

Summary of responses to Cheshire East Council's

WorkplaCE Consultation 2023



Executive Summary

Introduction

Between 24 July and 17 September 2023 Cheshire East Council conducted phase 1 of a WorkplaCE Consultation. The purpose of phase 1 of the consultation was to gather initial views on the potential closure of Westfield Offices in Sandbach, with staff potentially being relocated to other corporate offices within the borough.

On 6 September 2023 the consultation closing date was extended until 17 September 2023, to enable extra responses from members of staff who are only employed during school term time.

In total there were 795 consultation engagements, including 578 online survey responses, 216 online event attendees, and 1 email response. These response numbers include a total of 61 extra responses which were received during the period the consultation was extended between 6 and 17 September.

Consultation responses were invited from anyone who wished to respond – the consultation was not run as a referendum nor as a statistically robust random sample survey.

About the survey respondents

Of the survey respondents:

- 45% had Westfields as their assigned workplace, with 41% assigned to Delamere House or Macclesfield Town Hall.
- 63% go to their assigned workplace at least once a week.
- 86% travel to work by car, with 10% travelling by public transport, on foot or by bike.

Although many survey respondents live within Cheshire East, significant proportions of respondents live outside the borough in places such as Stoke, Chester, Ellesmere Port, Greater Manchester, North Wales, the Peak District, and even as far away as places such as Lincoln and Hereford.

Level of support for the closure of Westfields

Overall, 47% of survey respondents supported the closure of Westfields, with 35% opposed to it. This gave overall net support for the proposal of +12%.

Support for the closure of Westfields was dependent on employee type – respondents more likely to support the closure of Westfields included those:

- Based in Delamere House, Crewe (+51% net support)
- Working in the “Place” directorate (+49% net support)
- Living in:
 - “Peak District” (+60% net support)
 - “Crewe, Nantwich” (+44% net support)
 - “Chester, Ellesmere Port, Neston” (+35% net support)
 - “Macclesfield” (+28% net support)
- Working in the teams:
 - “Corporate; ICT” (+80% support)
 - “Corporate; Financial support and procurement” (+78% support)
 - “Place; Housing” (+74% support)

Reasons given for supporting the proposal included that respondents felt the Westfields office is underutilised and often empty, and that it will help save money.

However, it was noted that support for the proposal is dependent on relocation specifics, particularly depending on where people are relocated to.

Level of opposition to the closure of Westfields

Opposition to the closure of Westfields was also dependent on employee type – respondents more likely to oppose the closure of Westfields included those:

- Working in the teams:
 - “Corporate; Legal Services” (-69% opposition)
 - “People - Children's services; Children's Development and Partnerships” (-50% opposition)
 - “Corporate; Human Resources” (-35% opposition)
 - “People - Adult Social Care and Health; Adult Social Care (South)” (-35% opposition)
- Living in:
 - “Sandbach” (-46% net opposition)
 - “Stoke, Stone, Newcastle” (-16% net opposition)
- Currently based in Westfields (-18% net opposition)

Reasons given for opposing the proposal included that respondents felt:

- Westfields is central, accessible, and people will have to travel further to get to another office
- Westfields has good and free car parking
- Westfields is a useful and versatile space, and a modern office
- The closure of Westfields and relocation could impact employee wellbeing, both mentally and financially

Relocation preference for Westfields staff

65% of current Westfields staff that completed the survey would prefer to be relocated to the South of the borough (Crewe), and 20% would prefer to be relocated to the North of the borough (Macclesfield), if Westfield were to close.

However, the relocation preference of employees was often split within individual teams. For example, 65% of “Corporate; Human Resources” staff that completed the survey would prefer to be relocated to the South (Crewe), compared to 25% who would prefer to be relocated to the North (Macclesfield) if Westfields were closed.

Suggested alternatives to the proposal

Respondents suggested a number of alternatives to the closure of Westfields which they felt should be considered, including:

- Close one floor of Westfields to council employees and use it to generate income by renting out space to businesses and other organisations
- Provide workspaces in other council buildings, such as libraries, town halls, leisure centres and other smaller council buildings, including for hotdesking
- Encourage more working from home, and change contracts to reflect this
- Close Delamere House or Municipal Buildings instead, as those buildings are not as good as Westfields, and have worse car parking

The WorkplaCE principles

Respondents listed things they felt were missing from the WorkplaCE principles, including:

- Staff considerations including:
 - the financial impact of this proposal on staff
 - staff wellbeing
 - career development / progression
 - ensuring there are enough staff to cover workloads
 - improving the council culture
 - indicating whether staff are being encouraged back into the office or not

A suggestion was also received by email that the council should reintroduce staff canteens to help improve the culture within the council – see email 1 for detail

- Ensuring the work locations are accessible for staff and residents, and that they have ample car parking
- Ensuring office spaces are fit for purpose, accessible, inclusive, flexible and allow for collaboration, sharing and learning

- Ensuring IT / office equipment is fit for purpose and supports flexible working

Summary of event feedback

216 staff and trade union representatives attended one of a number of online events held during the consultation. The following themes were raised at these events:

Car parking – It is felt there is a lack of convenient car parking provision at alternative locations, particularly Delamere House. Poor parking provision adds stress to journeys and to the working life and puts people off attending offices. Poor parking provision also impacts on flexible working if a first come, first served approach is taken. Will there be relocation mileage? Will parking permits be issued, and if so how? A bad car parking offer may lead to a loss of staff.

Poor equipment / ICT in offices – It is felt there is a lack of equipment such as monitors, keyboards, mouses and chairs across the estate. There is poor lighting in some offices. Poor equipment in offices puts people off attending.

Access to offices within local communities – Some staff, especially frontline staff (e.g. social workers) need local offices to be able to pop into to access toilets, refreshments, printers and to have confidential conversations. Closing Westfields would leave a large area in the middle of the borough without any office.

Consultation cynicism – This decision is seen as a fait accompli, that a decision has already been made.

Working from home Vs Working in offices - What is the council policy on this? Are we encouraging people back into offices or not? If yes, how does closing Westfields help that? Working from home is lonely for some people. The booking system / poor ICT equipment is a barrier to people coming in. Concern the new Chief Executive might want people to start coming into offices more.

Conclusions

Consultation response

The response to the consultation has been fairly good, though it should be noted that it is likely those who responded were more likely to be those based in Westfields and those who are opposed to the proposed closure of Westfields.

+12% overall net support for the proposals

It is important to note the overall net positive support of +12% for the proposal to close Westfields, indicating a general acceptance among many for the need to reduce the office estate and make savings.

Strong opposition to the proposals from some

However, it is clear that there is strong opposition to the proposal to close Westfields among some groups of staff, with 53% of current Westfields staff who responded to the survey opposed to its closure.

It is noted that the strongest levels of opposition are seen among those who would be most inconvenienced by relocation, especially for those who might have to travel further, who might have a less convenient journey, or for those who might have to spend more to get to work.

It is clear that for a certain proportion of staff the closure of Westfields and subsequent relocation would have a negative mental and financial impact on them, and could lead to employees leaving the council altogether. The closure of Westfields may reduce the appeal of working for the council.

If Westfields is to close, the council should explore how to mitigate the impacts of this, perhaps by looking at how to make the journey from areas such as Sandbach and Stoke to alternative offices easier, by looking at how to ensure car parking provision at alternative offices is plentiful and easily accessible, and by looking at providing smaller office spaces in towns around the borough that teams could access instead of Westfields, especially for front line teams such as social care teams who need a local base, and for teams strongly opposed to relocation from Sandbach such as Legal Services. The council should also put in place measures to assist the wellbeing of those who might be adversely affected by relocation.

The South (Crewe) is the preferred relocation destination

It is noted that if Westfields were to close, indications are that staff would prefer to relocate to the South (Crewe) of the borough at a ratio of more than 3:1 compared to the North (Macclesfield) – Does the council have enough office provision in the South of the borough to accommodate that volume of relocation?

Relocation preference splits within individual teams

It is also noted that there are significant splits within individual teams over relocation preference, with some members of the same team preferring to be relocated to the South of the borough, and some preferring to be relocated to the North. Some staff suggested that people working from home much of the time should be assigned to the council office closest to their home address.

Is the council proposing a flexible relocation policy, willing to let members of the same teams relocate to different offices? Or will the council relocate entire teams to specific offices? If the latter, this may lead to greater opposition to the relocation process, could lead to greater turmoil within the council and make staff retention even more difficult.

Other issues raised during the consultation

A number of key themes arose during the consultation outside the scope of the closure of Westfields, which may need addressing within a wider cultural review of the council.

These key themes included:

- Staff wellbeing and career development
- Perceptions of poor car parking provision in our main towns, which it is felt doesn't allow for flexible working
- Comments on the poor quality of ICT and office equipment across the estate
- Questions around what the council's policy towards working from home Vs coming into the office is
- That the Cledford House closure and relocation had not being well managed
- That Active Travel and better transport links should be promoted, with large proportions of staff travelling to work by car as opposed via public transport, on foot or by bike.

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Report produced 18 September 2023 by Ben Buckley of the Research and Consultation Team, Cheshire East Council. Email RandC@cheshireeast.gov.uk for further information.

Introduction

Purpose of the consultation

Between 24 July and 17 September 2023 Cheshire East Council conducted phase 1 of a WorkplaCE Consultation.

The purpose of phase 1 of the consultation was to gather initial views on the potential reduction of council office space, through the closure of Westfield Offices in Sandbach, with staff potentially then being relocated to other corporate offices within the borough.

The decision to consult on this proposal had been agreed at [Full Council on 22 February 2023](#), with this proposal included within [the Medium Term Financial Strategy \(MTFS\) for 2023 to 2027](#). The proposal included within the MTFS was the “Rationalisation of the council’s office space buildings to reflect increased hybrid working, and to secure reduction of business rates and holding costs. Key assets in the North and South of the borough will be retained and invested in to provide modern workplaces for staff, Members and stakeholders”.

Consultation methodology

The consultation was promoted through direct emails to all council staff, through promotion on the council’s staff webpages (centranet), and through word of mouth via managers.

On 6 September 2023 the consultation closing date was extended until 17 September 2023, to enable extra responses from members of staff who are only employed during school term time.

Consultation responses were invited from anyone who wished to respond – the consultation was not run as a referendum nor as a statistically robust random sample survey.

Staff could give their feedback either by filling in a short online survey, by attending an online event hosted by the Director of Finance & Customer Services, by writing an email or letter, or by giving their feedback to their manager or Trade Union representative.

Consultation responses

In total there were 795 consultation engagements, including:

- 578 online survey responses
- 216 online event attendees

- 1 email response

These response numbers include a total of 61 extra responses which were received during the period the consultation was extended between 6 and 17 September.

