

Flexible Working Guide

This document was produced by Wisework Limited for and on behalf of the Project Nomad - Flexible and Mobile Working for Local Authorities programme



guide



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1 Why Do It?

Flexible working is concerned with any aspect of how, when, and where work is done as well as who does what. Flexible working can create major change and benefits for the organisation and the individual.

1.1 Benefits

The rate of return on well founded and planned flexible working projects can be very high leading to improved business performance on service delivery, customer satisfaction, efficiency savings and reduced recruitment and retention costs. There are also environmental benefits and improvements in employee morale, productivity and loyalty. Examples are given below of improvements achieved in local authority environments. These are from a range of sources.

1.1.a Reduced Accommodation Costs

- Moving from a central urban office to regional satellite offices produced savings of 33% in accommodation costs.
- Flexible working arrangements led to a 25% reduction in accommodation costs.

1.1.b Environmental Benefits

- Use of regional centres reducing work-related car journeys by 30%.
- Reductions in travel to work journeys thereby reducing CO₂ emissions

1.1.c Productivity

Substantial productivity improvements, often reported at over 25% resulting from:

- Improved attendance resulting from lower absence
- Improved customer service, increased contact at times convenient to the customer
- Improved revenues resulting from changed contact times
- Reduced employee turnover leading to lower recruitment, induction and training costs

1.1.d Morale and Motivation

- Reported higher levels of employee satisfaction, up from 60% to 89% satisfied
- Increased control of environment leads to lower levels of reported stress
- Low levels of unauthorised absence.

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Making the Case

The evidence that flexible working delivers real and measurable business benefits is growing. There is a slow trend away from seeing flexible working as simply a route to work life balance and employee benefits towards its contribution to business performance and efficiency. A survey conducted for the Local Government Employers (LGE) quotes examples directly attributed to flexible working in local authorities:

“The council tax collection is now in the upper quartile and impressive productivity figures have been achieved within Building Control for plan checks”

“Employee turnover rate fallen from 16% to 10%”

“Reported sickness was 10.5 days and is down to 8.7 days; turnover was 12% and is down to 10%”

“Now have over 90% staff satisfaction”

Successful business cases are likely to have the following features:

- They take account of the business drivers such as the efficiency agenda, accommodation strategies and the drive to become employers of choice and reducing the environmental footprint of the Council
- They are based on measurable performance indicators
- There is a clear cost benefit analysis
- The case is well researched and takes account of experiences of others
- Risks are understood and dealt with.

3

Making it Happen

The potential benefits are high but achieving them, as with any substantial organisational change, requires the change to be managed.

There must be a clear objective aligned to corporate strategic goals, a planned process, properly resourced implementation and good communications plan. The visible support of senior managers is critical including a willingness to change their own management practices where necessary. It is important to train managers in how to lead a more flexible workforce so they can adapt their leadership style to suit the new environment. The change management process should include adequate provision for piloting the new working practices for a variety of employees and learning how best to introduce it for the rest of the organisation.

3.1 From Planning to Roll Out – and Action Checklist in 3 Stages

3.1.a Planning

- Identify the requirements including the needs of the business, people, internal and external customers
- Determine what flexible working options might help achieve these requirements
- Identify the stakeholders – including staff, senior managers, ICT support, health and safety, trade unions, suppliers (both internal and external), customers and elected members
- Appoint an active, fully committed high-level champion – someone who actually does it
- Form and brief a cross functional project implementation and operating team
- Review what is already happening in the organisation (e.g. informal/ad hoc flexible working practices)
- Identify the benefits, advantages and disadvantages, and likely problem areas
- Develop and agree clear goals and objectives – communicate them at all levels
- Agree the measurement and success/failure criteria and monitoring/feedback methods
- Identify what resources are needed and available and act to fill any gaps
- Produce the project plan and agree who is responsible for delivering what – and by when.

3.1.b Develop and Prepare for a Pilot Programme

- Develop and launch an internal communications plan
- Use the plan to manage stakeholders' expectations throughout the programme
- Develop assessment tools and methodologies
- Draft interim policies and procedures including transparent selection criteria to ensure equality of access
- Run executive briefings – get top level, organisation-wide support and involvement
- Select the area(s) and people where the pilot(s) will be run paying particular attention to the suitability of jobs for flexible working
- Run management and supervisor briefings – get their support and involvement
- Run staff orientation sessions – include internal IT, finance, facilities management etc
- Brief and train the managers and staff selected for the pilot(s)
- Brief staff not involved in the pilots (because of unsuitability of jobs and/or personal circumstances)
- Acquire, test and install equipment and services together with appropriate support and management processes and resources. Conduct health and safety risk assessments.

3.1.c Run Pilots, Evaluate Success and Roll Out

- Launch the pilot programme to trial the new flexible working practices
- Evaluate progress & success at project milestones, identify what's working & what isn't
- Implement any changes required
- Continue with the balance of the pilot/s
- Conduct end of pilot assessments (surveys, workshops, data analysis, etc)
- Report findings and make recommendations to senior level
- Obtain executive agreement to implement flexible working in appropriate areas
- Publish definitive policies, procedures and user guides
- Launch flexible working as a recognised practice in the organisation
- Continue to publicise through an awareness campaign - Flexible working is part of "business as usual"
- Continue to monitor and evaluate and make any changes as and when required

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A Culture for Sustained Success

WiseWork Ltd, specialist consultants in Flexible Working, has identified 10 critical factors for sustained success in Flexible Working projects (included with their permission).

| SUCCESS FACTOR | ACTION |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CLEAR LEADERSHIP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show your commitment • Describe clearly what you are doing and why • Talk about the benefits • Hold meetings with your team/s |
| FLEXIBLE APPROACH | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't get stuck in a 9 to 5 mentality • Use technology appropriately • Be flexible in your dealings with people • Lobby for relaxation of rigid rules |
| TRUST | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver what you promise • Assume that people can be trusted and see what happens • Trust is 2-way • Build on positive experiences |
| INVOLVE PEOPLE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask individuals and teams for their views • Involve work teams in deciding practical work patterns • Pilot new practices. Do not formalise until you are sure they work • Set clear limits for pilots and define success |
| FAIR TREATMENT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise that different levels of flexibility may suit different people • Recognise that flexibility may not be easy or possible in some roles • Make decisions based on a fair process – the outcomes may vary from person to person • Make opportunities as freely available as you can |
| COURAGE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stand up and be counted • Share the risk by partnering with a colleague • Build confidence through understanding and communicating measurable benefits from case studies |
| WORK PROCESSES AND SYSTEMS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure accountabilities and responsibilities are clear • Conduct effective risk assessments including at home • Change processes to suit flexible working |
| SHARED BENEFITS | All stakeholders benefit: Individual, Organisation, Customers, Elected representatives |
| MONITORING AND MEASURING | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear project planning and implementation • Measure outputs rather than inputs • Agree clear measures • Involve staff in deciding effective measures |
| COMMUNICATION | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate, communicate, communicate • Use the available technology • Change time and place • Communicate flexibly |

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Effective Monitoring and Management

A key finding of the Employers Organisation survey is that monitoring and measurement of the impact of flexible working is not well developed among local authorities. Yet is critical to be able to measure and report on success. This will involve:

- Deciding on the measurement criteria and methodologies to be used
- Agreeing performance measures and targets
- Deciding how to measure a range of indicators such as productivity, absenteeism or sickness rates, staff retention and premises utilisation
- Deciding the frequency of measurement and reporting
- Agreeing who is responsible for data gathering, evaluation and reporting – and when
- Building monitoring into pilot and roll out project plans
- Being prepared to take brave decisions based on your monitoring process.

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Be Prepared

Think about the worst that can happen and....

- Conduct thorough risk assessments of flexible working options
- Set up contingency plans to cope with catastrophes such as the network going down cutting off links to your flexible workers.
- Ensure that business continuity plans embrace flexible working.
- Make sure that staff working flexibly know what to do when things go wrong
- Decide in advance how will you handle requests from key staff that have tried home working and found that it does not work for them. Test the contingency plan on a regular basis to ensure it is still adequate.
- Plan physical resources carefully to ensure that flexible workers have all the support services they would normally get at base. How do they post letters, get stationery, contact each other, manage their time, contact the IT support desk and their manager?

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Human Resources Implications

| <i>HR ACTIVITY</i> | <i>ACTION</i> |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| HR Strategy | Needs to support the organisation's business plan as it develops and changes to embrace flexible working. For example, flexible working can be used as a means of becoming an "employer of choice" |
| Policies | Identify policies that need to change as a result of flexible working, amend, gain agreement and publish |
| Compliance | Ensure compliance with statutory and other regulations such as Working Time Regulations, The Right to Request Flexible Working, discrimination legislation |
| Consultation | Start early consultation with employees and trade unions so that people fully understand what is planned, the implications, disadvantages and benefits |
| Terms and conditions | Pay careful attention to changes to terms and conditions, contracts of employment, pay and taxable benefits issues |
| Recruitment and retention | Recruitment and retention policies need to be modified. Do you mention flexible working in recruitment advertisements? Are flexible working options part of a wider flexible benefits scheme? |
| Monitoring and measurement | Put systems in place to measure the benefits of flexible working including: retention, sickness, productivity, turnover |
| Training and development | Modify T& D approaches to take account of flexible working. This might include changes to induction, time and location of training, increased use of blended learning, more coaching and mentoring |
| Psychological Contract | Find ways to ensure that the informal and social relationships that currently exist between office-based employees can continue under flexible working. Consider monitoring the impact of new working practices on staff stress levels, feelings of isolation, workloads and work-life balance. |
| Support | Consider arrangements for "buddies" - co-workers who are available to mentor and support. Discussion boards on the corporate Intranet may be useful as a means of providing support and capturing and sharing ideas as to "what works best for me ...". Provide effective ICT support and ensure that staff know what is available and when |

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Getting Help

Some useful links for more information, forms, frameworks, advice:

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| Project Nomad Mobile Working | www.projectnomad.org.uk |
| WiseWork Limited | www.WiseWork.co.uk |
| ODPM (for Efficiency Review information) | www.odpm.gov.uk |
| Local Government Employers (LGE) Organisation | www.lg-employers.gov.uk |
| DTI – Employment Relations | www.dti.gov.uk/er/fw_wlb.htm |
| Future Work Forum at Henley Management College | www.henleymc.ac.uk/fwf |
| The UK Telework Association (The TCA) | www.telework.org.uk |
| SOCITM (Society of IT Management) | www.socitm.gov.uk |
| Health and Safety / Occupational Safety and Health guidance | www.hse.gov.uk |

Project Nomad



Contact: Info

Address: Cambridgeshire County Council
Shire Hall
Castle Hill
Cambridge CB3 0AP

Tel: 01223 717697

Email: info@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Web: www.projectnomad.org.uk