



Classification	Item No.
Open	

Meeting:	CABINET
Meeting date:	14 October 2020
Title of report:	Agile Working Model Pilot in Bury Town Centre Sites
Report by:	Councillor Tahir Rafiq, Cabinet Member for Corporate Affairs & HR
Decision Type:	Key Decision
Ward(s) to which report relates	

Executive Summary:

Covid has changed the way in which many of our staff work and how some services are delivered. Underpinning all of this is a much greater reliance on our technology as, over recent months, new platforms have been implemented to ensure that the Council's core business could continue. There is a real opportunity to now build on this approach through new, agile ways of working for Council and CCG staff which drive the productivity of the workforce; further the ambition for carbon neutrality and will help manage the risk of the poor condition of much of the Council's office estate.

The Council and CCG already support agile working, however the extent to which this operates is inconsistent and there is currently limited ability to work in a blended way, i.e. bringing together those working at home and in the office. It is proposed that the current agile working offer is developed and enhanced under the banner "*Let's do it ... flexibly.*"

It is recognised that any change in the way that we work needs to be carefully managed and that there are complex issues across workforce, estate and technology to address. On that basis this report proposes a pilot agile model across a consolidated, improved property footprint in the town centre. The pilot sites are proposed to mitigate immediate risks around the condition of the Town Hall site in particular. The new way of working is

proposed as part of the emerging corporate transformation programme, with specific objectives to:

- improve staff wellbeing
- deliver cashable and non-cashable savings from estate costs
- contribute to wider strategy – this case digital and carbon neutrality strategies and
- enhance the Council's profile as a flexible and attractive employer.

Recommendation(s)

Cabinet are asked to:

- Note that the Town Hall will not be available for office use other than the ground and 50% of first floor
- Agree the principle of the agile working model, as a basis for consultation with the Trades Unions
- Agree the proposed pilot of an agile working model in the Town Hall and 3 Knowsley Place, at a maximum occupancy of 50%, to take place when infection levels allow a return to an office base
- Agree that a team is appointed as part of the capital programme to deliver the pilot and establish the longer term business case

Key considerations

Introduction

Bury Council and Clinical Commissioning Group have signalled an intent to a programme of transformation to embed the partnership; drive better outcomes through staff engagement and productivity and secure financial sustainability.

Both the Council and the CCG already provide the opportunity for staff to work in an agile way, however this has never been fully developed into an all-inclusive modern approach that enables different working arrangements to be brought together, in a consistent and blended way. At the same time it has to be recognised that the Council has significant costs just in operating and maintaining the buildings from which it operates. Additionally the state of repair of some of these buildings means that the council is targeting its resources at reactive maintenance rather than creating suitable, more efficient and effective, working environments that will not only improve staff wellbeing but will reduce the immediate and long term costs.

This report sets out the ambition and overarching proposed approach to an agile working model for all Council and CCG staff, subject to the support of the CCG Governing Body and the Council's Cabinet. It is proposed to trial this approach through a formal pilot of staff normally based within the Town Hall and at 3 Knowsley Place, when COVID-19 infection levels allow a planned return to an office base. Staff at other sites who wish to adopt the approach may apply to their manager to do so.

The principles of the model are proposed for agreement in this report, but individual components will be presented for individual decision as they are developed, for example development/disposal plans for individual buildings and the workforce policy framework.

Drivers for Change

A total of c1000 staff across the Council and CCG normally operate from 40 Council office buildings. Of these staff, the majority are required to work in a flexible and agile way either by attending meetings, working in integrated teams from partner sites or dealing with residents and customers. The opportunity to access systems remotely using 'mobile enabled' ICT also means that a significant number of staff choose to work at home or from other places of work on an ad hoc basis. Even though the way in which our staff work and our services are delivered has changed significantly over recent years, our buildings footprint has not, meaning that the Council is spending more of its resources on its buildings than it needs to.

Standard of the estate

As the Council operates from multiple buildings there is no consistency in the standard of the work environment. Over recent years, the estate has not been maintained and large numbers of buildings are considered to be in a state of disrepair. The standard of estate is currently represented as a major risk on the corporate risk register and was escalated to the corporate JCC following a joint inspection of the Town Hall led by the Trades Unions in 2019. A maintenance schedule has not been followed for the last c20 years

and it is therefore anticipated remedial works are required across all sites at significant cost.

The risk to the estate is evidenced by the fact that £1.1m was needed to address some key health and safety risks in the Town Hall. Following these works the site will still only be less than 50% usable due to damage and disrepair to the roof experienced recently, following which there was water ingress and internal damage. It is anticipated that this situation is replicated in many other buildings and that to bring the whole current estate up to standard would require a programme of works over many years and cost multi-million pounds. This is neither cost effective and does not represent value for money in the use of the Council's resources.

Under the leadership of the Executive Director Operations there is a programme of work underway to secure facilities management of the current estate. There is also now provides an opportunity to consolidate our buildings footprint, generating capital receipts from any buildings that are sold and also focus our resources in a much more effective way.

Employment offer

The Council and the CCG already provides the opportunity and has the relevant HR policies in place to support 3 main workstyles:

- Office based
- Home based
- Agile

These workstyles are still relevant to the current workforce however it is felt that a much more developed offer around the agile model is needed as this is where the greatest benefits can be achieved.

COVID adaptation

There is a current legal requirement to make all workplaces "COVID secure" with a rigorous risk based assessment approach. This requires significant planning and site adaptation, at a cost. Social distancing requirements will require an overall reduction in office space capacity to allow 2 metre distancing. This will be incorporated into any space planning/designs.

Neighbourhood and Locality Working

The Council benefitted from a Neighbourhood Asset Review from which a commitment was made to move to a neighbourhood model, with staff operating in localities in order to strengthen relationships with service users; understand the issues and opportunities within a place and to add value to the local community. In support of this approach the Radcliffe Strategic Regeneration framework includes a proposal for a public service hub, for example.

A Strategic Estates Group has been established between the Council and CCG to lead this approach, with public service partners working together to make full use of the public estate is a whole through shared use. Proposals in this paper will make a major

contribution to this strategy by mobilising staff across two key sites and showing wider leadership to the system in the principles of implementation.

Carbon Commitment

The Council has also committed to the target of carbon neutrality by 2030 and to be plastic-free by 2022. Relatedly, Bury 2030 commitments include both carbon neutrality and a digital-first approach.

All of these strategies may be furthered through a radical review of work place provision to facilitate “local” working with minimal staff travel and locations which add value to wider strategy and do not simply host a working day.

Working outside of the office environment - Experience and Evaluation to date

The Council has operated a flexible working framework for some years and around 65% of staff currently operate some formal flexibility in their hours of work.

Flexibility in place as well as time of work was implemented through necessity due to the COVID lockdown on 23 March 2020. Since this time the majority of office-based staff have been working remotely; the majority of offices have been closed and all internal and external meetings have been taking place digitally via Microsoft Teams, which is presently supporting c1000 remote log-ons every day. Throughout this period:

- The Council has maintained the majority of core services; progressed the strategic delivery plan and facilitated the emergency response. There have been very few reported issues from line managers about barriers to delivery
- Reported absence has reduced by around 50% between April and August 2020, compared with the same six month last year.

A survey of all staff working remotely was undertaken in summer 2020. The feedback reflected the fact that for many staff remote working during COVID had been difficult and disruptive as migration from the office was not planned and many staff were balancing work with domestic and caring responsibilities due to the emergency. Issues around social isolation were also reported, with many people missing interaction with their colleagues. Many staff perceived the potential benefits of working from home, however, including no longer commuting and having more scope to balance work and home demands.

Survey feedback signalled the following preferences from staff:

- 20% of staff would like to remain working largely at home
- 12% could not sustain home working and required an office space
- 68% staff would like to pursue a balance.

In the context of a potential future agile working model a further survey has been conducted of staff based in the Town Hall and 3 Knowsley Place, to establish precise demands for desk space if an option to work remotely is available. Feedback has currently confirmed a requirement for 103 fixed desk spaces and 443 flexible spaces,

which is proposed to be a proxy for wider workforce requirements and is in line with earlier survey findings.

Proposal – agile working

The extent of change that is potentially required across the estate, combined with the present opportunity of a vacant estate and a largely positive reported experience of remote working to date, presents an opportunity to consider an alternative approach to desk-based roles.

