

17 SEPTEMBER 2020

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

HR COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the HR Committee held on Thursday, 17 September 2020

- * Cllr Barry Rickman (Chairman)
- * Cllr Mark Steele (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

- Hilary Brand
- * Keith Craze
- * Kate Crisell

Councillors:

- * Michael Harris
- * Maureen Holding
- * Mahmoud Kangarani

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

David Hawkins

Officers Attending:

Heleana Aylett, Debbie Bruton, Bob Jackson, Donna Langfield, James Loring, Zoe Ormerod, Manjit Sandhu, Karen Wardle, Karen Warner and Antony Whittle

36 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 June would be submitted to the next meeting for approval.

37 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made by members in connection with an agenda item.

38 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no issues raised in the public participation period.

39 HR UPDATE

The Committee received the HR update.

The National Pay Award for 2020 had been agreed and implemented and therefore no further action was required.

The five Health and Leisure centres had reopened and some staff had returned to work from furlough. In response to members questions it was noted that roughly 100 staff members remained on furlough. Swimming instructors were anticipated to

return to work on 21 September and some members staff had returned to work for a particular role at the leisure centre but could remain on furlough for other duties.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

40 EMPLOYEE SIDE LIAISON PANEL - MINUTES OF 27 AUGUST 2020

The Committee received and noted the Employee Side Liaison Panel meeting from the meeting held on 27 August 2020.

41 EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESULTS

The Committee received a presentation on the results of the Employee Survey carried out from 15-31 July 2020. The presentation is appended to these minutes as an Appendix.

The level of participation in the survey was high, with 386 responses. This was equivalent to 48% of staff working for NFDC at the time. The survey identified the following:

- 61% of staff enjoyed working from home, with most staff having access to suitable working space and equipment in the short term. 58% would welcome the opportunity to work from home more in the future, however 43% felt they did not have the right equipment to work from home in the long term.
- 90% of employees felt trusted to work from home.
- 4 out of 5 employees felt they were as effective or more effective working from home and that they had a better work life balance.
- Those who said they were less effective working from home felt their work station set up was not as comfortable, that it was difficult working on a small screen and to collaborate with colleagues.
- When asked about returning to work, only two out of five employees (39%) would feel comfortable doing so, with touching items touched by others being a key concern. Concerns also included working within a close proximity to others and increased exposure to the risk of coronavirus. Toilets, washrooms, kitchenettes and desk spaces were the areas within the workplace which caused the greatest concern.
- Those respondents who were already working in a Council setting had a slightly more positive outlook, with 46% feeling comfortable or very comfortable about being at work.
- In relation to mental wellbeing, 70% of respondents felt able to make up their mind and felt useful the majority of the time. However, around a third (30%) hadn't felt relaxed or close to other people.

As part of the survey staff had been asked to identify their service area. Each Service Manager had been provided with the results for their area in order to discuss the findings with their team and address any areas of concern.

Members welcomed the results of the survey. It was noted that all service areas had adapted their working practices to continue to deliver the Councils services effectively throughout the pandemic.

42 RETURN TO WORK

The Committee received a presentation regarding the work carried out to date to enable members of staff to return to the office in a safe manner.

A review had been carried out of the existing desk space at Appletree Court and how members of staff could return with social distancing measures put in place. It was proposed that less than 50% of staff would return to the office. The majority of staff would continue to work from home. Managers were expected to establish the need for staff to go to the office, possibly to carry specific tasks, or for some collaborate work. It was also acknowledged that some members of staff wanted to return to the office to have some social interaction.

Staff would continue to be supported working from home and managers were encouraged to keep in touch with members of staff. A booking system for attendance in the office was proposed so ensure that the number of staff on site was limited. Staff would work in “bubbles” which would be centred around the Executive Head for the service. Each bubble would have dedicated office space, entrances / exits, kitchen and toilet facilities and it would not be possible for one bubble to mix with another bubble. Communication would therefore need to take place virtually between different bubbles.

The Committee were provided with plans to show how the different bubbles would work across the different Executive Heads at Appletree Court.

It was acknowledged that the work carried out to enable members of staff to return to the office had been done to ensure that staff had a safe environment in which to work. The health and wellbeing of staff was the highest priority and the measures would continue to be reviewed in light of any new guidance.

Members noted that staff returning to the office would help to support the local economy. Members questioned whether equipment would be made available to support those who continued to work from home. It was noted that there was a supply of equipment (e.g. screens and keyboards) which could be made available to staff upon request.

43 TRAINING UPDATE

The Committee considered an update on corporate training undertaken since April 2020.

It was noted that HR had continued to provide training during the COVID-19 pandemic by offering training online. The courses provided had been well attended and good feedback had been received. Members noted the success of the online training and suggested that training be provided to all members on the use of skype and other platforms to enable them to work more effectively.

RESOLVED:

That the training undertaken be acknowledged and that support continue for training through the year and into the future.

44 WORKFORCE PROFILE AND INCLUSION REPORT

The Committee considered the workforce profile and inclusion report. It was noted that this was the first report from the new HR system on the profile of the workforce. The statistics within the report would enable the Council to monitor trends over time in relation to equal opportunities. The report included information and statistics on age, BAME representation, disability and gender.

It noted that all employees were required to complete an e-learning training module on "Essential Equalities" every three years and members suggested this time frame be reduced.

Members noted that the report showed that NFDC employees were broadly representative of the local area. Whilst it was noted that there was a higher percentage of male top earners, it was acknowledged that HR strive to promote equal opportunities and to be fair in the recruitment process. Appointments should be made to the best person for the job.

RESOLVED:

That the Workforce Profile document be published on the Council's external web pages, reviewed annually and updated.

45 WELLBEING REPORT AND ACTION PLAN

The Committee received and noted the content of the Wellbeing Action Plan, used to assist in assessing the needs of employees in respect of mental health and wellbeing.

46 QUARTERLY HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT

The Committee considered the quarterly health and safety report which provided an update on the key health and safety issues in the last quarter and summarised any significant issues raised at each of the safety panels during July 2020.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the quarterly update be noted and that the Committee be aware of ongoing actions that require monitoring or intervention.

47 EMPLOYEE AND PUBLIC ACCIDENT/INCIDENT STATISTICS 2019-2020

The Committee considered the employee and public accident and incident statistics for 2019-2020.

