
To: Scrutiny Board 1

Date: 13th October 2021

Subject: Agile and Flexible Working Update

1 Purpose of the Note

The purpose of this update is to provide Scrutiny Board 1 on progress made regarding agile and flexible working.

2 Recommendations

Scrutiny Board 1 are being asked to provide feedback on the proposed changes to the flexible working arrangements based on the supporting evidence.

3 Background and context

3.1 Prior to the pandemic, the City Council operated a flexible working policy which enabled in line with legislation for employees to be able to apply to work on a flexible basis. There were a number of recognised options including; part time hours, compressed working week, job share, term time working, flexitime which were subject to line management approval based on service need.

3.2 Over the last 18 months over half the Council has worked from home due to the pandemic and subsequent restrictions. This change occurred overnight and was underpinned by the technology available through Teams and Sharepoint. It is accepted this was a steep learning curve for all but despite this productivity did not decrease and 'work rounds' were found for tasks that could not be undertaken as they were previously.

3.3 What was crucial was to ensure everyone worked as safely as possible regardless of the environment or location they were in. So, for the those who remained in the workplace this meant appropriate PPE, risk assessments and following the latest public health advice. This was no different for those staff working from home, risk assessments to determine equipment needs were undertaken, display screen and workstation set up advice provided and a system for the supply of necessary kit was established. Regular updates were also provided as reminders, plus the creation of the Flexible Toolkit to provide advice to manager and employees on the options and potential solutions. A good example being converting annual leave into hours, which is being retained going forward.

4. Support

Over the last 18 months, three 'pulse' surveys have been undertaken to help us establish how employees are feeling and what support was needed either to help keep them safe and well or to be effective at work.

The first survey generated 1200 responses and highlighted the need for good communication and health and well-being support. The organisation responded through the

establishment of the employee assistance programme, which is a helpline which operate 365 days a year, 24/7. The second survey generated the highest response to date of over 1500 completed forms, from this survey we developed our flexible working toolkit which explained the process, gave access to equipment, lived examples from across the organisation and provided practical advice on the offer available.

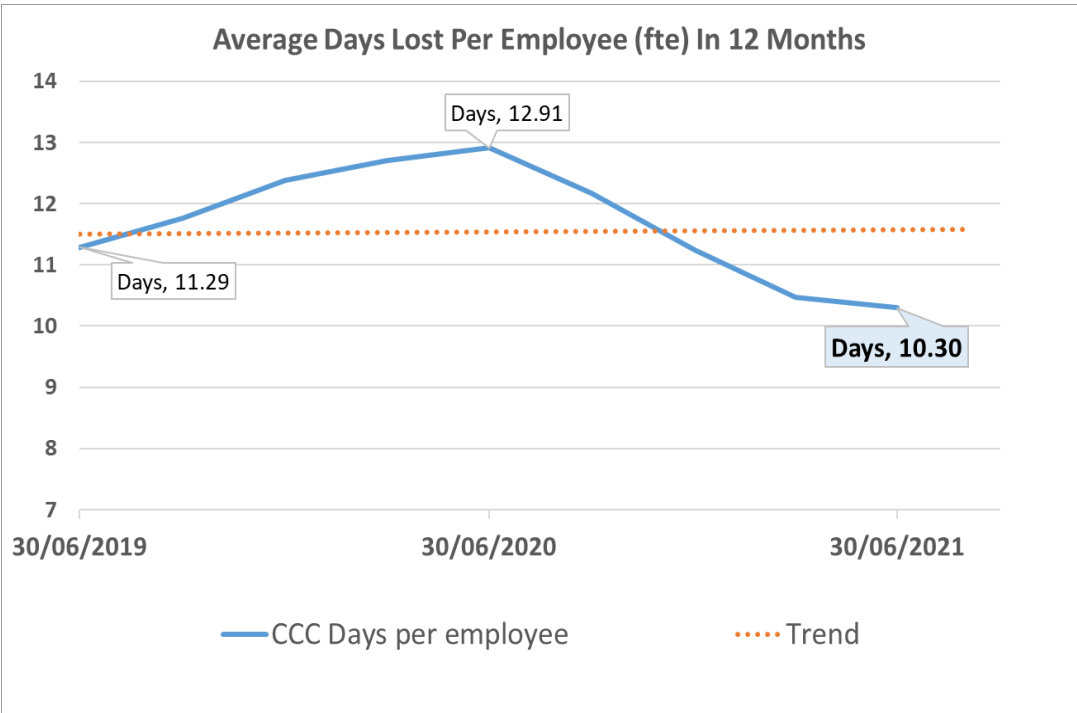
Finally, the latest survey in September has generated 1322 responses, equal to over a quarter of the workforce and this survey provided the following headlines;

