



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.

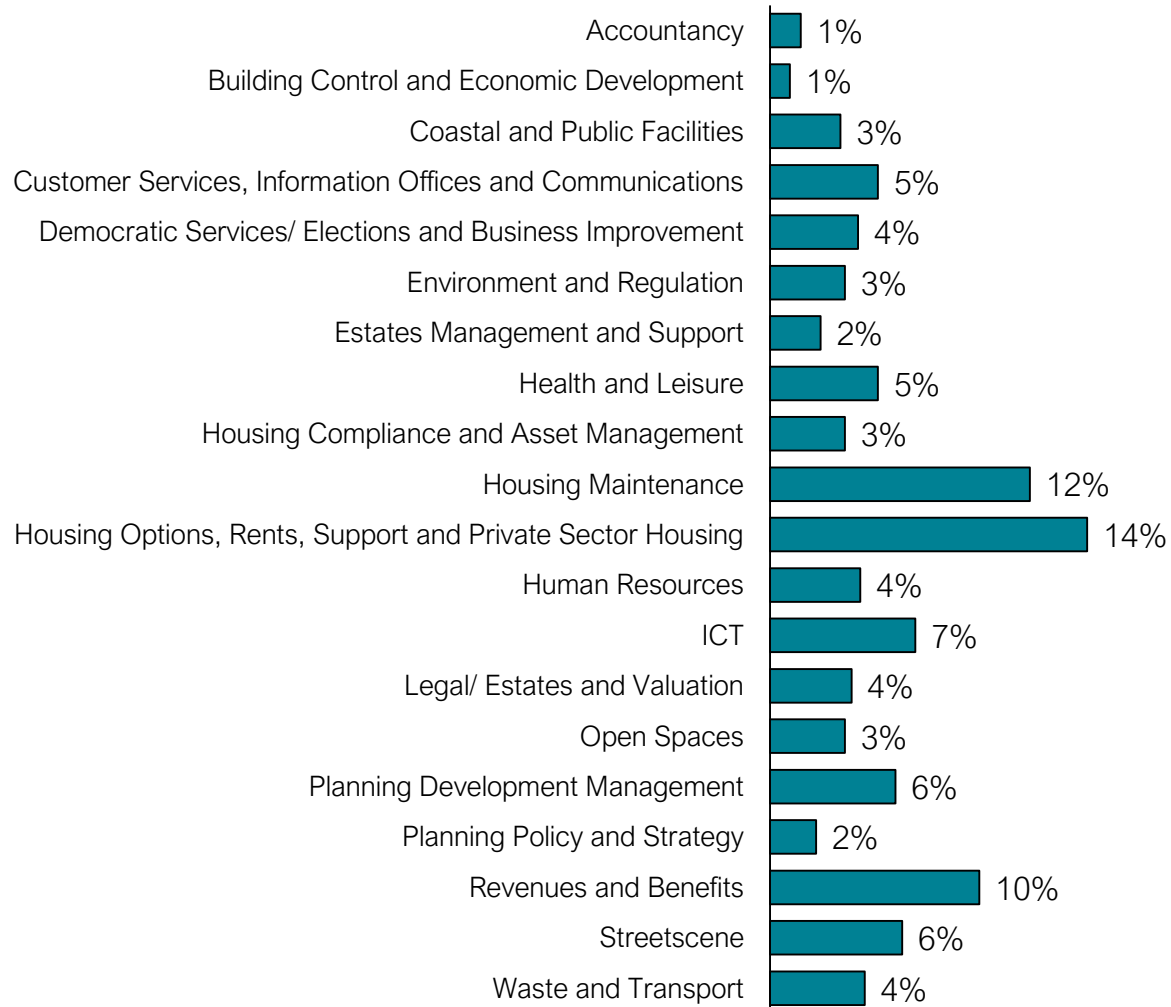
New Forest District Council would like to thank every colleague who took the time to participate in this survey.

