

SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Meeting date: 22 May 2020

From: Executive Director – Corporate, Customer and Community Services and Executive Director – Economy and Environment

Ways of Working and Return to Workplaces

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 This report, and slides attached as Appendix 1, provides Scrutiny Management Board with an overview of the impact on the Council's ways of working during the coronavirus pandemic and resulting lockdown measures, and the work being undertaken to ensure employees and elected Members can return to workplaces safely as lockdown measures are lifted in a phased approach.

2.0 Issues for Scrutiny

2.1 To note the activity to date and consider the objectives and principles set out in the report and in the slides attached as Appendix 1.

3.0 Background

3.1 The significant impact of the coronavirus pandemic on ways of life and ways of working began to be felt in mid-March 2020. Particularly significant were the Government instructions in relation to the closure of businesses, public buildings and services, and the instruction to work from home if possible. It is also recognised that many of the most vulnerable people in Cumbria are 'shielding' which greatly impacts on life of residents, including some of our staff and Members.

3.2 An enormous shift in ways of working was achieved across the Council in the initial few days following the announcement of the 'lockdown measures', and work has continued in the 2 months since that point to respond flexibly to changing circumstances and to support the Council's workforce in adapting to the situation – both at work and at home.

3.3 Our workforce is diverse. Given the breadth of County Council services provided, the working arrangements have varied from those employees

continuing to work in offices, fire stations, care homes and highways depots to those who have been able to work at home.

- 3.4 A major proportion of staff moved to homeworking and the swift introduction on a large scale of technological and digital solutions to support this. The circumstances have also resulted in many frontline members of staff working in very difficult circumstances, and the redeployment of staff to support critical services. The high levels of innovation and flexibility demonstrated by staff has been vital to the Council being able to deliver critical services and support over the last few weeks.
- 3.5 The Council has also put in place a comprehensive health and wellbeing support package to support staff through this period, and it is recognised that this support is likely to be in place for a substantial amount of time as the country moves into phase 2 of the recovery strategy, with no certainty about timescales when future changes will be able to happen.
- 3.6 Members have also changed the way they work during this time with a move to homeworking and maximising the use of technological solutions available to carry out their work. Members have also adapted to different and new ways of engaging and supporting their communities.
- 3.7 This is not a short-term crisis. It is likely that COVID-19 will have long-term impacts on the way we deliver Council services and our ways of working. As with any crisis there are opportunities to capture new and better ways of doing things.
- 3.8 In taking this forward the Council is considering which of the new ways of working to hold on to and to embed and build on; the things that have been particularly challenging; and how to build on the understanding of the impact of these changes on different parts of the Council's workforce and services.
- 3.9 The presentation slides attached as Appendix 1 to this paper set out early work on the objectives and principles guiding this programme of work, the role of the Organisational Development Programme Board in promoting an organisation-wide approach, and the outline plans for engagement with staff, Members, Trade Unions, and other stakeholders.
- 3.10 As a starting point, employees who can work from home are being advised to continue to do so, in accordance with Government Guidance. When restrictions are gradually lifted some employees may be able to return to their workplace. Plans are underway to adapt our offices and buildings to ensure a safe return to the workplace and manage the number of employees working in a building at any one time.
- 3.11 The planning phase of the recovery is critical to the health, safety and wellbeing of staff, and in embedding effective ways of working that have been established over the last 2 months.

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 This early engagement with Scrutiny Members on the next phase of workforce planning is an important part of ensuring that the Council moves into the next phase of recovery with the right focus for the future.

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and

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13 May 2020

Appendices

Appendix 1 – presentation slides ‘Ways of Working and Return to the Workplace’

Previous Relevant Council or Executive Decisions [including Local Committees]

No previous relevant decisions.

Background Papers

No background papers

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