

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL  
AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 September 2024

Report by Director of Business Operations and Partnerships

RESPONSE FOR AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ON THE  
IMPACT OF HYBRID WORKING

**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. As requested by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee this report is to provide an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of working from home drawing on local experience and the findings of research on this issue at a more national level.

**RECOMMENDATION**

2. The committee are asked to note the report.

**BACKGROUND**

3. At Audit & Scrutiny Committee on 23 November 2023, members requested that a report was submitted to a future meeting on the advantages and disadvantages of working from home, drawing on local experience and the findings of research on this issue at a more national level. This request arose from a discussion based around the Internal Audit Plan 2023/24 update.
4. East Renfrewshire Council has given employees the ability to work from home on an informal basis for many years. This was previously called Agile Working.
5. Through the pandemic the Council introduced guidance called The Way We Work and put in place four different workstyles. These workstyles were developed to provide a variety of patterns of work to support the effective delivery of services to East Renfrewshire residents. The workstyles are Fixed, Mobile, Hybrid and Home, and further details are contained in Appendix 1 along with examples of job roles.
6. A new policy was introduced which replaced Agile Working, called the Hybrid Working Policy in May 2023 which aims to allow employees to work in different ways and locations to meet customer needs, reduce costs from unnecessary travel, increase productivity by having the flexibility to work from locations most appropriate to their workload, subject to service demands and local team agreements, and to improve work life balance.
7. Depending upon the needs of the service, the Hybrid Working Policy will typically allow hybrid employees to work from home for up to 40-60% of the time where the needs of the service can still be met. This means on average, employees must attend the workplace a minimum of two days a week.

**VOLUME OF EMPLOYEES ACROSS WORKSTYLES**

8. There are no employees who are permanently/contractually based at home. There is the option for employees to request this, however it is dependent upon the service requirement and individual circumstances.

9. A review of types of roles and job titles has been conducted to identify the approximate number of employees in each workstyle, and this is included in the table below. This is caveated by saying whilst some employees may have the ability to work hybrid this is not formally recorded on our HR system therefore these figures are estimated. Further some employees may attend the workplace every day rather than work any days at home but may be counted as having a hybrid workstyle.

Work Style	FTE	% FTE	Headcount	% Headcount
Fixed	2647.78	67%	3373	70%
Hybrid	572.23	14%	605	13%
Mobile	748.66	19%	841	17%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3968.66</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>4819</b>	<b>100%</b>

10. The employee headcount within the Council is approximately 4819 (3968 FTE) based on March 2024 data. The percentage of employees who are able to work on a hybrid basis using headcount data is 13%.

### ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF HYBRID WORKING

11. A review of a number of reports and studies has been undertaken to identify advantages and disadvantages. Links to these reports are at the end of the report. A summary is provided below:

#### Advantages

- Retention of talent – Studies have shown hybrid working improves employee wellbeing and satisfaction which ultimately leads to an increase in retention.
- Employer cost savings - Employers can save on office space, utilities, and other overhead costs associated with maintaining a physical workspace.
- Employee financial wellbeing – Employees can save on travel costs and also on food costs as they will be able to eat at home, rather than purchase food that is easier to prepare at work or purchase food at a food outlet.
- Increased productivity - Some studies (including those conducted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) suggest that remote workers can be more productive due to fewer distractions, the ability to create a personalised work environment and having the ability to carry on working to finish a piece of work.
- Access to a broader talent pool - Remote work opens up opportunities to hire talent from different geographic locations, potentially leading to a more diverse and skilled workforce.
- Recruitment attraction - In 2021, the UK Government's Equalities Behavioural Insights Team worked with the jobsite Indeed to review more than 20 million job applications, and found that job adverts offering the ability to work flexibly attracted up to 30% more applicants.
- Flexibility - Employees can work from the comfort of their homes, allowing for better work-life balance and flexibility in managing personal and professional responsibilities. Research conducted by Timewise in partnership with EY found younger people are the most likely to want to work flexibly. Amongst full-time workers, flexibility is either used or wanted by 92% of 18-34 year olds; 88% of 35-54 year olds; 72% of those aged 55+.

