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Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority
Human Resources Committee

AGILE WORKING

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date: 05 November 2021

Purpose of Report:

To set out proposals for implementing agile working arrangements for Service employees.

Recommendations:

That Members support the Service's approach to implementing Agile Working arrangements.

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1.   BACKGROUND

1.1   The People Strategy 2020-22 set out an objective to "Develop different working models to create more agile and flexible ways of working". This aim is aligned to the need to provide a modern workplace which has the agility to change established ways of working for the benefit of improving service delivery, to use the opportunities provided by advances in technology, and to support the well-being of service employees. It also acknowledged the role of more agile working arrangements as part of an effective transition to sharing a Joint Headquarters with the Nottinghamshire Police.

1.2   The changes to workplace practices during the last eighteen months, due to Covid restrictions, has brought a change to the traditional concept of office working. The majority of private and public sector organisations are now reviewing their need to require employees to work solely from an office base in recognition of the benefits this can bring. Benefits which include greater productivity, cost savings, reducing commuting and carbon emissions and enhancing work-life balance for their workforce.

1.3   There is an increasing expectation from employees that they should be able to work more flexibly and, in an increasingly competitive recruitment market, this is likely to influence retention and recruitment decisions.

1.4   During the Covid period, the majority of those undertaking support roles have been able to work from home or other bases due to the development of technologies which allow them to work "as though" they were in the office. The advent of Team and Zoom meetings and messaging has allowed employees to effectively engage with each other, partners and service users and mobile technology has facilitated secure access to all key IT systems remotely. This ability to adapt our way of working has been one of the key lessons learned from this period.

2.   REPORT

2.1   In reviewing the potential for working in a more agile way, consideration was given to four key options: (i) maintaining the existing office-based approach; (ii) employees predominantly working from home unless required to attend the workplace; (iii) "hot desking" whereby employees book a desk or meeting room when it is needed and work peripatetically across the NFRS estate (iv) a hybrid model whereby all of the above options are available to managers depending on the role undertaken and potential impact on service delivery.

2.2   As part of consideration of the various options, the Service has undertaken a review of the benefits and challenges of adopting a more agile approach, drawing from subject matter experts from ICT, Health and Safety, data governance, human resources and finance and has developed detailed guidance for managers and employees.

2.3   Employee and manager surveys were also undertaken to establish views on whether agile working arrangements during the pandemic had worked well and whether such arrangements should be extended. The surveys established that the principle of agile working was supported, with benefits, including: increased productivity, better work-life balance, reduced stress, a positive impact on morale and job satisfaction, and effective team working. Ninety percent of employee respondents reporting that agile working was more likely to make NFRS an employee of choice and make staff feel more committed and engaged.

2.4   Both managers and employees supported an approach which balanced working from an office base with flexibility to work from other locations for part of the working week. This is referred to as hybrid working.

2.5   In summary, the benefits of adopting a more agile working approach are summarised as:

• Improved efficiency and performance leading to better and more responsive services;
• More efficient use of premises and resources;
• Better time management;
• Effective use of technology;
• Enhanced recruitment and retention – employer of choice;
• Supporting a reduction in carbon emissions by reducing commuting;
• Improved health and wellbeing - allowing some flexibility about when and how people work can have a positive impact on mental well-being, and reduce sickness absence;
• Maintenance of business continuity;
• As a reasonable adjustment, to support disabled employees to enter or remain in employment where this would otherwise be difficult.

2.6   Introducing a more agile way of working will also present challenges around maintaining service delivery and customer support, performance monitoring, effective team working, complying with health and safety regulations, maintaining employee well-being, employee development, data security and cost. When considering an agile working arrangement, these are areas that managers will need to address before agreeing to a change in working practice and ensure ongoing monitoring is in place.

2.7   Having considered the benefits, challenges and requirement to work in a more agile way, the preferred option is to continue to work from an office base for the majority of NFRS employees who are employed in professional and support roles, or uniformed employees who are part of the non-ridership establishment, but to offer flexibility where this would achieve the benefits set out in paragraph 2.5 as part of a hybrid approach.

