REPORT

Workforce Partnership Council (WPC) report: agile and flexible working

Report on supporting agile, flexible and homeworking principles that are fit for purpose.

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Introduction from the Chair

This report represents the culmination of nearly 12 months of work by social partners on agile working within the public sector. The group was tasked with this work at the height of the pandemic and has continued the work whilst coordinating the public sector response as we transition from pandemic to recovery.

The group is aware of the Welsh Government vision to have 30% of the public sector workforce working remotely and is committed and dedicated to the public sector in Wales which has at times of tremendous challenge continued to deliver for citizens of Wales.

During the pandemic there was a mandate to work for home, moving forward the challenge will be around engagement and getting the balance between choices around agile working and business need. The Task and Finish Group is therefore mindful that its recommendations and guidance needs to create a principles framework which can future proof the agile working agenda at a local level.

It is hoped that this report, can lead the way in highlighting the areas of good practice in the public sector and beyond, can build on the partnership and positive engagement with trade unions during the pandemic and future proof the public sector working environment.

Chris Llewellyn
Chair

The Task and Finish Group

The Joint Executive Committee of the Workforce Partnership Council took the decision to establish a Task and Finish Group on 21 January 2021 to consider agile working within the public sector. This decision was ratified by the Workforce Partnership Council on 15 March 2021 when it agreed the Workforce Partnership Council's forward work programme.

The Terms of Reference for the Task and Finish Group were agreed in September 2021. The membership of the group was established on a tripartite basis, with equal representation from all 3 social partners, employers, trade unions and Welsh Government. Members were sourced through nominations from social partners on the WPC JEC.

The objective of the task and finish group was to support a transition to a new normal by developing WPC guidance and best practice to support changes in agile and flexible working and homeworking. It will do this in the following ways:

a. Undertake a rapid review to identify and summarise what work has been undertaken across the public sector to date
b. Gather feedback from Social Partners on the work that is already taking place supporting agile and flexible working in public services to avoid duplication and add value
c. Use this information and evidence gathering to inform the development of the WPC Guidance document
d. Co-develop the content of the document that will promote and support agile, flexible and homeworking principles that are fit for purpose

Membership

Social partner	Name	Representing
Chair	Chris Llewellyn	WPC JEC
Trade Unions	Bethan Thomas	UNISON/Wales TUC
	Jan Tomlinson	UNISON/Wales TUC
	Dave Rees	UNISON/Wales TUC
Employers	Sarah Powell	NHS Wales
	Jonathan Lloyd/ Karen Higgins	Welsh Local Government Association
	Elizabeth Connolly	Devolved Sector Group (DSG)
Welsh Government	Lea Beckerleg	Remote Working Policy
	Gemma Humphries	HR Policy
	Judith Cole	Deputy Director Local Government Finance Policy and Workforce

Background and context

The COVID-19 pandemic saw nearly half of those employed in the UK doing at least some of their work at home in April 2020 (**Coronavirus and homeworking in the UK: April 2020**, ONS, July 2020). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed the perceptions around agile working, the approach of organisations and business and enabled many workers, who previously were unable to work in an agile and flexible way to have an improved work-life balance.

In September 2020 Welsh Government stated that its long-term ambition was to see around 30% of Welsh workers working from home or near home on a regular basis, including after the threat of COVID-19 lessens.

Agile working can offer advantages and opportunities, but the challenge for employers is to ensure a sustainable shift that works in the best interests of the worker and employer in the long-term. Consideration is therefore needed in respect of health and wellbeing, managing, training, engaging, and leading their teams, and the practical support needed to achieve it.

The group acknowledges that for some workers within Wales, the 30% aspiration is not achievable given the nature of their role. It is necessary to consider where priority actions are best delivered, and for some workers this will continue to be in a designated location.

That said, the group felt strongly that there must be equity and that full consideration must be given to agile working for all jobs roles so that it was not a benefit perceived to be only available for senior colleagues or roles.

