

# Cabinet

10 December 2020

## How We Work Programme – Agile Working Offer and Online Protocols

### Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Supports the adoption of the Agile Working Offer and Online Protocols as part of the *How We Work* programme as set out in Appendices 1 and 2
2. Notes the overall progress of the *How We Work* Programme and the future work to complete the Programme as set out in Appendix 3

### 1.0 Background and context

- 1.1 The *How We Work* Programme was developed following Cabinet's adoption of the Council's organisation wide Design Principles and Transformation Plan in June and July 2018.
- 1.2 The programme has underpinned the transformation of our operating arrangements and has been focused on supporting delivery of both our Council Plan 2025 and our Covid 19 Recovery Plan, which was approved by Cabinet in September 2020. The Programme specifically addresses our business objectives of:
  - Adopting a customer focused approach to the delivery of services;
  - Creating the conditions to support a high performing culture; and
  - Supporting the creation of an agile, modern, fit-for-purpose organisation.
- 1.3 The Programme impacts upon all aspects of the Council's service delivery arrangements but more specifically has been of relevance to the development and implementation of the following strategies;
  - Our People Strategy – refreshed and to be considered by the Staff and Pensions Committee in December
  - Customer Experience Strategy
  - Digital Strategy
  - Data & Intelligence Strategy (draft) – to be presented to Cabinet early in 2021.
- 1.4 The Programme, comprises four inter-related workstreams:

- People;
- Technology;
- Process; and
- Space.

Proposals for enhancing our agile working approach relate to each of these workstreams and an update on each workstream, together with an outline of the Programme's future work, is provided in **Appendix 3** of this report.

- 1.5 The Programme has also driven culture change in line with the new operating model, aligned to the behaviours and values previously approved by Cabinet and linked to all four workstreams.
- 1.6 It has been possible to accelerate several elements of the Programme in light of the opportunities presented to us as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. These, together with the views expressed by our staff through the well-being check ins that have been carried out and the priorities identified by members through the cross party member working groups around recovery which took place during the Summer, have helped to shape the future proposals around the Programme, in particular those relating to Space and Process.
- 1.7 This report sets out proposals for what this means for the way we work and the basis of which we deliver services for the future. It asks Cabinet to support the new Agile work offer and online protocols as part of the 'Process' workstream in the *How We Work* programme. These new ways of working have a significant impact on and drive our future office property requirements which are the subject of a separate exempt report also on the Cabinet agenda.
- 1.8 For added context, the report also provides an update on the status of the overall *How We Work Programme* and an outline of the future direction for the Programme.

## **2.0 WCC Agile Working Offer and Online protocol**

- 2.1 The Covid-19 pandemic saw an unplanned overnight move of 4,500 staff from being predominantly office-based, spending on average 20% of their working week away from the office, to becoming predominantly home-based agile workers.
- 2.2 The pandemic has accelerated changes in how we work and strengthened our ambition and vision in developing an agile workforce. The last 10 months have demonstrated the benefits of agile working in balancing work and home life whilst continuing to deliver business benefits and outcomes for our residents.
- 2.3 Since the first lockdown we have continued to listen and engage with our staff and based on a significant volume of feedback from check-in and spot check

surveys there is a considerable evidence base to support the appetite of our staff to consolidate and capitalise on the changes that we had to put in place rapidly at the start of the pandemic by now implementing supporting processes.

2.4 Two key products have been developed to address this need:

- WCC Agile working offer; and
- WCC Online protocols.

A summary of each of these is set out below and the full products attached in **Appendices 1 and 2.**

## 2.5 WCC Agile Working Offer

2.5.1 The Offer seeks to manage agile working by outcomes, giving employees a choice over how, where and when to undertake their work, subject to outcomes being achieved and business needs being met. Where business needs require it, employees would still be required to attend the office or other workplace setting.

2.5.2 The offer is intended to support the Council as a high performance organisation able to maintain exceptional customer service through the positive impact of the flexibility we can offer on recruitment and retention, on staff sickness absence and on creating a high performing workforce focused on delivering outcomes.

2.5.3 Whilst the agile working principles will be promoted to staff as the new and expected way of working, it is recognised that not all services or individuals will be able to work in this way. Equally the significant benefits of bringing teams together physically from time to time to deliver business objectives should not be underestimated. The 'space' element of the Programme will therefore ensure that our future office accommodation provides sufficient collaboration and team space to enable that to happen, while also providing an appropriate level of choice to meet the diverse needs of our customers, staff and teams.