Headline findings

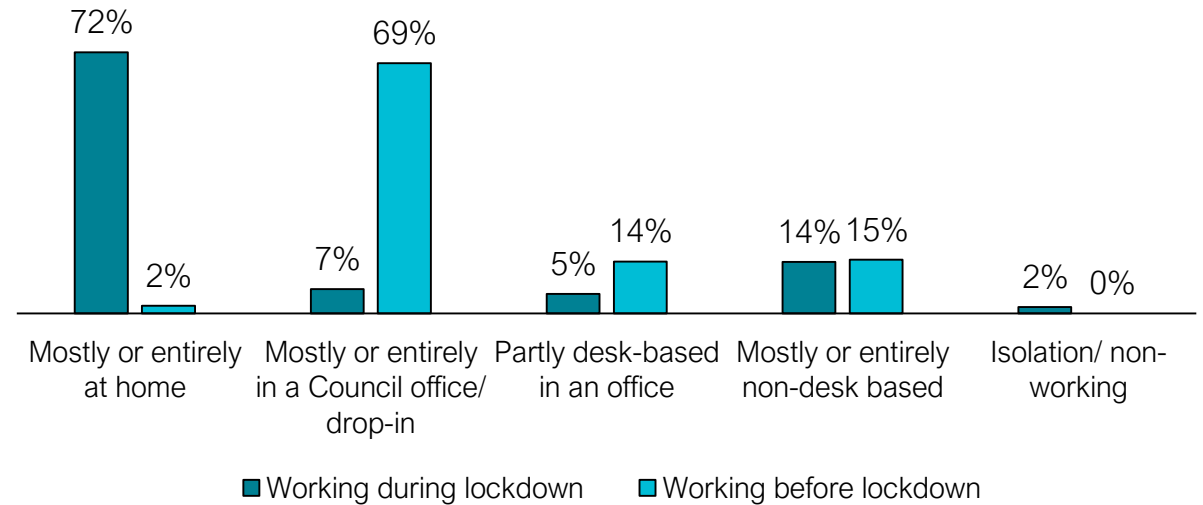
- Most respondents have **enjoyed working from home** (61%), with most having access to a suitable working space (71%) and equipment (80%) for the short term. Over half (58%) **would like the opportunity to work from home more often in future**, however, 43% feel they don't have the equipment to do so 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.

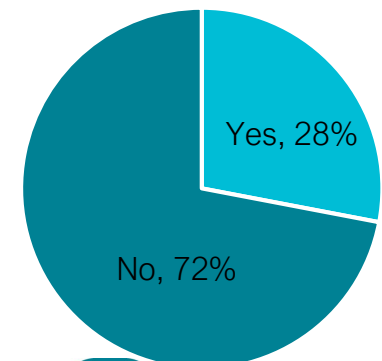
Which service area do you work in? (Base: 348)



