

DRAFT - FOR REVIEW

Oxfordshire County Council – a framework for agile working

This document sets out a framework for agile working at Oxfordshire County Council. Its contents will also be published as a series of webpages on our intranet (for current colleagues) and our recruitment page (for prospective staff).

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Introduction: what is the purpose of the agile working framework?

When we refer to ‘agile working’, we simply mean the way we work and the locations we work from, which are enabled by great workplaces and spaces, effective technology, and simple customer focused processes. It is a state of mind and a way of working that is built on flexibility, trust and keeping things simple, with the people and communities of Oxfordshire at the heart of what we do. This framework explains in more detail what agile working means for our people – customers, colleagues and councillors at Oxfordshire.

Well before COVID-19 disrupted traditional ways of working, we had plans to enable our colleagues to work more flexibly. In some ways, the pandemic accelerated those plans, allowing us to test them out. In other ways, it has slowed us down as we’ve had to focus on immediate priorities and response rather than longer term design and investment in agile working solutions. We know there is no going back, the future of work is different, more flexible, and we need to take advantage of new technologies available and continue to build on what has gone before.

As we look ahead, we’ve heard loud and clear that our colleagues and prospective employees want to know what they can expect from their working arrangements – now and in the future. That’s why we prioritised a project focussed on agile working as part of Delivering the Future Together (DTFT), our programme for organisational development and change.

This framework is the result of extensive engagement and collaboration with teams across the organisation, managers at all levels and, crucially, our brilliant network of DTFT champions. Thank you to everyone involved!

So, what does the framework do? It sets out:

- **Our vision for agile working and ambition for the future.** We recognise agile working is a concept that needs some support and guidance while we transition to different ways of doing things. In the longer term, we hope we will no longer need to refer to 'agile' as it will be embedded in our culture and just the way we do things – part of our journey of continuous improvement.
- **Core principles for agile working.** These principles will inform our decisions and develop new solutions now and in the longer term, for our organisational policies and practice, the location and design of our physical workplaces, and our technology.
- **Our People.** We know that agile working will mean different options for different people, we have developed some broad principles to explain what agile working means for different types of roles.

It's just as important to articulate what the framework does not do as it is to explain its purpose. **The framework is not prescriptive, and it is not a list of rules, it is flexible.** We are a work community of more than 5,000 individuals in different roles offering varied services to our internal and external customers. We all have unique preferences and personal circumstances. Working arrangements for every individual will be discussed, agreed and regularly reviewed with line managers.

Our vision for agile working and ambition for the future

Our vision

for agile working

Our aim is to develop an agile workforce and service delivery model, which provides flexibility and convenience for our staff and customers and supports our commitment to net zero.



Agile working

We will work hard to minimise journeys for staff.

We will retain home-working and provide desk space in our buildings for those who need it.

We will remodel our offices to create safe and welcoming spaces for teams to come together to interact, plan and collaborate.

We will provide staff with the technology and equipment they need to work flexibly and confidently wherever they are based.

Agile service delivery

We will work hard to minimise journeys for customers.

We will ensure the council is visible and accessible at locations across the county.

We will make services that are not bound to buildings or set locations accessible remotely and digitally.

Where needed, we will deliver face-to-face services in local spaces, places and community venues, in customers' homes and by working with partners and suppliers.

We will plan and develop services in set locations where there is community need, such as libraries and children's centres - incorporating digital access and flexible working.



Some benefits of agile working

We are committed to supporting and developing agile working approaches because we know that there are some significant benefits and opportunities, these include:

- Organisational resilience – ensuring we have more ways to continue working even when faced with challenges such as a snow day, power outage or pandemic lockdown.
- Increasing productivity – by providing greater flexibility and new technologies
- Providing new ways to quickly collaborate using online tools
- Informing a clear strategy for the use of our property estate
- Helping to reduce the use of paper and printing
- Helping to reduce the cost and environmental impact of travel
- Provides opportunities to improve staff engagement, wellbeing and inclusion by being able to reach more people flexibly.

- Is an important part of attracting and retaining new and existing colleagues and co-workers.

We also know that to maximise these benefits we will need to support people to ensure colleagues are not isolated and customers can still access services. This means being mindful of digital exclusion and the power of real-life collaboration and in-person service delivery and getting this balance right.

Core principles for agile working

Our overarching principle, above everything else, is that **we are flexible**. We are committed to providing individual colleagues with the support they need to succeed, professionally and personally, while ensuring we meet the needs of the people and communities of Oxfordshire and here at the council.

Our core principles are:

- The way we work together is underpinned by our five organisational values and associated behaviours which are embedded in our systems and processes;
- Together we will nurture an environment where people develop, grow and have the freedom and trust to make good decisions;
- We will bring the right people together at the right time and in the right place to focus on developing solutions that are impactful for our services, customers and people; sharing ideas, collaborating, solving problems and developing our services;
- We will work hard to minimise journeys, not assuming that customers and colleagues should travel into Oxford City Centre and that the county council should have access and visibility at locations spread across the county.

