

REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR - CUSTOMERS, GOVERNANCE AND EMPLOYEES

UPDATE ON REVIEW OF FLEXIBLE WORKING

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with a further update on the review of flexible working arrangements for Council employees and to confirm the Council's accreditation as a Timewise employer.

Information

2. A report was presented to Personnel Committee on 23 May 2018 providing members with information on the negotiations on a revised package of terms and conditions for the Council's directly employed workforce. The package was subsequently agreed and implemented from 1 April 2019. The report specifically mentioned work being undertaken with Timewise, an award-winning social business providing consultancy services to help identify, encourage adoption of and share best practice on flexible working. A further report was presented in October 2018 to provide an update on the work which was ongoing with managers and the recognised trade unions.
3. Employees were advised that the work around flexible working would continue and there was an opportunity to comment in a series of employee workshops led by the Chief Executive. Employees unable to attend the workshops were provided the opportunity to email their comments, ideas and feedback to a confidential email address and this information was added to that already gathered from the sessions and other subsequent engagement activities which have taken place.
4. Following on from an initial scoping meeting with managers, the trades unions and Timewise, there have been ongoing discussions with Timewise about the Council's existing flexible working provisions and an action plan was developed to focus on the areas requiring further development. This has enabled the Council to become part of the growing network of local authorities taking a leadership role on flexible and agile working which continues to ensure that the Council has the workforce it needs now and for the future.
5. The very positive discussions with Timewise, managers and trades union colleagues began to look at different approaches and best practice as we worked towards becoming a Timewise accredited employer. It is recognised that working flexibly is something many colleagues value and that it can also benefit the Council and people for whom we provide services.

6. This Council is committed to the principles of working flexibly where service needs allow. We have made significant investment in new technologies to enable and facilitate more flexible ways of working where this is an option. In seeking to review the Council's overall approach to flexible working, we will ensure that we make the best use of the available opportunities to support service delivery.
7. The Covid pandemic which required many employees to work differently has provided fresh impetus to the work which was being developed over time. The transfer for many employees to working remotely during the first lockdown created opportunities and challenges for both the physical environment and how work is delivered.
8. Members may recall the report to November 2020 Committee on the Workforce Resilience and Recovery Strategy and Action Plan which was unanimously approved. The action plan has a specific strand on smarter working which will further embed the principles of flexible working across the Council's workforce.
9. The feedback from the employee workshops proved invaluable in shaping the ongoing work around flexible working with Timewise. Clearly many colleagues value the opportunities it presents but in some places there is an issue around what working flexibly actually means. For some areas it is viewed simply as a way to alter start and finish times of work. However, there are many more applications providing a much greater range of options for services to consider from revised working patterns, remote working, compressed hours to more fundamentally how jobs are designed to reflect the different ways some parts of our workforce can now operate.
10. An employee survey returned at the beginning of June clearly highlighted the many positives employees experienced from the ability to work more flexibly. However, as we know, the pandemic has also highlighted issues of isolation, a concern over the loss of team working and personal safety which will continue to be addressed as part of the ongoing work. This work on flexible working supports our ambition to be an Employer of Choice and better places us in the race for talent.
11. Having undertaken the initial scoping work with Timewise and provided them with copies of our existing flexible working provisions, we have developed and submitted our improvement plan (Appendix 1). I am pleased to report we have received formal notification on 11 December 2020 of our accreditation as a Timewise employer (Appendix 2).

Other Options Considered

12. Timewise is the recognised sector leader in developing innovative solutions around flexible working and therefore the Council wanted to align itself with their accreditation process to demonstrate ongoing commitment to meet the expectations of our workforce as a modern public services employer.

Reasons for Recommendations

13. Members have been greatly interested in the well-being of the Council's workforce and seek to understand the reasons for employee absence and how we can remain an employer of choice in a very competitive job market. Understanding what perspective and existing employees want in terms of flexible working is critical to ensure we have a workforce which can transform and deliver the services required by the residents of Nottinghamshire. Employees have clearly stated how much they value the ability to work flexibly where service needs allow.

Statutory and Policy Implications

14. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Data Protection and Information Governance

15. There is no personal information about named individuals contained within the body of the report. However, there are challenges for the Council as employees choose to work more flexibly around data security, safeguarding personal information and information storage. These issues remain under constant review and are primary considerations in the design and development of training packages to support flexible working solutions.

Financial Implications

16. The Council has paid the Timewise fee of £4,000. It is considered value for money to use their nationally gained expertise to support the Council as it continues to develop its flexible working arrangements. This will be an annual charge which can be met from existing service budgets and will enable the Council to continue to access workshops and development tools which will assist in developing our approach and maintaining our accreditation.

Human Resources Implications

17. The work to develop the Council's flexible working solutions is a shared responsibility between Human Resources and the Smarter Working work strand involving representatives from across all departments, and the Workforce Resilience and Recovery Group, chaired by the Service Director Customers, Governance and Employees. Gathering information from employees, managers and the recognised trades unions continues through various engagement routes including the Q&A sessions with the Chief Executive and Corporate Leadership Team and in the existing consultation and negotiating panels. The recognised trade unions have been supportive of the work undertaken to maximise the benefits of flexible working for our employees wherever possible.

Smarter Working Implications

18. The opportunities to maximise the benefits of flexible working rely on the existing principles of smarter working but extend beyond the physical environment and address more fundamental issues such as how jobs are designed to reflect a more transformational approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 1) Members recognise the achievement of securing accreditation as a Timewise employer.
- 2) Members agree to the continuing work to further explore how the Council can maximise the positive outcomes provided by flexible working opportunities.
- 3) Members agree to the outcome of the Timewise accreditation submission being appropriately communicated to our existing workforce and utilise the Timewise emblem in future recruitment advertisements.

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Chief Executive’s Department

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

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Constitutional Comments (KK 16/12/20)

19. The proposals in this report are within the remit of the Personnel Committee.

Financial Comments (SES 18/12/2020)

20. The financial implications are set out in paragraph 16 of the report. The Council has paid the Timewise fee of £4,000. It is considered value for money to use their nationally gained expertise to support the Council as it continues to develop its flexible working arrangements. This will be an annual charge which can be met from existing service budgets and will enable the Council to continue to access workshops and development tools which will assist in developing our approach and maintaining our accreditation.

HR Comments (JP 23/12/20)

21. The human resources implications are implicit in the body of the report and will be the platform for wider employee engagement with the Corporate Leadership Team, departmental leadership teams, directly with the wider workforce and their nominated representatives.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All