

SECTION 1 - DO I NEED AN EIA?

DO I NEED AN EIA?

Name of policy/activity:
SMARTER WORKING PROJECT – Embedding Hybrid Working
Please choose one of the following:
Is this a:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New policy/activity?• Existing policy/activity? ✓• Budget proposal/change for this policy/activity?• Pilot programme or project?
This is a project to embed existing Flexible working policy with hybrid working ensuring efficient use of offices, rationalising offices where possible

Decision
<i>Set out the rationale for deciding whether or not to proceed to an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)</i>
There are potential equalities and socio-economic impacts arising from increase in staff hybrid working that require to be considered.
Date of Decision: 13/4/23

If undertaking an EIA please continue onto the Section 2. If not, pass this signed form to the Equalities Officer.

Assessment undertaken by:

Director or Head of Service	Rhona Gunn
Lead Officer for the project	Jeanette Netherwood
Other people involved in the screening (this may be council staff, partners or others i.e. contractor or community)	Smarter Working delivery group Smarter Working Board

SECTION 2: EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Brief description of the affected service

1. Describe what the service does:

The implementation of the revised flexible working policy and the embedding of hybrid working for office based staff (not including teaching staff) has the potential to affect all services, with an office base, across the Council.

2. Who are your main stakeholders?

- Employees
- Members
- Customers
- Partner organisations

3. What changes as a result of the proposals? Is the service reduced or removed?

Employees whose roles are suitable for hybrid working are encouraged to work from home 3 days a week (subject to individual adjustments), after being provided with the appropriate ICT equipment to facilitate this.

Service should be maintained throughout and there should not be any detrimental impact to effectiveness or efficiency.

Managers consider if the role is suitable for hybrid working – where the point of service delivery is required from a specific location, such as a reception, this may limit or restrict hybrid working potential.

If the role is assessed as suitable for hybrid working the manager discusses the arrangements with individuals and the team to determine how they will work it to ensure service is maintained appropriately. Staff will complete a DSE self-assessment to identify if they have a suitable and safe working environment and what adjustments may be required. At this point the manager will also take into consideration any specific issues pertaining to the individual when agreeing the arrangements that will be sustainable going forward.

4. How will this affect your customers?

Customers should not be negatively impacted by embedding hybrid working through the Smarter Working project and service should be maintained.

During Covid a lot of changes took place out of necessity that have been retained following the outcome of the Customer Services project, for example the establishment of Information Hubs in Libraries. Many contacts with customers are now through use of

electronic means, however, where requested or required, face to face contacts can be held.

5. Please indicate if these apply to any of the protected characteristics		
Protected groups	Positive impact	Negative impact
Race	Increased flexibility in respect of where to work will allow colleagues to find a way of working and work environment which suits them	n/a
Disability Of total workforce 38 staff (0.63%) advised they have a disability	<p>Providing the flexibility to work in an environment that best fits in terms of meeting both work requirements and those that relate to the specific needs of each individual disability should have a positive impact.</p> <p>There may be increased potential to meet certain reasonable adjustment requirements as identified for individuals based on occupational health information and recommendations..</p> <p>Increased flexibility provides potential for reduction in need to travel as frequently (reducing time and cost) where mobility issues are a factor.</p> <p>Hybrid meetings can be of benefit to some colleagues (including hearing impaired) as technologies make it easier to listen/have subtitles</p>	<p>Consideration of reasonable adjustments that involve, for example, specialist equipment, may lead to reduced opportunities for some to be able to work in a hybrid way and so working principally in the office or at home.</p> <p>Colleagues are required to carry equipment (laptop) to office.</p> <p>-</p>

