once employees are at Level 4 of their grade, they are not obliged to take part in any performance review process however these staff are being encouraged to do so by management. This requires further clarification.

For those who had *not* achieved the top of their grade yet, it was also seen as largely meaningless because even if they were appraised as 'exceeding', a pay increment was still unlikely as the approval process appeared to be arbitrary, more of a 'lottery' and to be driven by budget considerations.

Many also explained that the existing Performance Review system did not provide an adequate explanation for how to move beyond various performance levels. It is however, positive to note that the new Performance Appraisal form includes behavioural anchors to assist with bringing consistency (inter-rater reliability) and objectivity to employee and manager ratings across each competency area, which should clarify what is required to 'exceed' or advance, and that the form includes a Training and Development Plan.

*"The performance appraisals make it very difficult to achieve above the satisfactory level with no clear guideline as to how this is achieved"*

Some noted that as position descriptions change over time and more roles and responsibilities informally get moved to staff members, the utility of a performance review assessing against an outdated position description seems questionable.

*"My JD [Job Description] doesn't reflect at all what I do. You question the appraisal. You question your pay rate."*

The Performance Review process was however acknowledged as a useful process for managing underperformance.

### ***Absence of performance reviews***

For some respondents, they perceived that there was no performance review process in place

*Doesn't seem to be happening at all in some areas:*

*"Have not had a performance review for an entire year."*

*"I have not had a face to face performance review for at least 12 months."*

*"Having been employed for around 8 mths, I have never had a performance review"*

*At the time of writing this my co-workers and myself have not had an employee review for almost a year."*

### ***Inadequate recognition for good performance***

*I personally have worked here for over [more than 5] years and have not received one performance review pay rise. I over-achieved my goals but each year I'm informed it comes down to budget, but we hear managers received them."*

*"No matter how well I perform, I'm on level 4 and get a stock standard letter from HR saying thanks for effort but no pay increase. I get it, I do, but hey it's not too hard to personalize a letter a bit more"*

*"Staff not rewarded for good performance, increases not paid due to lack of funds"*

### ***No incentive to work harder due to the pay ceiling and a lack of recognition***

*"There is no real incentive besides personal work ethic to perform to the best of your ability. In pay brackets that most of the workers at council are on, moving up in your pay grade often provides such a small increase in wages its hardly noticed."*

*"There is little incentive to excel in the course of your employment if you know you'll just be 'satisfactory' or 'unsatisfactory'."*

*"The current appraisal system makes it very difficult to succeed above the satisfactory level."*

*"At the level we work at there is very little chance of promotion, pay is at the lower end of the scale, with little incentive and there are little or no rewards of any kind."*

*"There are no real rewards for staff that go above and beyond consistently especially if you have reached the top of your pay grade."*

### **Lack of recognition – formal and informal**

*"I have never been acknowledged that I played even a part [a given] success. When I did state this disappointment to my manager, he said that it goes without saying that people think you did a good job. Whilst I don't expect for a pat on the back, I recall as a young employee [13 years ago] a senior officer of the organisation I was working for came over to my desk and that of my colleague and said what a great job we were doing. That was amazing and lifted us to even perform harder."*

*"due to the day to day requirements, milestones are not highlighted enough by senior management to the individual staff. Not just at large Council events / newsletter, [individuals just want to be] appreciated for the work which they do"*

Some team leaders/supervisors/managers discussed the importance of providing recognition to their staff in terms of morale and acknowledging their extra efforts

*"We've got so many jobs to do. When I or my guys are feeling it, after the day, you just say to every single person 'thanks guys'."*

However, some staff still felt it was insufficient, or that a culture of informal recognition did not properly exist within their work area.

Further, templated post-review letters were cited as a lack of WSC's care for the system. Although this has apparently been improved in more recent times, it was noted that letters of performance review are rarely individualised and some felt insulted by this, especially if they had exceeded, not received a pay increment and been advised to speak with their manager about how to improve their performance.

Formerly, monthly work BBQ's bringing together indoor and outdoor staff were held. This has been discontinued, although in some areas the managers take it upon themselves to do it anyway, sometimes paying out of their own pocket (despite not being allowed to).

*"We used to arrive on a Friday afternoon to have office staff setting up and cooking, making you feel a bit special. Not anymore."*

*"We have a BBQ once a month at the worksite for the guys to say thank you." ... "A lot of managers pull that out of their own pocket"*

*"I take my team out for lunch at least 2 or 3 times a year. To me, that's what a team leader does." [And this person pays for it themselves.]*

### **Inadequate recognition for outstanding performance**

*"acknowledge of high performing staff via salary increases is strangely done by whose turn it is"*

*"Poor organisational culture in formally rewarding outstanding performance."*

### **Uncertainty regarding promotion process**

*"Its hard to measure if internal promotions are working as we don't have succession planning in place."*

*"No specific processes or policies for internal promotions."*

### ***Little/no mentoring***

*"I have seen most new employees 'sink or swim' as there is almost no mentoring, there are no systems or manuals for new staff to use; when one staff member leaves, they take all that knowledge with them - their replacement has to learn everything the long and hard way."*

*"Little training provided on commencement of employment I was basically dropped in the deep end and has to figure it out myself."*

*"I have not received any positive mentoring nor support in this role" and I am unaware of any training or development opportunities in my department*

*"New employees would greatly benefit from a team leader or experienced employee working alongside to develop a quicker understanding of the role requirements"*

### ***Poor flexible work arrangements***

*"The organisation is reluctant to offer variable workplace (part time) or retirement (transition) opportunities."*

*"We have inflexible working conditions. I am at the top of my pay scale and the best reward that could be offered to me for good performance would be flexible work arrangements"*

*"More flexible work hours should be allowed"*

*"More flexible work arrangements would be fantastic."*

### ***No celebration of milestones***

*"I'm unaware of any milestone that are important to the organisation, these are not advertised anywhere."*

*"I am not aware of any organizational celebration of milestones."*

*"This could be communicated better e.g. monthly achievements email or something"*

### ***Underperformance mostly not managed***

Whilst there is a growing appetite for and evidence of underperformance being actively managed, it is still seen as the exception by many. Apparently in the past, underperformers tended to be given the worst jobs in the hope that they would leave or they would be sent to other teams but HR/Organisational Development has put a stop to these practices however the perception that underperformers are not managed or are moved around still exists.

There was also a perception that underperforming people managers appeared to be protected unlike staff who were actively managed out of the organisation i.e.

*"People [managers] who underperform end up having more people inserted between them and their Direct reports to buffer their incompetence because it is easier to plug the gap than manage the person"*

Managing underperformance is seen as unusual and when you do it, you are seen as "the bad guy" because it is not 'what you do here' according to some of the more proactive people managers. Some Managers who had taken an active role in managing underperformance reported having incurred physical damage to their personal property and other negative repercussions.

## Collaboration

This factor looks at issues concerned with the opportunities for employees to be involved and to influence workplace decisions, and the level of teamwork within the workplace.

### WWI Quantitative Survey Results

Collaboration	Don't Know	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Level of Agreement
27. There are clear procedures in place to deal with workplace conflicts (e.g. mediation proceedings, external consultations)	10%	12%	27%		40%	7%	47%
28. I believe that employee feedback is documented, considered and acted upon in this organisation (e.g., employee suggestions, exit interviews, complaints/ grievances)	13%	6%	17%	35%	23%	6%	29%
29. This organisation has and uses informal mechanisms for soliciting employee input and feedback (e.g., suggestion box, email)	17%	6%	15%	36%	22%		26%
30. I believe all staff are held equally accountable for their actions in this organisation	9%	24%	27%		30%	6%	36%
31. I believe most people get along well together in this organisation		9%	21%		59%	7%	66%

### Survey Analysis

Although many WSC employees who responded to the survey believe most people get along well in the organisation (66% agreement) it was also evident that the majority of staff feel limited in their opportunity to influence workplace decisions and perceive a lack of equality for accountability in the organisation.

It is evident from the ratings provided that there are a number of key development areas and opportunities for WSC pertaining to formal and informal mechanisms for employee suggestions and feedback.

In particular, only 29% of respondents believe that employee feedback is documented, considered and acted upon in the organisation. Very few felt that the organisation has or uses informal mechanisms for soliciting employee feedback (26% agreement).



Slightly more promising, was the 47% of respondents who agreed that there are clear procedures for dealing with workplace conflict, although this still indicates that more than half of respondents are not sure or disagree with this statement which is unacceptably high.

