



SPECIAL POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 21ST JANUARY 2021

SUBJECT: FLEXIBLE WORKING UPDATE REPORT

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on progress with the Flexible Working Corporate Review following the previous report presented to Scrutiny Committee on 29/9/2020.

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 over the last 3 months is included within this report as requested by Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 29th September.
- 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, Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee are asked to provide comments on the work done to date and endorse the recommendations below prior to presentation to Cabinet:
- 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 particular 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).

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.

- 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, 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 External Mouse Soft Phone Headset Desk Chair	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 specific requirement at service level.

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 is currently open for 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 if 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 wifi 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 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. LINKS TO RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES

7.1 Corporate Plan 2018-2023.

- 7.1.1 The report links to the Council's Corporate Plan 2018-2023, and contributes to the Well-being Objectives, as follows:
 - 7.1.2 Objective 1 - Improve education opportunities for all – Flexible working has and will continue to allow teachers to deliver lessons remotely.
 - 7.1.3 Objective 2 - Enabling employment – Flexible working promotes more autonomy over where and when staff work, thus affording flexibility for enabling balance between work, leisure, family and caring responsibilities. This will open up more opportunities for people to apply for roles that may have previously been unsuitable due to the lack of flexibility around working hours and locations.
 - 7.1.4 Objective 3 - Address the supply, condition and sustainability of homes throughout the county borough and provide advice, assistance or support to help improve people's health and well-being – The ability to better balance the professional and personal aspects of our employees lives, combined with application of appropriate wellbeing and management support for these new ways of working should create an environment where employee health and well-being will flourish.
 - 7.1.5 Objective 4 - Promote a modern, integrated and sustainable transport system that increases opportunity, promotes prosperity and minimises the adverse impacts on the environment - There are clear environmental benefits realised by flexible working in terms of office/asset rationalisation and lesser journeys attributed to commuting or work based travel. This will assist in reducing the impact on the climate and improving air quality. With less cars on the road it is already evident that more people are prepared to engage in active travel.
 - 7.1.6 Objective 5 - Creating a county borough that supports a healthy lifestyle in accordance with the sustainable Development Principle within the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 - Improving work life balance and reducing the need to commute utilising flexible working offers the opportunity for staff to partake in more social, sports and leisure activities and to utilise active travel options which will improve health and well-being.
 - 7.1.7 Objective 6 - Support citizens to remain independent and improve their well-being – Flexible working when linked into a digital transformation of service delivery will assist residents to access services at the time and location that suits them helping them to remain independent.
- 7.2 There are further links to the TeamCaerphilly transformation strategy, firstly echoing the mantra - *A new "whole-authority" operating model to ensure a resilient Caerphilly County*

Borough for the future.

7.3 Further synergies include – *“We will need to move away from traditional models of service delivery, embrace change, be prepared to innovate and take well managed risks. We will also need to modernise through harnessing emerging technologies and fully engaging with our workforce and communities”.*

7.4 The recognition of strong corporate will and clear strategy, with equal buy-in by the leadership team, is again reflected in the TeamCaerphilly transformation statement;

“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.”

7.5 Furthermore, the Cabinet commitments already defined, include: -

- We will build on Caerphilly County Borough Council’s reputation as an innovative, high performing local authority.
- We will ensure we have an engaged and motivated workforce.
- We will always strive to ensure Caerphilly County Borough Council delivers value for money in everything it does.

7.6 Similarly, the notion of harnessing the success of the recent transformation in view of flexible/digital working and customer interaction (equally with the corporate appetite for such) can be harmonised with the **Customer and digital strategy**; whereby the Cabinet Members foreword describes being brave / bold in approach to embracing technologies and innovation to deliver citizen centric services, including an flexible, iterative approach to our work.

8. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

8.1 This report links directly to the Well-being goals within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015:

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A globally responsible Wales

8.2 It is consistent in all of the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act that it supports:

8.2.1 **Long-term** – Flexible working promotes many long-term benefits for the organisation as a whole, with both employer and employee recognising substantial improvements as outlined within the report. The introduction of flexible working will have a positive impact on future generations and primarily will offer safeguard in view of; improved business continuity, reduction in organisational and personal carbon footprint, improved work life balance and increase in wellbeing, health and happiness. Equally, the Council’s customer-centric ethos will be enhanced and the needs and demands of Caerphilly’s citizens best met.

8.2.2 **Integration** – A flexible workforce will form an integral part of the Council’s overall transformation strategy and complements the suite of policies that serve to balance home and work life commitments. There current crisis has provided opportunities for the many varied services of the authority to become truly “One Council”. Each service area is clearly assisting

others to ensure the highest priority objectives are delivered to the customer. There is clear evidence that the flexible working approach has allowed true service integration across the council, with other service sectors and primarily with its residents and customers at the heart of its approach.

- 8.2.3 **Involvement** – All staff need to be fully engaged in view of the flexible working transformation as not all roles and responsibilities are conducive to flexible working, and there will be a notable disparity between blue and white-collar workers and those that need to provide front line service delivery. There needs to be an effective communication plan to ensure the strategy behind flexible working, along with the suitability of application, is transparent to all parties. This will require the involvement of staff (staff survey already conducted) and engagement with all relevant stakeholders.
- 8.2.4 **Collaboration** – Flexible working not only brings the Council's internal departments closer together to deliver the best working model and to move to the "One Council" approach, it has also already promoted wider collaboration within the private / public sector due to the ease in which meetings and working arrangements have continued almost seamlessly with the utilisation of a digital approach.
- 8.2.5 **Prevention** – Carefully prioritised and justified budget commitment for flexible working platforms will ensure confidence in both application and investment. This will assist in ensuring service continuity, reducing the risk to service failure during any future crisis or emergency. 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.

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 An EIA screening has been completed in accordance with the Council's Strategic Equality Plan and supplementary guidance. No potential for unlawful discrimination and/or low level or minor negative impact has been identified; therefore, a full EIA has not been carried out. The flexible working approach will allow more flexibility in where and how people undertake their roles which will assist in providing equality.
- 9.2 As work progresses EIA's will be undertaken in regard to each element of policy or change in approach as necessary to provide surety that there will be no potential for unlawful discrimination from any decisions made. Furthermore, a workforce focussed EIA and a community focussed EIA will be undertaken as outlined in the objectives of the Flexible Working Review.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 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.

11. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 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.

- 11.2 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.

12. CONSULTATIONS

- 12.1 A full list of consultees is included at the end of the report and their respective comments have been incorporated within the report.
- 12.2 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.

13. STATUTORY POWER

- 13.1 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

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