Agile working – staff guide

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Work is an activity we do, rather than a place we go

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1. Introduction

1.1 West Suffolk Council is committed to ensuring its workforce feels supported and valued and is recognised as being key to enable the council to deliver its aspirations.

1.2 Like most public sector organisations, we are going through a period of significant change. COVID-19 has enabled us to consider new ways of working and take every opportunity to assess how agile working can be at the heart of transforming the way we deliver our services both efficiently and effectively, balancing this with supporting the health and wellbeing of our workforce.

1.3 This guide has been developed to provide information on how to introduce agile working practices and address some of the common questions and challenges staff may face in developing more agile ways of working, supporting the transition to new ways of working across the workforce as the council further develops West Suffolk 2025 plans.

1.4 This staff guide should be read in conjunction with the full 'Agile working guide'.

2. Aim and benefits

2.1 Our aim is to improve service delivery by changing the way we work and where we work (work is an activity we do, rather than a place we go). A culture change where we encourage and support where you work and empower you to challenge the way you work will bring about the following benefits:

- allow us to focus time and money on services, not buildings, to ensure delivering services takes priority over occupying buildings and redesign and repurpose office space for the most cost effective use
- focus our work on outcomes rather than processes
- reduce unnecessary travel time, which in turn will increase productivity and reduce cost
- create an environment which allows you to achieve an improved work life balance, encourages collaboration and innovation and provides greater job satisfaction, motivation, morale and productivity
- lower our carbon footprint, through reduced emissions from reduced travel
- improve the recruitment and retention of skilled and experienced employees by offering a range of work styles to match individual work preferences
- reduce absenteeism and related costs.

3.   Principles

3.1   We will support you to work to the following principles aligned to our approach to agile working:

Culture	The most successful agile working arrangements are built on a culture of trust and responsibility. Building trust in an agile working team can sometimes involve meeting several challenges that, with planning, openness, honesty and good communication, can be overcome.
Manage by performance	Staff will be managed by performance and outcomes rather than presenteeism, with clear and realistic objectives agreed between an employee and their manager, using goal setting managed through one-to-ones and performance review meetings.
Mutual agreement	The need for staff to come into the office is a two-way relationship and requires a balance between both an individual and the organisational need. Managers have a pivotal role in helping their teams shift to new ways of working and communicating with their teams, but individuals also need to take ownership and exercise their judgement on selecting the best place to work.
Availability of agile working	Flexibility in the way we work will be the norm rather than the exception and our staff will be encouraged and supported to work this way. However, teams will identify those who need a regular presence in the office for operational, personal or health reasons.
Effective place of work	Work will take place at the most effective location, taking into account the tasks to be undertaken and the customer, individual and team needs.
Updating individual availability	Staff will take responsibility to ensure email messaging and calendars are up to date so that colleagues, members, customers and partners know when they are available.
Health and wellbeing	We will all take responsibility for our own health and wellbeing and that of our colleagues, ensuring a good work life balance.
Collaboration and workspace allocation	Whilst workspaces will be available for collaborative and creative thinking, large scale team meetings should continue to be held remotely wherever possible, accepting that teams may also wish to hold away days as a service or directorate and make provisions for doing so.
Workspace availability	Flexible workspaces – that is, those not allocated – will be available via an audited bookable system and staff will be able to book part of full days.
Location	Location for agile working can be in our offices, home working or community based.

Travel	We support staff to work flexibly in support of agile working and to plan their working day around their individual and work needs. If staff travel into the office during the working day, this is not considered part of their working day.
Continuous learning and challenge	We all have to be flexible as we develop new work habits and be prepared to continually review what is working and what is not working individually and collectively and adapt our response accordingly.

4. Difference between agile working and flexible working

4.1 Agile working, also commonly referred to as hybrid working, is often mistaken as flexible working, but there are distinct differences. COVID-19 has created even more ambiguity between the two as the majority of the workforce has worked from home.

4.2 Flexible working is at the request of an employee, where a working pattern is required, which often supports commitments outside of work such as caring responsibilities. There are two types of flexible working:

- formal flexible working – such as part time working, fixed working pattern and term time – requested as a contractual change
- informal flexible working – working predominantly within a framework of hours but with the opportunity for give and take, depending on the work demand – for example, flexible working hours such as late start, early finish and TOIL, accruing and taking back time at a later date.

4.3 Agile working is usually driven by business need but benefits both the employer and the employee, requiring employees to complete their duties at a time which suits the business.

4.4 Agile working is not just about homeworking but encourages employees to work differently – not necessarily in traditional offices – with homeworking and working at other suitable locations being other options. It recognises that work is not a place, but an activity, and can be done in an environment which suits delivery of that activity and is not governed by a rigid set of hours, but focuses on people, processes, connectivity and technology.

