

CORPORATE AFFAIRS AND LOCAL ECONOMY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL
24 JUNE 2021

WorkSmart – The Business Case

1. Recommendation

- 1.1 That the members of the panel note the content of the report and feedback any comments on the proposed WorkSmart initiative for the consideration of the Cabinet.

2. Purpose of the report

- 2.1 This report provides the panel information on the proposed implementation of the WorkSmart initiative, the next step in the Council's Smarter Working Programme, supported with a HR Policy and a Members Guidance Document.

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 (who transfer to Freedom Leisure on 1/7/21) 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 had 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.
- 3.4 A clear demand exists for future hybrid working options for councillors as well as employees, particularly in more informal settings. WorkSmart can therefore also apply to Elected Members when undertaking Council business.

4. A shift to homeworking during lockdown

- 4.1 During the first national lockdown period in the UK, between March and July 2020, the Council maintained the majority of its services. We successfully implemented homeworking arrangements for most of our office based employees during this time, although operational staff including Waste, Grounds, Streetscene and Housing staff, were required to continue working to deliver essential service to the public and our tenants.
- 4.2 The investment in ICT that has been made over the last few years has paid dividends and was key in enabling the shift to remote working. Most office based staff had been given a laptop so it was actually fairly straightforward to mobilise many office based staff to start working remotely straight away.

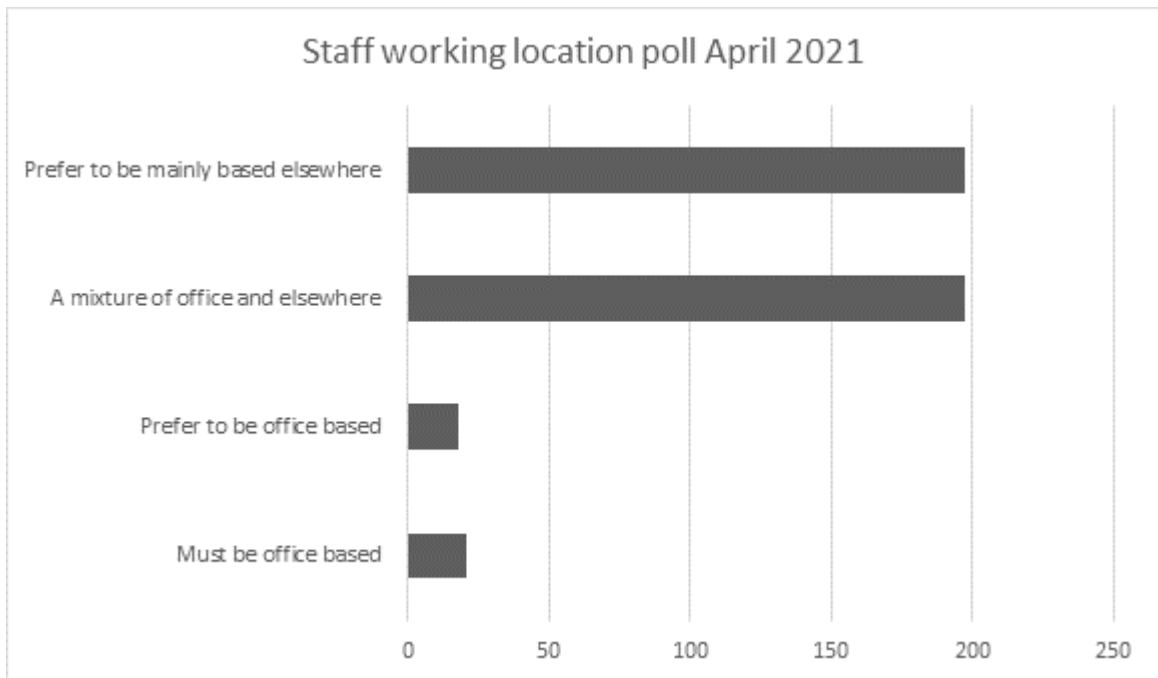
5. A shift to virtual meetings during lockdown

- 5.1 The enforced move to working from home but still staying in touch presented some challenges. The move from Skype to MS Teams has made this easier. Most staff with laptops have embraced the technology. The significant majority of meetings have taken place virtually since April 2020, including council meetings. The online etiquette is now seen as common practice and managers are encouraged to stay in touch with staff regularly through online meetings both one to one and as team meetings.

