



Classification	Item No.
Open	

Meeting:	CABINET
Meeting date:	26 May 2021
Title of report:	Agile Working Model roll out
Report by:	Councillor Tahir Rafiq, Cabinet Member for Corporate Affairs & HR
Decision Type:	Non key
Ward(s) to which report relates	

Executive Summary:

In October 2021 the Council’s Cabinet agreed to the principle of an agile working model for Bury town centre based office staff. The same decision was made for CCG staff by NHS Bury CCG Governing Body. The approval of the concept of agile working was given on the basis of:

- harnessing the technology and new ways of working which evolved during the pandemic response
- providing an opportunity to drive the productivity of the workforce; reduce costs; promote inclusion and further the ambition for carbon neutrality and
- helping manage the risk of the poor condition of much of the Council’s office estate, including the reduction of available office space in the Town Hall by c50%

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. This paper proposes the detail of the strategy which it is proposed to roll out, subject to a structured evaluation. Agile working will be open for all staff subject to the requirements of their role, but there is a particular imperative within the Bury town centre sites where estate maintenance and social distancing adaptations have required significant reductions in estate footprint.

Recommendation(s)

The Cabinet is asked to endorse the roll out and evaluation of the agile model for all staff, as described in this report, from Stage 4 of the national roadmap out of lockdown, which is currently assumed to be 21 June 2021

Key considerations

Introduction

In October 2020 Bury Council and Clinical Commissioning Group agreed to the concept of an agile working model. The decision was made on the basis of:

- a largely positive experience during enforced home working during lockdown
- the potential benefits of a substantive agile arrangement which research tells us may include a reduction in fixed costs; improved staff productivity and engagement and contribution to the carbon neutral agenda
- reductions in available space in the town centre as a result of disrepair within the Town Hall in particular

Since last autumn work has been undertaken on the proposed approach and the detail has been refined based on further learning. This report sets out the final detail of the model to be implemented, which is a phased approach as follows:

- an agile-first workstyle to be adopted for all staff, subject to the requirements of their role, from Stage 4 of the national roadmap out of lockdown which is currently assumed to be 21 June 2021. The model will be implemented using current buildings and technology and with limited further investment. The model proposed therefore is based on the removal of any social distancing requirements etc. Any change to the government roadmap may require an amendment to the detail of what is set-out below.
- structured evaluation at the end of the calendar year to inform the longer-term approach and a potential significant business case to reduce the buildings footprint and reinvest in digital infrastructure and shared facilities within the remaining estate.

Proposed model

It is proposed that the Council and CCG commit to the principle of an agile-first workstyle: *Let's do it! ... with agility.* The model involves all workers:

- completing routine **desk-based activity off site**, rather than at a prescribed work base. For example completing email management, report writing and MS Teams meetings from home. Office time should generally be used for collaboration and fixed requirements only
- arranging regular **"face time"** with colleagues, their line manager and customers at the most appropriate frequency and location for the work and personal preference. This may include access to Council meeting spaces; use of partner sites and non-confidential meetings in public space eg cafes.

- accessing **necessary facilities/equipment on site** at Council locations for the fulfilment of particular roles, eg specialist meeting space and equipment will be provided for access as and when required. Desks will be provided for people who have a genuine requirement for them
- taking a **paper-free, digital-first approach** to delivery with **minimal travel**, including conducting all internal, informal meetings over MS Teams in order that staff can join from a range of locations. Council committee meetings and formal meetings eg HR hearings will normally be held face to face.

Over time, all office space will be vacated and either released for savings; re-provided as either shared space or allocated for specific service requirements. The first buildings to be re-provided will be office space within Bury Town Hall and 3 Knowsley Place.

The guiding principle of the agile working strategy is that “**work is something you do, not somewhere you go**”. In support of this ethos the further specific expectations apply:

- All office-based staff will be encouraged to become agile workers on the basis it is mutually beneficial for the service and individual. **Agile working will only be applied by staff agreement**, however, so staff who are unable or unwilling to work with agility will be provided with office space to work from. Agile working may be revoked by either side if it is proven not to be effective
- The model will **evolve** over time and with investment, based on evaluation and business case-based investment. This will also see further considerations in relation to agility in terms of when and how colleagues work as well as where. Specifically, the model for June will be designed around the best of the home working experience during the emergency but is a different construct as it includes face to face contact. Over time, the model rolled out in June will be expanded and invested in to improve communications and establish hybrid working
- The aim is to operate within a **high trust / high accountability** environment where:
 - staff have greater freedom to deliver when and where suits them
 - work is measured by outcomes not attendance
 - these impacts are demonstrated through more routine performance reviews
 - Agile workers are subject to the **same rules**, procedures and expected standard of conduct and performance as when they were working in their former, fixed workplace. Agile workers must remain contactable at all times
- The agile working model will be subject to regular, structured **review**. The first formal review will take place in December 2021

Staff whose role is **location dependant will continue to operate from their normal work place**. Equivalent investments will however be made in facilities for non-office based workers, as part of this strategy

