

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

14 SEPTEMBER 2021

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

FUTURE SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the Council's work to date and plans for its future service delivery model as it recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives/other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objective under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:

- **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Covid-19 pandemic has presented the biggest challenge to local public services in a generation and has led to rapid and significant changes to the way in which the Council and its partners deliver services. Since March 2020, the Council's focus has been to preserve life, minimise the spread of the virus and support all our communities.
- 3.2 The Council's staff have demonstrated their willingness, flexibility, commitment and dedication to deliver front line services to the county borough's communities. For some staff it meant adapting to new ways of working from home. To enable this there has been a significant investment and roll out of additional ICT and DSE equipment to staff with ICT issuing over 700 laptops within the first few weeks of the pandemic, and a shift towards the delivery of many services in a different and more remote way, with an emphasis on enhanced digital availability. A significant investment was also made in core ICT infrastructure to support these changes and provide a reliable home working service. Successful claims of £468,152 were made to the Welsh Government Covid-19 Hardship Fund to initially establish home working arrangements. However the terms and conditions of the fund indicated that as the assets in place should provide longer term benefits to local authorities, then the balance of required investment of £458,497 was directly funded by the Council.
- 3.3 In the main the delivery of services has been maintained very successfully with the Council responding very effectively to both the additional challenges of delivering new Covid related services such as track and trace and helping to implement the hugely successful vaccination programme, while also ensuring that, where significantly

increased demand for its services has emerged, resourcing has been prioritised to those services. However, the unprecedented nature of the challenges the Council has faced has also raised risks and issues which have been identified in the Council's corporate risk assessment. These include the risks to delivering transformational change and agreed financial savings, the recovery and restoration of services while ensuring a Covid safe environment for the public and staff, and workforce issues relating to attracting, developing and retaining staff with the necessary skills to meet the demands placed upon the Council and its services.

- 3.4 A mission critical challenge for the Council now as we accelerate through the recovery phase from the pandemic is how we now most effectively plan for and embrace what has worked well over the past 18 months, while also continuing to address some of the issues and concerns that have arisen around staff wellbeing, team development and access to some services. It is clear that an opportunity exists to develop and implement a new operating model for the delivery of many of the Council's services which will ensure that the Council is 'fit for purpose' moving forward, with a focus on being as agile and customer focussed as possible.
- 3.5 The Council is a diverse and disparate organisation delivering up to 800 different services and employing over 6,000 staff in total. Many staff have continued throughout the pandemic to work as normally as possible, and for many depot based, school based and some social services staff, for example, the future service delivery model may not change in the same way as for other predominantly office based staff based on the nature of staff roles.
- 3.6 In addition to the work on the Council's operating model and accommodation strategy it should be noted that the Council continues to focus on many other parts of 'recovery' from the Covid-19 pandemic including implementing the recommendations from the elected member Cross Party Recovery panel. The response to these recommendations and also other ongoing work to promote recovery has been positive, with action plans implemented in areas such as economic recovery and the response to homelessness.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 The pandemic has created an opportunity to transform the way in which the Council operates, building on and implementing the lessons and experiences emerging from the pandemic which has seen far more of the Council's services delivered remotely and virtually, and the public embracing new ways of doing business with us. Clearly we must also be minded to ensure that none of the County Borough's residents are excluded by any new ways of working and that, in particular, our services continue to be targeted effectively at those who are most in need and most vulnerable.

Project Board

- 4.2 A project board has been established, chaired by the Chief Executive, to drive forward this work with a view to creating a new agile blended model of working. The blended model of working will capitalise on the acceleration of digital transformation during the Covid-19 pandemic and seek to increase the efficiency of services.

- 4.3 The project board has established a number of work streams to support and inform its work; digitalisation, HR, communication, accommodation and management of the interim phase.