2.8   Not all roles will be suitable for an agile working approach, this will depend upon the nature of the role. Therefore, agreement to agile work arrangements would be at the discretion of the line manager and would not be a contractual right or expectation on employees. Managers will review roles within their teams to identify those which may be open to working in a more agile way.

2.9   It should be stressed that working in an agile way is not designed to offer an alternative to planned childcare or dependent care arrangements or to undertake secondary employment or self-employment. Employees must arrange their working time as if they are working at their normal office base and be available to attend at the office when required.

2.10   It is recommended that office-based employees would work a minimum of three days per week (pro rata for part-time employees) at their work base, although this may vary for a specific reason agreed with the line manager, for instance to meet a particular deadline or provide flexibility for the team or individual. However, this should not impact upon effective working arrangements, particularly where a presence in the workplace is important to meet customer requirements or supports team working and delivery of Service priorities.

2.11   As part of agile working arrangements, home working will be considered in specific instances. As this is a permanent contractual change, where a contractual home working is requested by the employee or required by the Service, this will require a business case to be agreed at Head of Department level and must meet defined criteria to ensure that service delivery will not be adversely impacted.

2.12   An Agile Working Policy and detailed procedure have been drafted which set out the considerations to be addressed, criteria to be met and process to be followed before implementing agile working arrangements. The draft policy is attached as Appendix A to this report. The policy will be subject to consultation with the representative bodies.

2.13   Whilst the flexibility offered by agile working arrangements set out within the report relates primarily to where an employee undertakes their role, the principle of agile working has many different aspects and can act as a catalyst to improve working practice. For instance, re-engineering work processes to make them more efficient, enhancing ICT systems solutions with the aim of improving effectiveness, delivering better and more responsive services and enhancing the working environment for employees. These objectives are set out within the new Community Risk Management Plan.

3.   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1   There may be costs associated with implementing a home working arrangement which may arise due to the provision of office furniture (desk/chairs) or equipment to comply with Health and Safety regulations or to provide reasonable adjustments and this will be built into existing budgets. A Home Working payment of £312 per year may be payable to contribute to utility costs in line with HMRC home working allowances. This cost will be built into the non-uniformed salary budget.

3.2   The implementation of the digital strategy has already seen the replacement of desk-top computers with more mobile devices such as laptops and surfaces. There may need to be an increase in the provision of mobile devices to facilitate

agile working arrangements, and these will be built into the existing ICT equipment budget.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

Human Resources implications are set out within the report. There will be implications in terms of employee engagement, consultation, and potential changes to contractual terms, which will be managed within existing resources.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

An initial equality impact assessment has been undertaken and is attached at Appendix A. This indicates that any impacts are likely to be positive or neutral in terms of protected characteristics.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Service will need to exercise a duty of care to employees who work from home, whether permanently or as a hybrid arrangement, in terms of compliance with health and safety regulations and in terms of employee well-being.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There is a risk attached to not offering choice through agile working arrangements in terms of employee morale, recruitment, and retention.

9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS

There are no collaboration implications arising from this report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members support the Service's approach to implementing Agile Working arrangements.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)

None.

John Buckley
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

Title: Agile Working Policy

Document: POL 2220

Scope
NFRS staff eligible to be considered for agile working.

Summary
The purpose of this policy is to set out the Service's agile working arrangements for office-based employees.

Security classification	Official
Author	HR Policy & Project Officer
Department	POD
Approved by	Head of People and Organisational Development
Assessments done	EIA –

Version	Date	Modified by	Changes
1.0	Oct 2021		New policy.

Contents

Information Delivery System (IDS)

The IDS uses colour to identify sections within documents, namely:

Section	Colour	Purpose
Key		Is critical 'need to know' information and can consequently be found at the front of the document.
Primary		Is information that supports and elaborates on key

		information but is not immediately critical in nature.
Support		Is background information that further underpins the previous sections.
Appendices		Is relevant information such as process maps, tick lists, flowcharts, and templates etc.

