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Report title: Ways of Working (WoW) Programme update
Report to: Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee
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Date: 20 September 2021 **For:** Update
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County Divisions affected: *All Essex*

1. Background

1.1 Recap / Introduction to the Ways of Working programme

Ways of Working (WoW) is a large cross-organisational change and transformation programme that has been using an evidenced based approach to transition Essex County Councils (ECC) current working model (primarily 'office-based' working) into a Hybrid one (a mixture of flexible working arrangements, based on business and customer need. (See Flexibility of workforce section below).

The programme has largely been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic and has bought together three key areas, People, Property and Technology for success. Like many other local authorities such as, Central Bedfordshire; Leicestershire; Hertfordshire and Cornwall, the programme seeks to embed a permanent change to how we once worked (Pre-covid) that is fit for purpose and sustainable for the future.

The key changes the programme seeks to deliver:

I.   **People**

- ✓ **c75% of total workforce** (**c5.8k** employees) to have adopted and be working permanently in a hybrid way with the support of new workspaces and technology by Autumn 2022
(There are a total of 7767 permanent and fixed term/casual contract employees within the Council)

- ✓ Resilient and inclusive hybrid teams, achieved by developing and rolling out learning and development programmes and actively measuring wellbeing, customer satisfaction and employee productivity

II.   **Property**
Pre-covid 19 – Our current buildings had a 50% occupancy rate.

- We want to redefine the purpose of buildings and create spaces staff need and will utilise by Autumn 2022.

- We need to re-learn how & when to use buildings and workspaces going forward
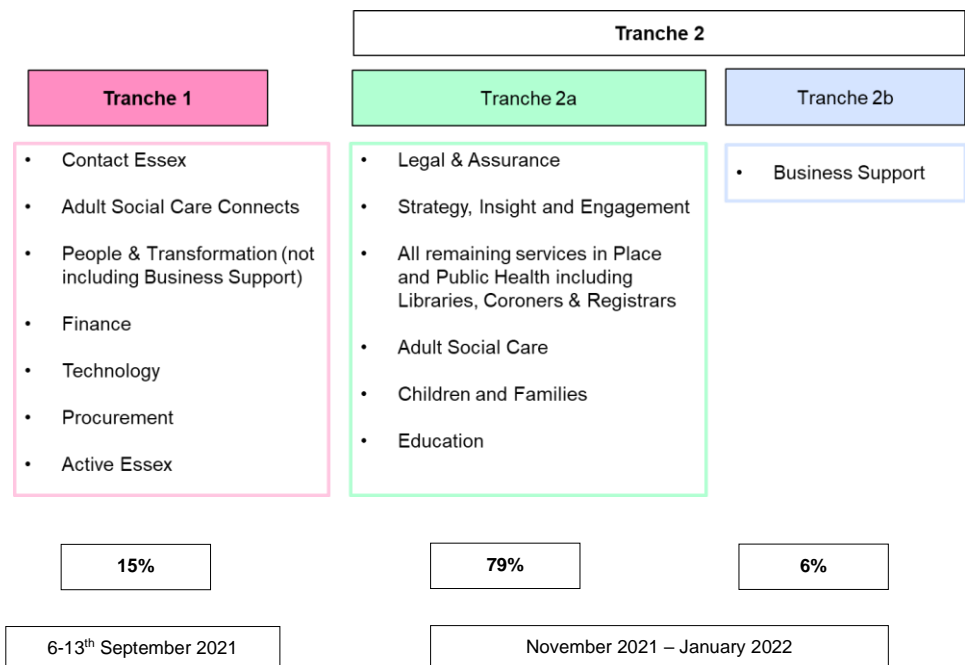
III.   **Technology**

- We want technology that enables us to connect us across different locations, support productivity gains and are user focused, intuitive and easy to use.

Given the size of the organisation (7767 employees, not including contingent workers), WoW will transition the workforce in two key phases.
This will ensure:
  o Effective delivery and change management
  o Equality in the level of support provided (with scope to support those services that require extra due to complexity of service and scale of change)
  o Returns to using buildings are managed in safe and co-ordinated way

	Tranche 2	
Tranche 1	Tranche 2a	Tranche 2b
• Contact Essex • Adult Social Care Connects • People & Transformation (not including Business Support) • Finance • Technology • Procurement • Active Essex	• Legal & Assurance • Strategy, Insight and Engagement • All remaining services in Place and Public Health including Libraries, Coroners & Registrars • Adult Social Care • Children and Families • Education	• Business Support
% of total workforce	**15%**	**79%**	**6%**
Employees testing and working in accordance to their workstyles / hybrid way of working and return to interim spaces	6-13th September 2021	November 2021 – January 2022	

Achievement to date:

✓ Approximately c**1200** employees (15% of organisation) (Tranche 1), have transitioned into their hybrid models, now testing their aligned workstyles (Majority **Anywhere workers,** with 6 employees in Corporate Services aligned to a **Fixed based worker**) and workspace requirements using interim spaces.

