

Report to: STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING BOARD

Date: 23 June 2021

Executive Member Councillor Brenda Warrington – Executive Leader

Reporting Officer: Tracy Brennand – Assistant Director People & Workforce Development

Subject: DETERMINING THE FUTURE OF THE COUNCIL AND CCG'S WORKFORCE CULTURE

Report Summary: It has been twelve months since the Country's national lockdown forced our workforce almost overnight to change what, where and how they work. We have begun to reflect on lessons learnt around these new ways of working over the last twelve months, as well as national, regional and organisational trends.

The Council and CCG now need to design their 'new normal' working model, and have a unique opportunity to create a new culture. One that finds the right balance between how we have been working during COVID and a more hybrid approach that maximises productivity and inclusivity, whilst meeting the needs of our workforce to achieve a better work life balance.

It is proposed to engage with external 'People Architects' to create a new working model quickly, preventing a shift back to pre COVID ways of working, based on understanding how people will behave and work in the 'new normal' and how this translates into people, digital and place requirements. This will help align the organisation's review of its estate, its digital strategy and people culture.

Recommendations: That the Strategic Commissioning Board approve the concept and introduction of Hybrid Working across both the Council and CCG approve:

1. the principal and introduction of Hybrid Working across both the Council and CCG
2. that there will not be an immediate return to full time office based working seen prior to the COVID pandemic following the relaxation of lockdown measures and that an appropriate plan will be developed which increases productivity, inclusivity and supports a reduction in our estate.
3. an initial investment of £50k to procure through STAR external specialists in workforce architecture to develop options for a new post COVID working model that increases productivity, inclusivity and supports a reduction in our estate.

Corporate Plan: This supports the five strategic objectives set out in the People Plan; the attraction, development, retention, wellbeing and leadership of our workforce. In particular, it focusses on the increased productivity and wellbeing of our people with an inclusive workforce that represents the community it serves.

The People Plan underpins all aspects of the Corporate plan, enabling transformational change, whilst driving continual improvement in delivering our priorities.

Policy Implications:

None at this time although a review of associated workforce policies, particularly homeworking and flexible working will be required longer term.

Financial Implications:

(Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer)

The pandemic has had an impact on how all staff work and that as the country recovers there will be new normals that are formed. The Council has already partly recognised this in its budget strategy, with significant savings already identified from estates as new opportunities are taken to build on the new ways of working that have been adopted as part of the Councils response to the pandemic.

There has been significant support to Councils from central government to support them during the pandemic and there remains some general grant funding that has been carried forward into the new financial year. It is proposed that this workstream is funded as a first call from the surplus carry forward, and that a budget of £50k is established within the Human Resources and Organisational Development team to fund this initial phase of work.

The Council, longer term, faces significant financial uncertainty, with the current funding settlement expiring in March 2022, coupled with pending reviews of the local government funding regime, business rates reform, the ongoing issue of how to fund adult social care and NHS reorganisation. It is therefore vital that any unallocated resources are spent wisely with a view to achieving the corporate plan and delivering the future operating model.

The work proposed in this report is likely to be the first stage of a more transformative process that is likely to require additional one off investment and will be subject to a further report.

Legal Implications:

(Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

The Council has a statutory duty to achieve a balanced budget – this in effect means that its outgoings must be equal to or less than income without the need of reserves. Additionally it must deliver these services to meet its duty of best value- efficiently and effectively. Moreover, it must be able to demonstrate how it is meeting its public sector equality duty, which requires all public authorities to consider or think about how their policies or decisions affect people who are protected under the Equality Act. Reviewing our new normal provides the opportunity for the Council to put in place a new model of working for its most valuable and costly assets (staff) that increases productivity, inclusivity and supports a reduction in our estate.

Risk Management:

A planned approach to a new workforce model and culture will assist in mitigating risks around health and safety, cost and potential impact on service delivery, associated with an unmanaged return to the workplace post COVID.

It seeks to ensure a joined up approach between the estates review and the needs of the workforce to ensure objectives of productivity, inclusion and wellbeing are realised.

Use of external specialists will assist in an expedient options appraisal. This will ensure timeliness of the project, which is crucial

to minimise the risk of drifting back to old ways of working as lockdown rules are eased. Value for money will be ensured through a competitive procurement process.

