

**Committee**     **AUDIT AND REVIEW**  
**Date:**           **8 November 2022**

**Report:**         **MAJOR PROJECT REVIEW: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE  
INTRODUCTION OF BLENDED WORKING**

### **Purpose of report**

1. To provide an assessment of the impact of the introduction of Blended Working (BW) on the operation of the Authority's services (internal and external) and to identify lessons learnt that should be taken into account in the development/implementation of future policy.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. That Members note the lessons learnt from the introduction of Blended Working, and comment on the recommendations to be taken into account in the development and implementation of future arrangements.

### **Strategic Planning Framework**

3. The information and recommendations contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:

**Corporate Plan, action 37.2:** Review the effectiveness of the BW arrangements.

### **Background**

4. Reports on lessons learned from 'major projects' provide Members with an opportunity to hear from officers about what has been achieved, what worked and what didn't, and to consider recommendations for future project development and management across the Authority.
5. This Committee agreed in April that one of the reviews this year should focus on lessons learned from the introduction, in March 2022, of a policy of BW for a substantial proportion of the Authority's officers, to examine and understand the impacts on service delivery, effectiveness and staff well-being.
6. BW refers to *authority services being delivered by staff using a combination of office, site and homeworking*. The introduction of this approach was first discussed at a Policy Development Forum in December 2020, and was then set out in detail in a paper to the

Finance & Resources Committee in December 2021, the conclusion of which was that BW would be introduced as soon as circumstances permitted. After another round of government-directed homeworking, BW finally commenced in March 2022.

7. The practical introduction of BW followed on from an assessment of which jobs were suitable for BW and how individual BW patterns should be arranged to ensure service continuity and effectiveness. Certain jobs were deemed unsuitable for BW arrangements, including roles which are site-specific (e.g. National Park Centre or Reception services) or delivering 'outside' services (e.g. Rangers). Directors were also excluded from formal BW arrangements.
8. A general principle established by the Authority was that we would remain a predominantly office-based organisation. This meant that officers with BW arrangements would typically be working from Authority premises for 3 out of 5 days each week, though that might translate into an average figure across a team, with some team members working slightly more office time, some slightly less.

### **Findings from the review**

9. The full findings from the review are set out in the **Appendix**.

### **Conclusion**

10. The introduction of BW arrangements across the Authority has generally been seen as a success, with work/life balance advantages for officers but also adding flexibility to our working practices. A small number of recommendations is included in the Appendix, designed to improve the current approach.

**Richard Burnett**  
**Director of Corporate Services**

21 October 2022

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE INTRODUCTION OF BLENDED WORKING

### THE INTENTION

#### Why was the policy introduced?

1. In managing the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, a considerable increase in home-working took place during 2020 and 2021. As early as September 2020, it became clear that, post-Covid, there were opportunities to increase the flexibility around where staff were working from when they were carrying out their duties and responsibilities.
2. Potential advantages of the approach included:
  - More efficient working practices (including less travel time to meetings), supported by improved IT facilities, to enable officers to work anywhere.
  - Improved recruitment and retention, based on the positive impact on most officers' working lives. Given that similar BW or home-working approaches were being developed by many businesses across the country, choosing not to explore this would risk creating a competitive disadvantage in the jobs market.
  - Maintenance of good staff morale, with officers trusted to undertake their work with reduced in-person supervision.
  - For those officers where home-working is practicable, a saving on travel costs and travel time, and opportunities to improve work-life balance.
  - Following on from reduced home-to-work travel, a reduction in carbon emissions associated with work.
3. Potential disadvantages included:
  - An adverse impact on service provision.
  - Increased IT data security risk, from less centrally-controlled ways of working and extra costs associated with implementing new IT facilities.
  - The difficulty of managing staff 'remotely'.
  - With less attendance at the offices, a loss of the 'corporate culture' (or 'feel') of the organisation.
  - Communication difficulties for officers, due to uncertainty as to where colleagues were working and how to contact them.
  - Dissatisfaction amongst those officers for whom a BW arrangement was not deemed practicable.

#### What was the policy intended to achieve?

4. Members discussed this issue at a Policy Development Forum in December 2020. A set of principles (**Annex 1**) were established within which our BW arrangements should be developed. Members agreed that, in the first instance while the new policy was developed, we would remain a predominantly office-based organisation. Members supported a vision that the Authority should strive to be:

*An organisation that delivers high quality, efficient and welcoming services, and empowers its staff to do that by enabling work to take place wherever and however it will be most effective.*

5. The process of implementing BW has sought to realise the potential advantages and to avoid the potential disadvantages. To help to achieve this outcome, managers were tasked with reviewing the individual BW arrangements of each of their staff at 3 months and at 6 months after the introduction of BW. These reviews provided a mechanism whereby any deterioration in the quality of services resulting from BW could be addressed.