It is proposed that the Council and CCG explore moving towards an agile working model for office-based staff. Agile working is fulfilment of a role at a time and place that meets the needs of both employer and employee, without the constraints of fixed hours and place of work and facilitated by digital technologies. The proposed key tenants of a future approach are as follows:

- The Council office suite is reduced and re-provided on a across the borough on a “hub” basis, in accordance with the emerging neighbourhood model. Sites will be upgraded to a high quality to allow maximum shared usage and to drive productivity
- Office-based staff, where the role allows, will be given the **option** to work 20-80% of their working time from home (i.e. at least one day and a maximum of four days per week for full time employees). The remainder of time would be spent at one or more identified “hub” sites on a zoned access basis. Fixed desks will no longer be routinely provided for any member of staff, other than where health and safety or the requirements of the role require it
- The model is choice-led, subject to service need, therefore the extent of home working will be subject to individual discussions and office space will be made available for everyone who requires it. To facilitate planning, flexible working patterns agreed between line managers and staff will be binding in the short term, subject to review at each formal appraisal Staff may, of course, be reasonably required to report to an office location at any time
- There will be no council contribution towards costs for home workers, but equipment already taken home can continue to be used and future requirements will be considered as far as practicable
- Office space access provided for time spent on site will be on a shared basis across teams. On the basis of the returned survey data, this will be allocated to teams on a “**zoned**” basis; it will be for managers to allocate this space to their staff on a planned basis. Fixed desks for individuals will be by exception
- Time spent on site, for staff that do not require a fixed desk, will normally be for **collaboration** and administration (e.g. confidential waste disposal; ICT systems management, access to printing / plotters etc.) rather than desk-based work.

Expanded meeting space & dedicated collaboration zones / rooms will gradually be made available to facilitate this, underpinned with the IT infrastructure to support collaborative working

- Agile arrangements will be underpinned by a strengthened approach to **performance** management, together with a refresh of the flexible working framework
- The council's recently upgraded **digital** offer, including the roll out of Microsoft 365 in autumn, will be used to facilitate flexibility including:
 - Upgraded hardware for all staff to be used to maintain remote log ons and the facility to work across any site with wi fi
 - Access to digital storage and information rather than paper-based working
 - Every officer-led meeting will be arranged to run with a mixture of digitally and physically present staff. Committee meetings will be subject to separate plans
 - Desk phones are likely to be ultimately withdrawn and staff will use MS Teams and installed "soft phones" for telephone-based contact instead

To drive productivity, it is proposed that the Council will develop a consistent service offer that can be provided across all retained offices that will:

- Provide and embed a "corporate landlord" model to manage the health and safety and legislative requirements of occupying buildings;
- Provide flexible space through the allocation of "zoned" desks for teams to maximise the occupancy levels of the space;
- Incorporate meeting rooms and other agile space to support meetings including those that involve partners and/or residents;
- Incorporate effective ICT that enable effective collaboration and brings together our staff, partners and others in a blended way;
- Provides breakout space that can be used flexibly and remove an over reliance on meeting rooms;
- Provide reception areas and facilities where needed and where buildings are used for public facing services.

Delivery Programme

A programme of work will be required to deliver the pilot and potential longer term agile model. Key workstreams are described below, with additional critical advice required from finance and the Data Protection Officers throughout:

- Facilities management will be responsible for planning and managing site occupancy, health and safety compliance, facilities provision, maintenance and repair
- Asset management to determine an estate plan and financial forecast
- Human resources to ensure the staff policy framework reflects the new model and to lead on engagement with the Trades Unions. This work will include the agile

working policy itself; flexible working framework, Performance management and staff wellbeing

- Communication with staff, managers, customers and other stakeholders
- Digital including IT and telephony provision for agile workers and meeting spaces; an electronic system for desk and room bookings and a digital solution of data storage. Access to and quality of wi fi and broadband access will continuously improve as part of the internal improvement strategy and GM-wide 5G implementation by 2022.
- Underpinning all of these will be defined outcomes against which the success of the pilot can be measured.

Bury Town Centre Pilot

A fully agile model will be a significant change in ways of working which will require considerable investment in buildings, infrastructure and the policy framework. It will require a programme of change including work across Facilities Management; Asset Management; Finance; Human Resources/Employee Relations and ICT/digital. Given the extent of change involved it is important that the approach is fully tested and developed carefully. As such an initial pilot of agile working between home and normal office space only is proposed in Bury town centre only, including all staff who normally operate from the Town Hall and 3 Knowsley Place.

The pilot site has been chosen on the basis of:

- The poor state of repair of Bury Town Hall within which office space is now significantly reduced
- Staff feedback, described above, which reflects a largely positive experience of remote working
- Proven digital capabilities and robust plans for development of the Council's ICT and telephony platforms going forward

Staff at other sites who wish to trial the approach may apply to their manager to do so.