✓ Work progresses to learn, explore and repeat for Tranche 2 (c6570 employees), starting with Tranche 2a (**c6140 employees)**

2. Flexibility of workforce

2.1 People:

- Mobile and flexible working was supported by ECC prior to the pandemic, but most saw this as a minor adjustment (such as working from home on an occasional Friday), rather than an integral part of where and when we work.

- The fundamental shift to the way we had worked during the pandemic restrictions proved that large-scale flexible working at ECC was achievable. This realisation galvanised the WoW programme to focus on exploring flexible working possibilities and challenge previous expectations to drive cultural change.

- We have since embarked on a process to support team and individual mindset changes by holding discussions with services to review what has gone well whilst working remotely, what is valued and what hasn't gone so well, in order to explore how teams could work in a new way (Hybrid model framework, see appendix 1 below).

- ECC also provides a wide range of services requiring employees with a variety of professions and roles.
  In order to help to plan our future workforce, property and technology requirements, all roles will be assigned to one of four workstyles (Anywhere, Fixed-based, Community & Field-based) (See appendix below)

- The Workstyles define the parameters of where, when and how each role could be performed and provides teams, individual employees and their managers a framework to operate within when determining how best to work flexibly while maintaining a high standard of service provision. Once the workstyle is determined this is paired with Workstyle personalisation, which is agreed at a local level to define how each team member's place and hours of work can be flexed to suit business and personal needs, such as wellbeing.

- Flexibility for some roles will be defined by the activities that they perform; 'Fixed based workers' and 'Operational Field-based Workers' will have limited personal flexibility about where they work due to the nature of the role types (front-desk receptionists won't be able to work from home) but all roles may have the ability to allow some element of flexibility.

- In addition to enabling flexible working through mindset change, the programme also has workstreams to consider how best practical changes are made such as Technology support, Property (see below).

- The focus that the WoW programme has given to flexible working is empowering our managers and employees by not only giving 'permission' but providing structure and encouragement for managers and employees to explore a better balance that works for the council, our employees and our service users.

- During this Programme and ongoing, we will baseline and measure productivity to ensure we are creating the right conditions for people to be as effective and as efficient as they can be

2.2 Property:

- To support the change journey and enable effective flexible working, we are currently developing recommendations (through the workplace strategy work, see below) to ensure that we right-size our estate portfolio and workspaces and align it to how the services within the organisation will now work.
  We will seek to create physical and tangible change across our current workspaces in line with organisational evidence (space requirements).
  This will be designed and tested before we embark on final configurations (see Estates Strategy below)

2.3 Technology & equipment:

To enable flexible working to date:
  - Technology Services added extra capacity to our existing home working solution. But has since built a cloud based replacement, Global Protect which is currently in use by 3,000 users and rising. This new solution bypasses County Hall and offers improved resilience, DR, and a more reliable service. This work has been complemented by an ongoing Cloud Modernisation Programme which has seen applications move to being cloud hosted, including Visual Files, Essex Archives Online and parts of the public facing web portfolio. These migrated services also benefit from improved DR and resilience

  - **Blended Meeting rooms**
    We want to ensure that both those in a meeting room and those joining remotely feel part of the meeting using "presence" technology. It is expected that this technology will be installed across 27 existing meeting rooms in E block including Committee Room 1, **during October 21** in the first instance. Further areas will be explored following decisions being made on the Workplace strategy.

  - **WFH equipment package**
    Whilst some employees already spent some of their time working from home, or had a suitable working space such as a study, many employees did not have the correct space or equipment to be able to work comfortably and safely from their home environments.
    In response to this, in June 2020, ECC introduced an equipment allowance for all employees to access which allowed them to claim for equipment such as a desk, chair and lamp. Sustainable options for the future are being reviewed.
      - Desk - £100
      - Chair - £100
      - Lamp - £30
    There was capacity to meet £500k from existing service budgets in 2020/21 and replenish (if required) from incidental underspends (i.e. travel and mileage expenses etc.) Spend from June 2020 – August 2021 equated to an estimated **£329k.**
  - Sustainable options for the future are being reviewed.

3. Future Estates strategy

Plans of activity:

- **The Workplace Strategy**
  To be delivered in 3 phases.
    1. **Blueprint** – using the findings from Tranche 1 exploration and CLT Hybrid working figures to identify the direction, look and feel and how many people we will need to accommodate in our buildings
    2. **Estate Appraisal** – Establishing the strategy going forward, looking at and assessing the assets we have available to us and recommending the buildings that would best accommodate the needs of teams working in a Hybrid way – **October 21**
    3. **Action and Design -** Once the strategy has been agreed, phase 3 will commence to make any changes to the portfolio (buying, selling etc) as well as designing our new workspaces within the buildings we have agreed to retain for that purpose – **From November 21** (dependent on internal governance processes)

- **Hibernating parts of County Hall**
  Whilst the final strategy is being developed and agreed, in preparation to test the right-sizing of the main hub (County Hall), **In September 21**, we have been successful in hibernating part-blocks B, C and D and shifting (where applicable) utilisation for all Tranche 1 services to E and A blocks. This will see savings of £125k for 2021/22 and £250k for subsequent years if maintained.

