

Briefing Note

Title: Smart Working

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Intended audience: Internal Partner organisation Public Confidential

Purpose

To provide feedback on concerns raised by C3 Scrutiny Panel held on 18 April 2018

Overview

On 18 April 2018, C3 Scrutiny Panel was briefed on the possibility of introducing a Smart Working Policy at City of Wolverhampton Council. Within the briefing, a number of concerns were raised – this briefing note aims to respond to those.

Background

This briefing note is laid out by providing the concern raised and the response directly below it.

1. Why introduce a Smart Working Policy?

- 1.1 Concern – C3 wanted to understand the business case for introducing a Smart Working policy.
- 1.2 Response: There is no defined business case, the main driver was that in 2015 it was agreed to operate efficiently within the buildings we need and dispose of buildings we don't by working more proficiently in the buildings which remain open, under the Future Space work stream. This involved retaining 4 buildings, disposing of 16 and approximately 2,000 employees working from 4 buildings instead of 20.
- 1.3 As a result of the reduction of workspace within the Civic Centre, agile working was initially rolled out to encourage employees and managers to be flexible in terms of their work location. This would involve working from varying locations and having a bank of desks in the Civic Centre that could be used when back at the office. An Agile Working Protocol was introduced in 2017 to support this way of working and to provide employees and managers with some protocols and guidance around this.
- 1.4 The Future Space programme, which began in 2015 and has seen essential repairs, maintenance and improvement to the Civic Centre, has now concluded and has been handed back to Corporate Landlord. The programme was completed on time, in budget and will deliver annual savings of £500,000. This means that the final phase of employees can move into the Civic Centre so it is at planned capacity.
- 1.5 In February 2018 CWC conducted a Smart Working survey to find out employees' views on Smart Working and any potential barriers preventing Smart Working. This also helped to gauge the level of Smart Working practices adopted across the Council. There were 434

responses to the survey and respondents came from a wide range of services and locations across the Council.

- 1.6 Of those who responded, 60% of managers and 45% of employees (non-managers) confirmed they already adopt Smart Working practices. This includes ways of working such as; occasional working from home, using technology to replace the need for travelling to meetings, reporting progress to managers using technology, adapting the hours worked to the tasks that need to be completed and changing the location they work to be closer to the activities they have planned for the day.
- 1.7 Due to many of these practices already taking place across the Council, it was identified that there is a need to replace the current agile working protocol with a policy to ensure that these practices are governed appropriately, consistently and managed effectively.
- 1.8 To support this method of work, CWC recognises that there are a number of benefits for adoption of Smart Working as follows:

2. What are the benefits of Smart Working Policy?

2.1 Improved productivity

2.1.1 Putting a price on productivity is a challenging task. However, National research carried out by Lister and Harnish (2011) 'The Shifting Nature of work in the UK- bottom line benefits of teleworking' found that by 'workshifting' to mobile work, remote work at a client's location, work at a shared office centre/hub or home work just twice a week could bring about productivity savings. They identified a productivity increase equating to an annual saving per Smart Working employee of £2,054 per year (based on 2011 average national wage).

2.1.2 In Acas' research paper (2013) 'Home is where the work is' Acas found that performance is slightly higher for homeworkers and mobile workers. In addition, work hours were the shortest amongst office workers and homeworkers and partial homeworkers are more likely to work in excess of their contracted hours, while mobile workers work significantly more hours in excess of their contracts than all other groups of workers.

2.1.3 There is a need to carry out further research within CWC to understand the potential productivity benefits of Smart Working although increases in productivity have already been seen in some areas. The use of Skype to replace travel to meetings has been demonstrated in some services (see appendix 1- Smart Working in Adult Social Care) and having a clear Smart Working policy and revised travel policy will help to encourage further use of such practices.

2.1.4 Productivity can be increased across the Council through other smart working interventions, including using technology to work collaboratively on documentation and being able to access files from any location rather than having to return to a fixed office base. Other examples include field workers who visit clients in their own homes – they can travel to work locations close to them to print documents, check emails etc if they have available downtime rather than spend time travelling to their base location when it will take longer and cost more as it is further away.

