

Equality Impact Assessment

Please see the *How to Make an Equality Impact Assessment* sheet for assistance to complete this form. You are also welcome to contact Delyth Williams, Policy and Equality Officer on ext. 32708, or DelythGadlysWilliams@gwynedd.llyw.cymru for further assistance.

The Council is required (under the Equality Act 2010) to consider the impact that change in any policy or procedure (or the creation of a new policy or procedure) will have on people with protected equality characteristics. The Council also has additional general duties to ensure fairness and to foster good relationships. Therefore, a timely assessment must be made before a decision is taken on any relevant change (i.e., that affects people with protected equality characteristics).

1) Details

1.1 What is the name of the policy / service in question?

Hybrid Working Scheme

1.2 What is the purpose of the policy/service that is being created or amended? What changes are being considered?

The attached Scheme applies to approximately 1,800 of Cyngor Gwynedd's existing workforce (i.e., jobs with aspects of 'office work' that can be undertaken when hybrid working). It addresses those posts where a substantial change was seen in the nature and working arrangements as a result of the pandemic.

The Hybrid Working Guide is presented following the modification of our working arrangements over a period of a year and a half. In September 2021, discussions were held between managers and staff members in order to obtain an understanding and an initial overview of their wishes regarding their working arrangements for the future with the options at the time including working from the 'Office', 'Hybrid' or 'Mainly from Home'.

It was emphasised that the response from staff at the time was not a permanent commitment to implement these specific working arrangements and that any arrangement would be subject to a trial period before final agreement. No contractual change was made to staff contracts as a result of that.

By now, the trial period has ended and the supplementary Scheme will be presented in order to set out the Council's expectations of our workforce when moving on in terms of our work arrangements for the future. It reflects the changes that have occurred in the working world over the last three years and further strengthens our duty of care and well-being to staff as well as acknowledging the need to ensure regular face-to-face contact across all our services.

It is important to ensure that we weigh up the wishes of staff with the needs of the services and the people of Gwynedd, and a Hybrid Working Scheme that sets the expectations in terms of our way of working for the future will be a key part of ensuring a prosperous working culture and performance.

Cyngor Gwynedd will continue to support flexible working and acknowledges the benefits that options such as hybrid working offers staff as well as our services.

Taking this into account;

- Officers can work up to 3 days a week from home where their posts allow hybrid working.
- Every officer where their work situation allows hybrid working will work a minimum of two working days a week from the normal work centre (or an equivalent proportion of the working week for part-time employees).
- Except in exceptional circumstances, officers will not be able to work from home on a full-time basis, and consequently, there will be no contractual changes as a result of these arrangements.

1.3 Who is responsible for this assessment?

Project Manager

1.4 When did you commence the assessment? Which version is this?

The assessment continues to be reviewed since its original submission to the Cabinet in March 2021.

2) Action

2.1 Who are the stakeholders or partners whom we will have to work with to undertake this assessment?

Offices Group
Corporate Management Team
Human Resources Advisory Service
Health, Safety and Well-being Advisory Service
Trade Unions
Staff Members

2.2. What steps have you taken to engage with people with protected characteristics?

The staff members have discussed their wishes for working arrangements for the future individually with their managers, taking their personal circumstances and any protected characteristics into consideration.

These arrangements were formally trialled between May 2022 and February 2023 to review the suitability of the arrangements from the perspective of the staff member and the Council as an employer. All service managers with a responsibility for 'office' staff (not including front-line staff) were asked to consult and discuss amongst their teams to confirm the wishes of individuals when moving forward.

Teams were asked to report formally on their wishes following the pilot period. Managers were asked to discuss with the staff member and weigh up their individual wishes as well as service considerations.

Discussions about the working arrangements were held with the trade unions and they have provided their observations.

2.3.1 What was the result of the engagement?

In September 2021, discussions were held between the manager and the staff members in order to obtain an understanding regarding their working arrangements for the future.

In brief, the responses were as follows (2021):

Hybrid - 59%

Mainly from Home - 25%

Office - 15%

It was explained that any flexible working arrangement would be subject to a trial period before it is finally agreed, in order to review the suitability of the arrangement from the perspective of the staff member and the Council as an employer.

At the end of the trial period, all service managers with responsibilities for 'office' staff (not including front-line workers) were asked to consult and discuss amongst their teams in order to report formally on their wishes following the pilot period. Managers were asked to discuss with the staff member and weigh up their individual wishes as well as service considerations.

In brief, the responses were as follows (2023):

Hybrid - 65%

Mainly from Home - 17%

Office - 18%

The above percentages are based on 1,518 of the Workforce - i.e., 1,068 staff members out of approximately 1,800 (jobs with aspects of 'office work' that can be undertaken when working from home/hybrid working) received information about their wishes. Where no responses were received, the following results have taken previous wishes into consideration (i.e., September 2021). Therefore, final results based on 1,518 of the workforce.

