Scottish Borders COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
TUESDAY, 3RD OCTOBER, 2023

Please find attached the Report and Appendices in respect of Item 6 on the agenda for the above meeting

6.	**The Impact of Agile Working on Service Delivery** (Pages 3 - 92)	20 mins
	Consider report by Director – People, Performance and Change. (Copy attached.)	

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THE IMPACT OF AGILE WORKING ON SERVICE DELIVERY

Report by Director People Performance and Change

Executive Committee

3 October 2023

1   PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 **This report sets out:**

(a)   The Council's approach to agile working and the positive effect on standards of service delivery.

(b)   The background in relation to agile working and the benefits to the adoption of this way of working for the Council, employees and prospective employees. Our agile working approach has been developed over the past 15 years and evolved over that period. Whilst the report discusses some options in relation to our policy and approach to this, with the technology now in place, moving away from agile working is not considered a viable option given the challenges the Council faces in an increasingly competitive employment market.

2   RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 **I recommend that the Executive Committee: -**

(a)   Notes there is significant interest in more flexible forms of working, and agile working, is now an essential tool in attracting and retaining staff. Organisations who support flexible forms of working experience reduced employee turnover, increased employee engagement and improved rates of talent attraction. Agile working can also provide many other opportunities for the Council including reduced estate and facilities costs, improved employee wellbeing, diversity and inclusion as well as being more environmentally friendly.

(b)   Considers the mainly positive comparison in performance in 2019 and 2022 respectively across those Services utilising agile working arrangements. (Appendix 1)

(c)   Notes the adopted agile working principles and supports that are in place to provide a framework to support the effective operation and management of agile working. Our aim is to continue embedding an agile working model that gives our people greater flexibility in balancing their work and home lives. Whilst simultaneously supporting effective recruitment and retention and the health & wellbeing of our staff.

(d)   Recognise that we want to build a culture where our people are customer focused, feel trusted and empowered, and will have greater

freedom on how, where and when their work is delivered. Focus will be placed on outcomes as opposed solely to attendance at our offices. However, this level of flexibility, due to the nature of some roles, will not be achievable for all our people. Nevertheless, there will remain a commitment within the Future Operating Model to explore how a level of agile working can be built into roles across the organisation.

(e) Teams that can utilise agile working have engaged in co-designing their Team Agreements which describe how they will work. This includes when they are required to hold face to face team meetings, time with new colleagues and how they will collaborate. It is part of the HQ refresh plan to ensure there is the right collaborative and workspaces available for those days, so employees can book desks in the same location or arrange other meetings or collaborative events.

(f) Agrees that supporting agile working in the longer term will require more inclusive approaches to remote working, more training and support to workers on cybersecurity and increasing access to digital technologies and infrastructure as well as improving digital skills.

(g) Endorses the vision to nurture an empowered, resilient, and high performing workforce. A workforce which has the skills and equipment to work flexibly to deliver high quality services in an efficient, sustainable, and environmentally friendly way, now and in the future. Workplaces with modern, flexible spaces not only encourage collaboration across functional activity but also strengthen our corporate culture, increase engagement with our partners and support a better customer experience.

3   BACKGROUND

3.1   Agile working describes a type of flexible working where an employee can split their time between the workplace and remote working, normally in their own home but also other locations. It can consist of a one-off day, an informal or set pattern to work remotely or can be a temporary and adaptable measure to suit the needs of the business and/or the employee.

3.2   An agile working model may be structured in different ways depending on the individual organisation's needs. For example, it may involve:

o Workplace base preferred, with remote working when appropriate.
o Remote working with visits to the workplace when face-to-face meetings are needed.
o A set pattern of days in the workplace, such as 1 or 2 days per week or fortnight.

3.3   Agile working has become an increasingly competitive area for employers seeking to attract talent. The Council's flexible working offer is a key factor in recruitment and retention. Using data and analysis from the 2021 Census the ONS (Office for National Statistics) provided some useful insights - As Local Government struggles in many areas to recruit and retain staff it is worthwhile considering its overall perception as a progressive employer and what other industries, with which it competes

as a sector, offers to its' workforce. The data finds that the proportion of people hybrid working has risen in 2022 based on survey responses collected from the 27 April to 8 May 2022, when guidance to work from home because of the pandemic was no longer in place in the UK, 38% of working adults reported having worked from home at some point over the past seven days. Pre-pandemic this figure was just 12%. Before the pandemic, remote and agile working had been increasing gradually. Between January and December 2019, around 1 in 10 (12%) of the of the UK workforce had worked at least one day from home in the previous week and around 1 in 20 (5%) reported working from home.

3.4   Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) are specialists in local authority frontline services and operate one of the UK's largest research programmes in local government policy. Their survey and results from over 50 local authorities provides a robust assessment of other councils' approaches to and experiences of agile working, from which the Council has tested its agile working, principles, and support in place to provide a framework for the effective operation and management of agile working. https://apse.org.uk/index.cfm/apse/members-area/briefings/2022/22-34-local-government-survey-post-covid-return-to-office-working/

3.5   Research indicates that workers perceive both benefits and disadvantages to agile working. Benefits of remote and agile working for staff include increased wellbeing, self-reported productivity gains, work satisfaction, reduced work-life conflict, new ways to collaborate and more inclusive ways of working using technology. Challenges can include increased work intensity, longer working hours, decreased social interactions and an inability to disconnect from work.

3.6   Research indicates that organisations perceive both benefits and disadvantages to flexible working. Benefits of remote and agile working for organisations can include increased staff wellbeing, reduced overhead costs, productivity gains, reduced sickness absence levels and more efficient allocation of resource. Challenges can include reduced mental wellbeing of staff, and difficulties in staff interaction, collaboration, engagement, and connection.

PDF
flexible-working-les
sons-from-pandemic

PDF
flexible-working-th
e-business-case-apr

3.7   Agile working allows the current talent pool to expand as it makes jobs accessible to a higher number of people, irrespective of where they live. This is an essential tool to improve our recruitment and retention challenges in some areas.

3.8   The Council employs 5,100 staff over a wide range of different services. Most of our staff are working in front line customer facing roles such as Adult Social Care, Waste Collection and Education. Around 1200 roles,

traditionally those that were office based, are currently suited to agile working.

3.9   The Council first adopted a flexible working policy in 2007. Whilst the terminology has subsequently changed, it was similar to agile working in recognising that developing technology meant that some jobs could be undertaken at home, at different work locations and much more flexibly. However, before the COVID-19 pandemic, agile working and working from home regularly was still largely the exception in many services. For many staff working from home was often only utilised to respond to e-mails or to undertake work that required some focused time or prolonged concentration. The technology available at that time was better suited for this type of work but not conducive for meetings or collaborative work. The pandemic and lockdown in March 2020 changed all that and the Council introduced Microsoft Teams in 2020 to successfully facilitate effective remote working.

3.10   Like many organisations, the Council had significant numbers of staff working from home in accordance with the lockdown measures in place. Many staff took on different roles to support our communities such as staffing local hubs or working within our Care Homes. Microsoft Teams was used for communication and meetings at all levels. The Council also implemented solutions to make other business critical systems accessible for staff working at home which, previously, had not been possible. Due to people and technology working effectively together, we ensured that we both maintained and supported the delivery of essential services together in response to the pandemic. Backed with the right investment in working practices, technology, behaviours, and workspace this effectively endorsed the concept of agile working. For some staff work is no longer the place we go, work is what we do, what we achieve and the outcomes we deliver. (Appendix 1)

3.11   Across the Council, teams and services have used the learning from working in this way and particularly the positive changes to change how they work post-pandemic. As a result, our agile working principles have evolved, and been co-designed with services and our people. This provides the Council with a level of resilience we did not have before, and we are now able to maintain business continuity in any emergency such as storm Arwen.

3.12   Working through the Covid-19 pandemic was challenging; with many being initially reluctant to working from home however, significant numbers of our workforce have embraced a different way of working. This was out of necessity rather than choice, but it has accelerated the journey we had started already. Whilst delivering better outcomes is our primary focus this way of working also brings benefits and opportunities for individuals, to work more flexibly in a way and at a pace we could not have imagined. It has provided the opportunity to change the way we work forever. This includes the ability for some employees to work remotely or from home and other locations, utilising technology more effectively.

3.13 There has been a clear indication from our staff through surveys and other forums that they welcome the idea of greater flexibility in working locations that technology enables, but we do not want to lose all the social, shared learning and collaboration benefits that working alongside colleagues brings.

3.14 Agile working places new demands on our managers and staff. In response to this, we continually review existing learning and development programmes and activities, and where appropriate create new ones to ensure new ways of working and changes to culture are fully supported. When doing so, consideration is given to the most efficient and sustainable mode of delivery, whether face to face, virtually or by eLearning. We have also continued to invest in the wellbeing of staff ensuring we provide a wide range of healthcare benefits that include a variety of mental health supports.

3.15 Onboarding new team members was challenging during the pandemic and our induction process has been refined to ensure new staff working in an agile model get face to face time with colleagues and in some cases such as MA's a continuous programme of time with colleagues to ensure they are effectively supported.

3.16 The Council has faced many of the same challenges as many other employers in managing the move to agile working post pandemic and we adopted the following principles:

- We want to offer our employees a degree of personal choice about where they work provided business/service needs continue to be met.
- It is recognised most roles within the Council are not suitable for agile working, but we should explore other opportunities for flexible working for front line staff.
- It is our intention to retain regular face-to-face contact and social interaction amongst colleagues. The creation of collaborative spaces in HQ and locality offices and zoned team areas are key to encouraging staff to come into the office environment.
- Employees working as part of an agile working arrangement may be required to work in an office or attend team or service meetings at the request of their manager as and when required to meet business requirements.
- We have chosen not to prescribe a set or average number of days or hours by which employees must work from an office as part of an agile working arrangement. To date we have implemented Team agreements where working arrangements are agreed by managers and team members based on job and collaboration requirements.
- The Council is not imposing agile working (or a requirement to work at home) on employees. Any employee that wishes to work in a Council building or workplace can do so.
- If there are any concerns about efficiency, effectiveness or safety of agile working arrangements, the Council Management Team will

have the final determination on work location and working arrangements.

- The Council's obligations to consider reasonable adjustments continues to apply to staff working in an agile model.
- The Health and Wellbeing of our workforce is paramount. We recognise the benefits that agile working can bring in terms of flexibility and work life balance for employees. However, there can be potential risks arising from sustained periods of homeworking or employees feeling that they should always be available or accessible.

Benefits

3.17   There are huge benefits for both employees and the Council, greater work life balance, reduced travel time, reduced carbon emissions, reduction in travel costs and time, more flexibility within the working day and greater job autonomy. Trusting people to do the right thing and empowering them to choose where and when to work most effectively - focusing more on the outcomes achieved rather than simply the time spent working in the office (presenteeism) adds to improved job satisfaction which in turn has a positive effect on staff retention.

3.18   The draft Scottish Government Scotland's Climate Change Plan due for publication in December 2023 encourages businesses to focus particularly on decarbonising both the commute to work and journeys made for work purposes. There is an objective in the Plan to improve digital alternatives to travel.

3.19   It is now standard for the offer of agile working to be included within job adverts and so it is important that the Council's approach stands up in the marketplace and provides us with the best opportunity to attract and retain talent. It will also mean that we can attract employees from outside of the area who may not have otherwise considered Scottish Borders for employment opportunities and geographically it supports local staff who live in a rural area where there is little transport, to access work in their community.

Support to managers and employees

3.21   As set out above agile Working has brought some challenges and benefits. In addition to the policy framework, we have a wide range of support in place including:

- o   An extensive e-learning suite to assist and support staff with making the most of technology to wellbeing has been developed.

o Team sessions facilitated by HR Business Partners to work with managers and employees to work through how agile would work best for their teams.

o Using Teams to reach a far wider audience for Senior Manager Meetings and meet your director drop-in sessions. Being on Teams enables these events to include a far higher number of participants.

o Additional wellbeing and healthcare support to staff.

3.22 The approach we have taken to implementing agile and remote working and providing support to staff and managers aligns with the guidance issued by the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development which highlights the importance of engagement and some co-design.

RELEVANT RISKS

3.22 One of the risks from agile working may be from a perceived loss of control by the employer or concerns about a reduction in productivity. However, most employers have reported a positive impact from agile working and the mutual benefits it can bring. (Appendix 1)

3.23 Association for Public Service Excellence are (APSE) a specialist in local authority frontline services and operates one of the UK's largest research programmes in local government policy. Their survey and results from over 50 local authorities provides a robust assessment of other councils' approaches to and experiences of agile working which evidenced a positive impact on productivity.

3.24 Each service has its own performance indicators down to team and individual level. There is no evidence that performance within services has been negatively impacted by agile working and feedback from managers and staff is positive.

3.25 The Council has been explicit within the principles developed that if there are any concerns about the efficiency, effectiveness, or safety of agile working arrangements, the Council Management Team will have the final determination on work location and working arrangements.

4 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 **Financial**
The use of Teams for online meetings has contributed to a significant reduction in business mileage across the Council.

4.2 **Risk and Mitigations**

4.3 **Integrated Impact Assessment**
(a) An IIA (Integrated Impact Assessment)has been completed – it is not anticipated that the proposals recommended will of themselves eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity between people who share a characteristic (age, disability, gender re-assignment,

trans/transgender identity, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race groups, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation) and those who do not; and foster good relations between people who share a characteristic and those who do not. However, agile working may enhance our ability to recruit and retain those who identify as belonging to an equality group.

4.4 **Sustainable Development Goals**

Agile working assists staff to improve their carbon footprint and may provide opportunities to reduce consumption and costs as well as opportunities to reduce the overall property footprint of the Council's estate.

4.5 **Climate Change**

Agile working reduces the amount of travel time and carbon emissions from business miles.

4.6 **Rural Proofing**

The ability to agile work may enable people living in rural areas that have limited access to public transport to take up employment opportunities that would not have been possible in the past due to the need to travel to a work location.

4.7 **Data Protection Impact Statement**

There are no personal data implications arising from the proposals contained in this report.

4.8 **Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation**

No changes are required to either the Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation because of the proposals in this report.

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 The Director of Finance and Procurement, the Director of Corporate Governance, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and any comments received have been included in the report.

Approved by

Clair Hepburn
Director People Performance and Change

Author(s)

Name	Designation and Contact Number
Clair Hepburn	Director People Performance and Change

Background Papers: https://apse.org.uk/index.cfm/apse/members-area/briefings/2022/22-34-local-government-survey-post-covid-return-to-office-working/

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Previous Minute Reference: Nil

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Clair Hepburn can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

Contact us at Clair Hepburn, Scottish Borders Council, Council Headquarters, Newtown St. Boswells, Melrose, TD6 0SA. Tel. 01835 826617 Email: chepburn@scotborders.gov.uk

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SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

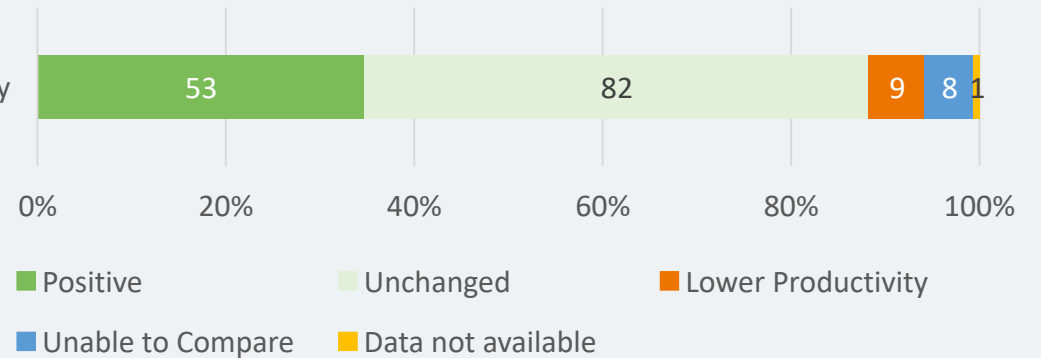# The Impact of Agile Working on Service Delivery

Scottish Borders COUNCIL

Summary

SBC's current productivity compared to the productivity before the COVID-19 pandemic is 88% positive or unchanged. Of the 153 outputs reported, 53 of them are showing a positive change. There were 82 outputs where productivity remained unchanged and only 9 outputs had a lower rate of productivity. The 9 areas requiring ongoing focus for improvement are not attributed to agile working but other factors. There were 8 outputs where pre and post COVID figures could not be compared and 1 where no data was available.

Productivity Summary

53		82		9	8 1

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

- Positive
- Unchanged
- Lower Productivity
- Unable to Compare
- Data not available

● Positive	There has been a notable improvement, or the data indicates a particularly positive position
No Change	There has been no significant change
● Lower Productivity Rate	There has been a reduction in performance, or the data suggests a position that we will be focusing on for improvement
Unable to Compare	The data recorded for the 2 financial years has changed parameters or is only available for one year
No Data	No data available for comparison

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FINANCE

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity	2022/23 Productivity	Productivity Change
Number of Invoices processed	82,857	93,807	🟢
%age of invoices paid within 30 days	90%	94%	🟢
% of payments made electronically	98%	100%	🟢
Number of non invoice payments	24,584	57,973	🟢
Supplier records created	1,507	1,499	No Change
Quarterly Revenue Monitoring	4	4	No Change
Quarterly Capital Monitoring	4	4	No Change
Quarterly Balances	4	4	No Change
Annual accounts process	1	1	No Change
Common Good Fund reporting	4	4	No Change
Pension Fund Committee	4	4	No Change
Various annual report (eg Procurement annual report, Procurement Strategy, debt write off report)	1	1	No Change
Financial Plan	1	1	No Change
LFR - Capital Return	1	1	No Change

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity	2022/23 Productivity	Productivity Change
Returns (Various)	16	16	No Change
Council Tax leaflet	1	1	No Change
Grant Claims (various)	17	14	No Change
DSM Statements	2	2	No Change
Whole of Government Accounts	2	2	No Change
VAT Return	12	12	No Change
Bank Income			
Daily files input	Every working day	Every working day	No Change
% of income posted to ledger	100%	100%	No Change
Daily Banking	Every working day	Every working day	No Change
Payments	532	702	🟢
Bank Reconciliation	12	12	No Change
Sundry Debtors Write Off Reports	2	2	No Change
Sundry Debt Collection	Privacy level has increased from an open plan office to home but no change to productivity levels		No Change

Scottish Borders COUNCIL

RETURNS

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity	2022/23 Productivity	Productivity Change
APSE (Catering)	1	1	No Change
NDR (provisional, mid-year, notified)	3	3	No Change
Council Tax			
CTRR	2	2	No Change
CT Base	1	1	No Change
CTAS	1	1	No Change
Housing Benefit Subsidy	3	3	No Change
CIPFA (Cultural Services)	1	1	No Change
Cost of Collection (CT, NDR)	2	2	No Change
Tax Returns for Subsidiaries	2	2	No Change
Returns (Various) TOTAL	**16**	**16**	No Change

HR

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity		2022/23 Productivity		Productivity Change
	Occurrence	Completed	Occurrence	Completed	
No of Hearings	82	82	58	58	No Change
Formal Disciplinary Cases	38	38	27	27	No Change
Formal Attendance Cases	33	33	24	24	No Change
No of Investigations	10	10	28	28	
No of Grievances	10	10	7	7	No Change
No of Appeals	1	1	1	1	No Change
Team Meetings	12	12	50	50	No Change
HR Cases - Recording of	886	886	1131	1131	No Change
Processing Occupational Health Referrals	No Data	No Data	236	236	Unable to compare
Special Paid Leave Processes/Meetings	15	15	15	15	No Change
Staff 1:1's	8 x 8 persons	8 x 8 persons	10 x 8 persons	10 x 8 persons	No Change
Staff Appraisals	8	8	8	8	No Change
Redundancy Consultations	9	9	2	2	No Change
No of active e learners No of in person training provided		1942 558		4759 432	●

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HRSS Payroll & Recruitment

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity	2022/23 Productivity	Productivity Change
*SBC Employees and Members	64,688	64,611	No Change
*Pensioners	41,890	46,918	●
Election Staff	653	328	No Change

* This is the total number of salaries/pensions processed – the completion rate remains at 100%

*

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity	2022/23 Productivity	Productivity Change
Number of Vacancies Advertised	843	1143	●

This is the total number of vacancies advertised which shows a significant upturn in demand/successfully advertised. Previous backlogs have been addressed.

