

Cyngor Sir CEREDIGION County Council

REPORT TO: Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee
DATE: 19 July 2023
LOCATION: Hybrid
TITLE: Review of Hybrid Working arrangements
PURPOSE OF REPORT: To review the Council's approach to Hybrid Working
REASON SCRUTINY HAVE REQUESTED THE INFORMATION: Pre-decision scrutiny

BACKGROUND:

Beginning in March 2020, 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. Staff respond quickly and positively to this change which was attributed, in the main, to 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.

Way We Work project

To build on the lessons learned the Council established a 'Way We Work' project to review the remote working practices adopted during the pandemic. A large scale staff engagement exercise was undertaken at the outset to gather feedback, experiences, ideas and future workplace requirements in order to support strategic decision-making. A high level of employee engagement occurred and the themes emerging from this exercise together with national research, trends and highlights informed the development of a 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

In July 2022 Cabinet adopted the Hybrid Working Strategy. This was developed to set 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.

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’.

All corporate workforce roles were categorised into the following four workstyles by the relevant Corporate Manager:

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.

INTERIM HYBRID WORKING POLICY

An Interim Hybrid Working Policy was adopted by Cabinet in July 2022 for a period of 12 months to allow for hybrid working to be trialled as the managers and our workforce identify an effective new way of working post-pandemic. The policy was developed to provide detailed information around what hybrid working means for the Council. Its aim was to 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.

To support the implementation of the hybrid working model three workstreams were 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.

Policy Headlines

The main policy headlines were:

- 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 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 was a voluntary arrangement
- Hybrid status may be withdrawn under certain circumstances
- Recruitment/interviews were virtual interviews by default unless there was a strong justification for face to face interviews.

REVIEW

Engagement with employees has taken place periodically throughout the period to gather information and feedback on how the policy was working in practice and to identify any areas of needing attention. No large-scale changes were made but employees were kept informed of any minor changes through updates via the weekly Team Ceredigion News email and Teams channel.

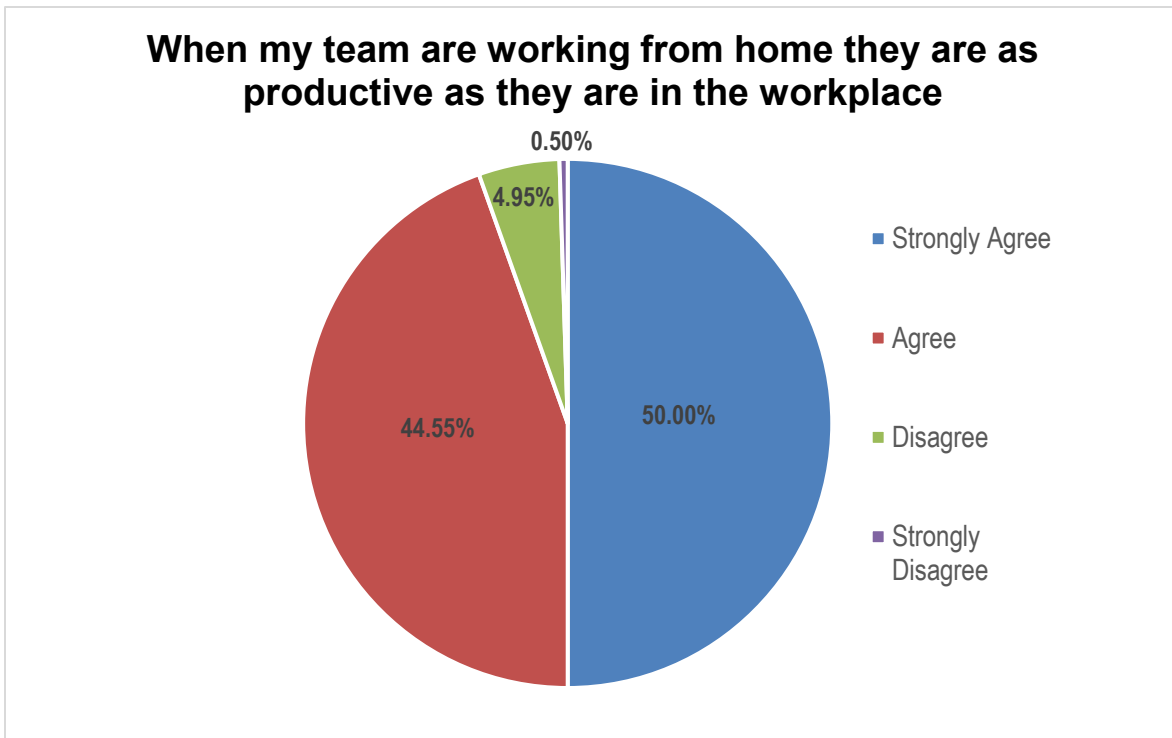
A review of the 12 month interim period was undertaken during June 2023 with employees and their line managers being asked to provide feedback on their experience over the period. All employees who occupy hybrid eligible roles were asked to complete an anonymous staff survey. The survey comprised of two parts, the first for all employees and the second for those with line management responsibility. A total of 870 responses were received resulting in a response rate of 75% and all Service areas were well represented. As the following results will show there is an overwhelming majority who have seen hybrid working as a positive experience and support the continuation of hybrid working as a permanent option.