As we now seek to conclude this work the group, the UK is faced with new challenges in the form of the changing global political and economic pressures, a climate emergency and the war in Ukraine. The UN is warning that the global

economy may on the cusp of a new crisis, whilst recovering from the pandemic (**World Economic Situation and Prospects: June 2022 Briefing, No. 161**). The UK now faces an unprecedented cost of living crisis and changes to interest rates. The devastating impact of this crisis is being felt by families and households across Wales and throughout the UK. It is therefore also within this context that the group has based its recommendations.

What is agile working?

> " Aligning people, processes and connectivity with technology, time and place to find the most appropriate and effective ways of working to carry out a particular task. "

(NHS Wales Approach to Agile Working: Briefing and Guidance)

Agile working can mean different things to different groups of workers and employers. For many employers agile working means fewer employees in the office and hot desking as a way forward. Supported by a package of measures, agile working can bring a number of advantages, it can reduce reliance on buildings and estates; and helps to further promote a suite of new digital tools to ensure that work can be managed collaboratively from a range of locations – whether that be in the office, from home, a remote working hub, or elsewhere in Wales or the rest of the UK.

When considering Agile Working in the context of this Paper, the group means agile working as a flexible environment within which workers can undertake duties and tasks in relation to their work. It is not intended to replicate or define statutory rights afforded to employees in the course of their employment relationship.

Agile working in the public sector in Wales pre-pandemic

Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic a number of public sector employers had flexible working policies in place which concentrated on flexi-time processes, occasional home working and the use of flexible working requests to compress working hours and work in a flexible manner. The overarching theme of these policies was around having a fixed base at which the majority of work would be completed.

The CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) research, '**Embedding new ways of working**' found that:

> " before the crisis, the most widely offered flexible working arrangements were part-time work (56% of employers), regular working from home (45%) and flexi-time (43%). "

It has been advocated by trade unions that there was not an equality of opportunity around agile working, with many workers feeling that agile working was a benefit available to those only on higher grades with sufficient seniority. This view is supported by TUC polling which has shown a **significant divide in access to homeworking** between higher-paid and working-class occupations.

Prior to the pandemic Welsh Government had introduced a **smart working policy** which applied to all categories of staff regardless of grade, this was in support of its ambition to see 30% of the Welsh workforce working from home. The Guidance note to Smart Working outlines:

> " Smart Working will help us to become a more open, dynamic and modern organisation that fosters creativity, efficiency and collaboration…

> " ….. Smart Working in Welsh Government is defined as informal flexible working i.e. WG staff working away from WG premises in other suitable locations on an ad hoc or more regular basis, with line manager agreement to do so. "

There was no consistent approach with regards to Agile Working prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and wholesale agile working was not a consideration for many public sector employees.

Agile working during the pandemic

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic many employers in Wales were required to adapt or introduce temporary arrangements to account for the imposed pandemic working arrangements.

This resulted in temporary guidance or policies negotiated with trade unions on a social partnership basis

NHS in Wales

On 27 March 2020 NHS Wales Employers issued **Home Working Advice and Guidance for Managers and Staff** the purpose of the guidance was to ensure that the support and delivery of core NHS services during the pandemic was maintained whilst supporting the Welsh Government's aim to maximise working from home and social distancing to slow the spread of the virus. This is followed by a **joint statement** outlining how Welsh Government, employers and trade unions within NHS Wales will seek to maintain social partnership working at all levels during the pandemic.

Local government in Wales

Across local government, the 22 local authorities adopted different approaches in response to the pandemic way of working. Many local authorities had some sort of agile working policy or procedure in place prior to the pandemic and whilst some chose to operate these more flexibly when Welsh Government regulations were introduced, others created new or interim policies and procedures in response to the requirement for staff to work from home. Local authorities needed to ensure that core services could remain operational, whilst ensuring staff were supported and remained safe. Those staff who were able to work from home were supported to do so in line with Welsh Government guidance. For local authorities this increased pressure on agile and flexible working, its associated policies and technology. The majority of local authorities introduced interim hybrid-working policies outlining the expected ways of working during the national pandemic.

