

<b>9 June 2020</b>		<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Impact of COVID-19 on the Current Agile Working Programme</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Not applicable	
<b>Report of:</b> Andrew Mulholland, PMO Manager, Corporate Programme Team		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Gary Staples, Assistant Director Transformation		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Jackie Hinchliffe, Director of HR, OD & Transformation		
<b>This report is</b> Public		

## Executive Summary

In December 2019 phase two of the Agile Working Programme aimed to deliver a modern, dynamic workforce that delivers our services from locations other than the traditional working environment of one designated desk/workstation per person in a Council building. The overriding ethos being “work is **what** you do – not **where** you do it”.

To achieve the objective it was agreed there is not one single solution; but a suite based on 3 key disciplines - Technology, Workspace and Culture.

This report considers the impact of COVID-19 across the three Agile Working disciplines, the current activity and the future steps for the Agile Programme.

It demonstrates how the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated change and overcome many of the barriers perceived to prevent an Agile working environment. The speed of change has resonated across the organisation and it is clear we will not be returning to Old Ways of Working. Harnessing the benefits is now an integral part of our recovery planning and helps deliver the ambition of ‘fewer buildings and better services’.

One of the, as yet intangible, benefits of an agile working ethos is that of its alignment with the Government’s commitment made to the Committee on Climate Change (CCC), back in October 2019; to reduce the UK’s emissions to an ambitious net zero emissions target by 2050. Subsequently The Council too passed a resolution declaring a climate emergency with the aim to reduce its emissions in support of the Government’s commitment. Now with evidence that less of our workforce having to travel in, or to, the Borough in order to deliver our services is

achievable, we are absolutely confident that we can help contribute to the desired climate change objectives over the longer term.

## **1. Recommendation(s)**

### **1.1. The Committee comment on the content of the report and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Ways of Working.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1. What do we mean by Agile? Agile is a concept that work is an activity we do, rather than a place we go. This concept enables people to work in ways that is the most effective both to them and an organisation. It places an emphasis on a change in culture or work-style and encompassing the technology across the organisation.

2.2. There is evidence in both private and public sectors that agile working can provide a range of benefits for personal, business and the environment. The high-level benefits of agile working are commonly described as:

- Greater productivity and services delivered more effectively
- Focusing on outcomes rather than processes and being seen
- The costs and environmental impacts of work reduced as space is shared and used more intensively, less road travel and commuting
- Reducing the running costs of the organisation through making best use of our assets
- People having more choice about when where and how they work, supported and connected by effective and appropriate use of technology
- People having the opportunity to lead more balanced and healthier lives. Improving work-life balance and reducing sickness
- Improved reputation as employer of choice
- The ability to change the hours of operation to suit its customers without necessarily having to extend the operational opening times of buildings
- An agile workforce enables greater flexibility with staff shift patterns to enable the delivery of remote services - when they are needed most

2.3. Rather than specific targets, good practice describes agile in terms of maturity and how flexible officers feel about their approaches to working and technology.

2.4. Thurrock first adopted the initial agile working concept under an IT Connect project within the Civic Offices refurbishment programme that was completed in early 2016. However, current drivers towards better utilisation of office space, creating more effective ways of delivering services to our customers through use of technological advances and supporting transformational regeneration schemes meant that we had to do more.

2.5. The Council's most recent Pulse staff survey, ran independently, provides some insight. The results for 2019 includes:

- 77% of staff believe that the Council offers flexible approaches to working
- 76% say they are able to strike the right balance between work and home life
- 75% feel they are able to work in a flexible and agile way within their role
- 71% of staff said they were given enough authority to make decisions
- 55% of staff said they were satisfied with the IT systems and processes in place to support them to work flexibly and in an agile way

All of the indicators are above the national average and have improved over the 2 year period from the previous survey.

### 3 Current Agile Programme

3.1 In December 2019, various activities were considered to understand the appetite and feasibility of re-energising agile working further and to inform the next steps of an Agile Working Programme. This, along with good practice guidance from the private and public sector, had identified some enablers for a more comprehensive agile approach for the Council.

