

Report



Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation

Part 1

Date: 30 August 2022

Subject New Normal – Policy Updates

Purpose Following previous reports to Cabinet around the Councils approach to New Normal, this paper seeks agreement from the Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation on the changes to the 4 policies considered as part of the New Normal Project:

Homeworking; Travel & Subsistence; Flexible Working and Flexi Time

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Ward All

Summary During the COVID-19 pandemic Newport City Council adapted the way in which it operates in order to maintain services, ensure the wellbeing of its staff and deliver services for our residents. A project team was established to review the 'New Normal' operating model for the Council and to provide support for our staff. As part of this work, three policies have been revised and a new Homeworking policy developed.

This report sets out the introduction of the Homeworking Policy and the amendments to the three existing policies under our new operating model in line with our Strategic Recovery Aims, which focus on increased workforce flexibility, the wellbeing of our staff and enabling modern working practices.

Proposal For the Cabinet Member to agree to the permanent changes and implementation of policies.

Action by Head of People, Policy and Transformation

Timetable Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Chief Executive & Directors
- Head of People, Policy & Transformation
- Head of Law and Standards
- Head of Finance
- Trade Unions

Background

In March 2020 the COVID 19 global pandemic struck affecting the working environment. Subsequently Newport City Council staff had to adopt new approaches to working overnight including for some, working from home, adapting to technology and balancing the commitments work and home life. As a result of the first lock-down in March 2020 the Council had to adapt the way it operates. Whilst front line services were 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 infrastructure to support homeworking has been enhanced and Homeworking assessments have been undertaken to allow staff to safely work from home and continue to operate at the best of their ability.

Building on our current Corporate Plan theme of Modernised Council and as part of our recovery aims, agreed June 2020, a review of the 'New Normal' working arrangements have been undertaken to ensure we harness the positive working practice from the pandemic and achieve our commitment under our plans to sustain a Safe, healthy and productive workforce, modernise our working practices and support our workforce to become more agile.

There are some very clear organisational and staff benefits to continuing to operate in a flexible way – work/life balance, interacting with our communities, carbon reduction, reduced congestion on our roads, opportunities for utilising our facilities and buildings in different ways. In enabling our workforce to work in this new way, balance and support has been given to our staff around their wellbeing and identification of any development areas required to support the arrangements.

Policies

All policies have been drafted and consulted upon with our Trade Unions. Comments received from each of our trade unions are included.

1. Homeworking

The Homeworking policy is a new policy for the Council. The Council has a commitment to enable flexibility of working arrangements with the aim of meeting both organisational and individual needs. The Homeworking policy covers whether the employee's home or the Council's premises will be the main place of work and could include the following options:

- Home as the main place of work.
- Flexible homeworking with time split between home and the office.
- Mobile working with a base at home to travel to the Council's different premises and service users.
- The office as the main place of work with working from home occasionally.

In developing this new policy the Council recognises that there are a range of benefits associated with homeworking. These can include:-

- Increased productivity as output from employees working from home often improves due to fewer interruptions than in the office.
- Greater engagement, commitment and loyalty from employees who value being able to work from home.
- Wider choice when hiring due to being able to recruit from a larger pool of talent because of where potential employees currently live may be less of a factor in whether they apply.
- Attract a more diverse
- Potential for a wider range of talent and innovation.
- A homeworking policy helps the carbon and green agendas, by cutting down on commuting.

Ultimately alongside providing our current workforce with the opportunity to work flexibly this policy will also help us become an employer of choice, flexible in our approach, which can help attract and keep talented staff.

This policy does not apply to school based staff.

2. Travel & Subsistence

The Travel & Subsistence Policy is an existing policy. The policy aims to ensure reimbursement of staff whilst undertaking duties which take them from their normal place of work as long as the expenses incurred are reasonable and necessary to perform their duties and are allowable under Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) regulations.

The main changes to the Travel & Subsistence Policy are:

- Claiming mileage from permanent work location, which could be the employee home address
- Reference to consideration of audio / video conferencing meetings to reduce the need to travel
- An updated link to the HMRC approved mileage claim rates for fuel and electric cars
- Insertion of HMRC 'out of pocket' allowance claim rates

This policy is relevant to all Council staff as and when there is a need to claim travel and subsistence. Governing bodies will be commended this policy for adoption.

3. Flexible Working

The Flexible Working Policy is an existing policy. The Council recognises that employees may require flexibility around their working patterns to suit their own personal circumstances. The flexible working policy has been updated to include the option of employees requesting a change in work location, arrangements or homeworking. The policy is supported by the new Homeworking policy. As an existing policy with amendments around homeworking, the normal process for agreeing requests for flexible working will continue.

This policy is relevant to all Council staff as and when there is a need to request to work flexibly. Governing bodies will be commended this policy for adoption

4. Flexi Time

The Flexi Time scheme is an existing guidance document. It should be noted that since the start of the pandemic, this policy has been temporarily suspended to support the workforce in their work life balance commitments whilst also ensuring services continued to be delivered.

The main changes to the flexi time scheme are:

- Amendment to the flexi time carry over allowance which has been amended to 8 hours. *(In amending the flexi time carry over a commitment has been given to our trade unions to review the 8 hours limit in 6 months from its implementation).*
- Removal of bandwidths, with services defining their core operational bandwidths for flexi purposes.
- Move to using Employee Self Service (ESS) to manage the process.

This policy does not apply to school based staff.

The draft policies are attached as appendices to this report.

Consultation

Consultation has taken place with the trade unions and feedback has been received. Some proposed changes were suggested. The feedback grid is available which also outlines the response and action from the Council in response to the Trade Union feedback, this was also considered by the Employee Partnership Forum.

The Report was also received at the Employee Partnership Forum at its August 2022 meeting.

Implementation, Training & Communications

Following agreement to implement these policies a period of system amendments, training and development will be required to support the implementation. An implementation plan will be put together with a view to implementing the new policies over the summer months once system changes have been made and any support has been provided for staff.

Financial Summary

There are no direct costs associated with implementing these policies. There may be some additional equipment costs in some flexible working requests. These costs will be met in service areas.

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?
Unable to meet our aspirations as a modern and attractive employer	H	H	Temporary working practices are in place to support the changes noted	Head of People, Policy and Transformation alongside all other Heads of Service

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

The report has links with our Corporate Plan, People & Culture Strategy, Strategic Recovery Aims and our Climate Change plans. The policies are intrinsically linked with other policies as detailed within each policy.

Options Available

The options available are as follows:

1. For the Cabinet Member to approve the adoption of the policies.
2. For the Cabinet Member to not approve the adoption of the policies.

Preferred Option and Why

For the Cabinet Member to approve the adoption of the policies so that the workforce and organisation can offer and make arrangements for the future new ways of working.

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

It is not anticipated that there will be an adverse budgetary impact as a result of adopting these new and updated policies. The cost of any additional equipment required will be met through existing service area budgets. With more and more councils adopting hybrid working practices and operating virtual meetings there will potentially be a positive impact in terms of expenditure on car allowances and mileage claims and this will be monitored through established budget monitoring processes.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

The proposed action is in accordance with the Council's statutory powers under section 112 of the Local Government Act to fix reasonable terms and conditions for the employment of staff. In addition to statutory employment rights and contractual terms and conditions of employment, the Council has a

number of discretionary working policies that regulate how staff carry out their work. These discretionary employment policies include arrangements for flexible working and reimbursement of the costs of travel and subsistence. The existing policies need to be reviewed and adapted to reflect the new working arrangements agreed by Cabinet as part of the “New Normal” operating model. In addition, with the move to hybrid working, then a new home working policy needs to be adopted to regulate how this new model will operate in practice. The draft policies have been the subject of consultation with the recognised trade unions and, where appropriate, their comments have been reflected in the proposed changes. The views of the Employee Partnership Forum are also requested to help inform the final decision to adopt these new policies. Subject to any comments that the EPF may have, then the decision to formally approve and adopt these new employment policies falls within the executive scheme of delegation for the Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation, as they are strategic HR policies. Because these are discretionary HR policies, and are not a statutory right or contractual entitlement, then they can be changed without the need for any collective agreement or contractual notice period. The policies do not affect the statutory Pay & Reward Policy and, therefore, do not require in-year Council approval. However, the cross-reference to various employee benefits and policies in the Pay & Reward Policy will need to be updated in next year’s report.

Comments of Head of People, Policy and Transformation

The comments of the Head of People, Policy and Transformation are contained within the main body of the report by the HR & OD Manager.

Comments of Non-Executive Members

Councillor Kellaway:

I note in the principles of homeworking the perceived benefits of working from home such as being more productive, however we do need to give proper weight to the benefits of an office and team environment, such as the social interaction and emotional and wellbeing support working in a team can bring. It would also be prudent to regularly review the efficiency and productiveness of such an arrangement.

Response:

The support for the policy is noted. The Homeworking draft Policy notes the importance of well-being and additional considerations for new and other staff. HR will also be working closely with managers to ensure that effective management is in place, both for staff well-being /team development and also effectiveness and performance.

Councillor Drewett:

I fully support the introduction and implementation of these policies which will bring benefits to both employees and to NCC as employer.

Councillor Reeks:

I am mindful that hybrid working can be more advantageous to both the employer and the employee in terms of time/cost/sustainability, and I would support the draft but would want assurances on the following please:

- 1) That the service to the residents/business users of Newport does not in any way suffer or fall short of what is expected due to not enough staff being available in the office to accommodate their requirements?
- 2) That the employee as a “lone worker” at home is covered by the necessary safeguards required under the NCC’s Duty of Care as an employer and that their wellbeing is also monitored?

Further, in light of the escalating price costs will the home workers be able to claim expenses for working from home in respect of their energy usage.

Response:

The support for the policy is noted. The Homeworking draft Policy notes the importance of well-being and additional considerations for all staff. HR will also be working closely with managers to ensure that

effective management is in place, both for staff well-being /team development and also effective service delivery and performance. It is the intention of the homeworking policy to enhance service delivery to residents; and requests to work from home for a proportion of the working week will be considered on a business need basis ensuring service delivery is not negatively impacted.

The cost of living concerns are also noted and offices will remain open for employees who need to attend a place of work, the homeworking application is optional for those members of staff who would prefer their base to be their home.

Scrutiny Committees

The report was discussed at the Employee Partnership Forum in August.

Equalities Impact Assessment

An FEIA on the combined impact has been conducted and is available for review.

Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The wider Policy updates contribute to the well-being goals for a more equal Wales and a prosperous Wales. The policies support our employees with their work life balance commitments and aim to make us more flexible as an employer of choice. The five ways of working have been applied when considering this proposal and policies developed with longer term and short term workforce commitments in mind. The policies also form a key part of the Council's People and Culture Strategy and Covid Recovery objectives.

Consultation

As outlined within the report.

Background Papers

Policies – Homeworking, Travel & Subsistence, Flexible Working, Flexi Time
Cabinet Report – New Normal

Dated: 30 August 2022