

**STAFFING COMMITTEE
10th July, 2023**

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

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Ball.

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. WORKING LOCATION UPDATE

The Assistant Director introduced the report noting that when Council employees first moved to Riverside House in late 2011, desk ratios averaged six desks to every ten employees due to the size of the workforce at the time.

During the COVID lockdowns approximately half of the Council workforce were forced to work from home due to the restrictions and did so using technology to interact with customers, colleagues and access information remotely to deliver Council services.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Council had seen over 2000 new starters join the Council, equivalent to 41% of the workforce. Of those, around 500 were office-based staff.

Prior to the lifting of lockdown restrictions, a new Hybrid Working Policy was approved in September 2021 but not implemented fully until March 2022 when Covid-restrictions were lifted. This focused on delivering the best possible services for residents, whilst also recognising the benefits of staff working more flexibly.

When the Hybrid Working Policy was approved, the Staffing Committee had requested a review after six months of operational use. The review was delayed to enable a more detailed assessment of desk requirements to be undertaken with a particular focus on Riverside House.

As the Council returned to more normal ways of working, clarity began to be sought by both managers and individual employees, in terms of expectations around their working arrangements. This included queries about the number of days that they would need to be based from work locations across the borough, to enable them to provide the best possible services to residents, whilst still making use of the technologies and new

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ways of working that Covid restrictions brought about. Some managers made a choice to bring staff back into Riverside House.

The review undertaken, considered feedback from the Employee Opinion Survey of 2021, performance outcomes and further feedback emerging from both service events and team meetings, in addition to discussions that have taken place with elected members and the Trade Unions. It also considered the occupancy levels across the Council's workplaces, in particular Riverside House.

From the combined feedback, it is clear that there is the need to ensure an ongoing balance between ensuring that first and foremost, the Council is able to deliver high quality, effective services to residents, making better use of its operational assets, with having a degree of flexibility that many staff appreciate.

The title of the Policy had also been changed from 'Hybrid Working' to 'Working Location' in order to better reflect the range of options for staff when attending a work location within the Borough.

The Assistant Director Human Resources added that a number of Council services require face to face delivery, in order to deliver best outcomes for residents and customers. In order to do that some services returned to office-based working at the point that covid restrictions were lifted, on a rotational basis.

Information presented from a range of surveys concluded that from a health and wellbeing point of view, people who were working mostly from home could feel isolated. Feedback had been received from some employees regarding the lack of face-to-face contact during their inductions.

During the pandemic, the Council saw reduced levels of sickness absence in directorates where officers worked predominantly from home. The reduced absence levels continued throughout 2020 but began to increase again during the second year of the pandemic, with absence rates returning to pre-pandemic levels by the beginning of 2022.

It was noted that teams could collaborate, and problem solve virtually however having opportunities to meet face to face increased relationship building.

The contractual base of staff had not been altered. During the development process for the current Hybrid Working Policy and since launch, regular discussions had taken place with South Yorkshire Local Authorities to share their approach and insights on implementing a more flexible working location proposal. Working Location arrangements in other local authority settings had also been reviewed as part of the lessons learned activity. It was noted that other council in the neighbouring areas had instigated similar arrangements.

Three options had been presented for consideration the first was to discontinue the Hybrid Working Policy. This was not recommended. The second was to maintain the current approach however further clarity would be needed around its expectations. The third was to review and revise the Policy and this was the recommended option. It stipulated a minimum three days' attendance at a work location across the borough (such as attending meetings with partners on behalf of the Council or working in communities) for full time staff.

The Chair expressed the need to work with the Trade Unions regarding implementation of the Policy. It was proposed that a review be carried out after six months of implementation to ensure it was working well for both the Council and its employees.

The Assistant Director Human Resources explained that arrangements for those needing reasonable adjustments, such as display screen equipment and assessments, would need to be updated and refreshed as part of implementing the Policy.

The Assistant Chief Executive welcomed the opportunity for a six-month review on the updated Policy to be carried out. This was enabling the organisation to set out how it expected its workforce to be managed and wider engagement via Directorate Leadership Team (DLT) meetings would be held which would be supplemented with a set of Frequently Asked Questions.

The Leader noted that there had always been a degree of flexible working since moving into Riverside House, which had always been a balance for managers to achieve. Covid created a change to the way everyone worked and there were lessons to be learned from that. Concern was expressed for new starters, who were not coming into a workplace but joining and doing the job in isolation from others. It was important that staff were in a place, that they were connected to it and available to residents and customers. Services had dealt well with recovering from the pandemic in terms of balancing their own needs and that of service delivery.

There was an expectation that office-based staff would be site for most of the time, so for some services that meant someone was available Monday to Friday between 9am to 5pm. He did not want to lose the advantages of flexible working however it was right that more guidance was provided to staff and residents to enable the Council's customers to know that staff were on site doing the work expected of them.

It was queried if productivity was better when staff were working from home. The Assistant Chief Executive explained that productivity was hard to measure however in order to do that consideration should be given to the activities within the Council Plan. Most of those activities had been delivered which was a good indicator of productivity. Conversations had

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taken place within DLT's, who each had their own management information to measure performance. Each Strategic Director and DLT was accountable to ensure arrangements were put in place to ensure staff were focused on high quality service delivery.

Resolved:

1. That Staffing Committee noted the review of the Council's working Location arrangements.
2. That Staffing Committee approved the implementation of the revised Working Location Policy.
3. That a review of the Working Location Policy would be carried out and reported back to the Staffing Committee in six months' time.

4. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair reported that there were no urgent items of business requiring the Committee's consideration.