

# Policy and Sustainability Committee

**10.00am, Tuesday 5 October 2021**

## Our Future Work Strategy

<b>Item Number</b>	
<b>Executive/Routine</b>	<b>Executive</b>
<b>Wards</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>Council Commitments</b>	

### 1. Recommendations

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It is recommended that the Policy and Sustainability Committee:

- 1.1 Approves the proposed Our Future Work Strategy, delegating authority to the Executive Director of Corporate Services to make any final adjustments to the strategy, particularly in respect of presentation and the inclusion of further case studies, prior to publication.
- 1.3 Notes that the scope of the strategy is to set out a vision and approach to flexible and hybrid working for the Council in the future, alongside a proposal for three trials of new ways of working in Waverley Court, City Chambers and a locality.
- 1.2 Note that the content of the strategy reflects engagement with both employees and elected members over the past 18 months.

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## Our Future Work Strategy

### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 The City of Edinburgh Council put in place measures in March 2020 to ensure that, where feasible, colleagues could continue to deliver their roles whilst working remotely. The pandemic is now at a stage when the Council can start considering options for learn the lessons from these changes to working practices and what that may mean for the future use of our operational estate, aligned to other Council strategies. This report sets out details of the work undertaken to date, including the proposed Our Future Work Strategy for consideration by the Policy and Sustainability Committee.
- 2.2 Whilst working during the Covid-19 pandemic has been and continues to be challenging for all parts of the Council, it has provided us with the opportunity to review and reflect upon the way our services work and to commence a discussion about how we could change for the future with different groups of Council employees. This consideration includes the ability for more employees to work remotely or from home, utilising technology more effectively.
- 2.3 The proposed strategy for Committee has been developed following engagement with both Council employees and Elected Members. The programme team has also worked with the sustainability team and 20-minute neighbourhood team to ensure this work is wholly aligned.
- 2.4 The proposed strategy does not seek to present a comprehensive, detailed plan for the coming months. Rather, it provides Council employees with confirmation that their views have been heard and that positive steps are being taken to trial new ways of working for the longer term.

### 3. Background

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#### **Covid-19 has changes how we want to work**

- 3.1 Insight from 6,400 employees across the Council was gathered through two surveys in April 2020 and November 2020. The key conclusions included:
- 3.1.1 The pandemic has enhanced the Council's sense of collective purpose and highlighted how important our services are to Edinburgh and its citizens. The video messages from senior leaders during this period have been welcomed and considered to be much more engaging and personal than written messages.
  - 3.1.2 Colleagues have little appetite for returning to working exactly as we did before the pandemic. Almost all employees have said they'd like to retain a more flexible approach to work in the future.
  - 3.1.3 For building-based teams, any future solution should recognise the different needs of employees. For example, some will not to be able to work at home on a long-term basis, for a range of reasons, and equally others struggle with an office environment. Most employees would like a mixture and on average, employees who are able to work from home would like to do so 70% of the time.
- 3.2 Issues were also raised in the survey feedback about how flexible working could be achieved equitably given that teams may choose to apply different flexible working models to their working days/week. There was also concern expressed around how flexible working could be applied to frontline services. Whilst office-based staff fit much more neatly into a hybrid working model, this is not the case for those teams who need to work fixed hours to deliver a service. However, this does not prevent us from exploring how flexible working could be applied to frontline services. We therefore intend to undertake a series of focus groups where teams will be invited to discuss how greater flexibility in their role could enhance their wellbeing whilst continuing to deliver efficient and effective public services.

### 4. Main report

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#### **Benefits of flexible working**

- 4.1 Working more flexibly in a hybrid model has the potential to increase our efficiency and effectiveness. It could mean less travel, enabling colleagues to save time and money and reducing their carbon footprint. Working flexibly also has the potential to support a better work-life balance and open up recruitment to a wider pool of talent of potential employees with the skills and experience we need to deliver critical services.

- 4.2 A key component to getting this right will be making better use of our current technology and investing in new solutions to better enable hybrid meetings. This will take time, so we propose to not rush in changes. Instead, we propose to run a series of pilots in line with the 1 metre social distancing requirements the Council has applied in its operational estate.
- 4.3 The proposed strategy lays out high level details for three trials to explore our new ways of working:
- 4.3.1 Waverley Court: Explore how we can adapt the space to fit our future needs for a working environment where people to come together, collaborate and maintain the necessary human connection and the social aspects of work that are missed by work remotely.
  - 4.3.2 City Chambers: Explore how we can adapt the space and use technology to support successful hybrid working model for both our elected members and officers.
  - 4.3.3 'Near me': Working with the 20 Minute Neighbourhood Team we are going to trial local 'near me' offices. The concept will be built into the Town Centre Approach and is part of a longer-term plan.
- 4.4 A cross-Council programme team has been established to lead this work and they are in the process of scoping options and developing a business case for each pilot. The intention is for the pilots to run in parallel with our continued engagement workstream and we will continue to review and adapt plans as we deepen our understanding of the future needs of our services and colleagues, alongside current Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland guidance.
- 4.5 The initial focus is proposed to be on the City Chambers and Waverley Court as this will enable both Elected Members and office-based colleagues to trial using the office in a more flexible manner. Teams will be invited in a phased approach to take part in pilots starting with Human Resources, Committee Services and the Corporate Governance Team. As the programme team are able to roll out more changes to Waverley Court, further teams will be invited to participate.
- 4.6 In the meantime, the Our Future Work programme team is developing a toolkit for managers to enable them to begin discussions with teams about how they could work together in a flexible way going forwards and updated Flexible Working operational guidance has already been published for employees. The strategy at Appendix 1 is a key part of the toolkit in that it sets out the future work vision for the organisation.

## **5. Financial impact**

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- 5.1 The financial impact of each trial will be developed through the use of a business case approach, working closely with Finance and Digital Services. At this stage, it is expected that the cost of the pilots can be managed from within existing service budgets.

## **6. Stakeholder/Community Impact**

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- 6.1 The programme team has been engaging directly with employees and elected members on the development of the strategy, as well as with the joint trade unions.
- 6.2 The longer-term stakeholder/community impact of this strategy will be assessed as part of the three proposed trials.

## **7. Background reading/external references**

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- 7.1 None.

## **8. Appendices**

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- 8.1 Appendix 1 – Our Future Work Strategy

# Our Future Work

Flexibility, Trust and Empowerment



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# Introduction

The impact of coronavirus has changed the way many of us work. Never did we think we could collectively achieve so much while working apart. It has shown us that there are options about how we work, and that technology plays an important role. What was once just theory has now been shown to work well in practice.

We've asked our colleagues how the pandemic has changed how they work and what they want for the future. The response was resoundingly 'flexibility' underpinned with an ask for more trust and empowerment.

This strategy sets out a way forward for adopting and facilitating a new approach to how, where and when colleagues work, where roles allow. In an organisation as large as ours, doing this properly will take time and, as shown in our case studies, working flexibly will be different depending on where you work. We're much clearer about what flexible working means for our office-based colleagues who, over the coming months, will be encouraged to start using our buildings again and move to hybrid working.

To ensure we've understood what flexible working could mean for front-line colleagues we'll be running focus groups. In these focus groups we'll be trying to identify changes we could make now to enable frontline colleagues to also work more flexibly. We already have examples of this as shown in case study one.

The strategy therefore sets out the changes we can make now, along with our longer-term ambitions. Most importantly, the strategy looks at the type of culture and behaviours we need to develop to ensure a flexible model works for everyone. It builds on the values and behaviours we've demonstrated during the pandemic, such as trust and collaboration. As we start to think about flexible and hybrid working, we must remember that the experiences of our 18,500 colleagues have been, and will be, very different. For some, home or remote working has been positive in that it has enabled them to find a greater balance between home and work life. Whereas for others it has been more challenging to find a suitable space to work, or it has negatively impacted on their wellbeing and led to periods of isolation. More than ever, we need to find a way to balance the needs of the different services and expectations of our colleagues. For example, the work expectations of a 'baby boomer' are very different to those of a 'millennial'. We need to work together to balance these differences in our workforce.

This is why taking a flexible approach to how we work in the future is key to achieving a sustainably high performing council. We want to support different lifestyles and wellbeing needs while maintaining high quality services for the people of Edinburgh.

## Our Vision

The workplaces of the future will be environments designed, built and adapted to drive the Council forward with a shared sense of purpose within a culture of collaboration aiming to improve outcomes for local people.

Our approach to hybrid working sets out to achieve more dynamic work settings and effective ways of working. We hope this will improve performance, knowledge sharing and autonomy leading to greater employee satisfaction and improved service delivery.

