

## **Cabinet 9 February 2022**

### **Customer Focused Ways of Working Update**

**Portfolio:** Councillor M Statham – Internal Services

**Related portfolios:** All

**Service:** All

**Wards:** All

**Key decision:** No

**Forward plan:** No

#### **1. Aim**

1.1 To update Cabinet on our Council wide customer focused approach to ways of working; recognising that the world of work has changed and we are now able to deliver effective services to customers and to support staff by using the benefits of technology and flexible working,

#### **2. Summary**

2.1 In April 2021, Personnel Committee agreed a number of blended working principles. These principles said that the Council should:

- Adopt a policy of “Work is what you do not where you do it”;
- Enable staff to work from home unless there is a specific purpose to be in a building or in the community, i.e. there is “presence with a purpose”;
- Comply with public health and Government guidelines.
- Make better use of smaller community-based buildings to support our most vulnerable customers.
- Offer a wider range of digital self-serve tools via the Council’s website and Intranet.
- Work with partners to help ensure that our most vulnerable and digitally excluded residents can access the information and support they need close to home.

2.2 In June 2021, Cabinet agreed to an action plan for the Council called Resetting through Proud. This action plan capitalised on the progress made over the last two years using technology and digital working, to facilitate the tangible delivery of the three Proud Promises, to:

- Improve Outcomes and Customer Experience

- Improve Employee Satisfaction and Engagement
- Improve Service Efficiency and Performance

2.3 Resetting the Council through Proud is not about reinstating how we worked previously, before the pandemic. Covid-19 has changed our world profoundly and Cabinet has agreed not to return to the way things were at the beginning of 2020. Covid-19 has been the catalyst that has driven innovation, adaptation and transformation at pace. We have seen purposeful local leadership, swifter decision making, deeper collaboration, better use of evidence, and increased digital adoption. Furthermore, we have seen a strengthening awareness of the capacity of communities and what the Council, partners, businesses and local people can achieve by working together.

2.4 This report explains how the new customer focused ways of working are operating in practice – for staff, for buildings and for customers, now that the reset action plan has progressed and we move into our new permanent customer focused way of working

### **3. Recommendations**

3.1 That Cabinet notes the report.

### **4. Report detail - know**

#### ***Context***

4.1 Legal restrictions on our day-to-day lives are no longer in place but Covid 19 has not gone away and the pandemic continues to be a challenge nationally and locally. Thousands of people have died and many lives have been adversely affected. The overall impact and cost of the pandemic still needs to be fully understood. Guidance from Public Health will continue to inform the customer focused ways of working and will be regularly reviewed. Covid case rates in Walsall remain high and are still amongst the highest in the country.

4.2 The key principles agreed by Personnel Committee in April 2021 have been supported by a number of important themes in the action plan agreed by Cabinet in June 2021. These are:

- Allow the public to access services in a safe way and listening to our customers;
- Listening to our staff and keeping them safe in the office;
- Making sure our buildings are fit for purpose for blended working;
- Keeping our people safe at home and on the front line;
- Allowing our managers to manage;
- Allowing our teams to thrive and collaborate.

- 4.3 These themes have been applied in our customer focused approach to ways of working; capitalising on the benefits of working remotely and adoption of new technology. They continue even when eventually the Covid pandemic subsides and will help to deliver the three Proud promises.
- 4.4 The blended working principles mean that previously office based staff will use council buildings when and where they need to. Examples include:
- face to face meetings with Elected Members and customers
  - supervision meetings
  - induction and introductory meetings
  - meetings where body language is important e.g. disciplinary hearings , sickness meetings
  - recruitment and interviews,
  - professional learning and development
  - events
  - collaboration and problem solving
  - team work and team building
  - management, team and project meetings
  - wellbeing, and connectivity,
  - paper based administration,

This is illustrated in Appendix 1.

- 4.5 In other circumstances, staff will work digitally and will continue as they have done throughout the pandemic to deliver for residents. It is not a productive use of time for staff to commute to the office to do individual work on reports and e-mails or to hold on line meetings, which can be carried out more effectively in a digital way. All community, front line and depot-based staff will continue their roles from their current places of work, as they have throughout the pandemic, following Public Health guidance to ensure their safety, the safety of their colleagues and of their customers
- 4.6 All buildings, including locality offices, the Depot, the Civic Centre and Council House are fully available for staff use as required. Some will continue as is – some will change according to the customer-focused ways of working. There will be no allocated team spaces in the Civic Centre / Council House – instead there are desk bookings, drop down spaces, pods, project spaces and meeting rooms. A review of space requirements, including collaboration space and technology requirements is in progress. Staff will be able to work wherever suits them best in the context of service delivery and new ways of working. This includes working in the community rather than a building and in accordance with the agreed principles of “presence with a purpose”.
- 4.7 All staff are accessible via Teams chat, telephony, e-mail and in person in accordance with the “presence with a purpose” principles. Customer service standards and Customer Experience Centre call answering standards have been introduced with the roll out of Teams Telephony for services dealing directly with customers. If an officer is not available to pick up an external call, Teams

Telephony has been tailored to forward calls to other team members with appropriate use of voicemail.