Members questioned how accidents in relation to manual handling and sharp objects could be prevented. It was noted that work was being carried out in relation to the provision of PPE, in particular the provision of gloves for the collection of garden waste. The gloves provided to staff were being reviewed in terms of quality, dexterity and puncture level in an attempt to reduce accidents. An update detailing recommendations was expected to be presented to the next HR Committee meeting. In relation to manual handling accidents, a draft Waste Strategy was due

to be considered and proposals were expected to come forward which would reduce the amount of manual handling.

In response to a member question regarding first aid for members of staff working in refuse collection, it was noted that all refuse vehicles held stocked first aid kits and all supervisors were trained in first aid delivery.

RESOLVED:

That the health and safety performance report be noted.

48 DATES OF MEETINGS 2021/2022

RESOLVED:

That the following meeting dates for 2021/22 be approved (Thursdays at 9.30 am):

- 17 June 2021
- 16 September 2021
- 13 January 2022
- 17 March 2022

CHAIRMAN

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New Forest
DISTRICT COUNCIL

COVID-19 Employee Survey

Findings Report
August 2020

Produced by the Insight and Engagement Unit, Hampshire County Council

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has required all Council colleagues to change ways of working, rise to new challenges, and adapt to a fast moving, unprecedented situation. The Covid-19 Recovery Employee Survey was designed to help the Council to understand the impact of these changes and thereby inform both immediate and longer-term 'recovery' planning, with a particular focus on:

- **experiences** of a changed working environment and conditions;
- the level and range of **concerns** about returning to work in a 'usual' workplace setting; and
- how the Council could further **support colleagues to work safely and effectively** in the coming months.

∞ The survey ran between 15 July and 31 July 2020. It was available online and also as a paper form.

There was a good level of interest in the survey, with a total of **386 responses** received, equivalent to **48%** of those currently still working for New Forest District Council. There are 1,202 members of staff in total (as of August 2020) however 396 of them are currently furloughed.

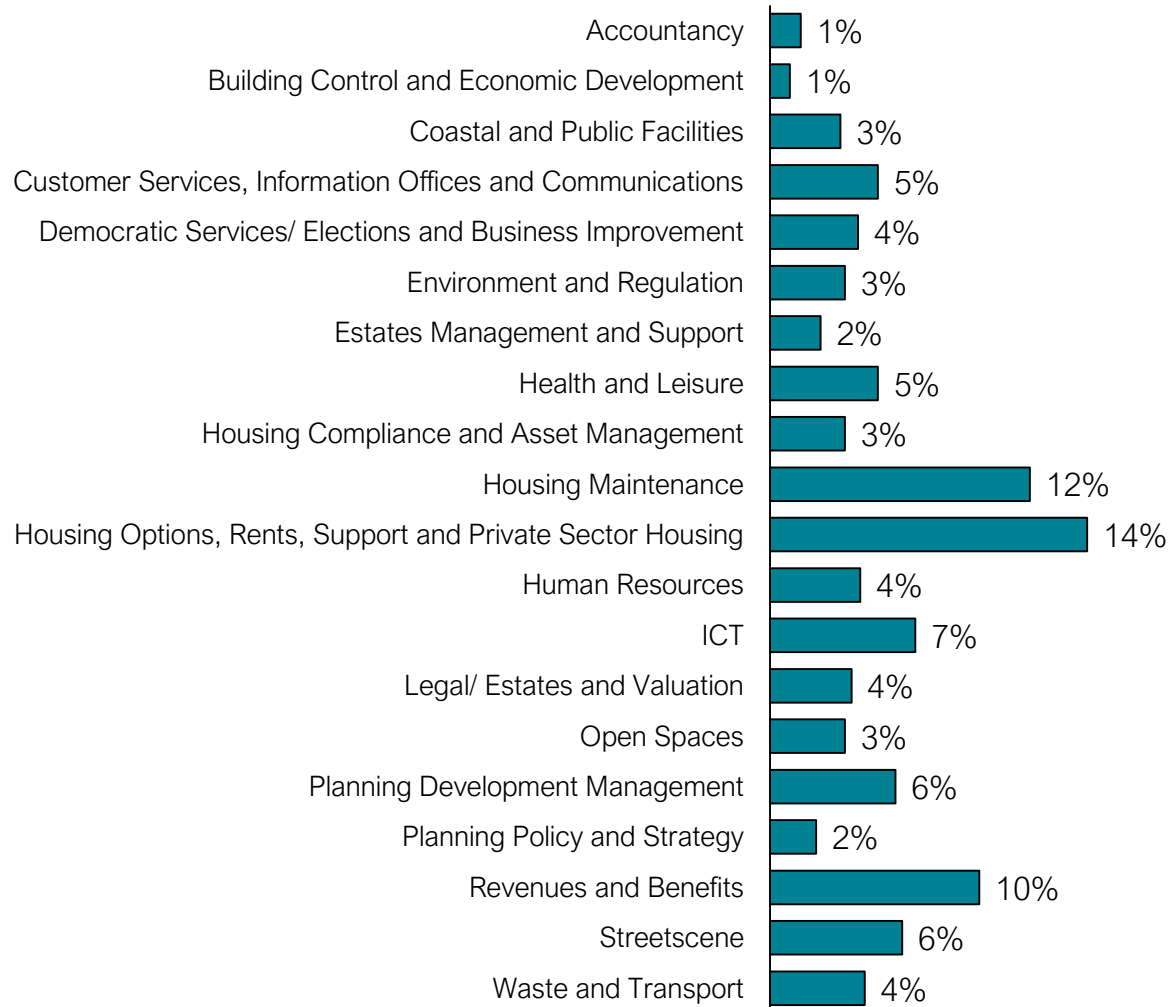
New Forest District Council would like to thank every colleague who took the time to participate in this survey.