### **Original timescales**

6. The intention was that BW would be introduced in Spring 2021.

### **Proposed means of implementing the policy**

7. Preparatory work ahead of implementing BW included:
  - Researching the contractual implications associated with BW.
  - Identifying all posts within the organisation that were suitable for BW and setting out proposed working arrangements for each post.
  - Taking into consideration individual circumstances and any impact they might have on BW, i.e. suitable work space at home (supported by the completion of risk assessments for homeworking), health concerns, caring responsibilities, etc.
  - Identifying, purchasing and developing the IT infrastructure to allow greater flexibility in our working arrangements that also supports the BW approach.
  - Providing the training and support to enable the development of management approaches to facilitate the new ways of working.
  - Carrying out a number of surveys of staff to ascertain views and responses to how the lessons learned from Covid working could be adopted in new BW arrangements.
8. The importance of the Covid working experience to the design and implementation of BW was fundamental; we saw an almost seamless transition to BW, assisted by arrangements already put in place to support Covid home working, particularly around IT resources and adjustments to management practices. In this context, certain aspects of our approach (e.g. IT resourcing) need to be seen in a longer time frame that stretches back into the Covid working period, to fully appreciate their costs and impact.
9. The arrangements that have been introduced require those officers with BW agreements to work predominantly (i.e. more than 50% of their time) from offices. All officers are expected to come into the office any time that work requires them to be there. These arrangements haven't resulted in any changes to employment contracts, with BW arrangements being agreed at the officer's request, rather than being a requirement of the Authority.

## Original resourcing

10. Direct costs associated with BW were linked to IT-related developments. Because BW immediately followed – indeed, evolved from - Covid working, the majority of these costs were incurred in the Covid period. This is discussed in more detail within ‘*The Reality*’ section, below.
11. Indirect (staff time) costs were projected to relate to managing the process: establishing which posts were suitable for BW, what individual BW patterns should be to ensure service continuity and effectiveness, and then monitoring the success of these arrangements, including formal reviews at 3 and 6 months after their introduction.

## THE REALITY

### Actual achievements of the policy

12. The overall conclusion of this review is that the introduction of BW has generally been a success and – broadly speaking – the potential advantages of BW have been achieved and the disadvantages addressed. 94 employees (55% of the workforce) have BW arrangements in place.
13. Whilst some improvements to the existing process can be made, the majority of these are arguably minor or managerial issues (e.g. where managers need to reinforce accepted behaviours on communicating and responding to communications from other officers).
14. The above statements are supported by the material informing this review, which included a full staff survey designed to investigate the impact of BW arrangements on service provision (both external and internal) and on the day to day operations of the Authority. Other NPAs have been trialling versions of BW, but haven’t - as yet – fully reviewed the success of their approach.
15. In summary, the **conclusions and observations from that material are as follows:**
  - (i) **Impact on services to the public and other external stakeholders.** All available customer service related material<sup>1</sup> which related to the BW period (and the preceding Covid period) was reviewed, and no evidence of a deterioration in customer service was noted: most survey respondents were either ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with the service provided.

During Covid homeworking, a number of failed calls were logged where the enquirer couldn’t get a response from the service provider within the Authority, so informed the Receptionist: 35 such calls over the three-month period from March 2021 to June 2021, of which just over half related to the Planning Service. However,

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<sup>1</sup> Planning Service Customer Satisfaction (Applicants; Agents) April 2021; Dales Newspaper Service Delivery Survey June 2021 and 2022; Reception Log issues June 2021; Customer Service Excellence July 2022. Although the conclusions of the CSE review were very positive, a major part of the customer-facing services covered by that assessment were ones where BW didn’t apply, notably the National Park Centres and the Ranger service.

immediately on highlighting this issue it was resolved, the Receptionists commenting that 'as more people got used to diverting phones, answering mobiles and updating their calendars, the situation is much better now'. There was no repeat of this problem during the BW period.

Pool car usage hints at a possible underlying issue. Assuming that usage patterns reflect the way in which 'outside' work – including visiting and interacting with customers and other stakeholders – then this work is now concentrated across the three 'mid-week' days, suggesting services may be less available outside that period. However, there is as yet no indication from customers that this is a problem. And it may in any case be that 'outside' working patterns prior to the pandemic were similar (they were not monitored).

