

Committee: **Corporate Overview Scrutiny**
Date of meeting: **16th April 2021**
Report Subject: **Proposed Agile Working Policy**
Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Nigel Daniels, Leader / Executive Member
Corporate Services**
Report Submitted by: **Andrea J. Prosser – Head of Organisational Development**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
x	x	12.04.21			16.04.21		x	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to give the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee the opportunity to scrutinise, challenge and make suggestions on the proposed Agile Working Policy for the Council's workforce ("the policy") (attached as Appendix 1).

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Further to the report that was considered and approved at Council on the 25th March 2021 on the New Council Operating Model & Working Arrangements (attached as appendix 2) - the introduction of a new model of working across the Council, incorporating modern working practices, will seek to enhance employees' working experience, maximise performance and productivity and deliver the greatest value to the organisation, in terms of improving service delivery, as well as realising financial gains. The Agile Working Policy is a key enabler in delivering the future working model. It also links to the Council's vision for sustainable development including sustainable economic growth, de-carbonisation and the health and well-being of both staff and the community.
- 2.2 The policy will cover all Council employees excluding school based staff appointed by governing bodies.
- 2.3 The policy clearly sets out Corporate, management and employee responsibilities and includes:
- Designation of roles into one of three **workstyles**, defined as; Homeworker, Agile Worker, Service/Community Worker
 - Assessment of permanent roles as at January 2021 determined 369 Homeworkers, 386 Agile Workers, 958 Service/Community Workers – these figures are at a point in time and subject to change (figures exclude temporary and fixed term roles)
 - Proposes payments to support homeworking for the Homeworker (£26 per month tax free) and Agile Worker (£12 per month tax free)
 - Details the standard **equipment** which the Council will provide to home/agile workers. Reasonable adjustments may necessitate additional equipment
 - Focuses on **health, safety and welfare** including employee/employer responsibilities

- Outlines **data protection, security and confidentiality** requirements
- Demonstrates commitment to **equal opportunities/reasonable adjustments** and to treat staff in a fair, equitable and consistent manner and to comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010
- Provides guidance on the **individual consultation process on application of the policy to the current workforce** - the Council will support the current workforce with adjustment as appropriate.

3. Working with Trade Unions

3.1 The trade unions Unison, GMB and Unite have been engaged in the development of the New Council Operating Model and the draft Agile Working Policy over the past few months. The draft policy was sent to Unison, GMB and Unite for formal consultation on the 29th March asking for written feedback by the 7th of April 2021. The following requests have been received from Unison for the Corporate Overview Committee to consider in terms of the policy:

- Unison would like to see a £16 allowance for Agile workers not £12, as currently stated. The Corporate Leadership Team discussed this proposal and support a figure of £15.60 to recommend to Members for their consideration (pro rata figure which would be fair to all workers)
- All current employees that are designated as home or agile workers be able to utilise an allowance of up to £200 to cover the cost of a chair and desk that will be able to fit in within the home environment. The allowance will be used with an approved council supplier/s. The Corporate Leadership Team support the choice for the workforce from approved suppliers/including recycled equipment. Unison also requested that any future workforce be given the option of the allowance if they are paid scale 6 or below.

4. Options for Recommendation

4.1 **Option 1:** That Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee support the attached proposed Agile Working Policy to progress to Council for decision making.

4.2 **Option 2: (*preferred option*)** Consider the formal representations of the trade union and suggest amendments to the policy prior to presentation at Council.

4.3 **Option 3:** Make further suggestions for amendment of the policy prior to presentation at Council.

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

5.1 Corporate Plan Priorities

The policy, through reduced travel, reduced emissions and consequent lowering of our carbon footprint as well as less time spent commuting/travelling promotes the following corporate plan priorities:

- Strong and Environmentally Smart Communities;
- Efficient Council.

5.2 Services need to reflect on the New Council Operating Model and Future Working Arrangements in terms of focussing service design around the customer and delivering Council priorities.

5.3 **Statutory Responsibilities**

The policy has been drafted in accordance with, and to comply with, the Equality Act 2010, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Working Time Regulations 1998, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).

