Date: 1 October 2019

CARDIFF
CAERDYDD

Councillor Huw Thomas,
Leader,
Cardiff Council,
County Hall,
Cardiff
CF10 4UW

Dear Huw,

Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee: 25 September 2019

On behalf of the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee my thanks for attending Committee for consideration of the CADP Smarter Working project. Please also pass on our thanks to Chris Lee and the team of officers for their comprehensive presentation of the challenges ahead. The Committee enjoyed the opportunity to fully understand the aims of this project, and consider that smarter working has the potential to succeed but only if it is well designed, supported and implemented. We therefore offer the following comments and observations for your consideration and response.

Culture

The Committee endorses your view that the greatest challenge in delivering successful smarter working is getting the right organisational culture in place to allow its aims to be achieved. In many ways it is also true to suggest that without a culture shift its aims could also fail to be met.

Members heard that the message behind this initiative is that '*work is what you do not where you do it'*. We believe the project's success lies in managers planning, designing, implementing and supporting the change process professionally and with commitment. There are further comments on this under the leadership heading below. We support the assertion that this new approach can become transformational in terms of service delivery, that it will benefit from branding and require an organisation wide initiative to seek to win hearts and minds. It will certainly require constant ongoing support and reinforcement to become established and succeed in the longer term.

Implications for Employees

We can understand the aspiration to create a community facing proactive and more agile workforce and the potential benefits for the employer of this approach. Agile working also offers potential benefits to employees although we heard that not all employees will slip easily into this new way of working.

Agreed work boundaries and outcomes rather than fixed desks means that a new understanding about roles and expected work output will need be established. This will need to be based on increased levels of trust between the manager and the staff member. Poor direction and supervision could lead to the failure to accomplish the benefits being sought and to employee demoralisation.

Concern was expressed that some home workers may think that their change of work place may lead to an added personal cost, mainly in terms of fuel use. Officers explained that most workers would also save on travel and other costs but we flag this up as something which is likely to be raised during negotiations.

We note the expectation that greater flexibility of working arrangements will initially impact positively on sickness absence levels, though the experience of other organisations is that this could be reversed without the presence of sound leaders who are prepared to listen to their colleagues and provide continuous support. One measure of the success of the initiative could be a positive movement in the absence and sickness level. There will be value in examining such movement on departmental basis to seek and resolve any unexpected upward spikes.

It is probable that some employees will struggle with the introduction of agile working and it will be important to support those who are at risk of demoralisation and lack of direction. Appropriate levels of contact with work colleagues and managers will be an essential element of the agile working framework. We urge that senior managers, in setting up this new initiative, talk to staff and listen carefully to the many issues which they will raise. There will be signals from those who will handle things seamlessly and those who will need support. There may need to be different levels of support for different individuals based on their perceived confidence and competence in handing

new arrangements. Ultimately, we urge that employees must feel they have the option of speaking up if new arrangements are not working for them.

Technology

The Committee acknowledges that central to the success of this project is the provision and use of technology. We heard there are examples of good working practices where agile working has assisted in maintaining service levels in difficult circumstances, such as facilitating over 600 employees to work from home in the extreme weather conditions of last winter. We note there is currently a 60/40 split in terms of employees equipped with fixed versus mobile technology and that where hardware is due for renewal your preferred option is to replace with mobile technology. We would expect the provision of new technology and training in its use to precede the start of the agile working project.

Touch Down Points

We note that work continues on mapping out appropriate touch down points across the city. We consider it important that employees have a range of locations where they can complete certain tasks, meet face to face with colleagues and create and consolidate social networks.

You acknowledged that, at some point, this new model of working could result in a problem of overcrowding at hubs and other meeting points. In preparation, we recommend that work be carried out to assess location needs and appropriate furnishing to ensure that hubs can meet requirements. We consider there is an opportunity for the development of a staff app in relation to the daily availability of space at touch down points. We note that where there are increased cost implications of adapting hubs to meet new touch down requirements these will be met within existing operational budgets.

We are pleased to hear that a conversation is ongoing with our Public Service Board partners with a view to sharing touch down points. We would encourage you to include third sector partners in these conversations.

Members are keen to assess whether, in two to three years' time, there will be a payback for the introduction of agile working with fewer buildings to maintain. You stressed that, at this point, the project is focussing on flexibility for employees alongside taking improved services to our customers rather than reducing costs of accommodation. We would expect officers to consider and evaluate both these potential gains. The committee will keep this important question in abeyance for future scrutiny.

Leadership Challenge

We note your faith in the Council's managers to step up to the new challenges of leadership presented by an agile model. The Committee feels strongly that successful smarter working poses complex leadership challenges that will require new leadership skills.

They are likely to include:

- the capability to measure and agree with staff the work outcomes expected when the individual moves to a self-managing model
- acquiring the ability to measure team and individual productivity since this is quoted as one of the key potential benefits expected from agile working
- managers changing their roles towards providing support through regular contact and one to one reviews. This will include the assessment of the individual's agile working capability and how they are adapting to the new model
- redesigning the roles people will be asked to fulfil and any changes in working practices
- arranging for the team to meet when appropriate to share learning and concerns and reinforce collaboration between its members

Consultation

The Committee heard limited information about benchmarking and learning from organisations who had experience of introducing smarter working. We believe that there are opportunities to engage widely before practical steps for its introduction are finalised. We recently undertook a Customer Focussed inquiry and found companies such as British Gas, Welsh Water and Admiral Insurance keen to share their expertise with the Council. We would be happy to pass on details of our contacts who could, we believe, provide added value based on their experience of introducing this

kind of change. There will be other organisations, in addition to those mentioned above, who could also be involved.

I look forward to receiving your response to the committee comments contained in this letter. Once again, on behalf of the Committee, please pass my sincere thanks to all who attended PRAP Scrutiny Committee to assist us in consideration of the Smarter Working project. We very much look forward to further updates on this significant initiative.

Yours sincerely,

COUNCILLOR DAVID WALKER
CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

cc   Members of the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee
        Cllr Chris Weaver, Cabinet Member Finance, Modernisation& Performance
        Chris Lee, Corporate Director Resources
        Dean Thomas, Programme Manager
        Phil Bear, ICT Service Manager
        Nicola John, Business Analyst
        Joanne Watkins, Cabinet Office Manager
        Debi Said, Cabinet Support Officer
        Alison Taylor, Cabinet Support Officer.