

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Employment Committee
Date: 28 June 2021
Report for: Information
Report of: Sara Saleh, Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources

Report Title

Trafford Smart Working - Approach to Reintegrating Employees Post COVID19

Summary

This report details the proposed approach to new ways of working, building on our learning from the pandemic, regarding the benefits that home working brings to both staff and the Council.

Recommendation(s)

That the contents of this report are noted.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

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Background Papers: n/a

Background Information

Relationship to Corporate Priorities	Aligns with the 'Health & Wellbeing' and 'Green and Connected' Priorities.
Relationship to GM Policy or Strategy Framework	Not applicable
Financial	An investment in some ICT equipment will be required plus office furniture both within office environments and employee homes. The costs have yet to be established. However in the medium to long term, savings may be generated from our estates.
Legal Implications	Contractual changes may be required at some point in time. These are currently being explored with Legal Services.
Equality/Diversity Implications	An EIA will be informed through the employee engagement process. Likely to have a positive impact for staff with certain protected characteristics.
Sustainability Implications	There should be a positive impact with carbon reductions (see below) due to less travel. Also reduced use of paper and printing with a move to electronic documents in the main.
Carbon Reduction	This proposal should lead to reductions in home to work commuting and also business travel, which will reduce carbon emissions.
Staffing/E-Government/Asset Management Implications	Covered in the body of the report.
Risk Management Implications	Not applicable
Health and Safety Implications	There is a need to ensure that staff working from home and other locations have appropriate equipment to reduce risk of health issues arising.

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Trafford Council like many organisations, including the other GM authorities, wants to capitalise on the lessons learnt from the pandemic in terms of how our staff can work in very different ways. Prior to the pandemic we had agile working in place with varying levels of maturity across our business.
- 1.2 With the sudden move to a significant proportion of our workforce working from home, the enabling technology and kit was quickly put in place to ensure service continuity. Over the following year staff and teams have adapted to working and interacting with colleagues, service users and other stakeholders in a different way – truly seeing the benefits, whilst also acknowledging the challenges that this type of working poses.
- 1.3 This unplanned social experiment is leading to radical changes in the ways that organisations think about where and how their staff work, with the principle that ‘work is something we do, not somewhere we go’. With this in mind, we need to agree what our best approach can be.

2.0 RESEARCH AND BENCHMARKING

- 2.1 There is a lot of information currently in the HR field about future ways of working, with so many organisations considering changing their approach. We have been absorbing as much as possible from national sources such as the CIPD along with sources from a local government context, such as the LGA and regionally from North West Employers.
- 2.2 More locally we have attended employment law seminars on the subject, to ensure we are aware of the legal and contractual considerations in making changes to the location in which staff work from.
- 2.3 The Council is the lead organisation for the GM ‘New Ways of Working Squad’ which has the remit of sharing learning and where possible co-producing some of the policy, guidance and other resources that we will need to enable our future ways of working.

3.0 SMART WORKING CONCEPT

- 3.1 Currently (subject to government the government roadmap changing) the aim is that as part of the phased reintegration plan, phase 3 will see us being able to have normal occupancy levels in our building and so welcoming all staff back. This is anticipated to happen in the autumn. However when we are able to do this, we would like to have branding for a new approach so it is clear that this is different from the ‘agile’ working concept pre-pandemic. ‘Smart Working’ is an approach that has been used by some Central Government departments for several years and is suggested as the umbrella term for this change programme.
- 3.2 Smart Working is a business-focused approach to flexible working that delivers more efficiency and effectiveness in work organisation, service

delivery and organisational agility. It achieves this via modernisation of working practices while providing improved work environments and benefits for staff.

Key features are:

- Managing by outputs
- a trust-based culture
- high levels of autonomy
- where possible flexibility in the time, location and ways of doing work
- new tools and work environments
- reduced reliance on physical resources, maximising use of electronic/digital resources
- openness to continuous change.

3.3 There are many benefits that we can harness with this approach:

- Increasing the effectiveness of our activities
- Focusing our work on outcomes rather than processes
- Meeting the aspirations of staff for an improved work-life balance - this may be particularly important for some groups who are more disadvantaged by rigidity of working hours or location
- Improving employee engagement through more autonomy and work satisfaction
- Reducing the financial costs of running our organisation
- Creating work environments that facilitate collaboration and innovation
- Reducing the environmental footprint of our working practices.

4.0 WORK STYLES

4.1 We believe it will be beneficial to have different ‘work styles’ to cover all roles within the Council. A work style is an approach to delivering the outcomes of a job from the most appropriate location. For example, subject to the requirements of the role, it could be delivered from within the community, on customer sites, on the move, in an office or at home. Having these in place will help inform the requirements in terms of kit/equipment and workplace capacity and will make it clear to staff the expectations of how they spend their time in terms of location. There are also different contractual positions linked to these.

4.2 Suggested smart work styles and descriptors:

Smart Work Styles	Principles
Home-based Worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract states home as work base. • Business ICT applications the service uses are efficient accessed from home.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not required to attend many 'in-person' meetings in Council offices, except may attend for check-ins and team meetings. May have meetings but can be held remotely. • Role requires them to spend the majority of their time at a work station.
Office-based Worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract states Council setting as work base. • May need a fixed desk/chair or be able to hot desk. • Only works from an office location and doesn't work from home or works from home on a very occasional basis. • Requirement is based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ICT applications/software or equipment used by the service are not suitable or efficient enough for more than ad hoc home working or working from other locations. ○ Other business reasons. ○ A reasonable adjustment to support the employee.
Neighbourhood-based Worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract states Council setting as work base. • Normally in roles where they spend most of their time working with service users/residents and working patterns/location are tied to this direct interaction. • Normally won't use a PC much if at all – may have shared access to one for certain tasks. • Examples of this are: cleaners; catering staff; school crossing patrol; passenger assistants; staff who work in nurseries, care facilities and children's homes.
Hybrid Worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract states Council setting as work base. • Work can be carried out from a variety of locations including council buildings, the home, partner's offices, with service users. • Up to service and employees to agree the split between time spent at home and Council settings. However expectation that on average minimum of 1 day per week will be spent in an office base. • When in a Council office building will hot desk.

4.3 The first 3 styles have a mostly fixed location with the hybrid worker having different locations, i.e. it may include home/office/community/partners etc. The assigning of work styles to roles/individuals is based on business need first, however where employees have certain requirements these will be taken into consideration as well. The 'neighbourhood-based worker' will be obvious in most cases and they aren't in the equation in terms of home working, due to the nature of these roles. With regards to home-based workers – staff who want this work style would request it through the existing flexible working process. Another option is that services consider homeworking as a possible business

model and engage with staff regarding whether they would welcome it with a voluntary move to a Home Workers contract. Thinking is that the 'office-based worker' would be office-based because of a business reason or could be further to a preference from the employee, for example to support their mental health, disability, or they have lack a suitable space at home to safely work from.

- 4.4 It is envisaged that the majority of staff who use a PC/need a workstation for at least some of their role will be hybrid workers and we will adopt a 'hybrid by default' position for these type of staff. The amount of time spent in different locations can be determined by the employee's role, the service and is likely to change. We will need to invest to ensure that staff are able to work efficiently and safely, with health and wellbeing being at the forefront. Staff will need appropriate kit at home to enable this. It is envisaged that requirements will be identified further to a risk assessment as they vary dependant on the amount of time spent working at home and any particular support needs of the employee.
- 4.5 The ultimate aim is that the work style for each employee will be recorded on iTrent, the Council's HR and Payroll system. We will also record employee's main work base, enabling reports to be produced on the numbers of staff in the different work styles and their locations to be produced. It is suggested that work styles are not finalised and agreed for staff until a settling in period after phase 3 of reintegration. Some needs and considerations both from the business side and employee side may not be apparent until they have 'lived it' for a while.

5.0 SMART WORKING TOOLKIT AND ENABLERS

- 5.1 This new approach requires changes to some of our policies and also new guidance and other resources to be put in place. We are currently developing a toolkit.
- 5.2 There are other enablers/aspects to be considered to support the success of this practical and culture change, and many of these are being progressed:
- Appropriate workstation and ICT kit - in the office and home for Hybrid workers
 - Sufficient meeting rooms with technology to hold 'hybrid meetings'
 - Office redesign with more flexible workspaces/appropriate furniture
 - Desk and room booking systems fit for purpose
 - Roll-out of office 365
 - Modernisation/digitalisation programme
 - Parking charges approach

6.0 ENGAGEMENT

- 6.1 The People work stream have fed into this work and a presentation was taken to the Silver Group – Staffing, Digital and Modernisation plus a report has been considered by CLT, with approval in principle for this approach.
- 6.2 Engagement across the Council is now taking place as follows:

- Union colleagues
- EPIC Pioneers
- Staff networks/groups
- Staff engagement sessions
- Management engagement sessions

6.3 We know from the Pulse survey that was undertaken last year, that from those who responded, there was support for spending time working from home in future. 95% of staff said they would be open to working from home for part of their working time and 60% stated that they would be open to working from home for all or their working time.

6.4 Staff engagement sessions will be taking place late June and early July. At these sessions employees will be given an overview of the outcome of the pulse survey, lessons learnt from COVID and current thinking. We will introduce the 4 working styles and the support that will be available to employees and managers to support the new ways of working. Employees will be given an opportunity to provide feedback on the proposals.

6.5 Further to the engagement with staff and unions we will refine our approach and this will help to inform any other resource we will need to provide to ensure this is a success.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Further to considering the drivers for change, our future ambitions, research and benchmarking, it is suggested that we reintegrate staff with the Smart Working approach as detailed in the report.

7.2 As this will change the ways in which staff work (as compared with pre-pandemic) we are engaging colleagues on the proposals to get their support and to ensure that we put in place all of the enablers to make it successful.

7.2 Employment Committee are asked to note the contents of this report and support our proposed approach.