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

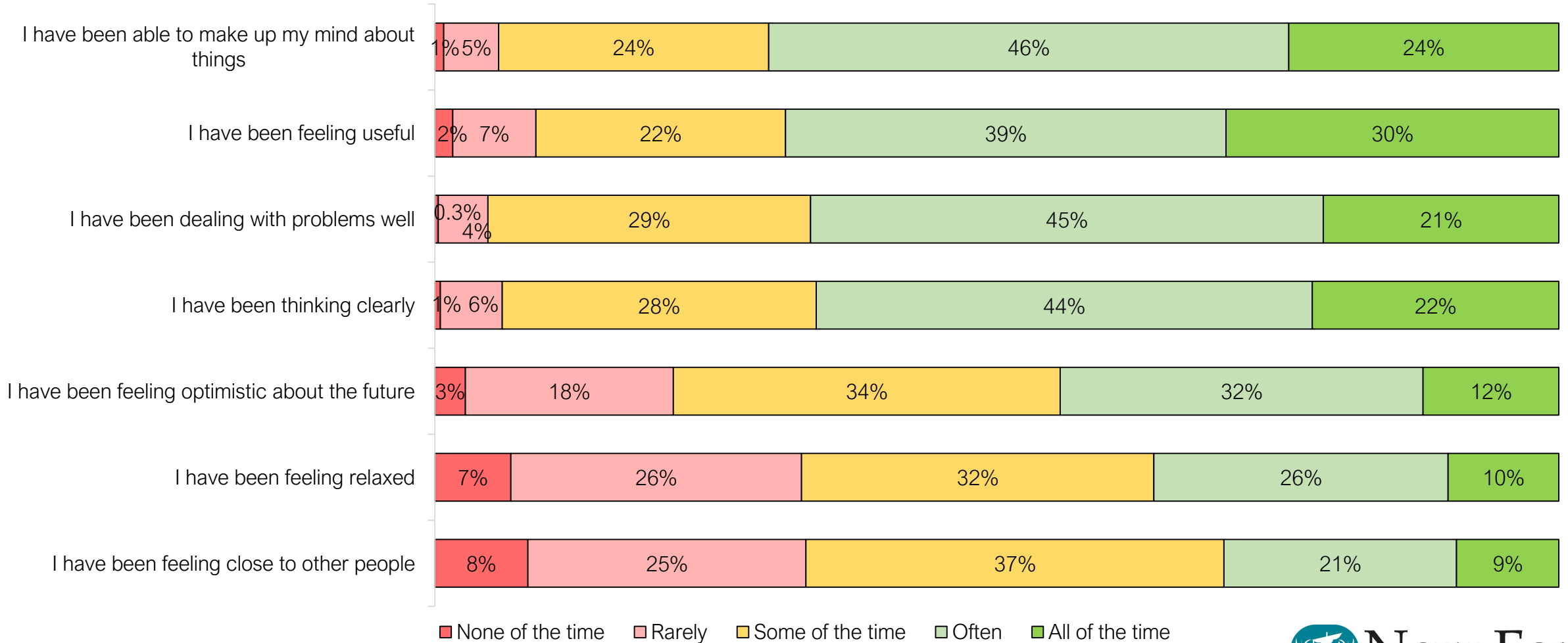


Do you have managerial responsibilities? (Base: 381)



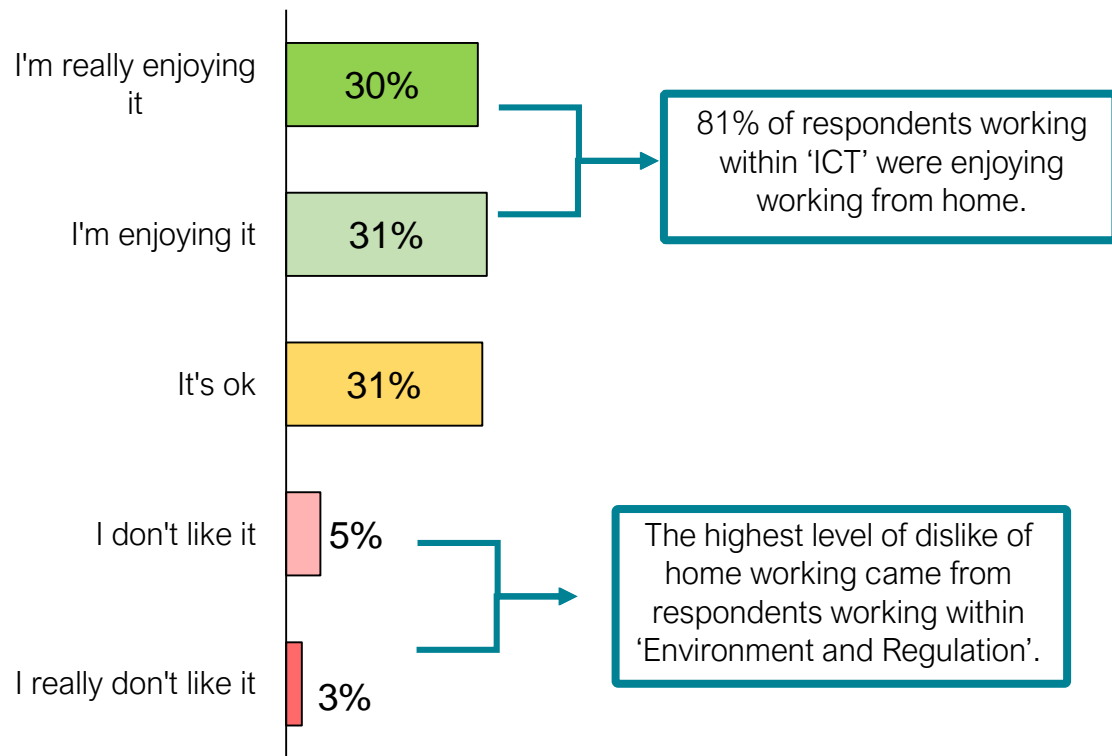
Mental wellbeing: Around 70% of respondents felt able to make up their mind and felt useful the majority of the time. However, around a third (30%) haven't felt relaxed or close to other people.