In their survey responses employees and their line managers identified that they are as or more productive working from home than they are in the workplace. This view is supported by the outcome of assessment from our external regulators. Care Inspectorate Wales in their Performance Evaluation Inspection in May 2023 found that *“There is strong senior leadership within social services. We were told by staff, stakeholders and partners that senior leaders are visible, accessible, supportive and*

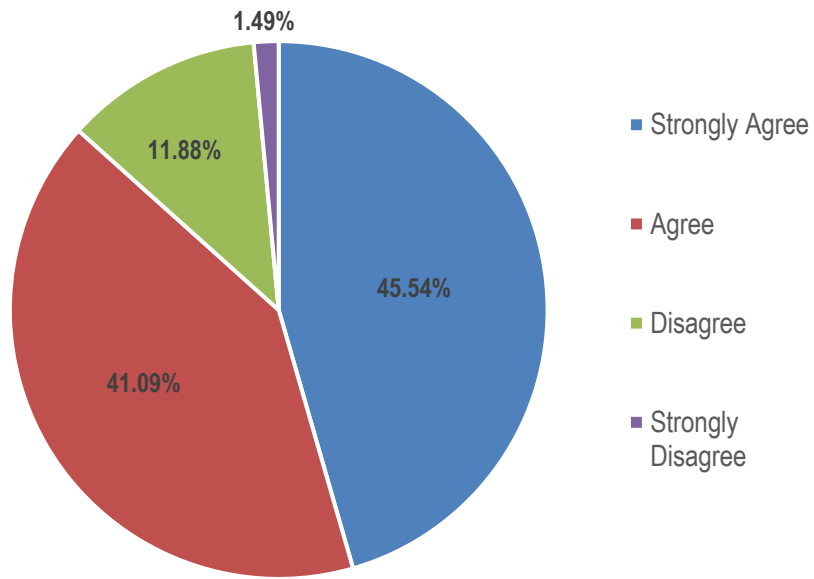
approachable. Feedback we gathered indicates a culture which is focused on well-being, building and maintaining relationships and achieving safe outcomes for people”, and also “Ceredigion has a committed workforce which is responding to an increasing workload both in terms of complexity and volume. Wales Audit in their Springing Forward – Strategic Workforce Management audit in May 2022 stated that “the pandemic has accelerated the move to new ways of working and promoted positive operational and cultural changes within the Council” and that “the Council has well developed plans, monitoring, review and improvement arrangements for its workforce.”

Line managers

In addition to the responses shown below, line managers also provided a range of data on related matters such as how their management skills have evolved to manage hybrid teams, a focus on inducting new starters face to face rather than virtually, regular check-ins when working remotely and suggestions for developing a sense of belonging to a team. A regular comment was the recommendation of periodic team meetings face to face, ranging from fortnightly to quarterly, primarily to support team identity and for wellbeing purposes.