**(ii) Impact on internal working.**

A staff survey was undertaken to inform this review, a summary of the results of which is included at **Annex 2**. Setting aside the conclusion that there is a significant staff well-being gain, other points of note are that:

- The majority of officers felt that the arrangements were working well, and had bedded-in over the past six months. Line management relationships are continuing to operate satisfactorily in this new environment, and there is no evidence that BW has caused any problems for new starters.
- Around a fifth of officers said that they felt it was harder to contact colleagues than before. The solution is a more rigorous obligation on staff to keep work calendars up to date and to make sure phones are forwarded.
- Reduced face to face contact means that casual, unplanned work interactions are more limited than they were, though it's not clear that this is causing any significant operational problems.
- Although most people accept that the volume of e-mail traffic is part of the way we now work, a fifth of responses said there were still too many e-mails. Reduced day to day /casual contact means more reliance is placed on e-mails, and different working patterns can also mean that the periods of work for different officers no longer overlap as much as they used to.
- The culture of the organisation has changed: setting aside the views of those officers who joined the Authority after the onset of the pandemic (who have no experience of the Authority's pre-Covid culture), over half of other respondents noted this change.

**(iii) Staff recruitment and retention.** There has been no discernible effect, either on recruitment - number or quality of applicants - nor retention, noting that a 6-month period may be too early to tell.

However, given that most employers within the local government sector now offer some form of homeworking, it's likely that the hidden benefit of offering BW is in maintaining our competitiveness as an employer. One new member of the usually hard to recruit to Planning team commented that they wouldn't have applied had BW not been part of our offer.

The 2021 Investor in People assessment noted that 'Reward and recognition' continues to be the Authority's lowest scoring indicator within that model, so the successful introduction of BW can be seen as making a contribution in that direction.

- (iv) **Benefit to staff.** Savings include staff time and travel (petrol/diesel) costs, totalling perhaps 5000 hours annually, with a value of circa £40k. Although hard to quantify, the home working element of BW is likely to support better work-life balance, including where carer responsibilities (principally, childcare) exist, or simply by reducing the amount of time committed to unproductive work-related activity (i.e. including travel to work journeys). This was borne out in the staff survey: 'Almost everyone agreed the introduction of BW has facilitated a better work/life balance. Just under three quarters said it has had a positive impact on their wellbeing'.
- (v) **Staff welfare.** There is no evidence of any adverse impact linked to the introduction of BW. There have been no reports of any accidents or near misses during homeworking and there has been no discernible impact on staff sickness patterns. However, members of the IT team were often working to challenging deadlines, at periods when office-based working (including contact with other staff) was problematic; this was a difficult and stressful situation.

During the BW period the HR team and the Health, Safety & Wellbeing Working Group have raised the profile of the importance of mental health, providing training sessions on the subject and introducing initiatives such as mental health 'first aiders'. The issue has links to the challenges of working away from the 'social' environment of the office, and the isolation that can be the result of that.

- (vi) **Use of facilities.** One very visible outcome of BW is that the offices, particularly at Grassington and Bainbridge, are now used less. This is particularly apparent on Mondays and Fridays, which many individual BW work patterns allocate to home-working.

This pattern is repeated in pool car usage: officers may in future wish to take more advantage of pool car availability at the start or end of the working week.

- (vii) **Environmental Impact.** The home working element of BW is very likely to have generated a considerable carbon emissions saving, by reducing the weekly number of home to work journeys. Although these emissions are not counted as part of the Authority's emissions, calculations suggest that, in terms of scale, they may be equivalent to approximately 30% of the Authority's own emissions.

As part of this review we have been able to estimate the impact of blended working on aspects of the journey to work for staff. These are significant from the perspective of work/life balance, personal costs incurred by staff, and carbon emissions:

- Estimated mileage saved by blended working: **244,000 pa**
- Time saved by officers on their commute: **5,426 hours**
- Money saved by officers in terms of petrol: **£41k**
- Carbon emissions **59 tonnes**. This doesn't currently form part of the Authority's own emissions, but can still be compared with our current total organisational emissions of **187 tonnes**, and the travel component of that total (leased vehicles + grey fleet + Member and volunteer travel) of **94 tonnes**.

### Actual timescale

16. BW working was fully operational from March 2022, following the easing of lockdown restrictions. This was a year later than planned, the delay being caused by two subsequent lock downs / semi lockdowns as the Covid-19 pandemic ran its course.

### Actual means of delivery

17. BW arrangements were agreed by managers, following an assessment to identify which posts were suitable for BW. This included the completion of an assessment to ensure that appropriate facilities were available at home, for each post. Every individual arrangement was subject to review after 3 months and then again after 6 months, to check for and then resolve any problems that might have arisen.

18. BW was facilitated by changes to IT systems, including their availability and accessibility. This included modifications to software in use and – particularly – an increase in the availability of portable IT equipment.

### Actual costs

19. Excepting staff management time, the most significant costs were associated with IT. The introduction of BW was achieved within budget.

## LESSONS LEARNED

### What went well, and why?

20. IT: This was to a tight timeframe and under very challenging circumstances. More information on IT-related issues is included at **Annex 3**.

21. Rapid cultural shift and new working practices enabling the Authority to continue to function effectively. Officers adopted the home working system very quickly at the onset of the pandemic, and it is clear that our move to BW is built on that foundation. Without the pandemic as catalyst, moving to BW would almost certainly not have been achieved so efficiently or indeed at all.



### What went less well, and why?

22. There is no question that IT resources were very stretched by the introduction of BW. This was a difficult time for IT services, exacerbated by HR issues in the section. By and large most officers were supportive and understanding of these pressures.
23. Communication issues have been and remain a challenge, with some officers finding it hard to contact others.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

24. The conclusion of this review is that the introduction of BW has largely been a success. Initial teething troubles - particularly around communication - have diminished. There are a small number of recommendations which could further improve how we work:
- Keeping e-calendars up to date (including referencing appropriate phone numbers) and making sure that phones are forwarded properly, should be non-negotiable for officers who wish to have BW arrangements.
  - Officers should be encouraged to make more use of the phone system and Teams, and place less reliance in e-mail, whenever a conversation is a viable alternative.
  - Managers should ensure that more efficient use is being made of pool vehicles during off-peak periods at the beginning and end of the week.
  - The annual IT budget should be increased, to cover the cost of replacing the additional IT kit (mainly laptops, which have a shorter operational life than desktops) resulting from BW.
  - Office space requirements should be reviewed, in the light of current partial occupancy brought about by BW; consider developing a hot-desking policy to enable any planned reduction in office accommodation.
25. Members should note that this review is limited to the introduction of current BW working practices in the NPA. It does not seek to address the many issues connected with extending that process, e.g. contractual changes, payment to officers for the requirement to work at home etc. These issues, and many more, would be part of any development of the BW approach.
26. Also excluded from this review are any recommendations about developing (or redeveloping) the corporate 'feel' of working for the Authority. During the early phases of the pandemic, many people missed the social aspect of working together in groups, and addressing that is a continuing challenge within BW. This area is already a work in progress, with more regular face to face team meetings, staff development days and all-staff meetings now taking place. But it remains a challenge for all organisations as they develop their approach to this work.

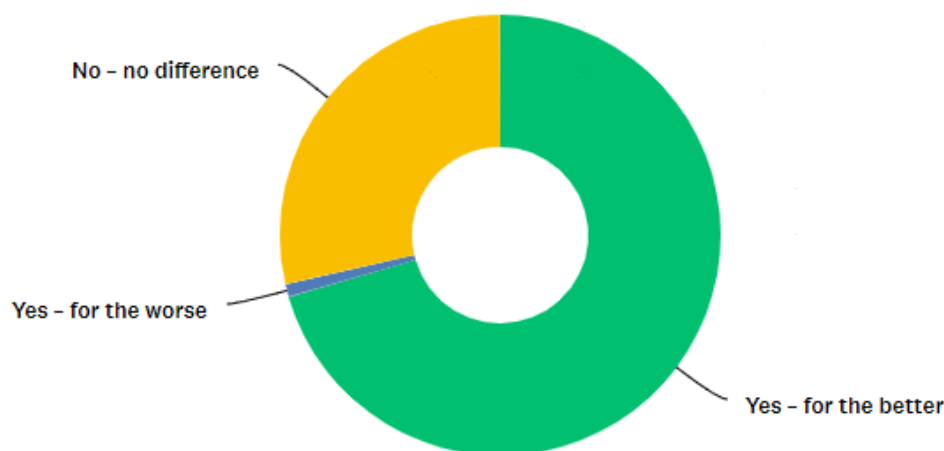
## **PRINCIPLES FOR DETERMINING NEW WAYS OF WORKING**

- The provision of a high quality, good value service to the public, and internally, is paramount and any changes to working arrangements must support this.
- We must be easily accessible to the public and each other, recognising that the nature of our work means the availability and opportunities for face-to-face contact are important.
- We use public money, so cost-effectiveness and value for money are important.
- We will establish and maintain a cohesive and highly motivated workforce, recognising that staff face-to-face contact is an important part of our organisational culture.
- We will find the right balance between consistency and flexibility in our working arrangements, so we are an attractive and fair employer that is able to attract and retain high quality people.
- We will ensure that the governance of the Authority remains timely, inclusive, open, honest, and accountable, taking full account of the role and views of Members.
- Any new arrangements we introduce should lessen our environmental impact and help achieve our carbon reduction objective.
- We will equip our staff to do their job effectively whilst protecting the integrity and security of our data and equipment.

