

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Personnel Committee - 12 December 2005

REPORT ON: Flexible Working

REPORT BY: Assistant Chief Executive (Management)

REPORT NO.: 705-2005

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek the Committee's approval to the proposed Flexible Working Policy and Home Working Policy.

2 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee:

2.1 approves the Flexible Working Policy (attached as Appendix 1);

2.2 approves the Home Working Policy (attached as Appendix 2).

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 Applications to undertake flexible working may be refused where the burden of additional costs is considered to be excessive. There may be an increase in costs in the short term, where, for example, an employee applies to work from home. However, management should also bear in mind the potential savings, in the longer term, in accommodation costs, equipment sharing, etc.

3.2 Under the terms of the Home Working Policy, where an employee is required to work from home, he/she will be paid an allowance. Again, management should bear in mind the potential savings, in the longer term.

4 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None.

5 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The policy direction accords with the Social Inclusion and Community Planning agendas.

6 BACKGROUND

- 6.1 The Employment Act 2002 introduced the right, with effect from 6 April 2003, for parents of children aged under 6 (or 18, if disabled) with 26 weeks continuous service to request to work flexibly.
- 6.2 The Council decided to open up this right to all of its employees and allow requests from any employee ie applications are not limited to parents of children aged under 6 (or 18, if disabled) or to those with 26 weeks continuous service.
- 6.3 At present, the flexible working arrangements which are in place are, in the main, the result of requests from individual employees. The Social Work Department, however, has successfully piloted a number of flexible working arrangements within specific teams. Evaluation of the Social Work pilots concurs with research findings that there are benefits for organisations which promote flexible working in terms of a more motivated and efficient workforce. Background information on flexible working is contained in Appendix 3.
- 6.4 The proposed policies aim to introduce a more cohesive approach to work-life balance issues by facilitating flexible working systems wherever possible.

7 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The Council Management Team and the trade unions have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1 None.

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2 December 2005

DRAFT**FLEXIBLE WORKING POLICY****INTRODUCTION**

Dundee City Council recognises that its employees are its most valuable asset and that the health and welfare of its employees are critical to the success of the Council in achieving its vision for Dundee.

The workforce in the UK is now more diverse than ever before, reflecting changes in society and the make up of the population. Many of them are working parents, some are lone parents and overall there are more people with caring responsibilities. The national workforce is ageing and responsibilities for older people are increasing. As a result, the demand for part-time and other flexible working patterns is increasing.

The Employment Act 2002 introduced the right for parents of children aged under 6 (or 18 if disabled) with 26 weeks continuous service to request to work flexibly. However, the Council widened the scope of eligibility to apply to all employees (i.e. applications are not limited to parents of children under 6, or 18 if disabled, and there is no length of service requirement).

Flexible working can achieve benefits for both employees and the organisation. However, the key is not to promote flexible working as an end in itself but to look for opportunities to use flexible working where employee and departmental needs coincide. The central issue is to create a positive and supportive culture where flexible working arrangements may operate successfully and deliver the potential benefits in terms of service delivery and employee wellbeing.

POLICY STATEMENT

Dundee City Council is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of its employees by introducing and promoting policies which encourage and support healthier lifestyles. It recognises that the need to balance the demands placed on an individual by work-life and home-life may be a source of pressure. Similarly, the Council needs to balance requests for flexible working from employees with the demand to provide high quality services to the people of Dundee.

The Council will adopt flexible working arrangements where all of these needs can be balanced and where there are demonstrable benefits for services to the people of Dundee as well as for employees and management. Flexible working will not be approved where there could be a resultant detrimental effect.

The Council will require departments to consider flexible working options when changes are being planned, particularly where these will enhance service delivery, and enter into discussions with employees at an early stage.

All decisions in relation to the implementation of flexible working will be considered on the needs of the provision of the service.

The Council will continue to work with managers, employees and trade unions to develop flexible working options.