Headline findings

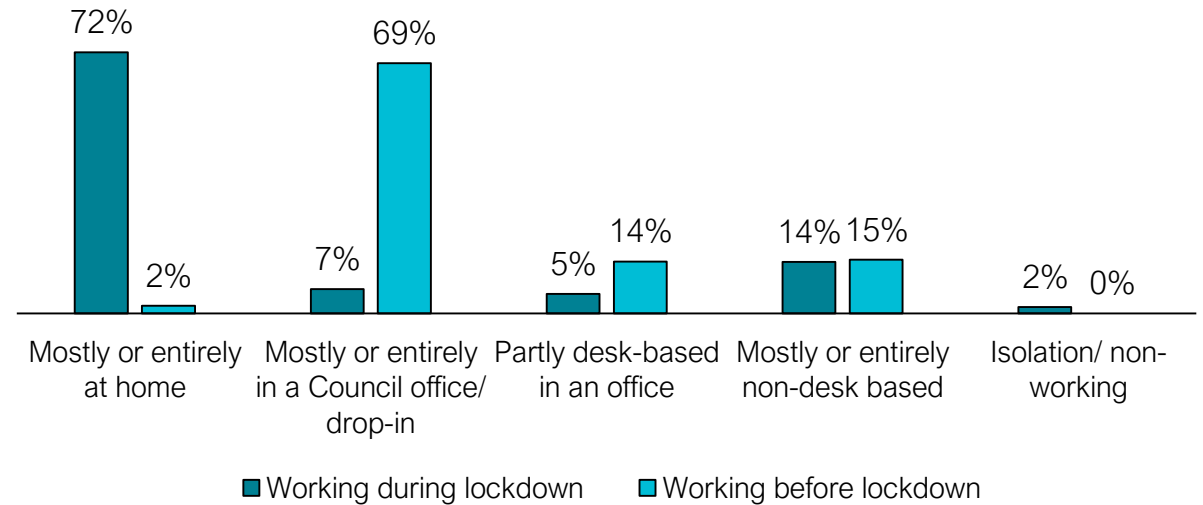
- Most respondents have **enjoyed working from home** (61%), with most having access to a suitable working space (71%) and equipment (80%) for the short term. Over half (58%) **would like the opportunity to work from home more often in future**, however, 43% feel they don't have the equipment to do so long-term and 30% would **require adjustments to enable them to work effectively**.
- People working from home generally felt trusted to do so (90%) and seemed to be keeping in touch with colleagues (86%), and managers (84%). **Four of out five (83%) felt that they were as effective, or more effective**, than when they were in the office as they have fewer distractions (81%), feel better able to manage their time (68%) and spend less time travelling between meetings (64%), enabling a better work/ life balance (70%).
- Those who felt **less effective** (18%) cited that their **workspace setup** was not as comfortable (69%), it was difficult to work on a **small screen** (67%), and it was harder to collaborate with colleagues (61%).
- With regards to **returning to work**, currently only **two in five (39%) would feel comfortable or very comfortable** doing so. Touching items other people have touched was a key concern for many (63%), working in close proximity to others (57%) and increasing their exposure (54%) also featured as reasons for feeling uncomfortable about returning to work. Toilets (68%), kitchenettes (43%) and desk space (35%) were seen as the areas where the risk is greatest.
- **Respondents who were already working in Council settings or offices had a slightly more positive outlook**, with just under half (46%) feeling comfortable or very comfortable about being at work in the current circumstances. Those that felt uncomfortable reported the same top three concerns as those who were working from home.

Respondent Profile: 386 responses received, equivalent to 32% of the entire Council workforce (1,202). 48% of those working at the time of the survey. Almost three quarters of respondents said that they were working from home during the lockdown.

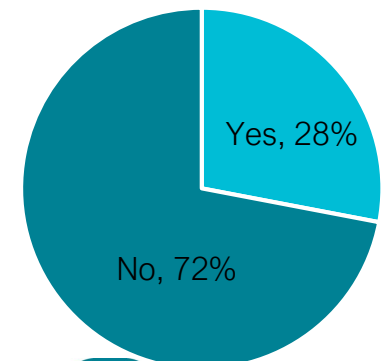
Which service area do you work in? (Base: 348)



Where are you currently working vs where did you work before lockdown (Base: 386, 384)

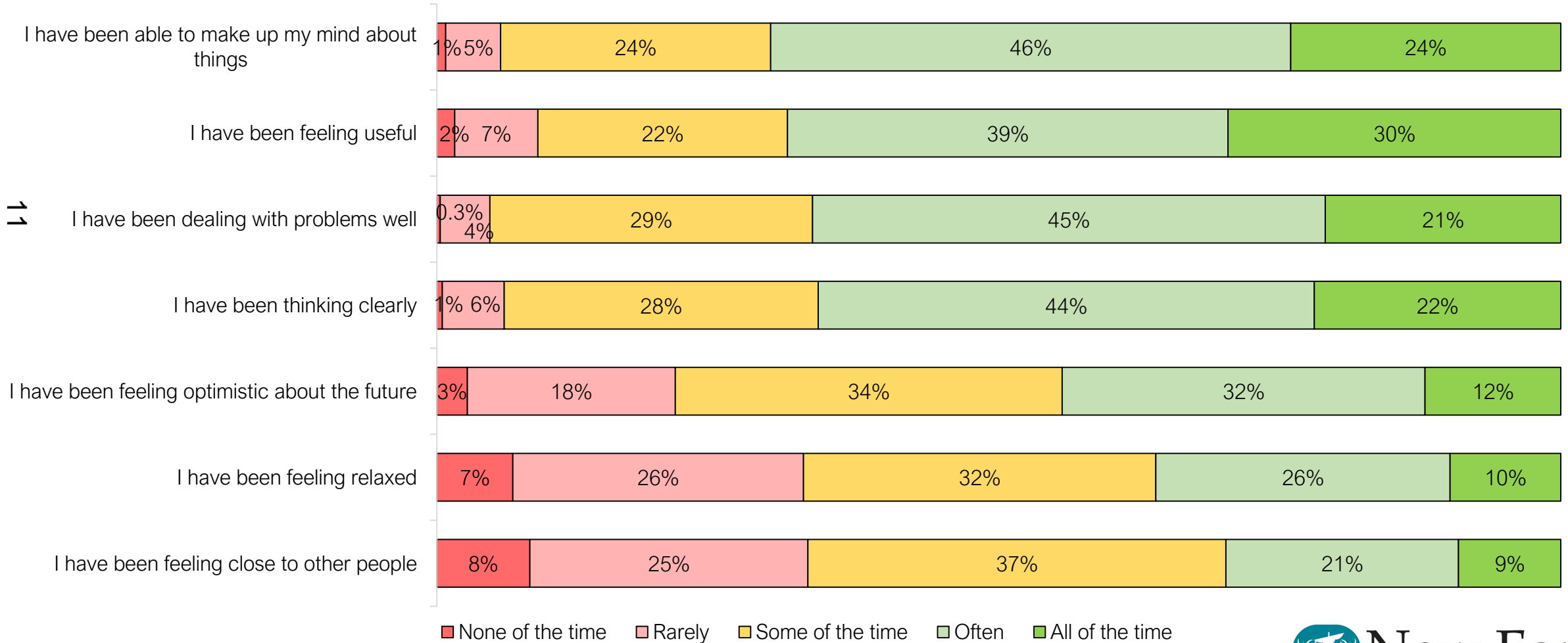


Do you have managerial responsibilities? (Base: 381)



