



17 JANUARY 2023

<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>HYBRID WORKING</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES</b>

## **REPORT SUMMARY**

This report set out the Council approach to the adoption of hybrid working and an update on the steps taken to implement this way of working across services.

This report affects all wards. It does not require a key decision.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

The Audit and Risk Management Committee is recommended to note how the Council has adopted hybrid working, the principles and support that are in place to provide a framework to support the effective operation and management of hybrid working.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 The Audit and Risk Management Committee requested a report on Hybrid Working and how this is being managed by the Council.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 The report sets out the background in relation to hybrid working and the benefits to the adoption of this way of working for the Council, employees and prospective employees. Our hybrid working approach is well developed and whilst the report discusses some options in relation to our policy and approach to that, with the technology now in place moving away from hybrid working is not considered a viable or advantageous option.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 Hybrid working describes a type of flexible working where an employee can split their time between the workplace and remote working, normally in their own home but also other locations. It can consist of a one-off day, an informal or set pattern to work remotely or can be a temporary and adaptable measure to suit the needs of the business and/or the employee.
- 3.2 A hybrid working model may be structured in different ways depending on the individual organisation's needs. For example, it may involve:
- A set pattern of days in the workplace, such as 2 or 3 days per week.
  - Workplace base preferred, with remote working allowed when appropriate.
  - Remote working with visits to the workplace when face-to-face meetings are needed.
- 3.3 APSE is the foremost specialist in local authority frontline services and operates one of the UK's largest research programmes in local government policy. Their survey and results from over 50 local authorities provides a robust assessment of other councils' approaches and experiences to hybrid working, from which the Council has tested its hybrid working, principles and support in place to provide a framework to support the effective operation and management of hybrid working.
- 3.4 The Council employs around 3,500 staff over 200 or so different services. Around 1800-2000 roles, traditionally those that were office based are suited to hybrid working.
- 3.5 The Council adopted an agile working policy as long ago as 2013. Whilst the terminology has subsequently changed, it was very similar to hybrid working in recognising that developing technology meant that some jobs could be undertaken at home, at different work locations and much more flexibly. However, before the COVID-19 pandemic, agile working and working from home regularly was still largely the exception in many services. For many staff working from home was often only utilised to e-mails or to undertake work that required some focused time or prolonged concentration. The technology available was better for this type of work but not conducive for meetings or collaborative work. The Council introduced Microsoft

Teams in 2018/19. This was still in the process of being rolled out and so was not widely used. The pandemic and lockdown in March 2020 changed all that.

## **Pandemic**

- 3.6 Like many organisations the Council had significant numbers of staff working from home in accordance with the lockdown measures in place. Around 2,000 Council staff worked from home full time for most of 20/21. Microsoft Teams was used for communication and meetings at all levels. The Council also implemented solutions to make other business critical systems accessible from staff working at home which, previously, had not been possible. Due to people and technology working effectively together, we ensured that we both maintained and supported the delivery of essential services together with our local response to the pandemic. Proving the concept that with the right investment in working practices, technology and behaviours, and workspace - work is what we do, what we achieve and the outcomes we deliver – not just somewhere you go.
- 3.7 Across the Council teams and services have used the learning from working in this way and particularly the positive changes to change how they work post-pandemic. As a result, our hybrid working principles have evolved, and been co-designed with services and our people.

## **Culture change**

- 3.8 The Council delivers a wide range of services to local residents. We have a very diverse workforce, operating a range of working styles in different job roles.
- 3.9 Working through the Covid-19 pandemic was challenging; however, significant numbers of our workforce have embraced a different way of working. This was out of necessity rather than choice, but it has accelerated the journey we had started already. Whilst delivering better outcomes is our primary focus this way of working also brings benefits and opportunities for individuals, to work more flexibly in a way and at a pace we could not have imagined. It has provided the opportunity to change the way we work forever.
- 3.10 This includes the ability of many more employees to work remotely or from home and other locations, utilising technology more effectively.
- 3.11 There has been a clear indication from our staff through surveys and other forums that they welcome the idea of greater flexibility in working locations that technology enables, but that they do not want to lose all the social, shared learning and collaboration benefits that working alongside colleagues brings.

## **Challenges**

- 3.12 The Council has faced many of the same challenges as many other employers in managing the move to hybrid working post pandemic which were:
- Homeworking had worked so successfully that it presented a legitimate challenge about whether some roles needed to return to a workplace at all.
  - Employees have their own individual and personal preferences about what would work for them from a hybrid working model – there is no ‘one size fits all’.

- Some job roles do rely much less on collaborative working or meetings and arguably can be done anywhere.
- Some staff do not enjoy homeworking as they felt isolated and, to different degrees, take value from working with others, the social factors of work and the structure from office working.
- New employees need specific support that can't always be provided from remote working arrangements.
- Some staff do not have a home environment that is suitable for sustained periods of homeworking.
- Concerns that the employer could lose some control over employees and that hybrid working brought risks to reduced performance and productivity.
- The implications for buildings and estate and in some case, supporting businesses impacted by the significant change in working patterns and numbers, e.g. local retail or car parks.

