



Flexible working provides the key to more effective service delivery at reduced cost

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Service Director, Strategic Procurement and e-Services
City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council

The City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council engages BT Mobility Transformation consultants to help improve office space utilisation and introduce a flexible working culture to transform services to citizens

Marketplace

The City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council serves a population of 315,000 people and employs around 8,000 non schools-based staff, including around 3,000 office-based employees. As part of its response to the e-government agenda the council was looking to implement more flexible ways of working to improve services to citizens and at the same time realise savings from the more effective use of office accommodation.

A key driver was the Wakefield Council Office Accommodation Strategy – part of its “Worksmart” programme. The council was keen to support the regeneration of parts of the City of Wakefield and was considering entering into a lease to occupy 123,000 square feet of new office accommodation to be constructed as part of the Westgate Key Development Area of the City. This would allow the council to consolidate staff from 34 different buildings into just six.

Business opportunity

Although the new office accommodation at Westgate would not be ready for occupation until 2009 there was a lot of preparatory work to undertake to ensure that the council would be ready for the move.

Alan Kirkham, Service Director, Strategic Procurement and e-Services for Wakefield Council, explains: “Our future plans assume a higher and more flexible utilisation of office accommodation, so we need to prepare the ground by changing the culture and providing the technology and infrastructure necessary for more flexible working. This allows us to transform the way the council operates – focusing more on delivering better and more accessible services to citizens.”

The council was keen to learn from other organisations that had made the transition and it recognised that it needed an external body to challenge its thinking and help to build the business case.

Case study

City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council

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Wakefield Council invited proposals for consultancy services to enable the definition of the necessary work styles and enabling technology that would drive change and deliver both productivity and customer service improvement.

Alan Kirkham continues: “From a strong field we selected BT because it had first hand experience of implementing flexible working internally and had already helped other organisations succeed. In short, the BT offer was not only the best but also the most credible.”

Over the past ten years BT has transformed itself into an agile company, in part by using flexible working practices. The results have been clear. An internal BT survey conducted in 2005 revealed that BT people working from home are between 15 and 31 per

cent more productive and its home-based workforce is seven per cent happier than site-based colleagues. Through a combination of home working and desk sharing, BT has reduced its accommodation requirement in London by almost two-thirds.

BT solution

BT assigned two consultants from its Mobility Transformation Team to the task. Working collaboratively with Wakefield Council staff the team began by hosting a series of workshops with the council’s senior managers, HR, e-services and property teams. There followed a number of focus groups involving more than 100 people across a wide range of service teams and “day in the life of” and diary studies with people that already worked flexibly, albeit not in a formal way.

This work enabled the team to capture the requirements and begin to define the work patterns that would be necessary to support the council’s ambitions. A space occupancy survey followed. BT also called in its Property and HR experts to advise and consult with counterparts at Wakefield Council, sharing ideas on best practice and lessons learned based on BT’s own experience.

Alan Kirkham comments: “The study enabled us to identify five priority service areas for rolling out flexible working and define four work styles – workplace, flexible, mobile and home based – to match our needs. It also enabled us to begin the task of educating our people that work should be seen as an activity, not a place.”

Results

The study was conducted over a four-month period and the compilation of a business case was enabled by the comprehensive capture of key information. The business case was presented to and approved by the Wakefield Metropolitan District Council Cabinet in November 2006. It demonstrated that by implementing a flexible working policy the council could transform council services and realise significant property savings.

The space occupancy survey confirmed that the council is currently using less than 50 per cent of its office space at any one time. Even considering peak time occupancy this means that at least 25 per cent of office space can be released – a saving of 500 desks. The new Westgate building is to be designed to cater for 1,200 workstations, but with flexible working this is now set to cater for the needs of at least 1,500 and up to 1,800 council and partner organisation employees.

Flexible working will encourage greater contact with citizens and could develop a platform for collaboration with other agencies. The work life balance of individuals will be improved: helping to attract and retain talented people and reduce absenteeism. The council’s environmental footprint could also be much improved with less travelling leading to fewer emissions.

Alan Kirkham sums up: “BT has been an enormous help and quite simply we could not have put our plans in place so quickly without them. With help from the BT Mobility Transformation consultants we have developed a plan that will see at least 250 of our office-based people working flexibly by September 2007 – rising to 1,250 by 2009.”

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Main BT products and services

- **BT Flexible Working consultancy services, delivered by specialists from its Mobility Transformation team**

