

Agile Working Policy

January 2024

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1. Introduction and Aims

- 1.1 The Covid Pandemic accelerated the speed at which hybrid working patterns were adopted across all sectors, facilitated through the adoption of new technology by both the workforce and those who the Council serves. In recognition of this, the Council adopted an Agile Working Policy in June 2021 which has worked well for the last three years. This policy updates that document and aims to help create the conditions for a high performing, engaged and motivated workforce which is effectively supported and enabled to drive delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan and the LET'S Do It Strategy
- 1.2 The development of this policy document has been informed by:
1. Feedback from staff through Pulse Surveys, a range of engagement sessions and via the Trade Unions
 2. Feedback from residents and service users
 3. A review of approaches taken elsewhere both within and beyond the Local Government sector
 4. Research and best practice on the changing world of work.
- 1.2 This updated policy recognises that:
- The nature of work has been changed by the Pandemic and, in order to attract, retain and engage an effective workforce, elements of agility are critical. – **Let's proactively find ways to innovate and improve things**
 - Agile working supports inclusion and wellbeing and is an enabler to cost savings through supporting a reduction in the corporate estate and carbon reduction through estate rationalisation and reducing business travel. – **Let's make and explain decisions, keeping Bury residents at the heart of everything I do**
 - Regular time together, in person, is essential to the development and maintenance of an engaged and high-performing organisation, supporting colleagues to build relationships and to learn and grow. – **Let's be a respectful and positive member of the team**
 - As a local authority, engagement with and within the communities we serve is crucial. – **Let's spend time connecting with our communities, understanding their challenges and preferences**
 - To make agile working effective the Council will need to continue to embrace technological developments and develop and shape our estate to align with new ways of working. – **Let's proactively find ways to innovate and improve things**

- The balance of time spent in different locations may vary because of the nature of roles and may also be influenced by personal circumstances and choice: Managers should be empowered to manage based on the needs of their service, within a clear and transparent framework. – **Let's actively work with others to shape the way we do things**
- Due to their nature, many roles in the Council can not work across different locations. There are, however, other ways that flexibility and agility can and will be supported in these roles. – **Let's work through challenges when they arise, and focus on finding solutions**
- Time together, in person, is particularly crucial for the induction of new starters and to support learning and development. – **Let's build trusted relationships by asking questions, listening and responding.**

1.3 This policy complements the Council's existing flexible working options, supporting employees' wellbeing through enabling a more flexible integration of their work and home lives, it also supports the Council's commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy sets out a fair and consistent approach for considering and, where appropriate, supporting agile working for all staff who wish to participate and are employed directly by the Council, including part time and temporary workers.
- 2.2 Within some services, Council staff will work alongside staff from other organisations. Staff external to the Council will need to refer to their own organisational policies regarding flexible working.

3. Principles

- 3.1 The guiding principle of our approach to agile working is that **'work is something you do, not somewhere you go'**.
- 3.2 No contractual places of work will change as a result of this policy.
- 3.3 All staff are encouraged to work with agility on the basis it is mutually beneficial for both the service and the individual. However, agile working is only applied by agreement, and so any staff who are unable or unwilling to work with agility will be provided with appropriate space to work from. Agile working may be revoked by either side if it is proven not to be effective or able to meet reasonable service requirements or individuals' needs.
- 3.4 For some staff, the nature of their role will directly dictate the location which they work in. (*Location dependant roles*). For these staff, managers are

encouraged to explore other elements of agility and flexibility with reference to the Council's Flexible Working Policy.