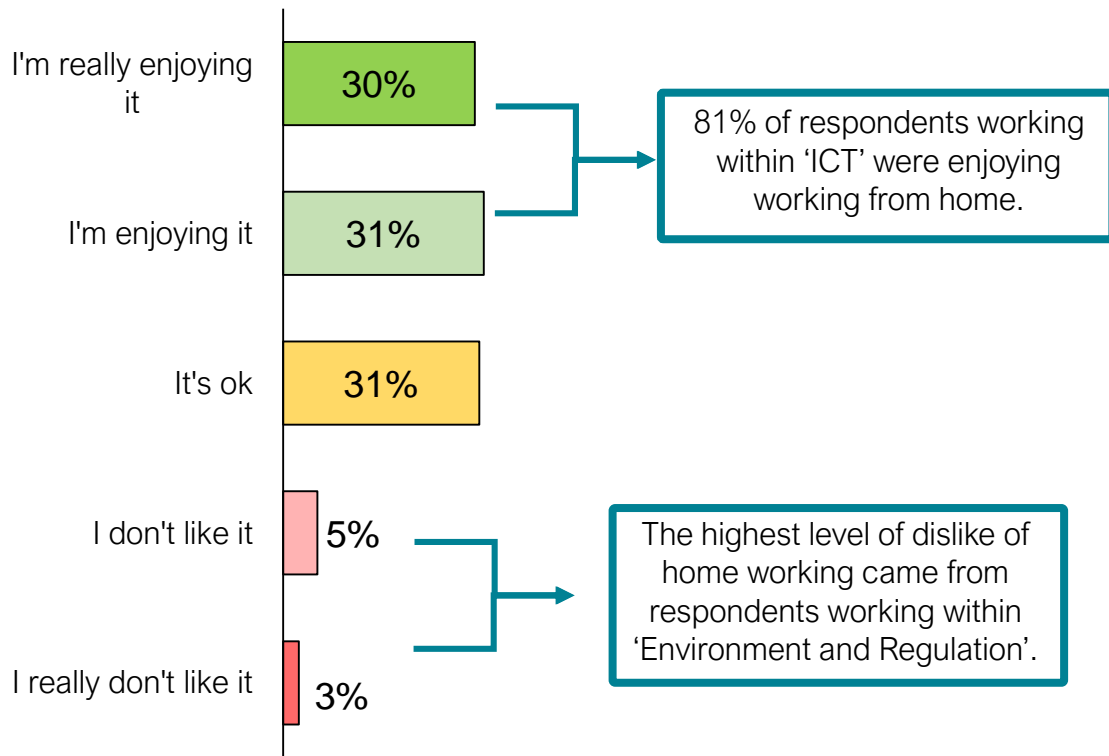
Mental wellbeing: Around 70% of respondents felt able to make up their mind and felt useful the majority of the time. However, around a third (30%) haven't felt relaxed or close to other people.

Please indicate below how you feel about the following statements thinking about how they apply over the last two weeks:
(Base: 386, 386, 384, 383, 384, 384, 383)

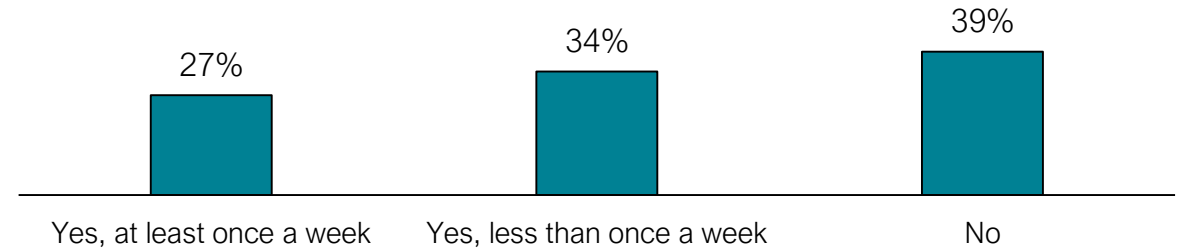


Enjoyment of working from home: 61% of respondents enjoyed working from home. Those who had previously worked from home were most comfortable doing so.

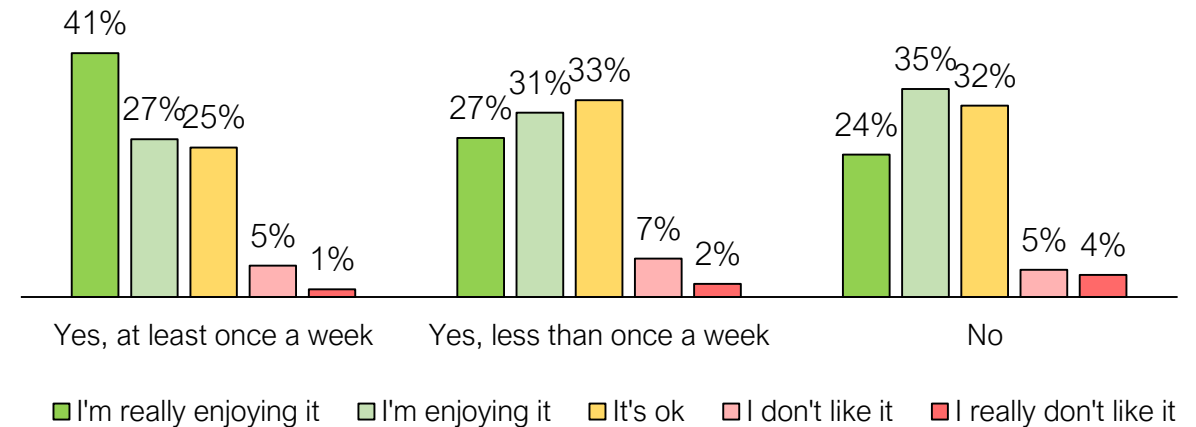
Generally, how do you feel about working from home? (Base: 277)



Had you worked from home before? (Base: 276)



Had you worked from home before vs how do you feel about working from home? (Base: 276)