In light of these results, the current Wellbeing Survey initiative is extremely well timed and important as a tangible indicator of a change in approach. These results indicate a very strong desire for a more participatory and supportive style of management and leadership and send a loud signal to senior leadership, that *the workforce will be closely watching their response to this Survey and the feedback contained herein.*

### **Findings from focus groups, stakeholder interviews & responses to Open-ended questions in the WWI Survey**

Illustrative Quote: "Overall I feel the organization has serious cultural problems. There seems to be a sense that there are different rules for different people. And that bad managers can hide their shortcomings too easily." – This sentiment of 'different rules for some' and poor management being protected was echoed a number of times.

#### ***Poor accountability***

As indicated in the earlier Leadership factor where 41% of respondents noted that their direct manager/supervisor did not receive the support they need from organisational leadership to do their job effectively, there is a pervading perception that middle management are not held accountable to escalate the issues raised by staff or by supervisors/team leaders to decision-makers and have them acted upon, or at minimum, be required to provide some sort of feedback or follow-up to the coordinator/supervisor/team leader or staff.

*"Accountability at manager level is poor"*

It would also appear that there is a sense that incompetence at middle management level is either masked by inserting more competent staff between the manager and their direct reports to buffer for this incompetence, or hidden by middle management pushing responsibility for mistakes downwards.

The extent to which accountability for actions was maintained amongst staff, appeared to vary depending on the skill and appetite of the people leader to address underperformance and their maturity to move from 'mate to manager'. There appeared to be no expectation that staff should hold each other to account.

*"Some employees are allowed to shirk duties and get away with it. Laziness is rife amongst a few workers. The attitude is council doesn't care so I/we don't"*

*"Some staff within the organization are a protected species - not sure why."*

*"I feel the organization has double standards between branches."*

*"I believe there are rules for some and other rules for the rest"*

There were some exceptions to this however, with numerous reports of underperformance being proactively and effectively managed by the Coordinator of Parks and Open Spaces, Manager of Design and Construction, and Group Manager Planning and Development. Amongst Parks and Open Spaces staff, this preparedness to be held to account also appears to have cascaded downwards, with staff during focus groups describing examples of how they do hold each other to account if they have not done what they were supposed to do.

### ***Non-responsiveness to feedback / no feedback mechanisms***

The scores in relation to feedback mechanisms were some of the lowest across all survey questions. Clearly, the vast majority of respondents felt that the organisation does not seek or respond to their feedback and this sentiment played out 'loud and clear' across the focus groups and other qualitative data.

*"God forbid we get a suggestion box / email."*

This finding may have been especially accentuated by the relatively recent restructuring in which there appeared to be, by necessity, little to no involvement in the decision-making.

There was also a widely expressed view that feedback was not welcome, and that there may be negative repercussions if you asked questions or provided feedback about management decisions. Several felt that simply 'having an opinion' that was contrary to a manager's liking or created some tension could explain redundancies and firings within the last few years.

*"I don't think that staff feedback is welcomed. "*

*suggestions are not being listened to or acted upon due to team leader acting as though they're threatened by ideas or suggestions."*

In some cases, the organisation's apparent lack of responsiveness to Exit Interview data was also referenced with many suggesting feedback about ineffective management had not led to any changes despite this being the major reason why people left.

*"With the high turnover rate in council a number of exit interviews have been completed, with the primary reason for leaving being lack of effective management. Nothing has been done to correct this despite the DGM's and GM being advised directly"*

*"I know of many exit interviews that were treated as those staff just complaining... not sitting back and considering that a similar thread was appearing in feedback which needs to be dealt with."*

This perception is not substantiated by the Exit Interview data reviewed for 2014 – 2016 i.e. Of the 23 people who exited the Council during this period, 16 resigned, 2 were made redundant and 5 were terminated/probation. From this population of 23, 8 Exit Interviews were conducted out of the 16 who resigned, and of these, only 2 made reference to factors related to people management such as workload, communication of duties, job satisfaction and staff morale. (Of the remaining 6, 2 cited need for greater job security as they had been on fixed contracts, 1 cited family commitments, and 1 wanted to try the private sector). Whilst it is possible that some of these employees sanitised their reasons for leaving so as to avoid 'burning bridges', ineffective people management does not appear to be the main reason for staff leaving but it is still worth noting that this perception exists amongst staff.

### ***Workplace conflict***

Workplace conflict appears to be poorly managed, with numerous reports that it was often ignored by front-line managers (Coordinators, Team Leaders, Supervisors), and only finally dealt with, both reluctantly and ineffectively, when things reached breaking point and Organisational Development was called in to assist. Many felt that this was because front-line managers lacked the skills to resolve disagreements or grievances "at the level at which they occur" (as per the Grievance and Dispute Policy), and that they also did not receive the necessary support or coaching from their Managers to help them resolve conflict early and effectively.

*"When there are workplace conflicts, not enough is done to address them, particularly when the conflict has been long and ongoing ... vibe seems to be as long as the job is done, it doesn't matter how it was done or how staff are treated in getting it done."*

*"I have experiences of a grievance/complaint not being acted on and dealt with to resolution so can't agree with"*

In addition, many respondents felt that there were no clear procedures for dealing with workplace conflict.

*"I haven't seen any procedures or policies for workplace conflicts when looking on the intranet I couldn't find anything ... no simple or clear way of finding HR policies etc"*

*"have never had access to these"*

*"Procedures are difficult to find, most staff are unaware of where to look ... I have made an enormous effort to provide input regarding process improvement and raised issues ... this has appeared to be a waste of time; very little has been done to accommodate this feedback."*

*"I do not think that there are enough clearly documented procedures on this matter. I do not think that all staff know of their existence nor where they can be located."*

Whilst the Reviewer noted that the Council has a Grievance and Dispute Policy and Procedure, neither of these explicitly reference conflict, and appear only to clearly articulate the escalation pathway rather than provide any tips or strategies for addressing conflict *early and informally* before it reaches the threshold of a formal dispute or grievance. This information and training/tips for early dispute resolution may be available through other means not sighted by the Reviewer.

Some also made reference to the tendency for Council to outsource responsibilities for dispute resolution rather than attempt to resolve things internally and informally, which leaves them feeling unsupported and or frustrated by a lack of an on-going resolution to the issue.

*There seems to be a lot of out sourcing of mediation work that come across as a cold and clinical solution. We often receive emails and have posters about support services, but rather than talking to someone within the organisation, you are asked to call an external consultant. I'm sure it saves council money but it is a impersonal solution, and it makes HR seem uncaring.*

*Mediation, external consultation maybe used but there is often no resolution from these actions*

### **Interdepartmental conflict**

- **Water and Sewer**

There are reports that these two areas are not working together effectively, if at all. According to respondents, ever since Water and Sewer were amalgamated into the same work site, this has created an 'us and them' mentality, leading to disputes and conflicts over resource usage and access to over-time, managers failing to communicate with one another, and one team deliberately damaging the equipment of the other team (e.g. slashing tyres) or leaving it unserviceable. Reliable sources were adamant that this deliberate damage or sabotage was being undertaken by the same five members of one section in 9/10 cases. They also described petty but hostile actions being taken by this same group towards the other such as deliberately wetting down the chairs in the lunchroom so the other team had nowhere to sit at lunch.

These sources described the environment as toxic and that people are so keen to avoid this dysfunctional group of five, that they will sit outside in the rain to eat lunch if they are in the lunchroom. Sources said that it appeared that this group 'festered' off each other and that it was extremely distressing to be around, so they tended to provide a 'bit of a cocoon' around their team mates to protect them from this toxicity.

*"within our own team, the culture is quite strong. But when we work with other areas, it gets very divisional"*

Some also described this team of five as being part of a 'protected species' supported by the Manager as there was an absence of any visible consequences for their behaviour. There were reports that relationships within the yard did improve for a while but that they were slowly worsening again and that in April this year, there was a vote of no confidence in the Manager of Water and Sewer.

- **Customer Service**

*"I think customer service would be the worst place to work" ... "I know departments that wouldn't even answer a call from Customer Service"*

This area specifically had numerous difficulties in collaboration, given that they need to form an interconnected 'hub' linking all of the requirements of residents/councillors to the varied arms and functions of the council. Yet there has been a lot of change, a lot of uncertainty and lost experience.

It was noted that some departments may be helpful, but others (e.g. some Planners and some Rangers) will simply dismiss requests with a 'that's not my job' or be openly condescending towards the Customer Service Officers.

*"Hey girls! How you going? – This is how some of the Development and Infrastructure Services staff greet the Customer Service Officers! It's as if they are stuck in 1966 and it disrespects the fact we have males on the team"*

Understanding requests to help meet needs can be difficult, both internally especially in the Depots (very idiosyncratic jargon and roles), and externally, with customers often confused.

