

Committee: **Special Council**

Date of Meeting: **29th 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	x			16.04.21		29.04.21	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval of 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 (£15.60 per month tax free). Part-time Homeworkers will receive £15.60.

- 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 – the forms to support health and safety assessment at home have been further simplified in the policy proposed to Council
- 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 – no staff member will be forced to work from home

3. Corporate Overview Scrutiny

3.1 The proposed policy and consultation feedback from trade unions was considered and reviewed at the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee on the 16th April 2021. The Scrutiny Committee requested that the policy be amended to reflect the formal consultation feedback from the trade unions and include the following:

- The allowance for Agile Workers to be £15.60 per month and not £12 as originally proposed
- All current employees that are designated as home or agile workers to be able to utilise an allowance of up to £200 to cover the cost of a chair and desk that will fit in within the home environment. The allowance will be used with an approved council supplier/s or recycled furniture
- Any future workforce if they are paid scale 6 or below 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 fit within the home environment. The allowance will be used with an approved council supplier/s or recycled furniture

3.2 The Committee also requested that consideration be given to introducing a social clause for future recruitment to vacant posts. This has been considered and legal advice sought which highlighted there are risks of potential indirect discrimination - recruitment decisions have to take into account the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. In line with the Council's equality and diversity policies, the aim is to have a diverse multi-cultural workforce which will in part be achieved through recruitment practices. This requires vacancies to be advertised to the widest possible pool of potential candidates to encourage applications from groups who are under-represented. A social clause/policy to recruit locally may potentially be indirectly discriminatory if, for example, persons with particular protected characteristics are under-represented. Therefore, there is no recommendation to introduce a social clause on recruitment to the Council.

4. Implementation of the Agile Policy

Welsh Government Guidance in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic is still that if you are able to work from home you should do so. The Corporate Leadership Team will

consider setting a 'go live' date for the implementation of the policy in line with any changes in Welsh Government advice and consultation with trade unions.

4.1 The implementation of the policy will be supported by:

- Workforce engagement and communication plan
- Leadership development
- Engagement of the workforce in designing the agile workplace
- Development of a Corporate procedure for distribution and management of equipment and furniture

5. **Options for Recommendation**

5.1 **Option 1: (*preferred option*)** That Council approve the attached proposed Agile Working Policy.

5.2 **Option 2:** That Council make further suggestions to amend the policy for implementation.

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

6.1 **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.

6.2 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.

6.3 **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).

6.4 **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.

7. Implications Against Each Option

7.1 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 as detailed in this report in line with the amendments suggested by Scrutiny still supports the business case presented to Council on the 25th March 2021 (attached at Appendix 2) and is summarised below.

Table 1

	No. of Staff (@ January 2021)	Monthly Allowance	Total Per Annum	Total Per Annum As per the Business Case
Permanent Homeworker	369	£26	£115,128	£115,128
Permanent Agile Worker	386	£15.60	£72,259	£55,584
TOTAL			£187,387	£170,712

The business case accounted for a £12 per month allowance for the Agile Worker - by increasing the allowance to the proposed £15.60 there is additional cost of £17,000. This additional cost can be funded from within the overall funding identified within the Business Case.

The proposal of the up to £200 allowance for furniture was also accounted for as part of the report and business case to Council on the 25th March.

The financial business case has been based on permanent full time workers and application of the policy to temporary and fixed term staff will be an additional cost to the business case.

7.2 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.

7.3 **Legal**

Relevant legislation has been used to develop the policy, the allowances and its application.

Legal advice was also taken in term of responding to the request from Scrutiny for a social clause on recruitment. This is detailed in section 3.2.

7.4 **Human Resources**

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

8. **Supporting Evidence**

8.1 **Performance Information and Data**

The recent staff survey undertaken indicates that the majority of those staff rate their productivity as the same or better since commencing 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.

8.2 **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.

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

There has been effective engagement and consultation with trade unions in developing the Agile Working Policy and formal feedback was considered at Scrutiny and amendments made to the policy that is presented to Council.

8.4 **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.

8.5 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.

8.6 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.

8.7 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.

8.8 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.

9. 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.

10. Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Agile Working Policy



DRAFT 13 - Blaenau
Gwent CBC Agile W

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



CO2103D7 Council
Report TOM 250320: Appendix 1 (003).pd



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