



VEREDUS

RE-THINKING THE  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ESTATE

---

JUNE 2020



# FOREWORD

---

The local government estate has always been large, diverse and complex.

COVID-19 has added to this complexity. There is now an enormous interest in how local authorities plan to use their office space and the wider estate post-pandemic.

This short report is a snapshot of current thinking in the sector.

Based on detailed conversations with leaders with responsibility for property and estates across local government, our 16 key findings show significant changes have already taken place with more to come.

Enjoy,

Veredus Local Government Team.



# OVERVIEW

---

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Conversations about estate reconfiguration are not new. COVID-19 has merely pushed them further up the agenda.

Councils with smaller estates have been able to increase their digital interaction with local communities during the pandemic.

Those with complex estates are having to make decisions about closures and repurposing *now* to address an unknown future landscape.

Mental health and well-being for remote workers is a key issue.

Any savings in operating costs are not expected to be gained in the short term.

Flexible working is becoming even more nuanced as the timing of the traditional working day changes.



# KEY FINDINGS

---



Remote working was already a key part of the corporate plan. The pandemic has now fast-tracked it. Currently, around half of the council workforce is classed as office-based.



Council co-location with other parts of government was already well-established. What will the wider impact of the pandemic be on the 'one' public sector estate?



Some small groups were already working from home regularly; now this group is almost everyone who doesn't need to be physically in an office to do their job. In some councils the figure is now as high as 80% working from home full-time.



Days in the office are still seen to be important but how that time is spent has changed. The new focus is on collaboration, team meetings, brain-storming and break-out sessions.



# KEY FINDINGS

---



IT infrastructure has been a barrier for some in home working. Many councils have not been able to give access to all the relevant systems to all employees at the same time. In some instances, we heard of where time slots were allocated for workers to access certain systems with logins being shared.



As in the private sector, many councils are positively engaging with their employees to find out how they have found working from home and what the organisation needs to consider for future working arrangements.



Some councils stated that they have invested heavily in technology and digital over the last few years, so they felt well placed to cope with the situation. For others, budget constraints have made access to technology much more of a challenge.



Changes to the estate are likely to generate savings in operating costs, but for most councils these savings will come into play in the long term and some investment is required in the short term.

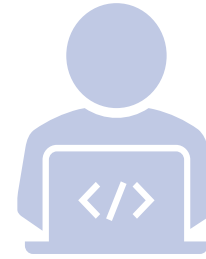


# KEY FINDINGS

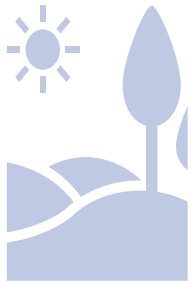
---



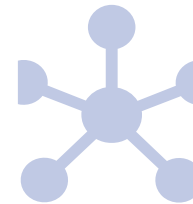
From the conversations we had, 75% of the council's office estate could be reduced as a direct result of the impact of COVID-19.



Whilst the pandemic continues, when staff do return to work social distancing may mean 50-60% of office desks will be unusable.



Local authorities who own land or assets are likely to hold off on selling them, even if it would boost their income, as current prices are low and the market is uncertain.



Some local authorities will look to repurpose some of their assets to make better use of them. One of our conversations suggested turning office blocks into residential properties to meet new demand. However, investment is required for such changes.



# KEY FINDINGS

---



The timings of the working day are becoming increasingly flexible and variable to allow staff to work from home and cope with childcare and other demands.



Due to the complexity of the nature of roles within local government, different arrangements are having to be set up for different teams. For example, although social workers still need to visit service users' homes, they also need to meet virtually as teams to discuss cases.



Some local authorities who have taken on a role as a commercial landlord to private sector businesses are re-thinking this strategy given the risks that it presents in the current crisis.



While some councils have used the crisis as a reason to speed up estate reconfiguration, some are using it as a time to pause and reflect. There is much uncertainty over the timescales for aspects of office working such as social distancing. Big decisions around spend must be carefully considered.



# CONVERSATION OPINIONS

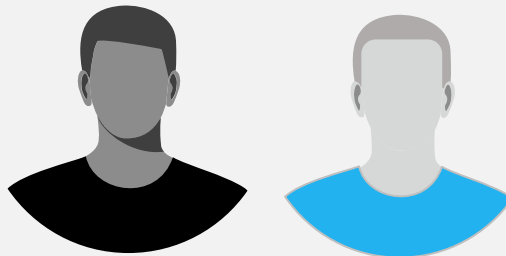
---

“We have been talking to our staff about how they feel about working from home. The feedback is really mixed. Some feel more productive and some are itching to get back into the office. I am sure it is the same in other sectors.”



“Most Local Authorities are already quite lean in terms of the estates that they have in place. Many have been trying to remove costs for the last 3-5 years, so the current situation has just fast forwarded some of the conversations.”

“Members of the public often have to come to our properties to have access to a service, this could be a planning application or even to pay bills. We have to think about how these buildings can best be used in the near future. Not all Local Authorities are very digital in the way that they offer these services. That probably needs to change, but requires investment.”



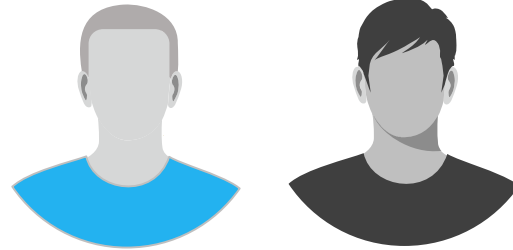
“We employ such a mix of different staff and professions within the Council. We have to make the right decisions to suit each team, so this is a complex process. We will have to consider the needs of each team on a case-by-case basis and do our best to facilitate this, so that it works for everyone.”



# CONVERSATION OPINIONS

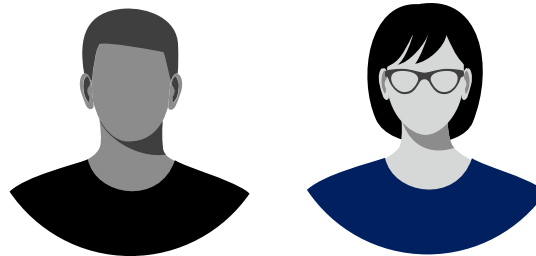
---

“Budget is a key consideration, but it isn’t sensible to sell anything now. The market is uncertain and prices are low, so we need to wait.”



“There is more of a spotlight on Local Government than there is in the private sector. The public will be looking at what we do and therefore there is more pressure on us to get things right”

“We are asking more questions about why we have certain parts of our estate and whether we need it going forward. We can answer some of these questions already, but for some things we need to wait until things become clearer.”



“There is a heightened focus on social responsibility which has to be factored into all of the decisions that are currently being made in local government.”



Veredus has a proud history of delivering executive search, interim placements and assessment centre design and delivery to the local government sector. For over 25 years, our team have been behind some of the most high profile and hard-to-fill senior management and leadership appointments in local government.

[vereduslocalgovernment@veredus.co.uk](mailto:vereduslocalgovernment@veredus.co.uk)

[www.veredus.co.uk](http://www.veredus.co.uk)

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/veredus>

@Veredus

