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HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE

The HSE Board

FLOORPLANS IN HSE OFFICES

A Paper by Steve Dennis

Advisor(s): Steve Dennis and Steve Bailey

Cleared by Vivienne Dews on 24 March

Issue

1. Floorplans in HSE offices, the principles that should underlie them and the messages we wish to send through them.

Timing

2. For decision on 31 March 2004

Recommendation

3. That the Board

- a. confirms that we should implement a generic layout for our offices in Merseyside and at Rose Court (para 9);
- b. provides a steer on desk allocation (paras 11 to 13).

Background

4. We will be re-planning the layout of both our London and Merseyside centres over the next few months - London because we will be implementing the Board's decision to seek to sub-let several floors of Rose Court, and Merseyside in order to plan the move to the new building. We are also implementing a new layout in the Bristol and Worcester field offices, where hot desking is being trialled, that will be applied to other field offices if the pilots are successful.
5. Floorplans (i.e. the arrangement of desks) need to take account of the resources HSE wishes to allocate generally to the accommodation function and provide a suitable environment for the tasks we ask people to carry out. We would not normally expect the Board to devote time this topic but the issue will affect many of HSE's staff over the next year or so and it is

important issue to many of them. The office environment we provide is also a physical manifestation of our approach to status, hierarchy and teamwork and we can influence the culture we are seeking to achieve through it.

6. The Board's current policy is to provide open plan space for all staff and contractors working in HSE's offices. At present, each building, and in Rose Court and Merseyside each floor, has been laid out slightly differently to reflect the size and shape of the floor plate, the size and grade-mix of teams and the preferences of the people who work there. Typically, in open plan offices, this has resulted in clusters of four desks (or occasionally six) for staff at B3 or below, B2s sometimes sit with their teams in a cluster, sometimes with other B2s in groups of two desks, or sometimes are in "singletons". Band 1s and the SCS in open plan offices are almost invariably singletons. "Churn" costs are incurred as teams expand and contract, or the grade mix changes, or sometimes because personal preferences change.
7. At Rose Court, the Board's decision that we should sub-let several floors and work towards a space standard of 12m² per person will be a new driver of space planning. In Merseyside, the MHQ Project Board has asked us to plan for a generic floorplan so that there is the same layout of desks on every floor. People would move to different desks, in different parts of the building but we would only change the generic floorplan in extremis. The contract for the new Merseyside HQ includes desks and allows for an extra 10% over 2002 staff numbers to allow for variations to demand throughout the 30 year term. We intend to provide the full number of desks even though 10% would initially be vacant in order to provide an equitable generic floorplan and some flexibility.
8. In the field, the floorplans for the Bristol and Worcester offices have desks arranged mainly in clusters of four. The most senior managers in each office (B1 in Bristol, B2s in Worcester) will use desks in these clusters along with other staff.

Argument

9. Before consultation on the more detailed design issues begins at Rose Court and Merseyside it would be helpful if the Board could confirm a commitment to generic floorplans (perhaps depending on the number of SCS posts on each floor, see para 11 below) in these buildings. The main advantages are that it will:
 - a. visibly demonstrate equality for all D/Ds and counter potential arguments concerning actual space allocation within the different blocks of space;
 - b. utilise office space efficiently and provide the flexibility to handle re-organisations while minimising churn costs;

- c. largely eliminate a time-consuming and resource intensive dialogue between managers, staff and space planners in customising each individual floorplan.
10. This issue does not arise in the same way for field offices where one plan is developed for the whole office.
 11. The other main related issue on which the Board's steer is invited is the allocation of singleton desks. The main messages we want to send through the way we arrange our offices are that there is a broad degree of equality between and within commands, and that we continue to value the senior, experienced staff outside of the SCS who may see detriment from the new office environments. We would also want to avoid any serious disparities in the office environment between Rose Court, Merseyside and the field.
 12. Practically, the planning and bidding documents for the new building in Merseyside assume only SCS staff are allocated singleton desks (as a result of a decision earlier in the process by the MHQ Project Board) and, de facto, all grades outside the SCS are sharing clustered desks at Bristol. The logic in SCS members sitting by themselves, other than status, is that they deal with a higher proportion of confidential work.
 13. It is likely that the contentious area will be at Band 1, and particularly for those who are moving from cellular offices to open plan at the same time. We can only allocate singleton desks for every Band 1 (currently 54) in the new Merseyside building at this stage if B2s are accommodated in four desk clusters (this does NOT mean four B2s need to sit together). Allocating B1s singleton desks in Rose Court would also be an unhelpful constraint in re-organising to sub-let. The options would therefore appear to be:
 - a. a generic floor plan of desks in cluster of twos, fours and above (where appropriate) which accommodate all grades outside the SCS (who would be accommodated at singleton desks, currently the case in all of our current and planned accommodation models);
 - b. as in 13a above but which included the SCS as well as other grades;
 - c. SCS and Band 1 staff allocated singleton desks with everyone outside these grades accommodated in, as a minimum, four desk clusters.

Consultation

14. The Senior User Group of the Merseyside HQ Project (chaired by Paul Davies), FOD HQ (for the OG field aspects), the Trades Union side of the MHQ Joint Consultative Group, the TU Chair of the London Whitley and the Chair of the Trades Unions will all be consulted before the Board and the results will be reported verbally.

Presentation

15. The Board's steer and its underlying rationale will be explained as part of each estates project. Each of these projects has or will have its own communications plan.

Costs and Benefits

16. The main costs associated with the steers that have been requested arise from any loss of morale or motivation from those who believe they have been adversely affected and how this impacts on productivity and outputs. We have not attempted to quantify this. The benefits arise from faster, simpler estates projects, avoiding churn costs (this might amount to £100k pa in total), and increased morale and motivation from those who believe there is a fairer scheme of allocating office space.

Financial/Resource Implications for HSE

17. No additional resources are being sought at this stage. Any resource savings will be made and brought to account through individual estates projects.

Environmental Implications

18. N/A

Other Implications

19. The office environment is a factor for some people in work-related stress, sometimes through noise but occasionally people's immediate neighbours. A more generic environment with more people working in clusters of desks may increase stress. On the other hand, such an environment may result in closer support from colleagues, a better team ethos and less need for consultation and decisions over office layouts, thus reducing stress.

Action

20. As in paragraph 3.