

## **WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - RESOURCES**

**20<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2022**

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**Title: HYBRID WORKING**

**Portfolio Holder: Cllr Clark  
Wards Affected: All**

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#### **Summary and purpose:**

The Committee has asked to be updated as to how the Council is responding to the opportunities and challenges presented by remote working. This report seeks to respond to that request.

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#### **How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities**

This correlates with the "Health and Wellbeing of our residents" priority and in particular the new ways of working described in the corporate strategy.

#### **Equality and Diversity Implications:**

No implications

#### **Financial Implications:**

No implications.

#### **Legal Implications:**

No implications.

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### **1. Background**

- 1.1 Members will clearly recall that when the country went into lockdown in Spring 2020 we saw the numbers of people coming to work at The Burys office fall dramatically to around 40 per day with the balance required to work from home. Fortunately we had already placed an order for an increased internet pipe and had come to a view about a video conferencing solution and so we were well placed to quickly adapt to the new remote working requirements.
- 1.2 Since Spring 2020 government advice changed in line with the fluctuations of the pandemic and building occupation levels rose and fell accordingly, although at no time did we see more than 100 people in the Burys on any single day. In order to respond and co-ordinate action organisationally, a work-stream entitled "Where Work Happens" was added to the Business Transformation Work Programme. The project was made up of three work-streams looking at physical re-occupation of the building, IT support requirements and cultural changes respectively. The

first two work-streams have effectively concluded and merged into business as usual, the third “culture” work-stream is still active.

- 1.3 The rapid move to home-working was a universal phenomena for those able to work in that way and has had an ongoing impact with all businesses and employers being required to come to a view as to whether such arrangements should perpetuate post lockdown. This continues to be a national debate and we are well used to the pros and cons being rehearsed in the media.
- 1.4 At Waverley recognising that our staff had varying experiences of the benefits and challenges brought by the requirement to work from home we have twice carried out whole work-force surveys. These showed that a large majority of staff expressed a preference to work at home at least part of the week, most commonly for two or three days.
- 1.5 This fed into our thinking about the “return to work” process and how we should re-configure going forward. Given the negligible impact on performance levels and our aspiration to re-develop The Burys site it was agreed that we should re-calibrate our working environment to accommodate smaller numbers of on site staff. Importantly this would demonstrate to us whether this was viable long term before we made any final decisions as to our requirement post re-development.
- 1.6 Based on working patterns, expressed preferences and a range of national studies (most particularly that carried out by the University of Hull) we concluded that we could operate with a maximum of 150 work-stations which allowed us to entirely vacate the top floor of the building.
- 1.7 Our re-design did in fact allow for 170 work-stations to be sited on the ground and first floor. The majority of work-stations are “bookable” and we have an electronic system to facilitate that so staff can plan where they will sit and who with. There are also a number of drop in areas for those who have not booked space and fixed areas mainly for specialist staff.
- 1.8 We have now moved from a position of lock-down and are in a period of reaching a new normal. Whether we have actually reached a new normal is still an open question. We do though monitor occupancy levels on a daily basis and can see that we are now operating within a range of 70-130 staff on site per day. Typically Tuesdays and Wednesdays are the busiest days which is when most part time staff are working and unsurprisingly Friday is the quietest day. These numbers bring with them the added benefit that there is now sufficient car park space at The Burys and Wharf combined to allow all staff to park on site.
- 1.9 During this period we have needed our IT service to be flexible and creative in responding to the new requirements of the organisation. The combination of our “bring your own device to work” strategy which enables personal lap-tops, tablets and smartphones to be configured to allow connection to our environment and the adaption of i-gels for home wifi connectivity has gone a long way to facilitating change without any significant impact on budgets. We now have over 150 people with igels at home thus replicating almost entirely their office environment.
- 1.10 Our surveys have shown us that a very small number of staff struggled to work from home either due to space requirements and/or equipment issues and we

tried to support these individuals as best as we could. Anyone working from home now is required to complete a work station assessment.

- 1.11 Now significant numbers of people have returned to the office the immediate challenge is the provision of suitable video-conferencing facilities. The most particular need is for those meetings between one or two office based staff and one or two staff working remotely and/or external participants. We do have two fixed Zoom facilities and two mobile facilities but we may need to increase these hopefully be being able to adapt the Teams offer.
- 1.12 Having vacated the top floor we have been looking at leasing the space on short term lets pending decisions on the future of this building. Having had three parties who expressed interest in moving in and having begun the negotiating process it is disappointing to report that all three eventually terminated their interest on a variety of financial grounds. We have loaned space to a number of charities and marketing is now in the hands of external agents.
- 1.13 The move to hybrid working does create some cultural issues which can impact on contracts, terms and conditions etc. These are largely addressed by other reports on this agenda (i.e. Workforce Profile). Suffice to say that as part of this year's Performance Agreement (Appraisal) process all staff are been designated as home, office, mobile or hybrid workers in recognition of the change in circumstances.

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### **Recommendation**

Members are invited to comment on the content of the report.

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### **Background Papers**

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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