

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



A Report to a meeting of the Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date of meeting: 15 February, 2022
Cabinet Member: Councillor Nia Jeffreys
Contact Officer: Geraint Owen
Contact Number: 01286 679072
Subject: **THE COUNCIL'S VISION FOR WORKING IN THE FUTURE**

THE DECISION SOUGHT

- The Cabinet's support to adopting the vision for Working in the Future, and not return to the pre-pandemic way of working.
- Vision - A workforce that can work flexibly and give their best to deliver and provide services of quality for the people of Gwynedd. For Gwynedd Council to be a good place to work, which promotes a work-life balance for the well-being of staff and in order to retain and attract quality staff.

THE REASON WHY A DECISION IS NEEDED

- The report outlines how the Council can build on the advantages and keep hold of the benefits experienced when providing services successfully in different ways during the pandemic, and adopt more flexible working arrangements for staff in the future.
 - The report outlines the vision for the new way of working for the future and provides an update of the background work in progress in preparation for the new way of working in the future.
 - The Council has acted in accordance with Welsh Government guidance with the instruction for those staff who are able to work from home to do so, since March 2020. We continue to do so, although the request for staff to work from home is no longer a legislative requirement (since 28 January, 2022). We are considering health, safety and well-being measures as we plan for the safe reopening of offices in the long-term.
-

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 through 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.
- Domestic Costs - 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.

- Travelling Costs - 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 £1,207,090. 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.

13. NEXT STEPS / WORK PROGRAMME / TIMETABLE

- Should the Cabinet express its support to this paper, it is proposed that the work continues in order to adopt the working conditions and employment policies to address future working arrangements.
- When appropriate health, safety and well-being arrangements are in place in the offices, it is anticipated that staff can be given the option to return to the office and trial new working arrangements in order to assess their long-term suitability.

- Proceed with adaptations to offices - it is proposed that the changes are implemented per service/location over the coming months.

14. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

See attached

OBSERVATIONS - MONITORING OFFICER

I have no observations to add in relation to propriety but would note my support for the recommendations which build on the positive changes and learning in relation to staff and workplace arrangements which were developed in the last two years.

OBSERVATIONS - HEAD OF FINANCE

I can confirm that the draft Budget for 2022/23 includes one-off funding for this project. I will support this scheme and will assist as needed to ensure that any changes are cost-neutral.