2.1.5 In addition, employees may choose to begin work at a different work location as they have a meeting within that building later on in that day which also saves on travel time and cost.

2.2 Asset realisation

2.2.1 The benefits of delivering the Future Space programme will not be fully realised if Smart Working is not supported across the Council.

2.2.2 Within Council buildings there are 2,013 employees and 1,734 workstations. Up until now this ratio has been achieved through the flexible use of space including desk sharing and to a lesser extent the option for working from home. If, as planned, further buildings are disposed of, employees would have to be supported to work in fewer buildings. Increasing flexibility in terms of location and times of work is essential if the benefits of Future Space are to be fully met. This can be done by promoting the Smart Working policy and providing support to managers to facilitate the change to working practices.

2.2.3 In addition, the Smart Working survey found that employees wanted better use of space to allow them to work efficiently. This included; quiet space for uninterrupted work, more informal space to allow collaborative working and workspaces that allow skype calls to be made in a more private way.

2.3 Reduced cost of sickness absence

2.3.1 In 2014 the Office of National Statistics conducted a large-scale study which surveyed more than 60,000 people to investigate the relationship between commuting to work and personal well-being. It found on average, commuters were less satisfied with their lives, rated their daily activities as less worthwhile and reported less happiness and higher anxiety than non-commuters.

2.3.2 People working from home were the happiest and most satisfied group, and the most likely to find their work worthwhile.

2.3.3 Acas says 'in return for providing greater flexibility on hours, and offering opportunities to work from home, employers can often expect to see improved loyalty, engagement and productivity from their employees'.

2.3.4 A CIPD Absence Management Survey conducted in 2009 said 'In organisations where flexible working was not offered but valued by employees as an option they would like to have, an average of 7 days were lost per employee per year. Where flexible working was offered and valued by workers, average absence was 3.2 working days per employee per year.... Unfortunately for organisations that want to reduce sickness absence, there is no neat formula that says if they introduce flexible working practice X, they will reduce sickness absence by Y amount. But there is a general feeling that where flexible working practices are embraced by an organisation and help make it a better place to work, then sickness absence levels are likely to fall.'

2.3.5 In 2017-2018 CWC lost 39,735 days due to sickness absence. The public-sector average for 2016 was 9.3 days per employee per year (source: XpertHR survey conducted 2017). City of Wolverhampton Council's average during 2017-2018 per employee was 9.3 days.

2.3.6 Wokingham Borough Council introduced Smart Working in 2011 and found that absence rates for employees who were smart working is nearly 2 (FTE) days less than those who were not smart working (Source: <http://www.flexibility.co.uk/cases/wokingham-council-smart-working.htm>)

2.4 Reduction in travel

2.4.1 Currently CWC has annual mileage claims in the region of £531,000 and 1,196,656 miles are travelled by car for work related travel. This equates to 351,302 tonnes of CO2. By using the Smart Working technology available to us and supporting this with the Smart Working policy, we can help to reduce work related travel across the Council. This should result in a reduction in Carbon emissions and mileage expenses claims. Skype for Business is a key tool in reducing the need for work related travel and the Smart Working policy promotes the use of this and other communication and collaboration tools.

2.4.2 Examples where savings could be made include:

- Holding skype meetings rather than several people travelling to one location for a meeting
- Travelling to work locations close to meetings to work rather than back and forth to an office base
- Working from home and skyping in for meetings and telephone calls when needed
- Working from client sites or external locations where there is wi-fi

2.5 Recruitment and Retention

2.5.1 In research carried out by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD,2009) 65% of companies indicated that offering flexible work was their most effective hiring strategy.

2.5.2 Other local Councils offer flexible working arrangements, including Birmingham City Council who offer a 'Flex' scheme (24 hours a day). Under the scheme, employees have the flexibility to work around personal commitments to help achieve a better work/life balance. Core hours have been removed and employees are not restricted to working set hours in a fixed workplace. This scheme promotes equality, aims to increase agile working, increase morale, improve productivity and remove core hours.

