

Committee(s): Corporate Services Committee	Dated: 21 February 2024
Subject: Workplace Attendance Update Report	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	2, 3, 8, 9
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N/A
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Alison Littlewood, Interim Chief People Officer	For Decision
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Summary

This report provides an update to the Committee on the Workplace Attendance Policy.

The current workplace attendance policy was initially implemented in January 2023 and was well received by most employees. Following a review, at the July 2023 Corporate Services Committee, Members were given two options, with option 1 being adopted. These were:

1. That the current policy continues with an agreed review point in six months, with a change from 1st September 2023 for officers in the Senior Management Group (SMG) to attend a minimum of 3 days per week (or pro rata for 60% of their hours).
2. That the policy be changed with an agreed review point, with the long-term position included as part of Ambition 25 and recommendations to be agreed by Members.

Since the adoption of option 1 above, several high-profile City based organisations, the wider Civil Service have agreed that office-based workers will spend a minimum of 60% of their working time working face to face with their colleagues either in offices or on official business, rather than at home.

Details of the current Workplace Attendance policy for context can be seen at Appendix A. The words the civil service have shared with their workforce can be seen at Appendix C.

Recommendation(s)

To provide clarity to our workforce and confirm our long-term position, the Corporate Services Committee are asked to approve the following: -

- With effect from the 1st September 2024, a change to the current workplace attendance policy will apply.
- All employees in the current hybrid and academic categories who currently are required to attend their office or place of work on a minimum of 2 days per week, will be required to increase their attendance to a minimum of 3 days per week (or 60% of their working time).

This change is driven by consideration of the benefits arising from working in-person with colleagues. This includes collaboration, innovation, and fostering a sense of community. CIPD research shows that the benefits of having time face to face with peers and managers adds to the wellbeing of the workforce and benefits their long-term mental health.

Informal face-to-face ‘water cooler’ moments cannot be recreated virtually and are still the time that employees are at their most creative and when they have their best collaborative ideas. These changes will not impact those employees with existing reasonable adjustments that have already been agreed based on disability, specific caring responsibilities and “other similar temporary flexibilities” agreed with line managers, including phased returns to work following sick leave.

Existing contractual arrangements will also remain unchanged, including flexible working arrangements made under the statutory flexible working scheme under part 8A of the Employment Right Act 1996.

We appreciate that both our employees and Chief Officers will need time to prepare for this change to our policy. To assure the continued wellbeing of our employees a period of adjustment is proposed with the implementation date set as the 1st September 2024.

Main Report

Decision

In response to creating certainty and requests from some Members and line managers to increase workplace attendance and the need to acknowledge that many employees are already attending their place of work more frequently than the current minimum level set out, now seems to be the right time to provide clarity to our employees on our position on Workplace Attendance.

The inherent importance of the Corporation as a place-based organisation, as well as the importance by Members and Chief Officers of in person collaboration, learning and observation, means that we now need to increase the minimum workplace attendance requirements from our current position of two days per week for our hybrid and academic workers.

The current position of the Executive Leadership Board (ELB) being at their place of work or office for a minimum of three days a week has been well received by employees. To ensure strong visible leadership across all the City Corporation our Executive Leadership Team will lead by example and continue with this practice. Their presence will help colleagues have the support, guidance, and development they need to keep delivering excellent services.

The 2021 All-Staff Survey showed that Guildhall employees would like to see the return of onsite catering. After the exit of the Gild caterer, in 2020, the Gild remained empty for three years. Post Covid, a coffee cart service was implemented for 9 months in 2022-23. Recently, Street Markets UK - a collection of entrepreneurs and food vendors – have been providing a “pop up” catering offer at the Guildhall site on Tuesday to Thursday.

To continue to support the People Strategy and workplace attendance policy, our City Surveyor officers are currently reviewing new opportunities to provide a fuller catering and beverage offer at Guildhall over 5 days, Monday to Friday. We acknowledge that not all employees can access or afford the Guildhall catering options and therefore our facilities across all our sites need to be modern, accessible, and user friendly.

Equalities Impact

In terms of equalities impact, an EQIA has been undertaken for the option put forward. In headline terms, having a more flexible workplace attendance policy is positive for most employees, including those with caring responsibilities and those with disabilities. This risk will be mitigated by ensuring that all adjustments for workplace attendance are managed using the Flexible Working policy.

The EQIA showed that the risk around the potential for underlying resentment across the workforce in terms of cost of travel and living is increasing, with workers in the three non-hybrid categories not understanding why the workplace attendance policy has not been updated to reflect a fairer approach which is more aligned to other organisations who are returning their workforces to their offices and places of work.

The feeling of divide by our employees who fall into the categories of Workplace-based, Workplace Plus and Academic (see Appendix A) where the nature of their role requires them to attend their workplace or office for 5 days a week or those who cover evening functions is gaining momentum.