*"When a customer escalates it to DGMs, or councillors, it becomes a question of 'why didn't you respond to this?'. But we tried! just didn't get any response."*

*Counter: "To be fair, it's confused within the Depot itself! Some more clear responsibilities would be beneficial." ... "There's been a lot of turnover in the organisation. Knowledge isn't as high as it should be."*

*"Often [at the Planners Duty Desk], we have difficulties translating the customer requests. The internal request is about A in X, but when you speak directly to the customer, it's about B in Y"*

In operations on the ground, some noted action requests do not properly explain what the customer wants, or why it is happening. In addition, communication comes through too many people, resulting in confusing or unclear instructions at a job site/call out for outdoor staff.

It was also noted that a recent restructure in this area had affected the ability of the Customer Service team quite substantially, because not only are most of them new staff, but the organisation they are trying to help customers navigate has also gone through some restructuring, so there is a fair amount of confusion across the entire Council about 'who does what'. There also appear to be some pockets of resentment at the way the restructure was undertaken, which leads to these individuals being less helpful with the new Customer Service Officers.



## Workflow

This factor looks at issues concerned with workload management, and how the workplace functions.

The majority of responses in this section were positive results in general.

### WWI Quantitative Survey Results

Workflow	Don't Know	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Level of Agreement
32. My work team has adequate resources (equipment, technology, budget) to complete our work	5%	17%	24%		44%	9%	53%
33. My work team has adequate staff to complete our work	9%	27%	22%		35%	5%	40%
34. My manager clearly outlines what tasks need to be completed and by when		8%	18%		56%	14%	70%
35. My manager gives me reasonable time to properly complete my allocated tasks	6%		20%		58%	14%	72%
36. My formal job description is a good reflection of what I actually do in my role	9%	16%	18%		44%	9%	53%
37. I am able to prioritise my tasks so I can better manage my workload			15%		61%	20%	81%
38. I am able to suggest to my manager or colleagues new ways of doing work tasks to make better use of my own or my team's resources (time, materials, equipment, budget etc)			13%		54%	25%	79%
39. My colleagues are willing to provide each other with help to get work done during busy times.	5%	10%			49%	33%	82%



## Survey Analysis

This was a much more positive factor for WSC. A very substantial majority of WSC employees feel that they: are able to prioritise their tasks to better manage workload (81%); can obtain help from colleagues to complete work in busy periods (82%); and can make suggestions to managers and colleagues about how to better carry out tasks to make better use of their own or their team's resources (79%), although based on previous feedback, it would appear that in at least some cases, the latter only applies provided it is consistent with the ideas of their supervisor.

Generally, a majority of respondents also reported that: they are given reasonable time to properly complete their allocated tasks (72% agreement); and that their manager clearly outlines what tasks need to be completed and by when.

Whilst responses for the following three items all fell within the neutral range, they do signal opportunities for improvement if wellbeing is to be enhanced. Only 40% agreed that their team had adequate staff to complete their work, whilst 53% agreed that their team had adequate resources (equipment, technology, budget) to complete their work and 53% agreed that their formal job description is a good reflection of what they actually do in their role.

Overall, these results would suggest that most WSC employees feel that they are generally able to manage the work that is required of them adequately, within their team, although well-being would be enhanced by having more staff, a position description which reflected their actual job and more resources.

As we will see, the qualitative responses indicate a desire for this positive workflow to also be present on an organisational wide level.

## Findings from focus groups, stakeholder Interviews and responses to open-ended questions in WWI Survey

### ***Under-staffing***

There were numerous complaints from various areas within the WSC that there are not enough staff to effectively complete their work. This was concerning particularly in terms of safety surrounding operations issues, particularly in roles such as Roads and Traffic. It was noted that staff want to get work done safely, but feel strained.

*Roads and Traffic: "I'm doing 3 jobs. Teams should be 6 to make it healthy and easy, but often gets down to 2 – 3."*

*RRC: "we are understaffed out there, but we have a lot of team members trying to get the job done"*

*"Our manager just let 2 guys go and tried to let that workload dissolve into our team." This happened for 6+ months*

*Customer Service – On windy days, Contact Centre staff are pushed over the edge, On Rates day (i.e. when Council rates are due), the cashier does not get a break*

The lack of staff also means that many are needing to do work that is below their expertise or simply time-consuming for no good purpose

*"I file [despite being a top level town planner] – I don't have time to do anything else. All admin, paper-handling stuff I need to do all day"*

Whilst casual and contract-based staff are being used to address some under-staffing needs, these do not always appear to reduce the workload for others.

*With staff being allocated to other areas of council, we are consistently understaffed or sent casual labour who do not fully understand their role and constantly need to be supervised and helped.*

It was also acknowledged that some roles, such as certifiers, were difficult to recruit so different recruitment strategies needed to be deployed to address the under-staffing in this area

### **Work hours**

Under-staffing appears, at times, to place some staff at fatigue-related risk due to the on-call nature of their job. In operations outdoors staff, it was noted that call-outs could be at odd and very late hours and this affected Rangers and Water and Sewer staff in particular. According to reports, due to break rules, before 2am is classed as a different day so if the employee is called out after this time, then they can be and are required to work through for that day. When asked if they could then finish earlier to compensate, many said that this 'just wouldn't work' as there are some aspects of their job they need to be in attendance for during full business hours, and that it would also mean the rest of their team would be under-staffed and they were reluctant to let their team-mates down.

As a result, fatigue can be very high, with reports of trying to drive home or come to work without falling asleep.

*"If we get called at 3am for a 3 - 4 hour callout, we're still expected to come into work at 8:00am"*

### **Politics creates instability**

As already referenced in the Leadership factor, Councillors' urgent, high profile and highly political requests, many of which attempt to circumvent appropriate systems and controls for getting work done, creates constant instability and issues with workflow. This factor was noted across all levels and job types within Council and was identified as causing high stress, confusion, and resentment about staffing or other resources being urgently re-directed to accommodate these requests, many of which are not consistent with Council's formal operational plans and with the team's priorities.

*"From my perspective [in integrative planning & coordinated govts], you might come in with a plan for the day, but suddenly it changes. My area is really under-resourced. That is a risk to my team. We can't achieve work-life balance in my team."*

The need to 'stop Councillor interference' and better manage these requests was consistently identified as a high priority action by staff if their wellbeing and pride in being an employee of Council was to be improved.

### **Inadequate resources, some posing physical safety risks**

Throughout the qualitative feedback, there were numerous complaints about a lack of resources in various areas of the WSC. When requests are made for more resources to do work more effectively and efficiently, these appear to be often ignored or not acted upon, even when there are solid business cases presented for investing in the resources. These requests could range from simple such as several more chairs in an office space, or to a car to get between locations within the shire as required by their job.

In addition, the need for better IT resources was frequently raised

*"better software would make my job easier."*

*"We waited nearly 2 months for software which will enable our team to combine and email PDF documents instead of printing each page and scanning them together to send to customers."*

*"We have no support for IT issues at all. Is quite pathetic."*

*"computer support & software leaves a lot to be desired"*

### **Lack of funds and delegated authority**

Lack of money and authority to buy the resources needed to do their job, was also noted, especially amongst team-leader/coordinator/supervisor level as they saw first-hand where a simple resource could deliver significant improvements. The bureaucracy associated with having to purchase simple one-off items via the procurement processes was also noted as hindering people from doing their job in an effective way, especially those in Outdoor and Asset Maintenance roles.

*"I have no budget at all. I rely on the goodwill of others to fund resources I use."*

*"I feel that my direct supervisor and myself are often stressed by the pressures of the daily workload. I feel this is due to lack of time, funding and resources to complete required tasks that customers and volunteers expect."*

*"Council staff and budget are inadequate"*

Where resources were allocated, there was sometimes a sense of confusion and injustice as to how these were distributed e.g. a \$1000 lunch service provided, despite not being able to provide crucial safety equipment for rangers

- *Library – "We often run out of time, staff, resources, etc. to do projects"*
- *Rangers – "If we are called out to a remote location at 3am to herd cows off a road, we are on our own, sometimes dealing with angry people or animals, and at times there will be no mobile [phone] coverage but when we have asked for satellite phones, we are told there is not enough money in the budget"*
- *Customer Service – [Contact Centre] staff can't breathe! There is no ventilation and we are waiting on louvres for the windows. In the meantime, staff are getting sick and feeling stressed. [Staff] see executive staff getting new desks and furniture, yet [they] can't get ventilation!*
- *Customer service – We are counting money in an open and unsecured area. At rating time, we can handle \$100,000 in 1 week and when Council meetings are on, the front door is left open so anyone can come in. A security assessment has recommended jump barriers and security doors, it has been listed as a WHS issue on numerous times over a 4-year period but we are told there is no money. Staff are very concerned and anxious for their colleagues who are counting the money.*

### **Meetings- too many and too long**

Adding unnecessarily to work load, was the frequency and length of meetings, many of which were seen as unjustified and robbing time-poor managers of the ability to actually deliver on the actions agreed to during such meetings.