5.4 **Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

The policy, through improving work/life balance; promoting employee well-being; and reduced travel promotes the following aspects of the Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan:

- To look after and protect the environment;
- To encourage and enable people to make healthy lifestyle choices in the places that they live, learn, work and play.

6. **Implications Against Each Option**

6.1 **Impact on Budget**

This policy, in promoting home/agile working, where possible, should result in substantial savings and allow the Council to focus money spent on services as opposed to buildings.

Option 1

The cost of implementing the proposed Agile Working Policy is detailed in the report presented to Council on the 25th March 2021 (attached at Appendix 2) and summarised below.

Table 1 – As per the Business Case

	No. of Staff (@ January 2021)	Monthly Allowance	Total Per Annum £
Permanent Homeworker	369	£26	115,128
Permanent Agile Worker	386	£12	55,584
TOTAL			170,712

Option 2

- Increasing the allowance for Agile Workers to £15.60 would cost an additional £12,058 – this would be within the funding available within the business case.
- The business case has accounted for no more than £200 (one off allowance) for a desk and chair for the current workforce.
- Any proposal for an allowance for a desk and chair for the future workforce would need to be found from within Directorate budgets.

The financial business case has been based on permanent workers and application of the policy to temporary and fixed term staff will be an additional cost to the business case. It is not anticipated that the furniture allowance would be paid to fixed term or temporary staff.

6.2 **Risk**

Failure to implement this policy and to embrace home/agile working (where possible) could result in a lost opportunity to improve employee well-being; save costs; and promote the de-carbonisation agenda of the Council and WG. Further, many employees have embraced home/agile working during the COVID-19 pandemic and for those who wish to continue working in this way, job satisfaction/productivity could be reduced if this were prevented.

6.3 **Legal**

Please see 4.2 above.

6.4 **Human Resources**

This policy, by enabling BGCBC to embrace home/agile working, could: improve employee well-being, engagement and performance; aid employee recruitment and retention; and reduce absences.

7. **Supporting Evidence**

7.1 **Performance Information and Data**

The recent staff survey undertaken indicates that: the majority rate their productivity as the same or better compared since homeworking; the majority feel appropriately supported; the majority feel they have a healthy work/life balance; and the vast majority rate their wellbeing as fair, good or very good. These all contribute to performance. It is, however, recognised that the staff survey was undertaken at a certain point in time and in response to a pandemic although there is no apparent reason why productivity, support provided etc. should change post the pandemic.

7.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

Members of the public may be attracted to an employer, which promotes home/agile working, thereby improving employee well-being and lowering our carbon footprint etc. This may contribute positively to the Council's reputation among members of the public. Services need to reflect on the New Council Operating Model and Future Working Arrangements (appendix 2) in terms of focussing service design around the customer and delivering Council priorities.

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

Consultation, engagement and participation regarding the policy has been internal to the Council, together with the Trade Unions, who are supportive of the policy.

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

The clear aim and aspiration of the policy is that, long-term (and short-term), it will enhance employees' working experience, promote well-being by improving work/life balance, realise financial benefits for the Council and support sustainable development.

7.5 **Preventative focus**

The policy will reduce travel/emissions and assist in lowering the Council's carbon footprint, in line with WG's aspiration of increased remote working.

7.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

A collaborative approach is proposed, with each individual member of staff discussing, with their manager, their designated workstyle and any adjustments to reach agreement.

7.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

The policy aims to boost productivity, improve services and reduce absences (sickness absence has reduced since March 2020, leaving aside COVID-19 sickness absence) and, in this way, positively impact on all service areas.

7.8 **EqIA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)**

The policy promotes equal opportunity; reasonable adjustments will always be considered for any individuals who are disabled pursuant to the Equality Act 2010.

8. **Monitoring Arrangements**

It is proposed to formally review the policy after one year. Furthermore, regular discussions will take place between managers and direct reports in regular 1 to 1 sessions and performance coaching, which should highlight any operational/practical issues.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Agile Working Policy

Appendix 2 - New Council Operating Model & Working Arrangements report to Council March 2021