

EMPLOYMENT MATTERS COMMITTEE

2 DECEMBER 2020

STAFF SURVEY ON WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

Report from: Neil Davies, Chief Executive
Author: Samantha Beck-Farley, Head of HR

Summary

This report accompanies a short presentation on the results of a survey on the working arrangements experienced by colleagues whilst we have been responding to the pandemic. The survey aims to capture feedback on the current experience and thoughts from the workforce on how we take good practice forward into our new ways of working, and how we can eliminate any concerns colleagues are facing.

1. Budget and policy framework

1.1. This report is outside the Council's policy and budget framework including the Council plan, at this time, however if we are to act upon the survey results further work will be required which will result in potential policy changes and budget implications.

2. Background

2.1. Now more than ever, smarter working approaches are needed to help us deliver public services in a safe and effective way. Across any public service, many people are working from home by default, and only where necessary are there people continuing to work in office spaces. So, it is essential we explore what it is that smarter working can offer us while we continue to carve out a new normal as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2. The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak will have a long-lasting impact on working lives. We have had to make rapid changes to how we operate, including how and where colleagues perform their jobs, as well as planning for, or consideration to whether staff return to work and how this can be done safely. Colleagues in turn, have to navigate new ways of working, policy amendments, as well as adapt to changing circumstances in their personal life.

2.3. Whilst an important activity for continuous engagement is always to understand our colleagues job quality and working lives, we want to go further by examining people's experience of work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Soft information suggested colleagues were comfortable with the current way of working so we wanted to test this assumption, identify concerns and use evidence-based feedback to help shape the future way of working for Medway Council.

- 2.4. In addition to the operating model we want, we will need to demonstrate our commitment to colleagues' well-being. We want to acknowledge the stress created by COVID-19 pandemic and listen to colleagues' concerns to help inform and shape any additional support that may be required.
- 2.5. In an effort to build trust and credibility, we now need to share the results widely, identify what we have learned from the survey and our experiences, and start to develop and take action.

3. Options

- 3.1. Sharing the survey results is the first phase of understanding and scoping what future activity is required. To support and help shape this a working group comprising 7 workstreams looking at potential solutions and appropriate action has been established. These include,
 - HR (including policy review).
 - Expenses and millage (including allowances).
 - ICT equipment (including support).
 - Leadership development (including culture).
 - Health and safety (including wellbeing).
 - Smart working (including automation and an agile workforce).
 - Property (including property rationalisation).
- 3.2. Through the working group a number of suggestions will be explored and shared to support the benefits experienced from this new way of working and address any concerns colleagues may be experiencing.

4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1. The headlines from our survey inform us that a different way of working is preferred in that:
 - 89% are satisfied with the flexible working arrangements as is
 - 91.8% have established a good routine for work
 - 75.4% agree they maintain a healthy work/life balance
 - 72.4% feel they are more productive
 - 82% feel the manager is aware of their well-being
 - 78.4% have created a suitable workspace
- 4.2. For us to fully embrace smart working, it is essential we understand what we mean. It is more than just working at home, in essence it's about embracing digital innovation and rethinking our approach and offering flexibility and autonomy to colleagues whilst focussing on results.

- 4.3. If we get this right the benefits are immense: a better lifestyle, with positive benefits for recruitment and retention; a reduced carbon footprint; enhanced accommodation of diversity into our workforce; better mental and physical health; improved productivity; more effective use of property.
- 4.4. The main principles of the Smart Working philosophy involve five areas of work life:
- leadership,
 - workplace,
 - technology,
 - estate,
 - people and culture.
- 4.5. Work is under way looking at lessons and taking our learning to help our back to better ambition. We are constantly evaluating interventions and identifying efficiencies and the voice of colleagues has helped us test our assumptions.
- 4.6. One of the biggest challenges for remote teams is staying connected. Fear and anxiety still occur for some, and wellbeing remains our priority. Senior managers in the organisation will continue to wrestle with challenges as we lead our colleagues through uncertainty.
- 4.7. Whilst this survey supports our assumption that smart working has proved beneficial, to truly embrace the opportunity we will need a cultural shift. The working group must now focus on priorities around our people, our behaviours and an evolving culture if we are to support colleagues, ensure increased productivity and reap the benefits of this new way of working.

5. Risk management

- 5.1. Whilst there are no decisions at this time, failing to act upon the survey results presents the following risks.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Mental Health and wellbeing concern	Working at home can impact mental health and wellbeing and contribute to social isolation	Regular communication with Team leader and colleagues is essential. As well as access to support organisations, for example Carefirst. Regular webinars on managing	C2

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		<p>wellbeing to be provided.</p> <p>Regular activity and suggestion from our mental health team to keep this concern under review.</p> <p>Ensure colleagues take leave regularly</p> <p>Monitor absence levels</p>	
Musculoskeletal concern	<p>Inadequate equipment, inactivity, and poor posture can lead to complications including back pain, spinal dysfunction, joint degeneration, and neck pain</p>	<p>Full DSE assessment to be carried out to ensure appropriate working environment. Where specialist equipment is identified access to work is engaged and kept under review.</p> <p>Reminders to the workforce around the importance of regular exercise and breaks away from the display screen.</p> <p>Office accommodation offered if the home working environment is unsuitable.</p>	B2
Loss of productivity	<p>Transitioning to remote work during a global crisis is not easy.</p>	<p>Support leaders to manage a remote workforce by empowering people to have</p>	D3

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
	<p>Delivering essential public services whilst adapting to work has put teams under more pressure than before. Under such difficult circumstances if not supported and managed It is expected productivity would drop.</p>	<p>autonomy over their working day.</p> <p>Ensure high engagement - regular communications between line managers and teams is in place and is structured.</p> <p>Monitoring of absence levels</p> <p>Explore Microsoft analytics to understand the frequency of collaboration and focus time</p> <p>Ensuring leave is taken regularly</p> <p>Monitor KPI and ensure team are aware of expectation and how they fit in with the whole Council.</p>	

6. Consultation

- 6.1. The survey results have been shared with all directorates to help inform their plans and a staff wider infographic (Appendix A) has been designed to share with the organisation.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1. There are no financial implications from this report.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1. There are no legal implications from this report

9. Recommendations

9.1. The Committee is asked to note and comment on the survey findings.

Lead officer contact

Samantha Beck-Farley, Head of HR, Medway Council and Gravesham Borough Council, Business Support Directorate. 01634331463,
Samantha.Beckfarley@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix A – Survey Infographic

Background papers

None

Appendix A
Survey Infographic

