EMPLOYMENT AND APEALS COMMITTEE

8 February 2022

FUTURE WAYS OF WORKING

Report of the Strategic Director 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	All	

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS
That the Committee:
1. Notes the latest position and progress with our Hybrid Flexible Working model.

1   PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1   The Committee has been provided with two previous reports outlining the evolving arrangements for our ways of working, leading to a trial of a Hybrid Model commencing in October 2021.

1.2   This report brings Members up to date with how the trial is progressing, the lessons we are learning and how we are identifying the actions needed to take us forward and what our Future Ways of Working model may look like.

2   UPDATE ON THE TRIAL

2.1   From the beginning of October, we were able to commence the trial – the Vaccination centre had moved to Oakham Enterprise Park and our IT and Property team had put back in place workstations, kit, and equipment, to enable more people to return to the building.

2.2   Since then, we have seen some increased presence in the office but not as much as anticipated – average number of staff entering the building in September was 61

per day, in October 66 per day and in November 80 per day.

2.3   Plan B measures came into place on 13 December 2021 and hence staff were advised to work from home again wherever possible – the average per day therefore fell in December to 64; from the period 13 December to 23 December, the average per day was 53.

2.4   A 'pulse survey' we undertook at the end of November identified that 24.5% of those who responded do not attend the workplace at all and 43.7% attend about 25% of the time.   This has indicated that the balance of the Hybrid model has been primarily working at home with very occasional visit/ attendance at the office.

3   WHAT INFLUENCES PEOPLE'S BEHAVIOUR?

3.1   As outlined in section 2, we have seen some variation in behaviour with some staff spending a little more time in the office. Staff attend the workplace for a range of reasons – for example:

- Their role does not enable them to work from home.

- To attend meetings that need to take place 'in person' (some people have been meeting up for 1-1s).

- To carry out tasks that can only be done from the office.

- Drop in base in between other visits.

- Induction of new starters.

- Beneficial to meet up with people face to face – need company; building relationships; professional and personal wellbeing; team building; making connections.

- Prefer to work from the office/ change of scenery and environment.

3.2   And in terms of why staff do not go into the office – the most referenced reasons are:

- Their job does not require them to – they consider they are fully productive and effective at home.

- They have suitable work facilities at home which are fully DSE compliant.

- Reduced costs of petrol and parking.

- Other comments include – less distractions at home – able to concentrate more; more productive and trusted to get the job done; better work life balance.

3.3   In the main, managers, teams and individuals are making choices based on their local service needs – what works well for them.   In addition, people talk favourably about their current way of working.

3.4   Behaviour and choices are influenced by people's positive and also their negative

experiences on the basis that flexible working/home working/hybrid models do not work for all.   The purpose of a Hybrid model is to enable that middle ground rather than 'all back in', or 'all staff working at home'.

4   CURRENT FEEDBACK AND ASSESSMENT

4.1   Overall, staff give a favourable response to their current working model and the support put in place by the organisation and their manager. They feel they are benefitting from the flexibility in terms of improving their productivity, with less interruptions. It is pleasing to see that we have put in appropriate systems and processes, kit and equipment, to enable staff to work well – remotely and through such challenging times.

4.2   Some staff feel disadvantaged that their role does not enable them to work from home and therefore they are not able to describe a 'better work life balance' in the way that others often do. They express frustration about their continuing costs for travel to work and parking, again, compared to those who can work from home.

4.3   Some staff also miss the workplace and find working at home to be isolating; they worry about the lack of social interaction and contact with work colleagues.

4.4   Staff have provided a lot of comments about Catmose in particular as a workplace. Whilst some would welcome the use of open plan facilities with hot desks, others remain attached to their legacy room and team space – some for-confidentiality reasons. Certainly, at present, those that do come in are spread across the building and therefore the opportunity for engaging with others is restricted and can be described as isolating as working from home. Suggestions have been made around condensed use of the building and a design that is more conducive to our working model – this may therefore encourage more people to come in.

4.5   Of note, of those who responded to the November survey, 27% live less than 5 miles from their workplace and 28% live more than 20 miles. In addition, 81% drive into work.

4.6   There are clearly different circumstances across the workforce and whilst one model that fits all will be challenging, it is important that all staff have a voice and are heard.

5   WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?

5.1   We have shown that we can mobilise quickly in a crisis and enable remote working in a way that enables us to continue to deliver key services and functions.

5.2   It is very difficult to develop a model that works well across the workforce – there are inevitable perceptions of inequity and unfairness – we are seeing this as a common feature across employers both in the private and public sector.

5.3   The level of staff who are spending more time in the building is less than anticipated – this may be due to the current design and layout of the building (as before, Plan B now requires us to work from home wherever possible).

5.4   We need to ensure that staff who cannot work so flexibly have a voice and are heard.

5.5   Most staff are telling us that they are productive at home, have established a good working model and wish to continue that way. But what do our managers think –

how do they know this and how are they judging it?   This is a key feature of our January/February review.

5.6   We must keep a watchful eye on the impact on recruitment and retention. We are seeing national reports and research that is showing the shift in working patterns that have arisen over the past 18 months will have a lasting effect.   As already identified, most of our staff feel that hybrid/remote working is better for them from a work and wellbeing perspective – others not so much so.