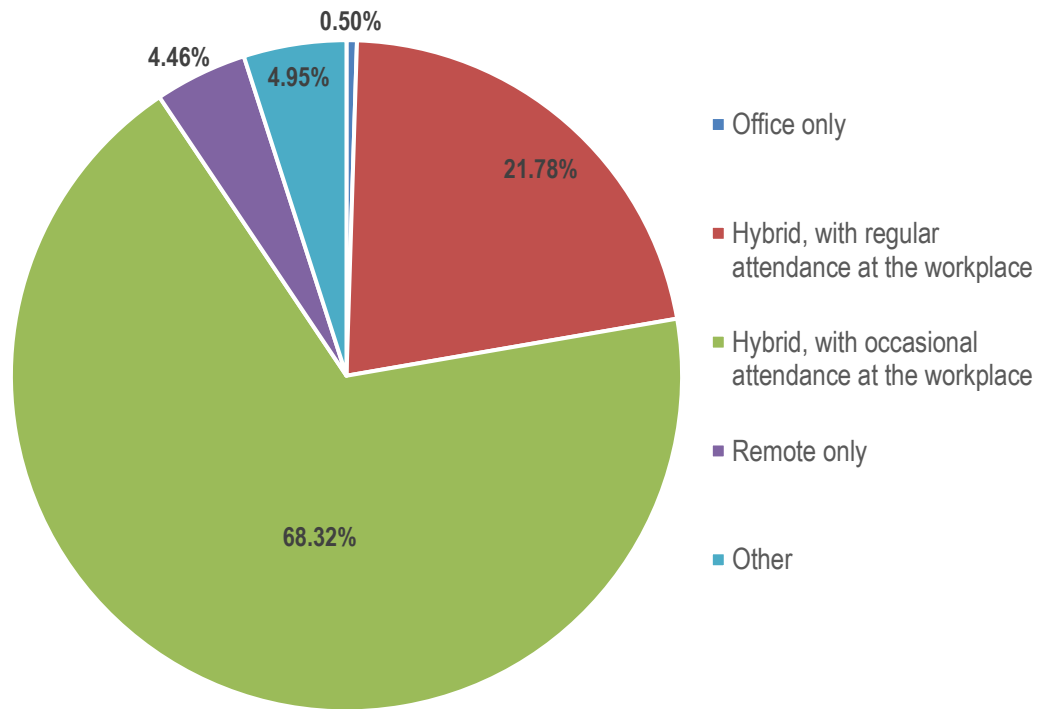


When my team are working from home I can manage them as effectively as I can in the workplace

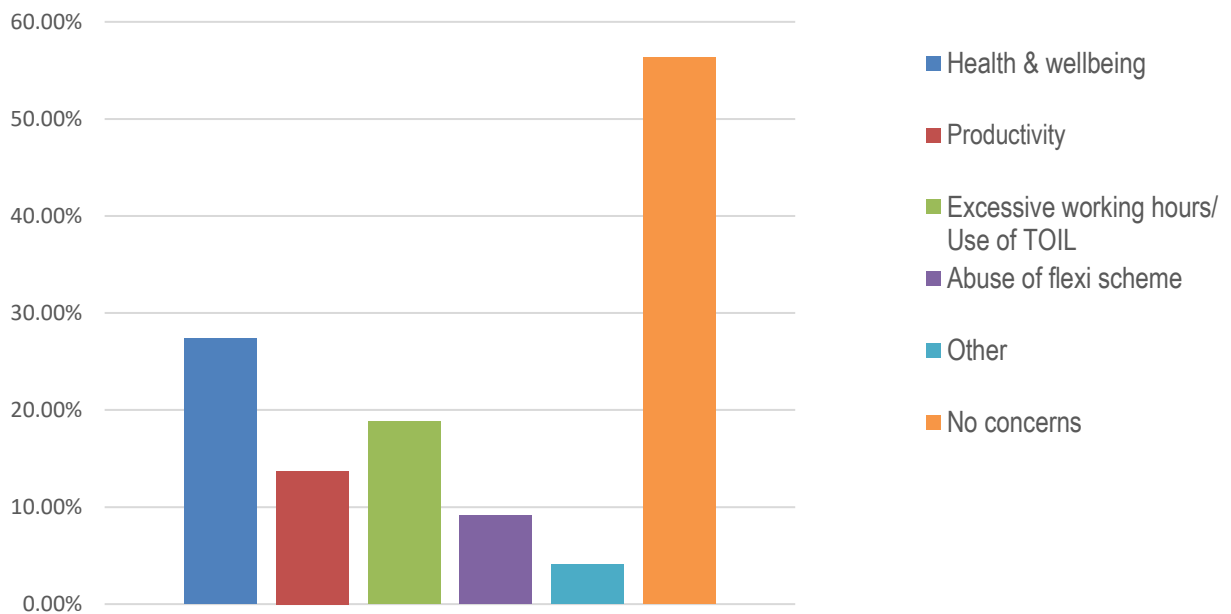


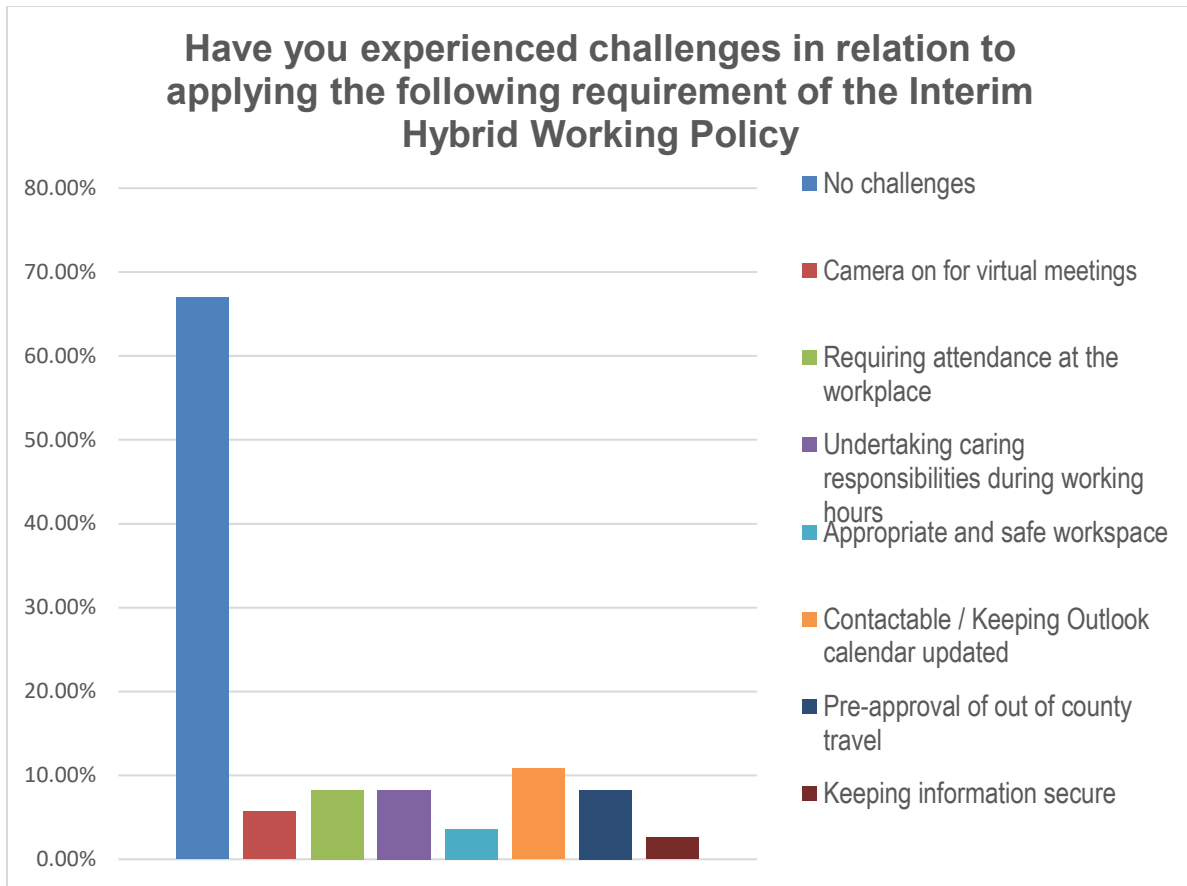
When my team are working from home...	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
they have the skills to work effectively	56.44%	42.08%	0.99%	0.50%
they have the equipment/tools they need to effectively undertake their work	59.90%	36.63%	2.97%	0.50%
they are able to work effectively in a paperless way	53.47%	41.09%	4.46%	0.99%

If given the choice, what working practice would you prefer your hybrid eligible employees adopt?



With regards individuals in your team, do you have concerns in relation to:

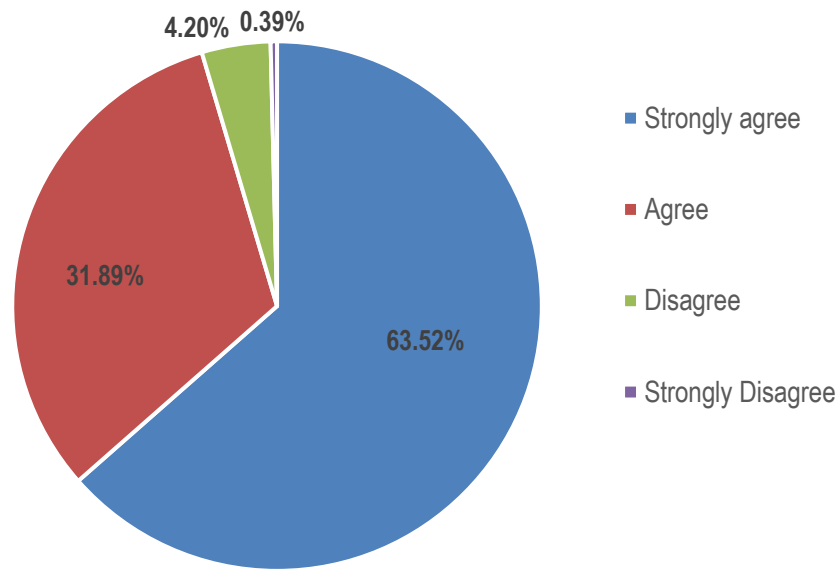




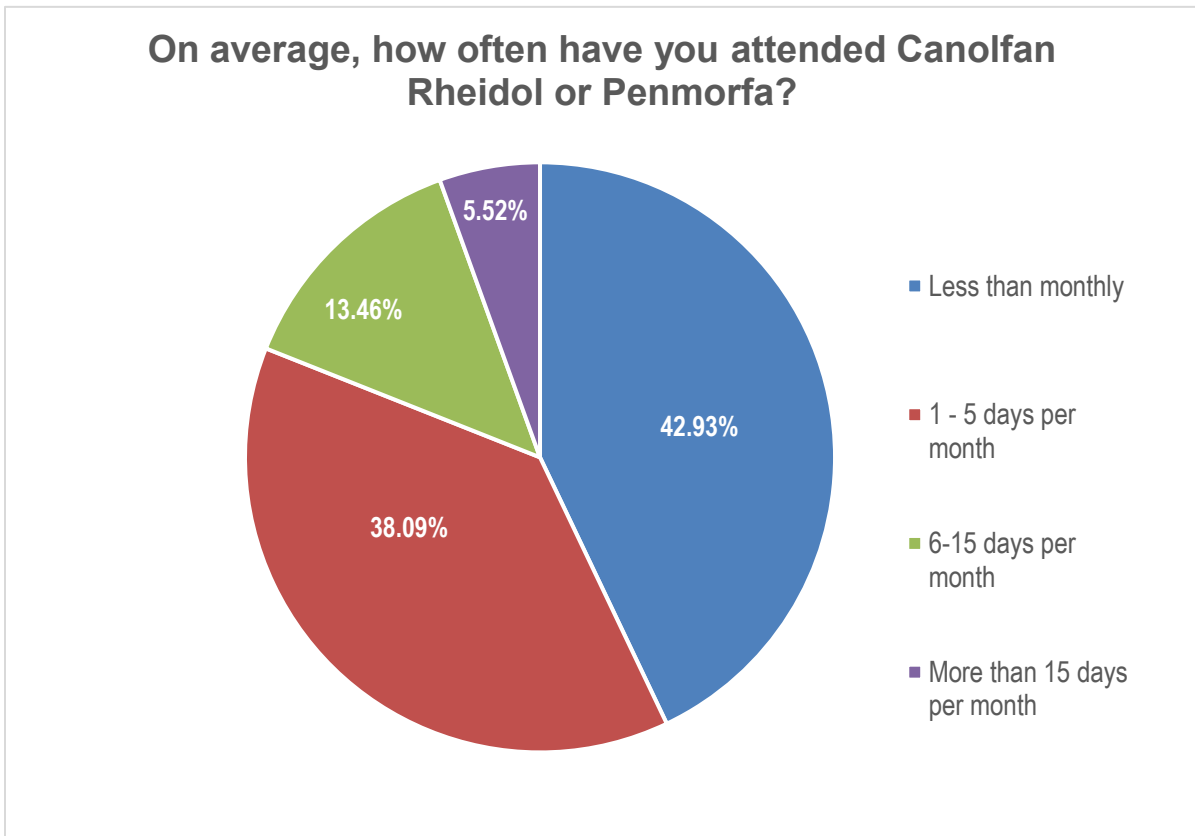
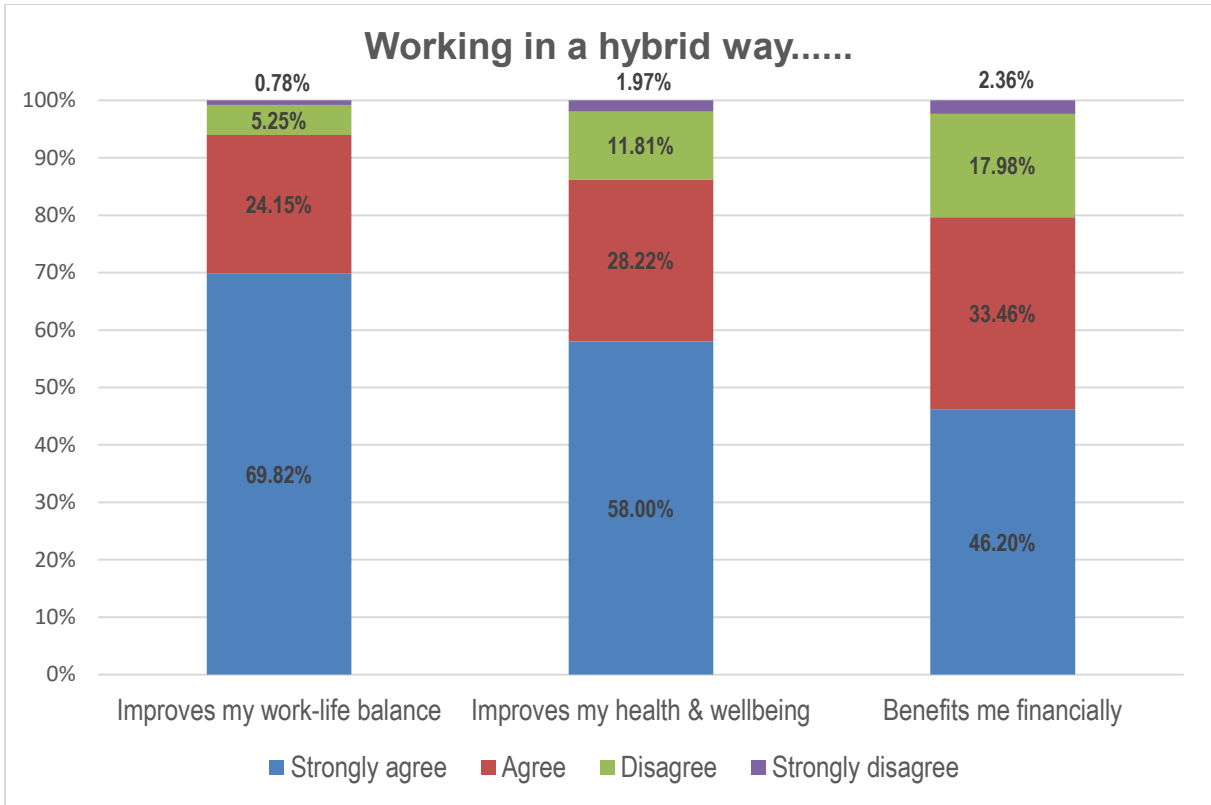
Employees

