

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

9 July 2021

* Councillor Joss Bigmore (Chairman)
* Councillor Jan Harwood (Vice-Chairman)
* Councillor Paul Spooner

*Present

EM1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies for absence.

EM2 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT - DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

EM3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2021 were confirmed as a correct record. The chairman signed the minutes.

EM4 ADOPTION OF AGILE WORKING POLICY

The Committee considered a report on the proposed introduction of an Agile Working Policy for office-based staff. Councillors noted that the current pandemic had resulted in a requirement for office-based staff to work from home if possible and this situation was ongoing with a partial return to the office environment. In preparation for the anticipated lifting of Covid-19 restrictions on 19 July 2021, the Council needed to confirm to the office-based workforce how we planned to work in the future, and the Agile Working Policy, which was appended to the report, provided this guidance.

The Committee acknowledged that office accommodation requirements could be reduced significantly through remote working creating an opportunity to generate rental income. Prior to the pandemic, the Council's aim was to achieve a desk ratio of 1.5 employees: 1 desk; however, it was now likely that a ratio of 2:1 was achievable. A review of the need for office accommodation at Millmead was a key part of the operational asset review, which formed part of the Council's savings strategy. There was a target to achieve £1.5million savings from this workstream of which the Millmead site was expected to contribute significantly towards the achievement of that target. In addition, the Millmead offices were being included in the Guildford Economic Regeneration (GER) Project as a potential site for the delivery of housing. To enable the Council to realise the benefits of the GER Project, it would be necessary to find alternative office accommodation. The cost of providing alternative office accommodation would be lower if the 2:1 desk ratio outlined above could be implemented.

The Committee noted that homeworking arrangements for non-operational staff introduced last year in response to the pandemic had been very successful despite the rapid transition for most staff from office to home based working. These staff were able to access the systems in the same way as they do whilst at their desk as long as they have a home broadband connection. Home workspaces were the responsibility of the employee and no furniture or equipment was provided other than the laptops with built in soft phones, some mobile phones and small items such as laptop risers. An allowance of up to £100 could be claimed towards the employee's home office set up as a one-off payment.

As the current pandemic restrictions come to an end, it was intended to offer most office-based employees the option of working up to half of the working week from home or another remote location. This hybrid office and home-working arrangement would ensure team integration and enable the management and development of staff, whilst not returning to the pre-Covid-19 office attendance levels. Unison and staff had been consulted with widely and were supportive of an approach which combined remote and office-based working.

The line manager, in conjunction with the Service Leader, would determine the category of each job role within their team depending on the business needs and individual service requirements. Working patterns would then be agreed and approved by the Director to ensure fairness and consistency of approach across the Council. Where service requirements changed, possibly at short notice, staff may be required to increase their office attendance either on a temporary or permanent basis.

In considering the proposals, the Committee felt that it might be appropriate in individual cases, and on an exceptional basis, for the Council to consider making a contribution towards the provision of a broadband connection at an employee's home, where broadband provision was inadequate for homeworking.

Accordingly, the Committee

RESOLVED: That the Agile Working Policy, attached as Appendix 1 to the report submitted to the Committee, be approved, subject to the addition of the following at the end of paragraph 10.2 of the Policy:

“In exceptional circumstances, we may consider making a contribution towards the cost of broadband provision at an employee's home where broadband provision is inadequate for homeworking.”

Reason:

To enable the Council to implement new working practices for staff following the working from home arrangements that resulted from the Government advice during the pandemic which are due to end later this month.

The meeting finished at 9.57 am

Signed

Chairman

Date