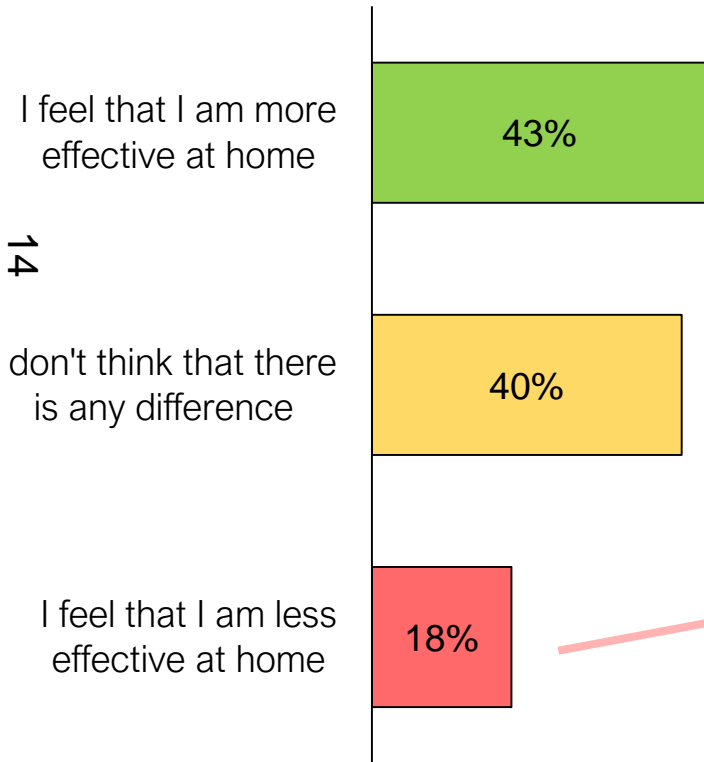


Experience of working from home: Key take outs

- Most respondents felt positively about almost all aspects of working from home, with agreement across all except one of the statements ranging from 55% to 90%.
- Most respondents felt that they were trusted to work from home (90%), had sufficient broadband to enable home working (87%) and were keeping in touch with colleagues (86%) and managers (84%).
- A large proportion of respondents (85%) felt that they had a good work routine in place, a similar number (83%) can access the software and applications required for their job and 82% found that they could work collaboratively with colleagues while working from home.
- Although 80% of respondents said that, in the short-term, they were able to work effectively using the available equipment, only 43% agreed that this would be the case in the longer-term. Although equipment was not a driver of **enjoyment**, it was a significant area of concern for respondents in terms of effectiveness.
- Over three quarters (77%) of respondents with supervisory responsibilities felt that they were able to manage their staff effectively even when working from home.
- Three out of five respondents (61%) enjoy working from home. This could be improved further by encouraging them to maintain a healthy work/ life balance, create a suitable workspace and take regular breaks.

Effectiveness when working from home: Four out of five respondents (83%) felt more effective or as effective than when they were in the office, compared with one in five who felt less effective.

At the present time, how effective do you feel you have been when working from home, compared to working in an office? (Base: 276)



The five reasons most commonly given for increased effectiveness included (Base: 118):

- Fewer distractions (81%)
- Better work/ life balance (70%)
- Better able to manage my time (68%)
- No time travelling between meetings (64%)
- More flexibility around working hours (60%)

"My preference would be to permanently work from home. I have created a workspace and appreciate the reduction in travelling time which is a great help to the work/life balance."

"I think that those, like myself, who have proven that not only are we able to work from home effectively, but also that our productivity is, if anything, enhanced by doing so, should be allowed to continue to do so."

"More flexible with kids - game changer."

"Less travel time to and from work. More energy in afternoons as can take long walk with dog at lunch"

The five reasons most commonly given for reduced effectiveness included (Base: 49):

- Less comfortable alignment of chair and 'desk' (69%)
- Smaller screens (67%)
- Harder to work with colleagues (61%)
- More software issues (55%)
- Harder to take breaks (55%)

"To be able to sustain working from home on a longer-term basis, I feel that I would need a better set up. A larger screen, keyboard and even a proper chair would be great to enable me to work more comfortably."

"I do not have access to the [relevant] databases when working from home... This means that I cannot complete all of my given work on a set day."

"Collaborating with colleagues effectively is a challenge without any balance of office/ homeworking."

Tips on working from home: 92 respondents shared their tips. Most frequently these related to taking breaks, being in a good mindset, and managing their workspace and routine.

15

Breaks (41% of comments)

- Take regular breaks (26%)
- Use breaks to go outside and get fresh air (15%)
- Use breaks to exercise (7%)
- Block out break times in calendar (3%)
- Set reminders to take breaks (1%)

“Maintain regular breaks, go and make up a cup of tea or go out for a quick stroll to get some fresh air. I find getting some fresh air prior to starting work for the day really beneficial.”

“Have a set time to have a coffee to make you stop for a couple of minutes and don't feel guilty about stopping for a minute”

Mindset (29% of comments)

- Chat to colleagues (15%)
- Prepare for work the same as you would if going to office (10%)
- Appreciate flexibility of working from home (3%)
- Set boundaries with family members (3%)
- Listen to music while you work (2%)

“Appreciate the little things: Convenience - flexibility, no travel time or expenses, nice refreshments on hand. Comfort - relaxed dress code, comfortable clothing - wearing your slippers! No need to worry about appearance! Mood enhancing - listen to your favourite music, enjoy interaction with your pets. Keep in touch with colleagues - our team have a WhatsApp group for social interaction.”

Workspace (27% of comments)

- Set up a proper workspace/ dedicated work area (11%)
- Put laptop/ work away when finished (10%)
- Work far away from kitchen to increase steps/ encourage to keep active (2%)
- Set up a larger screen (2%)

“Try and have a dedicated workspace, somewhere that you can call your 'office' for the day so at the end of it you can 'commute' back to your home life, even if that is just walking across the room/ downstairs!”