IMPLEMENTATION

Range of Options

Flexible working options and the potential benefits and problems of each, are outlined in Appendix 1A. This is not an exhaustive list as an employee may request to work any flexible arrangement suiting his/her needs. For example, an employee may request to work a combination of options such as job share combined with term-time. All requests from employees will be considered in accordance with the policy.

Procedure

- 1 Requests must be made on the form "Request for Flexible Working".
- 2 The line manager will meet the employee within 20 working days of receiving the request.
- 3 The line manager will complete the form "Request for Flexible Working - Departmental Response" confirming his/her decision regarding the request.
- 4 The employee will be informed of the decision within 10 working days of the meeting.
- 5 If the application is approved, a letter formally amending the employee's terms and conditions will be drawn up and agreed by both parties.
- 6 If the request is refused, the employee will be advised, in writing, of the reasons for refusal and of the right of appeal.
- 7 Where a request for flexible working is refused, the employee will have the right of appeal to the Head of Department of the employing department. One further and final appeal may be submitted to the Assistant Chief Executive (Management).

The Personnel Department can provide advice and guidance on the procedure if required.

The IT Department will be available to provide advice and guidance on the feasibility of meeting IT requirements and overcoming technical difficulties.

Reasons for Refusal

A request to undertake flexible working will be given careful consideration and any refusal must be based on one, or more, of the following grounds:

- burden of additional costs;
- detrimental effect on the efficient and effective operation of the department's/Council's services;
- inability to re-organise work among existing employees;
- detrimental impact on the performance or quality of work;
- lack of work during the periods the employee proposes to work;
- planned structural changes.

Where flexible working is proposed as the result of team discussions or initiated by management, an assessment will nevertheless require to be undertaken to determine whether there may be a detrimental impact and ensure any decision fully considers these aspects.

Amendment to Terms and Conditions

A letter detailing the flexible working arrangement will be drawn up and agreed with the employee. This will constitute a formal amendment to the employee's terms and conditions. However, a flexible working arrangement may be withdrawn where the system of flexible working is found to have a detrimental impact on service delivery. The Personnel Department will provide advice on the content of this letter.

REVIEW

Managers will require to monitor and review those areas where flexible working is being undertaken to assess the effect on service provision and employee satisfaction. Where a system of flexible working is found to have a detrimental impact on service delivery, the arrangement will be reviewed and revised as a matter of urgency.

The Flexible Working Policy will be monitored on an on-going basis to ensure that it is meeting its aim to create a positive and supportive culture where flexible working can operate successfully and to achieve benefits in terms of service delivery and employee well being.

The policy will be reviewed regularly.

RANGE OF FLEXIBLE WORKING OPTIONS

The range of options available under flexible working fall into 3 categories: reducing working time, varying working time and varying working location. Various options are discussed in some detail below. This is not an exhaustive list as an employee may request to work any flexible arrangement which suits his/her needs, including a combination of options.

1 Reducing Working Time

The following methods of working flexibly actually reduce the total number of hours worked and therefore pay, annual leave entitlement, accumulation of pension etc will be affected. The advantage to an employee of working reduced hours is that he/she has more time to spend on other activities of importance to him/her.

- **Reduced Hours** - managers will need to ensure that there is no detrimental effect on the operation of the service by ensuring that sufficient employee cover is available at busy times, and that the standard of performance and productivity is maintained at an acceptable level. It may, however, be possible to extend service delivery where a number of employees prefer part-time hours at different times of the day.
- **Job Sharing** - this is a form of part-time working where two or more people share the responsibility for a full time job, and share the pay and benefits in proportion to the hours each works. Job sharers may work split days, split weeks, or alternate weeks. Managers will need to ensure that work is allocated appropriately and that there are adequate procedures for communication and hand-over between sharers. Details can be found in the Job Sharing Policy.
- **Reduced Working Year (term time work)** - this is a form of flexible working where the employee works regular full time hours during most of the year and takes several weeks off at times which suit his/her other commitments. In most cases this option is used by employees with school age children in order to take leave during the school holidays. Managers will need to ensure that there is no detriment to the service by organising appropriate hand-overs, adequate employee cover during the periods of leave and that the individual is given sufficient time and information to catch up when he/she returns from a prolonged period of leave.