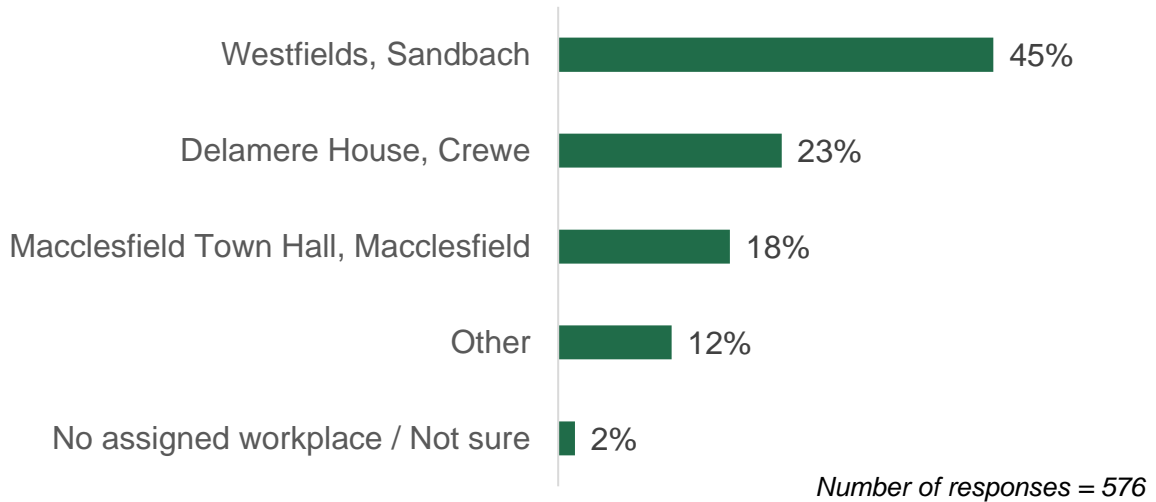
Throughout the report, survey analysis of questions has only been presented by individual council team, or home town, if there were at least 10 responses for that team or home town. This has been done to protect the anonymity of individual respondents.

Survey respondents – Current behaviours

Assigned workplaces

45% of survey respondents had Westfields as their assigned workplace, 23% had Delamere House, while 18% had Macclesfield Town Hall as theirs.

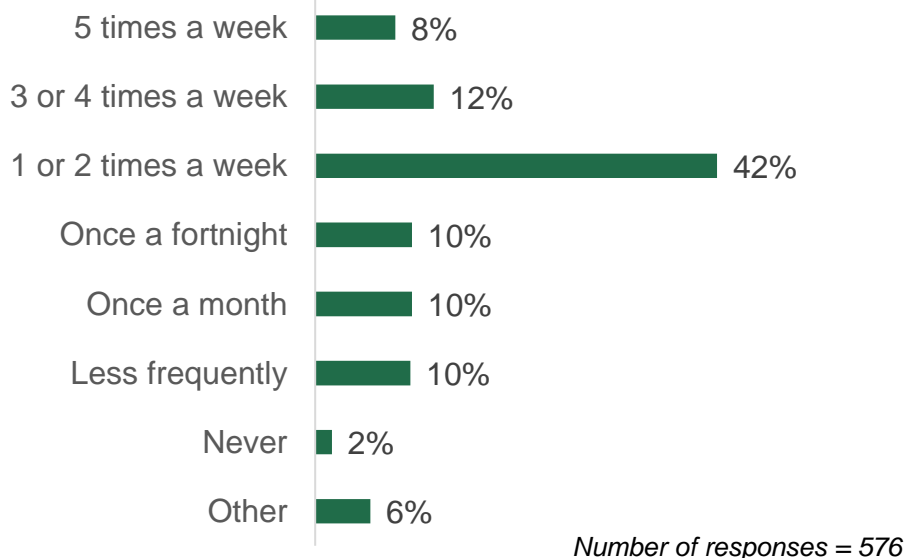
Which of the following Cheshire East Council offices is your assigned workplace, even if you work from home most of the time?



Frequency of office visits

21% of survey respondents go to their assigned workplace at least 3 times a week, with 42% going 1 or 2 times a week, 30% go less frequently, while 2% never go to their assigned workplace.

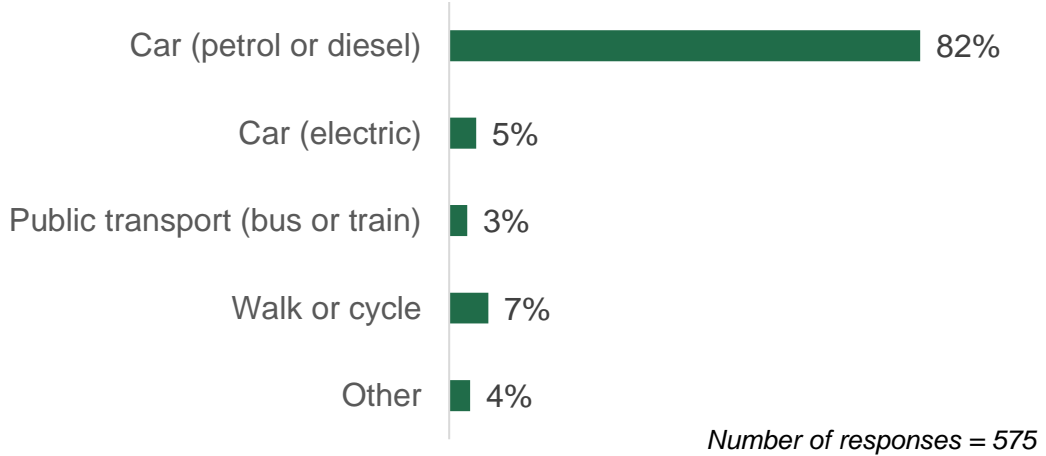
Generally speaking, how often do you go to your assigned workplace for work purposes?



Method of travel

A very high proportion of survey respondents, 86%, travel to work by car. 10% travel to work by public transport, on foot or by bike.

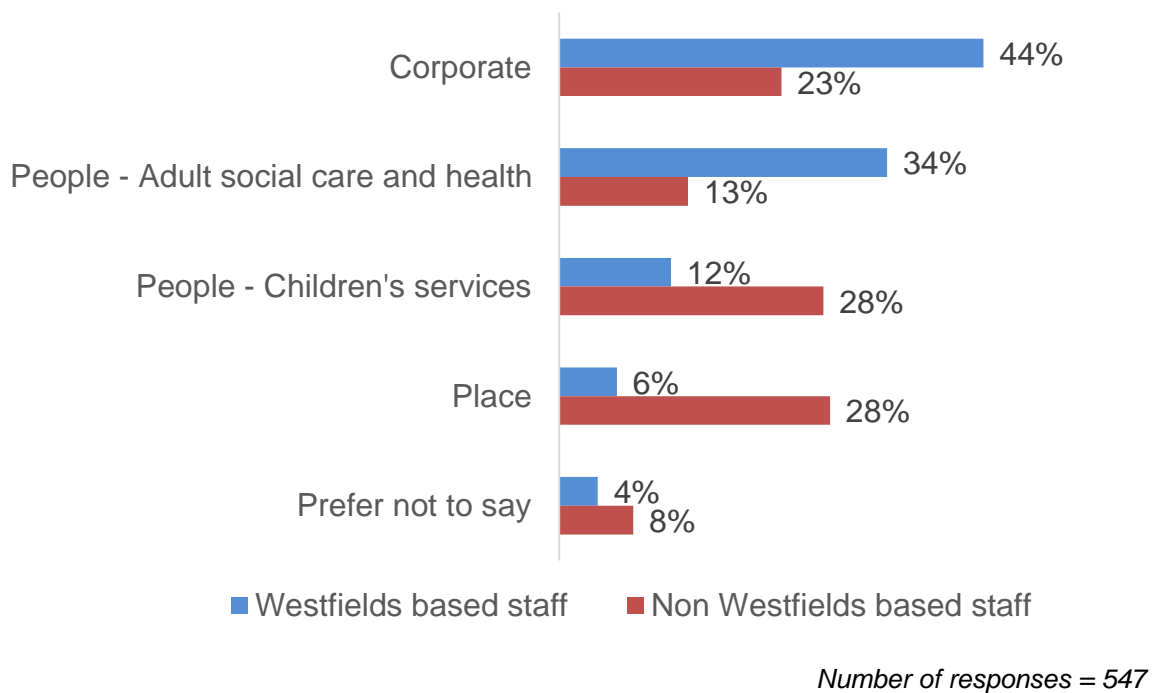
How do you usually travel to your assigned workplace when you do go?



Directorate of Westfields staff

44% of survey respondents based in Westfields work in the “Corporate” directorate, while 34% of Westfields staff work in the “People – Adult Social Care and Health” directorate.

Which Directorate within the council do you work? *By work location*

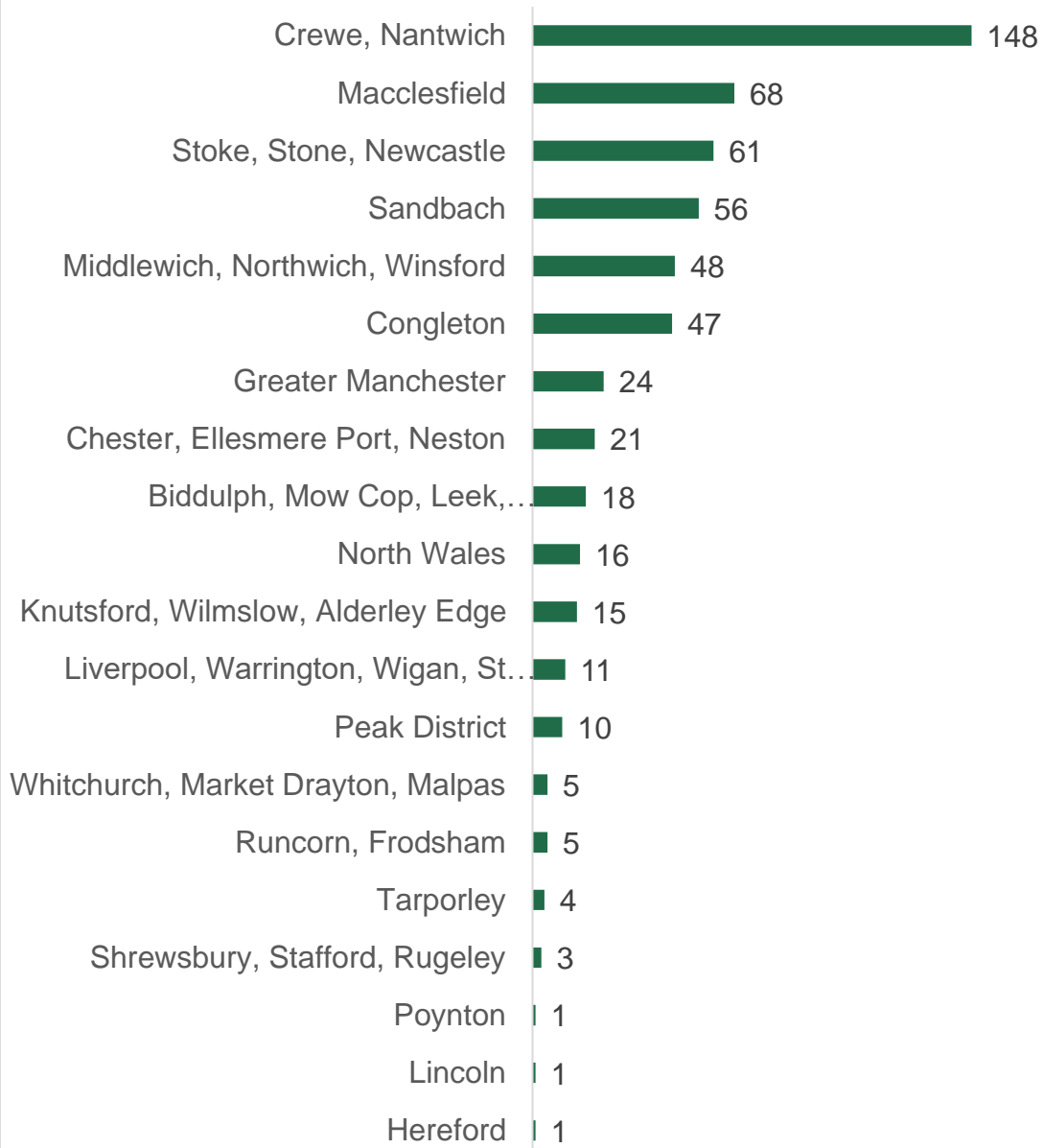


Home town locations

Many survey respondents live in one of the Cheshire East towns of “Crewe” (148), “Macclesfield” (68), “Sandbach” (56), “Middlewich, Northwich, Winsford” (48), or “Congleton” (47).