4.5 Homeworking will not be enforced but will be encouraged where you are able and willing to work differently and your role and tasks support new ways of working.

5.   Contractual considerations

5.1   Homeworking will not be a contractual change to terms and conditions, except in roles where a job is deemed a 100 per cent homeworking role.

5.2   You will still be able to request formal changes to your working arrangements in terms of formal flexible working, such as change of hours or work pattern.

5.3   You will not be required to formally request agile working. This is about new ways of working that are both business and individual driven and, therefore, agile working can and will change with the business needs. It is not an arrangement set in stone and you and your team will review ways of working to ensure they cover service needs whilst promoting different ways of working for employees.

5.4   Agile working does not change the contractual place of work.

5.5   You will retain your current designated base for travel claim purposes, although you may choose to work from an alternative location to allow for improved efficiency and a more effective service. Travel claims must ensure that home to work mileage is deducted before claims are submitted.

5.6   We will not reimburse any household bills associated with working from home, although you can apply for tax relief through from the Government – visit GOV.UK for information: https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home. Increased costs of working from home are offset for most people in terms of reduced commuting and lunch costs.

6.   Organisational and team charters and values

6.1   It is important that teams have clear expectations of what their priorities are and agree how they work together to ensure good communication and collaboration.

6.2   Teams will need to consider what best works for them, accepting that not all teams will work in the same way but, at the same time, considering the wider corporate need.

6.3   Establishing a team charter can help ensure that that a team knows what is expected of them (our organisational remote working charter is shown in Appendix A) and should include:

- how to respect and separate personal and work life
- virtual meeting etiquette
- how we will connect with others
- having respect for flexibility
- trusting each other to operate in an agile way

- setting meetings with purpose
- ensuring team alignment
- staying true to our values and behaviours.

6.4   It is also important to remember that, as part of flexible working, employees would often **work at home**, usually to have periods of concentration with limited interruptions. Agile working encourages employees to **work from home** to undertake their role. There is a difference. Teams will, therefore, need to agree how to communicate and manage this to enable staff to have those periods of uninterrupted time.

7.   Responsibility of managers

7.1   Managers are key to the success of agile working which relies on good communication and keeping in touch with their staff on a regular basis, in the same way they would if they were 100 per cent office based.

7.2   Managers should jointly agree, with the employee, the agile working style and how this will be achieved, taking into account the needs of the team and the service.

7.3   Managers will manage by outputs and outcomes, ensuring that employees have clear objectives and goals and know what is expected of them, and have regular discussion and feedback about their performance.

7.4   Managers are responsible for regular communication and keeping teams up to date, supporting the work of their teams and ensuring they support their health and wellbeing. Managers will need to consider how best to support those staff working in agile ways with those who may be working in more traditional ways.

Good communication and contact include:

- regular one-to-ones
- performance management and reviews
- check in calls for wellbeing
- MS Teams catch ups
- team meetings
- face to face meetings when required
- normal contact during periods of sickness absence, checking in and keeping in touch
- creating and nurturing a sense of belonging when teams are working in multiple places.

7.5   Managers are responsible for managing and supporting the health and wellbeing of their teams which includes:

- acting as a role model to promote a positive work life balance, supporting staff to separate work from home
- making sure wellbeing is a regular agenda item for all team meetings
- supporting staff where there is work life conflict

- ensuring staff are not working excessively long hours on a regular basis, but balancing their hours and outcomes
- ensuring appropriate risk assessments and acting on any areas of concern for employees who they are responsible for
- reviewing agile working arrangements where there are issues, making every effort to resolve matters.

8. Responsibility of employees

8.1 Employee engagement is essential to successful agile working. You must engage with regular communication and contact with your managers and teams, as agreed through team charters.

8.2 You must:

- agree your working style and working plan with your manager, ensuring this supports the operational and team needs

- commit to keeping diaries up to date to ensure you are able to communicate your availability to others

- be responsible for your own health and safety by complying with council policies relating to work, whether in the office, at home or other locations, and ensuring that risk assessments and training are carried out

- ensure that caring arrangements are in place so that you can work from home, in the same way you would if you were office based

- make sure your manager is made aware at the earliest opportunity (usually before normal work hours) should you be absent due to health, an unplanned caring situation or anything which prevents you performing your duties, in the same way you would if you were in the office

- optimise meetings to minimise the amount of travel time when working off site, respecting that travel time during the day to attend the office is not considered work time

- comply with confidentiality, data protection and Internet security policies

- ensure that any personally adapted equipment (for example, left-hand orientation or widescreen laptop) required in order to undertake your duties is available for your use wherever you are working under this arrangement

- take responsibility for personal insurance needs related to working in different locations

- act responsibly in terms of being aware of hours worked and taking regular breaks, to look after your own health and wellbeing, and raise concerns either through your manager or HR.

9. Workspace

9.1 Agile working allows us to repurpose our office space and consider commercial opportunities with excess office space.

9.2 We have approximately 200 employees who are based at West Suffolk House. With our new ways of working, there will be approximately 80 bookable desks at this location, with a variety of other operational workspaces. The desk space available, and the primary purpose for its use, is given below:

Desk space	Reason for use
Fixed desks	Long term use – primarily for those who are unable to work from home or other locations (for example, roles which are office based, to support health and wellbeing, for those who have no suitable workspace at home).
Bookable desks	Long and short term use – bookable when an employee considers that they need to carry out some of their working duties in the office. A desk can be booked for a half or full day.
Touch down points	Short term use – available for staff coming into the office for short periods of time, such as using the office as a starting point or to use as a workspace between meetings and appointments.
Collaborative open space	Long or short term use – bookable for teams, either within teams or matrix teams, to come together to work collaboratively to share ideas or work on joint projects.
Small meeting rooms	Long or short term use – bookable for small meetings considered sensitive or confidential and not suitable for open space working.
Break out areas and coffee stops	Available to support social interactions between our employees.

9.3 Any desk that is booked and then not needed must be cancelled immediately to enable the desk to be allocated to others. Desk bookings will be monitored.

10. Useful links

- Agile working guidance:
  https://intranet.lan.westsuffolk.gov.uk/people/hrpolicies.cfm

- Toolkit for managers, wellbeing conversations:
  https://intranet.lan.westsuffolk.gov.uk/people/upload/Toolkit-for-managers-Wellbeing-conversations.pdf

- Data security:
  https://intranet.lan.westsuffolk.gov.uk/howto/upload/HomeworkingGuidanceOnDataSecurityDuringCOVID-19.pdf

- Email and Internet usage:
  https://intranet.lan.westsuffolk.gov.uk/howto/upload/EmailAndInternetUsagePolicy.pdf

- Health and safety:
  https://intranet.lan.westsuffolk.gov.uk/people/healthandsafety.cfm

Appendix A:
Organisational remote working charter

Eight principles of how we work remotely

#We'reAllInThisTogether
#TeamWestSuffolk

1. **Create clear separation between work and personal time**

   Just because we can be connected 24 hours a day, seven days a week, doesn't mean that we should be. We respect each other's personal time, the need to disconnect and the importance of self-care.

2. **Virtual meeting etiquette**

   We will all actively engage in virtual meetings, which means limiting multi-tasking and being visible by turning on our cameras as required during the meeting.

   We will make sure our backgrounds during meetings are appropriate and use background blurring if necessary.

3. **Connecting with others**

   We support each other's wellbeing and show empathy, care and consideration for others.

   We encourage virtual breaks to check in, catch up and stay connected with each other.

   Even when we are apart, we are all in this together.

   We encourage people to share their ideas and regularly discuss how they are feeling.

   We encourage people to make use of the range of ways we can communicate with others, reducing the over-reliance on emails and the necessity to send emails to multiple recipients for information purposes only.

4. **Flexibility**

   We understand that one size does not fit all, and we support all our staff to work in ways that work for them.

   We respect the fact that people are working at different times and we will show consideration for their choice of when and how to work. We do not expect people to reply to emails outside of their working hours.

Staff are empowered to work flexibly, although their work patterns should be known by line management to ensure we manage our customers' expectations.

We want to focus on people working in smarter ways and in ways that work for them and our customers.

We encourage and expect managers to carry out regular wellbeing conversations and distinguish between supervision of work and personal support*.*

5. Transparency and trust

Everyone is committed to and accountable for their performance, but we encourage people to find ways of working that work for them so that we can balance work and life and remain healthy and productive.

6. Meetings with purpose

We respect each other's time and busy schedules and understand that not everything has to be a meeting.

We respect break and lunch times when scheduling meetings.

Meeting duration and time management should allow for productive positive meetings that don't overrun. We respect the needs of others for breaks away from screens.

Formal meeting objectives should be clear in advance, allowing for focused discussions.

7. Team alignment

We encourage all teams to review their expectations and ways of working and communicate with each other in ways that work for them and their teams.

We encourage all teams to focus on their achievements and generate a positive working environment.

8. Upholding our values and behaviours

We continue to focus on delivering exceptional service for our communities and we remain committed to providing a high quality, people-oriented service across the organisation.