- **Pilot Spaces**
  To allow employees to test new ways of working environments, two pilot spaces will be developed, to showcase some of the possibilities of ways of working ahead of final configurations. Employees will be surveyed during this test period with feedback fed into the final Estates Strategy (See Pilot Spaces in appendix for more information)

- **Main building hubs in Colchester**
  There is a proposed plan for two buildings in Colchester. Essex and Stanwell House. A CMA that sets out the plan for closing Stanwell House, invoking the lease break clause (deadline end March 2023) for vacating Essex House by end Sept 2023 and to request some funding to support the delivery of this (including relocation costs) is underway. A new Head of Property was recently appointed to take this forward.
  Dependent on approval of the CMA the next steps will be as follows:

  - Children's, Families and Education will be moving from Stanwell House and Essex House into Rowan House
    o Finalise the pre-agreement for Rowan House
    o Sign the Rowan House lease
    o Place Stanwell House on the Market
    o Colchester Borough Council (owners of Rowan House) are currently refurbishing the site and have stated that works will be completed between May 22- Aug 2022.

  - Essex Records Office (ERO) also occupy Stanwell House using a specialised room to house artefacts
    Two options (TBC):

      o Convert a meeting room within Chelmsford ERO to house the artefacts currently in Stanwell House
      o Move to available space in Suffolk

4. Key next steps (See WoW high level plan in appendix 5)

- Start the to manage and monitor change in Tranche 1 – **September 21**

- Analyse function/service workspace requirements based on expected new ways of working to feed into Estates Appraisal **– September 21**

- Pilot Space (County Hall E1 Bridge) complete and ready for teams to test – **End September 21**

- All Blended Meeting rooms tested and ready for use – **October 21** (subject to equipment availability)

- Third employee survey analysed and shared with Functions – **October 21**

- Managing in a Hybrid world development programme rolled out **– October 21**

- Estates Appraisal complete and approved – **October/November 2021**

- **c6570 employees** (Tranche 2) transitioned (where applicable) into their new way of working – **November – January 22**

- Manage and monitor change in Tranche 2 – **November – February 22**

- Workspace designs approved – **December/January 22**

5. List of Appendices

(i)   Appendix 1 – Other Achievements
(ii)   Appendix 2 – Hybrid Framework
(iii) Appendix 3 – Workstyles
(iv) Appendix 4 – Pilot spaces
(v)   Appendix 5 - WOW – high-level programme plan

Appendix: For information

1. Other achievements to date

People:

- ✓ Hybrid Framework developed to facilitate hybrid discussions across the organisation, understanding what has worked well during this unique time, what is valued and exploring hybrid working opportunities. (see appendix 2 and Flexible Workforce above)

- ✓ Bespoke communication and engagement platforms developed and delivered to support the organisation on the change journey, providing them with the tools to succeed.
  - WoW hub
  - WoW One News site

- ✓ Third employee survey closed on 18 September to obtain the views of employees around working patterns, building use and opportunity to express feedback.

    The data is currently being analysed so that informed decisions can continue to be made going forward.
    However, responses from employee surveys issued in May 2020/October 2020 and latest one in August 2021, have remained consistent in highlighting that the majority of the workforce could carry out their role effectively (in this new way of working) with the latest survey suggesting that the majority of respondents would prefer to work out of a building no more than once or twice per month.
    Note. *Further consideration will need to be given to those services/employees, who require and/or continue to work from buildings.*

- ✓ Robust Wellbeing resources and support in place to support new ways of working – *The latest employee survey noted many highly positive comments and thank you messages from employees who feel everything and more has been done to ensure their wellbeing (especially from new starters')*

Property:

- ✓ Interim spaces (allocated workspace – a set number of desks and chairs aligned to new ways of working service requirements) set up in County Hall (majority in E block) and Essex House (Majority of Contact Essex & Adult Social Care Connects employees) to accommodate Tranche 1 returns

- ✓ Partner Building – Rowan House (owned by Colchester Borough Council) agreed for Children, Families and Education use that supports the Property Strategy for vacating Stanwell House. (see Future Estates Strategy)

Technology:

- ✓ MS O365 (including MS Teams) was successfully rolled out to all staff in ECC, including Members, allowing staff to hold virtual meetings, make use of the chat functionality and collaborate   MS Teams functionality is continually upgraded and upgrades that have been beneficial, include 'hands up', 'break-

out' rooms and multiple presenter modes to improve and support with online collaboration and meetings.

✓ Technology Services has improved the way we build and provide laptops to staff, removing the need for them to come into ECC buildings. The move to Global Protect allowed for some technology fixes to be deployed remotely by Technology Services.

✓ Changes were made to enable staff to purchase IT equipment to support their home working – monitors, keyboards etc.

Benefits:

✓ As a result of the shift in ways of working, there was a c£4m reduction in actual incidental spends during 2020/21 financial year compared with the previous year. This largely related to travel/ meeting expenses, office expenses. Further work on benefits is underway and will be underpinned by decisions made on the Workplace Strategy.