

Brighton & Hove City Council

Policy & Resources Committee

Agenda Item 146

Subject: Future Ways of Working

Date of meeting: 16 March 2023

Report of: Executive Director of Governance, People & Resources

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Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

1.1 The Future Ways of Working (FWOW) programme is in place to continue the development and implementation of new ways of working that best serve the needs of our customers as well as optimising the use of our office space, in particular using hybrid working to create efficiencies.

1.2 On 6th October 2022 P&R agreed £0.223m funding to further support hybrid working and the flexible use of office space. At that meeting a further report was requested to present to committee terms of reference for FWOW, the Working Asset Strategy, and the Customer Service Strategy.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Policy & Resources Committee:

2.2 Note the progress that has been made by the Future Ways of Working Programme.

2.3 Note the continued work to optimise the use of the council's office space and the 'Operational Accommodation Strategy' (see Appendix 2).

2.4 Approve the refreshed Customer Experience Strategy (see Appendix 3).

3. Context and background information

3.1 The Future Ways of Working (FWOW) programme ensured a joined-up approach to deliver significant changes to our ways of working during the pandemic and has continued to develop a model for hybrid working where there is flexibility in where and how work is done, including working at home, which is driven by service and customer needs.

3.2 The Terms of Reference (see Appendix 1) outline the purpose of the programme to establish a clear direction and model to bed-in new ways of working and to align the work of Property & Design, HR&OD, IT&D and Customer Experience teams.

- 3.3 The FWOV programme supports the Operational Accommodation Strategy (see Appendix 2) and related corporate property objectives approved in the Asset Member Board (AMB) includes:
- providing the right buildings in the right place and condition to meet future service delivery needs
 - deliver value for money property services and support the council modernisation
 - use our assets to help achieve a sustainable and carbon neutral city by 2030
- 3.4 The Operational Accommodation Strategy is a continuation of the successful forward-thinking twelve-year consolidation and rationalisation of the council's operational estate focusing on our office accommodation whilst exploring all opportunities for co-location with other services and public sector organisations, improving service delivery and customer experience. It has delivered significant achievements for the council:
- reduced our accommodation by over 60%
 - produced revenue savings of approx. £3-4m pa
 - reduced our carbon footprint by 22%
 - moved over 4000 staff
 - generated over £30m in capital receipts.
- 3.5 Phase 1 is predicated on the council's service led hybrid flexible model of working developed from the experience of changes to the way we work through the pandemic. Evidenced staff profiling has reduced the need for a desk centric way of working and created more space for activity led ways of working and different collaborative uses of space.
- 3.6 Combined with reduced occupancy levels at Bartholomew House and Hove Town Hall since the pandemic to approximately 18-20%, and the imperative need to generate savings to help the council's budget position Bartholomew House floors 3 and 4 in Spring 2023 are to be vacated, services re-located to Hove Town Hall in the main and the floors are to be leased and managed by a "flex operator" as serviced offices enabling a diverse range of tenants offering social value.
- 3.7 This proposal has been enabled through the FWOV programme and will make savings to contribute to the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- 3.8 Going forward, Phase 2 the longer-term Operational Accommodation Strategy will review our whole operational and office estate to ensure we are making best use of our assets as we continue to understand the future requirements of services for space post pandemic.

