

Minutes of the Meeting of CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held Hybrid - Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion, Penmorfa, Aberaeron / remotely via video conference on Tuesday, 21 June 2022

PRESENT; Councillor Rhodri Evans (Chair), Councillors Euros Davies, Ifan Davies, Elaine Evans, Eryl Evans, Geraint Wyn Hughes, Hugh R M Hughes, Ceris Jones, Caryl Roberts and Carl Worrall

Also in attendance: Councillors Bryan Davies, Leader of the Council and Gareth Lloyd

Officers in attendance: Mr Geraint Edwards, CLO- People and Organisation , Mrs Angharad Rees, Human Resource Officer, Miss Lowri Edwards- CLO- Democratic Services, Mr Russell Hughes-Pickering, CLO- Economy & Regeneration, Mr Stephen Johnson, CLO -Finance & Procurement, Mr Steve Hallows, Service Manager Highways Department, Mrs Louise Harries, Solicitor, Mrs Nia Jones, Corporate Manager- Democratic Services and Mrs Dana Jones, Democratic and Services Officer

(10.00 - 12:15pm)

1 Apologies

Councillor Endaf Edwards, Paul Hinge together with Councillor Gareth Davies (Cabinet Member) apologised for their inability to attend the meeting.

**2 Disclosures of personal interest (including whipping declarations)
Members are reminded of their personal responsibility to declare any personal and prejudicial interest in respect of matters contained in this agenda in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, the Council's Constitution and the Members Code of Conduct. In addition, Members must declare any prohibited party whip which the Member has been given in relation to the meeting as per the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.**

Councillor Elaine Evans and Eryl Evans declared a personal and prejudicial interest in item 4, prior to the vote being taken on this item.

3 Draft Hybrid Working Strategy and Interim Hybrid Working Policy

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bryan Davies presented the report upon the Draft Hybrid Working Strategy and Interim Hybrid Working Policy. It was reported that the Covid-19 pandemic saw the abrupt enforcement of a national lockdown that included the requirement to remain at home and work from home wherever possible. These measures necessitated that the majority of the office staff work within the Council in a significantly different way. Staff responded quickly and positively to this change. In the main, the positive response was as a result of steps already taken towards a more agile and smarter way of working, including the investment in digital

equipment and software, and the enhancement of the existing flexible working arrangements already in place.

It was reported that having responded well to the initial challenges posed by the pandemic, focus shifted to how the Council could learn and build from the experience. The 'Way We Work' project was established to review the remote working practices adopted during the pandemic. The project aimed to explore the appetite for long-term change within the workforce whilst ensuring that service delivery remained the primary focus. The project allowed the opportunity to explore the extent of a shift in the wider strategic vision of where, when and how the organisation undertook work.

As part of the project, a significant staff engagement exercise was undertaken to gather feedback, experiences, ideas and future workplace requirements in order to support strategic decision-making. An estimated 74% of the working from home workforce participated in at least one of these engagement activities. Themes emerging from the staff engagement exercise and national research, trends and highlights had informed the development hybrid working strategy.

The staff engagement exercise indicated that there were many benefits from home-working but also recognised that there were challenges for some staff. The benefits reported included virtual meetings, increased productivity, improved collaboration, elimination of office distractions and interruptions. The identified challenges included poor broadband connectivity, training and inducting new staff, a lack of separation between work and home living in the "office", feelings of isolation due to less social encounters, and inadequate workspace in their home.

Using research findings and staff engagement evidence the Hybrid Working Strategy was developed setting out the principles and implementation process of a hybrid working model that maintains the required high level of service delivery whilst also providing employees with greater flexibility in balancing their work and home lives. The needs of the service would always be the over-riding priority when considering any hybrid working possibilities. It was recognised that this level of flexibility, due to the nature of some roles or other constraints, would not be achievable for all staff but that there would remain a commitment to explore how a level of flexibility can be built into roles across the organisation. During the initial stages of implementation, Customer Contact services would remain online and over the phone. The reception desks at Canolfan Rheidol and Penmorfa would also remain closed initially whilst other face-to-face services would be phased in as part of the implementation process. ."

It was stated that the strategy introduced a set of priorities including a) agile and mobile ways of working; b) environmental and financial sustainability; and c) providing a better customer experience. In addition, a set of parameters were identified within which the hybrid working model could be built, such as 'where our staff can work as efficiently remotely or in the office they can choose where they work on any given day'; 'hybrid working staff having no permanent personal space in the office, other than in exceptional

circumstances'; and 'our meetings with colleagues and external partners would be virtual wherever possible'.

In order to identify different types of roles across the corporate workforce four workstyles were introduced: Fixed – a role which requires the post holder to attend the workplace due to the nature and requirements of the role and therefore not suitable to hybrid working. The remaining three were all types of hybrid working - Flexible Hybrid, Limited Hybrid and Roaming. Categorising roles in this manner assists in determining ICT equipment requirements, training and development methods and office demands. Corporate managers in each service would place each role within their teams into one of these categories. The categorising would depend on the role and nature of their work.

The Corporate Lead Officer, Economy & Regeneration reported that to support the implementation of the hybrid working model three workstreams had been created, each chaired by a Corporate Lead Officer, and who report to a Ways of Working Project Board. The workstreams were:

Workplace Design – Responsible for redesigning workspaces to increase inclusivity, flexibility and to support new ways of working for the workforce and customers.

Digital Solutions – Responsible for reviewing and improving digital solutions to support collaboration, hybrid working and improved customer service.

Policies, Procedures and Training – Responsible for developing new, and reviewing existing, policies and procedures to support new ways of working.

The Interim Hybrid Working Policy had been developed to provide detailed information around what hybrid working means for the Council. It would support employees and their managers in implementing hybrid working by providing practical advice and information, enabling employees to work from the office or home effectively, productively and safely.

The proposal was that the policy was in place for a period of 18 months to allow for hybrid working to be trialled as the managers and our workforce identify an effective new way of working post-pandemic. At the end of this period, the interim policy would be replaced by a Hybrid Working Policy and other policies would be reviewed to ensure that they were fit for purpose in a new landscape.

The policy had been subject to consultation with the recognised Trade Unions and who had been involved in the development of the document from the early stages. Their feedback and suggested amendments had been incorporated where appropriate.

The main policy headlines had been set out below:

- Hybrid status was a benefit which the employee can apply for where their roles had been designated as hybrid suitable (Flexible Hybrid, Limited Hybrid & Roaming)

- Hybrid working employees may choose to attend workplace (or hub) on a daily basis but would only have to access to a hot desk booked via a desk booking system.
- To achieve hybrid status employees must demonstrate or agree to:
 - Sufficient broadband speed
 - Accommodate the necessary equipment for productive working
 - Ensure maintenance of information security
 - Safe working environment
 - Return to workplace if disruption to connectivity
 - Only work from recorded remote working locations
 - Attend the work location if required
- No contractual changes during period of Interim Policy. The contractual work location would stay the same and there would be no travelling expenses to attend work location or hot desk hub
- No working from home allowance payable as this would be a voluntary arrangement
- Hybrid status may be withdrawn under certain circumstances
- Recruitment/interviews would be virtual interviews by default unless there was a strong justification for face to face interviews.

The purpose of all staff policies and procedures was set out the behaviours, processes and procedures required of staff, how they could gain advice or support and, where applicable, the consequences of not adhering to the policy and/or procedure.

Following questions and comments from the floor, it was AGREED to recommend to Cabinet to endorse the Hybrid Working Strategy and the Hybrid Working Policy subject to the following amendments:

- Para 3.1.1 – that line managers should **aim** to hold interviews remotely in the Recruitment & Selection Policy;
- Para 3.1.2 – line managers are permitted to hold interviews face-to-face if they believe that there is justification to do so the Recruitment & Selection Policy;
- Para 3.2.2 – managers should monitor the use of their e-mails and the e-mails of their teams after 9pm and prior to 6am in order to ensure that pressure is not placed upon staff to work beyond these hours in the Work Life Balance Policy
- A recommendation that the employee review takes place after 6 months

4 Corporate Bonds and Sureties Policy

It was proposed that the Council introduced a corporate bonds policy in order for officers to have a clear, fair and consistent approach to approving and entering into bonds with third parties. The report had been presented to ensure that bonds could be easily accessed and utilised if necessary and that bonds secured with third parties were only entered into with third parties with high credit ratings to protect the Council's position.

It was AGREED:-

- (i) a bond received in cash was the Council's preference:
- (ii) a bond which was secured by a third party requires the third party to have a credit rating Moody's of A3 or a credit rating with Standard & Poor's or Fitch of A-
- (iii) to recommend to Cabinet to approve the Bonds and Sureties

5 To confirm minutes of the previous meeting and to consider any matters arising from those Minutes.

It was AGREED to confirm the minutes of the previous meeting.

6 Forward Work Programme

The Forward Work Plan was agreed as presented subject to the following items to be considered at future meetings

- Community Housing Proposal- to proceed with its implementation and to consider Council land available to provide housing
- Council Tax Second Homes Premium – To receive an update on the Council decisions, 03 March 2022:
*“4.a) The level of Council Tax Second Homes Premium charged to be set at 25% (with effect from 1 April 2017); and,
b) that all monies raised from the 25% Council Tax Second Homes Premium (net of the Council Tax refunds), be ring -fenced and used to support the Community Housing Scheme.”
b) That all monies raised from the 25% Council Tax Second Homes Premium between the period 01/04/2017 to 31/03/2022 (net of Council Tax refunds), to be ring-fenced and used to support the Community Housing Scheme.
c) That all monies raised from the 25% Council Tax Second Homes Premium from 01/04/2022 (net of the Council Tax refunds), to be ring-fenced and used to support the Community Housing Scheme.
d) That from 01/04/2022, all monies raised from the 25% Council Tax Empty Homes Premium (net of the Council Tax refunds), be ring-fenced and used to support the Community Housing Scheme
e) That Council decision 16/03/2017 minute 8.b) Council Tax Premiums on Second Homes, be revoked*
- County Farms
- An update on the use of empty properties within the Authority
- A report upon the recruitment policy/process of the Authority in appointing and making the Council an “employer of choice”
- The efficiency of ICT and software within the Authority

Confirmed at the Meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 3 October 2022

Chairman: _____

Date: _____