### **Staff Blended Working Survey: Summary**

1. The staff blended working survey ran from 16 - 30 September 2022. 105 individual responses were received, many accompanied by more detailed comments, of which the sample quoted within this Annex are typical.
2. Three quarters of respondents said they have a blended working arrangement in place with almost everyone making use of it.
3. Almost everyone agreed the introduction of blended working has facilitated a better work/life balance. Just under three quarters said it has had a positive impact on their wellbeing.

#### **Has the introduction of blended working had an impact on your wellbeing?**



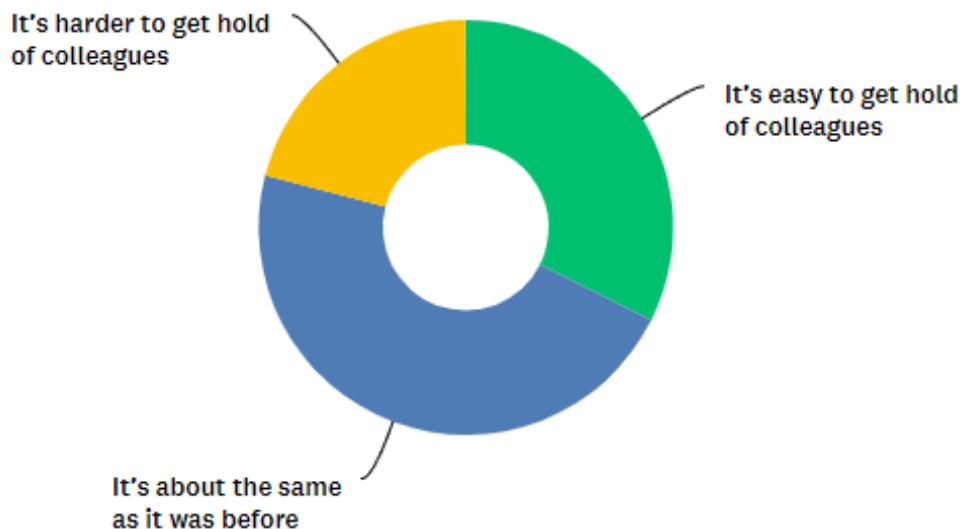
- *“For me, it’s really reassuring to know that if child is sick I was able to WFH instead of office, and if snow arrives I can WFH. Before blended working, I would have needed to use leave for this”*
  - *“Two days at home and three days in the office is working well for me. I have a quiet period at the start of the week to get ahead on projects and emails and then a period in the office to catch up with colleagues face to face. I think it has improved my productivity”*
  - *“It has improved my wellbeing - reduced stressful and wasted time commuting, allowed me to better support my kids and spend more time with them, given me more time in the week to get chores done and have more down time (less time spent commuting). I also spend less on fuel and vehicle running costs”*
4. We asked staff if they had any comments regarding the way blended working has been implemented. Common themes included:
    - *“I think the level of discussions in teams and the review discussions have been a good way to talk through any issues and concerns. I think however there have been difficulties for staff who do not have blended working, when they may have been home / hybrid working for the last 2 years with no apparent issues, I think*

*there was an expectation that this would continue, and some feel like they have been treated unfairly”*

- *“There was confusion from staff about the term predominantly an office-based organisation, so expectations to work from home more than was allowed initially caused some irritation for some, but now it has bedded in, things seem to be going smoothly. It was a massive job for IT to ensure people had equipment and licencing”*
- *“Each team seems to be working out what works best for them, which is probably the right approach - ensuring there is at least some office cover each working day”*
- *“I think it has been implemented well and was a natural progression from the previous couple of years”*
- *“It is good that there has been some flexibility within the blended working arrangements, such as being able to vary which days are office/home based to suit the weeks'/months' work needs, however I think it would be beneficial to be more flexible with the number of days allowed. There needs to be more trust in staff. Blended working should be more actively encouraged as to benefit our/the authority's carbon footprints, after all we did announce a climate emergency”*

5. We asked staff how easy it is to contact colleagues since blended working was introduced. Over three-quarters said it's either the same or easier. Keeping calendars up to date and having desk phones diverted to mobiles were a common theme.

