



CABINET – 5TH OCTOBER 2022

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON AGILE WORKING

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Cabinet on the progress that has been made in respect of embedding Agile Working principles across the organisation and to outline the steps necessary to formalise these practices.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 During the pandemic, the Council's back office, or administrative staff, were asked to begin working remote from the office almost overnight. It was these agile practices that secured the Council's ability to deliver key services to the public even when our communities were 'locked down'. Contact Centre staff were able to seamlessly receive and manage customer enquiries from home; Revenues and Benefits staff were able to process multiple grant payments, and officers involved in the emerging requirements of the pandemic response could instantaneously switch between meetings with multiple responders.
- 2.2 While the democratic process was initially suspended at the very beginning of the pandemic, the rollout of equipment and Microsoft Teams, enabled the Council to reinstate its decision-making processes with elected members then fully able to participate in decision-making initially from their homes.
- 2.3 These practices have continued during the last 24 months or so with agile (or flexible) working practices now very much the de facto way of working for many back office staff and legislation being introduced that makes hybrid meeting capabilities a requirement of Council businesses. across the Council. During that timeframe customers have also become accustomed to accessing Council services that are being supported by staff who are working from a wide range of locations.
- 2.4 These new ways of working have already enabled the council to:
- reduce levels of unproductive time that officers previously spent travelling to and from work and to and from meetings across the Borough and across Wales
 - reduce its CO2 emissions in terms of business travel and staff journeys

- see our employees find a better balance between their home and work lives
 - see staff with specific caring responsibilities find a way to wrap their jobs around those responsibilities avoiding the need for either aspect to suffer unnecessarily
 - increased service resilience by introducing a way of working that would buck the elements (snow days, red weather warnings etc)
 - embed a range of more efficient mechanisms for dealing with customer engagement
 - reduce the number of administrative buildings that it has in operation
- 2.5 During this period, the Council has amassed significant learning about what will be required if it is to formally adopt agile working practices within its operating model, something that it has not done at this point.
- 2.6 The most recent staff surveys which included specific questions on Agile demonstrated a shift in staff preference towards these modern methods or working with circa 80% of staff either preferring to 'mostly' work from home or split themselves equally between work and home.
- 2.7 The relaxation of restrictions on staff accessing Council's buildings during the autumn last year has seen a modest increase in the numbers attending those buildings on a daily basis. The attendance at Ty Penallta, for example, peaked at around 22% and demonstrates a clearly link to the fact that many administrative jobs can be delivered from a range of locations, if suitable tools and connectivity are available.
- 2.8 A future capacity planning exercise carried out through the Spring of 2022 asked Heads of Service to work with staff to establish staff working patterns and capacity requirements for buildings against the needs of our citizens. This exercise once again confirmed that the surplus capacity being experienced at the majority of buildings would likely continue moving forward.
- 2.9 This additional capacity provides a range of opportunities for the Council in the coming years in terms of its overall requirements for premises, its operating expenditure, overall service resilience, its position as an employer of choice, its carbon footprint and the way in which its staff are equipped to support service delivery.
- 2.10 This report gives Cabinet a position statement on the Council's current approach to Agile working, sets out some of the potential benefits that a formalised approach to agile working will provide, seeks to focus the work of the Agile Corporate Review Team on the development of an Agile Hub at Ty Penallta, and in doing so, provide all necessary foundations for a broader rollout across all Council buildings.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Cabinet:
- 1) Note the progress of the Agile Working Corporate Review to date
 - 2) Note the strategic intent and proposed Outcomes for the Agile Working Corporate Review
 - 3) Comment on the intention to develop Ty Penallta as an Agile Working Hub
 - 4) Note the progress against the workstreams to support this development

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To support the development of an Agile Hub at Ty Penallta and the development of all of the necessary policies and practices to formally embed agile principles as a core principle of Council service delivery.

