

WORKSMART – THE BUSINESS CASE

1. Recommendation

- 1.1 That the Cabinet support the content of the report, noting the Overview and Scrutiny Panel's comments on the Business Case and noting the HR Committee's endorsement of the 'Worksmart – Hybrid Working Policy', and their recommendation to Council that the new HR policy be approved.

2. Purpose of the report

- 2.1 This report provides the Cabinet with 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

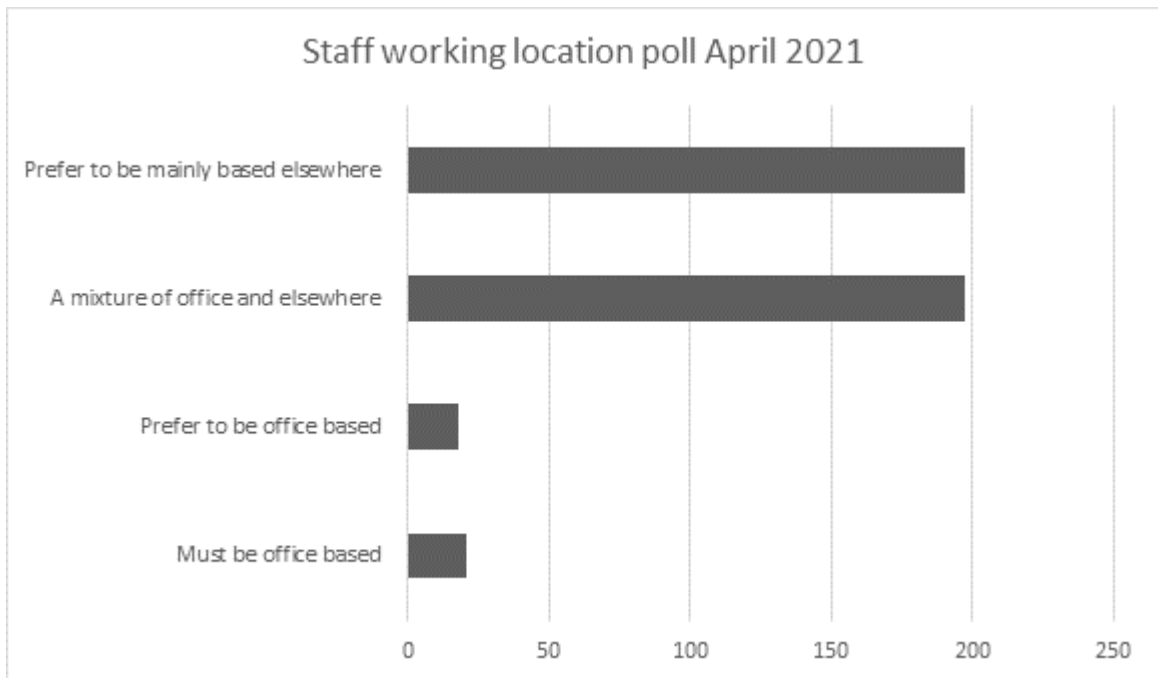
6.1 Employees

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. HR Committee Comments

- 10.1 The HR Committee, at its meeting on 23 June 2021, recommended the adoption of the Worksmart HR Policy to the Council, with a review after the first 12 months of the initiative being implemented.

11. Corporate Affairs and Local Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel Comments

- 11.1 The Corporate Affairs and Local Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel, at its meeting on 24 June 2021, supported the business case for Worksmart. The

Panel recognised that as the Council moved forward with more hybrid working, this would necessitate a review of the Council's use of offices across the District, to ensure it met the needs of the organisation moving forward. The Panel welcomed the opportunity to consider these matters at the appropriate time

12. Financial Implications

12.1 There are no immediate Financial Implications arising from the report, however it is envisaged that increased remote working may result in recruitment savings and reduced travel, both resulting in a saving to the Council.

12.2 The provision of screens to employees and laptops to some members to enable effective working from home has resulted in the need to acquire additional ICT, but costs here have been contained within existing budgetary provision.

13. Crime & Disorder Implications

13.1 There are none arising as a result of the report.

14. Environmental Implications

14.1 As outlined in section 9 of the report, the adoption of the Worksmart Business Case and Hybrid Working Policy has the opportunity to make a positive contribution towards the Council's green agenda.

15. Conclusion

15.1 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.

16. Portfolio Holder Comments

16.1 I am grateful to all officers and elected members who completed the surveys. It is important that we maintain our high quality of service delivery while adapting the way we work. I am confident that this hybrid working policy seeks to meet the aspirations of our employees while protecting service delivery and maintaining productivity. As we move to the 'new normal' we will monitor the impact of these changes and it is likely that some adjustments will need to be made as we learn from our own experience and best practice from both the public and private sector.

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Background Papers

HR Committee - 23/6/21

Corp. Affairs Panel –

24/6/21

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WORKSMART - Hybrid Working Policy

We promote flexible working for all staff and will agree to an employee working partly or wholly from home or an alternative location (herein referred to collectively as 'off-site') as opposed to solely from an NFDC workplace, where appropriate.

