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Report of Director of Resources and Housing

Report to Resources and Strategy Scrutiny Board

Date: 21 June 2021

Subject: Future Working Arrangements at Leeds City Council

Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	☐ Yes	☒ No
Has consultation been carried out?	☒ Yes	☐ No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	☐ Yes	☒ No
Will the decision be open for call-in?	☒ Yes	☐ No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: 10.4(3)	☐ Yes	☒ No

Summary

1. Main issues

- During the 2020/21 municipal year, Resources and Strategy Scrutiny Board received regular updates around how the council had responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, the changes to the way people had worked, and how this affected the use of our estate.

- A summary evidence report was presented to the Board's 22 March 2021 meeting. This allowed members to review all of the evidence shared during the year and to begin looking at the longer term implications around future working arrangements at the council.

- Since March, extensive planning and consultation has taken place. An initial set of corporate principles for Future Working have been agreed. These principles are built around 3 elements: People; Workspaces and places; Technology

- All teams are currently producing local plans for future working that recognise the unique and different service they provide. They have been asked to strike an effective balance between:

  ➢ **Individual staff preferences** - around working patterns

  ➢ **Service needs** – what customers and teams need

  ➢ **LCC resources** – what the council can afford and provide

- The Council has made a commitment and pledge to all staff around working environments, in line with our Best Place to Work ambition

- This update provides Board members with an overview of this activity, including the results of our staff survey (to determine staff preferred working patterns) and chief officer survey (to consider service delivery needs and expectations)

- A key part of our planning has been in anticipation of step 4 of the Government's Covid roadmap, and the potential that current 'work from home if you can' instructions and social distancing measures are relaxed.

2. **Best Council Plan Implications** (click here for the latest version of the Best Council Plan)

- Ensuring that staff can work effectively underpins the delivery of the Best Council Plan ambitions as does the provision, spread and flexibility of our buildings. In particular our organisational and agile work policies, as well as changes to our estate supports the Best Council ambition to be 'an efficient, enterprising and healthy organisation'.

- Our People Strategy 2020-25 sets out our ambition to be the Best Place to Work with a clear focus on creating a great all round employee experience for all staff, with the support of their leaders and managers working in a positive organisational culture, driven by our council values.

3. **Resource Implications**

- The financial investment plan to support the Future Working programme is currently being refreshed, and a further update can be shared with Scrutiny Board at a future meeting.

Recommendations

a) Resources and Strategy Scrutiny Board is asked to:
   I. Note the contents of this report
   II. Note the Best Place to Work pledge made to all staff.
   III. Consider the results from the recent Staff and Chief Officer surveys and how these are shaping our Future Working arrangements at the Council, in line with our corporately agreed principles for those staff that have been working from home during the Covid pandemic.
   IV. Note the ongoing uncertainty regarding when and how the transition back into the workplace will be allowed for office based staff, and that we hope to be in a position to provide a clearer update at the Board meeting on 21st June, following the next planned Government announcement which is due on 14th June.

1. **Purpose of this report**

1.1 To provide Resources and Strategy Scrutiny Board with an update on the latest consultation and planning around Future Working arrangements at Leeds City Council.

2. Background information

2.1 Up to 7000 council colleagues have continued to operate in front line roles throughout the pandemic, and Covid safe working arrangements and support have been successfully established

2.2 During the initial COVID-19 lockdown period, over 8,000 Council staff moved to working from home overnight. This has broadly been a positive experience for staff and a range of support was provided to help employees to work from home effectively.

2.3 The Council now has well developed approaches for managing all aspects of service delivery in this pandemic environment.

2.4 The plans for further/complete relaxation of Covid restrictions have been set out in the Government's 4 step roadmap, but a degree of uncertainty remains about what will happen and when. As such, a range of potential scenarios are being actively considered.

2.5. The council has established a Future Working programme. This will guide our decisions over the coming months as we come out of Covid restrictions. In addition, it will also set the long term arrangements that the council will adopt, with positive, permanent changes to working practices for 2022 and beyond.

2.6 Throughout April and May 2021, a significant level of consultation and engagement has taken place with staff, managers, trade unions and teams.

2.7. A primary focus of this consultation has been to set out future plans for those colleagues who have been working mostly from home – so that they have a clear picture of their personal working arrangements, and what this looks like in the short, medium and long term.

2.8 All service managers have also been asked to deliver action plans in 2021 to improve staff experiences around our Best Place to Work pledge. This includes all front line colleagues, office based and those working from home.

3. Main issues

3.1 A pledge to all staff – Best Place to Work

3.1.1 The Covid pandemic has changed the way many council staff work, and how we deliver our services, but there are also many other factors which continue to shape a different approach e.g. customer behaviour, financial challenges, digital advances, the climate emergency.

3.1.2 As the council and the world outside changes, a commitment has been made to all staff – through a Best Place to Work Pledge.

3.1.3 The pledge applies to all staff – frontline, office based, community based, outdoor workers, peripatetic, in and out patterns, working from home.

3.1.4 The pledge is that all employees will have a workspace that:

- Helps them to be their best
- Keeps them safe and well
- Is fun and productive
- Provides the right tools for the job
- Provides support and contact with managers and colleagues
- Is green, low carbon and low waste

3.1.5 Throughout 2021, all services will engage with colleagues in their teams to listen to current staff experiences in relation to the pledge, and take action to improve the working environment for all.

3.2 Future working arrangements for those who have been working from home during Covid.

Corporate Principles

3.2.1 In addition to the all staff pledge outlined above, specific planning has been undertaken regarding the 8000+ colleagues who have predominanlty been working from home during Covid.

3.2.2 All teams are currently producing local plans for future working that recognise the unique and different service they provide. They have been asked to strike an effective balance between:

- **Individual staff preferences** - around working patterns

- **Service needs** – what customers and teams need

- **LCC resources** – what the council can afford and provide

3.2.3 An initial set of principles (see table below) set out our corporate expectations in three important areas: People; Workspaces and places; Technology. All Chief Officers have been asked to use these as a guiding framework when assessing and developing local plans.

People	• Staff continue to split time between home and workplace
	• Majority of people spend most of their time working from home
	• People who can't work from home will be supported in the workplace
	• Everyone will have an agreed pattern, which can change
	• Everyone will spend regular time with their team in the workplace
Workspaces and places	• We will have fewer but better used buildings
	• Everyone will have a Teamzone – a designated base where they can meet with other members of their team
	• Majority of visits to the workplace will be for social interaction and collaboration – in a remodelled space
	• 50% of colleagues can be accommodated in the workplace at the same time

	• Individuals and groups will book space when they want to come into the workplace – by planning ahead • Everyone will be welcome at a wide variety of locations
Technology	• Everyone will have the kit they need to work at home, in the workplace or on the go • All staff will have Microsoft teams • Hybrid meetings will provide a great user experience • Wider Microsoft 365 Rollout will bring longer term benefits

Results from our staff survey – preferences around future working patterns

3.2.4 During April 2021, approximately 7000 staff completed a survey to share their future working preferences. We asked colleagues to tell us their ideal way of working, and their preferred split between home and the workplace. The survey predominantly targeted those that had been working from home during the Covid pandemic

3.2.5 Team by team results were shared with Chief Officers in May – and have informed local planning, alongside consideration of the corporate principles.

3.2.6 The results from the April 2021 staff survey were consistent with a similar survey produced in June 2020, again highlighting a strong appetite for flexible and home working across the council's employee base.

3.2.7 A summary of key findings from the survey are shown in the table below

How people feel about their current working situation	• When asked about their current working arrangements, four in five staff (79%) were very or fairly happy • A range of questions considering staff ability to work effectively and productively from home saw increased agreement, compared to June 2020 • Nine out of ten (91%) respondents said the level of contact with their manager was about right, but a lower percentage, 84%, were happy with their level of contact with colleagues.
How people feel about spending more time in the workplace	• When staff were asked how they would feel about spending more time in the workplace almost half (47%) reported a positive view, compared to 30% saying they are unhappy. • The most important factor for staff when deciding when and where to work in the office is that their team are there, with more than three quarters of respondents selecting this (77%) • Positives of working from home: appreciate not commuting, like working from home, able to work effectively from home, improved

	• work / life balance, and feeling less at risk of Covid 19. • Positives of working in the office: wanting social interaction, spending time with team for meetings / collaboration, receiving peer support, and a general preference for working in the office. • Many individual comments referred to the positives of both home and workplace
Preferences for the future	• More than half of staff (51%) would prefer to work from home most or all of the time, and four out of five would prefer at least half of the time from home (80%). Results are almost identical to those reported in the June 2020 Homeworking Survey. • More than half of staff would like to spend time in the office most weeks or every week (55%), however three in ten (30%) would prefer to only visit the office now and then
Workplace/ office requirements	• Thinking about different workspaces, staff rated closed confidential shared team areas as most important (47% Very important), closely followed by space to collaborate with colleagues (46% Very important). However less than one in four rated having access to an individual desk as being very important (23%). • One in seven staff said they would need a lot or a fair amount of storage space in future (15%)
Homeworking environment	• Four out of five staff (81%) said that they have everything they need to work comfortably and safely from home, and one in five (19%) responded that they didn't. The main issues were unsuitable furniture, followed by having limited room for a workspace • The demand for IT equipment and furniture from staff was higher than anticipated, despite previous distribution efforts during the pandemic.
Additional support needs	• Almost one in five (18%) of respondents said that they have a reasonable adjustment related to a disability, long term health condition, non-visible impairment or mental health condition • Staff were most likely to need support for working in an office/depot (25%) followed by working from home (16%). Other issues included such as travel and mobile working and carrying equipment. • 200 people took up the offer for an individual call back to discuss their display screen equipment (DSE) or assistive technology support.

Setting out service needs and expectations – Chief Officer survey returns

3.2.8 Since April 2021, Chief Officers have been leading engagement across their teams and making local plans. They have the task of setting out service needs and

expectations, to ensure that all quality standards, customer expectations and performance outcomes are considered as part of planning.

3.2.9 A toolkit was provided to all teams to help with this exercise, and, at the end of May, all Chief Officers were asked to complete a survey return, with the purpose being to capture their returns, flag any emerging issues with the programme team and develop clear messages to share back with teams.

3.2.10 Each Chief Officer was asked to assess how well their plans balance against each of the following (the % that felt there was a good fit is shown in brackets)

- corporate principles and available resources (94% - good fit)
- staff preferences and ideal ways of working (100% - good fit)
- the workplace and space they were returning to (88% - good fit)

3.2.11 The questions, issues and challenges raised by Chief Officers are currently being picked up and addressed with the programme team, and we are confident that all the points raised are already being addressed, or can be resolved as part of our next stage planning. The following gives Board members a feel for the type of issues being raised (not an exhaustive list)

- The need to keep new ways of working under constant review, test our working assumptions and check impact
- Importance of being alongside your team when visiting the workplace
- Managing expectations of those staff who cannot work from home because of their role
- Support for staff who are reluctant to return because of health concerns and anxieties
- Maintaining confidentiality and protecting data and information
- Further clarity on the Teamzone arrangements and how they will work
- More details on the booking systems that we will use, and availability of meeting rooms and other space
- Designing and remodelling our work spaces to meet the different needs of teams
- Providing the IT Kit and furniture that people are requesting for working at home
- Ensuring the Hybrid meeting experience works effectively
- Providing further training and support around new ways of working

3.2.12 The next step is to communicate the service expectations back to teams, and have 1:1 conversations with all employees who are currently working from home to give clarity on individual working arrangements, subject to final agreement and approval of the new approach across the various service areas.

3.2.13 At the time of writing, the uncertainty around the dates and timings on the Government Covid Roadmap remains, and we will ensure that we take both an ambitious and realistic view on planning the return to the office given the mixed range of views and feelings our teams have.

3.2.14 We hope to be in a position at the Board meeting on 21st June to give a clearer position on how our transition back into the workplace will take shape, following the next Government Roadmap update which is due on 14th June.

3.2.15 We are currently considering a full range of different options and scenarios, and are keen that we allow ourselves the right amount of time to test things out in practice, bring people back in gradually according to individual and service needs, and make sure we get things right.

3.2.16 We will retain Covid safe working arrangements in place for as long as needed, and do more to help our colleagues to understand more about the new workspaces we are creating and how best to use them.

4   Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

4.1.1 The main body of the report details the extensive consultation that has taken place since March 2021, with staff, teams and senior council leaders. This will continue through the coming months as we implement and test out our new working arrangements.

4.1.2 A Trade Union working group has been established and meets regularly to discuss the Future Working programme.

4.1.3 A formal governance structure has been established for the programme, with reporting through Best Council Design team group. This includes representatives for all council directorates, working alongside the core team from Human Resources, Asset Management and our Digital and Information Service.

4.1   Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

4.2.1   Equality Diversity Cohesion and Integration is at the heart of considerations about the Council's working practices, and an Equality Impact Assessment around Future Working arrangements is underway.

4.2   Council policies and the Best Council Plan

4.3.1   Ensuring that staff can work effectively underpins the delivery of the Best Council Plan ambitions as does the provision, spread and flexibility of our buildings. In particular our organisational and agile work policies, as well as changes to our estate supports the Best Council ambition to be 'an efficient, enterprising and healthy organisation'.

4.3 Resources, procurement and value for money

4.3.1   The financial investment plan to support the Future Working programme is currently being refreshed, and a further update can be shared with Scrutiny Board at a future meeting.

4.4 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

4.4.1 There are no legal implications related to this report.

4.5 Risk management

4.5.1 Through our programme board and governance arrangements, all risks are identified and regularly monitored, for each strand of the programme: People, Workspaces and places, Technology.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Resources and Strategy Scrutiny Board is asked to:

     I. Note the contents of this report

    II. Note the Best Place to Work pledge made to all staff.

   III. Consider the results from the recent Staff and Chief Officer surveys and how these are shaping our Future Working arrangements at the Council, in line with our corporately agreed principles for those staff that have been working from home during the Covid pandemic.

   IV. Note the ongoing uncertainty regarding when and how the transition back into the workplace for office based staff will be allowed, and that we hope to be in a position to provide a clearer update at the Board meeting on 21st June, following the next planned Government announcement which is due on 14th June.

6 Background documents[1]

6.1 None.

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[1] The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.