



Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council

Forward timetable of consultation and decision making

Ethical Governance and Personnel Committee 12 October 2022

Wards affected: All wards

Hybrid Working

Report of Director (Corporate & Streetscene Services).

1. Purpose of report

1.1 To present for approval the Hybrid Working Policy and the Right to Request Flexible Working Policy.

2. Recommendation

1.2 That the policies are approved.

3. Background to the report

3.1 During the covid pandemic most of our office-based employees temporarily worked from home to maintain key services for residents of the borough. Given the duration of the subsequent lockdowns, this unprecedented situation provided an opportunity for the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) to review how it could operate in the future and to consider whether to move towards a permanent operating model centred around hybrid/remote working.

3.2 A project group was established in May 2021 and its primary task was to consult managers and staff to establish if this new way of working could be a possibility, and what the council could do to maintain good service to customers. As a result of the initial consultation exercise, it was clear that there was a desire from staff to retain a more flexible way of working and that they were open to consider this on a permanent basis.

3.3 Following the consultation exercise, a project group, led by the Director (Corporate Resources & Streetscene Services), was tasked to develop and

implement a new 'Future Operating Model'. The group took into consideration key areas including HR Policy, Customer/Stakeholder Engagement, Council Buildings and ICT Support. HR was tasked to review its current policies considering the new arrangements.

- 3.4 A new Hybrid Working Policy was developed and consulted upon with staff and the recognised trade unions **Appendix A**, which took place during September 2021. The new policy was designed to provide flexibility to attract and retain staff, whilst also seeking to meet our customer needs. The policy centred on the principle that staff can work from any location, this being their home, office, and any other suitable location.
- 3.5 Running alongside the consultation process, plans were put in place to trial the new operating arrangements at the offices and the Estates Team remodelled the layout ready to be trialled in January 2022. That trial is now complete. The ICT infrastructure was also updated to support Hybrid working.
- 3.6 Furthermore, since the trial has been implemented the Estates Team, working with the Director (Corporate Resources & Streetscene Services) has been in negotiations with partners to lease the ground floor of the Hub to secure additional income to the council.
- 3.7 The policy made clear that hybrid working is undertaken on an informal basis and without any contractual change; fundamentally retaining the contractual location as the council offices. Therefore, terms and conditions of employment and policies that apply to employees working remotely from home will be unchanged from those that would apply in the workplace. This decision is in line to that of neighbouring local authorities.
- 3.8 The policy is underpinned by the following principles:
 - Customers are to be at the focus of our new working arrangements. The council's workplaces will be set up to better support collaboration, productivity, wellbeing, and customer service
 - Workspace is prioritised for activities, not individuals - flexibility is the norm and fixed desks are kept to a minimum for operational or wellbeing reasons
 - Employees should work in the most appropriate location for the task they are doing rather than being at a council office by default
 - Employees will be encouraged to work as flexibly as possible whilst always remaining contactable, using a mix of workplaces (offices, working from home, remote working) to best meet service and customer needs, and support staff wellbeing
 - Employees will be given the equipment they need to support working in a more flexible but affordable way
 - To shift towards a digital first culture that makes the most of the efficiencies hybrid working offers
 - Ensure a team working culture is in place when developing a hybrid culture to maintain staff development and wellbeing

- Ensure that new employees to the council are embedded in the organisation through regular contact
- Face to face contact with customers to be on a prearranged basis
- Productivity and performance to be maintained and managed appropriately.

3.9 Given the degree of flexibility that the council's hybrid working arrangements will provide for its employees, it is expected that staff will also be flexible. Employees may be required to attend the council offices days at the request of their line manager for example: training, face to face meetings (if it is agreed that this is best conducted in person) or if there are capability issues and the employee is on an improvement plan.

3.10 Moving forwards the new model will be monitored by SLT to ensure that hybrid working is both effective for the council and the employee. The policy principles will be reviewed and measured on a regular basis to ensure that the principles are adhered to, particularly regarding the impact upon team working given its impact upon performance, staff development and wellbeing; SLT will measure this by ensuring that managers hold regular team meetings and team days with their staff.

3.11 It is also important to note that the operation of the new Hybrid Working Policy does not prevent the statutory right to request flexible working and this option is still open to staff. This applies to those who wish to make a formal request to change their working hours or location on a permanent basis under the scheme (employees must have a least 26 weeks' service). Any request made is subject to agreement by line management and if agreed, will result in a permanent change to terms and conditions of employment. The Statutory Right to Request Flexible Working Policy **Appendix B** has been updated as a standalone policy to provide a clear distinction between the two new policies.

4. Exemptions in accordance with the Access to Information procedure rules

4.1 The report to be taken in open session.

5. Financial implications [DW]

5.1 The implementation of the Hybrid Model offers income generating opportunities in respect of office space no longer used by HBBC Staff. The level of this income is unknown at this stage and would only be released once the relevant negotiations with partners was concluded.

6. Legal implications [MR]

6.1 Set out in the report.

7. Corporate Plan implications

7.1 The introduction of hybrid working meets the Corporate Plan aims 'People' – recognise diversity as it supports work life balance. It also contributes to

'Place' – to reduce the councils carbon footprint thereby contributing to the aims of the climate Change Strategy.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 Both policies have been subject to full consultation with staff and the recognised trade unions.

9. Risk implications

- 9.1 It is the council's policy to proactively identify and manage significant risks which may prevent delivery of business objectives.

- 9.2 It is not possible to eliminate or manage all risks all of the time and risks will remain which have not been identified. However, it is the officer's opinion based on the information available, that the significant risks associated with this decision / project have been identified, assessed and that controls are in place to manage them effectively.

- 9.3 The following significant risks associated with this report / decisions were identified from this assessment:

None.

10. Knowing your community – equality and rural implications

- 10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the Hybrid Working Policy. The impact assessment identified positive impacts on the following equality groups:

Disability - staff reduction in travelling/commuting particularly welcome for many staff especially for those with physical disabilities and mental health concerns.

Disability and Sex - improved employee work life balance for those with physical disabilities, mental health issues and caring responsibilities.

All - enhanced recruitment and retention – able to recruit from a much wider geographical area plus appeals to those who prefer home working.

The impact assessment identified negative impacts on the following equality groups:

Age – the introduction of Hybrid working may adversely affect new employees but particularly younger trainee staff such as Apprentices and Graduates. The building of team knowledge/development for new trainees may be impacted upon by not working together. The mitigation to address this issue includes the practice of working in the office on a regular basis for new employees and encouraging regular 'in person' team days across the council.

A full copy of the impact assessment is available on request.

11. Climate implications

- 11.1 The introduction of Hybrid Working for will see a reduction in commuting. However conversely, it is important to highlight that staff may see an increase in energy costs in their home environment. Improved technology, such as Microsoft Teams has reduced the need to travel to meetings thereby reducing work travel; this will have a positive impact upon the council's carbon footprint.

12. Corporate implications

- 12.1 By submitting this report, the report author has taken the following into account:

- Community safety implications
- Environmental implications
- ICT implications
- Asset management implications
- Procurement implications
- Human resources implications
- Planning implications
- Data protection implications
- Voluntary sector

Background papers:

Contact officer: Julie Stay, 01455 255688
Executive member: Councillor S Bray