2 Varying Working Time

The following methods of working flexibly involve changing the times the individual works whilst the total number of hours remains unchanged. Pay is therefore unaffected by working these options. Any agreement to vary working time will depend on the planned pattern of work complying with the terms of the Working Time Regulations 1998.

- **Flexitime** - the Council operates a Scheme of Flexible Working Hours which requires employees to work their contracted hours over a 4 week accounting period, with some allowance for carry over of credit or debit hours. The scheme has core time periods, during which employees are required to be at work, and a maximum bandwidth during which employees may be at work.

- **Enhanced Flexitime** - some departments operate an enhanced flexitime scheme where the contracted hours may be worked in a pattern which does not comply with the core hours or bandwidth of the corporate scheme. The actual hours worked by each employee are required to be agreed in advance with the line manager on a week to week basis. Such a scheme would usually be introduced on a team or departmental basis and may provide opportunities to extend service delivery by widening the hours at which employees are available.
- **Compressed Hours** - under this arrangement the number of hours worked remains unchanged, however working time is re-organised so that the employee works longer hours on certain days to enable an early finish on other days, or even works a 4 day week or 9 day fortnight. Managers will have to ensure that there is adequate employee cover at all times.
- **Annualised Hours** - under this system the number of hours an employee works is defined over a whole year. There may be advantages to the employee and/or service delivery, depending on the pattern of work adopted.

3 Varying Working Location

The following methods of working flexibly involve a change to the working location.

- **Home Working** - this method of flexible working allows a worker to work at home on an agreed work pattern for all or part of the working week. An extensive assessment procedure requires to be undertaken before agreement can be given to this option and further details of the procedure can be found in the Council's Home Working Policy (attached as Appendix 2).
- **Hot Desking** - this method of flexible working allows a worker to work from a mobile location and "hot desks" are provided at a central location, which employees can book when they require access to the Council's computer systems/intranet/filing systems, etc. The employee does not have a regular workstation and therefore savings can be made in terms of office accommodation, furniture, etc. Should hot desking be a possible option for both the employer and the employee, the Personnel Department will be willing to provide further advice and guidance.

DRAFT**DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL****HOME WORKING POLICY****1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Employment Act 2002 introduced the right for parents of children aged under 6 (or 18 if disabled) with 26 weeks continuous service to request to work flexibly. The Council widened the scope of eligibility to apply to all members of staff (i.e. applications are not limited to parents of children under 6, or under 18 if disabled).
- 1.2 Home working is one of the possibilities which is included within the scope of the Flexible Working Policy. However, as there are many areas to cover before home working could be undertaken by an employee, this additional policy will ensure consistency of approach across departments and ensure that managers give due consideration to all of these areas before an agreement to implement home working is entered into.
- 1.3 There may also be circumstances where the Council requires an employee to work from home. In these cases, the same issues will require to be considered and agreed upon before home working can be undertaken.

2 DEFINITION OF HOME WORKING

- 2.1 Home working is defined as a situation in which an employee has entered into an agreement with the Council to undertake work at home, on an agreed work pattern, for all or part of the normal working week. This may require the use of technology or equipment supplied by the Council, and the arrangements regarding this will form part of the agreement.
- 2.2 There are four main categories of home worker:-
- 1 those who work at home on a full time basis, i.e. all contracted hours or all contracted output;
 - 2 those who work at home on a part time basis, i.e. some contracted hours or output at home, some at Council workplace;
 - 3 those who work at home, either on a full time or part time basis, but whose working times may vary from week to week;
 - 4 those who work at home on an occasional basis.
- 2.3 In the case of home workers falling into categories 1-3, the use of technology and/or equipment supplied by the Council is likely to be involved. Those in category 4 who work from home only on an occasional basis may not require equipment supplied specifically for the work undertaken at home. Whilst arrangements in these circumstances may be agreed on an ad hoc basis and fairly quickly, the procedure should be followed as far as possible and a written agreement must be made. This agreement may be worded in such a way that it will also apply for future occasions when the individual may request to work from home. However, it will be required to be reviewed regularly.