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)

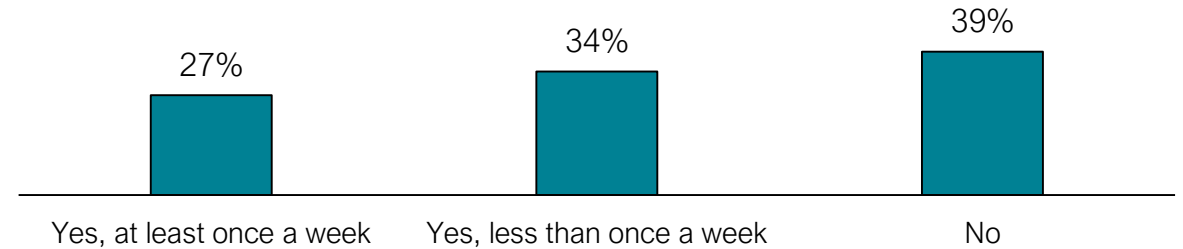


Enjoyment of working from home: 61% of respondents enjoyed working from home. Those who had previously worked from home were most comfortable doing so.

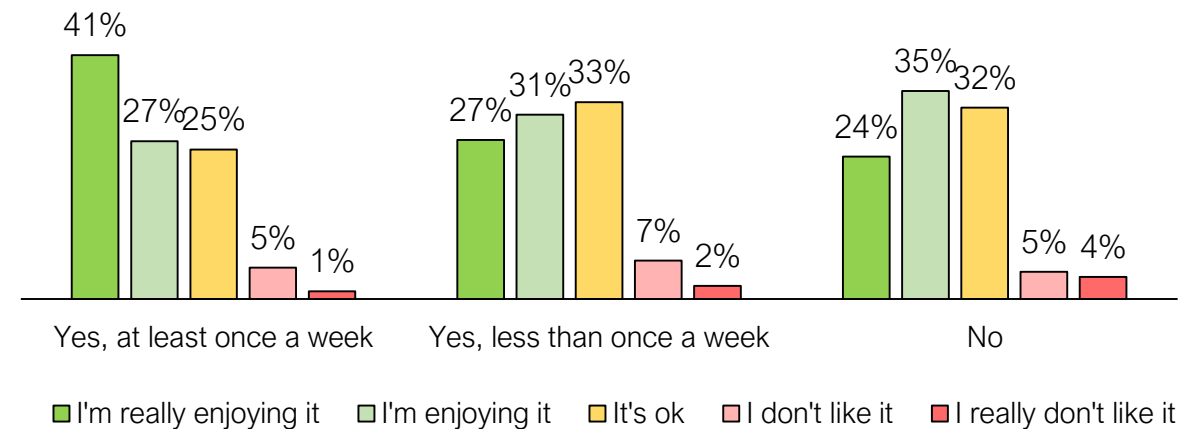
Generally, how do you feel about working from home? (Base: 277)



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)