However, many survey respondents live in areas outside Cheshire East, including “Stoke, Stone, Newcastle” (61), “Greater Manchester” (24), “Chester, Ellesmere Port, Neston” (21), “North Wales” (16), the Peak District (10), Lincoln (1) and Hereford (1).

Repondent home town (grouped where convenient):



Number of responses = 563

Survey respondents – Support and opposition to the closure of Westfields

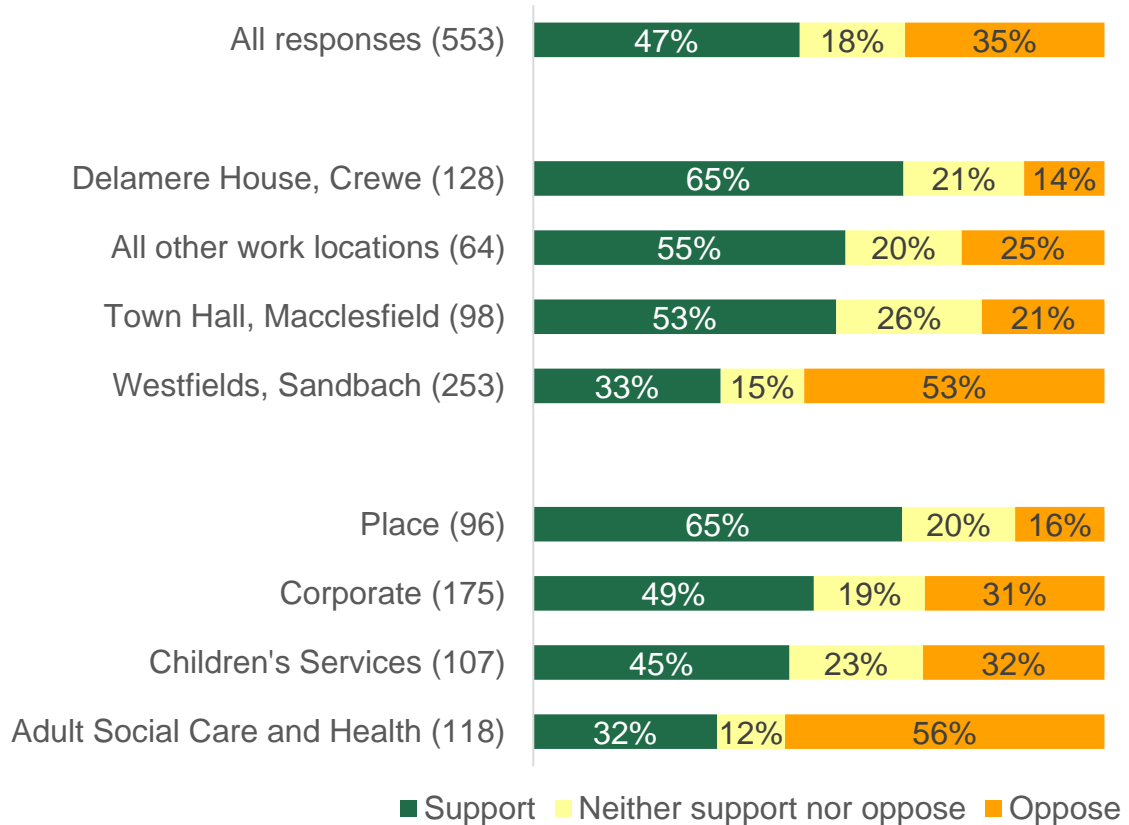
Overall level of support / opposition to the proposal

Overall, 47% of survey respondents supported the proposal to close Westfields offices in Sandbach, with 35% opposed to this proposal. This gave overall net support for the proposal of +12%.

Survey respondents currently based in Westfields were most likely to oppose the proposal to close this office, with 53% of those currently based in Westfields opposed to its closure, giving an overall -20% net opposition to the proposal. Those based in Delamere House were most likely to support the proposal, with net support of +51%.

Survey respondents in the “Place” directorate has the strongest net support for the proposal of +49%, while survey respondents in the “People – Adult Social Care and Health” directorate had strongest net opposition to the proposal of -24%.

Generally speaking, how strongly would you support or oppose a proposal to close Westfield offices in Sandbach?



Number of responses in brackets

Support and opposition to the proposal by service / team

The individual teams most opposed to the proposal to close Westfields offices included:

- Corporate; Legal Services (-69% net opposition)
- People – Children’s Services; Children’s Development and Partnership (-50% net opposition)
- Corporate; Human Resources (-35% net opposition)
- People - Adult social care and health; Adult social care (south) (-35% net opposition)

Service; Team	% support	% neither support nor oppose	% oppose	Net support / opposition	No. of responses
Corporate; ICT	87%	7%	7%	80%	16
Corporate; Financial support and procurement	83%	13%	4%	78%	23
Place; Housing	79%	16%	5%	74%	20
Corporate; Business change	67%	15%	19%	48%	27
People - Children's services; Education partnership and pupil support	50%	40%	10%	40%	11
Corporate; Customer services	63%	13%	25%	38%	25
Place; Development management	58%	17%	25%	33%	14
Corporate; Audit and risk	42%	33%	25%	17%	14
People - Children's services; Special education needs and disabilities	50%	14%	36%	14%	14
People - Children's services; Preventative services	53%	6%	41%	12%	17
People - Children's services; Prefer not to say	44%	22%	33%	11%	10
People - Adult social care and health; Adult social care	43%	21%	36%	7%	18
Corporate; Governance and democratic services	35%	20%	45%	-10%	20
People - Adult social care and health; Commissioning	35%	18%	47%	-12%	17
People - Children's services; Cared for children and care leavers	31%	25%	44%	-13%	16
People - Adult social care and health; Care4CE	31%	23%	46%	-15%	13
People - Adult social care and health; Public health	38%	0%	62%	-23%	13

People - Adult social care and health; Adult social care (south)	30%	4%	65%	-35%	25
Corporate; Human resources	15%	35%	50%	-35%	20
People - Children's services; Children's development and partnerships	10%	30%	60%	-50%	10
Corporate; Legal services	6%	19%	75%	-69%	16

Support and opposition to the proposal by home town

Survey respondents who lived in the following areas were more likely to support the proposal to close Westfields offices:

- Peak District (+60% net support)
- Crewe, Nantwich (+44% net support)
- Chester, Ellesmere Port, Neston (+35% net support)

Survey respondents who lived in the following areas were more likely to oppose the proposal to close Westfields offices:

- Sandbach (-46% net opposition)
- Stoke, Stone, Newcastle (-16% net opposition)

Respondent postal town	% support	% neither support nor oppose	% oppose	Net support / opposition	No. of responses
Peak District	80%	0%	20%	60%	10
Crewe, Nantwich	63%	19%	19%	44%	148
Chester, Ellesmere Port, Neston	55%	25%	20%	35%	21
Macclesfield	51%	27%	22%	28%	68
Liverpool, Warrington, Wigan, St Helens	55%	18%	27%	27%	11
North Wales	53%	13%	33%	20%	16
Knutsford, Wilmslow, Alderley Edge	43%	21%	36%	7%	15
Biddulph, Mow Cop, Leek, Kids Grove	44%	11%	44%	0%	18
Congleton	41%	16%	43%	-2%	47
Greater Manchester	33%	29%	38%	-4%	24
Middlewich, Northwich, Winsford	35%	20%	46%	-11%	48
Stoke, Stone, Newcastle	33%	19%	48%	-16%	61
Sandbach	22%	9%	69%	-46%	56

Reasons for support for the proposal

Survey respondents were asked to give reasons why they supported the proposal to close Westfields office. 296 comments were made in reply, and these comments have been summarised into the below categories.

If you wish to, explain why you support this proposal:	
Westfields office space is underutilised, surplus to requirements, and always empty	68
It will save money / save on costs. Keeping it open would be a waste of public money	52
Support for the proposal is dependent on relocation specifics – Which office we are reassigned to, what facilities there are like and the quality of the offices, as well as whether there is ample parking provision at the new office	38
General support for the closure, even though Westfields suits me and I use it. Generally understand the need for the closure and support it	33
Utilising free space elsewhere (North or South) would be more effective. This would also bring teams together in 2 locations rather than 3.	27
I mainly work from home, more people are working from home now, and so the proposal will have less of an impact than it would have pre-covid. More people can work remotely.	22
I dislike the building, it is an unpleasant environment, has no historic importance and is bland	19
The land where Westfields is located would be the most attractive to buyers, would sell for most, and has most commercial potential	16
This will reduce the carbon footprint and environmental impact of maintaining an empty building	7
Crewe / Macclesfield – These are good / better alternative locations	7
Crewe / Macclesfield – These have good / better public transport provision and links	4
What will happen to the building / hope put to better use	3

Reasons for opposition to the proposal

Survey respondents were asked to give reasons why they opposed the proposal to close Westfields office. 520 comments were made in reply, and these comments have been summarised into the below categories.

