



Broxtowe
Borough
COUNCIL



Report of the Overview and Scrutiny
Committee

Review of Agile Working

January 2023

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Summary

1. Broxtowe Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a review of Agile Working, to be carried out by the Overview and Scrutiny Working Group at its meeting 19 October 2022. The review was requested by Councillors P J Owen and D D Pringle, who suggested that there needed to be a focus on employees working from home and effects on services delivery.
2. The review is in accordance with the Council's values of innovation and readiness for change, valuing employees and enabling the active involvement of everyone, continuous improvement and delivering value for money and integrity and professional competency.
3. The Working Group met on 3 November 2022 after receiving information from the Executive Director, Kevin Powell.
4. The purpose of the review was to achieve the outcomes outlined in the scoping report¹. The review sought the following outcomes:
 - Residents getting the best service possible. Positive impact of services.
 - Service Delivery expectation has not been reduced since agile working
 - A better understanding of how agile working operates and how this is communicated to residents and Councillors.
5. This report sets out the review process that was adopted and recommendations.

¹ The scoping report is attached at appendix 1.

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Working Group

1. The Working Group was chaired by Councillor S Dannheimer, with Councillor S Easom as the vice chair.
2. Three other councillors were part of the Working Group:
 - Councillor L Fletcher
 - Councillor M Hannah
 - Councillor I L Tyler.
3. The Working Group was assisted by Kevin Powell, Executive Director and Lisa Evans, Democratic Services Manager.

Conclusion

The Working Group concluded that they were happy with the agile working arrangements. Key questions on mental health for home workers, employee welfare, and performance were answered satisfactory. Where performance becomes an issue, arrangements are in place for employees to work from the Council offices in order for additional support to be provided. These arrangements can be reversed if employees meet the necessary performance improvements.

The wellbeing survey showed that employees were happy with the agile working arrangements and the data reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Working Group demonstrated that customer satisfaction was not adversely affected.

Recommendations

It is proposed to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to recommend to Cabinet that:

1. It be ensured that Mental Health training encompasses identifying when individuals are struggling at home and to signpost where necessary.
2. It be communicated to employees, to highlight that in the event of long term absence, appropriate opportunities can be considered for them to receive training in order to allow them to work during the period of absence, subject to the appropriate consent of their GP to carry out the training and work.
3. Strengthening social cohesion be considered and collaboration be undertaken with staff to welcome innovation opportunities. (The water cooler discussions)
4. Managers consider where a face to face meeting may be more appropriate, in relation to performance management issues, rather than a meeting over Microsoft Teams.
5. Where service delivery is adversely affected as a result of performance related issues, managers will take appropriate action including the potential of reducing or removing flexibility. When it can be demonstrated that performance has improved managers can consider reintroducing flexible working arrangements.

Background

1. The topic was suggested by Councillor P J Owen and Councillor D D Pringle to consider Agile Working.
2. The review was scoped at the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 October 2022 where the Scrutiny Working Group was allocated the review, which sought to provide an update on Agile Working.

Considerations at the Working Group Meeting

1. Members of the Working Group were updated with the Agile Working presentation and information that was provided at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 19 October 2022 from the Executive Director.
2. There were a number of lines of enquiry which included: when people were not in the office how did they feel active, what were the safeguards, what do employees expect from homeworking and how should it be managed?
3. The Executive Director confirmed that the data provided indicated that employees were managing stress and work related stress was low. The absence data indicated no rise of absence since home working. The Council had implemented Mental Health First Aid through the Health and Safety Officer. Training was being provided to all Heads of Service and Senior Management Team. An update would be provided to check if the Mental Health training recognised staff struggling working from home and how they would be signposted.
4. In consideration of those who worked manually, when there was absence from their usual work after an injury there was an offer of alternative work within the Council with the agreement of employee, general practitioner and Manager. The Council could consider the options available if the employee wished to remain working rather than be absent long-term. This provided some reassurance that manual workers had some alternative options to manage their long-term absence.
5. Discussions ensued with new starters and how training was provided. It was confirmed that new employees would initially be in the office with their line manager to establish working practices and ensure all training had been completed prior to being able to work agile. In the event of a current employee not meeting targets then face-to-face meetings would be arranged with their line manager rather than through Microsoft Teams. Customer Services failing the needs of the service was provided as an example where the team was required to return to the office to improve performance and ensure all targets were met.

6. Currently the Council was using, on average 25% of Council space. Providing office space to voluntary organisations was currently being considered.
7. Members queried whether digital exhaustion was being monitored and how employees worked in collaboration with other teams and what would the next steps mean for agile working. Agile working had become a way of attracting skilled employees to local authorities with providing flexibility, a better home work life balance and retain the staff within the Authority. It was further agreed that agile working provided flexibility, was effective and economic and met the needs to reduce carbon emissions across the Borough.

Scoping Form Information

The Executive Director provided the following information to assist the Working Group in relation to the specific points on the scoping form.

1. How many employees worked from home pre COVID-19?

Eight permanent home workers and approximately 25 officers occasionally working from home

2. How many worked through COVID-19 and how many currently?

At the beginning of the pandemic approximately between 20 to 40 employees worked in the offices every day out of a possible ~250 employees that can work in the office. During the pandemic this figure rose to approximately 40 to 60. There are employees covering all services to enable all services to be delivered face to face as required and deliver the necessary Health and Safety requirements (e.g. fire wardens, first aiders etc...) – each day varies but approximately 75+ employees each day

3. How many employees are working frontline / back in the office but managers work from home. Degree of fairness between management and worker?

The Agile Working Management Guidance document (circulated to the Committee) demonstrates that each service has developed appropriate working arrangements including rotas for employees and managers balancing home and office working.

Senior management are on a rota to ensure that there is a senior management presence every day of the week.

4. How many employees are happy working from home?

This question is moot as if an employee wishes to work in the office they can work in the office. Working at home is not mandatory and is dependent on:

- a. The employee being able to establish a safe working environment
 - b. The employee having an appropriate broadband capability
 - c. The employee's performance
 - d. The employee's skills (e.g. new employees will likely require greater face to face interaction with colleagues)
5. Has working from home affected mental health?
- a. The question is broad – there are many variables that affects an individual's mental health
 - b. Absence data suggests that this is not the case
 - c. Employee Survey results show an ongoing improvement in the wellbeing score
 - d. If an employee is adversely affected they can return to the office. Working at home is not mandatory.
6. How many employees find working from home difficult – anxiety problems?
- a. If an employee is adversely affected they can return to the office. Working at home is not mandatory.
 - b. Absence data suggests an improving picture for anxiety
 - c. Employee Survey results show an ongoing improvement in the wellbeing score
7. Where has the decision come from not to return to the office. By who and why?
- a. ICT Strategy 2017 to 2021 adopted 2017 along with common ICT Strategy for Rushcliffe Borough Council and Newark and Sherwood District Council
 - b. New Ways of Working project started in 2018 to deliver ICT Strategy outcomes namely Agile Working / Leveraging benefits of technology investment / Efficient use of space available
 - c. ICT Strategy 2022 to 2027 adopted by Policy and Performance Committee early 2022
 - d. Cross party support for ICT Strategy and its objectives
8. Is it fair for residents of Broxtowe to have employees working from home
- a. Data comparing 2018/19 to 2021/22 shows that compliments are up
 - b. Data comparing 2018/19 to 2021/22 shows that complaints at Stage 1 are down
 - c. Data comparing 2018/19 to 2021/22 shows that complaints at Stage 2 are following a downward trend
 - d. Data from the budget consultation comparing 2018/19 to 2021/22 data shows that the trend is positive for: How satisfied are you in the way that the Council provides its service? (2018/19 data added to presentation as requested by Councillor Kerry)

- e. Data from the budget consultation comparing 2018/19 to 2021/22 data shows that the trend is positive for: How satisfied are you with your local area as a place to live? (2018/19 data added to presentation as requested by Councillor Kerry)
 - f. Performance data demonstrates that the Council is performing well when compared with other district Councils in the East Midlands and out performing when the cost of service provision is taken into account.
 - g. Insight: residents are not being adversely affected
9. Is there a difference between senior and junior manager roles when deciding who are able to work from home and amongst teams?
- .
- a. The Agile Working Management Guidance document (circulated to the Committee) provides the basis by which each team has developed its own arrangements in respect to Agile Working based on 7 Key Principles:
 - i. Prioritising service need: we cannot compromise on the services we deliver for our residents, businesses and members.
 - ii. Building relationships based on trust
 - iii. Preserving Broxtowe's values
 - iv. Preserving the work life balance
 - v. Managing performance based on results and outcomes, rather than presence
 - vi. Maximising productivity and innovation while reducing environmental impact
 - vii. Focusing on your own arrangements, not comparing with others – trust that others have made arrangements with their managers, which serve the organisation, just as you will have done.
 - b. Yes, there will be differences across the different service areas due to the needs of the service being difference
10. Are the same principles applied throughout the Council?
- a. Yes – because the first principle is prioritising service need. If the service cannot be managed by employees working from home, then they will be working in the office
11. The two questions that have not been answered in either the presentation or the information provided above are “Seems unfair frontline employees would have to take sick leave when back office employees can work from home?” and “Does this affect sickness statistic currently?”

The first question appears moot. I will try to reflect based on a couple of scenarios.

Scenario 1: An employee breaks a leg – an office based employee may be able to continue working in the office or at home, whereas, a refuse loader would not. This has always been the case home working has not changes this.

Scenario 2: An employee has a bad cold – an office based employee may be able to carry out useful work at home where as an employee working in the field may not be physically able to carry out any part of their role. This has always been the case home working has not changed this, managers are able to work with employees based on individual circumstances and appropriate risk assessment.

There is a possibility that should field workers be happy to received training in for example “answering the telephone for customer services – the simplest type of call is a refuse call” then the same flexibility may be available. We have 2 examples of where this has happened in the last 5 years. The practicalities of delivering this may be complex – for example, a broken leg should be fairly easy to achieve (longer term e.g. 6 weeks), providing the employee is willing and the relevant authority is obtained (e.g. from a GP) but an odd day will be less easily achieved due to the nature of the many different career paths that exist within the Council.

Sickness data has been provided in terms of the second remaining question above.

Scoping Report

Title of review	Agile Working
Expected outcomes	Residents getting the best service possible. Positive impact of services. Service Delivery expectation has not been reduced since agile working A better understanding of how agile working operates and how this is communicated to residents and Councillors.
Terms of reference/Key lines of enquiry	How many employees worked from home pre COVID-19? How many through COVID-19 and how many currently. Breakdown through MTWTF employees WFH/back in the office how is this decided? Manager or left to own to manage. How many employees are working frontline/back in the office but Managers work from home. Degree of Fairness –between Mgt and workers How many staff are happy working from home? Has WFH affected mental health. Seems unfair frontline staff would have to take sickness leave when back office staff can work from home. Does this affect sickness stat currently? How many staff find work from home difficult to work –anxiety problems Where has the decision come from not to return to the office. By who and why? Is it fair for residents of Broxtowe to have staff still working from home. Is there a difference between senior and junior manager roles with deciding who are able to decide to wfh and amongst their teams? Are the same principles applied throughout the Council?
Possible sources of information	Customer Satisfaction Complaints and Compliments Impact on service delivery Employee survey HR Manager Executive Director Random selection of staff Questionnaire Residents
How review could be publicised	Through Comms Team Email me Members Matters Social media

Specify site visits	Visit to Offices –Kimberley and Beeston.		
Possible witnesses			
Resource requirements	Data for staff questionnaire		
Projected start date	19.10.2022	Draft report deadline	TBC
Projected completion date	TBC		

APPENDIX 2

Staff Consultation on Agile Working

The Senior Management Team was asked their views on Agile working for feedback to this Committee. A total of 27 staff was emailed with the questions as set out below. There were 14 emailed replies.

- How often do you work from home on average per week?
- What drives your decision to work from home or in the office?
- How do you organise your teams and do you require them to be in the office at any time? What are the reasons for your answer?
- How do you measure productivity and has that changed because of agile working?
- Has there been any impact on service?
- Do you have any thoughts on agile working?

How often do you work from home on average per week?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I work from home 4 days out of 5, but I also go into the office for meetings or appointments with tenants as required, so this is often more frequent. I am also part of a management rota – we always have a Manager on cover in the office.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team all come in on Wednesdays and we have a face to face team meeting, but we also have various ad hoc Teams meetings throughout the week too to deal with specific issues. We don't come in on other set regular days, although BLZ inductions for new starters are carried out as required on Mondays and on other days to carry out BLZ training with the Repairs MSOs. Other than this we come in as and when required to deal with issues and it's left to individual team members to decide on which type of meeting is appropriate. We always come in to join a manager in a meeting with one of their team members. We work at the Depot as well as at the Council Offices. There is one us in the office every week in addition to Wednesdays.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 days at home, 1 day in office. The one day tends to be two halves rather than a single full day.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 days a week, go into the office once a week
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 days a week on average
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically, four days at home, one day in the office (varies dependent upon evening meetings)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 days out of 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I work from home 3 or 4 days a week. These days vary depending on the needs of the service and requirements to be available to face to face meetings, such as Cabinet.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am in the office a minimum of two days a week, sometimes three. However, if I am not in the office it does not necessarily mean I am working at home as I attend a range of meetings outside Broxtowe connected with, for example Police and Crime Commissioner, County Council, Chief Execs meetings, D2N2. My online diary is visible to everyone so they can see what meetings I have and when I might be free.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I personally WFH 3 days a week. There is a rota in place for Business Support which does not require anyone to be in the office more than 2 days a week. Electoral Services and Land Charges are normally in at least once a week.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On an average week, I work 3 of my 4 working days at home but can come in more frequently than that if the job requires me to – in person meetings, events etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most of the week unless there is a meeting and preparation and printing is required. Team meetings and training have been organised in the office. At a Councillor request if they wish to hold a meeting in the office.
What drives your decision to work from home or in the office?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Travel expenses (I get the bus to and from work); I also find that I am less productive in the office due to constant interruptions and the noise and bustle from being in an office environment. A lot of my job is data analysis, performance monitoring and also calculating large sums of money which could cost the Council if I make a mistake. I now ensure that any work I undertake where I must completely focus, I do from home.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I go to the office to do things that cannot be done at home (such as solving IT issues or collecting files) or to attend in-person meetings. My main reason for continuing to prefer to work from home is the much increased productivity / efficiency at home due to fewer distractions and no time lost in commuting. Cannot really overemphasize this. There is of course also the work / life balance improvements, in that I lose no personal time in commuting and can spend my lunch / break times relaxing or performing domestic tasks which would otherwise need to be done in the evening or at the weekend.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I go into the office if something needs signing/executing and when attending committee meeting on a 'need' basis.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficiency – whether the number of meetings are best completed over MS Teams and therefore at home OR whether I have any collaboration / innovation meetings, employee meetings, or site visits that require face to face or physical attendance.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office – One day in the office linked to expected senior management cover. Office – Planned meetings with elected members (including Committees), management and the team. Office – Meet and work with colleagues, as necessary, where there is added value in having face-to-face contact.