2.5.3 The policy has the following exclusion 'The Flex Scheme may not be suitable for all roles or services within the organisation – for example, services that require face-to-face delivery during specified times'. It also says this method of working should not be allowed if it were to have a detrimental impact upon service delivery and it must be agreed by managers in advance.

2.5.4 The Flex scheme is intended to make Birmingham City Council: 'an employer of choice in order to attract and retain excellent staff'.

2.5.5 Allowing greater flexibility can support employees to be happier, healthier and more productive. CIPD research (2016, Employee Views on Working Life- Commuting and Flexible Working) 28% of respondents said that flexibility of working hours and locations was a key factor in them staying with their current employer.

2.5.6 It is important to note that Birmingham, Dudley and Walsall Councils have flexible working arrangements and relaxed working hours. CWC compete against these for talent acquisition – it is therefore vital that we review our working practices and hours of work so that we have an attractive offer for those who value flexibility or where it could be a determining factor in working for us.

3. Inclement Weather

3.1 Below is a table showing concerns raised by C3 Scrutiny panel in relation to inclement weather and the response from HR:

Concern from C3	HR Response
<p>3.2 The course of action taken by the Council during recent inclement weather was adversely affecting women due to the fact that more women were likely to take time off to look after dependants whilst schools/nurseries etc closed than men.</p>	<p>At CWC during the period between 01 April 2017 to 31 March 2018, a total of 1,103 days was booked on Agresso as Time off for Dependants across the Council (including WMPF).</p> <p>70% were booked by female employees and 30% by males. This is representative across the organisation as there were 70.5% females and 29.5% males.</p> <p>This shows that time off for dependants is taken equally between men and women at CWC.</p>
<p>3.3 There is a requirement that employers should give notice to make employees take annual leave</p>	<p>According to ACAS, all employees have the right to time off during working hours for dependants to deal with unforeseen matters and emergencies under the Employment Rights Act 1996. There is no legal right to be paid; however, some employers may offer a contractual right to pay under the terms and conditions of employment – CWC does, it offers up to 5 working days off a year for these circumstances and also where time off may be required for the bereavement of a relative.</p> <p>Time off for Dependants was not offered in this situation because advance severe weather warnings had been issued and this was therefore not classed as an ‘unforeseen matter or an emergency’.</p> <p>CWC allowed employees to take annual or flexi leave rather than taking unpaid leave to avoid any detrimental impact on pay – in addition, ACAS states where there is bad weather employers can allow employees to take annual leave - http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=2797#close</p>

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<p>3.4 Where a workplace is closed employees should be paid</p>	<p>This is correct but an employer also has the right to offer alternatives to the employee, these can be as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask staff to work from another workplace or temporarily work from home • Allow employees to come in slightly later than usual • Use flexible working to allow employees to make up lost time <p>Source: http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=2797#close</p>
<p>3.5 Where employees have no annual leave remaining what choice would they have when they are unable to travel to work?</p>	<p>Other options were available to employees – such as taking unpaid leave, flexi leave etc. Some managers also allowed employees to make up the hours lost at an alternative time. In addition, employees can now purchase up to an additional 10 days of annual leave.</p>
<p>3.6 Adversely affect employees who work further away from the Civic Centre</p>	<p>Start and finish times were relaxed for employees during the inclement weather to ensure those who had further to travel had sufficient time to do so.</p>
<p>3.7 Feedback from JCP – Caterers and Cleaners have to work from an alternative location if their usual workplace is closed. If the employee is unable to do this they have to take unpaid leave.</p>	<p>Upon receipt of advice from Human Resources (after discussion with SEB), this has now been adapted so where a workplace is closed during inclement weather, Caterers and Cleaners will be paid and will have to make up for hours lost at an alternative time.</p>

3.8 The HR recommendation to SEB for inclement weather is as follows:

3.9 Currently, during inclement weather, employees are required to take annual, flexi or unpaid leave if they are unable to attend work during inclement weather. To tie in with SMART working and as a result of member and employee feedback, SEB are asked to consider allowing manager discretion to agree to homeworking during inclement weather if, even after every effort has been made, employees are unable to attend work. This would allow services to operate at near normal capacity, rather than seeing a spike in annual leave and a decline in service levels from those services impacted by employees who could not get into work.

