

# PPMA EXCELLENCE IN PEOPLE MANAGEMENT AWARDS 2017

## IMPROVING WORKPLACE PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH BETTER WORK LIFE BALANCE

### DRAGONS' DEN WELI-BEING CHALLENGE



## **INTRODUCTION**

Over the last year the Council has been seeking to progress an employee engagement and wellbeing strategy as part of a wider service transformation programme. The aim has been to increase the flexibility, engagement and resilience of the 6000 strong workforce in order to help respond to future service and financial challenges.

The continual challenge was always to develop something that had traction across the whole workforce, was employee driven and which could be run on a sustainable and 'low-cost' basis. In October 2016 this led to the launch of the Council's **Dragons' Den Well-Being Challenge**.

## **THE APPROACH AND PHILOSOPHY**

The Dragons' Den Wellbeing Challenge was launched at the Council's Leadership Café in October 2016. It was designed by a group of managers and staff from across the organisation and delivered in two stages. The first stage was to send out an invitation for creative well-being ideas in August 2016 and the second stage was to hold a 'dragon style' evaluation evening with short-listed finalists in October 2016.

The main criteria for submissions were that: -

- They needed to be capable of delivery at low (or zero) cost
- They needed to be capable of delivery in the short to medium term
- The submitting group needed to take responsibility for delivery

The incentive was that any successful idea would receive the sponsorship and support of one of the self-proclaimed 'dragons'; namely the Council's Section 151 Officer, Head of Strategy, Head of Shared Regulatory Services and Head of Human Resources.

Over 25 entries were received in the weeks before the event; seven shortlisted for presentation and four of which captured the interest, imagination and finally sponsorship at the event. Each of the entries has now been launched thanks to the passion and creativity of the submitting employees and the 'door opening' sponsorship of the dragons.

Each submission is now beginning to deliver real well-being benefits for the organisation and also (almost inadvertently) giving life to other well being initiatives across the organisation. The submissions may not be considered staggeringly innovative in themselves, but are remarkable when considering their collective effect as part of a well-being programme and the collateral benefits that have been achieved across the wider organisation. The four initiatives are summarised below: -

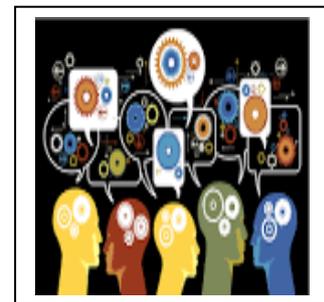
- The Corporate Vale Choir

The Council's first ever corporate choir is now being formed with the leadership of one of the Council's long serving Social Workers and the sponsorship of a Head of Service in the Council's Learning and Skills Directorate. The cross service 'Vale Choir' is hoping to make a debut performance at the Council's award and recognition day later this year



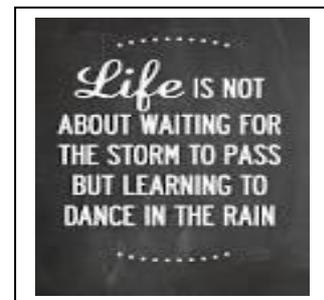
- The 'share a skill at lunchtime' initiative

An idea designed to uncover hidden skills and interests from across our 6000 employees and facilitate a community of shared talent. This has already attracted a lot of interest from staff who are not only prepared to seek new interests but who wish to share surprising passions including 'tai chi for beginners', 'the joy of allotment gardening' to 'collecting antiques of the future'



- Start your day with an inspiring 'pick me up'

Over the next few weeks a group, sponsored by the Council's Section 151 Officer will be launching an 'inspirational quote of the week' initiative on the Council's Intranet site. The idea is being managed by a group of HR Officers and, over coming months will be extended to ensure coverage of all 'hard to reach groups' across the Council



- Corporate Gardening Club

Exciting work is now underway to transform the Courtyard in the Council's Civic Offices from an un-usable space into a gardening and relaxation area for staff during lunchtimes and evenings. This is being led by a passionate group of gardening accountants and the sponsorship of the green-fingered Head of Shared Regulatory Services.



## **THE IMPACT THAT HAS BEEN MADE ON THE ORGANISATION**

The impact of the Dragons' Den Well-being Challenge has been significant and more than a little surprising. Having started as a 'one-off' event, it has already now begun to take traction in the organisation and 'give-life' to other related activities.

The 'share a skill at lunchtime' initiative has, for example given life to a number of discrete interest groups which will continue beyond the well-being challenge. It has helped to uncover the talents of employees beyond their day job and to develop the confidence of employees in their presentation skills and enhance employee well-being. The Choir is preparing to entertain staff at the 'award and recognition' event to be held for the first time this year.

The Well-being Challenge has helped to reinforce the values as set out in the Council's Staff Charter. Whilst the initiative was founded around the well-being agenda the collateral value of the initiative has been the bringing together of staff from the across all services, the anecdotal accounts of increased corporate engagement and the increase of visibility of senior officers of the Council in their sponsoring roles.

In terms of specific evaluative data (around productivity) it is perhaps too early to draw correlative conclusions. The signs are, however encouraging. Absence rates have seen an 8% decrease across all Directorates (as recorded at the end of February 2017). Voluntary turnover rates have decreased by 11% and engagement levels (as reported to Cabinet in January) were 72%. The well-being scores for the Council were reported at an encouraging 81%. It is hoped that the correlation between this (and other engagement) initiatives and the Vale's status as the best performing Council in Wales is not coincidental.

The well-being initiatives will continue to be monitored and supported over the next few months and plans are already afoot to launch the well-being challenge (Mark 2) in September 2017.

## **WHY THE APPROACH IS INNOVATIVE**

The approach is seen as innovative on the basis of its governance arrangements and underlying principles. Its success and traction has been based on the fact that it is a voluntary endeavour. Those who have contributed have done so on a purely voluntary basis i.e. outside of their normal working hours. This has demonstrated a desire for sharing knowledge, for breaching service boundaries and an overall pride in the work of the Council.

The well-being challenge (and all the 'spin off' initiatives) has also been delivered on a purely cost free and non-hierarchical basis. The only involvement of senior managers has been in their sponsoring role and ensuring that the innovation and commitment of employees has been given full reign. The outputs, in terms of increased engagement have been noticeable across all areas. The outputs in terms of measurable and sustainable well-being products is significant and impressive.

## **HOW STAKEHOLDERS HAVE BEEN INVOLVED**

The Dragons' Den Well-Being Challenge was designed by employees from right across the Council and from all service areas. It was launched as one of the events of the Council's Leadership Café and with the support of the recognised trade unions. It has been endorsed at both Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee level and its value actively supported by the Corporate Management Team (CMT).

The support of CMT has been demonstrated at both a collective level, and individually through the sponsoring role of individual Chief Officers. The real stakeholders are, however those employees who have taken a leadership role in developing the four initiatives and an increasingly growing group of employees who are finding value in their participation.

## **SUMMARY**

The Council are proud of the Dragons' Den Well-Being Challenge Initiative and are keen to support its development over the next 12 months. There is a real confidence that it will grow in popularity and value and will help contribute to a wider engagement and well-being strategy (and ultimately continued organisational performance).