

Report

Cabinet

Part 1

Date: 15 December 2021

Subject **The New Normal - Newport City Council Operating Model**

Purpose Discussions have been on-going regarding a new operating model for Newport City Council. In order to progress this work Cabinet will need to reach a decision on a series of options and policy areas in relation to our staff and the use of our assets. These decisions are detailed within this report.

Author Director of Transformation and Corporate Services

Ward N/A

Summary Newport City Council has adapted and developed the way in which it operates in order to maintain services and protect the safety of residents and members and staff. The organisation, its staff and Elected Members have adapted to many challenges and have overcome these. There is an opportunity to realise many benefits associated with how we utilised our assets, how we support the climate-change agenda and how we support and enhance the well-being of our staff through a smart working model.

This report sets out the next stages of moving to a new operating model in line with our Strategic Recovery Aims, which focuses on increased workforce flexibility, the wellbeing of our staff and enabling modern working practices to be implemented to a greater degree, whilst being mindful of our environmental impact.

Proposal The proposal is for Cabinet to agree to the recommendations within the report and allow the Director of Transformation and Corporate Services to consult with relevant Trade Union representatives and staff on changes to terms and conditions of employment.

Action by Chief Executive
Strategic Director – Transformation and Corporate Services

Timetable Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Corporate Management Team
- Recognised Trade Unions
- Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee
- Head of Law and Regulatory Services
- Head of Finance

Signed

Background

The Covid 19 health emergency has posed a significant and unprecedented challenge to the way in which we deliver our services and our way of life. Since March 2020, the Council's focus has been to preserve life, minimise the spread of the virus, and support our communities and the vulnerable. The impact of the virus has brought about systemic change, pervading every aspect of society. At Newport City Council, material changes to where and how we work have been swift. From day one of the health emergency, Council staff have shown enormous resilience. Those delivering front line services, often to the city's most vulnerable people and communities, have been altruistic in their dedication. Whilst others have quickly adapted to a remote and dispersed way of working using technology to work from home to minimise the spread of the virus.

Elected Members have also had to adapt, blending their work within their communities with the remote meeting arrangements that have been put in place to ensure the on-going functioning of the democratic process, whilst adhering to Covid regulations and keeping individuals safe. Whilst the on-going response to the pandemic remains the number one priority for the Council, it is also an opportunity to consider the changes that have been made and consider the long-term impacts on the Council's operating model.

Cabinet agreed our **Strategic Recovery Aims** in June 2020. This includes **Strategic Recovery Aim 3, to Sustain a Safe, Healthy and Productive Workforce**. Cabinet also agreed that operational services would need to be able to safely engage with its service users, work safely in Council buildings, offices and to work remotely both in the short term and long term.

Within the current **Corporate Plan, Building on Success, Building a Better Newport**, the Council made several pledges under the banner of a Modernised Council. We committed to developing a modern, capable workforce, where the use of agile working would be explored and implemented wherever possible. We recognised that this could lead to improvements in staff wellbeing, better and more efficient services and contribute to a reduction in pollution caused by vehicles on our roads. We committed to freeing up 20% of our Civic Centre to save money and create space for commercial and social innovation.

This report sets out the next stages of moving to a new operating model in line with our Strategic Recovery Aims, which focuses on increased workforce flexibility, the wellbeing of our staff and enabling modern working practices to be implemented to a greater degree, whilst being mindful of our environmental impact and our intention to be carbon neutral by 2030. **It is important to remember that under the current circumstances, the requirement for staff and Members is to work from home where possible. Opportunities for staff and Members to make more use of the Civic Centre, and other buildings, will only be realised once it is safe to do so.**

Current Position

As a result of the first lock-down in March 2020 the Council has had to adapt the way it operates. Whilst front line services have been protected and enhanced for the most vulnerable, office based functions and the staff who support them have been asked to do this from home, wherever possible. The Council's investment in IT in recent years, as it develops the Modernised Council agenda, has enabled the Council to continue functioning.

Home working station assessments have been undertaken and additional kit provided to support a safe working environment. As a result, many services have been able to develop remote operational models. There are some very clear benefits to continuing with this approach – work/life balance, carbon reduction, reduced congestion on our roads, opportunities for utilising our buildings. However, there are challenges. For staff working from home there may be isolation, increased energy costs and a lack of team development, for example. There is also a challenge around visibility.

The principles of agile or remote working were established in the Council's Digital Strategy, which is also referenced in the Corporate Plan. The Council will need to weigh up the opportunities but also potential

impacts when determining how it will proceed beyond the current situation into a longer-term operating model.

Climate Change

Newport City Council has committed to work towards being a net zero organisation by 2030 as part of the Welsh public sector. This includes carbon emissions from our:

- Buildings
- land use
- transport (fleet and business mileage)
- procured goods and services

However, as a Council we also have a wider role, to support the decarbonisation of our city. The Welsh Government has committed to a net zero Wales by 2050 and reducing staff commuting will support that commitment for the Newport area. 45% of all carbon emissions in Newport originate from transport. This is the third highest in Wales after Cardiff and Rhondda Cynon Taff.

Prior to the pandemic whilst other sectors such as energy had seen a marked decarbonisation the transport sector had shown little or no improvement.

