

**Recovery Theme Plan: Remote & Flexible Working**

<b>Recovery Theme Title:</b> Flexible and Remote working
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<b>Lead Member:</b> Richard Mainon – Lead Member for Corporate Affairs
<p><b>Summary of Recovery Theme:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many of the Council’s functions have been delivered successfully through virtual working during the pandemic. Use of the CAG system, where users access the Council’s systems virtually, has risen during this period from around 200 per day up to nearly 1600. Nearly all meetings – operational and democratic - are currently ‘virtual’.</li> <li>• Working in this way has brought real benefits: staff home to work and business mileage has significantly reduced, as has travel to meetings by Members, both reducing the Council’s carbon impact. Local traffic congestion and consequent pollution have reduced, and working from home has improved the work life balance for many people, staff and Members alike.</li> <li>• For these reasons, this model should be maintained when social distancing is no longer required. All, or most, routine meetings should be ‘virtual’ and working from home should be the norm, with our HR, contractual and Democratic arrangements recognising this. This should include Cabinet, Scrutiny etc., with the possible exception of full Council meetings, where virtual presence could be optional.</li> <li>• Visits to the office or Committee rooms should be the exception for most staff and Members. Where face to face meetings do take place, they should be for the purpose of networking, mentoring or for the sort of work that is harder to deliver virtually (team building or creative sessions for example).</li> <li>• Such meetings need not be through formal channels either; if the purpose of a meeting is to retain coherence in a team or group, or to combat isolation, it doesn’t need to be ‘in the office’ at all, it could take place in less formal settings or in less formal ways, with appropriate safeguards.</li> <li>• This principle doesn’t just apply to ‘office’ work: new ways of operating ‘virtually’ may be possible for some operational functions as well. For example, greater use of video evidence instead of site visits etc.</li> <li>• There would be democratic benefits from such a change: virtual working, by definition, reduces the need to travel and therefore the time commitment involved in attending the various Council meetings. This would make it much easier for Members with work or caring responsibilities to participate in the democratic process, so attracting a wider range of people to stand, a long term aspiration of the Council. This could be a realistic target for the election of the next administration in 2022.</li> </ul>

- An additional benefit of this form of working, particularly if other Councils follow suit, would be the wider distribution of the economic impact of staff's presence, with those that live in rural areas spending much more time there, helping to sustain and revive those communities.
- Adopting this model would eventually bring a further benefit, because it would reduce our requirement to maintain dedicated office space for staff to work in. In the long term, our main office buildings may no longer be required; instead, when they need the facilities of an office, staff could travel to their nearest facility to hot-desk. This could be a DCC building (local office or Library for example), or buildings operated by our partners under reciprocal arrangements, so that travel is minimised.
- The question about how much office space we might need is for another time though, as we don't yet know the answer to that. The important thing now is to use the new capabilities we have acquired during the lockdown and make a step change in the way we work in the Council, enhancing our democracy, reducing our carbon imprint and boosting our communities.

#### **Key Objectives**

- To make the council more efficient by changing working practices to reduce costs, particularly in relation to home to work and to business travel.
- To reduce the Council's carbon footprint
- To increase democratic participation in the working of the Council
- To improve the work/life balance of DCC office based staff
- To increase the sustainability of rural communities
- To ensure that the Council's buildings are optimally configured to reflect the level of need.

#### **Key Milestones.**

- Making the decision that the Council will continue to work virtually wherever possible, as a 'new normal'.
- Restating the Council's HR policies so that working from home, or potentially from a local 'shared space' is the norm, and contracts are no longer defined by a single nominated work place.

- Reviewing democratic arrangements so that they can be operated effectively and legally through virtual means, including attendance by the public where required, so encouraging greater participation.
- Ensuring that the Council has the ICT tools for sustained virtual working and that Officers and Members have the right equipment to work from home.
- That office space is equipped to facilitate the 'softer' aspects of organisational working, where face to face contact is strongly preferred.
- Longer term, reviewing the Council's requirement for formal office space, with a view to balancing the overall footprint to match any reduced level of demand.

**Risks & Opportunities:**

1. Opportunity to take advantage of the step up in capability to work effectively virtually, achieved by officers and Members during the lock down period
2. Opportunity to build a lower carbon and a more efficient organisation
3. Opportunity to engage a wider section of the community in the democratic process.
4. Risk that the impetus to reinstate business as usual will forestall more fundamental change.
5. Risk that unfamiliarity with ICT and virtual working will limit people's confidence to expand its use.

**What does Success Look Like?**

- The Council is more efficient
- The Council thinks 'greener' and has a smaller carbon footprint
- Democratic participation is enhanced
- Local communities are more sustainable
- Road capacity is freed up, benefitting commercial traffic and potentially providing opportunities around education logistics.