

# Cyngor Sir CEREDIGION County Council

**REPORT TO:** Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**DATE:** 21 June 2022

**LOCATION:**

**TITLE:** Draft Hybrid Working Strategy and Interim Hybrid Working Policy

**PURPOSE OF REPORT:** To review and recommend the draft Hybrid Working Strategy and Interim Hybrid Working Policy

**REASON SCRUTINY HAVE REQUESTED THE INFORMATION:** Pre-decision scrutiny - to review new strategy and policy

## **BACKGROUND:**

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 our office staff work in a significantly different way. Staff respond 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.

## **Way We Work project**

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 we as an organisation undertake 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 have 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.

## **HYBRID WORKING STRATEGY**

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 will 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, will not be achievable for all staff but that there will 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 will remain online and over the phone. The reception desks at Canolfan Rheidol and Penmorfa will also remain closed initially whilst other face-to-face services will be phased in as part of the implementation process.

*The Vision for the strategy is “to nurture an empowered, resilient and high performing workforce. A workforce that has the skills and equipment to work flexibly to deliver high quality services in an efficient, sustainable and environmentally friendly way, now and in the future. We will design workplaces with modern, flexible spaces that not only encourage collaborative, cross-functional activity but also strengthen our corporate culture, increase engagement with our partners and support a better customer experience.”*

The strategy introduces 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 will 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 are 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 will place each role within their teams into one of these categories. The categorising will depend on the role and nature of their work.

To support the implementation of the hybrid working model three workstreams have been created, each chaired by a Corporate Lead Officer, and who report to a Ways of Working Project Board. The workstreams are:

- 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.

## **INTERIM HYBRID WORKING POLICY**

The Interim Hybrid Working Policy has been developed to provide detailed information around what hybrid working means for the Council. It will 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 is that the policy is 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 will be replaced by a Hybrid Working Policy and other policies will be reviewed to ensure that they are fit for purpose in a new landscape.

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

### **Policy Headlines**

The main policy headlines have been set out below:

- Hybrid status is a benefit which the employee can apply for where their roles has 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 will 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 will stay the same and there will be no travelling expenses to attend work location or hot desk hub
- No working from home allowance payable as this will be a voluntary arrangement
- Hybrid status may be withdrawn under certain circumstances
- Recruitment/interviews for will be virtual interviews by default unless there is a strong justification for face to face interviews.

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

**Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If, not, please state why** Yes

**Summary:**

**Long term:** Long term planning has been embedded throughout the development of this strategy and policy. The initial phase of the strategy is 2022 – 2027, whilst the policy is interim for a period of 18 months, this is to allow for regular review to ensure effectiveness and building a solid foundation for further developments. Overtime, this will allow for the best use of resources and space requirements.

**WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS: Integration:**

Consideration given to how the policy will impact staff across the Authority. Their roles have been assessed on suitability for hybrid working whilst ensuring high quality Service delivery. A reduction in travel, both commuting and business, due to hybrid and virtual working will have a positive impact on the Authority's carbon footprint

**Collaboration:** Collaborated with employees and recognised trade unions throughout the development of the strategy and policy

**Involvement:** The strategy was developed following a large staff engagement exercise. The policy was developed through a workstream which included trade union partners.

**Prevention:** -

**RECOMMENDATION (S):**

- To recommend the approval of the Hybrid Working Strategy by Cabinet
- To recommend the approval of the Interim Hybrid Working Policy by Cabinet

**REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION (S):**

- To support the implementation of the new Hybrid Working model.

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**Designation:** Corporate Lead Officer – People & Organisation

**Date of Report:** 30/05/2022

**Acronyms:**