The result for employees is similar to that of line managers with over 95% of employees agreeing that their hybrid working experience has been positive. Employees have made their preference clear as the following results show. The financial benefit of hybrid working did not have as many employees choosing strongly agree but almost 80% of employees believe that it has benefitted them. When asked if they would consider alternative employment if their ability to work in a hybrid way was removed, 39% selected Yes; 24% selected No and the remaining 37% were Unsure.

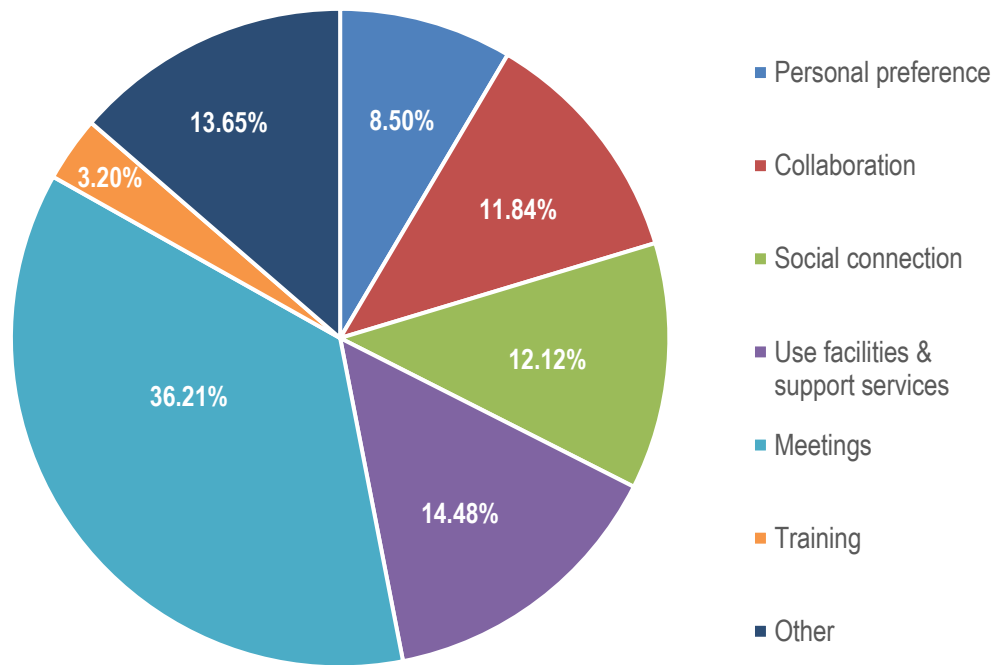
My hybrid working experience has been positive



