

# Smarter Working

## Hybrid Working Strategy



# Context

The ability of the County Council to succeed is underpinned by a well-supported workforce which is fit for the future, employed in an organisation which is digitally mature and innovative.

The Council's workforce is diverse, operating a range of working styles, in different job roles, delivering a wide range of services to local people. The scope for and nature of hybrid working will depend on roles, the nature of the service, team, and individual circumstances.

Whilst working through the Covid-19 pandemic was challenging, this has provided us with the opportunity to review the way we work and build on the progress of our Smarter Working programme, which was already underway prior to pandemic. This includes the ability of many more employees to work remotely or from home, utilising technology more effectively. The Council will use the learning from the pandemic and feedback from employees to provide a springboard for new ways of working in the future.

Our workforce is the Council's greatest asset and it is vital to continue to engage with our employees about the future of work. Feedback from employees in the most recent Workforce Wellbeing survey in April 2021 was very positive with the majority of employees feeling 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 working with their team in future.

Approximately half of respondents 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.

The responses and underlying themes emerging from the survey are being used to shape the next iteration of the smarter working vision and how our future workspaces will be designed and built. This valuable intelligence has also informed the development of the Hybrid Working Strategy.



## Our Vision

The workplaces of the future will be environments designed, built, and adapted to drive Nottinghamshire County Council forward with a shared sense of purpose within a culture of collaboration aiming to improve outcomes for local people.

Our approach to hybrid working sets out to achieve dynamic work settings and environments and create more responsive, efficient, and effective ways of working. We believe this will improve performance, knowledge sharing and autonomy leading to enhanced employee and service user satisfaction.

# The benefits of hybrid working

Working more flexibly in a hybrid model will increase the Council's efficiency and effectiveness and improve the productivity of employees. It will mean less travel, save time and money, and reduce our carbon footprint. More modern, agile ways of working, which support a better work-life balance, will improve recruitment and retention of employees with the skills and experience we need to deliver critical services.

Working differently will enable us to be closer to our communities and work with them to ensure that services are accessible and designed and delivered to meet the needs of local people in the best way possible, maximising the use of digital and other technologies.

## Hybrid working principles

- **The Council will be flexible and forward thinking** reflecting the diversity of our workforce and services we provide and enabling us to continue to adapt to changing circumstances.
- Our workplaces will be **hybrid workspaces** which merge physical and virtual approaches, encourage use of technology, and enable digital ways of working.
- Our approach will maximise **spatial and financial efficiencies** and be **environmentally sustainable** in a reduced county-wide estate.
- Service imperatives will be prioritised, led by the nature of the work, and maximise interdependencies between services to **improve outcomes for local people**.
- Our building design, usage and ways of working will encourage **closer working with partners** to further enhance service delivery for local residents.
- The **health, safety and wellbeing** of our employees, Councillors, partners, and people using our buildings will be a key consideration.
- Working spaces and ways of working will encourage team and **social interaction, collaboration, innovation, and creativity** and help build **working relationships**.
- We will **communicate** with and **involve** staff; trades union colleagues and staff support groups in designing and developing our workspaces and ways of working.
- We will ensure people have the necessary **tools, equipment, training, and ongoing support** to fulfil their role wherever and however they are working.
- We will ensure new working practices are **inclusive** of all and reflect diverse employee groups and individual needs, not a "one size fits all" approach.
- Managers will be supported to create **clear expectations** about how and when people can/should work and manage their teams effectively.
- We will prioritise effective **information governance and confidentiality**, particularly in respect of personal and sensitive information.



# Scope

Departmental leadership teams will determine which services and teams can benefit from hybrid working as some roles do not lend themselves to hybrid working and will continue to require face to face working or working in a particular place or community. Managers will be supported and enabled to have conversations with individuals to discuss how individual preferences can be balanced with service imperatives. Any issues around disability and reasonable adjustments will form part of these conversations.

Other people using Council buildings on a day-to-day basis including Councillors, partners and service users will be also involved in designing, developing, and implementing hybrid working approaches

across the Council in order to ensure our services are accessible and inclusive and meet a range of different needs.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council used virtual Committee meetings to enable democratic processes to continue with minimum disruption. Virtual meetings facilitated greater Councillor attendance and increased public engagement with council meetings. Legislative changes would provide flexibility for the Council to determine whether public meetings can take place virtually or in a hybrid way. This strategy will support greater Councillor involvement in the operation of the Council.



