ST HELENA ETHICS AT WORK SURVEY REPORT

SUMMARY REPORT FROM ST HELENA GOVERNMENT

Introduction

This report is a summary of the Ethics at Work Survey carried out for SHG by the UK's Institute of Business Ethics (IBE), from January to March 2013 (IBE's full report is attached). This note summarises the Institute's findings and takes account of the St Helena context.

SHG commissioned IBE to survey attitudes to ethics at work on St Helena. The survey forms part of SHG's work to strengthen good governance, as well as providing baseline figures for SHG to improve its ethical environment. SHG's Ethics Working Group is managing the project and recognises that the survey was carried out during a period of change in SHG and St Helena.

The survey was carried out primarily for SHG, but was also extended to larger Private Sector businesses and Civil Society organisations. This enabled SHG to gain an overview on how ethics are perceived at work across St Helena as a whole, whilst providing a baseline for Government work.

Therefore the results provided are not only representing the views of Government employees, but also include those of Private Sector and Civil Society employees.

The Ethics Working Group would like to thank all those who took the time to respond to the survey. This is the first ethics survey for St Helena and the results gained are invaluable for ensuring improvements are targeted towards areas of concern going forward. This 2013 Ethics Survey will not be a one-off exercise. There is commitment to monitor and improve the ethical culture of both SHG and St Helena. The economic and social impact of improved ethics in the workplace culture will be of benefit to everyone on St Helena.

The full IBE report accompanies this summary report.

Respondent Profile

The survey was distributed by SHG on behalf of IBE and was completed by 444 employees. Thus, roughly 20% of the working population of St Helena took part in the survey. 50% of the respondents described themselves as at 'Junior' level.

This will be a marked as the 2013 baseline, with the hope there will be an increase each time the survey is performed.

Almost one in four respondents were non-SHG.

IBE's Key Findings

- Just over half of respondents feel that honesty is practiced in their work team 'always'.

- Almost 75% of respondents said that their organisation has written standards of ethical conduct, that their line manager/leader sets a good example of ethical behaviour and that their line manager/leader supports them in following the organisation's standards of ethical behaviour.

- Only 2% of respondents feel that business is behaving 'very ethically' – the majority of respondents said it was behaving 'fairly ethically' (44%). Out of the three age groups sampled, 16-29 year olds were more likely to say that business was behaving 'not very ethically'.

- The majority of respondents considered a range of business practices such as 'fiddling hours worked on timesheet' and 'treating friends/family amongst any staff you supervise differently from other staff' as 'totally unacceptable'. Although very small in number, respondents over 46 years were more likely to say that these practices were acceptable.

- In their work teams, 'speaking up (whistleblowing)', 'work-home balance' and 'conflicts of interest' were the most common forms of unethical behaviour observed. 'Work-home balance', 'conflicts of interest' and 'bullying & harassment' were seen by respondents as the most common form of unethical behaviour observed in their Directorate/Department and, in the organisation as a whole, a large percentage of respondents said they had observed unethical behaviour in terms of 'environmental impact', 'discrimination' and 'tax avoidance'.

- Issues that are considered to be most in need of addressing are 'health, safety and security in the workplace' (43%), 'employees being able to speak out about company wrongdoing' (36%) and 'discrimination in treatment of people' (33%).

- Of those that did observe unethical behaviour, 37% did not report their concerns to management or another appropriate person.

- The most trusted professions in St Helena are 'teachers' (56%) and 'IT & technical professionals' (54%). The least trusted professions are 'Councillors' (9%), 'Journalists' (14%) and 'Business leaders' (18%).

St Helena Context

- The survey suggests that in general employees understand the concept of ethical behaviour and confirms that they understand what ethical and unethical behaviour is.

- Despite most respondents confirming their respective organisations have policies and procedures in place, some suggested that 'employees being able to speak out about company wrongdoings' and 'discrimination in treatment of people' are issues that need addressing on St Helena (along with 'health, safety and security in the workplace'). This type of attitude may be partly due to working in a small community and people not wanting to speak out about people they know. The SHG's Action Plan will look at ways to support people reporting concerns in a way that they are comfortable with.

- 44% of respondents confirmed that they have written ethical conduct advice, procedures and good example setting from their leaders and managers when it comes to ethical behaviour within their organisations.

- Respondents felt that honesty is not always practiced within their Directorates/Department and organisations, and on occasions within their work teams. All the different types of unethical behaviour listed in the survey, are said to have been witnessed over the past year, with 'conflict of interest', 'work-home balance' and 'bullying and harassment' appearing to be the most observed. Of course, it is possible that several people could have observed the same case of unethical behaviour, but we must take into account that each respondent could be reporting on separate events. This will be picked up by the Ethics Working Group.

- It is not clear at this stage why respondents felt 'work-home balance' to be unethical. The Ethics Working Group plans to identify and address this issue through the SHG Action Plan.

- Just over half of respondents say that honesty is 'always' practiced in their work team. This may be because staff have close contact with people in their immediate team and are more likely to be aware of their strengths,weaknesses and actions. Honesty is defined as doing what is right, speaking the truth and having fair and open dealings.

