

**CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.**

**CABINET EXECUTIVE**

**21 September 2021**

**REPORT AUTHOR:** County Councillor Beverley Baynham  
Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance and  
Regulatory Services

**REPORT TITLE:** New Ways of Working for the Council's workforce

---

**REPORT FOR:** Decision

---

**1. Purpose**

1.1. The purpose of the report is to update Cabinet and seek approval as to how the Council can build upon its experience of successfully delivering services in different ways during the pandemic. The report sets out New Ways of Working (a new way for a Council to operate) which best captures the learning from the past 18 months. Under the New Ways of Working (NWOW), it is proposed that all staff across the Council's services will continue to work in one of three defined work styles. This will enable many staff to continue to work in agile ways, which better support future service delivery, whether this be to work regularly from home, from Council facilities, including corporate buildings, hubs, local facilities, or from agreed partner facilities.

**2. Background**

2.1. "By 2025, Powys will be widely recognised as a fantastic place in which to live, learn, work and play". The vision of NWOW is of an empowered, trusted, and supported workforce, who have the right skills and equipment to work flexibly and productively together and with our partners and communities, to deliver high quality services in a way which significantly reduces our impact on the environment and contributes towards net zero carbon targets.

2.2. This will build on the success of the existing and new ways of service delivery which developed throughout the pandemic, through giving staff the flexibility to work in an agile way from home and / or other local bases and maximising the use of digital platforms for meetings and communication. The future emphasis will be on how work is done, and the outcomes achieved, rather than on where staff work. The transition aims to reduce travel, improve productivity, aid recruitment, enable many staff to enjoy an improved work-life balance, and make the Council more efficient and cost effective.

2.3. The main drivers for the permanent move to agile working are:

- Good staff wellbeing, leading to high productivity, as evidenced by the staff surveys which have been undertaken since June 2020.
- To aid the Council's ability to recruit staff from the wider employment market by offering flexible working, where this supports service delivery.
- Reductions in CO2 emissions created by commuting and travelling for work, as part of the Council's net zero carbon target.
- Capturing the best practice of the pandemic period, rather than returning to "old" ways of working
- A streamlining of the corporate property portfolio in the longer term

2.4. The transition to NWOW will be underpinned by a number of key principles / a cultural shift:

- Digital by default - virtual meetings will become the norm across the organisation wherever possible. Business travel will be reduced as far as is reasonably practicable within service delivery needs.
- Flexibility in where and when staff work - attendance at offices, depots and other worksites will only be required if it is an essential part of the working role.
- It will be a service and line manager decision as to how a service operates effectively and when and where staff work, in discussion with the employee.
- Place based employees will already have been assigned an allocated desk for the purposes of delivering their service, and particularly for meeting members of the public.
- There will be an online desk booking system for flexible workers to book a workstation when they need to work from a corporate facility. Desks will also be available in zoned areas, for instance for confidential work, and rooms may be booked for essential meetings, as previously.
- Wellbeing – staff will continue to be supported in their work by managers and the organisation, through for instance frequent communication, teambuilding, mental health support and the provision of essential compliant workstation equipment as required.
- All Staff will be supported to work flexibly in the way that maximises their engagement and productivity in delivering services. It is acknowledged that individual circumstances can be very different, and the decision around where and when to work will be made by staff and managers together through discussion, with the final decision being subject to the agreement of the manager. No member of staff will be required to work from home

if it does not support their health and wellbeing, or if their home arrangements do not enable them to work from home.

- Corporate offices will be used in different and more flexible ways, particularly for communication, team building and active collaboration, rather than for static work which can be undertaken from home.
- The move to NWOW is not about changing workforce numbers or the structure of the workforce, rather it's about the way staff actually work to deliver services.

2.5. The proposal is in line with Welsh Government's commitment to develop a remote working strategy, with the expressed ambition of 30% of the Welsh workforce being able to work at or close to home.

### 3. Moving to New Ways of Working

3.1 The Council is in a period of transition, moving from the pandemic towards what is being referred to as a new normal. As part of this, the following 3 workstyles have been identified which reflect the organisation and how the Council delivers services, both today and in moving forwards:

**Place-based workers:** these are staff who are based at a particular location in order to fulfil their role, or because they are unable to work from any other locations for a variety of reasons. Examples include receptionists, library and museum staff, depot staff, catering and cleaning staff, residential care staff, youth hub workers etc.