Approach

We have identified four areas of focus, detailed within this report. They are:

1. Democratic Function
2. Technology
3. Employment policies
4. Building (Civic Centre) and Public

1. Democratic Function

Objective: To ensure that Members and the Democratic Process are catered for within this process and that NCC is able to meet the requirements of the Local Government and Elections Act.

As previously reported to Cabinet, under Part 3 of the Local Government and Elections Act we have a duty to Promote Access to Local Government. This requires us not only to ensure an electronic broadcast of Council meetings but also to make provision for remote access to those meetings. By doing this it is hoped that a wider and more diverse group will come forward for Civic Duty. **This is independent of any decision as a result of the New Normal work.** Work is underway to ensure that we will be compliant with the requirements of the Act.

At the July Cabinet meeting it was agreed that a review by Democratic Services Committee would be sought into the impacts of dispersed working on members' well-being and support. This was discussed in the October Democratic Services Committee as part of the draft IRP report. The committee felt the increase basic allowance payment would sufficiently cover the financial impact.

We also need to consider Member's needs in relation to access to the Civic Centre. Having full, face to face Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings still remains an unnecessary risk. However, Cabinet are asked to consider the following:

1. Trialling hybrid Cabinet and Committee meetings, based on a thorough risk assessment and strict management of numbers within Committee rooms
2. Allowing Members to use the Civic Centre for informal meetings and undertaking business in relation to their representative role. This would require individual risk assessments and we would need to agree the parameters to limit this activity.

2. Technology

Objective: To ensure that our IT provision is appropriate to the needs of the organisation. To look at new opportunities/innovations that can support our development as an organisation and for this to influence the development of the new Digital Strategy. To implement the Cabinet decision to move IT infrastructure from the Civic Centre

The council has continued to function effectively through the pandemic as a result of its previous strategy for increased staff mobility and improved IT system facilities. Increased funding has provided opportunities to improve capability and capacity further. We have previously reported on the opportunities, impacts and challenges of this hugely increased reliance on our IT infrastructure.

If the decision is taken to move to an interim position where we utilise one part of the Civic Centre as part of our Covid Recovery work and prior to a final New Normal position, we will need to undertake an IT audit to ensure we can meet the requirements of this way of operating. This will include:

- Telephony
- Wifi and Network capacity
- Hardware requirements – monitors, keyboards, docking stations, etc.
- Utilisation of current systems
- Hybrid meeting facilities

Challenges

One of the main challenges is to ensure that even greater reliance on technology is supported by suitably accessible and resilient IT systems with sufficient capacity in this new working environment. A specific challenge also exists around cyber resilience in the current environment with an increased threat level highlighted by a large number of cyber incidents in the UK and globally. The council has implemented a specific solution to mitigate this risk but there are still significant risks. These challenges should be reduced as a result of the council's increased investment in digital technology over the last three financial years but the costs associated with these greater demands have not been quantified.

Priorities

Cabinet has previously agreed an increased investment within our digital and IT infrastructures. Therefore there are no specific requirements for approval from Cabinet. However, below are our priorities that we will need to progress over the coming months:

1. Ensure that we continue to implement the hybrid meeting facilities for both Member and officer usage
2. Match up the current IT capital programme with the requirements of any reconfiguration of the Civic Centre for both our interim and future needs
3. Continue to progress our work to maximise our O365 enterprise agreement to facilitate flexible and smart working practices
4. Proceed with the data centre move (previously agreed by Cabinet), increasing resilience and reducing our carbon footprint
5. Where opportunities arise make decisions in line with our digital aspirations to move systems to the cloud, reducing in-house infrastructure needs and future capital expenditure

3. Employment policies

Objective: To consider the redesign of, and consultation on, new employment policies for our staff, including:

- **Agile Working Policy**
- **Work/life Balance Policy**
- **Flexi time Scheme**
- **Travel and Subsistence Policy**
- **Parking at the Civic Centre**

Agile Working Policy

The move to remote working for many has created an increased interest in flexible working and has led to greater expectation around provision being made by employers for increased flexibility. The remote workforce has identified the benefits to be gained from homeworking - a better work-life balance, greater ability to focus with fewer distractions, more time for family and friends, saved commuting time and costs, access to IT and digital technology and higher levels of motivation. Organisations who choose to disregard these perceived benefits and revert to pre-pandemic arrangements may be in the position of having increased employee turnover, higher levels of sickness absence, reduced employee engagement and limits to attracting future talent to join the workforce. Newport City Council will need to be mindful of the increasing number of organisations that are moving towards an agile culture and that this will increase competition in the labour market at a time when employment vacancies are at a significantly high level.

Whilst the Council does not have an existing Homeworking policy, it has an Agile Working policy which was introduced as a result of changes in IT infrastructure enabling greater levels of connectivity to the Council's network and systems. However, the Agile Working policy is geared towards an ad hoc homeworking position and was written in a time pre-video conferencing which has been the key driver in homeworking being more effective. This report proposes a replacement of the Agile Working policy with a new Homeworking Policy, clearly setting out the organisational expectations around homeworking, the responsibilities on employees and managers in supporting wellbeing whilst homeworking, and the Health and Safety implications of a formal homeworking agreement.

In addition to homeworking considerations, supporting staff to choose alternative workplace locations such as public sector remote working hubs will need to be factored into how remote working can be safe for the individual, maintain confidentiality and be effective.

Work/Life Balance Policy

The existing Work/life balance policy allows for employees to make a formal request to vary their contractual working pattern, usually by reducing the standard working week to a number of hours that better suits their work/life balance. There is no provision for homeworking as a flexible working option. Amending this policy to include homeworking as an option will give greater opportunity for flexible working to be explored, particularly if it is promoted by the organisation to demonstrate that applications are likely to be supported. Our recent survey to staff showed that nearly 60% of those who have worked from home during the pandemic would consider making a voluntary application to vary their employment contracts, and over 80% of respondents indicated that they would prefer the option to work from home for three days per week or more (Appendix 2).

Should this addition to the policy be included and applications received, it would not mean a change from the current position where staff are advised to work from home wherever possible as per the Welsh Government guidance. During the period where this advice remains in place, any application for homeworking on a part time basis would not signal a return to the workplace on the remainder of the working week.

Managers would need to start considering the long term implications of including homeworking as a flexible working option and how to appropriately balance the spread of cover amongst teams when a return to Council buildings is available to all, balancing individual requests for specific working patterns with business need.

Flexi time Scheme

Whilst the flexi time scheme is used by a minority of the workforce (circa 1200 staff) it is seen as a much valued benefit of employment by staff. Having the ability to balance start and finish times with occasional peaks in workload and take time off at a later point is a popular term and condition. The scheme has been suspended since March 2020 and staff have been supported to work flexibly without the confines of a formal clocking system yet have not been able to accrue time to take off at a later point. A review of

the scheme would be required to determine the best way to manage operational workload whilst allowing staff to have as much flexibility as possible.

Travel and Subsistence Policy

A consequential step will also be to revise the existing Travel and Subsistence Policy which treats all claimable mileage as needing to be from a designated Council workplace, and not from a home as a place of work. If contracts of employment are varied to include home as a work base, consideration should be given to the parameters contained within the existing Travel and Subsistence policy and whether they are appropriate for the long term with a significant number of employees working from a range of work sites, both at home and at alternatives such as a geographically local public sector hub.

Engagement

It will be vital to engage with not only our trade union representatives but with our workforce who will be affected by any decision to continue to work remotely. Their views and feedback on any proposal will be essential to understanding the likely future culture of the organisation, their thoughts on how the Council can make hybrid working a success and the likely challenges that they might perceive in implementing it for the good of the individual person, but also their team and the overall workforce. Since the July Cabinet report a New Normal staff survey was issued and over 700 responses were received, 58% of the potentially eligible staff group. The results of the survey have been discussed with trade union representatives and shared with the workforce. As per the preferences indicated by the respondents, the fortnightly Council newsletter will provide updates on progress with the New Normal project.

As an employer with a responsibility to collectively bargain with recognised trade unions on terms and conditions for the workforce, any proposed employment policy change would be fully consulted upon prior to adoption at the Council's Employment Partnership Forum. Newport City Council strives to work in social partnership with our trade union representatives and it is anticipated that review of the above policies would be undertaken jointly with the trade unions.

Parking at the Civic Centre

In line with our aspiration to become carbon zero by 2030 the Council will promote Active Travel amongst its workforce as the primary method of commuting to a workplace. With a large proportion of Civic Centre based staff currently working from home, and potentially continuing to do so with any variation to the Family Friendly policy, a review of the parking arrangements would be appropriate.

The available parking capacity, circa 150 spaces, will need to be prioritised to meet business need in the first instance. Electric fleet vehicles that can be used by employees who are required to make home/site visits to residents and service users could be an example of a high priority area. Similarly, the Council's responsibility towards those employees who have need of a disabled parking bay (3% of respondents in the staff survey) should be considered for greater priority, as should space for bicycles and associated storage, external visitors and members. The general staff parking provision scheme is unlikely to continue given the high demand for priority groups.

4. Building (Civic Centre) and Public

It is recommended to Cabinet that we focus our utilisation of the Civic Centre on the East Wing. Analysis shows that this is the most conducive to enabling larger numbers of staff to operate within, both during Covid restrictions and when these are lifted. This will still enable the use of the central core of the Civic Centre (for meeting use during the pandemic and to fulfil the democratic functions of the Council when safety allows). This opens up opportunities for the creation of a Cultural Hub and Public Sector Hub in the other parts of the building, and it gives us the option of exploring other third-party usage in order to off-set the on-going costs of running and maintaining the building.

The proposal at this stage would be to occupy the current floor plans and furniture available. This is low/no cost but is a sub-optimal position. However, it does retain the flexibility and adaptability that we

will need as we develop our position further and we remain open to future opportunities. We should remember that this hybrid way of working is very new and we are not yet aware of the medium and long term challenges we may face. It therefore seems sensible not to commit resource to a particular option at this point.

Conclusion

Previously when we reported to Cabinet, we highlighted the following drivers for change:

1. Expectation

Covid 19 and the response to it has changed the expectations for both our staff and our service users. There are undoubtedly those who would prefer to the way things were in early 2020. However, there are many (staff and public included) who now have a level of expectation regarding remote accessing of services, work-life balance and flexibility.

2. Carbon reduction

We have very challenging targets and will become carbon neutral by 2030. We will struggle with this target (and the ensuing and on-going environmental impacts) if we don't reduce both commuting and grey mileage, encourage and make possible active travel options and be smarter about how we use our buildings.