For other areas of the devolved public sector, including Amgueddfa Cymru, Transport for Wales and the Older People's Commissioner, interim guidance on agile working was introduced for employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidance focused on the nature of customer focused roles and looked at the designation of tasks and obligations rather than a specific work base or location.

Agile working: a greener way of working?

One clear benefit of the greater number of people working from home during the COVID-19 crisis, was the reduction in commuting, not only fewer people using public transport but a noticeable reduction in car use during lockdown. Employers may be keen to show that they are continuing to help the environment by cutting the amount of pollution caused by their workforce in a daily commute when advocating homeworking. The use of virtual meetings also

means fewer business journeys.

However, the impact of agile working in delivering a net zero Wales is strongly debated. There are differing views on whether energy consumption associated with non-traditional ways of working is reduced or increased. What is clear that the green benefits and potential detriments of agile working have yet to be determined. A full impact review would need to be undertaken across the public sector in order to establish the evidence base in this regard, particularly as agile working has not been tested during the winter months where restrictions have not been in place.

Agile working post-pandemic

Almost 1 in 9 workers told the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) and Work Foundation report '**Making Hybrid inclusive - key priorities for policymakers**' that they don't want to return to pre-COVID working patterns. This is confirmed by the **UNISON Cymru/Wales survey** which found that 71.7% of workers had a preference in the long term for hybrid working, with only just over 14% wanting to permanently work from home and just under 14% wanting to be fully office-based.

Further, the Welsh Government published Smarter working: a remote working strategy for Wales on 25 March. The strategy sets out its plans to work with business, trade unions and key stakeholders to help more employers adopt a more agile and flexible approach within their workplace, so that employees can made a choice on the way they work, whether that is locally from a shared workspace, from home or a mixture of both.

As part of the initial NHS Wales review of the response to the pandemic Directors of Workforce and Organisational Development recognised that there was a significant amount of learning that could be captured and developed into

guidance which could underpin moves to consolidate agile working in a planned and sustainable way.

A task and finish group, led by NHS Wales Employers was established in partnership with trade unions to explore the broader concept of agile working within the NHS. Its report **Approach to Agile Working: Briefing and Guidance** outlines key considerations, workstyle models and practical considerations for NHS boards when considering Agile working.

In local government the return to a new normal is prompting a reflection on lessons learnt from the pandemic, with new hybrid working practices likely to remain for the long-term where roles allow. Agile working has continued where this can be facilitated, with guidance or policies in place to support this. The majority of local authorities have or are planning to have permanent arrangements in place to support hybrid working, some pending further review and consultation. This acknowledges that these processes are evolutionary given the way in which working practices have been impacted as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the pace at which they have had to be implemented, reviewing and learning from practice will ensure that policies are fit for purpose and fit for the future. Several mutual benefits have been identified including improved productivity and work-life balance due to the greater flexibility staff have in determining where and how they work. This continues to be an ongoing piece of work to monitor and hone ways of working and review best practice strategies. This will enable authorities to deliver on their statutory duties to the communities that they serve, whilst supporting their employees to have greater opportunities to support work-life balance.

The positive impact of agile working

Overall, more people **polled in the RSPH** (Royal Society for Public Health) felt working from home was better for their health and wellbeing (45%), compared to

around one third (29%) who thought working from home was worse for their health and wellbeing.

A key finding from UNISON's survey highlighted in the report '**Covid 19 and disabled workers – time for a homeworking revolution?**' was that a number of disabled workers reported taking less sickness absence as they were able to manage their condition better when working from home. This is backed up by recent ONS statistics that show that those who do any work from home (whether disabled or non-disabled) have a lower sickness absence rate than office-based workers.

UNISON's 2020 equalities survey found that some UNISON members believed working from home to be healthier in general, both for the environment and individuals. Of those working from home, over 6 in 10 members felt there were no risks to their health, safety and wellbeing.

