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Moving Office – Issues to Consider

An office move presents a great opportunity to approach eco-issues afresh – and develop new eco-habits.

Choosing new premises

Location

Well located offices can cut staff and visitor travel and encourage people to use more environmentally friendly travel options.

Look for offices with good public transport links and a walking route from public transport to the offices that will feel safe during the day and after dark. Locating near to organisations you work closely with, or regularly buy services or supplies from, will reduce work travel and delivery distances. If you are open to the public, a central location near to other services will enable visitors to combine visits to you with other trips – cutting down on travel.

The building

The design of the building that houses your offices will influence how energy efficient it is, the size of your energy bills and how comfortable it will be to work in.

Good natural light makes for a more pleasant working environment and reduced energy consumption for artificial lighting.

Overheating in summer makes for uncomfortable working conditions and high energy consumption to cool the building (cooling a building is more energy intensive than heating). South facing offices with lots of windows are most likely to overheat. Check that you can open the windows to provide ventilation – and add blinds to provide shade. Equally, buildings that are too cold in winter will lead to high energy bills and miserable staff. Ask how old the boiler is (older systems are likely to be less efficient and more expensive to run) – and check that windows are double glazed.

Its difficult to work out whether the building will be comfortable after a quick visit – the best way to find out is to ask other tenants.

Facilities and services

Does the building include facilities and services that will make it easy for staff and visitors to adopt eco-behaviour?

Consider whether the building offers facilities for cyclists, such as secure parking, lockers and showers – or the option to add these. Does the landlord already provide recycling services? If not, is there space to add extra bins in the office – and in the bin area outside? Look for offices where you can locate IT equipment like servers, which generate a lot of heat – out of the main office space. Are cleaning contractors ethical – offering a fair wage to their staff, and using eco-cleaning products.

The pre-move clear out

When you are packing up, and clearing out, to move, offer unwanted items such as furniture, IT equipment or stationery for reuse. Organisations based locally or in the same building might be interested – or you can try on-line options such as eBay or Freecycle. Recycle any items that you cannot find a home for.

Moving in

Lay out your new office to make the most of natural daylight and ventilation. Both are best within about 7 metres of opening windows. Include lots of recycling bins so that it's as easy for staff to recycle as to throw away.

If you need new furniture, go for good quality, second hand furniture rather than new – to save waste and money.

Take this opportunity to change to greener suppliers and contractors for energy, water, waste and recycling, stationery, cleaning, catering etc.

Sources of advice and information:

- The Furniture Reuse Network www.frn.org.uk

Office refurbishment

Every office gets a refurbishment now and then. This can be a major opportunity to make positive environmental choices and some longer-term changes.

Changes to internal layout

If you are planning to add partitions, consider the impact this will have on natural daylighting and ventilation (nobody likes stuffy, dark offices!) Ensure internal partitions respect heating and cooling systems. If you box a radiator into a new office it will overheat and heat won't reach the rest of the office.

Choosing materials

Work with contractors to ensure that materials used in your office refurbishment are eco-friendly and will create a healthy working environment for staff. Ask for materials that are locally sourced, recycled, have a low chemical content (e.g. paints) or use fewer resources to do the same job. Ask for timber to be certified as coming from sustainable forests.

Sources of advice and information:

Green Street <http://www.greenstreet.org.uk/index.php?ct=1&filters=f25>