Agenda Item 10

Anytime Anywhere Employees Returning to Work: Update

Title: **Anytime Anywhere Employees Returning to Work: Update**

Meeting: **Emergency Executive**

Date: **17 September 2020**

Submitted By: **Director of Corporate & Housing Services**

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 Following the report to the Emergency Executive in June 2020, this report provides Members with an update on the work being done to support the return of employees to their workplace. This is being implemented over the different phases of the lifting of the lockdown. The report also focuses on the longer term office working arrangements to support the Strategic Property Review.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 The Emergency Executive is asked to note:

- **the work being done to support employees returning to the workplace in line with national guidance**
- **the future plans for working arrangements for desk based employees who are able to work from home**

3. Background

3.1 This report provides an update to the report considered in June by the Emergency Executive on arrangements to support the return of employees to the workplace.

3.2 This work is being undertaken in line with any announcements by the Scottish Government on the phased lifting of the lockdown. It is worth highlighting that a number of employees have continued to work during the lockdown period, whilst others have more recently returned to the workplace.

3.3 For those who can work from home, the national guidance confirms that this should remain the default way of working for phase 3, and should still be encouraged for phase 4. To provide Members with some context on the changes since the last report, there are now c1300 employees who are self-reporting to be working from home. This has reduced considerably following the re-opening of schools given the return of teachers to the workplace.

4. Considerations

4.1 The national guidance enables some workplaces to be opened up subject to safety requirements. This includes for example, outside spaces, construction sites and schools. Working from home continues as the default throughout all phases of the Scottish Government's recovery roadmap and is still encouraged in phase 4.

4.2 As previously explained, a Group has been established, chaired by the Head of People, Technology & Transformation, to support the recovery arrangements as Services implement their recovery plans. Four sub groups have also been established. The main group and the sub groups have cross service and Trade Union representation. The 4 sub groups focus on: Buildings; Health & Safety and Cleaning; Office Environment; and Front Line Workforce and Vehicles. Considerable work is required to support the return to workplaces. The following sets out the actions achieved to date.

Buildings

4.3 Since lockdown commenced most buildings have been partially open; some only on a very limited basis. Whilst it makes business sense to leave buildings closed in line with the SPR objectives, the practical application is complicated by a number of factors. For example, some employees have been entering those buildings which are open on only a very limited basis, where they require to access a file or obtain information to be able to continue to work from home.

4.4 Prior to the full opening of a building, a range of building checks must be completed. The Facilities team are managing the statutory building checks, and premises managers for each building are also require to undertake a range of other checks. This involves significant levels of work.

4.5 To prioritise this work, public facing buildings have been prioritised over offices. Consideration has also been given to the Strategic Property Review, with buildings highlighted as 'under review' being delayed to enable others to be assessed in the first instance. This includes general office accommodations such as Municipal Buildings, the Forum, Sealock and Abbotsford House. Denny Town house, supporting a front line service has re-opened at the request of the Chief Officer. Based on the Scottish Government route map, the majority of individuals based in these locations should, in any event, be continuing to work from home where they can and as such, services covered by these offers should continue to operate. In the meantime, access to these buildings will continue to limited.

Health & Safety

4.6 Alongside the statutory checks which are required for all buildings, health & safety measures must also be followed and put in to place before employees should start to use any buildings.

4.7 Guidance has been developed and issued to managers, outlining all of the steps they must take before employees can return to the workplace. This

includes information on how offices and workplaces should be designed to ensure a safe work space.

<u>Occupancy levels</u>
4.8 Occupancy should be limited to c30% in buildings to facilitate effective physical distancing and to mitigate the potential impact of employees being required to self-isolate under the Scottish Government's Test & Protect programme. For building based employees, for occupancy levels to be successful, employees will need to continue to work from home for the majority of their working week. The 30% is an average level of occupancy and may be higher or lower depending on service requirements. Managers may also need to implement a shift system to ensure physical distancing, where large numbers of employees start at a particular time. Managers have also been advised not to ask employees to attend the workplace unnecessarily.

