Employment Committee Report

Report of Managing Director (Head of Paid Service)

Author: Francesca Smith, Lead Specialist HR

Tel: 01483 444014

Email: francesca.smith@guildford.gov.uk

Lead Councillor responsible: Joss Bigmore

Tel: 07974 979369

Email: joss.bigmore@guildford.gov.uk

Date: 9 July 2021

Implementation of Agile Working Policy

Recommendation to Employment Committee

That the Agile Working Policy, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, be approved.

Reason for Recommendation:
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.

1.   Purpose of Report

1.1   It is the responsibility of the Employment Committee to approve the Council's human resources policies.

1.2   The current pandemic resulted in a requirement for our office-based staff to work from home if possible and this situation is ongoing with a partial return to the office environment. The progress of the pandemic is uncertain; however, the Government's Road Map sets out the date for the ending of Covid-19 restrictions as 19 July 2021. In preparation for this we need to confirm to our office-based workforce how we plan to work in the future and the Agile Working Policy, attached as Appendix 1, provides this guidance.

2.   Strategic Priorities

2.1   The Council needs to demonstrate that it is using innovation, technology, and new ways of working to improve value for money and efficiency in Council service

2.2   Office accommodation requirements can be significantly reduced through remote working creating an opportunity to generate rental income. Prior to the pandemic our aim was to achieve a desk ratio of 1.5 employees: 1 desk; however, it is now likely that a ratio of 2:1 is achievable. A review of the need for office accommodation at Millmead is a key part of the operational asset review which forms part of the Council's savings strategy. There is a target to achieve £1.5million savings from this

workstream of which the Millmead site is expected to contribute significantly towards the achievement of that savings target. In addition, the Millmead offices are 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 we will need to find alternative office accommodation. The cost of providing alternative office accommodation will be lower if we are able to implement the 2:1 desk ratio outlined above.

3.   Background

3.1   Prior to the current pandemic there were a number of our staff working from home on an informal basis through agreement with their managers, and a few members of staff with an agreed contractual arrangement of working part of their weekly working hours from home.   No staff were fully home-based workers and all of the partial homeworking arrangements in place had been requested by the employee as their preference. These arrangements had been agreed with their line managers and had generally been accommodated for reasons such as long commuting distances and childcare/eldercare arrangements.

3.2   The homeworking arrangements for non-operational staff introduced last year in response to the pandemic have been very successful despite the rapid transition for most staff from office to home based working. These staff are able to access the systems in the same way as they do at their desk as long as they have a home broadband connection. Home workspaces are the responsibility of the employee and no furniture or equipment is 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 can be claimed towards the employee's home office set up as a one-off payment. The line manager requires the employee to complete an on-line homeworking health and safety module which provides a self-assessment of the suitability of the workspace set up.

3.3   As the current pandemic restrictions come to an end, we intend to offer most of our 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 ensures team integration and enables the management and development of staff, whilst not returning to the pre-Covid-19 office attendance levels. Unison and staff have been consulted with widely and are supportive of an approach which combines remote and office-based working. working.   Whilst the Policy clearly benefits the workforce, the implementation of the Agile Working Policy will also support the operational asset review which forms part of the Council's savings strategy.

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

4. Equality and Diversity Implications

4.1 The Council's duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 is to have due regard to the matters set out in relation to equalities when considering and making decisions. There are no direct equality impacts associated with agreeing the Agile Working Policy; however, the impact and application of the Policy will require monitoring.   There is an unequal gender balance in the non office-based employees who are predominantly males engaged in Operational Services and who will not be eligible for remote working arrangements. This impact is unintentional and arises from the nature of the role rather than a corporate decision or practice. The positive financial, environmental and wellbeing impact on introducing agile working arrangements for the majority of our workforce mitigates the unintended consequence of the equality impact.

4.2 A copy of the Equality Impact Assessment completed in respect of this policy is attached as Appendix 2.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are significant accommodation savings to be realised from the reduction of office attendance and the possible rental income from office space. Accommodation requirements are under review currently with a number of options being considered all of which result in reduced accommodation costs. If the Agile Working Policy is agreed, it is expected that 90% of the office-based staff will work remotely for either one or two days per week.

5.2 This change to our working arrangements will be key to the Council's aim to achieve significant savings through the operational asset review and to delivering the GER project as set out in paragraph 2.2 above.

6. Legal Implications

6.1 The regulations within the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 set out the employer's responsibility to ensure a safe working environment and this extends to remote working arrangements. Employees complete a self-assessment of their remote workstation which requires management approval prior to agreeing to home working arrangements and those employees requiring special adaptations to the workstation will be considered on a case by case basis.

6.2 ICT Security and Data Protection issues can arise from remote working arrangements and these are addressed within the ICT Security Policy which all staff are required to comply with.

7. Human Resource Implications

7.1 Agile Working will not be a contractual requirement for our existing employees; however, we may require new employees to work remotely for part of the working week. Contracts of employment will be amended to provide for agile working arrangements for new office-based employees, but the primary work location indicated in the contract will continue to be an office base.

7.2 Training will be provided for managers in managing remote workers and monitoring productivity.

8. Conclusion

8.1 The Agile Working Policy encourages our employees to adopt a flexible, collaborative working style which supports the delivery of effective customer service. This flexibility means that we can utilise our accommodation more efficiently and provide an environment where teams can expand and contract over time and accommodate working with partners.

9. Background Papers

None

10. Appendices

Appendix 1: Agile Working Policy
Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment