

## EMPLOYMENT AND APPEALS COMMITTEE

7 July 2021

### FUTURE WAYS OF WORKING – A HYBRID MODEL

#### Report of the Strategic Director for Resources

Strategic Aim:	All	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Mr O Hemsley, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Policy, Strategy and Partnerships, Economy and Infrastructure	
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Ward Councillors	N/A	

#### DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

1. Notes progress and development of the Council's approach to a future working model for its staff as we move to a post pandemic world.

## 1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

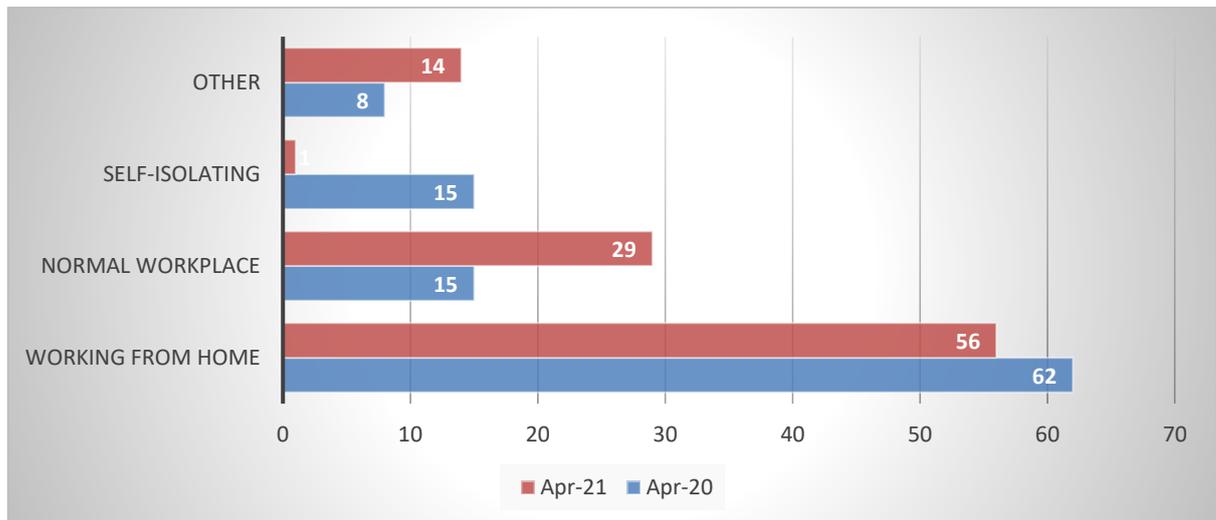
- 1.1 To update the Committee on progress of a future working model that enables the Council to continue to effectively deliver its services to customers, support our staff to be productive and achieve a healthy work life balance, and contributes to the Council's objective of minimising its carbon footprint.

## 2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 2.1 In March 2020 at the start of Lockdown 1, we quickly moved from our standard operating model to a remote model for those staff who were able to work from home. Many of our staff have continued to work either from a site (building specific) or within the community eg. Community support services.
- 2.2 There is consistent acknowledgement that we have made it work through technology and people, and a range of support wrapped around it. Our IT team quickly provided laptops and network access to enable staff to continue working; we rolled out 'Teams' as a key tool to help us keep engaged; and we provided regular

updates, bulletins and guidance notes to keep us as informed, connected and productive as much as we could, given the very difficult circumstances. In the main, teams have proved highly resilient and flexible, dealing well with the challenges whilst coping and adjusting to a global pandemic.

2.3 We did not anticipate that over a year on, remote working would still be the working arrangements for most staff. For example, as at 28 April 2020, over 60% of staff were working at home, a year later in April 2021, slightly less but still over a half of the workforce.



Note: Other = annual leave, maternity leave, not working (service stood down/not rota'd)

2.4 Our ways of working have therefore evolved around a remote working arrangement, and we have heard from staff that as a result:

- They have a better work life balance – improved health and wellbeing and family life.
- Improved productivity – developed new and better ways of working; less paperwork, less printing.
- There is a desire to retain some flexibility about work location going forward.

2.5 It is important to clarify that remote working does not suit all staff. During the periods of lockdown, where home working has not been possible for staff eg. due to availability of an appropriate workstation or negative impact on wellbeing, we have facilitated a small number of staff to continue to work from the office. Some have found the lack of separation between home and work very difficult; personal and family circumstances are not conducive to home working; they need more regular social interaction with colleagues. For many, they still feel that coming together with colleagues from time to time is important and necessary – although this doesn't have to be in the office. These messages are equally important when looking at working arrangements going forward.

2.6 There is no doubt that we have all reduced our carbon footprint over the past 18 months. Ongoing reduced commuting between home and work, together with less travel to external meetings, will enable us as an employer to directly contribute to the Council's net-zero carbon footprint goal.

