



The mobile revolution

Across the country, in councils big and small, a range of battles against the status quo are taking place that add up to a revolution. Consistent with the twin goals of increasing efficiency and improving customer services, it is likely to result in the biggest change to practices in local authorities over the next few years.

Battlefronts in this revolution have been given a variety of names including "smarter working", "New Ways of Working", "modern and flexible working", "21st Century working", "Modernising the Way We Work", amongst others. Perhaps the best name for the overall initiative is location independent working (LIW). At heart, it is about delivering change and it covers all activities that encourage and enable staff to work primarily independent of location.



Who is commanding the forces?

All too often the agenda is not being driven in a coordinated way. Progress typically, is driven by one person who is looking at only one particular set of benefits. Many times it is seen as just a way of realising property savings, sometimes about using clever technology, and to others a way of providing a better work-life balance.

Central government does not always help. Providing specific funding or grants to cover specific projects does not encourage sharing of resources and learning (e.g. £13M funding for mobile technology to support children's social workers – DFES, 28 March 2007). This only promotes more "siloeed" systems to develop, and further inhibits joined up working.

The most forward thinking councils have realised that all these different initiatives need to be seen as inter-dependent. Often it does grow out of one clear driver, but councils should realise that they need to break out of this and see the whole picture.

One council last year found more than 15 "pilots" taking forward LIW. They have now coordinated this activity into a coherent programme and have a clear plan for using location independent working to deliver council-wide transformation.



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A unified attack

What's wrong with a revolution from the roots, a bottom-up approach to change management? It is important for the further development of organic initiatives that are working well and to accommodate the diversity of how council staff work. However, there is a need for a central coordinating structure in order for key issues to be addressed and all the benefits realised. By having common guiding principles and having a central project structure, each service unit will be able to share resources with and learn lessons from their colleagues. Taking this point one step further, councils will have to decide on whether they will implement it on a piecemeal basis or a blanket implementation across the organisation.

The initial drive for flexible working was our accommodation strategy – we are building a new office and wanted to understand how flexible working would influence this. We quickly realised that location independent working is much more than a sub-component of our accommodation plans. We are now looking forward to realising benefits relating to space, productivity improvement and reduced travel. And of paramount importance to us – improved shared services to our customers.

David Perry
Director of Corporate Resources
South Gloucestershire Council



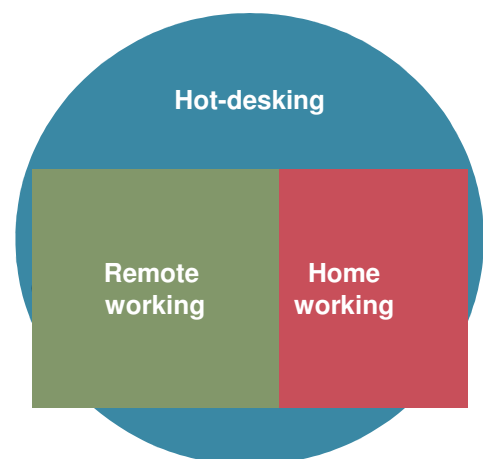
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Attacking on different fronts

In order for a successful LIW campaign, councils must balance all of the following four elements:

- **People.** LIW involves fundamentally changing how people work and this brings significant challenges. For example, managers will have to realise that “managing by seeing” is best replaced by outcome-based managing.
- **Process.** Real benefits come from using the flexibility to work anywhere in order to do things smarter. Although this should lead to an increase in productivity, councils should take a sensible and pragmatic approach on changing processes.
- **Technology.** IT is always a key enabler, but LIW projects should never be technology-led. There are numerous high-tech hardware and software solutions available in the market, but many times a simple solution is all that is required. It is not surprising to see social workers write their case notes down on a case record form and then hand them over to someone who will manually enter the information into their social care system. An alternative would be to provide tablet PCs to social workers who can continue to write down their case notes but this time on an electronic copy of the case record. The data can then automatically be uploaded to the back office system upon reaching the office.
- **Property.** There is no doubt that there are significant cashable savings in this area for some councils. This is especially true for councils that have multiple leased buildings, particularly in high-value properties in the town centre. Property savings can be alluring and lead to other less tangible but potentially more significant benefits to be overlooked (such as productivity gains and improved service delivery).

Service units within councils usually focus on just one new type of working at a time -- hot-desking, remote working, or home working (many councils also offer flexi-time schemes). This, however, also minimises the benefits one can achieve. For example, a home-working policy can deliver productivity improvements, but adding a hot-desking component means the office environment can be restructured to best suit those staff when they do work in the office, as well as releasing accommodation savings. So, in order to release anywhere near the potential level of benefits, it is important to attack on all three fronts, bearing in mind that specific staff roles will call for different combinations and levels of LIW.





Who wins?

The great news about this revolution is that it really is possible for all stakeholders to win. Customers, staff, individual service areas, the council as a whole and partner organisations can all benefit significantly from each new way of working if implemented properly.

The table below shows a limited selection of these benefits.

Stakeholder	Remote working	Hot-desking	Home-working
The public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enabling public-facing staff to spend more time in the community instead of a central office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contributing to efficiency leading to reduced Council Tax increases Potential for more and better meeting rooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced traffic congestion and pollution Information made accessible to remote staff can more easily be made accessible to the public
Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased productivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property savings (i.e. Accommodation Strategy) Better designed work areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased productivity
Corporate Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More flexible workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property savings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing absenteeism / improving recruitment Business continuity
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowered staff Increased productivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frees staff from traditional styles of management and puts the onus on them to manage their outputs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced travel time and travel costs Better work-life balance Reduction in childcare costs
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peripatetic workers can work across properties owned by different partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential shared use of workstations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information made accessible to remote staff can more easily be made accessible to partners
Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More flexible workforce Increased productivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist strategic aims to deliver a modern local authority organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased productivity Reduced travel time and travel costs



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The beginning of a revolution

The sheer diversity of each local authority – including customer interactions, type of staff, size and quality of offices and range of service – has meant this revolution has taken longer than in other sectors. But these very factors also mean that if councils do get it right, the benefits of true location independent working can really mean a revolution can take place.

More importantly, if councils do not act promptly, they will soon realise that their departments are again going in their separate siloed ways – similar to the situation when each service area within each department used their own independent back office system with hardly anyone giving a thought to the long term. In fact, if you are not trying to join these up now, you are in danger of being taken over by the revolution!

iMPOWER have extensive experience of developing and implementing LIW strategies in a number of councils including Warwickshire County Council, South Gloucestershire Council, Derbyshire County Council and Warrington Borough Council. If you would like to discuss how to develop your corporate LIW strategy please contact enquiries@impower.co.uk or telephone 020 7017 8030.

Jeremy Cooper and Joseph Silva
[Jeremy](#) and [Joseph](#) are iMPOWER managers and topic experts on LIW

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