Key information

1.   Definitions

1.1   "Agile Working" - is a concept which supports a more flexible approach to the way that people perform their roles with a focus on People, Place and Technology. A modern workspace is no longer the place that you go, it is what you do and how you do it. The traditional office-based model assumes that employees need to work from a single work base to be productive, but the progress of information technology has challenged this idea and has revolutionised many of the traditional aspects of work and the workplace. It is now common for information to be shared and stored electronically, which makes processes, communication and information sharing far more accessible.

1.2   Agile working has many different aspects - from re-engineering work processes to make them more efficient, introducing ICT solutions to make data readily available and replacing previous manual tasks, to reviewing when and how people work – with the aim of improving effectiveness, delivering better and more responsive services and enhancing the working environment for employees.   An agile working approach supports the objectives of the People Strategy, Well Being Strategy and Digital Strategy.

1.3   "Hybrid working" – is a concept which combines office-based working with some flexibility to work from other sites, including from home, and brings together different aspect of agile working. NFRS has adopted a hybrid working model as part of its agile working provisions. The details are set out later in the policy. Please note that this is different to the Flexible Working Policy (link) which covers request for permanent requests to changes in hours or work location.

1.4   Hybrid working will not require a contractual change, but are simply working arrangements agreed between the manager and employee which may entail a combination of working from the normal office base, the facility to occasionally work from home or other work base (i.e. other NFRS locations) or within partner organisations, where this is mutually beneficial.

1.5   "Hot-desking" – this happens when an employee doesn't have a permanent work space but uses an available desk at a work location when they require it.

1.6 "Home Working" – this is a contractual arrangement whereby an employee undertakes the majority of their work at home.

1.7 "Work-station" – will include a desk, adjustable chair and IT connections to the NFRS network at an NFRS office base.

1.8 "Reasonable adjustment" – arising from a DSE assessment or recommendation from Occupational Health to provide an adjustment to the work-station due to a disability or medical issue which may be temporary or permanent in nature.

Primary information

2   General Principles

2.4 Working from an office base will remain the norm for the majority of NFRS employees who are employed in professional and support roles, or uniformed employees who are part of the non-ridership establishment.

2.5 There are many advantages to working from an office base as part of a team including ready access to colleagues and managers, informal communication and pooling of ideas, on-the-job learning and the development of effective working relationships between teams. Agile working should enhance these arrangements and lead to:

> Better, more responsive services.

> Improved efficiency and performance

> More efficient use of premises and resources

> Better time management

> Effective use of technology.

> Enhanced recruitment and retention

> Supporting a reduction in carbon emissions by reducing commuting

> Improved health and wellbeing

> Maintenance of business continuity

> As a reasonable adjustment, to support disabled employees to enter or remain in employment where this would otherwise be difficult.

2.6 Not all roles will be suitable for an agile working approach, this will depend upon the nature of the role. Therefore, agreement to alternative work arrangements is at the discretion of the line manager and is not a contractual right. Managers will review roles within their teams to identify those which may be open to working in a more agile way.

2.7 For employees who are new to NFRS, a period of office-based working is essential to ensure that they can familiarise themselves with the Service, systems, culture and meet colleagues and partners. This initial induction period may be different for different roles but should align with the probationary period. This may also be the case for those returning after an extended period of absence, or where performance concerns have been identified so that support and supervision can be provided.

2.8 In order to ensure that an agile working approach is effective, and meets criteria around health and safety, data protection and ICT connectivity requirements, the Service has produced guidance documents for managers to support their decision-making and ensure consistency of approach and can be found as appendices to the Agile Working Procedure. If these criteria are not met, then an agile working approach is likely to be unsuitable.

2.9 It should be stressed that working in an agile way is not designed to offer an alternative to planned childcare or dependent care arrangements or to undertake secondary employment or self-employment. Employees must arrange their working time as if they are working at their normal office base and be available to attend at the office if required.

2.10 When considering whether agile working is appropriate to specific roles, managers should consider whether the role is:

> Fixed desk – the employee requires their own dedicated work space and need to be physically available to perform the role effectively. This might apply to front-facing and some support roles. Agile working is not likely to be appropriate for this work style. For employees who require significant workplace adjustments, a fixed desk location is likely to be more suitable.