- The majority of respondents stated that they would like to work a mixture of at home and from council buildings, 58%.
- Just under half of respondents (50%) state that their working pattern has changed and almost two thirds of respondents, 65% agreed that they would benefit from more flexibility around working patterns.
- Achieving a good work/life balance was the highest factor in helping people stay well with over three quarters of respondents citing this, 76%.
- Employee benefits were now cited by over a fifth (22%) of respondents as being important in keeping staff staying well compared to only 3% previous surveys.
- In terms of support 1:1 meeting with our manager, use our personal judgement, decide on order in the way we do things, were the top three statements that received most agreement.
- 79% who completed the survey felt they were getting all the support needed
- Areas to consider the responses about support varied according to those in the working in the workplace to those that are working from home.

Whitley Depot is to have its own survey later this month so there is a more bespoke and relevant assessment of their experience.

The wish to retain and/or extend flexible working has been consistent during the last 2 years and this is supported by the pulse survey feedback.

It should also be noted that during this time absence has decreased as the table below shows.



These figures will also include the following covid-19 information

- 282 employees absent with Covid19 which equates to 5.7% of days lost, and 32 employees absent & unable to work due to high risk, health condition shielding equalled 1.3% of days lost. The highest reason for absence remains as stress, anxiety and depression followed by musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions.
- Occupational health has added to its support resilience training and the 'new' normal support for those anxious about returning to work. This is in addition to counselling services, and stress risk assessments.

Feedback from the pulse surveys has identified methods of additional support and help we can provide such as the podiatry clinics which were an additional service added this year and a Health and Well-Being Lead who has developed a calendar of events for the year on health campaigns and engagement events across the Council.

The most recent survey shows flexible working and healthy lifestyle changes made by employees have been the most beneficial during the last 18 months.

5. Next Steps

5.1 The feedback from the pulse surveys indicated the need to review and revise the Flexible Working Policy which has been developed with support from frontline managers and supervisors who were asked to provide feedback on what was needed going forward. This information was used to develop a revised version of the policy, which is now subject to consultation with the trades unions. The proposed definitions of the types of workers/working locations are outlined below;

Work style	Description
Fixed	Workplace based employees who operate from an office or shared work setting i.e. Care Homes. A fixed worker will typically remain at one place of work for the majority of their time.
Internally Mobile	The role is not tied down to one particular location and supports the internal functions of the council. Internally mobile employees can successfully and regularly carry out their activities from a mixture of appropriate facilities. For example, to attend meetings, work from home, council buildings or on the move according to the needs of the job that day.
Externally Mobile	The role directly supports the external services provided by the council and the majority of time is spent visiting people, attending meetings or carrying out work across various external sites e.g. field workers. Depending on the needs of the service, externally mobile employees can carry out work from a variety of locations including Council buildings, the premises of service users, community-based locations or from home.
Home Based	Home based employees carry out the majority of their work at home. However, they are still required to attend meetings, supervisions etc in Council premises. For these employees their home becomes the contractual place of work.

5.2 Digital changes are being made to continue to support the development of hybrid working investment has been made for both formal and informal office space as well as public meetings. The programme of installation commenced in August and will be completed during October.

Where rooms have not been configured there are speaker phones available to support a mixed attendance. A new room booking has also been introduced to enable rooms to be booked electronically which will support hybrid working more effectively. Finally, consideration is being given to increase meeting room and collaborative spaces initially in Friargate as this is showing to be an area of demand/growth

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