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MILEAGE

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity	2022/23 Productivity	Productivity Change
SBC Employee Mileage (miles) - *staff travel policy and pool cars introduced before 2019 had a significant impact on overall staff miles travelled*	1,458,521.13	1,346,623.97	●
SBC Employee Mileage (cost)	£653,652.84	£604,990.20	●
SBC Elected Member Milage (miles)	99,802.50	48,365.29	●

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STAFF SURVEY

General Observations from Data
- Overwhelmingly positive responses overall – 866 total received so far
- Very positive about working for SBC
- Strong awareness of role and contributions to SBC's strategic aims
- Strong agreement of learning and development culture
- Exceptionally high positivity on wellbeing and health, with caveat about workload.
- Very positive about agile/ remote working
- Significant positives around flexibility and work/life balance. Some negatives about isolation and loss of interaction with team.

Working Environment
- Strong positivity about tools to do job
- Very high positivity about support to work in hybrid & flexible way
- Comments about important workplace option for collaboration, team integration and onboarding new colleagues
- Hybrid working viewed as an aid to retention/recruitment
- Negative comments about flexible/hybrid working appear to correlate with staff who are not able to work in an agile manner

Customer Advice & Support

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity	2022/23 Productivity	Productivity Change
Number of calls to 0300 100 1800	113573	116875	No Change
Number of calls to Homeless	14971	9376	No Change
Number of calls to SW duty hub	8436	9708	No Change
0300 100 1800 average abandonment rate – *CASS aware of issues which are due to significant recruitment difficulties*	0.1523	0.2395	🟠
Homeless calls average abandonment rate	0.1252	0.0497	No Change
SW duty average abandonment rate	0.1396	0.125	No Change
Community Care Grants - Applications awarded	446	663	🟢
Crisis Grants - Applications awarded	1526	1976	🟢
Number of DHP applications receieved	1010	1116	No Change
Blue Badges - Applications awarded	2347	2676	No Change
Council Tax - Total % of DD payers	0.7641	0.733	No Change
Council Tax - In year collection	0.9662	0.9657	No Change
Number of Council Tax Reminders issued (CY)	16212	14375	No Change
Number of Council Tax Reminders issued (PY)	2908	2390	No Change
% of new claims processed (HB/CTR)	100% (4027)	100% (3478)	No Change

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity	2022/23 Productivity	Productivity Change
Number of changes processed (HB/CTR)	50331	47827	No Change
Number of Council Tax processes completed	48732	45321	No Change
Number of HB/CTR processes completed	44382	38466	No Change
Number of NDR processes completed	4218	9202	No Change
Number of letters issued Print and Post	1145	3273	No Change
Number of pages scanned into Civica – *variation down to more automation and digital services*	102487	45490	🟢
% of online interactions logged (CRM)	0.026	0.472	No Change
Number of HB/CTAX/NDR letters issued (Civica)	70808	64571	No Change
HQ Opening Hours for public – *policy change during COVID but increased online access*	Mon - Fri	Mon -Thu	🟠

Important to note that nearly all staff in CASS worked in Area Offices or Contact Centres prior to the pandemic. They continue to work either in those sites or at home on a hybrid basis. One of the key changes has been a reduction in opening hours in relation to the face to face enquiry points but this is due to decreased demand/footfall and increased digital services.

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BUSINESS SUPPORT

It is not possible to determine specific productivity info across Business Support. However, the attached information demonstrates significant changes to more automated and digital solutions which will allow for higher productivity and efficiency gains overall. There is no indication of any downturn in actual productivity.

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity	2022/23 Productivity	Productivity Change
Locality other Offices			
Number of Corporate Appointee's (Community)	82	91	No Change
Corporate Appointee (Cash transactions)			
% of Cash Transactions	100%	0%	●
% of electronic Transaction/ All Pay cards	0%	100%	●
% of SW section payments made cash /cheque	100%	0%	●
% of SW section payments made Electronically /All Pay	0%	100%	●

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity	2022/23 Productivity	Productivity Change
SW Meeting Facilitated in person			
% of out of PPU meetings minuted in person	100%	51%	●
% of out of PPU Authority meetings minuted Electronically via teams/OWL/recording	0%	100%	●
Resources (foster Payments, Carers payments, Adoption etc)			
Payments made electronically via Mosaic & BW?	0%	100%	●

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BUSINESS SUPPORT cont...

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity	2022/23 Productivity	Productivity Change
Mail			
% of staff time spent on mail handling for I&E at HQ (mostly done electronically)	100%	40%	●
Volume of physical Planning Neighbourhood letters issued (mostly done electronically)	707	62	●
Mail HQ sent out Print to post (ie. electronically generated mail)			
Overall Number of users Print to post	9	227	●
Overall Number of Teams Print to post	1	42	●
Overall Volume of Mail to post	7260	50839	●
Outwith HQ Number of users Print to post (included in overall total)	0	116	●
Outwith HQ Number of Teams Print to post (included in overall total)	0	16	●
Outwith HQ Volume of Mail to post (included in overall total)	0	32367	●
Trade Waste			
Approx Volume of Sales Invoices input to Business World at contract renewal	4500	1700	●
Value of cheques received for payment in advance of invoice	£250000	£0	●

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity	2022/23 Productivity	Productivity Change
School Enrolments			
No of Enrolments processed	No Data	4000	Unable to compare
% of Electronic Enrolments processed	0%	100%	●
% of Paper Enrolments processed	100%	0%	●
% School Placing Requests Processed	100% (328)	100% (272)	No Change
% of Electronic Enrolments processed	0%	100%	●
% of Paper Enrolments processed	100%	0%	●
Educational Maintenance Allowance Payments			●
Number of application with payments made over a year	306	376	●
Value of Payments made over a year	£236,120	£238,680	No Change
% paper applications	100%	0%	●
% Electronic application	0%	100%	●

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BUSINESS SUPPORT cont...

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity	2022/23 Productivity	Productivity Change
Schools			
Cash payments in schools	45%	5%	●
% of Cash Transactions	100%	5%	●
% of electronic Transaction/ All Pay cards	55%	95%	●
Volume of primary school catering orders received in HQ for printing off and manually keying into BW	4212	0	●
School Lets			
School Let bookings taken in paper format	100%	0	●
School let bookings taken through electronic format	0	100%	●
Supply Teacher Staff Timesheets			
% claimed using paper timesheets	100%	5%	●
% now claimed through Business World	0	95%	●
Parks & Environment			
% of 139 playpark inspections sheets issued in paper format	100%	0%	●
Petty Cash Imprests			
Reduction of HQ petty cash imprests	3	2	No Change

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity	2022/23 Productivity	Productivity Change
Langlee Recycle Centre (Roads Aggregates Yard-incoming/outgoing material)			
Volume of paper tickets received in HQ and manually entered on a spreadsheet prior to invoicing or journal	3268	0	●
Signshop (Sign Manufacture & Erection packs)			
Printed versions (packs) of Works Order, Sign Design, CDM Safety Documents, Location Plan, PU's (up to 6 drawings)	160 packs	0	●
Credit Card Spend			
Volume of transactions printed in preparation for Director authorisation, all documents scanned as back up for journal submission - including Purchase Authorisation Form, Cardholder Reconciliation Statement and appropriate payment transaction back up. All paperwork saved in lever arch files	664	0	●

Scottish Borders COUNCIL

EDUCATION

Service Feedback

It is not possible to demonstrate any productivity changes as such in education, although performance information suggests that there has been no detrimental effect across Scottish Borders Council

- More frequent connection with teams as meeting via Microsoft Teams is more flexible in bringing a team together whilst fitting in meetings around visits to schools

- Colleagues report greater productivity and ability to focus due to removal of interruptions at desk in open office

- Visits to schools not cut short by need to return to office for meetings – visit can be full day with any essential Microsoft Teams calls being able to be done from site

- Coming together more purposeful and focused

- Opportunity to work in schools or Inspire Learning favoured over office at e.g. HQ and this is used effectively

- Flexibility of supporting events and activity outwith office hours from good use of agile approaches and less occurrence of having to leave work early to travel to evening events

Scottish Borders COUNCIL

ASSESSORS

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity	2022/23 Productivity	Productivity Change
New entries to Council Tax Valuation List	380	388	No Change
Valuation amendments to Valuation Roll	472	472	No Change
Additions to Register of Electors – **2019/20 appears to be a particularly high year. However, no productivity change as 100% of all additions and deletions processed**	8982	8161	No Change
Deletions from Register of Electors	7608	7769	No Change

Scottish Borders COUNCIL

FOIs

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity	2022/23 Productivity	Productivity Change
Number of FOIs Received	1254	1333	No Change
Number of FOIs completed	1271	1327	●
*Percentage of FOIs completed	101.3%	99.5%	No Change

*A slight difference has occurred because of the timings of FOIs being received and completed in different years. There has been no discernible downturn in productivity

COMMITTEE SERVICES

Service Feedback

- Council committees were cancelled from March to July 2020 and then proceeded from August 2020 online and livestreamed to the public

- From August 2022 onwards, blended meetings came in for some meetings e.g. Council, Executive

- Where there are blended meetings, one of the Democratic Services Officer will always be in attendance in the room

- Processes have been adapted for remote working but the delivery of committee business has not changed due to home working

- When the Democratic Services team are working from home they are available to Councillors and the public as usual through phone and email and come into HQ as necessary

Scottish Borders COUNCIL

Audit and Risk

Service Feedback

- Post pandemic Audit and Risk staff at all levels are now able to engage in national forums for risk management, internal audit, and counter fraud. Not only does this avoid the time and cost of travel to participate and gain learning and development from such forums, it provides a useful professional network for staff working in specialist support services in SBC

- There has been no impairment to the independence or objectivity of the Internal Audit function arising from the change to remote working, the change in approach to some assurance work, or from consultancy work during the year

The Internal Audit Annual Plans each year are very different so unable to compare productivity year on year. However. the staff within Audit & Risk feedback positively on the benefits of home working in particular no interruptions from office 'chat' or people popping up to your desk. This is particularly important when doing background research to plan audit engagements and when writing reports as both of those aspects require enhanced levels of concentration.

Scottish Borders COUNCIL

PLANNING

Key Output	2019/20 Productivity		2022/23 Productivity		Productivity Change
	Decisions	Av timescale (weeks)	Decisions	Av timescale (weeks)	
Major developments	1	12.9	1	33.7	●
Local developments (non-householder)	272	8	223	9.6	●
Local: less than 2 months	208	6.3	No Data	6.4	No Change
Local: more than 2 months	64	13.4	No Data	17.3	●
Householder developments	325	6.2	294	6.9	No Change
Local: less than 2 months	298	5.8	No Data	6.1	No Change
Local: more than 2 months	27	10.6	No Data	13	●
Housing Developments	No Data	No Data	33	16.9	Unable to compare
Major	n/a	n/a	0	n/a	Unable to compare
Local housing developments	51	11.4	33	16.9	●
Local: less than 2 months	23	7	No Data	7	No Change
Local: more than 2 months	28	15.1	No Data	25.1	●
Business and Industry	No Data	No Data	14	7.2	Unable to compare
Major	n/a	n/a	0	n/a	Unable to compare
Local business and industry developments	45	6.7	14	7.2	●
Local: less than 2 months	42	6.4	No Data	6.2	No Change
Local: more than 2 months	3	11.4	No Data	9.7	No Change
EIA Developments	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	No Data
*Other Consents	152	6	124	7	No Change
**Planning/legal agreements	No Data	0	No Data	No Data	Unable to compare
Major: average time	0	0	1	33.7	Unable to compare
Local: average time	7	21.1	9	21	No Change

* Consents and certificates: Listed buildings and Conservation area consents, Control of Advertisement consents, Hazardous Substances consents, Established Use Certificates, certificates of lawfulness of existing use or development, notification on overhead electricity lines, notifications and directions under GPDO Parts 6 & & relating to agricultural and forestry development and applications for prior approval by Coal Authority or licensed operator under classes 60 & 62 of the GPDO.

** Legal obligations associated with a planning permission; concluded under section 75 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 or section 69 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973

Scottish Borders COUNCIL

IT Client Team

Service Feedback

The IT Client Team is a supporting service therefore tt is not possible to demonstrate any productivity changes as such, although performance information suggests that there has been no detrimental effect whilst supporting colleagues across Scottish Borders Council

- The IT Client Team is working agilely and on site to support team members and colleagues when required

- The number of meetings and site visits has increased post Covid with technology enabling colleagues to work with both internal and external stakeholders without the requirement to travel long distances

- As well as weekly online meetings, the team also meets in person to perform more focused work on a regular basis, utilising the collaborative capabilities within the Microsoft Teams suite has resulted in increased productivity and improved responsiveness

- In addition to regular online Teams meeting with CGI colleagues, the team meets fortnightly with colleagues at the CGI building in Tweedbank to discuss both service and transformation activities

Adult Social Care

Service feedback

99% of Adult Social Care staff work directly at the point of care i.e. Care Homes, Care at Home, Learning Disability Day Services and the Community Equipment and Alarms Services who are all working as per pre COVID.

In terms of ASC Senior Management it is not possible to provide quantitative data for Adult Social Care. However, performance information suggests an increase in productivity, with no detrimental impact on Scottish Borders Council

Reduced travel time results in increased opportunity to meet with colleagues across all Adult Social Care Services more frequently with less planning involved.

• Reduced mileage
• Increased productivity
• Less distraction and ability to focus compared to working in an open office working environment
• Increased quality of meetings due to visits to services not being cut short by need to return to office for meetings – visits can be full day with any essential MS Teams calls able to be done onsite
• Improved remote access to files, resulting in assurance/audits being done more efficiently without distraction of being on site.
• More responsive to service demand, with flexibility to respond to critical situations via MS Teams compared to travelling to the service concerned
• Increase in number of projects underway in Adult Social Care
• Creation of Adult Social Care Programme board
• Creation of Adult Social Care Performance board
• Creation of Adult Social Care Governance meetings
• Creation of Adult Social Care Operational Delivery Oversight Group
• Face to face meetings are more meaningful as they don't take place as often
• Improved responsiveness to FOI's/complaints due to reduced travel around services
• Colleagues are more flexible when working from home; logging on earlier and logging off later due to reduced travel time

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
Team Arrangements

TEAM SUMMARY

I&E	
Engineering/Roads & Open Spaces	• Regular in person meetings and on site (weekly & fortnightly respectively) • Onboarding in person induction programme • Agile working at other times
Planning	• Team meets in person either once or twice per month • Roads Planning – in office once a week • Left to individual at other times • In favour of being able to sit with team if come in • Onboarding in person induction programme
Estates	• 3 weekly in person team meetings and team managers in once per week • Otherwise flexible • Onboarding in person induction programme
Soft Facilities	• Fortnightly co-ordinators' meeting face to face • Otherwise a mix • Onboarding in person induction programme
Major Projects	• All flexible working • Onboarding in person induction programme
Parks/Environment	• Weekly team meetings which are face to face once a month • Onboarding in person induction programme
Roads/Fleet/SB Contracts/Asset Management	• Asset/ Network/ Street Lighting largely working remotely • Onboarding in person induction programme
Roads/SB Contracts	• managers working remotely • Onboarding in person induction programme

TEAM SUMMARY

Resilient Communities	
BS HQ Operations	• Monthly in person team meetings • Other meetings on Teams • Onboarding in person induction programme
CASS – Benefits	• Onboarding in person induction programme • Otherwise can work remotely
CASS – Bus Support	• Requirement for some staff in office • Otherwise can work remotely • Onboarding in person induction programme
CASS – Business Systems	• Can work remotely • Onboarding in person induction programme
CASS Care Resource Team	• Onboarding in person induction programme • Otherwise can work remotely
CASS Development Team	• Onboarding in person induction programme • Can work remotely
CASS – Operations	• Contact Centres require on site presence • Onboarding in person induction programme • Otherwise can work remotely
Registrars	• Registration Offices require on site presence • Onboarding in person induction programme • Otherwise can work remotely

TEAM SUMMARY

Social Work	
Children & Families	• On site, ranging from 80-20 for Newly Qualified Social Workers to 50-50 • Onboarding in person induction programme • Group Manager/Chief Officer don't require as much time in office
Justice	• Onboarding in person induction programme • On site 3 days per week, with UPW having to be in person
Adult SW	• On site 2 days per week • Onboarding in person induction programme
Emergency Duty Team	• On site office based, Team Leader works from home
Public Protection	• In person team meeting every 6-8 weeks • Supervision on Teams • Onboarding in person induction programme
Mental Health	• Team meetings in person • Duty Officer on site • Onboarding in person induction programme
Adult Social Care – Service Managers	• On site twice per week as a minimum • Onboarding in person induction programme • Meetings are predominantly Teams • Monthly 1-1s face to face

Scottish Borders COUNCIL

TEAM SUMMARY

Business Partners	
IT Business Partners	• In person team meeting every 6 weeks • Onboarding in person induction programme • Otherwise Teams
HR Business Partners	• In person team meeting every 2 months • Onboarding in person • Otherwise Teams

Communities & Partnerships	• Weekly in person team meeting • Otherwise Teams meetings • Onboarding in person induction programme • Largely working in communities

Finance & Procurement	• Predominantly Teams for meetings • In person workshops • Onboarding in person induction programme

Emergency Planning	• Regular on site working • Onboarding in person induction programme

Systems Admin	• Corporate/People largely remote • Regular workshops in person • Onboarding in person induction programme

Education	• expectation is 2-3 days pw in education sites but are using Teams effectively for meetings • Onboarding in person induction programme

Scottish Borders COUNCIL

HQ DESK BOOKINGS

Desk Booking Overview
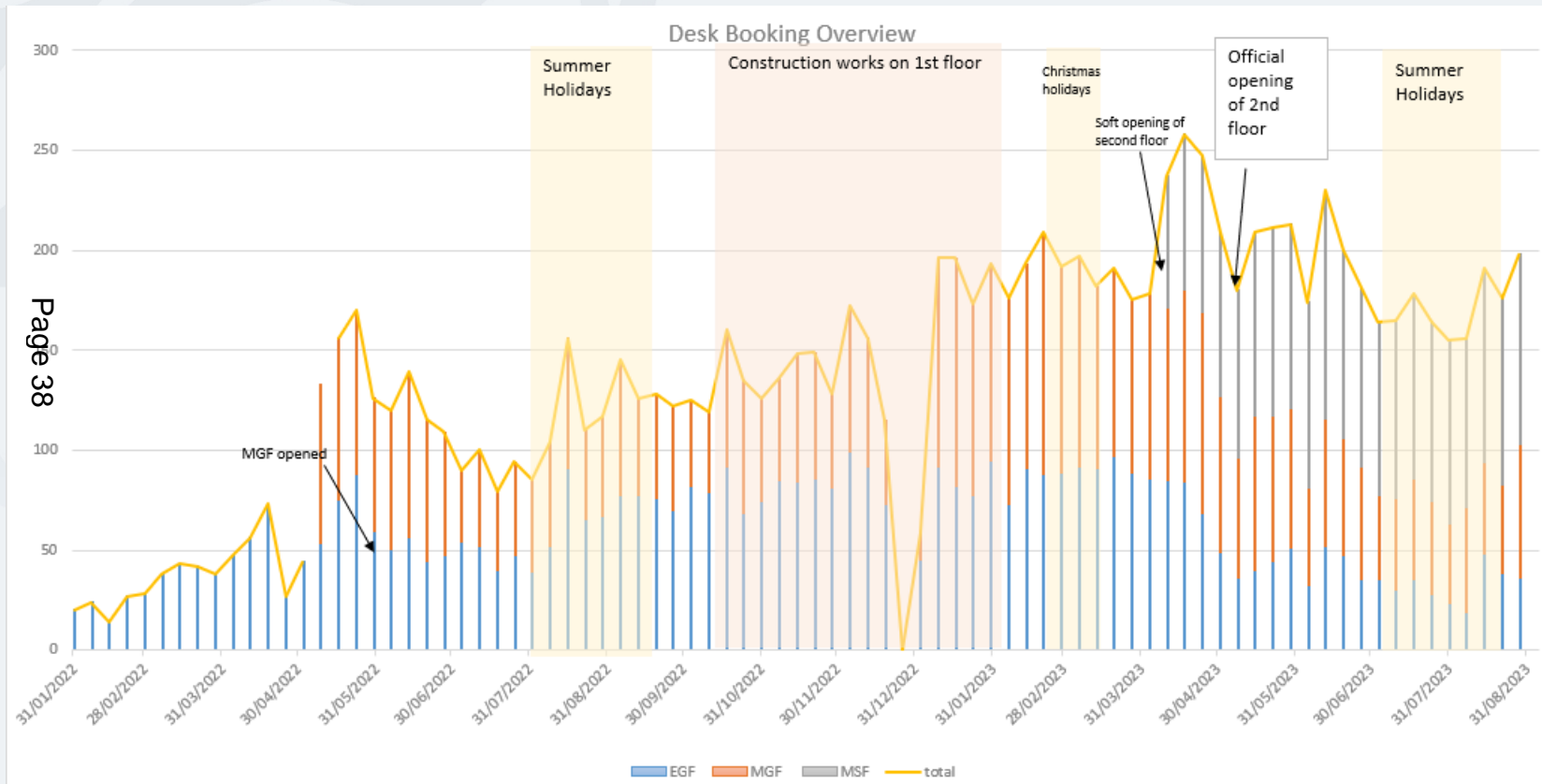
The overall trend of Desk Bookings has been increasing since the reopening of the HQ Campus.