- 3.5 Other staff will generally fall into two groups and the Agile Working Policy is predominantly focused on these colleagues:
- Staff for whom the majority of their work is desk-based and have more flexibility to work between home, the office and other sites. (*Desk-based role*).
 - Staff for whom their role will involve spending much of their time with and within Bury communities and mixing this with time working in the office and from home. (*Community focused roles*).
- 3.6 For those working in community focused and desk-based roles the balance of time spent in different locations will vary dependant on the nature of the role, the specific work commitments in any given week, and personal circumstances. All staff in these roles should, however, normally be spending at least two days of their working week (pro-rata) together with colleagues in an office or community setting. – More frequent office attendance may well be required for some roles dependant on the nature of the work undertaken and service delivery and personal and team development needs.
- 3.7 Where staff work will differ across teams with some spending higher proportions of time at home and others spending more time in the office. Teams should have discussions about what is right for them and liaise with others sharing the same office space. Some teams may agree set 'office days' whereas others may need more fluidity. Staff will have input into discussions, however the split of time will ultimately be determined by service need, as agreed by Service Managers, and informed by desk capacity.
- 3.8 To support development, engagement and learning team meetings, one-to-ones, employee reviews and learning and development sessions should ordinarily take place in person wherever possible.
- 3.8 New staff or those who need extra support may spend more time in an office setting so they are surrounded by colleagues to learn from. Consideration also needs to be given to ensuring enough colleagues are in the office to facilitate this.
- 3.9 To maximise the efficiency of the Council's operational estate staff will not ordinarily have access to a fixed desk. (Although fixed desks will be provided where necessary to support an agreed workplace adjustment). Desks will normally be allocated to Services on a 1:2 desk to person ratio. – To ensure suitable office space to enable teams to regularly come together during the working week, managers will need to work collaboratively to plan how the available space will be used.
- 3.10 Agile working requires the ongoing commitment of all employees to maintain a high trust / high accountability environment where:
- Staff have greater freedom to deliver.

- Work is measured by outcomes not attendance.
 - These impacts are demonstrated through more routine performance reviews.
- 3.11 Agile workers are subject to the same rules, policies, procedures and expected standards of conduct, attendance and performance irrespective of where they are located. Agile workers must remain contactable at all times during their agreed working hours.
- 3.12 Agile working should not create financial hardship for employees and any additional costs experienced, e.g. utilities and broadband, should ordinarily be mitigated by savings which may otherwise be incurred in attending a fixed workplace each day, e.g. travel, workplace parking and workwear. Normal travel costs in relation to attending the workplace (such as petrol and parking) are a regular part of working life and should not act as a barrier to attending the workplace. - Support, where possible, is provided for any individual for whom financial issues are a barrier to agile working. HR coordinate this process with line managers via our financial wellbeing offer and separate guidance relating to this is available. Flexible discounted parking is also available for staff, which can be purchased from two days a week upwards.
- 3.13 Staff are expected to operate in accordance with this policy in a fair manner and not abuse or fail to comply with its terms. Abuse of this policy may result in the withdrawal of agile working or action under other associated policies such as disciplinary.

4. Approach and guidance

4.1 Workstyle

Every employee should determine their workstyle (i.e. location-dependant, desk based or community focused and the practical implications of this for their way of working) in consultation with their line manager. This should be considered by all staff, at least annually, as part of the Employee Review process, and discussed on an ongoing basis through one-to-ones.

Workstyle discussions will be led by service needs, with further consideration given to:

- Mitigating costs and maximising convenience for both sides
- Taking a digital-first approach
- Organising and clustering time into activities, to minimise travel and inefficiency
- Ensuring the working practices are mindful of the wellbeing and development of the individual and their wider team
- Building on previous experience of agile working, to ensure positive aspects are maintained and concerns mitigated
- Ensuring privacy and confidentiality at all times.

4.2 Work Bases

On-site Council facilities

Desk space will be made available for employees whenever required, usually based on a 1:2 desk to employee ratio, in Service Zones which should be used flexibly. – All staff should be welcoming to other colleagues who need to ‘touch down’ within their Service Zone whenever possible.

The Council will make available specialist facilities/equipment to be accessed by employees as and when required for their work, e.g., confidential meeting space, secure storage, specialist (e.g. large/non-transportable) equipment and on premises ICT systems. Services are required to self-organise access to these facilities, which may require booking them.

