

Report for: Staff and Remuneration Committee, 2nd December 2021

Title: Update on the council's approach to the way staff work and use its office accommodation

Report authorised by: Susie Faulkner, Director of Customers, Transformation and Resources (Interim)

Lead Officer: James Wills-Fleming, Strategic Commissioner for Council Accommodation (Interim)

Ward(s) affected: All

**Report for Key/
Non Key Decision:** N/A

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 The report summarises the plans to continue the council's journey of changing the way staff work. It sets out the expectation that the period when the majority of staff working almost exclusively remotely from home is coming to an end and that moving forward the majority of council staff will split their working time between council offices, being out in the community, and working from home, under a flexible 'Hybrid working' model.
- 1.1.1 Provides an update on the council's plans for how it will transform and enhance the its main office accommodation both in the short- and long-term to support the increasing use of our office space by staff and to enable the way the we want our organisation to work moving forward.

2. Cabinet Member Introduction
N/A

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. To note the content of the report

4. Reasons for decision

- 4.1. N/A

5. Alternative options considered

- 5.1. N/A

6. Background information

6.1. Introduction and current context

- 6.1.1. Prior to the pandemic, the council was on a journey of adopting modern, flexible ways of working and improving council accommodation to enable this.

- 6.1.2. A significant number of staff have continued to come into Haringey and use council accommodation during the pandemic but this period has also demonstrated that widespread flexible and home working can allow officers to continue to deliver for our residents and reduce the cost of council accommodation, whilst also improving the work-life balance for many staff.
- 6.1.3. The Council's vision for how it will work in the future will recognise the benefits of maintaining flexibility in where its staff work. Whilst there are clear benefits to retaining the ability for staff to work remotely from home and other locations, we also believe that a physical connection to Haringey as a place is vital to ensuring that our staff maintain a close relationship with the residents and communities we serve and enabling our staff to collaborate with colleagues from across the council and partner organisations.
- 6.1.4. Under this 'Hybrid working' model, most 'office-based' staff will not need to come into the office every day, but it is still expected that all staff will have regular reasons to come into work in Haringey, either within council accommodation or out in the communities we serve.
- 6.1.5. Hybrid working means that most staff will split their working time between some combination of council office accommodation, community locations and home. It is therefore envisaged that very few Council roles will continue to be 100% remote working.
- 6.1.6. Why staff come in to use our office space will also change, with greater emphasis on using our office spaces for collaboration and flexible working, moving away from spending time in the office on individual tasks that can be completed just as well at home or elsewhere.
- 6.1.7. To enable the transformation of the way we work, an ambitious programme of accommodation improvement has been set out to provide both short- and long-term office space that enables how we want to work as an organisation moving forward.
- 6.1.8. In December 2020 Cabinet approved a project to repair, restore, refurbish and extend the Civic Centre. The project will bring the Civic Centre back into use by the Council as its main staff office accommodation, freeing up Alex House, River Park House, 48 Station Road and 40 Cumberland Road for other uses.
- 6.1.9. We will also be looking to increase the amount of area- and locality-based working over the coming years to ensure that our front-facing services are delivered as close as possible to residents and customers receiving them.
- 6.1.10. The proposed redevelopment of the Civic Centre will likely take around 4 years so in the meantime we will be consolidating our Wood Green office accommodation into Alex House and 48 Station Road. To facilitate this, both of these buildings will be refreshed and refurbished to ensure that they are fit for purpose for our staff over the next 3-4 years as well as adding to the long-term value of the assets.
- 6.1.11. The refurbishment works are expected to start late this year, with each floor refurbishment being completed and available for use in a phased approach

over Spring-to- late Summer next year. The detailed timing of these works is still being finalised and will be subject to the procurement of contractors.

6.2. Reconnection starts now

6.2.1.1. We are not waiting for the full refurbishment of our offices to start our journey towards our new way of working, however. Our offices are open for use now and are configured to be Covid-secure in line with the Council's risk assessment and Public Health guidance.