### **The Council's approach**

3.13 The Council has developed a draft policy framework for hybrid working which includes a range of guiding principles for both employees and managers. These were launched in July 2022. We have deliberately retained them as draft as it is acknowledged that there may need to be review and change in light of experience and feedback.

3.14 The principles we have adopted are:

- We are keen to offer our employees a degree of personal choice about where they work provided business/service needs continue to be met.
- It is recognised not all job roles within the Council are suitable for hybrid working.
- It is our intention to retain face-to-face contact and social interaction amongst colleagues.
- Employees working as part of a hybrid working arrangement may be required to work in an office, attend team or service meetings at the request of their manager as and when required to meet business requirements. Managers should give reasonable notice of plans.
- We have chosen not to prescribe a set or average number of days or hours by which employees must work from an office as part of a hybrid working arrangement. Our preference is that this is agreed by managers and employees based on job and collaboration requirements.
- Taking into account the size of our workforce and the Council's office availability, staff who intend to combine working in an office with homeworking as a regular pattern of work may look to attend the office or another location several times a week, but we recognise this may vary.

- The Council is not imposing hybrid working (or a requirement to work at home) on employees. Any employee that wishes to work in a Council building or workplace will be able to do so.
- Managers are required to hold face to face team meetings at least once a month as we embed hybrid working ensuring team welfare and collaboration. For days those meetings are arranged managers and employees can book desks in the same location or arrange other meetings or collaborative events.
- There may be times where working from an office location is appropriate to meet specific issue, for example if someone is new into the organisation or is being supported with their learning and development. Likewise, managers and their teams collaborating together either virtual or face to face all provide benefits and ensure team support and effectiveness.
- We will make desk space and meeting rooms available for managers, teams and employees to work.
- Employees should utilise their time, places to work and technology to make hybrid working a success and ensure organisational priorities and outcomes are achieved.
- Hybrid working arrangements are subject to review and ongoing agreement with your line manager. There may be times where hybrid working arrangements need to change to meet business needs.
- Managers must be flexible in their approach and recognise the opportunities and benefits to the Council and employees from hybrid working. Managers will be supported to create clear expectations about how and when people can/should work and manage their teams effectively.
- If there are any concerns about efficiency, effectiveness or safety of hybrid working arrangements, the Council will have the final determination on work location and working arrangements.
- The Council's obligations to consider reasonable adjustments applies to staff working in a hybrid model remains unchanged.
- The Health and Wellbeing of our workforce is paramount. We recognise the benefits that hybrid working can bring in terms of flexibility and work life balance for employees. However, there can be potential risks arising from sustained periods of homeworking or employees feeling that they should always be available or accessible if working at home. Regular breaks are important and encouraged.
- Employees are not expected to work regularly above their normal contractual hours and a culture of working long hours is not expected or encouraged.
- Employees should actively utilise the option of holding virtual meetings within their day-to-day-roles to maximise productivity, efficiency and reduce carbon emissions and costs. For example, we do not expect that employees would travel across the borough to meet a colleague face to face for a meeting unless by exception.

- Employees working at home must ensure that the home working environment is safe and that all homeworking risk assessments, training and checklists requested by the Council are completed.
- Employees must not combine childcare or other caring responsibilities whilst working at home. The Council reserves the right to require employees to work from a Council building if they do not provide assurance that the home working environment is appropriate and health and safety requirements are met.
- Employees will not be deemed exclusively as a home worker so there will be no change to the Council's responsibilities as an employer or of employees' responsibilities to work to required policies and processes.
- If employees wish to request permanent changes to their hours, working pattern, location or place of work they must request this in line with the Council's Work life Balance Policy.

### **Other Policy provisions:**

- 3.15 In addition to the principles, the draft Hybrid policy includes a range of provisions covering the provision and return of equipment, car mileage and expenses, management of performance, working hours, reasonable adjustments and health and safety.
- 3.16 All employees are required to complete an online Working Safely at Home assessment which incorporates the DSE assessment.

### **Benefits**

- 3.17 There are huge benefits for both employees and the Council, greater work life balance, reduced travel time, reduced carbon emissions, reduction in travel costs and time, more flexibility within the working day and greater job autonomy. Trusting people to do the right thing and empowering them to choose where and when to work most effectively - focusing more on the outcomes achieved rather than simply the time spent working in the office (presenteeism).
- 3.18 It is also integral to our plans to rationalising our estate and reducing costs. In 2024, the Council will occupy new accommodation within Birkenhead Commercial District. The Business Case for this is predicated on closure of nine buildings and termination of lease arrangements. The new office will be designed based on hybrid working numbers. In addition, a recent report by Global Workplace Analytics and Design Public Group (DPG) cites that employers will be able to make general financial and productivity efficiencies for each employee that works remotely 2 to 3 times a week. There are efficiencies include less people being on site including consumables together with savings from reduced printing, postage and stationary costs as a result of more digital solutions being implemented.
- 3.19 Hybrid working has increasingly become a competitive area for employers seeking to attract talent. The Council's hybrid working offer, and the flexibility of it, is a key factor in recruitment and retention. Using data and analysis from the 2021 Census the ONS provided some useful insights - As Local Government struggles in many areas to recruit and retain staff it is worthwhile considering its overall perception as a

progressive employer and what other industries, with which it competes as a sector, offers to its' workforce. The data finds that the proportion of people hybrid working has risen in 2022 based on survey responses collected from the 27 April to 8 May 2022, when guidance to work from home because of the pandemic was no longer in place in Great Britain, 38% of working adults reported having worked from home at some point over the past seven days. Pre-pandemic this figure was just 12%.