Our workplaces will:

- provide different types of spaces to come together and connect, collaborate and interact with our colleagues, customers and partners;
- be in locations that bring us closer to the people and communities of Oxfordshire, so we all feel a sense of belonging to the county;
- become a real destination where our colleagues, customers and partners want to come together and connect – instilling a sense of pride to make everyone feel valued;
- be designed with the wellbeing of our colleagues, customers and partners at their heart - places that are inspirational, safe, accessible and inclusive;
- represent the professionalism and progressive nature of Oxfordshire County Council, reflecting our strong identity visibly throughout;
- support our commitment to become carbon neutral by 2030;
- be equipped with the right technology to support the needs of our colleagues, customers, and partners.

- recognise that we are an accountable public body, and our democratic and decision-making processes need to reflect these principles, our approach will enable a combination of local meetings, virtual public meetings and more traditional council chamber-based meetings with public broadcast to ensure our democracy reflects, enhances and supports our agile delivery model.

Our technology will:

- Support effective communication and enable the ability to work well anywhere, any place, and at any time.
- Be underpinned with effective user guides and training, ensuring everyone can take responsibility for using the technology that supports their role.
- Enable customers to access our services efficiently and effectively.

Our customer contact will:

- Continue to focus on channel shift enabling our customers to complete transactions online simply and efficiently wherever possible.
- Recognise the real impact of digital exclusion and will ensure that there is no wrong gateway to customer service so people who do not wish to or cannot use digital channels are not disadvantaged.
- Shape the development of a property strategy that ensures services are accessible across the county.

Our people

We are a diverse community, with individuals in different roles and with varying preferences and personal circumstances. Therefore, we offer all colleagues flexibility within the scope of their role. Working arrangements for every individual will be discussed, agreed and regularly reviewed with their line manager.

We've developed four role types that broadly represent the nature of different posts held by our people here at Oxfordshire. The purpose of these is to help us plan, support and make decisions about what type of workspaces we need, now and in the future, to ensure that key enablers around technology are in place, and to help prospective employees understand what working at the council looks and feels like.

This framework is not prescriptive and, therefore, neither are the role types. Many colleagues will see themselves within one of these categories while, for others, their role may span more than one of the roles. The role types are not related to pay grade or level of responsibility within the organisation.

Our role types

I work at a fixed location or base

Colleagues who need to work at a specific office or other location for the majority (or all) of their working time to undertake their role. This may be because their work involves mainly direct engagement with customers, because they require specialist facilities or equipment or because their service is delivered specifically from a fixed location.

Fixed based colleagues will be provided with access to high quality workspaces, including individual workstations, breakout areas and spaces for one-to-one conversations. Some colleagues may be allocated specific equipment depending on the needs of their role.

I deliver services out 'in the field' or offsite

Colleagues who mainly work remotely to deliver council services, with teams, customers or partners. Although their work means they are mostly out in the field, those in these roles do need access to suitable workspaces for things like training, team meetings or tasks requiring specific equipment.

We equip these colleagues with the technology they need to work flexibly from a range of different locations, as well as providing access to individual workstations, breakout areas and spaces for one to one conversations as required.

I am community based

Colleagues who work predominantly within a locality (and occasionally from home) to deliver front line services from local bases, community settings or client homes, often engaging with vulnerable people and communities. People in these roles tend to have lots of face- to face interaction with customers, which also requires face to face collaboration with team colleagues to deliver services effectively.

Community based colleagues will be provided with the technology they need to work in the community safely and securely. They will also have access to workspaces for collaboration, training and individual conversations.

I can work anywhere

Colleagues who can work from any location, including home and council premises. Their work is predominantly in collaboration with other colleagues or partners, and they can make good use of technology to interact and perform their day to day tasks. The choice of location will depend on the role's responsibilities and personal circumstances. For some, this may mean being at one of our workspaces for the majority of their working time while other colleagues may be able to work mostly remotely.

We equip these colleagues with the technology they need to work from any location, as well as providing access to workspaces, including individual workstations, breakout areas and spaces for one to one conversations.

