

INTRODUCING WORKSMART

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 That the members of HR Committee note the content of the report and feedback any comments on the proposed WorkSmart initiative for onward reporting to Cabinet and Council.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report provides the committee information on the proposed implementation of the WorkSmart initiative, the next step in the Council's Smarter Working Programme, supported with a HR Policy.
- 2.2 It is accepted that changes to the policy may have to be made due to external factors such as the NJC pay negotiations which has a homeworking element this year.
- 2.3 It is also accepted that while the council is supportive of this approach to flexible working there will need to be measures in place to ensure that productivity is retained. Should this not be the case then the council reserves the right to revert back to office based working arrangements.

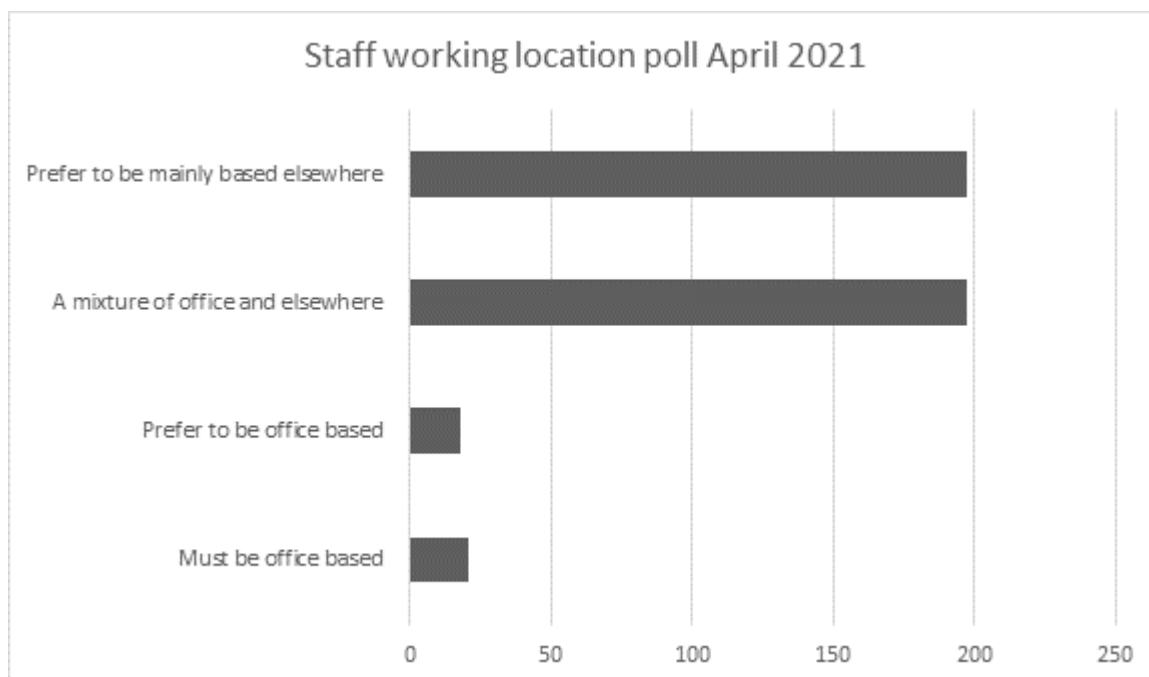
3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The significant majority of the Council's c400 office-based employees work in roles that have been working from home since the middle of March 2020. WorkSmart introduces a policy to allow staff to continue to work from home or an alternative base. Working from an alternative base is not possible for our Operational, Leisure and field-based employees
- 3.2 The investment made by the Council in recent years in its ICT equipment and infrastructure meant the Council was in an excellent position to respond to the immediate challenge faced by enforced home working in March 2020. In addition to the Laptops and Virtual Public Network the Council has in place to enable remote access, the Council provided ICT bundles consisting of a Keyboard, Mouse and Monitor to ensure employees they have the equipment that they require to work from home effectively. In addition employees have the opportunity to recycle surplus office equipment such as chairs and small filing cabinets.
- 3.3 The mainstay of the WorkSmart Policy for staff is a commitment from the Council to support officers to work from home or from another location for part of their working week, in line with the business needs of the service.

4. INTRODUCING THE WORKSMART PROGRAMME FOR EMPLOYEES

- 4.1 A couple of months into lockdown, an Employee Survey of all employees was carried out. In particular we wanted to assess how they were coping with their new working arrangements at home and in general we received a lot of positive feedback. Despite all the concerns and upheaval caused by enforced home-working, many employees welcomed being able to work from home. Those who were homeworking were liking the fact they were commuting less and that they could work more flexibly around childcare and they said they felt supported and trusted and that they enjoyed having autonomy over their work.