<u>Risk Assessments</u>
4.9 Where it is decided that workers are required within any workplace, a Risk Assessment for that workplace must be developed. This is to ensure a safe workplace and to manage the risk of transmission. To facilitate this, a Risk Assessment Working Group involving Trade Unions has been set up to review all risk assessments for all workplaces. All risk assessments need to be kept dynamic, being changed as and when changes happen in the workplace, or new national guidance is issued. Risk assessments must also be made available to all employees for their own workplace. Arrangements have been made for this and managers have been advised of the need to ensure employees know how to access the risk assessments.

<u>Signage and Hand Sanitisers</u>
4.10 An assessment has been made of the need for signs, and screens to be installed in buildings. Signs have now been printed for buildings based on the feedback from managers and will be installed in advance of a building re-opening. This includes reminder signs for safety reasons and one-way directional signs where required. Hand sanitiser dispensers have also been purchased and installed in buildings to ensure these are available when employees do return. To support employees, a video is being prepared which will show employees what to expect in the workplace and how it will look when they return. Abbotsford House is being used for this purpose.

<u>Hotdesking</u>
4.11 Hotdesking in its normal sense, has been temporarily suspended in buildings, to avoid unnecessary transmission, with a desk being made available to one person to use each day, with cleaning before and after.

<u>Cleaning</u>
4.12 Additional day time cleaners have been recruited to provide necessary cleaning in all buildings, including schools. Additional cleaning equipment

has been purchased and specialist equipment piloted to enable anti-bacterial spraying of wide areas in a safe and effective way.

Council Vehicles

4.13 To support service delivery and the need for physical distancing, some pool cars have been temporarily transferred to other service areas. This has ensured that those employees who must travel for work purposes can do so safely. These arrangements will continue until such time as physical distancing requirements change and enable a higher vehicle capacity. A small number of vehicles remain available at different locations as pool cars for employee use. Where required, employees can use their personal vehicle and claim mileage.

4.14 Signage has also been produced for Council vehicles to remind the driver of the safety measures they must take when using the vehicle, for example, using the cleaning materials provided to ensure the vehicle is cleaned before and after use. This helps to reduce the risk of transmission.

Canteen Facilities

4.15 Canteen/kitchen areas are provided in a number of workplaces. These can currently only be used where appropriate physical distancing and suitable cleaning arrangements are in place. Managers are making appropriate arrangements for this as part of workplaces re-opening. This includes, for example, staff rooms in schools. Alternative rooms may require to be used to ensure the appropriate safety measures are followed and this will be dependent on the facility available.

4.16 The Council also has a catering provision for employees at, for example, the Municipal Buildings and Abbotsford House. Whilst the Scottish Government guidance now enables these to be open, to do so would be in contradiction to the advice to employees in these buildings to continue to work from home. In addition, usage would need to comply with physical distancing measures. The numbers who could get into such facilities would be limited. For these reasons, such catering provisions remain closed for the time being. This will continue to be reviewed. Canteen areas used for this provision can, if appropriate, be used for eating packed lunches provided physical distancing is maintained.

Homeworking

4.17 As detailed in paragraph 3.2, services have responded to the Covid-19 crisis with a much higher proportion of our workforce enabled to work from home. This continues to be the case. This also supports the ambitions of the Council's Anytime Anywhere project which promotes home working as a method of working which can support the Strategic Property Review, support wellbeing, support improved productivity and bring more efficient ways of working.

4.18 The Scottish Government's route map suggests that homeworking will remain in place in Phase 4. This means it is expected to continue for the foreseeable future and will be part of the new normal. This does however, mean that we

must properly support employees working in this way. Consideration has therefore been given to the equipment employees require to support an effective and safe home working environment, and to ensure that barriers to home working can be removed. A specification for the appropriate 'kit' (both furniture and IT) has been developed and employees have now been asked to indicate their individual needs to ensure an effective and safe home workplace.

