

Committee	Audit and Governance Committee
Title of the Report	Working for the Future and the Mental Wellbeing Support
Purpose of the Report	<p>Provide an overview of the plans for working in the future and identify the support offered to staff in relation to mental well-being</p> <p>The Audit and Governance committee are invited to consider the information presented</p>
Date of Meeting	10.02.22
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BACKGROUND

The report is presented in response to the request of committee members for information on the Council's plan in relation to future working arrangements and also the provision for supporting staff mental wellbeing.

The vision for working in the future is to be presented formally to a meeting of the Cabinet on the 15th February and the content and details of that vision is noted in the first part of this report.

The support provided for the health and wellbeing of staff by the Council is acknowledged to "Gold Level" Corporate Health Standard as sponsored by Wales Government and details of the basic service provided in relation to mental wellbeing, in addition to additional support provided during the pandemic, is summarized in the second part of the report.

WORKING TO THE FUTURE

1. VISION

- A Council that supports, empowers and trusts the workforce to work flexibly and productively to provide high-quality services, in a way that substantially reduces our impact on the environment.
- Build on the new ways of providing services that have been developed during the pandemic, by giving staff the flexibility to work flexibly and use technology to work and communicate virtually.

2. DRIVERS / ADVANTAGES

The main drivers for adopting new working arrangements for the future are as follows;

- Staff well-being will benefit from an improved work-life balance, which leads to staff being more productive. Staff see the benefits of flexible working, and this is reflected in their wishes for future working (see Part 7 below)
- Advantages for the Council in the recruitment market when offering flexible working arrangements where possible.
- Less travelling in vehicles to work, thus reducing the county's carbon footprint.
- Offers flexibility in terms of how offices are utilised, with potential to rationalise buildings in the future.

- The experience of working throughout the Covid crisis shows that the technology can support different ways of working; moving more in the direction where there is much less reliance on paper.
- Makes better use of staff time - less travelling.
- Flexible working arrangements can give better opportunities to disabled people and individuals who care for disabled people, thus having a positive impact on equality.

3. PRINCIPLES

Some principles will form a foundation for the flexible working arrangements;

- Where the circumstances of the post allow, any flexible working arrangement will be voluntary for staff.
- Any flexible working arrangement will be subject to the nature of the post and there will be a need to ensure that there will be no negative impact on services for the people of Gwynedd.
- The new working arrangements have nothing to do with altering current workforce numbers or structures; but it relates to how staff deliver their work and provide services for the people of Gwynedd.
- Any home or hybrid working arrangement will be subject to the space and circumstances of the home allowing the individual to undertake their post effectively and safely.
- Internal meetings will be held virtually (to include fellow officers and individual Members), using "Microsoft Teams" normally, whilst acknowledging the benefit of holding face-to-face team meetings occasionally during the year.
- That staff well-being is central to the arrangements and they will continue to receive regular support such as timely communication; training; health, safety and well-being support (including mental well-being) from their line manager and the Council more widely.
- The vision aligns with the Welsh Government's commitment to develop a remote working strategy, with the aim of enabling 30% of the Welsh workforce to work close to or from their homes.

4. WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

It is anticipated that the Council's staff, where it is possible to achieve their jobs flexibly, will adopt one of the following working arrangements:

- **Working from Home** - the staff member will carry out all of their work from home on a full-time basis, apart for occasions when they will be required to attend the office at the reasonable request of the manager (face-to-face team meetings) or due to the needs of the service.
- **Working from an Office** - the staff member will carry out all of their work from an office.
- **Hybrid Working** - the staff member will combine working from home and from the office. Meeting the service's needs will take priority in a hybrid working arrangement, and the work pattern must be agreed with the manager. Under hybrid working arrangements, the staff member is expected to work a minimum of 2 days a week from home (or a proportion that equates to a working week for part-time workers).

5. STAFF WISHES REGARDING FUTURE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

- Approximately 1,800 staff within the Council undertake jobs that could be carried out from home in the future.
- In September 2021, discussions were held between these members of staff and their managers, in order to obtain an understanding and an initial overview of their wishes regarding their future working arrangements. The responses received from staff were not a formal commitment to adopt these specific working arrangements.
- In brief, the responses were as follows:
 - 59% wished to adopt a hybrid working arrangement
 - 25% wished to work from home
 - 15% wished to work from an office

Any flexible / new working arrangement will be subject to a trial period before it is finally agreed, in order to review the suitability of the arrangement from the perspective of the staff member and the Council as an employer.