Strategic Principles

- 4.4 A set of corporate strategic principles have been developed to guide the effective development and implementation of the future service delivery work programme. They have been shared initially with staff groups and the trade unions with a view to setting the parameters and managing expectations for work moving forward. It is recognised that any new delivery model should be informed by a clear view of what service delivery will look like going forward and so it will be important to recognise the differences within each directorate or service area and what is essential for effective service delivery. The principles include the following:-

- **OPPORTUNITY** - That the Council takes advantage of this once in a lifetime opportunity to effect change to the ways in which the organisation works, whilst recognising the challenges this will bring.
- **ALIGNMENT WITH WELSH GOVERNMENT (WG)** - That the model will be developed to achieve, as a minimum, the Welsh Government goal of 30% of our workforce being agile and working from home, at any given point, by 2024.
- **SERVICE DELIVERY LED** - That the Council's proposed model should be directed by its ability to deliver effective services across the County Borough, demonstrating benefit to the Council and its customers.
- **CUSTOMER CENTRIC & IT ENABLED** - That the model should maintain a customer centric approach and explore the potential to further enhance the delivery of digital services. The model must be IT enabled.
- **CIVIC OFFICES AS THE MAIN CIVIC & OPERATIONAL BASE** - The model will work on the assumption that the Civic Office will be retained as the main administrative and democratic base for the Council for the foreseeable future which will also ensure a visible and tangible Council presence in the town centre, but that in due course a rationalisation of other office buildings may be possible.
- **BLENDED MODELS OF WORKING** - The model will recognise the wide range of services delivered by the Council. That some employees may need to work full time from service delivery locations. For others a hybrid agile model of office and remote working would be suitable. This must be service led whilst also taking account of employee wellbeing. In particular new ways of working will encourage where appropriate, less travel, allow more people with caring responsibilities or other circumstances that make it more difficult for them to attend in work all of the time to have greater flexibility in their work practices, and promote better work, life balance.
- **COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT** - That clear communication with staff and trade unions will be critical. Engagement should be taken forward on a set of pre-determined principles and within an agreed set of parameters that can then be reviewed following feedback.

- PROJECT TIMESCALES - That a realistic timeline for the project with agreed milestones must be developed. At this stage, and while government advice remains that if you can work effectively from home you should do so, it is envisaged that an interim phase of a managed, gradual and cautious return to the office will be in place between now and next spring with a long term sustainable plan agreed and in place in readiness to be implemented after that.

Potential Benefits

4.5 There are a number of potential benefits that could be derived from a revised future service delivery model, including close alignment with agreed national and corporate objectives. It is recognised that these will have to be managed and monitored carefully moving forward.

- Contribution to the discharge of the Council's duties under the Well-being of Future Generations Act, and in particular an involvement for staff and their representatives in designing a new operating model and an enhanced work life balance for many staff.
- Alignment with WG's target for 30% of workers to be working from home by 2024. To be clear, Welsh Government advice remains at this time that if you can work effectively at home you should do so.
- Positive contribution to the net carbon 2030 agenda by reducing the need to travel to work.
- Contribution to the well-being of staff and a positive work life balance. It is noteworthy that in the recently completed staff survey the vast majority of staff welcomed and supported a more flexible and agile working model, based on blended working that included some home /remote working but with access to the offices and/or meeting rooms as necessary.
- Contribution to the Council's digitalisation strategy with goal of enabling a Digital Council by 2024. The Council's budget consultation exercise last year showed significant support from the public to move in this direction.
- Add value to, and enhance, the existing remote working model by enabling face to face, office based working.
- Contribution to attendance - build on the positive reduction in sickness absence during 2020/2021, although long term trend analysis is not yet available.
- Positive impact on retention and recruitment within some key service areas. This is particularly pertinent at a time when the Council is having difficulty recruiting and retaining staff in some key service areas, for example social care. It is clear that the labour market has changed post Brexit and post Covid 19 pandemic, with greater competition and staff shortages at some grades of work, and a change from many major employers, including most local authorities, to more flexible ways of working for certain roles, which means that if this Council does not similarly adopt more flexible practices it would potentially be disadvantaged compared to its neighbours.

- Possible financial savings from the smarter use of resources including a medium term aim of further rationalising the Council's office portfolio and /or sharing space with other public sector organisations. It is also possible that in due course surplus office space could be made available for alternative use by the private sector providing financial benefits to the Council and helping to sustain long term footfall in Bridgend town centre.

