From mountain to sea

Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL

One Aberdeenshire:

Workforce Transformation

What is One Aberdeenshire?

Organisational culture is the "personality" of an organisation, that guides how employees think and act on the job. It is a key factor, not only in achieving organisational goals, but in attracting and keeping committed employees, creating a positive public image, and building respectful relationships with stakeholders.

The strategic driver for the project is the desire to facilitate cultural change in the organisation, as a key enabler to delivering the Council Plan 2017-2022 and improving Aberdeenshire's ability to respond to change.

The Principles are the cultural aspirations of the workforce and underpin how the Council will achieve its vision. By 2020, these Principles are expected to have shaped the council's systems, processes, and structures.

1. Everyone brings their 'best self' to work every day

- We try to do our best every day, going above and beyond when necessary;
- We treat each other the way we want to be treated;
- We recognise that leadership and team-working is for everybody.

2. We are clear about what is expected of us and ask for clarity if unsure

- We work in our communities, for our communities;
- We communicate clearly and honestly with each other;
- Where our work falls below the standards expected we accept the support offered to improve.

3. We take informed decisions as close to the action as possible

- We use information and skills to make the right things happen;
- Our freedom to make sensible decisions is supported;
- We are involved in making sure we have as few 'rules' as possible and our ways of working are as simple as they can be.

What are the aims of One Aberdeenshire?

To understand what enabled colleagues to 'do the right thing', to improve the quality and value of the services they provide to both colleagues of Aberdeenshire Council and the communities of Aberdeenshire.

We are achieving this by:

- Understanding what enables colleagues to improve the quality and value of the services they provide to internal and external customers of Aberdeenshire Council.

Why are these Principles important and how does this fit into the bigger picture?

Organisational culture guides how employees consider and act on the job and is a key factor, not only in achieving organisational goals, but in:

- Attracting and keeping committed employees;
- Creating a positive public image and;
- Building respectful relationships with stakeholders.

The Principles represent employees' experience of working at their best. They have been developed following significant engagement with all services across Aberdeenshire, exploring examples of best practice and what is at the heart of our successes.

The project contributes to the council becoming more dynamic and providing excellent services, by discovering new and more efficient ways of working. The project further demonstrates the commitment to continuous improvement, where the quality and efficiency of service is guided by strong leadership and committed employees, bringing their best self to work.

The Principles are the cultural aspirations of the workforce and underpin how the Council will achieve its vision. By 2020, these Principles are expected to support the shaping of all the organisations future systems, processes, and structures and demonstrate the organisational priorities. One Aberdeenshire Principles particularly fall in line with one of the council's eleven priorities by *"having the right people, in the right place; doing the right thing, at the right time".*

How is this project unique?

By moving away from traditional methods often used by local authorities and businesses, Aberdeenshire Council has taken a positive approach to transforming the culture of our organisation and managing our response to change.
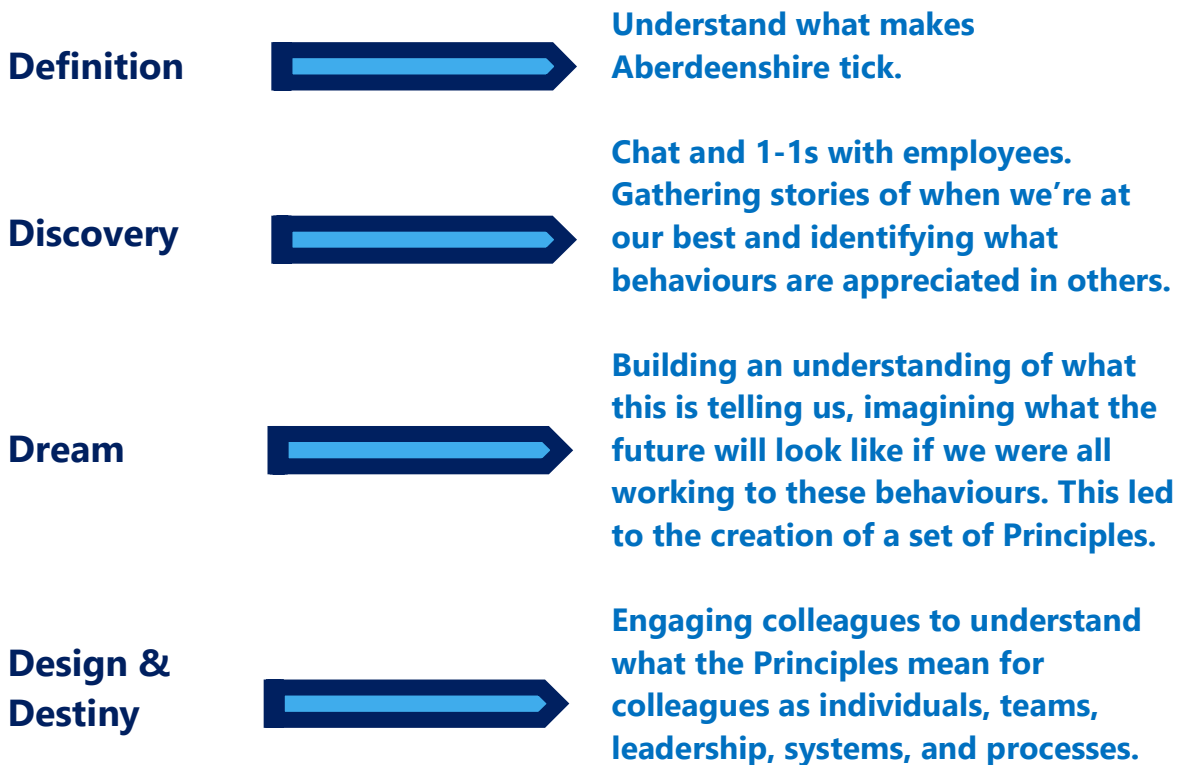
The Appreciative Inquiry (Ai) approach is a strengths-based change model which focuses on an organisation's positive core strengths. It is an inclusive and