Individual requests for hybrid working will depend on whether or not your work can be done off-site effectively. We cannot agree to all requests because every job is different, service demands are different and every employee is different.

An integral part of the decision as to whether agreement can be reached between the Manager and employee on the flexible working request will have regard to what is happening across other service areas. Requests for flexible working will not be considered in isolation but on a corporate basis.

If making a request to work off-site you should consider whether or not you have the necessary organisational and time-management skills; the ability to work without direct supervision; and are able to cope with the potentially conflicting demands of work and family.

This policy outlines the working arrangements that will apply when a flexible working request has been approved. All requests granted will initially be for a period of 12 months. A review will then be undertaken before any further request is agreed to. Should there be concerns about productivity then meetings must be arranged during the trial to discuss this. If the issues cannot be overcome then the trial may be halted.

Hours of work

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. These should typically be between the hours of 8am and 6pm.

We would expect all staff to be in regular contact with their supervisor and team colleagues when working off-site.

Where employees are required to be accessible to members of the public then arrangements need to be put in place to accommodate this. Where members of the public are unable or unwilling to use devices to facilitate a virtual meeting then alternative arrangements need to be made which will include face to face meetings at an NFDC workplace.

All employees must ensure they take adequate rest breaks, as set out by the Working Time Regulations 1998:

- take a break of at least 20 minutes if working a period of 6 hours or more;
- ensure the time period between stopping work one day and beginning the next is not less than 11 hours; and
- have at least one complete day each week when no work is done.

All employees working off site will be required to complete a DSE Assessment of their off site set up and this will need to be submitted as part of their application for flexible working. The Council has appropriate workspace in its office locations for any employer whose home DSE assessment fails to provide a suitable workspace.

Visits to the employer's premises

Any staff that work off-site are required, on request, to attend the NFDC workplace for purposes such as, but not limited to; training, performance assessments, collaborative work and team briefings. In the event of any ICT issues experienced you may be asked to attend the NFDC workplace to provide ICT staff physical access to your device. The dates and times of such visits will be agreed in advance. Travel to and from the NFDC workplace will be in the employees own time.

Equipment and materials

We will provide and maintain all ICT equipment and materials necessary for you to work from home. It is your duty to ensure that proper care is taken of such equipment and materials.

Specifically, we will provide:

- a laptop computer;
- Screen
- Keyboard / mouse

On termination of your employment for any reason, we will have the right to visit your home at an agreed time and retrieve all equipment, materials and documents belonging to us if you are unable to bring them back to the office yourself.

Telephone and internet accounts

You will pay the costs for all telephone and internet connections in your home and these must be of a suitable quality to ensure you can carry out your work with maximum productivity. If a suitable stable internet connection is not available then you will be unable to work from that location.

We will pay all charges on any mobile phone provided by us, with the strict proviso that it must be used only for work-related purposes. The employee should be aware of their data usage on their NFDC device and speak to ICT immediately if they have concerns about data limits.

Mileage Claims

On days that you work from home / off-site you will be able to claim mileage for any visits undertaken using your home / off-site location as your base.

On days when you work in the NFDC workplace – any mileage claimed should start using the NFDC workplace as your base starting point.

Employees are responsible for planning their days sensibly to minimise travel and downtime during work hours.

Stationery Printing and Postage

If you require stationery to complete your job whilst working off-site, then this should be collected from the NFDC workplace.

There will be no reimbursement of printing or postage costs. The Corporate Admin team offer a printing and postal service and this can be used via the online eform available on Forestnet.

Security

You must not allow members of your family or third parties to access or use our equipment.

Employees who work off-site are responsible for keeping all documents and information associated with our business secure at all times. Specifically, those that work from home are under a duty to:

- keep filing cabinets and drawers locked when they are not being used;
- keep all documentation under lock and key at all times except when in use; and
- use a unique password for the computer and any other digital devices.

Further, the computer and other equipment provided by us must be used for work-related purposes only and must not be used by any other member of the family or third party at any time or for any purpose. All employees working off-site must continue to adhere to the ICT Security Policy; http://forestnet/media/1111/ICT-Security-Policy/pdf/ICT_Security_Policy_-_New.pdf

Health and safety issues

We are legally obliged to ensure the health and safety of homeworkers in the same way as office-based staff. We are therefore required to ensure that:

- all equipment is safe;
- all articles and substances are handled and stored safely;
- an assessment of your workstation is conducted;
- information and training on the safe use of equipment, including display screen equipment, is provided; and
- relevant risk assessments are carried out.

All employees who work off-site have a duty to ensure, insofar as is reasonably practicable, that they work in a safe manner and that they follow all health and safety instructions issued by us from time to time.

Insurance

The homeworker is responsible for checking that all home and contents insurance policies provide adequate cover for the fact that they work from home. Any additional costs would need to be met by the employee.