The general exceptions to this has been over holiday period.

Local Government Survey

Post-Covid Return to Office Working

association for public service excellence

Briefing 22-34
August 2022

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Research Author

This paper was written and researched by Mo Baines, APSE Deputy Chief Executive.

About APSE

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) is a not-for-profit local government body working with over 300 councils throughout the UK.

Promoting excellence in public services, APSE is the foremost specialist in local authority frontline services and operates one of the UK's largest research programmes in local government policy and frontline service delivery matters.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about rapid changes to working practices. Out of necessity and to follow Government guidance from across the UK administrations, where possible workers and therefore employers, were forced to adopt to new ways of working and in many cases, this effectively meant home working. For many in local government however those providing frontline services or involved in the management and delivery of frontline services, effectively continued to work within depots or offices.

With the relaxation of social distancing guidance and the 'work from home' messaging from UK administrations changing a number of APSE member councils have raised queries as to what other councils are doing with regard to returning to the office environment. They have also questioned how other councils plan to support their workforce but ensure that productivity is maintained, and adapt policies to suit new and emerging needs.

APSE therefore conducted a short survey and undertook to share the results of the survey and further analysis with its' member councils and survey respondents. Over 50 local authorities are represented in the survey sample from across the UK and as such the survey results and analysis provide a robust assessment of the emerging issues. The analysis is drawn not only from the text responses that survey respondents were able to provide to enhance the survey results but other data sources and reports that have emerged post-pandemic.
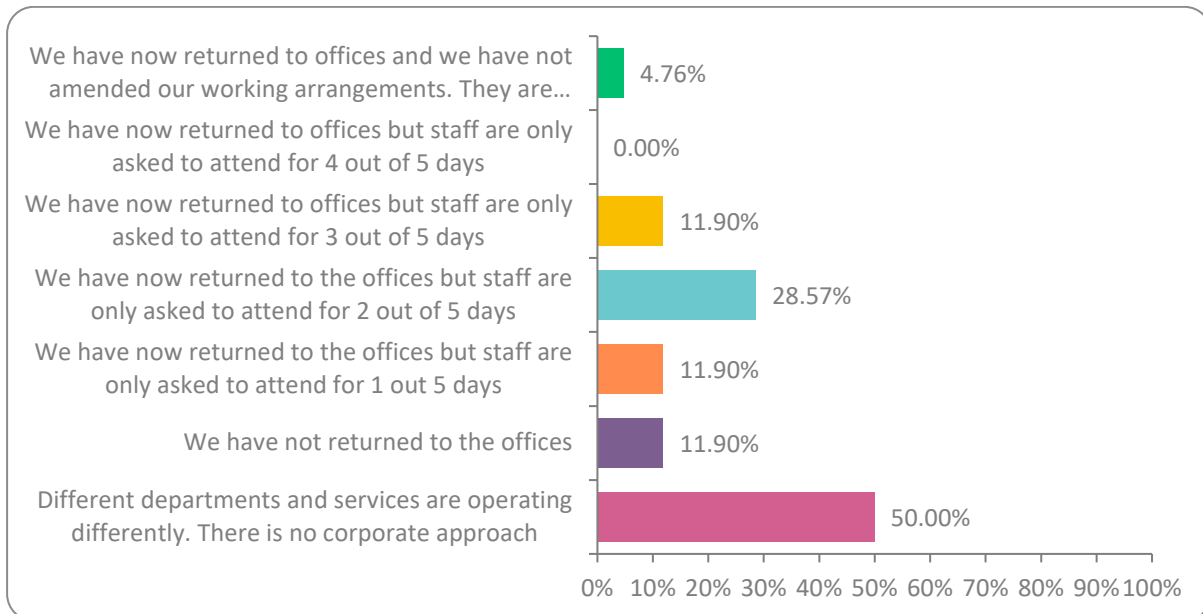
Survey Results

1   Current (post-Covid) ways of working

We asked '*Thinking about staff who pre-COVID worked mainly from the office environment how would you describe the current ways of working*? Respondents were able to tick all the responses that applied to them.

Interestingly over half of all respondents reported that policies towards office returns or the continuation of home-working practices was left to departmental discretion rather than through the operation of a corporate policy. This creates a slight concern as issues such as fair access to different working arrangements may be challengeable if it cannot be justified on objective grounds. Near to one third have been asked to return for 2 out of every 5 days but equally near to 12% are working either 1 day out of 5 or 3 days out of every 5.   Less than 5% have returned to pre-pandemic working practices without amendment and in the majority of cases there is a requirement for some in-person attendance within the workplace.

In terms of factors influencing in-person working in some cases this is determined by office capacity and ongoing reductions in available workspaces. Some commented that they had initially operated voluntary returns but slow take-up has led to some discussions to move towards mandatory 'days-in'. In other cases, 'Team Agreements' have been developed, to ensure office cover is provided from across teams on specific days. There appears to be some local determination by managers in terms of what works in what areas. However relatively few have a fully thought-out policy though in one respondent area they have attached descriptors to staff to determine their working arrangements with 'frontline' expected to be in the office every day with others able to work on a hybrid basis providing service needs are met.

Q.1 *Thinking about staff who pre-COVID worked mainly from the office environment how would you describe the current ways of working?*

We have now returned to offices and we have not amended our working arrangements. They are… **4.76%**

We have now returned to offices but staff are only asked to attend for 4 out of 5 days **0.00%**

We have now returned to offices but staff are only asked to attend for 3 out of 5 days **11.90%**

We have now returned to the offices but staff are only asked to attend for 2 out of 5 days **28.57%**

We have now returned to the offices but staff are only asked to attend for 1 out 5 days **11.90%**

We have not returned to the offices **11.90%**

Different departments and services are operating differently. There is no corporate approach **50.00%**

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

In some cases, a much more detailed approach to new ways of working has emerged corporately through change programmes. For example, in the case of Buckinghamshire they have developed a new change programme called 'Work Smart'. The vision for this new programme starts with a statement *"We will provide our staff with the right spaces, tools and skills so they can work in the best location for their role, be collaborative and achieve a good work life balance, making Buckinghamshire Council successful in delivering its services and a great place to work."*

There are three work streams within Work Smart and within each, key deliverables have been identified that are critical to the success of delivering Work Smart.

- **Workstyles** which focus on staff, looking at employee wellbeing, training and development, digital skills and capabilities, employment policies and contractual changes, induction, health and safety and communication and collaboration mechanisms.
- **Workspaces** which aim to create the right spaces including the estates strategy, workspace designs, storage and car parking.
- **Worktools** Which aims to provide solutions to help everyone work effectively, designed around the needs of services and staff. This includes ensuring the availability of the right technology for different roles, the right meeting and collaboration spaces, printing, receiving and sending post, information governance and the councils carbon footprint.

In other councils whilst even where staff are able to work autonomously there is still an expectation that they attend the office to ensure they continue to collaborate with colleagues with many citing the benefits of informal interactions and sharing of intelligence to aid services and service delivery.

Frontline managers and supervisors in areas such as Street Scene, Refuse and Recycling stated that they never effectively left their office environment as they could not, as one put it '*hide at home, when our staff were out daily in the public domain'.* This is an important dynamic when considering access to hybrid working and issues of fairness in terms of what arrangements are available to which groups of staff.

2 Office or building capacity post-Covid

Given a number of councils have reported downsizing their property portfolio, as a means of saving money and generating capital, we wanted to know what the impact of such approaches is having on capacity levels for returning to the office. We therefore asked *'What would you regard as the average capacity in your buildings / office post-Covid'*

Near to half report that they are at 25% or less of capacity but 63% confirm that they are at 50% to 100% of capacity post-Covid.
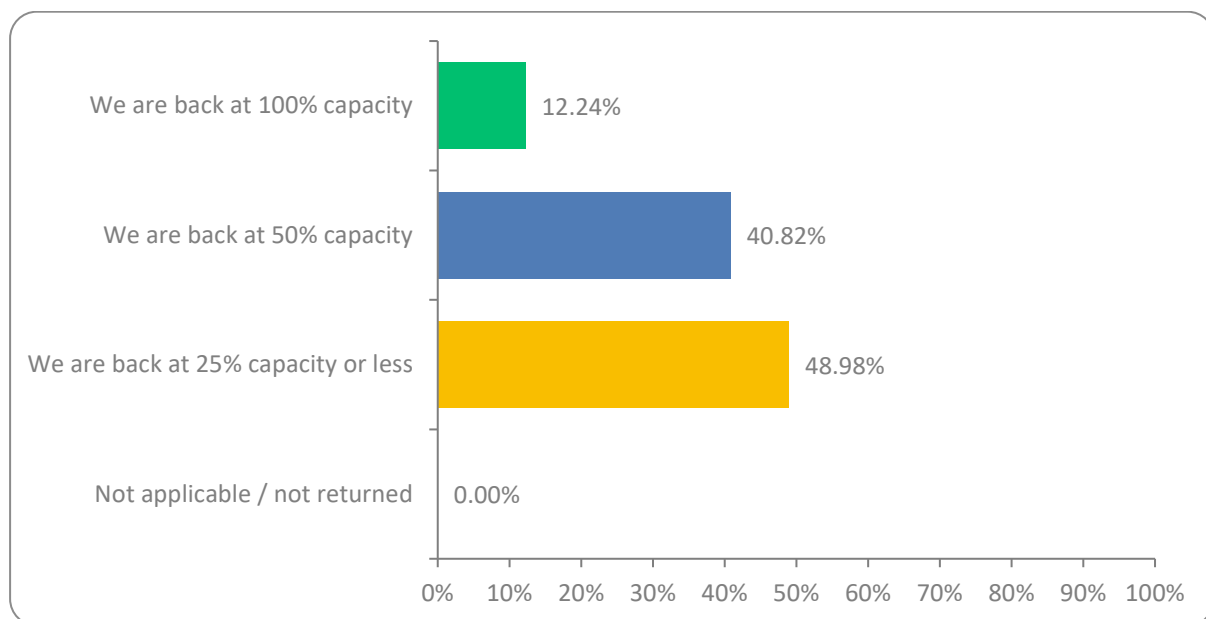
In terms of responses to this issue of capacity some report that the return to office working is about using space differently; for example, where desk capacity is as before the pandemic in many cases the plan is to reduce overall desk capacity, whilst creating better spaces for collaboration. Reliance on hot-desking looks set to increase alongside use of facilities to pre-book desks. There are concerns about 'wasted space' if desks remain unused but equally in discussions around APSE's strategic forums some have raised legitimate concerns as to whether current working from home arrangements, will be sustained over the winter. This is driven by concerns that the workforce will experience record increases in home heating and energy costs which may make working from home a less attractive option for many.

3 Rationalisation of office space

As with 2 above many press reports have suggested that across both the public and private sector there are plans to rationalise office space. Whilst over 61% suggest that this will be the case it would be unhelpful for property values and the returns on sales if neighbouring councils were to all flood the local market with vacant premises. In some cases, some innovative solutions are being considered or were indeed in place pre-pandemic. This includes sites becoming residential developments to enhance city centre living options and in other cases to develop a longer-term plan to include walking and cycling routes within developments by enhancing public offices into more hub style places.
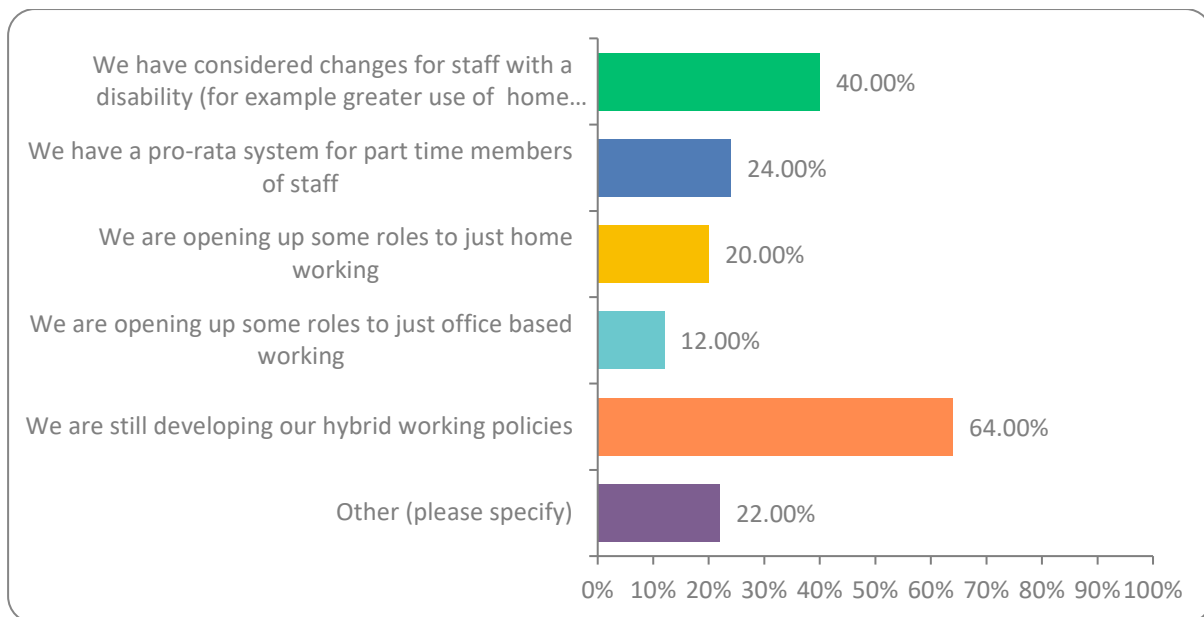
Yes	61.22%
No	12.24%
Unsure	26.53%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
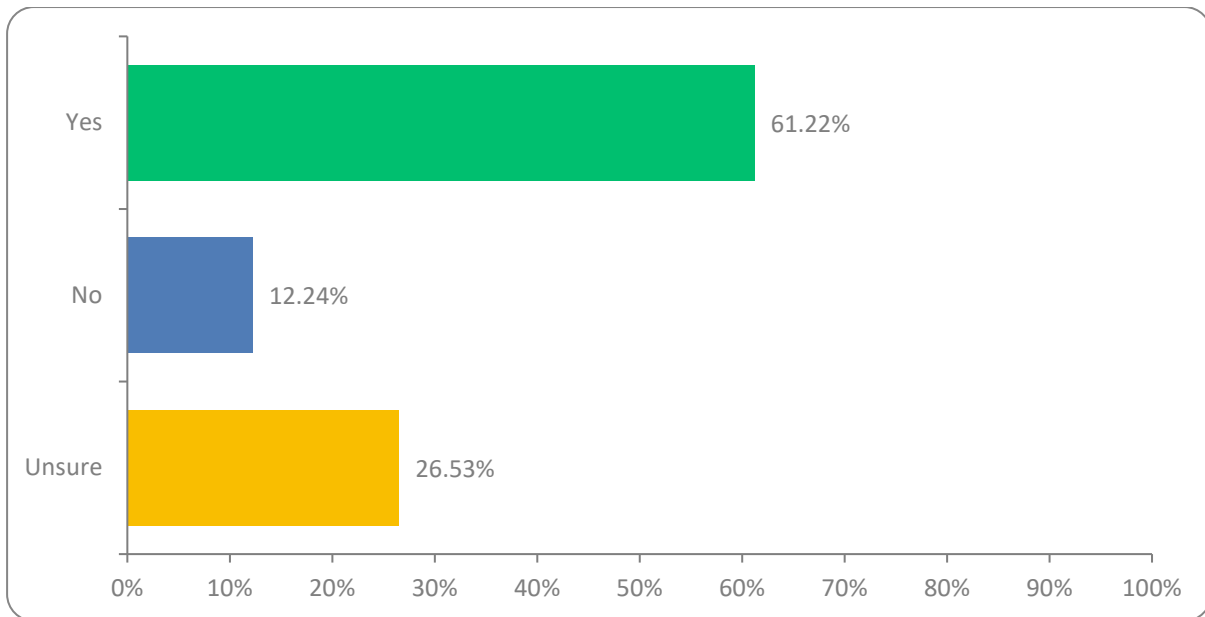
4   Considerations of job roles and delineation of worker 'types'

As many APSE member councils have appreciated in many ways discussions around the future workforce and hybrid working have clearly identified that 'one size does not fit all' and we therefore wanted to establish what factors had been considered in looking at greater use or otherwise of home working. Interestingly 40% of respondents have considered what further changes could be made when considering staff with a disability. In many cases again the view was that this needs to be centred around the individual whereby for some workers with a disability not having to travel as much to a place of work may be seen as advantageous, if it can be accommodated within the needs of the service, but equally in some cases better workplace ergonomics, social interactions and support networks were considered to be a benefit of attending a designated workspace.

There has also been much discussion about the attractiveness of opening up some roles, particularly new roles to just home-working. This does not appear currently to be a major feature within the cohort of survey respondents with 20% considering this option currently, which might be less than expected. Conversely a lesser response of 12% suggest that they would have some roles that are purely office-based roles.

It may well be that many public sector jobs views as 'front facing' are considered less adaptability to hybrid or home working; for example, call centre work where a worker is dealing with a highly personal welfare or benefits matter, may be considered differently to a call centre dealing with washing machine repairs. In other words, the bar may be set higher in terms of security and concerns as to service delivery.
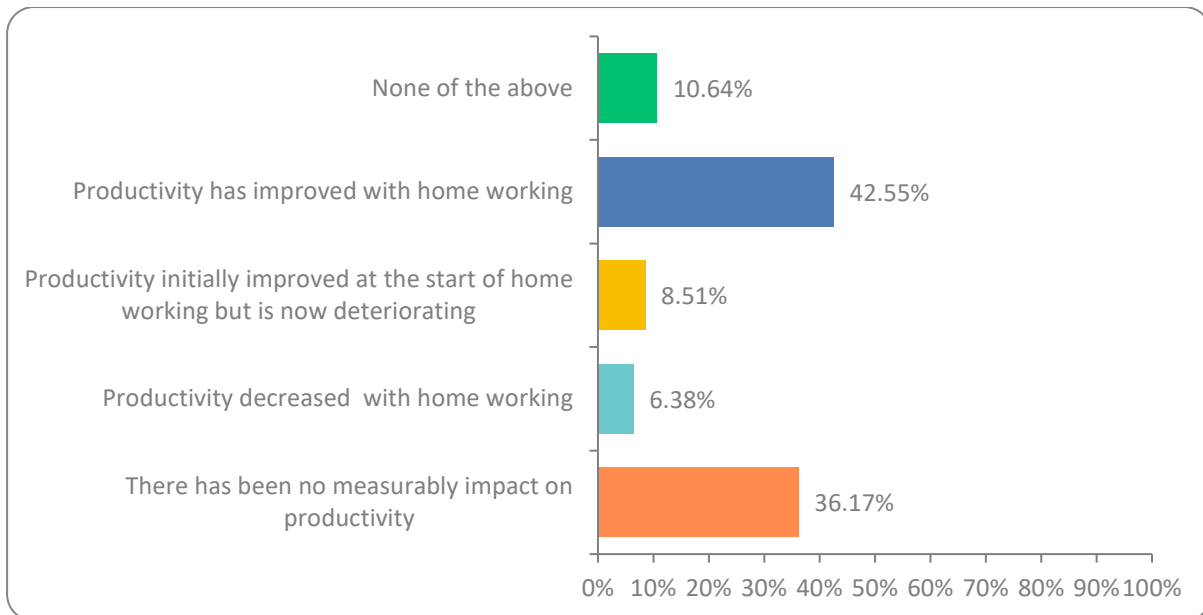
The chart shows a horizontal bar chart with the following data:
- We have considered changes for staff with a disability (for example greater use of home…): 40.00%
- We have a pro-rata system for part time members of staff: 24.00%
- We are opening up some roles to just home working: 20.00%
- We are opening up some roles to just office based working: 12.00%
- We are still developing our hybrid working policies: 64.00%
- Other (please specify): 22.00%

5   Issues of Productivity

Whilst some would claim productivity gains from home working others suggest that measurable gains are less so and therefore, we asked '*Thinking about productivity. Which of the following applies? You may tick as many boxes as applies'.*

Whilst just over 42% suggest productivity has improved 8.5% suggest that productivity initially peeked during initial home working and the emergency response phase of the pandemic response but is now deteriorating. One respondent suggested that "initially we were only looking at delivering emergency services, when the need to offer wider non responsive services, the home working model has meant efficiencies have slipped". Others suggested that they had not formally measured productivity of that this was applied differently across departments and in some areas was difficult to measure.

A theme to emerge is that productivity is highly variable. Some reported that there was a decrease in productivity for some services due to home working, but in other areas productivity continued at the same level or increased. Some suggested that hybrid working might bring about the 'best of both worlds'. One respondent reported that when returning to the office for some of the week – 3-4 days based in the office – the home working day(s) were more productive; this was attributed to more consciousness of work deadlines, tasks and performance targets, when returning to 'normal' service.

In a further reference to 'Teams Agreements' it was suggested that this is a way of managing productivity – with Teams being aware of what is expected of them in terms of the flexibilities of home working in ensuring that productivity does not deteriorate. Again a clear theme to emerge is that managers are aware – wherever their staff are working from – as to what tasks they are engaged on and ensuring that the services are delivered.

Chart showing productivity responses:
- None of the above: 10.64%
- Productivity has improved with home working: 42.55%
- Productivity initially improved at the start of home working but is now deteriorating: 8.51%
- Productivity decreased with home working: 6.38%
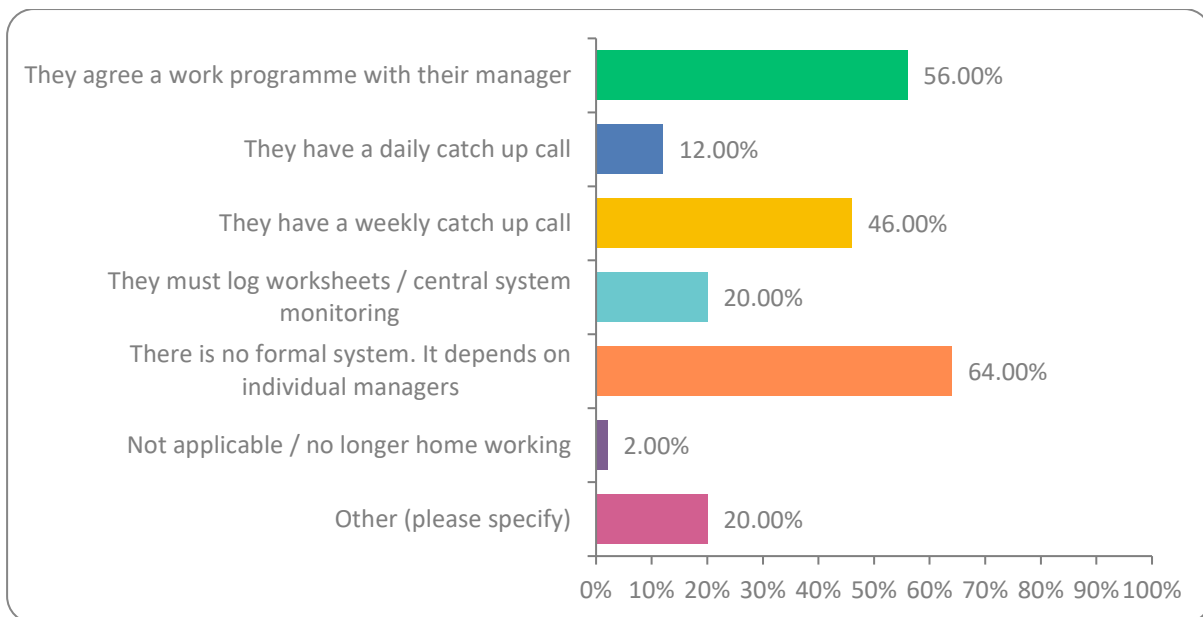- There has been no measurably impact on productivity: 36.17%

6   Support and Supervision of remote working staff

A common theme during APSE's own Covid networks during the pandemic was the supervision and management of remote working staff. Whilst many frontline service managers remained in depots and workplaces and continued face to face supervision and management in some areas, where work could be carried out at home, managers and supervisors had to consider remote supervision and management. We therefore asked '*How do you support, supervise and manage remote working staff? Please tick as many as applies*'

Surprisingly given over two years has emerged since the rapid expansion of home working 64% suggested that there is no formal system in place and this is very much down to individual managers. This is a potential cause for concern. Whilst clearly managers need some scope and flexibility to deal with work expectations, in the most effective and appropriate way, a lack of common systems could give rise to claims of differential or unfair treatment – for example if a member of staff feels micromanaged compared to a more laissez faire approach in other cases. More encouragingly 56% state that work programmes are agreed with their managers, which suggest mutual trust in simply 'getting on with the work'. 12% make use of a daily catch up and 20% make use of logs and worksheets and central monitoring systems.

Further 'best practice' measures shared in the text responses suggest that individual teams will agree what is needed in terms of contact but as an absolute standard outlook calendars must be kept up to date and where staff are working from and apportionments or Teams calls – even if from home – must be in the calendar so time is managed appropriately and managers are aware of what an individual is working on. One respondent reported that they had expanded core hours to allow flexibility to sign off later in the day (though in services it is important staff are available during core time to meet customer needs). Many have implemented a minimum of one meeting per month that must be face to face and appraisals must be face to face.   Some respondents reported that they are looking to access training on the topic of 'managing remotely'.

Category	Percentage
They agree a work programme with their manager	56.00%
They have a daily catch up call	12.00%
They have a weekly catch up call	46.00%
They must log worksheets / central system monitoring	20.00%
There is no formal system. It depends on individual managers	64.00%
Not applicable / no longer home working	2.00%
Other (please specify)	20.00%

7   Collaborative spaces in the office environment

As many employers across different speres in both the public and private sector learn from the pandemic experience a key finding in many studies is that whilst home-working provided advantages to some, and allowed businesses and services to continue, many found a loss of collaboration, team working and learning through the informal workplace networks. We asked '*Have you created any new collaborative spaces in your office environment? For example to allow staff to socialise, meet or network when they are in the office?*'

46% of respondents said that they had created new social spaces or collaborative spaces within their offices. Whilst 18% answered 'not yet' combined with the 20% of 'other' responses there appears to be a significant shift towards this type of facility. In terms of types of spaces newly created or being rolled out on the return to the office respondents reported that they have a range of facilities including: -

- Pods for quiet working
- Larger tables for meetings or group discussions
- Large pods which can be booked out for small group meetings
- Confidential space meeting rooms for managers or topics of a confidential nature

One reported that some services have a 'locked' office space so that no-one from outside their team can enter without permission, for example in areas like Childrens' services. However, some have argued that everyone could make a 'special case' to be treated differently and not work across open plan or shared facilities and hot desks.

There have been many studies on the benefits of informal collaborative spaces and conversations within the office environment and indeed during the covid pandemic some companies experimented with virtual water cooler conversations of kitchen chats.
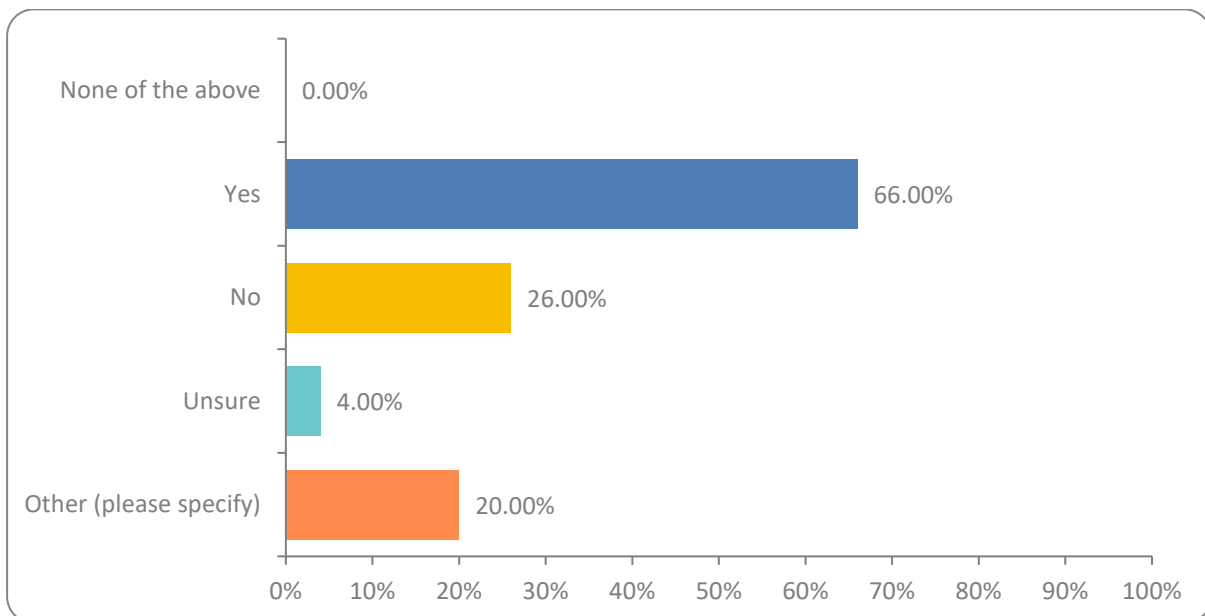
Some of the reported benefits of 'water cooler talk' is the opening up of informal communications between different layers of employees – an equalising and humanising effect where day to day conversations cut across 'rank' or 'status' within an organisation. This it is argued is empowering and creates a corporate culture of trust and transparency. Whilst Schultz's Theory of 'Human

Capital' focused on formal education and training increasingly studies have identified that learning from peers within the workplace is crucially important and whilst informal workplace learning spans age groups and roles, it is a key driver of performance amongst younger or newer workers.

Response	Percentage
Yes	46.00%
No	22.00%
Unsure	6.00%
Not yet	18.00%
Other (please specify)	20.00%
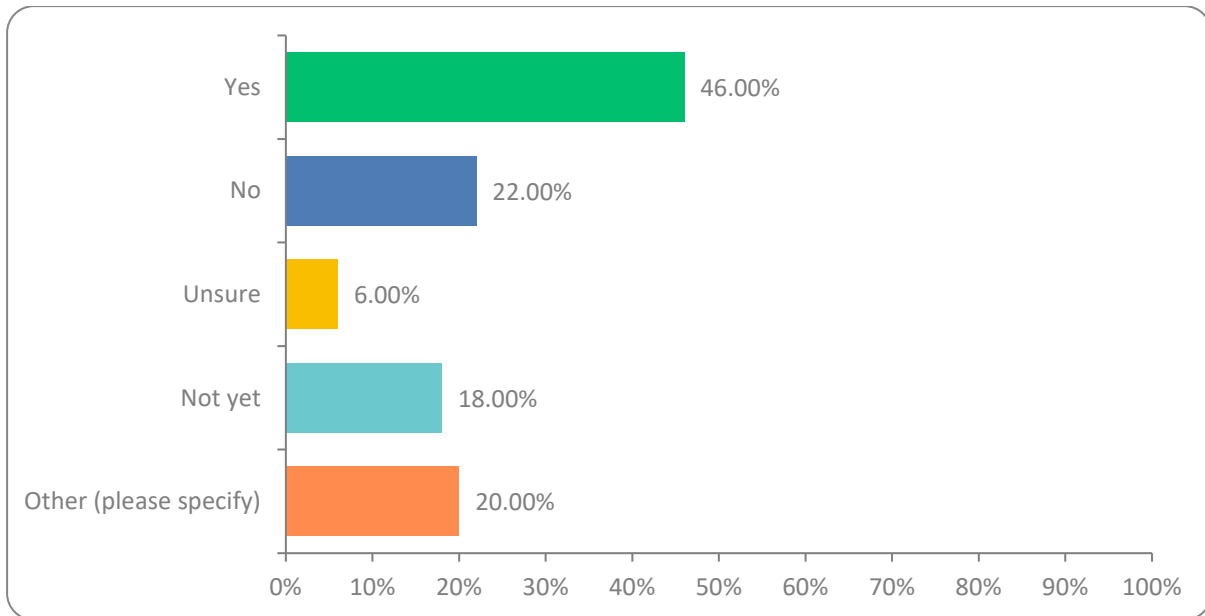
8   Office layout and accommodation changes

Given social distancing measures put in place we wanted to assess if changes have now been made to accommodate post-Covid working. A majority of 66% stated that changes had been made to layout – such as increased spacing - but based on reduced numbers within offices. In other cases, the limited numbers working together on one day has meant that more permanent changes have not been justifiable on cost grounds. Some have temporarily retained screens put in place during covid but what not envisage this to be long-term.

Response	Percentage
None of the above	0.00%
Yes	66.00%
No	26.00%
Unsure	4.00%
Other (please specify)	20.00%

9   A two-tier culture between staff in job roles able to work from home and those unable to work from home

As observed during the pandemic many workers were considered 'key workers' and in spite of restrictions and social distancing, they were expected to turn up to their normal place of work and with adjustments, and added safeguards, continue in their job roles. This included job roles such as social care, refuse loaders and drivers, street-scene teams, gas inspections and emergency repairs in social housing, and in areas in support of other key workers in the NHS, such as the provision of school meals to key-worker children.

We therefore wanted to establish if, in reviewing the ability for on-going or extended hybrid working arrangements, the issue of a two-tier culture has been considered or addressed. We asked '***Have you tackled the issue of a two-tier culture / them and us where some staff are able to work remotely and others because of job role are unable to work in this way?'.*** This was the largest response of 'unsure' across the survey at near to 58%

Yes please specify	26.67%
No please specify	15.56%
Unsure	57.78%
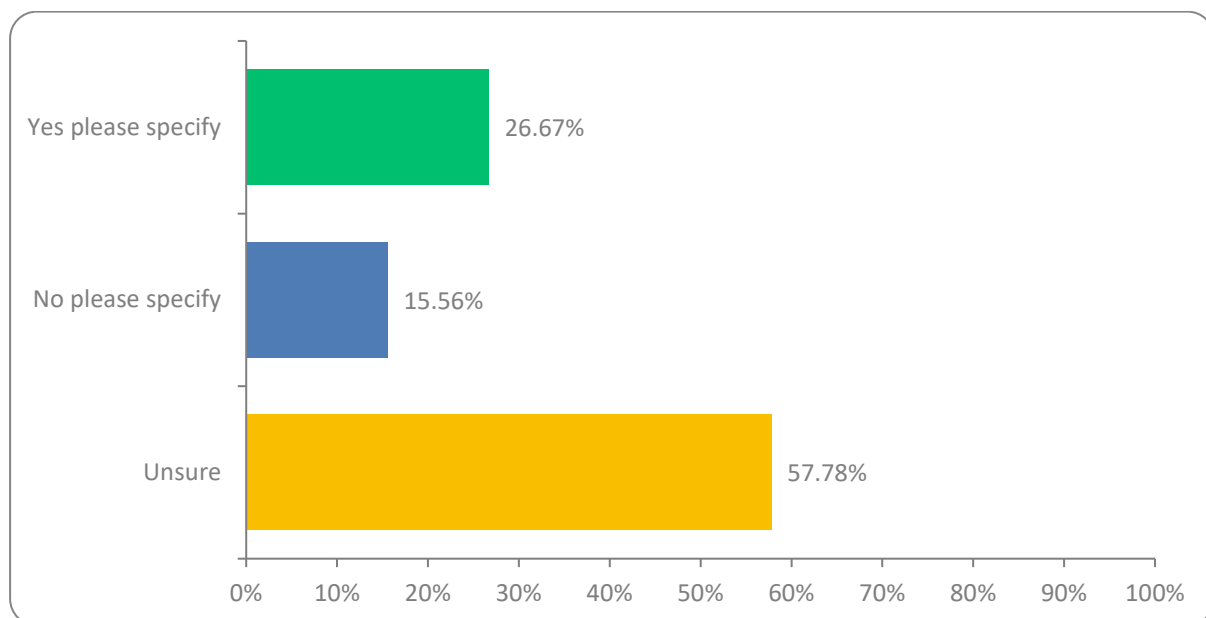
In terms of additional responses to this question many suggested that the route that they had adopted is based upon clarity as to what job roles are available for hybrid working; so, for example in areas like parks, facilities management and street scene teams, it is clear that the workforce must be out on site / report to a depot. However, some are starting to look at further adaptations to this including introducing flexi-time working and compressed hours such as five days worked over four days, where possible.

With an awareness of the potential creation (and negative impact on staff unable to work from home) some respondents report staff surveys are being undertaken to seek views and opinions on what additional flexibilities could be arrived for staff unable to work under a hybrid or homeworking arrangement. In some cases, agile working policies have already been introduced in consultation with trade unions.

It would appear that in most cases the issue of clarity as to which roles are open for hybrid working or available for home working has been through defining the overall job roles and supporting managers in explaining these issues to staff. In many cases managers themselves have adopted a more visible approach to being 'in the office' with their teams below adopting a more flexible hybrid approach.

Some respondents suggested that there is an awareness of the issues that a two-tier culture could raise but that they are currently working on how to respond rather than having a firm policy in place. Others suggest that at least some days in the office, for example two days per week, has started to ameliorate some of the perceptions of some staff 'hiding at home', which had been cited by some frontline staff unable to work at home.

10 Support for staff

An issue to emerge given the lengthy lockdowns was that of isolation and loneliness, amongst staff forced to work at home, against their choices. We asked how are staff supported, particularly in areas where ongoing home working is being encouraged.
The role of managers was a reoccurring theme in terms of supporting staff and colleagues.

Line manager managers colleagues need counselling team colleagues
wellbeing network managers available staff calls
support employee work come office regular line well HR
encouraged office full time offer

Many respondents suggested that the issues of lockdown isolation had diminished as post-Covid many staff who had felt isolated were able to socialise outside of work; whereas in lockdown many felt confined to home with no socialisation opportunities.

On an on-going basis lesson from the pandemic have generally continued with the use of team conference calling, with some staff joining in from home and others from offices, and the option for staff to work from the office whenever they so choose; in other words, no one reported that staff are now 'forced to work from home' – so that issue of choice now allows staff to better manage their own needs.

New agile working policies have also taken into consideration the types of support available to employees such as support from managers and occupational health teams, and the setting up in some cases of well-being teams and allocation of resources to staff well-being. Others have encouraged or trained managers to have an awareness of staff well-being issues when staff are working remotely. There appears to be positive use of video calls rather than just telephone calls as a means to ensure staff are well, providing more personalised interactions, though it is noted some staff may equally feel uncomfortable with video calls. In one case they are using the LGBQT staff group to ensure regularly liaison, as it is recognised that support networks accessed by staff, may be more limited outside of the traditional workplace.

11 Staff motivation

We asked if any respondents had looked at any specific ways to motivate and engage staff who are not in an office environment. Regular communication emerged as the chief motivational factor.

Call social office meetings team meetings good team weekly
Regular manager communication leaders work groups Staff

The forms of communication do however vary from regular weekly team meetings to cascading staff newsletters. Many have adopted an 'in-person' fortnightly or monthly meeting to ensure that everyone receives the same core messages and provides an opportunity to be in the same room. Informal motivations are through WhatsApp groups and social events such as team quizzes, both online and in social settings. Use of new collaboration spaces is also noted as is the role of managers in identifying and any deterioration in performance and supporting employees to re-engage. Again, training of managers in managing remote or hybrid workers is a feature in many responses as is the need for good communications with individuals and groups. This includes regular 'elevenses' as well as using MS Teams groups for business and separate channels for general chat as "that would have previously happened in the main office space".

One or two respondents did however report that the issue of motivation is often overlooked and there is too much reliance on individual managers rather than a more corporately driven approach.

12   What other matters have been considered in developing new working policies

All employers have a duty of care to employees and employees must also make reasonable endeavours to ensure their own safety at work. However, home working raises different risks to that of the traditional office or depot setting, where risk can be more readily identified and removed or limited.

We therefore sort to establish the types of risks that have been considered in a home working environment such as risk of domestic violence, ergonomics of the work station, parental or carer burdens, workers in poor quality or unsuitable housing such as HMOs where they may not have a private workspace, and security or privacy risks to information.
Perhaps unsurprisingly near to three quarters of respondents have considered information or privacy risks in terms of home-workers and near to 66% have considered the work station such as risk or injury and ergonomic design. This is likely to be as a result of these risk assessments already being a feature within an office environment, such as the regular self-assessments by staff using VDUs.