3.10 Recommendation: Allow home working at managers discretion during inclement weather.

4. Exclusions to the Policy – Teachers and Schools

4.1 Concern - Smart Working Policy needs to be reconsidered to take into account concerns over equalities issues for teachers and school staff, who were currently excluded from the policy.

- 4.2 Response - Teachers terms and conditions are agreed separately to employees who are on single status terms and conditions and we would therefore have to consult separately with school unions to agree this. In future, if there is a requirement from schools to introduce a similar policy, this can be explored.
- 4.3 Ultimately, smart working is only allowed dependant on the needs of the service. Many areas throughout the Council will only be able to implement Smart Working partially, whilst others fully or not at all. Schools will need to adopt these same principles.

5. Equality Impact – General

- 5.1 The Smart Working Project Manager has liaised with the Council's Equalities team throughout the project to ensure that the equality impacts of the project are understood.
- 5.2 The Smart Working policy has the potential to bring about greater equality across the Councils employees, with specific regard to employees with protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act (2010).
- 5.3 Among the potential impacts of the Smart Working policy are:
- The ability to be more flexible in terms of working hours and locations can bring benefits to carers and working parents, allowing a better balance between work and their caring role/ childcare arrangements.
 - The use of technology to reduce the need for work related travel (e.g. travel to meetings in other locations). This has the potential to reduce travel and related stress and could allow people with mobility issues to attend meetings virtually.
 - In locations where we have desk sharing, the Council is committed to making reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities, which may include having an assigned desk.
 - Other organisations have found that Smart Working has seen an increase in the number of women returning to work following maternity leave. For example, BT's Anytime Anywhere working scheme, which allows flexible hours and location working identified that 99% of women returned to work after maternity leave. This is compared to a 40 per cent UK average (CIPD, Annual Recruitment, Retention and Turnover Study).
- 5.4 Wokingham Borough Council has deployed Smart Working effectively across its employees since 2011. Their policy applies to 'all non-school based employees (unless adopted by the school governing body) working for the Council whose work location may be 'Smart'. Smart Working is a contractual requirement for all other new employees in Wokingham and this is mirrored across other Councils which have met the challenge of reducing building bases by taking a firm stance to enforce work from other locations.
- 5.5 Smart Working is not just about working from home. However, it is appreciated that there may be inequalities where some employees can work from home, but others cannot. This will apply to roles that are dependent on face-to-face, observation, supervision etc. The CWC policy will confirm that there will be exclusions and also where these may apply to

ensure consistency. However, it is important to note that some elements of Smart Working may still be available to these groups (e.g. collaborative working with colleagues using technology, being able to access information on the go etc). Where other Local Authorities have implemented smart working, a statement has been included within the policy that it will not be available to everyone.

- 5.6 It is also important to recognise that not all people want to work from home or can work from home. This may be due to personal circumstances or preferences. The Council is committed to ensuring that working from home is a choice, rather than a demand.
- 5.7 The CWC Smart working policy includes the following wording to assist employees and managers:
- 5.8 It has been recognised, that for many employees, it may not be practicable for them to take advantage of smart working as the needs of the service will make it impossible to operate. Managers must therefore consider the impact of granting access to increased flexi-time to one group of workers but excluding others within the same team, e.g. care staff and admin staff.
- 5.9 It should be noted that all CWC jobs when advertised include a job description, these should give applicants an indication of whether the job they are applying for may allow elements of smart working or not, and general hours of work.
- 5.10 Additionally some employees may be classed as fixed workers when their actual workstyle is mobile, due to the equipment required to support their disability. Managers must ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to ensure that they are treated as much as possible the same as their mobile counterparts.

