

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF THE:	POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE		
DATE:	15 DECEMBER 2022	REPORT NO:	CFO/55/22
PRESENTING OFFICER:	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER PHIL GARRIGAN		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	NICK MERNOCK	REPORT AUTHOR:	NICK MERNOCK
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TEAM EMPLOYEE FOCUS GROUPS		
TITLE OF REPORT:	HYBRID WORKING POLICY		

APPENDICES:	APPENDIX A: HYBRID WORKING POLICY
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Purpose of Report

1. To advise Members of the work undertaken to introduce new and more agile ways of working into the Authority given the learning from the pandemic; the more widespread use of mobile technological solutions and the potential to become more productive through a more agile approach.
2. The recruitment offer and the retention of staff has also been a consideration in the production of the Policy alongside the potential to minimise the costs of living expenditure currently being experienced by staff during the current cost of living crisis.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that Members;
 - a. note the content of the report; and
 - b. approve the Hybrid working policy

Introduction and Background

4. Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority ('the Authority') recognises the need to develop modern working practices to enable employees to maximise their performance and productivity and deliver the greatest value to the business, whilst maintaining a good work life balance and personal wellness.
5. Our approach to hybrid working addresses our vision to support the importance of sustainability and the health, wellbeing and financial wellbeing of our staff. The benefits of improved work life balance, employee engagement and reduced travel make a direct contribution to this strategic priority.

6. The policy is based on the concept that work is an activity we do, rather than a place we attend.
7. It allows employees the option to manage their own time and work their contracted hours in order to complete their job. We trust that colleagues will structure their day/week in a way that balances work and home life while continuing to deliver to the communities of Merseyside.
8. New technologies are making it easy to access information remotely, work from a variety of locations, whilst promoting a more joined up service. The Authority continues to develop its ICT Strategy to support this approach.
9. The Authority has already approved an Agile Working Policy to permanently put in place the learning and successes achieved during the last lockdown and the flexible ways staff have delivered their roles and this has proved successful for one off pieces of work
10. As part of a Members engagement day it was raised by staff that the extension of the agile scheme to incorporate a broader hybrid system that facilitated longer working from home would be beneficial to our employees
11. As a consequence of this work began with two very well attended staff consultation groups chaired by the Chief Fire Officer to enable staff to discuss option they felt would work or consider schemes that they were aware existed in other organisations
12. From these meetings, and a number of subsequent emails providing additional views, a set of proposals were structured and formatted through the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) considering their impact on organisational delivery as well as employee flexibility
13. Two further consultation meetings were held with our employees to describe to them the considerations to date and explain the proposals recommended by SLT. Again, these were well attended and positive in their nature
14. This report now provides the Policy which will provide to employees a basis to apply to undertake hybrid working for up to two days a week
15. Employees will be asked to provide the work pattern they would like to undertake and confirm that they have a suitable base to do this at home
16. They will also have the opportunity to seek to work at a fire station more local to their home rather than travel into work every day
17. The line manager will consider the application and approve or reject the request based on the suitability of the request.
18. If an employee feels the decision is unfair they will have an option to appeal to the Director of People and Organisational Development

19. From discussions with our employees it became clear that hybrid working could be supplemented by extending the scope of the flexible working arrangements
20. The proposal that employees could start working earlier in the morning or work later into the evening to give them greater flexibility that was agreed.
21.
It was also debated that employees could have the option to clock out during the working day to attend urgent appointments or caring responsibilities and then clock back on again to complete their working day either in the office or at home.
22. The final element enables staff to accrue 3-day flexi leave per four-week reference period rather than two. Again, it was felt that this will allow people to complete urgent tasks as required and then have appropriate time off and support their work life balance and personal wellness.
23. This will initially be trialled for 12 months linked to the cost of living crisis to allow all parties to assess its viability and suitability. It will also allow changes to be made if deemed appropriate.
24. Staff are clear it is not a contractual change , and so if an employee needs set time off for issues such as childcare that still remains a separate process through the Family Friendly working procedure.
25. If the trial is successful then a move towards a more permanent hybrid working workforce will also open up potential opportunities for the Authority to reduce its estate, and reduce all full range of energy costs in the future.
26. The benefits of home working for our employees are they can manage their working day more efficiently, increase engagement as a result of autonomy and trust at work, reduce travelling time and related costs and increase their wellbeing, health and happiness.
27. Likewise, the benefits for the Authority can be seen as, allow the Authority to focus time and money spent on services not buildings to ensure delivering services takes priority over occupying buildings, reduce unnecessary travel time, which increases productivity and reduces cost, result in reduced costs through reduced travel and expense claims and lower our carbon footprint, through reduced emissions from reduced travel.

Equality and Diversity Implications

28. The Hybrid Working policy will form part of a suite of policies to support all employees' ways of working, and will be available based on their ability to meet the basic assessment criteria in conjunction with their line manager.
29. The use of the Hybrid Working policy and Flexible Working will be regularly monitored during the trial period to ensure its usage does not knowingly preclude any specific work group.

30. A draft Equality Impact Assessment is currently being reviewed.

Staff Implications

31. Staff will complete an application form to set out their preferred working arrangements. This will be assessed by the line manager and either agreed, rejected or an alternative pattern can be proposed. It will provide our employees with a clear opportunity to adapt their work approach in a flexible way.

32. Staff will be able to propose a number of different ways of working under the policy, and those staff who wish to continue to work permanently within the office environment can do that if they wish.

33. Hybrid working will be agreed subject to the following principles:

- Productive work is possible from any agreed location
- That Line Management remains visible
- In any agreement more time is spent in the workplace than the alternatives (unless specifically agreed)
- Departmental meetings are facilitated, this may be having a designated day
- Organisational Meetings are facilitated
- Service benefit is demonstrable (ink cost burden)
- The employees welfare is fully considered
- The employees working environment is conducive to home working

Legal Implications

34. The Authority continues to have a duty of care for its employees whilst they are at work and must comply with any relevant health and safety legislative requirements. The Authority will ensure all appropriate measures are in place prior to any commencement of home working.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

35. The introduction of home working may incur some initial costs to the Authority for the provision of equipment.

36. The Authority has provided a number of laptops and mobile technology devices to our staff during the last period of lockdown and will continue to review this situation as staff reach agreement with their line manager to access home working.

37. Whilst it is envisaged any additional technology costs can be contained within current budgets, any additional costs incurred will need to be identified through the departmental budgets.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

38. From an environmental perspective this will support reduced travel, and use of Service vehicles. The relevant health and safety requirements including completing the relevant forms for any proposed home working to ensuring the welfare of employees remains paramount.

Contribution to Our Vision:	<i>To be the best Fire & Rescue Service in the UK.</i>
Our Purpose	<i>Here to serve, Here to protect, Here to keep you safe.</i>

39. The staff focus groups resoundingly confirmed that employees felt more engaged with the ability to be able to adapt the way they work. It will assist with future recruitment, as well as contributing to retention of employees. It will also contribute to employee engagement across the Authority

BACKGROUND PAPERS

CFO/111/11 If this report follows on from another, list the previous report(s)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ARA Any Relevant Acronyms used in the report or technical terminology