Scrutiny Report

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Part 1

Date: June 2021

Subject   The New Normal – Newport City Council Operational Model

Author   Scrutiny Adviser

The following people have been invited to attend for this item:

Invitee:	Area / Role / Subject
Rhys Cornwall, Head of People and Business Change	**To support the committee discussion**

Section A – Committee Guidance and Recommendations

1   Recommendations to the Committee

The Committee is asked

1. Consider the information contained within the report

2. Discuss the potential opportunities, disadvantages and considerations with regard to potential changes to the Council's operating model

3. Feedback views to Cabinet for consideration

2   Context

Background

2.1   As a result of the first lock-down in March 2020 the Council has had to adapt the way it operates. Whilst front line services have been protected and enhanced for the most vulnerable, office based functions and the staff who support them have been asked to do this from home, wherever possible.

The Council's investment in IT in recent years, as it develops the Modernised Council agenda, has enabled the Council to continue functioning. Home work station assessments have been undertaken and additional kit provided to support a safe work environment. Consequently, many services have been able to develop remote operational models.

There are some very clear benefits to continuing with this approach – work/life balance, carbon reduction, reduced congestion on our roads, opportunities for utilising our buildings. However, there are challenges. For staff working from home there may be isolation, increased energy costs and a lack of team development, for example. There is also a challenge around visibility.

The Council will need to weigh up the pros and cons when determining how it will proceed beyond the current situation.

Previous Consideration of this item

2.2   Scrutiny has previously considered the Modernised Council agenda when it has scrutinised the Corporate Plan.

In February 2021, the Committee considered a discussion paper 'Responding to the New Normal' which outlined a range of considerations in relation to changes to the operating model.

A previous discussion paper was brought to Committee in February 2021 and this covered the following:

1. How was Newport City Council positioned prior to the first lock-down in March 2020?
2. What changes have we made to continue operations?
3. What are the current and future drivers for change?
4. What opportunities are there?
5. What are the challenges?
6. Potential future model?

There was a very useful discussion and debate at Committee and the following points/recommendations were made:

- The Committee welcomed the report and praised the detail and positivity contained within.
- The Committee discussed Active Travel, and queried if we can measure and survey the number of active travel miles that staff undertake, and also look into the possibility of rewarding staff for taking part. Comment was also made if we could look into any kind of barriers that this may cause.
- The Committee requested that once the service area develop the conversational document into an options paper, it comes back to the Committee to consult, before it goes to Cabinet.

In response to the Committee question on Active Travel, an annual staff survey is undertaken as part of the Gwent Healthy Travel Charter work. This survey is to monitor progress against the targets in the Charter. The survey asks participants:

- How often they travel to and from work by different modes or transport including walking and cycling
- How often and by what mode of transport (including walking and cycling) do they travel during the working day

There is no mileage data, however there is data on the number and percentage of journeys that are travelled by active travel. The survey is anonymous. However there is an option for participants to supply their name if they wish. Last year participants gave their name to take part in a small prize draw. Text could be added to say that rewards would be given for active travel journeys.

However, it is important to note that not all staff complete the questionnaire. In February 2020 720 members of staff took part in the questionnaire.

Barriers to Active Travel
Commonly cited barriers to active travel are:

Cycling
- Busy roads
- Lack of cycling infrastructure
- Lack of secure cycle storage
- Lack of showers
- Lack of lockable storage for change of clothes and equipment etc.
- Lack of cycling confidence
- Safety
- Hills

Walking
- Insufficient pedestrian crossings

Both
- Onward travel
- Distance
- Weather
- Time
- Poor parking
- Convenience
- Car seen as the only option

These barriers are not specific to Newport.

3   Information Submitted to the Committee

3.1   A report for Scrutiny, prior to Cabinet being asked to make any formal decision on changes to the current operating model.