6. Management of Employee Productivity

- 6.1 Concern – Would like to have a better understanding of how performance would be monitored before the policy was implemented.
- 6.2 This concern was mirrored by SEB who asked Human Resources to undertake focus groups with managers. The aim was to understand whether there may be any training requirements.
- 6.3 Human Resources attended several leadership and management team meetings where this was discussed and the consensus was that they already have the skills and knowledge to manage staff by outcome rather than observable behaviour. It was confirmed (and then later supported by the Smart Working survey) that both managers and employees had already adopted smart working in an informal way. They did however feel that it would be useful to have a policy to refer back to if they had queries in relation to this method of work.
- 6.4 To support managers who may be new to this way of working, a Managers guide to Smart Working has been produced to accompany the Smart Working policy. In addition, briefing sessions will be held for managers and employees before and after the Smart Working Policy is introduced. This will help managers to manage employees based across a number

of physical locations by outcome as opposed to observable behaviour. It will also assist employees to understand how their performance may be measured/monitored.

7. Policy implementation – Possibility of trialling Smart Working Policy

- 7.1 Concern - Some Panel Members suggested the policy should be implemented on a trial basis in a certain team
- 7.2 Response - Smart Working practices have already been adopted across many teams within the Council. To further support Smart Working and to provide reassurance around the potential impacts, Smart Working initiatives will be planned with discreet teams rather than taking a whole Council approach. These teams will be identified following consultation with Management Leadership Teams within the Council.

8. Risk Assessments – pressure on management

- 8.1 Concern - Appropriate work place risk and health and safety assessments will be taking place for those working at home as the employer still has a duty of care. The extra risk assessments which would be required would put more pressures on managers.
- 8.2 The proposed CWC Smart Working policy takes guidance from The Health and Safety at work Act 1974 (HSWA) which places duties on employers and employees.
- 8.3 Proposed Policy statement: If working from home or other work locations is agreed (regardless of frequency), the employee has a responsibility to ensure they have an appropriate workspace with adequate security, storage and screening from activities and noise. There must also be adequate ventilation and lighting. It is necessary to ensure that any workstation used is not likely to cause employees any health risk. In view of this, employees should assess the risks for workstations that are occupied at irregular intervals as a result of flexible working practices such as hot-desking. The basic criteria employees should always check when working with display screen equipment can be found on the Health and Safety Intranet Portal (DSE – Self Assessment Form). Any risks must be discussed with management to help minimise these.
- 8.4 The HSE provide the following advice on a frequently asked question:
- 8.5 Question - If I have to hot-desk do I have to carry out a workstation assessment every time I use a new desk?
- 8.6 Answer: It is necessary to ensure that any workstation you use is not likely to cause you any health risk. In view of this, you should assess the risks for workstations that are occupied at irregular intervals as a result of flexible working practices such as hot-desking. There are basic criteria you should always check when working with display screen equipment (see below). It may be useful, if hot-desking is widespread within your organisation, to provide a checklist of what people should assess.

8.7 The guidance provided within the policy is in line with HSE information and will not put excessive pressure on managers to conduct risk-assessments.

9. Amendment to working hours and impact to employees and the Council

9.1 Concern - Core working hours are being changed and a request was made for further information on how this would impact staff and the Council.

9.2 The proposed amendment to the Working Hours Policy would see employees given greater choice and control over when they work. Managers of services would need to ensure the needs of the business continue to be met and this aligns with the wording of the proposed Smart Working policy. It is also supported by the responses we received from our Smart Working survey, which found that given the choice of 67% of respondents would adapt their working pattern depending on the needs of the service.

9.3 By increasing the flexibility of the workforce, there is the potential to decrease congestion at rush hour on the cities roads, allow employees a better work/life balance and help CWC to be more responsive to customer queries. In addition, it will help to attract and retain talent as other Local Authorities have already adapted their working hours to make them more flexible.

10. Which teams would see improved productivity/no benefit

10.1 Concern - Members requested further information on which teams the Smart Working Policy was expected to improve performance and for which teams there would be no perceived benefit.

10.2 Response - As part of the Smart Working initiatives, we are planning to identify key processes within services and support employees to use technology and policy to make the processes more efficient. Examples of success will be used as case studies to promote Smart Working across other areas of the Council. Smart Working has the potential to benefit the majority of teams across the Council.