5.6.1   Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) research has shown:

- Employers are now more likely to say that the shift to homeworking has boosted productivity (33%) than they were in June 2020 (28%).

- Two thirds of their respondents stated that they plan to introduce or expand the use of hybrid working to some degree.

- The majority of workers want to continue to work from home at least some of the time (this is reinforced by our own survey).

- Organisations who do not support flexible forms of working may increase their risk of increased employee turnover, reduced employee engagement and limitations on the ability to attract talent in the future.

5.7   We will also take some learning from other organisations and are currently gaining some feedback through our Local Authorities network, particularly regarding their policy decisions, level of investment and use of their office estate.

6   STRATEGY - WHAT NEXT?

6.1   **Our Future Ways of Working Model -** we have more work to do to understand how we make the model work effectively for us as an employer and this is a focus for further discussions with our Senior Management Team and Extended Leadership Team through February 2022. For example:

6.1.1   What should our 'balance' be of home working/office working?

- Is the Hybrid model the right model for us?

- Play back our experience and consider how we define our model – how formal or informal do we need to be, prescriptive/not prescriptive. SMT are considering this in January.

6.1.2   Defining how as an organisation we need to communicate, engage, develop working relationships, develop and embed our values. Developing the skills to ensure effective communication, performance management, team and relationship building and collaboration in hybrid teams. (see para 6.4).

6.1.3   What scope is there to align to our financial priorities and pressures against the context of the potential for a much reduced need for office space – for example:

- The on-going costs of maintaining an office estate/building that is not fully occupied ie. heating and electric in empty offices is not sustainable.

- Our model going forward is likely to be a variation of the current Hybrid framework meaning there will be an ongoing element of staff working from home.

- Catmose building, in its current layout, is not conducive to a flexible working model.

6.2   **Managing performance effectively** – instead of assessing employees via time in the office (*and able to observe)*, managers need to assess performance through outcomes, contribution and value. We moved away from the traditional Annual Appraisal approach a number of years ago and adopted the My Conversation model which is built on the principle of '…regular, meaningful dialogue that drives excellent performance….'. The key elements are:

- Regular, quality dialogue between individuals and their manager.

- Real-time feedback – both praise and areas for development.

- Short to medium term work and personal development goals – keep objectives relevant and achievable.

- It incorporates a My Conversation Tool which includes:

a) Performance
b) Wellbeing and Support
c) Development and Relationships
d) Professional supervision

6.3   **Wellbeing -** managing the risks and challenges of social isolation and lack of engagement with colleagues – both at an organisational level and personal level. External surveys and research are telling us that organisations are concerned about the impact of the pandemic and remote working on employee's health. Employee Health and Wellbeing continues to be a key priority for us and our strategy going forward will reflect:

- A model that can flex and evolve to meet the constantly changing influences of the wider environment (pandemic and work model).

- Enabling manager capability to support their team's wellbeing.

- Ongoing support for individuals – no matter what their circumstances.

6.4   **Development plan** – we are exploring an approach to support the development of our managers to:

- Develop virtual team leadership, relationship building and maximising impact with remote teams

- Equip our leaders with the skills they need to lead the organisation in a remote context

- Give leaders the soft skills they need to effectively manage their own performance, as well as that of their teams and the wider organisation.

(An update briefing on this will be given at the meeting).

6.5 Further decisions regarding the future use of Catmose may influence our model – the meantime, we need to pursue some short-term changes that can better support our working model. The outcomes of our Accommodation Strategy need to be considered alongside our working model.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 Ongoing briefings, consultations and surveys with staff and managers have been taking place.

8 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

8.1 Will be explored as part of our ongoing considerations regarding our Future Ways of Working.

9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Will be assessed as part of the ongoing discussions to determine any need for financial investment and in addition, opportunities for savings.

9.2 The Council has not set aside any financial investment at this stage so any costs arising will need to be met within existing budget.

10 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

10.1 There are currently no further legal and governance considerations.

11 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

11.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) has not been completed at this stage because there are no risks/issues to the rights and freedoms of natural persons.

12 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

12.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has not been completed at this stage but will be considered as we determine our future working model.

13 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 None identified.

14 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

14.1 As outlined in section 6.

15 ORGANISATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

15.1 **Environmental implications –** Studies and research are showing that less commuting (for staff working at home) can reduce carbon emissions and contribute to environmental sustainability. More working at home reduces greenhouse gas emissions, fossil fuel consumption, air pollution, and paper and plastic waste. In London (2020) – emissions were reduced 25% during the normal morning commute and 34% during the evening commute.

15.2 Other reports (eg. from the Carbon Trust) are also identifying the increase in energy and emissions where both individual's homes and offices are fully operating eg.use of power and heating – although there may be some seasonable variation (*research from WSP UK a London based consulting firm).*

15.3 This could therefore see a future model where sustainability efforts have an increasing focus on solutions for remote workers and where it becomes incumbent on individual workers to invest in their own lower-emission practices at home. Given the increasing costs of gas and electricity, there may be some further individual motivation in any event.

16 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

16.1 The Council is progressing the development of a future ways of working model and is currently trialling a Hybrid Model. Further assessment and review will take place during January to March 2022 with the considerations as outlined in this paper.

17 BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1 There are no background papers to this report.

18 APPENDICES

18.1 No appendices.

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