

Executive Summary

West Dunbartonshire Council have undertaken a comprehensive office rationalisation programme resulting in five modern, attractive and flexible offices – four refurbished and one new build location. The new build, 16 Church Street, is a custom made building created in the town centre to the significant betterment of their staff, services and the local community. They have used this as a vehicle to critique, challenge and change their culture and working processes as part of their ongoing transition into a modern flexible council.

In the first of a series of four related case studies, this case study explores the office rationalisation project conducted within the council which fronted their move to a new physical location, refurbishment of current offices and started their exploration of the possibilities contained within a new working culture.

Background

Prior to the move West Dunbartonshire Council had five office locations across West Dunbartonshire which predominantly held their office based staff. Some of the buildings were starting to deteriorate, were outwith the town centre and in need of major reinvestment therefore the council made the decision to refurbish where possible and to build a new space in the centre of the town built onto the façade of an old academy building.

Their vision was to provide staff with modern offices to not only increase efficiency and reduce costs but to also provide a catalyst for alternate ways of working. In order to realise this vision the **office rationalisation project** was planned and implemented.

Drivers

There were two key drivers for the project:

1. **Economic** – there was a need to save money across the council with buildings that more effectively used, that efficiently utilised their space, were cheaper to maintain and cheaper to run;
2. **Cultural** – there was a need for modern spaces for staff to work in as the council were starting to encourage staff into working in a more flexible manner.

Results

The new, flagship, office is simply breath-taking. When you enter through the traditional façade of the old academy building you are instantly surprised when you find yourself standing in the hall of an airy and bright modern office. The foyer is welcoming and immediately you can see an appealing atrium area incorporating seats for staff breaks and spaces for flexible meetings. The main work areas are spread over three floors, each with a similar layout and access is controlled through state of the art (and highly secure) biometric scanners.

The office space has moved away from the tradition of desks, pedestals, fans, lamps, lights, coat stands, pictures on desks and personalised spaces to a very light, modern and communal building. A third of the size of the previous building and using a desk:staff ratio of 6:10, there is still a good cross mix of teams within the building: HSCP, planning, environmental health, finance, senior leaders,

communication and ICT, providing a full range of council services working in the same manner and environment.

West Dunbartonshire Council have used this as an opportunity to modernise the dynamics within the new offices; managers are no longer in separate offices, teams are no longer situated together in larger rooms and staff are no longer isolated from other services within the council.

Instead, there is an emphasis on freedom and collaboration. Teams work in their zones until 09:30 and then they can choose where they want to work from a variety of options - hot desks, standing desks or a number of informal break out spaces (with a choice of high or low back sofas) are all readily available. If a meeting is required, there are informal break out options and a choice of small and large meeting rooms or private telephone rooms if a sensitive phone call is needed. Meeting rooms are very clearly labelled as to their capacity and the equipment available within the room and each enjoys extensive sound proofing to ensure minimal disruptions to fellow workers. Managers work in the same open plan system as their staff, with rooms available if they need privacy for any discussions.

Even smaller touches like the provision of standard cutlery and crockery (using modern zip taps for hot water) have ensured a communal feeling to this new building, rejecting previous territorial behaviours associated with personal desks, mugs and other claims to space. This helps reinforce an aura of shared belonging within the building – a shared belief in the services of the council and an appreciation of how everyone can work together to make that happen.

Also within the building are impressive new council chambers – very spacious and airy and also configurable to allow for the room to be used for multiple purposes – and modern training rooms. The training rooms are also light and airy and enjoy the benefits of up-to-date screens and Bluetooth projection capabilities so setting up for a presentation is a minimal effort.

With 500 members of staff within this building (although this number continues to grow as more staff are given access to the building to support changing workstyles) and 300 staff at the other end of the high street – there has also been a significant benefit to the economy of the town centre. The increased number of staff has increased the footfall for local restaurants, coffee shops and cafes (certainly helped by the decision to have no vending machines within the new building) and economic regeneration (with the appearance of new cafes and coffee shops) can already be seen within the town as a result.

Yet, this is not all about the creation of a new office. The refurbishment of the other four offices provided the same atmospheric and cultural transformation in those different physical spaces. Even when constrained by existing physical limitations it is still possible to analyse and change the infrastructure of offices to provide an environment that is much more suited to flexible and agile working practices.

“THE BUILDINGS ARE GREAT BUT THE PEOPLE WHO USE THEM ARE THE KEY ASSET TO ANY COUNCIL.”

**ALISON MCBRIDE
OD & CHANGE MANAGER**

Implementation

The move began with a pilot in the original office in September 2013 and ran until approximately a year ago. An award winning change management approach was implemented to ensure that communication was clear and consistent across the whole council which used change toolkits, change workshops and change champions (amongst other techniques) to great success. Organisational Development mandated all managers to take part in the workshops and delivered these to individual teams to ensure everyone understood the logistics of the change.

Throughout the pilot, and leading up to and after the move, there was a real desire to involve staff in every aspect of the project. New work configurations were discussed and trialled within existing buildings which helped make the planning of the final move simpler.

The pilot furniture has been used in a refurbished office but was also used to help prepare staff for an anticipated move to the new office. It was a real setback for staff who had been working in the new environment to go back to a traditional office and they really missed it. It was the simple things they missed; zip taps, decent seats for supporting their backs and the social and collaborative benefits of working with new people in the new office.

The final move was accomplished over a four-week period and went with minimal problems due to the planning and expectation setting completed in advance.

This is an ongoing project which will never be fully completed, change champions were used to assist in the move itself and after the move they transitioned into staff forum groups where the council could find out what was working, what needed to be changed and experiment with ideas to continually improve the environment.

Recommendations/Lessons Learned

Focus on employee engagement at every stage of the project and this will reduce the amount of problems you may face later and help facilitate the implementation.

Participant Details

1. Alison McBride – Organisational Development & Change Manager at West Dunbartonshire Council

Supporting Documentation

This case study is the first in a series of four linked case studies from West Dunbartonshire Council; the case studies should, ideally, be read in this order:

1. WDC Office Rationalisation
2. [WDC Employee Engagement](#)
3. [WDC Workplace of the Future](#)
4. [WDC Change, Appraisals, Learning and Development Interventions](#)

Watch a more detailed [video](#) describing the move.