3 ELIGIBILITY

- 3.1 Requests to undertake home working may be made by any employee, and will be examined by the Head of Department . Approval or refusal will be dependent on a number of factors including the skills and abilities of the individual employee and the suitability of the home environment, as well as the nature of the work, impact on service delivery, cost to the Council etc. The full range of factors to be considered is included at part 7 of this policy.

4 REASONS FOR REFUSAL

- 4.1 Careful consideration will be given to any request to undertake home working and any refusal of a request will be based on the grounds listed in the Flexible Working Policy:-

- 1 burden of additional costs;
- 2 detrimental effect on the efficient and effective operation of the Council's services;
- 3 inability to re-organise work among existing employees;
- 4 detrimental impact on performance or quality of work;
- 5 lack of work during the periods the employee proposes to work;
- 6 planned structural changes.

5 PROCEDURE

- 1 Requests to undertake home working must be made on the form "Request for Flexible Working".
- 2 The manager will undertake an assessment covering all areas listed at part 7 of this report and will meet the employee to clarify any points. In the case of applications to work from home on an occasional basis, the assessment procedure may be modified and the agreement less detailed. The meeting must take place within 20 working days of receiving the request.
- 3 The manager will complete the form "Request for Flexible Working - Departmental Response" detailing findings of this assessment, and will make a decision regarding the request.
- 4 The employee will be informed of the decision within 10 working days of the meeting.
- 5 If the application is approved, an agreement will be drawn up and signed by both parties. In the case of applications to work from home on an occasional basis, approval may be given in a less formal manner, but will require to be given in writing by the manager.
- 6 If the request is refused, the employee will be advised, in writing, of the reasons for refusal and of the right of appeal.

- 7 Where a request to undertake home working is refused, the employee will have the right to appeal to the Head of Department of the employing department. One further and final appeal may be submitted to the Assistant Chief Executive (Management).

6 ARRANGEMENTS FOR HOME WORKING

6.1 Agreement

A written agreement will be drawn up and signed by the employee and the Head of Department covering all aspects of the home working arrangement. While some aspects of homeworking will vary from post to post, the following conditions will apply in every case where home working is being undertaken. In the case of those employees working from home on an occasional basis, this agreement may be less detailed.

6.2 Review Period

All arrangements to undertake home working will be subject to regular review, under the categories detailed at parts 4 and 7 of this policy. The initial review, when an arrangement for Home Working has been agreed, should take place after 6 months, and reviews should be repeated at intervals of not longer than 12 months.

6.3 Dependants

- 6.3.1 The Council will require to confirm that suitable arrangements are in place for the care of the employee's dependants (if any) while he/she is undertaking work under the home working agreement.
- 6.3.2 Where the application to work from home has been made to allow for the care of dependants during the normal working day, the applicant may be planning to undertake the work outwith normal business hours. In these circumstances, the application to undertake home working will be classed under category 3 above, where the actual hours of work may vary from week to week. The agreed pattern of work will require to be agreed with the Head of Department in advance.

The following model, with the available working day being divided into 3 periods, may be used:-

Morning (hours prior to 1.00 pm);
 Afternoon (hours between 1.00 pm - 6.00 pm);
 Evening (hours after 6.00 pm).

- 6.3.3 Home workers, undertaking work from home on a full time basis, will require to work a standard working week over a minimum of eight of these periods per week. Home workers working less than full time from home may be required to work a standard working day over a minimum of two of these periods per day. The Home Worker will require to advise the line manager, in advance, what these hours will be. Line managers will assess whether the requested hours of work allow sufficient opportunity to make any necessary work-related contact with the individual. Line managers will approve the work pattern only if the principles of the Working Time Regulations 1998 are being followed.

- 6.3.4 As any arrangement to work other than the normal 8.30 – 5.00 working day will be solely at the request of the employee, he/she will not be entitled to any enhancements or allowances in respect of these hours.

6.4 **Health and Safety Risk Assessment**

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 will apply to employees who undertake home working as it does to those based in Council premises. Therefore, an assessment of health and safety risks in the employee's home will require to be undertaken by an employee competent to do so. The resultant risk assessment will be subject to regular review.

6.5 **Expenses**

- 6.5.1 Where the home is recognised as the permanent place of work (i.e. those Home Workers in category 1), travelling expenses will be payable in line with the Council's agreed procedure; however, if the individual lives outwith the Council's boundary, mileage will be paid from the boundary of the Council. Mileage between home and Council based workplace will not be paid. Where an employee is required by the Council to work from home, an allowance will be paid to cover additional expenses.
- 6.5.2 Where the employee has requested to undertake work from home, no allowance will be paid for heating, lighting or other costs incurred. The Council's view is that home working is undertaken at the request of the employee and he/she will make compensatory savings on travelling and parking expenses by not travelling to work.
- 6.5.3 Where the employee is required to make phone calls from his/her private phone, the cost of these will be reimbursed, subject to a record of calls being maintained and produced.
- 6.5.4 Where expenses have been incurred by the Council in facilitating a request for home working, and the employee subsequently resigns or requests to return to office-based work, such expenses may be reclaimed by the Council. A statement to this effect will be included in the written agreement.

7 **ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF MANAGER**

- 7.1 It will be the responsibility of the Manager to approve or refuse a request to undertake home working. Any refusal of a request will be based on the grounds listed at part 4 of this policy. The request will be assessed under the following headings: the suitability of the duties of the post which are to be undertaken at the employee's home; the suitability of the employee's home; and the suitability of the employee to undertake home working. The following questions, which are not exhaustive, provide examples of the issues to be considered:-

7.2 **The Duties of the Post**

- 1 Can the service the employee provides continue to be provided if he/she is based at home?
- 2 What are the implications for other members of the team or the service being provided?
- 3 How will work be allocated, measured and/or supervised?

- 4 What arrangements will require to be made for communication between the individual and the manager / team / other colleagues?
- 5 What arrangements will require to be made for staff development reviews, on-the-job training and off-the-job training?
- 6 How regularly will the individual be required to attend the workplace for team meetings etc?
- 7 What equipment, software, furniture etc will require to be provided by the Council? Is the cost prohibitive? The line manager will require to liaise with the IT Department if IT equipment is required.

7.3 The Employee's Home

- 1 Is there enough space in the employee's home for an office/workstation?
- 2 What arrangements will be required to ensure the security of Council-owned equipment?
- 3 What arrangements will be required to ensure the security of confidential information/documents?
- 4 Is the employee prepared to meet the cost of any adjustment/alteration to the property, which may be required?
- 5 Have arrangements been made for the care of the employee's dependants during working hours?
- 6 Health and safety risk assessments will also require to be undertaken in the employee's home.

7.4 The Employee

- 1 Is the employee able to work without direct supervision?
- 2 Is the employee motivated and disciplined enough to undertake workload and meet deadlines?
- 3 Is he/she able to cope with the social isolation of working alone?

8 ROLE OF IT DEPARTMENT

- 8.1 The IT Department will advise Departmental Managers regarding the feasibility of meeting the IT requirements in the employee's home, and in particular on financial and security implications.

9 HOME WORKING AGREEMENT

9.1 When these issues have been assessed by the line manager, and the post and employee have been deemed suitable for home working, an agreement will be drafted and signed by both parties, covering all aspects of the home working arrangement. This agreement will contain details of the following areas, together with any aspects particular to the individual case:-

1 Hours of Work/Output - specifying the actual hours the employee will work for the Council. Where the employee wishes to work variable hours at home, the arrangements for agreeing these hours, in advance, with the line manager will be included here.

Where the agreement to home working is based on output rather than hours of work, details of these arrangements should be included here.

2 Communication - specifying how, and how often, communication between the line manager and the employee will take place.

3 Review Period - initial agreement to undertake home working will be for a period of 6 months, and thereafter will be reviewed at intervals of not more than 12 months.

4 Equipment - specifying what equipment will be provided and maintained by the Council, and the employee's responsibility to report any faults or problems with equipment immediately; also a statement regarding the access required to the employee's home to undertake maintenance and repair of equipment.

5 Health and Safety - advising that it will be the employee's responsibility to provide a safe working environment and safe systems of work in the home. If the employee proposes to make any changes at home which will affect these, then the manager must be informed in order that further health and safety risk assessments may be undertaken.

6 Confidentiality - advising that the employee must comply with any arrangements made to maintain the confidentiality and security of information.

7 Expenses - advising that no allowance will be paid for heating, lighting or other costs incurred from working at home; arrangements regarding necessary phone calls; and in what circumstances mileage will be paid.

A statement may also be included advising that certain costs incurred by the Council will be reclaimed should the employee resign, or request to return to office-based work, within a set timescale.

8 Reporting sick - advising of arrangements for reporting sick where these differ from the Council's Reporting Procedure.

9 Reporting accidents - advising of arrangements for reporting accidents.

10 Dependants - statement clarifying the Council's position that home working cannot be combined with caring for dependants.

- 11 Insurance - a statement that working from home may affect the individual's building and contents insurance for their home, and advising that any increase in insurance premiums would require to be met by the individual.
- 12 Income Tax - a statement that the employee may be eligible for Income Tax relief, and advising that queries in this regard should be addressed to the local Income Tax office.
- 13 Moving home - statement to the effect that the approval to the request to undertake home working is dependent on the particular home occupied by the individual at the time of the agreement. If the individual moves home, then the agreement will terminate, and a new application to undertake home working would require to be made.
- 14 Job Specific - statement that approval to undertake home working is specific to the post currently occupied. If the employee moves to another post, then a new application to undertake home working would require to be made.
- 15 Termination of agreement - statement that either party may terminate the agreement if the arrangements are found to be unsatisfactory. Notice will require to be given in writing four weeks prior to the agreement ceasing. If the agreement is terminated by the Council, it will be on the basis of one or more of the factors listed at part 4 of this report. Where the agreement is terminated by the Council as a result of disciplinary procedures, the four-week notice period will not be required.
- 16 Termination of employment - statement that if the contract of employment is terminated for any reason, then the employee will be required to allow access to the home by Council employees in order to recover Council property.

FLEXIBLE WORKING - SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION

INTRODUCTION

Flexible working arrangements can play a valuable role in organisational performance. The key is not to promote flexible working as an end in itself, but to look for opportunities to use flexible working where employee needs and departmental needs coincide. Central issues are how to implement and operate flexible working policies in practice, to create a positive and supportive culture, and to deliver the potential benefits they offer in terms of performance and employee well-being.

RANGE AND FLEXIBILITY OF FLEXIBLE WORKING

Flexibility in the workplace is a nebulous concept. Examples are outlined below, but the list is not exhaustive.

In practice, flexible working doesn't operate as a straightforward basket of options from which employees pick and choose. In reality, departments will make decisions about which employees are able to work flexibly (for example, in view of the nature of the work they do and the operational requirements of the department or section they are in). Some forms of flexible working will be driven by departmental needs rather than the employee's. Annual hours frequently falls into this category, as can part time working. In addition, a form of flexible working being widely available in theory doesn't mean that it will be widely used by employees.

Examples of flexible working are outlined below:-

- Part time working
- Term time working
- Job share
- Flexitime
- Compressed hours
- Annual hours
- Home working
- Mobile working

There is a legislative requirement for organisations to consider requests for flexible working. This covers parents with children aged under 6, or under 18 where the child is disabled. Many organisations, including the Council, have extended this right beyond the legislative minimum.

REASONS FOR USING FLEXIBLE WORKING

However, organisations are not driven by legislative requirements alone. Helping recruitment and, in particular, retention are powerful motivators for using flexible working. Being seen to meet employees' needs is also an important feature.

Reasons why organisations make use of flexible working practices are outlined below:-

- Help retain employees
- Meet employees' needs
- Comply with legislation
- Support business needs
- Meet customers' needs
- Help recruit employees
- Support employer 'brand'
- Maximise use of organisations' premises

BENEFITS OF FLEXIBLE WORKING

A desire to improve retention is the most popular motivation for making use of flexible working practices. Many organisations also believe that implementing flexible working practices has a positive effect on employee motivation. The "psychological contract" also benefits from the implementation of flexible working practices. The psychological contract is the relationship of mutual obligations between employer and employee. Issues such as fair treatment and trust lie at the heart of this relationship. A positive psychological contract results in high commitment to the organisation, high motivation, and a sense of satisfaction and well-being.

Effects of implementing flexible working practices are outlined below:-

- Retention
- Increased motivation
- Recruitment
- Psychological contract
- Increased productivity
- Reduced absence
- Improved customer service
- Teamworking
- Knowledge sharing

As outlined above, productivity is another area where organisations see positive effects. Work-life balance is particularly influential on employee attitudes, with employees more likely to exhibit 'discretionary behaviour' or to 'go the extra mile' for their organisation.

The beneficial effects of flexible working on managing and reducing absence have been confirmed by research.

Research indicated that only a small proportion of organisations report any negative effect on customer service levels as a result of flexible working. However, teamworking may be slightly more problematical.

TAKE UP AND MONITORING OF FLEXIBLE WORKING

Enabling all employees to request flexible working arrangements (rather than just parents with young children, as identified by current legislation) is helpful in demonstrating fairness to all employees. If expectations are managed, this doesn't mean creating an 'entitlement' culture. Rather, it means that everyone can see that their requests are being considered on the same basis, and bearing in mind the operational needs of the business.

This can also help make it easier to accommodate requests for flexible working. Once there is a critical mass of people wishing to work flexibly - not only parents - this increases the chances of finding a workable solution for the team. This is because not all of those seeking to work flexibly will want the same kind of daytime hours, when childcare facilities are more readily available. In some circumstances, this could help deal with departmental challenges such as extending opening hours or the times at which a member of the team is available to handle internal and external customer enquiries.

There is also a need to monitor the effectiveness of flexible working from both the Council's and the employee's point of view. The Council will take a number of factors into account when reviewing flexible working arrangements. These will range from quantitative measures such as absence and turnover through to more qualitative information gathering using employee attitude survey findings and feedback from focus groups. Evaluation and monitoring of this kind are essential if the benefits of using more flexible working practices are to be recognised and promoted by the Council.

COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

The need to clearly allocate responsibility for the awareness and delivery of flexible working practices is important. Where in the past the Personnel Department has driven awareness, this must change if flexible working is to be embraced by all Council departments. This means that it is now important for senior and line managers to be supportive of flexible working and be willing and able to promote it to their employees.

There is also a need to ensure follow-through after the initial establishment or extension of flexible working arrangements. After the flurry of activity surrounding the launch or extension, it is important to embed the idea of ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

The importance of publicising flexible working arrangements cannot be overstated. This can be achieved in several ways:-

- Via the Employee Handbook
- During induction
- In recruitment interviews
- On the intranet
- In recruitment advertising
- Training line managers to communicate the policy

However, a word of caution is required. The Council must ensure that line managers do not inappropriately and enthusiastically over-promise regarding flexible working options at the recruitment stage, as this can lead to operational difficulties.

There are a number of constraints on the implementation of flexible working practices. These are outlined below:-

- Operational pressures
- Line managers' ability to effectively manage flexible employees
- Line managers' attitudes
- Existing organisational culture
- Lack of senior management support
- Financial constraints
- Technological constraints
- Lack of employee interest
- Employee resistance

Operational pressures are the most significant constraint for organisations when implementing or extending flexible working practices. This includes concerns about damage to service levels and ensuring continued productivity. However, while such concerns do act as a barrier, in reality they are not always borne out. In practice, service levels and productivity benefit from flexible working practices in most organisations. These benefits emerge primarily as a result of careful planning and management regarding employees' take up of flexible working.

Line managers' ability to manage employees working more flexibly and the attitudes they hold on flexible working are also constraints.

Senior level management support is a significant factor when implementing major initiatives and this applies to the introduction or extension of flexible working. Organisational culture and management style are also important considerations when seeking to implement and embed flexible working practices. For organisations with a 'command and control' style of management, flexible working practices can be seen as a threat to management authority. Close supervision and managing employees on the basis of "presenteeism" (ie time spent in the workplace) is difficult to reconcile when operating more flexible working arrangements. For these to be effective, a more participative style is needed and the relationship between employee and line manager requires more trust.

Some line managers will already have been informally operating flexible working arrangements with their employees over the years, as they have instinctively seen the value in this. As the Councils' large organisational initiative is being rolled out, it will be important to ensure that these people buy into the overarching Council policy and approach to flexible working, rather than continuing to operate a series of ad hoc arrangements.

It is accepted that difficulties will arise when line managers deal with requests for flexible working. Some of these are outlined below:-

- Inability to control workflow
- Having to demonstrate fairness between different employees
- Technical problems in restructuring/redesigning jobs
- Threat to management's ability to manage
- Reduced productivity
- Need to recruit more employees to maintain service/output
- Problems in managing the performance of the team
- Problems communicating with the team

One of the most important concerns is demonstrating fairness between employees. As has already been stated, enabling all employees to request flexible working arrangements is helpful in this respect. Without this process in place, there is a danger that some employees will be unfairly burdened with different and unattractive hours or tight deadlines, while those with children will not.

It is also important to have a fair and transparent process so that employees feel that they are being treated equally. The decision-making process should include the following 3 elements: the individual (for example, their work skills, style and preferences); the nature of their role (for example, how much time is spent out of the office and working with office-based colleagues); and the needs of the team.

Difficulties will emerge when competing requests for flexible working are received, and where agreeing to both is not supportive of departmental needs. In these circumstances, a transparent set of criteria against which flexible working requests are assessed is essential.

The challenge of demonstrating fairness to different groups of employees can sometimes be addressed by making use of self-rostering. When the roster for a team is devised by its members rather than the line manager, people are better able to recognise the important of balancing business with individual needs.

As well as having difficulties in implementing flexible working practices, line managers will also have concerns about their ability to manage a team with a larger number of flexible workers, particularly in relation to controlling the flow of work and effectively managing the performance of their team. Some managers may also see communication with their team as generally more difficult. With this in mind, there is a need to ensure that line managers have adequate skills in performance management and employee communication when introducing flexible working practices. There is also a need for advice and support from the Personnel Department.

It also has to be acknowledged that employees may have concerns about requesting flexible working and the following list outlines actions which the Council should take to allay these concerns:-

- Improve communication of the flexible working arrangements available
- Ensure that training and development opportunities are available to employees working flexibly
- Include questions on flexible working practices in employee attitude surveys
- Highlight flexible working opportunities in job advertisements
- Ensure that performance management concentrates on individual outputs rather than "presenteeism"
- Encourage managers to role model the take up of flexible working options
- Focus job descriptions on outputs

FLEXIBLE WORKING IN CONTEXT

The Government has suggested that the right to request flexible working should be extended to carers. Employers face major challenges associated with an ageing population and care for the elderly is the area where employee demand will grow most in the future.

The operation of more flexible working practices can be linked to initiatives relating to less rigid ways of working, which enable employees to carry out a broader range of work. Examples include multi-skilling, reshaping job roles and encouraging employees to assume more ownership of the way the team operates.