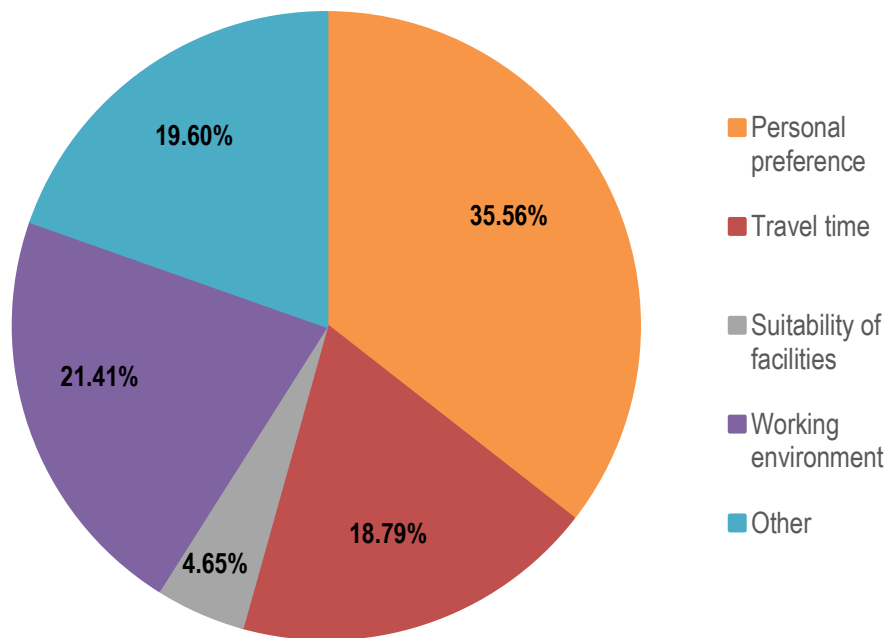
When working from home...	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I'm equally or more productive than I am when working in the workplace	69.29%	25.33%	5.25%	0.13%
I'm managed as effectively as I am in the workplace	63.12%	29.92%	6.04%	0.92%
I have the skills I need to undertake my work effectively at home	72.31%	26.77%	0.79%	0.13%
I have the equipment I need to undertake my work effectively at home	66.40%	29.27%	3.54%	0.79%
I am able to work effectively in a paperless way	62.99%	30.31%	5.64%	1.05%



What is the main reason you attend the workplace?



If you do not regularly attend the workplace, please indicate the main reason for this

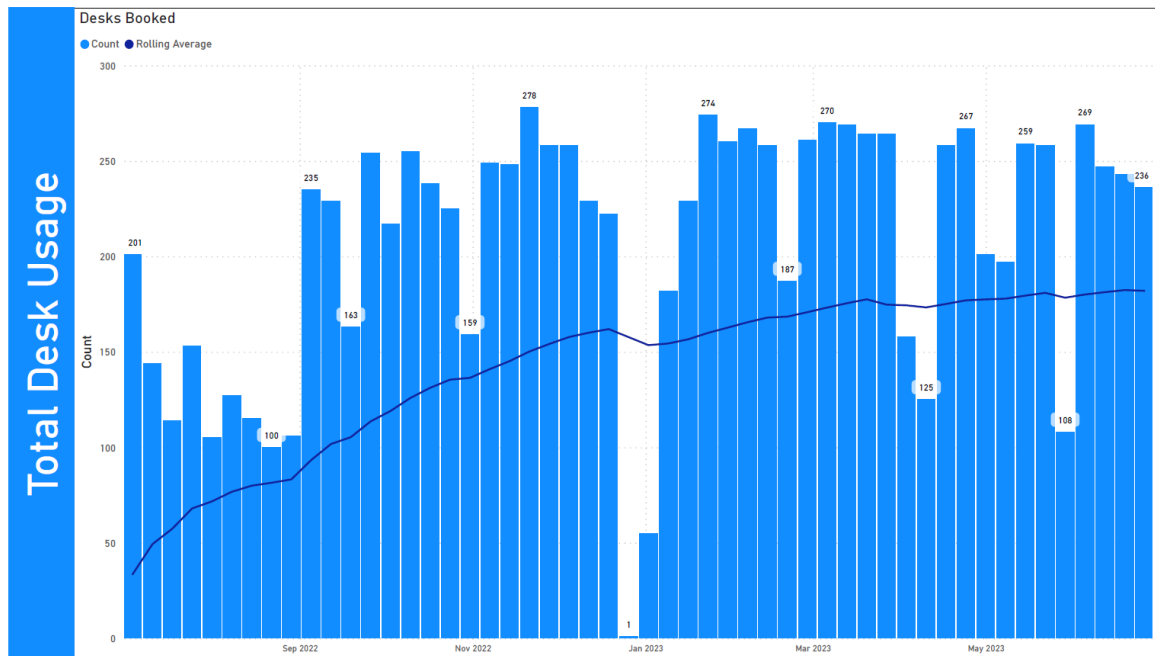


The survey results are clear that from a line manager and employee perspective hybrid working is seen as a key benefit and retention tool. It is therefore recommended that hybrid working is accepted as a long term flexible working option and that the Interim Hybrid Working Policy should be revised to reflect this.