3.2   A link to the previous paper submitted to the Committee

4.   Suggested Areas of Focus

Role of the Committee

The role of the Committee in considering the report is to:

The Committee is asked to review the paper before it and consider the potential opportunities and disadvantages presented by changes to the way the Council operates. The views of the Committee will be included in the report that will go to Cabinet when it is asked to consider any long term changes to the organisation's operating model.

Specifically, the Committee is asked to:

- Consider whether there will be any positive or detrimental impacts on service delivery or operational activity as a result of the proposed changes

- Assess whether staff welfare issues have been sufficiently highlighted and mitigated

- Assess and make comment on any specific areas of concern, challenges with policy or operation, giving particular consideration to any welfare concerns that may need to be addressed

- Conclusions:
    - What was the overall conclusion of the Committee?
    - Is the Committee satisfied that it has had all of the relevant information to base a conclusion?
    - Do any areas require a more in-depth review by the Committee?
    - Do the Committee wish to make any Comments / Recommendations to the Cabinet?

Suggested Lines of Enquiry

4.1   The Committee may wish to consider the following:

- How will issues around staff leadership, development and organisational values be upheld?
- How confident are we that the technology will meet our needs?
- What concerns are there over staff welfare and how should these be addressed?
- How do we ensure that service users can access the services they need, whether these are face to face or through a different channel?
- What are the implications for our estate?

Section B – Supporting Information

5   Supporting Information

5.1   Included within the attached paper

6   Links to Council Policies and Priorities

- The main Corporate Plan focus is on the Modernised Council theme but, dependant on decisions taken, will also positively impact on Thriving City.

Well-being Objectives	Promote economic growth and regeneration whilst	Improve skills, educational outcomes &	Enable people to be healthy,	Build cohesive & sustainable communities

	protecting the environment	employment opportunities	independent & resilient	
Corporate Plan Commitments	Thriving City	Aspirational People		Resilient Communities
Supporting Function	Modernised Council			

Other council strategies and plans that link closely with this work are the Carbon Management Plan 2018-22 and the Sustainable Travel Strategy (Air, Noise & Sustainability Action Plan). Both of these plans are looking to reduce business and staff travel. The Council is also signed up to the Gwent Travel Charter (below).

7 Wellbeing of Future Generation (Wales) Act

7.1 General questions

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 came into force in April 2016 and is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act is designed to support and deliver a public service that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. As one of the 44 bodies named in the Act, we must consider the Act in everything we do.

Seven well-being goals give clarity of the shared purpose of the public bodies listed in the Act for the long-term well-being of Wales. The council's approach to supporting members and staff to work remotely must support the well-being goals.

The Act also puts in place a sustainable development principle, which sets out the way we must go about meeting our duty under the Act. There are five ways of working that must be considered when developing and implementing the "New Normal" programme.

7.2 The Well-being Goals and the Sustainable Development Principle

The "New Normal" Programme will have **long-term** and **preventative** benefits to the health and well-being of staff and the wider community by contributing to the improvement of air quality and the reduction of carbon emissions in the area. Stakeholders including staff should be **involved** in a meaningful and effective way to help shape the programme as it is developed.

As stated above the programme takes an **integrated** approach by supporting many of the well-being goals namely: *A Prosperous Wales; A Resilient Wales; A Healthier Wales; and A Globally Responsible Wales* and does not adversely affect any of the others. The programme also support three of the council's Corporate Plan well-being objectives

2. To promote economic growth and regeneration whilst protecting the environment;

3. To enable people to be healthy, independent & resilient;

4. To build cohesive & sustainable communities.

In addition, the council is working with partners in a **collaborative** way through the One Newport Public Services Board (PSB) and the implementation of the Local Well-being Plan Well-being Objectives. The PSB as a whole has pledged to "become champions of sustainable travel, leading by example and reducing the public sector's contribution to air pollution".

To support this work the council along with 22 other public and third sector organisations across Gwent has signed up to the Travel Charter.

The Charter commits to supporting and encouraging staff to reduce travel and travel in a sustainable way. Through 15 ambitious commitments, the charter promotes walking, cycling, agile working and the use of public transport and ultra-low emission vehicles.