3. Maximisation of our assets

There is a commitment to maximise the assets we have. This is better financially and better for the environment. We will not do this unless we adapt and change the way we do things. Going back to pre-Covid occupation levels is inefficient and removes any opportunity to look at how we use our assets differently (and in the case of the Civic Centre, bring it back in to full usage).

Cabinet has committed to Strategic Recovery Aim 3, to Sustain a Safe, Healthy and Productive Workforce. The report describes how we can continue to meet this Strategic Recovery Aim, take in to account the drivers for change and respond to the ever changing pressures created by Covid 19. The options within this paper show an interim position that acknowledges change but also allows a full range of options to be explored when we exit pandemic conditions.

Financial Summary

This report signals the next steps the Council will take in terms of moving towards a new way of working. In the initial phase, the focus will be on creating an environment that facilitates a gradual return of staff to the building, without the need for significant building adaptations or acquisition of new furniture or technology. As a consequence, the cost of this phase will be low or even zero and, should any costs arise, these will need to be absorbed as part of the revenue outturn position for 2021/22.

In terms of the longer term solution, the potential cost implications will be driven by the chosen solutions in terms of office layout and required technology and facilities. Indicative costs are not yet available, as there are currently a number of factors that could influence the cost, with further detailed work required. Whilst a definitive costs are not currently available, it is anticipated that costs could be incurred in relation to:

1. One off costs associated with replacement furniture to enable maximum utilisation of the reduced footprint within the Civic Centre
2. One off costs associated with any building adaptations required to accommodate the desired number of employees and ensure accessibility
3. One off costs associated with any reconfiguration of facilities within the Civic Centre (such as power and network access)
4. Ongoing revenue costs associated with the new ways of working

A funding solution has not yet been identified for any revenue or capital costs that may be incurred and this will not be possible until such costs have been quantified. Currently, there are no specific capital or

revenue allocations for any of the work required. Therefore, any costs arising will either need to be met from existing revenue budgets or earmarked reserves, available capital headroom, or from existing Capital Programme allocations connected, for example, with the upkeep of the Civic Centre or ICT Infrastructure. Should costs arise that cannot be met from within existing resources, it will be necessary to factor this into the ongoing budget planning process for 2022/23 or set aside funding from any overall revenue underspend, as part of the 2021/22 closure of accounts process, subject to the necessary approvals.

However, before any additional Council funds are allocated to the project, it would be appropriate to ensure that any external sources of funding have been explored, as well as maximising the financial savings arising from the change in operating model. Examples of these are outlined below:

1. Reduction in costs associated with other assets
2. Use of external grant funding
3. Capital receipts from the disposal of other assets
4. Income generated by third parties' use of our unused space

Risks

Risk	Impact of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L)	Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L)	What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect	Who is responsible for dealing with the risk?
Failure of IT infrastructure	H	L	Business Continuity Arrangement System prioritisation with SRS System back up and fail safe	Head of Service SRS
Information Security	M	L	Information Governance arrangements Staff and member training Multi-factor authentication	Digital Services Manager
Health & Safety – Fire Risk	M	L	Update fire risk assessments, building management processes and staff training within the new work-space	Head of Service
Service Delivery	L	L	Ensuring service areas are engaged within the planning process so that customer needs are at the forefront	Heads of Service
Staff Retention	L	L	Policy review is likely to make NCC a more attractive place to work	HR Manager

* Taking account of proposed mitigation measures

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

- The main Corporate Plan focus is on the Modernised Council theme but, dependant on decisions taken, will also positively impact on Thriving City and Aspirational People.

Well-being Objectives	Promote economic growth and regeneration whilst	Improve skills, educational outcomes &	Enable people to be healthy,	Build cohesive & sustainable communities
------------------------------	---	--	------------------------------	--

	protecting the environment	employment opportunities	independent & resilient	
Corporate Plan Commitments	Thriving City	Aspirational People		Resilient Communities
Supporting Function	Modernised Council			

Other council strategies and plans that link closely with this work are the Carbon Management Plan 2018-22 and the Sustainable Travel Strategy (Air, Noise & Sustainability Action Plan). Both of these plans are looking to reduce business and staff travel. The Council is also signed up to the Gwent Travel Charter (below).

Options Available and considered

1. Accept a new operating model, in principle and pending consultation with Trade Unions and staff that builds on our experiences of operating during Covid.
 - a. Consult on the introduction of a Homeworking policy and the inclusion of homeworking as a flexible working option in the Work/Life Balance policy.
 - b. Review the Flexi Time scheme and the appropriateness of this going forward.
 - c. Develop a review of the Travel and Subsistence policy to reflect increased homeworking and associated travel for business purposes
 - d. A review of the parking provision at the Civic Centre will be required to effectively prioritise key groups
2. To meet our Strategic Recovery aims and to manage the interim position dealing with Covid 19 and implementing the New Normal
 - a. Agree to designate the East Wing as the primary area of occupation of the Civic Centre.
 - b. Zone the East Wing by Directorate so that staff are able to work together in their professional groups when in the building.
 - c. Develop technological solutions to support this (booking system, etc.)
3. Once Covid restrictions allow, return to the Civic Centre and operate in the way that we had previously

Preferred Option and Why

Options 1 and 2 are the preferred options. They enable us to meet the changing expectations of the workforce, reduce our carbon footprint and open up the Civic Centre for increased utilisation by other organisations.