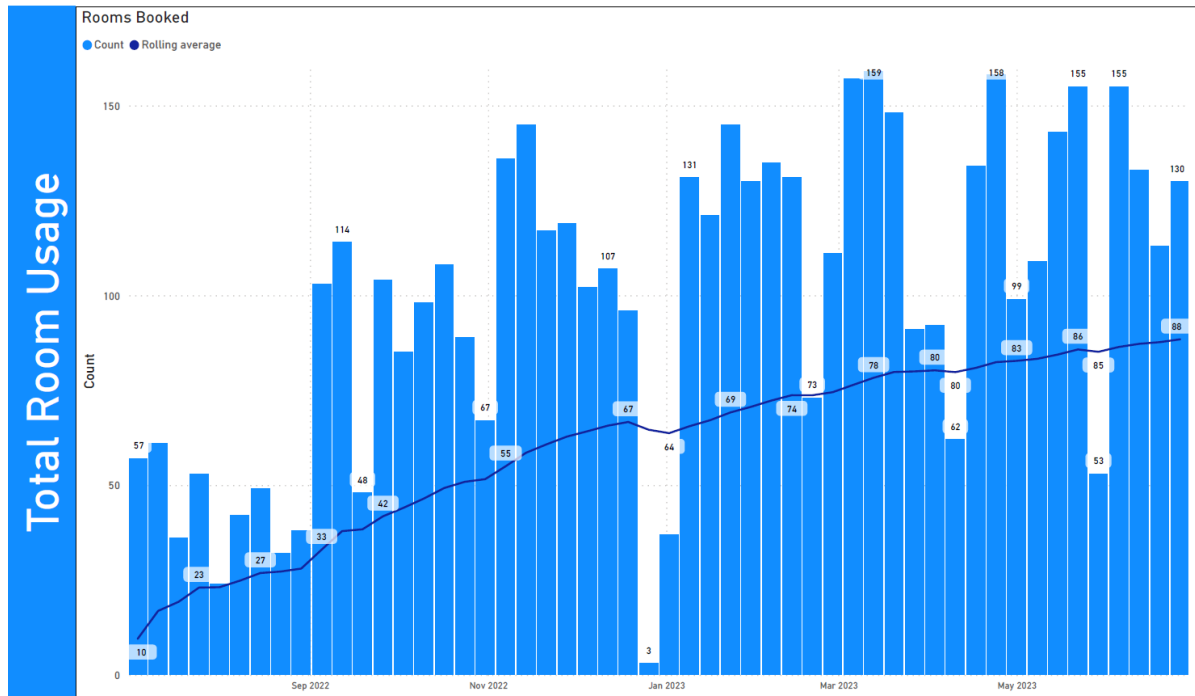
REPURPOSING OF COUNCIL BUILDINGS

If the proposal to permanently adopt hybrid working option for employees is approved this will allow the release of office space which has not been fully utilised during the period of the interim hybrid working trial. The previous 12 months has shown that the current hybrid working desk capacity in Canolfan Rheidol and Penmorfa is capable of accommodating demand in its current form, accepting however that more permanent arrangements will be put in place in both locations. Over the twelve month period of the trial desk usage peaked in early December and it March 2023 for rooms booked. It was observed that the average usage over the winter months was higher than during the warmer summer months but remained within maximum capacity limits.

Desks booked Jul 2022 – Jun 2023



Rooms booked Jul 2022 – Jun 2023



It is proposed that officers undertake a review of all Council office accommodation across its estate to identify potential for repurposing. The public engagement on future uses in Council offices resulted in several suggestions of possible usage including using building as facilities for the community, hospital or health care setting, spaces for businesses and residential accommodation.

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If not, please state why No. IIA will be completed should new Hybrid Policy be required

WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS:

Summary:
Long term:
Integration:
Collaboration:
Involvement:
Prevention: -

RECOMMENDATION (S):

- To recommend to Cabinet to adopt hybrid working as a permanent option for employees able to work as efficiently remotely as in the office.
- To develop a Hybrid Working Policy to replace the current Interim Hybrid Working Policy and bring back to Scrutiny following consultation

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION (S):

- To support the continuation of hybrid ways of working

Contact Name:

Geraint Edwards

Designation:

Corporate Lead Officer – People & Organisation

Date of Report:

28/06/2023

Acronyms: