



CABINET – 7TH APRIL 2021

SUBJECT: FLEXIBLE WORKING UPDATE REPORT

REPORT BY: FLEXIBLE WORKING CORPORATE REVIEW GROUP

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To update Cabinet on progress with the Flexible Working Corporate Review following the report being presented to Policy and Resource Scrutiny Committee on 21/1/2021.

2. SUMMARY

2.1 Because of the speed and nature of the COVID-19 lockdown, the Council was required to equip and train a significant proportion of its workforce to work and to provide services remote from their usual places of work and, in many cases, from home. Whilst Agile Working Principles were in place prior to the pandemic, they were mainly being used on an ad hoc basis.

2.2 While the transformation to this new model of service delivery happened at a significant pace, the technology platforms that have formed the foundations of remote working have proven to be intuitive and stable.

2.3 Some sections of the workforce have been operating remotely and very effectively since the beginning of lockdown and, over time, further services have been enabled and brought back online with much less of a reliance on buildings, premises and travel.

2.4 This has enabled many services to the public to be delivered safely and continuously and for the Council's employees to manage multiple aspects of their professional and personal lives in a way that has brought about a much greater work-life balance than was possible previously.

2.5 The Flexible Working Corporate Review Group has been formed and are considering the changes and effects of moving to a more flexible working model approach and an update on the progress of the review was recently reported to Policy and Resource Scrutiny Committee on 21st January 2021.

2.6 Whilst the focus of this report relates to staff who have primarily worked from buildings, it should be noted that opportunities for flexible working are available in front line services, which support employees' career choices and also personal circumstances, via part time working, shift patterns, for example.

- 2.7 The report embraces the TeamCaerphilly transformation strategy, echoing the mantra - *A new "whole-authority" operating model to ensure a resilient Caerphilly County Borough for the future.*

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 In terms of recommendations, Cabinet are asked to consider supporting and approving the work done to date and endorse the recommendations below that were presented to Policy and Resource Scrutiny on 21st January 2021. This includes an additional recommendation in 3.1.6 that Scrutiny Members unanimously voted for inclusion for Cabinet consideration:
- 3.1.1 Formally adopt the proposed flexible working employee categorisation identified within section 5.15 of the report.
- 3.1.2 Support the proposal to consider different approaches to the supply of equipment to individuals based on their specific circumstances particularly in relation to the provision of furniture to allow more flexible/home working where appropriate.
- 3.1.3 Support the continued work to consider the impacts of any property portfolio rationalisation as a result of changes in office accommodation requirements.
- 3.1.4 Support the review of how the local communities may be affected and how effective and constructive future engagement can be undertaken.
- 3.1.5 Note the formally identified workstreams in the Flexible Working Corporate Review Dashboard (Appendix 1).
- 3.1.6 A further updated staff survey be undertaken to gain additional staff views on flexible working given the extended duration of predominantly home/flexible working over almost 12 months.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The authority has gone through an unprecedented period of flexible working in relation to the current Coronavirus pandemic. It is wholly evident that there are options to enhance the standard approach to office accommodation that will benefit staff, the Council, the residents of Caerphilly County Borough and the wider environment.
- 4.2 The progress achieved over recent months in delivering services through flexible arrangements must now be captured and built upon to ensure services continue to embrace technology and modernise in order to remain sustainable over the long term, whatever challenges may emerge. The TeamCaerphilly Transformation Strategy highlights - *"This ambitious programme of change articulates the combined vision of the Cabinet and the Corporate Leadership Team and has been developed over the last 12 months. In making this Strategy a reality, courageous political and officer leadership will be essential to ensure that we successfully deliver the outcomes that we are aiming to achieve."*
- 4.3 Embracing transformation to flexible working will ensure the Council is both resilient and flexible in terms of business continuity during adverse conditions and aligns with