The % in terms of wishes are more or less the same as last time (2021 - Home 25%, Hybrid 60%, Office 15%). The % for 'Hybrid' workers has increased 6% with the amount working 'Mainly from Homes' reduced by 8% and the number stating 'Office' as their main workplace increased by 3%.

2.4 On the basis of what other evidence are you acting?

Having received qualitative comments throughout the questionnaire (to teams affected) and through consulting with service managers, department heads and management teams.
Management information available through the Information Technology Service.

2.5 Are there any gaps in the evidence that needs to be collected?

There are many staff where the scheme isn't relevant to them and therefore need to consider the possible effect of introducing the Scheme for that specific cohort of staff. e.g., is there a need to review and promote different opportunities of flexible working within the Council?

3) Identifying the Impact

3.1 The Council must duly address the impact that any changes will have on people with the following equality characteristics.

What impact will the new policy/service or the proposed changes in the policy or service have on people with these characteristics?

You are welcome to add other characteristics if you wish.

Characteristics	What type of impact? *	In what way? What is the evidence?
Race (including nationality)	None	No impact identified.
The Welsh language	Positive / negative	Positive - <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff will continue to provide services to the public in Welsh and hybrid working arrangements can bring advantages in the recruitment market by widening the geographical recruitment area and in doing so increasing the number of Welsh applicants.• The Council is seeking to ensure that there is sufficient face-to-face contact in place to collaborate and communicate effectively. This Scheme will have a positive impact on staff, and particularly on Welsh learners, by ensuring that they have sufficient opportunities to speak Welsh socially in the workplace. It is important to note that the same attention will be afforded to the Welsh language in terms of support to learn and develop language refresher skills when working from home as well as from the normal work centre. Negative - <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue to lose opportunities to speak Welsh socially in the workplace at times to compare with if they could immerse themselves in the language every day at the office.

Disability	Positive / negative	<p>Positive -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to work in a flexible way means a reduction in travelling (and the daily need to drive a car) to the office, that could be of help to some people with a physical impairment or learning disability. • More flexibility for staff caring for disabled friends or family members. • The option of working from home some days offers more privacy if in need of personal care. • Mental Health Conditions - more flexibility between work and home life, and improved work and life balance could lead to less stress and anxiety. Ensuring a balance between this and maintaining regular face-to-face contact is very important moving on. • Some staff members will have been coming in less than twice a week during the trial period and therefore have a better chance of socialising and less loneliness. <p>Negative -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health Conditions - Loneliness. Less contact with other individuals by working from home could increase anxiety. Ensuring regular face-to-face contact is important to address this. • Neurodivergent people could face difficulties trying to create work relationships and become a part of a new team if they or many of their co-workers work from home. • Hard for some individuals who have, over the trial period, become accustomed to working 'mainly from home' to have to adapt to working with others again and, for example, the employer may need to consider creating/finding quiet spaces as a reasonable adjustment in some environments. • Workers are still expected to come into the office on a 2-day-a-week basis (or an equivalent proportion of the working week for part-time employees) unless there are exceptions - therefore the Scheme could continue to restrict disabled people from applying for posts with the Council. • Carrying equipment - hybrid working will mean the need to carry equipment between the work centre (office) and home and this could create difficulties such as musculo-skeletal pain. • Parking - hybrid working will mean the need to travel to work and there will need to consider if there are enough disabled parking spaces for disabled workers and those who need to park closer to work. • Some staff members will have been coming in less than twice a week during the trial period and therefore could feel that the change is harder to deal with in terms of travelling, personal care, care role, coping with the work situation etc.
Gender	Positive / negative	<p>Positive -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence suggests that women are generally more likely to take on care responsibilities than men. As a result of this Scheme, women who have child/adult care responsibilities can work more flexibly. <p>Negative -</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The statistics from the questionnaire show that men are more likely to note their wish of working mainly from the office than women (14% Women / 27% Men). Also, more women in leadership/management roles have been choosing to work 'Mainly from Home' or 'Hybrid' (96%) over the trial period to compare with men (82%). We will need to consider how this change could affect the representation of women in the workplace, the opportunities available for women to apply for other posts such as leadership and management jobs (women in leadership) and possibly the pay gap within the Council. Work from home arrangements could lead to situations where some individuals would be of higher risk of suffering domestic abuse. Some staff members will have been coming in less than twice a week during the trial period and therefore could feel that the change is harder to cope with in terms of care responsibilities etc.
Age	Positive / negative	<p>Positive -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexibility for parents to balance work responsibilities and looking after children. <p>Negative -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot feedback has proved that many new / young workers have found it hard to learn from others and to settle into work. This Scheme will address this by specifying an expectation for teams whose posts allow hybrid working to come together face to face more frequently than two days a week to coincide with the new employee's induction programme (or a proportion that equates to a working week for part-time employees). Some staff members will have been coming in less than twice a week during the trial period and therefore could feel that the change is harder to cope with because of care roles etc.
Sexual orientation	None	No impact identified
Religion or belief (or non-belief)	Positive/ negative	<p>Positive -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easier to balance work with specific time/place for religious rituals such as praying when working from home. <p>Negative -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No provision of quiet rooms for religious rituals such as praying in the Council offices.
Gender reassignment	None	No impact identified
Pregnancy and maternity	Positive / negative	<p>Positive -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less time spent travelling to work if suffering from tiredness. Hybrid work arrangements facilitate the return to work for women following maternity leave, e.g., if breast-feeding. The ability to work from home and to work flexible hours (flexi scheme) allows workers to travel to appointments at the local surgery easier during pregnancy.

