

Committee: **Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **14th March 2024**

Report Subject: **Review of Agile Working, Agile Working and Flexible Working Policies**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Steve Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member Corporate Overview and Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Andrea J Prosser, Head of Organisational Development**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
x	22.02.24	04.03.24			14.03.24	10.04.24		

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to update the Members of the Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee on the review of agile working and give the opportunity to scrutinise and challenge the proposed reviewed Agile Working and Flexible Working Policies.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 A report was considered and approved at Council on the 25th March 2021 introducing a New Council Operating Model & Working Arrangements. An Agile Working Policy was approved at Council in April 2021 and implemented in September 2021 following an extensive consultation process and full engagement of trade unions. The policy was seen as a key enabler in delivering the future working model. It also linked to the Council's vision for sustainable development including sustainable economic growth, decarbonisation and the health and well-being of both staff and the community.
- 2.2 To support the move to agile working a number of leadership development webinars were held for managers on Transitional Leadership (moving out of pandemic) and Leading an Agile Workforce.
- 2.3 The review of agile working was scoped with the Corporate Leadership Team as planned in September 2022 and included:
- A staff pulse survey where 433 staff responded (26%)
 - Facilitated focus groups with a cross section of staff from across the organisation – 180 staff invited and 107 attended
 - A dedicated session with trade unions for feedback and suggestions for improvement

2.4 The full results of the pulse survey and the focus groups are attached to this report as appendix 1. The results have been communicated to the workforce and there have been facilitated sessions with the Corporate Leadership Team and the Wider Corporate Leadership Team to understand the feedback and develop actions to make improvements.

2.5 Staff accommodation has continued to be reviewed and plans are progressing to develop medium and long-term plans for staff accommodation and this will be led by the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Community Services.

3. **Recommendations from the review of agile working**

3.1 Appendix 2 is a table detailing the recommendations from the agile working review, outlining progress to date and actions moving forwards.

4. **Agile Working Policy**

The Agile Working Policy applies to all Council employees excluding school-based staff appointed by governing bodies. The policy (appendix 3) has been reviewed to reflect the current position and future management and the following changes applied:

- Information on reasonable adjustments and the process on how to change the designation of a post has been added.
- Non-payment of allowances during maternity leave has been added following legal advice.
- The payment of allowances will stop at the trigger of long-term sickness.
- The £200 allowance for purchasing furniture for grade 6 and below has been removed. Desks and chairs will not be provided for new employees going forwards.
- Information security advice strengthened further to requests from the Information Governance Group.
- Wellbeing advice added, including how to access the Council's Employee Assistance Programme.
- Forms no longer needed have been removed from the appendices section.

4. **Flexible Working Policy**

The Flexible Working Policy is applicable for Council employees where appropriate excluding school-based staff appointed by governing bodies. It aims to provide flexibility in service delivery for the benefit of customers. It further aims to provide significant additional flexibility for employees, to enable them to better balance their work and home commitments and support the Council in becoming an Employer of Choice. The reviewed Flexible Working Policy is attached as appendix 4. The headline changes to the policy are:

- It is proposed to increase the flexi bandwidth from 7am-7pm to 6am-7pm, to increase flexibility. If this option is adopted, OD would advise that building opening times are kept to the current 7am-7pm opening to avoid additional costs such as caretaker costs, heating and lighting. Any hours worked outside of this time and within the bandwidth should be at home.
- CLT will be asked to recommend what the Council's 'normal' operating hours are – should this remain 9am-5pm, as in the existing policy, or does this need to be amended?
- The Health and Safety section has been updated to strengthen the Working Time Regulations advice.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1**

That Scrutiny notes the outcome of the agile working review, recommendations, progress/improvement and support the reviewed policies for Agile Working and Flexible Working for progression to Council for endorsement.

3.2 **Option 2**

That Scrutiny Members make suggestions for changes/improvements to the Agile Working and Flexible Working policies prior to progression to Council.

4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

The review of agile working and the updated Agile Working Policy and Flexible Working Policy align to the Corporate Plan, Council priorities and the delivery of the Council's operating model. The policies are key workforce policies in delivering the Council's Workforce Strategy.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long-term impact)***

The reviewed Agile Working Policy removes the allowance of £200 towards a desk and chair for new employees so this will be cost avoidance for the Council.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

The policies enable agile and flexible working in line with the Workforce Strategy. They lay out the parameters for the workforce in working in an agile and flexible capacity and directly mitigate health, safety and well-being risks. They also support mitigating risks to ensure the Council is able to recruit and retain staff.

5.3 ***Legal***

The Policies detail employee and managerial responsibilities in terms of health, safety and wellbeing.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

The workforce is the most important resource of the Council and the Agile Working and Flexible Working policies are part of a Workforce Strategy that demonstrates the Council's commitment to its workforce and aims to create a good place to work. Developing a workforce that feels connected to and can meet the current and future needs of our community is critical in the Council's ability to deliver ambitious outcomes.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

The current workforce make up is 34% agile workers, 8% homeworkers, 58% service based (frontline workers).

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

Modern working practices and a fit for purpose Workforce Strategy make the Council a more attractive employer.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

The Corporate Leadership Team shaped the agile working review and have reviewed the recommendations and developed actions. The results of the agile working review in terms of the focus groups and pulse survey were presented to an Elected Members Briefing in July 2023.

The trade unions have been involved in the review of agile working and have welcomed the learning and confirmed that the feedback from their members has been positive.

The trade unions are in support of the reviewed Agile Working and Flexible Working policies. They are disappointed at the removal of the allowance for furniture in the Agile Working Policy, however, accept the Council's financial challenges. The bandwidth in the Flexible Working policy was much debated – and it was reduced from the original proposal further to trade union engagement from 6am – 8pm to 6am to 7pm. The trade union continue to challenge the proposed bandwidth the rationale given is staff wellbeing and request it to remain in line with the current policy.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The reviewed policies are key to delivery of the Council's operating model and are deliverables of the Workforce Strategy 2021-2026.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The contents of this report are all aimed at modernising the employment offer in line with Council priorities/operations to ensure recruitment and retention.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

Continued collaboration at a local, regional and national level to ensure that delivery actions in the Workforce Strategy are modern and in line with any legislative changes.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

The policies identify the workforce in scope for their application.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

Agile working has had impact on decarbonisation and reducing carbon emissions for the Council with a reduction in buildings and travel to work.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IAA)***

The Council's Workforce Strategy promotes equality of opportunity and diversity in the workforce and as an organisation and the reviewed policies are in line with this.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The reviewed policies will be reviewed in line with the policy review framework in Organisational Development. A full staff survey planned for autumn will further test views on agile working.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 Agile Working Review – Pulse Survey and Focus Groups
- Appendix 2 Table Recommendations and Progress
- Appendix 3 Agile Working Policy
- Appendix 4 Flexible Working Policy