What you can expect from an agile workplace

- We value the diversity of our colleagues and customers and recognise there will be no 'one size fits all' approach – we are flexible.
- Your working arrangements should be shaped around the needs of your job role and your personal circumstances. The council will provide a variety of technology and workplace solutions to support you in your role.
- Colleagues who need to be in an office or work-based environment for their specific role, their development, their personal circumstances or their wellbeing can do.
- Colleagues who undertake home working on anything other than an exceptional basis will be expected to undertake a relevant health and safety assessment. The council can support in the provision of equipment to facilitate home working if undertaken on a routine basis.
- Reflecting our 12,3,2 framework everyone will have the opportunity to attend team meetings and 1:1s face-to-face as well as remotely. Managers will be asked to set out the combination of face to face, hybrid and remote meetings ensure that service delivery needs, inclusivity and effective contact and collaboration are maintained.
- Attendance at an office or workplace is managed by supervisors, team leaders and managers, it is determined by the requirements of service delivery, with a priority on activities such as supervision, collaboration and training that cannot be delivered remotely. As office spaces and council properties are updated and refreshed arrangements such as desk booking systems may be implemented. At this stage there is not a desk booking system in place.
- Face to face collaboration may be undertaken in any suitable space – including a Council office, a partner/supplier's office or another location appropriate to the confidentiality of the discussion.
- Support is available for all staff, in terms of learning and development and health and wellbeing services, to work effectively in dispersed teams and to make best use of the technology provided. If you or your team need specific support, please discuss with the organisational development team.

Our plan for action

Following the development of this framework for agile working our plan of action includes:

Developing a new property strategy to... (LIST KEY OBJECTIVES WHEN PROPERTY STRATEGY SIGNED OFF)

Pilot new office layouts to shape the future of our accommodation design

Create technology and IT support options for each of the 4 work roles

Develop a toolkit and training options for agile management

Ensure the principles of agile working are reflected in human resources practice as we review policy (LINK TO TUs)

Production of floor plans with a combination of fixed and flexible social interaction spaces designed to encourage connection

Begin discussion with teams to understand accommodation and storage requirements

Support the further development of automated and digital processes

Clarifying technical support options for different work style/ persona groups

Continue to work on space booking and hybrid meetings technology as required (nb. space booking requirements to be resolved)

Pilot new workspaces – engagement with stakeholders

[Further support for colleagues](#)

To be included on the intranet

Toolkits for managers

To be developed – June 2022

Frequently asked questions

What's happening with the provision of IT equipment at County Hall and other office spaces?

At County Hall, you'll now find widescreen monitors on every desk, which you can connect to your laptop. These will be rolled out to our other offices soon.

We're working to provide things like laptop chargers, keyboards, mice and second screens in offices over the next few months to better support agile working. It's a significant challenge as there are a huge number of different makes and models of laptops and tablets in circulation, which is why we're also working to upgrade older laptops to ensure more consistency across the organisation.

Remember – if you're struggling with your technology, please do speak to your manager and log a call with IT.

What changes will be made to buildings to make them more compatible with agile working?

We're close to finalising our property strategy, which sets out what real estate we'll need in the short and long term. The strategy will be shared with colleagues later in the summer and includes design principles for our buildings which capture what we want for the feeling, function and form of all our spaces.

Bringing our buildings up to our desired standard is challenging given the investment required. Nonetheless, we do have plans to upgrade and modernise to provide flexible spaces for working independently, for collaboration and team discussions, and individual one to one meetings. This change will happen incrementally – for example, hopefully many of you will have seen the new breakout space in Common Hall at County Hall, which we encourage you to use.

Our three meeting rooms on the ground floor of County Hall are all equipped with technology to support hybrid meetings and we've heard from many of you that these have been working well. Providing this technology will be a priority as part of the wider refurbishment of office space, set out in the property strategy, with change coming in different phases.

When will we be asked to come to the office more regularly?

All managers have been asked to ensure everyone has opportunities to come together and connect in person. All colleagues are very welcome to work in our office spaces! If you're unsure about these arrangements for you and your team, please do speak your manager.

We've now developed our agile working framework following extensive consultation with colleagues. We'll be sharing this with our community of managers at the Leadership Summit in early June and it will be shared with all colleagues soon after.

The framework sets out that our approach is flexible, to accommodate the wide range of different roles here at Oxfordshire as well as the needs and preferences of teams and individual members of staff. We're not providing a list of rules or being prescriptive, as what works for one person will be different to what works for someone else. All managers will be asked to speak to their teams to agree individual working arrangements in line with the principles in the framework in the coming weeks. And remember, you can always raise the subject with your manager directly too.

Will we be introducing a desk booking system?

We have developed a desk booking system and it's been trialled in a couple of areas. Since the staff information session, we've decided not to roll out the system

more widely as most of our offices are generally under capacity. We've heard from other organisations who have removed similar systems soon after implementation as they found they weren't needed and, in some cases, can become a barrier for people who want to use office space to work. As always, we'll keep our position under review and we'll be guided by feedback from colleagues about how this is working.

What space is available for new teams who don't have a 'pre-pandemic' base to return to?

Please speak to your manager, who'll be able to escalate this as appropriate for further advice.

Have all managers been invited to 12.3.2 training?

Every manager with people management responsibilities has now been invited to complete the series of 12.3.2 managing for performance training. If you or any manager colleagues haven't received an invitation, please contact our organisational development colleagues at ODTeam@oxfordshire.gov.uk.

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