2.5.4 Full details of the proposed Agile Working Offer are provided in **Appendix 1.**

2.5.5 The proposed adoption of agile working as a default position for those services and staff that can deliver in this way unlocks the potential to use our physical assets (office space) in a different way and for those assets to make a greater contribution to the very significant challenges of balancing our Medium Term Financial Strategy. Crucially, this will also help embed the positive culture change already delivered and accelerated by the Covid pandemic. The exempt report on today's Cabinet agenda contains further detail on this aspect of the Programme.

## **2.6 WCC Online protocols**

- 2.6.1 Feedback from staff Check-In Surveys alongside both Corporate Board and Directorate live briefings have told us that whilst the majority of our staff are successfully working from home, there is further work to be done to shape and refine our online culture.
- 2.6.2 We know from staff feedback that it can be more difficult to take breaks when working remotely, that some staff feel that the boundaries between home and work have become more blurred and that there has been an increase in meetings which are often shorter but more intense.
- 2.6.3 We are also aware that there could be a seasonal effect on staff and their well-being which is more acute as we head towards the winter months with staff starting and finishing their working day in the dark.
- 2.6.4 With this in mind a set of Online Protocols have been developed which align with Our People Strategy and our Agile Working offer.
- 2.6.5 The principles have been shared with Employee Forums and distributed to all staff for comment. To date there has been feedback from 450 staff, with feedback indicating:
- 91% feel the protocols will help them take control of their working day; and
  - 93% say the examples feel right for them.
- 2.6.6 Full details of the Online protocols are provided in **Appendix 2**.

## **3.0 Financial Implications**

- 3.1 There will be financial implications of the Estates Master Planning work with the intention of the proposals making a contribution to the MTFs. These will be set out in separate reports covering this workstream of the Programme.
- 3.2 The Council has also supported staff by making available financial support (originally with an upper limit of £100 but now with no upper limit) to enable staff to work remotely in the most effective way possible. Costs incurred by staff are reimbursed through the usual expenses process. To date the costs claimed by staff have amounted to £87,804.

## **4.0 Environmental Implications**

- 4.1 The environmental implications of these proposals will involve a reduction in travel by staff and will as a result make a positive contribution to our Climate Change agenda. The specific environmental implications related to the

Estates Master Planning will be set out in more detail in reports which are specific to that workstream.

## 5.0 Next steps

- 5.1 Subject to Cabinet's consideration and support for the recommendations in this report and the Staff and Pensions Committee approval of the new arrangements and the associated Our People Strategy, the Agile Working Offer and On-line Protocols will be formally communicated to employees. The Offer will result in new terms and conditions of service being offered to those who accept the offer and these new working arrangements are intended to come into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021. A suite of resources will also be developed to support our managers and our people in working in an agile way.
- 5.2 *The How We Work* Programme will continue to be developed with key products brought to Cabinet for approval as required.

## Appendices

Appendix 1- Agile Working Offer

Appendix 2 -Online Protocols

Appendix 3 – How We Work Programme Update

## Background papers

None

Background papers	Name	Contact Information
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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Chair and Party Spokes of the Resources and FRS OSC

Local Member(s): None

Other members: None

# Appendix 1 – WCC Agile Working Offer

## Introduction

The vision of the Our People Strategy is, ‘**Warwickshire County Council, a great place to work where diverse and talented people are enabled to be their best**’. The strategy describes a culture that embraces an adult to adult working relationship. Therefore, empowering our people to work in the way that enables them to work at their best is key to the strategy.

Prior to the pandemic we were working towards a more flexible working offer. Since the pandemic it has been demonstrated that our workforce can work extremely well from remote locations.

There are many benefits for the council for the agile working offer, in particular:

To individuals	To WCC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater freedom to manage time and tasks</li> <li>• Improved wellbeing, work life balance and resilience.</li> <li>• Reduced unproductive commuting and lower carbon footprint</li> <li>• Fewer co-worker interruptions and distractions</li> <li>• Greater freedom to plan around personal appointments and commitments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is integral to the Our People Strategy, supporting all the building blocks and the culture of trust and empowerment.</li> <li>• Improved productivity</li> <li>• Supports the sustainable and resilient workforce agenda.</li> <li>• Supports the Council Plan’s greater emphasis on climate change and environmental benefits</li> <li>• Increase in employee engagement</li> <li>• Better use of and return on our property assets</li> <li>• Supports the employee value proposition of being an employer of choice, by having a more attractive offer to potential new employees, increasing calibre and diversity</li> </ul>

In order to meet our full aspirations in terms of the Our People Strategy, our Agile Working Offer is key. Agile working can play a part in delivering against all the building blocks.

## Our Agile Working Offer - Principles

- We acknowledge and are mindful that we have a number of positions in the organisation, which due to the nature of the role, may not be able to benefit from Agile Working.
- Work is what you do, not necessarily where and when you do it and where work can be done at home, our people are encouraged to do so.

- We are fostering a trusting environment, where there is an adult-to-adult relationship between managers and our employees with service delivery at the heart of all that we do.
- We trust everyone to do a great job.
- We want our people to bring their whole and true selves to work, we celebrate their diversity and understand that to achieve this that our people work best in different ways.
- We understand the link between autonomy and performance
- The terms Agile working and Flexible working have been used interchangeably to describe working from home. However Flexible Working is a legal right for people to request to work in a particular way , no matter what contract individuals are on. Agile working is a principle of working where work can be done in an Agile way. Therefore, “agile working” will be used to describe this offer.

### **Our Agile Working Offer – Employee Expectations**

- Agile working, where it meets the needs of the service, remains a choice for our workforce. Individuals who feel that working remotely is not for them either financially or for their personal wellbeing will still benefit from office accommodation. This can be on an agreed frequency between the individual and their manager.
- There will be limited expectations for staff to attend offices except where there is a business need, the need for collaboration space or for face-to-face meetings, unless the employee prefers to attend.
- We will manage by outcomes, so employees have a choice over how, where and when to undertake their work, if outcomes are achieved and where this enables the service to continue to provide exceptional customer satisfaction.
- To mitigate against unintended legal consequences for the Council regarding work locations, the expectation is that our workforce will reside in the UK. Where alternative arrangements are sought, they will be considered by the manager, legal and HR on an individual basis.
- All employees will be given a notional office base, it will remain the employee's responsibility to travel to and from this base, mileage over and above this daily amount will be claimable through the usual expense process.
- All employees will be expected to attend an office location upon request from their manager.
- In order to maintain the health and safety of our employees, those working from home will be expected to complete an annual DSE assessment for their working environment and will be supported with the appropriate equipment. Where this is not reasonable or possible, appropriate office accommodation will be available.



- Flexitime is not an option for agile workers, individuals who wish to remain on a flexitime contract will be expected to work from an office location and follow the flexi-time policy regarding working hours.
- Flexitime has not been an option for new starters January 2020
- It is proposed that these arrangements are effective 1 April 2021. Staff electing to remain on flexi-time will be required to return to WCC settings at the first opportunity in the event of government advice that people should continue to work from home being withdrawn.

## **Appendix 2 – Online working protocols**

To support the Agile Working Offer and support our wellbeing at work the following on-line protocols have been developed:

### **Protocol 1 - We will take ownership of our working day so that we balance work life and home life, whilst meeting the business needs**

Here's some examples of what that this could look like in practice:

- Update your working hours in your Outlook calendar
- Block out time in your calendar so that others know when they can and can't book in meetings with you.
- Use the red, green and amber dots to let people know when you are and aren't available
- Set boundaries between work and home life

### **Protocol 2 - We will prioritise our wellbeing and take regular breaks**

Here's some examples of what that would look like in practice:

- Get up, stretch, take exercise
- Block out time in your diary each day to take breaks and have time away from the screen
- Decline meetings if it means you will not have a break
- Try to schedule meetings to allow for breaks between meetings, for example; 25 minutes, 50 minutes
- Complete a DSE assessment for your workspace and remember you can currently claim reasonable expenses for any additional equipment you may need or arrange to collect equipment from the office

### **Protocol 3 - We will be considerate of other people's commitments and wellbeing**

Here's some examples of what that would look like in practice:

- Check other people's calendars before booking in a meeting with them
- Consider whether your meeting will mean the other person does not have a break
- Remember that other people may be working different hours to your working hours
- Finish meetings 5 or 10 minutes early if you can, to give people a break between meetings
- Be mindful when booking meetings of other individuals start, finish and lunchtimes and if you're unsure check with the individuals first
- Only send emails to people who need them – keep them short, clear, concise
- Share documents you want people to collaborate on (e.g. use OneDrive more) as it is quicker and easier than attaching documents to emails