5. THE REPORT

Progress to Date

- 5.1 Since its inception, the Agile Corporate Review Project Team has been developing and beginning to embed all of the policies, processes, equipment and management development required to support modern methods of working. The Team and the workforce have proven over the last two years or so that this has become a way of working that is now very much the norm for staff in certain roles and can be successfully applied to the Council's operating model without determined to our customers.
- 5.2 Through the introduction of Hybrid Meeting Technology, Members have also been able to make choices about whether they participate in meetings in person or join from remote locations. Again, this promotes choice, is in keeping with the new legislation and provides flexibility while not removing any aspect of the democratic role.
- 5.3 These new ways of working have already enabled the council to:
- reduce levels of unproductive time that officers previously spent travelling to and from work and to and from meetings across the Borough and across Wales
 - reduce its CO2 emissions in terms of business travel and staff journeys
 - see our employees find a better balance between their home and work lives
 - see staff with specific caring responsibilities find a way to wrap their jobs around those responsibilities avoiding the need for either aspect to suffer unnecessarily
 - increased service resilience by introducing a way of working that would buck the elements (snow days, red weather warnings etc)
 - embed a range of more efficient mechanisms for dealing with customer engagement
 - reduce the number of administrative buildings that it has in operation
- 5.4 Staff that are able to take advantage of agile working, to a large extent now have the IT equipment and connectivity they require to fulfil their role from multiple locations. Elements of the Council's infrastructure has been upgraded to support these new ways of working. The Council has a set of draft policies to formally support agile working which are ready for consultation over the Autumn.
- 5.5 A categorisation exercise was carried out with Heads of Service that has helped establish the roles that have the potential to be undertaken from home, as a mix of home or office based or purely as office based. The work also looked at the degree to which roles might be time bound. This work has helped establish working patterns over the last twelve months or so with the mix of home and office forming the predominant pattern for back office staff.

5.6 Cabinet agreed to make £500k of funding available to equip officers with the mobile devices and / or furniture required to support new ways of working. The majority of service areas have, to date, equipped their staff from local budgets so this funding remains available to be allocated to provide the equipment and furniture that will be in place across the Council's Agile hubs.

5.7 The Council has invested in the creation of an Agile Working space on the ground floor at Ty Penallta and adapted its glass restaurant provision, now known as "The Hive" to ensure that it better supports agile approaches.

5.8 The Council has framed its strategic intent in respect of next steps as follows:

Our aim: "To formalise the working practices and patterns that have successfully supported service delivery and individual needs throughout the pandemic, and to plan and implement any changes that may be required to ensure these mixed or hybrid methods of service delivery remain successful over the long term."

5.9 The Council has proposed a number of outcomes that will provide a framework upon which the success of the Project can be judged, and to which future decisions can be aligned.

FW 01	Work becomes something that people do, not somewhere they go
FW 02	Officers and Members have the equipment, skills and desire to work in an agile way
FW 03	Employees are trusted to get their job done flexibly
FW 04	An appropriate mix of home / remote and office-based working is defined and supported
FW 05	Staff productivity, work / life balance and wellbeing is improved
FW 06	Council's Carbon footprint is reduced
FW 07	Organisational sickness levels are reduced
FW 08	Administrative buildings are repurposed to provide an appropriate mix of fixed desks / hot desks, touch down points, quiet space and meeting space
FW 09	The monitoring regimes and administrative burdens associated with managing 'flexi time' are reduced

5.10 The Council has undertaken a future capacity planning exercise on a wide range of its buildings based on discussion between Heads of Service and their staff. The findings of the exercise have only been triangulated for Ty Penallta at this point, but the early results appear to confirm that there is significant desk capacity available across the whole estate which could now be repurposed. This clearly presents opportunities for the Council to migrate staff out of outlying buildings into a base at one of its emerging Agile Hubs, reducing costs (such as rent, heating and lighting) and maximising the number of individuals operating out of the available space.

5.11 The future capacity planning exercise was designed to take into consideration current and future working patterns for all staff based at our administrative buildings. The triangulated results for Ty Penallta are as follows:

	Current Desk Capacity	Future Desk Requirements	Surplus Capacity
Ty Penallta	964	452	512 (53.2%)

- 5.12 Scoping work has also been undertaken with an external contractor to explore the potential to reconfigure one wing of one floor at Ty Penallta as an agile working space. The initial designs, coupled with projected costs and the added bonus of providing collaborative space, team space, touch down facilities and a more social space from which to work, may also prove beneficial and something the Council would wish to progress.