As part of the review for this report, our work included a review of other options including four- and five-days’ workplace attendance. We concluded that the recommendation being put forward is aligned to the current strategies that other organisations are taking and provides the best solution going forward.

This risk will begin to be mitigated by the recommendations in this report.

Currently, we are not able to quantify the impact of our current policy on external candidate attraction or internal retention demographics and would need to review this over a longer period to enable meaningful insight on this. This includes time to hire and other factors which would need to be understood, e.g., employee sentiment and pay competitiveness. To mitigate this potential risk, candidate numbers and retention will be monitored and should a problem arise, flagged for immediate action.

However, the Corporation employee churn rate has gradually reduced, demonstrating a month-on-month decline, from 10.98% in October 2023 to 9.90% in January 2024.

Recognised Trade Unions

Conversations with our trade union colleagues have been taking place on this policy change and we will continue to work through issues that arise. We have also undertaken to ensure that our guidance for managers who will be managing this directly with our employees is clear and straightforward.

Recommendation

Having undertaken the EQIA and considering all risk factors, Members are asked to give due regard to the Equalities Analysis prior to taking their decision on the following recommendations:

- All employees in the current hybrid and academic categories who currently are required to attend their office or place of work on a minimum of 2 days per week, will be required to increase their attendance to a minimum of 3 days per week (or 60% of their working time).
- To enable our employees a period of adjustment prior to this policy change taking effect, an implementation date of the 1st September 2024 is agreed.

If these recommendations are agreed, updates to the current guidance for line managers and policy wording for employees, along with a communication strategy will be developed and agreed with ELB and in consultation with the unions. The risks and opportunity for the proposed recommendation is summarised in the table below.

Risks and Opportunity

Recommendation	Risks	Advantages
<p>All employees who are currently required to attend their office or place of work on a minimum of 2 days per week, will be required to increase their attendance to a minimum of 3 days per week (or 60% of their working time).</p>	<p>A requirement for 5 days a week working, visibility and presence may remain a concern for some Members.</p> <p>With many employees already attending the workplace over and above the current minimum required days, the workplace may not look or feel different with this adjustment.</p> <p>The potential impact on external candidate attraction and employee retention remains unknown due to a lack of available data for comparison, however it should be noted as a risk.</p> <p>Employees will experience an increase in their cost of living in relation to the extra day of travel and carer costs.</p> <p>Employees may appeal or challenge their designated employment status.</p> <p>An increase in flexible and part-time working requests may be seen as a result of this change.</p> <p>Productivity, performance, and employee engagement could be impacted because of this change.</p> <p>Employees may compare work patterns with their colleagues</p>	<p>Colleagues continue to perform well and gain the work life balance benefits of the current workplace attendance model.</p> <p>The roll-out of the Digital Programme will improve the current technology across our sites and reduce the risks as currently experienced in terms of access reliability.</p> <p>Managers continue to develop their confidence in managing remote teams and managing performance outcomes rather than presence.</p> <p>Increased presence from all employees. Greater city-wide presence and visibility of the workforce.</p> <p>Where there is a genuine business need and/or a health and safety reason for some roles to be conducted in a specific work pattern we will continue to honour these arrangements.</p> <p>It is recognised that some employees may compare their individual work patterns with their colleagues. The Corporation will continue to treat all employees fairly and equally.</p>

	and continue to feel disadvantaged.	
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We are not able to quantify any increase or decrease in productivity because of the changes as we do not have a useful way to track this, nor do we have a benchmark to compare to. However, multiple studies have shown that increasing workplace attendance has had no reduction on employee productivity or engagement levels across multiple sectors.

Conclusion

These changes will provide clarity to our workforce and confirm our long-term position.

Financial implications - None

Resource implications - None

Legal implications – The proposed changes relate to the workplace attendance policy and not to individual or collective contracts of employment which remain unchanged. Current flexible working arrangements made under the statutory scheme under Part 8A of the Employment Rights Act 1996 will continue to apply and eligible employees have the right to make requests for contractual flexible working arrangements and to have them determined in accordance with the statutory scheme”.

Risk implications – In addition to the risk areas highlighted above under different options, there is a risk that any change to workplace attendance increases the number of flexible working requests which may provide a challenge from the perspective of our ability to ensure consistency of approach between teams and by different line managers. Any change to increase the minimum number of days in the workplace will possibly increase employee turnover and potentially reduce our recruitment candidate pool. However, the evidence to support this is minimal.

Equalities implications – An Equality Impact Assessment has been conducted and is attached at Appendix B. We will continue to work with departments in terms of productivity and any adjustments that is needed for employees of protected characteristics.

Climate implications – None

Security implications – None

Appendices

- Appendix A - Current Workplace Attendance Policy
- Appendix B - EQIA Workplace Attendance Policy
- Appendix C - Civil Service communication around their approach to Workplace Attendance

Background Papers: N/A

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