participative learning process which encourages trust and strengthens working relationships. This approach reflects on existing strengths, achievements, and successes – the aspects of people's work that they are proud of, that motivate them, and achieve good results. This provides a basis for building a future vision and sustainable future.

Central to the process, is to ask positively framed questions, which identifies a 'positive core', linked directly to a strategic agenda where changes not previously deemed feasible can be rapidly achieved, while at the same time building enthusiasm, confidence, and energy to accomplish tasks. Without dismissing the council's failures, Ai helps people to collectively adopt a more positive and creative frame of mind, leading to system design/redesign, to achieve a sustainable future.

The Ai Model Applied:

Aberdeenshire's journey through the Ai process can be mapped to the stages below:

Definition → **Understand what makes Aberdeenshire tick.**

Discovery → **Chat and 1-1s with employees. Gathering stories of when we're at our best and identifying what behaviours are appreciated in others.**

Dream → **Building an understanding of what this is telling us, imagining what the future will look like if we were all working to these behaviours. This led to the creation of a set of Principles.**

Design & Destiny → **Engaging colleagues to understand what the Principles mean for colleagues as individuals, teams, leadership, systems, and processes.**

The Ai approach differs to other methods, which are problem-focused, as shown by the comparison below:

PROBLEM SOLVING (Traditional Approach)

APPRECIATING (Appreciative Inquiry Approach)
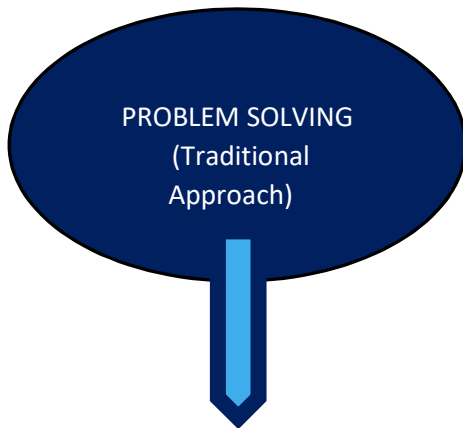
Assumption
An organisation is made up of a series of problems to be overcome, creating a deficit culture.

Assumption
Every organisation has qualities that give it life to make it effective, successful, and connected in healthy ways to its stakeholders and communities.

Identification of a problem
What to fix.

Discovery: Valuing the best of 'what is'
Identifying what is positive and utilising this to heighten energy, vision and action for change. With a focus on an ideal and how its roots are embedded in what is already working, it allows us to establish what to expand and develop on.

Analysis of cause
Focusing on problems, symptoms, causes and blame. Breaks things into pieces, leading to fragmented responses.

Dream: Envisioning 'What might be?'
Creates a new dynamic, where people are united around a shared vision of the future and change happens in the moment.

Analysis of possible solutions
The language is: solutions, action plan and interventions.

Design: Dialoguing 'How can it be?'
Determining the 'ideal' based on the assumption that organisations are a source of limitless capacity, and in turn, imagination and creating an appreciative culture.