## **Protocol 4 - We will stay connected with colleagues**

Here's some examples of what that would look like in practice:

- Organise social meetings, e.g., virtual coffee breaks, team quizzes, use Yammer
- Maintain regular contact with your line manager
- Use Teams channels
- Agree how you will work and communicate together as a team, taking in to account business needs and individual circumstances - link to team principles

## Appendix 3 – *How we work* programme update

The programme comprises four workstreams which are inter-dependent and which collectively provide the culture, behaviours and conditions which enable us to move from work being a place we go to, to being something we do. It recognises that our ambition of developing an agile, high performing workforce can only be achieved if we in turn change the way we support our staff to deliver their outcomes.

The programme has 4 workstreams:

1. People;
2. Technology;
3. Process; and
4. Space.

Updates and a description of each are set out below:

### People workstreams

This workstream focused on the development and agreement of the corporate skills and behaviours framework needed to support our new operating model, and the redesign of our services to align to these and ensure the delivery of our organisational objectives.

- The skills and behaviours framework was agreed in spring 2018.
- Our new Tier 2 (Assistant Director) and Tier 3 (Service Manager) structure was implemented in October 2018 and May 2019 respectively. Alongside our Chief Executive and Strategic Directors a new Senior Leadership Team was established.
- Service redesigns began in May 2019 to ensure our services were redesigned and fit-for-purpose to deliver the organisational objectives. All service redesigns will be implemented by April 2021. This will complete the delivery of the People workstream.

### Technology:

The technology workstream had two main areas of focus:

- **Technology platform** - This is our core suite of tools that provides us with email, calendar, telephony and collaborative work systems (Teams). In June 2019 the Council agreed that we would move from a mixture of Google and Microsoft products to Microsoft 365. Rollout of email, calendar and Teams was completed in October 2019 providing us with a cloud-based suite of tools with increased security and improved VPN access to core systems supporting agile working. Rollout of Telephony will be completed in December 2020.
- **Hardware** – in June 2019 it was agreed we would move from supporting at least 8 different forms of desktop, laptop and tablets to a single device for all staff. Rollout of Surface Pro's began in December 2019, was accelerated in March 2020 and completed by the end of March 2021.

- **Adoption and change** – this is the work that shows staff and members how to maximise the use of Microsoft 365 and the Surface Pros. There remains a further 6 months of planned campaigns which then completes the delivery of the Technology workstream.
- The timing and delivery of the workstream has proved critical in enabling us to continue to work and deliver services during the Covid-19 pandemic, keeping staff, customers and elected members safe and well.
- There will be additional consideration given to the technology workstream in the context of the Estates Master Plan report, also on today's Cabinet agenda, and this will be included as part of the ongoing work linked to the space workstream.

### **Process workstream**

Process covers all our policies and procedures that enable us to develop our future agile workforce.

- The most significant of this is the development of our Agile Working Offer
- The Our People Strategy has recently been refreshed and has a focus on embracing an adult to adult working relationship and ensuring that our people are able to bring their whole selves to work, all of which is supported by the Agile working agenda.
- The refreshed Strategy is being considered by the Staff and Pensions Committee on 14<sup>th</sup> December and the Resources and Fire and Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be asked to provide input to help shape the delivery priority themes on 16<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Space workstream**

This workstream focuses on the estates master planning and the workplace redesign which will deliver us the working environment we need to support agile working.

- Considerable work has been undertaken over the summer to engage with managers and staff on the workplace redesign strategy. The pandemic has provided us with an opportunity to demonstrate that there are few of our services that cannot now be delivered through an agile way of working. This was supported by managers who agreed we had an opportunity to support different, agile work practices.
- When asked about future workplace preferences the split across over 2000 staff (45% of our workforce) was as follows:
  - 7% wish to be office based
  - 34% wish to be home based
  - 59% wish to have a mix of both home and office working
- Pre Covid-19 on average staff spent 20% of their working week away from the office. Post Covid-19 on average staff expect this to increase to 60%
- As we move into recovery it is anticipated that all work that can be done from home will be and that time spent in the office will focus on collaborative / team based working. This will require a redesign of our current workspaces and a reduction in the space we require. There is also an interdependency on staff accepting the Agile Work offer.

- Proposals from this workstream are covered in the separate Cabinet Estates Master Plan report also being considered today, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020.