## Case study one: working flexibly in the cluster assessment and care management teams

Assessment and care management colleagues have been working remotely from home since March 2020 and have all been given laptops, iPhones, Personal Protective Equipment and lateral flow tests. They use MS Teams to meet each other and their managers regularly. They've created specific channels on MS Teams to share information and request assistance throughout the day. Where possible they meet service users, their families and other professionals on MS Teams.

Locality offices are now used as touch down space between visits or for welfare breaks. Colleagues who work on a shift basis can pre-book a desk before they go into the office if needed. They have regular Display Screen Equipment (DSE) risk assessments for home working and support is offered with equipment, if required e.g. adjustable office chairs. Everyone is encouraged and supported to look after their wellbeing.



# Chapter one: why now is the right time for flexible working

There are seven drivers which guide this work:

1. **Feedback and learning from the past 18 months:** There's little appetite for returning to work exactly as we did before the pandemic. Of the colleagues who completed our November 2020 survey, almost everyone said they'd like to retain a more flexible approach to work in the future. Colleagues who are buildings-based showed a desire to retain a hybrid model of working from a mix of locations – for example home, or other permitted locations, and a Council workplace. On average, colleagues who can work from home would like to do so 70% of the time.
2. **We need to be a modern, attractive workplace:** All organisations are now considering their approach and hybrid working is likely to become common place across many sectors. For the Council to continue to remain competitive and to attract and retain the best talent from Scotland and beyond, we need to offer modern working practices. In doing so we can also widen the talent pool available to us.

“ I've benefitted from working from home and feel I now have a better work-life balance. However, I still have a lot of meetings every day, and it can be quite tiring. I welcome being able to spread my time at home and in-office, but I do need to get out and about to visit colleagues working in our frontline services. So I plan to spend two days at home and three in the office or out and about.

I encourage all colleagues to embrace this new way of working and focus on their health and wellbeing. Our Future Work is a real step-change for our organisation, and together we can create a better working environment for everyone.

**Andrew Kerr, Chief Executive** ”

3. **Sustainability:** It's not yet clear whether home working has reduced carbon emissions, however the collective impact of colleagues working locally and not using transport is recognised. By changing our work practices, we have the potential to make a significant contribution to the Edinburgh 2030 carbon net zero target and show leadership to other organisations.
4. **Culture:** In our People Strategy we committed to supporting colleague wellbeing through enabling a healthy work-life balance. We have an opportunity like never before to achieve this.
5. **Collaboration:** Using our buildings differently creates more opportunity to share them with other bodies from the voluntary, public and private sectors. This can only support improved collaboration and the way in which we work together for communities. In time there are likely be financial benefits in addition to the creation of spaces for collaboration and partnership working.
6. **20-Minute Neighbourhood:** Our 20-Minute Neighbourhood strategy commits us to trialling new ways of working, including delivering our services closer to communities and enabling colleagues to work closer to home.
7. **Our Buildings:** As set out in the 20-Minute Neighbourhood strategy, better management and use of our buildings across the city will help us to deliver our ambitions to reduce carbon emissions. This is also about creating spaces where colleagues want to work.

## Case study two: wellbeing phone calls

Since April 2020, the Health and Social Care Partnership has made over 46,000 calls using Assistive Technology Enabled Care 24 service (ATEC24). This new approach meant we could check on individuals' wellbeing, provide companionship and offer advice and support on coping with lockdown. Of those participating in a service user satisfaction survey, 96% felt the wellbeing phone calls during the pandemic had been helpful and enabled them to feel well-supported.

We also made wellbeing calls to 457 people identified with dementia who prior to the pandemic were not receiving formal service involvement. These calls enabled a focus on wellbeing, including food/medication/shopping checks, daily living activities, general wellbeing and carer support, with advice and onward referrals provided as required.

# Chapter two: building blocks

## Embedding a flexible working model

We'll support colleagues and teams to agree how they want to work together, the frequency that they need to meet face to face and the type of office space they need. For example, some teams will want to come together to collaborate for some activities but may also prefer to work from home or local offices for the majority of the time. It may be the case that even more roles could become permanent home working roles.

In the discussion with teams, managers will want to think about the types of roles they deliver. Broadly these can be broken down into four categories:

- Mobile Working: roles which by their nature require colleagues to be out and about to deliver services;
- Hybrid Working: roles which can be undertaken from a mixture of locations including home or other locations on the Council estate;
- Home Working: roles which are contractually home based; and,
- Building Based Working: roles which need to be based in a Council workplace

### Case study three: hybrid working in practice

Simone spends two days a week working in the office. She then spends the other three days working from home or in a local coworking space. This enables Simone to have dedicated time working on reports in a quiet environment.