*"Too many meetings for the sake of meetings. Not enough effective strategic decision-making. What could have been done in 15 minutes takes 2 hours."*

*"Today I've got 4 meetings, tomorrow I've got 3. I get so much work out of every meeting, but not enough time to do all of it. Over the last 18 months I have been very behind"*

### ***Strong teamwork which buffers under-staffing & under-resourcing***

Numerous different areas reported having very strong teams around them that assist when times are tough and everyone needs to pull together despite limited resources, tight timeframes, etc. Especially noted were Parks, Assets and Customer Service which is not surprising considering the high quality of people leadership reportedly provided in these areas.

*"We're a small, under-resourced team. We all understand, have a bit of a vent, and everyone gets that. That's our strength. We've had to face a common challenge in resourcing & getting things done. It's helped us to blend as a group."*

*"My workload is large and yes we could do with another set of hands but we manage by communicating effectively and being open about our workflow and matters at hand"*

*"We have a great team who are all very committed .. and our manager empowers staff to do work as we need to, [but] we need at least one more member to keep up with the workload"*

### ***Strong commitment hiding jobs and excessive work-load***

Many staff explained that they often go above and beyond their job requirements just to be sure the work gets done. They also added that they rarely receive any thanks or acknowledgement for doing so

*"I choose to perform a much greater range of roles than covered in my position description, purely to try to fill gaps within the organisation."*

*"my current 'job description' isn't close to including 3/4 of the extra things I have to do in my role. I am not the only one who feels this way. and I personally feel mildly exploited and under-appreciated for the results I can achieve."*

### ***Out-dated position descriptions***

Some respondents also reported that their formal job description does not match the job they actually do. In some cases, respondents did not have a job description. This has significant implications for managing performance and well-being.

*"The job descriptions are very out dated."*

*"My job description has been out of date for some time but has not been rectified despite request to do so."*

*"my work role has grown to encompass somewhat more than that which is described in my formal job description."*

*"I am awaiting my job description to be updated for the past 2 years as the job description does not reflect my current work due to changes with my responsibilities and duties. I do however understand that job descriptions are being updated for the entire organisation at present. "*

*"My formal job description did not include training staff members, doing the departments accounting work, doing the team leaders work."*

Most respondents were aware that Position Descriptions were currently being updated by the organisation.



## Psychologically Safe Workplace

This factor looks at issues of employee engagement, and the implementation of measures that protect the psychological welfare of employees.

### WWI Quantitative Survey results

<b>Psychologically Safe Workplace</b>	Don't Know	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Level of Agreement
40. I am energized by the work I do		5%		20%	53%	20%	73%
41. I am motivated to do my job well		9%			53%	35%	88%
42. If I had an issue that impacted my ability to complete my work (e.g. personal or work related issues) I would discuss this with my manager			10%		53%	31%	84%
43. I feel comfortable using our organisation's Employee Assistance Program	15%	7%		33%	31%	13%	44%
44. Bullying and harassment is actively discouraged in our organisation		5%		21%	52%	17%	69%
45. My manager regularly checks in with me on a personal level	5%	13%		22%	42%	15%	57%
46. My organisation is interested in my welfare	7%	9%		28%	41%	12%	53%
47. I will be working in this organisation in 12 months time	12%			19%	40%	26%	66%
48. I feel psychologically safe doing the work I am currently carrying out		10%		16%	48%	24%	72%
49. I rarely feel overwhelmed in my job		23%		23%	43%	9%	52%

### Survey Analysis

On a positive note, 88% of respondents agreed that they are motivated to do their job well, 73% agreed that they are energised by the work they do and 72% feel psychologically safe doing their work. Even more promising was the finding that 84% of respondents agreed that if they had an issue that impacted their ability to do their work (e.g. personal or work-related issue), they would discuss



this with their Manager and 57% had managers that regularly checked in with them on a personal level.

Continuing in this positive theme, 66% agreed that they will still be working with Council in 12 months' time and 69% agreed that bullying and harassment is actively discouraged, although 10% *actively disagreed* with this statement which is of concern, especially as qualitative findings highlighted issues of bullying.

Whilst 52% agreed that they *rarely feel overwhelmed by their workload*, 25% *disagreed with this statement* which means that approximately one quarter of respondents (i.e. approximately 100 WSC employees, both staff and managers) *do* feel overwhelmed by their job more than rarely. Qualitative results also showed stress from work load as a factor depleting well-being.

In addition, only 44% agreed that they were comfortable using the organisation's EAP factor with EAP Optum's report for the period 1/2/14 – 6/1/15 showing only 5 individuals used this service during this period. Whilst this percentage use of an EAP is a fairly typical result some education on the benefits of EAPs may be necessary.

### **Findings from focus groups, stakeholder Interviews and responses to open-ended questions in WWI Survey**

#### ***Workplace bullying***

*"our immediate supervisor bullies and harasses her staff ... we are just scared of her....simple...and so are our family"*

*"Bullying is going on, people are being isolated. I don't believe anyone is interested in my welfare and quite often our job becomes overwhelming."*

*"Bullying and harassment by councillors is an issue and their poor behaviour in general"*

*"Bullying & Harassment is discouraged but in some work groups is a way of life so taking some time to change this culture. I feel overwhelmed as there is so much that needs to be done and is gradually changing as we chip away at it"*

Whilst Council appears committed to appropriate workplace behaviour through its provision of training to staff and managers on the prevention of bullying and harassment since 2014 and its development of a 'Workplace Bullying and Harassment Prevention Policy' (still to be signed off by the Executive), and many staff reported that there had been improvements in reducing such behaviours in recent times, workplace bullying and the perception of being exposed to this remains a serious risk factor, more so in areas such as Water and Sewer and some other isolated areas we were unable to identify as the information came from survey respondents who did not specify their branch.

Adding to this risk is the widespread view that even if you do report such issues, Council will not address it, nothing will change, and that there may be negative repercussions for the reporter and even positive consequences for the alleged perpetrator.

*"I see bullying and harassment from time to time and don't seem to find that much is done about it from a managers' point in some areas."*

*"even though you get sent to numerous workshops and compulsory training on bullying, harassment and workplace relations etc and what you should do if you experience these things, when push comes to shove, if you speak up nothing happens."*

*"There has been evidence of harassment and bullying, and discrimination as a result of action being taken against bullying in my workplace."*

*"Senior Management have often been aware of staff who are bullies and they are promoted way beyond their emotional IQ."*

Whilst staff seem to know that they should go to their Team Leader/Supervisor in the first instance if they have concerns over bullying or other inappropriate workplace behaviour, then escalate this to their Manager or seek help from Organisational Development if the matter remains unresolved, the reviewer noted that there was no 'Where to go to for help' slide in the Staff version of the 'Prevention of Bullying and Harassment' PowerPoint presentation used for their training, unlike the one in the Manager version. Furthermore, in the still to be finalised Policy document there is only a reference to "*... the procedures Council has in place to assist in the resolution of grievances regarding bullying and harassment ..*" (p. 2, 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph) and no explicit reference for how to report such issues or where to go to for help. It is understood that the Grievance and Dispute Procedure should be applied in such situations however this could be made more explicit.

It is also unclear to what extent Managers are trained in how to investigate bullying and 'settle grievances at the level at which they occur' as specified in the 'Grievance and Dispute Policy'. The Manager training appears to offer high-level information and techniques only but perhaps some of the enabling skills for early dispute resolution are provided and this is not obvious from the slides viewed.

Unfortunately, research shows that many organisations actually make things worse by their response – or lack of – to bullying, hence why it is so important that the necessary policies, procedures and people capabilities are in place to ensure an organisation's response to such matters enhances rather than diminishes well-being. It is also critical that bullying behaviours are not perceived as being rewarded or moved around the organisation.

### ***Stress and psychological ill-health***

Twenty-five percent actively disagreed that they rarely feel overwhelmed by their job and it is highly likely that the qualitative feedback about staff experiencing significant psychological ill health and distress emerged from this group of respondents. Whilst this percentage is the same as we would expect to see in the general population, this does not mean that the workplace is not making a material contribution to their distress.

