



Report to:	Cabinet – Monday, 13 June 2022
Lead Cabinet Member:	Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Resources
Lead Officer:	Jeff Membery – Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Service

New Hybrid Working Policy

Executive Summary

1. The majority of the Council's office-based staff have been working primarily from home since March 2020, when the UK first went into lockdown. While this caused some initial difficulties, all departments have now put measures in place to allow the continued delivery of services to our residents while operating a remote workforce. There is a clear need and desire for a continued hybrid working approach in the long term, and the proposed policy outlines how this would work at South Cambridgeshire district Council.
2. The policy has been reviewed by our Trade Union partners and the Employment and Staffing Committee; their feedback has been taken on board and changes made

Key Decision

3. No

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that Cabinet approve the introduction of the Hybrid Working Policy.

Reasons for Recommendations

5. The introduction of a hybrid working policy will allow us to continue to meet our residents needs while also accommodating the needs and wellbeing of our employees, and the increased flexibility that the modern workforce expects. This should also impact on our recruitment and staff retention, as it demonstrates we are a modern and caring council.

Details

6. Since March 2020, the majority of Council staff have been working primarily from home, with occasional visits or meetings in our offices. While this doesn't currently apply to all of our operational staff in the Shared Waste Service, we have had very positive feedback from colleagues in other service areas and local residents, with particular positivity about the benefits of hybrid working on flexibility and the wellbeing of our colleagues.
7. The move to homeworking did result in some rapid changes in many service areas, especially regarding ICT and telephone systems, but measures have now been put in place that allow colleagues to continue delivering excellent customer services from any location. This includes all teams completing a Team Charter, which outlines how teams will be working in a hybrid manner, and how they will continue to meet their service obligations.
8. A survey of SCDC colleagues conducted in March 2020 found that over 70% of respondents would like to continue working from home regularly in the long-term, and several more recent surveys, including a report by ONS in June 2021, suggest that there is a strong desire for hybrid working across all office-based sectors. This means that in addition to our current work force, potential future employees will also be expecting more flexible work offerings in the future so the Council must adapt to this change if they wish to be competitive and appeal to good candidates.
9. We are therefore proposing the introduction of a Hybrid Working policy, which will outline the Council's approach to hybrid working and how it can be applied to individuals. While this will include the option for remote working, it does not mean that employees will have to work remotely if they would prefer to be based entirely in the office. There are also some roles which, due to the nature of the role, will not be suitable for hybrid working (e.g. a refuse loader).
10. Our suggested approach is for employees to identify which working profile they fit into, these being
 - a. Fixed profile
 - b. Hybrid – on the go
 - c. Hybrid – desk based
11. Teams will then be empowered to use their Team Charter and individual conversations between employees and their managers to determine what working patterns would best accommodate the employees' wants and the services' needs, and these will be continually reviewed to ensure appropriate support and cover is provided. This approach will allow for individual needs to be taken into account, such as childcare arrangements, disabilities, or home workstation set-up.

12. The proposed policy has been aligned with other HR policies and practices, and consideration paid to our Health and Safety and ICT/data requirements. In particular, we have considered the impact the policy may have on our staff engagement levels, and the health and wellbeing of our employees, and are hopeful that the continuation of flexible and hybrid working options may be of particular benefit to colleagues with physical or mental conditions. For example, those who benefit from being able to take regular breaks away from their screen, or who find the traditional office-based work environment causes them anxiety or distracts them from their tasks. We are aware that the change to remote working has been difficult for some, and are intending to continue our programme of webinars and training around remote working and managing stress.
13. The policy was reviewed by the Employment and Staffing Committee on 14th January 2022, who made the following requests/comments:
 - a. The Policy be regularly reviewed with an initial review be set for 12 months after the implementation; this has been added to the Policy Plan
 - b. Concern over access to technology and how this would impact on Officer's interaction with residents and members.
 - c. Members' access to technology and support was also discussed
 - d. Committee were keen that officers be given access to the working environment which best suited their individual needs
 - e. Concern was raised over ensuring a healthy balance between work and life; home working can blur the lines between the two
14. In response to the points raised at the committee meeting, feedback has been provided to Democratic Services around the need for additional technological support for members.
15. Each service area has been asked to complete a Team Charter outlining how it will continue to provide its services to residents and customers, and part of this is ensuring that all residents have access to our services. While hybrid working will mean some staff are working from home, some staff will still be available in the office in the traditional manner. We are encouraging residents to contact Officers through our website primarily, and are confident we will be able to continue offering the same level of support with our officers working remotely.
16. The policy is also aimed at enabling officers to best identify what works for them and their team, so they can determine where they work. We also appreciate that this may change over time, and are keen that we remain flexible in our approach.
17. Since the Council moved to homeworking in March 2020, we have run a series of webinars, training, and events aimed at supporting our staff's mental and physical health. These have included manager training, challenges, and events for colleagues to get involved with, social events to encourage team building, and communicating what tools and supports are available. We will continue to provide these, and to monitor the impact of hybrid working on our staff through staff surveys.

Options

18. The options open to Cabinet are to:
- a. Refuse the new policy
 - b. Request additional changes be made to the policy
 - c. Approve the policy

Implications

19. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk, equality and diversity, climate change, and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered:-

Legal

20. The proposed policy has been written in accordance with all legal requirements and best practice.

Staffing

21. By increasing our flexible working offering to staff, our aim is to better support our colleagues and their work-life balance while continue to meet our residents' needs. Hybrid working is predicted to be a priority for future jobseekers, and our current workforce are strongly in favour of maintaining some hybrid working arrangements in the long-term.

Equality and Diversity

22. The EqIA for the new policy has been completed, and identified many positive impacts of the policy. There were a few negative impacts identified, but these are mitigated by existing processes and supports.
23. By increasing the flexible approach to working we are better supporting colleagues who may have struggled with some aspects of fully officed based work, such as travel or distractions that an office environment may present. Care has been taken to cover the Health and Safety aspects of hybrid-working, and the Council's commitment to providing safe and healthy working environments for all, including the provision of specialist equipment when needed.
24. Hybrid working also allows us to better support those colleagues who may have previously struggled to access work due to other ongoing commitments such as caring responsibilities, as it empowers them to make more decisions around their working schedules within the agreed upon frameworks.

Climate Change

25. By encouraging hybrid working, we are allowing staff to reduce their carbon footprint by reducing the amount of travel they must do to and from the office. We are also allowing residents to complete tasks virtually, which reduces the amount of travel they must do to our offices as well.

Health & Wellbeing

26. The new policy should help our colleagues maintain a healthy work-life balance, to the benefit of their health and wellbeing.

Consultation responses

27. The Council has consulted with Unison and GMB on this policy, and both unions are in favour of its introduction.

Alignment with Council Priority Areas

A modern and caring Council

28. By increasing our flexibility, we are demonstrating a commitment to modern ways of working and providing our employees with a safe and nurturing working environment.

Appendices

Appendix A: Hybrid Working Policy

Appendix B: FAQs

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