priorities to improve the way the council operates in order to protect the environment for future generations in many aspects but particularly from an impact on the climate.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 The current pandemic has provided a stimulus to show the benefits of working in a more flexible manner. The progress made and the lessons learned can directly shape the blueprint for future service delivery and redesign. Embedding flexible practices will enable the organisation to be ready to manage any future crisis as well as reflect the Council's need to remain an attractive and progressive employer. This approach has been clearly identified within the Council's TeamCaerphilly Transformation Strategy.
- 5.2 It is acknowledged that it is not going to be possible to design a one size fits all approach and that flexible working models will need to be developed and tailored to each service area and, in some cases, these models will differ depending upon role. The core focus, however, will remain a reduction in the reliance of the workforce and services upon physical buildings.
- 5.3 The success of any flexible implementation will be linked to a clear set of objectives, a consistently applied corporate approach, a strong communication and engagement plan as well as a suite of policies that support the new ways of working.
- 5.4 Team management and appropriate support will also be vital to the success of flexible working and Managers will need to be provided the necessary training and tools to be able to manage and support a distributed workforce while maintaining and optimising the benefits of team working.
- 5.5 It should also be noted that flexible working is not simply home working. Home working will form part of a range of flexible arrangements. Some employees will use their home as their office base, some will operate across multiple office buildings and some may even take advantage of working at times from other buildings. The flexible working approach should support staff to work where and when it best suits them while still ensuring the needs of the business are supported.
- 5.6 Due to the nature of the COVID-19 outbreak and the subsequent speed of the lockdown, it was necessary for the Council to deploy a large proportion of the workforce to work remotely, and in many cases, from home.
- 5.7 Whilst this move to remote working happened at significant pace, much of the workforce has adapted to this way of working; enabling service continuity in a safe manner.
- 5.8 Many staff have indicated that agile working has brought about a greater work-life balance than was previously possible. However, it is noted that this is not the case for all employees and there is a need for flexibility in meeting the needs of all employees; particularly in relation to wellbeing, whilst ensuring service provision is maintained.
- 5.9 The current arrangements for agile working have been implemented in a reactive manner due to the nature of the lockdown without the opportunity for planning and determining a structured approach. As previously stated, whilst Agile Working

Principles were in place prior to the pandemic, they were mainly being used on an ad hoc basis. It is now accepted that it is necessary to clearly define and agree how the Council will operate via flexible working going forward.

- 5.10 Flexible working will need to be extended to all appropriate areas of the Council workforce and all staff with similar roles will need to be provided with the same opportunities for flexibility.
- 5.11 Members will be aware that an initial staff survey has been undertaken as previously reported to Scrutiny on the 29th September 2020. This survey reported positively about home/flexible working. It is important that we further engage with staff again to establish the views and experiences of staff as the time period for home working has extended longer than initially expected.
- 5.12 The Head of People Services is writing a Well Being Strategy which will now consider agile/flexible working and the results of the staff engagement/survey referred to in 5.11 which will help inform the content of the strategy. The Strategy will be presented to Policy and Resource Scrutiny Committee as part of the consultation process prior to consideration by Cabinet.
- 5.13 The Flexible Working Service Group has been formally established following the previous Scrutiny and Cabinet meetings of 29/9/20 and 14/10/20 respectively. Five key workstreams have been identified along with lead officers. Initial meetings between the officers have taken place and a Project Dashboard has been developed to manage and monitor progress. This information is detailed in appendix 1.
- 5.14 At the P&R Scrutiny meeting in September 2020, members and the trade union's raised concerns around the necessity for sufficient training to be provided to managers. It should be noted that this has not been listed as a workstream in the flexible working review. This has been identified as a Workstream in the Workforce Development Review and is instead listed as a dependency (Appendix 1). A project lead has been identified to lead on the Management Training workstream and work has commenced in sourcing training options and reviewing best practice.
- 5.15 A number of proposed categories have been identified to designate employee roles in regard to the first workstream "Define the agile working approach". The proposed categories are listed below and take account of the location and time dependencies within the Agile Working Principles:

Flexible Working Proposed Categories

	Suggested Category Name	Determining Factors
Job A	Fixed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location dependent and time dependent • No choice of where to work • Set working hours

Job B	Flexible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location dependent, time independent • No choice over where to work but infrastructure supports significant time independence
Job C	Mobile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location independent – may be time independent or time dependent • Full choice over where to work
Job D	Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location independent – may be time independent or time dependent • May also work at other locations as required

5.16 The categories highlighted in 5.15 cover the vast majority of possible working scenarios that the authority provides. Each job role should be able to be categorised into these roles. It should be noted that some roles may need to cross between different categories for different work tasks. Further, there may need to be future changes dependent on the role and task required at a particular time.