Carers (for elderly, disabled or minors)	<p>There is a potential, following agreement with manager, for increased flexibility in hours worked which could help carers balance their work/life commitments more easily.</p> <p>When working at home there is a reduction in travel time to the office.</p>	
<p>Sex</p> <p>Breakdown by sex of Moray Council employees:- Women 78% Men 22% Source – Draft Moray Council Mainstreaming report 2022/23</p>	<p>Increased flexibility will help to accommodate home commitments for all. The Council has a predominately female workforce, who may, due to current social norms, be more likely to maintain caring or domestic responsibilities and will therefore experience a greater level of flexibility</p>	<p>Reduction in opportunities to attend office could remove a safe space from individuals dealing with issues at home (including domestic abuse).</p> <p>Women are more likely (based on social norms) to maintain caring or domestic responsibilities, could compensate for not physically attending offices by working longer hours to avoid a perception that they are not working effectively.</p>
Pregnancy and maternity (including breastfeeding)/ - paternity	<p>Where the role is suitable, hybrid working has the potential to facilitate the flexibility that may be required by pregnant or breastfeeding colleagues, (e.g if requiring to express milk, if they are more comfortable at home). Reduction in time spent commuting provides more time to spend with children/family</p> <p>Colleagues suffering from short term pregnancy related illness will have flexibility to work in an environment</p>	<p>Colleagues will require to carry laptops to office.</p> <p>Colleagues returning after maternity leave may find it harder to adjust to technologies or ways of working and re-establish networks when other colleagues are hybrid working.</p>

	that is best suited to their individual requirements.	
Sexual orientation	Availability of office space is beneficial for those living in unsupportive environments and can provide a safe place.	Reduction in opportunities to attend the office could remove a safe space for LGBTQ+ colleagues, particularly those who may not have a supportive environment at home.
Age (include children, young people, midlife and older people)	<p>Those people with caring responsibilities (young, midlife or older) may be able to balance work and caring commitments more easily with hybrid working on days working at home.</p> <p>Older colleagues, or those experiencing menopause symptoms may be more comfortable in their own environment where they can regulate conditions (i.e. heat, light etc)</p>	<p>Young people may be more likely to be living in shared accommodation or less likely to have suitable working space at home.</p> <p>Reduction in face to face contact may reduce opportunities to develop communication or other skills by learning from other experienced staff members.</p> <p>Whilst many older people are highly capable using new technologies, some older employees may not be as comfortable.</p> <p>Colleagues have reduced opportunities to engage with individuals across the organisations in ad hoc conversations and younger less experienced colleagues may miss out on opportunities to learn about the wider organisation.</p>
Religion, and or belief	Hybrid working may assist with balancing work and life commitments through flexibility of where to work and enabling colleagues to build their working day around times of prayer/worship.	N/A
Gender reassignment	Flexibility to work from home whilst going	Potential challenges for colleagues returning to

	<p>through gender re-assignment process is likely to further equal opportunities for this protected characteristic</p> <p>Colleagues will have increased flexibility in the location they work from which will allow them to find a way of working, during their reassignment, that is best for them, whilst maintaining work requirements.</p> <p>Availability of office space is beneficial for those living in unsupportive environments and can provide a safe place as an alternative to home</p>	<p>workplace after gender reassignment in relation to acceptance/understanding by colleagues/clients if there has been limited in person engagement.</p> <p>Reduced interaction with colleagues face to face has the potential to increase levels of isolation experienced by individuals who may require more support during this time.</p>
<p>Inequalities arising from socio-economic differences</p> <p>More women than men are found in lower graded posts</p> <p>2139 posts are found in the Grade 1-3 salary bracket which equates to 35.5% of the total workforce. 86.5% of this proportion of the workforce are women in comparison to 13.5% men which equates to 4.7% of men within the total workforce who hold Grade 3 posts or below compared to 30.7% of women who hold Grade 3 posts or below,</p>	<p>Reduces travelling costs of commuting to offices and reduced requirement to travel for work.</p> <p>Reduced costs incurred for purchase of work wear for the office.</p> <p>Opportunities will exist for people (who may have previously been prevented due to caring responsibilities at home) to rejoin the workforce through the increased flexibility that hybrid working provides in relation to location and times of work.</p>	<p>There may be an increase in heating costs incurred because of home working which may not be offset by reduction in travel costs.</p> <p>Colleagues experiencing socio-economic barriers may not be able to establish a suitable work environment at home, including appropriate broadband connectivity.</p> <p>Individuals who are at a socio-economic disadvantage or those living with family or those sharing accommodation may not have a suitable space to allow them to work from home.</p>