If you wish to, explain why you oppose this proposal:	
Westfields is central, accessible, and people will have to travel further to get to another office. It is centrally accessible for large teams. Westfields is known as the HQ. The easily accessible location is a perk of the job for those that live close.	133
Westfields has good, plentiful and free car parking, you have to pay to park elsewhere. Taking this away would have an impact on the employee offer.	91

Westfields is a useful and versatile space – It has good facilities and good / large meeting rooms, it does blue badge assessments and is a “key services” workbase. It is a good drop in place during the day to access printing etc. It is the nicest workspace the council has, with light and modern offices. It is a good building to meet customers and service users in. Westfields also has good storage.	80
The closure of Westfields and relocation of staff could impact employee wellbeing, both mentally and financially	65
The other office buildings will become overcrowded	25
Closing Westfields doesn't support collaborative working / cohesion	18
It might lead to even more people working from home more, which would be a negative	15
It will increase the carbon footprint and go against the green agenda as it will mean more travelling (e.g. across town to print then back to Sandbach to visit service users)	15
I would struggle to carry equipment and bags if have to travel further	14
Close Delamere House instead as that is old, in need of repair and costs more to maintain. No matter what you spend on Delamere the building is still depressing	14
There needs to be an accessible alternative for local residents	13
This could force people to leave the council to find better alternatives	13
It would have a negative impact the Sandbach's economy	13
Utilise empty space at Westfields instead – Rent out office space / hubs	10
Building Westfields, then closing it, would be a waste of money and would not look good	1

Neutral comments made about the proposal

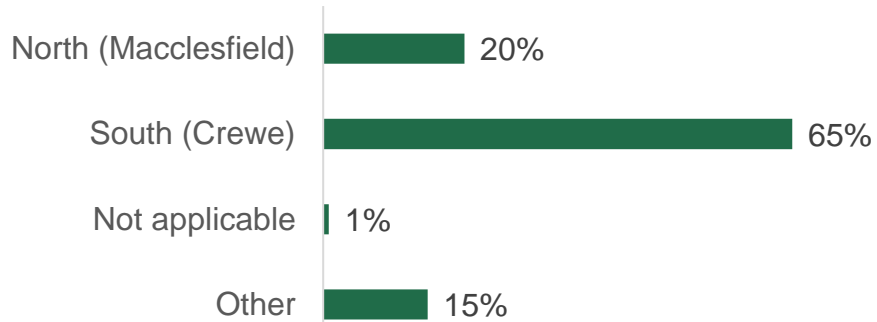
Survey respondents were asked to give reasons why they supported or opposed the proposal to close Westfields office. 12 neutral comments were made in reply, and these comments have been summarised into the below categories.

If you wish to, explain why you support or oppose this proposal:	
Westfields office use assessments used to support this proposal were conducted during an unrepresentative period, either during the pandemic or in its aftermath	4
Put in place a better working structure around coming into the office and around use of office space / home working	4
More detail and clarity is needed on the proposals	2
Transition to new office needs to be managed properly, including an induction, welcome pack and communication of the layout	1
Provide better laptops and homeworking equipment	1

Survey respondents – Relocation preference for Westfields staff

65% of current Westfields staff that completed the survey would prefer to be relocated to the South of the borough (Crewe), and 20% would prefer to be relocated to the North of the borough (Macclesfield), if Westfield were to close.

If the Westfields office were to be closed, would you prefer to be relocated to one of the remaining offices in the North (Macclesfield) or South (Crewe) of the borough? *Current Westfields staff only*



Number of responses = 255

The relocation preference of employees was usually split within individual teams, for example:

- 65% of “Human Resources” staff that completed the survey would prefer to be relocated to the South (Crewe), compared to 25% who would prefer to be relocated to the North (Macclesfield) if Westfields were closed

Relocation preference, by Service; Team	North (Macclesfield)	South (Crewe)	Other	No. of responses
Corporate; Human resources	25%	65%	10%	20
Corporate; Legal services	19%	69%	13%	16
People - Adult social care and health; Adult social care	17%	67%	17%	12
Corporate; Business change	17%	74%	9%	23
People - Adult social care and health; Public health	15%	85%	0%	13
Corporate; Audit and risk	15%	77%	8%	13
People - Adult social care and health; Adult social care (south)	14%	68%	18%	22
Corporate; Governance and democratic services	12%	88%	0%	17
People - Adult social care and health; Commissioning	8%	54%	38%	13

Survey respondents – Suggested alternatives to the proposal

Survey respondents were asked if they had any suggested alternatives to the proposal which they felt should be considered. 227 comments were made in reply, and these comments have been summarised into the below categories.

Do you have any suggested alternatives to this proposal which you think should be considered?	
Close one floor of Westfields to council employees and use it to generate income by renting out space to businesses, community based services, holding clinics, hosting partner services, hosting a family hub. Repurpose the top floor as a council chamber and committee rooms.	51
Provide workspaces in other council buildings, such as libraries, town halls, leisure centres, children's centres and other smaller council buildings. More contact rooms are needed with service users. Provide hotdesking facilities for council staff in libraries	42
Encourage more working from home, encourage people to only come into the office when needed. Create new contracts which reflect working from home as the main work location. Many people work better at home. Don't assign people to offices, or if so, assign them to the office nearest their home	34
Close Delamere House instead, as the Delamere House building is not as good as Westfields, and it has no car parking. Sell Delamere House as a residential conversion	22
Retain Westfields, as it has good car parking and is a good building	20
Close Municipal Buildings instead	4
Concerns around relocation – Lack of space, lack of parking, office not fit for purpose, more travel	24
Concerns around impact on wellbeing, both financial and mental	11
Encourage staff into the office more, improve public transport and cycling links to encourage more people into offices. Travel into offices has to be more sustainable, transport hubs are needed close to offices	6
Concerns around increasing carbon footprint	5
Encourage more collaborative working	4
Would like use of Delamere House and Municipal Buildings / keep all 3	2
Consider a 4 day working week (increased profits / productivity / staff retention)	1
Close each location one day a week (no running costs)	1

Survey respondents – The Workplace principles

The WorkplaCE programme focuses on five principles:

- Improve productivity, value for money and services to residents
- Reduce the environmental footprint of our working practices
- Meet staff aspirations for an improved work life balance
- Provide a safe creative environment to work together in and drive innovation and transformation
- Optimise the use of our office workspace and reduce our costs

Survey respondents were asked if they felt anything was missing from these principles. 154 comments were made in reply, and these comments have been summarised into the below categories.

Is there anything you feel is missing from these principles?	
Staff considerations including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The financial impact of this proposal e.g. for parking and extra travel • Ensuring the general wellbeing of staff is looked after • Career development, career progression and training • Ensuring there are enough staff to cover the workload • Improving council culture – setting out our behaviours and values • Indicating whether staff being encouraged back into the office or not • Employing local staff 	52
Ensuring the work locations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are accessible / within reach for staff • Are accessible / within reach for residents and service users • Provide ample car parking provision 	31
Ensuring office spaces: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are fit for purpose, accessible, inclusive and flexible • Allow for collaboration, sharing and learning 	31
Ensuring IT and office equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is fit for purpose • Supports a hybrid way of working and the digital strategy 	20
Environmental impact / Carbon footprint. Ensuring sustainable transport and Active Travel	10
Equality, diversity and inclusion	4
Principles should be sustainable / and measurable	3
More detail / clarity is needed on the proposals	2
Include reference to our role in supporting town centre economy / vitality	1

Survey respondents – Final comments

Survey respondents were asked if they had any further comments on the proposals, including any comments on how the council could make better use of vacant space in existing buildings. 264 comments were made in reply, and these comments have been summarised into the below categories.

Please add any further comments you wish to provide on the proposals here, including any comments on how the council could make better use of vacant space in existing buildings:	
Utilise empty space better, share it with other organisations, service providers, and small businesses. Make better use of space in other council buildings like libraries etc for hotdesking, meeting spaces, printing etc. Utilise current vacant buildings for staff use. Thought needs to be given to smaller local hubs to send items for posting, do scanning/printing. Maybe the libraries could accommodate these needs? It would reduce travel.	86
Ensure buildings are fit for purpose – Have adequate meeting rooms and areas for collaboration, especially when confidential, accessible and inclusive spaces are needed	47
Consider wellbeing impact on staff relocating, particularly the mental, financial and travel impact	24
Ensure ample car parking is provided at all office buildings. Parking in Crewe is very difficult, limited and costly. There may be some excess parking space available at Crewe Lifestyle Centre	24
Ensure the IT and office equipment provided in offices is fit for purpose	19
Provide desk space / hot desking in other council buildings e.g. libraries	14
Encourage staff to come into the office more	10
Sell off vacant spaces	9
Distribute IT / office equipment across sites (e.g. to Broken Cross), including unused equipment	6
Encourage more working from home	5
Close Delamere House, as it is dilapidated	4
Consider the impact on carbon emissions	3
Offer agency staff permanent jobs / make jobs more attractive	2
Move the library to the town hall	2
Be clear about hybrid working mixed messages. Consideration needs to be given for where staff are relocated to – is it based on personal preference, rather than where the team will be based? Also what is the corporate policy / guidance on coming into the office, should staff be attending the office, if so how often or is the message to work from home? It's currently very conflicting.	2
Disagree with the mobility clause in contracts. Staff should be able to choose their designated office as the one which is closest to where they live	2
A better desk booking system is needed, as is better desk share	1
Monitor over time and see how the landscape develops	1

Consider impact on Sandbach town centre, for businesses and footfall	1
Macclesfield Library should be protected	1
Have the running costs / maintenance been compared across sites?	1

Events attendees – Summary of event feedback

During the consultation a number of face-to-face events took place between the project management team and staff and trade union representatives. In total there were 216 attendees of these events.

Full notes from these events can be found in Appendix 1.

Summary of the key themes arising during the events

The key themes are listed in general order of how frequently they were mentioned.

Car parking

- Access concerns – Delamere House especially has limited parking especially if more people are moved there, there isn't enough room.
- Poor parking provision adds stress to journeys / working life. It puts people off attending offices.
- Limited parking impacts on flexible working if it is a case of first come, first served
- Will there be relocation mileage?
- Will parking permits issued, and if so who to / how?
- A bad car parking offer may lead to a loss of good staff / Free car parking is seen as a perk of the job

Poor equipment / ICT in offices

- There is a lack of monitors, keyboards, mouses, good quality chairs across the estate
- People are working on Surface Pros in offices or are having to bring in their own equipment from home which is not good
- There is poor lighting in some offices,
- Poor equipment in offices puts people off attending
- Can we have standing desks?

Access to offices within local communities

- Some staff, especially front line staff (e.g. social workers) need local offices to be able to pop into to access toilets, refreshments, printers and to have confidential conversations
- Closing Westfields will leave a large distance in the middle of the borough without any office
- This proposal has been put forward by people who are desk based

Consultation cynicism

- This decision is seen as a fait accompli, a decision has already been made
- Delamere House is being renovated and Westfields is being run down in preparation for the move

Working from home Vs Working in offices

- What is the council policy on this? Are we encouraging people back into offices or not? If yes, how does closing Westfields help that?
- Working from home is lonely for some people
- The booking system / poor ICT equipment is a barrier to people coming in
- Concern the new chief exec might want people to start coming into offices more

Working from home concerns

- Will the council reward people for working from home instead of coming into the office?
- Working from home is too expensive for some people during the cost of living crisis, hence people will need to come into offices more
- Has the council considered schemes encouraging people to make their homes greener?

Carbon emissions

- How does this policy help with carbon net zero, when hundreds of people are heating / lighting their own homes rather than the council heating / lighting one building?

Cledford House relocation

- That the Cledford House closure and relocation had not being well managed
- The ICT equipment transfer had not been conducted well during this relocation

Conclusions

Consultation response

The response to the consultation has been fairly good, though it should be noted that it is likely those who responded were more likely to be those based in Westfields and those who are opposed to the proposed closure of Westfields.