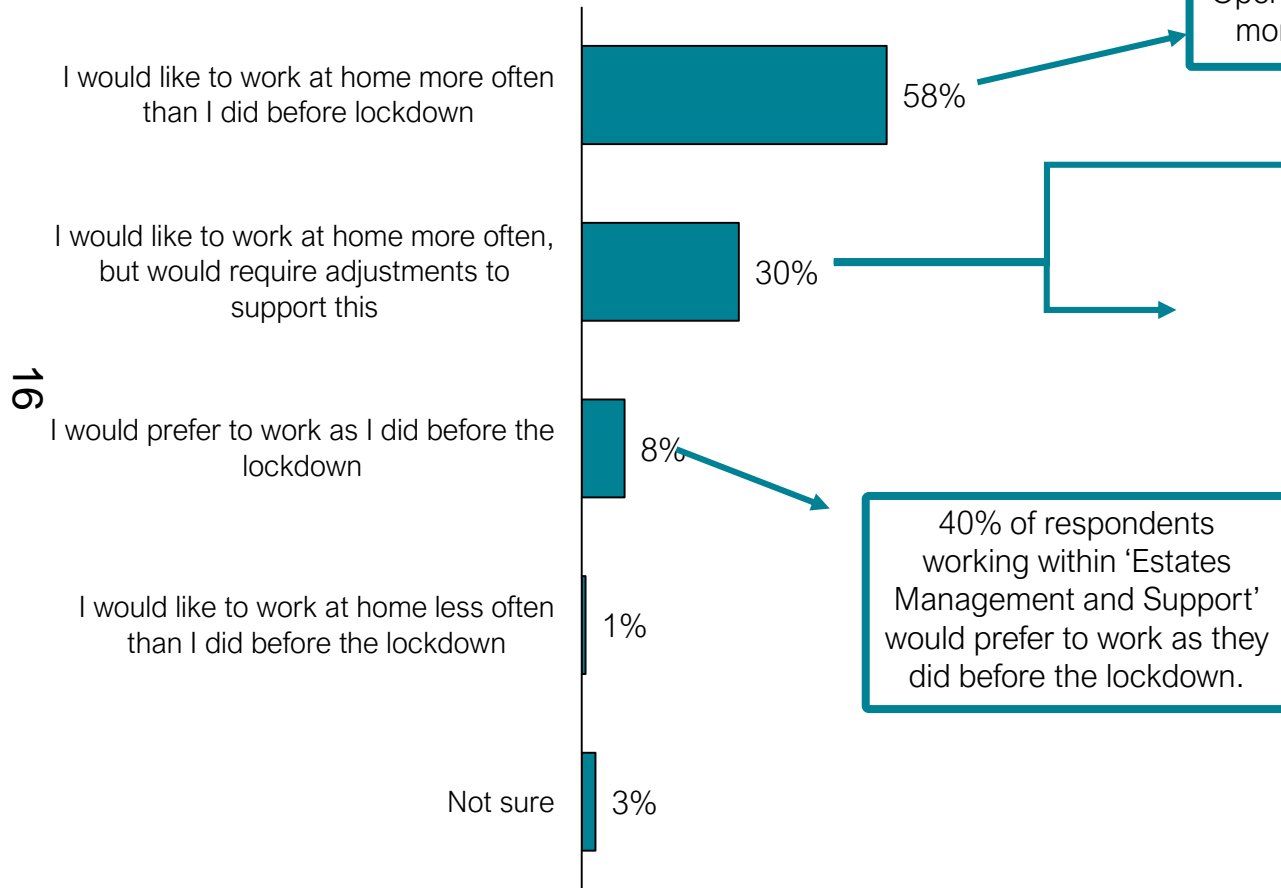
Daily routine (27% of comments)

- Keep to a routine e.g. start and finish times (19%)
- Allow a switch off - no checking emails after work or at weekends (4%)
- Use commute time for something new – more family time or to exercise (3%)
- Create a to-do list to keep on track (2%)

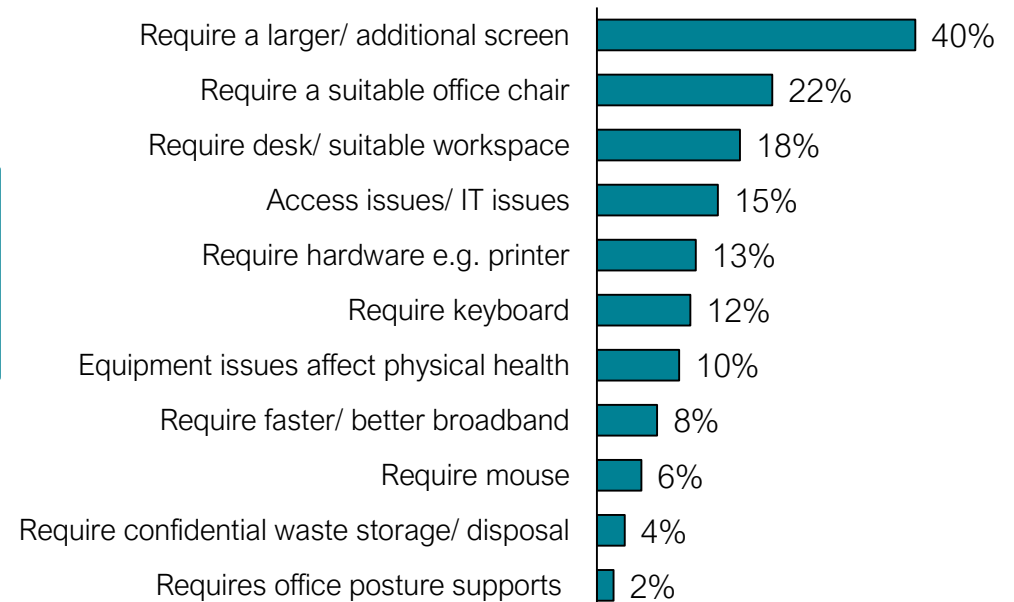
“Maintain a routine - easier to switch off at the end of a working day. Do something positive to replace the commute - such as exercise or mindfulness”

Working from home in the future: The large majority of respondents (88%) would like to work from home more. However, around one third (30%) would require adjustments to do so.

How do you feel about working from home in the future? (Base: 269)



Suggestions for improving home working – Adjustments (109 comments)



Areas for improvement: 144 respondents gave suggestions. 76% related to equipment and environment, with many requesting screens, office chairs and struggling to make a suitable workspace.

76% of comments related to equipment and working environment

Concerns

"It is essential I have the right equipment. A laptop screen is unsuitable. I have a poor DSE setup as I'm using an area designed for eating, not working. The ICT doesn't work well at all."

"Need better screens to work from home. Laptops are too small. DSE certainly not able to be adhered to."

"I am working from my dining room table which is not adjustable height, I don't have a suitable office chair - again no adjustable height."

Suggestions

"For longer term homeworking I would need a bigger monitor than the laptop screen and require a proper desk and chair instead of using dining table and chair which can get uncomfortable by the end of the day."

"Being provided with a keyboard and screen raiser in the long term would be suitable."

"I would require an external monitor and more ergonomic chair to ensure good posture."

34% of comments related to working from home

Concerns

"My home is not suitable for long term WFH it impacts on my family."

"It has been difficult to maintain a work life balance, one day blurs into another... It is also difficult working from home with other family members present."

"I hate working from home every day. I feel isolated and lonely, despite regular skype calls with colleagues and my manager. ."

