Subject: Agile Working Policy

Report by:	Director of Corporate Services Assistant Director People and Democratic Services
Contact Officer:	Lynne Thomsett People Services Manager lynne.thomsett@west-lindsey.gov.uk
Purpose / Summary:	To seek approval for an Agile Working Policy.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

1) That the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee support the recommendation of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee to approve the Agile Working Policy.

2) That any future minor housekeeping amendments be delegated to the Director of Corporate Services in consultation with the Chairs of Joint Staff Consultative Committee and Corporate Policy and Resources Committee, and with the People Services Manager.

IMPLICATIONS

Legal:

On 6 April 2024, new legislation was introduced which provided all workers with a right to request flexible employment from day one of their employment. Acas published a guide to accompany this legislation which included the following examples: part-time working, home working, hybrid working, flexitime, compressed hours. The themes of flexible working cover time and place.

It is anticipated that this legislation will be strengthened under the new government's plans, where it has been indicated that flexible working will be the default position from day one for all workers except where it is not 'reasonably feasible'.

Financial : FIN/64/25/VA

(N.B.) No financial implications

Staffing :

Across the workforce there are many examples of flexible, agile working arrangements, which have been established over several years. Since the pandemic and improvements in technology, agile working arrangements have become more accessible to the wider workforce.

This policy follows extensive consultation with staff and is intended to provide clarity, guidance and assurance for the council as an employer and its employees.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :

Flexible, agile working arrangements can have significant, positive implications for equality and diversity. For example:

- Increased accessibility: our jobs become more accessible to a diverse range of people including those with disabilities, carers and working parents. Gender pay gaps are also reduced.
- Reduction in bias: agile working with clear guidance for team managers with a focus on outcomes, rather than the individual can breakdown stereotypes and creates a more inclusive culture.
- Work-life balance; flexible, agile arrangements can improve work-life balance which is particularly beneficial for those with caring responsibilities.

Retention and attraction: the offer of agile working can help attract and retain a diverse workforce.

Data Protection Implications :

All staff data is retained in accordance with data protection regulations.

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities:

Working in an agile way significantly reduces the need for commuting and business travel and therefore lower carbon emissions.

Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations:

There are no known crime and disorder implications associated with this report.

Health Implications:

Health and wellbeing implications are considered within this policy and appendices.

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report :

None.

Risk Assessment :

Without a policy in place staff may not be aware of their responsibilities or the organisation's requirements. The council may lose job applicants for difficult to fill roles without having a policy in place to support agile working arrangements.

These risks can be mitigated by team charters, individual agreements and clear guidance around manager and employee expectations.

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)   **Yes** [ ]   **No** [x]

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications   **Yes** [ ]   **No** [x]

1   Introduction

1.1   During March 2024, the People Services Team facilitated a number of staff engagement workshops in person and virtually across the workforce. 73 employees attended the workshops. A questionnaire was also available for staff to complete, this was available on Minerva and promoted through weekly messages. 125 employees returned a questionnaire.

1.2   On 6 April 2024, new legislation was introduced which provided all workers with a right to request flexible employment from day one of their employment. Acas published a guide to accompany this legislation which included the following examples: part-time working, home working, hybrid working, flexitime, compressed hours, job-sharing. The themes of flexible working cover the times that people work and place of work.

1.3   Since the pandemic and improvements in technology, agile working arrangements have become more accessible to the workforce and many jobs are now no longer place or time dependant.

1.4   Many roles across the council are required to work outside of normal working hours, for example participation in evening meetings, site visits or other events and it is recognised that working in this way ensures that these critical activities are supported.

1.5   The policy focusses on organisational outcomes, manager responsibilities and the expectations of our employees. For example, all employees will maintain a contractual work base, i.e. Guildhall, Caenby Corner Depot, Trinity Arts Centre or Lea Fields Crematorium. It is recommended that teams complete a Team Charter document, setting out clear operating days/ times, meeting arrangements and assurance that wellbeing needs are met.

1.6   The Joint Staff Consultative Committee considered this policy on 5 September 2024 and decided unanimously to recommend this Policy to this committee for approval.

2.   Staff engagement findings

2.1   On 31 March 2024, WLDC had 281 employees. 221 people were employed to work full-time, 37 hours per week and 60 people were employed on a part-time basis. 249 employees have access to the IT network.

2.2   The staff engagement activities provided an opportunity to find out what arrangements are already in place, what aspects are working well and any suggestions for change. A summary of common themes noted during open discussion were:

- Trust, flexibility, and openness are important.

- Work with residents is not always restricted by time.
- Teams have established ways to collaborate with a focus on outcomes.
- Agile working supports people with caring responsibilities and those with health needs.
- Commuting, cost of fuel and parking fees are a concern for people.
- The workspace at the Guildhall with its current configuration could be improved.
- People felt that guidance about the use of electronic calendars and etiquette when using MS Teams would be helpful.
- Some teams find 'all in days' helpful.
- People find using MS Teams challenging when working in the office. They shared that it is sometimes difficult to find a quiet space for confidential discussions. People find it distracting when the person sat next to them is engaging in a video call/ meeting.

3.   Options for consideration

3.1   Option one- approve the Agile Working Policy.

3.2   Option two- reject the policy.

4.   Analysis of the options

4.1   Approving the policy will provide assurance that the organisation is compliant with current legislation. It will also provide clear guidance to our managers and employees of the expectations placed on them. The policy recognises the importance of work life balance, engagement, and wellbeing but at the same time ensures that the needs of the customer come first.

4.2   Rejecting the policy may mean that staff are not aware of their responsibilities or are unclear about the organisation's requirements. The council may lose job applicants for difficult to fill roles without having a policy in place to support agile working arrangements.