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Title of meeting:	Cabinet Member for Communities & Central Services
Subject:	Future Working Arrangements (Connectivity Project)
Date of meeting:	16 December 2021
Report by:	Director of Corporate Services
Wards affected:	N/A

1. Purpose of report

This report provides an update on the emerging Connectivity Programme that is tasked with delivering projects to support and enable our new ways of working.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that

- The Cabinet Member notes the progress made to date and the upcoming work that will be delivered by the Connectivity Programme.
- Members nominate a group representative(s) to enable cross party and officer engagement on the programme as it progresses.

3. Background

The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in unprecedented change in customer behaviour and how we deliver services to our residents. Following Government advice, the council instructed staff to work from home in March 2020 to stem the rate of infection and protect society from outbreaks of Covid, particularly in workplace settings. Due to lockdown restrictions some services were initially closed, however over the course of the last 18 months, services have stood back up and various measures have been put in place within city council workplace settings to ensure covid safe operations.

Prior to the pandemic the Civic Offices was the workplace setting for circa. 2,000 council, partner and tenant staff. As a result of the pandemic a risk assessment was undertaken that identified a maximum safe capacity in the building of 500 persons. Priority was given to staff in those services or individuals where there was a business need to attend the workplace (e.g. access to physical infrastructure; an inadequate, inappropriate or unsafe home working environment; and the mental wellbeing of staff). In order to facilitate home working, staff were encouraged to undertake DSE risk assessments to identify any needs

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for additional equipment including monitors, docking stations, office chairs and in some cases desks.

Staff engagement has been ongoing throughout the pandemic, and this has shown a degree of anxiety and negative impacts on mental health. Staff are concerned about a return to 'old' ways of working and show a strong desire to maintain some degree of flexibility with 'hybrid' working as a means of ensuring a safe workplace setting as we learn to live with covid.

4. Connectivity programme summary

The Connectivity Programme was established before the Covid-19 pandemic to support the organisation on its journey to becoming a modern digital council. As a result of the pandemic and easing of covid restrictions outlined in Step 4 of the government roadmap in July 2021 the council has reshaped the programme to incorporate our response to the changes in the way we work as well as our longer-term aspirations set out in the City Vision and Corporate Plan. The Connectivity Programme will deliver the following objectives:

- a) An **attractive place to work**, that enhances staff safety and wellbeing with working culture and practices supporting the delivery of Member priorities and the city's vision for Portsmouth.
- b) **Accommodation that is right size**, in the right place and is flexible enough to respond to changing needs.
- c) **Staff in the right locations** and able to dedicate more time to delivering frontline services and to respond to changing customer needs and demands.
- d) Staff able to work from and **manage teams in a variety of settings** - team areas, home, clients' home - to suit work demands.
- e) Staff with **access to the information and equipment they need to fulfil their role effectively** via efficient information systems, equipment and devices that are secure when required.
- f) **Effective partnership working**, facilitated by systems and environments, increasingly including co-location, data sharing and collaboration.

A set of principles have also been agreed to help guide our planning for the programme and new ways of working. These are:

Customers are at the heart of what we do, with the business needs of the council a priority.

- Work takes place at the most effective locations and times
- Flexibility becomes the norm and not the exception
- Everyone is, in principle, considered eligible for flexible working, without assumptions being made about people or roles

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- Staff have more choice about where and when they work subject to business considerations
- Space is allocated to activities not to individuals
- The costs of doing work are reduced
- There is effective and appropriate use of technology
- Managing performance focuses on results rather than presence
- Agile working underpins and adds new dimensions to diversity and equality principles
- Staff have the opportunity to lead balanced and healthy lives
- Work has less impact on the environment

5. Workstreams and projects

There are two key overarching workstreams that are embedded across the programme. The first is redefining how we work and the second is redefining where we work. Phase 1 of the connectivity programme includes three projects that are underway and due to be completed by April 2022:

- Standardisation of IT and office equipment
- Implementation of a resource booking system
- Implementation of hybrid meeting rooms

The current workspace at the Council is no longer fit for purpose as many items have been taken home by staff to facilitate home working in line with DSE risk assessments. Standardised IT and office equipment including desks and collaborative working spaces will be set up in the Civic Offices to allow for the gradual return to the office. An audit of equipment was undertaken in August 2021 to understand the shortfall of key items such as monitors, docking stations, chairs etc.