> Fixed location – the employee is required to work in a particular office or team environment to perform their role effectively, but part of their role can be undertaken from another location with access to the appropriate technology. This work style may be open to hybrid working arrangements.

➢ Multi-site – the employee works from other work sites as well as their primary office base. They are fully mobile and have the technology to support multi-site working. This work style is open to hybrid working arrangements.

➢ Peripatetic – the employee does not need a primary work base to undertake their role. They may work with partners and undertaken external visits and meetings as part of the normal working week. They are fully mobile and have the technology to support off-site working. This work style is open to hot-desking.

2.11 The main issues that manager will need to consider in agreeing agile working arrangements are:

➢ Effective team working – any arrangements should not impact upon the maintenance of a team working ethos

➢ Customer support – access for both internal and external service users is maintained and not diminished by agile working arrangements

➢ Performance – ensuring that individuals and team performance is maintained and ideally enhanced by agile working methods

➢ Communication – managers will need to ensure that team and personal communication channels are effective

➢ Health, safety and welfare – ensuring that the working environment complies with regulations and support employee's well-being

➢ ICT links and equipment are effective

➢ Data security is maintained.

➢ Any costs – this includes any specialist equipment, furniture or travel

2.12 Whilst agreeing agile working arrangements is not intended to be onerous, there are conditions which will need to be met:

➢ The employee has a work environment that meets DSE requirements and does not adversely impact upon their health. This may mean that an assessment of the workspace is undertaken with the line manager – this will be a pre-requisite for home-working;

➢ ICT connectivity is assured through reliable broadband connections – this will be at the employee's expense.

➤ The work environment is conducive to effective working i.e. the employee is able to undertake all aspects of their job role, and they are not subject to interruptions or distractions during working hours.

➤ The employee is contactable during normal working hours

➤ The employee attends the office at short notice, if required, at the request of their line manager. This may include on days when it has been agreed that they may work from another work location. For those with contracted home working arrangements, reasonable notice will be given of this requirement.

2.13 Within the conditions set out above, there will be some flexibility for the employee to arrange their working hours outside of normal office hours where this is preferred and does not impact upon effective working. For those employees contracted to flexitime arrangements, they will be required to work their contractual working hours and to manage their credit and debit hours so that they have no more than 12 credit hours or 4 debit hours per accounting period. (Please note arrangements for flexitime working are different for home working contracts).

2.14 It is important in maintaining employee well-being to balance working and home life where the agile working arrangements apply. Employees should factor in breaks during their working day, including lunch breaks, and take time away from a screen wherever possible, and should not work excessive hours.

Hybrid Working

2.15 Employees who normally work from an office base can request an agile working arrangement. The Agile Working Procedure sets out the process to be followed. This should be discussed with the relevant line manager, who will take into account the work style most appropriate to the role (see Paragraph 2.10). Arrangements will be considered on an individual basis, taking into account the reason for the request and must meet the requirements set out under Paragraphs 2.11 and 2.12.

2.16 Any arrangement must not adversely impact upon service delivery, productivity or team working.

2.17 In a normal working week, at least three days should be worked from the normal work base. It is accepted that, on an ad-hoc basis, this may vary for a specific reason agreed with the line manager i.e. to meet a particular deadline or provide flexibility for the team or individual. However, this should not impact upon effective working arrangements, particularly where a presence in the workplace is important to meet customer requirements or supports team working.

2.18 Please refer to the attached Agile Working Procedure for more detailed information about conditions which apply to an agreement to undertake a hybrid working arrangement.

2.19 Employees who work in this way, will need to accept that desk sharing arrangements will apply if they do not require a permanent work space and should work positively to ensure that they operate a "clear desk" approach to accommodate the best use of office accommodation for themselves and others.

2.20 Managers must complete the agile working assessment, which is attached as an appendix to the Agile Working Procedure, and return it to the HR department to be retained with the employee's personal record.

2.21 The arrangement should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that there are no adverse impacts for either the Service or employee.

Hot Desking

2.22 Teams will manage their own workspace within the office, which may entail the sharing of work-stations when employees do not require a fixed work location, work in an agile way or do not work from the office base on a full time basis.