- Councillors, business leaders and journalists were shown to be the least trusted professions. This could partly be due to the fact that these professions are linked to key decisions made for the Island at this time of change and are relatively high profile figures. Of course, it could be that a particular Councillor, business leader or journalist is not trusted. Interestingly, IBE provided a comparator to a similar UK Survey. Trust was also very low in UK politicians, journalists and business leaders.

- Of those that did observe unethical behaviour, 37% did not report their concerns to management or another appropriate person.

- Issues that emerge for addressing include 'speaking up (whistleblowing)', 'work-home balance', and 'conflicts of interest' (as the most common forms of unethical behaviour observed).

- Health, safety and security in the workplace', 'employees being able to speak out about company wrongdoing' (also above), 'discrimination in treatment of people' and 'bullying& harassment' also emerge as issues needing attention.

Other points worth noting include:

- In terms of the list of the perception of common practices and behaviours that may be practiced in the workplace, it was clear again that most employees understand the notion of ethics. Very small numbers of respondents thought some unethical practices to be acceptable. 77% of respondents indicated that they understand what is and is not ethical behaviour.

- In other words, most staff in St Helena recognise that it is unacceptable to favour your family or friends when recruiting or awarding contracts, or to treat your family and friends in any way differently from others

- It was good to see that there is a sense of loyalty amongst employees in work teams, with 48% of respondents stating that honesty is 'Always' practiced. The IBE analysers' suggests that because you have close contact with the people in your team, you are more likely to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses and what they are doing.

- Likewise, mixed results with regards to honesty in the Directorate/Department and organisation as whole could be partly due to *perceptions* of what is happening - due to a lack of close contact (as opposed to the working team).

- Also, more staff said they reported their concerns than said they observed unethical behaviour in their organisations. This might suggest that St Helena has robust reporting systems.

- That said, a slight contradiction perhaps points the other way. Whilst respondents state that there are adequate policies, procedures and support from leaders, 143 responses suggest concern over 'employees being able to speak out about company wrongdoings'.

- It was quite surprising to note that only 33% of the respondents trusted their fellow St Helenians (when St Helena is reckoned to be a tightly knit community). But again this could be due to respondents recalling a small number of examples, or thinking collectively (including Councillors, business leaders and journalists).

- Finally a key baseline for St Helena is employees' perception on how ethically they feel businesses operate in St Helena, although the level of 'no opinion' and 'no response to the question' makes it difficult to reach firm conclusions. But the findings might suggest that respondents had one particular organisation in mind, rather than thinking of the Island collectively.

Next Steps

The survey has shown that in general St Helena employees understand what is ethical behaviour and what is not. But the survey also suggests that whilst ethical behaviour is understood, in practice some staff do not feel their working environment is always ethical.

In addition to the actual findings, comments during the survey process also indicated that some staff were apprehensive and anxious that the survey would not be anonymous (despite being assured to the contrary). Some individuals were clearly worried about speaking up about colleagues.

In order to deal with the issues highlighted in the IBE Report and above, SHG has created an Action Plan aimed at improving SHG's ethical environment.

And it is hoped this summary, together with the full IBE Report and SHG's Action Plan, will be useful to other organisations in St Helena in encouraging them to review their ethical policies and practices going forward.

Action Plan (at May 2013)

- **SHG employees to be asked to provide suggestions on how to improve SHG's ethical environment.** A permanent feedback arrangement will also be set up so that employees will be able to feed in views in the future.

- **Focus groups will be established in SHG** to discuss current procedures and how they can be improved. Will also address issues such as 'work-home balance'.

- **Revision of SHG's Code of Management.** Revisions are currently being drafted, including separating Policies from the Procedures. This will provide employees with clear guidelines on how to deal with discrimination, bullying and harassment etc – and give confidence to employees that they can report anonymously and without fear of repercussions.

- **Standardisation of SHG's policies and procedures to deal with conflicts of interest, favouritism etc.** Some sections within SHG that have established these procedures, and work is now in hand to ensure implementation across all of SHG. Employees will be asked to complete an annual declaration of interests which will be used in relation to decision-making and front line services.

- **Creating an Employee Code Booklet** that will include a summary of the ethics code, and how to report anonymously when observing unethical behaviour.

- **An Awareness and Training programme** will be established to refresh employees in ethical behaviour, embed culture change and remind staff on how to deal with unethical behaviour. This will be delivered at all levels of SHG to ensure senior management are fully aware of their responsibilities in supporting staff. This programme has already begun, via IBE's online training (Understanding Business Ethics).

- **Liaison with appropriate authorities** to review current processes, including the tax system, Human Rights, money laundering etc. For example, initial discussions have been held with senior officials re tax avoidance and how to improve scrutiny.

Establishing a strong ethical culture throughout SHG is not something that can be done overnight, within a month, 6 months or a year. It is a **continuous process** and one that will remain on SHG's primary agenda. Acting in an ethical manner must become second nature to all staff in the Public Service.

SHG

May 2013