

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

03 October 2022

Report of the Director of Central Services & Deputy Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

For decision

1 TRANSITIONAL WORKING ARRANGEMENTS- UPDATE

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on the Transitional Working Arrangements (including Hybrid Working). Our analysis of the arrangements is that they have been a success, with positive outcomes across a range of measures, including climate change, productivity, financial implications and staff feedback.

The report presents for Member consideration a Remote Working Policy.

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the national lockdowns/ restrictions from March 2020 onwards, organisations across the globe had to redefine how they worked. In common with other local authorities, the Borough Council instructed the majority of colleagues to work from home where they could, and quickly the council adapted to increase the use of remote technology to facilitate meetings and continuing engagement with other colleagues, members and residents.
- 1.1.2 At the meeting of this Committee on 16 June 2021 Members endorsed the adoption of the Transitional Working Arrangements for Covid-19 Recovery Policy and Procedure (including Homeworking and Hybrid Working).
- 1.1.3 The Policy set out transitional working arrangements for a 12-month period (commencing September 2021) which provided an opportunity to trial new ways of working to assess the impact of differing working arrangements on the drivers for the policy e.g., corporate plan objectives/ review of assets/ climate change, as well providing a “safety net” in the event of further surges in Covid-19 infection rates in the short to medium term.
- 1.1.4 The transitional (trial) period also provided the opportunity to arrange working space so that it gave the workforce a realistic representation of what longer-term working arrangements may look like without incurring high levels of expenditure on building works. The “experimentation” with adjustments to office occupancy

enabled staff to give meaningful feedback during the ongoing consultation with Management Team and provided Management Team with the time and data to assess the impact of the proposed hybrid model.

- 1.1.5 Furthermore, a 12-month transitional period allowed time for the more detailed work to be undertaken to progress work concerning the release of covenants on the Gibson Building and progress investigations into longer term options. An update on that workstream was reported to the Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Committee on 26 July 2022.
- 1.1.6 This report updates Members on the monitoring of the transitional working arrangements since September 2021 and brings forward a new remote working policy (**Annex 1**) for approval.

1.2 Measuring Success

- 1.2.1 At the commencement of the transitional period, Management Team agreed 7 key measures of success, to guide the assessment of the working arrangements. These are: -
- Climate change
 - Financial
 - Productivity
 - Sickness levels
 - Space requirements
 - Staff feedback
 - Staff retention
- 1.2.2 These measures have been monitored by the Working Arrangements Officer Steering Group and Management Team throughout the transitional period. Detail on each of these is set out below.

1.3 Climate Change

Staff travel survey

- 1.3.1 All staff were invited to complete a travel survey during November 2021. The aim of the survey was to provide some insight on the impact the transitional working arrangements are having in reducing our carbon emissions. A critical element of that is the impact of the arrangements on staff travel habits, whether that is commuting to/ from the office or as part of their day-to-day role. We therefore prepared a short survey to ask staff about how their travel arrangements have changed since the start of the pandemic in March 2020.

- 1.3.2 The survey was reported to the Joint Employee Consultative Committee in March 2022. The key findings from the survey are reproduced below: -

Petrol use – 20% reduction in the number of respondents using a petrol vehicle for their commute.

Significant reduction in the number of respondents using a petrol vehicle to commute more than 50 miles per week. For example, only 10 respondents now commute more than 100 miles per week compared to 47 pre-pandemic.

Increase in staff numbers using a petrol vehicle for a shorter commute e.g., 91% increase in the number of respondents using a petrol vehicle for a commute of less than 25 miles per week.

Diesel use - 29% reduction in the number of respondents using a diesel vehicle for their commute.

Significant reduction in the number of respondents using a diesel vehicle to commute more than 50 miles per week. For example, only 9 respondents now commute more than 100 miles per week compared to 35 pre-pandemic.

Increase in staff numbers using a diesel vehicle for a shorter commute e.g., 30% increase in the number of respondents using a diesel vehicle for a commute of less than 25 miles per week and 62% increase in commutes of more than 25 but less than 50 miles per week.

Electric cars- Increase in the number of electric vehicle users (up from 1 to 3).

Business mileage – General reduction in the number of business miles claimed per month (static numbers of respondents claiming more than 150 but less than 250 miles per month). 22% increase in number of respondents claiming no business mileage/ not applicable.