4.19   The provision of home working equipment changes the office needs and specification for IT. Looking forward, the majority of office based desks will be equipped with a docking station at a cost of c.£100 per unit. This will enable employees to connect their laptop directly to the fixed monitors already on the desk. For hygiene reasons, each employee will also be provided with a personal mouse and keyboard and a set of headphones (for making and receiving telephone calls from their laptop). This approach will also enable the Council to undertake a more effective review of the telephony provided with the aim of reducing the on-going costs for this.

Employee Wellbeing
4.20   Employee wellbeing must be at the heart of our considerations for the re-opening of workplaces. As Members are aware, considerable work has been done to develop wellbeing pages on our website which all employees can access using the following link:

https://www.falkirk.gov.uk/employees/coronavirus/#wellbeing

4.21   Managers have also been encouraged to have regular contact with their teams to ensure appropriate support can be put in place, if required.

4.22   As employees return to the workplace, all managers have been provided with guidance asking them to undertake 1-1 discussions with employees covering a range of issues including how employees feel about returning to work. This ensures managers can support their teams appropriately as this happens. Through such discussions they will also be able to assess any additional support employees who are working from home may require. The needs of different employees will be very different and individual support plans must be considered where required.

4.23   For those employees who have been shielding, who are pregnant or who have been self isolating due to health reasons, very specific guidance has been provided to managers which requires an individual risk assessment to be undertaken. This ensures that we are considering their health situation in the return to the workplace. Specific advice can also be requested from our Occupational Health provider should this be of help to an individual's situation.

4.24   As part of the more general 1-1 process a question is also asked about health. We are likely to have some employees who have self reported as working from home but who may have an underlying health condition which has not been declared. If this arises in the 1-1 process, an individual risk assessment

should be undertaken with these employees too, to ensure their health needs are considered.

4.25   Work on wellbeing will continue to be developed, to ensure appropriate support is available for employees. A representative from the Council has also been attending the Scottish Government's Wellbeing Group, and any learning from this will incorporated in to the support made available.

Communication

4.26   Communication with our workforce during the recovery period has been crucial. Our communications team have assisted in producing updates for employees. This has helped to reassure employees that their health, well-being and safety is our top priority. Advice has also been offered to managers on how to support employees on wellbeing, and newsletters issued. A wide range of information is also available on the website.

4.27   An important part of this is the employee pulse survey which was issued on 24 June 2020.   This focused on Covid issues, and was a 'temperature check' of the views of our workforce. 1226 employees completed the survey, providing their thoughts on wellbeing, working arrangements, management & leadership and communication.

4.28   The results from the survey have now been published in the employee section of Council's website at:

https://www.falkirk.gov.uk/employees/engagement/pulse.aspx

4.29   A series of employee focus groups have been held in August to explore the key issues raised by the survey. The outcomes from these groups, alongside the results of the pulse survey and last year's employee engagement survey, will form the basis of an action plan.

4.30   The Trade Union liaison group continues to meet on a weekly basis. This has been very helpful. It ensures effective and regular communication and resolution of issues arising in the workplace as a result of covid-19.

Future Office Working Arrangements

4.31   Moving forward beyond Covid, consideration must be given to what the new office environment and working arrangements look like. This must be considered within the context of the Strategic Property Review. It is essential that the progress made over the period of the lockdown and more recently, is not lost, and that we build on these achievements. The ambitions of the Anytime Anywhere project are being reviewed and new milestones developed. It is however, important that we provide clarity to our employees on this.

4.32   The results from the pulse survey show that the majority of employees are keen to continue to work within a flexible arrangement.   Just over 50% of the respondents indicated that they would be happy to continue to work from home 2 or 3 days a week with, with some suggesting they would wish to work

a higher number of days from home. Just less than 20% suggested that they didn't want to continue to work from home.