5.17 There will be a need to determine the specific equipment that will be required for each of the categories. The “Resource/Infrastructure Assessment” workstream will undertake an exercise to determine the initial requirements and cost estimates. Some of the costs will be offset with current IT peripherals and some furniture may be allocated to specific staff. Once a full audit has been carried out of the potential numbers of staff falling into each category, then a more detailed analysis can be carried out. The suggested equipment required and factors to be considered for each category are detailed below:

Suggested Equipment

Category	Equipment	Factors to be considered
Fixed	Current stock to be utilised	
Flexible	Current stock to be utilised	
Mobile	Laptop with SIM (for mobile access where WiFi unavailable) Laptop Case Mobile Phone	Consideration will need to be given as to whether further equipment will be required – some of the time may be spent working from home i.e. will these staff require the further equipment as identified for ‘Home’ workers?
Home	Laptop Additional Screen Screen Adapter Cable External Keyboard	Consideration will need to be given to the requirement for printing, shredding and mail facilities. These could be maintained at Council Offices, however there may be a

	External Mouse Soft Phone Headset Desk Chair	specific requirement at service level.
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N.B. In addition to the above equipment, there may be a need for docking stations to be installed on those desks identified as 'hot' desks to enable Mobile staff to work at various locations. The use of "hot" desks will be in line with any health and safety guidelines.

- 5.18 It is intended that anonymised staff lists (broken down by job type) will be distributed to Heads of Service in the first instance in order that all staff can be categorised into each area. This will be the first stage of the audit process providing details of the number of roles that fall into each category. This will require Heads of Service to determine how best their services are delivered in the future. Further stages will require Heads of Service and Managers to discuss the specifics of working styles and preferences directly with staff to allow opportunity for staff to have valued input to any proposals.
- 5.19 Once this exercise has been completed, it is anticipated that a detailed cross-referencing exercise can be undertaken with IT services to ascertain IT equipment requirements. Due to the current working situation, many staff have already been provided with some IT equipment; thus the overall costs will reduce. However, it should be noted that there will need to be a refresh programme built in for the future.
- 5.20 The workstream "Policy and Procedure Review", the lead officer (Head of People Services) has identified that the core objectives are to identify and undertake a comprehensive review of all policies and procedures that will be impacted by the new agile/flexible working approach.
- 5.21 An initial review of the authority HR policies has identified eleven policies that are directly affected by agile/flexible working and a further five policies which are intrinsically linked and will be subject to a review due to legislative changes. The Trade Unions have been informed of the policies that need to be reviewed and timescales for completion of these reviews will be agreed with them. Completion of the reviews will be dependent on the authority establishing a clearly defined approach to agile/flexible working. It is envisaged that the review of these policies will take at least 9 to 12 months to complete.
- 5.22 The "Property Portfolio and Economic Impact Assessment" has started to consider the Asset Management Strategy that is already in place which provides a clear strategy for the rationalisation and consolidation of office accommodation at the Tredomen Park complex. In scope buildings for this project have been identified on this basis and planning policy appraisals are currently ongoing to identify the redevelopment potential of each in scope building and any associated redevelopment opportunities within the area which could be unlocked by the release of sites. It should be noted that the recommendations associated with any alterations to the property portfolio will be towards the end of the review which is likely to be around the end of 2021 and will be subject to separate reports to members.

- 5.23 An assessment of the economic impact and the potential opportunities of asset disposal will be carried out on completion of the planning policy appraisals which as highlighted in 5.22 will be towards the end of 2021 and further detailed reports will be provided at that time.
- 5.24 The flexible working approach aligns with the Welsh Government Transport Strategy which has recently undergone consultation. A key focus is the reduction of car usage by encouraging more flexible and local/home working along with modal shift to more sustainable modes of transport where journeys are necessary. This is further supported by the Council who are looking to harness the potential of remote working by establishing serviced co-working centres throughout the county borough. To this end the Council is currently developing 2 pilot co-working centres with the support of the Valles Taskforce. In addition, the authority has already started to install free public Wi-Fi in Blackwood and Caerphilly town centres with further plans for Newbridge, Ystrad Mynach, Bargoed, Risca and Rhymney to support residents who need to access Wifi for personal and business use.
- 5.25 Members raised concerns at the September 2020 Policy and Resource Scrutiny Committee meeting about the potential impact on communities if the workforce operated in a more agile way. To consider this a “Community Impact and Future Engagement” workstream has been established. An impact assessment is underway to consider this matter. The assessment looks at research currently being undertaken as part of the Walk-in Services and Remote Access Service Reviews, as well as ongoing analysis of the economic impact on communities and potential use of multi-agency hubs. The assessment will also seek to use existing datasets on availability of transport and digital skills, in addition to the outcomes of the ongoing Caerphilly Conversation and Budget Consultation. With the Walk-in Services Review due to report in the summer 2021, the Flexible Working Review will be looking to complete the impact assessment in parallel and will share the draft assessment with Scrutiny when it is available to allow appropriate feedback to be received.