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

Currently, there are no specific financial details, with the report seeking to recommend consultation on various policies and set out an overarching way forward. The report does, however, outline a plan for the ongoing utilisation of the Civic Centre. Clearly, as outlined in the report, this will give rise to certain financial impacts, notably the costs associated with adapting and fitting out the area to be used. Before any costs are committed to, it will be necessary to identify the required funding sources and seek the necessary authorisation. Capital resources are likely to be required and, whilst there remains available capital headroom, there are a number of competing priorities for this. Therefore, the capital works connected with this project will need to be set against other Council aspirations and prioritised accordingly.

Should additional Council resources be required, this should only be after having exhausted all other funding avenues. This will include, but not be limited to, external funding sources and internal efficiency

savings. Any other funding requirements will need to be considered as part of the medium term budget planning process, for both revenue and capital, as well as the process of closing the 2021/22 accounts. As a number of the likely costs to be incurred will be one-off in nature, it may be appropriate to consider setting aside an amount of revenue underspend at the end of this financial year, to be held in earmarked reserves and used over the course of the project, as and when costs arise.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

There are no specific legal issues arising from the report at this stage. Any legal implications will be addressed as part of the implementation process and the individual work-streams. The new operating model previously agreed by Cabinet is consistent with the Council's Covid-19 strategic recovery aims, the Corporate Plan objectives relating to a modernised Council and workforce and also strategic sustainability objectives. In terms of staffing implications, the new operating model will require changes to working culture and terms and conditions of employment, particularly in relation to the current Homeworking, Flexi-time and travel and subsistence policies. The Council is able to change terms and conditions in accordance with its general staffing and employment powers under section 112 of the Local Government Act 1972, but in making these changes it has to comply with the requirements of the Employment Rights legislation and, in particular, the requirement for meaningful consultation with the staff and recognised trade unions. Therefore, it is recommended that this collective bargaining process is commenced as soon as possible, so there is meaningful engagement and consultation with the staff and trade unions regarding the proposals. The re-use or re-purposing of Council premises is also consistent with asset rationalisation policies and the Council's general powers of property management under sections 122 and 123 of the 1972 Act. The Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 requires the Council to introduce the technology to hold "hybrid" meetings as from May 2022, as part of its democratic decision-making processes, and this requirement will apply regardless of any new operating model. This is intended to allow greater flexibility for elected members to participate remotely in meetings, as part of the equalities agenda to encourage more diversity among Council membership. Democratic Services Committee have considered the potential impact of the new operating model on elected members and are satisfied that there are no specific issues that need to be addressed in terms of members well-being. They were also satisfied that the remuneration packages being recommended by the IRP are sufficient to cover the new ways of working. However, the costs of members IT are additional to any basic and senior salaries, and there will need to be a review of member IT provision, including devices and broadband, to ensure that they remain fit for purpose under the new operating model.

Comments of Head of People and Business Change

Covid 19 and the response to the pandemic has introduced systemic change at incredible pace. There have been many benefits to this but it has also created challenges and these have been highlighted in previous reports. Cabinet have previously approved moving towards more detailed planning and this report details the requirements of the interim phase that enables us to respond to the changing requirements of the pandemic and keep open opportunities for future decisions.

Union comments received are within Annex A (to complete once comments in).

As an organisation we have a key and positive role to play as a leader in the climate change agenda and the report highlights the benefits for current and future generations.

Local issues

Not Applicable

Scrutiny Committees

An original discussion paper on the New Normal was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in February 2021.

An update was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in June 2021. Recommendations and comments from that Committee are below:

- The Committee would like further exploration on how mentors for Active Travel could work, for people who would like to cycle but do not have the experience or confidence. It was also requested that rewarding active travel could be reviewed as a part of the Travel and Subsistence Policy review.
- Members spoke of the importance of face-to-face contact and it shouldn't be neglected. Both from a staff perspective and a citizen perspective, it is very important for people to be able to interact in person. The Council need to pay important attention to this, as it is at the heart of local engagement and democracy.
- The Committee were pleased with the assurance that the Council is able to cope and have facilities in place with cyber-attacks.
- Members requested if there can be additional information included in the report about the potential future usage of the Civic Centre building.

Equalities Impact Assessment and the Equalities Act 2010

A fairness and equalities impact assessment has been drafted and will be updated following further stakeholder engagement.

Stakeholders, especially those with protected characteristics should be involved in a meaningful and effective way to help shape working models as they are developed.

Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The "New Normal" Programme will have long-term and preventative benefits to the health and well-being of staff and the wider community by contributing to the improvement of air quality and the reduction of carbon emissions in the area. Stakeholders including staff should be involved in a meaningful and effective way to help shape the programme as it is developed.

As stated above the programme takes an integrated approach by supporting many of the well-being goals namely: A Prosperous Wales; A Resilient Wales; A Healthier Wales; and A Globally Responsible Wales and does not adversely affect any of the others. The programme also support three of the council's Corporate Plan well-being objectives:

2. To promote economic growth and regeneration whilst protecting the environment.
3. To enable people to be healthy, independent & resilient.
4. To build cohesive & sustainable communities.