## Disadvantages

- Communication challenges - Remote work can sometimes lead to miscommunication or a lack of clarity due to reliance on digital communication tools rather than face-to-face interaction. To mitigate this it is important that the appropriate form of communication is used, e.g. if a meeting would be better in person then it should be arranged in the workplace.
- Social isolation - Working remotely can be isolating, leading to feelings of loneliness and decreased morale among employees who thrive on social interaction. To mitigate this it is important that employees adhere to the guidance of 40-60% of time at home, but remain flexible depending on the needs of their colleagues to collaborate in person.
- Difficulty in monitoring performance - Employers may find it challenging to monitor and evaluate the performance of remote workers, leading to concerns about accountability and productivity. To mitigate this it is essential that managers monitor work by outcome and have regular one to ones with their team members.
- Potential for work-life imbalance - Without clear boundaries, remote workers may struggle to disconnect from work, leading to burnout and decreased well-being. To mitigate this managers should keep in regular contact with their team members and pick up any concerns through one to ones.
- Development of colleagues - Employees naturally learn from others by bouncing ideas off one another. Employees in new roles or learning new processes may miss out on vital time if their colleagues are not in the office on the same days as them. To mitigate this managers are asked to ensure teams have time together in the office on the same days, and any development should be covered through Quality Conversations and opportunities for learning identified.

## LOCAL LEVEL RESEARCH

12. The table below shows a comparison, undertaken earlier in 2024, of hybrid working practices with local authorities within our geographical area:

Name	Time in Office	Contractual
Argyll and Bute	Management decision based on service needs	Limited contractual changes office location remains
West Lothian	Office based 40% minimum	Non contractual
Glasgow	Management decision, they estimate around 50% office attendance each week.	Non contractual
North Lanarkshire	Office based 10 days out of 20 per 4 weeks	No but they use a signed hybrid working agreement to enforce
East Dunbartonshire	Attend as requested, a minimum 1 day per quarter	Non contractual
North Ayrshire	No prescriptive days, attend office as required	Non contractual
Inverclyde	Office based 20% minimum per week	Non contractual
East Ayrshire	Office based 50-79% per week	Non contractual
Renfrewshire	Management decision based on service needs but generally attend site 2-3 days as required. Senior managers at least 50% in the workplace.	Non contractual
East Renfrewshire	Office based 40 – 60% of the week	Non contractual

## **NATIONAL LEVEL RESEARCH**

### **Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development Research**

13. Research undertaken by the CIPD based on 2500 responses found:

- 83% of organisations have hybrid working in place.
- 45% of organisations have a formal policy
- 52% of organisations require hybrid working employees to be in the workplace for a minimum number of days in the working week/month, while 46% do not.
- Employees are most likely to be required in the workplace 2-3 days per week
- Almost two-fifths (38%) of organisations say that more home/hybrid working has increased their organisation's productivity/efficiency. Just 13% say it has decreased their organisation's productivity/efficiency.
- 56% of public sector employees stated in their organisation employees are generally more productive when they are working from home or in a hybrid way, with 30% stating there was no difference, and 12% saying they were less productive.

### **Incomes Data Research**

14. ERC submitted a response to a recent Hybrid and Homeworking poll undertaken by the Incomes Data Research with a summary report provided in December 2023. The findings based on 107 organisational responses which included other Councils, Private Sector Organisations, Colleges/Universities, Housing Associations, Police Forces and Charities found that:

- 6% of staff work wholly from home
- 47% of employees on average work from home some of the time
- Few respondents have a formal policy in their workplace that stipulates how many days employees must spend in the office, but where they do this is typically asking staff to attend the workplace three days per week
- The option of hybrid working is increasingly being used in recruitment strategies with many stating candidates now expect a level of hybrid working.
- A third of respondents observed a decrease in hybrid working due to staff preference to attend the office more.

## **HYBRID WORKING IN PRACTICE IN EAST RENFREWSHIRE**

15. Our People Strategy has the vision to have engaged employees who are motivated to deliver quality services for our customers. We aim to deliver this through:

- Engaged, empowered and resilient employees
- An ambitious skilled workforce who deliver customer satisfaction
- An organisation that promotes and values equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging
- Inspirational and effective leaders at all levels

16. Our customers' expectations are changing and a vital part of our work is to iterate our ways of working to respond to future demands and challenges. At the same time the way our employees work is changing and new generations coming through have different expectations of work and this needs to be balanced against service delivery.

17. To be an employer of choice and to attract and retain talent it is important to offer hybrid working where possible. It is also important to continue to develop supportive mechanisms for employees and modern employee policies. There is a health and wellbeing action plan which includes a focus on financial wellbeing and employee benefits, and recent policy development also includes the Right to Disconnect policy. This policy encourages and supports our employees in balancing their working and personal lives whether they work traditional hours in the workplace, work remotely or flexibly.
18. For those employees who have access to hybrid working there are teamwork guidelines to ensure appropriate service delivery is provided. Employers and employees have responsibilities to maintain good communication links and to be flexible. Managers and employees should meet regularly on a 1-2-1 and team basis to maintain and develop working relationships including shared learning opportunities.
19. The Hybrid Working policy states that during agreed working hours caring responsibilities must not be combined with any home working. Any arrangements that an employee would require to have in place for childcare, or any other dependant (including animals), to enable them to attend the workplace must remain in place throughout the hours of work. Where a dependant is reliant on an employee it is not appropriate for the employee to undertake caring duties and work at the same time.
20. It is the responsibility of each manager to monitor the performance of their team and individuals therein and take action if required. If any impact is being seen as a result of workstyle practices this should be addressed as early as possible.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