Access to Information:

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Emily Drake



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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 It has been twelve months since the Country's national lockdown forced our workforce almost overnight to change what, where and how they work. As an organisation we had already been working towards more agile and productive ways of working that also addressed inclusion, however the transition was slow. The pandemic has catalysed this process and forced a shift in work culture that would have taken years had the pandemic not struck. This is not restricted to Tameside and Glossop or even the UK, with estimates showing that over 50% of the global workforce working differently during COVID lockdown.
- 1.2 In order to 'build back better' post COVID, we must learn and reflect on what the last 12 months has taught us. How have we been working? What have staff experiences been and how does that translate to the services offered to our residents?
- 1.3 Using this intelligence we can create a working culture that finds the right balance between how we have been working during COVID and a more hybrid approach which maximises productivity whilst meeting the needs of our workforce to achieve a better balance between work and home life.
- 1.4 If there are to be any positives from the COVID pandemic, it is that we have been given a unique opportunity to reimagine how we work and deliver our services. As a Council and Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) we should seize this opportunity. We have a small window of opportunity in which to reflect, learn and create a new working model to avoid a shift back to pre COVID ways of working. Only by quickly determined the way forward will we support the organisation to deliver savings through more productive ways of working and through a reduction in our estate.
- 1.5 This report outlines a proposed approach to explore and pilot what the Council's future workforce culture will look like, enabling us to plan for our 'new normal' post COVID.

2. NATIONAL OPINION OF HOME WORKING AND A SHIFT TO HYBRID WORKING

- 2.1 The Council's way of working during the COVID pandemic has been one centred around homeworking with staff working at or from home in the majority of cases unless they have continued to work on the frontline.
- 2.2 In 2020, national surveys focussed solely on homeworking and revealed that employee opinion on this way of working was mixed, with large variation between different opinion polls. YouGov polling suggests that home working was positively received by employees who had been working from home during the pandemic with 72% of respondents saying that they found it easy to adapt to home working and 59% stated that they would want to work from home more than they did before COVID-19. However, 37% of respondents stated that they thought home working had been bad for their mental health.
- 2.3 More recent feedback from workplaces in March 2021, summarised in the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), reveals that while some employees want to work from home all the time after the pandemic, most would prefer a balance where they are in the office for some of the week and at home for the remainder. This has led to the use of a relatively new term: hybrid working. Many organisations are now considering what 'hybrid' means for them, how it might benefit their business and what will need to be in place in order for these new ways of working to be effective.
- 2.4 Contrary to homeworking, hybrid working is the ability to work in the place and at the time most appropriate for the task in hand. It is not just about hot desking, and nor is it just about working from home. These are just two of many constituent parts of what hybrid working can be. It recognises that work is no longer sitting at a desk all day; it is about activities – collaborating,

studying, conversing, sharing ideas, challenging and communicating and working with others, whether that be in large or small groups.

2.5 This trend is also clear within Greater Manchester authorities. A recently formed collaborative group created to share knowledge and experiences about new ways of working has identified that all Greater Manchester authorities are exploring future hybrid working to create a highly productive, flexible and diverse workforce of the future.

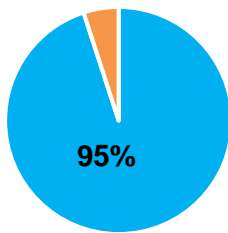
3 IMPACT OF COVID ON THE COUNCIL AND CCG WORKFORCE

3.1 Whilst national and regional trends are important, it is pivotal that any working model created is based on the experiences and feedback from our staff and managers, balancing pros and cons whilst ensuring the needs of our business and residents is prioritised.

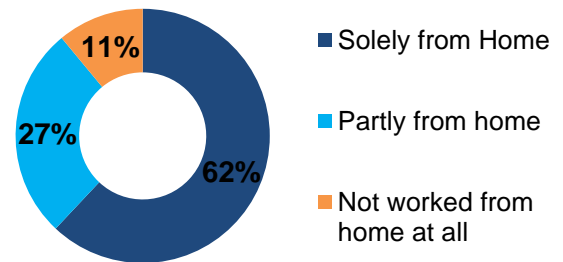
Workforce Feedback

3.2 In June 2020, staff were invited to share their experiences of work since COVID-19 in a whole workforce survey. The survey received the highest ever return rate ever with 1540 staff (over 55% of the workforce) taking the time to share their views. They key messages from staff and managers about homeworking were:

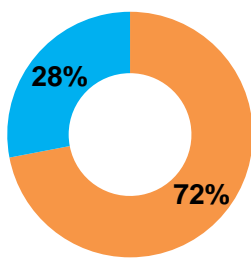
95% of employees said that the pandemic has changed the way they work



89% of employees have worked solely or partly from home during the pandemic



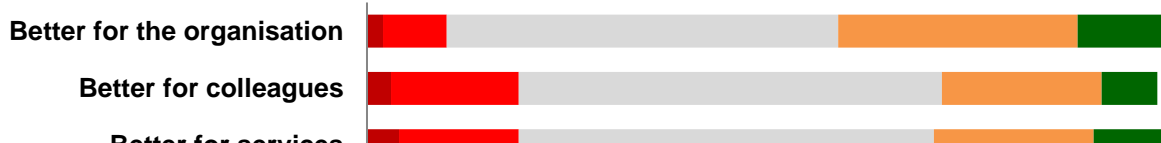
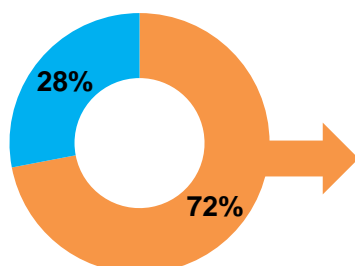
72% of people felt their normal job could be carried out from home



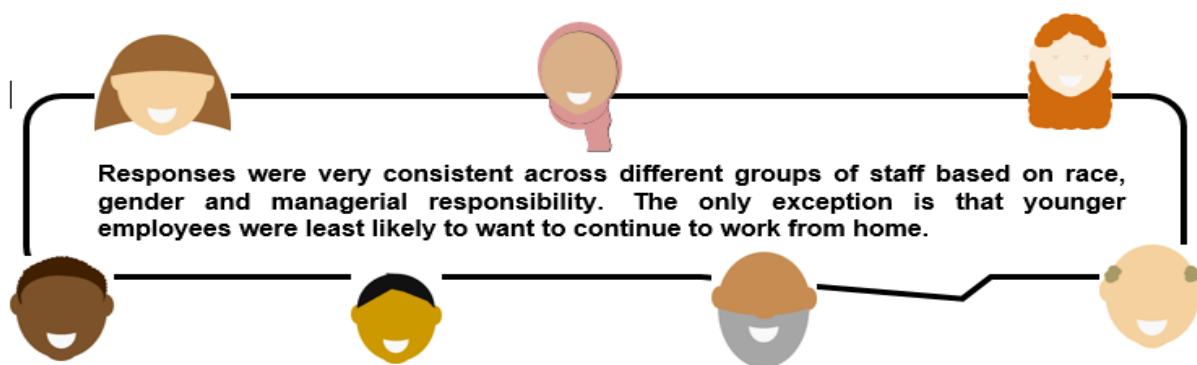
Over half of people would like to work from home permanently, a quarter are not sure, and a quarter would not choose to



72% of people have made changes to how their role is delivered in response to COVID-19 and the majority of staff reported that these changes meant either the same or better outcomes for the organisation, services and people.



Staff showed mixed views when asked if working from home was better for them, colleagues, services and the business but more people were in agreement than not.



Manager Feedback

- 3.3 In addition to the workforce survey, People and Workforce Development attended management teams to gather manager views on the current working model and future aspirations post-COVID. Managers were clear that they did not envisage returning to pre-COVID ways of working. They recognised that working differently had significant benefits for individuals and the organisation.
- 3.4 Benefits cited included reduced CO₂ emissions, reduced estate costs, reduced commuting times, increased productivity, increased attendance at virtual meetings and a shift to service digitisation. However, they requested specific interventions and support around:
- Strengthening our digital offer to enable virtual meetings and training.
 - Creating new types of spaces to enable face to face collaboration and engagement with colleagues, partners and residents.
 - Providing tools for virtual onboarding and digital induction for new staff.
 - Becoming 'virtual managers' e.g. outcome based management, managing 'at the individual level'.
 - Wellbeing to provide advice and tools to support good mental and physical health.
 - Ensuring staff have the right tools and environment to work effectively in their home and work environment.