Source – Draft Moray Council Mainstreaming Report 2022/23		
Human Rights	N/A	N/A

6. Evidence. What information have you used to make your assessment?

Performance data	
Internal consultation	<p>Manager engagement sessions have been held to outline the approach and discuss challenges and opportunities Hybrid working presents to enable sharing of good practice or identification of common issues and potential solutions.</p> <p>Managers then engaged with their teams and individuals to ensure they have completed DSE workstation assessments for all individuals intending to work at home, to ensure they have a safe place to work.</p> <p>Service requirements have been identified, following discussion with individuals and teams, to determine if and how hybrid working would be applied.</p> <p>The outcome of these discussions have been collated and would indicate that the majority of staff are willing and able to adopt hybrid working. Of 881 (783.74 FTE) staff in HQ Campus, 14% (127 people (112.46FTE) have identified the need to work only from the office, and of this 62 people (55.5FTE) are because their role is not suitable for hybrid working.</p> <p>Early adopter survey in April 2023, (50 staff), showed that majority of people like hybrid working and the flexibility it provides and feel that their output is greater giving examples that they are able to focus better at home away from distractions. Personnel Forum and Trade Union/Officer Group have been consulted throughout the review of the Flexible Working policy and Smarter Working Project.</p>

	Equality and Diversity Corporate Advisory Forum have been consulted and comments incorporated into this EIA.
Consultation with affected groups	<p>A Member briefing about the Smarter Working project was held in January prior to the consideration of the project outline business case on 2 February 2023 at Full Council.</p> <p>Further question and answer sessions are scheduled for May with members regarding the progress with implementation and the Full Business Case.</p> <p>Implementation of hybrid working should not cause a negative impact on service delivery for customers, nor has it resulted in any change to customer interface. To monitor this public consultation is undertaken through an annual customer services survey and includes questions regarding access to services. September 2022 had 383 responses, from individuals contacting us by telephone and email. Satisfaction with service received were 85% very satisfied/ satisfied and 85% were satisfied with accessibility. People who were not satisfied provided feedback and identified areas for improvement (such as improving online information and improving links) and these are being worked on.</p> <p>Moray Council provides a variety of mechanisms for stakeholder communication such as phone, online and face to face contacts in the office and in individual homes (where necessary).</p>
Local statistics	Moray Council Mental wellbeing survey 2022 Draft Moray Council Mainstreaming Report 2022/23
National statistics	<p>2022 info</p> <p>Scotsman 25/9/22</p>
Other	Audit Scotland – Equality Impact Assessment – Hybrid Working 9/11/22

7. Evidence gaps

Do you need additional information in order to complete the information in the previous questions?

Service requirements completed by managers will be reviewed by heads of service to ensure consistency of approach and resulting request for space and equipment. This information is being collated and will inform space allocations.

DSE assessments - completed by individuals for their home work environment are essential to ensure that any specific issues pertaining to the individual are discussed with the manager so that needs are addressed appropriately.

Once hybrid working is embedded as business as usual it will be necessary to carry out ongoing monitoring of effects on staff and customers. This will be undertaken through workload/supervision, Employee Review and Development (ERDP) meetings, absence statistics and surveys for employees and for customers.

Monitoring of mitigating actions will determine if they are sufficient to remove the impact – this will be done through service managers highlighting if they have any performance or staffing issues arising from the adoption of hybrid working. Additionally customer feedback will be received regarding service delivery and performance and the annual staff survey will provide information relating to satisfaction with work environment.

8. Mitigating action

Can the impact of the proposed policy/activity be mitigated?

The learning from experiences through Covid when the Council required the majority of staff to work remotely, to protect them and our community, has informed the approach to embed hybrid working in a sustainable way.

Managers will determine, in the first instance, if roles are suitable for hybrid working. Roles that are location specific i.e. the role requires to be performed in the office or specific location will not be deemed suitable for hybrid working, however it may be possible to utilise other elements of the flexible working policy relating to hours of work to accommodate needs where appropriate.

For roles that are suitable for hybrid working, managers will discuss with individuals the details of the DSE workstation assessment carried out on the basis of their workstation at home and any potential impacts, seeking to determine suitable arrangements that meet service and individual needs. These arrangements will be underpinned through use of existing core policies for example the Flexible Working Policy, [Menopause Policy](#), [Paternity/Maternity/Adoption Support Policy](#), [Equality and Diversity Policy](#), [Health and Safety Policy](#) and [Flexible & Early Retirement Policy](#).

Any issues highlighted by individuals to managers will be taken into consideration, in accordance with Council policies, and agreement obtained for way of working.