It is important to note that the organisation has a responsibility to identify and manage foreseeable risks, which includes ensuring workloads are manageable, people have the skills and resources to do their work and that compromised wellbeing is identified early and reasonable action is taken to arrest further decline e.g. by modifying work duties if required. Whilst there is always a certain proportion of an employee population who will be more at risk of psychological harm based on their personal predisposition, the 'egg shell psyche' principle applies which means an organisation still needs to be able to identify this and take reasonable actions to support the individual. It should also be noted that even the most resilient personality will experience compromised well-being upon exposure to chronic stress such as relentlessly high workloads with little support or opportunity to control. Examples of psychological distress reported are as follows:-

*"I love my job, but the enormity of it and the range of issues to cover is at times overwhelming. I have required medication to cope at times."*

*"I would like to stay here for the long term, however, my medical advice is that it is not in my best interest."*

*"I have suffered psychological damage when dealing with staff supervision issues that I feel were unsupported, until recently"*

*"At times, due to the pace and high emotional drive from customers, I can get overwhelmed at times."*

*"the workload in my job is very high. I feel overwhelmed, unfortunately, pretty regularly"*

*"I do feel overwhelmed and frustrated at times as things never seem to get done or decisions are never made. My manager doesn't seem to be interested depending on what role I am performing. I don't think the organisation cares at all."*

*"Often work is crazy busy, deadlines and requests from left field there are times when it's hard not to feel overwhelmed"*

*"Due to lack of adequate resources in my team and lack of normal support, I am usually overwhelmed in my job"*

*"I am motivated to do my job well but feel overwhelmed most days trying to get the job done to a satisfactory standard."*

### **Manager support for well-being**

Whilst it was extremely promising to note that a significant majority of staff (84%) agreed that they would discuss personal or work related issues impacting their ability to complete their work with their Manager, many admitted that their Manager was simply too busy most of the time to approach them, and some even stated that they felt that their Manager would probably judge them in a negative way if they explained they were having difficulties coping

- *"My manager will ask me how I am going, but if I say that I am struggling to keep up to the workload, it is clear that is not what he wanted to hear."*

There were also reports that when staff had disclosed mental health concerns to their manager, they had minimised or denied these.

- *"I have communicated my concerns about stress and how my work is affecting me; I have often requested to be relocated. No one has shown any concern."*
- *"Most management in this organisation in reality do not care for an employee's welfare or safety, and look at everything from a budgetary view."*

On a more positive note, during focus groups, there were many reports of informal discussions and allowances for time off and support provided to staff when a colleague is having difficulty. Certain supervisors and managers were noted as being very approachable and understanding of when an employee is strained or when 'their head's just not in the right place'.

*"We have operators coming up to managers and telling them 'oh, he's a bit off today', and make sure they're ok – let them go for a drive, talk a walk, if they're not in a good headspace. Take them off machinery or duties for a while/that day. We've got a good culture in our department, no issue too small to talk about and work at."*

*"I've seen guys like that, not in a good state, something happened at home or stressed from work – guys in the loader who shouldn't be around the general public ... You take them aside and have 5 minute chat; put them on another duty."*

This seemed to be more linked to within-team support and relationships, rather than top-down executive efforts or policy working.

Staff also reported taking breaks, walks, having tea or coffee to decompress after work stress. Usually, this was ad hoc, and promoted by individuals rather than teams or as an organisation-wide promotion.

Some line managers and staff, such as those in the Resource Recovery Centre and Outdoor teams showed a genuine commitment to looking out for the well-being of their team-mates, and were surprisingly candid about the importance of providing such support during focus groups.

### **Organisational support for staff welfare**

Whilst 53% agreed that the organisation is interested in their welfare, many were of the view that their interest was only from a compliance perspective

*"Staff welfare does not get the attention it requires, seems to be delivered as a tick box approach"*

*"[Re. Training and Bullying] - all talk and ticking 'training' boxes."*

Some also noted that when they had raised issues of a personal matter with Organisational Development, their ability to follow up on staff was limited, especially if you were located outside of the Council building, as there was no natural opportunity for informal, ad hoc follow up and their front-line supervisor was not involved in providing this either.

Some staff also noted that the HR department needs more training in how to handle serious mental health issues, rather than lighter work-related people skills. "I would like to see managers & HR more educated in psychological wellbeing, but also have it spread all the way down to all staff."

### **EAP usage**

When asked during Focus Groups about who knew about the EAP and how to use it, most did know about it and some even admitted that they had used it and found it helpful. Some opined that their issues were caused by work conditions, workloads, under-resourcing etc. that the EAP would not be able to affect regardless. This shows a need for some education about the potential benefits of using an EAP to help identify strategies for both changing a source of stress where it can be changed as well as changing the way one thinks about the stressor as both can enhance well-being.

### **Intention to leave**

Whilst survey data reveal 66% intend to be still working in the organisation in 12 months time, there was enough feedback to indicate that for some, especially those with more competitive skills in the market-place, they were currently seeking employment elsewhere as direct result of workplace factors.

*"I have had serious issues that the organization has ignored. I have plans to find a more congenial workplace."*

*"Would like to be working long term at this workplace but I'm not sure if mentally I can put up with the lack of support, encouragement and unhappiness in the team"*

### **Dealing with angry/irate customers**

It was noted by many that the Council can receive a good deal of abuse from residents. Particularly the rates department, customer service, and front-line operations crews but that no formal training or warning in dealing with these issues was noted in the Focus Groups or Training Calendar for 2016.

*"Induction [at Customer Service] doesn't include conflict resolution"*

*"At weighbridge we get angry customers all the time – no training."*

## Social and Physical Wellness

This factor looks at the balance between work and non-work issues for employees and processes in the workplace to promote physical exercise.

### WWI Quantitative Survey Results

<b>Social &amp; Physical Wellness</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Level of Agreement</b>
50. I regularly take my holidays every year (i.e. annual leave)	7%	18%	51%	20%			71%
51. I regularly participate in social events held by the organisation (e.g., BBQs, picnics, drinks functions)	7%	13%	35%	32%	11%		43%
52. Management supports the use of flexible work arrangements, where possible (e.g., compressed work schedules, work from home, virtual conferencing, part-time work, contract opportunities, job sharing)	8%	8%	13%	31%	30%	11%	41%
53. Physical well-being is actively encouraged within the organisation	5%	11%	39%	33%	8%		41%
54. I regularly participate in physical activities (e.g. touch football teams, running, indoor cricket teams, yoga classes) in my personal time or that are organised by the organisation	6%	5%	20%	32%	28%	10%	38%
55. Psychological well-being is actively encouraged within the organisation (e.g. stressful tasks are changed to assist staff, breaks are regularly provided from stressful tasks)	9%	7%	15%	38%	26%	5%	31%

### Survey Analysis

The ratings provided by WSC staff were predominately negative for this factor. Whilst a large percentage reported that they regularly take their annual leave every year (71%), that is where the positive contribution to well-being from organisation-initiated social and physical wellness initiatives ends. On all other factors, responses were either in the high risk zone and/or there was a large percentage of staff in the neutral zone having answered 'Don't know' or 'N/A' responses which



indicate that performance on this factor is failing as the effectiveness of this factor to positively influence well-being depends on staff knowing about these initiatives.

That is, only 41% agreed that management support flexible work arrangements, with 29% disagreeing and 31% being unsure.

Only 38% participate in physical activities in their personal time or that are organised by the organisation, with 31% disagreed and 32% were neutral. Only 41% agreed that physical activity was actively encouraged within the organisation and a significant 59% were neutral or disagreed.

Only 43% regularly participated in social activities organised by the Council whilst 22% actively disagreed with this, reflecting the theme raised during focus groups and stakeholder interviews that many staff who worked outside of the Council building were unable to attend these due to work commitments.

The greatest risk is shown by the response that only 31% agreed that the organisation actively encouraged psychological well-being with exactly the same percentage actively disagreeing with this statement.

### **Findings from focus groups, stakeholder Interviews and responses to open-ended questions in WWI Survey**

It is clear that the organisation is still in its early phases of developing an integrated approach to the promotion of psychological safety and well-being. Based on the review of HR-related documentation and feedback from Stakeholders and staff during focus groups, it is clear that there are a range of primary initiatives (e.g. Some capability leadership development), secondary initiatives (Induction activities, suite of policies and procedures relating to the management of people and performance), and Tertiary activities (e.g. provision of EAP, use of mediation) in place but these appear stand-alone, to lack explicit links to well-being and to lack integration. For instance, whilst flexible working hours and access to work-initiated social activities do occur, their implementation across the organisation appears to depend on the discretion of, and private funding by, the front-line manager, rather than part of some organisational-wide and consistently applied strategy or initiative for promoting well-being.

