



Two Saints Housing Association

A staff council was set up at Two Saints in 2003 to help improve internal communications and enable staff to have a bigger impact on client services. The staff council has begun a process that will ultimately support a culture of engagement and dialogue about the key issues affecting the organisation.

Two Saints provides a range of accommodation and support services for homeless people as well as specialist services for young adults, ex-offenders and people with mental health and substance misuse issues.

Managing a network of hostels, flats and support services, Two Saints employs around 250 staff, mostly in the provision of front-line support. It has an annual turnover of £8.5 million, over half of which is received from local authorities. As such, it is under constant pressure to involve key stakeholders, improve standards and make cost savings.

The introduction of the information and consultation Regulations in 2004 were an important driver for Two Saints in establishing a staff council. However, further impetus came from the desire to create a new culture out of the merger of the two housing associations, St Petroc (Wessex) Housing Association and the Society of St Dismas, from which Two Saints takes its name.

Getting started

The staff council was established in 2003 to develop a formal consultative mechanism involving elected representatives and challenge established perceptions among staff and managers about working for Two Saints. Phil Smith, HR director, explains that the problem was not about getting people engaged with their job, but with the concept of working for a larger organisation:

“Working as our staff do with a strong commitment to helping people, it has not always been apparent to them why they need to know what is happening elsewhere within the business or have a better understanding of the corporate functions. The reality is that contracts are not indefinite, and we need to involve our clients, customers and staff ever more widely in developing our existing work and in order to win new business,” says Smith.

Building engagement

As part of their preparations, the management discussed various representative structures. “We wanted to encourage our representatives to seek

Business information

Company:	Two Saints Housing Association
Business description:	Housing Association
UK headquarters:	Fareham, Hampshire
Staff:	250 contracted and relief staff
Sites:	Hampshire and West Berkshire

the views of people from across the business,” says Smith. In the end, ten representatives were elected from three geographical constituencies with responsibility for consulting day and night staff and management.

The representatives are expected to travel to meet their constituents and seek their views in order to inform the consultative process. Moving from quarterly to bi-monthly meetings has also meant a shorter period between issues being raised and subsequent consultation.

The relationship between the local management and the staff council has been slow to mature. Smith regrets not involving them more from the start, but hopes that a new Communications Strategy will help set this out more clearly. “The strategy re-affirms management as the primary route for communications and establishes the role of the Staff Council within this context,” says Smith.

Moving forward

Option based consultation is the preferred model for consulting the elected representatives, and this means that they are involved at a formative stage in senior management decision making, and informed about confidential matters. Recent discussion items include the revision of health and safety, discipline and grievance, equality and diversity and redundancy policies, the provision of staff training,

“Consultation with our representatives is a vital discipline in our communications strategy and encourages staff to think about the issues that affect the business.”

**Phil Smith,
HR director**

Consultation arrangements

Structure:	A single-tier arrangement of representatives elected biannually by secret ballot.
Union role:	No recognised unions
Frequency of meetings:	Formal meetings are held approximately four times a year.
Representatives:	Ten elected employee representatives in three geographical constituencies. The chief executive, HR director and operations director are also members.

the introduction of an employee assistance programme, and health and safety auditing.

Representatives have also been involved in a review of the management structure, including flattening the management hierarchy and the recent communications strategy. However, challenges remain, not least in maintaining a full complement of representatives. Smith hopes to expand the role of the representatives, encouraging informal working relations between the representatives and local management, and for them to develop a stronger presence within the workplace.

In particular, he hopes that as the consultative process becomes more embedded, the staff

council will develop its own institutional identity, providing an independent forum for the staff to raise and discuss the issues that affect the role and the future of the organisation.

The high performance workplace

This case study forms part of a project entitled 'Adaptable Enterprises'. The project includes educational and networking activities on: high performance working, healthy working and performance, the future of work and organisation, and intellectual capital.

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This case study was researched and written by Robert Stevens, Research and Information Manager, IPA. The views in this case study are those of the participants and may not reflect those of the IPA.

IPA support

Briefing management:	Provided information, examples and contacts to demonstrate the potential from consulting collectively
Early colleague engagement:	Delivered presentations for staff to learn about the proposed works council and discuss its operation
Developing the new forum:	Supported the development of a staff council handbook and communications explaining the role of the new forum
Electing representatives:	Organised first elections, with subsequent elections organised in-house by secret postal ballot
Strengthening the arrangements:	Provided initial training for managers and representatives, and has been periodically involved in presentations to reinforce the role of the staff council, discuss the benefits of consultation and help identify opportunities for improvement



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