Work progressed since October 2020

In October 2020 a report was approved by the Council’s Cabinet and CCG Governing Body which described an indicative approach and model for agile working. At that time it was proposed that all office-based workers in Bury town centre should be required to work 20-80% of their time on an agile basis, with remaining time spent on site at shared

desk and meeting space. The original terms have now been revised, as described above, based on further work and staff feedback which has included:

- Managers have been invited to identify members of their team who require access to a desk once return to work is possible. Around one third of staff have requested access to a desk which can be accommodated, subject to ongoing review
- A repeat of the survey of all staff working remotely has been undertaken. Feedback from staff is that the majority continue to experience the personal benefits of remote working and the vast majority are supportive of an agile approach in future
- the majority of office-based staff have been migrated to full M365 functionality.
- A fundamental investment case for a Corporate Landlord model is under development, to provide facilities management for all council buildings. The proposal will be brought forward separately when available
- Covid secure arrangements have been put in place across buildings that have remained operational
- Improvements have taken place in the Town Hall to establish improved office conditions aligned to agile working
- A robust performance management model has been established through the joint corporate plan and individual departmental plans, which set out delivery priorities and a process of performance reporting, to support outcomes-based management
- A staff wellbeing model has been established, aligned to the national “5 ways to wellbeing” theory, to support people who are working remotely. The model has been evaluated and found to be a benefit by the majority of respondents

In addition, the Council engaged a transformation partner, Ameo, in December 2020. In recognition of the potentially significant contribution to the overall transformation programme which agile could make, Ameo were asked to complete a “deep dive” into the agile strategy and enablers of success. The full deliverable is appended for completeness. Key messages are as follows:

- The outline strategy was endorsed as sector best practice
- The scope for potential savings from asset disposal was also validated, including a potential £5m of one-off capital receipts identified from the disposal of unused buildings
- The requirement for clear terms and expectation in an underpinning policy was reiterated. Within this, the definition of a clear, common “workstyle” was recommended, rather than the potential myriad of arrangements based on personal preferences which the initial report proposed

Proposed approach

It is proposed that the agile model will be rolled out as follows. Contractual terms remain unchanged:

- All office-based staff will be required to develop a baseline (pre Covid) and proposed (post Covid) detailed workstyle profile with their line manager, as part of their Performance and development Plan for 2021/22
- As a result of the workstyle assessment:
 - If an individual is willing to proceed as an agile worker (and this can be accommodated by the nature of their role):
 - the home/designated base must be risk assessed and agreed with their line manager
 - information governance records must be updated to record the information assets and processing they are responsible for and how these will be kept secure
 - performance objectives for the year should be set and weekly reviews begin
 - working hours and patterns must be agreed and communicated across the team and service users.

If the individual wishes to remain a non-agile worker an application must be made for office-based desk space.

- A structured evaluation of both the benefits and risks experienced from this approach will be undertaken, as defined in the “evaluation” section of this report.

During 2022, subject to a successful pilot, the model will be matured to include, for example:

- Hybrid meeting infrastructure to enable every meeting to host a mixture of digital and on site participants through investment in audio and visual equipment (this will be supported by development and guidance for staff)
- Appropriate process to formalise contract changes for staff to reflect an agile work base
- Potential extensive investment in digital capabilities to maximise the benefits of M365, funded through investment from potential large-scale estate disposals
- Consideration of options related to the wider aspects of agile working beyond location (where). For example hours of work (when) and role design and the more flexible deployment of resources to meet need (how). – These strands of work will offer particular potential benefits to staff who are not able to work away from a fixed location because of the nature of their role.

At this stage arrangements extend to volunteer Council and CCG staff only. The proposed exclusions are:

- Members of the Council. Members will be asked to support the agile model by maintaining MS Teams as the primary source of internal communication. A separate decision will be taken on meeting arrangements and site availability
- Staff who are not able/or willing to work with agility. These individuals have been identified and will be offered a desk at a council site. Desk space cannot be guaranteed at the site from which staff have historically operated however as, depending on the numbers of people it is necessary to accommodate, it may be necessary to plan occupancy across the whole office estate. In doing so we will,

however, be mindful of staff's individual circumstances and the needs of disabled colleagues.

Preparations Underway

Delivery of the model will require the following activities to be complete by June 2021

Customer

Lead: Head Communications & Engagement

Individual departments will be responsible for communicating the changes in work place and contact arrangements with partners and service users.