Over 57% of respondents reported that they had considered childcare or parental issues for home-workers. During the pandemic the Office for National Statistics found that women carried out significantly more daily childcare duties than men during lockdown, for an average of more than three hours a day compared with two hours for men. Whilst those statistics applied to households with children under the age of 18, and schools are now reopened post-pandemic, statistically women are more likely than men to take on unpaid child care. There is however global evidence that the burden of childcare, post pandemic continues to fall disproportionately on women, and this is further exacerbated by both cost and shortages in childcare provision. From an employer perspective consideration should therefore be given to both supporting parents with childcare
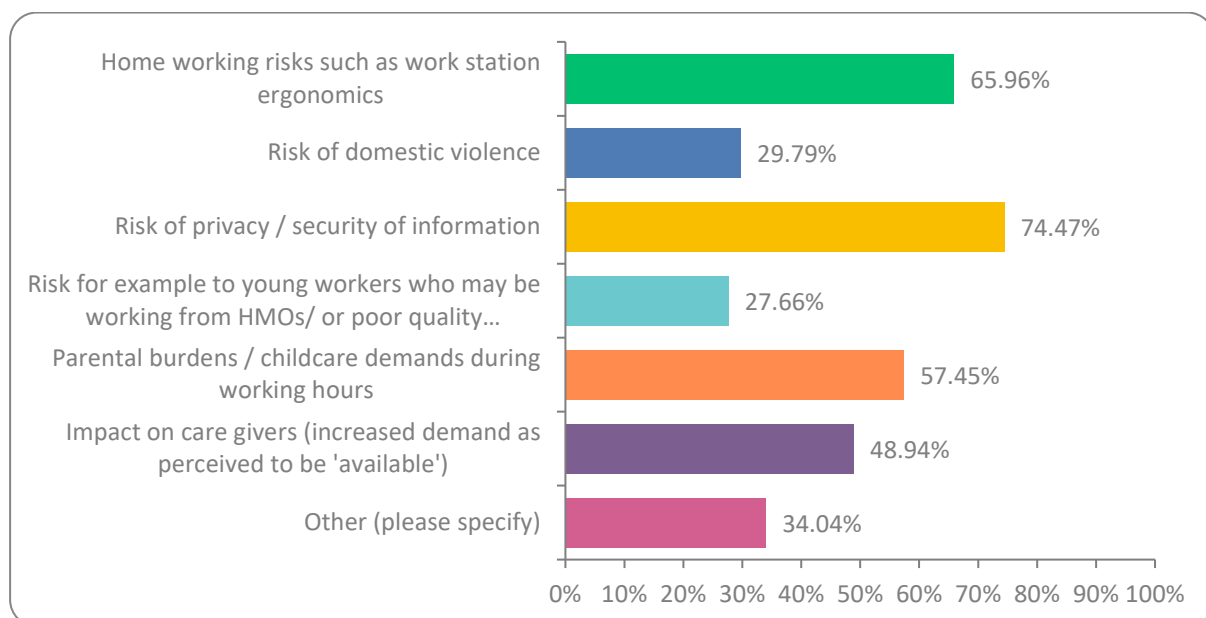
needs but to also ensuring that those working at home are not expected to cope with childcare demands during working hours.

There is a similar case for care givers whereby adaptability to provide care may be seen as an advantage but equally where the absence of a 'place of work' can create additional calls on care-givers, with the perceptions of 'not really being in work' when home-working. This should form part of assessment processes.

Finally, less than a third of respondents had considered the risk of domestic violence. The ONS data release 'Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2021' found an increase in domestic violence during lockdown of over 6%, and such cases made up 18% of all recorded crimes in the year to March 2021, much of which occurred during the strictest periods of lockdown where homeworking was most prevalent. Again, employers should be considering this in terms of both risk assessments and support; it is a particular consideration when there is no obligation to work at all in an office environment, which could create vulnerabilities for those in isolated domestic abuse situations being discouraged or actually prevented from attending the workplace.

More positively many reports HR teams and line managers are actively developing more holistic approaches to ensure hybrid working policies are fit for purpose and that there are escalation channels where risk or concerns are raised. This also includes more proactive approaches to training managers with a greater awareness of issues and equalities impact assessments taking place.

Many are keen to stress that in their own processes and policies if staff wish to work in a physical environment this will be provided. This is a core distinction which maintains the office or other workplace is considered to be the 'place of work' with homeworking an optional not compulsory feature.

| Category	Percentage
Home working risks such as work station ergonomics	65.96%
Risk of domestic violence	29.79%
Risk of privacy / security of information	74.47%
Risk for example to young workers who may be working from HMOs/ or poor quality…	27.66%
Parental burdens / childcare demands during working hours	57.45%
Impact on care givers (increased demand as perceived to be 'available')	48.94%
Other (please specify)	34.04%

13 Performance monitoring

When asked about the measurement and monitoring of performance on hybrid working staff over 70% rely upon direct line managers to monitor performance of hybrid workers, whilst 56% suggest that they do not distinguish between monitoring the performance of office-based workers to hybrid or remote workers. Just over a quarter however suggest that they do not have any formal

systems in place with only 6% or so relying on software systems.

A few respondents point to overall team performance measurements rather than individuals however this in turn flags to managers any issues of under-performance.

It may well be too early to consider performance issues given, in many services, the changes necessary to deal with the pandemic created service backlogs and 'normal' service levels may still not have resumed. This may be an area which in the future needs further consideration.
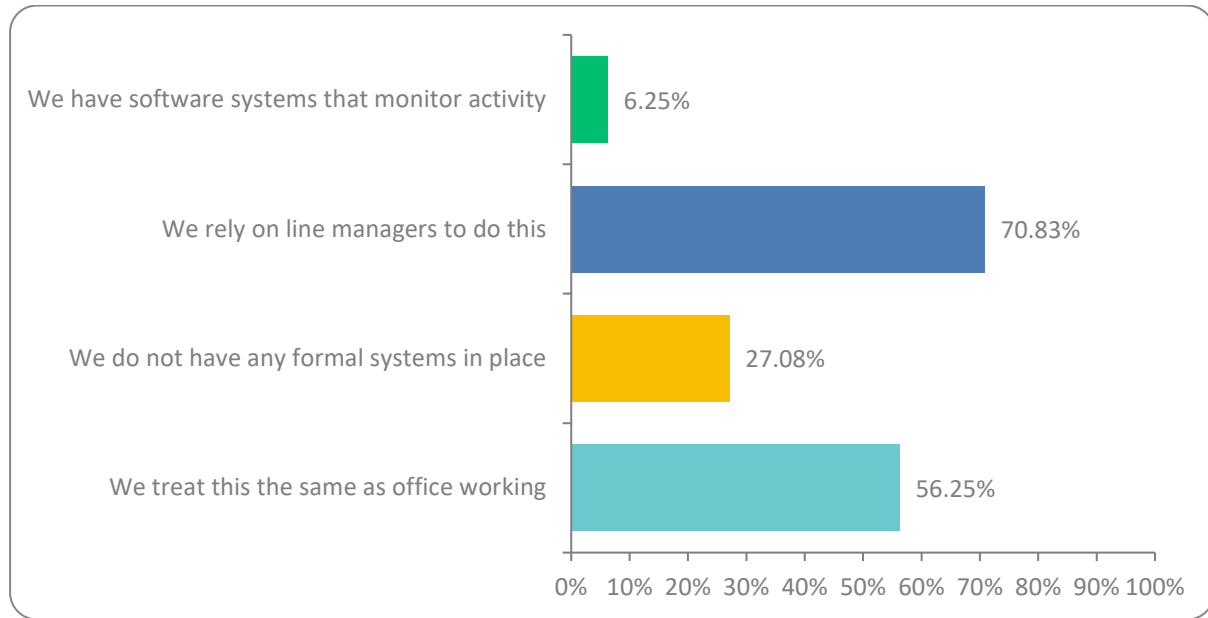
14 Conclusions and APSE Comment

The ONS release, using data and analysis from the 2021 Census 'Is hybrid working here to stay?' provides some useful analysis of emerging working patterns. As Local Government struggles in many areas to recruit and retain staff it is worthwhile considering its overall perception as a progressive employer and what other industries, with which it competes as a sector, offers its' workforce.

The data finds that the proportion of people hybrid working has risen in 2022 based on survey responses collected from the 27 April to 8 May 2022, when guidance to work from home because of the pandemic was no longer in place in Great Britain, 38% of working adults reported having worked from home at some point over the past seven days. Pre-pandemic this figure was just 12%. However, whilst this is a large and fundamental shift to hybrid work patterns 46% of workers reported that travelling to work exclusively was their most common working pattern, and based on interviews conducted in late April and early May 2022. This reflects many within local government where frontline job roles are simply not available for home working or hybrid work patterns.

It is reasonable to assume however that hybrid or homeworking patterns are here to stay in many areas of work. However, what may influence or impact upon the future drivers for hybrid or homeworking?

First of all, the UK faces a cost-of-living crisis that is likely to hit hardest in the colder winter months. Some previous analysis of spend patterns found that whilst homeworkers reduce their spend on

car parking fuel and public transport costs 86% reported that spending commonly increased on utility bills with this increasing to 92% for those living in rented accommodation. For homeworkers with dependent children the statistical analysis also suggests that they are slightly more likely to report increased spending on food (39%), utilities (89%), and internet access (27%) than those without dependent children.

In the public sector pay rises continue to lag well behind the private sector according to latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Released in August 2022 the data set looks at earnings between April and June 2022 and finds that while average annual total pay growth for the private sector was 5.9% in April to June 2022 it was only 1.8% for the public sector. This level of gap will fuel demands for larger public sector increases and at the same time could threaten the recruitment of new staff into local government. It may well yet see a winter impact on working arrangements with either demands for office-based working increasing, due to home heating costs, or conversely a demand for greater flexible working to decrease travel costs, with fuel prices remaining high and public transport costs rising as a result of inflationary pressures. In real terms, once adjusted for inflation, average weekly earnings fell by a record 3% during April to June 2022; this level of fall in earnings was last recorded in 2009 at 4.5% during the height of the global financial crash.

The impact of new working patterns on younger workers should also be considered. For many younger workers during lockdown home working was not a good experience; aside from the lack of social interactions many younger people find that they are locked out of traditional housing markets due to cost. It is not uncommon for young people to live in HMOs (Houses in Multiple Occupation) which as a source of housing represents over 497,000 people from the overall 4.7 million people in social housing and of which 38% are classed as young people. It may be that to allow greater flexibility the use of localised work-hubs – allowing more localised access to work places would be beneficial particularly for younger workers.

Finally, there remains much uncertainty about the post-Covid world of work. Whilst expectations and experiences have changed the training and skills in managing the workforce differently appear to have lagged behind those changes. There is also arguably a need for some ongoing analysis on what the wider changes in work patterns may mean for local economies. For example, in rural areas large swathes of workers choosing to stay at home could have a detrimental impact on the viability of public transport needed for other workers who are unable to work at home such as health and social workers or construction workers.

Equally consideration should be given as to how councils utilise their own property and assets to support not just their own workforce but others within the community to access suitable work hubs at a locality level. This was a matter considered in APSE's recent publication with CIPFA which can be downloaded here.

This report will be discussed at the APSE Annual Seminar 2022 in Swansea. For details see this link.

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- Roads, highways and street lighting
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CIPD

*Championing better
work and working lives*

FLEXIBLE WORKING:
LESSONS FROM THE
PANDEMIC

From the 'nature' of
the work to the design
of work

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The registered charity champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has more than 150,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Report

Flexible working: lessons from the pandemic

From the 'nature' of the work to the design of work

Contents

Acknowledgements

① **Executive summary**

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that, in the case of flexible work design, the impossible turns out to be possible after all. An enforced trial of homeworking has demonstrated to many managers that it works better than they could have imagined – and given them the opportunity to develop their skills in making it work. Perceived barriers in the 'nature' of the work – which were said to render remote working impossible – have faded away as managers have learned to design work differently.

Although the pandemic has enforced total, five-days-a-week homeworking, our survey revealed that, after lockdown, 63% of employers planned to introduce or expand the use of hybrid working to some degree, combining time in the workplace with time at home, depending on the needs of the job, the individual and the team, and the team working practices.

There was positive news on the productivity of homeworkers too. Despite the difficulties of lockdown, more than two-thirds (71%) of survey participants said that homeworking had no detrimental impact on productivity. This figure is made up of 33% who said that productivity improved, and 38% who said it was unchanged.

This report identifies seven strategies which teams and their managers can use to make a success of hybrid working:

1   Develop the skills and culture needed for open conversations about wellbeing.

2   Encourage boundary-setting and routines to improve wellbeing and prevent overwork.

3   Ensure effective co-ordination of tasks and task-related communication.

4   Pay special attention to creativity, brainstorming and problem-solving tasks.

5   Build in time, including face-to-face time, for team cohesion and organisational belonging.

6   Facilitate networking and inter-team relationships.

7   Organise a wider support network to compensate for the loss of informal learning.

The situation regarding flexible hours has changed less: employers have not experienced an 'enforced trial' of flexible hours. The wide range of sectors and types of work covered in the interviews for this research led to very different outcomes. Some interviewees did work which, when done at home, facilitated greater informal flexibility of hours – giving individuals more autonomy to choose their start, finish and break times, and enabling them to mix work and personal tasks without rigid boundaries. However, others found that the work demanded hours similar to those worked in the workplace, although of course without the commute.

Some interviewees found that flexibility of hours was prevented by the sheer volume of work, regardless of its location. Others commented that it was harder to set work–life boundaries at home, finding that they worked longer hours at home than in the workplace.

Benefits and challenges of homeworking

None of the benefits or challenges identified in our survey was mentioned by a majority of survey participants. This suggests that they are highly dependent on individual circumstances, both at home and at work. A tailored approach to individual needs, and to work design, is needed to maximise the benefits and minimise the challenges.

Employers reported the key benefits and challenges of homeworking as follows:

Benefits
- The most frequently mentioned benefit was increased wellbeing through avoiding the commute (46% of survey participants), followed by **enhanced wellbeing because of greater flexibility of hours** (39%).
- Although collaboration is often mentioned as a challenge of homeworking, survey participants reckoned that both **creating new ways to collaborate with IT tools**, and **IT upskilling**, were benefits of homeworking, at 34% and 23% respectively.
- A **reduction in distractions** also featured (33%), although given that lockdown enforced homeworking regardless of home circumstances, some employees were dealing with increased distractions.
- Normalising the use of technology could **help inclusion** for those with a disability or illness that prevented or impeded travel, and for those working in distributed teams.
- Finally, homeworking enabled people to **get to know their colleagues better** as individuals, learning more about their non-work life.

Challenges
The challenges of homeworking can be divided into three types: wellbeing, hygiene factors and work-related factors:

1 Reduced mental wellbeing of staff due to isolation was cited as a challenge by 44% of survey respondents.
2 Hygiene factors are those which, in a voluntary homeworking situation, would be dealt with in advance, or might preclude homeworking altogether: the unsuitability of certain jobs (36%); unsuitable home circumstances (31%); insufficient technology (15%); outdated technology (15%); and lack of staff proficiency with technology (14%).
3 Among work-related factors were: difficulty with staff interaction and co-operation (26%); lack of staff engagement (19%); line manager capability to manage homeworkers (19%); and line manager capability to monitor staff performance (18%).

Expectations of change in flexible working

Employers reported the following expectations of change in flexible working:

- While 63% of employers in our survey said that they planned to introduce or expand the use of hybrid working to some degree, a remarkably high 45% said they planned to introduce or expand the use of total, five-days-a-week homeworking to some degree. However, interviewees from operational business units were more cautious about the feasibility of total homeworking, preferring hybrid working for most teams and types of work.
- The most common measures planned to facilitate the expansion of homeworking were: changing policy (45%), improving technology (41% investing in the quality of technology; 35% investing in the quantity of technology) and online guidance (33%). Only 28% of respondents said they planned to put in place manager training in remote working – a low figure given the challenges of work design and management identified in this report. This is discussed further in section 3.2.
- Almost half of employers (48%) said they were planning to introduce or expand the use of flexitime (formal or informal; employer-led or employee-led) to some degree. Forty-five per cent of this group cited fairness as a reason: employees who can't work from home should still be able to benefit from other flexible working arrangements.

Conclusions and recommendations

The CIPD has recently launched its #FlexFrom1st campaign calling on organisations and the Government to introduce the right to request flexible working from day one of employment to support opportunities for all. This report makes the following recommendations for policy and practice to improve flexible working opportunities:

1 **Provide training and support to enable productive homeworking**. In order to achieve productive homeworking, employers need to provide training and support in hybrid working, using the seven strategies identified in this report and our guides. Our findings suggest caution in the use of total, five-days-a-week homeworking: wellbeing, productivity and learning could all suffer without much more extensive manager training and change in working practices. Despite 63% of employers saying that they will introduce or expand the use of hybrid working, only 28% have plans to train managers in how to manage remotely.

2 **Proactively explore flexibility of hours**. Employers need to be more proactive about flexibility of hours, particularly for those workers whose jobs don't lend themselves to flexibility of location. Job tasks need to be analysed for hours flexibility as well as location flexibility, and a more proactive, team-based approach will often yield better results than reactively waiting for individual requests for flexibility of hours.

3 **Assess the differing business case for flexible working in different sectors and jobs**. The wide range of sectors and types of work covered in this project has shown how much the business case for flexible working can vary by sector and by type of work. Government and employers need to work together to assess the business case for flexible working in 'hard-to-flex' sectors and jobs, where work has not traditionally been designed for work–life balance. The first step is to assess how the costs of flexible working are currently distributed between individuals, the business unit, the organisation as a whole and the state, in different types of work.

This report is supplemented by seven organisational case studies and guides outlining practical advice for employers and line managers looking to improve their flexible working offering.

(2) How the research was conducted

At the start of this project, we conducted a review of the research evidence on working from home. The research for this report then consisted of two elements, qualitative and quantitative.

Qualitative research

For the qualitative research, interviews with 32 senior managers and directors were conducted between October 2020 and January 2021, using insights from the evidence review. Seven interviewees were people professionals, but the majority were in operational roles. This approach enabled exploration of the practical challenges of designing jobs across a range of different types of work in hospitality, construction, education, IT, professional services, telecoms and local government. Some of these sectors have historically tended more towards employer-led flexibility, which is driven by business requirements for flexible resourcing, rather than employees' need for work–life balance.

Interviewees worked in both large and small organisations, in the public and private sector, and were located across the UK. Some worked for employers who were in the process of introducing or updating their flexible working initiatives and using lockdown as an opportunity to accelerate progress. Some interviewees embraced both flexible location and flexible hours, while others focused on homeworking. Interviewees were asked about the opportunities and challenges presented by homeworking, and how the pandemic has affected other types of flexibility. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed.

Quantitative research

The quantitative research involved an online survey with a total sample size of 2,133 senior decision-makers in UK organisations, conducted by YouGov. Fieldwork was undertaken between 14 December 2020 and 4 January 2021. The figures have been weighted and are representative of the UK business population by size, sector, industry and nation.

(3) Flexible location: seven strategies for hybrid working

3.1 Introduction: 'standard' and COVID-enforced homeworking

Working from home has long been an organisational strategy for both saving the cost of office space and improving work–life balance.

While the lockdown resulting from the pandemic offered a unique opportunity to trial homeworking, it's nonetheless important to remember that many jobholders can't work from home – health and care workers, delivery drivers, construction staff and supermarket checkout operators, for example, continued to work as before.

It's also worth remembering that there are several key differences between COVID-enforced homeworking and 'standard' homeworking: while the pandemic has provided a natural experiment in homeworking, it is far from being a controlled environment or ideal homeworking circumstances for many.

Voluntary and involuntary homeworking

First, and importantly, homeworking was enforced on the population whatever their personal preferences or home circumstances. Many people were working out of home environments that weren't suitable, using inadequate technology. In all, 43% of survey respondents said their employees had difficulty in working because they lacked space or privacy at home. Almost three in ten employers (29%) said their staff experienced reduced productivity as a result of poor internet connectivity, while 23% had difficulty conducting appropriate workplace risk assessments for people working from home. As one interviewee vividly reported, *'Some people, living with their family, just didn't have the space. Or the router was behind the back of the telly and they could only get access to it by sitting on the stairs.'*

COVID-enforced homeworking hit parents particularly hard because of the closure of schools and other forms of childcare (see section 4.2). Other interviewees reported that homeworking interfered with their household setup and relationships, so they preferred to be in the workplace: *'Some people are not interested in homeworking. They've always worked a particular way, they leave the house at that time, they get home at that time… and they don't want to change it.'*

Other interviewees noted that it was important that homeworking was a voluntary choice because different locations suited different personalities: the (usually) relatively quiet, static and socially isolated life of the homeworker wasn't for everyone. For example, a senior manager from the hospitality sector commented that *'the reason we choose this industry is because we like being out and about, we like being seen, not being trapped behind a desk, we like variety, that every event is slightly different. And now we're living a virtual life.'*

Planned and unplanned approaches

The rapid imposition of lockdown without much advance warning meant that employers and managers had little time to organise changes to working practices. There was no planned approach, no pilot before rollout, and rarely any measurement of indicators of success. A mass shift to remote working might normally involve some manager training and support, to deal with issues of wellbeing, productivity and learning. Not surprisingly, these became challenges in an enforced lockdown (see sections 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6).

