



Report of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Service and Performance

Cabinet - 20 October 2022

Post-Pandemic Working Model

Purpose:	To seek Cabinet endorsement of principles that will underpin the council's post-pandemic working model, and which take account of operational requirements, customer expectations and workforce needs
Policy Framework:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transformation and Future Development Wellbeing Objective• Agile Working Policy• Flexible Working Policy• Accommodation Strategy
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance, Legal.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Cabinet approves the proposed principles for post pandemic working at paragraph 3.42) Cabinet delegates to the Chief Executive responsibility for applying the principles to all services3) Cabinet requests a report on the effectiveness of the principles on operational performance, customer expectations and workforce needs to be presented in October 2023
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1. Introduction

1.1 Prior to and during the COVID19 pandemic the council has been:

- pursuing an accommodation strategy to rationalise the size of the administrative estate

- implementing an agile working¹ policy (Appendix 1) to support remote working on the basis that it would save money, and make the organisation more sustainable over the medium term
- 1.2 When the COVID19 pandemic started in March 2020, the country went into lock down and the council went into business continuity mode. All employees who could work from home were required by Government to do so, affecting around 3,000 Swansea Council office-based employees.
 - 1.3 On 28 January 2022 the legal requirement to work from home was removed but remained advisory and in March 2022 Welsh Government published ***Together for a safer future: Wales' long-term Covid-19 transition from pandemic to endemic*** which articulated an expectation that under a Covid Stable scenario (the current state) “there will be a gradual transition back to office working, at the same time as promoting more flexible working practices such as remote working”. The report also articulated the Welsh Government’s long-term aim for 30% of Welsh workers to be working flexibly at or near to home.
 - 1.4 Since the Government’s rules around home working have been relaxed decisions about employees returning to the office or staying at home have been left to managers and employees leading to some confusion amongst employees and members about how they should be working now services have returned to business as usual. In addition, in recent weeks there have been instances of customers being unable to contact employees due to a breakdown in customer contact channels within services, leading to a number of complaints.
 - 1.5 The Cabinet has made a commitment to develop a post pandemic working model which provides clarity to customers on how they can access services, and to employees on how they should be working taking account of operational requirements and workforce needs.

2. Background

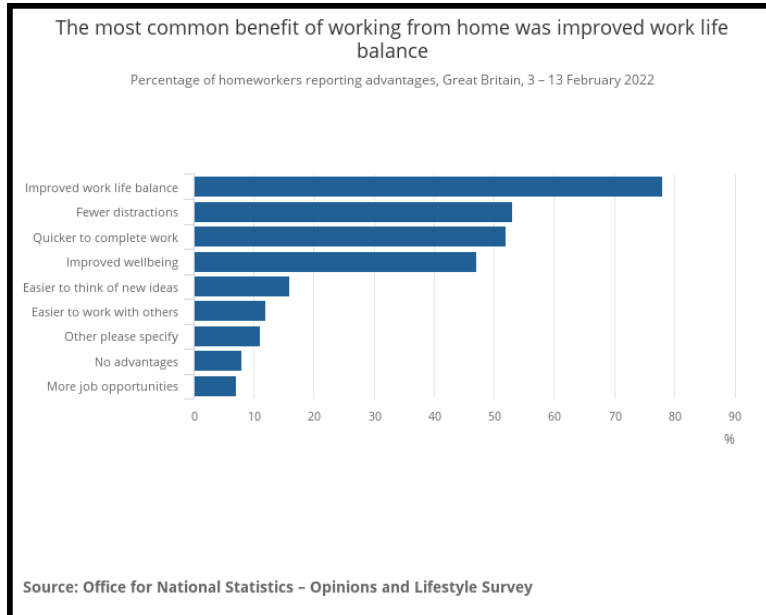
Workforce composition

- 2.1 As at August 2022 the council had 6,684 employees (excluding teaching staff) of which more than half work on the front line, based at depots, schools or in the community. Of the remainder 62 are home workers² (under the council’s Home Working Policy (Appendix 2)) and dual work bases and the rest have the Guildhall or Civic Centre as their assigned work base, albeit the majority have been working from home since March 2020.

