

Corporate Report

REPORT NUMBER 113-2023-City Manager's Office-Human Resources & Corporate Safety

DATE

PREPARED

March 1, 2023

FILE

MEETING DATE

March 27, 2023

SUBJECT

Work Life Initiatives Policy Update (Work from Home Program)

RECOMMENDATION

WITH RESPECT to Report 113-2023-City Manager's Office-Human Resources & Corporate Safety, we recommend that the amended Corporate Policy 06-01-36 Work Life Initiatives, appended to this report, be approved;

AND THAT any necessary by-laws be presented to City Council for ratification.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to recommend the permanent addition of Corporate Procedure HR-02-64 Work from Home Program to Corporate Policy 06-01-36 Work Life Initiatives (Attachment A).

City Council approved the addition of the Work from Home Program to the Work Life Initiatives policy as a pilot in September 2021. Council requested that Administration provide an update on the rollout of the pilot Work from Home Program including any financial impacts, number of staff involved, and overall cost benefit.

DISCUSSION

At the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic in March 2020, the City of Thunder Bay quickly transitioned many office-based employees to work from home in order to maintain employee safety and adhere to public health orders.

Corporate Procedure HR-02-64 Work from Home Program (Attachment B) which formalized options for employees to continue to work remotely on an ongoing basis was implemented in March 2022. The Work from Home Program is voluntary, and supports

a hybrid model which results in a combination of some remote work and some office presence for interested employees working in eligible positions.

The hybrid model of remote work is a work-life balance benefit that allows an employee to fulfil their regular job responsibilities remotely, meeting the needs of both the employee and the municipality. In a tight labour market, offering flexibility and balance to employees, when appropriate, is critical to the City remaining competitive in efforts to attract and retain talent.

The Pandemic accelerated widespread adoption of flexible and hybrid working arrangements across the globe. This has resulted in what many see as a permanent shift in the expectations of workers.

Cisco Canada recently released a Hybrid Work Study, conducted by Angus Reid, which found that:

- The majority (81%) of Canadian employees feel that flexible work policies directly affect whether they stay at or leave a job.
- Flexible work arrangements are considered a top priority for workers when choosing an employer, second only to salary.
- Different generations have varying perceptions on hybrid work, with 86% of the younger demographic (18-54) more likely to rate hybrid work positively versus 65% of the older demographic (55+).¹

One size does not fit all, and many jobs at the City of Thunder Bay cannot be performed remotely. For those jobs that do fit within a hybrid model, supervisors and employees work together to determine a hybrid schedule that suits the nature of the work, client requirements and the employee's needs. Schedules vary across the Corporation depending on the team and the type of work.

Work from Home Program Requirements

Participation in the Work from Home Program is subject to approval and ongoing review, based on the following eligibility criteria:

- The position is deemed eligible to participate in the program by the Director or General Manager.
- The duties can be performed reasonably and successfully from home.
- Services to the public are not compromised.
- Collaboration with colleagues and clients can be achieved with digital collaboration tools.
- There are no concerns regarding the employee's ability to work independently.
- Work tools, supplies, equipment and technology can be accessed at home to meet the requirements of the work.
- The security and confidentiality requirements of the position can be met from home

Approved Work from Home requests are subject to the following:

- The Employee will provide a dedicated and appropriate workspace in which to conduct business while ensuring privacy and confidentiality is maintained at all times.
- The employee must complete a Health & Safety Inspection Checklist of their home workspace.
- The City provides only one primary work location setup. If the primary work location is the employee's home, the employee and supervisor will collaborate to determine the employee's office equipment needs at home, and CTB will provide the required equipment (i.e. office chair, keyboard, mouse).
- The employee will provide and is responsible for the cost of a phone (landline or cellular).
- The employee will provide and is responsible for the cost of a high-speed internet connection of a minimum standard as determined by Corporation.
- The employee is responsible for any costs associated with working from home, including any increase in home insurance or utility costs.
- Employees working from home must report to the CTB work location as operationally required (team meetings, committee meetings, training, etc.) and at a regular duration as agreed/determined with the supervisor (for example twice per month).
- Employees are expected to make appropriate dependent care arrangements and manage personal responsibilities in a way that allows successful completion of their job responsibilities.