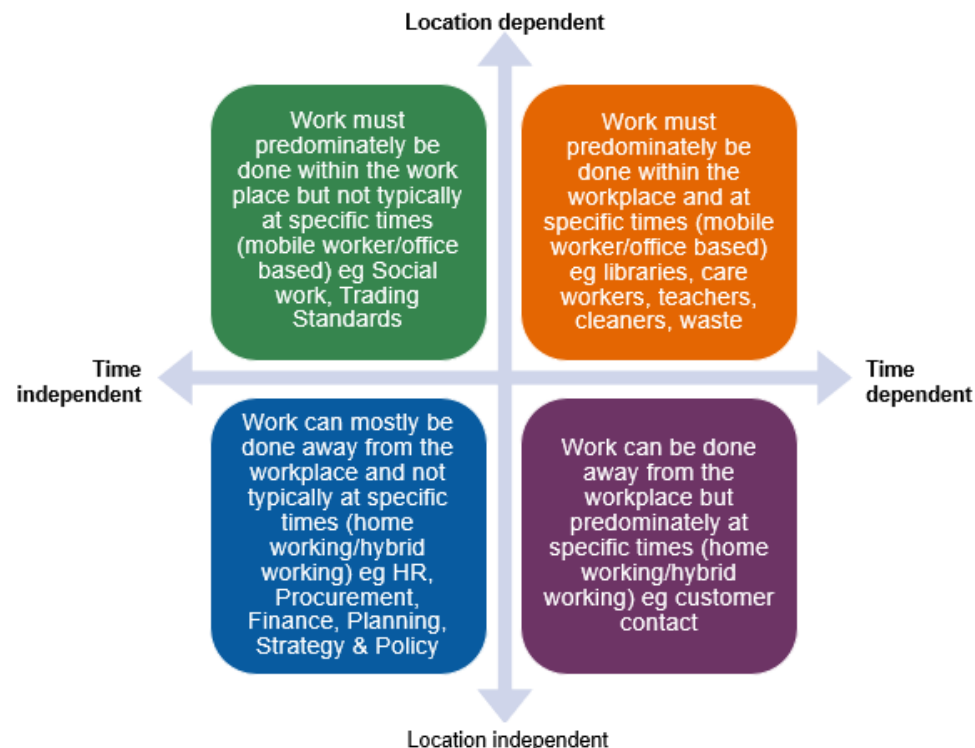
Working this way has also improved Simone's wellbeing as she is able to collect her children from after school club early on the days she is not in the office because she does not have commuting time.

## Mindset

Making the leap to flexible working can be hard but that doesn't mean we should shy away from exploring this and just revert to how our working lives were pre-coronavirus. We want to engage and support managers and teams to decide what's best for them. The answer will be different for each team depending on

preferences and delivery requirements. We'll provide frequently asked questions (FAQs) and a toolkit to support discussion over the coming months. We need to challenge ourselves at each step along the way to ensure we're striving to achieve excellence in service delivery while also improving the work-life balance for colleagues.

Here is a helpful tool for managers to use with their teams:



### I don't work in a building or at a desk. Does Our Future Work apply to me?

We have many different roles in the Council. Some colleagues were previously buildings based, whereas others needed to move around the city. As part of this strategy, we want to explore opportunities to apply the principles of Our Future Work to those services that aren't building, or desk based.

While recognising that some roles are more fixed in nature, we want to work with colleagues to hear ideas on how and where flexibility could be introduced to help improve work-life balance and support wellbeing for all. You'll be invited to complete our survey or take part in a focus group to share your views about what flexible working could mean for you and your role.

“Commuting for over two hours was previously part of my working day. While I did sometimes work from home, it was never regularly. However, since we've all had to change how we work, I've had a much better work-life balance. As a result, I now plan to continue working from home three days a week, where I will use the time to focus on specific issues.

I can also use this extra time to exercise at the end of the day rather than having a long commute. It helps my physical and mental wellbeing, and it's essential we all take the time to focus on ourselves.

**Jackie Irvine, Chief Social Work Officer, Service Director of Children's and Criminal Justice Services**”

“Being able to work flexibly allows me to balance different parts of my role. My personal plan for the future is to be in a work location each week for three days with two days from home.