### 3 WHAT IS THE HYBRID MODEL?

- 3.1 According to data from the Office of National Statistics, prior to COVID-19 only around 5% of the workforce worked mainly from home. In addition, according to research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), before the pandemic, 65% of employers either did not offer regular working from home at all or offered it to 10% or less of their workforce. Their report - 'Embedding new ways of working post-pandemic' shows that – after the Pandemic has ended - some 40% of employers expect more than half their workforce to work regularly from home.
- 3.2 A wide range of research, including a YouGov Survey and further CIPD research, indicate that the majority of workers want to continue to work from home at least some of the time, presenting new opportunities for organisations to establish new ways of working.
- 3.3 What we are hearing across all sectors, is that while some employees want to work from home all the time after the pandemic, most would prefer a balance where they are in the office for some of the week and at home for the remainder. This has led to the use of the term **hybrid working**.
- 3.4 Many organisations are now considering what 'hybrid' means for them, how they might meet this new employee demand, and what will need to be in place in order for these new ways of working to be effective. The full benefits of hybrid working as a specific form of flexible working are yet to be fully researched but we can expect that it will, when properly implemented and supported, lead to similar benefits for both employees and organisations alike.
- 3.5 Researchers are also reporting that organisations who do not support flexible forms of working may risk increased employee turnover, reduced employee engagement and limitations on the ability to attract talent in the future. Hybrid working also provides other opportunities for organisations in terms of reducing estate and facilities costs, enabling employee wellbeing, higher levels of employee job satisfaction, reduced absence rates, and supporting diversity and inclusion.
- 3.6 Our current approach is to adopt this **hybrid model** for our staff as far as we can and we have commenced discussions with the staff group on this basis. Paragraph 4 outlines how this model and our approach is developing.

### 4 HOW MIGHT THIS WORK FOR OUR BUSINESS AND STAFF?

- 4.1 Our general principles behind any future model is that it is able to:
- Meet the needs of staff, continuing with the benefits of working from home as far as possible.
  - Enable the business and our services to operate as effectively and efficiently as possible for customers, Members and staff.
  - Enable a return to the office for those who cannot/prefer not to work from home.

4.2 The approach we are taking is:

- Learn from ourselves – how has it been for us, what have we done, and what are our staff saying?
- Learn from other’s experiences – feedback from our networks.
- What will support it working?

4.3 There are some caveats attached to the stages and timescales of how we move forward, in particular the Vaccination Centre will occupy a large proportion of Catmose until September meaning that part of the building remains unavailable for staff to work from. In addition, the movement out of Lockdown on 21 June and any ongoing safe working arrangements will need to be factored in – such as wearing of face masks, social distancing, testing.

4.4 Our key milestones and timescales currently are:  
*(NB. Employee wellbeing programmes and support continues throughout)*

Phase 1 – Now to October 2021	
	Continue as now – staff work from home if possible. Re-equipping of offices with workstations – in particular re-positioning of desks. Establish Corporate Framework – see para 4.5 Review of Health and Safety obligations – awaiting Gov. Safe Working guidance. Ongoing support to managers and staff – Managing Remotely. Manager’s workshops currently in place.
Phase 2 – November to January 2022	
	Time to establish a way of working – balance and rhythm – review, learn, adjust. Culture change, expectations and behaviours. Feedback from staff – how is it going? What do we need to change? Space utilisation study – what is usage of our office estate looking like – how under occupied it is? Consider impact of emerging working practices on existing policies, terms and conditions.
Phase 3 – February to March 2022	
	Property Strategy Policy and contractual changes if necessary. Wider use of technology that support access to information and improvement in business processes.

4.5 The **Corporate Framework** will provide the detail of the initial boundaries and ‘rules’ that we will work to. These include:

- a) Expectations and behaviours of Managers and their staff
- b) The balance of working at home/in the office can be determined between the line manager and employee against consideration of:
  - i) Where the job can and needs to be delivered from
  - ii) Any specific tasks or elements of the job that can only/should only be done from an office
  - iii) What best enables the team to keep connected with immediate and wider colleagues, other partners, customers
  - iv) Individual engagement and self-motivation
  - v) Technology – ie. access to relevant systems
  - vi) Ensuring a DSE compliant workplace at home
  - vii) Employee wellbeing and personal needs/circumstances.
- c) In this first phase, no staff will be deemed as 100% working from home. We consider that some interaction and face to face contact with others is important for employees' wellbeing and team engagement. Managers will therefore agree a balance of office attendance and the regularity.
- d) There will be occasions when it is necessary for an employee to attend the office for short periods eg. induction, face to face training delivery, workshops that are more conducive to face to face engagement.
- e) In the main and where operationally practicable, meetings will continue to be held remotely; meeting rooms will be configured to enable 'hybrid' meetings to accommodate staff who are working from the office and at home.
- f) It is understood and acknowledged that arrangements across the organisation may vary from team to team dependent on service need, roles and individual circumstances and preferences.
- g) In Phase 1 there will be minimal change to Catmose – this avoids adaptations and associated costs until a full utilisation study has been completed. Staff will be able to access their legacy office and this will enable those staff who cannot or do not wish to work from home, to return to the office.
- h) There will be no change to existing policies, terms and conditions during Phase 1. Neither will the Council be making any supplementary payments to staff whilst working from home (this is emerging as the consistent message from other authorities). The workplace remains the employee's 'admin base'.
- i) There will also be some flexibility for managers and staff to determine a work pattern – this may be within a core hour's framework or more fluid. Again this can be determined locally and in line with service need.
- j) As now, employees will continue to be responsible for ensuring they have appropriate Broadband in order to support the necessary network and systems access.
- k) Employees will have access to a set of kit comprising laptop, monitor, keyboard, mouse – this can be kept either at home or in the office. When attending the office, employees will be able to work from their legacy office and connect to the Council's networks and systems through their laptop.

l) Specialist equipment and adjustments will continue to be provided where necessary and as identified through an Occupational Health referral, specialist or Access to Work.

m) All working arrangements will be reviewed between the manager and employee on a regular as part of our Staff Conversation model.

4.6 We have monitored emerging policies and practices in other authorities – nationally and regionally. Whilst some are more advanced in their accommodation strategies and taking the opportunity to reduce their office estate, all are looking at new ways of working and a hybrid model. Some are more able to provide additional kit and equipment but very few are either currently, or planning to provide staff with a working from home allowance. As ourselves, many have signposted employees to the HMRCs tax relief scheme.

4.7 The above framework is still evolving and will be adjusted to reflect feedback from staff over the next couple of months.

## **5 CONSULTATION**

5.1 We are sharing and consulting with the staff group on the emerging Corporate Framework. Should subsequent changes be required to HR Policies or employee Terms and Conditions, this will follow the usual consultation process through the recognised Trade Unions and then seeking of approval by Employment and Appeals Committee.

5.2 Feedback from Members has been supportive to empowering our staff to find a healthy and productive work life balance. In addition, suitable flexible working should be encouraged, subject to the role and service, and acknowledging that at times teams and individuals would need to meet collectively.

### **5.3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

5.4 The Council could:

5.4.1 Require all staff to return to the building – given the positive benefits of working from home that some staff have experienced, this would be considered detrimental and a retrospective step.

5.4.2 Require all staff to work from home – similarly, this would not be conducive to employee wellbeing as not all staff are able to work from home. Whilst this would release office estate and provide cost savings, this needs to be considered as part of the Council's wider agenda about service delivery, customer access, accommodation strategy.

## **6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are no costs associated with Phase 1 of this model.

6.2 As we move to Phase 2 and 3, any adaptations or recommendations that have a financial impact will be considered with full assessment of potential costs.

## **7 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS**

7.1 There are currently no further legal and governance considerations at this stage.

## **8 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) has not been completed at this stage because there are risks/issues to the rights and freedoms of natural persons.

## **9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has not been completed at this stage as there is no differentiation across the staff group. Where adaptations are required to support an employee, these will be fully explored and met where practicable. An EqIA will be completed should be we move to other models and ways of operating.

9.2 All employees have undertaken a Display Screen Equipment assessment.

## **9.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

9.4 There are no community safety issues arising from this report.

## **10 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 Employee health and wellbeing has been a consideration of developing the hybrid working model. As outlined in this report some employees have experienced improved wellbeing by being able to work from home; equally where this arrangement is detrimental to an employee, they have been able and will be able to work from the office.

## **11 ORGANISATIONAL IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 Environmental implications – the Council's is committed to meeting the challenge of climate change and has identified key strategic objectives within the Corporate Plan. A hybrid working model would mean staff are undertaking less travel between home and work and therefore contribute to the Council's zero carbon footprint agenda. For example:

- An employee commuting 5750km per year
- Based on 25km per day, 46 weeks of the year.

Distance	C02	Trees
5750km	1564kg	These emissions correspond to the yearly absorption of approximately 53 trees.

*(The values given are estimates based on averages, for information purposes, and not a precise measure of actual emissions which can depend on other factors. CO2 offsetting by planting trees is not, in and of itself, sufficient in the fight against climate change. Emissions also need to be reduced.)*

11.2 Human Resource implications – as outlined in para 3, it is anticipated that a hybrid working model can have a positive impact on employee wellbeing, morale, recruitment and retention.

## **12 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

12.1 Members are asked to note and support our approach to developing a Future Way of Working for our staff through a Hybrid model.

## **13 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

13.1 No additional background papers to the report.

## **14 APPENDICES**

14.1 There are no Appendices.

A Large Print or Braille Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.