These included, but were not limited to:

- Better desk-to-field telephony continuity for agile workers and/or wider availability of mobile devices
- Fully utilising existing technologies already available to staff (such as conference calling and screen sharing etc.)
- Better working, meeting and collaboration spaces
- A different mindset towards work ethics and utilization of office space
- An improved understanding of culture, communication and staff's availability/manageability when not always visible

3.2 The ambition for Thurrock is to have a trusted, technology enabled agile workforce who are able to choose the best place to work in order to deliver excellent services to its customers - whether that is from an open, collaborative office work space, remotely or from home.

3.3 The Agile Design Principles agreed for Thurrock are:

No.	Design Principle	Design Statement
1	Managed by performance	Staff managed by performance and outcomes rather than presentism
2	Everyone is capable	Flexibility is the norm rather than the exception. It is assumed everyone is capable of working agile irrespective of role or person

3	Effective locations	Work takes place at the most effective location and time, relevant to the task, customer, individual and team needs
4	Balancing choice with business needs	Agile working balances personal choice with responsibility to meet the needs of the business
5	Activity-based workspace	Workspace is allocated to activities, not individuals or hierarchy
6	Connectivity everywhere	Collaboration and connectivity can take place virtually everywhere
7	Continuous challenge	Traditional and new approaches are continuously challenged to make sure they are fit for purpose

3.4 To achieve the ambition, a range of projects and activities were brought under a single corporate programme reporting to People Board. This incorporates a number of sub-projects and specifically delivers across three disciplines:

1. **Technology**; in conjunction with Digital Board ensure staff have more flexibility and choice in how they deliver service by providing mobile devices as standard for all staff who are classed as an agile worker.
2. **Workspace**; in conjunction with Property Board ensure that, primarily, the Civic Centre office space is developed and designed to accommodate an agile working environment, using appropriate furniture and space to maximise agile working and collaboration opportunities. This will create the blueprint for all other Council buildings.
3. **Culture**; in conjunction with People Board programmes embed trust and confidence with the concept and tools for agile working by providing a comprehensive agile culture change programme together with any appropriate digitally re-skilling of the workforce.

3.5 The current programme includes three phases of development, as outlined below.

<b>Agile Programme Overview</b>
<b>Phase 1 – February to September 2020</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish Programme</li> <li>• Proactive focus on Civic Office, libraries and hubs</li> <li>• Technology roll-out</li> <li>• Concept trials for workspace</li> <li>• Culture and engagement mobilisation</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 2 - October 2020 to September 2021</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completion of Civic Office activity</li> <li>• Embed culture change and technology as standard working practice</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wider workspace analysis</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 3 – October 2021 to September 2022</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wider roll-out across other Council property assets</li> <li>• Co-ordinated with Civic extension</li> </ul>

#### **4 The impact of COVID-19 and the response by the organisation**

- 4.1 The Agile Working programme was already in-flight prior to the COVID-19 pandemic breaking out. As a consequence, some tasks have since been delayed but many others have now been accelerated. This was an unavoidable but accepted risk to the programme. Most significantly there was a dramatic and positive change in mind-set as to how to deliver services remotely. Many previously perceived barriers to agility were quickly overcome and a new demand for technology enhancements was prevalent.
- 4.2 Pre-empting restrictions likely to be imposed, prior to lockdown being announced, an Agile “test” day was held on Tuesday, 17 March 2020. This tested business continuity and was a success, with 992 unique log-ins recorded from home locations and 449 at other site locations.
- 4.3 Since the Government’s directive to Work from Home was formally issued w/c 23 March, a similar number of remote log-ins has continued at around 1500 on any given day throughout the lockdown period.
- 4.4 Throughout the duration, Agile messaging, support and advice for those working from home has been incorporated into regular bulletins utilising multiple communication channels.
- 4.5 Each of the three disciplines within the Agile programme has had to adjust, at pace to ensure business continuity. Below this is explored in a more detail.

#### **Technology**

- 4.6 Phase 1 of the Microsoft upgrade to MS 365 had already started in March 2020 and was originally scheduled to be rolled out over 12 weeks into May. This was 90% complete by the end of April including:
- Migrating on premise e-mail to Microsoft 365 Cloud
  - Migrating mobile email on phones/tablets from Blackberry to Intune
  - Migrating two factor authentication (2FA) from the Google authenticator to Microsoft authenticator
- 4.7 By end of March, there was an urgent need to enhance the council’s conference calling capability. Microsoft Teams scheduled for the summer 2020 was quickly brought forward to April.

- Within 2 weeks, 970 users had Microsoft Teams capability including guidance on how to use it
- 4.8 The approach to Digital devices has been a mixture of using your own device and the issuing of IT approved kit e.g. phones and laptops, for those that work remotely. A mobile thin-client device had been approved as part of the programme, this was cheaper and more reliable than traditional laptops but provided the same level of functionality for the majority of workers when using the Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) that was already in place since the completion of the previous IT Connect project.
- 4.9 As part of the Agile programme, 90 mobile thin-client devices and 120 mobile phones had already been ordered in February but delivery was delayed due to supply chain constraints with no new date.
- By end of March, 100 alternative laptop devices were sourced and prioritised to service users. Over 300 mobile phones have now also been made available. This means in total there are 800 mobile computing devices, and 1600 mobile phones in use across our services.
- 4.10 Through earlier Agile pilots, used to inform the new Agile programme, we had identified access to desk phones to be a barrier to enabling full agility. However, fortunately, a range of solutions had been tried and tested just prior to lockdown.

Three discreet telephony solutions were prioritised for roll-out to enable full agility;

- Landlines were diverted to mobiles wherever possible to maintain individual in-bound communication channels open
- Adaptors were provided that connected to home broadband routers and enabled current desk phones to be used at home and “hunt groups” to be retained
- A virtual service desk was set up to support our TCCA Community Response initiative that utilised ring-fenced landline numbers that divert to a number of mobile phones set up in a pseudo-hunt groups.

Within a week of lockdown, **all** telephony services were able to function remotely.

- 4.11 The reliance on paper, printing and scanning had also previously been identified as a barrier to greater agility. Services that rely on traditional mail correspondence, for example, would have to find alternatives for this and balance the need for printed matter, as part of legislated guidance or formal proceedings.
- Office printing for April reduced significantly by around 80%. Printing at home remains a challenge to enabling full agility due to the need to comply with GDPR guidelines. Whilst meaning there will be a need to restrict

printing at home it also raises an opportunity to explore further ways to continue with such printing reductions post-Lockdown.

## **Culture**

- 4.12 Raising awareness of agile ways of working, using change champions and training on technology were planned for late spring 2020. However the lockdown created an immediate need to support staff whilst working from home for a much extended period - including their health and well-being.
- 4.13 With the amount of on-line advices available and in use it was important for the Council to give clear and concise information about expectations - including how to work remotely and continue to be effective.
- 4.14 This meant we had to rapidly accelerate communications to the workforce. Within a week of lockdown advice was available on the Intranet covering:
- How working from home can work for you
  - Health and well-being advice
  - Guides and walkthrough for digital products
  - EAP – Employee Assistance Programme
- 4.15 This has been added to and enhanced daily. The expanded offer includes:
- Oracle learning community
    - Additional content to help staff embrace;
      - remote working
      - adapting to change
      - being 'visible'
      - maintaining learning
  - Links to specific agile related information and policies brought under a single intranet page
  - Agile working as a team and Local Charter
  - A range of tips and tricks to overcome challenges of remote working such as;
    - maintaining productive habits when working from home
    - keeping your team connected when working at a distance
    - providing confidence to team members during uncertainty
    - changing behaviours to increase safety for yourself and those around you
  - Online social community
- 4.16 Good practice in change management recognises staff “champions” of the change can improve and embed the desired culture. During lockdown those traditional routes of access to colleagues for support and advice may no longer be available. The IT team noted a 400% increase in contact via its online self-service portal 4ME.
- 4.17 The agile programme intention to develop change champions during May has been delayed slightly and is expected to launch in June. At the same time we intend to launch a staff survey to understand better how staff are feeling about

the current situation from an engagement perspective, and produce a comprehensive staff guide on further agile working.

## **Workspace**

- 4.18 The original programme intended to trial different types of office environments. To give office space a focus on collaboration settings, space booking and to move away from traditional desks. Prior to the lockdown announcement, Interactive screens had been installed in some meeting rooms at the civic offices, plans had been drawn up for converting some space to a model agile office and an initial feasibility trail for meeting room and hot-desk booking was scheduled to start in April.
- 4.19 These activities have been delayed and will need to be revisited, both in light of new back to work guidance for offices and social distancing, and how the new normal way of working will operate post lock down measures. In the longer term we could potentially be a lot more ambitious with the reduction in office accommodation across our asset portfolio and drive further efficiencies.

## **5 Conclusion relating to the impact of COVID-19 on the Agile Programme**

- 5.1 Due to the impact of the Coronavirus, the exact timings and content of the phases of the Agile programme are subject to change. In particular, activities relating to Technology and Culture have been brought forward very successfully. Changes to create an agile Workspace however have been delayed as these are mainly subject to guidance from Central Government for example on maintaining social distancing.
- 5.2 It was generally recognised that changing the mind-set of people to work agile would be the most challenging task to sustain. However the current period of home-working has been a catalyst for a change in agile thinking. Whilst the COVID-19 crisis has meant many of our plans have rapidly been brought forward, and perceived barriers to agile working have been overcome in the short-term. It is still one of the biggest challenges to sustain the approach, or at least the mind-set that work has not necessarily got to be done in an office.
- 5.3 In addition whilst home-working does limit some choices and may not be the most efficient way to undertake **all** tasks, either for the customer, the Council or the individual, home-working should be integral to how we see the options for agile workspaces.

## **6 Next phase of Agile working**

- 6.1 To understand how staff are currently feeling during this difficult period the Council is undertaking a Pulse survey to better understand employee engagement levels across the organisation.
- 6.2 The results are expected within the current phase of the Agile programme and will add value to the next phase of agile working programme later in 2020.

That phase will need to deliver against the question; How do we sustain agile working, capitalising on the best out of our new ways of working?

6.3 We expect to see a home-working setting as the first choice, the default workspace. Only coming into civic buildings where collaboration with others face-to-face for example, is a preference in order to deliver a better outcome. Along with some bookable desk and spaces to accommodate those that can't work from home.

6.4 What that means across the 3 Agile disciplines;

- **Technology;** A reliable, consistent technology offer, both at home, office and other remote settings, to support a change in work style, and any local service delivery challenges.
- **Workspace;** Making sure home environments comply with health and safety guidance for those who work the majority of the time at home (and the office space can support any longer-term guidance to minimise the impact of Coronavirus) and a redesign of the office space away from traditional seating layouts.
- **Culture;** Embedding new ways of working such as, ongoing staff support for health and well-being, practical and visual technology guidance, staff management skills that ensure staff remain connected so the social element of work is maintained.

## 7 Implications

### 7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Sean Clark**  
**Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property**

The Agile Programme had approved budget allocated as part of Digital Board and Property Board initiatives. Expenditure has been within existing budget. However with the uncertainty with regards the long-term implications of the Coronavirus the overall budget requirement and financial implications will need to be reviewed.

The first phase review is scheduled for October 2020. Its anticipated adjustments will be required for work spaces both in the Office, and at home to fully realise ambitions for agile.

Existing funding can be redirected as required to meet any new initiative with any further requirements being built into the 2021/22 budget process.

## 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Ian Hunt**  
**Assistant Director of Legal and Governance,  
and Monitoring Officer**

The report addresses the key legal implications arising from the Agile work programme.

## 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**  
**Community Engagement and Project  
Monitoring Officer**

An assumed benefit of agile working is to improve the work-life balance of staff. Adaption of the work place would need to ensure DDA and DSE assessments are considered. The staff Pulse survey will bring some clarity to assumptions around the impact on staff and diverse groups. Following which it will be important to consult with broader user groups via the normal channels. Any proposals to formally change working policies will be subject to Equality Impact Assessment and formal consultation.

## 7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder

None

## 7.5 Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

None

## 8 Appendices to the report

None

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