# The Hybrid Working Model

The Hybrid Working Model primarily focusses on people, places, and technology. The success of these working arrangements relies on ensuring that we have confident and skilled people, supported by technology, appropriate workplaces, equipment, systems and processes, who are willing and able to work in an agile and flexible way to meet service needs and improve outcomes for local people.

**A modern workspace is no longer the place that you go, it is what you do and how you do it.**

The diagram opposite illustrates how the key elements of the Hybrid Working Model; People, Buildings and Technology work together underpinned by a strong, positive organisational culture which empowers employees and encourages managers to exercise discretion in determining how work is organised and delivered. This is reinforced by ongoing dialogue and engagement with employees at all levels.

## Culture and Behaviours



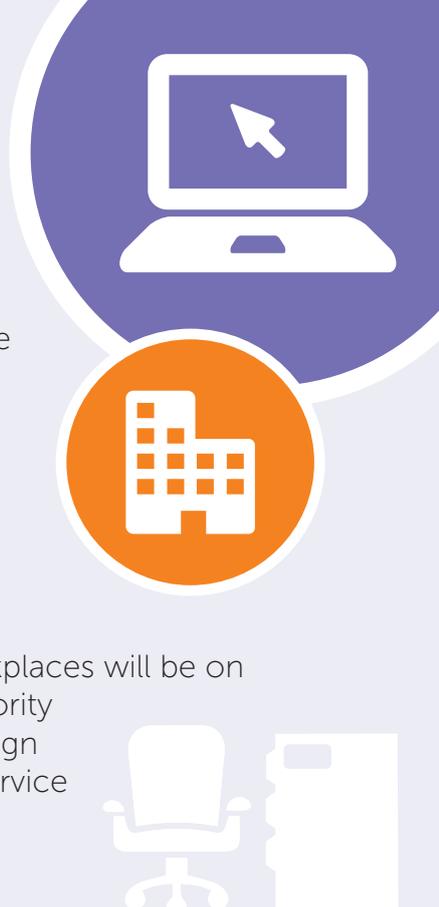
## Communication & Engagement

## Building and equipment

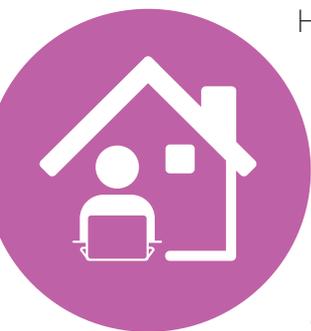
Workspaces will be inclusive and accessible and designed to promote user wellbeing including considering ergonomics, acoustics, and the green environment. Office space will be team focussed promoting a creative and collaborative culture with appropriate spaces made available for individual focus, meetings with colleagues and local people. We will work to an average seat ratio of 4:10 where this meets service needs.

Work is underway, as part of developing our Corporate Landlord model, to review safety and building management arrangements and standards to ensure continued safety of people using and working in our buildings in a more flexible way.

Changes to the way we use our buildings and the roll out of hybrid workplaces will be on a phased basis across the Council estate. Services will determine the priority areas and managers and employees will be involved as part of the redesign and reoccupation of our buildings to ensure the needs of employees, service users and other users of the building are considered from an early stage.



## Technology, systems, policies and processes



Hybrid working technology and approaches will provide the ability for many employees to work effectively using modern working practices and tools in a wide range of places and not be physically limited to particular workplaces.

Physical and virtual office spaces will be merged with tools in place to make workspaces accessible and inclusive by enabling workspaces to be used flexibly and collaboratively to meet a range of needs amongst different users with a balance of office space, quiet space, private and confidential space and bookable desks and meeting rooms.

Flexible meeting spaces and supporting technology will enable meetings to be productive whatever the location of the participants and ensure that all parties are able to take part and contribute effectively, regardless of their location. The technology used will be accessible to all and enable effective participation and collaboration for all users.

Enhanced use of technology will enable us to improve information sharing, efficiency, productivity and sustain effective working relationships. Increased digitisation of records and processes will improve management of data, reduce storage requirements, improve the use of our accommodation, and enable greater security of information.

Existing policies and processes will be reviewed and redesigned to realign with hybrid working practices. Employees, trades union colleagues and staff support groups will be involved in this to ensure a range of different needs are reflected in our approach.



# People and culture

The hybrid working model will give people flexibility, empowering them to balance their work and home lives whilst ensuring that service priorities are met. Employees will remain accountable for their work outcomes but have greater freedom on how, where and when their work is delivered. Clearly there will be some areas of work where this level of flexibility is not achievable but there is still a drive to explore how flexibility can be built into working across the Council.

To be successful the Hybrid Working Model will rely on the following:

- **Empowerment** – New working environments and ways of working will be developed that ensure employees are provided with tools, opportunities, and support to empower and enable them to maintain high levels of engagement and performance in a positive, supportive culture, based on trust.
- **Effective leadership and management** – Work continues to develop strong, confident, and engaging leaders with a clearly articulated vision of success and positive role modelling. Managers and leaders will encourage new ways of doing things and operating in a new context to remove barriers, foster innovation and capture the creativity which has been demonstrated during the pandemic. Embedding more shared and quicker decision making will drive new ways of working.
- **Collaboration** – A shared sense of purpose and a culture of collaboration will be critical to reinforcing the Council's vision as a forward-thinking organisation. Workspaces will be designed to facilitate effective collaboration between employees and with their managers, encourage knowledge sharing and reflect purposeful and different ways of working.
- **Behavioural safety** – We will develop and promote positive messages and behaviours around safety and ensure workplaces continue to be covid-secure as we continue to live safely with covid. We will take steps to mitigate risks and ensure that health and safety management systems reflect hybrid working arrangements.

- **Greater focus on mental health and wellbeing** – Our duty of care includes employees' physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing. Feedback from the Workforce survey suggests that we need to raise awareness and make better use of our existing support mechanisms for employees, ensure this support is meeting employees' needs and that managers are encouraging employees to prioritise their wellbeing. We will build on existing provision, review, and adapt this to reflect hybrid working arrangements and maintain our sense of team within a culture that is physically and psychologically safe.

To support different ways of working our organisational culture will encourage all employees to adopt a set of behaviours which include:

- Being flexible
- Open to change
- Willing to learn and develop new skills
- Behaving safely
- Trusting and respecting all colleagues
- Building and maintaining effective working relationships
- Willing to be involved and engaged
- Being creative, brave, and not blaming
- Recognising there are consequences of our action or inaction
- Promoting dignity and inclusivity

# Communication and engagement

The strategy sets out the Council’s high-level framework for hybrid working. Effective communication and engagement with employees, including front line workers, is essential in order to develop our culture, new behaviours, and ways of working. Consistent messages delivered as part of a two-way process ensuring that feedback from employees is used to shape our detailed approach will be central to developing and implementing our hybrid working strategy in practice.

A new Employee Communication and Engagement Strategy is being developed to support ongoing engagement, involvement and empowerment of employees and their managers by working through line managers and their teams and encouraging a more bottom up approach to communication, collaboration and cross-council working.



## Implementation and review

Additional guidance, toolkits and FAQs will be developed to assist in the implementation and application of the Hybrid Working Strategy. The Council’s Smarter Working Hub will be relaunched as a focus for information.

Employee focus groups and sessions with corporate, departmental, and extended leadership teams will be used to test and develop hybrid working approaches and materials, seek views and better understand the potential impacts on employees. Tools such as Learning Histories will enable us to test and develop our approaches over time ensuring we collect and use learning from earlier stages of activity to shape the next phases as we continually develop our approach.

Our approach will need to be kept under review to ensure ongoing success and that it continues to reflect learning, developing and new technologies and changing circumstances. We will undertake an initial review 6 months after implementation of our Hybrid Working Strategy to identify and resolve any initial issues.

Employee surveys and feedback from supervision and Employee Personal Development Reviews (EPDR’s) will help inform our review process. We will form a group of employees from across the Council who will be involved in reviewing our approach to ensure that we are able to keep up to date and reflect changes in our workforce and new developments in this evolving area of work. Trades union colleagues and our staff support groups will be involved in the initial implementation of our hybrid working model and subsequent reviews.





This information can be made available upon request in alternative formats and languages.