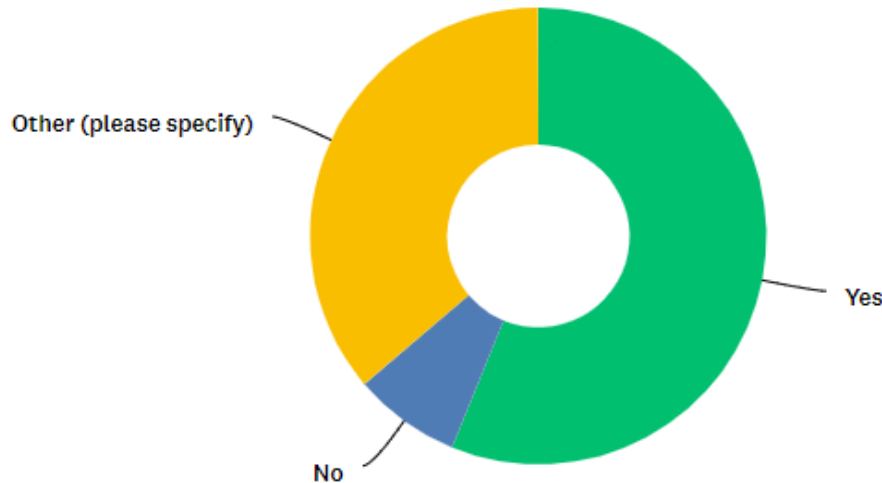
**Since blended working was introduced in April 2022 how easy has it been for you to contact colleagues?**



- *“Some Colleagues/Managers do not keep their diaries up to date plus they do not divert their phone when not in the office”*
- *“Definitely harder - desk phones are meant to be diverted to mobiles or home phones. I don't feel this is happening every time and those that are diverted are rarely answered”*
- *“I have not really had any issues with this, it has been easier since the issue of work laptops and the roll out of teams, plus the increased issue of work mobiles to more staff. In our team we are used to keeping our calendars up to date”*

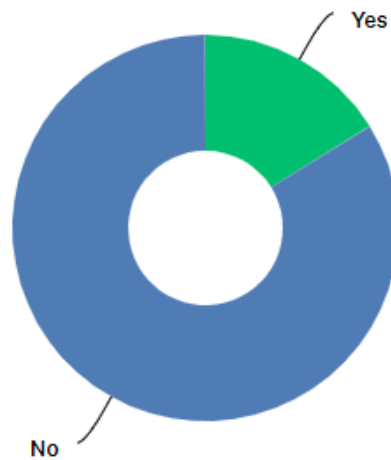
6. When it comes to looking up where colleagues are working and their contact details, more than half of staff say they find this easy, others chose to leave a more detailed written response to the question, which focused on keeping calendars updated and phones diverted. Only 8 people said they're finding it harder.

**Are you easily able to find out if and/or where colleagues are working on any given day, and access their contact details?**

