



People, Performance and Development Committee
9 June 2021

Ways of Working Post COVID

Purpose of the report:

To provide the Committee with an overview of the council's ways of working as COVID regulations are gradually lifted. The report sets out how teams are being supported to transition out of COVID, working towards being 'Agile' as defined and governed by the Agile Organisation Programme.

1. Recommendations

1.1. It is recommended that the Committee note the contents of this report.

2. Introduction

2.1. As COVID restrictions start to ease and we work towards the 21st June milestone on the Government's COVID Roadmap, the Agile Organisation Programme has set out support and guidance for teams in preparation for office space becoming available again for all. At this point we do not know whether social distancing within offices will be required from the 21st June (that is subject to a Government review) but we are planning for a COVID compliant office set up if this continues to be the requirement.

2.2. The Agile Organisation Programme (AOP) is a transformation programme that has been set up to specifically to deliver agile working alongside the Agile Office Strategy and also the other projects in the Organisation Transformation Portfolio (Digital, Data Insights, Digital Business & Insights and Resources Directorate Improvement). It uses a cross-functional governance structure to provide insight into projects that may have cross dependencies with organisational change.

- 2.3.** The Phase One objective of AOP was to exit County Hall by 31 December 2020 and move the Civic Heart to Woodhatch Place in Reigate. That is now complete, and we have moved on to a second phase of the Programme that currently includes the new Dakota building, a reconfiguration of space at Quadrant Court and supporting teams with understanding and working towards an Agile way of working. We are also reviewing the technology that gets put into our key offices that support agile working: online collaboration tools, hybrid meetings, as well as the ability to book seats, rooms and car park spaces.
- 2.4.** In managing the emergence from the COVID restrictions, teams and staff are actively encouraged not simply to return to the pre-COVID ways of working but to sustain the positive changes over the last 14 months including working flexibly from home, across SCC offices and in the community. This has been done through a range of communication channels, including direct engagement with teams and a regular blog from Leigh Whitehouse, as sponsor of the Agile Organisation Programme, and an area on “jive” with guidance, FAQs and signposts to information or support. Working in an agile way will be different for each service, dependent on what they do and the residents and customers they serve.

3. The Agile Organisation Programme and Office Space Provision

- 3.1.** The Agile Organisation Programme is now in its second phase having delivered the exit out of County Hall and the establishment of Woodhatch Place. The Agile Office Strategy is being developed to shape what happens to SCC buildings over the next few years. Once finalised this will inform office moves for the rest of 21/22 and beyond.
- 3.2.** Woodhatch Place is designed to accommodate 40% of a service / team at any time (desks / seats) in addition to shared meeting, collaboration and touchdown spaces, and is the blueprint for how all offices will be designed in the future. Several ‘Ways of Working’ polls undertaken over the last 9 months consistently show that the majority of staff see themselves making use of SCC office space a couple of times per week on average.
- 3.3.** The shifting views regarding the value and use of office space are reflected in the activity-led design of workspaces and choice of furniture. Like many other industries, our own staff feedback indicates that many feel more productive doing quiet and focused work at home and anticipate using the office spaces for activities requiring connection, collaboration, creativity and some formal meetings.
- 3.4.** The new Dakota Office building is currently being fitted out to provide space based on the same principles as Woodhatch Place. The building will

become available for occupancy on a phased approach across the Summer. The teams that will have Dakota as their administration base have been engaged throughout the development of Dakota and have inputted to the design to best utilise the space when they need to be at an office site.

- 3.5.** Work is underway at Quadrant Court to make more efficient use of the space and accommodate c 250 staff relocated from County Hall. This includes a minor redesign of the layout, introduction of new furniture, and a focused records management workstream to file, archive or delete documents and explore digital transformation. Teams currently based at Quadrant Court as well as the new incumbents are being engaged with, both in terms of working in an agile way and also around the practicalities for completing the project. This is a 'mini' project in that a proper refurbishment of Quadrant Court will happen at a later date. With that in mind, this project will deliver an average of 70% capacity instead of 40% but that will be reduced when we are able to do the full refurbishment.
- 3.6.** Greener Travel. A shift in ways of working and the use of technology, together with changes to the office estate, inevitably impact on travel. AOP has developed a set of travel principles that align with both agile working and the Greener Futures agenda, and is working in collaboration with Strategic Transport and Rethinking Transport to develop options for the future. This has included surveys of staff affected by the relocation from County Hall to develop travel plans and an in-progress review of access to car parking.

4. Transitioning out of lockdown into new and agile ways of working

- 4.1.** Whilst the Agile Organisation Programme works with teams that are impacted by specific property projects, as above, there is additional universal support around transitioning out of lockdown into new and agile ways of working. This includes supporting teams to consider where work is done most productively – home, office space or other – when and how teams come together, and what future models of work look like.
- 4.2.** Appendix A is the Transitioning out of Lockdown Guide that has been now been published on Jive and being actively used by the Change Management Team within the programme to facilitate service thinking and planning. The Guide outlines a set of principles, together with tools and templates, to support teams to discuss and shape their agile working arrangements and agree what works best for them, their team and ultimately customers and residents.
- 4.3.** A series of virtual Q&A events are underway, open to all staff, to ask questions and prepare for the transition out of lockdown. Take up and

engagement has been good, with approximately 400 people signed up. Additional sessions will be arranged in response to demand. The format has been answering pre-submitted questions as well as linking up staff with subject matter experts to discuss live issues and concerns. The sessions also provide another channel for restating the principles of agile working and reminding managers and staff that we will not be returning to the way that we worked prior to the pandemic.

- 4.4.** Hybrid working is a fast emerging term in all sectors to describe a world where we split work time between home and the office space. Google, for example, envisage a hybrid working week where staff typically spend three days in the office and two at home and an increase in full time remote working for some.
- 4.5.** In SCC, we define agile working as a broader ambition that incorporates choice and flexibility with remote and hybrid working, but also incorporates mindset and behaviours about being driven by outcomes for residents, and establishing a high-trust, high accountability culture where we manage by results and outcomes. A poll of over 1500 SCC staff indicated that for over 80% people, the ideal working pattern is two days or less in the office. This aligns with thinking and research emerging from both local government and other sectors, this will not apply equally to all roles, some which it is necessary to be on site more often or not possible to work from home, but as an overall headline it conveys the magnitude of the shift in working patterns that we anticipate.
- 4.6.** Hybrid meetings are a feature of future ways of working, whereby some meeting participants are physically together in a space and some participants join virtually. Successful hybrid meetings require not only the appropriate technology, equipment, and meeting rooms, but also the requisite skills and behaviours to plan and manage a meeting in a way that is equally inclusive and productive for all. Whilst hybrid meetings have their place, they are not suitable for all types of meetings, and this is part of the organisation's learning journey towards new ways of working. The AOP is developing a guide to support staff to consider and address the differences of running a hybrid meeting, when it is appropriate to use them, and to develop their skills and behaviours accordingly.
- 4.7.** Complementary to the above, the HROD function is incorporating agile working principles into its development programmes for managers and leaders, including managing performance by outcomes.

5. Returning to the workplace for all

5.1. Whilst offices have remained open for essential use throughout the pandemic, many staff have continued to work from home in line with government guidance and requirements. As the offices ‘open’ over the summer to staff who have predominantly working at home, there will be support at the main hubs especially for those who have relocated. This will include booking desks and rooms, using the conferencing technology, and understanding the layout of the building. This will predominantly be for Woodhatch Place, given it is a new location for many staff, but similar support will be provided at Fairmount, Consort House, Quadrant Court and Dakota. These are complemented by “Welcome Packs” for key hub buildings with key practical information.

5.2. Whilst staggered dates are being applied for opening spaces, all offices will be fully open by mid-August (that being the date for the second floor of Dakota to open), subject to the Government’s roadmap remaining on track. All buildings will continue to be COVID compliant, including the appropriate spacing of furniture, regular cleaning of equipment and fixtures and the right level of fresh air ventilation. This will continue until the legislation no longer requires it and SCC is happy to relax these measures.

5.3. Data will be utilised to understand the demand and patterns of working at offices. This will allow us to monitor the demand for office space over the summer. We will also be able to use the data to identify and target teams that may need further support or facilitation around overcoming any challenges they have in working in a more flexible and agile way. In addition, we now have access Microsoft’s Workplace Analytics, this allows us to analyse data based on people’s use of Office 365 and Teams. It provides an insight into collaboration and working styles/patterns and will act as an aid to teams to help them to think how they are working, as a team and with the wider organisation.

6. Conclusions

6.1. As offices open in line with the Government’s lockdown roadmap, we are using the opportunity for teams to further develop their agile ways of working. The office becomes another physical space for working, tending to be more for when teams need to collaborate physically, alongside the options of working in the community or from home.

6.2. A range of support is provided to teams to help them to prepare for the transition out of lockdown and establish more agile ways of working that support productivity and sustain the positive changes and learning from the last year. There is no one size fits all but rather, each team is encouraged to consider the agile working principles and find what works best for them and the residents and customers they serve. Learning will continue well beyond

the opening of offices as to what works best for teams and the Agile Organisation Programme will continue to support the Council on this journey.

7. Financial and value for money implications

7.1. There are no new financial implications arising from the information in this report. Finances and value for money in relation to the AOP are managed through the Transformation Assurance Board as Agile Working is part of the Organisation Transformation Portfolio of projects and programmes. Value for money is tracked in terms of benefits realisation for the overall portfolio.

8. Equality and Diversity Implications

8.1. An Equality Impact Assessment sits within the programme and is continually updated and monitored as the programme develops. Audits of building accessibility is currently taking place and staff are being engaged to support those.

9. Risk Management Implications

9.1. A Risk and Issue Log for the programme is live and actively managed. In relation to the ways of working post-COVID, we are mitigating the risk that staff continue to work in a way that was normal prior to the COVID pandemic. To help mitigate this we are using several communication channels to push out information and the offer of support. These channels are both council wide and Directorate specific. We have worked directly with teams based at the main hubs and those that are moving or are impacted upon by changes to the office set up that they currently have as their admin base. We will use trend data to help identify where teams are returning to old ways of working and we will use the data to engage with those teams and help them with challenges they may have.

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