11. Financial implications

11.1 The financial implications to the original report have been amended as follows:

11.2 The proposed Smart Working Policy has been developed in house.

11.3 The implementation of the proposed Smart Working Policy, focusing on a more agile working environment, will indirectly support the delivery of existing budget reduction proposals linked to transformation of the organisation through the Future Space and Digital Transformation programmes. It is also possible that the future adoption of new guidelines on travel and subsistence, consistent with the Smart Working Policy, will reduce travel costs incurred.

[MH/04062018/W]

Appendix 1- Smart Working in Adult Social Care- The Impact of Skype for Business on Quality Assurance Meetings (Author: Maria Smith)

Background

This case study shows the benefits of using Skype for business for over 65's Quality Assurance Meeting (QAM) during the period from 9 October to 27 September 2017.

Quality Assurance Meetings occur every Monday, 9:30-13:00. There is a static panel, which Social Work Unit Managers (SWUMs) present their cases to. SWUMs have previously been expected to attend the offices at Red Lion Street and present their cases in person. This is time-consuming and costly as most are based in the locality teams across the city.

QAMs are responsible for deciding if a proposed care and support plan is the most appropriate way of meeting an individual's needs, when large packages of care or care home placements are being proposed.

A referral is made to QAM after an assessment of need is completed and the proposed support plan is over the value of £250 for domiciliary care, over £100 for day care and if a current package increases by 20%. The allocated worker will then complete an application which provides details about the proposed support plan and outlines the costings involved.

The application is then reviewed by the worker's SWUM and if they agree the proposal is appropriate they present the case to QAM. QAM will debate and evaluate a support package and determine that all other potential solutions have been explored.

Adult Social Care's Digital Transformation

As part of their mobile/ agile working roll out, Adult Social Care distributed new equipment, including Skype for Business, to employees throughout the service in July 2017.

Video calling on Skype enables SWUMs to present their cases virtually and allows Adult Social Care to meet key objectives to improve productivity and reduce spending on travelling expenses and subsistence.

Benefits

Using Skype reduces claims on expenses for mileage and car parking:

Date of QAM	Number of SWUMs Skyped	Parking - £3 p/h	Mileage - 7 miles (approx.) claimed at 45p
9 October 2017	5	£15	£15.75
16 October 2017	4	£12	£12.60
23 October	3	£9	£9.45
30 October	3	£9	£9.45
3 November	4	£12	£12.60
13 November	2	£6	£6.30
20 November	3	£9	£9.45
27 November	3	£9	£9.45
Total	27	£81	£84.75

Approximate saving made since 9 October 2017 in parking and mileage costs= £165.75

Skype means that SWUMs do not have to travel to QAM. On average this saves up to an hour commuting to and from Red Lion Street. One SWUM explained that it took on average in total 1 hour and 30 minutes in total for commuting, waiting, presenting and parking.

The time spent travelling to meetings can now be used to conduct other tasks including providing supervision, dealing with Mental Health Act requests, maintaining the team desktop and screening all incoming referrals. One SWUM highlighted that the most important benefit was how they could maintain management oversight over the team and as a result staff feel more supported

Skype allows more flexibility with the agenda at QAM. If someone is running late or one item of the agenda takes longer than anticipated the SWUM is not as affected, as they can continue with their work in the meantime. One SWUM highlighted that they could wait up to 20 minutes to present their case.

Similarly, if QAM is running ahead of schedule there is more freedom to Skype the next SWUM presenting and reduces need to wait for them to turn up at Red Lion Street. This is a more efficient way of working, as if QAM finishes early it frees up time for the meeting participants, consequently increasing work productivity.

Skype enables SWUMs to refer to the allocated worker, who is usually in the office. This is extremely beneficial as the allocated worker (who prepared the report the SWUM is presenting) can provide clarity if queries arise. It means that questions that may go unanswered or help the panel decide, can be acted on immediately. This is positive as it can possibly prevent the case from returning to QAM the following week, maximising productivity.

Another benefit of using Skype is that other colleagues e.g. Commissioners, who may be unable to commit to attending the full Quality Assurance meeting, can be allotted a time on the agenda to join the meeting and respond to any issues that have been identified during the discussions.

Feedback

The consensus is that videoing calling SWUMs is preferred over attending in person, for both SWUMs and the panel.