Home – Efficiency, productivity, flexibility, typically longer-days (more contactable), no time wasted with the commute etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel time and arrangements with other team members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are different factors for my decision to work from home, these are both service driven and personal. During the period of the pandemic, I have personally never been more productive. My Revenues & Benefits Team are performed excellently. They have continued to conduct their day to day work but also picked up the additional COVID-19 work such as Business Grants, Council Tax Hardship & Test and Trace payments to name a few. This was all conducted whilst working from home and we were one of the highest performing authorities in the Country. On a personal note, agile working has allowed me to be available to support with family life. My son was born at the beginning of the pandemic and as a result my wife and I felt isolated from family and support. Having that ability to be close and offer support during challenging times has been instrumental in ensuring a better family balance. Just by removing the travelling time and cost of this has been so helpful. It is important to note that I do feel a regular attendance in the office is helpful for both my mental health and to ensure regular communication with teams.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel I want to have an office presence at least two days a week. It gives me the opportunity to have some informal conversations with people who happen to be there in a way that doesn't easily happen on TEAMS. As previously stated I am often at other meetings in other places. All Council business meetings are in person and in the evenings. It is now the case that almost all partnership meetings I am involved in (and there are a lot – for example Safer Nott's board; Safer Nott's board performance group; hate crime partnership; Nott's water safety partnership; Nott's safeguarding adults board and the sub group amongst others) are on line as the practice of bringing people together from all over the County is much more simply and cost effectively done online, with greater meeting attendance than what once happened – meeting face to face, with all the attendant travel time.) I tend to plan to come into the office on days when I do not have these sort of online meetings, as otherwise I would be spending most of my time in a private meeting room anyway, away from the open office.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office cover – 1 day, personal reasons, the other. Events such as elections will mean that I am in more, or one-off needs such as interviews. WFH provides a less distracting environment for report writing etc. and is more productive in terms of output.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firstly, work tasks – if there are particular meetings or events I have that require me to be in the office, if it would be more effective to speak to someone in person or whether I need a quieter space to work with no distractions to completed a specific task. Secondly, if there are no business requirements the need me to be in the office the personal arrangements e.g. childcare arrangements for the day.

- I can get on with my work at home with minimal disruption. It helps with work/life balance and saves time and fuel costs driving into an empty office. I can also stay later than office hours to finish work as required. The office is not a place of work it feels a drop in space. Remote working was already in place prior to COVID-19 and the flexible working arrangements are not unique to this Authority. I was already working 1 day a week at home prior to the pandemic.

How do you organise your teams and do you require them to be in the office at any time?

What are the reasons for your answer?

- My team effectively manage their diaries and come into the office if they have appointments and meetings as necessary. The rest of their roles can be conducted remotely at home or out on site.

- The work performed by my team is entirely desk-based and therefore can be completed at home just as well as in the office. Therefore, I do not require anyone to go to the office unless there is a specific reason. Thus far, the only time I have specifically asked people to go to the office was for appraisals (which I think require the 'personal' touch) and I have a full team meeting in the office planned for August to welcome a new team member.

Members of my team do arrange their own trips to the office, for a meeting or to pick up papers etc., but this is at their own discretion.

- The team who need to be in the office, are in the office more due to the nature of their work. They deal with property transactions and the first registration project that requires office attendance. As a result of this the Officers are usually in the office once a week. The other members of the team attend the office on an 'as and when' basis. The Head of Service attends for the monthly team meetings and or meetings relating to a particular topic for example going through the new constitution.

- Different services need to be managed differently depending on 1) service demand / service need 2) the level of support necessary for an employee e.g. a new employee may require training and additional managerial support 3) an employee's performance and therefore the level of support required.

The reasons are: 1) service need 2) support required 3) performance.

- Policy is clear in that agile working must always be aligned with business need.

No specific directive at present, so attendance in the office is currently voluntary, but encouraged.

