



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

15th MAY 2023

THE COUNCIL'S OFFICE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY

WORKSPACE PLAN: FIT FOR THE FUTURE

&

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL OPERATING MODEL
AND WORKING ARRANGEMENTS POLICY**

**REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE IN DISCUSSION WITH THE LEADER OF THE
COUNCIL, COUNCILLOR ANDREW MORGAN OBE AND THE DEPUTY LEADER
OF THE COUNCIL, COUNCILLOR MAUREEN WEBBER**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek approval from Cabinet to agree the Council's Office Accommodation Strategy, Workspace Plan: Fit for the Future, for the period 2023-2030 and the Council's Operating Model and Working Arrangements Policy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet

- 2.1 Approves the Office Accommodation Strategy (2023-2030) at Appendix I, which includes:
- i. Relocating the Council's headquarters into the heart of Pontypridd town centre, utilising vacant floor space at Llys Cadwyn;
 - ii. Exploring the feasibility of releasing the site at the Pavilions, Clydach Vale for the redevelopment of the site for a new Special School (n.b. Any proposal would be subject to the requirements set out in Welsh Government 's School Organisation Code (011/2018));
 - iii. Relocating services and staff currently at Ty Trevithick, Abercynon; Rhondda PSSO, Berw Road, Tonypany; Municipal Offices Pentre and Rock Grounds,



Aberdare, by either disposing of or repurposing the assets to generate capital receipts, reduce operating costs or secure community/social value and support regeneration within our communities;

- iv. Relocating services and staff currently located at Ty Sardis, Pontypridd (excluding the Housing Solutions Services); and
 - v. Retaining Ty Sardis as the Council's Housing Advice and Support Centre and facilitating the co-location of other specialist support and transitional housing accommodation provision currently in Pontypridd at a single, improved location.
- 2.2 Authorise the Chief Executive to assign suitable and sufficient office accommodation to services and staff to meet service requirements and support the needs of staff.
- 2.3 Authorise the Head of Democratic Services to assign suitable and sufficient office accommodation and services to meet the resource and facility requirements of Elected Members.
- 2.4 Approves the Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Operating Model and Working Arrangements Policy as detailed at Appendix II.
- 2.5 Note the overall revenue savings of £0.435M generated as a result of this proposal plus the removal of a backlog maintenance liability of £2.9M.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Office Accommodation Strategy provides the vision and clear objectives for the continued rationalisation and modernisation of the Council's office accommodation. The Council is committed to making the best use of its assets, providing value for money, and taking action to mitigate the risks of Climate Change. The Office Accommodation Strategy provides a framework to facilitate those commitments.
- 3.2 The proposed accommodation strategy is designed to deliver the requirements of the Council's proposed Operating Model and Working Arrangements Policy, alongside reducing costs and providing for a more efficient organisation.



4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Under the previous office accommodation strategy, which focused on a smaller number of sites with a preference for owning rather than leasing assets, the Council has successfully reduced the size of its office accommodation by over 33% since 2016 which already delivered annual savings of circa £513k and reduced our annual carbon footprint by 809 tonnes of CO₂. During the pandemic, previously vacated office space was, by necessity, reoccupied to facilitate social distancing recommendations across the estate and to distribute essential home working equipment. As a result, the use and occupation levels of our office accommodation has changed significantly over the past two years. The Council's principal office accommodation is currently contained in 21 of its operational sites.
- 4.2 The pandemic transformed the way people work. A proportion of staff are working in a hybrid way, combining working from home and the office effectively, supported by digital methods of communication. This has created an opportunity to do things differently. There is a continued need for face-to-face communication, necessary for effective management and supervision, collaboration, project work, one to ones and staff well-being to complement the working from home arrangements. It also fundamentally supports our ability to ensure that our residents, businesses and communities receive first class public services. In April 2022, the Council introduced an Interim Hybrid Working Policy to support staff and managers as we recovered from the pandemic and considered the more longer-term operating model.
- 4.3 In March 2022 Welsh Government published its "Smarter Working: a Remote Strategy for Wales", encouraging remote working across Wales, under which Welsh Government want to see 30% of the workforce remotely working on a regular basis. In the Ministerial foreword of the strategy, Lee Waters MS, Deputy Minister for Climate Change states "*This type of working can strengthen local communities and bring benefit for the climate and for well-being as we lessen the dependence on the traditional commute and we are in no doubt that less commuting can be a key contributor to achieving our net zero targets by 2050.*"
- 4.4 In light of the change in working arrangements and the associated change in how staff use the office, a comprehensive review of the Council's current office accommodation was undertaken. Data on the running costs, total backlog maintenance, condition and the amount of carbon generated from the buildings was gathered and analysed. The results of manager consultation and well-being questionnaires have also been considered alongside feedback from the public.



4.5 The move towards agile and hybrid working as an essential part of the Council's working practices, promoting high productivity, a healthy work life balance and reducing the Council's Carbon footprint, means that less office space is required to deliver the Council's services. It is though recognised that the Council needs to maintain face to face services where our residents require.

4.6 We need to remain focused on the long-term sustainability of the Council, maintaining the positive culture and ethos which we have established and ensure that residents, businesses, and our communities are central to our service design and operating arrangements.

5. THE DRAFT OFFICE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY 2023-2030

5.1 The Draft Office Accommodation Strategy can be seen at Appendix I. The Draft Strategy seeks to build upon the progress made since 2016 and responds to the changing working practices introduced in response to the Covid pandemic and the Council's proposed Working Arrangements and Operating Model.

5.2 The changes made to working practices in response to the Covid pandemic, increasing digitisation of services and some staff able to work from home, provides an opportunity to reduce the back office / support service office accommodation footprint further, reducing running and backlog maintenance costs and the Council's carbon footprint.

5.3 This Strategy looks ahead over the next 7 years to 2030 within the context of longer-term sustainability. The strategic objectives will be kept under review over the plan period to ensure that the plan reflects and is aligned with the developing corporate priorities and changing service needs. The strategy will be supported and flexed over time by the Service Asset Management Plans and service led initiatives.

5.4 To achieve this vision, the Strategy is supported by four complementary strategic objectives that will drive its delivery:

- Reducing the size of the office accommodation to deliver value through the creation of flexible multi-use hub/workspaces and corporate meeting spaces.
- Creating economic growth and community benefit by focusing office accommodation into town centre locations where possible. This will include utilising vacant space and sites to deliver other key public services, for example: new schools, Extra Care facilities, and specialist housing provision.
- Contributing to our net zero carbon target.
- Supporting service delivery and meeting customer expectations by managing the office accommodation portfolio strategically.

5.5 By delivering Objective 1- **reducing the size of the office accommodation portfolio to deliver value through the creation of flexible hub workspaces and corporate meeting spaces** - we will achieve the following outcomes:

- **Reduce by 43%** the Gross Internal Area (GIA) floor space of the existing office accommodation by decreasing the number of Council offices
- **Reduce by circa £435k** the annual running costs generating savings and efficiencies
- **Reduce by circa £2.9m** the backlog maintenance costs generating savings and efficiencies.
- **Reduce by circa 41% the total annual CO2 emissions**, and contribute to our net zero carbon target, by reducing the total amount of space we occupy and improving the environmental performance and condition of the rationalised portfolio.
- **Continue** to appraise the remaining office accommodation to identify, and propose to Cabinet, further opportunities to reduce the office accommodation portfolio in light of changing service need.
- **Transform working environments** by providing office accommodation that is fit for purpose, supporting current and future service needs by creating modern flexible multi-use workspaces that support collaboration and creativity reinforcing the key ambitions within the Council's Workforce Plan 2023-2028
- **Improve staff well-being** by providing modern, accessible, and well-located workspaces which can also assist in retaining and attracting staff to work for the Council
- **Collaborate with other Public Sector bodies** and facilitate added community benefit by **working with the Third Sector**, making best use of the estate

5.6 By delivering Objective 2 – **creating economic growth and community benefit by focussing office accommodation into town centre locations** -we will achieve the following outcomes:

- **Resident, business and community focused services** designed and delivered within our communities with the Council seen to be leading the way, stimulating opportunities for prosperity and community well-being
- **Generate footfall into town centres** by increasing the number of staff working at or visiting offices in town centre locations
- **Relocate the Council's Headquarters from The Pavilions, Clydach Vale** into a town centre location easily accessible by public transport which will be of benefit to staff and residents and improve involvement and engagement between the Council and residents
- **Create opportunities for regeneration** through alternative uses of vacant sites by the rationalisation of the estate
- **Generate Capital Receipts or add community value for the residents of RCT by disposing of vacant sites** or by transferring properties to community groups under the Community Asset Transfer policy



- **Create workspaces that are more accessible for staff using public transport** that will contribute to accessibility and carbon reduction targets and improve staff well-being supporting key ambitions within the Council's Workforce Plan 2023-2028
- 5.7 By delivering Objective 3 – **Contributing to our Net Zero Carbon Target** – we will achieve the following outcomes:
- **Reduce carbon emissions by circa 41%** through a reduced portfolio of more energy efficient buildings
 - **Improve the condition** of the revised office accommodation portfolio
 - **Demonstrate our commitment to Net Zero Carbon** thereby contributing to job seekers seeing the Council as a responsible employer
- 5.8 By delivering Objective 4 – **Supporting service delivery by managing the office accommodation portfolio strategically** – we will achieve the following outcomes:
- **Improve efficiency** in the use of the office accommodation portfolio, maximising the use of the assets
 - **Enhance communication** between Corporate Estates and the service areas
 - **Reduce the need for staff to travel by car** by providing offices close to public transport and providing flexible workspace hubs and “spokes” and corporate meeting spaces available to all services across the County Borough
 - **Provide good condition, well maintained office accommodation** that supports effective service delivery for the residents of RCT
 - **Provision of office accommodation that is fit for purpose** supporting current and future service needs by transforming working environments, creating flexible multi-use workspaces supporting collaboration and creativity which supports key ambitions within the Council's Workforce Plan 2023-2028. Modern accessible and well-located workspaces can also contribute to staff well-being and can assist in attracting staff to work for the Council
 - **Enhance the Council's existing Housing Advice and Support Centre** at Ty Sardis to facilitate the co-location of other specialist support and transitional housing accommodation provision currently in Pontypridd at a single, improved location, subject to feasibility and funding. [Cabinet Report](#).
 - **A new special school** development on the site in The Pavilions, Clydach Vale in accordance with [Cabinet decision](#) on the 26th September, subject to feasibility, funding and consultation in accordance with the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code(011/2018).
6. **OPERATING MODEL AND WORKING ARRANGEMENTS**
- 6.1 Within Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, it is very clear that our workforce is committed to provide first class services to the residents of the County Borough. This has never been more evident than during the pandemic



period and beyond where our staff have been innovative, collaborative, resilient and resourceful in the face of extreme pressure on many fronts.

- 6.2 Aligned to our vision for sustainable development which places an emphasis on the importance of the health and well-being of our employees, economic growth, and de-carbonisation, we are committed to developing and resourcing different working arrangements across our Council to meet these needs.
- 6.3 Using the categorisations below, the Senior Leadership Team has undertaken work to identify which service areas fall under which operating model. These models will be kept under review and changes will be made where the business need necessitates.

FRONTLINE SERVICES WORKING (FL)

Employees operating under this model, provide a direct front facing role to residents and communities and are necessarily located and deployed either across the County Borough or at physical locations from which our services are provided and / or residents / users visit. Examples of service areas that would operate under this model include residential homes, homecare, streetcare, cleaning, leisure, libraries, theatres, reception, one for all, registrars, etc.

DIRECT SUPPORT / MANAGEMENT OF FRONTLINE SERVICES (DSFL)

Employees operating under this model, undertake roles which are wholly or partly enabling the front-line services to be delivered effectively and co-location with service is essential. The expectation is that these roles will be in the workplace 5 days per week, with any exceptions subject to local agreement by the Employing SLT Director, with the minimum 2 day per week rule to apply in line with the Hybrid Office model below. An example of such a reduction, could be if there are specific and one-off packages of work which can be undertaken from home which does not have a detrimental impact on front line service provision.

HYBRID OFFICE WORKING (HOFF)

Employees operating under this model, are predominantly within the workplace environment (e.g., administration, transactional, professional, and associated management). Employees will be allocated an operating site, and this will be regarded as their fixed centre. This model has a minimum requirement of 2 days in the workplace, with the remaining time spent at home.



Attendance will be structured around a rolling rota system, co-located with 'Service Team', allocated workstation space but shared with other Service Areas on alternate days, to maximise accommodation/technology usage. In terms of the allocated operating site and rota system, there will be occasions where due to the nature of their role, staff will have to attend other sites for meetings, projects, etc. These events could also take place on days different to those allocated by the rota system and where this occurs, then these days may be counted within the minimum workplace attendance of 2 days.

In terms of workplace attendance, any employee wishing to use the office more than the team structured arrangement described above (e.g., for well-being requirements) may do so without limit, with appropriate space being made available by managers.

AGILE WORKING (AGILE)

Employees operating under this model undertake the majority of their work in the community, however some ancillary duties can be undertaken at home/workplace location. The employee will be allocated a fixed workplace location, albeit they may undertake the ancillary duties from home more efficiently.

At the allocated base, a workstation provision will be bookable through 'hot desk'/Team meeting room arrangements and will also be available across several Council locations. It is anticipated that these employees would still require structured face to face Team meetings, and these can be arranged at the allocated base or other council facilities.

Examples of service areas that would operate under this model include environmental health, trading standards, social care (social work, OT's, etc), educational psychologists.

- 6.4 The full Operating Model and Working Arrangements Policy can be seen at Appendix II. It is proposed that the new operating model and working arrangements are phased in from September 2023 onward in alignment with the delivery of the Office Accommodation Strategy to allow a managed transition from current working arrangements and maintaining service delivery.
- 6.5 Subject to Cabinet agreement, it is proposed that the Chief Executive now prepares a full implementation plan and that the plan and progress against it is reported to Cabinet on a 6 monthly basis as we transition toward and through the new operating model.



6.6 The Council's Digital Strategy 2022-2026 is fully aligned and will support the proposed operating model. The Strategy sets out our vision of being a truly "Digitally Driven Council," that provides excellent services, which are efficient, effective and designed with the person and modern customer expectations at their heart and delivered by a digitally empowered workforce.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

7.1 To ensure that we meet the requirements of equality, diversity, and the socio-economic duty we have undertaken an Impact Assessment to assess the effects of the Office Accommodation Strategy and Operating Model.

7.2 There are many positive impacts to groups that are covered in the Equality Impact Assessment. The Office Accommodation Strategy and Operating Model will support protected groups and allow people to participate fully. The delivery of the Office Accommodation Strategy will be built on user centred design principles and where possible will be fully accessible and support equality and accessibility.

7.3 We will take steps to mitigate any negative impacts by ensuring that the recommendations of the Equality and Socio-economic Impact Assessments are integrated into the individual action plans aligned to the overarching Implementation Plan.

7.4 In summary, the Equality Impact Assessment identifies positive impacts and no negative impacts upon the protected characteristics.

- The office accommodation with modern flexible workspace hubs and spokes will ensure that everyone regardless of age, gender, disability, race, sexual orientation, sex, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief, marriage or civil partnership, and/or gender reassignment feel safe and secure working in a positive environment that supports service delivery for the residents of RCT.
- The impact on all the protected characteristics (except for marriage or civil partnership which is neutral) is positive as the flexible workspace hubs and spokes offer flexible, modern workspaces that benefit staff across RCT including staff and public with protected characteristics.
- The office accommodation will be developed and designed to meet the needs of staff and residents of RCT and will be flexible, responsive, and adaptable to meet changing needs.
- The Operating Model supports the above.



8. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 To ensure that we meet the requirements of the Measure we have undertaken a Welsh Language Impact Assessment to assess the effects of the Office Accommodation Strategy on the Welsh Language.

8.2 We will take steps to mitigate any negative impacts and actively promote the Welsh language by ensuring that the recommendations of the Welsh Language Impact Assessments are integrated into the individual actions plans aligned to the overarching Implementation Plan.

8.3 The main findings of the Welsh Language Impact Assessment are as follows:

In relation to the Welsh language our strategy objectives are cross cutting but will be designed to support Welsh language and bilingual provision by providing more collaborative workspaces across the County Borough accessible by all employees regardless of service area.

The Office Accommodation Strategy provides an opportunity to further promote the use of the Welsh language in RCT by:

- Specifically creating spaces within which the Welsh language can flourish e.g. clusters of hot desks available for Welsh speakers and learners
- Allowing staff to work alongside other Welsh speaking staff and not being curtailed by designated office environments (subject to manager approval and service productivity) widening access to other Welsh speakers across the Council
- Promoting the availability of Welsh tools and services
- Creating Corporate Meeting Spaces which can be used by the Welsh Language Unit to deliver skills and learning activities through the medium of Welsh
- Receiving and acting upon recommendations made by the Welsh Language Unit through the Welsh Language Unit's participation in the Corporate Asset Management Working Group
- Complying with the Council's Statutory Welsh language Standards

9. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

9.1 To inform the development of the accommodation strategy several engagement activities were carried out, including service area consultation and Manager's Briefings. Further consultation will be required as actions within the strategy are delivered.

9.2 In respect of both the strategy and the operating model, the recognised trade unions have been consulted.

- 9.3 A communication plan will be formulated to ensure that the public are fully appraised of any service moves which have implications upon service users and on those who wish to engage in the Council's democratic processes.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The downsizing proposed in the accommodation strategy would enable the Council to release direct premises related costs associated with 6 current office accommodation locations, namely Ty Sardis, Ty Trevithick, The Pavilions Clydach Vale, Rock Grounds, Rhondda PSSO (Tonypany) and the Municipal Offices (Pentre). It would also remove the backlog maintenance costs associated with these premises which amount to £2.9M.
- 10.2 The proposed strategy would deliver annual and recurring revenue savings of £435k. This level of saving is supported by rental income generated at Llys Cadwyn now being in excess of that assumed in the original business case enabling the Council to benefit from this.
- 10.3 Fit out costs are to be determined and will be funded from a combination of existing office accommodation budgets, any capital receipts generated from the delivery of the strategy and the annual revenue savings in the short term.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 11.1 The Council's power to dispose of land and buildings is contained in Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972
- 11.2 The Council's power to acquire land and buildings is contained in Section 120 of the Local Government Act 1972

12. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.

- 12.1 The Office Accommodation Strategy and the proposed operating model and working arrangements policy contribute towards the priorities in the Corporate Plan:

- Ensuring **People: are independent, healthy and successful;**
- Creating **Places: where people are proud to live, work and play;**
- Enabling **Prosperity: creating the opportunity for people and businesses to: be innovative; be entrepreneurial; and fulfil their potential and prosper**



12.2 The Well-being goals which are particularly relevant to the Office Accommodation Strategy include:

- **A Healthier Wales:** a society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood
- **A Globally Responsible Wales:** a nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being
- **A More Equal Wales:** a society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic circumstances)

12.3 The Office Accommodation Strategy is consistent with the sustainable approach promoted by the with the five ways of working:

- Long term – the strategic approach takes into account that factors can change over time, we will continue to evaluate and monitor trends and will utilise a range of effective interventions to support our objectives for the long term
- Prevention – the strategic framework recognises that the Council needs to protect its assets to ensure that the land and building portfolio does not deteriorate or fall into disrepair and complies with statutory requirements. We will collaborate and share data and experiences with other public bodies to encourage early intervention
- Integration – a key feature of the Council's strategic approach to asset management is to ensure it is joined up, integrated, and coordinated with the Council's Digital and Workforce plans and the Council's Town Centre Regeneration Strategy
- Collaboration – intrinsic to the vision and objectives is collaboration with other public services and third sector organisations to make the best use of the public estate
- Involvement – communities and Council services will be involved with the delivery of objectives and have their say

13. **CONCLUSION**

13.1 The Council's Office Accommodation Strategy and Operating Model & Working Arrangements Policy sets out a clear direction of travel and framework for our longer-term ambitions for the Council's office accommodation portfolio for the period 2023/2030.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Item: Office Accommodation Strategy – Workspace Plan: Fit for the Future 2023-2030 & Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Operating Model and Working Arrangements Policy

Officers to contact:

- Paul Mee, Chief Executive
- Barrie Davies, Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director – Finance, Digital & Frontline Services
- David Powell, Director for Corporate Estates
- Richard Evans, Director for Human Resources
- Paula. L. McCarthy Head of Strategic Property Legal and Business Support

Appendix I

Joint Office Accommodation Strategy Workspace Plan: Fit for the Future 2023-2030

Appendix II

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Operating Model and Working Arrangements Policy