Working with UNISON, British Gas has introduced an agile working policy that supports all workers working from home, regardless of their job role.

> " The Agile Working Policy has really changed the dynamic and landscape of our work place in a positive way. Workers are encouraged to work flexibly and in an agile manner so that they can more effectively balance caring responsibilities or manage disabilities whilst also contributing positively to British Gas. Well-being is paramount with Managers receiving training on managing teams remotely and promoting well-being and we are all required to come into the workplace at least once a month to engage with colleagues, socialise and receive updates. British Gas is able to recruit a more diverse workforce and morale in the workforce has increased as a result of the policy. "

(Tess Morris, UNISON Branch Secretary British Gas Branch)

Non-traditional roles benefiting from agile working

Agile working within the public sector has seen a positive impact on the ability to provide greater value and experience to patients and service users. Attain, the UK's largest independent healthcare delivery organisation comments that:

> " The agile approach to project management has helped many teams within the NHS to deliver greater value to their patients, even when faced with rapidly changing demands and high-levels of uncertainty. "

One of the biggest benefits of working from home cited by workers and employers alike, is the improvement for many of their work/life balance, being able to deal with domestic and work demands more flexibly within the day, and often with much greater freedom to organise their day. In addition, workers benefited from not having to waste time on travelling to and from work.

The House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee highlighted in their recent report '**Unequal impact? Coronavirus and the gendered economic impact**', how working from home brought opportunities for gender equality in the labour market, making it particularly easier for women with children to balance family and work.

Agile working also has the ability to assist in increasing productivity, Research from the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research on 'Homeworking in the UK: before and during the 2020 lockdown' found that two-thirds of homeworkers said they were able to get as much done in June 2020 as they were 6 months earlier. A quarter said they got more work done.

The CIPD research, 'Embedding new ways of working' showed that two thirds of the employers they surveyed, reported that homeworkers were more or as productive as they were when in the workplace, as well as benefiting from

improved focus (38%).

> " Employers who say that productivity has not been affected or improved as a result of the shift to more homeworking refer to an increased ability to meet targets, more focused work time and a better work–life balance as key drivers… Some employers also reported a greater focus on tasks and more streamlined ways of communication as key advantages of the new way of working. "

('Embedding new ways of working' CIPD)

UNISON's report 'Covid 19 and disabled workers – time for a homeworking revolution?' found that almost three quarters of disabled workers said they were more productive or just as productive. Reasons for increased productivity included reduced impact on pain and fatigue due to less commuting and an ability to work more flexibly with additional breaks or later start times.

Some disabled workers also commented that their homes were better set up to manage their impairments, including in terms of access to toilet facilities. Additionally, disabled workers cited fewer distractions as helping to increase their productivity. For many disabled workers, the distractions they refer to were not simply colleagues asking questions but included the distractions of noise and lighting in busy open plan offices that do not make adjustments for disabled workers.

Neurodivergent workers and those with hearing impairments or mental health problems particularly reported that homeworking had allowed them to address these issues.

Gwynedd Council worked with trade unions locally to introduce a Q&A for staff to support agile and flexible working arrangements, with their vision for:

> " A workforce that can work flexibly and give their best to deliver and provide services of quality for the people of Gwynedd. For Gwynedd Council to be a good place to work, which promotes a work-life balance for the well- being of staff and in order to retain and attract quality staff.' "

Their vision also aligned with the Welsh Government's commitment to enabling 30% of the Welsh workforce to work close to or from their homes.

Key drivers for new working arrangements included:

- benefits for staff wellbeing
- improved work life balance
- productivity
- recruitment
- reduced travel and better use of staff time
- greater flexibility
- office utilisation
- opportunities for those with disabilities or caring responsibilities
- a positive impact on equality.