<p>Drive towards increase attendance (at least one-day per week), but geared towards working together as a team unit rather than just being in for the sake of it.</p> <p>No negative comments brought to my attention regarding the availability of officers in Finance Services (virtual or otherwise).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think that this is developing. Wednesday is the usual touchdown in the office
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within the team, we have a number of staff that want to work from the office full time. However, we ensure that there is a rota to provide relevant cover. The Customer Service team are currently required to be in the office at all times.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I measure the performance of the sections under my control by reference to outputs and outcomes. I also monitor and manage agreed tasks. The key ones are also stated within business plans and strategies agreed by the council. Critical service indicators, key performance indicators and management indicators are stipulated in business plans agreed by Councillors. I have one to ones with all my direct reports at which we discuss current performance for the sections they manage. <p>Every section is required under our agile working guidance document to work to a departmental agreement whereby the section head ensures that when the Council is open to the public employees are available to serve customers face to face and answer telephone calls which come in. This is done through the organizing of rotas to ensure there is always cover. Emergency cover and call out arrangements are also agreed.</p> <p>I won't repeat what my direct report heads of service say about how they organize their teams, as they will report directly. There are a variety of patterns, reflecting the needs of the service. Some general comments:</p> <p>When in the office Community safety team is located in the Police station, which facilitates a great degree of partnership working. Only people who are security vetted to the Police's standards can access this space. A significant part of the community's team's work is spent out in the community in schools, working with voluntary sector, at events, in community engagement work. If they were in the office all the time they would not be able to do their jobs properly.</p> <p>Environmental health officers spend a good proportion of their time out inspecting premises and meeting people who have raised issues for example connected with noise nuisance. This is an absolute requirement of their job.</p> <p>Planners have site visits to attend which is necessary to enable them to evaluate planning applications, so they are necessarily not always on the</p>

<p>office. However, I know that the Head of Planning and Economic Development asks all his staff to attend the office at least two days a week.</p> <p>Likewise, housing officers have neighborhood patches and spend time out talking to people face to face, seeing what is happening in localities, identifying issues and solving problems.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Business Support rota ensures fairness - everyone is required to go into the office. It ensures that there are sufficient staff in the building to deal with post (incoming & outgoing) & to deal with enquires from other staff in the building. Electoral Services/Land Charges – they go in once a week, which I have asked them to do and this time is used to catch up on work issues/face to face team meetings. Support Services are the only Team who cannot WFH.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team is organised around business need – if we have meetings or events that require them to be in the office or out on site or if it would be more effective for them to be in the office for a particular task or discussion. As was the case before agile working, holidays and absences are covered so that there is always cover during business hours and where this cannot be done at home, then a team member would be required to go to the office. There are regular opportunities to meet face to face with myself as Manager and with other team members.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We tend to go into the office as business need is required. We have met for team meetings on an ad hoc basis, training and to support the Committee meetings. The current COVID-19 pandemic has not gone away and if a small team all working in the same area becomes infected, this would have a massive affect for the service delivery of the Authority.
<p>How do you measure productivity and has that changed because of agile working?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My team have a very wide remit and they are all measured in different ways. Working remotely has increased their productivity and ensures that they can process their case work and applications effectively and efficiently without constant interruptions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We don't measure outputs/productivity. A good proportion of our work is reactive (not least dealing with all the COVID-19 issues) and we don't know what's going to occur throughout the week or how long something will take to resolve. We have been busier since (or rather due to) lockdown and on that basis our productivity has increased because we have been doing COVID-19 work on top of our usual tasks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have a detailed knowledge of the work that the members of my team do and am aware of where each individual project / workflow should be at any point in time. I would notice quite quickly if any wheels stopped turning or slowed down. Though I was not the manager of my team before agile working began, I do not imagine this is any different to how it was done prior.