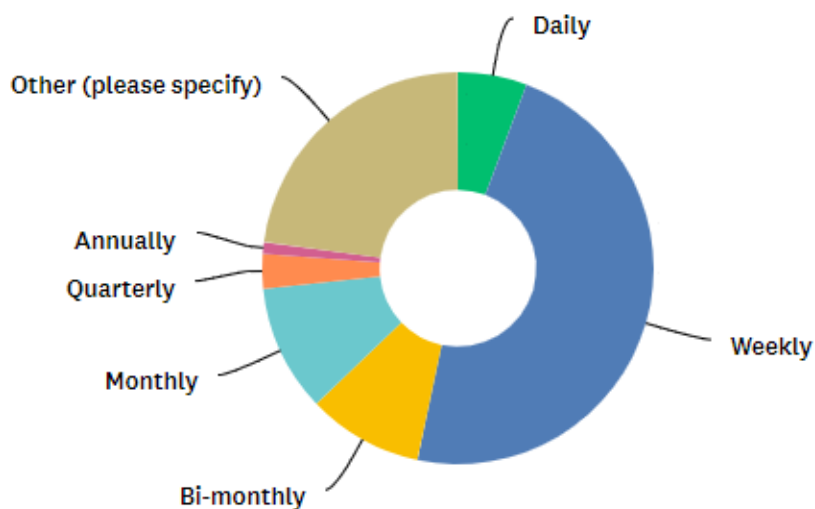


- *"It can be difficult to know where colleagues are. A bit of a guessing game at times"*
  - *"People's outlook calendars are not always up to date or filled in - this would help in tracking people down or knowing if they are working at all. I have started using the intranet to find contact numbers, but this would be easier done via outlook"*
  - *"Most staff are very good at using their Outlook calendars however, there are one or two that could be reminded to complete them more accurately"*
7. We asked to staff to think about the team they work in and whether colleagues with blended working arrangements had an impact on their ability to do their job effectively. Nearly all said it makes no difference. 8 people said it made their job easier with 8 more saying it made their job more difficult.
- *"The lack of face-to-face contact makes it more difficult to ask for a quick piece of advice, or to be involved in more general, informal discussions where you may have been able to make an input in the office"*
  - *"Problems can occur when staff change their plans and do not update their calendar"*
  - *"As I am able to contact colleagues whether they are in the office or at home, this does not impact on my ability to do my job effectively"*
  - *"All staff within my team still have a requirement to be in the office so many days, so if I want to see them in person I can. If urgent they are generally available by phone/teams"*
8. On the whole, blended working doesn't appear to be negatively impacting how often staff see colleagues face to face.

**Thinking about the team you work with, is blended working negatively impacting how often you see colleagues face to face?**



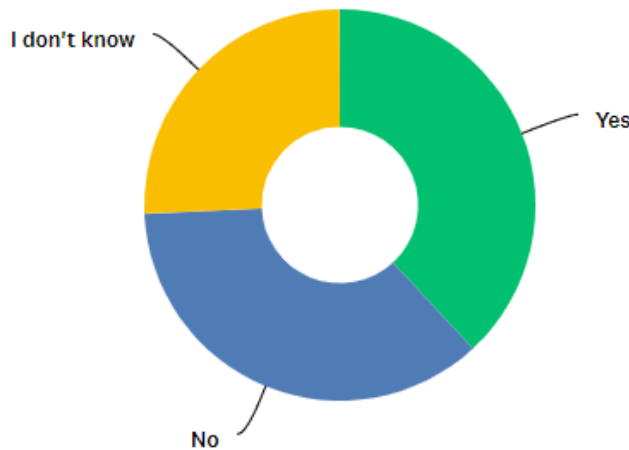
9. Staff told us since the introduction of blended working they continue to get quality time with their line manager. Only 8 respondents said they don't. The ease with which staff can contact a Section Head or member to SMT is roughly the same. Again, only 8 respondents said it's harder for them.
10. We asked staff how often they have face to face meetings to connect with colleagues.



11. Staff are split on whether blended working has created an increase in/reliance on, e-mail. Also, 79% said the current volume of e-mails is fine, the rest said it's too high.
- *“Possibly - but I think this is the main means of communication anyway and for some things it needs a record of the communications, and the info can be subsequently referred to. It is my preferred means of communication”*
  - *“There is less opportunity for short informal discussions on work issues with colleagues in the office which results in more minor queries being sent by email”*
  - *“I think email is a main contact medium, but I do not see this as a bad thing. I think everyone has an increased reliance on emails, including customers of the YDNPA”*

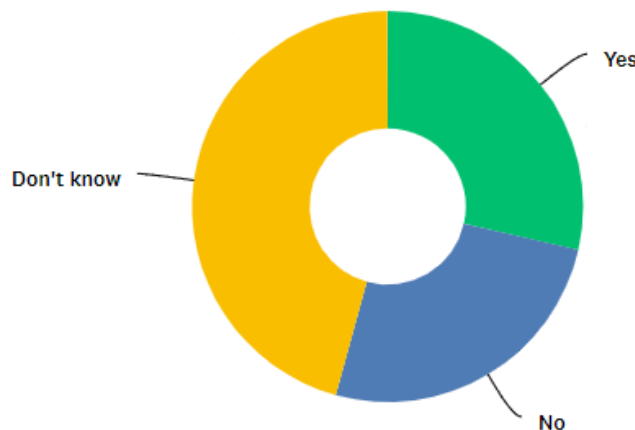
- *“There should be a return of all authority emails. I feel we are missing out on both important information and a sense of workplace community”*
- *“Cut all the emails about cycle to work and cheap iPads. But do email us with changes in staff, new projects, other work programmes etc*