- 4.8 Keep in Touch / Meet the Teams drop in sessions are being introduced for Elected Members for key services – specifically Licensing, School Admissions, Planning, Highways & Transport and Clean & Green. These sessions will be informed by live customer data providing insight into key areas of interest and will be scheduled at times convenient for Members, e.g. linked to training, Committee meetings etc.
- 4.9 A Directorate “who’s who, what do they do and how to contact them”, branded as “Meet the Teams” has been updated and is being shared with Elected Members via CMIS.
- 4.10 Customers can continue to access services, advice and support in a number of ways utilizing the Council’s website, Customer Experience Centre (CXC) and face-to-face as required. This is in line with the Customer Strategy agreed by Cabinet in December 2021. Usual operations in front line services, for example, schools, community services, care, and Clean & Green will continue. In line with the Customer and Organisational Development Strategies, all staff will continue to work in a customer-focused way; ensuring responses are focused on delivery of high quality and efficient council services.
- 4.11 Customers have improved access to services via the Council’s website, which now has a new modern design system accessible on mobile phones. The Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system has been launched, and customers can now register for a personal account, which will enable them to book or pay for services at times which are convenient to them and which may be outside of normal working hours. Whilst currently the personal accounts within the CRM are focused on Clean and Green and Complaints handling, over time, the number of Council services offered within the accounts will grow. By registering for a Walsall Council account, residents also have the option to sign up to receive updates about other Council services and to be informed about any benefits or grants they may become entitled to in the future. During the Covid-19 pandemic, this approach was trialled very successfully, with over £3.5m in grant payments already being issued directly into resident’s bank accounts, and a further £1.9m due to be issued before the end of March 2022 to help those at greatest risk due to rising fuel and food costs.
- 4.12 There will be more streamlined routes for the public to make simple requests for advice, help, or support, delivering customer satisfaction at the first point of contact. Access to services for those customers without personal access to digital technology, will be available via our Customer Experience Centre telephony offer, or via public digital access points available in libraries and some community associations. In the event that a customer does need specialist support with a complex issue, they can make an appointment to meet an officer in person, at a prearranged location, date and time. Where more complex needs exist, such as those for vulnerable adults and children, a joined up multiagency response will be given within the locality working structure currently being developed and

enhanced. Daily out-reach services will also continue to find and support any individuals at risk of rough sleeping in the area.

- 4.13 A key part of the customer-focused ways of working is the management by managers of performance and output. As blended working combines traditional 'office based' physical presence with online working, and employees have some flexibility over the time and place of their work, we recognize that they need to remain accessible to customers. Managers are supporting and managing their teams in a different way, focussing on output and outcomes, not only presence. The tools which managers can use include regular one to one's, in person Annual Performance Conversations and mid-year Reviews, and coaching. Managers will also use Key Performance Indicators and performance data via the developing Business Insights team to manage their services. In addition, there are HR guidelines and training on working digitally, meeting etiquette and working via Teams. Managers are also responsible for ensuring guidelines on health and safety and equipment needs are met in the context of this customer-focused way of working.

### ***Corporate Plan priorities***

- 4.14 The Council Plan sets out what the Council priorities are - the ways of working sets out how they will be delivered. Customer focused ways of working links to all services and all areas of the Council and enables delivery of the five areas of focus and the ten outcomes within the new Council Plan.

### ***Risk management***

- 4.15 All risks are being proactively managed through our risk management framework.

Key Risks and mitigations include:

- Risk to staff, Members and Customers of Covid-19 transmission – mitigated through safe working practices, provision of sanitiser, space booking arrangements, regular lateral flow testing, increased cleaning regimes and regular review of practices in line with public health guidance.
- Risk of reduced numbers of staff in the building leading to a false perception of colleagues not being accessible – regular reporting of access numbers, and roll out of connected working and training for managers to ensure productivity and outcomes are achieved. Management by output not presence. Roll out of Teams telephony and contact information and customer standards. Communicating the customer focused ways of working

### ***Financial implications***

- 4.16 There are no direct financial implications from this report. The Council has benefited from working in a different way particularly in reducing some third party spend during the Covid period eg on reduced printing and paper and reduced travel. Conversely, there are additional costs in some areas - loss of income and increased Facilities management costs. There will be further financial benefits delivered through Proud and our customer focused ways of working in the future

eg through reduced turnover or reduced sickness. All financial implications are incorporated into the Council's budget and financial plans.

### ***Legal implications***

- 4.17 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

### ***Procurement Implications / Social Value***

- 4.18 There are no direct procurement implications arising from this report.

### ***Property implications***

- 4.19 The long-term impact for our estate is being considered by the ongoing work in relation to the Strategic Asset Plan.

### ***Health and wellbeing implications***

- 4.20 Results of the employee survey show that the flexibility of a blended working approach has a positive impact on productivity, performance, health and wellbeing as well as improving work life balance. 45% of respondents say that working from home has helped reduce their stress levels; although staff also report working longer hours and taking fewer breaks.
- 4.21 Staff sickness and the number of working days lost has reduced. We believe this is linked to the flexibility of remote working, where people have more flexibility and may be more prepared to work from home, e.g. working a shorter day or starting later thus preventing them from taking a full day's sickness absence and sharing illness across the office. The flexibility may also mean that employees can accommodate home / family issues more easily preventing other absences being taken and enabling staff to manage their time whilst delivering their objectives and services to customers.

### ***Staffing implications***

- 4.22 Results of the employee survey show that staff and their Trade Unions welcome this blended working approach. There is a strong sense of staff being trusted to do their job. Staff are also clear about what is expected of them and they feel more productive, empowered and recognised. The flexible approach will help with recruitment and retention. Staff are encouraged to directly claim the working at home tax allowance from the tax office, HMRC.

### ***Reducing Inequalities***

- 4.23 It will be important for managers to manage in such a way as to reduce inequalities and be mindful of the impact on staff of blended working. The blended approach allows managers to manage and target support and ways of working to individual needs while the focus on all customers in terms of provision of and access to services remains key in line with the customer experience strategy.

### ***Climate Change***

4.24 There is likely to be a reduction in travel and commuting time and cost.

### **Consultation**

4.25 Public Health have been, and will continue be, consulted for additional advice on specific requirements. Customer feedback was gathered in October 2020 and again as part of the customer experience strategy. The interim results from the consultation, which is exploring customer priorities and needs in a post Covid-19 world, indicate that the biggest priority for customers (at 81% of respondents) is that information provided by the council is accurate and up to date. This is followed by 'the need for the council to be clear about what it can and cannot deliver' (at 71%) and that 'the council is easy to contact' (at 68%). Employee feedback was gathered from surveys conducted in June 2020 and in May 2021. Results show that the majority of employees welcome the flexibility a blended working approach offers. The survey highlights the positive impact on productivity, performance, health and welling being as well as work life balance.

## **5. Decide**

5.1 No decision is required

## **6. Respond**

6.1 Actions to deliver this customer focused way of working are included as part of the Proud promises i.e. customer focus, staff engagement and efficiency. We will continue to monitor the benefits of technology, presence with a purpose, management of staff and access to services.

## **7. Review**

7.1 This approach will be kept under review in line with guidance and best practice.

## **Background papers**

April 2021– Personnel Committee

June 2021 - Cabinet – “Resetting through Proud”

## **Author**

Deborah Hindson  
Executive Director



**Deborah Hindson**  
**Executive Director – Resources &**  
**Transformation**

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**Councillor Mark Statham**  
**Portfolio Holder – Internal Services**

09 February 2022



## Appendix A - Blended Working Principles

**A professional requirement for supervision**  
Peer support, challenge and wellbeing support, in carrying out duties to support and safeguard adults and children.

**Collaborating and Problem solving**  
Creative, innovative working sessions - where space, facilities, ideas generation, bouncing off others is essential.

**Administration**  
Access to specific hard copy records, dealing with post, scanning, creating signs when unable to use a digital solution.

**Induction and Introductory meetings**  
Meeting people for the first time.

**Team Building**  
Bringing everyone together in one place, to build and ensure team engagement.

**Connectivity**  
Ensuring all employees have connectivity to the system, for example when individuals have poor or limited connectivity at home, or increased processing capability is needed, e.g. waste unitary charge processing.

**Wellbeing**  
To support the mental, social and physical wellbeing of an employee, when there is a specific concern or support required for a period of time.

**Meetings where body language is important**  
For example negotiations, performance management, dealing with difficult situations / matters.

**Professional Development**  
Training and workshops which require face to face facilitation.

**Event management**  
Coming together around a specific event, access to information, quick decisions, checking on wellbeing, e.g. flood control room.