



PRODUCTIVE TIME

Location Independent Working Toolkit



Summary

As a result of recent developments in technology, employers are increasingly able to provide their employees with alternatives to traditional office based working practices.

By encouraging flexible arrangements such as home working and mobile working, employers can demonstrate a commitment to improving their employees' quality of life; maintain high levels of productivity; lower office running costs and improve staff retention rates.

This project aimed to develop a package of arrangements designed to support home working, mobile working and hot-desking, and to test whether the projected benefits could be achieved.

The final output was to deliver a toolkit capable of disseminating the lessons learned from the project. The toolkit is intended to facilitate the development of Location Independent Working (LIW).

Improvement through efficiency



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Project background

Developments in new technology coupled with a general increase in the awareness of the benefits of mobile and home working were the main driver for this project, which analysed the benefits and transferability of Location Independent Working for local authorities in the Derbyshire Transformational Partnership and the East Midlands.

The benefits of flexible and location independent working have long been championed by Derbyshire County Council, which is lead authority for this project.

Derbyshire noted that for many councils the start point has been to regard flexible working primarily as an employee benefit, however, results have almost always seen improvement and efficiency outcomes including:

- Reduced staff turnover with consequential reductions in recruitment and training costs
- Reduced sickness absence creating more productive time
- Productivity gains compared to “normal working patterns”
- Direct savings in accommodation costs
- Extended opening hours
- Working times matched to client needs
- Higher staff satisfaction leading to improved performance.

By developing the LIW toolkit the partners of the Derbyshire Transformation Partnership will be able to use a framework designed to maximise the aforementioned benefits of LIW.

Legislation

In April 2003 the Government passed legislation allowing employees to request flexible working arrangements. The objective of this legislation is to encourage employers to help employees to manage their work/life balance by providing more flexible working arrangements.

Initiating the project

The partnership required funding to explore opportunities for more flexible working arrangements, and in October 2005, submitted an application to the East Midlands Centre of Excellence (EMCE) for a match funded grant of £30k.

The bid was successful and the grant was used to initiate consultative support and develop a framework to assist the Partnership with the promotion and take up of LIW opportunities across various service environments.

Objectives

The partnership identified the following objectives as part of their application:

- To develop a transferable business case to establish the general feasibility for the implementation of a location independent working project
- To produce a methodology for the implementation of location independent working projects within the Derbyshire Transformational Partnership
- To provide a toolkit including a detailed implementation and project plan based on the methodology for use by other local authorities
- To identify a particular remote / mobile working technology for trial in a specific service environment(s) and against which to pilot the package of location independent support measures.

Benefits

A number of mobile and home working initiatives had already taken place within Derbyshire County Council. Generally, these were considered successful within their area, but had not been organised in a way that enabled the transfer of learning and methodologies to other areas of the organisation.

This is typical of most examples of flexible working in local authorities, which are implemented at a service level rather than for the whole organisation, primarily because funding is normally available to run small and medium scale pilots.

Whilst some of the dramatic benefits seen in smaller pilots are not likely to be replicated across the organisation as a whole there are still gains from going organisation wide that are being missed.

The move to flexible working at the organisation level is complex, involving as it does culture and organisational change, effective integration of IT solutions, accommodation strategies, financial implications, project management skills and the role of elected members.

Nevertheless the evidence suggests that the gains from an organisation wide approach are worthwhile and achievable and can be a key enabler for the achievement of both the transformation agenda and efficiency savings over the next few years.

By undertaking a pilot with the emphasis on demonstrating the benefits of location independent working as an authority wide initiative, with an extendable business case and implementation toolkit, it is hoped that location independent working projects will be implemented across the partnership.

Providing a generic business case and toolkit will allow authorities to benefit from a methodology that details the key factors for a successful implementation.

The pilot provides the opportunity to:

- Test new ways of working e.g. from home or multiple bases
- Measure the benefits and costs to the organisation
- Test the technology requirements
- Develop a process for roll-out e.g. templates, governance structures
- Understand risk factors and mitigate them
- Ascertain the impact Human Resource, ICT, Property and other policies have
- Dispel myths about location independent working.

One of the key drivers in piloting LIW was to test and validate costs and timescales in a live project environment. This would help ensure that a corporate 'blue print' was established on a sound footing, facilitate further rollout and ensure that full benefits realisation would occur.

Transferability

The outcomes of the project have been shared through a Location Independent Working Toolkit. It is intended to be used by any local authority considering a pilot project and consists of four key documents:

- The 'story' of the project - provides a definition of location independent working through the provision of an implementation guidance pack. This considers areas such as local authority and departmental buy-in, risk and culture, information technology, budget and investment requirements and management of the boundaries between work and home
- Pilot selection criteria - the evaluation model developed to enable a pilot to be chosen
- Business Case - a 'blank' business case framework for authorities to populate with their own data
- Implementation Plan - a project plan detailing key tasks from the start of the project through to the go live date, which can be tailored to meet partners' requirements.

The 6 main work streams covered in the implementation plan are:

- Communications
- Property
- Service redesign
- Technology
- Human resources
- Benefits measurement.

Role of RCE

With the encouragement and support of the East Midlands Centre of Excellence the Derbyshire Partnership was able to initiate this project on a match funding basis.

Many of the generic benefits have or will lead to cashable efficiency gains as a result of freeing up resources for other uses. Qualitative benefits such as improved employee morale or better customer satisfaction also have a substantial, but generally unmeasured impact on productivity and performance.

The services of an independent consultant have been engaged to validate the costs and benefits arising from the work undertaken in Derbyshire, and their report will be available late 2007.

Accessing the toolkit

The Derbyshire Transformation Partnership 'Location Independent Working Toolkit' can be downloaded from the EMCE website, visit: www.emce.gov.uk/liwtoolkit

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