Challenges

4.6 This innovative work programme will also bring with it a series of significant challenges. It will be important to understand these fully and ensure that the arrangements fit a corporate purpose, in addition to ensuring that each Directorate can deliver services effectively. Those identified include the following:

- There will be a need to manage expectations throughout the organisation and identify adequate resources and training requirements to deliver the cultural change and management required. Crucially it is not possible for all staff, depending on their roles, to work in exactly the same way moving forward.
- Work will need to be undertaken in two phases. An interim phase likely to be from now at least until the spring of 2022, prior to a co-ordinated and managed move to the new model of working. This timeframe is necessary to allow all legal, employment and HR matters to be resolved.
- Work will be dynamic and evolve with the organisation. So reviews of the efficacy of the working arrangements will be necessary. This will include how the Directorates will manage the flexibility offered by a hybrid model.
- There is potential for extremes of staff opinion – focus has to be on the effective delivery of each service area.
- There will be a need for corporate agreement on interim working arrangements.
- The work must recognise the potential impact on the town centre economy from the reduction in staff working on a full time basis in the town centre offices and continue to work closely with traders to maximise footfall and spend.
- Recognition that there could be difficulty in re-locating some services if there were issues with the long term viability of their current accommodation as space in the remaining facilities may be at a premium.

Interim Phase

4.7 At present, the Council is operating within the interim phase of these plans. An accommodation group has been established to consider business case applications from service areas to return to the office. The business case must clearly set out how a return will benefit service delivery and a risk assessment of the health and safety considerations of that return. A pilot scheme, that enables the Council to support the well-being of individual officers who, because of their circumstances, may prefer to return to work in an office base, has also been implemented within Ravens Court. Managers are able to book one of sixteen desks for their staff in advance for up to 12

weeks at a time. This can be for as little as a single day to a few days each week. So far there have been 6 staff that have benefited from this arrangement with a total of 90 days booked between them so far.

- 4.8 Staff are able to access a wide range of guidance and information to support them through this period and this has now all been brought together in the Portal for Covid-19 and Recovery. The portal includes updated FAQs on coronavirus and any changes introduced as restrictions continue to ease. It also includes updates on HR matters, practical homeworking advice and resources to support employee wellbeing.
- 4.9 Within this phase, a Remote Working Questionnaire was issued to all Group Managers (in addition to Heads of Service and managers where requested) across the Authority by Internal Audit. The purpose of the questionnaire was to identify any changes made to control or governance arrangements as a result of the increase in remote working due to Covid-19. The responses were analysed to gain assurances that key controls are operating effectively and to detect any areas of weakness or risk. The report in July 2021, concluded that the effectiveness of the internal control environment was reasonable and no specific recommendations were made.
- 4.10 Engagement with the trade unions will continue throughout this interim phase and build on an initial discussion with the Chief Executive and HR officers, setting out the corporate strategic principles.

Staff Engagement

- 4.11 As part of the interim phase, a survey was developed with the Heads of Service and sent to Group Managers and some Principal Officers, to help inform our understanding of how the remote delivery model has impacted service delivery and what, if any, changes could be made to further enhance future service delivery. Unsurprisingly, given the diverse nature of the Council, responses reflected the particular requirements of each service area. A hybrid model or remote model was welcomed by those service areas with office based staff whilst for other more front facing services, many have already moved back to their service delivery locations or are in the process of working through the relevant health and safety protocols to support that move. The need to ensure effective service delivery that meets the needs of the Council's customers was highlighted by all.
- 4.12 Some of the benefits have already been referenced above but managers highlighted increased efficiencies through having a more flexible and agile service and the move away from an over reliance on face-to-face meetings and paper processes. Having an adequately resourced ICT enabled service was seen as critical and managers were keen to explore further digital solutions for delivery, providing further momentum to drive forward the Council's aim of becoming a Digital Council by 2024, including options for the future management of member meetings. The long term goal, provided that suitable IT solutions can be found to allow it, (voting processes etc) would be for elected members to have the choice of whether they attend Council meetings in person or remotely. The well-being of staff was consistently raised as a concern within responses, along with the need to ensure that ICT enabled meeting spaces are made available to support team cohesion, future planning, training and induction. Managers put forward various options to support a new office model, including a dynamic booking system and the identification of designated service areas with Civic; these will be worked through by the Board. Multi-agency working

was also flagged as an area that will need consideration within the development of any new hybrid model along with the continued engagement of delivery partners and stakeholders.

- 4.13 There is a need to continue to engage and consult appropriately with staff and trade unions, as proposals are developed. Opportunities were taken during the recent staff survey, launched in June 2021, alongside a range of questions (on: culture; line management; corporate communications; knowledge and skills; health and safety and employee wellbeing) to seek views on homeworking.
- 4.14 The survey was made available to 3,166 staff (non-schools) and overall 33% (1,046) of staff responded, with 52% of staff stating that they were working from home for all of their work and a further 18% said they were working from home but only for part of their work. Some of the headline figures are as follows:

84% of staff agree or strongly agree that they can work productively in their remote environment
80% of staff agree or strongly agree that they have what they need to effectively work remotely
90% of staff agree or strongly agree that feel it is important to keep social contact with colleagues
77% of staff agree or strongly agree that they are able to take a break from their screen
85% of staff stated that communication/contact with the line manager while working from home had been about right
81% of staff felt that they did have an appropriate level of support from their manager while working from home
50% of staff said they occasionally encountered any internet/network connection problems whilst working at home that have affected their ability to work effectively

- 4.15 Within this section of the survey there was an open ended question enabling staff to comment on anything further about working from home. Over 200 comments were made, with the most common themes being I find working from home more effective (76), I have had lots of WCCIS issues (Social Services software system) working from home (36) and I would prefer a blended option working from home / office in the future (24). It should be noted that the WCCIS issues are linked to national system performance issues that have affected all users, not just those working from home.
- 4.16 Whilst this demonstrates a desire by staff in the main to continue some homeworking, there were also a variety of issues and concerns made throughout the survey where respondents took the opportunity to comment on issues linked to home working and these will be fully analysed and contribute to the developments and proposals for consideration.
- 4.17 In conclusion, an opportunity exists to develop a long-term operating model for the Council which embraces many of the benefits that have emerged from the way the Council has had to operate over the last 18 months during the pandemic, while also addressing some of the concerns that staff and the public have expressed regarding wellbeing issues, opportunities to meet in person where appropriate, and further enhancement of digital services to modernise services while also ensuring that no one is excluded. This programme of work represents one of the most significant operational challenges this Council has faced since its formation in 1995, as such it

will need to be resourced properly, communicated effectively and implemented skilfully to ensure its success.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

- 5.1 There is no immediate effect upon the policy framework or procedure rules. This will be kept under review as policies are developed and any policy change will be approved through the appropriate governance arrangements.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

- 6.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report. Any policy changes, including any new HR policies, will be subject to EIAs in the normal manner.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

- 7.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report and some of the proposals will support some of the well-being goals. As proposals are developed and introduced the implications will be considered in detail.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1. There are no immediate financial implications of this report but inevitably these could emerge as the detail becomes clearer.
- 8.2 As the future service delivery model is developed, all options will be subject to the development of business cases that will set out potential costs, savings, timescales and risk. A new hybrid model will likely offer up savings on mileage, office resources (printing/stationery etc.) and building costs, contributing to the Council's de-carbonisation agenda. These will need to be fully explored and considered against potential increases in ICT and office re-configuration costs, required to enable an effective and sustainable hybrid model.
- 8.3 Any costs associated with the on-going delivery of the interim phase will also need to be considered. To date the Council has made significant ICT investment in its core infrastructure, ensuring the delivery of a reliable home working service and in providing staff with over 700 additional laptops and DSE equipment. If the model is to continue, significant further investment will be required to maintain and enhance these arrangements.

9. Recommendations

- 9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- i. Note the information contained within this report and the progress that has been made with regard to a new operating model for the Council, and
- ii. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to develop options for the longer term operating model of the Council and provide a further report for Cabinet approval in due course.

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Background documents:

Cross party recovery panel recommendations and report to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 June 2021.