Personal Base

When working from home staff should identify an environment which has suitable space, heat and light and where the employee is fully contactable and able to access Council systems and communication. The location must be risk assessed by the employee using the agreed Health and Safety risk assessment .

The Council is responsible for ensuring the home/alternative base is a safe and proper working environment on the basis that it remains liable for any accidents or incidents which occur during working time. As such, the Council has in-place safe and appropriate systems for homeworking including:

- Practical assistance in setting up and risk assessing home working arrangements.
- The implementation of reasonable adjustments for disabled workers working at home.

Staff are responsible for:

- Arranging, as far as reasonable, the alternative home base.
- Completing a risk assessment for their workspace and addressing, with their line manager, any issues identified.
- Ensuring digital connectivity at all times, as far as is within their control.
- Notifying their home insurance provider, mortgage provider or Landlord as appropriate.

Should it not be possible for an individual worker to provide or maintain a safe, secure place of work they will need to work from the office.

If circumstances arise where an employee temporarily cannot work remotely, such as in the event of a system/Wi-Fi issue or they no longer have an appropriate environment to work, staff will be expected to travel into the workplace to undertake their duties.

Working in the community and on the move

In addition to home working and Council workspaces staff may also choose to work in other spaces such as partner buildings, cafes or public spaces such

as libraries. Staff may use these spaces for meetings and to work using portable technology but on the basis that:

- Locations are recorded in work diaries and the individual is contactable at all times during their agreed working hours.
- Confidentiality is maintained and private or sensitive information is not discussed in meetings or visible on screens (please refer to the Council's data protection policies).

4.3 Non-agile workers

All staff who require a council-provided desk space for their whole working time are able to access this. In the majority of cases this will be through the flexible use of their Service Zones and not a fixed desk. Staff requiring access to a Council office base each day will include those who:

- Require particular adaptations on the grounds of disability and wish to work from the office.
- Do not have a safe or healthy environment to work from at home.
- Do not have the facilities to work effectively from home.
- Work in a team where it is essential that staff sit near one-another and cannot perform their duties by working remotely.
- Require particular adaptations on the grounds of disability and wish to work from the office. (This may require access to a fixed desk).

Staff must leave desk spaces clean and tidy when they vacate them, on the basis that they are unlikely to be seated at the same desk every day.

4.4 Health and safety

Staff have a responsibility to take reasonable care of their own health and safety, wherever they are based. Staff are required to:

- Ensure all working arrangements and workspaces have been risk assessed.
- Notify the council of any accidents or incidents as required under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrence Regulations (RIDDOR) 2013, via the on-line system which can be found here

Particular regulations to consider in completing health and safety assessments include:

- Display screen equipment
- Heating, lighting and ventilation;
- Workplace ergonomics;
- Electrics, cabling and trip hazards;
- Working time;
- Lifting and carrying equipment;
- Security, including data security;
- Safety of third parties, including family members;
- Lone working.

The [Health and Safety pages on the intranet](#) should be used by employees to

access further advice on the implications of working from home.

4.5 Inclusion

Any reasonable adjustments will be supported and implemented – this may need to be both in the home and office.

Consideration should be given to employees' personal circumstances and characteristics when arranging meetings and agreeing working patterns. This is to support, as far as is reasonable, caring responsibilities, religious commitments and disabilities, etc.

4.6 Equipment

Staff will be provided with the equipment they require to work in an agile way – for example:

- A device, normally a laptop, which allows access to all council systems and information.
- Where required, a council mobile or soft telephone.
- Access to equipment within a Council building as necessary e.g. printers, postage, plotters and secure storage and disposal provision. Staff are encouraged to reduce reliance upon stationery, for example by using Microsoft OneNote rather than writing pads.