2.23 Where the employee is required to work from a fixed work base on a full or part time basis, they will be allocated a permanent work-station. However, this may be used by others when they are not in the office.

2.24 However, there may be roles which do not require access to a work-station on a regular basis. These will generally be roles which are peripatetic in nature i.e. move between work sites as a normal part of the working week.

2.25 All desk space will have access to the NFRS network. A suitable adjustable chair and monitor will be provided. The standard set-up will not include a computer, mouse, keyboard or AV connector or docking block, which will need to be provided.

2.26 The allocation of mobile computing device (laptop or surface), mouse, keyboard, docking block and AV connector will be in line with ICT procedures for mobile working.

2.24 Employees who require a desk space at an NFRS work location will arrange this, in advance, with the relevant manager at the location they wish to work

from. If they need to work from Headquarters, this will normally be within the office space allocated to their home department.

Home Working

2.25 This is a contractual arrangement whereby an employee uses their home as their permanent work base and therefore will only be suitable in very limited circumstances, which may include (but are not restricted to):

> ➢ An adjustment to enable a person with a disability to access or continue their employment with NFRS and where accessing the workplace on a regular basis is difficult

> ➢ As a recruitment aid where the skills and knowledge required are critical to the effective functioning of the Service and are in short supply i.e. the Service has received few suitable applicants through an open selection process and home working would result in a successful appointment

> ➢ As a retention aid whereby the skills and knowledge held by an employee are critical to the effective functioning of the Service.

> ➢ A personal or medical reason which prevents an employee from working from an office base on a permanent basis. In this instance, alternatives should be fully considered i.e. hybrid working arrangements or other welfare support, before a permanent contractual change is agreed

2.26 **In all cases, the manager must follow the Home Working Guidance to assess the suitability of the role for home working. This can be found as an appendix to the Agile Working Procedure.**

2.27 Home working arrangements should initially be established on a trial basis to ensure that it is suitable for both the Service and the employee. It is recommended that this is three months initially, which can be extended to six months if required.

2.28 As this is a permanent contractual arrangement, managers must not commit to a home working arrangement without taking advice from a HR Business Partner.

2.29 Each application for a home working arrangement will require a separate business case – please refer to the attached Agile Working Procedure – and must be authorised at Head of Department level.

General Conditions

<u>Health and Safety</u>

2.30 Employees authorised to work away from the normal office base will complete a Health & Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 (DSE) abbreviated self-assessment for each location they work from. The Service will not supply additional or specialist furniture/equipment to facilitate working from home or any other location as part of their agile working request, however this will be considered if linked to a DSE or risk assessment or recommended as a reasonable adjustment.

<u>NFRS Equipment</u>

2.31 Employees are responsible for ensuring security of any equipment as far as is reasonable. Any loss or damage shall be reported to their line manager immediately. The line manager shall notify the Data Compliance Manager and ICT without delay in order that data security measures can be enacted.

2.32 All equipment supplied by the Service to facilitate the employees work shall be insured by the Service's Insurance policy. All electrical equipment supplied by the Service shall be PAT tested according to that items normal testing policy, Employees shall ensure this equipment is made available at the scheduled testing time and place.

<u>Data Security</u>

2.33 Employees are responsible for ensuring the security of all data in their possession, this shall include information displayed on any monitor/screen as well as printed information. Data security shall include setting computer equipment to screen saver mode whenever they are away from their equipment and ensuring no other person can read any information.

<u>Reasonable Adjustments</u>

2.34 Where an employee requires adjustments under the Equality Act 2010, individual needs will be discussed thoroughly, and careful consideration given to how the employee's needs can be reasonably met in the context of agile working.

Support information

Related Documents.

Agile Working Procedure
Flexitime Policy
Disability Access Guidance for Managers
POL 2150 Driving Safety Policy
Email policy (POL2083)
Internet Acceptance Use Policy (POL2084)
Personal Computer Policy (POL 2085)
Mobile Computing Policy (POL2086)
Removeable Media Policy (POL2088)

Appendices

Equality Impact Assessment

Initial Equality Impact Assessment

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requires all public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their functions. This means that NFRS must consider how our workforce and/or the public is affected when we carry out our work. This form will help you do that by undertaking an equality impact assessment of your proposed policy.