6.2.1.2. As Covid-related restrictions ease, there is not going to be a single 'mass return' date when all staff who have been largely working from home start to come into the office with regularity. Officer teams are already in a phase of reconnecting and returning to a greater presence in the borough, which will continue through until next Spring.

6.2.1.3. We are asking staff that haven't been into the office, or Haringey more generally, very often over the past 18 months to come in more regularly between now and Spring to ensure that we don't prolong the period of time that staff are 'disconnected' from Haringey.

6.2.1.4. To support this, some immediate reconfiguration work has been undertaken to make two floors in Alex House 'Reconnection' spaces, designed in a way that encourages staff to come into the office to work together on activities such as:

- Projects and challenges where ideas and energy flows from being physically together
- Meetings requiring complex discussion, creative debate, or engaging the whole team in key decision
- Priority projects which require thinking beyond your immediate work area, like the borough plan
- Sharing and discussing sensitive or complex issues that are best done face-to-face as well as feedback and coaching conversations

6.2.1.5. Alongside the two dedicated 'reconnection' floors, each council Directorate also has allocated space in one of the council's office buildings for staff to carry out more focussed, individual work. Again, all of this space is configured in a Covid-secure way.

6.2.1.6. In summary, it is felt that this is a good time for those staff that have not been into the office very often, if at all, over the past 18 months to come in while our offices are still relatively quiet and specific space is available for team and collaboration work. Coming in for the first time is a good way to start the process of re-establishing our physical connection to Haringey as an organisation and place, and for staff to start getting comfortable with coming into the office again.

6.3. Returning to hybrid working

- 6.3.1. We're expecting a phased return to our full Hybrid working model and further increasing use of our offices from next Spring, subject to reviews of the Public Health guidance and the refurbishment works at Alex House and 48 Station Road.
- 6.3.2. The underlying assumption is that all community/locality-based and traditionally "office based" workers will be considered "Hybrid Workers" moving forward. These groups make up the large majority of the council's overall staff number.
- 6.3.3. A hybrid worker does not have a fixed working location, where they work will include a mixture of office, home, community setting and mobile. The precise location on a given day is determined by business need and hybrid workers are also able to exercise flexibility over their working pattern, subject to business needs.
- 6.3.4. Under this hybrid working model, it is expected that all staff will have regular reasons to come into work in Haringey, either within council accommodation or out in the community. It is therefore envisaged that very few Council roles will continue to be suitable for 100% remote working.
- 6.3.5. Hybrid working means that staff should generally not ordinarily attend the office to carry out work that could be done at home or elsewhere, such as focussed, individual working. Reasons for spending time working in a council office could include:
- for collaborative work, where greater benefit can be gained from people coming together in person
 - as a touch-down point between other meetings or visits in the local area
 - for training, where this is best delivered face-to-face
 - for team-building – a manager may bring their team together for in-person sessions
 - to improve professional practice, where it is deemed beneficial for staff to sit with colleagues from time-to-time to learn from, and mutually support, each other in their professional roles
 - for meetings (including public meetings) where attendance in person is necessary
 - to meet Members, clients or external contacts, where meeting in person is preferable or necessary
 - where work is dependent on specialist equipment or information that is not available outside of the office
 - where attendance in the office is necessary to ensure physical or emotional wellbeing (this should not assume full-time attendance at the office unless circumstances are exceptional)
 - where a worker is unable to work at home or another location due to domestic circumstances (this should not assume full-time attendance at the office unless circumstances are exceptional)
 - as part of onboarding arrangements for new staff
- 6.3.6. The list above is not intended to be exhaustive, and it is expected that services and managers will work with their teams to develop the most appropriate working arrangements for the roles that they deliver.

6.3.7. Information shared through the London Council's network highlights that virtually all other London boroughs have already implemented similar hybrid working arrangements, or are in the process of doing so, with a view to this being the 'norm' after pandemic restrictions are further eased.

6.4. Investing in our staff accommodation

6.4.1. The decision to consolidate and enhance our accommodation offer in Wood Green recognises how important it is that as an organisation we invest in our staff accommodation now and that we retain a strong civic presence in the borough into the future.

