

STAFFING COMMITTEE
22nd September, 2021

Present:- Councillor Alam (in the Chair); Councillors Allen, Read, Reynolds and Singleton.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair advised that there were no items of business on the agenda that would require the exclusion of the press and public from the meeting.

3. HYBRID WORKING POLICY

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Chief Executive that proposed the introduction of a Hybrid Working policy.

The report stated that since March 2020 and the start of the Covid-19 pandemic approximately half of the Council workforce had been working from home using technology to access information remotely to deliver services. The Council's Year Ahead Plan had also outlined the further steps that would be taken to support staff and improve services for residents, including supporting staff to work more flexibly by building on recent experiences of home working. It was noted that the introduction of hybrid working practices within services would be dependent on maintaining the best possible service for residents, service users and customers.

The report detailed the benefits that the Council and employees had experienced over the previous 18 months including significantly reduced sickness absence and the related increase in productivity, improvements in work-life balance and in reducing the amount of travel time and related pollution associated with travelling to a fixed workplace. It was noted that employee feedback over the new working arrangements had been carefully collated and monitored and had been used in the development of the proposed Hybrid Working policy.

The Assistant Director, Human Resources and Organisational Development, noted the extensive range of flexible working policies that the Council already had in place and advised that the proposed Hybrid Working policy would act as a supplement to these existing policies to enable managers and employees to establish a way of hybrid working that was suitable to their service. The Assistant Director confirmed that that the proposed policy would not constitute a contractual change for Council employees.

The full proposed Hybrid Working policy was attached as an appendix to the officer's report.

Members welcomed the proposed policy. Members noted the important emphasis included in the proposed policy that the priority of the Council would always be the delivery of high-quality services that met the needs of residents, service users and customers, rather than for employees to be able to work in a way that was most beneficial to them.

Resolved: -

- 1) That the introduction of the Hybrid Working policy be approved.
- 2) That the operation of the policy be reviewed by the Staffing Committee in 6 months' time.

4. EMPLOYEE SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERING POLICY

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Chief Executive that proposed the introduction of an Employee Supported Volunteering policy.

The report stated that in June 2019 the Chief Executive and members of the Strategic Leadership Team had facilitated a series of staff engagement events that had been focussed on raising awareness of the Council's Thriving Neighbourhood's Strategy and ways of working. A key focus of the events had been to obtain employee feedback on the strategy alongside suggestions for ways in which to improve the levels of trust with residents. The report stated that a consistent piece of feedback from staff engagement events that had taken place since had been that employees would like to engage more with local communities, potentially through voluntary work. It was noted that the Council did not currently offer any provision for employee supported volunteering, however, many organisations including other Local Authorities supported their staff to volunteer or engage with voluntary bodies.

The report stated that there was a strong business case for the Council to implement an Employee Supported Volunteering policy that had the potential to deliver positive impacts for both the Council and the local community, as well as delivering positive wellbeing benefits for those undertaking the volunteering. It was noted that the introduction of the proposed Employee Supported Volunteering policy would enable the organisations where staff would be volunteering to gain skills, advice, and expertise and for Council employees to achieve a sense of giving back and making a difference to local communities. It was noted further that the introduction of the proposed policy could have a potential benefit in raising and enhancing the Council's profile and reputation in the Borough.

The full proposed Employee Supported Volunteering policy was attached as an appendix to the officer's report.

Members welcomed the proposed Employee Supported Volunteering policy and the positive benefits that it had the potential to deliver for the Council, employees and for the Borough and its residents. Members sought assurance that risk assessments would always be completed in advance of a Council employee commencing a volunteer placement in order to both protect them and the organisation where they were volunteering. The Assistant Director, Human Resources and Organisational Development, confirmed that comprehensive risk assessments would always be completed in advance of the commencement a volunteering activity commencing.

Members requested that the guidance contained in the policy regarding the claiming of expenses by staff who were volunteering be reviewed by officers as it was noted that it would only be under exceptional and rare circumstances where an employee would need to claim expenses while volunteering.

Resolved: -

- 1) That the introduction of the Employee Supported Volunteering Policy be approved.
- 2) That Human Resources review the information and guidance contained in the policy regarding the claiming of expenses.
- 3) That the Employee Supported Volunteering policy be widely promoted in order to encourage the uptake of volunteering opportunities amongst staff when available.