- 1.3.3 It is acknowledged that the impact of the trial working arrangements upon carbon emissions cannot be measured solely by reference to the change in emissions arising from commuting. The overall carbon footprint calculation must also take into account the electricity and gas used by staff in their homes during the working day compared to the electricity and gas used by staff in offices. The calculation in respect of these aspects is itself subject to several variables e.g., whether the home would otherwise be heated e.g., if other family members work from home, whether the whole home is heated or just the room in which the staff member works, the energy efficiency of the building (both at home and in the office) and will vary according to the time of the year e.g. gas consumption will be lower during the summer months. Due to the complexities of identifying the differences in carbon emissions through survey data we did not seek to address this in the survey.

Other data

- 1.3.4 Data from the National Travel Survey and ONS (Office for National Statistics)¹ suggests that the average daily car commute is 20.9 miles (round trip). From this commute, you can expect to emit on average 7.3 kg CO₂e. If you were homeworking for one day a week, across a typical work year, 335.8kg CO₂e would be saved.
- 1.3.5 Should employees be homeworking for 4 days a week across a typical work year, 1,357.8kg CO₂e would be saved and 1,700.9kg CO₂e would be saved if homeworking full time.
- 1.3.6 On average, the typical UK home emits 2,500.4kg CO₂e per year on heating alone. It was estimated that the average UK household heating consumption increased by 14% on work from home days. Therefore, homeworking for 4 days a per week across a typical work year will increase heating emissions by 280kg CO₂e.
- 1.3.7 The Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy have found that on average in 2019, UK households consumed 3,600kWh per year². In 2019, this would have emitted 920.2kg CO₂e. According to the LSE³, average UK household electricity consumption increased by 15% on work from home days.
- 1.3.8 Using this 15% workday increase in consumption, household emissions would have increased by 110.2kg CO₂e if working from home 4 days per week across a typical work year.
- 1.3.9 In total, 1,357.8kg CO₂e is saved annually via a reduction in commuter miles should an employee be working from home 4 days a week. This employee would, however, see an increase in household gas and electricity emissions by 280kg CO₂e and 110.2kg CO₂e, respectively. This is an annual increase of 390.2kg CO₂e. Therefore, 967.6kg CO₂e would be saved annually by WFH 4 days per week.
- 1.3.10 Therefore, the reduction in commuter mileage emissions offsets the increase in household emissions from working from home. As shown in the below table, the net benefit of working from home increases with the more days working from home per week.

¹ [COVID-19 restrictions cut household emissions - Office for National Statistics](#)

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/886473/annual-domestic-gas-electricity-consumption-levels-review-methodology-note.pdf

³ [Does working from home cut carbon emissions? Not necessarily – in fact, it can have the opposite effect | LSE COVID-19](#)

Net Emissions Benefit						
<i>Not including commuter emissions for days in office (as these would already be occurring w/o WFH)</i>						
WFH 1 day per week		238.5	kg CO2e saved			
WFH 2 days per week		483.8	kg CO2e saved			
WFH 3 days per week		729.0	kg CO2e saved			
WFH 4 days per week		967.6	kg CO2e saved			
WFH 5 days per week		1212.8	kg CO2e saved			

1.3.11 In October 2021 Durham County Council and Durham University published the findings of a study⁴ undertaken to assess the carbon impacts of working from home. The data analysis showed that the carbon emissions related to travel far outweighed the building related impacts of lockdown. Staff who travelled long distances by car before the pandemic made major carbon reductions from home working, even if they increased their home energy consumption, whereas staff who walked or cycled to work generally increased their carbon emissions by home working. The study also found that many of the main offices showed only small reductions in energy consumption and carbon emissions after the initial and most intense lockdown period. Without careful zoning and other efficiency measures, the use of heating, lighting, etc. tends to be largely unchanged when a reduced number of staff are in the building.

1.3.12 More detailed data on the impact of our working arrangements on commuting emissions will in future be obtained via the annual carbon audit undertaken by the Climate Change Officer.

1.4 Space requirements

1.4.1 Prior to commencement of the transitional period detailed work was undertaken to establish, albeit indicatively, whether it would be possible to accommodate the office requirements of all services in Gibson East (the newer part of the Gibson site), or whether we would have to 'split' the transitional period to ensure all services had an opportunity to participate in it.

