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From:	**Peter Hall, Clerk to the CAL Committee**
Date:	**13 March 2014**
To:	**Shane McAteer, Clerk to the F&P Committee**
Subject:	**DCAL response to Flexible Working inquiry**

Shane

At the meeting on 13 March 2014 the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure considered the response from the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure to the Committee for Finance & Personnel's inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector.

Members of the Committee agreed that I forward this response to you for the attention of the Members of your Committee.

Regards,

Peter Hall
Clerk to the Committee

Enc.
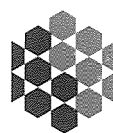
Our ref: COR/35/14
Your ref: C02 /14

5 March 2013

Mr Peter Hall
Committee Clerk ,
Committee for Culture Arts & Leisure ,
Room 344,
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BELFAST BT4 3XX

Peter,

RE; COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL INQUIRY INTO FLEXIBLE WORKING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR.

I refer to your letter of 10 February 2014. The information you have requested is set out in the attached Annex and covers DCAL and responses from its ALBs. It is structured around the key information requested by the DFP Committee i.e.

(a)   the extent to which flexible working practices are being applied;
(b)   any good practice cases; and
(c)   the number of employees who undertake all or part of their work from remote locations (i.e. away from the traditional office environment).

**Pat Wilson
DCAL Assembly Liaison Officer**

Enc

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DCAL

Extent of flexible working practices

In common with all NICS departments, staff in DCAL have access to opportunities for alternative working patterns including flexi time, part time, term time, partial retirement etc. Currently we have 52 (17%) staff working alternative working patterns.

In accommodating these alternative working patterns much will depend on the nature of the work, particularly in relation to the extent of direct service to the public such as in PRONI. The size of the branch and the grade of the member of staff are also taken into consideration. Flexible working is available for staff at all grades but a greater number of those staff on alternative working patterns (e.g. part time , term time) are in Executive Officer 1(EO1) , Executive Officer (EO2) Officer ,Administrative Officer (AO), and Administrative Assistant (AA) grades. Monitoring and managing performance is addressed through regular review by managers and NICS staff appraisal processes. Ensuring sufficient staff are available in the office at any given time needs to be carefully managed.

Good Practice Cases

DCAL's Fisheries Protection Officers are a good example of flexible working patterns. Based across 6 different offices throughout the North, they work any 42 hours within the working week as agreed with their line managers. As they are primarily field officers most of their work is outside of the normal working environment and outside normal office hours. Health and Safety is a major factor to be considered and DCAL has provided a Lone Worker Safety and Employee Management System enabled through the lone worker's mobile phone that is activated should the lone worker be encountering higher than normal risk activity.

This means that we make the best use of the officers to meet DCAL business needs as much illegal activity will take place outside of the normal 9 to 5 working day. Staff at the other fishery offices also operate to suit business needs, and whilst many are based at office locations, they also carry out a lot of work outside the office and operate outside of the normal 9-5 hours.

Work from remote locations (i.e. away from the traditional office environment).

Alternative work locations are limited. Apart from the department's satellite locations (the fisheries stations and PRONI) DCAL has a teleworking scheme which enables DCAL staff to work from an alternative government office. 5 staff currently make use of this scheme.

We provide opportunities for working from home although this is limited and on an ad hoc local arrangement agreed between line managers and their staff. Currently there are 28 staff who have an encrypted lap top and can connect via Home or NICS broadband onto the NICS Network and work remotely from their home. HR do not monitor the frequency of use of this facility but estimate that approximately 10 staff work at least one day per week from their home rather than come to the office. Some of these arrangements are provided as reasonable adjustments under the Disability Discrimination legislation to manage long term health conditions.

Working from home if done on several days per week presents challenges to both the business and the individual as it can reduce opportunities for engagement with staff, opportunities to working collaboratively as part of a team and can hinder communication generally.

Libraries NI

1. The extent to which flexible locations of work are currently available within their business (such as remote working from Home, teleworking from different offices)

The vast majority of Libraries NI staff are frontline staff delivering services directly to the public in 98 libraries across the region; for these staff there is no flexibility for remote working or teleworking. However, flexible locations of work are available for middle or senior manager positions or for back office/corporate work.

Libraries NI have a matrix structure operating across different locations, all with network access. For the most part all libraries have been grouped into business areas and districts, co-terminus with the proposed new council boundaries. To take account of the matrix structure, the changing demands on delivery and efficiencies of services, some staff employed in key service priority roles and managers with area and/or operational responsibilities are required to work flexibly between locations and are facilitated to do so by the pervasive network access. In addition, some higher grade manager posts have the facility to work from home. Homeworking opportunities are linked to laptops being assigned and VPN access. Currently VPN Client access is available to approximately 40 people.