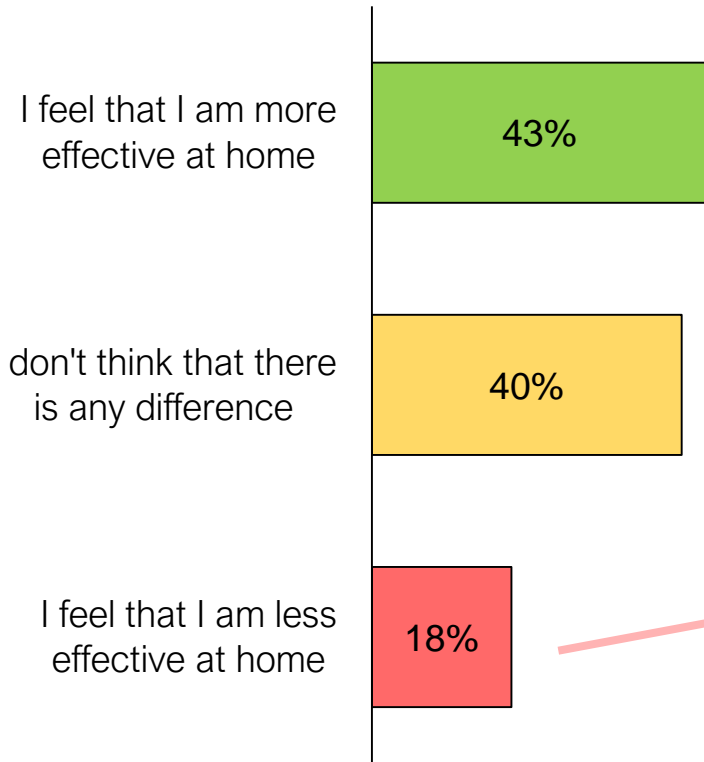


Experience of working from home: Key take outs

- 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.

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!”

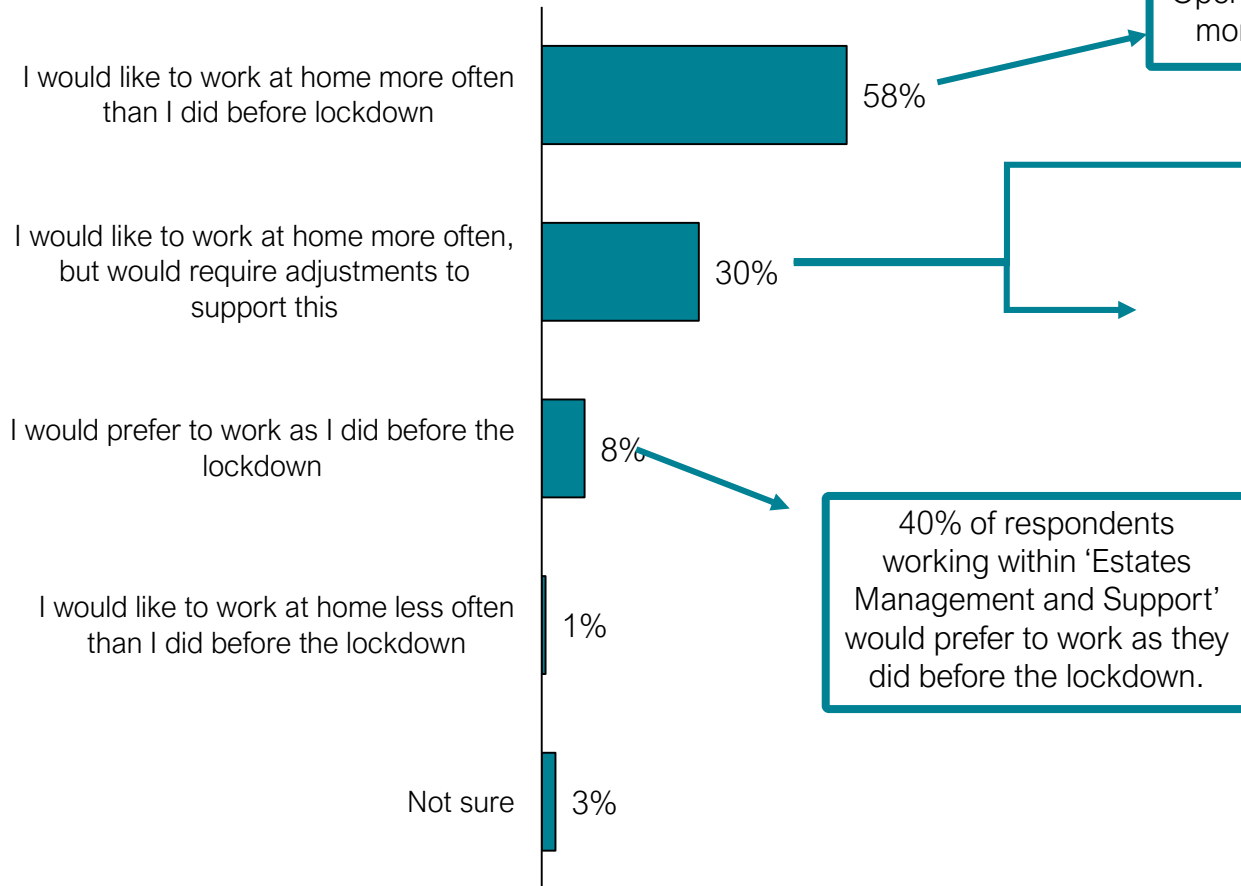
Daily routine (27% of comments)