1.4.2 A total of 136 hot desks were provided in the Gibson East building, split across 4 zones. These zones were divided broadly by directorate.

1.4.3 Gibson West (the older part of the Gibson site) has only been used by staff in specific circumstances, for example where they rely on access to specialist equipment or materials which cannot be relocated to Gibson East. This includes the Print Room, IT Helpdesk, Community Safety Unit and Caretakers. Members will also be aware that 2 areas of Gibson West are currently leased to third parties i.e., Kent Police and Jawatte. Gibson West also houses the Council Chamber,

⁴ [Durham County Council: Home working energy usage project | Local Government Association](#)

which has of course remained in use for Member meetings throughout the transitional period.

- 1.4.4 Staff have been required to use the hot desk booking system in Gibson East when working in the offices. The re-introduction of the 'work from home if you can' guidance during December 2021 and January 2022 created a temporary interruption to the transitional arrangements but we have nevertheless been able to monitor desk/ cellular office use throughout the period of the trial.
- 1.4.5 Desk occupancy has risen steadily since 19 January 2022, when the 'work from home if you can' guidance was withdrawn. The average desk occupancy has risen from an average of 27 bookings per day in January to 38 in June. Members are asked to note that the figures vary from day to day, with Tuesdays and Wednesdays being the busiest days (occupancy on these days was as high as 56 in June). The figures also do not include any staff working in Gibson West or at Tonbridge Castle.
- 1.4.6 It is important to note that staff across the Council have been working in a variety of ways during the trial period. The precise working arrangements have varied according to the specific roles undertaken by staff, with some roles lending themselves to a greater degree of hybrid working than others. In preparing for the transitional working arrangements all roles were placed into one of the 5 categories – hybrid, remote, static, mobile & roving, reflecting the wide variety of tasks undertaken by staff across the organisation.
- 1.4.7 Based upon the responses to the most recent staff survey, 62% of staff are working in a hybrid manner, dividing their time between the office and their home. The focus has been on ensuring that staff have been able to work with greater flexibility and spend their time where they are most productive, with hybrid staff coming into the offices for collaboration with others on a face-to-face basis or where their role requires use of certain equipment or space. Other staff have been based in the offices for their entire working week, have worked at various locations across the Borough or entirely from home. Due to the variety of roles required to deliver our services at the Borough Council, there is no 'one size fits all' approach and this has been reflected in the operation of our transitional working arrangements.

1.5 Staff feedback

- 1.5.1 All staff were invited to complete a survey on the transitional working arrangements during April 2022. This built upon a previous survey on working arrangements undertaken in January 2021.
- 1.5.2 The survey invited staff to provide feedback on their experiences of working under the transitional arrangements, whether that had been in the office, at home or at another location (or a mix of these). The survey also sought to capture information from staff about productivity, communications with managers/ colleagues, use of

technology and feedback on the success or otherwise of the trial so that this could also be fed into the review of our working arrangements.

- 1.5.3 The 3 surveys undertaken since the start of 2021 (including the travel survey) have all received a positive response from staff, with 75-82 % of all staff participating in each survey. The high response rate has been welcome as it gives greater confidence in assessing the effectiveness of the trial working arrangements.
- 1.5.4 The April 2022 survey was reported to the Joint Employee Consultative Committee (Officer Working Group) on 25 May 2022. Some of the key results of the survey are set out below: -
- 62% said that they were hybrid workers, 7% said that they were based at the Gibson Building for their entire working week, 3% said that they worked at various locations in the Borough for the majority of their working week and 28% said that they work entirely from home. It should be noted that 25% of staff did not respond to the survey.
 - 81% of hybrid workers thought that the split between the office and homeworking was about right, with only 6% disagreeing.
 - 94% of homeworkers agreed that their job can be performed entirely from home. Only 6% disagreed.
 - 57% of office-based staff agreed that their job can only be performed by working in the office, compared to 43% who disagreed.
 - When asked to identify the biggest benefit of working from home, the most common response from hybrid workers was 'not having to commute' (42% of respondents), followed by 'ability to have a flexible schedule' (26%) and 'I'm more productive' (24%). 4 respondents did not believe that there were any benefits in working from home.
 - When asked to identify the biggest struggle with homeworking, the most common response was 'I don't have any struggles with working from home' (35%), followed by 'It is harder to collaborate with colleagues' (23%) and 'not being able to switch off' (10%).
 - 88% of respondents felt that they get enough support from their line manager.
 - 80% of respondents felt they could connect with their line manager as well as if they were in the office.
 - 82% of respondents thought that the changes being trialled will be good for the longer-term future of the Council.
 - 86% of respondents believed that the rationale for the changes has been communicated well.