Developing an Agile Hub @Ty Penallta

- 5.13 With the building previously hosting nearly 1000 desks and with a future requirement of around 46% of those desks to service those 1000 staff, it may well be possible for several hundred additional staff to be based here. As well as freeing up outlying buildings, this also provides the opportunity for the Council to bring together groups of staff and teams that have never previously been able to work together.
- 5.14 With this in mind, the Agile Corporate Review Team is seeking to focus its work on creating Ty Penallta as the Council first Agile Working Hub. The principles of this work are set out below:
- As an Agile Hub, Ty Penallta will provide a mix of opportunities for Council staff who wish to use the building as part of their modern working practices (it is likely to provide a mix of fixed desks, hot desks, touch down spaces, quiet spaces, collaborative spaces and meeting rooms)
 - Over time it is expected that the daily occupancy at Ty Penallta rises and is as close to the maximum (964) as possible
 - Each service (or Team) located at Ty Penallta will be allocated a 'zone' on either floor 2, 3 or 4 with a specified number of desks (see capacity exercise in Appendix 1) for use by team members.
 - Each zone will have a clear desk policy in place and will provide fixed and remote working desks that can be used by multiple staff.
 - One wing on floor one will be developed as a truly flexible workspace to support modern working methods, greater collaboration and opportunities for staff who are visiting or in between meetings to have access to a well equipped, modern work space
 - All desks within the zones across the Agile Hub, be they for fixed use or remote working use, will have the requisite equipment in situ to support the work of those officers who choose to use them (including any specific DDA provisions).
 - All staff will have access to the necessary equipment and furniture they require to undertake their role in accordance with the role category agreed with their line manager and Head of Service
 - The Council will have an agreed Agile Working Policy in place along with a series of supporting Policies that enable these new ways of working
 - The Council will transition to a modern and progressive manner of delivering Mail that enables delivery to remote / agile as well as location dependent workers

- Where necessary, a small number of lockers will be made available to staff close to their respective zone that would enable personal effects to be temporarily secured
- All staff will be informed and regularly updated of the plans and timescales for creating an Agile Hub at Ty Penallta and will also be made aware of all of the agile locations that could be utilised across the Borough
- The Council will link its asset management plans to its emerging Agile approaches and is able to reduce the use of costly and expensive buildings over time in accordance with a pre-agreed plan
- Paper files and associated physical storage reduces over time in accordance with Information Governance and Records Management protocols
- Systems that support the booking and allocation of rooms, quiet spaces and other resources will be developed and implemented over time
- As the use of the building increases, consideration will also be given to wrap around facilities that could better support a modern workplace and potentially a wider public service offer
- Once the Hub at Ty Penallta is fully functioning, the approaches will be rolled out to other key administrative buildings

Workstreams and Projects

5.15 The following workstreams and projects are currently in train in respect of the development of Ty Penallta as an Agile Hub. Each project has a lead head of Service and is underpinned by a Project Plan. The Transformation Team are providing project support. The estimated completion dates are also included, albeit some of these are likely to be amended as the programme progresses and detail is firmed up:

#	Project Description	Estimated Completion
1	To develop, consult and gain approval for an Agile Working Policy and a suite of related Policies to support modern methods of working. (HR & Health and Safety)	January 2023
2	To develop a communication and engagement programme for staff, Members and Trade Unions that provides an insight into the project and keeps key stakeholders informed	September 2022 (and ongoing)
3	Define and create the specifications for the IT and Voice Equipment that will be provided to each specific Agile role category	September 2022
4	Define and create the specification for furniture that will be provided to each specific Agile role category	September 2022
5	Review the IT Infrastructure at Ty Penallta and then, if necessary upgrade it to ensure it is fit to support a well used Agile Hub	October 2022 and thereafter
6	Design and develop a Digital Mail Room facility to enable physical mail to be distributed electronically to staff where possible	January 2023
7	Develop and publicise an electronic inventory of existing	October 2022

	Agile Workspaces (those Council buildings and facilities that support touch down working for Council staff)	
8	Develop and implement a Room / Resource Booking System and associated management arrangements that will enable staff to book meeting rooms and quiet space across Agile Workspaces [linked to 7]	January 2023
9	Develop a Procurement Ready specification for a Flexible Workspace on one wing of Floor 1 [linked to 10]	October 2022
10	Carry out the procurements to enable the delivery of a Flexible Workspace on one wing of one floor of Ty Penallta [linked to 9 and 16] as well as the provision of the specified IT equipment and furniture [linked to 3, 4 and 16]	November 2023
11	Develop a plan for preparing each floor at Ty Penallta to support modern methods of working, to include a general building clean up, standardised desk layouts, removal of broken and damaged equipment and cabinets, development of a clear desk policy	November 2022
12	Using the capacity planning exercise and working with Heads of Service, propose some designs as to how the floors at Ty Penallta could be configured into a number of sufficiently sized zones to house the existing 452 required desks (above and beyond the proposed flexible working space on floor 1)	October 2022
13	Identify the Council buildings that house council staff and whether they are leased or owned and propose which might be suitable for disposal, with staff moving back to the spare capacity at Ty Penallta [linked to 12].	October 2022
14	Ensure Information Governance and Retention policies are in place, communicated and are appropriately applied across the disposal of any paper records and digitisation associated with the creation of the Agile Hub	January 2023
15	Identify a list of critical customer services as a means of ensuring those services are physically represented by staff at Ty Penallta in order to service face to face enquiries from customers.	October 2022
16	Ensure the finances and budgets required associated with developing an Agile Hub and equipping staff are in place	Ongoing
17	Ensure the back-office telephony arrangements are enhanced to support remote customer management and provide first class customer service	December 2022
18	Continue to enhance and refine the processes, management arrangements and training programmes that will ensure remote working remains a success	December 2022