In addition, the council is working with partners in a collaborative way through the One Newport Public Services Board (PSB) and the implementation of the Local Well-being Plan Well-being Objectives. The PSB as a whole has pledged to "become champions of sustainable travel, leading by example and reducing the public sector's contribution to air pollution".

To support this work the council along with 22 other public and third sector organisations across Gwent has signed up to the Travel Charter.

The Charter commits to supporting and encouraging staff to reduce travel and travel in a sustainable way. Through 15 ambitious commitments, the charter promotes walking, cycling, agile working and the use of public transport and ultra-low emission vehicles.

The public sector in Gwent employs almost one in three working adults. By working together, public sector organisations across Gwent aim to increase sustainable journeys made to and from workplaces, reducing the impact on the environment and improving health in Gwent for current and future generations.

The "New Normal" Programme supports this work along with the following Local Well-being Plan well-being objectives:

1. Everyone feels good about living, working, visiting and investing in our unique city.

2. Everyone has the skills and opportunities to develop, prosper and contribute to a sustainable, thriving city.
3. Everyone belongs to friendly, connected resilient communities and feels confident and empowered to improve their well-being.
4. Newport has healthy, safe and resilient environments with an integrated sustainable travel network.

Consultation

Trade Union Comments are at Annex A

Background Papers

- [The Essentials - Wellbeing of Future Generation Act \(Wales\)](#)
- [Corporate Plan](#)
- [Carbon Management Plan](#)
- [Sustainable Travel Strategy \(Air, Noise & Sustainability Action Plan\)](#)
- [Gwent Healthy Travel Charter](#)

Dated: 20th October 2021

Appendix 1

Trade Union Comments

No new trade Union comments have been received on this updated report. Previous Comments received are below for information.

Unison

Whilst no one can pretend that Covid has been a positive experience in any way, it has shown that many more staff can work flexibly from home.

Many staff have embraced working from home with flexible hours during this very traumatic period. Some service areas who have previously been very traditional in working methods have had to embrace agile working and flexible hours. I can think of many examples where staff on long term sickness could have been able to continue working if the service areas had been more open to staff home working. I would argue that with covid stats removed from sickness figures there would be significant drop in overall sickness levels. But I would also suggest that there may be a rise in stress and anxiety illness amongst some staff.

Whilst we believe that Newport should be using this opportunity to embrace new working practices any move to remote working will mean there needs to be additional support for staff to access. Work is not just work it's a safe place to be for staff in abusive or controlling relationships. It's a place to meet new people, a support network of colleagues and friends a routine to build a life around. This needs to be acknowledged and sufficient support be put in place for staff.

There needs to be a new work ethos that balances what's best for NCC and its workforce. There are financial savings to be made but this decision should not be seen purely as a savings or cost cutting exercise. Staff working from home have had to incur greater costs heating, electricity, upgrades to internet etc. whilst these costs have been picked up by staff in the short term if this model of working were to continue this does need to be addressed.

Working spaces within homes are not always practical and work station assessments will need to continue to be undertaken to support individuals and this would need to continue as a long term plan. There also needs to be clear demarcation between somebody working flexibly and a manager wanting/expecting responses or work completed on demand or having their team work flexibly around their needs.

There are massive advantages to be gained from continuing to work as we are and to continue to move in this direction and we recognise this. The gains for the environment, easing congestion and parking issues around the civic and other council buildings all need to be considered but the points mentioned above need to be considered too and a supportive balanced approach must be taken.

For this to continue successfully there needs to be a coordinated plan in place which is appropriately funded to ensure that all staff are supported. Supervision and management needs to be done supportively and be a two way process. All too many times when we are supporting members we find that support is a tick box exercise or supervision becomes a one way communication with managers using those opportunity's to highlight perceived problems or issues without listening or seeing what is happening with that individual.

Staff across the council are doing more with less now after years of austerity. Staff consistently work over their hours to complete tasks and to meet deadlines "because it has to be done" and this is difficult to monitor when staff work remotely.

Staff working remotely need to still feel like they are part of a team and supported.

There is a financial impact to consider on staff.

How mileage is calculated needs to be considered when staff are working from home but having to visit sites sometimes several per day. Where is classed as a base home or former work location.

Flexi time if it is to be removed due to home working what if anything takes its place.

Screen fatigue long use of screens has a detrimental impact on health and wellbeing this can be worse when considering potential poor lighting and lack of natural light in spare rooms and house spaces being used by staff.

Monitoring of screen time meetings and real world meetings to ensure a balanced approach to the new ways of working.

Peter Garland Branch Secretary Unison City Branch

GMB comments to New Normal cabinet Report - Newport City Council

The GMB is seeking clarity as to who defines who is regarded as a non-frontline employee and therefore able to work from home - with home as their start base of work? Do you expect disparity across departments with regards to this?

This has obvious benefits to non-frontline employees, should they feel happy to continue to work from home on some kind of flexible basis. GMB also acknowledges that continuously working from home can have a detrimental impact on individuals' health and wellbeing.

Whilst GMB sees this as a positive opportunity for many employees, it could (if not implemented correctly) lead to further, tangible divisions between groups of workers who will not have the same flexibility to their working practices - frontline/operational staff. We are therefore seeking clarification from the Council as to how they will mitigate the potential for employees to feel excluded.