- 82% of respondents felt that their views are being heard and taken into account in decisions about how the Council will be working in the future.

1.5.5 The responses to the questions about productivity are considered in 1.6 below.

1.5.6 Management Team agreed several actions in response to the survey, including further training for all staff on MS Teams and training for managers – best practice in managing in a hybrid working environment.

1.5.7 We have also installed hybrid meeting technology in one of the meeting rooms in Gibson East, allowing for teams to more easily meet on a hybrid basis when some of the team members are in the office and some working remotely.

1.5.8 Whilst recognising that the staff surveys undertaken in April 2022 and January 2021 are snapshots in time, the survey outcomes are consistent in confirming that there are significant levels of support from staff for the implementation of future working arrangements to accommodate hybrid working. There has been a consistent and broad employee consensus about the perceived advantages of hybrid working, for example that it facilitates a better work/life balance and enables people to go into the office for work that requires collaboration and connection and work remotely for work that requires individual focus or high levels of concentration.

1.6 Productivity

1.6.1 One of the complexities of delivering a range of different services across the Council is that productivity is measured against different metrics by different services. There is no 'one size fits all' approach in this respect. Furthermore, staff throughout the Council have been working in a variety of different ways during the trial period (see paragraph 1.4 above).

1.6.2 Members will of course be aware that the Council has a range of standing performance indicators, which are now to be reported to the Overview & Scrutiny Select Committees. These continue to be the benchmark for assessing the productivity of services and have remained so throughout the trial period. The working arrangements for staff may be a contributory factor to the overall performance of the service although by no means the only factor e.g., the growth in work linked to the pandemic may in some services have impacted upon productivity. Overall, however, we have seen no evidence that the trial working arrangements have had any negative impact upon productivity.

1.6.3 Internal feedback is another method we have used to assess the productivity of staff. To that end all Staff & Managers were asked about productivity as part of the most recent staff survey. That survey received a 75% response rate from staff.

1.6.4 In response to the all-staff question '*How has your productivity been affected by the trial working arrangements?*',

- 59% believed that their productivity was about the same
- 39% said it had improved
- 2% said it had declined

1.6.5 Staff were then asked to explain why they believed their productivity had improved or declined. Of those who believed that their productivity had improved, most respondents attributed this to having fewer distractions when working from home.

1.6.6 Asked about the impact of the trial upon the productivity of their team, those managers who responded to the survey answered as follows: -

- 69% believed that the productivity of their team was about the same
- 26% said it had improved
- 6% said it had declined

1.6.7 Whilst the feedback from staff and managers is subjective, there is a clear consensus that productivity has either been maintained or improved in all bar a small number of isolated cases.

1.7 Sickiness levels

1.7.1 The levels of staff sickness absence are monitored and reported on a regular basis. It is important to monitor the levels of sickness absence to ensure that the transitional working arrangements are not having a negative impact on staff sickness.

1.7.2 The table below shows the average number of days sickness per annum taken by staff during each financial year from 2017/2018 to 2021/2022, i.e., three years before the pandemic and two years during the pandemic. This information is broken down to show self-certified or short-term sickness and medically certified or long-term sickness.

Year	Self-Certified Sickness (Short term) Average days per year	Medically Certified Sickness (Long term) Average days per year
2021/2022	3.06	4.53
2020/2021	1.45	4.07
2019/2020	4.01	7.11
2018/2019	4.05	4.56
2017/2018	4.07	4.47

1.7.3 During the two years since the start of the pandemic there is a notable fall in the average levels of staff sickness compared with the three years preceding the pandemic. It is particularly noticeable in the self-certified sickness figures. These figures are when are absent due to sickness for a period of seven days or less.

- 1.7.4 During the first year of the pandemic when the majority of staff were mandated by the Government to work from home (where their job allowed) the sickness level dropped to just 1.45 days on average. This is significantly lower than the previous three years.
- 1.7.5 During the last financial year, whilst the average number of days was higher at 3.06 days it is still significantly lower by approximately 25% compared to the pre-pandemic sickness levels.
- 1.7.6 There is little difference between the average number of days for medically certified sickness during this period. This is perhaps not surprising, in the majority of cases relating to medically certified sickness require recovery from a medical procedure of some kind.
- 1.7.7 Whilst it is deemed to be a positive that staff sickness absence has fallen, the Council has a duty of care towards its workforce and staff wellbeing is extremely important. When staff need time off to recover from sickness then the necessary recovery period should be taken. It is not the Council's policy to ask staff to work from home if they are unwell. It is likely that the new ways of working offer staff more flexibility to work from home when they might have decided not to work from the office, for example if they felt they might have symptoms that would be contagious to work colleagues.

1.8 Staff retention

- 1.8.1 All staff who leave the employment of the Council are sent a confidential Exit Survey to complete. Whilst this is not made mandatory to complete, approximately 75% of all leavers have completed the survey.
- 1.8.2 As with sickness levels, it is important to monitor whether the transitional working arrangements are not having an adverse impact on the Council's ability to retain staff.
- 1.8.3 Of the 13 surveys received back, none of the leavers stated that they were leaving the Council due to the new ways of working.
- 1.8.4 The reasons staff choose to leave the Council can often be complex and, in many cases, there is not just one reason for doing so. In order to address this, one of the questions specifically asks staff for their opinions about the Council's transitional working arrangements. All the respondents stated that they had positive views and that they valued the flexibility afforded by being able to work from home or by working part of the time at home and part of the time in the office.
- 1.8.5 There is nothing to suggest that the transitional working arrangements have directly led to staff leaving the organisation. It is likely that being able to offer a variety of flexible working arrangements will positively impact on staff recruitment and retention.

1.9 Remote Working Policy

- 1.9.1 The COVID-19 pandemic has made employees and businesses (public and private) across the globe think about how and where they work, both now and in the future. We are far from alone in considering our working arrangements for the future – in March 2022 Acas commissioned YouGov to ask British businesses about changes to working practices that they have seen compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey found that 3 in 5 employers (60%) have seen an increase in hybrid working for staff compared to before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The poll also found that over half of employers (52%) have seen an increase in staff working from home full-time.
- 1.9.2 For the Borough Council, the 12-month trial has allowed us to assess the merits of longer-term hybrid/ remote working against a range of measures, considered in this report. It is clear from these measures that there are benefits to the Council and staff in the longer term in adopting a new remote working model.
- 1.9.3 A remote working policy has been prepared by the Working Arrangements Officer Steering Group and approved by Management Team. The policy (attached as **Annex 1**) promotes a longer-term working model where staff can apply to work in a remote or hybrid way, in agreement with the Council.
- 1.9.4 Any remote working arrangement agreed under the policy will be an informal flexible working arrangement which allows the employee to split their working time between the workplace (including site visits) and an agreed remote working location, usually their home. An employee might work from home all the time or divide their time between the workplace and their home (commonly referred to as a hybrid working arrangement). For the purposes of the policy, all such arrangements are referred to as ‘remote working’.
- 1.9.5 One of the features of a policy-based approach is that it maintains some flexibility both for the Council and for staff by ensuring that it is possible to modify (or abandon) the hybrid working model in the future if it becomes necessary to revert to previous working arrangements. This could arise for several reasons, whether that is due to a change in operational requirements or because the employee is not complying with the policy or maintaining an acceptable level of productivity.
- 1.9.6 The policy makes this position clear, by confirming that
- (a) any agreed remote working arrangements are informal.
 - (b) they do not amount to a change in the terms and conditions of any individual’s employment. In particular, the contractual place of work for staff will not change.
 - (c) the arrangements can be amended or discontinued altogether, or in relation to any specific individual, at any time. Whilst it is expected that individual agreements would only be discontinued in exceptional

circumstances, it is nevertheless important to be clear in the policy that agreements are subject to review and may be discontinued if necessary.

(d) if an employee wants to make a permanent change to their place of work, they can make a flexible working request.