6. OFFICES

- In adopting a new model of working, it is inevitable that changes will need to be made to offices in order to facilitate this. It is unlikely that a permanent designated workspace/desk will be available in the office for staff members who will be working to hybrid arrangements. An on-line desk booking system will be provided for times when hybrid staff members will work from the office.
- It is anticipated that zones/areas will be identified within the offices for specific services and teams in order to facilitate co-working and specific rooms will be provided to hold meetings and carry out confidential work.
- Further work will be needed in the future in order to consider the possibility of creating more local community hubs as workplaces for Council staff, or jointly with our partners.

7. WORKING CONDITIONS / EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

- A number of working conditions and employment policies are being reviewed in order to address and prepare for the new way of working in the future.
- We are consulting with the local Trade Unions representatives as we do this.

8. LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- Remote Leadership Training is already available for managers and leaders. Developmental work is currently in progress to provide further training, e.g. leadership skills / sustaining hybrid teams. It will be essential for managers and employees to keep in contact through regular conversations on welfare and performance. Managers and employees will need to agree and plan how they will communicate effectively together, and both sides will be responsible for ensuring that the meetings and agreed communication are undertaken.
- Induction arrangements for new staff - getting to know colleagues and learning from others is much more challenging when working from home; virtual communication does not fully fill this gap every time. Robust induction and

communication arrangements will be required in order to give new staff the necessary support.

9. HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

- Every working environment (including home workspaces) will be the subject of a risk assessment to ensure the health and safety of employees.
- The Council is already committed to support and maintain the mental well-being of all staff and the guidance and support in the future will be reviewed regularly to ensure that it addresses the new work environment.

10. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

- We will review the desk phone provision, taking advantage of computer telephone software. Traditional desk phones (with some exceptions) will disappear over a period of time during 2022.

11. DATA PROTECTION

- Data protection policies will be reviewed and relevant guidance will be shared with staff in a timely way.
- Services will need to consider and implement appropriate responses to data protection liabilities, i.e. in terms of sensitive / confidential conversations that take place in homes, the security of hard copy documentation in the homes of officers and offices, which equates to the sensitivity and size of the personal data affected.

12. COSTS

- The new working arrangements must be at least cost-neutral to the Council following any initial investment.
- As part of the national negotiations on pay and working conditions for 2021, the trade unions have asked local authorities to pay a home working allowance (£26 per month) to staff who work from home regularly. Nationally, employers have refused this element of the request. The request has also been considered locally, but as any home working arrangement will be voluntary and since staff gain other benefits from being allowed to work from home, paying an allowance is not considered suitable. This decision also considered the fact that many of our staff will save on the costs of travelling to the office daily, and that this could then be offset against the additional costs of working from home.
- Every member of staff will continue to have a named corporate workplace, and they can claim travel and subsistence costs from this location, and therefore no changes will be made to the existing policy on claiming travelling costs.
- The savings made on staff travelling costs in the 2020-21 financial year came to a total of £977,499. As the Council is yet to return to work without any restrictions, it is difficult to estimate the total permanent saving on travelling costs.
- An estimated one-off amount has been allocated for the purpose of adapting offices and to address IT, equipment needs, etc.
- It is possible that savings will emerge in years to come in relation to property, by rationalising office space.

MENTAL WELBEING

1. OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

The Occupational Health Service has been available to provide advice, information and support to individuals, managers and services. In addition, all fragile members of front-line staff (staff who have underlying medical conditions) have been referred for a 1 to 1 consultation with the Occupational Health Unit in order to receive medical advice on essential adjustments to protect them from the virus, and also to discuss any concerns they have as this has been an extremely anxious period for fragile individuals.

2. MEDRA

The counselling service has continued throughout the period, with Medra continuing to receive referrals. Because of the coronavirus situation most of the counsellors have been using either counselling over the phone or virtually. Proactive sessions (such as de-briefs) have been offered to care staff who have been working in difficult conditions, and a video was created by Medra to be shared with all front-line staff.

3. COVID19 SUPPORT PACKAGE

A Covid-19 Support Package was developed in order to support staff at a very challenging time. Specific information on mental and emotional wellbeing is part of the package and the Council have ensured that specific apps that give support with sleep and self-care are available free of charge to staff.

