

Agile Working Strategy

Context

In recent years, the Council has faced the largest reductions in funding from Central Government in living memory and we expect even more to come. Over the period 2011/12 to 2015/16 we faced government grant reductions (including the New Homes Bonus) of £1.9 million with a further grant reduction of £3.5 million expected over the period 2016/17 to 2019/20. The grant reductions have occurred at a time of increasing demand for our services, so the Council is faced with the need to do more with less. Agile working presents an opportunity to meet this challenge.

Against the back drop of a reduction in funding the Council's workforce has reduced from 593 employees in 2011 to around 500 in 2017.

The 'digital revolution' is transforming the way that many people live their lives, from the way they purchase goods and services to the way they communicate with others and this trend will continue. Ofcom reports that:

- 81% of adults in the UK have broadband (fixed & mobile) (Q1 2016)
- There were 9.2 million superfast fixed broadband lines at the end of 2015
- 93% of adults personally own/use a mobile phone in the UK (Q1 2016)
- 71% of UK adults have a smartphone (Q1 2016)
- 66% of people use their mobile handset to access the internet (Q1 2016)

Recognising its importance, broadband access has been described as the 'fourth utility' and there has been significant government investment in rolling out superfast broadband to those areas of the UK where commercial roll-out is not economically viable.

Where are we now?

Currently just under half the workforce are predominantly office based at the Civic Centre or Jubilee Depot site; the rest work in our leisure centres, community centres, parks or across the borough. The vast majority of office based staff have their own individual desks with a desktop pc and fixed telephone. There is access to desktop office products and a variety of business solutions. There are both front and back office systems that streamline the service processes and online document management is in place in some areas. Mobile devices (laptops, tablets, mobile phones) have, in the past, been issued in response to individual requests but are

actively being rolled out, initially to Senior Leadership Team and now to Service Managers. In summary, the day-to-day technology used by staff is good but much of the potential remains unrealised. The Council's Digital Strategy 2016/19 approved in September 2016 contains a number of actions to address this gap.

As the workforce has reduced, the Council has taken active steps to release office accommodation and co-locate with partners. Arnot Hill House is exclusively let to partners, including the MP for Gedling, Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner and the Registrar's office; the Civic Centre is shared with the DWP and Nottingham North and East CCG, and soon Jubilee House will be home to not only EMAS but also Nottinghamshire Police. This has enabled the Council to not only reduce its own accommodation costs but also generate rental income in of £210,000 per year.

There are examples of flexible working patterns across the Council, but generally these are determined on a case by case basis in response to individual employee requests. The culture of the organisation is such that employees are expected to be in the office and working during usual office opening hours. Flexibility in working patterns and working place is not embedded within the organisation or culturally viewed as the 'norm'.

The decision making structure remains much the same as that agreed following the introduction of the executive arrangements in 2000. Whilst some parts of the Constitution have been reviewed and amended over recent years, including the Proper Officer provisions, Contract Standing Orders, Members' Code of Conduct, Members' Allowances Scheme and Executive scheme of delegation, there has not been a systematic review of the whole document to ensure that it is fit for purpose for the modern day council.

What are our drivers for change?

- Saving money and creating efficiency
- Advances in technology mean that there are new ways to connect with colleagues and customers quicker and in different ways.
- Improving customer service and meeting customer need

What is our vision?

We want to create a more responsive, efficient organisation which empowers its staff to work with maximum flexibility, which in turn will ultimately improve customer service and increase customer satisfaction.

Whilst many organisations simply describe agile working in the context of flexible and mobile working we want to go further than this and create a Council which moves nimbly with speed and ease in its processes and decision making.

We want to be a Council where:

- We provide services to our customers in a way they want when they want
- Mobile and flexible working is enabled not enforced
- Flexibility in working patterns is the norm rather than the exception
- Technology is used to its full potential
- A paperlite approach is the norm
- Day to day routine decisions are made at the lowest level possible. Officers are empowered to make decisions that affect day to day operations whilst Senior Leadership Team and Members focus on decisions which set the Council's strategic direction
- There is a high level of trust across the organisation where output is valued more than visibility and we measure success by results rather than time spent in the office
- Our office accommodation is rationalised and workspace used more efficiently and there is an increased level of occupancy by partners

How will we do this?

Achieving our vision will require a cultural change across the Council and this change will be driven from the top.

Clear Leadership is critical to the success of agile working. Senior Leadership Team and Service Managers will set an example with their own approach to agile working and will support and celebrate effective agile working across the Council.

A number of working groups led by Service Managers will be established to oversee the delivery of our agile working programme. There are 4 main strands of work:

- People
- Premises
- Processes
- Paraphernalia

The work is not mutually exclusive and the working groups will work together to deliver the overall strategy.

People

There are different ways in which agile working can be undertaken and are dependent on the demands and needs of the Council.

Through our Agile Working Group:

- In consultation, we will identify which posts are suitable for agile or flexible working using the following categories:-
 - Fully Agile Worker – an employee that spends much of their time working out in the community and does not need to undertake their duties in an office environment
 - Flexible Worker – an employee that spends most of their time working in an office environment although could work from other sites or occasionally work from home
 - Fixed Worker – an employee that is at a fixed location for the majority of their time and unable to undertake their duties outside of that location
- We will Review HR policies and ICT policies to enable agile and flexible workers to work differently and ensure clear H&S policies are in place.

Initially we will pilot a service area and use that experience to role model and case study rather than rolling out agile and flexible working on a blanket basis.

In recognition of some personal circumstances, the Council will adopt a flexible approach to staff needs and requirements, however the nature of the job and the business needs of the Council will ultimately determine the approach to be taken.

Premises

Following the assessment of flexible/agile worker status, we will plan and design our accommodation in a strategic and systematic way in order to minimise disruption to staff and make the best use of our office space now and for the future.

Through the Accommodation Group, we will conduct a review of the Council's office accommodation which focusses on:

- Building opening times/customer access 24/7 by digital means.
- Minimising the amount of office space occupied by the Council's workforce
- Maximising the amount of office space which is available to be rented to partners
- Identifying which partners we would wish to co-locate with.
- Provision of flexible space, with generic and transferable 'workstations'.
- Consideration of 'touchdown' space outside of Arnold Town Centre.

Processes

Through the Constitution Review Group, we will conduct a thorough review of the Constitution such that it more suitably reflects our modernisation/transformation agenda. In particular we will ensure that it:

- enables decisions to be made with speed and ease whilst ensuring compliance with the law
- empowers officers to make decisions that affect day to day operations.

Paraphernalia

Through the Digital Programme Board, we will continue to implement the Digital Strategy to ensure that:

- Our staff have skills and awareness to think and work digitally
- Our staff have access to the technology needed to deliver high quality and excellent value for money services
- A corporate wide paper-lite approach is the norm with a full scanning and electronic storage approach.

What benefits do we expect to see?

We expect to see the following benefits:

- Improved services to residents
- Increased productivity
- Enhanced employee satisfaction
- Reduced commuting time and business travel claims
- Reduced sickness and rates of casual absenteeism
- Reduced accommodation costs and an increase in rental income
- Increased employment opportunities for those who may not be able to or wish to work a normal working day
- Ability to attract and retain the best staff
- Improved decision making
- Fully e-enabled customer approach where appropriate
- Focus on delivery and outcomes