+12% overall net support for the proposals

It is important to note the overall net positive support of +12% for the proposal to close Westfields, indicating a general acceptance among many for the need to reduce the office estate and make savings.

Strong opposition to the proposals from some

However, it is clear that there is strong opposition to the proposal to close Westfields among some groups of staff, with 53% of current Westfields staff who responded to the survey opposed to its closure.

It is noted that the strongest levels of opposition are seen among those who would be most inconvenienced by relocation, especially for those who might have to travel further, who might have a less convenient journey, or for those who might have to spend more to get to work.

It is clear that for a certain proportion of staff the closure of Westfields and subsequent relocation would have a negative mental and financial impact on them, and could lead to employees leaving the council altogether. The closure of Westfields may reduce the appeal of working for the council.

If Westfields is to close, the council should explore how to mitigate the impacts of this, perhaps by looking at how to make the journey from areas such as Sandbach and Stoke to alternative offices easier, by looking at how to ensure car parking provision at alternative offices is plentiful and easily accessible, and by looking at providing smaller office spaces in towns around the borough that teams could access instead of Westfields, especially for front line teams such as social care teams who need a local base, and for teams strongly opposed to relocation from Sandbach such as Legal Services. The council should also put in place measures to assist the wellbeing of those who might be adversely affected by relocation.

The South (Crewe) is the preferred relocation destination

It is noted that if Westfields were to close, indications are that staff would prefer to relocate to the South (Crewe) of the borough at a ratio of more than 3:1 compared to the North (Macclesfield) – Does the council have enough office provision in the South of the borough to accommodate that volume of relocation?

Relocation preference splits within individual teams

It is also noted that there are significant splits within individual teams over relocation preference, with some members of the same team preferring to be relocated to the South of the borough, and some preferring to be relocated to the North. Some staff suggested that people working from home much of the time should be assigned to the council office closest to their home address.

Is the council proposing a flexible relocation policy, willing to let members of the same teams relocate to different offices? Or will the council relocate entire teams to specific offices? If the latter, this may lead to greater opposition to the relocation process, could lead to greater turmoil within the council and make staff retention even more difficult.

Other issues raised during the consultation

A number of key themes arose during the consultation outside the scope of the closure of Westfields, which may need addressing within a wider cultural review of the council.

These key themes included:

- Staff wellbeing and career development
- Perceptions of poor car parking provision in our main towns, which it is felt doesn't allow for flexible working
- Comments on the poor quality of ICT and office equipment across the estate
- Questions around what the council's policy towards working from home Vs coming into the office is
- That the Cledford House closure and relocation had not being well managed

That Active Travel and better transport links should be promoted, with large proportions of staff travelling to work by car as opposed via public transport, on foot or by bike.

Appendix 1 – Full events feedback

During the consultation a number of face-to-face events took place between the project management team and staff and trade union representatives. In total there were 216 attendees of these events – details of these events are provided in the table below.

Date	Meeting type	Who with	No. attendees
28/07/2023	Online Employee & Trade Union Event	Open to all staff & Trade Union reps	27
31/07/2023	Online Employee & Trade Union Event	Open to all staff & Trade Union reps	108
04/08/2023	Online Employee & Trade Union Event	Open to all staff & Trade Union reps	81

Notes taken from these events are presented below.

Full notes from the virtual consultation event on 28 July 2023

Number of attendees: 27

Vocal comments, questions and answers arising during the event:

Comment: The Adult social care team based in Westfields has already been relocated there from Congleton already, now we could be relocated to Delamere House.

Question: Westfields is a lovely building, the most modern of the 3 buildings, including from a green perspective. Have we ever considered extending Westfields rather than moving to Delamere House, considering the money that would have to be put into Delamere House to modernise it, as Delamere House is a very old building and will need a lot of investment.

Answer: There are positives and negatives with Westfields, that site is worth a lot of money. Also, to extend Westfields is the most expensive option, in terms of building something. So what is putting us off is that we have existing buildings we can use without having to spend without having to spend a lot of money. The money we put into the project will be used to refurbish the existing sites, so new desks, new computers, access to better meeting rooms. If we did a rebuild, the money we have available would be for the building. It is something that may still be considered.

Question: There's a lot of space and car parking at Westfields for staff, the other concern is if we go to Delamere House there is really limited car parking, and the building is 7 floors that will be occupied but there is no parking there, there is limited parking as it is.

Answer: Car parking is not as convenient at Delamere House as it is at Westfields, but there is adequate parking there. Part of the reasons there has been such good parking at Westfields is because we have used sites which were just empty, but realistically that's not a good use of that spare land. The car park at Westfields is rarely half full. This is something we will feedback to council.

Comment: Not sure about that, as we were in Delamere House pre-covid and it was full.

Question: Has there been any thought about using buildings differently. We thought at Westfields about maybe closing one floor off and hiring out meeting rooms to generate income?

Answer: Yes the scope of the consultation is not restricted, the estates team are looking at what we can do with all of our space. Looking at moving Macclesfield Library into the Town Hall, if we can't do that we are looking at whether we can partition space off in the Town Hall if it doesn't relocate, maybe for community facilities, or being let out to the private or public sector. We could do that across the entire estate, where we rent off bits of our buildings, to maximise the use of them so they are full. We only occupy little bits of each building. Part of the problem with using each of our properties is that in estates terms it is not as efficient, you get more income if you rent out the whole building, rather than just little bits. If you sell a whole building you get quite a lump sum of capital receipt. So yes it is something we have considered, we are open to out of the box ideas. For example some Councillors have asked if we can sell the old town hall as a hotel.

Question: I agree with Liz, Westfields is the nicest building, though we do understand selling Westfields would bring in more revenue. Although this feels like a consultation process, there is already a lot of work going into updating Delamere House, new windows being put in – is this a done decision already?

Answer: We had a long debate at CLT about whether we should refurbish Delamere House, some of that was around what if we don't retain it. Our aim is to be Carbon Neutral by 2025, and for the borough to be Carbon Neutral by 2045. The works that are being done on Delamere House will contribute towards these carbon targets either way, and the works being done are government funded, it is not costing the council anything to replace those windows. That comes from a multi-million pound de-carbonisation grant. In terms of bang for buck, that was the most efficient spend of money, Westfields already has good carbon efficiency. We already rent out space in Delamere House to Ringways Jacobs and the NHS are requesting space to move

in there as well. So no, this isn't already a done deal. This is a consultation. We are conscious what this looks like, but that is not the case.

Question: What you say about better equipment, in future will monitors be put back on desks, the same as it was pre-covid, where we are using the office space? Working there at the moment isn't the most practical or health and safety conscious, for staff working with little Surface Pros, the desks aren't set up right, you can't follow the PSE guidelines that are supposed to keep us fit and well, for posture etc. Conditions there are not good without screens, we all need extra screens but not everyone has the opportunity to have one, very conscious of health and safety and welfare, and what is available for them to use, will that be looked at?

Answer: Yes in the report we included costs for an ICT fit out based on feedback we have had from staff. Based on HoS feedback, and the occupation of the buildings, we're working on a 60:30:10 split, so 60% of desks will have screens, mouse, keyboard etc, 30% with nothing, 10% with fixed equipment. It might be that split isn't the same across all teams, as some teams might need more than 10% fixed equipment if they have more permanent office-based staff. We've also been investing in meeting rooms across the whole estate. That equipment is transferrable.

Comment: No one should be working at this time without the right equipment, anyone who needs equipment they need to speak to heads of service and ask for what they require. This is important that people have the right equipment, the council are responsible for your wellbeing when you're working from home, as they are in the office. Don't work on an ironing board, or at a kitchen table. Don't sit on Surface Pros for 6 hours, that is not what they are designed for, never were, never will be.

Comment: Just to reiterate what Andy said, I use a Surface Pro, but ICT don't provide stands for Surface Pros, when you go in the office you get a cricked neck as you can't always get on a big screen, this is a big issue.

Question: In terms of timescales if this does get approved by committee, realistically when do you think a move might take place?

Answer: Realistically it wouldn't be an immediate decision, followed by immediate action. It would be a decision based on best value. We would consult with staff that are affected if a decision came back that we were closing a building, staff would be consulted on the impact on them as individuals. Refurbishment would need to take place before relocation, and that process is likely to take a year minimum. It will be probably a minimum of 18 months till relocation.

Question: Thinking about getting best value for money, have we looked at whether people can get paid to work from home full time, with just essential services coming in, to reward people who are working from home to get some financial reward for

using their own electric and gas. Will there be any financial incentive for staying at home? This would also save on Carbon footprint too.

Answer: Yes it has pros and cons – Some national government politicians don't like people working from home, they want them in the office all day long and seen to be there. At this point in time we recognise we can make the savings we need to with a reduced office estate. We didn't present an option to pay people to stay at home, at this moment in time that isn't an option. Property always has a value. Maybe this is something we will look at in future, but I am minded that some politicians will want people in.

Comment: Thinking about desk setup, I have a standing desk at home, I know we couldn't get that for every desk, but a small area for standing desks would be good, they help with back pain, they improve productivity. It's good to be able to stand up. They can raise quite easily.

Answer: That is a good point. We consulted with a movement group, some desks in Delamere House are designed for that. What we are looking at in that 60:30:10 split we would include more accessible desks, or different styles of desks. We aim to have a mixture. Hopefully we will have a good choice. Not sure if those different desks can be booked on the booking system. That is something we need to look at – can people book accessible desks.

Comment: Yes being able to book such a desk for a few hours throughout the day would be useful.

Answer: Yes I will check.

Question: What will the phase 2 consultation look like?

Answer: If a decision was made after phase 1 consultation that people are to be relocated, phase 2 would involve those being relocated, we would have individual consultation with the directly affected staff, through current management structures. When people relocate there are things like relocation mileage if people are having to travel further, for up to 2 years.

Full notes from the virtual consultation event on 31 July 2023

Number of attendees: 108

Vocal comments, questions and answers arising during the event:

Comment: This is a huge issue, especially after the Cledford consultation. When a building is closed and staff are distributed across other sites, car parking just isn't taken into account. We have not got enough parking at Delamere House, so if we relocate more people there, there isn't enough parking. Parking permits only apply to

certain people, so for example they don't apply to coordinators, so they will lose money, a lot of money, by having to a) travel further and b) stress and worry about parking, they're going to have to travel further, park further away, again desk space has been an issue so we're working on ratios and I think we've done that from covid, our staff are telling us they want to be in work, it's too expensive for them to work at home, heating bills, lighting bills are going up, they can't afford to work at home, so they're coming into the building and finding there aren't enough desks. They then have to go and sit somewhere else, so they can't work as a team as they intended. This is especially a concern during winter – have they got parking, have they got desk space, have they got ICT. I've seen all this with Cledford and I think it will happen again.

Answer: We have had this feedback quite a lot already, we are looking at creating an FAQ specifically for car parking. People who have worked at buildings with free parking have had significant benefits, compared to others elsewhere who have had to pay. We need a consistent approach for all staff that is fair.