Work from Home Program Participation

There are presently 149 City of Thunder Bay employees participating in the Work from Home Program in some capacity.

Of the 149 employees participating in the Program, 25 employees (16%) work primarily from home and report in-person to the office as operationally required. The remainder of participating employees are hybrid and alternate between working remotely and in-person at the office.

Given the numerous services and lines of business that the City operates it is not possible to provide all employees with the same options for hybrid or remote work. The City continues to explore opportunities to incorporate work life balance initiatives for all employee groups, including those whose jobs require them to be fully on-site.

Alignment with Digital Strategy

One of the major initiatives identified in the Digital Strategy is the advancement of a Digital Workplace that will connect all staff and use technology to make staff working lives easier and simpler.

The City is in the process of implementing technology that will increase the ability of staff to collaborate remotely and from different work locations, including Microsoft 365 implementation and a broader deployment of MS Teams amongst employees.

Corporate Information Technology (CIT) is presently undergoing a device review. Many municipalities have moved to a primarily laptop fleet and/or have offered staff choices from among various devices (desktop, laptop, tablets). Presently, there are 284 laptops issued to staff. CIT anticipates that the number of laptops issued to staff will increase by 45% with the lifecycle device replacement program as planned and budgeted for in 2023. The increase in the number of laptops should make it feasible for additional eligible staff to participate in the Work from Home Program.

Cost Benefit

The addition of a Work from Home Program offers flexibility and work-life balance to employees, and supports the City's efforts to attract and retain talent in eligible positions. Work-life balance benefits contribute to higher levels of job satisfaction, which in turn drives productivity and engagement at work.

An Office Space Optimization project was identified by the City Manager as a new initiative as part of Administration's response to the Grant Thornton Phase 2 Program and Service Review Report (Report 144/2020 – City Manager's Office). The purpose of the project is to review and recommend optimization of corporate workspaces.

An initial inventory assessment has taken place to identify the unique space savings opportunities and space pressures in each workspace/department. Upon approval of a permanent Work from Home Program, work will begin with the departments to support the design and promotion of flexible workspaces to make use of appropriate under-utilized space.

The conversion of assigned workspaces of employees participating in the Program to flexible workspaces will assist in optimizing office space within existing corporate buildings, addressing space pressures in some areas and deferring the need to expand the inventory of leased/owned office accommodations.

Over time it is anticipated that a permanent Work from Home Program will contribute to cost savings through enhanced recruitment and talent retention, and office space optimization and sustainability.

Municipal Trends

Many municipalities have continued to build on the workplace changes that were adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic and have implemented a permanent hybrid work program for employees:

List of Municipalities	
York Region	Halton Region
Region of Peel	Region of Waterloo
Durham Region	Niagara Region
Toronto	Ottawa
Greater Sudbury	Muskoka
Kingston	Barrie
Chatham-Kent	Brantford
Guelph	Peterborough
Hamilton	Kawartha Lakes