Hybrid and total homeworking

Homeworking pre-lockdown (and most homeworking expected post-pandemic) usually involved partial or hybrid homeworking for a few days a week, rather than for five days a week. The interviews highlighted that the absence of any face-to-face contact, or variety of working environment, could be challenging. For example, one respondent commented that *'I found homeworking very intense. To come to the same room, however nice it is, day after day, and do a lot of video calls… I cope, but I'm more motivated if I've got variety.'* Previous research has suggested that hybrid working is likely to be more effective than total homeworking in many circumstances.

3.2 Expectations of change in homeworking

Most employers plan to encourage more hybrid working post-pandemic

It's important to distinguish between five-days-a-week homeworking and hybrid or partial homeworking, where people split their working time between the home and the workplace.

More than six out of ten employers (63%) in our survey said that they planned to expand the use of hybrid working to some degree. Eighty-one per cent of this group were already doing some hybrid working, while the other 19% were planning to introduce it for the first time.

The survey also explored the predicted extent of this expansion: what proportion of the workforce did employers expect to engage in hybrid working post-pandemic, compared with the proportion that worked in this way pre-pandemic? Only 17% of survey participants said that more than half of their workforce was hybrid working before the pandemic, but 50% said that they expected more than half of their workforce to do so post-pandemic. At the opposite end of the scale, the proportion of the workforce that is expected to do no hybrid working at all has reduced to 16%, compared with 25% doing no hybrid working pre-lockdown.

Table 1: Proportions of employers estimating (a) more than half their workforce working in a hybrid way; and (b) none of their workforce working in a hybrid way (%)

200% rise in employers expecting more than half of workforce to adopt hybrid working

	(a) What proportion of employers estimate that more than half their workforce worked/will work in a hybrid way?	(b) What proportion of employers estimate that none of their workers worked/will work in a hybrid way?
Pre-pandemic (estimated)	17	25
Post-pandemic (expected)	50	16

Base: 2,072

In terms of employers' plans to facilitate this increase in homeworking, the most common types of measures planned were:

- changing policy (mentioned by 45% of survey respondents)
- improving technology (investment in the quality of technology was mentioned by 41%, and investment in the quantity of technology by 35%)
- providing online guidance (33%).

While these are all important hygiene factors, only 28% of respondents said they planned to put in place manager training in remote working. Given interviewees' perceptions of how remote working could be made both more feasible and more productive with changes to behaviours and working practices, more training in managing these issues is likely to be beneficial (see sections 3.4–3.6).

Turning to total, five-days-a-week homeworking, 45% of survey respondents (compared with 63% hybrid) said they expected to introduce or expand its use. A surprisingly high 31% said that they expected more than half of their workforce to work totally from home post-pandemic. Although this is lower than the 50% of employers who said they expected more than half their workforce to adopt hybrid working, it is nonetheless a remarkably high figure. Operational managers interviewed for this project tended towards a more cautious approach, citing the need for a degree of face-to-face time for wellbeing, for productivity, and for learning and development.

Most employers say that productivity has increased or stayed the same
More than two-thirds (71%) of survey participants said that homeworking had no

detrimental impact on productivity. This figure is made up of 33% who said that productivity improved, and 38% who said it was unchanged, while 23% reported productivity had decreased.

When combined with the benefits for staff wellbeing, and the potential savings to the employer in office costs, it's perhaps not surprising that many interviewees had changed their mind about homeworking. A senior operational manager credited his staff for making a success of the enforced trial of homeworking:

> *'If you had asked me this in March 2020, I would have said, "I cannot wait for every single one of my staff to be back in the office." I was a cynic about working from home. But I've learned a lot about our staff and what benefits there are working from home. With the results that they're producing, they have made it work, so it has been educational, to understand more about how we can operate better.'*

The pandemic has shifted perceptions even among those who were previously suspicious of homeworking because *'if I can't see you, then how do I know what you're doing?'* One HR director reported that, *'It's opened their eyes to say, "Maybe the perception I had before wasn't quite right. I can see the output still being delivered, and people are available, it's just that they're on a screen rather than in front of me."'*

On the other hand, almost a quarter (23%) of survey participants said that productivity decreased during the enforced trial of homeworking. Some of that decrease was due to the involuntary nature of homeworking, including inadequate workspace and technology, while some was no doubt due to broader lockdown issues such as the need for home-schooling, or reduced wellbeing because of health anxiety. Other factors concerned how the team's work was co-ordinated, and how well it was managed (see section 3.5).

Perceptions of productivity also differed between those organisations that had offered line manager training in remote working, and those that hadn't. Forty-three per cent of those that offered such training said that productivity had increased during homeworking, but only 29% of those that hadn't offered training said the same. While these findings show correlation rather than causation, employers might want to explore to what degree training for line managers can maximise the productivity of homeworkers. There is more advice on this in sections 3.4–3.6.

3.3 The benefits and challenges of homeworking

Overall, our research found a range of organisational benefits and challenges resulting from the shift to homeworking. None was reported by more than half of the survey participants, which suggests that both benefits and challenges are highly dependent on individual circumstances, both at home and at work, and on the type of work being done.

Benefits
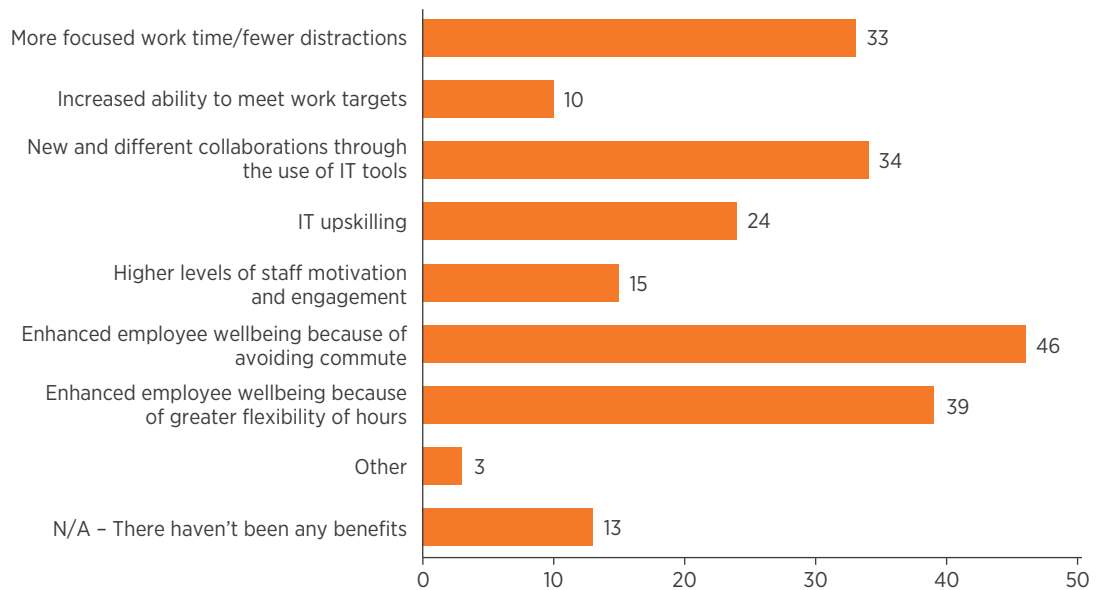#### Avoiding the commute
The most frequently mentioned benefit, cited by 46% of survey participants, was increased employee wellbeing because of avoiding the commute. Our interviewees echoed this finding: they enjoyed the increase in personal time, as well as the cost saving. Extra hours

in the day could be spent with the family: one graphically described how *'we discovered eating breakfast together as a family. I can't remember ever doing that, since I was on maternity leave. And because we didn't have the commute, we had dinner earlier, so we had an increase in our family time – games nights, movie nights.'* Others mentioned having more time for gardening, exercise, hobbies, online classes, cooking, housework, socialising (online), volunteering, helping neighbours and the joy of *'finishing work and being immediately finished'*. However, some interviewees also reported a tendency to work longer hours when homeworking (see section 3.4).

Figure 1: Main benefits of increased homeworking (%)

What have been the main benefits to your organisation of increased homeworking?

Category	%
More focused work time/fewer distractions	33
Increased ability to meet work targets	10
New and different collaborations through the use of IT tools	34
IT upskilling	24
Higher levels of staff motivation and engagement	15
Enhanced employee wellbeing because of avoiding commute	46
Enhanced employee wellbeing because of greater flexibility of hours	39
Other	3
N/A – There haven't been any benefits	13

Base: 1,524

For the remaining 54% of survey participants who did not regard avoiding the commute as a benefit, it may be that the upside was crowded out by the downsides of enforced homeworking, whether personal or work-related. Only one interviewee mentioned missing the work–life boundary provided by the commute, and that was more than compensated for by the extra time gained: *'I suppose the downside for me personally is, I like listening to audio books in my car. I miss that wind-down, I haven't got that detox at the beginning and the end of the day. However, I don't think it's a major issue because if I'm not driving, I'm going to use that time for myself.'*

Enhanced employee wellbeing through flexibility of hours

The second highest benefit (39% of survey participants) was enhanced employee wellbeing because of greater flexibility of hours, meaning that six out of ten (61%) survey participants did not regard flexibility of hours as a benefit of homeworking. This presents a complex picture, depending on both work and non-work factors. Some types of work, when done at home, allowed greater flexibility of hours, particularly informally, but for others, the same constraints on hours applied as when working in the workplace (see section 4.1). Some people found it harder to set boundaries around taking breaks or stopping work in the evening (see section 3.4). Some simply preferred a traditional routine of nine to five, and some undoubtedly found that work and family clashed when homeworking.

Team communication and collaboration
The third highest organisational benefit cited in the employer survey, at 34%, was 'new and different collaborations through IT tools'. Although team communication and collaboration is often cited as a barrier to homeworking, this finding suggests that with appropriate technology and working practices, homeworking might actually benefit organisational effectiveness (see section 3.5). Related to this, another organisational benefit was IT upskilling, cited by 23% of respondents: one HR director reported that *'even though we've always had the technology available to us, I think it's really forced us to embrace that technology so much more.'*

Reduction in distractions
A reduction in distractions, leading to more focused work time, is often cited as the major benefit of homeworking, but only 33% of our survey participants cited this, perhaps because the lockdown enforced involuntary and total homeworking, regardless of the suitability of the home workspace. While some people had fewer distractions at home, others had inadequate space and were dealing with partners, children, pets, and the inability of everyone to leave the home during lockdown.

Other benefits
Other benefits included normalising the use of technology, which could help inclusion, particularly for those with a disability or illness that prevented or impeded travel, and for those working in distributed teams. In one operational team, the manager commented that *'we've got somebody who works in Ireland; he used to be in an office that closed but now works permanently from home. He said that he's never felt so much part of a team, having that structure, the regular Teams calls, that connection.'*

And finally, several interviewees reported getting to know their colleagues better as individuals. A director noted that, *'previously, you would have seen me quite polished, in a suit, and now it's much more relaxed. That barrier of the work persona and the home persona has slipped. We have seen babies, kids, husbands, but that has forced people to talk more about their situation. I actually feel I know my team better now than I ever did before. I think that is a positive.'*

Challenges
As with the benefits, the organisational challenges of homeworking presented a complex picture which varied between different settings. Overall, the organisational challenges can be divided into 'hygiene' factors, work-related factors and wellbeing.

Reduced mental wellbeing
In all, 44% of survey participants cited reduced mental wellbeing due to isolation as a challenge to their organisation during the pandemic. Many of our interviewees, particularly those from HR, reported needing to focus more attention on wellbeing (see section 3.4). Isolation due to separation from work colleagues was of course exacerbated by the absence of a normal social or family life during the pandemic.

Hygiene factors
Hygiene factors are the issues of workspace, technology and home circumstances which, in a voluntary homeworking situation, would be dealt with in advance of a decision to move to homeworking, and might indeed preclude homeworking for certain people or types of task:

- 36% of respondents cited the unsuitability of certain jobs
- 31% unsuitable home circumstances
- 15% insufficient technology
- 15% outdated technology
- 14% lack of staff proficiency with technology.

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Work-related factors
Among work-related factors:

- 26% of respondents cited difficulty with staff interaction and co-operation
- 19% said lack of staff engagement
- 19% said line manager capability to manage homeworkers
- 18% said line manager capability to monitor staff performance.

Section 3.5 explores these factors and how our interviewees overcame them.

3.4 Wellbeing

Both HR and operational managers reported an increased focus on managing staff wellbeing – not only because of homeworking, but because of the broader social isolation imposed by the pandemic, combined with increased health anxiety and the difficulty of home-schooling during school closures.

Strategy 1: Develop the skills and culture needed for open conversations about wellbeing

Many managers reported that they found it harder to pick up on how staff were feeling when working remotely. Body language and non-verbal cues were more apparent when working side by side: *'I've had concerns as to how people were and whether you actually get an honest response when you ask. I'm not always convinced of the answers. I get the feeling that some people, certainly those who are anxious about the whole COVID-19 situation, are living a bit more in isolation, which is not as healthy.'* In the workplace, managers could find *'an opportunity to maybe have an ad hoc meeting, a check-in to make sure everything's fine'*, but it was harder both to notice, and to fix, reduced wellbeing for homeworkers.

Solutions
Upskilling managers to discuss wellbeing confidently
Good managers incorporated wellbeing into their regular one-to-one conversations about objectives, progress and workload: *'I've had to make sure that I've had my one-to-ones. And I've tried to keep as open an environment as I can so that people feel comfortable, if any frustrations come up, to speak to me.'* The frequency of these conversations depended on the work, but also on the individual's needs, and managers needed to be alert to the signs of reduced wellbeing. An HR director noted that, *'sometimes when the work is being done, you perhaps don't think, "Is everything else alright?" We set up catch-ups; we made time, and perhaps it was once a week to start off, and then it went to once every fortnight, and then perhaps we did it once a month, but it was just a check-in that we were all okay.'*

In a remote environment, managers needed to create opportunities to talk about non-work issues and actively encourage openness to talk about wellbeing. One operational manager described how team check-ins normalised the conversation about wellbeing, using *'a list of headings, to explore, what's going on for you at the moment? What have you been doing outside of work? How do you feel today, mentally? And physically? How are we all looking after ourselves? It can be a bit uncomfortable but people do resolve important things; it gives them a place where, if something's going on, those things come out.'* He noted that embarrassment could be overcome with practice, and particularly by setting an example from the top: *'I share what's going on for me as well; that helps.'*

More information about how managers can develop skills and demonstrate behaviours which will build the trust necessary for open, supportive conversations can be found under the 'Building and sustaining relationships' section of the CIPD's line manager support materials.

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Creating an organisational focus on wellbeing

An organisational focus on individual wellbeing (see Fujitsu and Onecom case studies) could help to set the tone and encourage appropriate behaviours. There's more advice on how people professionals can support wellbeing at work under the wellbeing page of the CIPD website and in the introduction for people professionals to the line manager support materials.

Strategy 2: Encourage boundary-setting and routines to improve wellbeing and prevent overwork

Many interviewees recognised that the loss of boundaries – in time and place – could lead to working longer hours. An operational director mentioned *'blurred lines between when work ends and when personal time begins. Maybe your bedroom is usually a place for personal time. When you're working at home, it becomes a place where you're working as well. And so you don't have that clear cut-off or transition.'* Others referred to *'day drift'* and *'struggling to differentiate between what is work and what is home life, so perhaps I'll be working and the kids will be downstairs, and at 5:30, I'll be thinking, "Right, I need to finish this and then I'll go and have my home life." But then something else will come in, and something else. People don't know when to switch off.'*

While many were glad to use their commuting time for personal and family activities, others donated their commuting time back to their employer: *'I've not said to anybody, "You must do this," but people are starting at home in front of the computer at the time they would have left to go to the office.'* The attraction of long hours might be particularly strong – and financially beneficial – for those working on commission or a bonus that could be earned by putting in extra hours: the leader of a sales team reported that *'prior to March, every single person's start time was 8:30am and it was a clear line. Our more aggressive top sellers will log on now at 7am or 7:30am. And their performance has increased. We don't ask them to, but some of them will stay on working, not all the time, but it could be until 8:00 at night.'*

Some managers found it harder to monitor whether staff were overworking without being able to see and hear what they were doing: *'It's not obvious that they're struggling. If you're next to them, it's easier to be aware if people feel overwhelmed with work.'* When working patterns across the group were diverse, it could be hard to tell whether someone was sending emails late at night because they were flexing their hours, or working too many hours in total: *'It's something we've been bothered about, people getting burnout, especially if the laptop is switched on in your kitchen.'* Some managers in workplaces that used physical access control systems to monitor overwork had no equivalent for the virtual world.

In addition to longer hours, the temptation to work without taking breaks could also be a challenge: *'I'm moving far less than I would do previously, and I'm taking fewer breaks, because I don't have people around me to take my breaks with.'* For those living alone, or whose colleagues weren't in regular contact, *'homeworking's more intense. You don't have the normal interruptions that you get in the office – someone popping in to ask a question, or someone doing a coffee round, or going to find someone. People are on their own with their computers, and there's nothing else going on.'* For those whose days were normally broken up by face-to-face meetings, which at least offered a chance to get away from the screen and a change of environment, back-to-back video calls were more stressful and tiring: *'Your diary is full all day, every day, on a call. When I'm in the office, I'm wandering about all the time, talking to people. Now I don't go anywhere, so my steps have dropped through the floor. My physical wellbeing is being discounted in that respect.'*

Solutions

Establishing boundaries and routines – and monitoring them across the team

Some organisations were offering training in boundary-setting and the use of routines to create appropriate start and finish times, and build in breaks to the working day. One manager described wellbeing as a basic, routine life skill: *'If at school, when they teach us how to cross the road and wash our hands and brush our teeth, they taught us all about taking breaks, and an hour lunch break, and walking 10,000 steps, we wouldn't need to be teaching our employees this now.'* HR departments had to define *'a whole new set of disciplines that, as individuals who are less familiar with homeworking, we're having to learn. That's part of the role that we've been playing centrally in HR, helping people to be aware of what those healthy practices are.'* These routines could be particularly effective if a team developed them collectively, so that colleagues could assist each other in monitoring progress and sticking to them.

Routines were needed for use of space as well as use of time. Another HR director recommended *'even something as simple as putting your laptop away when you're done for the day, moving into a different room, or finding a way to separate the space'*.

Taking breaks between video calls

To avoid the draining of energy that comes from constant video calls, one participant proposed, *'Don't have an hour call, have a 45-minute call. If it was going to be 30 minutes, do it as 20 minutes, so you can build the natural breaks into your day.'*

Noticing signs of overwork

For monitoring overwork, time-recording software could measure the time spent logged in. However, software is a blunt and partial instrument for checking on overwork: *'We have a timesheet system, so I'm always watching to make sure they're not breaking the Working Time Directive, but the timesheets are the backup, because we're watching out for people just through normal communication. Because you can see, you know? Our managers know. I rely on my local managers to go, "Tony has been working a lot of hours, what are we doing with him?" We're having far more conversations with our people, so we know when people have got too much to do.'* Managers needed to develop, or be trained in, the skills of setting realistic workloads and looking out for signs of overwork.

There's more advice on managing remote teams in the <u>CIPD's podcast on managing the wellbeing of remote workers</u>, in the <u>webinar recording</u> of the session on managing remote teams, as well as <u>guidance for line managers</u>.

3.5 Productivity

The amount of work that can be productively done from home in any particular job depends on the nature of the work, the line manager, and the team's working practices, as well as the preferences, personality and home circumstances of the individual. At the start of the pandemic, the focus was on the hygiene factors: having an appropriate workspace and desk; obtaining appropriate technology and learning how to use it; and negotiating shared space and attention with other household members, particularly children during school closures.

Over time, some teams and managers learned how to work differently, and discovered which team working practices suited them best, sometimes by trial and error: *'I'd say we got to the point of over-communicating, to make sure everyone is aware, until we got to the point where, when everyone's adapted to the working-from-home environment, we*

could kind of scale it back a bit and find the right level of communication.' Many reported homeworking as different, rather than harder, and some had developed strategies which were so beneficial that they planned to build them into normal practice post-pandemic.

