

Report to: Personnel Committee



Date of Meeting 30th November 2021

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Worksmart Review Update

Report summary:

This report provides the Committee with an update on the Worksmart Review, which is determining the Council's future ways of working, informed by learning through the pandemic.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

That the Committee note the contents of the report.

Reason for recommendation:

To allow the Committee to retain an overview of the work being undertaken to review the Worksmart approach.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

Equalities impact Medium Impact

Climate change Medium Impact

Risk: Low Risk; The equality and climate change impacts of a change in the Worksmart approach are being identified and mitigated against, as part of this work.

Links to background information Workforce Priorities report presented to Personnel Committee on 2nd September 2021 ([Agenda for Personnel Committee on Thursday, 2nd September, 2021, 10.00 am - East Devon](#)).

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
 - A greener East Devon
 - A resilient economy
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Report in full

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report provides an update on the work being undertaken within the Council to review the current Worksmart approach, informed by learning from ways of working through the pandemic.

2. Background

- 2.1. [Worksmart](#) was initially introduced when the Council relocated to its new Blackdown House offices in Honiton in 2019. It aimed to create an even better working environment where people can work more smartly, flexibly and be more productive, with flexibility of working arrangements in terms of time and place.
- 2.2. The Government's initial Stay at Home message at the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic led to nearly all office-based staff working from home. In July 2021 the Government guidance indicated that people could begin to return to workplaces, where they had been previously working from home during the pandemic. However at East Devon District Council we continue to operate a 'work from home if you can' approach for the time being, whilst Covid-19 cases remain high, to ensure the continued duty of care to our staff and to mitigate against the impact Covid-19-related absence may have on our teams and the delivery of our services, particularly in light of current demand and capacity pressures. We are also conscious of the need to continue to monitor the [Government's Autumn and Winter 2021 Pandemic Plan](#).
- 2.3. A multi-disciplinary Worksmart Review working group has been established, with representatives from HR, Strata, Estates, Climate Change, Customer Service Centre, Communications, Health and Safety and Finance. The purpose of the Review is to incorporate learning from our ways of working before and during the pandemic into our future Worksmart approach so that we can continue to create a working environment where people can work safely, smartly, flexibly, sustainably and productively.
- 2.4. There are three areas of focus for this work:
 - 2.4.1. How we continue to meet customer needs.
 - 2.4.2. How we support sustainability and mitigate against climate change.
 - 2.4.3. How we provide an attractive working environment that supports recruitment and retention, high performance, staff engagement and inclusion.

2.5. The scope of the Review includes the Worksmart vision and principles, policy and practice changes that may be required and how we can effectively use our assets (ICT, buildings and equipment) to support our approach. It will also include evaluation of the changes made to inform further developments as we learn more about what works to support our customers, the environment and our workforce. Many other organisations are also reviewing their working practices and therefore this work also includes learning from others and identifying potential opportunities to share resources (for example, through One Public Estate).

3. Findings to date

3.1. The information below summarises the findings to date from a customer, environment and employee perspective, which will inform the Worksmart Review.

3.2. **Customer** – To date customer feedback has been fairly positive regarding the operating arrangements during the pandemic, but we need to continue to monitor this. We need to ensure that we maintain a strong link between Worksmart and the digital transformation and performance management reporting work that is being undertaken, as our working arrangements will need to change as we implement improved digital channels and understand more about customer demand, through the availability of improved data. The current Worksmart Review decisions and actions will be based on what we know now, with further change when we know more. We therefore need to manage staff and customer expectations and build flexibility into the Worksmart approach, so that we can adapt to future needs.

3.3. **Environment** – it is recognised that Worksmart can significantly support our climate change aspirations, by minimising carbon emissions through how we travel, the use of buildings, the use of equipment and other assets and how we procure goods and services. For example, recent research has indicated that working from home can lead to around an 80% reduction in CO₂e per person¹. The Worksmart Review will include how we can use our estate (including working with partners) to reduce our carbon footprint. It will also consider our travel arrangements, use of digital rather than paper and how our procurement approach can support sustainability. As an employer we will need to determine whether there are measures which we would wish to impose (subject to appropriate consultation) and where we will aim to influence behaviour change and the implications of this on staff morale, recruitment, retention and any tax implications.

3.4. **Workforce** - the Staff Survey undertaken in May/June 2021 (which had an 88% response rate) indicated that many staff want to continue to work more flexibly following the pandemic (for example, only 4% of staff wanted to work for all of their time in the workplace and 52% were reluctant to return to the workplace). 70% of staff felt that they were more productive as a result of homeworking. We need to balance individual staff needs alongside ensuring effective service delivery, team cohesion, a sense of belonging to the organisation, staff wellbeing and parity and inclusion. It is evident that one size will not fit all, also considering that not all employees have the opportunity to work from home, due to their role. Staff are also looking for further clarity about future working arrangements.

¹ University of Exeter and Devon County Council research, September 2021

4. Revised Worksmart Vision and Principles

- 4.1. The findings above indicate that a flexible approach is required to ensure that we maximise the benefits of Worksmart whilst meeting the needs of our customers, the environment and our workforce. The approach to flexible working will also vary across each service area and team, as the Council is a complex and multi-faceted organisation. This means that we should not be prescriptive about where employees work from (i.e. implementing a complete work from home or work from the workplace approach) and instead this should be based on the needs of the service, team and individual, within agreed principles set out by the Council. The focus of Worksmart should also continue to include when you work, as much as where you work from, subject to service need.
- 4.2. The existing Worksmart vision has been reviewed in light of the above findings so that the vision for Worksmart going forward is that:
'We want to create an even better zero carbon working environment where people can work more smartly, more flexibly and be more productive, whilst delivering and enhancing the services we provide.'
- 4.3. The outcomes for Worksmart are therefore to ensure that:
- 4.3.1. We achieve greater workforce productivity and our services are accessible and delivered effectively when and how customers want them.
 - 4.3.2. We are purposeful about how we use our workspaces to meet customer and employee needs.
 - 4.3.3. Opportunities to work collaboratively and network across the organisation are maximised through the effective use of technology and our workspaces.
 - 4.3.4. We have clarity about and see a reduction in the costs and environmental impacts of our use of Council and employee work spaces, vehicles and other assets.
 - 4.3.5. People have more choice about when, where and how they work, supported and connected by effective and appropriate use of technology and informed by the needs of the team, customer and environmental impacts.
 - 4.3.6. People have the opportunity to lead more balanced and healthier lives and Worksmart makes us an attractive employer to work for.
 - 4.3.7. Business continuity will be improved by the ability to work in an all-electronic environment and from a much wider range of locations.
- 4.4. It is recognised that although our approach cannot be prescriptive, as one size will not fit all, it is necessary to have in place some Worksmart Principles which underpin our vision and outcomes. The existing principles will therefore be reviewed, along with the Council's existing behaviours framework, to ensure that they support our aims. From this, it will then be possible to determine the policy, practice and other changes that are required to support the revised Worksmart implementation. It is envisaged that this work will be undertaken from now until early 2022.
- 4.5. In the meantime, we will continue to advise staff to work from home where they can, to keep Covid-19 case rates low and to protect the most vulnerable. However, it is also appreciated that not everyone has suitable working environments at home and therefore we will also continue to enable staff to safely make use of our buildings, where required. Covid-19 safe measures will also continue and will be kept under review if Government advice changes. Further communications with staff will take place before Christmas, to provide them with information on the revised Worksmart vision and outcomes and update on the work that is taking place.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Although we are aware of the need to provide clarity about future working arrangements, this also needs to be balanced with continuing to mitigate against Covid-19 risks and ensuring that the needs of our customers, the environment and our workforce are fully considered. Good progress is being made and further updates will be provided to the Committee in due course.

Financial implications:

There are no direct financial implications to highlight at this stage.

Legal implications:

The report does not raise any specific legal implications requiring comment.