**On-the-go workers:** these staff are mostly out and about in the community, directly delivering services, but need an office or building as a base. Examples include HTR operatives, domiciliary care staff, some environmental health officers, etc.

**Flexible workers:** these are staff who can work flexibly from a variety of locations, including from home, various office buildings, partner locations, or community buildings which are near to where they live. Examples include the legal and finance teams, ICT, housing officers, HR, and property colleagues.

3.2 There will be cross-over within these categories, and it is not expected that all staff within a particular service area would be working within the same workstyle. Similarly a number of roles may fit across 2 workstyles, for example some flexible workers may also be on a rota for a place-based role for one day per week.

3.3 In identifying which staff are deployed in each workstyle it should be noted that the workstyles themselves are not new. For instance a Librarian or Receptionist was already deployed on a place based basis and will continue to be place based in the future. Similarly a Waste &

Recycling Operative was already deployed on an on-the-go basis and will continue to be, and HR staff were mainly deployed as flexible workers and will continue to work flexibly.

- 3.4 During the pandemic the Council was able to continue to deliver services with many staff working from home on a permanent or regular basis. Learning from this and in moving to NWOW, the difference the Council will see is that those staff who have been working flexibly will, subject to service delivery needs, be able to work from home a lot more regularly and where staff need to work from an office, there will be a lot more flexibility as to where this could be, for instance from a Council office or hub, or possibly a shared facility with a partner organisation or the facilities of another local authority with their agreement.
- 3.5 Given that as part of NWOW, there will be no change to job titles, job roles or the day to day work of the workforce, there will be no consequential change to the terms and conditions of employment for staff, who will therefore be able to claim any expenses in the normal way in line with current conditions and guidance. All staff will continue to have a nominated corporate work base, from which they can claim travel and subsistence expenses.
- 3.6 In transitioning to NWOW there is a small group of staff who have been homeworking for many years under a legacy policy, who are paid a working from home allowance each month. To ensure consistent and equitable treatment for all staff who will be working flexibly from home (including those on a full time basis) a management of change consultation process will be carried out about their workstyle under NWOW and to remunerate them accordingly. The consultation process will therefore explore the cessation of the payment of an allowance to this group.
- 3.7 In rolling out and embedding NWOW, it is proposed that the changes be implemented on a service by service basis, rather than a whole authority approach, from October 2021 onwards.
- 3.8 This will be important as in rolling out this opportunity, each service area will need to envision their future delivery, taking into account the service delivery needs of service users, the desired outcomes planned and the needs of the workforce.
- 3.9 The timing of implementation will also differ from service to service, as some services are in recovery or have recovered and can explore implementing this in the shorter term, whilst other services continue to respond to significant service pressures arising from the pandemic and will not therefore have an opportunity to plan for implementation until much later, which for some services will not be likely to be before spring 2022.

- 3.10 Transitioning in this way will also provide an opportunity for a small support team to help each service to plan and implement their roll out. This team could support the service's management team, with guidance, orientation, and any training for managers, in envisioning how NWOW can best support future service delivery, in planning the practical implementation of the transition and in engaging the workforce in this.
- 3.11 An exercise undertaken earlier this year established that in excess of 1,300 employees could potentially continue to work from home on a regular basis, this being in line with the Flexible Worker workstyle. This assessment will be reviewed by each service, as part of their plans to roll out NWOW and the workstyle of each employee clearly established.
- 3.12 In then rolling the new arrangements out, where the service identifies that an employee's workstyle is that of a Flexible Worker and that the work they undertake can be best delivered from home, the line manager will discuss this with the employee. This conversation will clarify that the service's assessment is that the employee can best work from home or their local area for most of the time, and that they will not generally be expected to attend their designated office, except for very infrequent visits, such as to attend team meetings. As part of this the manager will seek agreement about the flexible working arrangements and will formally write to the employee (using a template letter) to confirm the agreement.
- 3.13 It is recognised that it will not be possible for some staff to work from home for a variety of valid reasons, including any concerns about the impact of this on their mental health, or that their home is not suitable for home working. In exploring how flexible working arrangements can best work with each employee, they will not be placed under any compulsion to work from home, rather agreement will be sought.
- 3.14 Recognising that Flexible Workers will need occasionally to visit Council facilities, and a number will need to work from them more regularly, an on-line desk booking system will be introduced to book a space in a corporate building. During the ongoing pandemic the number of desks available will be subject to the number of COVID secure buildings open and any risk assessed control measures in place, such as any ongoing social distancing requirements.
- 3.15 The extent to which a flexible worker may need to work out of a Council facility will differ from role to role. In some cases this will be infrequent as described, whilst for others their roles and responsibilities may require them to work out of an office more regularly.
- 3.16 During the pandemic employees working from home, with the support of managers have undertaken Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessments, including an audit of compliant equipment available to ensure they were able to work from home safely. In rolling out longer term working arrangements under NWOW, Flexible Workers who will be

working from home for 2 days or more each week, or for 40% or more of their time, will be provided with a core set of office equipment for this purpose.

- 3.17 A number of relevant HR policies / guidance documents and Health and Safety Corporate Working Arrangements (CWAs) have been reviewed to ensure they fully support home working, in preparation for the introduction of NWOW.
- 3.18 Consultation with trade unions and engagement with the wider workforce about NWOW continues. The workforce has been engaged to date through 3 staff wellbeing surveys undertaken over the past 14 months, which looked at the experience of working from home (amongst other things), and through regular NWOW communication updates about the plans and progress and through having the opportunity to ask any relevant questions, with many having been asked and responded to over recent months. As outlined earlier in this report, staff in each service will also have further opportunities to be engaged as the transition to NWOW is planned in their service.
- 3.19 The developing plans and the proposals contained in this report have also been discussed and consulted with the trade unions, since summer 2020 when a move to NWOW was first envisioned.
- 3.20 More recently, a number of formal meetings were held over August 2021 with the unions, to share and consult about the detail of the transition to NWOW as laid out in this report. All relevant documentation such as the business case, and draft policies / guidance documents (HR, GDPR and ICT) and CWAs have been shared for feedback and comment. A formal consultative proposal was also provided setting out the Council's plans.
- 3.21 At the time of writing this report, the unions have not expressed any representation against what is being proposed. They recognise that what is being proposed is a progressive move by the Council, mainly as in exploring the future working arrangements with staff, they will not be compelled to work from home where this does not suit their circumstances. As stated above, it is recognised that there will be a number of reasons why employees may not be able to work from home, including the suitability of their home for this purpose and concerns about their working style and environment on their mental wellbeing.
- 3.22 During the consultation process the unions have asked that a home working allowance of £26.00 a month be paid to all staff who will be working from home on a regular basis. In addition to asking for this locally, the unions have also requested this nationally as part of the NJC negotiations regarding pay and terms and conditions of employment for 2021. In responding to the overall claim the national employers have formally declined this aspect.

- 3.23 The request has also been considered locally and recognising that the implementation of NWOW will not lead to any change to the job roles and responsibilities of the staff concerned, and that any final decision to work regularly from home will be subject to the agreement of the employee, the payment of an allowance is not considered appropriate.
- 3.24 This decision also took account of the fact that many of the staff affected are saving on their travel costs, which can fully / more than offset the additional cost of working from home. Furthermore, if any employee feels unable to work from home due to the costs, they can elect to continue to work from their normal work base, or by agreement from a more local facility.

#### 4. Resource Implications

##### 4.1. Estimated Implementation Costs

A specific Reserve of £435,000 was set aside at the end of last financial year to provide the funding to implement NWOW. The current estimated costs of implementation are shown below:

Description of Cost	Amount - £
Desks	59,250
Chairs	86,500
Monitor and Cables	81,500
Other Equipment incl keyboards, cables, wrist supports etc.	29,390
Contingency for Non-responses	30,000
Delivery Charges	30,200
Admin Support	3,000
Compensation payments for current Homeworkers if allowance is removed	5,000
Installation costs	3,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>327,840</b>

##### 4.2. Ongoing Savings

Reduced staff travel during 2020-21 realised a saving of £1,029,898 in the financial year.

As the council has not yet returned to working without any restrictions it is difficult to estimate what the permanent saving on travel will be, as services develop their Integrated Business Plans this will be a key consideration. An initial costing exercise for the 2021-22 budget, estimated that circa £1,410,000 will be required for travel expenses on an ongoing basis, resulting in an estimated saving of **£544,000**. **£450,000** has already been put forward by services as savings in 2021-22 or the budget has been used to fund other financial pressures.

#### 4.3 Assumptions / Future Costs

- The ongoing costs of replacement furniture and equipment will be the responsibility of the services. The services will be required to fund future replacement costs and the cost of any additional staff, as they do currently.
- The ongoing costs of travel expenses will be funded from the services as it currently is.
- It is estimated that the ongoing cost of refreshing laptops will increase due to having to deliver new equipment to homes, this is estimated at approx. £25 per device, totalling approx. £6,250 per year, it has been assumed that this can be funded through the current ICT refresh budget. It is not envisaged that there will be any further increase to ICT costs.
- The base of individuals will not change from their current base e.g., County Hall / Neuadd Brycheiniog, if this were to change this would have a significant financial impact.
- It is assumed PAT testing will continue to be carried out at no extra cost.
- There are likely to be savings in future years in relation to property these have not been included.
- It is assumed no Homeworking allowance will be paid, if this were to change this would have a significant financial impact.

4.4 There are no proposed changes to staffing structures or roles arising from the proposal. Moving forwards, Services will of course consider how New Ways of Working will support service delivery as part of the Integrated Business Planning process. Services will continue to review their service delivery models in light of these and other changes and any financial implications will be captured through the IBP process.

4.5 The Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) notes the content of the report. The recommendation captures the benefits that have been seen over the last eighteen months including significant reductions in costs. It is also expected that further financial savings can be identified through the implementation of the New Ways of Working and these will support the Council in bridging the budget gap in its Medium Term Financial Strategy.

#### **5. Legal implications**

5.1 Legal: The recommendation can be supported from a legal point of view.

- 5.2 The Head of Legal and Democratic Services ( Monitoring Officer ) has commented as follows: “ I note the legal comment and have nothing to add to the report”.

## **6. Data Protection**

- 6.1 Service areas will need to consider and implement appropriate responses to data protection obligations, namely in terms of sensitive/confidential conversations taking place in homes, the security of hard copy documentation in officer's homes and also remaining in offices, commensurate with the sensitivity and volume of personal data affected.
- 6.2 Information security policies will remain under review, and relevant advice issued as required.

## **7. Comment from local member(s)**

- 7.1 Not applicable.

## **8. Impact Assessment**

- 8.1 The overall summary of the Impact Assessment finds that:

*The New Ways of Working proposals aim to enable the Council to develop new workstyles for the future, building on the best practice displayed during the coronavirus pandemic, and enabling staff and services to deliver outcomes flexibly – work will become about **what** we do, not where or how we do it, i.e. the focus will be on outcomes. For those staff whose roles are identified as place-based or on-the-go workers, there is no change to what they do through this proposal. The main change is for those staff who are identified as flexible workers. Introducing more flexibility into work will help to ensure that services are sustainable for the long term, in terms of staff wellbeing, increased productivity and staff satisfaction levels, demonstrating PCC as a compassionate and inclusive employer. Work/life balance should be improved, and some staff will have more time and flexibility for family life, caring responsibilities, leisure and cultural activities and community participation. Existing and further strategies to promote staff wellbeing will be delivered as a key priority, and reasonable adjustments will be made for staff who have difficulties in working from home. The model will also contribute significantly towards a reduction in the impact of work-related travel on the environment of Powys, through improved use of technology and digital platforms (and in line with the Digital Strategy). The outline assessment is therefore that the proposal will have good positive impact.*

- 8.2 The impact assessment for this proposal is included at Appendix A

## **9. Recommendation**

- 9.1 That Cabinet approve the rollout of New Ways of Working and the steps to embed this in each service, as laid out in this report. In summary, from October 2021 onwards, each service will envision and shape how New

Ways of Working can best support future service delivery and will transition at a timing and pace that best underpins their plans.

Contact Officer:	Kay Thomas, Senior Project Manager
Tel:	01597 826 864
Email:	<a href="mailto:kay.thomas@powys.gov.uk">kay.thomas@powys.gov.uk</a>
Head of Service:	Paul Bradshaw
Corporate Director:	Nigel Brinn

Appendix A – New Ways of Working Impact Assessment