¹ Agile working is the ability to work in the place and at the time most appropriate for the task in hand and is about providing a working environment and way of working that allows choice and flexibility (extract from council policy). The policy was updated in 2021 to reflect learning from the pandemic

² The Health and Safety Executive define Home Workers as people employed to work at home for an employer

- 2.2 There are different working models operating across the council, reflecting the wide range of services and delivery models in place. The pandemic highlighted this fact, with many front-line workers (e.g., carers, refuse workers and teachers) being required to continue to work from their usual workplace (with necessary safeguards) while others were required to work from home. Notwithstanding this distinction in some cases those who could work from home (e.g., managers of front-line workers) chose to work alongside their teams to provide leadership and support.
- 2.3 As well as working from a variety of locations, there are differences in the way services and employees are supervised and managed, with managers' having the discretion to apply policies relating to flexible working³ (Appendix 3) and flexitime⁴ (Appendix 4) and / or local management arrangements depending on operational requirements. In addition since 2018 just under 200 employees⁵ have been part of an agile working pilot testing a new way of working that priorities employee outputs and outcomes over when, where and how employees work (albeit they are still required to meet the terms and conditions of their employment (e.g, working hours)). The pilot has been well received by participants (who report higher levels of productivity and wellbeing arising from the new way of working) and it is due to be formally evaluated to determine whether the arrangement should continue and/or be extended to other services.
- 2.4 Although not appropriate for all job roles, as well as reducing costs, employees report several benefits from agile/remote working shown in the graph below.⁶



³ Flexible working is defined as flexibility in employment that assists individuals in meeting their various domestic commitments, and gives them a greater choice over where, when and how they work

⁴ Flexitime is a scheme which gives employees the ability to manage the distribution of the hours they work within agreed parameters

⁵ HR&OD, Service Centre, and Property Services

⁶ Is Hybrid Working Here to Stay? ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, May 2022

- 2.5 There is a consensus that hybrid working⁷ will become increasingly commonplace across the UK with the ONS survey results indicating that most employees who were working remotely during the pandemic would like to continue to do so, albeit with some time spent in the office. However, during the current cost of living crisis employees are likely to weigh up the costs of staying at home against the cost of office working and make seek, at least in the short term, to increase the amount of time they spend in the office.
- 2.6 A recent survey undertaken by APSE⁸ shows that councils across the UK are grappling with the challenge of developing post-pandemic working models. The report identifies a range of factors that organisations are taking into account as they move to a hybrid working model and these are considered in section 3 below.

Employee Accommodation

- 2.7 Under the accommodation strategy, the council has entered into a strategic partnership with Urbansplash⁹ and the current expectation is that the Civic Centre will be vacated by the first half of 2025. It has also acquired 277-279 Oxford Street, to create a City Centre Community Hub planned for late 2023, which will house a number of council front facing services currently based at the Civic Centre. In addition, plans are also in place to create a central Public Sector Hub for back-office services also by 2025. Both Hubs are expected to attract partner organisations. These plans will be facilitated by the council's agile policy (based on the aim to reach a maximum staff: desk ratio of 2:1 and provision of collaborative and quiet spaces) and the use of surplus accommodation in the Guildhall. In the meantime, occupation of the Guildhall and the Civic is being organised to reflect the future model and there will continue to be sufficient desk space to accommodate a significant return to the office should that happen during the winter months.

3. Post-Pandemic Working Model

- 3.1 The Post-Pandemic Working Model must reflect the different services the council provides and while it cannot therefore be a single model, there can be consistency in the way in which services determine their own working models to ensure operational requirements are met and employees are treated fairly.
- 3.2 There are a number of external and internal factors which will influence each service's working model, including

⁷ Hybrid working is where an employee splits their time between their work base and a remote location

⁸ APSE Briefing 22-34 Post- Covid Return to Office Working, September 2022

⁹ Cabinet report Nov 2019 'City Centre Marketing of Strategic Site Joint Venture Opportunity and FPR7' and the subsequent approval from Cabinet to include the Civic Centre as a Strategic Development site

External Factors

- **Customer access needs:** i.e., when, where, how, and what customers can access in terms of services, advice, information, or guidance. This includes ensuring customers can contact the council and get a timely response online, by telephone or face to face.
- **Job Roles:** may have specific operational requirements that mean agile working is not applicable (e.g., refuse collection)
- **Cost of living crisis impact on customers and employees' prosperity, health, and wellbeing** is expected to increase demand for services and to impact on where employee's work where they have a choice
- **Council's financial outlook:** the cost-of-living crisis and energy costs are already having a significant impact on council budgets which will continue to drive the need to reduce costs and make savings
- **Climate change:** is a driver for reducing the administrative estate. However, the emissions council buildings and those arising in employees' homes while they are working remotely both form part of the council's carbon footprint and so need to be considered in the round
- **Local economy:** the council is a major employer in the local economy and decisions about its working model(s) could have a positive or negative impact on the local economy. The extant accommodation strategy to create community and public sector hubs seeks to protect the local economy while also delivering cost reductions and workforce policies that support employee health and wellbeing.

Internal Factors

- **Accommodation provision:** the council's accommodation strategy will provide two new hubs as well as capacity in the Guildhall, which combined will be sufficient to meet the accommodation needs of the agile workforce
- **Digital technology provision:** since the onset of the pandemic the council has demonstrated it has the capacity and capability to enable staff to work remotely
- **Workforce health and wellbeing: whilst remote working can have positive benefits to employees by enabling work/life balance to those with caring responsibilities or transport challenges, and support those with a long term health condition or mobility issue** it can also lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation and/or longer working hours, which need to be managed
- **Recruitment and retention challenges:** could be reduced in some services by offering agile working which is deemed attractive in the labour market and can enable the council to access talent further afield
- **Workforce policies:** the council's has extant agile working and flexible working policies both of which are at managers' discretion and are dependent on operational requirements of the service being met
- **Supervision / performance management of employees:** a consistent approach to supervision / performance management is needed when adopting different service models to ensure fair treatment

Post-Pandemic Working Principles

3.3 Developing a set of principles to determine the design of service working models can help to:

- keep important factors (e.g, customer access, workforce needs) front and centre
- ensure consistency and fairness across the organisation
- communicate to employees and customers the basis on which different service models are designed

3.4 Taking account of the factors identified in paragraph 3.2 above the following principles are proposed:

1. **Each service¹⁰ will have a written set of operational requirements** which reflect when, where, how, and what customers (external (i.e., the public, internal (i.e., other services/partners/members) can expect to access in terms of services, information, advice and/or guidance
2. The council will set out **corporate customer contact standards** (e.g., response times, contact options including alternative formats to meet our duty under the Equality Act 2010) as part of a customer contact strategy to provide consistency across the organisation
3. Each service will ensure **all job roles fulfil the service's operational requirements and clarify whether they are available for agile working** driven by the service's operational requirements
4. Each service will ensure **appropriate arrangements are in place to supervise and performance manage employees** in line with corporate policies, their job roles and their terms and conditions of employment
5. Each service will seek to **minimise the accommodation space each service requires** and will aim for a maximum staff:desk ratio of 2:1
6. **During the cost-of-living crisis agile employees will be supported to work from their assigned work base or another public sector building, if they choose**
7. Each service will ensure **appropriate arrangements are in place to support the health, safety, and wellbeing of employees wherever they are working from** (including regular 121s, formal supervision or team meetings as appropriate, regular in-person team contact, ergonomic workstations and clear work / home life boundaries and recognition of caring responsibilities, housing issues and risks of domestic violence/coercive control)
8. The council will **ensure the workforce and digital strategies provide employees with the training and development** they need to work in an agile environment
9. The council will **work with Public Service Board partners and other local authorities to identify physical locations in and outside the county from which employees can work on a hot desk¹¹ basis.**