5.16 Conclusion

Significant progress has been achieved through the Council's swift move to Agile working and the period that has followed but in order to formalise arrangements, maximise the use of key administrative buildings and reduce the costs associated with the Council's property portfolio, work will now centre on the creation of the Council's first Agile Hub.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 It is assumed that any costs associated with the equipping staff or remodelling agile hubs will be funded from the reserve set aside by Cabinet for IT Equipment and Furniture
- 6.2 It is assumed that the development of Agile Hubs will bring about cost savings associated with the release of surplus buildings and facilities.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 No IIA is required as this report is a report to update Cabinet on progress.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There will need to be financial investment in order to formalise agile working but is expected that the £500k already set aside should be appropriate to support the provision of equipment, furniture and building remodelling.
- 8.2 A national position is currently being sought on the potential provision of a Home Working allowance for staff. This has become more pressing with the cost-of-living increases. Should a national position be achieved, there will likely need to be additional investment secured to support its payment.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The need to review and refine policies in order to formally embed agile working will have a number of personnel implications and the support of the Trade Unions will be sought in overcoming any obstacles that emerge through consultation and engagement.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 The report was presented to Policy and Resources Committee on September 27th 2022 and the comments from the Committee are detailed within paragraphs 10.2 – 10.8.
- 10.2 Following an introduction from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, the UNISON Branch Secretary offered her comments for Committee consideration. The union representative outlined that UNISON was supportive of agile working but had concerns over the outcome of pieces of work referred to in the report which had not been shared with the Trade Unions. Members heard that these were: a future capacity planning exercise, a categorisation exercise, scoping work on initial designs to reconfigure Penallta House and the assumed cost savings associated with the release of surplus buildings and facilities. The Branch Secretary advised that she would like the outcomes shared with Trade Unions and Scrutiny Members.
- 10.3 One Member queried what would happen to surplus office furniture in Council buildings. The Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services advised that a flexible working space was planned for floor one at Penallta House and this would involve recycling furniture to create this new working environment. The Member also

raised the issue of costs associated with working from home such as the use of additional heating and asked if there would be any compensation for staff. The Head of People Services advised Members that discussions at a national level were taking place on issues such as a Home Working Allowance and mileage payments and that Members would be advised of the outcome.

- 10.4 One Member asked about the impact of the proposals on the carbon footprint and queried why sickness levels were still high after two years of agile working. The Member also asked if the proposed Hubs could also be used by outside organisations as a way of attracting additional revenue. The Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services outlined the reduction in commuting miles which was having a positive impact on the carbon footprint, highlighted factors outside the Council's control such as Covid-19 which had an impact on sickness levels and welcomed the opportunity to attract additional revenue which would be kept under review.
- 10.5 One Member highlighted the frustration of not being able to speak to an officer when their landline had been diverted due to working from home. The Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services advised that back-office telephony was a challenge that was being addressed by an ongoing project referred to in the report.
- 10.6 One Member highlighted the social benefits of working in an office and interacting with colleagues as opposed to working alone from home and expressed his concerns. The Head of People Services advised that management arrangements were the same whether an employee worked in the office or at home. Members heard about "My Time" one-to-one conversations between managers and staff, how office working was still an option and also how the most recent staff survey showed satisfaction with the support they received. The Chair asked the UNISON Branch Secretary for her opinion. The Branch Secretary advised that Member Surveys had shown that the vast majority welcomed the flexibility of working from home. However, a significant number preferred a hybrid system of both working from home on some days and the workplace on others.
- 10.7 One Member highlighted the importance of ensuring that the workplace environment was attractive for those members of staff who preferred to work in the office. The Member believed it was important for such people to have their own desk as opposed to a shared alternative. The Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services advised that zones would be established for existing teams. These zones would have a mixture of both fixed and hot desks.
- 10.8 The contents of the report were duly noted as per the recommendations. It was also noted that no negative comments were received on the intention to develop Ty Penallta as an Agile Working Hub.

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Consultees: Christina Harrhy, Chief Executive
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Liz Lucas, Head of Customer and Digital Services
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Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee
Trade Unions – GMB, UNISON, Unite