



Corporate Resources Scrutiny Committee

Briefing Paper

Report of: Mike Parker, Director of Planning and Regulatory Services
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Manager
Date: Thursday, 12th November 2009
Open

Draft Mobile and Flexible Working Policy

1. Summary

- 1.1 To consider the draft Mobile and Flexible Working Policy as set out in **Appendix A.**

2. Background

- 2.1 The draft policy sets out the procedure and standards for mobile and flexible working in Wyre Forest District Council. It builds on existing flexible working provisions (e.g. flexi time, part-time working, job sharing, compressed working weeks) but shifts the emphasis from separate 'working arrangement' policies to an integrated approach, which will better benefit the Council, its employees and customers.
- 2.2 Introducing new ways of working is seen as a business necessity to increase process efficiency and productivity as well as improved availability of the services delivered. The Mobile and Flexible Working Policy will therefore allow Directors to consider the appropriateness of these new work styles and implement them where there are demonstrable and significant benefits. Research from the DWP '*Home working – from a local authority perspective, November 2008*' has shown such benefits include:
 - a) Improved service delivery through smarter working practices thus benefiting both business and customer needs.
 - b) Increased productivity between 10 to 48% depending on service area.
 - c) Improved efficiency resulting in a reduction of costs.
 - d) Increased job satisfaction and a more motivated and productive workforce.

- e) Helping to aid the retention of skilled and experienced employees whose personal circumstances change and who would otherwise have to give up work.
- f) Achievement of work life balance for employees.
- g) Generate savings in accommodation in terms of both space and cost, especially when planning office moves.
- h) Offer a solution to a temporary problem e.g. employees may be unable to travel to the office but could provide continuity by working from home for a period.
- i) Reduce unnecessary travel and hence environmental damage.

3. Policy Development

3.1 The draft Mobile and Flexible Working Policy has been developed through the involvement and participation of the following officers / groups:

- a) **Corporate Development and Performance Management Working Group** – a cross Directorate group of senior managers,
- b) **HR and ICT Teams**, and
- c) **Officers who have been involved over the last 12 months in the mobile / flexible working pilots**, in the following service areas:
 - Building Control,
 - Licensing,
 - Council Tax, and
 - Environmental Health (Food Team)

3.2 The pilots tested out the practicalities of mobile / flexible working arrangements and the required IT technology. Results from the pilots indicate a 15% increase in productivity and most of the officers involved have said that they would wish to continue these new styles of working should a formal policy be adopted.

3.3 As well as undertaking our own pilots, we have considered the experience and best practice of other authorities (incl. North Hertfordshire District Council, Test Valley Borough Council, West Berkshire Council and Worcestershire County Council) who already have adopted procedures and systems in place for mobile and flexible working.

3.4 Consultation on the draft policy was undertaken during September 2009 with Managers, their Teams and the Trade Unions respectively. Comments received as set out in **Appendix B** have now been considered and where appropriate the policy has been revised.

3.5 Key Themes arising from the consultation feedback included:

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- Support of the proposed Household Allowance of £156 per annum as set by HM Revenue and Customs for heating, lighting and water costs.
 - Ensure that all Managers are fully trained to undertake Health and Safety Assessments of proposed work area in employee's home.
 - That there are effective communication procedures in place between home workers and line managers.
 - Concern over data security and protection, which will be addressed by having the relevant IT measures in place e.g. screen savers, password protection.
 - That the mileage policy needs revising to take into account that a large number of employees will be starting journeys from their home as opposed to from the office, which is what the current policy is based on.
- 3.6 All employees who submitted comments on the draft policy have received written feedback.

