

To: Council
Date: 30th January 2023
Report of: Head of Business Improvement
Title of Report: Flexible Working / Hybrid Working Policy

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To approve the Hybrid Working Policy
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services
Corporate Priority:	None
Policy Framework:	None

Recommendation(s): That Council resolves to:
1. To approve the Hybrid Working Policy.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Hybrid Working Policy
Appendix 2	Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix 3	Risk Assessment

Introduction and background

1. This policy is needed to formalise the working practices that have developed since the start of the pandemic. The Council has moved away from office-based working to a standard practice of hybrid working.
2. Not all roles are covered by the policy as there are a number of roles that may only be carried out in an office base and this includes Town Hall roles, for example. Hybrid working covers all back office roles. It also covers roles that have face-to-face contact with customers and businesses or work on site at different locations, as any desk-based activities can be carried out at home.

3. The proposed Hybrid Working policy will replace the current Homeworking Policy.

Hybrid Working Policy and Case for Change

4. The basis of this new policy is the existing Homeworking policy. The latter operated on the basis that some, but not all, work could be carried out at home. There was a requirement to attend work in an office location periodically. This is what we now refer to as hybrid working. Travel expenses could not be claimed for travel. A home working allowance was paid to circa 12 staff (who had an agreement to work from home) and this payment is protected for this group. We have not extended this allowance to others who have worked from home on a regular basis since the pandemic. This was agreed as part of the current pay agreement. The payment of the allowance will be reviewed in 2024 when the current pay agreement ends. It will be discussed as part of future pay negotiations. The expectation that employees will attend work in Oxford remains in the Hybrid Working Policy with frequency driven by job need. Travel expenses will not be paid.
5. The Homeworking policy described different categories of worker and this has been retained but with updated descriptions. These work profiles acknowledge the range of working arrangements and can be used in communications and to determine equipment needs.
6. Manager and employee responsibilities are made clear and health and safety considerations are included.
7. Where employees are unable to work from home, they have an office base and this will continue with the move to the Town Hall.
8. It is important to address this current policy gap so that policy reflects actual working practices, supports consistent approaches across roles with the same demands and provides clear information to employees.
9. Unison and Unite have been consulted and are happy with the policy.
10. Other options have not been considered as the aim here is to formalise existing practice.

Legal implications

11. Legal advice has been taken on the approach as we do not plan to update existing contracts of employment but will use policy to confirm current, established practice. Unison and Unite are happy with this approach and, in fact, Unison would prefer that we did not write to individuals as they believe this may raise concerns that we are changing something.

Financial implications

12. There is no financial cost to agreeing this new policy. Financial savings and income have resulted from a reduction in office space.

Health and Safety

13. Health and safety considerations are included. This policy will be supported by the roll out of DSE assessments and training later this year.

Level of risk

14. This is a low risk decision with no impact on residents. The revised policy will ensure that the Council complies with its legal requirements. The absence of the policy would increase the risk of action against the Council if individual managers adopt different working practices and this is seen to be unfair.

Equalities impact

15. A completed Equalities Impact Assessment is attached as Appendix 2. The policy and practice may disadvantage some groups, particularly around access to equipment, but this has been addressed.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

16. The policy has led to a reduced office footprint and Carbon reduction for the Council. Employee household carbon emissions may have increased.

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Background Papers: None

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