



REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL

SMARTER WORKING – HYBRID WORKING STRATEGY FOR THE COUNTY COUNCIL

Purpose of the Report

1. To approve the Council's new Hybrid Working Strategy as part of the Council's wider Smarter Working approach.

Background and information

2. A report to the Council's Improvement and Change Sub-Committee in March 2021 outlined the future vision for Smarter Working, including reference to emerging hybrid working approaches and changes to working practices since the COVID-19 Pandemic began.
3. The Council's Smarter Working vision was articulated as "The workplace of the future is an environment built and designed to drive Nottinghamshire County Council forward with a shared sense of purpose and culture of collaboration." It was acknowledged in the report that the Council's approach would continue to evolve.
4. As defined by the UK Government, Smarter Working empowers organisations and individuals to make the right decisions about where, when, and how people work; optimising the use of workplaces and technology, and realising savings for the taxpayer. It improves productivity through a focus on outputs and enables a better work life balance for all. There are, therefore, many benefits to be gained through the Council continuing to evolve the way it expects to work in smart ways including:
 - working closer to our communities and with our partners to improve outcomes for local people;
 - enabling staff to work productively through better use of technologies;
 - savings in travel time and cost by using conferencing software and holding online meetings;
 - protecting the environment by reducing employee travel to and from work, and working day travel, thereby reducing vehicle emissions and the use of carbon-based fuels;
 - staff feeling trusted to work flexibly, with improved wellbeing and reduced absenteeism;
 - improved recruitment, retention and motivation of staff;
 - protecting critical services through reinvesting cost savings into services from the reduced requirement for Council properties.

5. In the financial year 2020-2021, the Council undertook circa 3.5 million fewer miles travel than the previous year equating to a reduced financial spend of £1.6M and reduced carbon emissions of 1000 tonnes or the equivalent of annual emissions from 112 average households (based on the average household emissions across 6 core activities – Heating, Transport, Electricity, Aviation, Diet/Agriculture and Waste).
6. The Council's future approach to how we work will help towards continuing this reduction and delivery of our commitment to reducing our carbon emissions in line with the declaration of a Climate Emergency which was agreed at the Full Council meeting on 27th May 2021.
7. The Council is reviewing its office estate as part of the Investing in Nottinghamshire programme to ensure that the Council delivers services to local communities in the most efficient and effective way, retaining a reduced estate of financially cost-effective buildings, designed, used and operated in the most environmentally sound way.

Development of the Hybrid Working Strategy

8. A workforce check-in survey which focussed on employee wellbeing and future working arrangements was conducted in April 2021. The majority of 2,248 employees who took part in this survey feel satisfied with their health, safety, and wellbeing at work and with the support, supervision, and guidance they receive from their manager. Over three quarters of those surveyed felt that they are a valued member of the team and want to have the opportunity to spend time with their team in future.
9. Approximately half of employees who responded see themselves working a blend of home and office work in future. A further 32% see themselves as mainly home based, 6% primarily office based and 14% working in the community and other bases.
10. The key themes identified by employees in relation to future working arrangements were the need to:
 - engage and inform employees about future changes to working arrangements;
 - strike a balance between service needs and personal circumstances;
 - equip employees to undertake their roles effectively;
 - set clear expectations for how employees can work;
 - ensure workplaces are safe and enable us to live and work safely with COVID.
11. This valuable intelligence has informed the development of the Hybrid Working Strategy. The responses and underlying themes emerging from the survey are being used to shape how our future workspaces will be designed and built, and how we will work and use emerging technologies in the future.
12. The strategy attached to this report, as Appendix A, outlines the Council's vision, hybrid working principles, scope, and model. The Council's hybrid working model focusses on three key elements, People, Buildings and Technology, working together underpinned by a strong, positive organisational culture that empowers employees and encourages managers to exercise discretion in determining how work is organised and delivered to improve outcomes for local people.

13. Effective communication and engagement with employees are critical to the delivery of the Council's hybrid working approach. Employees, staff support groups and trades union colleagues will be involved in the implementation of the strategy and its ongoing development and review to ensure our approach continues to meet the needs of the Council, our workforce and local people whilst reflecting changing circumstances, new ideas, tools and technologies as they become available.

Implementation

14. The Council has developed the following three-phase approach to the implementation of hybrid working:
 - **Stage 1** – At the point of writing the report, the Prime Minister has indicated that working from home guidance will cease on 19th July, subject to confirmation on 12th July. Government guidance says that it is no longer necessary for Government to instruct people to work from home and employers can plan a return to workplaces. An update will be provided at the meeting.
 - **Stage 2 – (July until Autumn 2021)** It is anticipated that prioritised services will be able to return to offices utilising hybrid working principles. For certain offices within the estate there will not be the full kit and equipment in situ due to the need for staff to work from home during the pandemic and for this to remain in place whilst we fully transition to new ways of working.
 - **Stage 3 – (By the end October 2021)** Implementation of the hybrid working model, with buildings redesigned and equipment in place to enable new more flexible ways of working.
15. Employees, staff support groups and trades union colleagues will be involved in developing, testing, and reviewing hybrid working approaches, tools, and materials to ensure they enable staff to work effectively and more flexibly to improve outcomes for local people. This will include staff focus groups, departmental and corporate leadership teams, surveys, using feedback from Employee Personal Development Reviews and other tools such as learning histories to ensure we build on learning and experience as our approach develops.
16. The Council is also an independently accredited Timewise employer which recognises the Council's commitment to flexible working to benefit employees, our communities, and the people to whom we provide services. Timewise is the sector leader in developing innovative solutions around flexible working and will continue to work with the Council in implementing the Hybrid Working Strategy.

Other Options Considered

17. The Council could have returned to some of the more traditional ways of working in place before the pandemic. This approach would not deliver the increased flexibility and responsiveness the Council and most other large employers require in modern and evolving working environments. This would be likely to have a detrimental effect on productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness. Such an approach would not reflect the views of our employees or improve wellbeing and work life balance amongst our workforce. Consequently, employee motivation, engagement, recruitment, and retention as an employer of choice would be likely to suffer.

Reasons for Recommendations

18. The Council's Hybrid Working Strategy builds on work underway prior to the pandemic and new ways of working, learning and experience from working during the pandemic. The Council has previously established the principle of wanting to use the experience during the pandemic as a springboard to modernise ways of working and maximise the use of technology. The proposed approach will increase productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness and reduce travel saving time, money and continue to reduce the Council's carbon footprint. It will enable the Council to work more flexibly, closer to our communities and ensure services are designed and delivered to meet the needs of local people. The strategy will support a better work life balance for our employees improving motivation, recruitment, and retention of staff.

Statutory and Policy Implications

19. 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

20. The programme and outcomes will be designed to comply with current data protection requirements.

Financial Implications

21. A significant proportion of the outlined future vision is already funded within the County Council's Capital Programme. However, some additional funding, particularly for the technology requirements outlined, may be required as rollout progresses. Work continues to model the financial requirements which may result in future bids for capital resources.

Human Resources Implications

22. Engagement is ongoing with trades union colleagues, staff support groups and employees as the Council's hybrid working approach is developed, implemented, and then reviewed.

Public Sector Equality Duty implications

23. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken which considers the protected characteristics within the Equality Act 2010 and identifies relevant mitigations which will be put in place to deal with any issues arising.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 1) Members approve the Council's Hybrid Working Strategy attached as Appendix A.
- 2) Personnel Committee receives future reports on the implementation, progress, and review of the Hybrid Working Strategy, with the first review after 6 months.

Councillor Ben Bradley MP
Leader of the County Council

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Marjorie Toward – Service Director Customers, Governance and Employees on 0115 9774404

Constitutional Comments (KK 05/07/21)

24. The proposals in this report are within the remit of the Policy Committee.

Financial Comments (NS 02/07/21)

25. The report outlines the need to move to a modern and flexible approach to the delivery of our services. Previous investment in technology enabled the Council to respond to the pandemic and as we continue to adapt our services to the hybrid way of working some additional investment in technology will be required. The funding for this will be met from a combination of reserves and existing budgets flowing from the savings being made in travel expenditure. This latter amount will depend on the level of travel undertaken in the hybrid model.

26. As indicated in the report, the extent of additional investment will become clearer as the modelling of the appropriate solutions are developed and rolled-out across the Council. Future bids for funding will progress through the Corporate Asset Management Group and the relevant Committee in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations.

HR Comments (GME 05.07.21)

27. The Council's employees are its most valuable asset and it is vital that they continue to be fully engaged in the development of the Hybrid Working Strategy to ensure its successful implementation. A series of engagement events will take place over the summer months to gather people's feedback, ideas and concerns about the future of work. Work is underway to review the Council's employment procedures to ensure they reflect this changed way of working. The information from the engagement activities will inform a refreshed learning and development offer, a revised range of guidance on how, where and when work is undertaken, underpinned by a set of Frequently Asked Questions. Engagement will take place across the whole workforce and include the recognised trade unions and staff support groups.

28. This will be an iterative process as new technologies emerge and the hybrid working model evolves and develops. The strategy provides a platform to explore and maximise the benefits of flexible ways of working for employees across the Council. This will result in increased efficiency, improved physical and mental health and well-being due to greater autonomy and work/life balance. This will ensure we have a workforce prepared, supported and enabled to deliver enhanced services to the residents of Nottinghamshire and build on the Council's status as an "Employer of Choice". This means the Council will be able to attract and retain people

with the right skills, knowledge, experience and attitudes to ensure the future success of the Council and its ability to deliver a wide range of modern public services to the people of Nottinghamshire.

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.

Improvement and Change Sub-Committee Report – A new Smarter Working Vision for the County Council (22nd March 2021)

Policy Committee Report – Investing in Nottinghamshire: Utilising the Council’s Property Estate to deliver environmental, economic and financial benefits in a post-COVID world (9th December 2020)

Policy Committee Report - Investing in Nottinghamshire: Making the Best Use of Council Premises (12th February 2020)

Improvement and Change Sub-Committee Report – Smarter Working Programme (25th November 2019)

Policy Committee Report - Investing in Nottinghamshire: Delivering the Council Plan through a second Phase of the Smarter Working Programme (20th March 2019)

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All