Whilst the reduction in carbon emissions is welcome, it should be noted that services for such items as household waste will increase with individuals working from home, and these operational resources should reflect the increase from business waste to personal waste.

GMB welcomes the opportunity to work with the Council on this initiative, however it must be emphasised that managers/supervisors are properly trained and subscribe to the principle of inclusivity, fairness and transparency when considering the implementation of the New Normal.

Yours sincerely

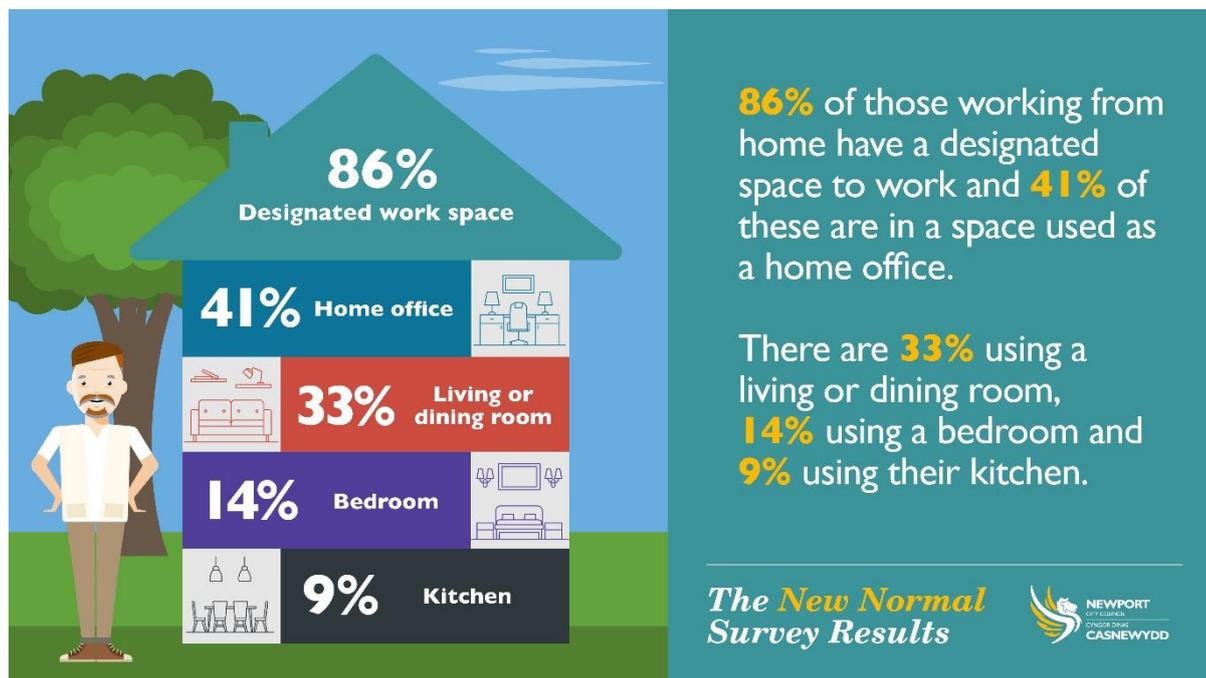
Rowena Hayward

Rowena Hayward
Senior Organiser

The New Normal Survey Results

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the New Normal survey over August and September – a total of 710 responses were received with an equal proportion across all service areas, giving a valuable and representative insight into the collective views of the workforce.

62% of respondents were working their contracted hours from home, with 21% working some of the time at home and some of the time from the Civic Centre. Only 3% of respondents were working their contracted hours from a workplace.



Over 70% responded to say that their working environment at home had appropriate lighting, ventilation and was a space free from noise and interruption, with fewer individuals having appropriate work station set up – 30% of people say their workstation set up is average or poor. This matches up with the responses seen to the question about DSE assessments – 75% of respondents confirmed that they had undertaken a DSE assessment and as result, 88% felt they had the right equipment to carry out their role from home.

Whilst the expected equipment was available in over 70% of responses (laptop, chair, desk, monitor, keyboard and mouse), fewer people are making use of risers or wrist rests (30%). 9% of respondents confirmed that they have specialist equipment at home, with chairs being the most common item.

99% of respondents have access to broadband at home, 97% of which had it prior to the Covid pandemic, and say that it is reliable – 83% have good coverage.



76%
more flexibility

8% of respondents have not enjoyed working from home and the same percentage feel that they have had less flexibility in their working hours.