There is a host of information available as part of the package such as latest news, information on matters relating to health and safety, safeguarding, items that affect work e.g. holidays, sickness, salary as well as a section that gives advice on how to care for ourselves and a specific section for managers. The information and resources are all available on an external website in order to ensure that every member of the Council's staff is able to access the available information. It is also possible to access from a mobile phone, tablet (e.g. iPad) and on a laptop. The information is updated regularly in order to ensure that the information is current.

4. HEALTH AND WELLBEING PROMOTION PROGRAMME

The Health and Wellbeing promotion programme has continued during the pandemic but it is important to note that the programme has been adapted in order to meet and respond to the current situation.

In April 2020 a series of specific sessions for staff were arranged under the title '**Looking after your Mental Welfare**'. These sessions were held virtually by Andrew Tamplin of Canna Consulting. As well as the sessions for staff, specific sessions for managers were held under the title '**Looking after our staff's Mental Welfare**'. There was a follow up to these sessions in November / December 2020 when sessions on '**Selfcare and looking after ourselves**' and '**Dealing with anxiety**' were held. Over 300 members of staff attended these sessions and the feedback received was excellent. Some Departments have arranged additional sessions themselves e.g. Canna Consulting sessions have been arranged by the Education

Department for School Heads. ‘**Respite Sessions**’ are currently being held by Andrew Tamplin.

The Occupational Health Service have also been giving short presentations to Departments and services in order to raise awareness of the support the service offers such as specialist advice, referrals to the counselling service and the physio service. Emphasis was given to mental welfare and how to achieve a work-life balance.

As part of the health and well-being promotion programme a new scheme has been established for Council staff called ‘**Camu Mlaen ’21**’, a scheme based on the Five Ways to Wellbeing. The idea behind ‘Camu Mlaen ’21’ is to create a place and time for members of the Council’s staff to share their experiences, learn and meet new people.

As part of the scheme, a walking challenge for staff was established and a number have been taking part. It is an excellent opportunity to go for a walk and share experiences and staff are encouraged to take a photograph whilst on their walk and posting it on-line on the staff Facebook group or record the walk through the Strava app. Camu Mlaen 21 encourages people to do as much as suits their ability and situation, and within the national guidelines. It is possible for staff to load the Strava app free of charge to their phone and join the ‘Staff Cyngor Gwynedd’ club to record their walk and see where their colleagues have been for a walk.

At the other extreme, a chess club has been established for staff and it is suitable for beginners and experienced players. Also, a club, ‘Palu Mlaen’, has been set up so that those with an interest in gardening can share ideas, good practice and tips. Events were also held in conjunction with the Euros football competition as another way of encouraging staff to take part in something different and to engage with colleagues.

A ‘Camu Mlaen ’21’ newsletter has been created and the first edition was published in February 2021. The newsletter is an opportunity to share the experiences of individuals who have been taking part in the scheme and inform staff of upcoming events.

5. NATIONAL HEALTH PROMOTION CAMPAIGNS

This year we have supported the following campaigns:

- International Sleep Day
- Stress Awareness Month
- Mental Health Awareness Week – Refer to the 5 Ways to Wellbeing, resources developed and shared, videos etc
- Men’s Health Week – created specific resources on mental wellbeing for men along with a dedicated video for men
- World Suicide Prevention Day – a video produced discussing an individual’s personal experience (member of staff) and support details
- World Mental Health Day
- Stress Awareness Week

6. LEADING REMOTELY

A remote management and leadership package has been developed to assist managers. A series of virtual sessions will be held under the heading of 'Leading Remotely'. The purpose of the sessions is to equip managers and team leaders to lead remotely to support their teams at large in an unsecure time where change is inevitable. Alongside the virtual sessions specific documents have been developed to support managers namely 'Steering the New Normal' and 'Working Remotely'.

All these provisions have been communicated to staff through the intranet, staff Facebook, staff self-service, 'Camu Mlaen' newsletter, Chief Executive's Bulletin, "Gair o Gyngor" as well as in specific and regular messages to Heads of Department and Managers.

7. FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

A one-off bid of £50,000 has been submitted for 2022-23 to further invest in provision to support mental wellbeing. It is intended to use this money, if approved, to assist managers and leaders in identifying the symptoms of stress and depression amongst staff and how best to support such situations. We will also reinforce efforts to raise awareness amongst staff generally in the assumption that we face a higher number of situations where support and training is required following the situation faced over the last two years.