

Joint Committee

9 September 2010

**Worcestershire Regulatory Services: Working Practices
(Flexible Working) and Accommodation**

Recommendation

That the Joint committee notes the actions thus far and endorses the approach taken to progress Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) in terms of its flexible working practices and accommodation needs.

That the joint committee members discuss with their respective authorities to mitigate accommodation costs to WRS as the Service seeks to liberate existing office accommodation space.

Introduction/Summary

Part of the detailed business case which was submitted to the 7 authorities, and on which the agreement was made to create WRS, expressed need to move towards a more flexible approach to working practices for appropriate field staff. This would reduce accommodation costs, generate more flexibility for staff, and reduce travel time and costs.

In order to achieve this staff would be encouraged to work at home, from home or using touchdown facilities around the County. Where office accommodation is required most officers would be required to work from flexi-desks i.e those which are shared between a group of officers without being assigned to any individual.

This reduction in capacity need would in turn avoid the necessity to retain all the existing 7 offices which are currently being under-utilised.

Report

A work stream group has been convened to look at the existing arrangements for accommodation within the 7 District and County Councils. Each authority has its own current office accommodation (to varying standards) with a large duplication of resource for staff occupancy, filing and storage etc.

Most do not operate flexible working practices giving rise to an excessive number of underused desks.

With WRS moving to a new single structure in the next few months there is huge potential to move to flexible working,

particularly for field staff, and a consequent rationalisation of accommodation without loss of service to our customers. In addition co-location would break down the barriers of diverse offices and functions and would in turn facilitate the integration of the new teams.

Local face to face accessibility for members and our other customers would be maintained through surgery type arrangements making use of touch down points in hub centres or other council buildings without the need to maintain a permanent presence at those locations.

In a staged approach it would be desirable to reduce the number of offices whilst maintaining that wide geographical cover through flexible working and improved communications.

Work on access to a single IT platform is also ongoing but continued use of current databases would be sustainable in the interim through internet access. This would further minimise the need for officers to continue to work from their existing bases.

Financial Implications

Currently WRS pays of the order of £300k to maintain its current 7 office bases. There is potential to reduce this significantly (perhaps up to 50%) by reducing the number of venues and adopting flexible working. However at present we are committed to paying a recharge to each authority for its current office space, whether used or not.

In order to make a saving this would require that each authority take back any unwanted office space and lift the financial recharge to WRS.

A high level business case is being produced for the Regulatory Services project board to this end, and if supported will require that a further detailed business case is produced to move us to a phased reduction in office locations.

Discussions are also ongoing with Property Services to establish cheaper, suitable alternative locations.

Sustainability

A reduction in accommodation costs would contribute to the required efficiency savings and an early move to fewer venues would mean that savings could be brought forward from the proposed year 3 to year 2.

Work within the Flexible and Mobile working group of WCC has identified that flexible working is also beneficial to the environment by reducing travel as officers get used to working at home or directly from home to their field operations.

It is, however, accepted that flexible working is not appropriate for all staff, either because of the nature of their

work or their personal circumstances. It would be our desire to work with staff to introduce this voluntarily rather than to impose such practices.

Contact Points

Steve Jordan, Head of Regulatory Services. Tel 01527 881466 or e-mail at s.jorden@bromsgrove.gov.uk

Steve Birch, Head of Trading Standards. Tel 01905 765380 or 01527 884195 or e mail at sbirch@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

None.