**Has blended working created an increase in, and reliance on, e-mail?**



12. Staff can't agree whether the culture of the Authority has changed since the introduction of blended working.

**Do you think the culture of the Authority has changed since the introduction of blended working?**



- *“Yes, more detached from the people and the Authority. I think that as blended working is now a permanent transition, which has many benefits, more importance and value should be put on gathering as a collective - such as reverting at least two full staff meetings, or meetings of this nature, where we can gather and bring back this feeling of belonging that, in my opinion, has been lost”*
- *“I think for any new starters or for the groups of e.g. younger staff who used to get together socially over lunch in Yoredale (as an example), it must have*

- changed. The office in Grassington has always been one extreme to the other, i.e. no-one in and then everyone in together...no not much change there*
- *“I think the culture of the authority was changed by the pandemic, as most office workplaces have been, not by blended working - most staffs working patterns had changed long before blended working was officially started”*
  - *“The office is a bit quieter, but the big changes have been Covid and more structural changes to the workforce rather than blended working”*
13. Finally, we asked if staff had anything further to add. Common themes included:
- *“Financially and work life balance wise, blended working has been the best thing for me, and for the environment as I am not unnecessarily travelling to the office which is saving on a 48-mile round trip and 1 and half hours travel time. I can work around the core times and at times that I can be most productive. I am also less tired from not having to do as much travel”.*
  - *“I want to continue with blended working and would find it very difficult if it came to an end. I would prefer total flexibility with working arrangements”.*
  - *“Some staff work less than the required 50%+ of their working week in the office”.*
  - *“Blended working is definitely the way forward, please get it formally approved for technicians too”.*
  - *“Blended working has been fantastic for my mental and physical wellbeing as well as allowing me to continue to provide a high quality of service and to maintain a fantastic work life balance, I am grateful that the Authority has moved to a blended working model”.*



## **IT development work need to support home working and BW.**

This annex describes the work required to enable BW, covering the period from 'lockdown' in March 2020 to the present day. This period is relevant to the current review, because some of the work needed to support BW took place as far back as March 2020. Technical solutions for full BW were largely in place in 2021, though the systems we use and the hardware and software behind them have continued to develop.

The challenges dealt with by IT appear to be very similar to those at other NPAs.

### **What were the IT solutions we needed to support Covid-forced home-working? And what else did we do to turn that into blended working?**

We were fortunate compared to some Parks in already having the RDS system in place. This allowed people to be sent home to work from their own/personal PCs at home as if they were in the office on any piece of equipment. However, there were equipment and security concerns – see later.

### **What the history was around our videoconferencing approach?**

The Lifesize VC product was a joint cross-NPA procurement managed by the Heads of IT Group. Initially it was extremely good value. VC was in its infancy when it was procured. We had two pieces of hardware which could call any of the other NPAs directly; or a weblink could be sent externally allowing people to join a meeting via their browser.

Our contract with Lifesize came up for renewal during the first wave of Covid and their renewal prices increased beyond affordability for the then IT budget. We negotiated an extension while we trialled alternatives (Zoom / Teams) and to keep the Committee process running.

### **What training was provided (e.g. on use of VC)?**

The IT team worked with Secretariat & Member Services, to get them up to speed as meeting administrators. They then passed this information to their delegates/participants.

Teams: MS has a comprehensive catalogue of training material which we shared. But we didn't want to push it too much because we can't yet offer all of the features of Teams.

### **Are people still using VC at significant levels?**

Yes, though usage levels vary. Some sections have effectively replaced their phones with Teams, whilst others hardly know it exists.

### **How much did it all cost?**

It may be more helpful, for the purposes of this review to identify spending across the period from 2020 to the present day, rather than simply showing the costs over the period since the introduction of BW. This is summarised below, and covers two main areas: the implementation and operation of MS365, and the large-scale provision of laptops and

mobile phones. Given that the MS365 roll-out would have happened anyway (albeit a year later), the 'extra' cost is arguably the sum spent on laptops and phones, i.e. **£82k**.

This expenditure was incurred across 2020/21 and 2021/22, with spending kept within the agreed budget.

Item	Purchase cost (£)	Annual Charges (£)
MS365 licenses		2021/22 £37,650 (2022/23 full year: £55,190)
MS 365 Implementation (consultants etc.)	8,550	
MS365 Training	3,500	
Mobile Phone handsets (17 to date)	4,307	3,060
Equipment to support Home working / BW: laptops, webcams, headsets, mice, stands, backpacks, speakers, wireless adaptors, chargers, docks, cabling	77,110	
Licenses for additional products		520
<b>Sub-totals</b>	<b>93,467</b>	<b>41,230</b>
<b>TOTAL 2020-2022</b>		<b>134,697</b>

Expenditure, particularly on replacing laptops and associated equipment, will be higher than before the pandemic; this will need to be taken into account when setting future budgets.