#### ***Flexible working hours – mixed access***

It was noted that allowing staff flexibility with working hours appears to be more at the managers' discretion and whim, rather than a fair and equitable policy with consideration to staff needs.

*"Some managers are fantastic – take time off, do whatever you need for your family. Others, it's a hard & fast rule – nup, no time off."*

Several participants in supervisor roles noted they received better results by 'treating staff as humans', and not following the overly rigid policy. There was some agreement that "we all ignore the policy", as it does not allow for fairness or reasonable flexibility in many cases.

*"You want flexibility, [but] if you implement the policy, it doesn't lend itself to it. In our role, we have a lot of after-hours work we need to. I give my guys a lot of flexibility, and it comes back [in terms of respect & relationships, output, etc.]."*

#### ***Social activities***

As described in the Reward and Recognition factor, most staff perceive very few work-initiated social activities as occurring and many of those that do occur are funded personally by the manager. The

'morning tea with the GM' event is difficult for remotely based staff and under-staffed employees to get to.

### **Risk management**

Paperwork following incidents/near-misses may be filled out, and then "we have a chat about it, recommend controls, and nothing happens." It would appear that time and resource pressures have prevented effective follow up in the past however there is an emerging awareness of the importance of recording all incidents, no matter how minor and plans to have managers audit other managers' areas, although at the moment this audit will be focussed on physical safety only.

It was also reported however that Council recently received a \$800,000 refund for their Workers' Compensation premium and that this year their premium will be less than last years. The people and processes behind achieving such an outstanding result should be engaged to contribute to any integrated psychological safety and wellbeing initiative the Council may wish to pursue as similar processes and understanding of risk management will be relevant to this.

### **Psychological Risk Management**

At present, it appears that Council does not carry out psychosocial safety audits but there is a plan that once it gets its current WHS recommendations implemented, it will start to refine its processes and systems of management to include the identification and management of psychosocial hazards.

Overall, it would appear that whilst WSC has a number of stand-alone initiatives which support wellbeing, as yet these are not coordinated and do not sit within an integrated framework comprising an explicit plan, strategy and priority actions with dedicated resources, which is regularly monitored and evaluated using appropriate metrics to determine if the actions and strategies are delivering the wellbeing outcomes the organisation is looking for.

## **Additional Psychosocial factors relevant to WSC**

Whilst the following factors are not directly assessed via the WWI, these were identified as key hazards for WSC and as such additional commentary has been provided.

### **Organisational Change**

If led effectively, the risk posed by Organisational Change is minimised. Effective leadership of change is demonstrated by the implementation of effective consultation and communication processes to engage employees in change and provide access to relevant support and training during change. Organisational change is accepted as a constant as such employees are selected for adaptability and supported in developing their change management capabilities.

The qualitative data from focus groups indicated that there is a development opportunity for WSC to manage organisational change differently in the future if it wished to minimise the impact on wellbeing. Some indicative comments of the impact of recent restructures and redundancies are below. This has also been reported under Workplace Environment.

### **Recent restructure has cost good relationships and staff**

*"We've been through a restructure recently. We lost a lot of good staff. I was successful in becoming team leader, but I'm the lost unhappy I've ever been here. I don't feel I've got a lot of support. I put myself out massively"*

*"We've lost the 'connectors' – people used to do that extra little bit to [make the council run smoothly]." Not part of the job description, and now when you have a lot of new people*

without knowledge of the organisation and connections, people don't know how to put that extra effort.

### ***Long-time staff lack trust and are demoralised***

"If you've been here for a long time and you've seen entire departments decimated, you do think what's left to come?"

"We've seen a lot of staff in that age group been made redundant (customer service, records), decimated, and it felt like there was a problem being solved by getting rid of the people who were doing a good job, rather than looking at the management of those people. I think that's done a lot of damage to the trust in this organisation. If you're a bit older, people are looking at you."

### ***New 'bureaucratic' team names and structures***

There was a good deal of confusion and uncertainty on WSC organisational structure following years of extensive and prolonged organisational change. A sense that few know "who holds what role and how to get things done". Responsibilities have become diffuse and unclear, as no restructure has ever been comprehensive or properly completed, in the view of participants.

*"We have fancy names with no descriptions of what they do"*

*"[We need] clear lines of delineation – whose responsibility is what?"*

This has also created confusion for the Customer Service team who, as a new team, rely on existing staff to direct them to the right person for their customer but in many cases this person does not know and/or they are no longer working with the Council.

It is understood that the Prince 2 Project Management methodology which Council intends to embed throughout its practices, will assist with better change management in the future.

It would also seem that some of the negative psychological impact incurred by 'surviving' staff may have been minimised if they were more aware of the consultation, communication and support (e.g. outplacement) provided to outgoing staff and if outgoing staff were provided with the opportunity to have input into their farewell narrative and process.

## **WSC Councillors and Contractors**

### ***Contractors***

Many staff were upset about contractors coming in, replacing work done by staff previously. Many felt the looming threat of contractors taking jobs. There was much resentment of the quality and cost of the work done by contractors, as opposed to dedicated WSC staff.

*"We have people at high levels of the councils who are determined to replace us with contractors." Participants perceive it to come through GMs, to managers, to supervisors. 'Faceless communication'.*

*"Now we have 2 deputy GM's, and it's started to filter through 'daily' or every other day – jobs are being looking at to be contracted out."*

Many Outdoor staff claim total replacement is happening already e.g. Cleaners, road-side mowers, *'they want to take half the parks'*

The introduction of contractors is lowering morale and discretionary effort:

*"'Contractors, contractors'. No matter how well you do your job. People have no incentive to perform better, and yet we have the threat of contractors hanging over us."*

*"We were contractors before! Most of these guys probably had businesses before."*

Many argued it has a heavy cost to the council i.e. WSC loses the experience and suggestions of people who've been there for years and who know how to make the work better, all while seemingly being paid more for their services.

*"There seems to be a reluctance to refill a position after a staff member goes. It has always been, 'we don't know what's going to happen', so they don't. But contractors might get 3x what a staff member does."*

'Hidden cost of contractors'

*"We have to go out and fix up the job when they do it poorly." Means community expectation is reduced.*

*"They might submit designs that are just wrong or bad, and we cop the blame for it. They're not held accountable – their mistakes are held to us"*

Contractors may arrive on site with little announcement, or even take over project management functions. An attempt to reduce workloads has resulted in poor communication within WSC.

*"In our area, it's unclear who owns what job. Is it a contractor or is it council staff? It is hard to get your head around."*

### **Councillors**

Political interference by councillors was a recurring issue at all focus groups.

Where residents complain directly to councillors, this gets picked up immediately and made a priority, despite perhaps being relatively minor compared to other work the council needs to do or has set for itself. Roughly half of one Focus Group agreed that councillors have a direct impact on their workflow personally, though it was noted that issues of managers being overworked and other 'flow down' problems caused by this means everyone is at least indirectly affected in some way.

*"If a councillor or the mayor hears a complaint, gets a Facebook message, it becomes the immediate top priority. The GM's get pulled into this, needing to discuss a matter that's not important at all. Completely reactionary all the time, and filters down the organisation entirely."*

*"I get emailed directly by councillors [when I shouldn't be, as a direct manager]. And I forward that to higher-ups [as per proper procedure]. But it's tough because, it becomes this 'quick, drop everything and put the fire out'. And in 10 min I'm getting another phone call if it's not done."*

*"The issue I have in my area is the political interference, and very suddenly what you're doing and what your team is doing needs to change suddenly."*

*"For my team, we're used to operating in that space, but you do get to the point where you've got an overworked, frustrated team because you change direction so suddenly. Noted that recruitment needs to emphasise political savvy"*

Some have noted that this system has meant that "some citizens realise they can just take it up with a Councillor to have it fast-tracked"

*"They can actually get to us individually, but shouldn't be allowed to ... so many problems with my work will be because if I don't give the right answer to a community member, they'll go straight to the councillor."*

*"Even when you're doing things with project plans and solid ideas, the councillors can circumvent this to get their way. Especially bad at the moment with an election on."*

Councillors can also have disputes between themselves that hinders council work and output

*"It's no secret that the councillors aren't holding hands. Some people say 'my job isn't affected by the councillors'. It is. Pressure comes from the top down every day."*

*"Political promises & campaign points can become prioritised despite them not being feasible or realistic."*

Many staff opine that Senior management need to more in terms of 'push back' against councillors who try to interfere directly. It's understood a new policy is being drafted and procedures being put in place, but these have not impacted work as yet.

