26 JANUARY 2021

CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK

Purpose

1. To seek approval from the Forestry Commission Executive Board on recommendations made by the Changing the Way We Work project group.

Background

2. In response to the coronavirus pandemic imposed changes to working practice and in line with Defra Group H3 People and Places Design Principles Forestry England and Forest Services have been developing principles for new ways of working focussed on:

    - **Blended working**: *a blended working approach is our default approach where job roles do not need to undertake or supervise site-based activity.*
    - **Travel**: *only travel when it is necessary*
    - **Meetings**: *hold meetings virtually where possible*
    - **Technology and connectivity**: *provide staff with the IT equipment and systems required to do their work wherever they are based.*
    - **Offices**: *adapt our workplaces to meet changing patterns of use*
    - **Cohesion**: *maintain cohesion with our teams through regular site based, face to face as well as online contact.*

3. Our approach to move towards blended working will improve organisational performance, including productivity, customer service, team satisfaction and motivation, collaboration, and workplace utilisation, and to reduce negative outcomes such as absenteeism, tardiness, turnover, and time loss.[1]

4. The principles aim to deliver net financial budget and carbon savings, targeting reduction in travel and overnight accommodation costs as two significant elements with future potential to reduce office costs. Forestry England travel costs were £2.5m (excluding VME Fleet) and contributed 2.7k tCO2e of carbon in 2019/20 and Forest Services costs were just over £1m.

5. These principles are a significant cultural change for the organisation and were tested at our recent Senior Managers Meeting where over 95% of attendees were supportive. It will be important to manage the whole as a programme of change as well as progressing individual programme elements.

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[1] Blended Working, Nico W. Van Yperen Burkhard Wörtler https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781119256151.ch8

6. The group has developed proposals to implement the CWWW principles which are set out in outline as appendices to this paper and summarised below. The principles and proposals have been approved by the Forest Services Board and Forestry England Senior Leadership Team. Forest Research is aware of the principles and could choose to implement a similar approach.

Proposals

7. **Blended working**: We propose that a blended homeworking approach is our default approach where job roles do not need to undertake or supervise site-based activity.

   7.1 30% of Forest Services and Forestry England staff could spend 40% or more of their time working from home

   7.2 The transition to blended working should be mutually agreed and managed at a unit level as some individuals will not be able to work from home due to their personal circumstances. Unit managers will need to consider team cohesion, job roles and individual circumstances in deciding proportion of blended working in their team.

   7.3 Contact time with colleagues is critical to team and organisational cohesion, knowledge transfer and socialisation and there will be an expectation for all staff to have some in person contact with colleagues on a regular basis that is agreed with their line manager, normally on a weekly basis but in most cases more regularly and we will set this out in a Ways of Working charter.

   7.4 We will continue to offer flexible working arrangements around start and end of the working day, compressed working weeks and a variety of contract types

8. **Office Accommodation:** Changing work and meeting patterns will require the adaptation and alteration of offices and workplaces. This should allow for three types of situation:
   - A **day to day** user will require a focus space type (desk) in a quiet area
   - A **visiting user**, the blended worker, may require focus space or an informal touchdown space
   - Those attending offices for **team meetings** will require the team to have a booked meeting room/conference space/social space

8.1 Planning work to reconfigure offices and workplaces should commence immediately after the recommendation is accepted. Starting this change swiftly makes the most of the opportunity for change and reduces the opportunity to revert to old ways of working as COVID controls relax.

8.2 Each major workplace will require a standardised booking system for hot desks and meeting rooms, plus a social space as described above. MS Teams compatible conferencing equipment in each meeting room will be essential, as team meetings will often be blended with multiple locations.

8.3 Meeting hub and collaboration centres across England will also be identified including the current Bristol office and we will make use of other bookable facilities e.g. DEFRA hubs and FE solicitors offices.

9. **Meetings:** Our recommendation is to aim to hold meetings virtually wherever possible. However, we recognise the benefits of face- to-face interaction and that certain meetings that must be held on site and/or face to face to meet business needs. The group has developed a set of principles for online meetings that should be adopted and staff should be provided with training for managing online meetings.

10. **Travel:** Travel in Forestry Commission is a significant cost element and historically has been the largest contributor to our organisation's carbon footprint. For example in 2019/20 Forestry England spent £2.5m and travelled 6.7m miles.

    10.1 In Forestry England, setting national level targets to reduce travel cost and carbon, and requiring each unit to produce a plan to achieve these savings that could reduce costs by over £500k per annum recurrently. Forest Services current expansion limits their ability to set targets at this time. They will instead aim for a reduction in per head travel costs that are currently £4,816 per FTE.

    10.2 Our principles should be:
        - Only travel when it is necessary
        - Plan travel effectively
        - Minimise financial and environmental cost
        - Consider health and safety

11. **IT and Connectivity**: Our aim will be to provide staff with the IT equipment and systems required to do their work.

    11.1 If the majority of their work will be done at home, then appropriate equipment will be provided for the home.

11.2 Access to systems where possible shall be consistent whether working from the office or elsewhere.

11.3 Offices will need to be equipped to facilitate hot desking as well as place-based teams.

11.4 We will establish agreement between the individual and Forestry Commission that sets out what the organisation will provide and what the requirements are for the employee in respect of home/flexible working.

Implementation

12. We propose that an implementation group is created by the EB made up of team members who can act on or instruct the actions suggested below. The groups first task would be to set out an implementation plan.

13. The change process will be gradual, and many staff will see limited change in their day to day work patterns. There may be a tendency to return to old ways of working as COVID restrictions decrease and so the overarching CWWW principles will need to be communicated and managed to ensure this does not happen. (EB/Communications/Unit Managers)

14. A staff and FCTU engagement process should start once principles have been agreed at FCEB. It is recommended that this engagement process should include a staff survey of working patterns. (Communications/HR)

15. Engagement and cascade with Senior Managers and unit managers prior to unit based staff engagement with teams and individuals most likely to be affected by these proposals. (Communications/HR/Management Units)

16. Updating FC wide HR policies to reflect new arrangements (HR)

17. Development of HR and linked finance systems to process payments and handle any tax issues arising from this policy (HR/Finance)

18. Analysis of existing and new roles to allocate them into the new working categories. (Management Units/HR)

19. A voluntary process to agree working arrangements with existing employees in home working and blended working categories (Management Units/HR)

20. Assessment of blended working arrangements within recruitment processes (Management Units/HR)

21. A review of office accommodation and development of plans to remodel and review lease arrangements (Estates/Management Units)

22. Development and allocation of IT hardware and support with connectivity to blended and home workers (IT/Unit Managers)

23. Agreement of travel and subsistence financial and carbon targets and savings (Estates/Finance/Unit Managers)

24. Training and guidance on online meetings (HR/IT)

Resource implications

25. Advice is being taken on potential tax liabilities. The tax liabilities and arrangements will be unchanged providing that peoples working arrangements are formalised and home to office journeys for blended workers remain at their present cost and rates.

26. Potential costs associated with delivery include:
    - Home facilities allowance at an average of £50 per annum per employee
    - Adjustment to buildings to accommodate new ways of working to be assessed in implementation phase and reprioritised from existing budgets
    - IT project management @ c. £50k to deliver required changes to office and individual IT needs

Risk Assessment

27. The key risks are:

    24.1 Lack of engagement with staff will mean that the cultural change required to implement these proposals is not achieved: this will be mitigated by our staff engagement plan

    24.2 Lack of resources on offices and IT mean that the changes to offices and effective changes to working practices cannot be achieved: this will be mitigated through the development of the implementation plans for these areas of work

    24.3 A clean implementation will be harder to manage if some staff remain homeworking due to the COVID restrictions during the transition period: flexible timing of implementation will mitigate this risk.

    24.4 Site based staff feel disenfranchised/ lack of benefit: will be mitigated through manager briefings and staff engagement plan.

24.5 Teams become less cohesive as a result of less face to face contact: mitigated through ensuring regular face to face contact and our staff Ways of Working charter.

Equality Impact Assessment

28. An equality impact assessment will be required for these proposals when agreed in principle key issues to be considered are suggested below.

29. Reducing travel is likely to have a positive impact as people to whom travel is a barrier are more likely to be able to join the Forestry Commission and existing staff are more likely to be able to participate in more work areas and activity.

30. Teams or individuals based at locations that do not have sufficient connectivity to deliver modern IT will be of significant consideration.

31. More virtual meetings will require better planning and consideration to ensure that unintended barriers are not created as a result of taking meetings online (for example for those with vision or hearing disabilities). However moving to an online presence for some meetings can open up opportunities for participation for those with mobility issues or caring responsibilities.

32. Blended working may increase opportunities for a more diverse workforce due to increased availability of flexible working arrangements and home bases.

33. There is a potential risk that a blended workplace may create a two-tier workforce which, if not managed effectively to ensure continued effective contribution and recognition for those working remotely, could result in negative disparate impact. As there is some evidence that women, disabled and non-white employees may be more likely to work from home we need to ensure bias does not exist in recruitment and promotion to favour office-based employees.

Communications

34. An outline communication plan has been prepared. This is focussed on engaging FCTU and those staff likely to be most affected by the changes whilst keeping all staff informed.

Recommendations

35. Forestry Commission Executive Board are asked to agree the following principles:

- Blended working: a blended working approach is our default approach where job roles do not need to undertake or supervise site-based activity.

- Travel: only travel when it is necessary

- Meetings: hold meetings virtually where possible

- Technology and connectivity: provide staff with the IT equipment and systems required to do their work wherever they are based

- Offices: adapt our workplaces to meet changing patterns of use

- Cohesion: maintain cohesion with our teams through regular site based, face to face as well as online contact.

36. Forestry Commission Executive Board are asked to support the development of an implementation plan as outlined above.

Changing the Way We Work Group
15 January 2021

Group Members:
Head of IT, Forestry England
Forester, North England, Forestry England
Finance Systems Administrator, Forestry England
Strategic Development Team Leader, Forest Services
Director Estates, Forestry England
Forester, West England, Forestry England
Central FMD, Forestry England
Internal Engagement Manager, Forestry England
Head of HR, Forestry England
Estates Contract Manager, Forestry England
Business Change Manager, Forest Services

Forestry Commission

Appendices:

Appendix I- CWWW Blended Working

Appendix II - CWWW Technology and Connectivity

Appendix III - CWWW Meeting Principles

Appendix IV - CWWW Offices for Blended Working

Appendix V - CWWW Travel Principles

Appendix VI - CWWW Communications and Engagement

Appendix VII - CWWW Summary