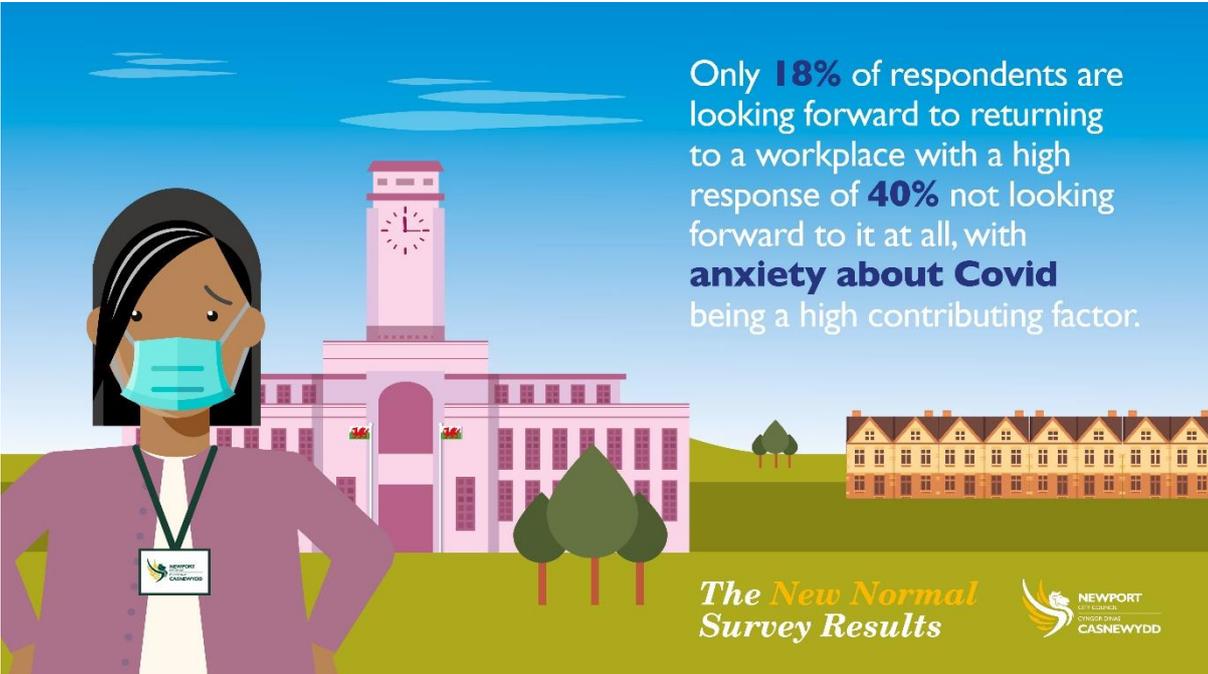
However, **68%** have enjoyed working from home and **76%** feel that they have had more flexibility in their working hours.

The New Normal Survey Results



NEWPORT
CITY COUNCIL
CIBORDDU
CASNEWYDD

13% of the workforce have visited a Council office to work in order to have quiet time away from home, with 4% not having suitable work space at home and 1% needing a safe working environment due to domestic issues at home impacting on work.



Only **18%** of respondents are looking forward to returning to a workplace with a high response of **40%** not looking forward to it at all, with **anxiety about Covid** being a high contributing factor.

The New Normal Survey Results



NEWPORT
CITY COUNCIL
CIBORDDU
CASNEWYDD

The top three measures that would make staff feel less anxious about a return to the workplace were restrictions on the number of people in the building, a strong focus on cleaning and the use of face coverings.

When we asked how many days in the office you would like to work, the results were:



0 days – 14%
1 day – 32%
2 days – 35%
3 days – 13%
4 days – 4%
5 days – 2%



*The New Normal
Survey Results*



We also asked how important it is for you to have a designated area to work and 50% of respondents felt that it was very important. Slightly fewer (45%) felt that it was also very important to have the same desk and office when returning to the workplace.

When we asked about what facilities you value the most, the top 3 were the ability to make tea and coffee, having fridges and microwaves and drinking water dispensers with the bottom 3 being shower facilities, reflection rooms and vending machines.

61% of respondents were not aware of the Welsh Government's pilot project to launch public sector remote working hubs but 48% would be willing to work from one if available and close to home.

With regards to commuting to a workplace, 83% of respondents drove by car with only 7% car sharing. Even fewer walk (10%), use a bus (8%), train (2%) or cycle (8%). Of the car users, 66% have petrol powered vehicles, 32% have diesel and less than 1% have an electric vehicle. If parking was restricted, 68% of respondents would consider an alternative means of transport to work, and would be encouraged by access to discounted public transport and better connectivity of public transport times/routes. An increase of those cycling to work could be achieved if lockers, showers and bike storage was made available (12%)

23% of respondents use their car every day for work purposes, 28% use it 2-3 times per week but 34% only use their car on an ad hoc basis.

3% of respondents are blue badge holders and would require access to a disabled parking space to attend a workplace.

57% of respondents would be **willing** to consider varying their employment contract to include their home as a work location, but **33%** are **unsure**.

The New Normal Survey Results

NEWPORT
CITY COUNCIL
CIBORDDI
CASNEWYDD

The most valuable factor of the flexi time scheme was chosen as being able to have time to balance work/life responsibilities e.g. caring responsibilities (49%), closely followed by the ability to accrue time, whereas the 7am-7pm bandwidth was the least popular response as being the most valuable factor of the scheme.

Staff emails and **newsletters** were the preferred method of communication and **fortnightly** was the preferred frequency level.

Whilst **84%** have regular team meetings on a weekly or monthly basis, **62%** of respondents said that they did not have service area meetings.

The New Normal Survey Results

What happens next?

A report will be taken to Cabinet in December proposing some options for the future. These will include considerations about HR policies, the Civic Centre usage as a building, how the democratic process could adapt and the impact of technology. If Cabinet approve the report we will be in a position to start consulting with trade unions on the proposals and communicate with the workforce on what changes are likely to be made. The report has been drafted with your views taken into account and the results of the survey will be included for Cabinet to reflect upon. The Chief Executive will provide further detail nearer to the time of publication.