The Q&A promoted a series of key principles as the foundation for flexible working, arrangements were voluntary for staff, subject to business need and a suitable workspace, internal meetings held virtually but with an understanding and commitment to meet on a face to face basis regularly and staff wellbeing central to arrangements with regular support such as timely communication; training; health, safety and well-being support (including mental well-being) from their line manager and the council more widely.

Potential challenges

The RSPH (Royal Society for Public Health) survey found that people who live with multiple housemates were more likely to think that working from home was worse for their health and wellbeing (41%), compared to people who live on their own (29%) or with just their partner (24%). Women were more likely than men to feel isolated (58% of women v 39% of men) and to develop musculoskeletal problems (44% of women v 29% of men) as a result of working from home.

The recent UNISON Cymru/Wales survey of members found that 35% reported that their physical health had deteriorated whilst working from home, with common issues being musculoskeletal pain such as back ache or hip pain, fatigue, eye strain, and a poor sleep pattern. Many others complained of lack of exercise and weight gain whilst working from home.

Over a quarter of respondents (27%) to UNISON's 2020 equalities survey felt working from home brought risks to their health, safety and wellbeing.

A **BMC Medical article in September 2021** referred to a 'shadow pandemic' of domestic abuse emerging from the public health measures adopted to contain the COVID 19 virus.

> " Before lockdown, I was just about coping as long as I was going into the office. But being kept at home and my children spending even more time with their abuser has almost broken me. "

(UNISON member: 2020 Equalities Survey)

The ONS have reported that the number of domestic abuse-related offences recorded by police rose in 2020 by 7% compared with 2019, this is a shocking increase, particularly in light of The CIPD emphasising that with more people

working from home "escape routes or time apart from an abuser may be dramatically curtailed".

The Institute for Employment Studies report '**Working from Home under COVID-19 lockdown: Transitions and Tensions – January 2021**' also found that maintaining the high level of productivity during the pandemic took its toll, with employees' responses on mental health and well-being ranking low. In particular, parents, carers and managers put in more hours, struggled with collapsed home/work boundaries, and felt under pressure

Generally, working from home has been found to give disabled workers more control over the pattern of their working day. From later start and finish times to the ability to timetable in more breaks, disabled workers could better manage their impairments without the rigidity of the work environment. Disabled workers also welcomed the positive impact of not having to commute on their pain and fatigue. Homeworking had completely removed this barrier for many.

Yet some disabled workers are clearly facing disadvantages when working from home. In the UNISON survey of disabled members covered in the report 'Covid 19 and disabled workers – time for a homeworking revolution?', many respondents had felt the need to buy their own equipment as they could not access reasonable adjustments. Deaf workers were often particularly excluded from work colleagues due to a lack of reasonable adjustments. This led to a sense of isolation amongst some.

> " Unable to call or take part in group calls. My department doesn't use any form of video conferencing that would allow a sign language interpreter to be included. "

(UNISON member)

Some neurodivergent respondents said that they needed clear boundaries

between work and home and found it difficult to work from home without clear structures. The second biggest obstacle to working from home for disabled workers in the future was resistance from employers, even though many showed that it could help them better manage their impairments and improve their productivity.

The group considers that there are opportunities to learn lessons from the mandatory working arrangements during COVID, so that any future hybrid working agreements can mitigate the impact of some of the challenges identified above.

Mental Health and the pandemic

The COVID pandemic has created a mental health crisis within the UK, not only for those workers on the front line delivering services through the pandemic, but also for workers working remotely. Many of the members surveyed by UNISON Cymru/Wales reported a considerable impact on their mental health when working from home, particularly reporting anxiety and depression. Over a third (33.8%) said that their mental health had deteriorated.

Similarly the **2021 CIPD/Simplyhealth Health and Wellbeing at Work** survey report found that 5% of remote workers said their work-related mental health had got worse during the pandemic, with 42% saying this was at least partly a result of inability to switch off from work.

> " I have felt isolated and this has increased my stress and anxiety at a time when I am already struggling with this and trying to return from sickness.