Action planning
Slow paced, requiring considerable positive emotion to make real change happen.

Review
Assess progress following implementation.

Destiny: Sustaining 'What will be?'
How to empower, learn and improvise to achieve what will be.

Our Journey….

In September 2016, the Chief Executive tasked a Short Life Working Group to understand the 'strategic narrative' by adopting the Appreciative Inquiry approach. The original questions were designed to establish what it meant to be working as 'One Council'.

From October 2016, Appreciative Inquiry interviews were conducted with 70 randomly selected employees.

Through the sharing of positive experiences, the Leadership Team were able to establish what enabled employees to excel in their role and came to recognise that the project should be about identifying as One Aberdeenshire, instead of the focus being on 'One Council.'

The engagement program continued with employees undertaking interviews, attending workshops and sharing their stories. Employees were asked to choose one word describing their experience of the initial interviews held between October 2016 and January 2017. The responses proved to be very positive. From this initial engagement the project were able to establish "One Aberdeenshire Ambassadors" that would support the project and further engagement.

Valued
Realisation
Appreciation
Supported
Commitment
Satisfaction
How did your interview make you feel about your work and the service you provide?
Happy
Hopeful
Reflection
Think
Opportunity
Positive
Included

Due to its success, the Chief Executive requested for the approach to be conducted on a larger cohort. By October 2017, One Aberdeenshire Ambassadors had interviewed over 600 employees.
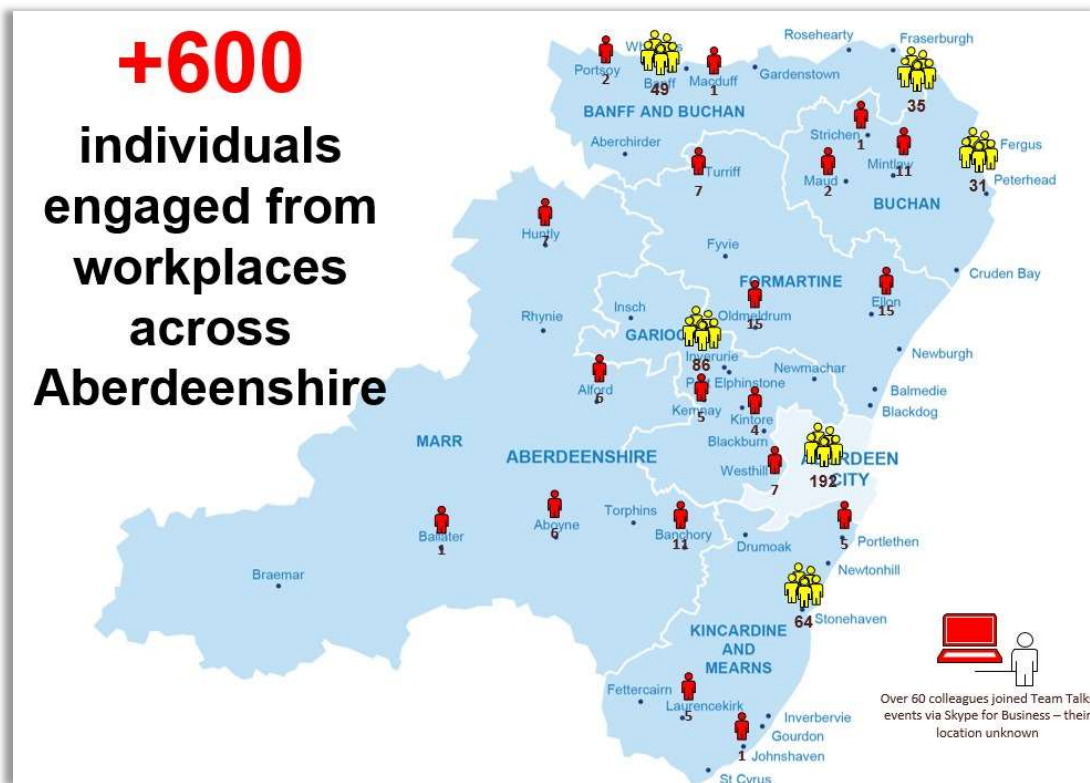
During the workshops, colleagues were asked to consider a set of statements (5Cs), which were as follows:

- Character
- Clarity
- Competency
- Control
- Community

From this, One Aberdeenshire Principles were developed, which the Chief Executive subsequently endorsed. The Principles have since been shared with Chief Officers and communicated to all employees.