Comment: We do but people took jobs based on them receiving free car parking – free parking makes a job viable. I understand there needs to be equity, but Westfields is one of the best places for parking, it's one of our better locations, and people may choose to leave as a result if they have to start paying for car parking. Parking in Macclesfield is terrible, Delamere is being swamped and we have had residents complaining, we've had increases in complaints from staff.

Answer: Yes we are aware of it, and we are factoring this in. Stage 1 of this consultation is related to an option to close Westfields, and if that decision was made stage 2 would be consultation with individual staff. It is definitely a factor, that is why we're trying to develop those FAQs to make it clear what the decision involves. The point about space, if you walk around most buildings they are very, very sparsely populated, and if we haven't got the desk balance wrong we need to look at that. We need to have a look to see if we have the overall balance right, and that is why we looked at the option of having designated floors for different teams. Historically we tried to create pods for teams, but that wasn't very effective because if one team wasn't in, other teams could be struggling for space. So that is why we have introduced a booking system.

Comment: I just want to echo what Sam just said, particularly in Macclesfield. If the weather is bad, it's not a great journey, I think a lot more people will start working from home more, when I thought the idea was we were encouraging more people to come into the office more often. And parking is a massive thing, if you've had a bad journey into work, and then you're trying to find a parking space.

Answer: Yes we have heard this thanks.

Comment: Yes just to reiterate what Sam said again, I took my job based on the free car parking. Free car parking at Westfields is brilliant. I also do a job where I need to nip into Westfields just to print as the clients I work with have to sign documents, so you literally park for free, whiz in for maybe 10 or 15 minutes. Also, if I get moved to Crewe I will be doing a lot of free miles. The council seems concerned about their carbon emissions, but what about people like us who are all heating our houses, all using our own electric, it's not a job I chose to do at home, it's quite a lonely job at home. To go to Crewe there are issues with parking. Also the businesses that are close to Westfields are in jeopardy. All Westfields needs is windows that open. It's sad.

Answer: This is a consultation process, that's why we want feedback. Lets be cautious that a decision has already been made here, this is still a consultation, we will listen, capture this feedback, and we will consider how we can deal with these things. The drop off point for people being able to have short term access to buildings, so people can access buildings for a short space of time – this is a new point and a really good point which we can look at. We will need to look at how we can accommodate that at all buildings. In terms of being able to work from different locations, we have had to limit this consultation just to the corporate offices, but part of the conversation is about how staff can use different facilities, libraries or day centres, the council has a lot of buildings and are looking at how people can access these buildings, so they have somewhere to touch down and have access to warm places and network facilities. Carbon emissions are for all, so CE as an area which has a carbon net zero target, shunting carbon from the council into the community gives us no gain whatsoever. We are trying to push people towards using pool cars, more efficient vehicles, promote Active Travel. In terms of the local economy – whatever happens Westfields will be occupied by someone, so the local economy should not be badly affected. Even if the council relocates, someone will be there. When speaking to local business people try and put their mind at rest, because even if the council moves out of Westfields, other people will occupy the space.

Comment: I agree with everything Sam and Kate said. Re. net zero, if it's supposed to be Cheshire East wide, rather than 1 building being kept warm you've got hundreds of houses being kept warm, and people driving around, so there's no way it's efficient to have 3 floors of workers wfh rather than working from one building, so I don't understand how that stacks up.

Comment: Re. Adults Directorate moving to the 5th floor of Delamere, I don't understand how they'd all fit in, I'm not sure you understand the amount of people that work in Adults Services? They certainly won't all fit on one floor.

Comment: When I've been in the Municipal Buildings I've not seen that much spare space, it seems to be mainly meeting rooms and offices at the back, so I don't understand how you could accommodate many more people in Municipal Building than in Westfields.

Comment: You say the decision is not made, yet you go to Westfields it looks like it is being run into the ground, the equipment is gone, chairs are broken and not fit for purpose, cables are all missing, the stuff you need to be able to work there has gone. What I do see is a lot of investment in Delamere House, the reception has been done, new windows are being put in, like it is being prepared.

Comment: You talk about people being able to use other buildings such as Libraries and Day Centres, but what about GDPR? You're going in there printing personal document and stuff, if there's even any space to use, you can't just rock up and expect them to find you a desk. Also warm spaces, that relates to net zero.

Answer: In terms of the number of employees in Adults, these plans have been seen by Exec Directors who decided based on the numbers that go in the plans were appropriate, but we know we would have to flex it if we found that some teams were working more in the office than others. We also have to recognise to get the best use out of our buildings we have to fill them on a Mon to Fri 9 to 5 basis, to get the best use out of them. Hopefully the booking systems will give us some more information about how much those are being used on a daily basis.

Comment: The largest population base is in the South, so Crewe is your biggest area, and you've got Nantwich, Sandbach, the biggest population is in the South not the North, so you'll need more space in the south.

Answer: The office space in Municipal Buildings is being taken away over time, so the comparison is Delamere and Westfields and Macclesfield Town Hall, which are the 3 remaining office spaces. That facility is effectively taken out, so sorry for the confusion about that.

Answer: Re. equipment, the ICT equipment we looked at what people require to come in to sit at a desk and we've done a calculation that suggested 60% of desks would have ICT equipment provided on them (a screen, mouse and keyboard), 30% would be for people to bring their own devices in to plug in / touch down, and 10% would have fixed equipment that people could log onto. That ties in feedback we have had from the Spring Back events, and that will be different for different teams, and that's how we have calculated the amount of money required to provide that equipment.

Answer: Re. the investment in the new windows at Delamere House, this is actually government funding to help us with our carbon emissions, that's where that money has come from, that's not Cheshire East Council investment. The energy efficiency of Delamere House was poor, and we were able to get grant funding to improve that facility. That came as an assessment of which of our buildings needed most improvement. CLT did debate that and didn't get the Comms right about it.

Answer: Re. GDPR – We are considering how we need more space for certain teams to be boxed off so they could have that privacy, so that's another reason why we looked at having floors for certain services, as opposed to a completely open space where anybody can go, we got that from certain teams, particularly children's services who need that privacy. So teams with those needs will have to be able to get that functionality from the buildings they use. This isn't a one size fits all.

Question: I work in Westfields most days and can appreciate the position we are in. The biggest risk we have is with car parking, and the knock on effect of that – I've worked before for employers that struggle with parking, and one of the biggest benefits we have is flexible working, if we then go to locations where we have to pay for parking, where in Crewe at the moment the amount of long stay parking is nominal, there is a lot of short stay where you have to move every 2 or 3 hours which is not an efficient use of peoples time, but if we have to be in by 8am to get a parking spot, the flexible working offer is then completely redundant, which is a big risk. So one of our biggest benefits is completely gone, and then the private sector offer becomes a lot more enticing for people. At other places I have worked car parking was the biggest issue that people moved on for. So this comes back to "what is our employee offer"?

Answer: We are looking at our workforce strategy, and how that employee offer is more complete and more transparent, and we know there have been a lot of conversations about staff and resident parking, and we know there's a way to go.

Question: These proposals are put forward by people whose jobs are 100% office based, who are now working from home. I work in the Adult Social Care Team, where we do a lot of community visits, so it's important to be able to pop into the office for 5 or 10 minutes, to print something off, how does that work if the parking is really difficult?

Comment: People tend to work in the areas where their community team is, so between meeting you can go home. If your office base isn't in the community, say it's in Macclesfield, you need a base in Macclesfield in between visits where you can go and use toilets, grab a coffee. Especially for someone who is disabled who needs disabled toilets, that is going to be a massive issue.

Comment: Also I do think the carbon emissions thing – swapping targets from one big building to lots of smaller buildings doesn't seem to stack up statistics wise at all.

Comment: Re. being transparent about pay – We have been having pay rises not in line with inflation, so a technical pay cut anyway, we're now paying mileage, for occasionally car use, working from home, and for car parking costs. Will there be a legacy mileage agreement if they do have to move?

Answer: Yes there is a relocations policy which would apply, but that is time limited. Re. having drop off points for people to check in, that is a new point that we can have a look at. In terms of carbon emissions like I say, transferring carbon emissions somewhere else doesn't assist the council, being able to fit more of our staff into more carbon efficient buildings because we can use our money more efficiently, then that is a positive benefit to the environment, so that is what we're trying to do. Also having pool cars and electric cars is something we're trying to do.

Comment: Re. offices being wound down, the desks we have at Macclesfield Town Hall, they come complete with a possibly broken chair and a plug socket, that's all we get, we don't get a monitor, we don't get any IT, we bring everything in from home, and that's been that way since Covid.

Answer: I understand what you're saying but those issues are not to do with office relocation, that is partly one of the problems we are trying to solve, that we can make sure the offices are properly fitted out.

Comment: Just to echo on that in Cledford House that's not been the case in buildings, we've not had the IT follow us, 100% that hasn't been the case.

Answer: I understand that, the point is the proposal that went to committee is that there is investment for that in future. We are trying to ensure those issues from the past don't happen in future. The fact things aren't right now, all I can do is work towards improving that.

Comment: The reason why we're saying is if we're being asked to make a decision about whether we would prefer to wfh or work from an office, if we're asked to choose between a good office space or an inadequate office space, those answers are going to be different.

Answer: Yes we have listened to this feedback in the past, and that is why we are proposing to invest in upgrading offices. That is really important to create nice working environments, they will be better places to work in.

Comment: It feels like the council is trying to make it so that Westfields closes, the lighting is not working, since this consultation started things aren't being fixed, it feels like it is being left to go, all we hear is Delamere House is getting this and that, it feels like Westfields is being forgotten about on purpose.

Answer: If we get anything reported in Westfields, we repair it, we are maintaining Westfields.

Answer: I need to squash that one, because it's just not the case, that is an absolute no, there is no activity that is leading towards a decision having been made already, because the decision hasn't been made already and that is why we are consulting. We are being as open as we can possibly be, if it is being interpreted any other way

that is wrong and that is poor communication from the council. That is just not the case. There is no pre-determination.

Comment: I'm very disappointed about Cledford House, because they were told they were going on the same floor, they were having their equipment moving, and so on. So what is a concern is that if a building is closed, and we're promising the equipment to be there, but we have been promised this in the past, so that gives people a lack of confidence it will be there.

Comment: A lot of people would like to work back in the buildings because of the costs (of wfh), but if the equipment isn't in the buildings this isn't possible.

Comment: I mentioned on Friday if we are going to do it, if people are going to wfh we should be paying them for the electric and stuff like that. It is really important people have these conversations.

Comment: People are aware they can claim car parking back I hope, because they can claim it back even if they haven't got a parking permit. There are a lot of issues here that really need to be resolved. This is a good debate, and I know you have been put under the cosh, but it's the right way to be as people are showing they're passionate over this.

Answer: Yes that's why I want to make it clear that a decision hasn't already been made. That was a really helpful summing up, what we have identified is things from the past which need to be fixed now.

Comment: The biggest concern from that meeting is the impact of phase 2. You can't decide to close a building and not know what the solutions and impact is going to be and that needs to be clearly communicated to reassure people if the building is being closed that it's all been thought through.