- 1.9.7 Consideration was given to adopting a contractual approach i.e., by changing the terms and conditions for staff but it was felt that the flexibility offered by a policy-based approach was preferable.
- 1.9.8 The model set out in the policy will be voluntary. No member of staff shall be compelled to undertake remote working, so any member of staff who wishes to continue to work from their normal place of work e.g., Gibson Building/ Tonbridge Castle will be free to do so. We are aware from our transitional arrangements that there are several members of staff for whom it is not practicable to work from home so these individuals will be able to continue to work from their normal place of work.
- 1.9.9 All staff will be eligible to make an application for remote working under the policy. However, the policy makes it clear that a remote working arrangement is unlikely to be agreed in certain circumstances e.g.,
- the employee needs to be present in the workplace to perform their job, for example, because it involves a high degree of personal interaction with customers, colleagues or third parties or involves equipment that is only available in the workplace.
 - their most recent appraisal identifies any aspect of their performance as unsatisfactory.
- 1.9.10 The policy also covers the following key areas: -
- Performance management
 - Data Protection & IT Security
 - Insurance & tax
 - Wellbeing
 - Childcare & other arrangements
 - Health & safety
 - Hours of work
- 1.9.11 If approved by Members, the remote working policy will replace the Transitional Working Arrangements for Covid-19 Recovery Policy and Procedure (including Homeworking and Hybrid Working).

1.9.12 Following an all-staff briefing the policy was shared with all staff for comments between 15 June and 13 July. These were then considered by Management Team on 26 July 2022.

1.9.13 A total of 7 comments were made by staff during the engagement period.

1.9.14 Subject to approval of the policy by Members, it is proposed that staff will be invited to apply and agree their individual remote working arrangements with manager between 13 September and 31 October. The new arrangements would then come into force on 1 November 2022, with individual agreements to be reviewed at annual appraisals thereafter.

1.10 Gibson Building – options for the future

1.10.1 Members will be aware that a report was submitted to the Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Select Committee on 26 July 2022 to update Members on progress with reviewing the Council's office accommodation requirements. The report also invited Members to consider high-level options for the future.

1.10.2 The Select Committee made a number of recommendations to Cabinet (set out below), due to be considered at the meeting on 7 September –

- the view of the Committee that the main offices of the Borough Council should continue to be located in Kings Hill be noted;
- the view of the Committee that the co-location arrangement with Kent Police should continue, if a suitable solution was identified, be noted;
- the view of the Committee in respect of the removal of covenants be deferred until legal advice had been received and circulated;
- Officers be asked to carry out further investigation into the feasibility of Option 4 (as detailed in the report) including negotiating a settlement with Kent County Council on the alteration/removal of the covenants (subject to Member approval).

1.10.3 In the intervening period, a survey of all Members has also been carried out, to seek their views on the preferred location for the main offices of the Council. The results of this survey will also be considered by Cabinet on 7 September.

1.10.4 We are still at a relatively early stage in progressing the work associated with the future of the Council's administrative headquarters. However, a key element of any work will be the identification of our future space requirements. These space requirements will in turn be influenced by the approach of the Council towards remote/ hybrid working.

1.11 Consultation with Unison

- 1.11.1 The proposed policy set out in **Annex 1** has been formulated by the Working Arrangements Officer Study Group. One of the members of the group is a local Unison branch representative.
- 1.11.2 The Tonbridge and Malling Branch of UNISON has reviewed the Remote Working Policy and made a small number of comments on it. These were considered by Management Team, leading to one minor change to the policy.

1.12 Legal Implications

- 1.12.1 The approach to remote working proposed in the policy will not require any changes to the contractual terms and conditions for staff.
- 1.12.2 As an employer, the Council is responsible for employees' welfare, health, and safety 'so far as is reasonably practicable' (s2, Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974). In addition to our statutory duties, the Council has a common law duty to take reasonable care for the safety of our employees e.g., we have a duty to see that reasonable care is taken to provide staff with a safe place of work, safe tools and equipment, and a safe system of working. It is also an implied term of employment contracts that employers will take reasonable care for the health and safety of employees and provide a reasonably suitable working environment for the performance of the employee's contractual duties. All these requirements are reflected in the recommended policy in **Annex 1**.
- 1.12.3 Members will have noted from the recommended policy in **Annex 1** that all staff working from home will be required to periodically review their DSE (Display Screen Equipment) Self-Assessment of their workstations and to report any required adjustments to their line manager.
- 1.12.4 The ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) Working from Home guidance has been factored into the recommended policy in **Annex 1** regarding a consideration of employers and employees' health and safety responsibilities, supporting employees to adjust to homeworking, equipment and technology, ongoing assessment of homeworking systems and arrangements, pay and terms and conditions of employment, working from home and childcare and expenses.

1.13 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.13.1 The transitional period has allowed allow the Council to trial new ways of working with a view to assessing whether it is viable to reduce our office space on a longer-term basis.
- 1.13.2 The Medium-Term Financial Strategy currently includes a saving of £200,000 from the rationalisation of office space arising from continuing the remote working scheme for the longer term. This is partially linked to the longer-term options for the future of the Gibson Building as a whole.

1.14 Risk Assessment

- 1.14.1 We have considered the advantages/ disadvantages of remote working, both for the Council and for staff. A copy of this is attached as **Annex 2**.
- 1.14.2 The homeworking protocols in the recommended policy at **Annex 1** takes appropriate steps to meet the legal requirement for the Council to conduct a suitable and sufficient risk assessment of all the work activities carried out by employees, including homeworkers, to identify hazards and assess the degree of risk (Reg 3, Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999).
- 1.14.3 Managers & staff will be required to review the health & safety workstation self-assessments carried out by staff on an annual basis as part of the appraisal process.

1.15 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.15.1 Hybrid/ remote working has the potential to increase inclusion, especially through opening up job opportunities for disabled people, those with long-term health conditions or caring responsibilities, or others who may find it more difficult to commute or work for the whole time in an office or other workplace environment. Hybrid/ remote working may also amount to a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act 2010.
- 1.15.2 The staff surveys conducted in January 2021 and April 2022 found that the vast majority of employees are keen for a continuation of the ability to work remotely, and that they felt home working allowed them to maintain a healthier work/life balance.
- 1.15.3 It is recognised that not every member of staff will want to or is able to work in a hybrid or remote way, depending on their role and personal circumstances. We are aware of some staff for whom home working is impracticable or detrimental to their wellbeing. The policy does not compel any member of staff to work remotely so staff will be able to work in the office if they prefer to do so.
- 1.15.4 All staff working remotely have been required to complete a DSE (Display Screen Equipment) self-assessment for their home working environment to ensure that the Council is able to identify any risks arising from working on a laptop at home. The self-assessments will also assist in identifying any reasonable adjustments that the Council may need to consider for employees with disabilities. Managers and staff will be required to review the self-assessments as part of annual appraisals to ensure that they remain up to date.
- 1.15.5 The proposed policy sets out a clear and transparent framework to assess eligibility for and access to hybrid/ remote working and establishes a system to monitor decision making (including review of agreements).

1.16 Policy Considerations

1.16.1 In the addendum to the Corporate Plan for 2020/21, Cabinet agreed the following as part of the 'Running the Council' theme within the Review, Reorientation and Recovery strategy:

- Undertake a review of the effectiveness of homeworking/flexible working and the potential to embed it within the culture of the Council in the longer term.
- Where appropriate, Managers to build flexible working into the work patterns for their teams in order to build resilience into the organisation and embed new ways of working.
- Review office accommodation requirements in light of changes to homeworking/ flexible working and in order to reduce overheads and meet the targets set within the adopted Climate Change Strategy

1.16.2 On 30 June 2020 Cabinet resolved that 'Management Team be asked to conduct a review of all the Borough Council's assets, including use of the Gibson Building, to cover all areas as well as the need, function and capability of the Council Chamber and Committee Room for Council, Cabinet, Advisory Board and Committee meetings, in line with the Digital and Climate Change Strategies'.

1.16.3 The Climate Change Action Plan for 2021/ 22 included the following target under the theme of 'TMBC Estate - reduce the environmental impact of the council's activities, increasing the sustainability of all our operations'

'Continue to progress review of office accommodation with a view to rationalising the space occupied, to reduce energy usage and reduce carbon emissions. Publish findings.'

1.16.4 The above theme remains in the Climate Change Action Plan for 2022/23.

1.17 Recommendations

1.17.1 Members are requested to **APPROVE** the adoption of the Remote Working Policy in **Annex 1** attached to this report.

Background papers:

Nil

contact: Adrian Stanfield
Mathew Brooks

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