Pupil Participation Forum

Recognising that pupils are our future employees, community and business leaders, the One Aberdeenshire project team undertook an engagement session with 34 pupils from Aberdeenshire's Pupil Participation Forum (PPF). The event, held at Inverurie Town Hall, involved representatives from 14 out of the 17 secondary schools and was one of the first activities of the school year for the forum to participate in. PPF members were invited to provide feedback on what motivates them in their life, at school and their aspirations for the place they want to live and work in the future. The debate was productive and stimulating, with the outputs from the event feeding

into the One Aberdeenshire project. The task allowed the pupils to be creative and imagine what "One Aberdeenshire" would be and look like. Some of these concepts are shown below:
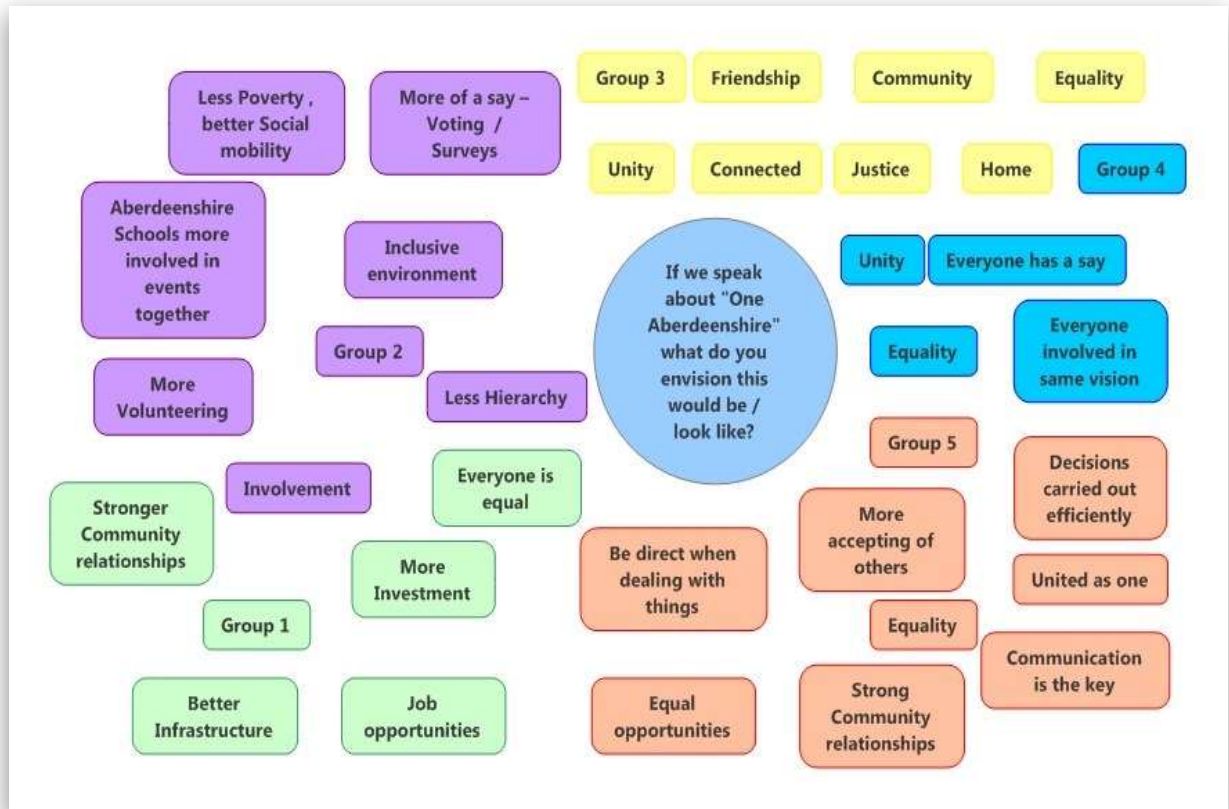
One Aberdeenshire SharePoint

Following on from the initiative, One Aberdeenshire created a SharePoint (cross-service sharing platform) site within the organisation's intranet, to advise employees on embedding the Principles and on the ways in which they can share their stories, to have a positive impact on the future of the Aberdeenshire workplace. The discussion board, within the SharePoint, allows employees and members (from frontline to Chief Executive) to be proactive and share best practice examples of what it means to work as One Aberdeenshire.

An example of this, is when the Waste Teams across Aberdeenshire utilised the tool to excellently demonstrate how they worked together with the Roads Teams, when the snow was at its peak in early 2018. When the snow was too deep to carry out waste collections, the priority was to clear roads, essential footways and car parks. The Waste Teams joined up together and with the assistance of the Roads Teams managed to continue the service expected of them.