Strategy 3: Ensure effective co-ordination of tasks and task-related communication

Many interviewees recorded having to change the way that they co-ordinated work when it was performed remotely. Managing the distribution of tasks to achieve collective goals needed a different approach when working remotely. In the workplace, reported one operational director, *'I sit very tight with my commercial manager, and things just come up: "Have we dealt with this, have we dealt with that?" Whereas now it all has to be formalised, you have to sort of list it down, before you pick up the phone: "I'm going to talk to him about this, I'm going to talk to him about that."'*

Some managers were more comfortable with 'management by walking around' as a means of co-ordinating work and sharing information across the team: *'I have a walk around, and then we look at things and we take actions. I'm a new set of eyes walking around and saying, "Consider this, think about that, why are we doing this?"'* These managers were reassured if they could hear that work was getting done: *'That kind of crosstalk, like communication by osmosis, when you hear those conversations going on, you kind of know that things are being managed.'* Some managers also relied on informal communication to share task-based information with, or gain information from, other teams: *'The extra bits that you overhear in the office, that's one area that we do miss out on. When we were all in the office, somebody would be talking about some issue or project, and somebody from another team would overhear and go, "Ah, I think that might cause a problem." We might lose some of that information or that interaction.'*

A particular challenge for those organisations that were new to homeworking, or that didn't use software to indicate whether homeworkers were available, was whether and when to approach a colleague. There was sometimes a reluctance to 'disturb' other homeworkers – perhaps a hangover from the days when homeworking was a means of getting away from distractions and phone calls: *'In an office you might just wander over. And that's a bit harder to manage at home. You don't know how busy someone is, you don't want to kind of burden them with another call.'* Task-related communication could be harder because of this reluctance to contact people, as an HR director reported: *'Somebody had a pensions issue and they hadn't done it for a while. In the office she would have gone, "Right girls, what do I need to do here? How do you do these?" But she said, "I struggled for about a day, and then I thought, why don't I just pick up the phone and ask somebody? I was trying to work through this minefield."'* Younger, less experienced or less confident people, or those new to the organisation without established networks or social capital (see section 3.6), might feel particularly reluctant to disturb their seniors or managers with questions or requests for information.

Solutions
Setting clear objectives
A key element of remote co-ordination of work was to ensure that clearly defined and measurable objectives were in place, regardless of work location (see Onecom case study). One senior finance manager described how the team's short-term, transactional goals were measured: *'I can see on the system how many things have been processed. We've got targets in place; we can always run reports, to see how many documents have been processed, or how many invoices have been raised, or how many supplier invoices*

we've taken in that day. There's nothing new in terms of the targets we use when people are working remotely; we haven't needed to change anything.' A project manager in a longer-term, less routine type of work recognised that the necessary trust came from having clear goals and seeing them being met: *'Checking against project performance and service goals has proved it [homeworking] does seem to be worth that extra level of trust. I can't see any of them, to know whether they are working or not. So I have to go on outcomes.'*

Calibrating the frequency of task-related communication

Remote co-ordination of work also required more formal, deliberate communication, often at pre-arranged times. If the work was fast-moving, time-sensitive or interdependent with other people's work, more frequent co-ordination of tasks might be needed: some interviewees described several group meetings a day to co-ordinate work remotely, while others got by with once a week. These meetings needed to be managed to ensure that all the necessary task information was shared, and everyone contributed their expertise. There's more advice on this in the guides for HR and line managers and our report on developing effective virtual teams.

Developing more deliberate task-related communication

This more thoughtful, deliberate style of communication was regarded as a positive by some: *'I think that one of the positives is that we've had to be more deliberate in our communication, everybody's had to think much more about communication. So you can afford to take much less chance now.'* Although social communication was generally regarded as having suffered because of remote working (see section 3.5), when it came to task co-ordination, it was acknowledged that the informal mode of communication might not be the most effective way. An operational director commented that, *'We've all had years of getting results by saying, "Right, everyone get into an open plan office together." But that doesn't necessarily create the best way.'* HR departments needed to develop people's skills in task co-ordination, as one HR director suggested: *'I think people professionals have had to become more conscious about how people communicate within the company, rather than leaving it to assumption and chance.'*

Refer to the factsheet on employee communication for more advice on this.

Strategy 4: Pay special attention to creativity, brainstorming and problem-solving tasks

Some tasks were harder to do remotely than others: brainstorming and problem-solving were often cited as particularly difficult, because some of the shared ideas, energy and creativity was lost. In some types of work, the need for intense periods of collaboration was hard to plan for: *'One of our challenges is that the work we do is very collaborative. So it's not the type of work that is just done in isolation, it kind of feeds off each other. You come up with ideas, and then you bounce around, and people add on to it. When you're working in the office, someone says, "Look, I'm working on this, I want to run my idea past the team. Can we go to the conference room and discuss it?"'*

Other types of deep collaboration, such as strategy development, were more plannable but still required a change of behaviour and outlook: *'If we are trying to look at our strategy for the next 12 months, really working it through and coming up with ideas, we have the technology to do it [remotely], but we have not quite moved the mindset away from being in a room and sticking bits of paper on a board, or chewing things over.'*

Solutions

Taking time to explore the functionality of the technological solutions

It might take months of practice for people to get to grips with the technology that, in theory, allowed these types of tasks to happen online. An impromptu group meeting to share and develop an idea could be started via a project chat facility, and then continued on a group video call. An online strategy meeting *'can be productive, because you get things done in a timeslot. We are using things like Kanban boards and technology to submit ideas in advance, so that people can do some of the thinking outside of the room. You can still post a Post-It note virtually. You do smaller discussion groups and then come together, or break it out.'* There is more information in the Coleg y Cymoedd and Fujitsu case studies.

Identifying which tasks are more effective face-to-face

It remains to be seen whether, with practice and habituation, the quality of creative, brainstorming and problem-solving tasks can be made materially identical online. It may depend on the technological tools available, the skills of the group leader, and the underlying quality of the group relationships – which develop over time and would almost certainly need some element of face-to-face time. Some operational managers remained convinced that energy and focus would always be missing if these types of tasks were conducted online: *'It's just not quite the same as when you're face-to-face across the desk from someone and you're explaining your idea and it kind of really pulses through to the other person.'* Another manager commented that, when these tasks are carried out online, *'our ability to be creative and connected, to really do some deep thinking, is challenged.'*

Strategy 5: Build in time, including face-to-face time, for team cohesion and organisational belonging

During the pandemic, the enforcement of total homeworking, without any opportunity to meet face-to-face, over an extended period of time, undoubtedly challenged engagement with one's team and colleagues, and, ultimately, with one's employer.

At the organisational level, HR directors were aware of the challenge of maintaining an organisational culture virtually. Keeping people motivated and engaged required a sense of connection: *'This is quite intangible, but how do you create the feel of the place virtually? If you go into an office, the culture is almost quite tangible. How do we get that common thread in terms of the culture when we're in a more virtual world? We can't claim to have cracked that, but we're keenly aware of asking, "How do we exactly do that?"'* Some questioned whether remote work could meet fundamental human needs in the same way as in the workplace: *'Work is not just about work: people go to work for all kinds of reasons, a sense of purpose, the need to belong somewhere. And I think the big question is, how do we recreate the employee experience in a virtual environment?'*

At the team level, it was harder to create team cohesion when there was no opportunity at all for face-to-face communication: *'The behaviour has always been to be together physically to create that connection. The team cohesion has to be forced more. So, we have to pay attention to it and create it almost artificially.'* The shared energy and motivation were harder to transmit online: *'The energy within the room, you know? You feel energy within a room. It's very buzzy within the office, there's negotiations going on, there's success, there's rejection, there's all those emotions, up, down, up, down. On Teams, it's just not that real energy. When I'm in that office and in that environment, I know what I need to do, and the energy then takes me forward.'*

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Solutions

Creating common purpose across the organisation

At the organisational level, the sense of common purpose had to be engineered more formally when people were not in close contact with each other (see Skanska and Wychavon and Malvern Hills District Councils case studies). Part of that sense of belonging came from frequent visual contact with colleagues: *'Being able to see other people in the company, being able to see them each day, it makes us feel that we're all working for the same company and we're kind of in this together.'* Large-scale company-wide events such as town halls or Q&A sessions enabled senior directors to become more visible and more accessible, and to build the sense of connection with organisational goals: *'We've had to think much more, and much more creatively, about how we reach more people. Once a month, our CEO now does an all-hands Teams meeting. So we'll have upwards of 3,000 people on those. So it's the only opportunity we've ever had for him to get to that many people, and you kind of think, "I wish we'd done this before."'*

Building personal and team relationships online

At the team level, in addition to the ubiquitous pub quizzes, line managers tried to reinforce team cohesion with a wide range of online team events, including fitness initiatives, charity fundraisers, and all types of social event involving games, food and drink (see Onecom case study). Many reserved sections of team meetings for relationship-building and sharing non-work news, being sensitive to the team's changing needs over time: *'In the first lockdown, we had a real social element to the call. So, what books are people reading, what are they watching on TV, who is doing the latest this, that, and the other? Then people got a bit fed up so we dropped that. Anyway, I've asked for feedback from the team and they said, "Can we have that bit back again?" We're having to force the social conversation, because you don't naturally have that when they don't bump into each other.'*

One HR director suggested focusing HR interventions on line managers who found this type of engagement harder: *'I think 80% of the teams are just fine. It's that 20% where the line manager may not be doing such a good job of reaching out and engaging. Typically, the good managers that we had before will be doing it well. And the others, it's probably no surprise that they're not doing it so well in the virtual environment.'* Operational managers were grateful if HR departments supplied new ideas for activities to create team cohesion: *'Variety was the key. No one solution is going to fix everything, so they've [HR] got to keep these things coming. We need the constant flow of new ideas and new initiatives going on.'*

It was important for managers to be sensitive to, and not make assumptions about, individual needs. For example, it's commonly assumed that introverts are more suited to homeworking (see Onecom case study). Another HR director noted that introverts still wanted social contact, but behaved slightly differently: *'People have engaged happily with social elements on the remote platform. The typical introverted thinkers, they're going to be much less effusive, but they like the engagement, to still have that connection. The raging extroverts want to be on the call and occupying the space.'*

Building in face-to-face time, post-pandemic

In the end, commented one operational manager, there was no substitute for face-to-face contact in getting to know people as individuals, and building the relationships that were essential to effective working together: *'To actually get to know your teams, you need body language, human moments. I think you really do need to spend time with them face-to-face.'* Organised team communication, and particularly timetabled team

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jollity, could become formulaic, removing the spontaneity and autonomy of personal relationships: *'In this remote working, the temptation is to keep setting up Teams meetings. Then there's this sort of overly organised communication. It's just trying to keep that time a bit more light-hearted, because a Teams call can get a bit regimented. I mean, they're very efficient, at times. But there's a little bit less of the personal.'*

Timetabling co-located working within teams

Nearly all the operational managers we interviewed felt that, in the post-pandemic workplace, some degree of co-located working was needed to ensure informal relationship-building. Managers needed to plan homeworking patterns to create days when the whole team was in the workplace together, and avoid a situation where *'staff are like ships passing, because their remote days might be different from their colleagues' remote days.'* Among geographically distributed teams, global teams, or mobile teams, there might be an increased role for face-to-face 'keeping in touch' events or days when work was not discussed at all, and the purpose was wholly social and team-building.

Strategy 6: Facilitate networking and inter-team relationships

When everyone was working from home, communication changed not just within teams, but between teams, and networking across the organisation suffered. While intra-team networking might be taken care of by organising online team meetings and socials, inter-team networking was often still being left to chance: *'When I was in the office, I'd be walking around and meeting lots more diverse people. Now I'm speaking less to the random members of staff and more to my own team.'* This could be a particular problem for those whose job involved working across the whole organisation: a senior strategy manager reported that *'we probably feel less connected with other teams than if we were in the same building. You don't know what they're working on, and whether you can help. When you're in a team that is driving organisational priorities, you need to work across teams, and that is hard.'*

Solutions

Creating opportunities for co-working with other teams

One solution was to roster the overlap of days in the workplace with other teams in the same way as rostering days in the workplace within a team: one manager whose team was partially back in the office reported that *'one of the teams who I work with on quite a lot of stuff, or we just bounce ideas off each other, I've arranged the rota so we're in together quite a lot. Otherwise all those conversations wouldn't be happening.'*

Encouraging inter-team relationships and networking at organisational level

Other solutions were cross-company social events (see Onecom case study) and mandating a minimum amount of time in the office (see Wychavon and Malvern Hills District Councils case study).

Even when teams are co-located and spending all their time in the office, it cannot be assumed that relationships are built automatically through mere presence in the same building. However, employers may need to create more formal opportunities for inter-team relationship-building and individual networking among homeworkers. Although networking and career-building were not front of mind in the relatively short period of the lockdown, other studies have shown that reduced networking may have long-term implications for career progression. Long-term homeworkers themselves might need to pay more attention to seeking out networking opportunities. Indeed, personal and professional development needs to be viewed differently when homeworking, as reviewed in our next section.

3.6 Learning and development

While formal training courses can be adapted for online delivery – often by reducing the length and the number of participants, and adapting the types of activities – much of the learning in organisations is informal or on-the-job. Managers were conscious of reduced opportunities for *'shadowing, and the things that you just instinctively pick up by being sat with a group of people with a similar responsibility to you'*. Homeworking, particularly if it's total rather than hybrid, may have long-term impacts on personal and professional development, and on career-building, which were not apparent from the relatively short period of the 2020–21 lockdowns (see our review of previous research on working from home).

Strategy 7: Organise a wider support network to compensate for the loss of informal learning

While informal learning can take place at any point, interviewees recognised several points at which learning needs were particularly intense. The most obvious was when joining the organisation: *'How do you help new starters to onboard effectively, and to build relationships and establish themselves? I think however senior you get, it's a bit harder if you're not in the office.'* The challenge was not limited to technical learning about the job, but extended to learning about the organisation. Even when *'the work is getting done and everyone is productive'*, new starters missed out on *'getting the measure of how this organisation works. You can do it through reading documents and structured sessions, but they miss the opportunity to experience the environment or really absorb the non-structured content.'*

Learning needs might also increase after a promotion, or when taking on a new task or area of responsibility, or switching project team. However, many felt that younger workers, recent graduates and apprentices faced the biggest challenges, because they were not only new to the organisation, but also to the sector, and sometimes the world of work too: *'It's quite tricky when you first come into the industry, or the profession, and you don't know which way is up, you don't know necessarily what your job role is, you don't know what to go and start doing. They might be sat next to someone in a traditional way, then they could just go, "How do you do this?" And it might be a 10-second conversation to say, "You just press this button there." Remotely, that requires a 15-minute Teams call or they might sit there for a couple of hours going, "I'm not sure how to do this."'* Younger workers *'don't have the same level of social capital or networks established, and it's harder to know what the rules are'*.

Solutions

Recognising the points when learning needs are more intense

This challenge was still a work in progress for most of the interviewees, although many felt that it would be easier in a hybrid world than in the period of total, five-days-a-week homeworking imposed by the lockdown. The first step was for line managers to recognise the points when more support was needed: *'I don't think we can claim to have overcome it, but the first thing is about becoming aware of it. So all of our onboarding is now virtual, it's about sharing the stories of these people who have onboarded over the past few months, and what has worked for them. And also, the manager should be paying really keen attention to the fact that it will be more challenging for somebody where they're building relationships.'*

Organising more structured development opportunities

More calculated planning of development opportunities was needed: *'Those development conversations have to be a bit more formal and a bit more planned than they would be in the physical office environment.'* Organising a wider support network instead of a single

buddy, together with more documentation, was another solution: *'Instead of buddying with one existing colleague, training was arranged with a wider range of existing staff during the first two months, backed up by more formal documentation of training procedures.'* In project-based work, managers could deliberately mix people up on consecutive projects to create greater opportunities for development.

Another solution was to rota colleagues' time in the workplace, to avoid a new starter feeling unsupported by remote-working colleagues: *'Someone new, I would want them to be in the office, but to do that, I then need people with them, to make it worthwhile.'* Depending on the nature and complexity of the tasks and the expertise of the new starter, colleagues could be asked to co-locate in the workplace for a set number of days or weeks.

④ Flexible hours: seizing the opportunity?

4.1 Introduction: work tasks can be flexible in terms of hours or location – or both, or neither

In many jobs there is a mixture of tasks which can be done anywhere, and tasks which have to be done in a specific place. Similarly, there are tasks which can be done at any time, and tasks which need to be done at specific times. When the tasks within any job are added together, some jobs will result in little flexibility on either dimension, while others will offer a wide degree of autonomy to the job-holder on both dimensions.

Figure 2: Identifying tasks that are location-flexible, and tasks that are hours-flexible
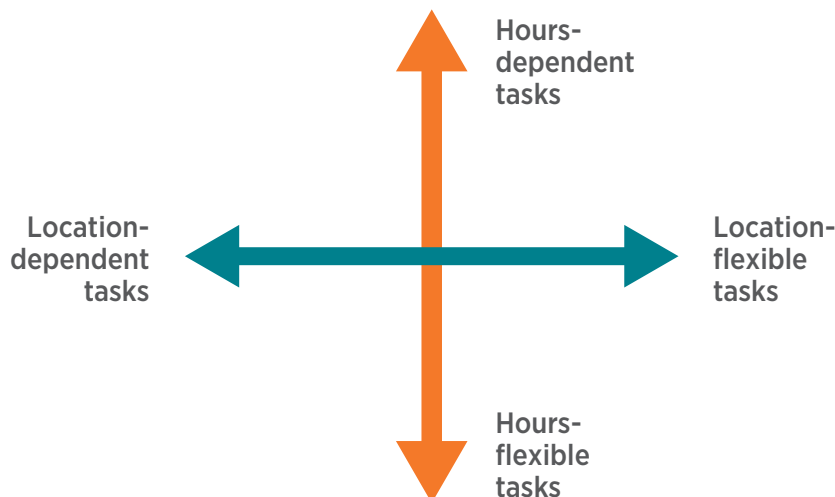
On the location scale, tasks at the location-dependent end include the physical handling of goods or materials, the use of equipment or machinery, and personal service tasks in health and care. Tasks at the flexible end include information processing, administrative tasks, creative thinking, and some types of sales and customer service. Tasks that might fall in the middle – capable of being done remotely, but requiring some degree of face-to-face contact for maximum effectiveness – include tasks that require personal or group relationships, such as teaching, people management, group problem-solving and some sales or customer service tasks that require long-term relationships with clients.
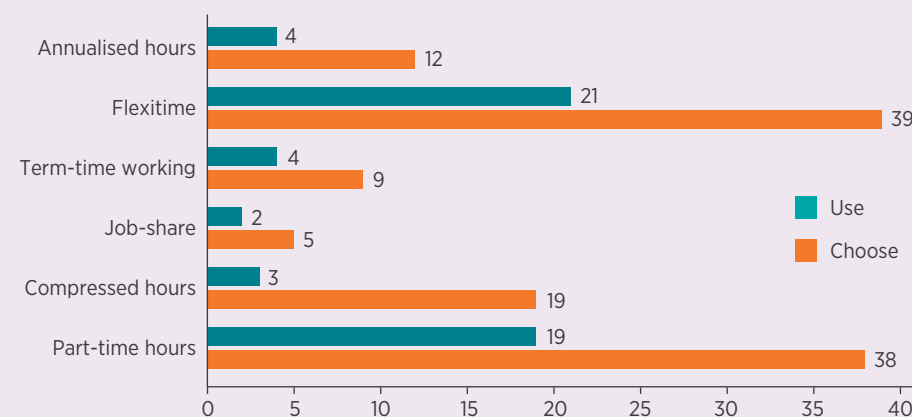
On the hours scale, constraints may come from customer requirements or team resourcing patterns, and in project-based work, may vary at different stages of a programme of work. In any kind of customer-facing role, hours may be determined by customer needs. In catering, meals have to be served at times when customers want to eat, and in education, teaching hours are specified at pre-arranged points in the timetable. In shift-based environments such as manufacturing, call centres or hospitality, the hours are controlled by the pattern of demand and by team resourcing patterns – although as in any team-based work, flexibility of hours for individuals can be increased by the way that resourcing is managed (see Compass case study). In construction, working hours are defined by the sequence of interdependent tasks laid down by the project plan.

The pandemic enforced and accelerated the expansion of flexible location, but there was no such enforcement of flexible hours. Many employers embraced the sudden widespread expansion of homeworking, but were at different stages of their journey towards flexibility of hours – and many of the barriers that prevented hours flexibility pre-lockdown were largely still in place during lockdown. Business unit leaders tended to be more cautious than HR interviewees about the opportunities for flexibility of hours, pointing out the costs and practical challenges when staff wanted to work at hours that were less than ideal for the team's deliverables. These practical challenges are also evidenced by a recent CIPD survey of employees, which demonstrated the gap between actual and preferred flexible hours working arrangements (see box below).

Unmet employee demand for flexible hours working arrangements

A CIPD-commissioned YouGov survey of 2,000 employees (weighted to be representative of the UK workforce) conducted in January 2021 shows a significant gap between the sorts of flexible hours arrangements people use and the arrangements respondents would use if they could choose (see Figure 3). This suggests there is significant unmet demand for different forms of flexible hours working arrangements.