*"Senior management isn't forcing councillors to follow proper procedure, getting it through the channel. No one has a backbone to tell them."*

*"It's just frustrating that we spend all this time and effort establishing the systems [to regulate requests and stop direct interference] and they don't get used"*

In addition, Council needs to do more to enrol Councillors in 'backing' Council staff when residents complain to them rather than automatically blaming them as blame erodes pride and aggravates divisiveness between Council staff and Councillors

*"Often ... a councillor gets an email [complaint] from a resident, and the councillor responds with 'oh, sorry council staff have made this mistake'. No matter how it was handled."*



## Qualitative Responses: Summary

Three general questions about WSC were provided to all survey participants upon completion of the WWI i.e.

- i. What does WSC do well?
- ii. What can WSC do better?
- iii. What are the biggest challenges facing WSC?

A question to generate solutions to well-being was also asked at the end of each focus group and Stakeholder Interview:-

- iv. If you could change one thing that would have a significant impact on your day-to-day wellbeing, or that of your team, what would this be?

The key themes and issues that emerged through a thematic analysis of the qualitative responses to these questions are defined and summarised over the following pages. We have provided exemplar statements where we felt they were particularly indicative of that theme.

The responses were edited (for anonymity purposes) and coded by theme for each question.

### 1. What does WSC do well?

Go through and add in indicative comments/quotes

- Working for the community – many noted that WSC undertakes council duties seriously and effectively, and was particularly good at community consultation. This was despite a heavy burden of public pressure, criticism and demands.

*We serve our community*

*"I am proud of what I do, I am proud to serve the community*

*'I am proud to be a WSC employee'*

*[WSC provides] good community consultation*

*Some great community events*

*We support our community and generally have the best outcomes in mind for them*

*We deliver services that are much better than the community realises when you consider the area we cover and limited population and income we have*

- Work culture and environment was seen as a positive, with a friendly environment and generally upbeat co-workers coming together to great an encouraging culture.

*There are a lot of good staff here*

- The staff themselves were regarded effective, motivated and supportive.

*Wingecarribee Shire Council generally attracts motivated and effective staff*

*We overcome crises and work well together when pressured to deliver*

*We are very good at supporting staff and encouraging staff in doing a lot of community-based fund-raising activities and events and supporting various causes throughout the year e.g. Movember, Relay for Life, Daffodil Day, Camp Quality, etc*

*I have found it a friendly and easy going environment to work with*

- A number felt training for staff was a strong point.
- Tourism, and Bushcare programs within the community were noted as particularly successful.

*Support for the arts e.g. Arts Trail; support for community volunteers e.g. Bushcare*

- Some discussed the Organisational Development team as being quite effective and good, leading initiatives such as Shire Tours for staff.
- Some noted the new GM has begun to make positive steps to improving work culture.

*I feel overall, WSC is a supportive place to work and is trying very hard to have a positive and upbeat culture*

- Inductions were regarded as being done well, spear headed by the Org Dev team.

## 2. What can WSC do better?

- Improve the workplace culture than can be somewhat negative and 'stuck in its ways'
- Handle change management better – there appears to have been much restructuring within the last 10 years. Many desired more consistent decision making and consultation with staff.
- More discussing and listening to staff was desired, involving people 'on the ground' and seeking input on workflows and strategic planning.
- Sharing information and reducing a silo culture was seen as imperative. Many noted a lack of cohesiveness between departments, segregation, and poor project coordination resulting in different areas being unaware of work in other areas.
- Many desired more recognition of staff for discretionary effort and achievements, 'highlighting the positives'

### 3. What are the biggest challenges facing WSC?

- The NSW Govt. 'Fit for the Future' and legislation changes, especially in the context of change responsibilities and cost shifting from State/Fed level Governments
- A large number of respondents highlighted that political/personal disputes from elected councillors were affecting the image & reputation of the council in the community, as well as causing tension and issues within the organisation as a whole.
- An increasing/ageing population was seen as a strain on the resources & capabilities of WSC moving into the future.
- Staffing issues were seen as very serious, particularly in terms of the high staff turnover, retention of staff, ability to attract and recruit good employees.
- Financial viability and rate increases, both in terms of continuing an adequate level of services and maintaining affordability.
- Community perception is an issue, with many noting the public have a negative and overly politicised view of the council, particularly in regards to rates & expenditure.
- Improving teamwork, getting people to 'work together', and eliminating the 'us and them' mentality between teams & branches
- More strategic and visionary leadership was seen as crucial to maintain overall goals, and not becoming short-sighted or shifting too often.
- Improving culture of communication and positivity. Low morale, conflict and bullying/harassment were seen as impeding the Council. Change was seen as difficult.

### 4. If you could change one thing that would have a significant impact on your day-to-day wellbeing, or that of your team, what would this be?

#### Focus group and Stakeholder Interview responses

- A corporate strategic plan to set the vision & the agenda for reaching that division, and implement it cohesively. "The change management has been shocking."  
*"The community seems to know where it's going and where we want to be, but the organisation has no idea. How do we deliver their vision without one of our own?"*
- Consistency and behavioural integrity in alignment between values and plans. Often noted that grand visions of what WSC is, and how it should operate, are not fulfilled.  
*"We seem to have a disconnect in implementing work to meet the policy/strategy documents. Confidence gets eroded, as plans are made with the community and council in mind, but then a totally different direction is taken."*
- Have clear plans for various high profile community services (e.g. Parks, Nature Strips, Footpaths, Pools), each signed off by Councillors (i.e. like the current Tree Management plan), which provide Council and all its staff with a clear mandate/blueprint in regards what their priorities are and where to assign resources, which they can then refer Councillors and members of the public to should any of their requests deviate from this. Having this plan/these plans, which may include a schedule of works (e.g. how often Park A is mowed) available on the Council web-site will also allow Customer Service Officers and all Council staff who interact with the public, to refer any enquiries they receive about these matters, to this central plan/register of plans in clear and professional way so the Councillors and public can see for themselves where their matter sits within existing plans/schedules of works and be invited to either submit an enquiry on-line or raise it with a Councillor if they find the response unsatisfactory. This will not only provide a helpful way for Council staff to defer/manage urgent requests by Councillors and angry members of the public, but it will also

## Recommendations

### 1. Enhance Senior Leadership visibility and follower engagement

Whilst it is widely acknowledged that senior leaders and managers are extremely busy, there is also, encouragingly, a widespread appetite for having a better sense of who their leaders are as people, what they stand for and where they are taking them. There is also a widespread need for trust to be restored between staff and senior management and the fact that many staff have limited contact with the senior leadership team, and only hear about them via the rumour mill, is not conducive for building trust and follower engagement. Trust and follower engagement with Senior leadership could be achieved in a number of ways including:-

- a. Participating in a road-show to announce the key findings from the Wellbeing Survey, priority actions to be undertaken and time-frames for these, including providing a contact number, Q&A portal or 'Staff Communications Box' for staff who would like to provide ideas for initiatives or receive updates on any initiatives. Staff are watching very closely to see how Senior Leadership will respond to this survey, so making a public commitment to certain initiatives and inviting feedback on these, and giving staff an opportunity to hold Senior Leadership to account will build trust – provided initiatives are delivered – and build respect for the importance of mutual accountability or,
- b. Participating in a road-show to articulate Council's vision, mission and values, its strategic priorities and flag the emergence of a new positive people and performance focused culture. This vision roadshow could incorporate a 'Wellbeing survey feedback and actions' announcement in lieu of its own roadshow
- c. Participating in more on-site visits to meet staff, especially when significant events occur or milestones are achieved to celebrating staff efforts and/or offer support and thanks
- d. Greeting staff as they walk through council work areas, especially in public areas where customers are present, rather than only greeting customers
- e. Participating in council-wide initiatives to raise money for charities which evokes pride and gratitude in staff for Council supporting their giving identity. Research also shows this enhances retention. If these initiatives also promoted physical or social activity, or wellbeing, then this would also build greater social and physical wellness.
- f. Newsletter communications, mainstream media and social media forums showing senior leaders engaging with staff and acknowledging key achievements and effort (e.g. taken during site visits)

### 2. Clarify the roles, responsibilities, delegations of authority and decision-making across all levels of management to ensure every manager is clear on the scope of their role and empowered and motivated to provide responsive and coordinated support to the people below them. i.e. 'Push equal doses of responsibility + support down'

- a. Incorporate 'Support to direct reports' as a KPI for all managers, and assess performance against this by feedback from their direct reports, ideally gathered anonymously via Organisational Development if viable

### 3. Remuneration is a 'job hygiene' factor, which means that it is not an active source of motivation or engagement whilst it is considered appropriate or fair, however it becomes a

potent source of demotivation and disengagement when it is not considered fair. In light of the widespread view that pay rates are not fair when compared to other Councils and not fair across jobs within Council, it is recommended that a review of remuneration levels and practices be considered a high priority. This review should consider how market-competitive current remuneration is, what incentives for merit and outcomes achieved – both monetary and non-monetary – can be offered, and ensure that these are internally equitable given the actual job being done versus reliance on potentially out-of-date Position Descriptions.

- a. This will require a revision of Position Descriptions to ensure they accurately reflect jobs being done
  - b. Review how remuneration is packaged and how financial incentives can be offered based on outcomes achieved regardless of grade or level
  - c. Provide greater transparency and consistency around how pay rates and increments are determined to ensure staff see these as based on merit or outcomes achieved rather than an arbitrary or 'lottery' style process. If there are genuine budget constraints, then this should be clarified upfront and opportunities for providing non-monetary recognition explored as an alternative
4. Continue to build People and Performance Management capability across all tiers of management by giving consideration to providing training and/or coaching in day-to-day skills such as:-
  - a. Transitioning from 'Mate to Manager'
  - b. Giving meaningful and effective feedback to direct reports on a day-to-day basis as well as during more formal performance review meetings
  - c. Calling inappropriate behaviours
  - d. Investigating disputes, grievances or other performance issues and implementing timely and effective resolution strategies to 'settle matters at the level at which they occur'
  - e. Soliciting feedback from others so they feel safe (i.e. from both peers and direct reports) and responding to this in a constructive way
  - f. Early dispute resolution to identify and manage conflict between individuals or teams
5. Continue to take a zero tolerance approach to bullying and other Inappropriate Workplace Behaviours and build capability across all staff and managers to support this approach, including inserting explicit reference within existing relevant policies and procedures to tips, strategies and resources available to assist staff and managers identify and address 'behavioural drifts' early and effectively.
6. To ensure the new Performance Review and Appraisal process drives improved performance and engagement, it is key that people managers possess the significant set of enabling skills required to effectively navigate and complete this process. Some examples of such skills include:- how to share both positive and constructive feedback in a formal setting (i.e. may be less operationally-focused and more about strategy, style), how to manage defensiveness and other difficult behaviours, how to prepare engaging performance and development goals and action plans across a wide range of employees who may variously see work as 'a job' (i.e. means to an end), a 'career' (i.e. opportunity for professional advancement and progression) or a 'calling' (i.e. seek expression of a greater good or value through their work which can be compromised if they are only offered external rewards or incentives); how to tie the



- achievement of such goals to realistic and relevant incentives for that individual, and how to manage the performance of someone with a disclosed or suspected mental health issue.
7. It is also important that the review process itself is seen as a meaningful and high priority activity by both staff and management rather than a tokenistic 'tick and flick' exercise to appease HR which it currently is. To this end, it is important that the requirement to engage in this process in a meaningful and timely way is incorporated into every employees' KPIs and that for managers, there is a random audit of the quality and timeliness of the performance reviews they complete with their staff so that they have true 'skin in the game'
  8. Review the current criteria for accessing learning and development to ensure it allows for staff to build new capabilities which can help with their promotion or move into another role within Council. This will not only assist with engagement, it will provide some much needed career mobility and succession planning within Council.
  9. Provide clarification to all staff across Council regarding roles and functions within new structure so staff feel more confident to navigate this
  10. Provide clarification to all staff regarding their role and responsibilities, and lines of reporting and support. This may need to identify when more of a matrix style of working is required e.g. when reporting to multiple supervisors across multiple projects. If the latter becomes more of a regular feature of the way work is done in Council, which is possible given the implementation of the Prince 2 Project management methodology, then it may be that Council need to redefine its organisational structure and build skills in matrix management and working within a matrix environment as the skills and mindset that work effectively in the current operational environment can undermine the success of working in a matrix way.
  11. Implement a Master Operational plan, which Councillors sign off on, to help manage Councillor requests and minimise stress and significant disruption to work flow caused by these. Ensure this plan articulates how attempts to deviate from this will be managed. This Master plan should incorporate specific plans or strategies for various high profile community services (e.g. Parks, Nature Strips, Footpaths, Pools), each signed off by Councillors (i.e. like the current Tree Management plan), which provide Council and all its staff with a clear mandate/blueprint in regards what their priorities are and where to assign resources, which they can then refer Councillors and members of the public to should any of their requests deviate from this. Having this plan/these plans, which may include a schedule of works (e.g. how often Park A is mowed) available on the Council web-site will also allow Customer Service Officers and all Council staff who interact with the public, to refer any enquiries they receive about these matters, to this central plan/register of plans in a clear and professional way so the Councillors and public can see for themselves where their matter sits within existing plans/schedules of works and be invited to either submit an enquiry on-line or raise it with a Councillor if they find the response unsatisfactory. This will not only provide a helpful way for Council staff to defer/manage urgent requests by Councillors and angry members of the public, but it will also help reduce the number of Customer Service Officer enquiries being sent through to various teams.
  12. Implement evidence-based selection practices to ensure best job-person fit, especially to achieve more people and interpersonal capability in roles with people management or customer interaction requirements.
    - a. The selection process should also seek to identify demonstrated capabilities versus qualifications where appropriate and possible, in order to allow for better internal career mobility for staff

13. Review current Recruitment practices to ensure they are attracting the right people, providing people with a realistic preview of the job, and packaging both remuneration and non-monetary offerings associated with working with the Council in a positive and targeted way.
14. Provide a more diverse range of informal reward and recognition options which People Managers have the authority and flexibility to assign on a merit-basis, in consultation with their direct Manager. These could be of a tangible nature (e.g. movie tickets) or less tangible (e.g. flexible working arrangements)
15. Provide more consistent access to flexible working arrangements, especially working remotely which may help with retention. To qualify, staff or their Manager, would need to submit a business case which would be assessed by their immediate and 1+ manager, WHS considerations would need to be assessed, and their direct manager will have undertaken training in managing staff remotely.
16. Whilst understandably, the Council's Training Calendar 2016 appears to be heavily focused on the areas of highest risk, such as compliance training to manage various physical safety hazards, it is also positive to see references to e-learning and leader training which target psychosocial hazards and promote well-being (e.g. eLearning EEO Awareness, eLearning Code of Conduct, eLearning Bullying and Harassment, Performance Appraisal, Manager and Supervisor Policy and Procedure update) although greater focus on building the necessary and sufficient capabilities for creating a psychologically safe and healthy workplace is warranted if wellbeing is to be optimised. (See Appendix C for Necessary and Sufficient Capabilities).
17. Consider providing physical resources to those areas/teams/roles identified in this report where physical and psychological safety risks exist due to their absence e.g. satellite phones for rangers, secure area for cashier, ventilation for Customer Contact Centre
18. Review Change Management Practices to ensure it incorporates sufficient rigour around communication and consultation, as well as support for both exiting and remaining staff where relevant
  - a. Consider employing external contract security staff to exit staff from the workplace once their employment has been terminated and cease use of Rangers for this function as it is placing them in a compromising position.
19. Consider implementing an over-arching Psychological Health and Safety policy which integrates all initiatives that promote psychological safety and wellbeing and provide a strategic plan against which to monitor the effectiveness of these various initiatives. The Project Management methodology currently being implemented can be used to manage this initiative.
  - a. Within this initiative, revise all existing policies and procedures to ensure they explicitly refer to wellbeing and identify practical steps and resources available to assist when wellbeing is compromised.

## Next Steps

The aim of the focus groups, stakeholder interviews and subsequent reporting was to provide clarity and information about what priority actions should be and what initiatives are required to enhance well-being across the Wingecarribee Shire Council.

As for next steps, we recommend reviewing the present report, and using this to inform a Strategic Action Plan for promoting wellbeing across the Council.

A Strategic Action Planning session is scheduled for 28 June 2016 at which this will occur

In addition, we will use this session to:-

- Discuss the findings and recommendations from this report.
- Consider which of the recommended actions are most likely to gain immediate traction and which are easiest or quickest to implement that will also provide the most meaningful impact.
- Identify priority actions and develop a draft plan, including time-frames to implement these
- Agree on Staff Feedback in relation to this process

It is also recommended that these recommendations be reviewed against other current and planned initiatives in the people and performance space to identify synergies and opportunities to take a streamlined approach to implementing initiatives.

## Contact Us

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## CommuniCorp Group

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