- 3.20 It is standard for the offer of Hybrid working is usually included within job adverts and so it is important that the Council's approach stands up and provides us with the best opportunity to attract and retain talent. It will also mean that we can attract employees from outside of the area who may not have otherwise considered Wirral for employment opportunities.

### **Support to managers and employees**

- 3.21 As set out above Hybrid Working has brought some challenges and benefits. In addition to the policy framework, we have a wide range of support in place including:

- Developed over forty-one learning resources accessible through our Employee Learning Experience Platform 'Flo'.
- Team sessions facilitated by OD to work with managers and employees to work through how hybrid would work best for their teams\*.
- Developed a range of staff stories and hybrid videos on how they make hybrid working work for them.
- Delivered Manager Networks and Staff Forum events.
- Dedicated Manager masterclasses and manager micros on hybrid working.
- A dedicated resource area on the intranet with guidance and FAQs.

- 3.22 \*Appendix One summarises the impact of these sessions, shares the benefits and solutions for other teams to consider.

- 3.23 The approach we have taken to implementing Hybrid Working and providing support to staff and managers aligns with the guidance issued by the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development which highlights the importance of engagements and some co-design.

## **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There is requirement to provide items of equipment for homeworking to ensure the Council meets its legal health and safety obligations. These have been met within existing resources.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Hybrid working is not a legal entitlement. It may form part of an application for Flexible Working which employers have a duty to consider.
- 5.2 The Council's duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work Act applies to Hybrid workers.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 There are no staffing implications arising from hybrid working. There has been a significant investment in ICT to enable the introduction of Hybrid Working and the

development of Cheshire Lines Building as a hybrid hub.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 One of the risks from hybrid working may be from a perceived loss of control by the employer or concerns about a reduction in productivity. However, most employers have reported a very positive impact from hybrid working and the mutual benefits it can bring.
- 7.2 APSE is the foremost specialist in local authority frontline services and operates one of the UK's largest research programmes in local government policy. Their survey and results from over 50 local authorities provides a robust assessment of other councils' approaches and experiences to hybrid working which evidenced a positive impact on productivity.
- 7.3 Each service has its own performance indicators down to team and individual level. There is no evidence that performance within services has been impacted negatively and feedback from managers and staff is positive.
- 7.4 Over the summer the Council ran a series of 'We are Wirral' events, with hundreds of our employees attending from across the organisation, to help co-design our people strategy. Together we explored the good practice that already exists at Wirral, described us on a good day, and shared ideas on how we can have even better days. Our people clearly told us the conditions needed for them to thrive and be at their best included hybrid working, being trusted and being empowered to deliver.
- 7.5 In our recent staff survey of 1,400 employees our line managers, strongly agreed (scoring 4 out of a total of 5), that they were equipped to manage their team effectively and our workforce felt trusted to do their job effectively (scoring 3.9 out of a total of 5).
- 7.6 The Council has been explicit within the principles developed that if there are any concerns about efficiency, effectiveness or safety of hybrid working arrangements, the Council will have the final determination on work location and working arrangements.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 The Hybrid Working Policy and principles were designed following comprehensive consultation with trade unions. There was also consultation with the staff forum, staff network groups and a large sample group of line managers from across the Council.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Hybrid Working is not available to all employees. As set out in the principles we have adopted, there are certain job roles which by their nature cannot generally be done at different locations or which are fixed to a shifts or services operational times.
- 9.2 The Council has not imposed a requirement to adopt a hybrid working model. Staff can continue to work from a fixed Council Building if that is their preference.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**



10.1 The provision of Hybrid Working, particularly with reduced requirement travel has a positive impact on the environment and climate.

## 11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no Community Wealth implications arising from this report.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1                      Examples of facilitated team sessions

The PDF file below may not be suitable to view for people with disabilities, users of assistive technology or mobile phone devices. Please contact [tonywilliams@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:tonywilliams@wirral.gov.uk) if you would like this document in an accessible format.

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

<https://apse.org.uk/index.cfm/apse/members-area/briefings/2022/22-34-local-government-survey-post-covid-return-to-office-working/>

[https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/hybrid-working-practical-guidance-2021\\_tcm18-103709.pdf](https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/hybrid-working-practical-guidance-2021_tcm18-103709.pdf)

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Audit and Risk Management Committee in accordance with Section C of its Terms of Reference.

## SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date