Answer: Just to be clear, the decision is made on the back of all the information we are gathering, and that's why the questions are so wide open, it's only if a decision is made, it's not instantly implemented without further consultation with staff on what the impact of that decision might be, so we can address all of those. If a decision is made in October, we would still go through another process with staff about that decision. All this information now is what goes into the consultation feedback, and that's why we've done it using the Consultation Team because they're used to this approach, and used to capturing all this information. I also want to assure you that if a decision was made not to close Westfields, we will still want to address all of these other issues that have been raised.

“Chat” comments and questions arising during the event:

Sorry I missed where Care4ce would be based?

Cost of living for employees needs to be considered - the cost of parking, the cost of travelling. cost of living should be a key priority.

Staff who have previously always paid for parking have now got used to not travelling therefore not paying for parking - this money has now been consumed within other household pressures. so equity is important but it will impact on all staff

Apologies if this has already been asked..... have the council considered renting floor space out to external companies to use?

I also feel that the amount of equipment needed to work in the office instead of home is a lot to carry. Then there's also not always the correct leads/plugs to be able to log in. This will have a greater impact in the winter having to walk further from car parks to offices.

I doubt a small business would cope till it is occupied.

Could we not make better use of Westfields and rent space out? Make more of a community hub? As a local resident, the thought of more houses being built there is worrying!

Withdrawing the salary sacrifice scheme for an option for hybrid/ electric vehicles wasn't a great idea now CEC want workers to travel more across the authority

Also what if your team needs store cabinets for documents?

Regarding parking, other than Westfields car park isn't there a plan to introduce paying for parking in Sandbach?

That would have a huge negative impact on the town.

It does feel like a done deal

I made the same comment last week *[redacted]*

Also we closed Cledford (against a lot of feedback and concerns) and told our Foster Carers they could use Westfields for their training with the fostering service, but this would now be Crewe, which is again too far for most of our foster carers.

What about confidential phone calls that social services need to make. That won't be possible if the office spaces are shared with other teams/public.

Hi *[redacted]*. Has it been considered to rent out private offices in co-working spaces? Or a salary sacrifice scheme for staff to purchase coworking space at a reduced cost via CEC? Or, perhaps improve marketing the community spaces available for people to drop into with parking and printing etc.

The desk booking system is now a barrier to staff coming into Westfield's, not enough IT equipment on the desks etc, however seems like CEC chose a great time to introduce it, as these figures are now going to inform the consultation. Most of my team need to nip in to complete assessments/ to use a printer / for peer support, having very personal conversations and dealing with sensitive information, not the kind of thing you'd discuss in a library or any other warm space

What is happening to like buildings Mountview and Lincoln house. They have been empty for years

Have we considered the current energy efficiency of the buildings under consideration or just the floor space?

Hi *[redacted]*. I haven't read all the documents associated with this consultation, but a lot of it refers to an option for Westfields to be 'closed' - can we assume this is the same as Westfields being 'sold'? If so, does this include all the land it sits on, do we have an approximation of the total sale value and what can we do with any money generated - does it just go into reserves or can we use it for frontline services?

I agree with all that has been said about parking and travel costs and extra time that would take in relation to the work life balance point - this could mean people would need to pay for more childcare with breakfast/after school clubs. Another concern is if the new chief exec would want people to start coming into the office more which would increase the impact.

My other point would be about the reputation of the council with our residents/customers, there is a lot of negative talk in Sandbach about how we knocked down a historical building that people loved to build Westfield's and for what if this happens - as mentioned above has letting out space been considered.

That would have a huge negative impact on the town.

it's in the budget plan I think (the MTFS)

Public transport is also not great, particularly since the withdrawal of arriva bus services, so people would also be restricted in terms of using alternatives to private cars

it's in the budget plan I think (the MTFS)

Whatever the plan is, it probably won't entice people into town if they have to pay for parking. It's a benefit for people visiting Sandbach. Plans are all well and good but the reality is usually different.

There is no decent public transport in Cheshire either so people are quite dependent on driving everywhere.

Public transport is also not great, particularly since the withdrawal of arriva bus services, so people would also be restricted in terms of using alternatives to private cars

I think there's a consultation on buses out atm

Reputation is a concern, I'm on a local residents group and it's not gone down well.

Using a pool car is great - but we still need to travel to collect the pool cars.

Westfields has a number of large rooms for training, will there be additional training facilities in Delamere House as this will be the more popular venue for training.

Not sure CEC understand the concept of pool electric vehicles for front line workers, CEC would be bankrupt in providing enough cars just to cover this option

has the Council considered a scheme to help employees with the cost of installing solar panels to assist with elec. bill increases from working from home ... it could also contribute to the borough's carbon reduction targets? like the Green car scheme / salary sacrifice but with a contribution from CE?

I have to leave but thank you for your time today. useful to share views and hear feedback. Really appreciate you taking the time to put this on.

Hi [redacted] - My question is how has the m2 been calculated? Is this based on staff attending the office 1 day per week or 5? If so, this will affect the amount of space available for staff to use? I guess the question is what is the expectation for staff being required to attend their potential new office base?

Not all people want to come back to the office full time. I appreciate some people do, for me it is more cost effective to work from home, despite heating bills but the cost of travelling and parking costs 5 days a week would outweigh my utility bills

The information gathered about demand for office space - does this need to be revisited given the changes in the cost of living and both managers wanting employees to be in the office more and some employees wanting to be in the office more?

The point about equipment investment is that we are currently being told we will have the equipment we need to do the job if we agree to the move, but the offices will remain like they are now (re broken chairs, no monitors etc) if we prefer to stay - that's the issue i was trying to raise rather than questioning current investment - it doesn't seem fair

I support rationalisation of buildings but I do think that how it will impact on myself will impact on whether I support the closure of Westfields.

Thanks for your honesty and patience *[redacted]*!

Thankyou to everyone for comments. All comments will be copied into a consultation report anonymously (individual names will not be included). This report will then be considered alongside all other feedback by Councillors and key decision makers, before any final decisions are made. The report may also be published on the council's website at some point as part of committee agenda packs. If you do not wish for your comment to be published in this summary report please let the Research and Consultation Team know by emailing RandC@cheshireeast.gov.uk.

Complete the consultation survey at

https://surveys.cheshireeast.gov.uk/s/WorkplaCE_Consultation_July_2023/.

Thank you

i really appreciate the opportunity for consult - thank you

Thank you *[redacted]*, really useful session

Full notes from the virtual consultation event on 4 August 2023

Number of attendees: 81

Comments, questions and answers arising during the event:

Question: What consideration has been given to Care4CE services, where we have registered addresses within Westfields, but to services, and Westfields is the registered address for the Care4CE service, there are requirements around CQC for us to have distinct office space for those which is separate.

Question: Is the Enterprise Centre in Sandbach still available to use, or has that now gone?

Answer: In terms of the registered office, yes, if you have Westfields as the registered office we would have to relocate those if Westfields is closed. We would have to name a different HQ if we closed the building entirely.

Answer: In terms of office touchdown space we have quite a broad estate. This consultation is only looking at the office space, the 5 main offices, but there are other touch down spaces in hubs, libraries or leisure centres where people might be able to access touch down space. I can't answer the questions about the Enterprise Zone in Sandbach. I don't recall a disposal in terms of sale, I thought it was let out. I will have to take that one away.

Comment: We have people who come to Westfields to collect their weekly spends, these are members of the public that we manage their monies for, so we would need

some space in Sandbach for 30 or so people who come twice a week to get their cash handouts, there is the option to go to places like libraries.

Answer: That's useful to be reminded of that, if people can't get to Crewe or Macclesfield, then yes we have space in libraries, and in other spaces too that they could use.

Question: If we would have a space to see clients, we would also need somewhere to have storage for monies, so in Westfields we have a safe in Westfields, so that would need consideration as well.

Answer: Yes I remember moving the safe from Congleton to Sandbach. That is something that would need moving, and something we would bare in mind.

Question: Slide 12 about Delamere House and the different floors, was that illustrative, or was that just a proposal to feed back on. Has the same activity been done for Macclesfield Town Hall?

Answer: Yes that was included as an illustration as to how we could set out both buildings. We would appoint floors, rather than having everyone working on one floor. We find different services / teams have different requirements. For example, we found that more desk space and worksurfaces are needed for Corporate Services, as opposed more collaborative space required in Children's Services who have confidentiality requirements, so it is better they have their own floor. It was purely for illustration, we are more than happy to have feedback on the design principles.

Question asked in the meeting chat: Is it proposed that Public Health would be on floor 5 with all of adults services? How does that fit space wise with number of staff and number of available desks?

Answer: The floor plan was set out by Directors, so Exec Directors would have floor space. We were looking at Adults and Health along with NHS space in there too, but when we talked about that we also found that Children's also have a similar touch down space with the NHS, so we have been working with the NHS around how their staff will access our buildings, whether they would be in a partition space, but the favoured response was that they would have the same access rights and freedoms as our own staff.

Question: For me it will be a considerable increase in travel time, so there will be an extra cost for petrol and parking. What will the situation be for parking?

Question: Also, how will it work within teams if some people want to be based in Macclesfield, some want to be based in Crewe, when obviously that will effect teams and how they work, and when it splits teams up?

Answer: It is important to recognise first off that this is just phase 1 of the consultation, so those more detailed conversations about individuals, and the specific details about how they might be effected, would come if there is a phase 2 consultation. So if Corporate Policy Committee did decide to close Westfields, there will be further consultation with staff about how we manage the implications. The standard package is that where people are assigned further away from their home there is a 2 year compensation package for that additional mileage.

Answer: In terms of parking, we are trying to put together a detailed response for parking, we got a lot of questions about that at the previous events. Whatever we do for parking we have to create something that is equitable for all staff. There will be a bigger response coming on car parking. What we have been looking at is where car parks are in relation to buildings. The conversation about staff being assigned North or South, that would be a phase 2 conversation. We need to work with the Exec Directors, as to how best to innovate, they need to be in 2 places at once, and we need to improve the visibility of our leaders, but Exec Directors will want to consider how they will want to assign teams North and South, whether it's nearest the customers, or nearest where the majority of the team live. But that is a phase 2 conversation.

Question: What about meeting rooms, we struggle to get meeting rooms in Westfields now even though it doesn't appear there are many people in, meeting rooms already seem to be full. Will there be extra provision at Crewe or Macclesfield?

Answer: The floor plan that was created, when we did the needs assessment we asked about what was required in terms of collaborative space, as well as just desk space, and when we looked at the principles for design, what we felt was there was a need for certain teams to still be able to break away from their desks and go into meeting rooms. Then we looked at the fact that one of the benefits of putting everyone in a number of spaces was that they could collaborate together. So Childrens & Adults, or Corporate would be able to get together more often, and the collaborative space for that would be separated out on another floor, so you get a bit more of people bumping into others from different teams by having those flexible space facilities. Now when we were talking at the Spring Back Events, there was a lot of feedback in terms of different styles of rooms, and whether it's just 2 sofas facing each other, or whether it's a booth that you need to sit in, or whether it's an office, or whether it's a mix of that, and our intention would be that some of that would be bookable, some would be free space that people can just go and sit in. In terms of how busy that space is, it's difficult to tell and it's difficult to understand how we manage to book out all the meeting rooms when there's no staff in the building. I think there's a little bit of discipline around how many rooms are booked out that have no one in. We need to consider how best to get that message out, as space becomes more precious in a way. Pre pandemic when there were more people in the

building was it such a problem. But yeah, good point. We maybe need to be more disciplined about only booking space that is needed.