Mortgage or rental agreements

You are responsible for checking applicable mortgage or rental agreements to ensure you are permitted to work from home, and for obtaining any permissions necessary to work from home.

Requests to work from home or an alternative location

Any employee who wishes to work from home or an alternative location should make the request under the council's Worksmart Flexible Working Procedure. In general, most requests should be made with a view to spending a proportion of a working week off-site, and a proportion at an NFDC workplace. Your manager will arrange a meeting to discuss the feasibility of your flexible working request within 28 days. If you do not accept the outcome of that meeting, you have the right to request a review be carried out by your Service Manager.

It is our policy to view such requests in a positive light and we will, whenever it is possible and practicable, agree to the request. You must however be in a position where your productivity will not be affected by working

WORKSMART

Hybrid Working Guidance – Elected Members

Background

This document outlines guidance for Elected Members in the wider context of the Council's Worksmart Policy for staff.

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.

A survey of Elected Members was undertaken 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.

Members' Survey Results

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

- 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.

Formal Meetings

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.

Formal meetings will continue to be held from the Council's Appletree Court offices.

Task and Finish Groups / Working Groups

The Council is investing in ICT infrastructure to allow Hybrid Meetings to take place. It is anticipated that pilot Hybrid Meetings could be held from August 2021.

In the meantime, Task and Finish Groups and Working Groups will be held as virtual meetings (following the Government coronavirus roadmap), with face-to-face options returning thereafter.

Informal Meetings and Briefings

As with Task and Finish Groups, it is anticipated that informal meetings and briefings could be held as Hybrid Meetings from August 2021.

In the meantime, face-to-face meetings with Council officers should be pre-arranged to ensure that attendees are on site at the preferred meeting time. Virtual meetings are encouraged if convenient for the attendees and the type of meeting, and specifically in line with the Government's coronavirus roadmap.

Ward / Case Work

The Members' Room at Appletree Court is available for Members to work on ward or case work from the Council's offices.

Remote working on ward or case work is encouraged where convenient and appropriate and is supported by the Council's ICT offering for Members.

ICT Equipment

All Members have been offered an individual ICT assessment to establish any necessary measures to fulfil their duties as a councillor. Standard issue laptop devices have been made available and over half of councillors are currently using one.

Peripherals are also available to Members such as keyboard, mouse and headset.

All Members are encouraged to routinely review their ICT setup and requirements to ensure they have the required support in place. It is the responsibility of an individual Member to ensure their broadband is adequate to support any virtual or hybrid meetings they attend. The Council can advise on this via the ICT assessment process.

In preparation for the 2023 elections, the Council will explore options for the issue of standard devices to all councillors. Standard devices provide for a smoother working experience and integration with officer functionality, which is crucial in a Hybrid Working environment.

ICT Security

Members must not allow family or third parties to access or use NFDC equipment.

Members are responsible for keeping all documents and information associated with Council business secure at all times. The following specific actions are recommended:-

- keep filing cabinets and drawers locked when they are not being used;
- keep all documentation under lock and key at all times except when in use; and
- use a unique password for the computer and any other digital devices.

Further, the computer and other equipment provided by the Council must be used for Council business only and must not be used by any other member of the family or third party at any time or for any purpose.

Sustainability

Moving to a hybrid way of working enables the Council to make a good contribution towards its sustainability agenda.

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.

The 44,000 miles travel in 2019/20 equates to 12.34 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.

The Council will monitor this performance to identify both financial efficiencies and the contribution made to the sustainability agenda.

Moving to virtual and hybrid meetings where appropriate has also enabled Members, managers and employees to stay in touch without the need to commute.

The Council is aiming to discourage mass use of printing in line with its commitment to reduce its carbon footprint. To that end, Members are encouraged to consider going paperless with the support of a Council device for viewing documents.

More flexible paper options are available, such as more complex documents being made available in paper (e.g. planning), whilst viewing other committee agendas and reports on a Council device.

Wellbeing Support

Members are routinely sent health and wellbeing information and the Employee Assistance Programme continues to be made available for Members. The aim is to ensure that Members can look after every aspect of their health, whether that be their mental wellbeing, their physical wellbeing, their social wellbeing or their financial wellbeing.

Member Poll - Results

37
Responses

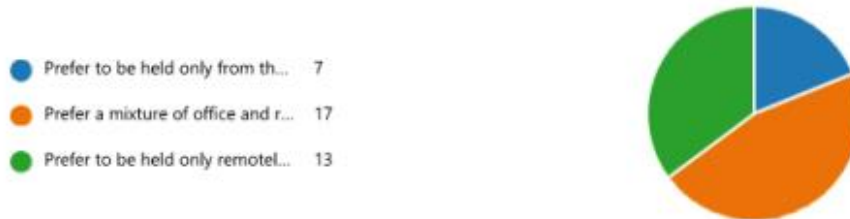
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Average time to complete

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:-