> " I have a chronic fatigue syndrome so some days are so much better working from home - especially when I have bad days. Then other days it has made me more mentally fatigued being on virtual meetings all day.

> " Poor mental health and lack of support from employer. "

(UNISON member responses)

Some categories of workers are experiencing heightened levels of stress, anxiety and poor wellbeing as a result of switching to remote working, a form of Agile Working. Younger worker and Gen Z workers experience detriment because having recently entered the workforce they do not necessarily have the social and professional support networks needed to build resilience and this can have a severe impact on wellbeing. Further, this generation of workers will not always be able to find a quiet designated workspace because of precarious living arrangements which may be exacerbated by the ongoing cost of living crisis (**BBC Global News**).

What this demonstrates is that agile working is not a one size fits all model. When implementing Agile Working it is necessary to balance flexibility, providing workers with the opportunities they need to remain productive in the workplace and balance this with their social, health and wellbeing requirements.

Observations

In the course of their review of the available information and literature, the Task and Finish Group were alerted to a number of related matters that could impact on the ability of the public sector to implement agile working but that did not fall within either the scope of the work of the task and finish group or within the devolution settlement.

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs mileage and allowances

Homeworking expenses and allowances are taxable or not can be a complicated issue. The group notes that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) does differentiate between those workers who choose to work from home and those who have to work from home.

To HMRC, a genuine home worker is one who cannot perform their substantive duties anywhere other than their home, so a hybrid worker who works part of the time in the employer's workplace is unlikely to be regarded as a permanent home worker for tax purposes.

A worker's permanent work-base would remain the employer's workplace where the worker is able to work from the employer's workplace on some days of the week under hybrid or blended working arrangements. This will also be likely to be the case for those workers who choose to work from home full-time as part of a flexible working option. This means that any commuting from home to the employer's workplace would not be counted as business travel and not be eligible for tax relief or be treated as a non taxable expense if reimbursed by the employer.

The task and finish group is mindful that there should be no detriment associated with agile working, and as such acknowledge that individual employers may wish to explore home working allowances at local level.

Task and Finish Group recommendations

The Task and Finish Group recommends that the Workforce Partnership Council and/or its successor body agrees to the following 7 principles in relation to agile

working in the public sector.

1. Jobs suitable for agile working

Employers should think upfront about agile working options that are available for the role and give employees the opportunity to work in an agile way from day one.

When determining suitability for agile working employers should, in the first instance, break down the specific tasks of each role in order to ascertain whether these can be undertaken in a different manner rather than looking at a role in its totality.

The criteria to consider when making a decision would include:

1. The likely cost/benefit of any proposed arrangement
2. The quantity and quality of work that can be realistically achieved and how this will be measured
3. The practicalities of undertaking specific tasks in an agile manner (i.e. availability of appropriate workstation, equipment, IT, information, security of data)
4. If the environment required to undertake agile work is achievable
5. Any adverse effects on the individual or other team members
6. If a trial period would be suitable and if so, for what period of time.

Where jobs can not be undertaken in an Agile manner consider certain duties that can be done in different ways to support other forms of flexible working.

As well as the needs of the job role, the employer should consider the individual worker's needs.

Any decisions about the suitability of jobs or roles for agile working should be

taken in social partnership with local trade unions.

2. Equality for all

No one should suffer any detriment or discriminated against at work. Where agile working policies or principles are agreed consideration must be given to the particular needs of individual workers and the different needs for particular groups of staff.

Employers should understand and take into account the particular circumstances of individuals, involve and communicate appropriately with workers and recognised trade unions and consider any particular measures or reasonable adjustments required. Decisions should be taken with workers, empowering them to work across locations if this is desired.

3. Health & safety and equality legislation

Duties under health & safety legislation continue where workers work in an agile manner. Employers should consult with trade unions including safety representatives on matters affecting members health and safety when working in an agile way. Risk assessments should be used as a tool to ensure the health and safety of workers and there should be an agreed public sector framework for agile working, which should include risk assessments, appropriate equipment, workstation assessment and the right to disconnect.