4.33   Assessing our future needs in terms of office space, the property team were working within a 0.6 FTE ratio of employees to workstations. It is clear from the Covid lockdown period that working from home can work well for most employees.   That being the case and given the pulse survey results, future planning will operate on the basis of a 0.5FTE employee to workstation ratio, allowing us to reduce the number of workstations and space required.

4.34   To achieve this, once the national guidance enables employees to return to offices, the intention is that they will return for less than 5 days per week. On average, employees will be asked to work on an average 0.5 ratio between home and the office. This will vary depending on individual circumstances. The employee's role and home environment will be taken into account. Some will work from home 4 or 5 days per week, whilst others may work from home for much shorter periods. Important to this is ensuring individual needs and requirements are taken into account. Work will be done with individual employees at the stage of a return to the office to assess how best to implement the 0.5 ratio. Key to this will be ensuring employee wellbeing is central to considerations, along with the personal circumstances of employees in making this transition.

4.35   In the meantime, in line with the Scottish Government roadmap, working from home will continue to be the default position where this is possible.

5   Consultation

5.1   These arrangements have been discussed at the Anytime Anywhere Group which has cross Council and Trade Union representation. They have also been discussed with CMT to which the Anytime Anywhere Group reports. Trade Unions have also been involved in these discussions.

6   Implications

Financial

6.1   There has been additional costs associated with building checks for e.g., water quality. It is likely that there will be additional costs relating to extended building opening hours for cleaning/caretaking should this be required, however at this stage there are no firm proposed changes. Additional cleaners have however been required within the school estate. Screens to facilitate face to face contact with the public may also be required in different buildings and this is being further explored.   Additional cost associated from the provision of signage, hand sanitisers and other safety measures have been incurred. Some of these costs may be charged to the Covid expenditure.

6.2   Costs will also arise from the additional equipment needed to support home working, along with additional keyboards and mice to support Covid-safe desk sharing arrangements. Additional costs are also likely from mileage/transport

if physical distancing requires to be maintained. Whilst some of these costs will be met from existing budget, additional capital expenditure has been requested as part of the Capital Programme for 2020/21; this will be referred to in the report submitted to Council on 30.09.20. This investment is required to deploy further laptop devices to all desk-based employees on a one-to-one basis, removing the need for desktop computers. It will also be used to ensure all of our systems can be adapted to work in a mobile and flexible way. In addition, we will ensure our front line employees have IT equipment, as appropriate, to undertake their role in 'real time' and to ensure such work is done as efficiently as possible. This shift to "anytime anywhere" working is essential to ensure business continuity and resilience. This project will also be a key enabler for savings to be realised through a reduction in our requirements for office space.

Resources

6.3   Ongoing resources will be required across all services to review arrangements in line with changing guidance. In addition, managers must ensure appropriate resources are available to complete the necessary building checks, the building risk assessments, the individual employee risk assessments and the employee 1-1 discussions. Continued and on-going support is being provided by the Health, Safety and Care team, the Facilities team and HR teams to assist managers in undertaking this work. There has also been a high level of input from Trade Union colleagues in undertaking such work. Work will also be required to distribute home working equipment.

Legal

6.4   There is a legal requirement to provide a safe system of work/safe place of work, which includes home working equipment. It is essential that all risk assessments are considered prior to employees being asked to return to work.

Risk

6.5   There are a number of health, safety and wellbeing risks identified within the report. It is essential that these are implemented prior to any return to work.

Equalities

6.6   National guidance is being considered and applied in respect of those with underlying health conditions, shielding and /or pregnant.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

6.7   A sustainability/environmental impact assessment was not required as part of this report.

7. **Conclusions**

7.1 Significant work has been undertaken to support the Council's workforce throughout the period of the lockdown. A number of employees have continued to work throughout this period. A range of work is now well underway to support the return of employees to the workplace in line with the lifting of the lockdown and associated national guidance. For those who can, working from home remains the default position. It is however, important that employees have clarity on the future of working from home and this is set out in the report.

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List of Background Papers:

None

The following papers were relied on in the preparation of this report in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973:

None