		<p>Negative -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrying equipment - hybrid working will mean the need to carry equipment between the work centre (office) and home and that could create difficulties to workers who are pregnant. • Parking - hybrid working will ensue the need to travel to work and the need to consider if there are enough parking spaces for pregnant workers who possibly need to park closer to work.
Marriage and civil partnership	None	No impact identified
Socio-Economic Disadvantage	Positive / negative	<p>Positive / Negative -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that the workforce attend the main offices at least twice a week (or equivalent for part-time employees) means that expenditure will continue in those towns, and at coincidentally, when staff work from home it could lead to an increase in expenditure in towns and villages closer to the homes of staff across the County. • The Council will not reimburse / pay allowance to staff for work from home costs (such as electricity and broad band). Working from home will be voluntary for staff and there will be other benefits such as saving on daily travel to work.

3.2 The Council has a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to contribute positively to a fairer society through advancing equality and good relations in its activities in the fields of age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, race, transgender, disability and pregnancy and maternity. The Council must duly address the way any change impacts on these duties.

General Duties of the Equality Act	Does it have an impact? *	In what way? What is the evidence?
Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation	Possible	<p>Ensures the implementation of regular face to face contact (e.g., 1:1 meetings, team meetings) that will be essential to support the staff's well-being. This is to try and avoid possible situations from arising and if there is any need for an early solution.</p> <p>Resolution of Complaints Policy in place that would support if such situations would arise as a result of change.</p>
Promote equal opportunities	Yes	Flexible working arrangements could give disabled individuals or those who have care responsibilities more opportunities to work for the Council.

		It could improve the work/life balance especially for workers who live in areas that are far from the Council offices. It could open doors for some to work for the Council.
Foster good relationships	Yes	Regular face-to-face contact helps foster good relationships within and between the teams in the Council. Ensuring balance between face-to-face and virtual contact improves people's chance of mixing. This will improve work relationships which, in turn, will promote attendance. This will be especially important to staff with protected characteristics that may not have been as confident in mixing over the trial period.

* To be deleted as required

4) **Analysing the results**

4.1 **Is the policy therefore likely to have a significantly positive impact on any of the equality characteristics or the General Duty? What is the reason for this?**

Adopting a Flexible Working Scheme will promote a better work/life balance and provide better opportunities for disabled people and individuals who provide care.

Offer more opportunities for people who live further away from the Council offices, to work for the Council.

Flexible working arrangements can have a positive impact for pregnant women, women who are breastfeeding or individuals with a physical disability or mental health condition.

4.2 **Is the policy therefore likely to have a significantly negative impact on any of the equality characteristics or the General Duty? What is the reason for this?**

The potential for possible negative effects has been outlined in Part 3.1 above.

However, the Equality Impact Assessment did not find impacts which would lead to changing the recommendation.

4.3 **What should be done?**

Select one of the following:

Continue with the policy / service as it is robust	√
Revise the policy to remove any barriers	

Suspend and abolish the policy as the harmful impacts are too great	
Continue with the policy as any harmful impact can be justified	

4.4 If you continue with the plan, what steps will you take to reduce or mitigate any negative impacts?

The potential negative impacts of this scheme outlined in Part 3.1 are regularly considered as developments in the work proceed.

4.5 If you are not taking any further action to remove or reduce the negative impacts, please explain why here.

5) Monitoring

5.1 What steps will you take to monitor the impact and effectiveness of the policy or service (action plan)?

The Scheme's success will be monitored in order to ensure the suitability of the arrangement from the perspective of the staff member and the Council as an employer. Staff, managers and trade unions will have an input into this monitoring work and will attempt to diminish any barriers that arise. This impact assessment will be monitored as a result.

Further observations -

If approved, the proposal is to introduce the final Scheme to the workforce as soon as possible, giving reasonable time to prepare for its full implementation from 1 April 2024. This will include time for the Council to adjust offices and also for staff to put appropriate arrangements in place that will allow them to work hybrid effectively.