21. Overall, hybrid working can provide numerous advantages for both the council and our employees. To be an employer of choice it is important to offer hybrid working as one of our workstyles, for suitable roles, to attract and retain people.
22. All employees working in the hybrid workstyle are required to have a presence in the office and this is in line with other local authorities.
23. We have a detailed Hybrid Working Policy and The Way We Work guidance which support employees and managers to get the best out of hybrid working, take action if there is an impact to service delivery, and address any other disadvantages.
24. The volume of hybrid workers is relatively small compared to other sectors due to the main focus of local government roles being community focused. The majority of our employees have a fixed workstyle.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

25. The committee are asked to note the report.

Louise Pringle  
Director of Business Operations and Partnerships

Report Author  
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## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The following background papers were used

Linked papers:

- [CIPD Flexible and Hybrid Working Practices 2023 - Flexible and hybrid working practices in 2023 | CIPD](#)
- [Office of National Statistics: Characteristics of homeworkers, Great Britain: September 2022 to January 2023](#)
- [Deloitte Hybrid Working Survey](#)
- [EY Timewise Report](#)

Embedded reports:



Income Data  
Research Report.pdf



UK Parliament  
Hybrid Worker Repc







PWC (AICPA-CIMA)  
Great Reshuffle Rep







Gov Equalities  
Office - advertsing f

## Appendix 1 – East Renfrewshire Council’s Workstyles

<p><b>Workstyle - Fixed</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Due to service requirements spends most of the time in a fixed location within council premises (circa 90%)</li> <li>• May have specific equipment requirements to work effectively</li> <li>• On occasion and/or in extreme circumstances may work from home or a different location.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Workstyle -Hybrid</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has an allocated base within council premises but no dedicated desk and can work from different locations</li> <li>• Subject to team requirements, has a degree of choice in where they work</li> <li>• Uses desks in Team Zones and touchdown spaces</li> <li>• Depending upon the needs of the service, will typically work from home for between 40-60% of the time where the needs of the service can still be met</li> <li>• Has appropriate devices for their role</li> <li>• Has an appropriate work station set up to facilitate working from home</li> <li>• Ensures they are on council premises for required meetings and tasks.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Workstyle - Mobile</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has an allocated base within council premises</li> <li>• Due to service requirements, works away from base for the majority of the time (circa 80%)</li> <li>• Depending upon job role, may start and end their day from base or from home</li> <li>• Is unlikely to have a dedicated desk/workspace in base</li> <li>• Has appropriate equipment (including ICT) necessary for the role.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Workstyle - Home</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has requested and is contracted to spend the vast majority of time working from home (Circa 90%) and has home as their base</li> <li>• Can carry out 95% of their tasks at home</li> <li>• Comes into the office for specific meetings and uses touchdown spaces in Team Zones</li> <li>• Has a dedicated workspace at home which is sufficient to the needs of the job role with all of the necessary equipment and which passes the required Health and Safety assessment</li> <li>• Workstyle – Home is different from Working from Home as part of the hybrid workstyle.</li> </ul>

The Way We Work Guide

Examples of roles and workstyles – these lists are not exclusive

<p><b>Workstyle - Fixed</b></p>  <p>e.g.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Community Safety Officers (based in control room/CCTV)</li> <li>2. Customer Services</li> <li>3. Registrar</li> <li>4. Teachers &amp; School staff</li> <li>5. Environment Operations – mechanic/workshop posts</li> <li>6. Store person.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Workstyle - Hybrid</b></p>  <p>e.g.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Community Revenues &amp; Change Teams</li> <li>2. ICT posts</li> <li>3. MART</li> <li>4. Democratic Services</li> <li>5. CEO Posts</li> <li>6. Environmental Health &amp; Trading Standards</li> <li>7. Planning posts.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Workstyle - Mobile</b></p>  <p>e.g.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Community workers</li> <li>2. Peripatetic music instructors</li> <li>3. Neighbourhood services – operative/driver/bus driver</li> <li>4. Activity Park Ranger</li> <li>5. All trades staff</li> <li>6. Tenancy enforcement officer</li> <li>7. Home support worker.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Workstyle - Home</b></p>  <p>No examples developed for 'Workstyle- Home' as this is by request and is dependent upon individual circumstances.</p>