"The recent weather gave us an opportunity to work side-by-side with colleagues from the roads team, giving us first-hand experience of the work, they do in the most extreme conditions...

...We work from a shared depot so there's always been a good working relationship, but this brings out the best in us all. We all get the satisfaction of a job well done in difficult circumstances and we enjoy helping each other out."

- *The Assistant Waste Supervisor for the Banff Depot*

Benefits and Impact

This project is creating change in 'real time'. Unlike many other change models and approaches, which attempt to create change through problem solving and planning, this approach facilitates change to happen more spontaneously through employee engagement, empowerment, and recognition of the Principles. The dynamic nature of the process encourages participants to take more control and unleashes creativity, thus enabling unforeseen outcomes and ideas to emerge.

Success of engagement has been evidenced by records of employees who are:

- **ASKING** to be involved in the process;

- **LOOKING** for more stories to be shared;

- **SHOWING** enthusiasm to hear more;

- **EAGER** to play a role in promoting the Principles.

It was as a result of this high level of engagement, that the One Aberdeenshire Ambassadors were nominated to deliver the Principles further and wider, with representation from all services.

Additionally, the One Aberdeenshire SharePoint discussion form has already proved to be a useful tool to facilitate employee engagement, as the 2018 interaction statistics demonstrate below:
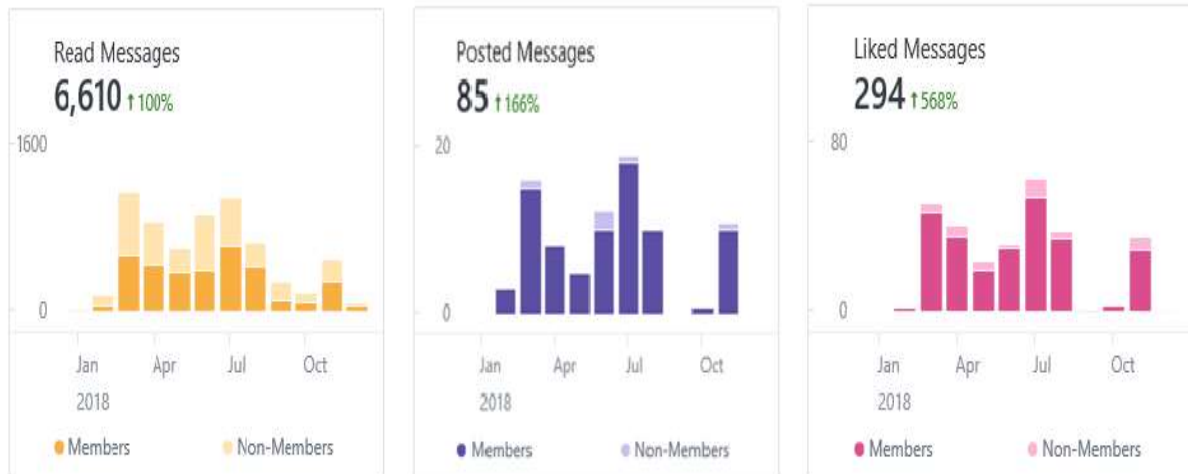
Moreover, during the Council's formal self-assessment process "How Good is Our Council?", it was established that employee engagement resulting from the One Aberdeenshire project was recognised as a strength.

While a direct correlation between customer service satisfaction and the embedment of One Aberdeenshire Principles cannot be formulated at this stage of its implementation, the workforce is now actively adhering to the Principles and in turn, feeling empowered to work individually and collectively to make the best possible decisions. This will result in improved, more progressive customer service.

What now?

We will aspire to incorporate the Principles into everything we do, and this will be demonstrated through our service delivery by collaborative working, efficiency, effectiveness, and customer satisfaction.

The engagement programme continues to work with employees to:

- Continue to identify how the Principles will be embedded across Aberdeenshire in all service delivery;
- Work with our Partners to acknowledge the One Aberdeenshire Principles and align these to their own values.

The organisation will continue to provide employees the opportunity to discuss the Principles and what it means to them through:

- Team discussions;
- 1-2-1's & PPP's;
- Team stories;
- Arcadia news articles;
- Video blogs;
- One Aberdeenshire Yammer page;
- E-mailing the Change Team.

Future assessment on the correlation between the initiative and customer satisfaction can be conducted and measured through the inclusion of One Aberdeenshire Principle focused questions in Customer Satisfaction Surveys, along with reviewing Performance Indicators.

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