

Committee: IT Working Group

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Title: Home & mobile working initiative

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Agenda Item

6

Summary

Home and mobile working conceptually provides opportunities for services to operate in different ways and to rationalise office space. The Corporate Plan for 2007/09 contains an objective of exploring the potential for home and mobile working at this Council. This report explains work carried out to date and what opportunities Officers have identified so far.

Recommendations

Progress be noted.

Background Papers

Corporate Plan 2007/09.

Impact

Communication/Consultation	SMB, HoDs and Unison.
Community Safety	None.
Equalities	Potential DDA matters.
Finance	Potential unspecified investment in technology. Home working expenses. Potential to achieve unspecified savings/additional income through reduced office occupancy/letting vacant space.
Human Rights	None.
Legal implications	None.
Sustainability	Potential increase in carbon footprint through previously empty homes being heated, lit and consuming electricity. Maybe offset by less travel to work.
Ward-specific impacts	None.
Workforce/Workplace	Changes to place of work. Need for supporting HR strategy. Health and safety strategy.

Current Situation

Each relevant post at the Council has been listed and a broad assessment made of the potential for home or mobile working. The assessment was based upon interviews with the relevant manager or member of staff. The findings can be categorised as follows:

- *Those posts that do not lend themselves to home or mobile working* because they need to be office based. These posts include stewards, staff dealing with certain customer contacts, staff providing certain support service functions and staff working in purpose built accommodation. Based upon work to date this appears to be the smallest category.
- *Those posts that lend themselves to periods of casual and planned home or mobile working.* These posts represent the largest category and is based upon adhoc and planned periods of working away from the office base.
- *Those posts that do lend themselves to home or mobile working* because the work activity is rarely or never office based. These posts include some visiting officers, field officers and community based roles. Based upon work to date there appears to an opportunity to improve the number of home or mobile workers.

The assessment also identified that a surprising amount of home and mobile working activity already occurs. This activity includes:

- Individual Officers carrying out a range of discrete work at home on an ad-hoc and planned basis.
- Some services being delivered jointly by home-workers and office based staff.
- Some services taking advantage of mobile technology and maximising time out in the field.

Despite the above, it is believed that much more can be done to exploit the available technologies and alternative ways of working. Little if any office space appears to have been systematically realised through home or mobile working, partly reinforced by people's natural unease at surrendering individual and or collective working space.

Almost everyone spoken to was comfortable with the general concept of home and mobile working provided they retained some control over it. Many were enthusiastic and also wished to do more, providing anecdotal evidence that they worked more productively at home. Equally many highlighted legitimate barriers to doing more, such as an inappropriate home environment, a wish to interact with other people, and the need for core office provision and storage space. The need to invest in supporting technology and HR strategy was also highlighted.

Next Steps

In some respects the above overall position could have been anticipated because it inevitably mirrors the position in many other organisations. The key to making further progress is therefore twofold:

- Taking reactive advantage of home and mobile working opportunities as and when they arise through other management initiatives or activities such as organisational reengineering reviews. This evolutionary strategy will probably take longer to realise benefits if rationalising office space is a key short-term objective. It could and should now form part of any transition management arrangements resulting from the current staff reductions.
- Proactively encouraging managers and staff to change how services are delivered. This could be overseen by a small group of Officers with an approved remit of reducing office occupancy rates, where it is based upon a sound business case.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Lost opportunity.	1	3	Corporate Plan monitoring. Project sponsor.
Resistance to change.	2	2	Any changes to be agreed at a local level with stakeholders.
Inability to invest in supporting technology.	2	4	Business case will need to reflect financial implications.
No HR or health & safety strategy.	1	2	Any changes to be aligned with appropriate HR and health and safety strategy.

* scale 1-4, with 1 being the lowest likelihood/impact