A resource booking system will enable staff to book desks on days they are attending the office. The system will enable management of the capacity in the Civic Office, whilst providing data on team and individual working patterns. It will also enable infection prevention and control by 'switching off' desk availability in the event of a need to have greater distance between workstations, reducing building occupancy, as well as providing usage data to assist with contact tracing should there be a need.

In order to work effectively with lower building occupancy there will inevitably be a mixture of both home and office-based working. In order to facilitate team working and collaboration, 37 hybrid meeting facilities will be introduced across the Civic Offices and other PCC offices enabling some participants to join remotely. Whilst not all meetings will need to take place from a meeting room, the council delivers a wide range of services involving multiple stakeholder and partner input/engagement; as such a range of individuals/teams will often need to meet and do so in a confidential environment, or in such a way as to not impact on other workplace users. A range of new furniture to enable

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non-confidential hybrid meetings and equipment for meeting rooms for confidential or large group hybrid meetings would meet this need.

Outside of the programme scope there are a number of other pieces of work underway that will enable our new ways of working. This includes the implementation of Fusion, Microsoft 365 and service re-designs through system thinking interventions.

6. Funding

c£1.3m of funding was secured from the Covid Outbreak Management Fund via the Public Health Protection Board on 12th October 2021. This funding covers the projected costs of Phase 1 (and the three projects outlined above).

7. Programme management and governance

The Programme Management Office (PMO) have supported the set up of a robust governance framework to drive and embed best practice programme management standards. The following engagement and reporting groups have been established and resource is being recruited to ensure the successful delivery of the programme:

- A monthly Programme Board responsible for developing and implementing the programme strategy. Membership includes the Director of Corporate Services (accountable for the successful delivery of the programme), Directors from Housing, Regeneration and Children/Adult Services.
- A monthly Steering Group to provide feedback from services that will help shape/prioritise programme and ensure the programme is service led around the needs of customers and business requirements. This includes representation from all Directorates.
- A monthly Working Group to plan the operational work required to deliver the project outputs and programme outcomes and benefits. This includes those tasked with project and programme management work, communications and stakeholder engagement activity and representation from all Unions.

8. Staff engagement and change management

We have learned that we are able to adapt, flex and innovate like never before and should keep that capability alive as the programme progresses. Work is underway to actively engage with staff and prepare all stakeholders in the organisation for any further changes to our ways of working. In addition to delivering a comprehensive communications plan of activity, the following engagement work has been carried out over the last few months to ensure staff and managers are listened to:

- February 2021 - all staff were sent a wellbeing survey - 1,815 responses received.

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- March 2021 - structured discussions were held with Senior Management Teams supported by the market research team.
- April 2021 - staff workshops run by Baker Stuart (accommodation consultants).
- May 2021 - Cabinet member for Communities and Central Services Portfolio and opposition spokesperson invited to participate in workshops with Baker Stuart.
- August 2021 - all teams were asked to create principles setting out how, where and when they will work. These were signed off by respective Director.
- October 2021 - all staff were invited to attend one of three vision development workshops to understand what they want the future state to look like. A programme vision will be approved by the Programme Board in December 2021.

9. Integrated Impact Assessments

Individual integrated impact assessments will be completed to understand if the projects could impact a number of areas including equality and diversity. Action will be taken to ensure any potential negative impacts are successfully mitigated.

10. Legal Implications

Following the removal of Covid-related restrictions which came into effect from 19th July 2021, Portsmouth City Council will continue to implement employers' guidance to ensure the safety of workplaces and in compliance with Health and Safety legislation. Particular circumstances of staff will be duly considered as part of the council's general duty of care. HR Policies relating to new ways of working will be reviewed and consulted. It is anticipated that this work will begin in early 2022.

11. Director of Finance Comments

The scope for Phase 2 of the Programme needs to be agreed and funding secured. This will be dependent on other decisions around the future usage of the Civic Offices. At this stage an expression of interest for £788k capital funding has been submitted to deliver a digital post solution in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the council's activity. The project would be a key enabler to transition to a more flexible working, breaking the link between specific locations being responsible for managing incoming and outgoing paper mail.

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Signed by:

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Signed by (Director)

Appendices:

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location