Council-owned equipment remains the property and liability of Bury Council, subject to normal and proper use. Staff are responsible for:

- Keeping equipment in good order, wear and tear accepted, and resolving any malfunctions or deficiencies.
- Taking all reasonable steps for security.

On termination of employment the Council has the right to recover all Council equipment and intellectual property including hard and software and information. Without prejudice to the Council's legal rights, entry to home bases to recover property is by mutual agreement.

4.7 Information governance

Staff are reminded to operate high standards of information governance to protect confidential information belonging to the Council, partner organisations, other work colleagues, clients, customers, service users, suppliers and contractors etc. Practical requirements to support this include:

- Considering the data protection risks of working in an agile way. This should highlight any risks to manage and actions to mitigate these.
- Completing the GDPR e-learning module (Only those who have completed this module within the last twelve months will be permitted to access the Council's Agile Working arrangements and completion every twelve months will be a requirement of ongoing access to agile working)
- Ensuring that confidential conversations are conducted out of ear shot of other people.

- Ensuring that computer screens are locked when unattended.
- Limiting the amount of hard copy information and locking away confidential records when not in use and ensuring these are never accessible to other householders.
- Disposal of all confidential waste in the bins provided on council sites only and never through domestic waste.
- Not sending work related information to personal devices e.g. phones or personal email addresses.

To assist in the practical discharge of these requirements it is assumed that agile workers will operate on a paperless basis as far as possible. Home printers will not be provided and staff should access office sites for either printing or disposal requirements by exception.

Staff must report any actual or potential breach of security, confidentiality or data to their line manager immediately. Serious data breaches and/or wilful neglect of information governance may be treated as misconduct under the council's disciplinary policy.

Staff who are unsure about any aspect of security, confidentiality or data protection, should seek advice from their line manager.

4.8 Working time and ability to be contacted

All employees must be fully available for work during the hours of work agreed with their manager. Agile workers must be contactable at all working times during these hours and the location of work stipulated in their diary, which must be open to their line manager. Staff must be available to be recalled to an office site if required by their manager, with 24 hours' notice (or more swiftly for any staff formally working on an 'on call' basis).

Agile workers must ensure that they take adequate rest breaks of at least 20 minutes for time worked over 6 hours during each working day and must not work over the 48 hours a week limit.

Agile workers must comply with Bury Council's sickness absence policy and ensure they report their sickness to their line manager when they are sick and unable to work.

Arrangements must be in place to cover any domestic or caring arrangements when working from home. Home working is not a substitute for caring responsibilities. The Council's flexible working framework should be used for temporary or permanent applications for different working patterns which allow carers or parents to manage the demands of these responsibilities, if helpful or necessary.

Agile workers continue to be managed within the relevant corporate policy framework including the flexi time scheme.

All agile workers are still expected to work their normal number of working hours. Employees working from home are encouraged to work within the core

hours of business for their service, but where appropriate and in-line with business needs employees may work at other times, as agreed with their line manager.

4.9 Performance management

Individual performance management arrangements will vary, based on the needs of the service, the nature of an individual's role and priorities. Some employees, including for example apprentices, may require greater levels of support and face-to-face time with their manager.

All employees should be supported through regular (at least monthly) one-to-one meetings and an annual employee review held in person.

If, at any point, the performance of an employee is suffering significantly because of agile working then this arrangement may be amended or withdrawn.

Employees must complete all mandatory training prior to being supported to work with agility.

4.10 Wellbeing

The Council values the wellbeing of all staff. Agile working is an opportunity to strengthen personal wellbeing by taking account of individual preferences and demands in the patterns and locations of work.

Long periods away from a work base can be isolating for some staff and unhelpful to collaboration. Ordinarily spending at least two days of the working week (pro-rata) together with colleagues in an office or community setting will help to mitigate this.

Employees can also obtain support for their physical and mental wellbeing via the Council's workplace wellbeing support offer, including the EAP provision.

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Council