

Cabinet – 16 June 2021

Resetting the Council through Proud

Portfolio: Councillor Bird, Leader of the Council

Related portfolios: All

Service: All

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: Yes

1. Aim

- 1.1 To agree to a **Reset Action Plan** (Appendix A), aligned to the Walsall Proud Promises and Corporate Plan outcomes that builds on the new ways working expedited by the Covid-19 pandemic and guides the work of the council over the coming months.

2. Summary

- 2.1 Over the last 15 months, the council has challenged itself to introduce and accelerate the Proud Ways of Thinking and Ways of Working to safely comply with Covid-19 regulations whilst maintaining service delivery, supporting our employees and residents through unprecedented times and delivering our Corporate Plan outcomes.

- 2.2 This report builds on the blended working principles approved by Personnel Committee in April 2021. It presents a reset action plan for the council that capitalises on the progress made using technology and digital working, it enables the continuation of opportunities introduced over the last year, and aligns to the tangible delivery of the 3 Proud Promises, which aim to:

- Improve Outcomes and Customer Experience
- Improve Employee Satisfaction and Engagement
- Improve Service Efficiency and Performance

The steps set out in the report will ensure learning gained over the last year is sustained and a slip back into old habits is averted.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet notes the steps taken to respond to the impact of Covid-19.
- 3.2 That Cabinet agrees the approach to resetting based on the principles set out, and gives a mandate to implement the Reset Action plan.
- 3.3 That Cabinet notes the findings of the Residents Survey and agree that ways to regularly seek the view of residents are explored and implemented.

4. Report detail - Know

Context

- 4.1 Covid-19 has been one of the biggest challenges which individuals, communities, businesses and the council have ever faced. Every resident in our Borough has been affected by the pandemic, many of our residents, communities, and businesses have suffered significantly and there has been unprecedented challenge to the way in which the council works and provides services. Understanding the impact of Covid-19, interpreting government guidelines and developing systems to manage risk and continue the delivery of critical services has been the focus of the council's attention during the last 15 months. Staff have responded with outstanding dedication and skill; managers have gone above and beyond to rapidly develop new ways of delivering services safely. A wide network of partnerships, statutory and voluntary, across the Borough have worked together to limit the impact of the crisis, partnering to ensure continued provision of essential services, working together like never before in communities to co-ordinate responses and support. Elected members of all political groups have played an active role in their wards to support constituents and voluntary groups as well as working with council officers to make the necessary decisions to protect residents and help them get through the pandemic.
- 4.2 Now is the time, given the successful vaccination programme, to develop the road map out of lockdown. We will look beyond those immediate challenges and the disruption caused by the pandemic, to a more hopeful future, capitalising on the progress and new ways of working developed during this period. Resetting the council is not about reinstating what existed previously. Covid-19 has changed our world profoundly. We cannot return to the way things were at the beginning of 2020, nor would we want to. Covid-19 has been the catalyst that has driven innovation, adaptation and transformation at pace – a demonstration of purposeful local leadership, of swifter decision making, of deeper collaboration, of better use of evidence, of increased digital adoption and of strengthening awareness of the capacity of communities and what the council, partners, businesses and local people can achieve together.

- 4.3 We must think about what comes next and what could look different. We will critically examine and capitalise on the lessons we have learnt from this experience, recognising the extraordinary contributions of our staff and volunteers, the rapid progress achieved in digitalising and transforming service delivery.

We have vital data from the feedback collated from our staff and our resident surveys which will aid us to shape the design for how the council will operate, how services will be accessed in the future, how we will work and what could look different, whilst continuing to manage the ongoing risk from Covid-19.

- 4.4 This report provides an overview of how Covid-19 has changed the way the council responds to service delivery, it considers how we will capitalise on progress made, how we will work in the future, what changes should be maintained and reinforced, including how services can continue to transform in line with the agreed Proud Promises.

Headline findings are included from recent surveys with residents and staff. The valuable insights from these, forms part of our commitment to engagement with residents and staff and part of our continuous learning. The results will shape the approach to Reset Through Proud, both at an operational and a strategic organisational level. The accompanying Reset Action plan (appendix 1) outlines a set of actions that will support the council to achieve the Corporate Plan objectives and outcomes.

This action plan is split into themes supporting delivery of the 3 Proud Promises:

- *Strategy and Principles*
- *Allow the public to access services in a safe way and listening to our customers*
- *Listening to our people and keeping our people 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*
- *Ensuring our teams feel engaged*
- *Talent management*
- *Culture*
- *Proud workstreams*
- *Financial implication of Reset and savings achieved via blended working*

Changes to the way the Council Operates

4.5 Keeping Our People Safe

- 4.5.1 From an organisational perspective the council had to change rapidly in response to the pandemic. Improved IT capabilities were rolled out quickly to ensure a significant proportion of the workforce could continue to work from home and this has continued throughout the pandemic, with teams and individuals working effectively from home whilst delivering services and outcomes for residents.
- 4.5.2 Supported by a clear management approval process, small numbers of individual staff and in some cases specific teams have been office based throughout the pandemic e.g., social workers, ICT and Print & Design staff. Some staff have returned to the office or to specific sites for work during the pandemic, either because the function or job role required some of the work to be undertaken on-site or to enable effective service delivery to residents and customers. A limited number of individuals have also returned to the office to support their personal, welfare needs during the pandemic and to allow them to continue to work safely where this was not possible in the home environment e.g. where reasonable adjustments made in the office could not be accommodated at home. Covid-19 secure building and working arrangements including regularly updated staff guidance, increased cleaning regimes, risk assessments, access to PPE and Covid-19 testing arrangements have ensured the continued safety and well-being of all such staff.
- 4.5.3 Council services have been encouraged and enabled to move more of their service delivery functionality online, in doing so embedding streamlined processes, such as electronic signatures, workflow approvals, improved access to documents and collaborative working and better access to information through new IT systems all supporting staff with better tools to aid their services. Where process improvements have demonstrated their effectiveness, these should remain, and lessons learnt from these changes will be deployed more widely, so that all services may benefit from the improvements. Culturally, amongst our staff, continuous review and improvements will become standard practice, supported by longer term policy developments and Proud ways of working.
- 4.5.4 The council has supported employees to work from home during the pandemic. by:
- Reviewing and updating the Agile Working policy (including inserting a temporary pandemic section and reviewing the home suitability risk assessment process). This will need reviewing further as part of the longer term blended working approach.
 - Providing appropriate IT equipment to all staff working from home (ensuring compliance with health and safety requirements and completion of a DSE risk assessment). Providing online help and support on IT

matters via the Intranet for common problems and online access to the ICT Service Desk, together with promoting a Digital Champion network of staff who can signpost and support colleagues with help and advice about how to use new technology features.

- Reimbursing expenditure (up to a set limit) against an office chair and desk (where required) to meet health and safety requirements (as well as facilitating the collection from existing offices of other key DSE items to meet health and safety requirements).
- Rolling programmes of communication and well-being support to promote a feeling of inclusion amongst those working from home and to ensure they are reminded of where and how to access appropriate support mechanisms if they are dealing with mental health concerns, feeling lonely / overwhelmed and/or suffering from domestic abuse.
- Increasing the number of structured counselling sessions available free through our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) from 6 to 8 per employee; and promoting the Mental Health First Aider support.
- Providing a range of advice and guidance through Coronavirus FAQs from planning and utilising annual leave effectively to accessing internal and external networks for support, as well as reviewing advice on practical issues such as claiming mileage and working time/hours.
- Introduced new guidance and support to staff about how to participate in digital online meetings.
- Revised advice to managers on how to support remote workers, providing hints and tips on regular contact and support and how to manage performance effectively through outcomes and deliverables.
- Arranged and enabled the Town Hall accommodation within the Council House to hold Members face to face meetings.

4.5.5 Addressing staff health, safety and wellbeing has been a primary focus along with ensuring business continuity and managing the shift to remote working. Having adapted well to the crisis, now is the time to recognise the good practices that will become common practice in our culture as ‘the way we do things around here’. The disruption we have experienced is likely to persist for months if not years and will reshape the way we work forever.

4.6 Making Council Buildings Safe

4.6.1 From a buildings and estates perspective, the council had to quickly introduce Covid-19 compliant processes so that employees, councillors and partners could safely access council buildings and sites. An electronic process was developed to streamline the access process and to ensure management oversight over the purpose of on-site visits during lockdowns. Buildings were risk assessed and made safe through a range of measures including signage, one-way travel arrangements, Perspex screens, social distancing measures and cleaning regimes. Public health guidance has ensured the application of

prevailing advice and guidance and the prioritisation of staff health and wellbeing.

4.6.2 Going forward, to ensure our employees are safe on site – a review of office accommodation will be undertaken with consideration for the existing and proposed locations of all office buildings as outlined in Appendix A and reinforced by our ways of working. This review will make recommendations to facilitate and implement the requirements for new workplace practices which will include building adaptations to provide safe, compliant, and fit for purpose environments for all staff and users.

4.6.3 Risk assessments will be undertaken for all council office accommodation buildings whilst service managers will be required to undertake service-specific risk assessments for their occupancy of each of the corporate estate buildings. Initial proposals for building adjustments and facilities arrangements to provide safe environments will include:

- Dedicated space and occupancy arrangements to accommodate new or blended working proposals.
- Identification of safe working environments and routes for safe travel and circulation inside the buildings.
- Additional cleaning regime to all areas, localised sanitation points and hygiene wipes regularly distributed through all office areas.
- Revised, Health and Safety, Fire evacuation and First Aider processes to take account of changes in occupancy.

4.7 Virtual Council Meetings

4.7.1 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 (“the 2020 Regulations”) allowed local authorities in England and police and crime panels in England and Wales to hold virtual council meetings up until 7 May 2021. The council therefore ensured that meetings were held virtually to maintain transparency and openness in local decision making.

4.7.2 Ensuring that the democratic process was maintained during the pandemic was a vital requirement, with Democratic Services working effectively with ICT to deliver Committee Meetings and Full Council Meetings digitally with 60 Elected Members accessing the meeting via internet connection. Elected Members have also cooperated fully in respect of training offered on the use of the technology such as Microsoft Teams. This has been a significant change in the delivery of this way of working. It has led to greater visibility of the democratic process through the publication of the recorded meetings via You Tube and the ability of anyone to view the event either as it is live streamed or after the event as it is stored as a You Tube recording. In one week in

February 2021 council meetings screened on You Tube attracted over 500 views. Unfortunately, the regulations have not been extended to permit virtual meetings to continue and the council has now had to revert to holding physical meetings going forward to comply with the requirements of the Local Government Act 1972. The government are considering changing primary legislation to allow virtual meetings to recommence and have called for evidence from local authorities to support such a change. The arguments for continuing with virtual meetings is it increases ease of participation at committee meetings; reduces carbon footprint; and in certain cases is favoured by participants for example school admission appeals.