- 3.9 Services will be reviewed and consulted about changes, needs, demands, as these develop through the budget process over the years and will firm up principles to allow us to monitor the situation on an annual basis. This will align with the Customer Service strategy and future access to services across the city.
- 3.10 A 5–10-year strategy can be developed using asset management data to inform service delivery decisions and Property will act as the enabler to help service delivery changes and the way our operational buildings will be used in the future. The process will identify buildings that require investment and those that are surplus to requirement, potentially forming planned prioritised programmes of investment and disposals over a 5–10-year period.
- 3.11 The FWOV programme also supports the refreshed Customer Experience Strategy (see Appendix 3) which includes:
- our Customer Promise
 - the Customer Experience vision
 - our Customer Experience operating model
- 3.12 Customer services are being delivered with a revised operating model developed by the Customer Experience Steering Group based on learning from delivering services during Covid-19 which is needs based rather than preference based.
- 3.13 More customers became used to contacting us digitally during Covid-19. Digital contacts are more cost effective and therefore we have made significant improvements to our digital offer for example, 54% of our customers pre-Covid renewed their parking permit online which has now increased to 99.8%. We also know that proportionately fewer residents are digitally excluded in Brighton & Hove than in other areas of the country (ONS 2020 – those who have used the internet in last 3 months – for UK 92.1% and for Brighton & Hove 97.7%).
- 3.14 Face to face appointments which require a location are provided where digital and telephone channels are not appropriate to ensure support is in place for those customers that cannot access services in this way.
- 3.15 Going forward, the council will continue to develop approaches to improve customer experience for example, exploring community access points, and the development of hybrid working will be led by service changes and by ensuring customers are at the heart of everything we do.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 The FWOV programme ensures that decisions about workspace are taken at a corporate level, and also ensures that investment into re-designing offices takes into account the cross-cutting requirements of services to

ensure the efficient use of workspace is optimised for the benefit of customers.

- 4.2 An alternative option is to leave investment decisions about workspaces to individual directorates without corporate oversight and coordination. Whilst this model may allow individual services to meet some needs of customers, it is likely to be sub-optimal and would not enable the council to support customers in a joined-up way. An uncoordinated approach would also reduce opportunities to ensure the most efficient and value for money use of space.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 This programme continues to bring together the council's Customer Experience Programme, Accommodation Strategy, Our People Promise and Digital Programme, and our ways of working has been developed with extensive engagement with colleagues across the council including service leads, Trade Unions and Workers Forums.
- 5.2 The programme has engaged with Members via the Member Development & Support Group with site visits, focus groups and survey.
- 5.3 This programme has approached any uncertainty of the work environment, external factors (pandemic and economic), and organisational capacity by taking considered steps informed by stakeholder engagement (Appendix 4) and Future of Public Sector Office Joint Working Group (JWG) (Appendix 5).

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The programme takes an informed approach to improve the workplace offer which supports flexible working arrangements including hybrid working.
- 6.2 This is a joined-up approach during a period of uncertainty which increases the organisational capacity to deliver services and respond to changing needs and circumstances by providing a more flexible workplace and maintaining a valued flexible working offer to staff.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The Committee agreed to the programme expenditure on 06 October 2022 and to be funded from the council's Modernisation Fund. Phase 2, now under way, has been allocated £0.488m across 22/23 and 23/24

Name of finance officer consulted: Peter Francis.
Date consulted (27/02/23).

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 There are no legal implications arising directly as a result of this report.

Name of lawyer consulted: Alice Rowland.

Date consulted: 24/02/23

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 This programme supports flexible working arrangements including hybrid working using inclusive workplace design, tools, and technology.
- 9.2 To improve the workplaces and standard across the city and provide greater flexibility in how workplace space is used and access to technology.
- 9.3 Includes Customer Service hybrid interview rooms to provide flexibility in access and technology through digital inclusion and support of customers

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.1 Release and changes in civic offices provides the opportunity for equipment repair and reuse for example, furniture and equipment in other locations.
- 10.2 Opportunities for surplus/ non-standard furniture and equipment to enter the local circular economy.
- 10.3 Reciprocal arrangements with other regional public sector organisations to reduce staff travel distance and work journeys by using shared workplaces.

11. Other Implications

Social Value and procurement implications

- 11.1 Release of workplace spaces through more effective use can enable high social value projects through the provision of affordable space.
- 11.2 Vacated space could be used to establish 'Circular Economy Hubs' to temporarily store equipment and materials before being redistributed or refurbished, repaired, and reused.

Supporting Documentation

1. Appendices

- 1. Future Ways of Working Terms of Reference
- 2. Operational Accommodation Strategy
- 3. Customer Experience Service Strategy
- 4. Summary of FWOV engagement and feedback
- 5. Future of Public Sector Office Joint Working Group

