

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 29TH SEPTEMBER 2021**POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEAD MEMBER FOR COVID RECOVERY AND WAYS OF WORKING**

Pre-pandemic, the Council was proceeding with a smarter working programme. A business case had been agreed, and a gradual roll out and implementation had been planned. As we're all aware, Covid changed that overnight. The majority of office staff have now been working remotely for 18 months. Whilst people have responded very positively, and there are great examples of officers demonstrating huge flexibility, we have also had concerns about the impact on mental health and wellbeing and a significant amount of work has been done to seek to address this. Staff wellbeing will continue to be an important priority.

Officers have taken the opportunity to use the learning from how we've worked during the pandemic to refresh the business case. We're now at the point of starting to move from remote working and recovery into a new long-term hybrid working model i.e. a mix of workplace and remote working, using office space for collaborative work etc. The business case covers three workstreams – people, technology and property – and reflects the investment made (and needed in future) in technology, in optimising our property assets (whether for increased rental income or to reduce our buildings footprint), and also ensuring that the right culture is created and embedded. I welcome the forthcoming scrutiny review of the ways of working business case, including the implementation plan.

The business case sets out a wide range of anticipated benefits. A few examples are: increased rental income; lower sickness absence; positive impact on recruitment, retention and turnover; improved productivity; and better services to our customers. Officers are undertaking some work on how to ensure that services and individual officers remain productive whilst working in a hybrid way, and to find different ways to measure productivity and efficiency. There are also systems in place to support leaders and managers in driving productivity.

Finally, it's also worth acknowledging that these new arrangements will directly benefit large parts of our organisation – typically those with an office base – but there are significant numbers of front line officers who won't be directly affected, such as home care teams and highways gangs.

The new ways of working at the Council are evidence of the impact the pandemic has had on how we work and deliver services. But it's undoubtedly the case that the impact on Leicestershire businesses and employees has been far more challenging. Working with partners and making use of our own resources, this Council has done much to help businesses and employees cope and to recover. In the last year the Council has provided just short of £1 million to businesses, including community pubs, set up an innovative, new Work and Skills programme and supported and extended the Government's Kickstart programme. But as a place we know we need to do more, so have worked hard with our partners and our Enterprise Partnership to develop a longer term plan for recovery and growth.

When this plan is in place and when we have clarity on the future role of the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) I will return to this council chamber and provide a more detailed update on the state of Leicestershire's economy and the progress we are making to see its return to full strength.

Mr P. Bedford CC