



**Board Meeting: 12 November**

**AGENDA ITEM: [5]**

<b>Title of paper:</b>	<b>SmartWorking Learning Phase</b>
<b>Purpose of paper:</b>	To update the Board on the implementation of the SmartWorking Learning Phase, our experience in the first six weeks and emerging findings.
<b>Action required by the Board:</b>	The Board is asked to note the ExCo sprint report on the SmartWorking Learning Phase, including the recent pulse survey research findings, and consider implications for the organisation.
<b>Official presenting the paper:</b>	Natalie Pearson
<b>Paper prepared by / cleared by:</b>	Gemma Humphries/Natalie Pearson
<b>TUS engagement/ Viewpoint</b>	Trades Union colleagues are fully engaged in the SmartWorking Learning Phase and are represented on all three directly-related strategy groups. Any recommendations that result from the Learning Phase evaluation that impact WG policy or T&Cs will require formal consultation
<b>Date submitted to Secretariat:</b>	5 November 2021

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 In July 2021 the Executive Committee agreed proposals for a six month SmartWorking Learning Phase to support the Welsh Government Civil service in moving from the predominantly remote working operating model which we introduced in response to the global pandemic and introduction of lockdown measures to a longer-term, 'blended' operating model for the future.
- 1.2 During this phase of SmartWorking, which was scheduled to last until the end of March 2022, ExCo agreed that we will not make any contractual changes but instead focus on flexibility within our current arrangements. We will explore new technology and different ways of using office space to support collaboration and ways of managing meetings that enable everyone to participate on an equal basis, wherever they are working from. This learning phase will also help us better understand how we can support individual performance and development and make the most of everyone's strengths while we are working as part of geographically dispersed teams. It is also intended to inform aligned work on our future workplace strategy and the future of our estate.
- 1.3 A corporate leads governance group was set up to drive progress against the six principles agreed by ExCo, with six-weekly sprint cycles as a framework for action, evaluation and iterative development.

## **2. Issues for consideration**

- 2.1 A copy of the first six-week sprint report for ExCo is attached at Annex One for the Board's information. At the Board meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> November, we will take Board members through a short slide presentation on key issues arising from the first sprint as a framework for discussion.

## **3. Resource implications**

- 3.1 The SmartWorking Learning Phase does not have a dedicated programme budget. SmartWorking-related activity is primarily funded from aligned business-as-usual and programme budgets within Facilities Management, IT, Learning and Development and HR. As the estate rationalisation work progresses we anticipate off-setting savings (and off-setting savings from reduced travel in the shorter term). Further discussion on the overall costs and savings potential from the blended working model will be held as part of the Learning

Phase and included in the evaluation and recommendations that will be presented to Board and ExCo.

### **Implications for staff**

- 3.3 This phase of SmartWorking will allow us to explore a range of issues including patterns of attendance across our estate, what we need in place to support collaboration and inclusivity in a blended environment, the medium-term impacts on productivity and performance of continued remote working and potential differential equality impacts for colleagues from different backgrounds and at different stages of their lives and careers.
- 3.4 Throughout the Learning Phase we will work in partnership with our trade union representatives, taking the collaborative and open approach that worked so effectively during the crisis.

### **4. Risks**

- 4.1 The Learning Phase was originally designed to last six months, allowing us sufficient time to test the blended working model with up to 40% of our staff working from an office base on any given day. The current public health situation and call from the First Minister for employees to work from home wherever possible means that we are unable to test the office-based element of blended working – including blended meetings and events – in the way we had originally planned. This means that the evidence base for our future workplace strategy including usage patterns across our estate, will be much more limited than we had anticipated.
- 4.2 We have had a number of previous discussions with ExCo on the potential equality-related impacts of SmartWorking and the risks of a ‘two tier’ workforce. Negative equality impacts remain a risk which will need further exploration through our Equality Impact Assessment process. This also ties in to a potential risk around perceptions of consistency and fairness in the way that managers apply SmartWorking within their teams. We will continue to develop guidance, best practice examples and training as we better understand the needs of the organisation to mitigate this risk but it is likely to require considerable focus during the learning phase.
- 4.3 There are also risks and live issues for all employers around tax implications of working in more than one place including at home. We

are engaging with UK Civil Service on this issue in their discussions with HMRC.

## **5. Communication**

- 5.1 Our communications to staff over recent months have continued to stress the Keep Welsh Government safe message – encouraging people to work from home as our default. While staff are able to attend an office for business or well-being reasons, this has to be agreed by line managers as part of Team and Individual Charters which are regularly reviewed. Virtual meetings also continue to be our default operating model – an exception-based business case for face-to-face meetings with groups of staff or stakeholders has to be agreed by DGs or delegated Directors with appropriate risk assessment undertaken in each case.
- 4.2 Given the First Minister’s announcement on 29 October, we have strengthened the message on remote working as the default for the organisation, sending a clear signal from the Permanent Secretary that every member of staff should be working from home where they can. Communications have stressed the leadership role we need to play in being an exemplar within the public service and the personal responsibility colleagues have to keep themselves, their families and each other safe.

## **6. General Compliance Issues**

- 6.1 There are no compliance issues associated with this paper.

## **Recommendation(s)**

- 7.1 The Board is asked to note the first ExCo sprint report at Annex One, including the findings from our pulse survey, and consider the emerging implications for the organisation.

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## **Publication**

This paper is suitable for publication, excluding Annex one, which contains information to be published at a later date.