4. Key Principles of the Policy

- 4.1 Over an agreed timetable, Directors and line managers will identify and assess which posts within their Directorate are suitable for mobile and flexible working. The assessment will determine whether the job is considered 'Fixed', 'At Home', 'From Home' or 'Mobile' (see paragraphs 4.9 and 4.10 for definitions). In assessing the suitability of posts, amongst other considerations, Directors will consider both the operational efficiencies and the practicalities of service delivery.
- 4.2 Employees whose jobs are defined as open to mobile or flexible working will be offered the opportunity to transfer to the appropriate work style. In the future, Job Descriptions may include the requirement to work flexibly or operate mobile working practices but it is anticipated that this will be introduced on a piecemeal basis as appointments are made to vacant posts. Employees may request at a later date to transfer to mobile or flexible working if they initially opted out.
- 4.3 Employees who transfer to flexible working arrangements will be expected to do so on a permanent basis or until operational arrangements are redefined. Due to the resources required to set up flexible working, it will not be possible to allow employees to shuttle between 'At Home', 'From Home' or 'Mobile' working. The Council will retain the right to reconsider the appropriateness of posts which are subject to flexible and mobile working arrangements where services are not being delivered as originally anticipated.
- 4.4 Employees working under the mobile/flexible working policy will be required to sign a mobile/flexible working Personal Plan/Agreement.

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- 4.5 All other policies and procedures of the Council that apply to office based employees will apply equally to those mobile or flexible workers.
- 4.6 Employees whose role is not considered suitable for mobile or flexible working may request a copy of the assessment with the reasoning for this. There is no appeals procedure.
- 4.7 The roll out and implementation of the Policy will be on a phased basis to ensure adequate resources and ICT support is available. All employees who are able to work flexibly will be required to familiarise themselves and/or undertake training in back office or document management systems where required to enable effective flexible working.
- 4.8 Definitions for the various work styles are as follows:
- 4.9 **Fixed work style** – the nature of the work dictates that the service can't be delivered effectively from working at home e.g. needing to respond to clients from a fixed building or requiring the use of specialised equipment to deliver the service e.g. refuse lorries.
- 4.10 Flexible work style – There are three main types of flexible worker:
- a) **At Home** – workers who can work effectively for the majority (at least 4 days per week for a full time employee) or all of the week from home.
 - b) **From Home** – workers who can work effectively for part of the week (at least 2.5 days a week from home for a full time employee) and would split their time between home and the office.
 - c) **Mobile** – workers are those employees who spend the majority of the working week travelling/visiting clients and therefore need access to relevant IT applications irrespective of their location. When not travelling/visiting clients they will either work from home or come into the office.
- 4.11 Subject to adoption of the policy, managers will undertake relevant training to enable them to carry out the required Health and Safety assessment of the area that the employee proposes to work from at home. In addition, they will be provided with training on how to manage teams remotely, which will be pivotal in supporting the successful and effective implementation of the policy.
- 4.12 Implementation of the policy will be on a phased basis from 1st January 2010.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 As outlined at the beginning of this report, the implementation of mobile / flexible arrangements will support efficiencies and savings to be made through smarter and more streamlined working practices. However like any

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new scheme there will be initial set up and ongoing costs involved. Some of these are already budgeted for whilst others will need to be considered as part of the 2010/11 and beyond budget setting process as listed below:

- a) The required IT infrastructure and equipment to support mobile / flexible working is part of the adopted ICT Strategy which has an allocated budget for delivery so there are no new financial implications.
- b) The proposed Household Allowance and Broadband Allowance, which will be determined on a case by case basis, will form part of the Budget Consultation/Proposals for 2010/11.
- c) Costs involved for training implications as described in paragraph 4.11 will be met through the existing training budget provision.

6. Options to the Committee

- 6.1 That this Committee provide comment on the draft policy.
- 6.2 That this Committee propose that Cabinet approve the draft policy for adoption by Council, subject to consideration being given to the feedback received from this Committee.

7. Appendices

- 7.1 Appendix A – Draft Mobile and Flexible Working Policy
- 7.2 Appendix B – Consultation Feedback on Draft Mobile and Flexible Working Policy – September 2009

8. Consultees

Councillor J.P. Champion, Leader of the Council

Diane Tilley, Interim Chief Executive

David Buckland, Director of Resources

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