

Somerset County Council Corporate Property

Policy for Office Accommodation Standards



Policy Objectives

The policy objective is to set out the strategy and principles for the review and rationalisation of office accommodation, with the aim of bringing back-office functions together to support service delivery, using a consistent approach in the planning and design of office accommodation, and producing the opportunity for reduced spending on offices and increased productivity by introducing higher occupancy levels alongside new ways of working.

This policy replaces the Corporate Office Accommodation Standards published 1 June 2006.

General Context

As a public service, our two largest resources are people and property. We need to address the challenge of how to achieve maximum effectiveness from these resources. A more rationalised and flexible approach to accommodation and work practice needs to be taken to contain pressures and respond to changing needs.

The drive for greater efficiency and more joined up Government is irreversible. Office of Government Commerce publications “Working Without Walls” and more recently, “Working Beyond Walls” focus on opportunities for improvement. From a property perspective, we need to maximise the use of our office accommodation, while ensuring that it is of good quality and fit for purpose.

Office accommodation is a high-cost necessity. Somerset County Council (SCC) has approximately 45 office bases, including County Hall, and many of the offices we occupy are inflexible and costly. Some exist for historical reasons rather than existing service delivery strategy. The lack of a consistent approach has led to some disparity and wasted resources.

The Office Accommodation Standards apply to all offices accommodating SCC services. The standards are to be applied to all upgrades, changes or new office accommodation.

Where the physical layout of the building will have a significant bearing of what can be achieved, then there will need to be a flexible interpretation of these standards. A critical evaluation of whether that property best meets the service needs must be made and an analysis of the cost benefits of retention should be considered.

The standards have been developed to reflect good space design and accommodation practice, tailored to experience of SCC’s office accommodation needs. They are underpinned by the following Office Accommodation Principles.

Deviation from these standards is at the discretion of the Corporate Property Client Group Manager only.

New Ways of Working - Integrated Workplace Strategies

As SCC has grown and evolved over time, so have the range of activities and types of work people undertake. There is considerable variation between staff in the amount of time they spend interacting with others or working alone, their need for space to concentrate, the types of tools they require for their work and the amount of time they spend working away from their desk and working outside the office.

However, these variations are not reflected in the types of work environment we provide. Desks and enclosed offices are allocated more to reflect hierarchy through ownership than about providing a working environment that best supports work practices.

It is increasingly important to create workplaces which support interaction and collaboration between staff to allow knowledge to be shared whilst still allowing space for concentrated and confidential work, helping to break down many of the established hierarchies and silos that inhibit flexibility across teams.

The principal approaches to achieving enhanced workplace performance through new ways of working include:

Focus on function: Evaluate needs to provide sufficient balance of dedicated, flexible and shared facilities as well as opportunities for home working

Optimise workspace layout: Radically reduce the culture of one-desk-to-one-person and individual offices

Provide collaborative workspaces: Enhance communication and collaboration by providing break-out areas and meeting spaces of varying sizes and levels of formality

Enhance meeting room management: Build flexibility into meeting room provision and make meeting room management a priority

Harness technology: Increase flexibility and effectiveness through new technology such as wireless access, document management and streamlined processes

Solve the paper problem: Tackle paper management, storage and retrieval of information

Manage cultural change: Ensure staff understand the objectives behind new concepts and changes, and that they are supported as they move to new ways of working

SCC Office Accommodation Principles

- Office environments will be open plan, using layouts to maximise flexibility, reduce occupancy costs and improve productivity

- Space Allocation is based on a maximum 6sqm average standard per individual work space, but will always comply with minimum standards laid down in the Workplace (Health, Safety & Welfare) Regulations 1992 of 3.7sqm
- There will be no right to a desk for each person. Space will be allocated according to function, not status and will provide flexible options so that people can change location depending on the task being performed
- Enclosed Offices will not be provided except for staff with specific functional needs. Occupation of existing individual offices will be subject to review as needed. New individual offices will not be constructed.
- Shared meeting rooms and quiet space will be provided for concentrated and confidential work to meet the confidential functions of most staff
- Services should co-locate with other services or agencies where possible, to share resources and reduce costs
- Customer access should be joined up with partners and delivered through a common front door, seamless and transparent
- Service managers should adopt flexible working practices such as team desking, home working, mobile working and using drop-in bases, to use space efficiently and minimise SCC's travel to work carbon emissions
- The workplace needs to support employees who are increasingly mobile, require flexibility and use mobile technology
- The workplace needs to support employees with diverse needs on an individual basis
- The workplace will take account of the need to minimise our carbon footprint. This will affect the products and services specified as well as the design and layout of the area
- Storage workplace will take account of the need to minimise our carbon footprint. This will affect the products and services specified as well as the design and layout of the area
- A clear desk policy will be in place to support flexible working arrangements and maintain confidentiality of information
- All office space is a Corporate resource and does not "belong" to any one service or Directorate
- Existing accommodation will be re-used/refurbished wherever practical. Improvements to short-term leased (3 years and less) property will only be permitted on health & safety issues or where they can be cost-justified for operational purposes
- Space will be based on existing staff levels during space planning. No allowance for projected growth will be made unless Directorates have specific approval from the Senior Management Board
- Directorates must undertake an options appraisal and provide a business case to justify the need for new office space as well as demonstrate that they can fund the necessary accommodation and associated required works
- Printers, photocopiers, kitchens, break-out space and meeting rooms will be shared facilities
- We will create space with a consistent but flexible style and with a quality that is conducive to good morale
- Protocols, outlining how staff should use the accommodation, will be developed

- Within existing offices, only “briefcase moves” will be undertaken for staff moves. Desks, chairs, cabinets, telephones and IT equipment will not be relocated except where special requirements exist

Funding/Resources

The introduction of this policy within SCC will involve major cultural change in the way staff work. It will also have far reaching implications relating to IT provision, information and document management, staff portal, flexible working arrangements and accommodation layouts that will necessitate the commitment of resources to support and implement delivery.

Benefits

- Improved efficiency, team working, communication and shared knowledge
- More flexibility to respond to work demands
- Refreshed brand identity and expression of values
- Quicker, accurate retrieval and storage of information
- Reduced vulnerability to loss or abuse of information
- Reduced storage costs
- Better space utilisation
- Reduced travel time and cost
- Staff can achieve better work/life balance
- Attract, motivate and retain the best people for the job
- Reduced carbon footprint

Further Advice and Guidance

This policy is administered and monitored by the Corporate Property Client Team. Accommodation changes are reported through the following channels for approval:-

Accommodation Group and Asset Strategy Group (ASG)

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