Comment: Yes people need to remember to cancel bookings too.

Comment: Care4Ce operate 24 hour services, would Delamere House be safe for people to be working till 10 o'clock at night, what security measures will be in place. We also have poor cars which are based at Westfields at the moment, which are there throughout the day or throughout the night, will there be a space for them to be kept without a fee? Car parking has been raised, some of the things that Members have raised is that they have to come into the office quite a lot throughout the day, will they have to pay multiple parking throughout the day as they are in and out. Also, access arrangements in terms of locations, you wouldn't want to be trying to find a space across Crewe as we literally are on a rota, as we literally just pop in, do our thing and then go straight back out. These are some of the issues I can foresee for Care4CE if we were based there hence why we have asked about the site that's at Sandbach as an alternative, given the numbers of staff – 50+ just for reablement services, then there is shared lives who have 200 carers, so it's big numbers.

Answer: In terms of safety, that was a line in our principles and we are aware of that, that's safety of people in the building as well as in peripheral areas, we will look towards having safer walking route and car parks, what sort of outside the building security we will have access to, that is in the minds of the project team to look at that. We do have staff in our buildings that are there throughout the night, whether they are operating machinery or whether they have more specific duties.

Answer: Re. car parking I can't add any more than I have said in previous events, we are looking at this. If there are not enough car parking spaces near the building, that is a surprise. There is enough parking generally close to our main buildings, we need to try and explain what the options are, and what availability is.

Answer: We are trying to promote pool cars, we can have electric pool cars which can be charged up on site, and in particular for Delamere House, being able to park close is something we will need to have to reserve places for as that will start to become more common. With the national scheme that we are signing up to, where you can rent the cars, that presents an opportunity to go to an out of town location, pick up a car, use it all day long, then come back to your own car, so that potentially gives an opportunity to be parking in an out of town safer environment, to then be able to use the pool cars.

Answer: The ability to pop into offices came up in the last meeting, we need to understand the scale of that, how many people do it and how often. We will be asking for more information on that. That is something that has only just cropped up in this particular conversation we are having. You mentioned about the Enterprise Centre in Sandbach, we can't answer that one yet, but one of the things we need to

wider this conversation out to is about community facilities, and understanding whether there are opportunities for staff to meet in hubs or libraires, as we have a lot of meeting rooms, we have function rooms which are frequently unused, so being able to access those more frequently would be helpful.

Question asked in the meeting chat: Will relocation and excess travel expenses be paid to staff previously based in Westfields (if they are all relocated)? Has this been factored into the budgeting exercise and how was this done (without using all individual staff addresses?)

Answer: Yes we shall respond to that one in the FAQs.

Question asked in the meeting chat: I remember pre Pandemic, there was a plan for Delamere House to be demolished and rebuilt by CEC. I appreciate the council are looking to save money and use available resources currently, but is the use of the existing building a long term one? due to the age of the building, will it incur ongoing maintenance costs (thinking Westfields is a much newer, modern building)?

Answer: Those plans never really came to fruition, that was part of a wider redevelopment of Crewe Town Centre, there were various proposals to make significant changes in the town centre beyond just the Royal Arcade and the bus station which is the only bit which has been redeveloped. Recently the windows in Delamere have been replaced, we are committing to upkeeping it. As for a demolished and rebuilt building, I can't see that possibly being affordable. So we are refurbishing what we have got, and the refurbishment for Delamere House has come from central government, so isn't costing us any money.

Question asked in the meeting chat: Where has the data/figures come from which have provided the evidence for the building changes. There was something about percentages of use of the office for example. How has that data been recorded?

Answer: Data has come from occupancy rates in buildings, and from future needs assessments. They looked at the numbers of staff we need on a permanent basis, the number on hybrid etc. We used a proxy square metres of staff to be able to understand how much that would come up in total to what was required. We're working on a ratio of 60:30:10, so 60% of desks that are available would have a screen, a keyboard and a mouse that people can take their devices in to plug into, 30% the desks would be empty where people can touch down and bring their own devices, and 10% would be for people who are permanently based in the office or who can't bring equipment easily with them, so they can log onto the specific connected device that is permanently on the desk. This ratio is an average across the council and not specifically related to individual teams, so some teams might have different percentages, but overall that was the percentage we were working

towards. And the costs for that where I referred to the MTFs having savings targets, but also some of the funding that was going to provide the new technology, or the change to the offices, that was going to come out of letting out the office space.

Question asked in the meeting chat: Is there consideration for staff who require specific equipment from their DSE such as chairs etc if having to share space?

Answer: We are trying to be clear on the safe and accessible elements of the principles, that came from conversations with the differently abled team, we want to be sure people can book tall desks or adjustable desks through the booking system, and that that's done responsibly, and if anyone has specific needs or a specific set up, that that will be reserved permanently through the booking system, if they need it so they know they will have it when they get into the office. We're trying to address that.

Answer: Re. DSE assessments, everyone is responsible for their own DSE assessment, and needs to take responsibility as to how they work. The space in offices should support a good environment that supports DSE needs.

Question: People with physical conditions who can reserve a desk permanently, does that work the same for people with mental health conditions. I come into the office 4 days a week because I don't like working from home it doesn't suit me, I like the routine because I do have mental health issues, is that something that is going to be taken into consideration too? I would like a permanent desk.

Answer: Yes it is, that is something we want to identify where some of those needs aren't being met, that is something we want to consider for the future design. Any design sign-off we will talk to different groups and unions, and if we're missing anybody let me know. We want the booking space to be as inclusive as possible, but we also don't want people to use reserved desks if it is better to have those desk permanently set aside. But we also want flexibility where if there is a space set up for a particular individual, if they're not there 26 days of the year because they're on leave then we don't want to waste that space.

Unanswered "chat" comments and questions arising during the event:

What will happen regarding car parking for staff at Delamere House.

Apologies having connection issues (so using chat instead of raising hand)

2) Is there any consideration to comparable meeting space available elsewhere? We often have to use CS1,2,3 as it's the only room big enough across the estate (we have had very poor feedback for rooms in 'old' Macclesfield Town Hall in terms of acoustics)

The proposals state 'For 2025/26, there will be a further reduction in our office/workspace and associated subsequent running costs around 7%. This is estimated to be a £150k saving'. Is there any information on what this relates to?

Why have we bought B and Q?

Will that be the new screens Alex? Some laptops don't now work with the older kit?

Appendix 2 – Email feedback

Email response #1

Date letter received: 8 August 2023

Summary of content:

Suggests the reintroduction of canteens in council offices to encourage staff socialisation, senior management engagement with staff, and to improve the workplace culture to encourage more people to come into offices to make them places where people want to go. Suggests this could be achieved at little cost to the council, and would be a step change to the current approach which seems to be so trip back everything to the minimum.

Full email:

Not expecting the survey questions to finish so quickly, I missed these comments out:

Probably to be resolved if a Phase 2 happens and we look at how we use the space... but back in my County Council days, the one space where 95% of the most effective collaboration took place was... the bustling staff canteen! It was like Chester/Crewe market on a good day... a respected asset which was full to capacity (sometimes with a queue going out the door!) every lunchtime. I knew all of the canteen staff by name and they knew mine. Friday was always fish and chip day, Wednesday pizzas. I still remember that in 2023! When I visited County Hall and had lunch there, same thing but I would meet different people and have lunch with them. I made it my mission to book meetings which gave me the canteen in between.

If you weren't in a canteen at sometime between 12-2pm, you were literally sat on your own having butties in the quiet office getting major FOMO. The younger usually on the apprenticeship and development programmes would meet at 12pm usually. The next big intake usually more senior managers and those wanting a slightly quieter canteen would come in at 1pm. There was a firm culture that no one booked (or accepted) meetings between 12-2pm. In fact, I think it was policy! You watched the clock approach 12pm when the canteen opened to get the fresh food. You rang round those friend colleagues in other depts to confirm they too were meeting you there.

It would not be unusual to be eating lunch opposite the County Engineer *[redacted]* (Tier 2) or one of his well known, usually by name, senior managers. The management team knew everyone by name and they introduced themselves to the new faces so they always made new staff feel welcome while learning who they are too. Senior Management made it their purpose through CLTs leadership culture to

make the time to come and have lunch with the team members; to hear about the real issues impacting the 'shop floor'. It was almost deafening the chatter amongst staff as they collaborated and communicated as much about work and not. Especially in the first hour when many of the younger, confident officers were putting the worlds to right. Many a time I voiced my (sometimes) controversial opinion to *[redacted]* and he always listened and sometimes acted on what I said. I felt listened to and more likely to speak up when I saw something not working. If you want to see a recent example, visit the regional Police/Fire HQ in Winsford. See how busy their canteen is at lunch and the collaboration that takes place there. All ranks mingle together.

So if there is a phase 2, and there are revenue savings from the loss of buildings, I encourage CEC to look very hard (again maybe) at the workplace culture and behaviors CLT need to embrace to encourage collaboration. Leading by example. Yes - the old canteen was subsidised, but not massively, just enough to help with cost of living and make you eat there rather than leave site to buy a butty. But most importantly the canteen was part of the office. It was a meeting point and encouraged staff to mingle. You could easily achieve this by using a fraction of the revenue savings from closing Westfields to make those canteen spaces in other buildings attractive and available (and make sure senior managers are visible in them!). You want them big, a whole large wing of Delamere for example. You want Senior managers as well as everyone to use them.

Workplaces should be a destination that our staff want to be in, and so consider other means making them attractive with 'perks' such as free drinks. Even consider making it policy to mandate staff to be in their key hub for at least 3 days a week. It will drive up the office population, collaboration and reignite both innovation and the desire to be in the office. It will be a step change from the current driver which so far appears only to react to the fact the buildings are empty by stripping back everything including fridges and water coolers. Then you wonder why there is no-one in work, where is the incentive?

Appendix 3 – Survey respondent demographics

Counts of survey respondents are presented by gender, age group and health / disability status below.

Gender

What is your gender identity?	Count	Percent
Female	383	69%
Male	108	20%
Prefer to self describe (write in below)	3	1%
Prefer not to say	58	11%
Total valid responses	552	100%

Age group

What age group do you belong to?	Count	Percent
16-24	12	2%
25-34	77	14%
35-44	119	21%
45-54	151	27%
55-64	114	21%
65-74	8	1%
Prefer not to say	74	13%
Total valid responses	555	100%

Health / disability status

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months? This includes problems related to old age.	Count	Percent
Yes	49	9%
No	458	82%
Prefer not to say	49	9%
Total valid responses	556	100%