Suggestions

"It would be good for the Council to recognise the difficulties parents face when working from home and not having access to childcare."

"... The strain of working from home is having a big toll, it hasn't been easy, and I don't think NFDC from a corporate point of view have actually done anything apart from just say 'take regular breaks'."

25% of comments related to workload

Concerns

"I find at home that I am putting in more hours and taking less breaks. I tend to start earlier as well. Our workload has increased with Covid so there has been more pressure to get the work done as quickly as possible."

"The service I work in is inundated at the moment and I have a very high case load. It can feel impossible to stay on top, so I very rarely take breaks."

"Work/life balance again reflects the increase in workload on an already stretched team."

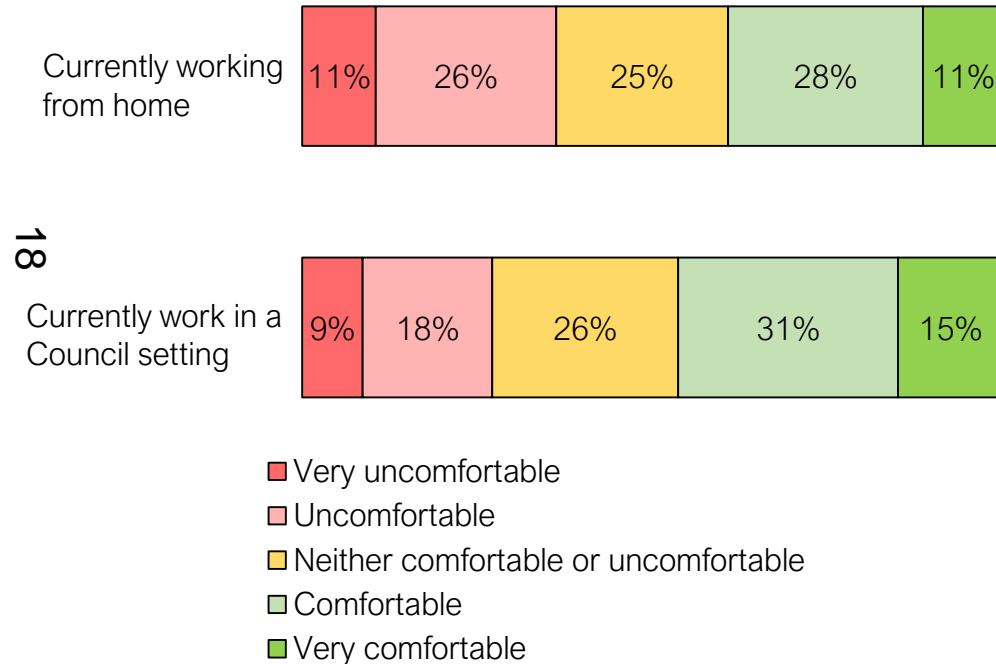
Suggestions

"I think that a WFH protocol should be written so all staff understand how they should 'behave' in the home office and giving them permission to be 'away from the office' for breaks ."

"Improvement would only come from myself; I believe that many staff working from home feel less inclined to take breaks as you almost feel guilty for doing so."

Working in a Council setting: Respondents working at home were more concerned about working in a Council setting (37%) than those who were currently working in one (26%).

Comparison of concerns about the workplace between those working and not currently working in a Council setting (Base: 237, 87)



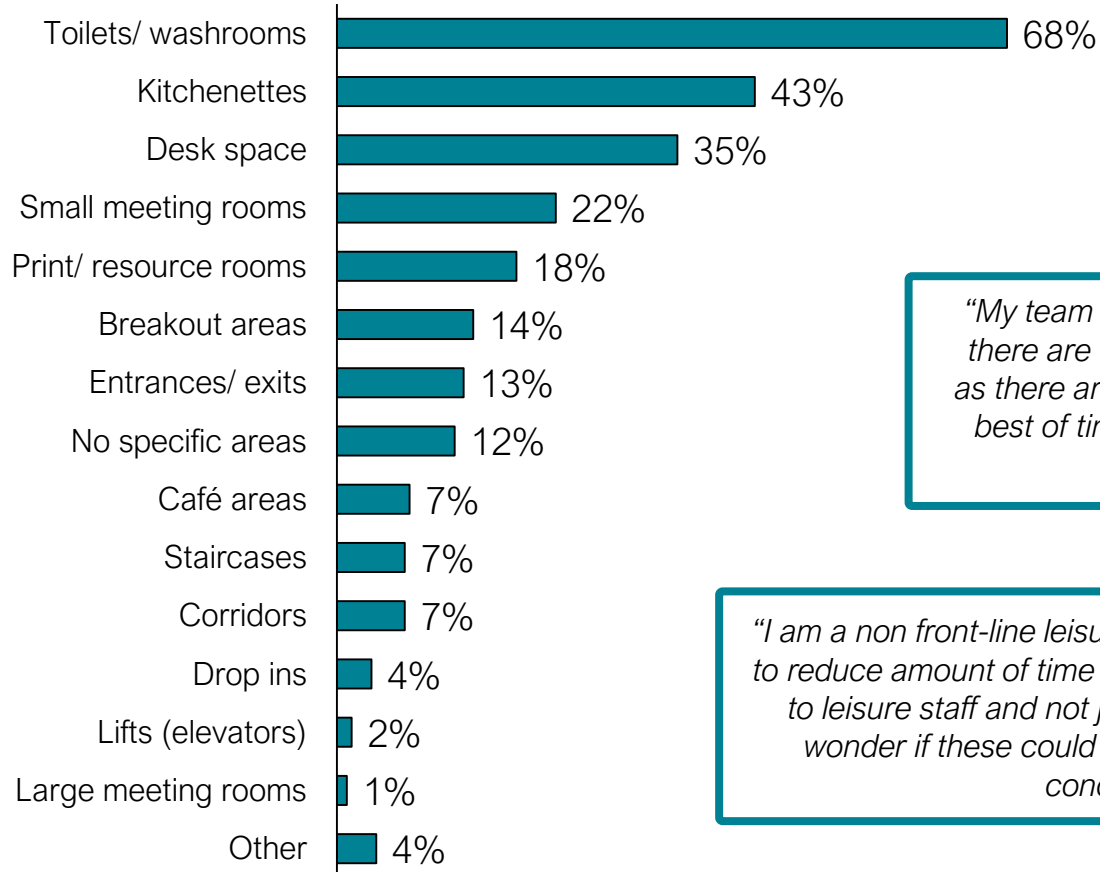
Both colleagues currently working in a Council setting and those still working from home had the same top three concerns, namely, touching things that other people have touched, being close to others and increasing their exposure to the virus.