- 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%)

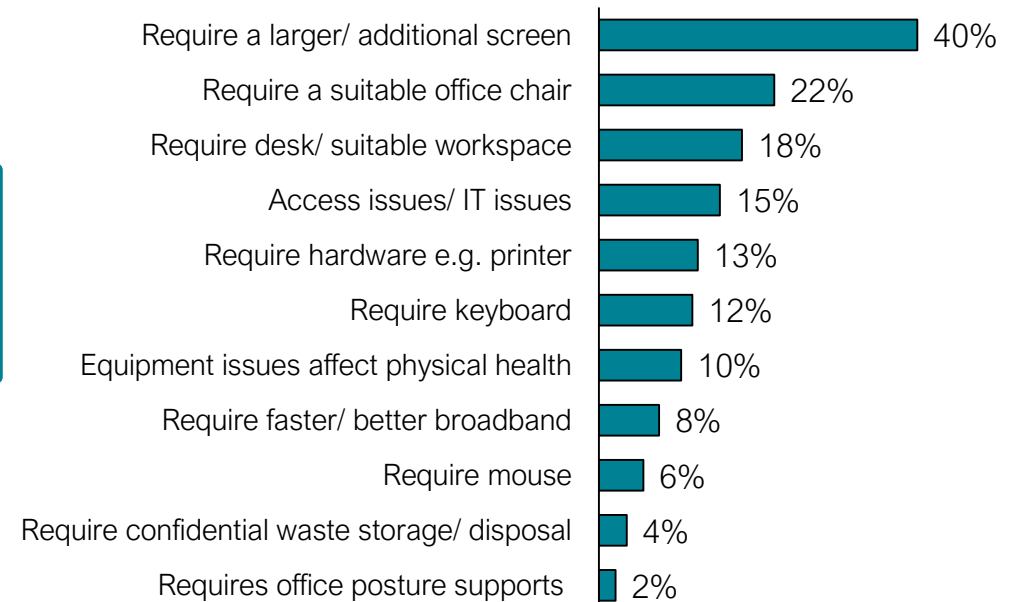
“Maintain a routine - easier to switch off at the end of a working day. Do something positive to replace the commute - such as exercise or mindfulness”

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."