The town centre agile strategy also presents an opportunity to streamline customer contact to deliver efficiencies and maintain the progress made to on-line communications. This will be achieved by:

- maintaining virtual reception and on line communication with service users as far as possible. Services will be required to maintain the first-level contact arrangements made during the pandemic as far as practicable
- A review of all reception points in the Town Hall and 3KP and consolidation into a single face to face access point which will be utilised by all affected services

Digital

Lead: Joint CIO

The agile working model is hugely digitally dependent. It is proposed that initial arrangements are enabled through use of M365 capabilities rolled out in the last 12 months, without any immediate additional investment. Infrastructure will be developed subject to evaluation outcomes and associated business cases. The digital workstream will involve:

- Every agile worker to be provided with at least one device through which they are contactable and have access to all council systems and information required for their role
- the complete roll out of M365 to all users to be complete by end June 2021, including skills development
- building wi fi to support a fully digital environment

Corporate Landlord

Lead: Executive Director Operations

- A fundamental investment case for a Corporate Landlord model is under development, to provide facilities management for all council buildings. The proposal will be brought forward separately when available
- Desk requirements for staff who cannot or will not work with agility have been determined and arrangements will be in place to coordinate access
- Meeting spaces will be available on the booking system to enable managers to plan and co-ordinate use
- All town centre office spaces will be vacated and cleaned, ready to be returned to use as shared spaces. Shared storage space for retained data and equipment will be provided

Human Resources

Lead: Director People & Inclusion

An agile working policy for both the Council and the CCG is under development in consultation with the Trades Unions and will be brought forward for approval. The policy sets out the terms and responsibilities of both sides in working with agility including managing costs, performance, health and safety and wellbeing.

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.

Alongside the above there will also be a need to give consideration to any work needed to support people managers in managing remotely (i.e. management by outcomes as opposed to presence or outputs). Focused work on how culture and engagement continue to be prioritised as we move to a more substantive agile model will also be progressed, aligned to the wider programme of 'Let's Do It' Organisational Development activity.

Wider dependencies

The agile strategy will be enabled and informed by the wider transformation programme. Particular initiatives include:

- the business support review, as part of the Council's budget options for 2021/22. This review will seek to standardise administration processes and templates for communication, which will support consistency within a more dispersed workforce. It is also anticipated that an agile delivery model provides scope for efficiencies through reduced demands to manage meeting spaces and visitors and through pursuing a paperless model.
- The Information Governance strategy, for which the following core work-streams have been identified:
 - Corporate Information Governance Structure
 - Policies, Procedures and Process
 - Records Management, Retention and Destruction
 - Training and Communication
 - Monitoring, Compliance and Review

Agile Working - Evaluation

The model will be subject to structured evaluation at months 3 and 6. Proposed benefits and risks which will be evidenced and assessed are those that were agreed in October 2020 as follows:

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 (ie revenue energy utility costs) to the Council.
- 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 the joint inclusion strategy
- A direct reduction in the carbon footprint of council operations which demonstrates leadership of the commitment to carbon neutrality in the borough by 2030
- The benefits for individuals (increased flexibility, reduced travel costs etc.) will also support the attraction and retention of talent into the Bury workforce.

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
- A reduced ability for new or more junior colleagues to learn and develop through physical colocation and interaction
- Challenges for staff who are disabled or do not have a home environment conducive to work
- The perception of a two-tier workforce: Those who can and those who cannot work from home.

The evaluation exercise will be co-ordinated by the Director of People and inclusion.

Recommendations

The Cabinet is asked to endorse the roll out and evaluation of the agile model for all staff, as described in this report, from Stage 4 of the national roadmap out of lockdown, which is currently assumed to be 21 June 2021

Community impact / Contribution to the Bury 2030 Strategy

The agile working strategy embraces the Let's do it! Principles by:

- Local – enabling staff to work at locations and within the communities that suit service users
- Enterprise – working when and where people are most effective
- Together – harnessing collaboration through digital technologies and management of working patterns across teams and with regards service user needs and
- Strengths-base by flexing locations according to individual preference.

Agile working almost makes a direct contribution to decarbonising the Council's footprint and achieving the target of carbon neutrality by 2038.

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.*

EIA Attached

Assessment of Risk:

The following risks apply to the decision:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
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<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>
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Consultation:

These proposals have been subject to stakeholders including:

- the Trades Unions
- staff, who have been surveyed about the proposals through a wellbeing and feedback model via MS Teams and the Change Agent network
- senior managers who have been consulted through the Senior Leaders' and Senior Manager's Fora

Legal Implications:

The proposed trial of agile working arrangements will not require at this point any contractual changes to contracts of employment. Once the voluntary pilot has been considered the outcomes will be reviewed and at that point any formal changes will be considered any changes proposed will be made in line with legislative and consultation requirements . The report sets out how reasonable adjustments for staff will be made. In line with our Equality Act duties the full equalities Impact Assessment is appended to this report.

Financial Implications:

The financial consequences are expected to be negligible as staff have been working in this way during the pandemic . However, any further costs will be captured and reported as part of the evaluation process at the end of the calendar year. This evaluation will also inform the longer-term approach and a potential business case to reduce the

buildings footprint and reinvest in digital infrastructure and shared facilities within the remaining estate.

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Background papers:

Report to Council Cabinet 15 October 2020

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

Term	Meaning
3KP	3 Knowsley Place

Appendices (available for inspection on request)

Ameo slides

EIA