

**Report of Director of Resources and Housing**  
**Report to Resources and Strategy Scrutiny Board**

**Date: 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

**Subject: Agile working approach and Estate Realisation – second report**

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

**Summary**

**1. Main issues**

- In November 2020, Resources and Strategy Scrutiny Board received a report that set out how the council had responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and the changes to the way people have worked and how this has affected the use of our estate.
- Whilst many council staff continue to deliver essential services on the front line, over 8000 employees are now regularly working from home
- Scrutiny Board asked for two further updates, starting in January, with a report about the wellbeing of employees and the support that has been provided throughout the pandemic. Another report is planned for February to look more comprehensively at estate issues.
- This is the first of the two updates and covers the latest Wellbeing Pulse Survey findings and the steps the council is taking to support all employees. Also included, as request by Scrutiny, are the costs associated with the provision of equipment over the last year to support more people to work effectively and safely at home. Finally, plans for further consultation about future, longer term working arrangements for Leeds City Council staff are outlined.

**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**

- As requested, this report outlines the costs associated with the provision of equipment to enable 8000+ council staff who have been asked to work more regularly from home since March 2020.

### **Recommendations**

a) Resources and Strategy Scrutiny Board is asked to:

- I. Note the contents of this report
- II. Consider the latest Wellbeing Pulse Survey findings and the support the council is providing.
- III. Note the costs allocated with providing equipment to enable 8000+ employees to work from home, as directed in line with Covid19 government advice.
- IV. Note the plans for further consultation with all stakeholders about future working arrangements and patterns, especially in relation to those currently working from home.

### **1. Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 To provide Resources and Strategy Scrutiny Board with an update on the wellbeing support being provided to all employees, including a specific reference, as requested, to the practical arrangements of those working from home.
- 1.2 To share latest plans for further engagement around future working arrangement and patterns.

### **2. Background information**

- 2.1 The Council conducted 3 Wellbeing Pulse Surveys with employees during 2020 – in May, June and October.
- 2.2 Naturally, the feelings and experiences of our staff have changed over time, in response to the different restrictions and outlooks at various stages of the pandemic. The unique experiences and issues for both frontline staff and those working from home continue to be addressed.
- 2.3 As well as Covid19 challenges, the council has also experienced significant financial pressures and change. This was cited by a growing number of employees as a cause of concern in late 2020.

- 2.4. Despite all the challenges that 2020 threw upon us, the majority of employees remained positive and felt well supported.
- 2.3 Early in the pandemic, we conducted another survey solely targeting those working from home. This explored how staff felt about working from home, how productive they felt they could be, what they needed in terms of equipment and support, and their attitudes towards working from home and returning to the office in future. The summary findings from this were reported to Scrutiny in November 2020, and showed a positive experience and attitude toward homeworking for the vast majority of staff.
- 2.3 Information from the 'Working from Home' survey helped us to understand and prioritise the distribution of equipment for those most in need. This was aided by over 1000 individual phone calls and contacts too.

### 3. Main issues

#### 3.1 Wellbeing Pulse Survey Results

- 3.1.1 The most recent results from our third Wellbeing Pulse Survey give us a useful comparison to how staff were feeling earlier in the year.

	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3
<b>Number of staff who responded</b>	4235	4664	3820
<b>When conducted</b>	May	June	October
<b>Staff feedback</b>			
<b>Staff who feel happy</b>	56%	64%	51%
<b>Staff who feel unhappy</b>	14%	11%	20%
<b>Staff positive about support</b>	81%	82%	74%
<b>Staff negative about support</b>	6%	4%	9%
<b>Number of Individual support calls made</b>	99	33	76

- 3.1.2 Our October results show a declining picture, with less staff happy with the general situation and also with the support they are receiving.
- 3.1.3 Whilst this trend is concerning, we need to balance that against the wider picture, which remains that 51% of staff are feeling happy despite all the challenges faced, and 74% are positive about the support they are receiving, at a time when their support needs are potentially much greater.
- 3.1.4 Given this trend, however, it is important that we understand the reasons why people are feeling this way, so that we can redouble our support efforts. The top three areas of concern in the October wellbeing survey were listed as: **further lockdown restrictions, missing human contact and mental health.**
- 3.1.5 When asked what else the organisation could do to support colleagues, the major themes from the comments provided continued to be related to **communication, financial situation and work pressures**

- 3.1.5 It's clear from the results that staff have been adversely affected by the prolonged impact of Covid, and a collective frustration that it's taking longer than hoped to remedy. This is now coupled with growing anxiety over the financial position and the reality that people are now exiting and remaining roles changing. However, notwithstanding these acute pressures, our responses remain on balance positive.
- 3.1.6 A ["You told us, we're doing" style poster](#) was created to communicate with our employees around the latest Pulse survey.
- 3.1.6 A number of next steps have been agreed by the Council's Corporate Leadership Team as follows
- We will use all of our intelligence to date and continue to prioritise support to the most vulnerable (e.g. teams showing lower positivity in the Pulse surveys and/or most impacted by the Early Leavers Initiative and other service pressures and changes).
  - Managers will continue checking in regularly with all members of their team through both individual check-ins and team check-ins (our mid-year appraisal check-in conversation provides a further opportunity to do that).
  - We will work together to ensure that every colleague, regardless of role, has access to our [#TeamLeedsBeWell core offer booklet](#), [#BeWell bulletin](#) and range of support sessions
  - All teams will take action in relation to feedback given. Our wellbeing mapping tool will be used by services to assess their approach to wellbeing.
  - The launch of our "Supporting Futures" toolkit will provide greater support for staff considering reskilling/upskilling opportunities, and/or those facing workplace change.

## 3.2 Wellbeing support provided during lockdown

- 3.2.1 The Council's Wellbeing Offer to staff was refreshed in 2020, and the full range of support is now brought together in this [wellbeing offer booklet](#)
- 3.2.2 For the benefit of Scrutiny Board Members, the table below gives an overview of the type of support that has been available to staff during the pandemic.

Frontline staff have been provided with the PPE equipment they need	Workplace and individual risk assessments have ensured people are kept safe at work	Covid secure workplaces were established early in the pandemic, and have been running ever since
Support for our staff to undertake Coronavirus tests, where appropriate	We addressed the specific needs of Clinically Extremely Vulnerable and Clinically Vulnerable staff.	Regular wellbeing check-ins and call backs have taken place
Changes to our employment practice around pay, leave and sickness monitoring	Access to Occupational Health Service – advice, support, guidance and training	Support from our network of Mental Health First Aiders and Wellbeing Champions
Staff and manager briefings, training and drop ins	Peer Support from our DAWN and Healthy Minds networks	HELP employee assistance

	and through our council Facebook group and wider staff networks	
Options to be in the workplace if struggling at home	Health and Safety Helpline for working from home	Regular communication, guidance and information on health, safety and wellbeing

### 3.3 Distribution of kit to support people working from home

- 3.3.1 Between March and December 2020, 13,000 pieces of equipment were distributed to council staff. This was primarily to ensure that they were able to work from home safely and effectively, and were Covid related, but some will have been business as usual purchases. A small number (<100) were issued to school based staff to support online learning for school children.
- 3.3.2 Whilst being a necessary response to the pandemic, the distribution of this equipment will also have longer term value, as home working becomes a regular and normal element of employment going forward, and we rationalise the estate.
- 3.3.3 During this period, the council spent a total of £895K on the supply of new equipment (8472 items). We estimate, over a similar period, the council would normally spend in the region of £379K. Therefore the specific, additional Covid related spend on equipment is estimated to be £516K
- 3.3.4 The council recycled and redistributed 4450 items of equipment from within existing stock. The cost of purchasing this equipment new would have incurred a cost of £1.041M.
- 3.3.5 £144K of staffing costs was required to refurbish existing laptops (964 items). This was as an alternative to new purchases, which otherwise would have cost £569K. A small amount of this money was spent on upgrading these devices to fit the new Windows 10 device specification.
- 3.3.6 A breakdown of spending and volumes, between March and December 2020 can be seen in the tables below

NEW SALES EQUIPMENT TYPE	NUMBER ISSUED	ACTUAL SPEND
HP 430/ HP 450 Laptop	375	£221,347.50
MiFi Devices & Data SIM	236	£37,269.12
Smart Phones & Voice/Data SIM	964	£295,205.72
Basic Mobile Phone & Voice SIM	294	£19,750.92
iPads	47	£23,547.00
Monitors (various)	554	£52,630.00
Headsets (single & double)	5897	£235,880.00
Large Desks	25	£3,375.00
Small Desk	80	£6,000.00
<b>SALES TOTAL</b>	<b>8472</b>	<b>£895,005.26</b>

<b>REFURBISHED AND RECYCLED EQUIPMENT</b>	<b>NUMBER ISSUED</b>	<b>ACTUAL SPEND</b>	<b>COST IF NEW</b>
19" Monitors	487	£0.00	£62,667.16
23" Monitors	711	£0.00	£110,112.57
29" Monitors	15	£0.00	£3,758.40
Keyboards	654	£0.00	£10,464.00
Mice	449	£0.00	£2,245.00
4 Port Hub	216	£0.00	£3,378.24
Misc Cables	224	£0.00	£672.00
Standard Workstation Chair	770	£0.00	£279,386.80
Refurbished laptops	964	See note 3.3.5	£569,010.64
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4490</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£1,041,694.81</b>

3.3.7 All spending on new equipment was authorised through the appropriate processes by Chief Officers and senior teams, from locally held budgets, and as part of Covid19 emergency budget costs.