Conclusion

- 5.26 When considering the way the world has adapted and changed, particularly in the light of the current pandemic, it is wholly evident that a new way of working can and should be supported to ensure that the organisation remains as flexible as possible and is able to react to any future national or global emergencies that would severely impact on service provision. The organisation may well need to turn on and off services more frequently as we continue to respond to the current pandemic.
- 5.27 Flexible working has been proven to work in Caerphilly. Services provided by the Council have not “fallen over” or ceased, in fact, it has been possible to continue to deliver many of these services without any disruption to delivery. In-fact additional services such as the delivery of free school meals, buddy scheme, and Test Trace Protect have all been delivered in addition to normal service provision.
- 5.28 The gains made over the last few months, albeit out of necessity, cannot now be lost. Now is the time to embrace transformational change and shape an organisation that is able to meet the challenges of the 21st century head on.
- 5.29 The initial work undertaken so far provides a good foundation to enable a fuller understanding of the impacts of flexible working on employees, employer and the wider community to be assessed as each workstream progresses.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 There have been no assumptions made within this report.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 As work on the proposals contained in this report commenced prior to the introduction of the Integrated Impact Assessment, an Equalities Impact Assessment screening was completed at the outset. No potential for unlawful discrimination and/or low level or minor negative impact was identified, therefore, a full EIA was not carried out.
- 7.2 It was the intention that as work progressed EIA's would be undertaken in relation to each element of the policy or change in approach as necessary together with the completion of a workforce EIA and a community focussed EIA. These will now be replaced by an Integrated Impact Assessment as work continues on proposals and data gathering. The IIA will be completed and submitted as part of a future report when the conclusions of the current work are finalised and decisions on proposals for flexible/agile working are sufficiently detailed for Scrutiny Committee comment and Cabinet Member decision.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Moving forward there will be far reaching financial implications from this and subsequent reports. The detailed financial implications will be firmed up in the medium to longer-term as specific requirements become clearer following further discussions with Heads of Service. Further reports will be prepared for Scrutiny and Cabinet which will include detailed costings and funding proposals, along with details of where revenue budget savings will arise from the new working models.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There will be wide-ranging personnel implications from this and subsequent reports. There will need to be consultations undertaken with Trade Unions and staff in relation to policies, procedures and changes to working practices.
- 9.2 An initial staff survey has already been undertaken in relation to flexible working which identified overwhelming support for the initiative, capturing the views of the workforce in the earlier stages of the pandemic and enforced remote working. A second workforce survey has been identified as a possible further objective in the Flexible Working Review to gauge further workforce opinion, with a view to ensuring a wider scope of employee survey engagement

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 A full list of consultees is included at the end of the report and their respective comments have been incorporated within the report.
- 10.2 The Trade Union have been engaged in the consultation exercise and detailed comments have been received which are in the whole supportive of this approach. They recognise further work is required and welcome the opportunity to continue to

work in partnership to develop flexible working across the authority, to achieve the benefits for employees, the organisation and the community.

- 10.3 Policy and Resource Scrutiny Committee Members were consulted on 21st January 2021, comments from the consultation are included below:

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE COMMENTS

The UNISON Branch Secretary advised Members that the trade union supported the recommendations in the report and endorsed the proposal for a further staff survey to be carried out. On the issue of categorisation of posts the trade union believed that categories should not be fixed and immovable for positions, but flexible and responsive to a change in personal circumstances. The Chair asked how the initial staff survey was carried out. The Head of Infrastructure outlined how an online survey via email had been circulated to staff and advised Members that despite a few concerns about health and well-being there was overwhelming support for flexible working. One Member expressed concern about closing offices in town centres which he believed would have a detrimental impact on local businesses. The Member also had concerns about the extra cost to staff associated with working from home, additional costs associated with heating and electricity were identified by the Member. The Head of Infrastructure advised that at this stage no assurances could be given about office closures, but he stressed that decisions would not be made without full consultation and engagement with the scrutiny process. On the issue of additional costs to staff the Head of Infrastructure outlined how those already working from home because of the Covid-19 pandemic had been encouraged to apply for tax relief for which home workers are eligible. Also, extra payments to staff working from home would be considered as part of the review. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services wished to provide assurances to Members that economic impact assessments would be carried out and considered before any decision was made on the future of Council-owned buildings. The Head of People Services also advised Members that the Welsh Government was undertaking work on the potential of additional payments because of agile working across all Public Services, she said that when a decision was reached she would ensure that it was fed into the review.

One Member wished to know what arrangements would be put in place for staff who do not benefit from agile working as it would negatively impact on their well-being. He also wished to know what considerations had been given to workplace adjustments for staff with disabilities if they were working from home. The Head of People Services advised that risk assessments for each individual employee would be carried out with their manager, she also advised that a Wellbeing Strategy would be produced and brought to Scrutiny at a future date. One Member asked if staff working from home would be invited to attend regular meetings with colleagues in an office environment so as to ensure that social interaction was maintained which addressed wellbeing concerns. The Head of People Services recognised the importance of bringing agile workers together and said that there would be opportunities for this in the future such as for staff training sessions. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services reassured Members that the Flexible Working proposals were not about forcing staff into a way of working which did not suit their circumstances. The Director outlined how the right balance had to be found that worked for both the employee and the employer. He said that it was a triangulation of the individual role lending itself to agile working, the employee being willing to operate in a new way and their Line Manager being comfortable with these arrangements. These arrangements would be kept under consideration should there be a change in circumstances. The Head of Infrastructure stressed that the report was centred on flexible working in a variety of different ways and was not just focussed on working from home.

One Member reminded the Committee that some staff would not benefit from tax relief as they did not meet the income threshold for paying tax. Another Member asked a question about the equipment that would be made available to staff who opted to work from home in the future. The Head of Infrastructure advised Members that agile workers would be provided with the equipment pertinent to their role. One Member raised the issue of domestic violence and asked if Caerphilly County Borough Council had a policy on this in light of the fact that in the future more members of staff would be choosing to work from home. The Head of People Services advised that the Council has a Pan-Gwent Policy on Domestic Violence and that training on detecting and reporting this issue was provided to staff and managers. The Chair asked if this policy could be circulated to Committee Members and the Head of People Services said that she would circulate it to Members via the Scrutiny Officer.

A Motion was moved and seconded calling for a further staff survey on flexible working to be made an additional recommendation on the report. This was unanimously supported by Committee Members.

Following consideration and discussion, and with the inclusion of the additional recommendation, the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee by a majority present, and in noting in that there were no abstentions and one vote against, ENDORSED the recommendations of the Flexible Working Update Report prior to a presentation to Cabinet.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government Act 1972 and 2000.

Author: Marcus Lloyd, Head of Infrastructure

Consultees: Cllr James Pritchard, Chair of Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Gez Kirby, Vice Chair of Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Colin Gordon, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services
Richard Edmunds, Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services
Rob Tranter, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
Stephen Harris, Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer
Liz Lucas, Head of Customer and Digital Services
Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services
Emma Strathdee, Manager Admissions, Policy and Customer Services
Gwyn Williams, Digital Services Manager
Ryan Thomas, Planning Services Manager
Joanne Jones, Information Governance Manager
Anwen Cullinane, Senior Policy Officer – Equalities, Welsh Language and Consultation
Mark Williams, Interim Head of Property Services
Sue Richards, Head of Education Planning and Strategy
Neil Cooksley, Principal Human Resource Officer
Trade Unions – UNISON, GMB and Unite
Policy and Resource Scrutiny Committee Members

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Flexible Working Dashboard
Appendix 2 – List of Policies requiring review