<p>I also maintain regular communication (teams calls) with all members of my team and speak to each of them on average once every two days.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I monitor the number of matters opened, closed and those matters that have remained open/not worked on in three months to assess productivity. This gives me an idea as to how quick matters are being progressed. This has not changed necessarily as this information has always been available.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Ways of Working (NWOW) was in place before the pandemic and therefore management by performance / service need rather than by presence was already in place and fairly mature. CSI, KPI, and MSI's are utilised to inform productivity as are 121 meetings and progress against agreed work programmes / business plans.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Productivity, in terms of key tasks completed, is generally managed the same way for Finance Services as it was previously before March 2020. <p>The main change has been the removal of flexi time recording.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Again I think that this is developing. The work is task driven and can be carried out remotely.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are transactional service so we performance management based on productivity. Where productivity is not at the levels expected then we will ensure that officer returns to the office to monitor them closer.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have monthly one to ones with my direct reports. (7 individuals) At each meeting I discuss the CSIs, KPIs, and MPIs which relate to their business plan targets. I would say for my own direct reports productivity has mostly improved. <p>As Chief Executive my attention is focused on the corporate plan performance I report on progress on this to cabinet. The latest report shows a good level of performance and productivity in achieving our corporate plan goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning maintains top quartile performance whilst experiencing a 20% increase in planning applications in the last year. Environmental health has just about caught up on the food safety inspection programme. The COVID-19 period was exceptional but during that time thousands of pieces of written advice were given to businesses in Broxtowe and a huge number of phone calls made. Economic development has performed exceptionally well under huge additional pressure and high people turnover. Community safety have an excellent record in achieving all their PIs and business plan targets with some minor exceptions, often beyond their control. During the COVID-19 pandemic many of these offers were key to providing and coordinating humanitarian relief. They worked long and hard outside normal hours to do this work.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The performance of rent recovery has been exceptionally good year on year despite the challenging economic climate <p>There have been challenges in housing allocations mostly caused by high void rates, high levels of homelessness and huge demand on the housing stock. None of these things have anything to do with agile working.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business Support have SLAs & Electoral Services PIs to work to. There has been no change in productivity because of agile working.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Productivity is harder to quantify in my service area due to the nature of tasks. 1-2-1s and regular catch ups, as well as meeting set deadlines for delivering projects has continued to be used as a measure, as it was before agile working.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We tend to go into the office as required. We have met for team meetings on an ad hoc basis, training and to support the Committee meetings. The current COVID-19 pandemic has not gone away and if a small team all working in the same area becomes infected, this would have a massive affect for the service delivery of the Authority.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We work to strict deadlines with publishing agendas, we also have Key Performance targets to meet. Complaint monitoring has targets to meet through the stages. All targets have been met and are continuing to do so.
Has there been any impact on service?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not anything negative for my team. I ensure that team meetings are now face to face, and the team ensure that they continue to provide an excellent service to tenants and leaseholders whereby they're available to see them as before. The only difference is that they must now make an appointment which is something we were already exploring pre-COVID-19. Most Councils have this approach too.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I don't think our service to customers has been adversely affected by agile working. The team likes having the choice about whether to work in the office or from home and this has improved morale and motivation. Also the two of us who don't live close are fresher because of the lack of commuting issues.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot comment in detail as I was not the manager of my team before agile working began, however I believe the impact to be positive for all the reasons above and below.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I would say better service delivery due to people not commuting, there seems to be more people available during office hours whereas before we would have people starting at different times due to commuting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For most employees the introduction of hybrid working (synonymous with agile / flexible working) has helped maintain service delivery while offering employees the type of working environment that attracts new employees to an organisation like Broxtowe Borough Council

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to measure I think at the moment but I would say not again because it is task driven.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Customer Service Team had a reduction in service quality for a short period of time. This wasn't completely as a result of Agile working as other factors contributed. However, it was identified as one issue. Now we have the right performance management measures in place, we would be in a position to return some aspects of agile working to this team. The Revenues and Benefits Team have had no adverse impact of Agile working.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19, skill shortages and pay rates have all generally had more of an impact on services than flexible working. We need to improve the look and feel and welcoming environment of the ground floor reception area. I would like to have a consistent friendly presence on the front desk immediately visible in front of you when entering the council offices. I think that would help to improve customer care. We need to ensure that those who choose not to or cannot embrace digital technology, get personal attention and help to complete their transactions on the ground floor of the Council offices.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not at all. We have not had any complaints about the level or standard of service provided by any of the Teams.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There has been no detrimental impact on service delivery – employees are available in person when they are needed to be and cover continues to be ensured during business hours. <p>Many employees use their usual commuting time to work so they often work more hours than they did before agile working, resulting in greater productivity.</p> <p>It has also enabled employees to continue to work in circumstances where they may have had to take sick leave or annual leave and therefore work would not have been completed or need to be covered by another employee e.g. someone who is unwell and doesn't feel able to come to the office but is able to work a few hours in a more comfortable environment at home or being able to do some work from home when children are off sick from school or nursery.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have adapted the service to meet the needs of the Members, examples include through the pandemic organising the Committee meetings onto Microsoft teams in line with the legislation. Hybrid attendance at meetings especially for visitors and Officers. Reducing paper agendas for Pre agenda, Chairs briefings etc...Meeting on teams for Chair's Briefings has allowed for Councillors to join from their home or office. The Carbon footprint has reduced for the events now on teams.
Do you have any other thoughts on agile working?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When new employees start, time needs to be spent with them in the office to ensure that they get a proper induction and training can be conducted effectively. I have had 3 new starters in my team since we have been working

remotely, and this approach seems to have worked well. If further training is required, I meet them in the office as required.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main positives of agile working for my team are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The shift to working more digitally has made things a lot easier. Post being scanned in and sent over to us has reduced the risk of paperwork going missing etc., and we only send out things in the post if required. We tend to mostly email documents to people now, which they prefer as it is instant. This also saves on postage. ○ Work/life balance is improved and there is more flexibility and motivation. ○ Reduced costs, stress and time for travel. ○ Meetings being held remotely with external organisations and training saves time and money. ○ Contributing to the Council's Green Agenda by not travelling unnecessarily. ○ Appointment system for residents is working well for us. It allows us to prepare before they come in, e.g. paperwork, checking the background of the case on the system etc. Allows us to have more control of our diaries as we can book the appointments in on the same day for example, thus making us more productive (e.g. signing up garage tenants on a specific day of the week in the office or making appointments for Right to Buy applicants). ○ Microsoft Teams allows members of the team who work remotely all over the Borough to come together more easily. It has also made people more accessible – people you would usually have to book a meeting in with can now be contacted easily on Teams wherever they are. ○ Efficiencies have been made by moving all customer satisfaction surveys online. They used to be posted out. ○ Higher productivity – less interruptions than being in the office environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council effectively scrapped 'presentism' when they got rid of the clocking mechanisms; they actively and consistently promoted agile working before and during the pandemic; they have consistently looked to sell off our office space, before and during the pandemic; they have limited our ease of access to the office from removing parking in front of the Council Offices to the latest regression with Devonshire Avenue parking; they have told employees that all flexi has to be agreed in advance (thus taking away flexibility – a lot of roles require employees to finish when they finish. It isn't always easy to stop working after 7hrs 24 minutes when you are in the middle of a piece of work and need to get it completed) whilst championing flexible working; they have eroded our benefits consistently and silently, ignoring staff concerns for the last decade or more.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the reason for this review is related to the public struggling to get in touch with services, hopefully members bear in mind that this is not always down to employees but managers to ensure that sufficient resources and

<p>technology is in place. If rotas etc. are managed effectively, there should always be at least one person in each team/department in the office available for any queries.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is not being applied consistently throughout the Council.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From a wider HR perspective giving staff the opportunity to work from home has been a positive development. I'm not aware of any office-based member of staff who wants to go back to working in the office full-time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment – agile working (or flexible working, homeworking etc.) is no longer considered a special privilege and is generally expected by desk-based professionals. I have seen evidence of this through interviews I have been involved in at the Council, informal discussions with other managers and conversations with other people outside the Council. By way of example, two consultants at a large company that I have worked with recently have their 'office' in Birmingham but live in Hull and Sheffield respectively and have not been to their 'office' since 2020. <p>Retention – it seems clear to me that, generally, people at Broxtowe prefer to work from home the majority of the time. One only needs to wander the Council Offices (or look at people's backgrounds in large team's meetings), to evidence this. Most people I talk to about this suggest that they do not mind going in to the office if there is a good reason, but the setting of a more-or-less arbitrary requirement to go to the office for 1/2 days per week could generate resentment and possibly make people reconsider their role, especially for those who may have a significant commute / childcare consideration etc.</p> <p>Productivity / efficiency – it is commonly noted that working at home increases productivity and efficiency by removing the myriad distractions in the office and saving commuting time at both ends of the day. Increased task-focus is perhaps the best way of phrasing it. Also, there is very little that cannot be done electronically now through a combination of email, teams call and screen-sharing.</p> <p>Phone cover – Pre-pandemic, on a daily basis there was some discussion, and occasionally some team disharmony, regarding who was going to 'stay to the end' or 'cover lunches' in order to ensure that the phones were covered. This has disappeared now as people are happier to wait for their lunch break if needed and the lack of commute time means people are generally happy to stay 'to the end' without even being asked.</p> <p>Environment – the less people travel, the less carbon is produced, thus helping towards the Council's 'Carbon Neutral' target.</p> <p>Cost of Living – Many people I imagine have saved quite a large amount of money through not needing to commute in the last two years. Given the high price of fuel now, to potentially lose this could cause unnecessary hardship</p>

<p>on some employees. This may perhaps be offset in Autumn / Winter as people need to turn the heating on, but at least this can be done to the degree that they choose (some may prefer that second jumper and a hot water bottle).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before COVID-19, the team already worked from home once a week, I was the only team member who didn't do this as I found it more convenient to be in the office. However, now I think agile working is great, what I am now finding is when I do attend the office on a busy day I am unable to 'block the noise out' this is something I was able to do before. I am able to concentrate better at home. I do hope we continue with the hybrid way of working.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council had already introduced NWOW before the pandemic, rationalising its estate (sale of the Town Hall), and already reduced office space to achieve a 7 to 10 employee to desk ratio (mainly achieved through normal employee absence, site work and annual leave – agile working / hybrid working is the natural extension of NWOW – the pandemic helped the organisation achieve an even lower employee to desk ratio through the disruptive change. Employees that did not have the skills to operate remotely had to learn and adapt and in the main now appreciate the flexibility being offered – if an employee would rather work in the office that option is available. It is likely that without the disruptive change the level of adoption would have remained low. Opportunities have been opened up for example the opportunity to obtain income from renting out spare office space, reduce the Council's carbon footprint through reduced mileage (from both home to work and business mileage), possibility of future consideration of the Council's need for such a large piece of prime real estate in the middle of a town centre.
<p>A modern way of working, almost an expectation in the post-pandemic world, and a positive benefit of working for the Council.</p> <p>The flexibility benefits the service but also supports a positive work/life balance for the employee.</p> <p>Any return to the 'full-week office' would present a significant increase in the risk of staff retention and recruitment (a key strategic risk).</p> <p>Culture and systems could be improved to move to a more planned, appointment based approach, if face-to-face contact is required.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think that generally the agile working piece has morphed into the norm since the necessity of lock down. There now needs to be a proper discussion and agreement with team members. The old school in me likes to see more visibility however Teams is an important tool to get over this. The team should be out and about for at least part of the working week anyway, visiting premises, seeing what is going on in the market etc. and so not being in the office I do not see as an issue and writing site notes and so on can be done anywhere. I do believe in at least one day in the week being an in the office day as important. I think that the Rees-Mogg approach is poor. However,