In addition teams will continue to discuss how they will continue to deliver their service, maintaining or enhancing standards, whilst adopting hybrid working. These discussions will include communication, team meetings, work flow and performance.

Standard templates have been provided to managers to provide guidance for the framework for conversations for consistency and ensure all necessary elements are covered and that managers are aware of our duty to make reasonable adjustments (applicable to working from home as well as the workplace). Guidance and toolkits are available for the Flexible Working policy and there is a variety of other guidance, information and training courses available to support managers and employees.

Smarter Working and embedding hybrid working does not change the customer interface. However there are interdependencies with other projects of the Council, one of which is the Customer Services Review, which has increased the provision of information hubs in all libraries across Moray (including rural areas such as Tomintoul, Dufftown, Aberlour, Cullen and Lossiemouth) that now provide access and support to access services. Times vary across all libraries (http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_41162.htm) but are 10:00 to 20:00 in Elgin (and Saturday 10:00 to 16:00), in comparison to prior to Covid which was 9:00 to 17:00.

There have been two formal complaints since September 2022 in relation to access to services where they were not able to walk in to see someone face to face immediately. Neither complaint was upheld.

9. Justification

If nothing can be done to reduce the negative impact(s) but the proposed policy/activity must go ahead, what justification is there to continue with the change?

The Council needs to make effective and efficient use of all assets. The Office Review was underway prior to Covid, looking to rationalise offices where possible. Covid required the rapid provision of ICT equipment to enable staff to work at home and following this experience the Council agreed on 28 September 2022 that hybrid working would be the norm for roles that were suitable, recognising that individual circumstances need to be taken into consideration.

Employees of Moray Council had to embrace working at home during Covid as there was little option. With the implementation of Hybrid working many office based employees

welcome the opportunity to work at home as it continues to provide the the ability to manage work/life balance and other domestic commitments that they experienced as a result of Covid. The reduction in travel time and costs, reduction in costs of clothes for work can, for many people, offset any cost of heating and lighting space at home. The ability to control their working environment at home, manage workloads and perform tasks requiring focus without interruption, improves morale. In addition attendance in the office ensures maintenance of face to face connections with their team and network of colleagues and continued familiarity with working environments and equipment. So, for most employees hybrid working provides the benefits of both working environments. For those groups where there are potentially negative impacts from the embedding of hybrid working, there is scope within the Flexible Working Policy and through the use of the range of other relevant employment policies and procedures, to consider, take account of individual circumstances and requirements and make appropriate adjustments in terms of the provision of a suitable working environment.

The Council needs to save money and by adopting hybrid working at this stage three offices will be vacated and put into the surplus property process. This will initially reduce operating costs and may provide either rental income or capital income if ultimately the property is sold

Have you considered alternatives?

The alternative would be to retain all offices and move all staff back into them, but this would not help reduce operating costs nor would it be welcomed by the majority of staff who appreciate the improved work/life balance that hybrid working provides.

SECTION 3 CONCLUDING THE EIA

Concluding the EIA

1. No negative impacts on any of the protected groups were found.	
2. Some negative impacts have been identified. The impacts relate to:	Y
Reducing discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010	
Promoting equality of opportunity	Y
Fostering good relations	
3. Negative impacts can be mitigated the proposals as outlined in question 8	Y
4. The negative impacts cannot be fully mitigated but are justified as outlined in question 9.	
5. It is advised not to go ahead with the proposals.	

Decision

Set out the rationale for deciding whether or not to proceed with the proposed actions:

The approach being adopted is set out to be consistently applied across services to ensure equality. Standard template and guidance has been issued to managers to assist and support is available from the Smarter Working Delivery Group.

There are policies and procedures in place to address any individual circumstances that arise relating to difference of opinion between manager and employee.

The implementation of hybrid working will release at least 3 offices and reduce operating costs for the Council

Date of Decision: 9 June 2023

Sign off and authorisation:

Service	n/a
Department	n/a
Policy/activity subject to EIA	Smarter Working project
We have completed the equality impact assessment for this policy/activity.	Name: Jeanette Netherwood Position: Senior Project Officer Date: 16/6/23
Authorisation by head of service or director.	Name: Rhona Gunn Position: Depute Chief Executive Date: 16/6/23
Please return this form to the Equal Opportunities Officer, Chief Executive's Office.	