3.3.8 In addition, 323 pieces of specialist equipment have been purchased at a cost of £110,528 to support those with additional health needs and disabled employees. This is part of our commitment to make the necessary reasonable adjustments for such staff, and includes items such as specialist mice and keyboards, assistive software and screen magnifiers.

3.3.9 Based on current estimates and demand, any further equipment needs will be met from within existing council stock.

### **3.4 Future working patterns and arrangements**

3.4.1 The immediate need to support working from home remains, and Covid restrictions will continue to affect council services, workplaces and staff. As previously reported to Scrutiny Board, working from home is something that many council staff will continue to do. Based on our survey data, there is a strong appetite amongst the vast majority of those currently working at home to do so on an ongoing basis, post pandemic.

3.4.2 During January-March 2021 we will scale up our stakeholder engagement around our future strategy. Short term, our plans will be dictated by what happens with national and local Covid19 restrictions, but we are also looking to develop and agree our longer term plans.

3.4.3 There are many considerations to take on board, to ensure we find solutions that are good for the individual, the service and our business, including:

- Securing service delivery, quality and meeting the needs of our customers
- Creating the optimum balance between the amount of time spent at home and in the workplace, and a culture that encourages and supports new ways of working.- a hybrid model that gives the best of both worlds.
- Providing the individual flexibility and choice that staff are seeking, whilst successfully balancing against team needs, including the importance of teams coming together on a regular basis in person to connect and collaborate
- Our duty around the health and wellbeing to our staff
- Ensuring our digital infrastructure is fully aligned, and we have robust information and data security in place.
- How we best design our workplaces and spaces to meet our future needs
- Ensuring that staff have the right tools and equipment – both in the workplace and at home
- Making sure that nobody is left behind by considering the impact on individuals, especially on more vulnerable or potentially disadvantaged groups

3.4.4 Focus groups with staff have commenced in December 2020, and these will be scaled up in the new year. These will provide further feedback to build on the valuable insight we already possess. A Trade Union working group has been proposed to inform our future planning, along with another employee survey to capture views from as many staff as possible regarding the way forward.

3.4.5 Covid19 has dictated that 8000+ employees have worked from home for 9 months or more. As and when the restrictions fade, the hybrid working model will move away from being a necessity, and then become an organisational choice. Listening to and working with a wide range of stakeholders (staff, partners, trade unions, managers, professional leads, staff networks, service teams, customers), we will be better placed to find the right strategy that balances the needs of all, and brings benefits for all too.

3.4.6 Our stakeholder engagement work will sit against the ongoing backdrop of financial pressures, service review and change. These will continue to influence our plans and decisions around long term future working arrangements. We appreciate the anxiety that many of our staff feel because of this uncertainty, By late January/early February we hope to be in a position to share some firmer plans with our employees, which can then be further developed throughout the first half of 2021.

## **4 Corporate considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and engagement**

- 4.1.1 Throughout the Covid19 pandemic, the Council has worked hard to ensure that the experiences and views of staff have been heard. There are many examples in this report that describe how this has been done, specifically in relation to the health and wellbeing of staff, and how this has helped shape our response.
- 4.1.2 Looking forward, this report shares plans for scaled up stakeholder engagement in early 2021, to inform the development of our longer term strategy around hybrid working

#### **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 working from home 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 As requested, this report provides details of the costs associated with providing the kit necessary to support large numbers of employees to work from home.
- 4.3.2 Financial considerations will continue to be one of the key factors in deciding our longer term working arrangements.

#### **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 At the time of writing (Dec 2020), tighter Covid19 restrictions have just been introduced in London, the South East of England and other parts of the country. In light of the growing spread of a new strain of the virus, there is significant potential for further disruption in 2021, with ongoing health and wellbeing challenges for staff and volatility around our mid to long term working arrangements.
- 4.5.2 The longer the pandemic lasts, the greater the impact on staff wellbeing, and the more important it becomes for the council to ensure the support is getting through to all staff who need it.
- 4.5.3 The success of any large scale change programme such as new ways of working and estate rationalisation is dependent on the buy in and contribution from the full range of service teams, trade unions and support functions such as Human



Resources, Asset Management, Digital Information Service. Capacity is stretched across all areas, and that is a risk to progress.

## **5 Recommendations**

5.1 Resources and Strategy Scrutiny Board is asked to:

- i. Note the contents of this report
- ii. Consider the latest Wellbeing Pulse Survey findings and the support the council is providing.
- iii. Note the costs allocated with providing equipment to enable 8000+ employees to work from home, as directed in line with Covid19 government advice.
- iv. Note the plans for further consultation with all stakeholders about future working arrangements and patterns, especially in relation to those currently working from home.

## **6 Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

6.1 None.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.