6.4.2. The office accommodation in Alex House and 48 Station Road will be designed to reflect our new flexible, hybrid working model and place greater emphasis on encouraging collaboration.

6.4.3. The proposed building and furniture layouts will provide a mix of work settings for staff, including traditional desking for focussed, individual work but with a significant increase in the amount of flexible space designed to enable collaborative working.

6.4.4. The building will also be equipped with new audio-visual technology to enable hybrid meetings and collaboration, allowing staff to work together regardless of whether they are in the office or working remotely.

6.4.5. The plans are also designed to encourage greater collaboration between council directorates and services. Whilst each council Directorate will have an allocated home floor, in either Alexandra House or 48 Station Road, we don't expect only those from these Directorates to work there and the workspaces have been designed to facilitate collaboration on cross-cutting projects and work.

6.4.6. The remaining floors in each building will not be allocated to any specific service. These 'corporate' floors will instead provide flexible working and meeting space for all council staff to use, further increasing the opportunities for cross-service mixing and collaboration.

6.4.7. The overall number of available workstations will be lower than previously available reflecting that many staff will not be in the office every day so we will need less focus on individual staff and teams 'owning' particularly areas of the office space and more focus on hotdesking and freeing up desks when not in use.

6.4.8. In order to ensure that workstations are available for all staff, we are not expecting personal items to be left on desks from one day to the next, and desks may routinely be cleared at the end of each day.

6.4.9. Included in the refurbishment are improved facilities for cycle parking and showering. This will support staff to adopt Active Travel to work modes (walking, cycling, running) which supports the Council's sustainability goals. It also makes

possible physical activities for staff as part of our Workforce Wellbeing strategy (for example through running clubs).

6.4.10. Our experiences of working in this new kind of environment will inform how we design and ultimately use the proposed new Civic Centre.

6.5. Workforce engagement

6.5.1. In developing these plans, an extended period of consultation and dialogues with our workforce has taken place. This includes:

- Staff surveys to gather information about staff experiences of working from home, their work-style preferences
- Consultation with the trade unions, to understand key issues facing staff.
- Discussions with staff networks including the Disability and Health network and the LGBT+ staff network
- “Let’s Talk” sessions, which all staff are invited, to facilitate engagement directly between staff and senior management.

6.5.2. There have also been extensive discussions with service management teams to support services to work through how they intend to work going forward, to build confidence that office accommodation and wider organisation policies and support will enable them to continue to deliver high quality public services as the pandemic eases.

6.5.3. Staff have indicated a strong preference for continuing to work remotely for a portion of time. In order to recruit and retain a high performing workforce, moving to modern ways of working is in therefore strongly in the Council’s overall interest and our hybrid model should ensure this is enabled.

6.6. Equalities Considerations

6.6.1. In developing the approach contained within this report, the Council has had due regard to its public sector equalities duties. The Council has a highly diverse workforce and values the range of life experiences we can therefore draw upon. Accordingly, it is essential that all our Council buildings are accessible and welcoming to all.

6.6.2. A major consideration is that the buildings need improvements to the toilet facilities to ensure they are inclusive and cater for disabled users.

6.6.3. Our plans will make provision for gender-neutral toilets, whilst recognising that the overall provision needs to be suitable for all.

6.6.4. As we develop plans for office refurbishment, our ambition is to take account of modern guidelines for creating environments that are dementia friendly and are suitable for neuro-diverse individuals.

7. Contribution to strategic outcomes

7.1. This report contributes to the Borough Plan priority “Your Council” – Outcome 19 “We will be an able, positive workforce with the skills needed to deliver for

Haringey". The Delivery Priority this supports is "Design smarter working environments to endorse modern and agile working".

8. Statutory Officers comments

8.1. Finance

8.1.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

8.2. Procurement

N/A

8.3. Legal

N/A

8.4. Equality

N/A

9. Use of Appendices

N/A

10. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

N/A