From: [redacted] on behalf of Morton, Gillian
To: [redacted]
Cc: Director People & OD; Morton, Gillian; O"Kane, Eamon
Subject: FW: FHRAG - Hybrid Working Policy Paper
Date: 24 May 2024 12:12:12
Attachments: [redacted]

Good afternoon [redacted],

Please see below comments on behalf of Gillian Morton:

Colleagues

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Hybrid Working Policy Review documents. As you know DfC has reviewed its own application of the policy and we offer some comments/suggestions in furtherance of that. Text in red is proposed as an add on or alternative to the existing text in the documents.

RE the Draft Tor

- Should the purpose of the review at 3.1 should be expanded as follows? – "to ensure that hybrid working arrangements in the NICS are fit for purpose and provide consistent clarity to all staff on the NICS approach to Hybrid Working."

- At 4.1, should it be a 'revised' policy or a 'refreshed' policy? Revised implies changes to the policy. We found the policy to be mostly fine with only a few areas in need of refresh, most of which are covered in section 2.6 of the TOR. Refreshed would imply more a clarification or refinement of some aspects of the policy.

- Also at 4.1 we propose a further objective. The objective of the review is to agree, in consultation with stakeholders, a refreshed Hybrid Working policy that:

    i. appropriately addresses the main concerns of the current policy;
    ii. takes account of best practice;
    iii. equips managers to be more capable and confident in managing the hybrid working process.
    iv. equips all staff with better understanding of the NICS hybrid policy intent and the rationale for maintaining a hybrid working environment.

- We wonder if the policy is clear enough on the point that hybrid working is not about regular/consistent home working and is most definitely not a home working policy?

- The key milestones at 9.0 suggest engagement with CTUS etc towards the end of the project. From experience we would suggest engagement earlier to understand more

about their current concerns/experiences that might inform the refresh.

- There may be 2 issues missing from the proposed review that became quite important in our review.

    - The first is a common understanding of 'business need'. This phrase is used in several organisations' hybrid guidance. What we found is this is open to wide interpretation, eg branch need, directorate need and group need etc, with branch need often being the primary driver. What is missing is a wider relevance for Departmental corporate need. The DfC refresh has a strong alignment with the requirements for staff and knowledge sustainability and succession. A branch need can be too insular and doesn't necessarily assure wider longevity resilience/improvements for the department.

    - The second relates to the current policy relationship between a line manager and their direct report. We do not believe the original policy intended to remove the authority of a more senior manager to seek changes/alterations to a work style agreement that had been agreed by a manager at a lower grade. The refresh needs to be clearer on the right of any senior manager to question and/or require alteration of a work style agreement either because it is not working for the Department, is outwith the guidance given by the department, or needs to change because of operating environment changes.

- We note the presentation outlines an option to set a 'minimum' attendance requirement. This was obviously a contentious matter in our review. However not reinforcing the concept of minimum has created a culture of 'maximum' attendance. This results in staff not coming in more when needed and undermines the 'flexibility', 'availability' and 'common sense' principles of the original policy. It would seem this has been an experience in a number of departments.

- The presentation also touches on well-being. In the context of hybrid this is a key issue. Research will show that hybrid can have both positive and negative well-being impacts depending on the employee and wider life factors affecting them. Hybrid is a benefit for most but can be damaging to some. Presence in the office, even on an agreed work pattern, offers valuable opportunity to see people and determine more about their well-being status. Some signs are more notable in person than on a Teams call, especially when cameras aren't working or are turned off.

In the coming days we plan to publish our DfC review and the FAQs we have developed Eamon O'Kane will also be sharing them with you at that time. It might help in your own review.

Many thanks,
[redacted]

[redacted] **to Gillian Morton| Corporate Services Deputy Secretary's Office |Department for Communities**
Level 9, Causeway Exchange, Belfast, BT2 7EG
[redacted]

From: Director People & OD [redacted]
Sent: Thursday, May 23, 2024 11:39 AM
To: Gibson, Neil [redacted]; Duffy, Paul [redacted]; Minne, Jill [redacted]; Shannon, Catherine [redacted] ni.gov.uk>; McBurney, Joanne [redacted] Simpson, Tony [redacted] DAERA Corporate Services Deputy Secretary [redacted]; Malcolm, David [redacted]; McGeown, Declan [redacted] Luney, Peter [redacted] Morton, Gillian [redacted]; Matthews, Chris (Resource and Corporate Management) [redacted]; Armour, Ronnie [redacted] Johnston, Gareth [redacted]; Brown, Deborah [redacted]; Hughes, David (DoF) <[redacted]>
Cc: Quinn, Aisling (P&OD) [redacted]; DoF Corporate Services Division [redacted] Director People & OD [redacted]; DfC Corporate Services Deputy Secretary's Office [redacted]
Subject: FHRAG - Hybrid Working Policy Paper

Good morning all,

The attached paper was considered at the FHRAG meeting on 8 May. Thanks to those who have replied. Just a reminder that any further comments should be sent to [redacted] by cop tomorrow, Friday 24 May.

Many thanks

[redacted]

[redacted] **Governance & Support Branch | People & Organisational Development | NI Civil Service**
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[redacted]


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