- 4.2 There were some staff that did feel isolated and were looking forward to a return to the office.
- 4.3 Most staff at that early stage said they would welcome a hybrid approach.
- 4.4 A second staff poll was run in April 2021, 12 months after the initial move to remote working. The results clearly favour a remote / in-office mix (i.e. 'Hybrid'), or a pure remote working pattern.



- 4.5 This feedback favouring hybrid and remote working has prompted the council to consider whether these arrangements could become the "new normal", when lockdown ends and employees are able to return to their offices.
- 4.6 The mainstay of the WorkSmart programme would be a commitment from the council to support employee's, with the managers agreement, to work from home or from another location for part of their working week. The scheme would be flexible but there would always be occasions when there would be a need to come into the office for meetings or to collaborate with colleagues on a scheduled remote working day. Agreement from employees to this element of the programme would be essential.
- 4.7 With their managers agreement employees would be able to work flexibly outside of the current 'core hours'. There would be some exceptions that are role dependent, for example where there is a need to be available to answer customer queries during normal office hours. Flexible working arrangements would be managed through agreements with line managers and would still be subject to a regular pre-determined work pattern. Normal working hours would be expected to be between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday.
- 4.8 Managers will arrange flexible working locally - and they will be responsible for ensuring they are getting the business outcomes they need and are providing a good level of service with sufficient cover.

5. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

- 5.1 Managers will be required to maintain frequent contact with their team members and are encouraged to maintain team collaboration and communication through regular virtual 'touch point' meetings and on-site team meetings and briefings.
- 5.2 Managers will be responsible for setting targets for individuals and discussing their performance expectations. Regular constructive feedback will be essential to ensure employees remain both engaged and positive in terms of their performance.
- 5.3 Where managers become concerned over an employee's performance or contribution to the team then initially this should be addressed by more regular contact. If no improvement is made then a more formal approach may be required.
- 5.4 Managers will keep track of overall and individual team performance and will regularly feedback to their Executive Head.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Although there may be no direct financial implications, indirectly the ability to offer employees the flexibility of hybrid working may well lead to greater retention rates and therefore reduced recruitment costs.

7. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Moving to a hybrid way of working enables the Council to make a good contribution towards its sustainability agenda.
- 8.2 Employee travel (not including commuter or roundage miles) in 2019/20 was in the region of 480,000 miles. A reduction in travel is anticipated from employees who have a new flexible working arrangement in place, which could generate financial and time benefits.
- 8.3 A hybrid way of working could therefore also lead to a reduction in the Council's carbon footprint.
- 8.4 The Council is also aiming to discourage mass use of printing in line with its commitment to reduce its carbon footprint.

9. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Any employee will be able to request flexible working which would enable them to spend some of their normal working week off site.
- 9.2 All applications will be considered taking into account the needs of the business and the customers

10. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There will be strict requirements placed on employees who wish to work off site to ensure the confidentiality of data. This will apply equally to paper and electronic data.

11.0 EMPLOYEE SIDE COMMENTS

11.1 Hybrid Working Proposal paper

- The paper implies in item 3.3 and other areas throughout the document that this approach will enable staff to work part of their working week at another location outside of the civic centre. However, it also implies that some staff might work all of their time in that way. Further clarification is therefore needed.
- The paper does not have sufficient detail around the process for making a Work Smart request, timescale for implementation or any right of appeal if a request is denied. Equally, it does not say whether successful requests are time limited or subject to review
- The paper also fails to mention the implications that any such changes might have on individual contracts of employment. This needs further clarity

11.2 Hybrid Working Policy paper

- It would be useful to have a better understanding of how staff will be monitored when working at home to ensure they are not working outside of the 8am-6pm parameters
- In our view the council should reconsider its stance on not making any contribution towards internet costs. I am aware of other employers who have made such contributions and we would like to discuss this further before any final decision is made
- On the issue of H&S, it would be useful to have some further information as to how the DSE assessment of a homeworking work station is to be undertaken
- In relation to insurance, the council will have a responsibility to insure its own equipment, albeit that it might be in someone's private home. This needs to be clarified. Furthermore, the council also retains the responsibilities for employer liability when it comes to accidents in the home that occur whilst the individual is carrying out work duties. I would therefore appreciate some further consideration on this point

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Background Papers:

WorkSmart Policy