

**Report to:** Place Scrutiny Committee

**Date of meeting:** 26 November 2021

**By:** Chief Operating Officer

**Title:** Workstyles Review

**Purpose:** To update Place Scrutiny on the undertakings of the Workstyles Review.

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***RECOMMENDATIONS:***

**The Committee is recommended to note and comment on the Workstyles Review.**

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**1 Background**

1.1 A large portion of East Sussex County Council (ESCC) workforce started working from home as of March 2020, though it is worth noting that a significant portion of the workforce have remained working in our buildings throughout the pandemic for various work or personal reasons. The feedback from staff has largely been positive with an increase in productivity and improved work life balance, and there have been significant reductions in carbon emissions due to reduced requirement for staff to travel. However, there have also been some difficulties for new starters and those with poor home work spaces.

1.2 The impact of the pandemic has created a large-scale shift in how organisations operate and has provided an unprecedented opportunity to reimagine how we work in the future. To lock in the benefits we have experienced, the Corporate Management Team (CMT) agreed a 'Workstyles review' in September 2020. This is being coordinated collaboratively between Human Resources & Organisational Development (HR&OD), Property and Information Technology & Digital (IT&D) in order to understand future ways of working for staff across ESCC.

1.3 A key part of this work has been extensive engagement with all services across the Council. This has provided a significant amount of information and insight into expected future ways of working and, in common with a number of businesses and local authorities across the Country, 'hybrid working' has emerged as the most common future approach. Hybrid working is defined as a way of structuring work, communication, hours and physical locations to enable our staff to be as productive as possible no matter where, when or who they work with.

1.4 The Covid landscape is being continually monitored to assess how we can safely enable more staff to return to the office in the short term, and teams in both Property and Public Health continue to work closely to ensure we are working in a safe way. The Workstyles review is running concurrently to understand future needs of teams once social distancing can be fully lifted from our buildings.

**2 Supporting Information**

2.1 Engagement with management teams has been positive and all departments agree that a hybrid approach is an appropriate model for future ways of working. For many, we anticipate this to mean working from the office two or three days a week, instead of the traditional five days. Decisions around working patterns will be led by business need at their core, rather than driven by personal preference.

2.2 Whilst an increase in working from home/alternative locations will remain a feature of future working, it is also clear that the office continues to be a crucial asset for the operation of our services, with staff working in the office for a proportion of the working week for face-to-face collaboration, connection, or team working.

2.3 To enable our workforce to thrive in a hybrid environment CMT agreed the following Workstyles Principles:

<b>We will</b>	<b>We will not</b>
Be driven by business need	Be led by personal preference
Have a consistent approach on a service level	Mandate one approach across the whole organisation
See increased office space for collaboration and connection between staff	Have as much focus on desk space for individual work
Facilitate hybrid meetings (where appropriate), thus reducing business travel expenditure	Expect staff to physically attend meetings unless there is a reason to
Continue to provide staff with a contractual working base	Have home-working contracts, except in exceptional circumstances

2.4 Embracing these new ways of working will be a key part in supporting the Council's carbon reduction strategy to become carbon neutral by 2050. By adapting the way we work, we will be able to build on the carbon benefits realised over the last year through reduced travel to the office to work, or to attend face to face meetings.

2.5 There are many additional benefits to the Council supporting a hybrid working model. These include: greater staff retention and recruitment opportunities; reducing the cost of staff travel; ensuring a more resilient and adaptable working culture for future challenges; and future opportunities to rationalise our office estate and reduce occupancy costs through leasing floors.

2.6 Cabinet agreed the budget to enable hybrid working from savings made by the reduction in work-based travel since the pandemic. The budget will be used to provide resources by investing in technology and configuring different working spaces.

2.7 The Workstyles team are engaging closely with department leads and key contacts in each building to discuss and agree adaptations for each area. With Microsoft Teams now routinely used, space to join hybrid meetings or ad hoc calls will be in high demand. Meeting spaces are being adapted to optimise the effectiveness of hybrid meetings and providing configured spaces for different types of work. This includes suitable technology and specific room layouts, for example:

- Enhancing the amount of hybrid meeting spaces available. This will require adding video conferencing tools to a larger portion of our meeting rooms, and ensuring the layout is maximised for facilitating a meeting where some people are in the room and some are attending virtually (for example, laying the room out in a horseshoe arrangement).
- Creating large meeting spaces to enable teams to come together periodically for team cohesion, project work and collaboration. This will be especially beneficial to those teams who anticipate being in the office fewer days a week as it provides an opportunity to connect with colleagues.
- Creating open meeting spaces on some floors to provide space for informal meetings and discussions. These areas will be defined using existing storage, lockers, and acoustic screening as a boundary to the open office and will be equipped with video conferencing tools.
- Increased confidential meeting spaces, equipped with video conferencing tools. This is in response to staff feedback about availability of private meeting space.

- Implementing quiet desk zones by using acoustic screens, as well as the introduction of booths for staff to drop into for non-confidential video/phone calls. This will provide staff with a space to attend Teams meetings whilst not taking up valuable meeting rooms.

2.8 Physical changes to floor layouts in the Eastbourne and Hastings hub buildings will take place during the winter, with County Hall adaptations being reviewed in Spring 2022.

2.9 To support a hybrid way of working, a resources toolkit has been developed for staff to access on the Intranet, covering key information to support staff on matters relating to the spaces they work in, the technology they use, and the resources available to support them ([Workstyles review – ESCC Intranet](#)). Mandatory e-learning on how to work in a hybrid environment has been produced to help staff understand every aspect of hybrid working.

2.10 The Workstyles Policy (Appendix A), was agreed by the Governance Committee on 30 September and is a key component in supporting the hybrid way of working. It has formed a core part of the engagement and communication arrangements with managers and teams ensuring working arrangements are determined by the needs of the service.

2.11 Teams will use the Workstyles Policy to guide their discussions when agreeing hybrid working arrangements, based on the needs of the service. These discussions will form a written Team Agreement, which must be completed before returning to the office.

2.12 Hybrid working will be fully facilitated once current social distancing requirements have been relaxed.

### **3 Conclusion and Recommendations**

3.1 The impact of the pandemic has created a large-scale shift in how organisations operate and has provided an unprecedented opportunity to put in place new ways of working that support both the needs of the service and the Council's workforce.

3.2 The Workstyles review has included a significant programme of engagement across the Council regarding our future working arrangements. This engagement with Services is ongoing, with agreed changes being implemented in stages during the winter and spring/summer next year. A further review will take place in six to nine months' time to understand the effectiveness of the changes and agree whether further adaptations are required.

3.3 The Committee is recommended to note and comment on the Workstyles Review.

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