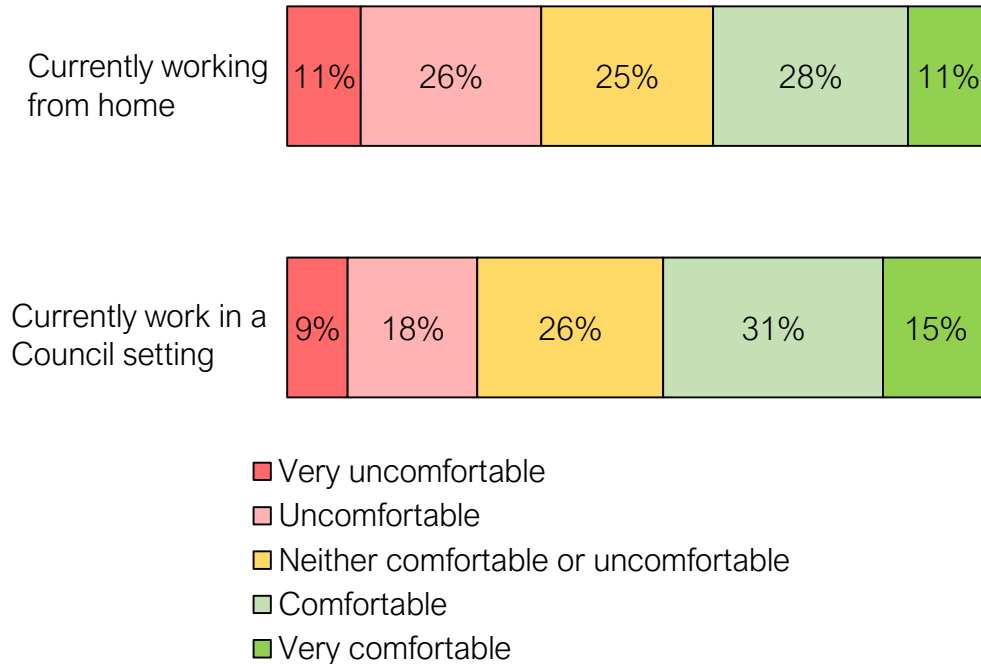
Suggestions

"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)



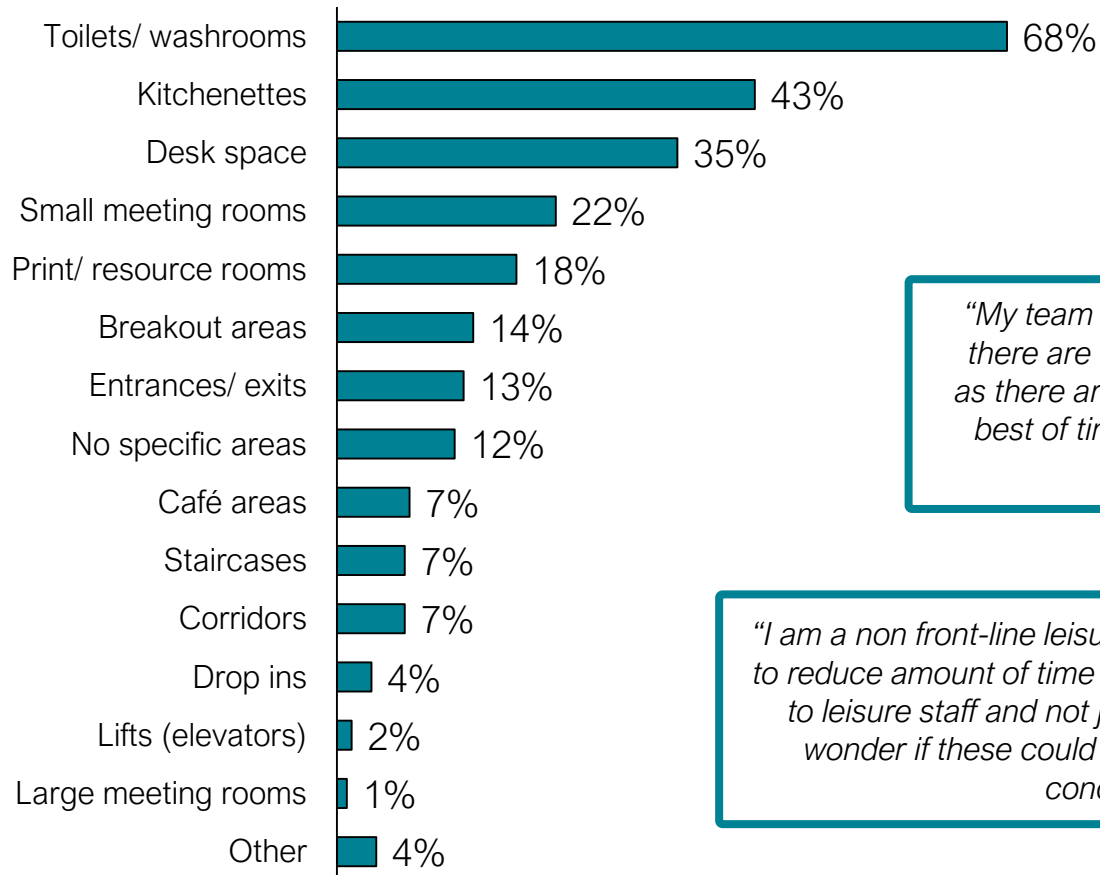
Both colleagues currently working in a Council setting and those still working from home had the same top three concerns, namely, touching things that other people have touched, being close to others and increasing their exposure to the virus.

Colleagues currently working in a Council setting were least concerned about travelling to work, whereas 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