![North Northamptonshire Council logo]

EXECUTIVE
13th January 2022

Report Title	Future Ways of Working Strategy
Report Author	Adele Wylie, Director of Governance and HR
Executive Member	Councillor Jason Smithers, Leader of the Council

Key Decision	☐ Yes	☒ No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	☐ Yes	☒ No
Are there public sector equality duty implications?	☐ Yes	☒ No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	☐ Yes	☒ No
Applicable paragraph number for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1974		

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Future Ways of Working Strategy

1.   Purpose of Report

1.1.   The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the proposed Future Ways of Working Strategy for North Northamptonshire Council.

2.   Executive Summary

2.1   The Covid-19 pandemic has had a worldwide impact on the way that organisations deliver services and on how employees work. The predecessor authorities adapted their working practices from the start of the pandemic in March 2020 and since vesting day, North Northamptonshire Council has continued to adapt its working practices in response to changing government guidance, whilst maintaining services to residents and businesses. Whilst some of its workforce have continued to attend offices and provide essential services in the community, the majority of staff have worked in a hybrid way of attending the office and working at home.

2.2   To capture evolving working practices and inform future development, the Council designed and conducted a comprehensive survey of its workforce in November 2021. The results of this survey have informed the development of the Future Ways of Working Strategy ("the Strategy") which recognises the

benefits and challenges of adapted working practices and how they can be harnessed to enable excellent services and ensure employee health and wellbeing in the future. This Strategy proposes the consolidation of the change in working practices brought about by the pandemic. It promotes a corporate culture of working in the most appropriate way to deliver the best outcomes to service users, rather than being constrained by how services have traditionally been delivered in the past.

2.3   The Strategy sets out key principles for future ways of working. It proposes that the Council focuses on the end result for service users and allows flexibility for staff to determine the most appropriate way to deliver that. It recognises that a "one size fits all" approach is not appropriate, and that the majority of its staff can work in a hybrid way, combining office and home working.

2.4   The move away from a presenteeism mindset necessitates a new approach to the working environment provided by the Council for its staff. The Council recognises the need for workspaces of the future to facilitate innovation, collaboration, and a solution focus, designed around people and not services.

2.5   This Strategy articulates the Council's commitment to investing in the right tools, systems, and support for its staff to maximise performance and productivity while ensuring staff health and wellbeing.

2.6   The core commitments promoted within the Strategy are grouped into three key themes: "Our People", "Our Building and Workspaces" and "Our Technology". Each theme identifies commitments which will be supported by detailed action plans to measure success of the Strategy.

3.   Recommendations

3.1   It is recommended that the Executive;

a)   Approve the Future Ways of Working Strategy attached at **Appendix A**.

3.2   Reason for Recommendation:-

a)   The introduction of the Strategy will support the Council's ambition to deliver excellent services, have a positive impact on climate change, support financial resilience and promote staff health and wellbeing. The Strategy consolidates the Council's commitments to how it will work in the future.

4.   Background

4.1   The Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic began to impact upon the UK in early 2020 as the Council prepared for vesting day on 1st April 2020. This had a significant impact on workforces around the world and has created a "new normal" that has fundamentally changed the world of work at a pace which is unprecedented.

4.2   Like many organisations, the Council now has a large amount of its workforce working from places other than traditional offices and this has given the Council the opportunity to consider how it designs the delivery of services, so they are

fit for the future and flexible enough to respond to the challenges ahead. Such a fundamental re-think of traditional ways of working would not have been possible to achieve in such a short timescale without the cultural and technological changes brought about by the pandemic. It is therefore vital that this exceptional opportunity is not wasted and that these advances are consolidated into a clear direction on future ways of working to deliver excellent services.

4.3   In October 2021, the Council approved its Corporate Plan. This was a significant milestone, setting out what its key priorities are for the next four years. One of the key priorities was a commitment to becoming an employer of choice. Clear workforce strategies and policies are required to help the Council to deliver on this commitment by retaining staff and attracting talent into the organisation.

4.4   The Future Ways of Working Strategy has been co-produced with the workforce. The Council has sought and listened to their views about the sort of organisation they want to work for, how they want to work and captured their perspective of the opportunities and challenges faced in the past year. Colleagues have been encouraged to provide ideas and feedback to the Council and their responses have formed the foundation of the principles and commitments within the Strategy.

4.5   In November 2021, the Council asked its employees to complete a Workforce Survey. This focussed on how employees are currently working, wellbeing and support, management support and homeworking. The response rate was significant, with 1409 staff taking the time to provide their views; this represents almost 50% of the workforce. The response rate highlights that the Council's workforce is both engaged and invested in its future direction.

4.6   The majority of responses provided clear preferences around working in a hybrid way which encompasses working both in an office environment and home. It was clear however that this approach will only succeed if supported by the provision of adequate tools, technology, and support to maintain it in the longer term.

