

# Levels of staff morale falling among workers at Christchurch and East Dorset councils, says survey

By [Katie Clark](#) – Daily Echo 21<sup>st</sup> March



Christchurch civic offices

A report has revealed plummeting levels of staff morale and motivation at Christchurch and East Dorset councils in the last few years.

The confidential report, seen by the Daily Echo, says the survey took place last year among staff at Christchurch and East Dorset Partnership.

It details a decline in job satisfaction, with staff less motivated compared to 2010 and 2011.

The survey comes at a time when council budgets are being squeezed, leading to cuts, more demand on services and extra pressure on fewer staff.

The study, in which more than half of the councils' staff took part anonymously, also revealed a fall in the proportion of employees who felt able to express their opinions and two thirds of staff saying the senior management team were "not in touch with the situation on the ground."

There was also a decline in the proportion of employees who have pride in either their work or the councils work.

The two authorities started sharing services in 2010 in a bid to cut costs with expected savings of around £1.4million.

Positive aspects in the report credited the partnership with more efficient working, as well as giving the two councils a stronger voice in the region.

Employees say they have been given support and feedback from their line managers.

But when asked how they would rate the partnership as a place to work compared to other organisations, more than a third rated it the worst or one of the worst, with four in 10 rating it neither best or worst.

Only a fifth said it was better.

It was recommended a group be set-up to devise an action plan to make improvements.

The Daily Echo contacted the partnership for a comment on the survey but [David McIntosh](#), chief executive of Christchurch and East Dorset Councils said: "We do not comment to the media on internal, confidential documents."

Independent councillor Colin Bungey, who has raised the issue of staff morale throughout the partnership process, said he was appalled the confidential document had been leaked and refused to comment on its contents.

He said generally he did have concerns, which he had raised in the past, but at the time had received assurances that there were no problems.

### **What the report said**

- Less than three in 10 employees – 27% - agree they are proud to tell people they work for the councils. 41% disagree.
- Just over half – 51% - of employees feel that they have been treated with dignity and respect at work. Previously this question was asked only to staff at East Dorset in 2011 where the figure was 80%.
- Fifty-three per cent of council employees agreed the partnership helped to maintain frontline services in the face of Government spending cuts. The agreement has declined slightly in Christchurch from 2010 – 56% - and more in East Dorset from 76% in 2011.
- Nearly half – 45% - agree the partnership helps the two councils to utilise best practice from both organisations. Nearly a third disagreed.
- Around 53 per cent of staff disagreed the partnership helped to improve the quality of services to the public.
- Job satisfaction rates have also fallen from previous results with Christchurch declining more than 30% from 73% in 2010 to 39% now.

### **Employees hit out at communication issues**

In a comments section, employees hit out at communication issues with senior members, with one staff member saying: "Seniors have no idea what some staff actually do day-to-day.

"Very many unhappy staff with no encouraging leadership – it may well be alright in the end but it's how we get there that counts."

This was supported by the survey, which revealed only 14% of staff felt senior management understood the situation on the ground with two-thirds - 66% - disagreeing.

Nearly half of the respondents felt senior management didn't value their contribution.

Other comments focus on a lack of trust and stressful performance reviews leading to a severe lack of morale.

One person said: "I have never worked for any organisation that is more resistant to change, more secretive, more tolerant of mediocrity, more top heavy in terms of un-needed managers, more intolerant of being questioned and more tolerant of wasteful, redundant and pointless procedures than here."

Another added: “The messages from the top do not reflect the workplace. The mood on the ground seems to be either move job or wait for redundancy, as the partnership is blind to the realities of service provision.”

And one staff member said: “It is recognised that in periods of change, people lack motivation but equally people understand the need for the change we are currently going through.

“There is a general feeling however of a dictatorial approach from senior managers – you can only say something if you say it positively.

“Don’t criticise – your view is fine as long as it accords with the partnership ethos and direction of travel and challenging the same is not welcomed.”