I recognise that this might need to flex depending upon my commitments, from time to time, but I also think role modelling flexible working is not only good for me, it will hopefully help others feel able to make that shift.

**Dr Stephen Moir, Executive Director of Corporate Services**”



# Chapter three: hybrid working, a closer look

## Does hybrid work change how I work?

Hybrid working does not change the support that we can expect. Colleagues will have the same access to work, and opportunities for learning, development and progression. No one should miss out on anything because of where they work. While we all have a role to play in creating a positive work culture, the role of line managers remains especially important in ensuring everyone works together collaboratively.

## What do teams need to think about when moving to hybrid working?

What works for one person, won't necessarily work for everyone. It's important that teams discuss a work pattern that works for everyone. When having these discussions, managers will need to explore:

- The needs of the service and how this drives work patterns. In particular, if a service user or stakeholder expects meetings or work to be done at specific times.
- How to welcome and induct new colleagues to the organisation and ensure they develop and build a network.
- Whether a task needs to be carried out in the workplace or at home.
- How the team communicates, works together and ensures everyone is included. 'Out of sight' must not mean, 'out of mind'.
- Any health and safety concerns that need to be addressed.
- The frequency that teams should meet in person and whether there are core times that everyone needs to be available.
- How to ensure everyone takes a break from their screen or work on a regular basis.

## How will technology support hybrid working?

We're at the start of our journey on exploring hybrid working and know that we'll need to continue to evolve as we learn best practice. However, we have already made huge progress as an organisation over the past 18 months.

We'll need to optimise our technology in rooms to ensure we can smoothly hold meetings where some attendees are dialing in. Investment in technology will be our key to supporting our future way of work. As part of our plans we'll look at the

right technology to support working in our buildings, working remotely and working in a hybrid way.

Our audio-visual equipment will be required to connect colleagues and other stakeholders in both remote and hybrid settings. We will also need to look at meeting etiquette in a hybrid setting.

### Case study four: future vision for hybrid working

I start my day at home by having breakfast with my children and I then walk them to school. On my way home I buy a coffee and speak to a colleague about preparing for a meeting later in the week. It's also an informal chance to check in with each other. I then spend a couple of hours working on my report at home and managing my inbox.

In the afternoon I walk to my local office where I've arranged to meet colleagues for a workshop. The hub has been set up with other public sector partners and it's a great place to network and share ideas. I've used a phone app to book a space for five people so we can run a workshop. Two members of the team needs to join us virtually, so I've booked a space with a visual screen to dial them in. Before starting the meeting, everyone familiarises themselves with meeting etiquette which is especially important when there are virtual and in person attendees. The technology works and we have a productive session.

I then head home and have my 1:1 with my manager virtually and then finish my working day. My partner collects the children as they have a different flexible working pattern to me.

## Combatting virtual fatigue

Not commuting to and from work, coupled with going from meeting to meeting without a break can be really hard both mentally and physically. While meeting virtually is a good use of time, the lack of physical connection or opportunity to move between meeting rooms means there is no chance to decompress or chat informally.

We need to redefine our home working culture to rediscover these moments again. In effect, we need to recreate time away from the screen.

Practical changes that teams could make could include:

- Ensuring meetings end at a time that will allow colleagues to have a break before the next meeting.
- Encouraging everyone to set their MS Outlook so that meetings start at 5 minutes past the hour and end at ten minutes to the hour.
- Ensuring everyone has the right type of homeworking space and, if this is not possible, agreeing they can return to building based working.
- Using daily connect and finish meetings could help structure work and ensure nobody gets into a habit of working long hours.
- Keeping virtual coffee breaks and holding time in diaries for fresh air and exercise.
- Setting up wellbeing groups or buddy systems for new starters.
- Encouraging face-to-face meetings near you and your colleagues' homes.



“The last 18 months have undoubtedly bought challenges for us all, but equally it's paved the way for us to think differently about how and where we work. Our expectations and needs have changed. Consistently colleagues have fed back that they want to be more empowered and trusted – what a great opportunity we have to respond to this and try different ways of working. Let's move where we focus on what colleagues have delivered and not the hours they've spent in the office. “

**Katy Miller, Service Director:  
Human Resources**”



## Chapter Four: trialing different ways of working

Supporting flexible working, whether digitally or in our buildings, will require investment over a number of years. Any change we make needs to be led by colleague feedback so we're not rushing into immediate changes. Instead, we'll take an agile approach and trial different ways of working across our operational estate. Working in an agile way means we test and evolve plans as we go, based upon feedback.