Employer's duties under the Equality Act 2010 for making reasonable adjustments for disabled workers. Whilst working in an agile manner could be a reasonable adjustment for some disabled employees, it should not be used as an alternative to making reasonable adjustments in the workplace where this is requested.

Employers must also ensure that where there agile working patterns in operation, workers are able to take adequate rest breaks and not work beyond contracted hours. Consideration should also be given to adopting mental health policies to support risk assessments.

4. Promoting employee wellbeing

Where agile working is implemented, some workers may be uncomfortable with change, feeling the loss of a permanent workplace and reduced face to face contact. The approach should therefore not be about forcing workers to work in different ways but about personal choice subject to operational constraints and service requirements.

During transitional arrangements, employers should ensure that workers can receive additional support and signposting during this time. Promoting wellbeing at work is a priority for the public sector and managers and workers are encouraged to work together to overcome challenges in working arrangements. This could include but is not limited to regular check ins and engagement, staff surveys, pulse surveys and robust and effective occupational health provision.

Where particular elements of agile working, such as homeworking is unpopular with employees because of any potential negative impact on work/life balance, the employer should agree to explore alternate forms of agile working.

Employers should invest in employee wellbeing programmes to support any agile working but also to recognize the impact that the pandemic has had on public sector workers.

5. Domestic abuse

Given that the negative impact that agile working can have on workers

experiencing domestic abuse and the commitments contained in the Welsh Government Violence against women and domestic abuse, all agile working policies or agreements should be supported by a domestic abuse policy developed with trade union. Employers must have in place robust paid special leave policies that would support survivors of domestic abuse to find a new home, access refuge support, receive legal advice or other associated activities.

Employers should be mindful of the ACAS guidance in terms of supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse and routinely share information with workers about the **Live Fear Free helpline**.

6. Leadership and management

To support agile working, employers need to move away from the ethos that people need to be managed and directed to an understanding that where workers are given clear responsibility and authority they will be highly engaged, take care of each other and deliver focused solutions with exceptional results.

It is therefore essential that both the worker and the employer agreed on a workstyle that complements the working arrangements agreed upon and that there is a shared ownership of the effectiveness of the arrangements.

Employers should focus on creating high trust environments that focus on individual communication and engagement strategies to ensure the continued effectiveness of hybrid working.

Workers become less visible when working in an agile manner, therefore any workplace measures identified to monitor performance must focus on quality rather than quantity – ensuring that the outputs reflect a more accurate picture than presenteeism.

7. Practical support for agile working

Employers and trade unions, working in social partnership at a local level must ensure that there is positive role modelled leadership (collaborative and compassionate) to support agile working.

Agile working is an investment in the workforce, a commitment to agile working in the public sector therefore represents a commitment to allocating appropriate resource to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of agile working.

Future work

The Task and Finish group is recommending that the Workforce Partnership Council or its successor Body agree the 7 ambitious principles to accelerate Wales' journey to support having 30% of Welsh Workers working from home or near home and embed agile working into the public sector in Wales Whilst it is recognised that not all roles are suitable for agile working, the principles identified will ensure that where Agile working is possible, full consideration is given to this as an option for future and current working.

There should be a clear transparent agile working policy adopted locally across the public sector developed with trade unions adopting the principles identified in this paper. Having reflected on the work and experience within the NHS Wales in respect of agile working it was felt that having local agreements, that incorporated the principles identified, would be more effective in achieving Agile Working as they would be more able to reflect local nuances, organisational structures and service user demand.

There should also be an acknowledgment from all social partners, that, at times of social and economic crisis that there should be no detriment associated with

agile working and a review of potential allowances locally and nationally should be undertaken to complement the developing agile ways of working. This should form part of the commitment from the public sector to invest in agile working as a model for the future and should include investment in health and wellbeing, recruitment and development, leadership management and engagement, operations, and practical support.