Are people (members of the public and/or employees) affected by the policy, procedure, function, project or initiative?	Yes	X	No	

If No, you do not need to complete the rest of this form

Name of Policy, procedure, function, project, initiative etc.	POL 2220	Date of Analysis	1 September 2021

1. What are the aims of the policy?

The purpose of this policy is to establish the conditions under which Non-Uniformed Service Employees can work in an agile manner, while demonstrating the benefits to the organisation and employee.

2. List the groups of people potentially affected by this proposal.

All non-uniformed employees, including part-time and fixed term contract employees.

3. List any involvement, engagement and consultation you have undertaken on this proposal

Full consultation within the Service consultation procedures, including SLT, Managers and Trade Unions.

4. List any equality data available relating to the use or implementation of this proposal

This is a new policy, evidence from Covid-19 lockdowns demonstrate that working from home in particular did not disadvantage any group and could be seen to benefit certain groups of people.

5. Can a monitoring system be established to identify any effects this policy or initiative has?

Yes, the policy intentions are to apply equally to all office-based employees, a review should be

taken to ensure these intentions have been achieved, by investigating all applications measured against those approved and ensuring the percentages of each protected characteristic does not proportionately change in a disproportionately negative manner.

Protected Characteristic	Taking into account the information you have gathered above, consider how the following groups of people could be affected by the policy both inside the Service (as employees or applicants) and outside (as service users or communities).	Tick the relevant box below if the impact is positive, negative, neutral or not known			
		Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unknown
Age	An indirect benefit can be identified, whereby younger employees may not be drivers, are able to undertake their role in a more conducive manner.	X			
Disability	Disabled employees may benefit as they will be able to select the environment that is more suitable to their disability, if home working is the preferred option adaptations may already be in place to allow the disabled person to perform at their highest level.	X			
Gender Reassignment	This policy is expected to have a neutral impact to persons within this characteristic.			X	
Married and Civil Partnership	This policy is expected to have a neutral impact to persons within this characteristic.			X	
Pregnancy and Maternity	This policy is expected to have a neutral impact to persons within this characteristic. An indirect benefit might become apparent to pregnant women who might find driving difficult, uncomfortable, or potentially distressing, so allowing them to work closer to their anticipated week of confinement.	X		X	
Race	This policy is expected to have a neutral impact to persons within this characteristic.			X	
Religion or Belief	This policy is expected to have a neutral impact to persons within this characteristic, although those required to fast for religious reasons may find a	X		X	

Protected Characteristic	Taking into account the information you have gathered above, consider how the following groups of people could be affected by the policy both inside the Service (as employees or applicants) and outside (as service users or communities).	Tick the relevant box below if the impact is positive, negative, neutral or not known			
		Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unknown
	benefit from the reduced need to travel.				
Sex	This policy is expected to have a neutral impact to persons within this characteristic.			X	
Sexual Orientation	This policy is expected to have a neutral impact to persons within this characteristic.			X	
Rurality	This policy may benefit those living in a rural setting as travel is reduced whether using public or private transport.	X			

This Equality Impact Analysis was completed by: (Ian Sawyer, Human Resources Policy and Project Officer)

		Analysis Ratings
■		As a result of performing this analysis, it is evident that there will be a negative impact on one or more groups of people. It is recommended that you take advice from the EDI Unit when considering justification.
■		As a result of performing this analysis, it is evident a risk of discrimination exists, and this risk may be removed or reduced by implementing the actions detailed within the action plan.
■	**X**	As a result of performing this analysis, no adverse effects on people from different groups are identified, no further action is required.

Action Plan Owner: HR Manager	Commencement date:	Sign off date:
	Action Planning	

As a result of performing this analysis, what actions are proposed to remove, reduce any risks of adverse outcomes identified on people (employees, applicant's, customers, members of the public etc)

Identified Risk	Recommended Actions	Responsible Lead	Completion Date	Review Date