

CYNGOR GWYNEDD – Report to Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Title of item:	<i>Hybrid Working Scheme</i>
Cabinet Member:	<i>Cllr Menna Trenholme, Cabinet Member for Corporate Support</i>
Relevant Officer:	<i>Geraint Owen, Corporate Director</i>
Date of meeting:	<i>19 September 2023</i>

1. The Decision Sought

To adopt the Hybrid Working Scheme for Cyngor Gwynedd staff.

2. What is the reason the Cabinet must make the decision:

Guidance will be required from the Cabinet regarding the way of working within the Council in the future, after we adapted our working arrangements for a period of time over the past years. This will enable us to continue to support and get the best from our staff in order to provide the best possible services for the people of Gwynedd.

The Council is eager to promote a work-life balance amongst staff and acknowledges the positive impact that flexible working arrangements can have on staff motivation, well-being, performance and productivity.

3. Introduction and Rationale

3.1 Background / Introduction

The attached Scheme applies to approximately 1,800 of Cyngor Gwynedd's existing workforce (i.e. jobs with aspects of 'office work' that can be undertaken when hybrid working). It addresses those posts where a substantial change was seen in their nature and working arrangements as a result of the pandemic.

In September 2021, discussions were held between managers and staff members in order to obtain an understanding and an initial overview of their wishes regarding their working arrangements for the future. It was emphasised that the responses from staff at the time was not a permanent commitment to adopt these specific working arrangements.

In brief, the responses were as follows (2021):

Hybrid – 59%

Mainly from Home – 25%

Office – 15%

It was explained that any flexible working/new arrangement would be subject to a trial period before reaching a final agreement, in order to review the suitability of the arrangements in relation to the staff member and the Council as the employer. No contractual change was made to staff contracts as a result of that.

These arrangements were formally trialled between May 2022 and February 2023 and all service managers with a responsibility for 'office' staff were asked to consult and discuss amongst their teams in order to confirm the wishes of individuals when moving forward.

Teams were asked to report formally on their wishes following the pilot period. Managers were asked to discuss with the staff member and weigh up their individual wishes as well as service considerations.

In brief, the responses in relation to potential working arrangements were as follows (2023):

Hybrid – 65%

Mainly from Home – 17%

Office – 18%

The information shows that the wishes were similar to 2021 on the whole, with 'Mainly from Home' reducing by 8%, 'Hybrid' increasing by 6%, and 'Office' as the main workplace increasing by 3%.

3.2 The rationale and justification for recommending the decision

A comprehensive consultation has been held over the past year and a half with officers and managers, heads of department, Cabinet Members and local union representatives regarding the drawing up of a Hybrid Working Scheme for the Council.

The conclusions and the observations received in response to the questionnaire have assisted to draw up a draft of the Hybrid Working Scheme that is to be considered. The main aim of the Scheme is to put working arrangements in place which are flexible and make the best possible use of technology, but which also encourage and support personal contact within our teams. We believe that this combination is the key to ensure a service provision of the highest possible quality.

Relevant considerations:

The Scheme reflects and supports the Council's commitment to;

a) *Carbon Footprint Reduction*

Consideration needs to be given to carbon emissions when working from home, as well as commuting emissions to the offices and from business journeys. It is anticipated that

commuter carbon emissions to the work centre/office 1 day a week over a working year would lead to 337kgCO₂e in emissions per day in comparison to 134kgCO₂e when working from home (approximately 60% more). Although managers and team leaders are expected to conduct the majority of their team meetings and 1:1 conversations face-to-face with staff, virtual meetings will continue to be a part of officers' day-to-day work in the future in order to avoid unnecessary business journeys and the resulting emissions. Please note that the carbon figures for business journeys would be additional to the figures for commuting to work.

See Appendix 3 – Carbon Emissions Figures

b) Equality

By introducing this Scheme, the Council will continue to promote a work-life balance and will consequently improve the opportunities available to individuals with disabilities and/or caring responsibilities to work for the Council. The potential impacts of this scheme in relation to the Council's duties towards equality are outlined in Part 3.1 of the Equality Impact Assessment and is considered regularly when introducing and monitoring the Scheme.

Following the pandemic, it is important to acknowledge that the arrangements that are set out within this Scheme could involve a degree of change to some employees. Although no permanent change was made to staff employment contracts, it should be noted that some individuals (approximately 17%) have been working 'mainly from home' during the interim period. The impact assessment addresses the impact of this change on staff and a reasonable time will be given to employees to be able to put arrangements in place to ensure that they work in accordance with the requirements of the Scheme in full.