4. OUR FUTURE HYBRID WORKFORCE CULTURE

- 4.1 Our workforce and managerial feedback tells us that a significant proportion of staff would like to continue to work at or from home with clear benefits in doing so for individuals, services and the organisation. However, as with national trends, feedback is mixed, demonstrating that the 'ideal' way of working varies significantly from individual to individual and service to service.
- 4.2 This mixed feedback on homeworking shows that there is no 'one size fits all' in determining the future working model for the Council and CCG. This supports the concept that the organisations are pointing towards a hybrid workforce model as the 'new normal', less prescriptive than the homeworking model that we have been all forced to adopt during COVID.
- 4.3 Evidence demonstrates significant benefits associated with hybrid working, where the best parts of both home working and office working can be realised simultaneously. Some of these benefits are outlined in more detail below.

Better Outcomes for Residents

- 4.4 Hybrid working creates flexibility. Flexibility of location, time and approach. By creating a truly agile workforce we can offer place based service delivery and connection with the community

which results in better outcomes for residents. Services may be able to focus less on face to face delivery at fixed core hours and offer a broader option for access to services.

Better Work-life Balance

- 4.5 The most significant benefit hybrid working brings for individuals is their ability to manage a better work life balance. With reduced commuting and more flexible working patterns, individuals are better placed to juggle the demands of work and home life. Within our workforce, 54% of people have been working more flexibly during the COVID pandemic.
- 4.6 Importantly the flexibility associated with hybrid working is symbiotic. 40% of our workforce reported to be able to take time for personal commitments such as childcare and caring responsibilities, which, considering the high proportion of employees who are Tameside residents, may reduce demand on our Social Care teams.
- 4.7 In addition, flexibility in work is a valuable tool in improving workplace equality and creating an inclusive culture. It can help parents return to work, reduce the gender pay gap and help carers and people with fluctuating health conditions stay in work, all of which supports our organisational STRIVE values especially respecting diversity, trust and support.

Increased Productivity

- 4.8 Hybrid working is conducive to higher productivity rates with employees able to plan their work in a way to maximise output. For example, choosing to work at home for specific pieces of work with fewer interruptions than office based working, and meet with colleagues face to face to generate ideas and collaborate.
- 4.9 Certainly, the productivity benefits of homeworking appear to have increased during the pandemic, with the CIPD reporting employers are now more likely to say that the shift to homeworking has boosted productivity (33%) than they were in June 2020 (28%).

Improved Service Delivery

- 4.10 We have since a variety of changes to the way we deliver our key services since the Pandemic that have enabled our residents to continue to access services. Our Early Help service has developed a range of online resources and live sessions to ensure that parents and their children were able to access support and advice and remain connected during the lockdown, a lot of the approaches developed during this time will remain in place as part of the enhanced offer to our residents, alongside some face to face sessions.
- 4.11 Prior to the pandemic, the Councils postal system was delivered by the traditional method of a post service that received, sorted and distributed daily post for the whole organisation. At Lockdown, this was not possible and an electronic postal system was developed. This change to the former system enabled a full review of post and items received by the Council and determined that a significant percentage of this was 'junk' mail, that had not been cancelled or unsubscribed from. The current electronic system remains in place and it is planned that this would remain as the future operating model for the Council.

Decreased Sickness Absence

- 4.12 The organisation has already experienced a significant improvement in attendance levels since the COVID pandemic forced the widespread introduction of homeworking. From April to December 2020 the average number of days lost per employee was 4.59 days, compared to 5.69 days for the same period in the previous year. 100% attendance has also increased with 78% of staff maintaining 100% attendance compared to 64% in 19/20. The CCG has also seen a similar trend in their staff absence levels.

Better Recruitment

- 4.13 Pre COVID, 60% of jobs were advertised more than once to find a suitable candidate. Some jobs were never successfully filled. Offering hybrid working options for example flexible working hours and homeworking at advert stage could widen the labour pool and make

recruitment to hard to fill positions easier, quicker and consequently reduce the impact of vacancies on service delivery.

Reduced Mileage Costs and CO₂ emissions

- 4.14 Business mileage claims have reduced since the COVID pandemic by around 38% for the full year with around 320,000 fewer miles claimed. This is the equivalent of driving all the way around the earth 13 times. Not only is there an associated financial and time saving from reduced work-related mileage, the associated reduction in CO₂ emissions supports our commitment to the green agenda.

Reduced Estates Costs

- 4.15 Strategic Property have been tasked with a cross cutting budget action to review the operational estate to provide revenue savings and meet the priorities of the Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP).
- 4.16 A key enabler of property rationalisation is the adoption of hybrid working practices through the WorkSmart project as adoption of new ways of working will reduce the need for operation estate based desking /workstation facilities. As a first pass, strategic property have identified property savings and income over 5 years of £1 million with a programme of reviews to identify further rationalisation opportunities. This rationalisation will also result in increased capital receipts to support the capital programme.

Mental and Physical Wellbeing

- 4.17 100% homeworking is not for everyone and, depending on circumstances can, if not managed carefully, extend the working day, diffuse work-life boundaries and have a detrimental impact on mental wellbeing.
- 4.18 Hybrid working addresses this issue by encouraging a more blended approach of remote and collaborative face-to-face working. It allows individuals to work in a way that balances business need with their own personal needs and consequently brings the best of both office and home working worlds together.

Connecting Virtually and Face to Face in Collaborative Spaces

- 4.19 We have learned that as an organisation we can accomplish many office-based tasks remotely without a drop in productivity or quality. However, a particular issue raised by managers and employees is the loss of connection with colleagues. In particular, people report missing the incidental 'corridor conversations' and note the impact that this has on informal knowledge sharing across the organisation. Similarly, providing meaningful inductions and on the job training to new employees has proven challenging for some in the virtual environment.
- 4.20 Consequently, provision will be needed, post COVID, for people to come together or meet partners or residents. Hybrid working will enable this important connection between people. Hybrid working allows employees to determine when the value of face-to-face is needed whether that be to foster relationships, create ideas, network or maintain good mental health.

5 CONCLUSIONS - THE NEXT STEPS IN IDENTIFYING THE FUTURE WORKFORCE MODEL

- 5.1 The Council and CCG have the opportunity to capture the momentum towards a productive and inclusive workforce generated by the COVID pandemic. We need to turn the feedback that we have gathered from our workforce and managers and translate this into a tangible workforce model that benefits our organisations and residents.
- 5.2 Bearing in mind there is no 'one size fits all' solution with hybrid working, this is a bespoke and unique piece of work. Our organisation understandably does not have the skill set to undertake this exercise alone, which falls outside of our 'business as usual'.

- 5.3 Designing a workplace offer also needs to happen quickly, preventing a shift back to pre COVID ways of working. Current in house capacity would also inhibit the speed of delivery of any workforce model outcomes.
- 5.4 Furthermore, expediency of this project is important to support the review of our estate. We have committed to reducing our estate over the coming years and this will only be possible if we have transformed how and when our staff work. Failure to deliver this project would prevent delivery of savings associated with a reduced estate.
- 5.5 It is therefore proposed, considering the importance and widespread implications of this work that external specialists in workforce architecture are procured to assist in developing a new post COVID workforce model of the future for the Council and CCG.
- 5.6 The overall objective of this externally procured project would be to understand how people will behave and work in the 'new normal' and what they would need from a space, digital and workforce perspective to enable them to do so. Consultation with all stakeholders would support the workforce survey findings and focus on understanding in more detail what ways of working would benefit the organisation and its people in the future.
- 5.7 These specialists would be needed to:
- Assist in transforming our way of working and how our work spaces are used.
 - Reflect our organisation's vision, strategy, processes, people and property in any recommended model.
 - Assist in creating solution options that maximise productivity and inclusivity and puts both our employees and our residents at its centre.
 - Consider the views of all stakeholders.
 - Create options for a proposed approach quickly to prevent a shift to old ways of working as national restrictions are lifted.
 - Assist in creating an informed evidence based model that facilitates a reduction of the estate and supports realisation of projected savings.
 - Meet a skills gap in the organisation for this unique piece of work.
 - Reflect the variation of need across services.
 - Assist in producing an outline business case to ensure that should any future financial investments be required these are projected accurately and value for money demonstrated.
- 5.8 To fund this work, a one off investment of £50K would be required to engage with external workforce architect experts. This investment would enable better, more informed planning of workspace, digital, and culture changes and the associated financial implications. The investment will not be to achieve the rationalisation of the estate, nor will it address all workspace redesign that may be required in the future. It will however, provide a sound, evidence based options model to how the organisation might work going forwards. In the absence of this investment, the future working model would be difficult to plan timely or accurately and as such risks around inaccurate financial projections could arise and a drift back to former working methods is likely to be experienced.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 As set out at the front of the report.