2. Any good practice cases

In order to support business needs within the matrix structure, some key service priority teams work from different offices/branches to cover the entire region.

3. The number of employees who undertake all or part of their work from remote locations (i.e. away from the traditional office environment)

No employees undertake all of their work from remote locations. The majority of middle/senior managers undertake part of their work away from their base location. Some staff, due to the nature of their work will undertake part of their work in locations other than their base location. This will be subject to business needs e.g. events, delivery of programmes etc.

4. **Options presented by new technology and workplace design to support flexible working practices, Up to date technology facilitates and supports flexible working practices.**

All locations are covered by a secure network, email and web access, telephone and video conferencing, smart phone (email access) and hot-desking are all available and the approaches to monitoring and managing performance in such circumstances.

Work is monitored through output and outcome measures, not input measures. Monitoring and managing performance is addressed through regular review with managers and staff appraisal. Targets are monitored on a regular basis through regular meetings with managers and progress is reported formally on a quarterly basis.

The nature of many work activities across frontline services does not lend itself to specific start and end time periods.

5. The critical success factors, challenges, barriers and risks to introducing flexible working and how these can be managed and mitigated as appropriate.

The critical success factor is the Digital environment / infrastructure - investment in tools and technologies that support people to work remotely, assume responsibility for fulfilling their role, and needs to be clearly defined to gain experiences and build capacity. The Communication strategy is key to ensure staff at all levels receive and understand the appropriate messages. Challenges include the impact on already constrained resources and the pressure on relationships. .

It is useful to define competencies and motivational profile required to undertake remote working. It provides opportunities to gain critical development experiences. Other challenges can be mitigated by consideration of opportunities for training, coaching / mentoring strategies.

Armagh Observatory

1. The extent to which flexible locations of work are currently available within Armagh Observatory (such as remote working from Home, teleworking from different offices)

Flexible working locations are available to staff within Armagh Observatory. The IT infrastructure enables staff to access emails via the internet when they are off-site. This typically occurs when observing overseas or travelling for work purposes.

2. Any good practice cases

The use of video-conferencing and tele-conferencing to facilitate meetings involving representatives from various locations.

3. The number of employees who undertake all or part of their work from remote locations (i.e. away from the traditional office environment

Available to approximately 25 staff on an occasional basis.

4. The range of options presented by new technology and workplace design to support flexible working practices, such as mobile working, teleworking, remote conferencing, hot-desking and satellite offices, and the approaches to monitoring and managing performance in such circumstances.

Technology has assisted in widening the availability of flexible working arrangements. However the benefits of working from a traditional office environment should not be overlooked e.g. regular communication between colleagues, increased accessibility, increased engagement.

5. The types of work or job roles within the ALB which are suited to flexible working locations

Astronomers, PhD students, Director, Computer Systems Manager, Operations Manager may be suited to occasional use of flexible working locations.

6. Critical success factors, challenges, barriers and risks to introducing flexible working and how these can be managed and mitigated as appropriate.

Critical Success Factors:
- Carefully managed policy and procedures
- Trust

Challenges:
- Ensuring sufficient staff are available in the office at any given time
- Ability to manage flexible working locations
- Performance monitoring

Barriers:
- Not available to all staff – could be seen an inequality
- Reduced engagement with staff working remotely

Risks:
- Reduced productivity – although research demonstrates this is often not the case
- Reduced collaborative working
- Reduced communication throughout the organisation

NIMC

NIMC maintains remote working links for two key staff in order that business may be undertaken when it is not possible to attend the office. Currently this is a risk mitigation matter rather than for flexible working. NIMC is also considering remote links to assist staff access office information when they are undertaking visits to museums.

National Museums

National Museums does not operate a formal policy however it can accommodate ad-hoc requests to work from home as and when required. The nature of our work is such that it is focused on the main museum sites (including stores) and therefore the greater imperative is for staff to be available to the public.

Sport NI

Currently Sport NI has a Flexible Working Policy which is aligned to the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Staff members have the right to make a Flexible Working application in terms of their working days, hours and work patterns.

Sport NI has two main locations House of Sport, Belfast and Tollymore National Outdoor Centre (TNOC) in Newcastle. Generally, members of staff are situated in either of the

two locations. However, there are times when staff will move to either location for the purpose of meetings, training, site visits etc. Both sites are set up so that staff can work seamlessly from their laptops and access the internal network.   At times video conferencing or calls will be arranged if appropriate to minimise travel.

For those staff at management level and above, there is the option to work from home if necessary. However, this is ad hoc and determined by current business needs and requirements. Any staff that would request a day to work from home would need to have prior authorisation from their line manager and this would be on an *'ad hoc'* basis. The purpose of this would be to focus on business critical work or to ensure full concentration and completion of a task or project. This can be successful if managed effectively and it remains on an *'ad hoc'* basis.   The nature of the work that the organisation fulfils requires integration within the organisations people, systems and stakeholders so it is not a practice that is widely used very often.

Arts Council

ACNI have only one location (Belfast office where all staff are based) and no working from home policy.

NI Screen

Within its Work-Life policy, NI Screen has a range of Flexible Working Arrangements in place to enable its employees to balance their home and work commitments. These are:

- Career Break
- Part-time Working
- Carer's Leave
- Parental Leave
- Adoption Leave
- Working from Home

NI Screen's Work-Life Policy currently enables all eligible staff to apply for a flexible working option and the organisation has a statutory duty to consider all requests made by eligible employees in accordance with the legislation. Eligible employees may request the following:

- A change to the hours they work
- A change to the times when they are required to work
- To work from home

Most jobs in NI Screen are not suitable to be carried out on a permanent basis from flexible locations as they involve collaboration between colleagues and communication

with the industry. Staff on occasion undertake their work from remote locations depending on circumstances, and we currently do not have any employees who do this on a regular basis. The improvements in technology, in particular advances in smart phones and tablet computing have made it easier for NI Screen's staff to engage with work either from home or from remote locations when needed.

All senior staff have access to work emails at all times (some through work mobiles and some through personal mobiles), and will respond to emails when working at events and meetings away from the office.

The development executive role requires scripts to be read and at times this will be done from home and can be accessed through electronic means.

Foras na Gaeilge

Foras na Gaeilge offers a level of flexibility in terms of work practices, including flexi-time and part-time and term-time working patterns where feasible.

The facility is available to all staff to work in other offices. Working from home is agreed on an individual basis for certain projects

There are five offices in total on the island of Ireland. All but one of the offices has Video Conferencing facilities and this is used for meetings, up to Board Sub-Committee level, to reduce the need for inter-office travel.

All senior managers have been furnished with 3G Mobile devices with phone/e-mail access and secure remote access to files.

The dictionary editor regularly works away from his office in Gaoth Dobhair (Gweedore). The CEO, Deputy CEO and the Director of lexicography regularly work away from their main office as do some of the managers.

Foras na Gaeilge has always been mindful of the strategic challenges - and opportunities - of working across multiple office sites and thus when it was was directed by the North/South Ministerial Council to open its Office in Gaoth Dobhair (which it did in 2010) particular attention was devoted at the planning stage to the requisite management structure for such an office and to the roles which would be most suitable for such an office, thus the office's emphasis on dictionary and editorial work, for example, much of which is conducted in discrete parcels which lend themselves to easier performance management.

Ulster Scots Agency

The Ulster Scots Agency has two offices, connected via a Virtual Private Network so they are working together in real time.

The Agency employs two Development Officers and two Education Officers. All four are mobile and have been furnished with laptops to enable them to work offline. When these officers return to the office they can synchronise their laptops to update files and documents.

Senior Managers have remote access to the system, and mobile devices that enable them to work outside of the office environment.

Seven staff have been issued with mobile phones that also allow them to send and receive e-mails.

The Agency does not have any staff working from home or from alternative locations at present, apart from the Development and Education Officers. They use technology to enable key staff to keep in touch while out of the office travelling to/from and attending meetings.

Waterways Ireland.

Waterways Ireland offer flexi-time, part-time working and term-time working.

The majority of Waterways Ireland (WI) staff are employed as a direct manual labour force, and many of the facilities covered in this query could not apply to them.

Waterways Ireland has multiple sites all over Ireland. This means that many employees, particularly Managers, are required to travel to other locations. These staff have been provided with Blackberry devices to allow them to access and send e-mails wherever they are located.

Employees can use the remote access facility to access the WI system from other Waterways Ireland offices. Many offices have facilities for visiting staff such as spare desks and PCs or a desk/room where a laptop can be used.

Teleconferencing is available at all WI key sites and employees who do not have the facility at their normal location are invited to the nearest WI location with the facility, to take part in teleconferences with colleagues from other areas.

Employees working remotely are in constant communication with colleagues and managers working on team tasks and objectives, allowing performance to be monitored and measured even when they work away from their normal base. Effective

communication and training, particularly for line managers is vital for controlling the workflow and for managing performance.

Waterways Ireland has three employees who each work from home one day a week. The three work in the Professional Technical and Administrative cohort and have remote access to the Waterways Ireland IT system and the use of a mobile phone for work purposes.

Pat Wilson
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Our Ref.: C02/14

10 February 2014

Dear Pat,

Committee for Finance and Personnel Inquiry

At the meeting on 6th February 2014, the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure considered correspondence received from the Committee for Finance and Personnel regarding their inquiry entitled Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland.

Members agreed that I forward this to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure for consideration. Also, that it is circulated to the Department's Arm's Length Bodies for their response.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Peter Hall
Clerk
Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

Enc.

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