The trial will begin from the time when COVID infection levels allow a return to office base. It is anticipated this will be early in the New Year. During this time office capacity across the two sites will be re-provided at around 45% of former capacity. Access to this space will be on a planned, bookable basis as described in the earlier section of this report. Other buildings that it has been necessary to open during Covid, to enable services to be provided, will continue to operate in the current manner under the establish Risk Assessment process.

Impact

Proposed benefits

An agile model is best practice across the public and private sector. Anticipated benefits which have been proven elsewhere and begun to be apparent through evaluation in Bury during the COVID evacuation are as follows:

- Reduction in running costs to the Council. On the basis of revenue energy utility savings across council buildings circa £500 000 is being included within the 2020/21 budget; the feasibility of this savings target will be tested through the Bury town centre pilot
- Reduction in staff absence. The reduction in absence experienced over the last 6 months is forecast to continue
- Improvements in staff morale/engagement, through the facilitation of preferred working patterns and location. This will be measured through ongoing staff survey exercises
- Greater workforce productivity by allowing people to work at a time and place that suits them
- An improvement in workforce inclusion, which will directly support implementation of actions from the current independent equalities review
- A direct reduction in the carbon footprint of council operations which demonstrates leadership of the commitment to carbon neutrality in the borough by 2030

Risks

A reduction of staff working daily from town centres may also present some issues including:

- A reduction in spend in the local economy, for example lunch time food purchases and after work social meetings
- A reduction of footfall in Council town centre facilities such as leisure centres and library use
- Staff preference for or productivity within an office site

The potential risks to Council service demand will be considered in related planned reviews including those concerning leisure services and Bury market.

The impact of Council staff spend in the local economy will be considered in the wider economic strategy including an intended future procurement review to maximise local public service spend.

The impact on and preferences of staff will be tested and explored through the pilot.

Proposed Implementation actions

The return of staff to office space will be determined by the Council and CCG Gold Command with regards infection levels and public health advice.

On the basis of information available at the time of writing it is proposed that:

- The Town Hall is made available from end October 2020 to all staff who can evidence an inability to comply with the Government requirement for everyone who can work effectively from home to do so. Office space will, however, be provided in line with the principles proposed in this report
- Consultation with the Trades Unions commences on the agile working model proposed
- The basis of a pilot exercise in Bury Town Centre is developed, for implementation when infection allows. It is anticipated it will be feasible to pilot the model early in the New year

Delivery

Internal delivery leads have been identified for the workstreams described in this report, including the Corporate Landlord team; HR; Finance, Communications and ICT, co-ordinated by the Deputy Chief Executive (Corporate Core). Additional capacity will be required, however, in view of the scale and complexity of proposals and technical expertise required on latest market best practice.

It is proposed that delivery of this model is included in the 2020/21 capital programme and an external project team engaged to deliver alongside the internal team, on a business case basis, with expertise including:

- Programme management
- Workforce transformation
- Asset management

Recommendations

The Cabinet is asked to:

- Note that the Town Hall will not be available for office use other than the ground and 50% of first floor
- Agree the principle of the agile working model, as a basis for consultation with the Trades Unions
- Agree the proposed pilot of an agile working model in the Town Hall and 3 Knowsley Place, at a maximum occupancy of 50%, to take place when infection levels allow a return to an office base
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Equality Impact and considerations:

24. *Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:*

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;*
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.*

25. *The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.*

Assessment of Risk:

The following risks apply to the decision:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
<p>A reduction of staff working daily from town centres may also present some issues including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a reduction in spend in the local economy, for example lunch time food purchases and after work social meetings• a reduction of footfall in Council town centre facilities such as leisure centres and library use.	<p>The potential risks to Council service demand will be considered in related planned reviews including those concerning leisure services and Bury market.</p> <p>The impact of Council staff spend in the local economy will be considered in the wider economic strategy including an intended future procurement review to maximise local public service spend.</p>

Consultation:

Subject to the outcome of this initial pilot exercise which is based on individual preferences, a formal consultation with the Trades Unions will take place regarding any extension or confirmation of arrangements into a mandatory corporate model. All new and revised policies will be subject to individual consultation before any changes are made

Legal Implications:

The Council has obligations as an employer to ensure the health safety and wellbeing of its staff, as well as others accessing its premises. This report focuses on those issues

and makes proposals for a longer terms strategy to balance the interests of all whilst meeting those obligations. It is appropriate to consult with the union on the proposals as well as considering any contractual implication. These alongside the associated HR policies will require review and alignment.

Financial Implications:

The access to the capital funding needs to come forward as part of the capital programme work for 2021/22.

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Background papers:

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term	Meaning
3KP	3 Knowsley Place