<p>the service has to be provided, so if that is at risk then a clearer return to the office policy is needed. My other observation is that the office is woefully under utilised and that is part of my function to look at the strategy for the next 5/10 years.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agile working is a significant advantage to individuals now and will have a direct impact on recruitment and retention of staff if not offered. From April 2020 to March 2022, the Customer Service Team had one individual leave for other employment. Since the team were forced to return to the offices, I have received notice from one individual and I am aware of four others that have interviews for employment away from the Council. Three of these have combined experience of over 30 years of working in the Contact Centre and will be a significant impact on the Team.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment and retention is exceptionally challenging for Broxtowe and all local authorities at present especially in areas where there are key skill shortages. The ability to offer agile working is absolutely what applicants expect these days. To restrict that too much would hamper our ability to recruit and retain staff and that would be extremely unwelcome at this time. <p>There are differences in how different generations see agile working. Younger people tend to value the opportunity for social interaction and generally prefer to spend more time in the office.</p> <p>There is a small danger that for some (small number of) people too much working at home can lead to them becoming vulnerable to mental health problems due to social isolation and some “de-skilling” of their existing social interaction capabilities. It is the job of managers to make sure all employees get the balance right between office working and home working. Everyone needs a certain amount of informal engagement with colleagues to retain an emotionally healthy sense of wellbeing.</p> <p>It is extremely important for new recruits to spend more time in the office, sitting with peers, learning face to face and being introduced to colleagues. Supervision of new staff is easier done in the office, and it is easier to pick up the values in the early stages of employment when there is more interaction with new recruits. Over time as they learn the job, don’t need to ask so many questions or be shown things, things can change. I encourage all my heads of service to ensure this happens with people who are new to Broxtowe.</p> <p>I would encourage face to face team meetings. Spontaneous ideas generation and innovation can happen better in a face to face group. They don’t all have to be face to face but it’s good to do it this way quite often.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It provides a good balance between maintaining “teams” and the opportunity to work at home where productivity is usually greater/meetings can be easier (quieter, no need to find a room, particularly if they are to discuss sensitive issues), greater work/life balance – less travelling & more relaxed without that/better for the environment.

- It is important that it is well managed to ensure service delivery and it does not work for all employees e.g. personal preference to be in the office full time or performance issues requiring them to be in.

As a Manager, the greater flexibility we are offering employees, means they are more willing to be flexible with us in terms of working outside normal hours if required, which is important in our type of work. The greater work life balance allows us to retain valuable and knowledgeable staff.

It has also helped support employees who have health conditions to manage these conditions and still be productive by being able to work at home on days when they may find visiting the office difficult.

From a personal point of view, agile working gives me a much greater work/life balance and flexibility which gives me several hours a day extra with my daughter that would otherwise be spent commuting every day. If agile working was not an option for me then I may not have returned to this job after maternity leave in favour of one which did offer it.

- Benchmarking across other Authorities with recruitment I have noticed organisations have recognised there is not a need to be in an office to deliver the services required. A lot of processes have moved to a digital way of working involving the public including banking, sending letters and documents, setting up accounts online and apps for shopping, paying bills and managing data. Authorities are offering a variety of agile working/hybrid working. Other authorities are advertising the importance and value of supporting employees to balance their home and work life and be able to work in the most efficient way. One off payments of £250 to help achieve a safe and suitable work space at home, support to work from abroad for up to a month a year where appropriate are some of the examples.

We should look at what the future holds for us, not just staff but how we engage with external stakeholders and meeting the needs of the Carbon Neutral target and what the public require from the Council. Car mileage has reduced significantly and air quality reports have shown improved rates across the borough. Staff all have different needs to temperature and working agile removes the problems faced with staff sitting at the same desks near windows etc. There is a lot of office space underutilised currently. Printing and posting of agendas could be done more agile by using a digital platform to access agendas. It's looking at services we could improve to make the whole experience more agile not just staff being agile

When I was new to this post during COVID-19 I found it difficult to learn or just ask a question, it felt very isolated. It has been recognised now that new staff would need to attend the office to learn and train from their team prior to working from home.

Training and work shadowing can prove quite difficult working from home. However, online training opportunities with external providers has been a massive advantage and has saved a lot of money on time and travel. The advantages of working from home benefit me by not rushing around to get to work, not sitting in traffic, and saving on parking. I can start working a lot earlier than I would be going into the office and can be more flexible if I have to attend an appointment near to home.