Colleagues currently working in a Council setting were least concerned about travelling to work, where as those working from home were least worried about reactions from the public.

List of concerns	Importance ranking (1 = most important)	
	Colleagues not currently working in a Council setting (Base: 139)	Colleagues currently working in a Council setting (Base: 46)
Touching things that other people have touched	1 (63%)	2 (52%)
Being in close proximity to others	2 (57%)	1 (54%)
Increasing my exposure	3 (54%)	3 (44%)
The number of people that will be working together	4 (38%)	7 (15%)
That I may cause others to be infected	5 (19%)	4 (37%)
Readjusting to an office environment	6 (19%)	=10 (2%)
Adjusting to changes in my working environment	7 (11%)	6 (22%)
Adjusting to being around other people again	8 (9%)	=10 (2%)
Travelling into work	=9 (6%)	13 (0%)
Fulfilling my caring responsibilities	=9 (6%)	=10 (2%)
Other concerns	11 (5%)	9 (7%)
Negative reactions from members of the public	12 (1%)	5 (33%)
Whether social distancing can be maintained when more colleagues return	N/A	8 (9%)

Returning to work in a Council setting: The three areas within the workplace that caused the greatest concern, were toilets/washrooms, kitchenettes and desk spaces.

Which, if any, parts of your workplace concern you in relation to catching and/ or spreading Covid-19? (Multi-code, select up to three options (Base: 202)



"I think a phased return of staff into the offices would be sensible as there is still a risk of COVID19 being spread, and the more hands that touch door handles, printers, use the entrances and toilets etc increases the risk."

"My team have been asking how the bathrooms and cleaning of those would be managed. I believe there are one-way systems in place. Largest concern would be how to manage the breakout areas as there are very few places for teams to go, with my team only having access to Work café which at best of times was often to busy. It is important for the teams to have breaks away from their desks and offices, and during the colder/ wetter months this could be made difficult."

"I am a non front-line leisure services employee and would like the opportunity to work from home some of the time to reduce amount of time in contact with other people and sharing desk spaces etc and hope this can be extended to leisure staff and not just ATC staff. I am concerned about the keypad entry locks all around the building and wonder if these could be replaced with swipe card entry. Internal air conditioning units are another cause of concern, plus hotdesking, use of shared equipment (photocopiers) etc."

How the Council could support colleagues to work safely: 144 respondents gave suggestions. Most frequently these focused on changes to home working or office environments to improve safety.

Working from home (59% of comments)

- Would like appropriate equipment/ to be reimbursed for equipment purchased (21%)
- More frequent/ permanent working from home (16%)
- Additional equipment needed to work from home longer term (14%)
- Would not like to return to office until fully 'safe' (7%)
- Working from home can be isolating/ bad for mental health (7%)
- Would like to have more contact with team while working from home (7%)
- Would like utilities to be funded/ reimbursed e.g. broadband, electric, heating (6%)
- Greater efficiency is possible working from home (6%)
- Working from home does not suit everyone/ individuals circumstances should be looked at (6%)

Office procedures (24% of comments)

- Should limit the number of colleagues in buildings (6%)
- Ensure all staff obey the social distancing and cleaning rules (5%)
- Implement a rota system for staff (5%)
- Provide clear instructions on what to expect when returning to working environment (4%)

Council's response to COVID-19 (21% of comments)

- Would like to receive more support from New Forest District Council (13%)
- New Forest District Council could have been better/ faster in their approach to COVID-19 and changing work arrangements (7%)
- New Forest District Council have been good/ supportive in their approach to COVID-19 and changing work arrangements (4%)

Office environment (13% of comments)

- Do not allow hot-desking/ ensure desks are not shared (5%)
- Increase area/ space available to allow for social distancing to be followed (4%)
- Consider the ventilation/ air conditioning in offices carefully, concerns that it could spread illnesses and suggestions that it could help stop the spread (3%)

PPE and Cleanliness (10% of comments)

- Would like face masks/ covering to be made available (5%)
- Would like antibacterial sprays/ wipes to be available for use (4%)
- Would like gloves to be made available to wear (1%)

How the Council could support colleagues to work safely: Many suggested that working from home could be improved through funding/ support with getting better equipment to help with physical health.

Working from home (59% of comments)

"Also a monetary subsidy to assist in covering higher utilities. Keeping in mind the Council would have to cover all these costs should these things need to be provided in office buildings, often at higher costs too. Therefore to maintain safety and productivity of staff, I feel these costs should be allocated to staff to enable them to continue working from home."

"My preference would be to permanently work from home. I have created a workspace and appreciate the reduction in travelling time which is a great help to the work/ life balance."

"Provision of a computer monitor, potentially funding towards an office chair and desk."

"I personally feel as if I am able to carry out my job just as efficiently from home so am in no rush to return, I think that considerable time should be taken before returning staff to work to minimise staff's risk."

"I feel safe from covid working from home, but I don't feel safe in the sense that I can see it having a negative effect on my mental health."

Office procedures (24% of comments)

"Try not to have too many people in each office at once as mixing with multiple people in an enclosed area increases the risk of infection."

"For return to office - ensuring that all staff stick to the rules re social distancing, cleaning etc, not just some and others totally ignoring the guidance."

"The volume of people in buildings should be reduced e.g. max 50% of staff, managed by workspace rotas".

Office environment (13% of comments)

"I believe that each person should be given their own desk, and no one should share the desk even with cleaning!"

"Having access to some other rooms for a 20-minute break from our desk would be nice at the moment or even an outdoor marquee so we have shade/cover from sun."

"Internal air conditioning units are another cause of concern..."

Response to COVID-19 (21% of comments)

"More proper support not just another typing exercise, is there anyone listening out there? It doesn't feel like it!"

"Other employers at the beginning of lockdown quickly provided staff with 'working at home kits' and allowed them to take home office chairs in the interim. NFDC do seem to be very slow to develop this facility."

"Council has been a positive and honest throughout the process."

PPE and Cleanliness (10% of comments)

"No masks, too many people working in close proximity, required to have contact with outside delivery drivers without any masks, plastic face screens etc."

"I think we will need regular sanitising of desks...wipes and sanitizer should be supplied to each individual."

"All other people entering the building (if essential that they do only) issued with all issued a fresh disposable mask and gloves on entry."



New Forest
DISTRICT COUNCIL

COVID-19 Employee Survey

Produced by
The Insight and Engagement Unit
Hampshire County Council