See Appendix 4 – Equality Impact Assessment

c) Well-being of Future Generations Act

Long-term. The Scheme sets a vision regarding the way of working within the Council in the future, after monitoring and adapting our working arrangements for a time during the past years. There will be a need to continue monitoring to ensure that our working arrangements reflect the culture we need and that we continue to provide the best possible services for the people of Gwynedd.

Prevention. It is believed that the Scheme assists the Council to get the best from our staff, including attracting and retaining staff, by offering flexibility in our way of providing services and encouraging them to be creative by seeking to prevent problems and find solutions.

Integration. Working in partnership with other organisations is crucial to maintaining effective public services, and recognition is given to the importance of this in terms of ensuring sufficient face-to-face contact as well as continuing with the virtual

arrangements which have been successful when working with partners and promoting collaboration across the Council.

Collaboration. The Scheme sets the vision and expectations on staff in order to ensure that a "one Council" culture is professed, including effective communication and working together as a team. Teams will be expected to set out their expectations/working arrangements, and consider hybrid working as a part of their operational principles.

Involvement. The content of this Scheme is based on over a year and a half of consultation. It reflects the experiences of officers and teams over the trial period and subsequent feedback from service managers, heads of department, Cabinet Members and local union representatives.

d) The Welsh Language

Staff will continue to provide services to the public in Welsh and hybrid working arrangements can bring advantages in the recruitment market and increase the number of Welsh applicants.

The Council is seeking to ensure that there is sufficient face-to-face contact in place to collaborate and communicate effectively. This Scheme will have a positive impact on staff, and particularly on Welsh learners, by ensuring that they have sufficient opportunities to speak Welsh socially in the workplace. It is important to note that the same attention will be afforded to the Welsh language in terms of support to learn and develop language refresher skills when working from home and from the normal work centre.

See Appendix 4 – Equality Impact Assessment.

e) Costs

There will be a need to monitor the potential costs of actioning this scheme, including adapting offices, heating, business travel. A sum of money has already been earmarked by the Council last year for this purpose and any cost exceeding what was anticipated will need to be addressed within the funding earmarked for realising the Asset Plan.

The Hybrid Working Scheme (**Appendix 1**) and the 'FAQs' document (**Appendix 2**) are attached.

To summarise, this Scheme is recommended to the Cabinet based on thorough consultation and research carried out over eighteen months. The Scheme reflects the changes that have occurred in the working world over the last three years and further strengthens our duty of care and well-being to staff as well as acknowledging the need to ensure regular face-to-face contact across all of our services.

It is important to ensure that we weigh up the wishes of staff with the needs of the services and the people of Gwynedd and a Hybrid Working Scheme that sets the expectations in terms of our way of working for the future will be a key part of ensuring a prosperous working culture and performance.

3.3 Next steps

If approved, the proposal is to introduce the final Scheme to the workforce as soon as possible, giving reasonable time to prepare for its full implementation from 1 April 2024.

4. Views of the statutory officers.

4.1 Chief Finance Officer

"Hybrid working has been established for around three and a half years now, and the proposed Policy is the outcome of detailed research and consideration to the Council's service needs as well as what can be done to improve staff well-being. I therefore welcome these efforts to formalise the procedure and give clear guidance to Council staff. As the report notes, there will be some cost to the Council in order to adapt offices so that they are suitable for hybrid working, whilst improving the efficiency of the use made of the office estate. A one-off bid of £250,000 for adaptations to offices in order to address the new working arrangements for the future, has already been approved in March 2022 (when setting the 2022/23 budget), but I expect that there will be a need to fund further capital work; this will be considered when reviewing the Asset Management Plan."

4.2 Monitoring Officer

"This detailed report weighs up the range of factors which relevant as the new arrangements are established. The significant change which has occurred in the Councils work patterns, a mixture of the impact of the pandemic and the subsequent development of arrangements can be acknowledged. Nevertheless the range of patterns and arrangements across the Council means that there is scope for inconsistency and unfairness within employment arrangements which needs to be addressed. The consideration given to the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the detailed Equalities Impact Assessment is appropriate. I am satisfied that the recommendation represents a pragmatic and appropriate resolution for the Council."

List of Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Hybrid Working Scheme

Appendix 2 - 'FAQs'

Appendix 3 – Carbon Emissions Figures – commuting and hybrid working

Appendix 4 – Equality Impact Assessment