The public sector in Gwent employs almost one in three working adults. By working together, public sector organisations across Gwent aim to increase sustainable journeys made to and from workplaces, reducing the impact on the environment and improving health in Gwent for current and future generations.

The "New Normal" Programme supports this work along with the following Local Well-being Plan well-being objectives:

1) Everyone feels good about living, working, visiting and investing in our unique city.
2) Everyone has the skills and opportunities to develop, prosper and contribute to a sustainable, thriving city.
3) Everyone belongs to friendly, connected resilient communities and feels confident and empowered to improve their well-being.
4) Newport has healthy, safe and resilient environments with an integrated sustainable travel network.

7.3 Climate change and carbon reduction plans

Newport City Council has committed to work towards being a net zero organisation by 2030 as part of the Welsh public sector. This includes carbon emissions from our:

- buildings
- land use
- transport (fleet and business mileage)
- procured goods and services.

However, as a council we also have a wider role, to support the decarbonisation of our city. The Welsh Government has committed to a net zero Wales by 2050 and reducing staff commuting will support that commitment for the Newport area. 45% of all carbon emissions in Newport originate from transport. This is the third highest in Wales after Cardiff and Rhondda Cynon Taff.

Prior to the pandemic whilst other sectors such as energy had seen a marked decarbonisation the transport sector had shown little or no improvement.

8. Background Papers

Include all additional documents that are referenced in the report, and those that you have used as background reading. Hyperlink to online versions of them if available.

- The Essentials - Wellbeing of Future Generation Act (Wales)
- Corporate Plan
- Carbon Management Plan
- Sustainable Travel Strategy (Air, Noise & Sustainability Action Plan)
- Gwent Healthy Travel Charter

Report Completed: June 2021

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Update report on The New Normal

Introduction

The Covid 19 health emergency has posed a significant and unprecedented challenge to the way in which we deliver our services and our way of life. Since March 2020, the Council's focus has been to preserve life, minimise the spread of the virus, and support our communities and the vulnerable.

The impact of the virus has brought about systemic change, pervading every aspect of society. At Newport City Council, material changes to where and how we work have been swift. From day one of the health emergency, Council staff have shown enormous resilience. Those delivering front line services, often to the city's most vulnerable people and communities, have been altruistic in their dedication. Whilst others have quickly adapted to a remote and dispersed way of working using technology to work from home to minimise the spread of the virus.

Elected Members have also had to adapt, blending their work within their communities with the remote meeting arrangements that have been put in place to ensure the on-going functioning of the democratic process, whilst adhering to Covid regulations and keeping individuals safe.

Whilst the on-going response to the pandemic remains the number one priority for the Council, it is also an opportunity to consider the changes that have been made and consider the long term impacts on the Council's operating model.

Cabinet agreed our Strategic Recovery Aims in June 2020. This includes Strategic Recovery Aim 3, to Sustain a Safe, Healthy and Productive Workforce. Cabinet also agreed that operational services would need to be able to safely engage with its service users, work safely in Council buildings, offices and to work remotely both in the short term and long term.

Within the current Corporate Plan, **Building on Success, Building a Better Newport,** the Council made a number of pledges under the banner of a Modernised Council. We committed to developing a modern, capable workforce, where the use of agile working would be explored and implemented wherever possible. We recognised that this could lead to improvements is staff wellbeing, better and more efficient services and also contribute to a reduction in pollution caused by vehicles on our roads. We committed to freeing up 20% of our Civic Centre to save money and create space for commercial and social innovation.

The key decision now is whether we press forward with the cultural and operational changes we have implemented as a result of the pandemic, or whether we return to the pre-Covid model.

Current Position

As agreed, prior to the final options paper being presented to Cabinet the Committee is presented with detail on the key areas of work, with options for consideration. We would welcome comments from Committee.

As a result of the first lock-down in March 2020 the Council has had to adapt the way it operates. Whilst front line services have been protected and enhanced for the most vulnerable, office based functions and the staff who support them have been asked to do this from home, wherever possible. The Council's investment in IT in recent years, as it develops the Modernised Council agenda, has enabled the Council to continue functioning. Home working station assessments have been undertaken and additional kit provided to support a safe work environment. As a result, many services have been able to develop remote operational models. There are some very clear benefits to continuing with this approach – work/life balance, carbon reduction, reduced congestion on our roads, opportunities for utilising our buildings. However, there are challenges. For staff working from home there may be isolation, increased energy costs and a lack of team development, for example. There is also a challenge around visibility.

The principles of agile or remote working were established in the Council's Digital Strategy, which is also referenced in the Corporate Plan. The Council will need to weigh up the opportunities but also potential impacts when determining how it will proceed beyond the current situation into a longer-term operating model.

Welsh Government Remote Working Wales initiative

The Welsh Government are aiming for 30% of the Welsh workforce to work remotely (from home or near to home). Coronavirus restrictions have seen fewer people working in offices, which has meant a fall in road congestion, pollution and private car use.

The Welsh Government has said it wants to give workers across Wales more flexibility to work remotely and believes this has the potential to drive regeneration and economic activity in communities.

It also recognises the importance of learning lessons on issues such as mental health support, childcare arrangements and more innovative housing design.

As part of this, a network of community-based remote working hubs is also being explored which offers choices beyond a simple home/office split. These hubs, within walking and cycling distance of people's homes, could be used by public, private and third-sector employees. They could also help encourage new partnerships to develop between Welsh Government, local government, industry, and others.

The intention is to develop a hybrid workplace model, where staff can work in the office, at home, or in a hub location. The aim is that this will enable 30% or more of workers to work remotely, helping reduce congestion and pollution and improving work-life balance for employees and employers.

Pilot schemes are starting to come forward to enable public sector workers to access the hub and work remotely. This ambition is intended to help town centres, reduce congestion and cut carbon emissions. Newport City Council is actively involved in discussions with Welsh Government to create a public sector remote working hub in Newport and enable our staff to register to work from other remote working hubs

Climate Change

Newport City Council has committed to work towards being a net zero organisation by 2030 as part of the Welsh public sector. This includes carbon emissions from our:

- buildings
- land use
- transport (fleet and business mileage)
- procured goods and services

However, as a council we also have a wider role, to support the decarbonisation of our city. The Welsh Government has committed to a net zero Wales by 2050 and reducing staff commuting will support that commitment for the Newport area.

45% of all carbon emissions in Newport originate from transport. This is the third highest in Wales after Cardiff and Rhondda Cynon Taff.

Prior to the pandemic whilst other sectors such as energy had seen a marked decarbonisation the transport sector had shown little or no improvement.

Approach

We have identified four broad areas of focus, detailed within this report. They are:

1. Staff
2. Building (Civic Centre) and Public
3. Democratic Functions
4. Technology

Staff

Objective: To consider all the implications of the implementation of a smart working approach for our staff, including:

- **Well-being**
- **Remuneration**
- **Professional development and support**

According to data from the Office of National Statistics, prior to COVID-19 only around 5% of the workforce worked mainly from home. According to research from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), before the pandemic, 65% of employers either did not offer regular working from home at all or offered it to 10% or less of their workforce. After the crisis, that 65% is expected to fall dramatically to 37%. This represents a significant shift in ways of working which employers will need to prepare for. As a Council we will need to consider the culture shift and its associated policies and procedures that enable the change.

The move to remote working for many has created an increased interest in flexible working and has led to greater expectation around provision being made by employers for increased flexibility. The remote workforce has identified the benefits to be gained from homeworking - a better work–life balance, greater ability to focus with fewer distractions, more time for family and friends, saved commuting time and costs, access to IT and digital technology and higher levels of motivation. Organisations who choose to disregard these perceived benefits and revert to pre-pandemic arrangements may be the position of having increased employee turnover, higher levels of sickness absence, reduced employee engagement and limits to attracting future talent to join the workforce.

Well-being

The Council has been issuing wellbeing surveys to the workforce at periodic moments throughout the pandemic, with the latest version (February 2021) showing that only 42% of respondents rated their mental and physical wellbeing as good or excellent. 58% felt that the Council supported them with balancing work and caring responsibilities effectively whilst 59% felt safe or very safe in their workplace, with a further 16% feeling neutral. Over 69% of respondents felt supported by their manager and 67% felt that they had the appropriate equipment to carry out their role remotely. However, only 49% of respondents felt able to disconnect from work, highlighting that there is scope to explore ways in which to promote a healthy work life balance when the boundaries between work and home are blurred due to your physical location of work being in the home.

The Council also carried out surveys on manager wellbeing and the impact that working from home has had, which can be shown in the graph below, when rating the experience on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being a negative response and 10 being the most positive.

In line with the wellbeing survey results there has been a significant decrease in the amount of lost time due to non-Covid related sickness absence. The total number of days lost to sickness absence in 2019/20 was 43,565, with 12,190 of those days due to short term absence such as viral infection, sickness/diarrhoea and ear/nose/throat. Comparing these figures to 2020/21, the total number of days lost was 31,736, with 5,837 of them due to short term absence. This is a 52% decrease in the number of days lost due to short term absence and a 47% drop in the number of occurrences. However, the

number of days lost due to stress and anxiety remains the most common reason for absence with 12,407 days lost in 2019/20 and 11,184 in 2020/21, a drop of 11%.

This suggests that whilst the working from home guidance has had a significant impact on short term absences caused by transmissible illness, the reduction in stress related absence is not as positive and further work remains to be done in supporting staff to cope with poor mental health and stress in the workplace. Our Wellness at Work Policy, currently being consulted upon with trade unions, should contribute to improving levels of support upon implementation later in 2021.

Remuneration

From 6 April 2020 those eligible employees have been able to claim tax relief from HMRC to cover additional costs incurred if they have had to work from home. The UK government have confirmed that this tax relief will also be made available for the 2021 financial year. Eligible taxpayers can claim tax relief based on the rate at which they pay tax. For example, if an employed worker pays the 20% basic rate of tax and claims tax relief on £6 a week, they would receive £1.20 a week in tax relief (20% of £6 a week) towards the cost of their household bills. Higher rate taxpayers would therefore receive £2.40 a week (40% of £6 a week). Over the course of the year, this could mean taxpayers can reduce the tax they pay by £62.40 or £124.80 respectively.

Whilst the Council has signposted staff to the online portal to claim this tax relief, alternatives will need to be considered should we move to a position whereby as an employer the Council asks staff to re-designate their place of work to their home, even if this is for part of the working week. Employers are able to make an allowance of £6 per week (£26 per month) to employees who are required to work from home.

Policy review

Continuing to embrace the positive elements of remote working will require a Homeworking Policy to be drafted and negotiated with trade unions. Prior to the pandemic Newport City Council did not have a pre-existing Homeworking Policy as all work was carried out from a Council owned workplace, with very occasional ad hoc permission to work from home to carry out a specific task. Implementing our first Homeworking Policy will be essential if we are to ask sections of the workforce to continue to work from home for an element of their contractual working week.

A consequential step will also be to revise the existing Travel and Subsistence Policy which treats all claimable mileage as needing to be from a designated Council workplace. Consideration should be given as to whether this is appropriate for the long term with a significant number of employees working from a range of work sites, both at home and at alternatives such as a geographically local public sector hub.

Engagement

It will be vital to engage with not only our trade union representatives but with our workforce who will be affected by any decision to continue to work remotely. Their views and feedback on any proposal will be essential to understanding the likely future culture of the organisation, their thoughts on how the Council can make hybrid working a success and the likely challenges that they might perceive in implementing it for the good of the individual person, but also their team and the overall workforce.

Professional development and support

As we move towards an operating model where parts of the workforce are working remotely with increased trust and empowerment, our performance management and time monitoring policies and procedures will require review. We have already implemented a technology solution for online, remote performance management check-ins where progress towards performance and personal objectives can be discussed and assessed.

Likewise, our learning and development offer has moved online and courses are delivered remotely or via e-learning. Whilst this has been effective during a prolonged period of homeworking, the long term position will see face to face training events return, but there is opportunity to reflect on which events can continue to be delivered remotely in order that engagement and attendance is not impacted by a hybrid operating model with some staff physically present in a workplace and some working remotely. Our development offer will need to adapt to increasingly needed digital upskilling, a feature identified in our workplace plan.

However, with less frequent supervision being a long term feature, the way the value of a time-based monitoring system is called into question. The Council's flexi-time scheme has been suspended since the working from home guidance took effect, partly due to there being no opportunity to supervise time spent working and partly to support the demands on employees with home schooling, supporting dependent relatives and assisting those who are vulnerable in their communities. It would be appropriate to scope a review of the flexi-time system and assess whether it meets our on-going business needs or whether a move towards performance outcomes is more suited to a modern, adaptable and remote workforce.

Challenges

Health and Safety

The Council has ensured that its duty of care towards employees working from home has been maintained during the pandemic. Staff were directed towards a specific e-learning module on Display Screen Equipment (DSE) and appropriate workstation environment which was required to be completed prior to each individual then completing a DSE assessment. A checklist of required equipment was then able to be ordered and delivered to individuals to enable them to work from home at an appropriate workstation. Any long term plan to continue with working from home will require investment in workstation equipment and reassessment of need at intervals.

There will be employees with physical or mental health conditions that will need to be taken into consideration when determining long term places of work. The working from home guidance has assisted those with some mobility issues to remain in the workplace and provide effective service due to not having to address physical challenges with some Council buildings and access to adequate levels of parking. Likewise, there will be individuals who may struggle with isolation at home and have a specific need to access workplaces on a more frequent basis. Balancing these individual needs with those of the organisation may present challenges, but individual circumstances should be taken into account wherever possible.

Culture

Our new recruits since March 2020 have experienced an entirely different culture to the one that was evident in our buildings and offices prior to the pandemic. They are unlikely to have met their line manager, their team members or even visited the workplace. It will be our responsibility to ensure that new talent joining the Council experiences a positive working culture where colleagues are respected, valued, entrusted and empowered to make decisions, take responsibility and use initiative for the benefit of our residents, our City and our fellow co-workers. We are seeking to increase under-representation of young people across the workforce and expand our apprenticeship programme, meaning that a section of new starters may not have experienced any employment prior to joining Newport City Council.

There may need to be priority status awarded to such new starters in considering any reduced footprint across our office spaces in order that they can experience a richer welcome to the organisation, meet many people and understand how their role fits into the wider objectives of the Council.

Considerations/Options

1. The first option is, once Covid restrictions come to an end and it is safe to do so, to return to our offices and for staff to operate in the way in which they did pre-Covid.

However, if we choose to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the new approach to work then we will need to look at the following:

2. We will need to consider the introduction of a homeworking policy and associated allowance for staff required to work from home for at least one day per week
3. We would need to review the flexible working scheme and the appropriateness of this going forward
4. We need to consider investment in new approaches to support staff with long term health conditions, with the emphasis on supporting mental health in a post-pandemic environment
5. We will need to employ different techniques and tactics to ensure engagement with a dispersed workforce

Committee is asked to note any views and further considerations

Building (Civic Centre) and Public

Objective:

- **To determine the optimum usage and configuration of the Civic Centre to support NCC objectives.**
- **To seek opportunities to increase the usage/income associated with the Civic Centre to support on-going costs**
- **To look at opportunities within the broader estate that can support flexible working opportunities**
- **To ensure there remains a focus on meeting of service user requirements and that the Civic Centre has enhanced capacity to support the needs of the people of Newport and the services that support them**

The Council has for several years been rationalising its property estate in accordance with its Strategic Asset Management Plan. Despite this it is known that some areas of the Civic Centre are underutilised and a previous study in 2018 recorded desk utilisation (in core hours) of around 40%. The pandemic has accelerated some business change processes and allowed officers to reconsider what property /accommodation is required to better support service delivery. The way we work is changing and the types of spaces required by individuals and teams when attending the Civic Centre needs to be flexible and agile to meet these changing demands.

