

# Title of report: Flexible Futures Policy

**Decision maker: Chief Executive**

**Decision date: 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022**

**Report by: HR Improvement Manager**

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

This is not an executive decision

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose**

To approve the Flexible Futures Policy.

## **Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

- a) **The Flexible Futures Policy, Appendix 1 is approved and implemented from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022.**

## **Alternative options**

1. The policy is not adopted and implemented by the council, this is not recommended as the policy sets clear guidance and expectations to staff and managers.

## **Key considerations**

2. In March 2020, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic the Government instructed employees to work from home where possible and this forced a shift for staff to work from home and managers to run services in a new way of working. Since then, restrictions have lifted and we are now moving to a 'new way of normal'; which still supports roles and staff having the flexibility to work in an agile way.
3. Herefordshire Council directly employs 1327 staff, who work a variety of worker styles. Some roles are fixed to a location / building to provide a service (i.e. libraries). Some work entirely

field based (i.e. school crossing patrols) and the remaining staff use a council building as a base but work a flexible blend of attending the office or working at another location (i.e. home). Throughout the Flexible Futures programme 3 main worker styles have been identified and existing roles have been aligned to these, which are detailed in the policy.

4. With the shift in working practices, the recruitment market has seen a change with applicants having more freedom over which roles they applied for based on their expectations and wants, without being defined by location. This has also pushed employers to reconsider what they offer, and a concerted effort to review the culture of the organisation. With agile working comes a range of expectations and benefits such as enhanced work-life balance, and there is a need to address this.
5. There has been previous endeavours to review the flexibility of working arrangements and working from home, however, the approach to this remained on an application basis. Flexible Futures aims to go further than this and establish a culture of trust, focussing on outcomes rather than presentism, whilst balancing against service and customer needs and the assessment of the flexibility that can be offered is on a role basis rather than an individual one.
6. The Flexible Futures programme has undergone consultation with staff to inform them of these worker styles and also the impact on workspace and technology. Consultation was through the form of change & wellbeing champion sessions which began on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2022. Feedback from these sessions have helped inform the policy and the shape of the project.
7. The introduction of this policy will set employee and employer responsibilities, and re-affirm existing policies and procedures of the following areas: Performance Management, Health & Safety, Data Protection, Expenses, Technology (kit), Work Patterns and attendance at council buildings for collaboration or training. The policy also sets out what the council offers in terms of resource to each worker style.
8. It is anticipated the policy will be implemented on 1 September 2022 and reviewed annually.

## **Community impact**

9. This policy supports the Workforce and Organisation Development Strategy 2021 – 2024 by supporting an engaged, agile and resilient workforce. The policy holds the clear principle that when defining a worker style, the ability to meet service and customer needs is a priority.

## **Environmental Impact**

10. Flexible Futures and flexible working allows employees to reduce the amount of journeys to a council building during peak times and during the day; this will have a positive impact on the council commitment to reduce carbon emissions and improve the air quality within Herefordshire. With fewer employees on site and increased digital capacity and video conferencing, this should also have a positive impact on waste produced from council offices.

## **Equality duty**

11. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

12. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.

13. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed which has assessed the introduction will have a positive impact on three of the nine protected characteristics and the policy will not disproportionately impact any other groups of staff that have a protected characteristic. Flexible working has been seen as very positive for disabled employees, pregnant employees and those with caring responsibilities.

### **Resource implications**

14. There are no costs arising directly from this policy.

### **Legal implications**

15. The Chief Executive is the person who is responsible for determining the terms and conditions of employment for council staff and the proposed policy is considered to inform those terms and conditions. Under Part 3 Section.5.21 (c) Employment Panel is to be a consultee on all terms and conditions including policies for all staff.

16. There are no other legal implications arising from this report.

### **Risk management**

17. Consideration should be given to the risks / opportunities to the council if the recommendation(s) are agreed and how these will be managed; and the risks / opportunities to the council if the recommendation(s) are declined and how these will be managed. Enter the risks / opportunities and associated mitigations into the table below;

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Staff who work remotely could feel isolated and less engaged	The policy encourages collaboration with teams and colleagues and will be supported by guidance to keeping in touch and managing their wellbeing.
Managers may find it difficult to manage remote teams	Guidance and resources will support managers in managing remote teams
Staff have a greater flexibility and a better work/life balance.	Approving this policy unlocks this opportunity

## Consultees

18. The council has undertaken a lengthy consultation process with staff and management through the Change and Wellbeing Champions group with a cross section of staff from different services. Consultation began on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2022 and will continue through until August 2022. Items or concerns raised by the group have been considered and have been taken on board. It is expected that the group will be kept to keep the channel open for communication of any new projects.
19. The policy has been shared with the recognised Trade Unions and they were invited to comment, and their views have been taken in to consideration on drafting the policy.
20. This policy has been consulted with the Employment Panel on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2022. The panel generally supported the policy and recommended the policy is reviewed annually. The panel raised the importance of coaching and training for managers, which will be picked up as a wider piece of work with the L&OD team, not directly through this policy.

## Appendices

Appendix 1 – Flexible Futures Policy  
Appendix 2 - Equality Impact Assessment

## Background papers

None identified.

## Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

**Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published**

Governance	John Coleman	Date 03/08/2022
Finance	Louise Devlin	Date 05/08/2022
Legal	Alice McAlpine	Date 26/07/2022
Communications	Not used	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Equality Duty	Carol Trachonitis	Date 25/07/2022
Procurement	Not used	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Risk	Not used	Date Click or tap to enter a date.

Approved by	Tracey Sampson	Date 09/08/2022
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**Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.**