- 4.7.3 Moving forward there are likely to be further changes required to comply with legislation, the use of hybrid ways of working and a mixture of one site and remote meeting attendances, which can still be facilitated through the technology provided.

4.8 Communication

- 4.8.1 Effective dissemination of clear and consistent information, advice and support to a range of different stakeholders including residents, staff and elected members about keeping safe, getting help, continuing daily life, continuing service delivery, understanding what the council is doing and knowing how to support its efforts, has been an essential part of the council's role in managing the pandemic.
- 4.8.2 Communication with staff has been really important throughout the pandemic. Regular communication messages, via written messages and video recordings from the Chief Executive have played an important part in keeping our staff engaged and motivated, providing a sense of belonging.
- 4.8.3 Moving forward the increased output from communications will be retained and built upon to ensure it enables and supports the new ways of working and staff well-being.

4.9 Changes to Service Delivery Allowing the Public to Access our Services in a Safe Way

- 4.9.1 The way many council services are delivered has changed in response to Covid-19. The most notable changes have been in relation to customer contact services, with most staff now operating from home and having to establish new ways of working to meet our customers' needs. Whilst this is now working well in most instances, the residents survey results from October 2020, suggested some services had become harder to reach by telephone in the first few months of lockdown, which put additional pressure on the operators in the Call Centre.

- 4.9.2 Front facing services, such as those operating out of the First Stop Shop, were forced to close during Covid-19 restrictions and this contributed to an increase in email traffic and telephone demand received from residents. To help support the Call Centre to meet the increased demand, officers were temporarily redeployed from the First Stop Shop to work as part of the telephone response team. In areas where customer digital self-serve pathways were available e.g., revenue and benefits and leisure services experienced an increase in customers using them during this period. As part of our customer strategy, we will continue to encourage our customers to move across from face to face and telephone to digital self service capabilities, as this is key to the Council's Proud Ways of Working and is a positive contributor to help deliver financial benefits.
- 4.9.3 During the Covid-19 pandemic work continued within the council to improve outcomes and customer services. The Proud Customer Access Management work stream has delivered a new Customer Experience Centre capability, supported by a new telephone contact service, a state-of-the-art integrated digital customer platform, building self-serve opportunities for residents and customers to choose, apply, report, book and pay for council services online at a time and place convenient for themselves. In the summer a new customer relationship management system will be introduced, providing a single front door for customer contact. This will provide better insights about our customers, building up a history and profile to inform service design and delivery for the future. Aligned to this is a refreshed council web site with improved information content, contact details, signposting and e-forms.
- 4.9.4 A recent on-line customer survey suggests that there may have been a small improvement to the satisfaction rates of our customers with rates reported as increasing from 67% in 2019 to 73% in 2021. To test this further, with a wider range of customers and stakeholders, the Customer Engagement Team is currently undertaking further public consultation. The results will inform the development of a new Customer Experience Strategy for Walsall Council. 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%). It is essential that any benefits gained as a result of new ways of working developed during Covid-19 are not lost as Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.
- 4.9.5 Feedback from disability groups suggests there is still demand for face-to-face support from our most vulnerable customers; there is also demand for more local access points. The Council therefore needs to change its pre Covid-19 operating model which saw large numbers of customer's accessing the First Stop Shop daily. During the pandemic voluntary sector partners in Walsall took a lead role in supporting vulnerable and elderly residents who were shielding. We want to further enhance the new customer pathways and relationships developed in this period to support the Council to move towards

a Customer Engagement Strategy that embraces our Resilient Communities model.

4.9.6 Discussions are already underway with partners and colleagues, who are already operating from community-based Covid-19 secure buildings to explore how to support our most vulnerable customers in a different way. We are co-designing some new ways of working with our partners which we will pilot over the summer months and use the learning to inform the final Customer Strategy, which is expected to go before Cabinet in September 2021.

4.10 How will we work in the future?

4.10.1 In April 2021 Personnel Committee considered a report setting out the high-level considerations for how we will work in the future. The report recognised many aspects of remote working had worked well, capitalising on investment in technology, finding different and better ways of working.

The following principles of blended working were agreed:

- *Work is what you do not where you do it.*
- *To ‘test out’ the principle ‘where staff have been able to work from home that they continue to do so which means that these staff do not return to work in any of our buildings to carry out their daily routine tasks. That we continue to predominantly work from home locations as we have done so for the past year’*
- *Staff currently working from home will continue to do so and will only meet in buildings for the purposes of collaboration, team building, on boarding and development opportunities.*
- *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.*

4.10.2 An employee survey was undertaken in June 2020 and repeated again during May 2021. Results from the most recent employee survey show early indications that the majority of employees would welcome the flexibility a blended working approach offers. The survey highlights the positive impact on both productivity/performance, health and wellbeing as well as work life balance. With this survey only having been completed during May, work is currently in progress to quantify all the key feedback, however key findings are:

Key findings:

- Overall the majority of respondents (76%) want to or want to continue working from home in the future, a slight increase from 73% seen in the 2020 survey. However the proportion not wanting to work from home in the future remains at 1 in 9 people (9%).
- Working From Home (WFH) has improved the work life balance for a large proportion of the workforce (72%) and has increased since the July 2020 survey where 62% said their work life balance had improved.
- Furthermore, 45% of respondents say that WFH has helped reduce their stress levels.
- WFH has not had quite the same positive effect on physical activity levels. Although 36% agree they are more physically active, over two fifths (42%) disagree.
- Staff still say they are taking fewer breaks and working longer hours, even more so compared to the 2020 survey. After more than 12 months working from home, over half or all respondents say they now take fewer breaks and 48% say they work longer hours (48% compared to 37% in 2020).
- Staff appear to have settled into new ways of working, more organised and equipped to work from home and as a result compared to 2020 fewer now say that they find it harder to do their job (19% compared to 31%).
- For some (29%), working from home brings the feeling of isolation and loneliness, something that has not improved since the 2020 survey where 30% said this. Over half however disagree (54%).
- Having the right equipment, tools, resources and space is important for anyone working from home and 83% of respondents wanting to or considering working from home in the future say they have what they need to do so effectively. 17% however said that they are lacking something, with most saying a suitable furniture (desk/chair), monitor(s) and space in which to work.
- Approaching two thirds of those willing to work from home in the future would be happy to work 100% of their working week at home. A total of 32% would like to work between 50% and 99% of their working week at home, preferring a mix of home and office.
- The survey explained that blended working builds on the concept of flexible working, including working in a way that combines on- and off-site working, as well as flexibility in when, and for how long, workers engage in work-related tasks based on service need. Blended working combines traditional physical presence set up with online working, and employees have some control over the time, pace, and place of their work.
- The suggestion of blended working practices was well received. Half of all respondents think that working in a blended way could enhance and improve their work life balance, with a further 30% saying to some extent. Just a small number (91 people) do not think that blended working would benefit them in this way.

- For most respondents who can perform their job in a flexible way, nothing puts them off or prevents them working in a blended way (60%). However across a range of issues listed, loneliness / isolation and mental health concerns were most frequently identified as something that puts them off / prevents them from working in a blended way (17% and 12% respectively).
- Where not already doing so, working part of the time in the office and part from home is welcomed by far the most people, 77% would like to / would be happy to do this. Taking breaks at times that suit is something that 63% would like to do / be willing to do. Just over half of all respondents would like to / be willing to permanently work from home (52%) and work entirely digitally (paperless).
- Few are open to spreading their working week over 7 days, 75% would not be willing to do this. Whilst 50% would be willing / happy to start their working day earlier, just 39% would be willing to start it later.
- Views towards changing the traditional office format are mixed. Working in more informal office 'touch down' spaces is divided, with 46% willing / happy to do this and 44% saying they would not like to do this.
- Staff are comfortable working virtually and would prefer to perform many tasks this way including 121 supervision (80%), Annual Performance Conversations (APCs) (79%) and meetings with external clients. Recruitment interviews was the only activity where more preferred face to face / in person then virtually.
- The survey asked respondents to think back over the last 12 months and what they felt had become better or worse. Results show that for most there has been no or little perceived change, respondents are more likely to say there has been an improvement than not. Based on net scores the biggest improvements are seen in IT skills (net 54%) and personal productivity (net 48%).
- With the workforce now better equipped and organised, compared to the 2020 survey, results show that more people now feel that the following aspects are better; productivity (55% compared to 48%), personal morale (37% compared to 33%) and the level of customer service they are able to provide (30% compared to 24%). Other aspects remain largely unchanged from 2020.
- As seen in the 2020 survey, there is a strong sense of being trusted to do their job; 88% agree, up slightly from 84% in 2020. Staff are also clear about what is expected of them, 85% agree, up slightly from 82% in 2020. Also up is the proportion who feel inspired to do the best in their job (80% compared to 77% in 2020).
- Reflecting the programme of work designed to equip staff with the tools they need to do their job, 75% now agree compared to 68% in 2020.
- The proportion agreeing that they feel empowered has increased from 57% to 64%, with feeling valued and recognised for the work they do up to 66% from 63%.

- Respondents are most likely to say that compared to 12 months ago there has been no change in how well connected / in touch or up to date they are regarding Walsall Council overall (53%) and Walsall Proud Programme (WPP) (61%). Views are however more mixed with regard to their manager and others in their team. Whilst 39% feel more in touch / connected to their manager, 19% feel less so. Likewise 32% feel more in touch / connected to others in their team, however a third feel less connected / in touch, arguably a direct result of working from home.
- A fifth of respondents say they are thinking of leaving the council in the next 12 months, the most common reason being to pursue a new job / career. Those aged 40-54 and males are more likely to say they are thinking of leaving.
- Slightly more people now agree that they feel Proud when they tell others they work for Walsall Council (60% compared to 57% in 2020).
- Looking back further to the 2017 staff survey, big increases are observed in the proportion of respondents now saying they now feel inspired to do the best in their job (up +38 percentage points), feeling valued and recognised for the work they do (up +25 percentage points) and having the tools they need to do their job (up +22 percentage points). Undoubtedly much of the improvement can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, the internal changes that have come about as a result of working differently, as well as the wider public awareness and greater appreciation of the work of local councils.

4.10.3 Key findings from the feedback from these two surveys held during lockdown has shown a positive response to the technology provided for staff to carry out their roles. Through the latest Microsoft O365 and Teams solutions staff are able to communicate effectively one to one or one to many, share documents and information and collaborate on the co-creation of reports and documents. This has been a significant productivity gain as the use of MS Teams has enabled people to easily attend digital meetings negating the need for travel or reliance on transport.

4.10.4 Through shifting to virtual working, managers are able to manage performance in a different way i.e., by output and not presence and employees feel empowered to work flexibly which has a positive impact on well-being, absence levels and people choosing to resign from their employment with the council. Moving forward there is opportunity to manage staff performance through the use of reinforcing Proud Ways of working such as Connected Working.

- Average working days lost currently stands at the lowest level since records were maintained (2012/13) at 8.02 days per employee a 27% reduction on the previous year's figure of 10.98 days.
- The number of working days lost have reduced by 25.5% and costs by 24% (demonstrating a saving of c.£750k compared to last year). These figures include a reduction in short term sickness due to stress, mental health and depression of 52%.

- Voluntary turnover (resignations) has also markedly reduced from a record high in 2019/20 of 7.88% to 4.51% this year, which is lower than the previous lowest figure across the 6-year trend of 5.54% in 2016/17.
- The number of opened disciplinary cases are down 80% compared to last year.
- The number of opened grievances are up from 5 cases last year to 7 cases this year.

4.10.5 The turnover figures in part may be linked to remote working (and the nature of it suiting employees lifestyle choices / work life balance) but will also be linked to the unpredictable year brought about by Covid-19 with some employees seeking stability who would have otherwise left, there could also be a nervousness around interviewing / starting a new job in a remote working environment which has deterred some from moving to new jobs.

4.10.6 The sickness statistics are more obviously linked to the flexibility of remote working, where people have more flexibility (when they are feeling a little under the weather) may be more prepared/happy to work from home, e.g., working a shorter day or starting later) this is preventing them from taking a full day's sickness absence. The flexibility may also mean that employees can accommodate home/family issues more easily preventing absences being taken (for example to attend a school performance). A definition of flexible working will be developed through this action plan process. As well as the 52% reduction in stress related short term mental health sickness implying the flexibility offered through remote working is being well received by employees and potentially in some situations maybe having a beneficial impact on employees managing their mental health better (would be helpful to interpret alongside the employee survey results).

4.10.7 A reduction in disciplinary issues could also be linked to the remote working environment and the potential it provides to eliminate the opportunities for the creation of particular physical workplace issues. Although this would need further analysis / consideration to ensure that leaders are able to monitor performance effectively. It will be key for us to ensure we are continuing to support all employees through any remote working / blended hybrid model.

4.10.8 There is an ongoing dialogue with peers at other local authority organisations throughout England. There is consideration for sharing ideas and plans. From this dialogue it is evident that they are all considering their own version of blended working. None have indicated plans to return to the office in any form at all before September. Some have indicated no return date, signalling that there isn't an expectation of return to office working. Many authorities have surveyed employees who overwhelmingly (90%+) indicate a desire to remain working in an agile way.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities

4.11 The reset action plan is linked to all services and all areas of the council and its development and implementation will be in line with the 5 areas of focus

and the 10 outcomes within the Corporate Plan and aligned to the Walsall Proud promises.

Risk management

- 4.12 Undergoing transformational change at this scale and speed is not without risk, a Reset Risk register has been established, Lead Officers have been assigned, and all risks are being proactively managed through best practice programme and risk management. Progress to plan and risks will be regularly reviewed with the Corporate Management team and assigned a CMT Sponsor, Workstream Leads and dedicated Programme management.
- 4.13 Reverting to former ways of working would present a greater risk, particularly given the council's challenging budget position and the significant financial, customer and staffing benefits that have already been realised. Our Ways of Working are still developing and whilst efficiencies are being identified and realised, to create the right environment to support Blended Working may require on going investment, this will be drawn out through the next phase of work. The recent customer and staff consultations have highlighted that there is still a need for some face-to-face services to support our most vulnerable customers. In addition, different services, groups of staff and service users have different needs, which is why it is recommended that we take a blended approach to future service delivery.

Financial implications

- 4.14 The Council has already reaped the benefits of working in a different way particularly in reducing third party spend during the Covid period and there will be further financial benefits delivered through reducing the size of our corporate estate, introducing digital ways of working which will reduce printing and storage of paper records together with the blended working approaches being proposed. This is likely to require some investment to deliver the required changes and outcomes and a reserve will be set aside as part of the council's 20/21 outturn position to support this.

Legal implications

- 4.15 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. The council will continue with its current practice of having its staff predominantly work from home, except when required for business need and the delivery of council s services. The council will review its current working practices at the appropriate time subject to government guidance, the prevalence of the Covid-19 virus and its business needs when deciding to change the current status quo. In addition, the council in the future may introduce blended working policies, but the council will as it usually does liaise with both Trade Unions and its staff before implementing any changes to terms and conditions of employment.

Procurement Implications/Social Value

4.16 There are no direct procurement implications arising from this report. Advice will be sought from procurement to ensure that any future contractual changes associated with the reset plan are completed in a compliant manner and aligned to Proud workstreams where applicable.

Property implications

4.17 The property implications are outlined in Appendix A Section B2-B3, summarised below for ease of reference:

4.17.1 The way which the council will manage and maintain the office accommodation will be directly impacted by the outcomes of the staff survey, the proposals for the new ways of working, blended working arrangements, the reinventing of the workplace as well as the requirement to align with both the Office Accommodation Strategy and Estate Strategy which are currently ongoing. Implementing the new office accommodation arrangements to facilitate the new ways of working will provide a shift change in both the owned corporate estate as well as the third party occupied estate.

4.17.2 Determining how office accommodation buildings are to be utilised in the future is a key consideration. A move to utilising buildings for one off purposes will require reconfiguration of space including the creation of dedicated meeting spaces equipped with appropriate technology to support hybrid meetings, training sessions, onboarding and induction where some attendees can be in the office and others in distinct locations such as localities and at home.

4.17.3 To understand how blended working works in practice, explore all considerations and possible impact across the estate, Corporate Landlord Services have commissioned the services of Faithful & Gould to scope the requirements of the office accommodation agenda, and to programme manage the various project work streams which will develop. This delivery will include exploring the various options for the blended working arrangements and to best utilise the new uses and arrangements for all of the office locations across the council's estate.

4.17.4 The proposals will ensure alignment with the developing Estate Strategy, the Office Accommodation strategy and Government's guidance. Engagement with stakeholders and all of the service users' groups will be part of the arrangements to capture the accommodation and blended working requirements.

4.17.5 The condition of the existing buildings and the wider estate will be considered as part of the review to determine future investment priorities and building rationalisation decisions.

4.17.6 The exercise will also inform any proposed works such as the current heating and ventilating works proposed for the Civic Building and Council House which will be paused and reviewed to ensure that any new configuration to the spaces because of the blended working proposals avoids any abortive works and costs.

4.17.7 Other building work aspects which will need to be considered as part of the reconfiguration of the spaces will include elements such as the fire alarms, building safety, security, access control arrangements, time recording and attendance and desk booking systems, and changes to the storage requirements which will need to align with the blended working arrangements and proposals. Capital investment will be required to undertake any of these alterations or rationalisations to the office space and accommodation.

4.17.8 The Faithful & Gould appointment will be undertaken on a phased arrangement with the initial part of the appointment addressing the scope and options appraisals and proposals, with further stages to include the implementation and delivery etc at the appropriate times. All of these options and proposals will be benchmarked against current and ongoing industry space and office use standards.

Health and Wellbeing Implications

4.18 The Council have prioritised a number of health and wellbeing initiatives during the pandemic to support employees:

- *Mental Health First Aiders and other informal channels for Mental Health support were promoted to staff.*
- *Online self help tools for managing stress that are available on One Source were promoted.*
- *Shared staff stories about the ways people had been staying connected to colleagues including innovative ways of working (virtual coffee breaks, quiz nights), calling instead of sending an email and encouraging staff to 'Make time for T.E.A.' Talk about anything, Enjoy some downtime, Ask for support if you need it.*
- *Senior Management group received training in the effective management of remote teams.*
- *Promoted the use of MS analytics to help manage time and other ways it can help.*
- *Reminded colleagues about policies including flexible working.*

4.18.1 Any implications on resident or staff health and wellbeing will be considered during formal approval for blended working plans and taking into account feedback from resident and employee surveys.

4.18.2 In the May 2021, Employee survey most respondents score high or very high in relation to aspects of personal wellbeing, in particular doing things that feel worthwhile (75% high / very high), happiness (68% high / very high) and overall satisfaction with life (68% high / very high). There are however notable proportions who score 'low' for these statements.

- 4.18.3 The nationally benchmarked Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing (WEMWB) provides a measure of mental wellbeing. Most respondents (60%) have 'moderate' wellbeing and 28% have 'high' wellbeing. A small proportion (12%) have low wellbeing.
- 4.18.4 More than likely a direct result of lockdown measures easing, mean scores indicate a slight improvement since the 2020 survey in feeling optimistic about the future and being close to other people.
- 4.18.5 Females, BAME respondents and those without a disability are slightly more likely to have 'high' wellbeing when compared to their counterparts.
- 4.18.6 Whilst most report COVID-19 having no notable impact on their physical (46%) or mental health (49%), 31% feel that their physical health has deteriorated and 29% their mental health.
- 4.18.7 Awareness of Mental Health First Aiders is high, although 19% were not aware.
- 4.18.8 An Equalities Impact Assessment and appropriate actions will be developed covering all aspects of Reset work and public health will be engaged to ensure we review and action feedback based on employee surveys.

Staffing Implications

- 4.19 Whilst acknowledging there is a proportion of staff who have continued to work on site throughout the pandemic or have, by nature of the work not been able to undertake their work remotely and are now returning to their place of work (e.g., leisure centres and libraries) of those that have been working from home, there is a high percentage who have expressed a preference to continue working as they have through the pandemic.
- 4.19.1 We will continue to engage with staff looking at business need and service delivery outcomes to determine the best model for new ways of working going forward. These considerations, including resource needs are outlined in Appendix A, Section B.

Reducing Inequalities

- 4.20 The implications for reducing inequalities will be taken into account and assessed. EQIAs will be carried out on any proposed change activity resulting from the recommendation of this paper.

Consultation

- 4.21 Some elements of resetting of the council and the way it operates may require consultation with staff, Trade Unions and service users. Appropriate consultation using established HR policies will be put in place when required.

5. Decide

5.1 The actions outlined in the Reset Action plan – Appendix A set out the short, medium and longer term activities required to address the aim of this work.

6. Respond

6.1 Resetting the Council through Proud will lead to the creation of detailed plans for the next 18 months and these plans will be evidence based, consider the implication of any lessons learned, include regional, national and international best practice and any profound economic, environmental or societal adjustments required.

6.2 The implementation of these plans will be delivered through the council and where appropriate, partners and wider communities.

7. Review

7.1 The reset objective work and outputs will be managed as a project, supported by the Proud PMO resources. The contributors to this report will form a Steering Group in order to maintain pace and delivery against the action plan activities and ensure appropriate communications are shared.

7.2 Regular progress updates will be provided to CMT and where applicable, in line with existing Walsall Proud governance monitoring and benefits realisation reported through to Walsall Proud Board.

Author

Andrea Potts
Director – Commissioning and Early Help
✉ Andrea.Potts@walsall.gov.uk

Carol Williams
Interim Director – Transformation and Digital
✉ carol.williams@walsall.gov.uk



Deborah Hindson
Interim Executive Director
Resources & Transformation, S151

16 June 2021



Councillor M Bird
Leader of the Council

16 June 2021

Theme	Action or measure	Owner	Timeline Short (By September 21) Medium (September – Feb 22) Long (Feb 22 Onwards)
Strategy and Principles			
Consider the implications of reset on the council's Corporate Planning	Update the Corporate Plan 2022-2025 in light of reset and blended working principles.	Director of Public Health	Medium (Sept 21 – Feb 22)
Consider the implications of reset on the council's budget and financial strategy.	Review council expenditure and consider how this spending enables us to deliver the agreed council outcomes and whether there is a better way to achieve these outcomes.	Director of Finance with input from Director of Public Health	Medium (Sept 21 – Feb 22)
Section A - Improve outcomes and customer experience			
A1 - Allowing the public to access services in a safe way.	Review and propose options on First Stop Shop and how customers will access council services.	Director of Customer Engagement	Medium (Sept 21 – Feb 22)
	Review and propose options on libraries and how customers will access Council services.	Director of Place and Environment	Medium (Sept 21 – Feb 22)
	Review and propose options on leisure centres and how customers will access council services.	Director of Place and Environment	Medium (Sept 21 – Feb 22)
	Review implications of blended working on the requirements to be able to contact staff. Ensure telephony services are fit for purpose and have robust business continuity plans and disaster recovery processes.	Director of Digital and Transformation and Director of Customer Engagement	Short (By September 21)
	Review implications of blended working for Customer Access and Management programme – ensuring customer feedback is sought and input into plans for reset and the service overall.	Director of Customer Engagement	Short (By September 21)
	Review implications on stakeholders through completion of an	Director of	Short (By September 21)

	EQIA	Customer Engagement	
A2 - Listening to our customers	As part of the Proud Promises, regularly review feedback from customer surveys – ensuring this input is used to define our customer service vision and services.	Director of Customer Engagement	Short (By September 21)
Section B – Improve employee satisfaction and engagement.			
B1 – Listening to our people.	Reviewing the results of employee surveys – ensuring this input is used to define our reset approach and blended working principles.	Director of People, OD, and Admin	Short (By September 21)
	Review management information such as sickness rates to ensure we understand the impact of working from home on productivity and welfare.	Director of People, OD, and Admin	Short (By September 21)
	Present plan to become an “Employer of Choice” whilst working in a blended way – Link to Proud ways of working (Enabling Communication and Culture)	Director of People, OD and Admin	Medium Term (Sept 21 – Feb 22)
B2 - Keeping our people safe in the office.	Review and propose testing approach and whether there are any considerations that need to be taken into account for blended working and reset.	Director of Public Health	Short (By September 21)
	Review social distancing measures and whether there are any considerations that need to be taken into account for blended working and reset.	Director of Public Health	Short (By September 21)
	Engage with managers to ensure requirements to fulfil the principles of blended working are facilitated using Connected Working coaching capacity	Director of People, OD and Admin	Short (By September 21)
	Define ongoing procedure for any member of staff who tests positive for Covid-19 when on site or off site and any implications of isolation/quarantining after employees take holiday.	Director of Public Health	Short (By September 21)
B3 – Making sure our buildings are fit for purpose for blended working.	Commissioning a scope of work with a contractor/partner to understand how blended working works in practice and exploring all the considerations and possible impacts across the estate.	Director of Finance and Corporate Landlord/Head of	Medium Term (Sept 21 – Feb 22)

		Corporate Landlord	
	<p>Estates Strategy – consider the buildings to potentially close and explore the potential to use the Civic Centre as an alternative base for displaced teams, albeit in an agile way</p> <p>Review WMBC staff in partner buildings and consider the cost implications of contributory payments/ agreements when we have space available.</p> <p>Consider which teams may be more suited to working from satellite sites.</p>	<p>Director of Finance and Corporate Landlord/Head of Corporate Landlord</p>	Medium Term (Sept 21 – Feb 22)
	<p>Stakeholders - consider our partners - CAB / One Walsall / NHS/ Police</p> <p>Undertake a scenario planning workshops with key stakeholders to develop future office scenarios.</p> <p>Ensure approach considers staff survey outcome.</p>	<p>Director of Finance and Corporate Landlord/Head of Corporate Landlord</p>	Short (By September 21)
	<p>Children’s Services locality working arrangements – pilot blended working arrangements in the West locality building and use learning to agree approach and roll out across other 3 localities.</p> <p>Service User Engagement Space – identify 2 alternative locations for Children’s Services following termination of lease agreements. Review implications of any Income generation targets and allowing services the space to do business.</p> <p>Review implications across the estate of CAB and One Walsall</p> <p>Review allocation of space to Registrars</p> <p>Review the purpose of the Council House space – potential to explore a corporate space we can do our business from</p>	<p>Directors of Children’s Services</p> <p>Director – Finance and Corporate Landlord/Head of Corporate Landlord</p>	<p>Short (By September 21)</p> <p>Medium Term (Sept 21 – Feb 22)</p>
	<p>Review Impact of blended working on support services across the estate - site usage including opening times- impact on support services (cleaners/ security/ curators/porters) printing supplies/ waste management/ refreshments/ bistro. Cleaning of rooms and</p>	<p>Director of Finance and Corporate Landlord/Head of</p>	Short (By September 21)

	collaboration spaces following use.	Corporate Landlord	
	Building and fabric planned improvement schemes. Heating and ventilation replacement scheme – £70k design element of the scheme has already been invested- complete change may be needed and further funding for additional scheme design. Replacement fire alarm system required. Access control improvements due to ‘end of life components and support	Director –of Finance and Corporate Landlord/Head of Corporate Landlord	Medium Term (Sept 21 – Feb 22)
	Storage – proposals for clearing existing stored items across the estate and providing the ‘right kind’ of storage for services requiring physical resources.	Director of Finance and Corporate Landlord/Head of Corporate Landlord	Short (By September 21)
	Business improvement - consider a phased approach to the project to identify who and how many services need to be in the building imminently and which teams will work towards digitalisation /paper free processes with a view to agile working across the estate.	Director of Finance and Corporate Landlord/Head of Corporate Landlord	Short (By September 21)
	Building safety - with blended approach, consider and review how we cover fire regulations (escape, marshalling, capacity monitoring) and First Aid needs across the estate.	Director of Finance and Corporate Landlord/Head of Corporate Landlord	Short (By September 21)
	Benchmarking - review what colleagues in other organizations/sectors are reporting and what we can we learn from them. Ensuring we have options for how we will measure success across the estate.	Director of Finance and Corporate Landlord/Head of	Short (By September 21)

		Corporate Landlord	
	Room and desk booking systems – ensure options for systems to measure utilisation, options for which tools/systems we will use and considerations for prioritisation (taking into account the democratic calendar etc) across the estate.	Director of Finance and Corporate Landlord/Head of Corporate Landlord – Director of Digital and Transformation	Short (By September 21)
	Members, Corporate Management Team, Executive Directors / Directors – review and evaluate to ensure the suitability is fit for purpose accommodation to be in line with blended working principles and the latest Covid-19 guidance.	Director of Finance and Corporate Landlord/Head of Corporate Landlord	Short (By September 21)
	Parking – review arrangements and potential booking system for parking across the estate in line with blended working approach	Director of Place and Environment	Short (By September 21)
	General Workplace Environment- Need to follow the Governments guidance notes and good practice in terms of post Covid-19 preparations across all sites and working environments. Branding/Décor in offices– encourage collaboration, promote Walsall Council values and objectives across the estate – Liaise with Comms, Marketing and Brand	Director of Finance and Corporate Landlord/Head of Corporate Landlord	Medium Term (Sept 21 – Feb 22)
B2 – Keeping our people safe at home.	Review and amend HR policies in line with blended working arrangements i.e., flexi time, agile working and define the extent of manager discretion whilst ensuring fair treatment.	Director of People, OD, and Admin	Short Term (By Sept 21)
	Consideration of those staff who do not have an adequate space or environment to work within	Director of People, OD, and Admin	Short Term (By Sept 21)
B3 – Keeping our front-line people safe.	If social distancing remains in place – consideration for adjustments for the workplace for front line workers, social	Director Public Health	Short Term (By Sept 21)

	workers and those not regularly office/home based.		
B4 – Allowing our managers to manage.	Define and set out training requirements, ensure wellbeing checks take place for teams to combat isolation. Consideration of training those who may not have ICT skills or equipment - access to sites with such facilities.	Director of People, OD, and Admin	Short Term (By Sept 21)
B5 – Allowing our teams to thrive and collaborate.	Defining our principles for team working i.e. defining minimum levels of check ins, the utilisation of connected working and circumstances for meeting in person/on site	Director of People, OD, and Admin	Short Term (By Sept 21)
B6 –Ensuring our teams feel engaged.	Review and propose the tools we can use to measure engagement and respond to lower levels of engagement. Ensuring managers are trained and equipped to work and lead teams in a blended environment. Produce a communication and engagement plan to support blended working and supporting activities.	Director Comms Marketing and Brand, Director of Digital and Transformation and Director of People, OD, and Admin	Short Term (By Sept 21)
B7 – Talent management	Review the impact of blended working on new staff, inductions, apprentices, and gender gap.	Director of People, OD, and Admin	Short Term (By Sept 21)
B8 – Culture	Plans to reinforce desired culture, behaviours and ways of working. Ensuring we have feedback mechanisms from employees of the impact of blended working and take these in account for future measures. Engaging with public health to address any health and wellbeing implications from blended working and create an action plan based on this	Director of Digital and Transformation and Director of People, OD, and Admin Director of Public Health	Short Term (By Sept 21)
B9 – Proud Workstreams	Review workstream plans in line with Reset and Blended working principles and ensuring we consider options for ensuring change sticks in a blended working environment.	Director of Digital and Transformation and Director of People, OD, and	Short Term (By Sept 21)

		Admin	
Section C - Improve service efficiency and performance			
Determine the financial implications of reset.	Capture cost savings and remove from budgets.	Director Finance	of Medium Term (Sept 21 – Feb 22)
Capturing the savings achieved via a blended working approach.	Determine reset costs – revenue and capital. Set aside a reserve for reset costs as part of financial year end close down.	Director Finance	of Medium Term (Sept 21 – Feb 22)