Our workplace of the future needs to provide spaces where people can come together to interact and connect. We'll need spaces that enable quiet working and rooms that allow for confidentiality. We'll also need space that embraces current and new technology and allows us to connect with our citizens and services users, as well as people working from different locations. Most importantly, the spaces we create must support the mentoring of our new employees or those who are just starting out in their careers. We must ensure new and positive relationships continue to be forged as we embrace a different way of working.

We want to start this journey by investing in three trials that, if successful, could see us make these changes permanent.

### Waverley Court

Waverley Court sits in the centre of Edinburgh with excellent transport connections. We'll always want to use this space to come together, collaborate or meet with partner organisations. The changes we make need to support social connection and the other aspects of work we miss. This could include:

- team tables and collaboration rooms to support delivery
- quiet rooms to provide people with space to support thinking and report writing
- individual rooms where colleagues can take confidential calls or have a private meeting with others
- secure environments provided for tasks covered by legislation which require privacy
- space to relax
- space to log into a laptop or contact digital services for support
- space for mentoring and development.

Getting this right will require technology that includes everything from keeping colleagues safe within buildings to apps to book space in buildings and systems which allow up to invite others to attend meetings virtually.

### City Chambers

Sitting over ten floors in a grade A Listed Building, the City Chambers is the civic and democratic heart of the Council and is where our elected members are normally based. The chambers are also occupied by a variety of Council services and partners, including social work, registration services and the resilience centre. Additionally, there is a customer hub and several spaces which support numerous civic and public events, including weddings and civil partnership ceremonies.

There are various spaces in the City Chambers that lend themselves to supporting hybrid working. We propose to better use some of the agile space we already have, such as the business centre, and we will create four hybrid meeting rooms with audio visual capabilities for elected members and officers to trial.

### Case study five: waste and services technical team

At the start of Covid-19 we knew that we had to work differently. In particular, we changed our working hours so that we could balance out our roles with caring responsibilities.

We didn't ask colleagues to submit time sheets, instead we worked on the basis of trust. Walking meetings have become part of our culture and a great way to step away from the screen. Some teams' meetings have been held in parks, which helps new starts get to know their new colleagues.

However, we've also found that MS Teams has helped us to have really productive meetings which are more efficient and focused. For our new starters we have also arranged a virtual meeting with the manager of the Technical Team to welcome them to the Service. Going forwards we'll want to maintain this balance of using available technology but also holding face to face meeting locally.

## Local 'near me' offices

The 20-Minute Neighborhood Strategy sets out a vision for local areas. This includes enabling people to work locally to reduce the need for commuting. In turn this will also have positive benefits on local economies and reduce traffic congestion. There are three key reasons why now is the right time to make this change:

- investing in local working and 20-Minute Neighbourhoods will contribute to reducing local emissions which is essential if we're to deliver our target to be a net-zero city by 2030;
- supporting local economies and businesses who can provide for the daily needs of communities but also create employment opportunities; and,
- future opportunities to share the space with partners and third-party organisations.

“ We started flexible working in response to the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic and teams across Edinburgh have done amazing things to support the most vulnerable while working agilely and flexibly. It's great that we can now extend that flexibility in how we work into the future. We've been listening to what colleagues have said over the past 18 months and the strategy reflects that. I'm now planning a split between being building based when we need to be and working from home.

**Judith Proctor, Chief Officer of the  
Edinburgh Health  
and Social Care Partnership** ”

## Timelines

The trials will run in parallel with our engagement workstream and we will continue to review and adapt our plans as we develop our understanding of the future needs of our services and colleagues, alongside current public health guidance.

A cross-council project team is working on plans for a phased approach. The initial focus will be City Chambers and Waverley Court. From October, teams will be invited to participate in trials on a gradual basis starting with Human Resources, Committee Services and the Corporate Governance Team. As we're able to rollout more changes in Waverley Court, we will invite more teams to start using the space in the coming months.

In the meantime, a toolkit will be provided to all managers to support them to have discussions with their teams about how they would like to use flexible working going forwards.

The local offices trial is a longer-term plan that will be developed in line with the town centre strand of the 20-Minute Neighbourhood strategy.

