
Hybrid Working Project: Key Actions, Learning and Next Steps

Executive Summary

In March 2022 ELT agreed to proposals for a hybrid working project in order to align our people policies, physical spaces and digital technologies with HCPC's post-pandemic requirements within our corporate strategy. This paper sets out what work was undertaken by the project, what we have learned, and the ongoing work being undertaken to embed and enhance the organisation's approach to hybrid working.

A pilot phase was undertaken at the start of the project, to learn more about the organisation's requirements and preferences for hybrid working whilst minimising investment and maintaining flexibility pending decisions on HCPC's estates strategy. The subsequent estates decision was to vacate 33 Stannary Street (following the previous exit from 405 Kennington Road) whilst retaining Park House, reducing the estate by approximately 50% and now operating entirely within the freehold buildings.

Based on the learning from the pilot phase, hybrid working was adopted on a permanent basis and officially commenced in January 2023. An expected level of office attendance of 20-40% has been set, with sensible levels of discretion available for senior managers to allow for individual circumstances and needs.

Work is now nearing completion to ensure that Park House offers a fit for purpose range of spaces that should meet the long-term hybrid working requirements of the organisation. The timetable of work has been impacted by the need to prioritise vacating 33 Stannary Street but is expected to be completed over the summer.

We have also continued to support people working remotely within the overall hybrid approach, including through provision of laptops to all staff, health and safety assessments and funding to purchase equipment that may be identified as necessary by the assessments.

Employee surveys and exit interviews demonstrate that hybrid working continues to be the most valued initiative at the HCPC. It has also brought organisational benefits in enabling new and more productive ways of working through enhanced technology, collaborative workspaces and improved work-life balance.

Our approach will continue to evolve with experience and in line with changing business needs following the closedown of the project. Key themes are:

- optimising the use of our reduced office space, to improve efficiency, sustainability and productivity;
- continuing to enable productive remote working within the overall hybrid approach; and
- improving utilisation of the optimised office space towards the benchmark set in the hybrid working policy.

Previous consideration	A project closedown report was submitted to ELT on 2 May 2023. Progress updates have been provided throughout 2022-23 through the major investment programme and Resources and Business Performance directorate reports.
Decision	Council is asked to discuss the actions undertaken by the project, the learning points arising, and next steps outlined in this report.
Next steps	The executive will complete the carried over activities set out in the report below and the hybrid working project will move into 'business as usual'. We will continue to monitor office attendance rates and employee feedback, adapting our approach as necessary to optimise organisational performance.
Strategic priority	The Hybrid Working project formed a key element of the 2022-23 major investment programme, helping to deliver strategic aim 5 of the Corporate Plan: build a resilient, healthy, capable and sustainable organisation.
Financial and resource impact	An overall project budget of £270k was originally agreed. £60k was spent during the pilot phase, and a further £130k is committed in implementing subsequent improvements to Park House's meeting and collaborative spaces. £80k was released back to the overall investment programme budget. The reduction in office estate from releasing 33 Stannary Street and 405 Kennington Road will secure recurrent savings of c. £1.2m.
EDI impact	By being able to offer greater flexibility for people who have a disability, who have care responsibilities outside of work, perhaps to children or the elderly, those candidates (who are usually women) are more likely to consider a position where a daily commute isn't a requirement. An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of project governance.
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1 Estates

- 1.1 In December 2021 HCPC successfully completed the exit of 405 Kennington Road, taking account of the much-reduced utilisation of the estate during the pandemic and the anticipated move toward permanent hybrid working. This yielded a significant financial saving of c. £1M annually.
- 1.2 In late 2022 the decision was taken to investigate underletting 33 Stannary Street for the remainder of the leases. Through the process it was determined that the optimal position for HCPC was to negotiate to exit rather than underlet, therefore reducing the risks (financial and others) involved. This was successfully achieved on 31 March 2023. With a short-term payback period this will provide a further annual saving of c. £200k.
- 1.3 The significant reshaping of the HCPC estate (c. 50% reduction) aligns with the now permanent move to hybrid working and the strategic priorities of maintaining both financial and environmental sustainability achieved through reducing cost and resources (including carbon emissions) required to maintain our operations. Our focus is now moving from reshaping the estates towards further improving the financial and environmental sustainability of our operations. We are also working to improve utilisation of the smaller, reshaped office estate (see Section 3.4).
- 1.4 HCPCs hybrid working office space plans were developed working closely with a commercial interior design company to make the most productive use of Park House, increasing the attractiveness to staff off the office as a collaborative working environment. A proportion of the overall suggested changes were implemented during the pilot phase, addressing the need for a variety of collaborative, hot desking and support spaces.
- 1.5 Further works are currently underway based on the learning from the pilot phase. This includes the creation of a large collaborative workspace, a touchdown area, and improvements to meeting room facilities (see Technology section). These works have been delayed by the need to prioritise the exit of 33 Stannary Street, but will be concluded by the summer.

2 Technology

- 2.1 To enable all employees to be able to work productively from any location, a decision was taken in early 2022 to provide all staff with a HCPC laptop as the default personal IT device. This also enables the IT team to support a dispersed workforce effectively by moving to standardised equipment with modern remote device management solutions built in. Feedback from this initiative has been highly positive, including that we have addressed a historic perceived inequity between staff who have been issued HCPC laptops and those expected to provide their own devices.
- 2.2 A desk booking app was procured and implemented to support the adoption of a hot desking approach. The app selected offered a quick implementation time, low upfront cost, as well as the majority of the desired functionality.

- 2.3 Following the successful trial of a 'pop-up' collaboration zone in the old Canteen area as part of the pilot phase, a permanent facility is now being created. This will include two large interactive screens, audiovisual equipment for hybrid onsite/offsite participation, and flexible seating. This will create a large multifunctional space that can be used for team development sessions, 'town hall' meetings and events.
- 2.4 The pilot phase highlighted the paramount importance of good quality meeting room technology to the effectiveness of hybrid meetings. Most of the meeting rooms in Park House are currently being equipped with interactive screens and audiovisual equipment to support both traditional meetings and collaborative workshops. The project team has worked closely with a company specialising in office technology and furnishings to ensure that the rooms work well as a unified whole. As noted above, these works have been impacted by the need to prioritise the vacation of 33 Stannary Street but should be complete by the end of Q2.
- 2.5 We will keep the configuration and layout of the office space under review as we learn from experience, including ensuring that we get value from the recently-installed tribunal suites and that we have enough meeting rooms to meet demand.

3. People and Culture

- 3.1 During the trial period departments held team workshops to establish their various requirements. These showed that teams wanted a mixture of traditional desk-based working in the office on set days and teams coming into the office for collaboration including through workshops and team-building events; the balance between these different ways of using the office varies between teams, with the bigger operational teams currently having most use of desk-based working.
- 3.2 Legal advice was also sought on HCPC's terms and conditions and contracts and whether they needed to be amended to reflect hybrid working arrangements. The advice given confirmed that the best way to implement a hybrid working policy is on a non-contractual basis, with the base work location for most staff (apart from a small number of designated home workers) remaining our office in London unless otherwise formally agreed. Any specific changes to contracts would be dealt with in the usual way under the HCPC's flexible working policy.
- 3.3 A hybrid working policy was published following completion of the pilot phase, which included consultation with ELT and the Employee Forum. The policy sets out principles to inform our approach to hybrid working. It recommends that employees spend between 20-40% of their time in the office, while recognising that different teams will have different needs. It sets out how specific individual employee circumstances will be considered and makes reference to flexible working requests in line with employment legislation. As noted, the Kennington office continues to be the main place of work for most employees. The policy also provides guidelines to ensure that the safety, health and wellbeing and productivity of staff working remotely at home. The policy will be kept under review as we learn from experience.

3.4 Levels of attendance are currently below the benchmark level, at 15% average for the last three months (Feb 23 – April 23). The executive is taking a number of measures to increase attendance towards the benchmark, while maintaining the valued benefits of staff being also able to work remotely:

- increasing the “pull” factor attractiveness of the optimised office space, through the enhancements described above;
- refining and monitoring attendance figures monthly;
- restating the existing attendance benchmark with a clearer positive expectation that all teams are expected to abide by it, with clearer criteria for agreeing any exceptions to the benchmark; Heads of Service will then be required to apply these criteria within the framework set by ELT; and
- we will pursue opportunities for securing commercial value from the office space, including the tribunal suites, subject to ensuring consistency with our values and to practical constraints such as office security. As part of this approach we are in discussion with the General Chiropractic Council about continuing their current occupancy of part of the remaining estate.

3.5 It is worth noting that as we are now operating solely within the freehold estate, we have an opportunity to embed our hybrid working approach, including on attendance levels, whilst realising the budget savings and efficiencies secured by relinquishing the previously leased additional office spaces.

3.6 Quarterly Pulse surveys have been introduced to provide management with regular updates on employee sentiment, alongside ongoing monitoring of key people metrics including turnover and recruitment. The surveys showing that hybrid working is the most valued employee initiative at the HCPC. This is also highlighted in exit interview feedback meetings.

3.7 Work continues to build a positive organisational culture within the hybrid working approach. There has been an increase in wellbeing and equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives, onsite departmental development days, management workshops and onsite interviews. Managers and teams are encouraged to meet new starters onsite on their first day. Corporate inductions will restart being held on site this year to better enable network building.

4. Post project management

4.1 Following the implementation of the new hybrid working technologies and collaborative spaces described in Sections 1 and 2, training will be put in place to support employees in understanding the capabilities of the new equipment and how best to utilise them. A communications plan is in development to promote the new onsite facilities, aligned with a drive to increase office attendance.

4.2 The governance arrangements for the Hybrid Working Project will be stood down once the actions referred to above have been completed. Management of the estates, technology and people aspects of hybrid working will become a ‘business as usual’ activity for the Resources and Business Performance directorate. Monitoring of office attendance, space utilisation and employee

feedback will continue. Responsibility for the successful operation of hybrid working at an operational level, including compliance with the organisation's expected level of office attendance, will remain with line managers and Heads of Service.