6. Introducing the WorkSmart programme

6.1 Employees

- 6.1.1 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. Despite all the concerns and upheaval caused by enforced home-working, many employees welcomed being able to work from home and in general we received a lot of positive feedback. 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.
- 6.1.2 There were some staff that did feel isolated and were looking forward to a return to the office.
- 6.1.3 Most staff at that early stage said they would welcome a hybrid approach.
- 6.1.4 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.



6.1.5 This feedback favouring hybrid and remote working has prompted the council to consider whether these arrangements could become the "new normal", when Coronavirus restrictions end and employees are able to return to their offices.

6.1.6 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.

6.1.7 Off-site workers are not subject to fixed hours and subject first and foremost to the needs of the business and the agreement of their manager, are free to perform the agreed number of hours/work at times that suit them. The flexible working agreement would include details of the working pattern agreed. Normal working hours would be expected to be between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday.

6.1.8 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.

6.2 Elected Members

6.2.1 A survey of Elected Members was undertaken in May 2021 which identified a clear demand for future hybrid working options for councillors, particularly in

more informal settings. WorkSmart can therefore also apply to Elected Members when undertaking Council business

6.2.2 The full survey results are attached as an appendix to this report. In short, the following themes can be drawn:-

- For formal meetings, Members broadly favour a mixture of face-to-face and hybrid meetings.
- For Task and Finish Groups and Working Groups, Members broadly favour a mixture of hybrid and virtual meetings, with some face-to-face options.
- For informal meetings, Members broadly favour a mixture of hybrid and virtual meetings.
- For ward/case work, Members broadly favour the flexibility to work both remotely and at Council offices.

6.2.3 It is recognised that at present, a change in legislation is required to allow formal decision making meetings to be held virtually or with hybrid attendance. However, through a commitment and detailed preparations for Hybrid Working, the Council will be able to respond positively to any future changes to legislation. A mix of face to face, hybrid and virtual meetings is anticipated for Members as we move into the “new normal”.

7. ICT and Document Security

- 7.1 Employees and Members must not allow family or third parties to access or use NFDC equipment.
- 7.2 Employees and Members are responsible for keeping all documents and information associated with Council business secure at all times.
- 7.3 Employees must continue to adhere to the ICT Security Policy.
- 7.4 Members must continue to adhere to the Members ICT Security Protocol.

8. Performance Management

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 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.

- 8.3 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.
- 8.4 Managers will keep track of overall and individual team performance and will regularly feedback to their Executive Head.

9. Sustainability

- 9.1 Moving to a hybrid way of working enables the Council to make a good contribution towards its sustainability agenda.
- 9.2 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.
- 9.3 Members' travel in 2019/20 was in the region of 44,000 miles. A reduction in travel is anticipated from some Members undertaking a hybrid way of working, which could generate financial and time benefits.
- 9.4 The 524,000 miles travelled in 2019/20 equates to 159.33 tonnes of CO2 emissions in an average petrol car. A hybrid way of working could therefore also lead to a reduction in the Council's carbon footprint.
- 9.5 The Council will monitor this performance to identify both financial efficiencies and the contribution made to the sustainability agenda.
- 9.6 Moving to virtual and hybrid meetings where appropriate has also enabled Members, managers and employees to stay in touch without the need to commute.
- 9.7 The Council is also aiming to discourage mass use of printing in line with its commitment to reduce its carbon footprint.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 The introduction of a new hybrid policy builds on the Smarter Working platform which has been well established by the Council over the past 3 to 4 years. It supports the Council's Green Agenda, and suits the needs of the Council to be an employer of choice to ensure it can continue to attract and retain a high calibre of employee. The new hybrid working policy takes into account everything that has been learnt since March 2020 in terms of how to make a success of remote working for the benefit of the organisation, and the employee.

Alan Bethune

Executive Head of Financial (S151) & Corporate Services

Tel: 023 8028 5001

Email: Alan.Bethune@NFDC.gov.uk

Background Papers

HR Committee - 23/6/21

WorkSmart Policy Ap 21

Heleana Aylett

Service Manager – HR

Tel: 023 8028 5662

Email: Heleana.Aylett@NFDC.gov.uk

Matt Wisdom

Service Manager – Democratic Services

Tel: 023 8028 5072

Email: Matt.Wisdom@NFDC.gov.uk

Member Poll - Results

37
Responses

01:06
Average time to complete

Active
Status

1. For formal Council meetings (including Committees and Panels), would you:-



2. For Task and Finish Groups and Working Groups, would you:-



3. For informal meetings (briefings, officer meetings), would you:-



4. For ward/case work, would you:-