4.7   Colleagues supported the view that workplaces of the future should not encourage presenteeism but instead should facilitate collaborative working between teams, valuing problem solving and social interaction. There was a clear desire for suitably flexible and collaborative spaces where colleagues could come together, break down barriers to communication and focus on solving issues. Colleagues recognised that by challenging barriers and focusing on solutions, improved outcomes will be achieved for North Northamptonshire.

4.8   To build on the results of the survey, focus groups comprising a cross section of staff have been established to ask questions, further explore their views on the survey results, and challenge assumptions. Colleagues continue to help the Council design detailed action plans that will deliver the commitments within the Strategy.

4.9   The Council has also worked closely with recognised Trade Unions to provide further insight into workforce priorities.

5.   Issues and Choices

5.1   Lots of organisations have adopted Hybrid Working Policies but this Strategy is more than that; it is the catalyst for the evolution of the culture of the new Council. It seeks to create an environment which promotes a culture of focusing entirely on delivering the most appropriate and efficient end result for service users. It will be facilitated by designing spaces based around people and not services. The Strategy will enshrine workforce autonomy and flexibility to determine how and where they work as well as the tools they need to deliver.

The Strategy Principles

5.2   The Strategy being recommended for adoption by the Executive sets out the following overarching principles for the Council's future ways of working:

- Services will be outcome focussed and ways of working will support the best possible end result for service users;

- Barriers between services will be broken down to enable a focus on the issue not constrained by the team staff are aligned to;

- Where appropriate, staff will have flexibility to determine where work is carried out;

- Consideration of different service needs and the health and wellbeing of our colleagues will replace the traditional 'one size fits all' approach;

- Staff and leaders will be supported to work and manage in a hybrid environment;

- Technology that supports staff to be more efficient, and service users to access services digitally as well as through traditional methods, will be developed and implemented;

- Working spaces will be designed to encourage innovation, facilitate stronger relationships between services and teams, social interaction, collaboration and sharing knowledge;

- Workplaces will be reviewed and re-designed to support a hybrid approach to work as appropriate;

- Staff will be provided with the necessary tools, equipment, training, and ongoing support to fulfil their role wherever and however they are working.

The Themes

5.3   The above proposed principles are underpinned by commitments under the three core themes of "Our People," "Our Buildings and Workspace" and "Our Technology." The commitments will be supported by detailed action plans to ensure that the Council can measure the success of the Strategy and adapt it as necessary in response to rapid and constant changes in the modern working environment.

5.4 The "Our People" theme focuses on working as "one team," supporting the Council's workforce and its health and wellbeing. The Council's People Plan which has been recommended for approval by the Executive sets out clear actions for the next 12-18 months to retain and attract talent and supports the Strategy. It is important that colleagues are empowered to decide how they can best deliver services and the commitments set out in the Strategy will provide them with the support to do that. There is a clear commitment to enhancing the Council's corporate learning and development offer to support colleagues and leaders to work and manage in a different way.

5.5 The "Our Buildings and Workspace" theme focusses on designing physical environments that promote innovation and collaboration. It will address supporting staff to work in a hybrid way with a modern approach. It is likely this will result in the provision of less traditional desk space, which will enable longer term rationalisation of the current diversity of workplace provision. The commitments contained within this theme are considered to be essential to improving outcomes for residents and business. Workspaces that are designed around people rather than services will help the Council to look at the bigger picture when planning how to tackle issues.

5.6 The final theme of "Our Technology" relates to the provision of appropriate equipment, systems and digital solutions to staff and leaders to enable the efficient delivery of services and an improved customer experience in North Northamptonshire.

The Benefits

5.7 Delivery of the principles within the Strategy will provide clear benefits to North Northamptonshire. Reducing travel to and from face-to-face meetings and working from home more regularly will have a significant impact on carbon emissions, provide financial savings (through reduced mileage claims), reducing congestion and increase productivity by reducing staff travel time during working hours. The Council will continue to monitor the impact that this Strategy has on these key priorities.

5.8 The challenges for the public sector continue in terms of financial resilience and having adequate resources to deliver excellent services. Local government employees have a strong public sector ethos; they want to support communities and the place they work for, and this is a huge driver in retaining and recruiting talent into local government. If the Council is to fulfil its commitment to becoming an employer of choice, it also needs however to show a strong commitment to protecting a healthy work life balance for its employees. Allowing employees the flexibility to work from wherever is most appropriate contributes to this.

5.9 Whilst an alternative option is not to have an overarching Strategy, it is of clear benefit to the organisation and North Northamptonshire to set out how it will deliver services that will meet future demand and expectations and provide clarity to its workforce.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

6.1.1 Whilst there will be additional pressures as a result of the commitments made within the Strategy, they will be considered on an individual basis as a result of detailed action plans that underpin the Strategy. There are no direct financial implications in approving the Strategy.

6.2 Legal

There are no legal implications arising from the introduction of the Strategy but there may be implications in any individual decisions arising from the Strategy. These will be managed and consulted upon in due course and as appropriate.

6.3 Risk

6.3.1 There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report. If the recommendations are not approved there is a risk around communicating and consolidating the Council's approach to working in the future.