¹⁰Directors and Heads of Service to determine definition of services for the purpose of applying working model principles; Leadership (i.e., Corporate Management Team and Heads of Service) to be included as a distinct group to define the model to be used to meet the council's democratic / Members' needs

¹¹ Hot desking is when multiple workers use a single physical workstation during different time periods

Employees will also be encouraged to use the Welsh Government's Local Remote Working hubs¹²

- 3.5 Guidance and support will be provided to service areas on how to prepare their operational requirements and customer standards in line with the above principles. This will include the requirement for an IIA to be completed to ensure that impact on key groups has been fully considered.

Assurance that the IIA process has been duly completed and approved by Access to Services prior to submission to Directors will be required.

4. Integrated Assessment Implications

- 4.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs

- 4.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental, and cultural well-being of Wales by acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

- 4.3 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

- 4.4 An IIA Screening Form has been completed with the agreed outcome that a full IIA report was not required: The summary of impacts has been categorised as low providing the agreed principles are applied correctly. Whilst the proposed working model principles apply to all Council employees they largely reflect existing policies and their impact on specific groups is low. However, when adopting the principles a separate IIA will

¹² at Canolfan y Bont, Pontarddulais, Swansea (Hub Cymru), Blaen-y-maes Drop in Centre, Swansea (Hub Cymru) and Swansea (Indycube)

need to be undertaken by each service due to the operational requirements potentially impacting on service users. The customer service standards will also need a separate IIA as part of their development due to the impact on service users. This assessment will be submitted to Directors along with operational requirement proposals before any changes are implemented.

- 4.5 With regard to involvement, key stakeholders including council employees, managers and recognised Trade Unions have been involved in the development of the council's agile and flexible working policies. Public Service Board Members will be involved in developing members of the Public Service Board and they will be involved in developing a network of locations from which agile employees can work..
- 4.6 The report adheres to the transformation and future council development well-being objective in the Corporate Plan - so that we and the services that we provide are sustainable and fit for the future.
- 4.7 The risks surrounding the project are considered low as the policies on which the principles are based are already in place. The principles provide a framework that will ensure the policies are adopted and implemented in a consistent and fair manner.
- 4.8 With regard to the cumulative impact of the project, there will be changes to the working model as a result of the implementation of the principles identified in paragraph 3.4 above. However, these changes are internal and would be considered as overall improvements. To provide surety, when the IIA process is undertaken by services as part of their model development, impact on staff of the proposed way of working will need to be fully considered.
- 4.9 The report proposal identifies that there will be impact on a wide range of staff groups as a result of its approval, but the impact will not be known until each service area completes their operational requirement and customer standard model. This is an internal mechanism and each individual service will need to fully consider the impact of their specific model on key groups, the public in general and members of their workforce. Individual IIA's will be carried out by services to support this process. The guidance and support provided to service areas will ensure that the IIA process is duly completed and that Access to Services are engaged with the assessment process prior to submission to Directors for approval.

The customer services standards proposed in this report will require its own IIA process to support its development.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report. However, fundamental changes to the shape of future service provision and location of services and employees, will have a widespread impact across a range of budgets. Given the financial outlook for this Council, along with all others there is a

presumption that the overall budgeted costs will reduce and make a contribution to wider service efficiencies and budgetary savings. The cost of that transition will also need to be carefully managed given the future constrained resource outlook.

6. Legal Implications

6.1 There are no direct legal implications as a result of this report.

Background Papers: None

Appendices:

- Appendix A Agile Working Policy
- Appendix B Homeworking Policy
- Appendix C Flexible Working Policy
- Appendix D Flexi Time Scheme
- Appendix E IIA