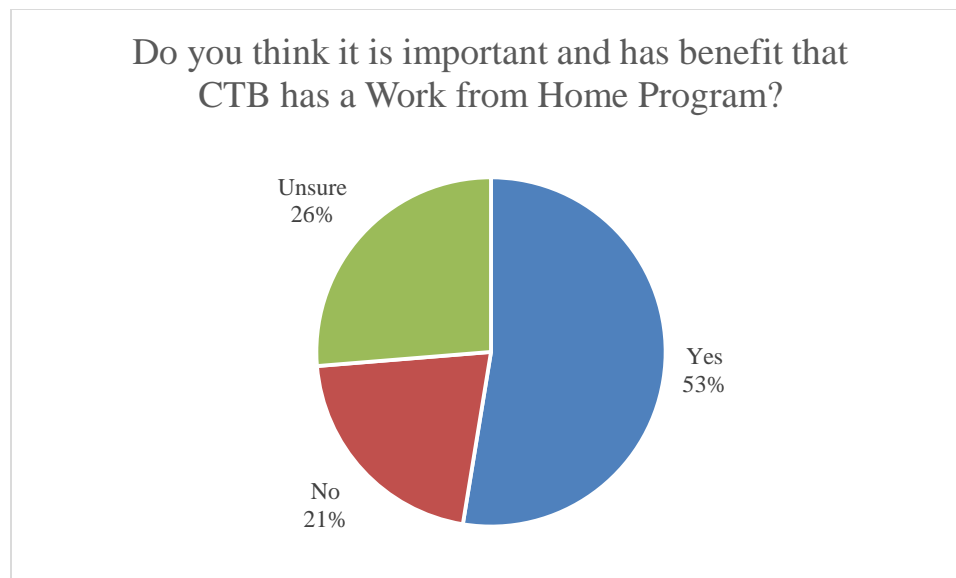
There is no one-size-fits-all approach for adopting a hybrid workplace model, and municipalities are no exception. Remote work policies vary at each municipality, with many providing fully flexible options for employees, and others requiring in-office attendance required on prescribed days of the week.

Employee Survey

In June 2022, the City conducted a survey of employees on a variety of worklife topics, including the Work from Home Program. 420 employees responded to the survey, and of these:

- 209 (50%) identified that they are not participating in the Work from Home Program and their coworkers are not participating
- 102 (24%) identified that they are not participating in the Work from Home Program and their co-workers are participating
- 109 (26%) identified that they are participating in the Work from Home Program

Although the majority of survey participants do not participate in the Work from Home Program themselves, the majority of respondents (53%) identified that the Program is important and has benefit.



Of the 109 employees who identified that they are participating in the Work from Home Program, 97% agreed that the Program:

- supports their work life balance;
- contributes to job satisfaction; and
- is an important, value-added benefit as an employee.

A number of employees identified that they do not presently participate in the Work from Home Program because it is not feasible to transfer a desktop computer between their home office and the workplace. It is anticipated that the increase in the number of laptops supplied to staff through the device replacement program in 2023 will encourage additional eligible staff to participate in the Work from Home Program.

The survey responses highlighted that there are frustrations and misperceptions about the Work from Home Program from some employees who are not participating in the program themselves. The City continues to explore opportunities to incorporate work life balance initiatives for all employee groups.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

There are no immediate financial implications directly resulting from the approval of Corporate Policy 06—01-36 Work Life Initiatives.

Over time it is anticipated that a permanent Work from Home Program will contribute to cost savings through enhanced employee recruitment and retention, and office space optimization and sustainability.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that Corporate Policy 06-01-36 Work Life Initiatives, as amended to include a permanent Work From Home Program, should be approved.

BACKGROUND

The City has a Work Life Initiatives Policy that serves to support work life balance initiatives for employees wherever possible in a manner consistent with the Corporate Visions and Values and the terms of collective agreements or the Managerial/Non-Union By-law, and the Employment Standards Act. The policy was updated in August 2021 to include the Work from Home Program (Pilot) as approved by Council.

REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED

Attachment 'A' - Corporate Policy 06-01-36 Work Life Initiatives

Attachment 'B' - Corporate Procedure HR-02-64 Work From Home Program

REFERENCE

Cisco. (2023, February 23). *No Longer Just A 'Perk': Cisco Survey Finds Canadians Now Expect Flexible, Hybrid Work*. [No Longer Just A 'Perk': Cisco Survey Finds Canadians Now Expect Flexible, Hybrid Work](#)

REPORT PREPARED BY

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REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY

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03/16/2023