Figure 3: The proportion of working people who use different flexible hours arrangements currently and the arrangements that respondents would use if they could choose (%)

Arrangement	Use	Choose
Annualised hours	4	12
Flexitime	21	39
Term-time working	4	9
Job-share	2	5
Compressed hours	3	19
Part-time hours	19	38

Base: 2,127 (all UK employees)

4.2 Expectations of change in flexible hours

Hours flexibility is expected to change less than location flexibility

Among the flexible working arrangements that employers were planning to introduce or expand the use of, almost half of survey participants (48%) cited flexitime, much higher than for any other type of flexible-hours arrangement, but lower than hybrid working (63%). Flexitime is a very broad term that covers a range of formal and informal arrangements about working hours; it may serve the interests of either the employer, the employee or both.[1]

Many of the operational managers cited constraints on flexibility of hours in the 'nature' of the work. For customer-facing jobs, *'there are limitations to how much we can flex the hours that people are working, because we have an SLA that we've got to meet for our customers.'* In IT support, *'because our users are predominantly 9:00–5:00, and that has not changed, our support of those users has to mirror that.'* In some types of work, the expectation is that workers will be flexible to meet the project schedule (employer-led flexibility) rather than their own needs: *'Everything's programme-related and tasks are at particular times: I need to do this by then, and that by then. They think flexible working should be sort of standardised, you know, "Every Friday I'm off." It's not flexible then really, it's just a change of working hours.'* In education, *'our priority is making sure that the curriculum and the timetable is right for our learners. Where the timetable has been shifted around towards staff working patterns, it hasn't always suited the learners.'*

The expectations of availability could be strong even when informal: *'There's almost an unwritten expectation that people will generally be there between half nine and half four. During lockdown, everyone kind of had the feeling that that was what was expected. And often there will be meetings put in your calendar, so you need to be there at those times.'* The sheer volume of work might also preclude flexibility of hours: *'I think there probably is some flexibility, although it's probably quite hard to fit that in if you're really busy, and you're already working too many hours. If the workload is right, then there's a lot of scope for moving the hours around.'*

Of course, for those whose work was hours-flexible before lockdown, that could continue when homeworking: *'I work in a group of people where we're generally flexible anyhow. I don't even expect my team to say to me, "I need to nip out for an hour at three o'clock." They do it if they need to and they make the time up whenever. Because we have that environment where you can do that. It's not the same if you're on a shift or you have to be there because of your customer. But we're output-driven rather than sitting at a desk from nine to five.'*

Some types of work, when done from home, allowed greater informal flexibility of hours

For some types of work, homeworking provided more informal flexibility of hours – making changes to start and finish times, or to break times – because *'when they are in the workplace, they are more than likely an hour away from home, so they are not going to pop home and pick the kids up, or drop parents off at hospital appointments.'* Some found it easier to have *'a proper break from work at lunchtime'*, particularly where *'there's not a lot of staff space available at the office, so a lot of people tend to have lunch at their desk, in front of their computer. Whereas if I'm at home, I'll go and have lunch with whoever's in the house. And watch the news, or read a book or something like that. And it's possible to get away from feeling you're at work for half an hour.'* Of course this depended on the workload, and the home environment, but a segment of the working population reported more autonomy in organising the timing of their work and non-work tasks in a way that worked for them.

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[1] The CIPD's definitions of a range of different types of flexible working can be found on the CIPD website.

Flexible hours: seizing the opportunity?

While flexibility of hours was partly determined by the nature of the work, there was clearly also a cultural element at play. Some noted that they found autonomy easier to achieve if nobody was watching them: one manager suggested that *'no one really knows what you're up to if you're working remotely; there isn't someone sat next to you looking at what you're doing, which is pure autonomy, I guess.'* Another said that taking time out *'is much easier when you're working from home because you don't need to worry if you need to go away for 15 minutes'* – which begs the question of what caused the 'worry' when taking time out from a day in the office.

It's not just the 'nature' of the work: a team-based approach to availability

The 'nature' of the work can sometimes be used as an excuse to not offer flexible hours. However, flexibility of hours lies not only in the 'nature' of the work but the way it's designed, and particularly in how teams co-ordinate work between team members to cover required time slots. Some employers in this project were on a journey to proactively create more flexibility of hours as part of a broader workforce strategy (see Skanska case study). Some individual teams (see, for example, Wychavon and Malvern Hills District Councils case study) had embraced a team-based approach to covering hours of service, agreed and then rostered by the team themselves.

Where the organisational and individual needs for hours of work didn't match, there were different perspectives. As outlined above, for many operational managers, the working hours were non-negotiable: the employee had to work the hours required by the job, or find another job. However, another option in some circumstances was multi-skilling: a larger group of employees with the same interchangeable skills could cover the required timeslots by juggling hours between them, building schedules from week to week that met individuals' requirements. This could create more flexibility of hours, even in jobs with very specific hours requirements (see Compass case study). Beyond these options, the perception was that extra costs would be incurred, because resourcing needed to build in a degree of slack in order that people could cover for each other.

Employers perceived fairness as a reason to improve flexibility of hours

Among those employers who had plans to improve flexibility of hours, the reasons were the usual ones: to improve staff work–life balance, wellbeing, motivation and productivity, and to attract and retain staff. However, almost half (45%) also cited the need to ensure that employees who can't work from home can also benefit from flexible working arrangements, suggesting that the pandemic might have highlighted the concept of fairness for non-homeworkers (see Skanska case study).

Has lockdown reinforced the connection between flexibility of hours and parenting?

Over the last 20 years, many employers have tried to reduce the automatic association between flexible hours and parental responsibilities, aiming instead to encompass reason-neutral flexible working that depends on the needs of the job rather than 'accommodating' individual caring needs. However, when asked about flexibility of hours, most interviewees in this project – both HR and operational managers – replied in terms of parents. The pandemic – specifically school closures and the need for home-schooling, as well as the loss of informal childcare by extended family, friends or neighbours – may have reinforced the connection between flexible hours and parenting. The spotlight was again on flexible hours as an (inconvenient and potentially costly) 'accommodation' of parents' needs, rather than part of a proactive organisational approach to work design for all. However, a few interviewees also pointed out that enforced homeworking raised the visibility of the challenge of combining work and childcare.

Many employers tried to facilitate more flexible hours for parents who were trying to combine work with childcare and home-schooling: *'We just tried to work around that because it wasn't something that anyone could do anything about. No one really had any choice in the matter. I think it's been a hugely challenging issue for parents.'*

However, the pandemic also challenged employers to reconsider who should bear the costs if parents were unable to fulfil their work obligations during working hours. One view was that parents should make up the hours – and the productivity – later in the day or week, but this only worked with job tasks at the hours-flexible end of the spectrum. Others thought that the employer should take responsibility for the costs, so that parents were not disadvantaged relative to other workers: *'We told people, "It doesn't matter if you don't do all your hours, just do as much as you can and class it as if you've done your full contractual hours," so it's not detrimental. So we were recognising that people had childcare issues.'* Yet another view was that, where tasks were at the hours-dependent end of the spectrum, the state should pay, via the furlough scheme: *'We've got a colleague whose partner is in the Army, and he was unfortunately out of the country. She has a six-month-old and a two-year-old, so there was no way that she was able to do a nine to five job. So, in that instance, we used the furlough scheme and she was so grateful for that.'* Different employers therefore had very different perspectives on who should bear the costs, when non-work commitments prevented job-holders from doing the work in normal hours, and the nature of the work prevented them from doing the work at different hours. In some cases, individuals had to bear that cost, while some employers said it should be absorbed by the organisation, and others expected the state to pay.

⑤ Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Homeworking

Conclusion: the enforced trial has highlighted seven strategies to realise the benefits of hybrid working

The enforced trial of homeworking has improved perceptions of its feasibility, as managers have learned from experience how to make it work. Most employers (71%) say that productivity has either increased or stayed the same. Many of the challenges can be overcome by adopting hybrid, rather than total, homeworking: indeed, more employers are planning to encourage hybrid working (63%) than total homeworking (45%) after the pandemic.

Among the challenges of homeworking, the hygiene factors – home workspace, technology, and domestic and family circumstances – can be resolved post-pandemic by making homeworking a voluntary rather than enforced arrangement, although this will preclude homeworking for certain people or types of task.

Once the hygiene factors are dealt with, managers can turn to work design. It's important to identify which tasks can be done remotely, and which need face-to-face contact, taking into account the wellbeing and learning needs of each individual and the whole team, and bearing in mind that these will change over time. The seven strategies for effective homeworking are:

1 Develop the skills and culture needed for open conversations about wellbeing.

2 Encourage boundary-setting and routines to improve wellbeing and prevent overwork.

3 Ensure effective co-ordination of tasks and task-related communication.

4 Pay special attention to creativity, brainstorming and problem-solving tasks.

5 Build in time, including face-to-face time, for team cohesion and organisational belonging.

6 Facilitate networking and inter-team relationships.

7 Organise a wider support network to compensate for the loss of informal learning.

Recommendation: employers need to provide training and support in hybrid working and determine carefully when total homeworking might be appropriate

Effective and productive homeworking requires different working practices, so employers need to train and support line managers and teams to adopt the seven strategies outlined above.

Despite 63% of employers saying that they will introduce or expand the use of hybrid working, only 28% say they have plans to train managers in how to manage remotely. A further incentive for training line managers might be the fact that 43% of employers that offered training said that productivity had increased during homeworking, while only 29% of those that hadn't offered training said the same. While these figures show a correlation rather than necessarily cause and effect, it would be wise to consider managers' skills in the seven strategies before widespread rollout of hybrid working.

Employers should also explore the differential impact of total homeworking and hybrid working on wellbeing, productivity and learning before embracing it too extensively.

5.2 Flexibility of hours

Conclusion: informal flexibility of hours was a side effect of homeworking in some jobs – but in others, the constraints still apply

Informal flexibility of hours happened in some jobs during lockdown: people changed their start and finish times, or took breaks at different times during the day. However, this was

limited to certain types of job: the pandemic did not enforce or accelerate the expansion of flexible hours to the same extent as flexible location. Flexibility of hours needs to be considered separately from flexibility of location: many of the barriers that prevented hours flexibility pre-lockdown remained in place during lockdown.

Almost half (45%) of those employers who were planning to expand flexitime said that part of their motivation was fairness for those whose jobs couldn't be done from home.

Recommendation: employers need to be more proactive about flexibility of hours

In order to meet the demand for flexible hours, and be fair to workers whose jobs don't allow flexibility of location, employers will need to analyse job tasks on the hours scale as well as the location scale. A more proactive, team-based approach can maximise flexibility of hours, rather than waiting for individual requests, because in many jobs (particularly interdependent jobs, and customer-facing ones), flexibility of hours needs to be considered at a team level in order to ensure service cover.

5.3 The business case for flexible working

Conclusion: the pandemic has raised questions about who pays when flexible working isn't cost-neutral

The wide range of sectors and types of work covered in this project has shown how much the business case for flexible working can vary. The concerns of operational managers about designing effective flexible jobs, particularly flexible-hours jobs, demonstrate the policy–practice gap. In some types of work, there is a mismatch between HR policy and the practical challenges and costs faced by operational business units.

In terms of the business case for flexible location, the mass trial of homeworking has normalised the idea that employers should cover homeworkers' expenses – workstation, IT kit, broadband: *'You wouldn't send an engineer out without a toolbox, so why send a homeworker out without their toolkit?'* However, the lockdown experience has raised questions beyond out-of-pocket expenses. Individuals and their managers might have acquired different perspectives on the effectiveness of homeworking: *'If I'm running a team of 30 project managers, we might need them to be in Birmingham one week and the next week in London. We're starting to get people going, "Well, I don't really want to work in London because I used to be able to work from home." And if somebody has worked from home for six months, they might not want to go and work in the office for the next six months.'* Employers will need to consider changes in employee expectations alongside the traditional business case for homeworking as a means to reduce office costs, and the costs of redesigning work and training managers to implement the seven strategies.

The business case for flexible hours usually resides in the need to attract and retain staff. During the pandemic, schemes to support workers, such as additional carers' leave or extra wellbeing time, involved costs which could be treated as a central overhead – an organisational investment in the long-term health and wellbeing of staff – or as a cost to be borne by the business unit: *'The company gave additional carer's allowance but different people interpreted that in different ways. My boss was like, "Oh, we don't want people to take that." Obviously, it's going to cost her money to give people this time. I could understand that.'* As detailed above, home-schooling during lockdown has also challenged employers to reconsider who should bear the costs if parents can't fulfil their work obligations during working hours, and the work can't be done at a different time.

The pandemic has also brought unprecedented government intervention in the labour market, with the state not just paying some of the wages of furloughed or part-furloughed staff, but also allowing employers to furlough staff whose caring responsibilities rendered them unable to work from home or at the times the employer needed. This has raised the larger question of the degree to which government should support workers when the business case for flexible working at the organisational level is not clear, because non-work needs render people unable to fulfil their organisational responsibilities in a particular timeframe.

Recommendation: further research is needed into the costs of flexible working for the individual, business unit, organisation or state

Although the pandemic is expected to create more flexibility overall, CIPD research and our organisational case studies have shown a very variable landscape. For some types of work, there are costs to implementing some types of flexible working – or at least employers and line managers perceive there to be costs. In the wake of the pandemic, more research is needed on where costs – or perceived costs – lie, for different types of worker and for different types of flexible working, particularly flexible hours. This research needs to focus on how those costs are distributed between the individual, the business unit, the organisation and the state.

Once such costs have been identified and articulated, better policy can be developed on how support for flexible working could be divided between the organisational centre and individual business units. Furthermore, the collective impact of the costs borne by individuals is, of course, a cost to the economy as a whole, and therefore a matter for the state.

5.4 Summary of conclusions

Overall, the research finds that the pandemic is likely to lead to a significant long-term shift towards more home and hybrid working, which will mean organisations will have to think carefully about how they manage and support employees working in this way.

The evidence in this report suggests employers that train their line managers in core people management skills and focus on supporting employees' wellbeing and providing opportunities for collaboration and networking will be best equipped to benefit from this shift.

Employers will have to think carefully about how they can promote and support the uptake of other forms of flexible working besides home and hybrid working to ensure flexible working opportunities are inclusive and are accessible to those who can't work remotely.

Organisations and policy-makers will also have to consider who bears the costs of flexible working for some sectors and types of work. Such costs often fall on the business unit, but may need to be considered at the level of the organisation or the state.

This is something the UK's Government's Flexible Working Taskforce will consider as part of its forthcoming review of hybrid working, overseen by Small Business Minister Paul Scully MP.

The taskforce, which is co-chaired by CIPD Chief Executive Peter Cheese, will also feed into the Government's forthcoming consultation on making flexible working the default position and consideration of other possible changes to policy such as making the right to request flexible working a day one right.

More information is available on the CIPD website.

⑥ Further resources on flexible working

This project includes other resources:

- Seven organisational case studies accompany this research.
- There is a guide for HR professionals and a guide for line managers, extending the recommendations made throughout this report.
- This report was based on a review of previous research evidence on working from home.

The CIPD publishes a wide range of materials on flexible working and related topics:

- Advice about how line managers can support the health, wellbeing and engagement of their team can be found here.
- If you need a quick-access resource, try our 10 top tips for managing remote teams.
- A review of research evidence on developing effective virtual teams can be found here.
- The CIPD's campaign to make flexible working a day one right is FlexFrom1st.
- Advice on how organisations can begin to prepare for a return to the workplace once pandemic restrictions begin to ease and plan for a longer-term move to hybrid working can be found here.

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CIPD

Flexible working: the business case

Flexible working is defined as working arrangements which allow employees to vary the amount, timing, or location of their work,[1] usually to the mutual benefit of the individual and organisation.

Flexibility helps more people access the labour market and stay in work, manage caring responsibilities and work-life balance, and supports enhanced employee engagement and wellbeing.

However in too many workplaces, obstacles such as a lack of understanding and even negative attitudes of leaders and line managers towards flexible working can prevent its benefits being realised either for individuals or the business. It is important therefore to make the case for employers to invest in creating more flexible working opportunities across their workforce, and to help in attracting people from different backgrounds and experiences.

Attraction of talent

There is a strong, unmet demand for more flexible jobs; 87% of people want to work flexibly, but only 11% of jobs are advertised as being flexible![2]

- Advertising jobs as flexible can help organisations access a wider and more diverse talent pool – so you can get the best person for the job.

- By not advertising jobs as flexible, you're cutting yourself off from potential applicants. This is especially true for roles with skill shortages and hard-to-fill vacancies.[3]

- Build your future talent pipeline as 92% of young people want to work flexibly[4] and flexible working is central to understanding why many talented workers choose temporary work.[5]

Improved engagement, job satisfaction and loyalty

Staff are more likely to recommend their employer, stay loyal to their organisation, and go the extra mile if their employer offers flexible working.

- Flexible workers have a higher level of job satisfaction, commitment, and are more likely to increase discretionary effort compared to those who do not work flexibly.[6]

- Flexible workers are also more likely to be engaged[7] which yield significant advantages for employers – potentially generating 43% more revenue and improving performance by 20%, compared to disengaged employees.[8]

Reduced absenteeism and improved well-being

- Flexible working can reduce absence rates[9] as it allows employees to manage disability and long-term health conditions,[10] and caring responsibilities,[11] as well as supporting their mental health and stress.[12]

- Parents and carers (especially those on low incomes) benefit the most – they tend to have increased wellbeing and are less troubled by stress when given access to flexible work.[13]

Employee retention and progression

Flexible working practices are a key reason for staff at all career stages being satisfied with their work and staying with their employer: flexibility can reduce staff turnover.[14]

- For senior and managerial staff, flexible working arrangements are pivotal for being able to continue to work and develop as professionals,[15] particularly if they become parents.

- For entry-level employees, flexible working reduces job-life spillover which in turn improves retention and commitment.[16]

- Higher levels of engagement, experienced by working flexibly, can reduce staff turnover by 87%.[17]

Productivity

Employees and managers agree that flexible working increases individual performance, and is more motivating than a bonus!

- 9 in 10 employees consider flexible working to be a key motivator to their productivity at work (89% – even more than financial incentives (77%).[18]

- 81% of those who have access to remote working believes it increases their productivity.[19]

- Managers and co-workers also report a positive or neutral impact on individual performance in terms of quality and quantity of work when flexible working practices are adopted.[20]

- When it comes to working with others, flexible work schedules help employees, including parents and carers,[21] balance their work and life responsibilities and boost performance,[22] increasing average labour productivity for large and small businesses.[23]

Improving business outcomes

- The normalisation and support of flexible working arrangements can help businesses to reduce their gender pay gap.[24]

- Flexible working supports more diverse talent pipelines within organisations and help improve board level diversity. As some global analysis shows, companies with diverse boards outperform their rivals and have an opportunity cost equivalent to around 3% of UK GDP.[25]

- Gender diverse leadership teams also deliver an 18% return on equity premium, and McKinsey have calculated that improving diversity could add £150 billion a year to the UK economy by 2025.[26]

Agility and responsiveness to market change

Flexible working allows companies to adapt to fluctuating market demand to boost responsiveness and competitiveness. The CBI Employment Trends survey[27] found that 99% of all businesses surveyed believes that a flexible workforce is vital or important to competitiveness and the prospects for business investment and job creation.

Tesco's, Lloyds Banking Group and Ford Motor Company are three examples of a number of organisations using flexible working to increase responsiveness to customer demand:

- A Tesco superstore uses part-time working and multi-skilling practices to meet customer demand more effectively, generating value equivalent to approx. 13% of total workforce costs.

- A head office function of Lloyds Banking Group generates value equivalent to 7% of total workforce costs through using freelancers to meet seasonal demand and locating staff across multiple sites to lower premise costs.

- A Ford Motor Company Ltd manufacturing plant saves the equivalent of about 3% of total plant costs by using outsourcing, flexible absence cover and alternative maintenance shifts to achieve cover in line with plant needs.[28]

Quality flexible working could also help the NHS deliver a 24/7 environment which work for all staff and enhances overall attraction, development and retention of employees.[29]

Endnotes

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2   Timewise Flexible Jobs Index (2018): https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Timewise_Flexible_Jobs_-Index_2018. pdf quality jobs defined a £20k +FTE

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6   Working Families & Bright Horizons (2018) Modern Families Index

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9   Giardini & Kabst (2008) Effects of work-family human resource practices: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233121173

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The Flexible Working Task Force, which is co-chaired by the CIPD and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, was set up to help increase the availability and uptake of flexible working across the economy. Its members include:

Acas • Age UK • Carers UK • CIPD • Confederation of British Industry • Chartered Management Institute • Department of Health and Social Care • Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy • Department for Work and Pensions • Equality and Human Rights Commission • Federation of Small Businesses • Government Equalities Office • HM Treasury • Timewise Foundation • Trades Union Congress • Working Families