Whilst the Civic Centre is home to what would traditionally be seen as 'back office' functions, it also houses front line service delivery and as a public building, is open to members of the public. The primary points of contact are Customer Services and Social Services.

Any options for changing the way in which we operate the building needs to take this into consideration. In fact, the delivery of services to the public should be the main driver when considering options regarding our staff and the utilisation of the building.

Technology implemented during Covid has enabled us to provide a different offering to the public. Enhancing this will enable us to better direct our resources where they are most needed. Feedback from Service Areas has directed us to a zoned approach with our planning, should the decision be taken to utilise the Civic Centre in a different way.

In focussing further on better utilisation of the Civic Centre, opportunities to further rationalise the estate will emerge. This would also potentially reduce the Council's carbon footprint in the operation of its own property estate and reduce running costs.

There will also be opportunities to generate income by letting space to third party occupiers who may wish to co-locate with the Council.

Examples:

Cultural Hub

Work has been on-going with Newport minority communities to develop options for a Cultural Hub that will celebrate the diversity of our city and offer shared opportunities for mutual development and understanding. Similar developments have taken place in other cities, and it affords real benefits for community cohesion. We are currently working with Race Council Cymru on the development of this proposal.

There are several potential opportunities to share space at the Civic Centre with others which can be explored further once the Council's own requirements are fully determined. There is also the potential to utilise other Council assets as touch down spaces for staff.

Considerations/Options

There are two broad options for the Council to consider. They are:

1. Reoccupy the Civic Centre in the same fashion as pre pandemic
2. Seek to maximise the occupation of the Civic Centre as the main administrative headquarters and centralise other Council facilities and potential third-party occupiers within the premises

If we maintain a more flexible approach then we would recommend

3. Zoning the Civic Centre (by Service Area of Directorate) so that staff are able to work together in their professional groups when in the building
4. As part of this we would develop service specific areas (confidential areas, fixed locations for specific activities, etc.) including public accessible areas either on a drop in or appointments basis
5. We would develop technological solutions to support this (booking system, etc.)
6. We would need to consider the utilisation of the reception area and meeting rooms

Committee is asked to note any views and further considerations

Democratic Function

Objective: To ensure that Members and the Democratic Process are catered for within this process and that NCC is able to meet the requirements of the Local Government and Elections Act.

Under Part 3 of the Local Government and Elections Act we have a duty to Promote Access to Local Government. This requires us not only to ensure an electronic broadcast of Council meetings but also to make provision for remote access to those meetings. By doing this it is hoped that a wider and more diverse group will come forward for Civic Duty. This is a position beyond that which we have put in place during the Pandemic. We will need to facilitate a hybrid meeting solution to Council meetings. This is independent of any decision as a result of the New Normal work.

Whilst Newport City Council has no employment relationship with Elected Members we would still need to consider the dispersed working impacts on Members, in a similar way to staff.

Well-being

Newport City Council provides a broad well-being service for staff. Elected Members are able to avail themselves of this support (this excludes attendance at specific staff networks but does include attendance at relevant training and/or well-being sessions). Should we enhance this well-being programme in line with a new operating model then Elected Members would be supported through this.

Any further Member specific interventions should be discussed Democratic Services Committee.

Remuneration

The last Independent Remuneration Panel Annual report reiterated that Members should not have to pay for any of their technical support, which is necessary for them to discharge their duties.

"Determination 10: Such support should be without cost to the individual member. Deductions must not be made from members' salaries by the respective authority as a contribution towards the cost of support which the authority has decided necessary for the effectiveness and or efficiency of members

…the Panel does not consider it appropriate that elected members should be required to pay for any telephone usage to enable them to discharge their council duties as a ward member, committee member or cabinet member.

3.22 The Panel considers it is necessary for each elected member to have ready use of e-mail services, and electronic access to appropriate information via an internet connection. The Panel does not consider it appropriate that elected members should be required to pay for internet related services to enable them to discharge their council duties as a ward member, committee member or cabinet member. This comprises the necessary provision for a member to be in proper contact with council services and to maintain contact with those they represent. Councils are committed to 'paperless working' and without electronic access members would be significantly limited in their ability to discharge their duties. It is not appropriate for facilities required by members to be available only within council offices within office hours"

Any changes to this would have to be recommended to Council by the Democratic Services Committee.

Considerations/options

1. Should the Council retain a dispersed working model are current well-being provisions adequate or should Democratic Services Committee review this?
2. Should the Council retain a dispersed working model is the current remuneration package sufficient or should Democratic Services Committee review this and make recommendations to Council?

Committee is asked to note views and further considerations.

Technology

Objective: To ensure that our IT provision is appropriate to the needs of the organisation. To look at new opportunities/innovations that can support our development as an organisation and for this to influence the development of the new Digital Strategy. To implement the Cabinet decision to move IT infrastructure from the Civic Centre

The council has continued to function effectively through the pandemic as a result of its previous strategy for increased staff mobility and improved IT system facilities. Increased funding has provided opportunities to improve capability and capacity further. Whilst the Council's existing telephony has largely served the organisation well, there are opportunities to modernise these facilities and provide simplified and more flexible telephony. The increased use of Microsoft 365 provides opportunities for working smartly. This will include the use of an enhanced remote access solution, AlwaysOn VPN. This

will also include the use of Microsoft Teams and its video/chat facilities. The council will invest further in technology to support staff and members in council buildings and remotely by way of "hybrid meetings". This will build on newly installed committee room and meeting room audio visual equipment. A successful Welsh Government funding bid will provide the ability for hybrid council meetings in the Council Chamber and remotely. Such initiatives will be supported by the migration of the council's data centre including a core network and new improved facilities together with the migration of more of the councils' systems to the cloud. Initial discussions on the Digital Strategy refresh have highlighted the importance of the council's web site and opportunities for its improvement. Identifying and providing a greater variety of devices to use IT systems has also been identified.

Challenges

One of the main challenges is to ensure that even greater reliance on technology is supported by suitably accessible and resilient IT systems with sufficient capacity in this new working environment. A specific challenge also exists around cyber resilience in the current environment with an increased threat level highlighted by a large number of cyber incidents in the UK and globally. The council has implemented a specific solution to mitigate this risk but there are still significant risks. These challenges should be reduced as a result of the council's increased investment in digital technology over the last three financial years but the costs associated with these greater demands have not been quantified.

Committee is invited to make comment regarding this section but we will not be seeking any specific decisions from Cabinet at this point.

Conclusion

There are both opportunities and challenges associated with the decision to return to the pre-Covid 'normal' or embrace the 'new normal.' However, three areas which need to be paid particular attention when considering the final decision are:

1. Expectation

Covid 19 and the response to it has changed the expectations for both our staff and our service users. There are undoubtedly those who would prefer the way things were in early 2020. However, there are many (staff and public included) who now have a level of expectation regarding remote accessing of services, work-life balance and flexibility

2. Carbon reduction

We have very challenging targets and to become carbon neutral by 2030. We will struggle with this target (and the ensuing and on-going environmental impacts) if we don't reduce both commuting and grey mileage, encourage and make possible active travel options and be smarter about how we use our buildings.

3. Maximisation of our assets

There is a commitment to maximise the assets we have. This is better financially and better for the environment. We will not do this unless we adapt and change the way we do things. Going back to pre-Covid occupation levels is inefficient and removes any opportunity to look at how we use our assets differently (and in the case of the Civic Centre, bring it back in to full usage).

Given the work and societal changes during the pandemic, it is probably unrealistic that things return to the way they were. Therefore embracing a new flexible operating model, is probably a better approach for the Council