

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: STAFFING COMMITTEE
DATE: 23 JUNE 2021
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF TRANSFORMATION
AUTHOR: ANDREA HARVEY

SUBJECT: AGILE WORKING POLICY

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides Members with an overview of the Agile Working Policy that has been developed in anticipation of the Government lifting the current working from home restrictions. This policy has been developed in direct response to the feedback and lessons learned from how staff have worked during the Pandemic.

Recommended: That

[1] Members note the policy and endorse the new way of working.

Background

2. During the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Government issued a mandate that required staff to work from home if they were able to perform their work duties remotely. This impacted on a large majority of Fire staff roles and some operational managers.
3. In response to this the Service developed a Homeworking Guidance document to ensure the implications of working from home during the Pandemic period were considered and understood by staff. It also ensured that appropriate actions were taken to facilitate productive, safe and secure working from home. The Homeworking Guidance document is attached at to this report as Appendix A.
4. During summer 2020 the Service commissioned a survey which solicited views from staff about issues relating to their wellbeing and level of engagement during the Pandemic. The results of the survey highlighted that many of the staff that were working from home would like to continue with a similar arrangement once restrictions were lifted.
5. In anticipation of the country returning to a more normal state and in response to staff feedback, a new policy enabling staff to request a working from home arrangement has been developed. This is attached at *Appendix B*.

Information

6. In developing the Agile Working Policy a number of principles have been incorporated. The purpose of these principles is to ensure that the Service is able to retain a level of control and ensure that all working from home arrangements remain flexible and do not constitute a permanent change to an individual's terms and conditions of employment.
7. The key principles within the Policy include the following:
 - No working from home arrangement is permanent. All arrangements will remain temporary in nature and following an initial trial period, will be kept under review.
 - Staff will not be permitted to work from home for their full contracted hours. They will need to attend their normal work base for at least one day per week.
 - All requests require approval and are be subject to an assessment regarding the role, proposed working environment, connectivity, safety, security and equipment requirements.
 - All requests are subject to an agreement regarding how and how often the individual and the line manager will communicate and connect.
 - All agile working arrangements will be flexible and staff will be expected to prioritise the needs of the business and be prepared to return to the office as and when required to attend face to face meetings etc.
 - Whilst working from home staff will not be permitted to carry out caring duties for young children and/or for vulnerable/elderly adults.
8. The policy proposes that the Service will provide the necessary technology to facilitate a working from home arrangement. All equipment however, will remain the property of the Service and will be returned upon resignation/retirement from the organisation.
9. Office furniture will be provided by the individual and this will be subject to scrutiny as part of the agile working application. The policy does, however, give provision for supporting the purchase of furniture in either exceptional or hardship cases.

Financial Implications

10. During the lockdown the HMRC relaxed some of the rules associated with allowances and homeworking. This enabled CFRS to provide all staff working from home with a monthly allowance of £26 to cover additional heating, lighting

and electricity without it being classified by HMRC as a taxable benefit. We understand that this exemption will not continue beyond lockdown and all allowances relating to homeworking will become taxable.

11. With this in mind, and on the basis that all future agile working is voluntary coupled with the likelihood of savings in respect of commuting to and from work, the new policy does not provide an allowance for additional expenses incurred as a result of working from home.

Legal Implications

12. All employees (subject to eligibility) have the right to request a permanent flexible working arrangement such as reduced hours, compressed hours, term time working etc. Employers are required to follow the relevant employment legislation and the ACAS code in response to requests to make permanent contractual changes to working arrangements. This policy sits outside of this framework and is intended to be a standalone policy that is intended to facilitate non-contractual agile working arrangements.

Equality and Diversity Implications

13. An Equality Impact Assessment has been developed and no discriminatory elements have been identified within the policy. This is largely because decisions around agile working will revolve primarily around the suitability of the role for homeworking. It is likely however that because a high proportion of fire staff roles are occupied by females, that there will be more females than males working from home within CFRS.

Environmental Implications

14. An increase in homeworking will reduce commuter journeys by the Service's employees. It will also alter the way that offices are utilised. Both of these changes should, ultimately, lead to a reduction in emissions associated with the Service's activities.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE