

Guidance – How to work in an agile way

Version control

This document is subject to regular review due to legislative and policy changes. The latest versions of all our publications can be found on our website. Before contacting us about the content of this document, we recommend that you refer to the most recent version on the website and any relevant guidance.

Version	Date approved	Approved by	Notes / changes
v1.0			New guide

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Guidance – How to work in an agile way

Introduction

There's a certain energy that comes with being in a physical office space. It can be driven by morning routines, familiar conversations, and casual kitchen/printer or corridor interactions. That energy can be difficult to recreate when employees work in an agile way.

Denbighshire County Council is committed to ensuring that all employees are supported whilst working in an agile way. It is proved that employees who have the choice as to whether they work in the office, at home or another location will have a positive work engagement. However, the council recognise that there is a need to support some employees who may find this way of working more of a challenge.

This guide will give employees some general guidance and offer advice of things that they can consider to adopt when working in an agile way. Some of the suggestions may not work for all employees and working in this manner will dependant on business needs also, but there may be some useful ideas that could be adopted which would support a more agile way of working.

Definition

Agile working is a form of flexible working where employees spend some of their time working remotely (usually, but not necessarily, from home) and some in the employer's workspace. At the same time, it is important to recognise that agile working may not work well for everyone. There may also be certain roles or tasks that require employees to be co-located (i.e. working in the same physical location as colleagues), and that working at home or from another location would not suit the service.

It is advised that managers and employees continually review their working arrangements as part of the 1 to 1 discussions. Circumstances and job roles frequently change and evolve, and it is therefore important that the working arrangements works for both parties, that an open dialogue is adopted. Business needs will remain the priority when working arrangements are being discussed and agreed.

If any employee requires any additional support when working in an agile manner, the following pages on the council website might be of use:

<https://www.denbighshire.gov.uk/en/jobs-and-employees/my-employment/mental-health-wellbeing/mental-health-and-wellbeing.aspx>

Points to consider when working in an agile way

This guide will look at the main important points that employees may wish to consider when working in an agile way.

Corporate Image

For those employees who work in an agile manner, Denbighshire adopt the 'Dress for your day', allowing employees to tailor their clothing choice to suit their day and demands of the role. Employees should consider their day's schedule, tasks being performed and the people they will be interacting with. Good judgement should be applied when making decisions on workday attire.

Clothing should always be suitable and safe for the work being performed. Employees may not opt out of using/wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) whenever it is required.

Agile working may mean lone working

Ensure that a lone worker risk assessment has been carried out with your line manager, this should cover you and the way you work. A lone worker "safe working procedure" must be in place for you.

Create a space to work from

Employees should, where possible, have a physical space specifically set aside where they can work consistently. While not all employees will be able to have an ideal setup, things to consider when trying to optimise the space include personal comfort, privacy, noise, Wi-Fi connection strength, natural light and a temperature-controlled area. The kitchen table will do for short term working, but employees might want to think more strategically if they're setting up for longer stretches of time.

Consider some of the following:

- Set up a designated workspace. Separate space for yourself to work in, somewhere you can focus on tasks without being distracted and set up with everything you need for a normal working day – laptop, keyboard, mouse, stationery, papers etc.
- Make sure you have all the technology you need. This includes a reliable and secure internet connection, any necessary files, hardware and software, remote access to your company network (CAG) and, importantly, knowledge of how to get IT support.
- You will need to consider Health and Safety. Your Line manager should have developed an Agile Working Risk assessment with you and your team.
- Employees are responsible for their own home set up and are required to complete a **‘Workstation Risk Assessment Checklist’** and the **‘Homeworking Checklist’** which can be accessed via the Corporate Health and Safety pages on Linc (intranet). You should inform your line manager if your workstation assessment identifies that you require additional DSE equipment, you will not be charged for this.
- You may not necessarily need office type furniture or equipment at home to achieve a good posture. Equally your own furniture or equipment may not be suitable or sufficient. The Workstation Risk Assessment Checklist is a useful tool to help decide what is needed for your situations and circumstances.
- Make sure that you are comfortable and have the appropriate chair and screen as well as any other equipment which will make things easier for you to work from home.
- It is important to note that if you do not have the required space or equipment to work from home, then there will be office space available for you to use.

Please ensure that you:

- Arrange equipment and furniture to avoid trailing leads and cables
- Check that your plugs, leads, wires and cables are in good condition
- Keep your work area tidy and free from obstructions that could cause slips or trips

- Check you have adequate lighting in your work area to avoid eyestrain
- Report any work related incidents and/or accidents to your line manager immediately. All incidents and/or accidents must be reported using the Accident / Incident Form available on the Corporate Health Safety pages in the intranet (Linc).

Set a beginning and end time for the workday

Remote worker burnout is a concern. Come up with a plan and stick to it consistently. Some employees might find adhering to an 9am-5pm schedule will work for them, however for some employees this will not work, due to personal commitments and childcare.

Employees must note that the ability to work from home is not a substitute for child care or similar carer responsibilities. It will be an employee's responsibility to ensure that adequate provision is in place to avoid conflict with work performance whilst at home. All working arrangements, working patterns and working hours will need to be discussed on a regular basis and agreed in advance with your line manager. Business needs will take priority.

Flexibility is a benefit to agile working and being able to have a better work life balance has proved to be successful in keeping employees engaged and morale high. However, you need to understand what your manager expects of you and this should be discussed on a regular basis. It is essential that the needs of the service has equal priority to your Health Safety and Welfare.

Consider some of the following:

- Know when to step away from your desk. Be clear about when your working day begins and ends and take breaks to refresh. It's easy to let yourself be 'always on' when your home and office are the same place.
- At the end of the day ensure that you close the door on the work space where possible as if you would when leaving the office or your other place of work. If you have no dedicated work space, ensure that you pack away your work equipment out of sight until the following day, so that you have a clear distinction between home and work.

- For those sending emails outside of the normal 9-5 working pattern, the following sentence should be added to the signature of emails to prevent an “always on” culture, “Please be aware that I work flexible hours, so whilst this is a convenient time for me to send this email to you - I do not expect a response from you outside your normal working hours.”

Set a routine for the working day

Employees should treat the beginning of their day as if it were any other day. Shower and get dressed and have breakfast, as you would if you were going to a place of work. From there, have time set aside for daily tasks, team meetings, and even breaks throughout the day. Having a good routine will keep energy levels high. It may be that you complete a daily exercise class before or after work, walking the dog, reading or spending some time meditating.

Consider some of the following:

- Get dressed. Changing into working clothes will help you mentally switch to productive work mode. It will also help you distinguish between ‘homeworking’ and ‘home life’.
- Make sure to take time for lunch and don't have lunch at your desk. Take the time to re-energise at lunch break for example. It's really easy for employees to just work through lunch and then have a snack so ensure you have a proper break.
- When scheduling meetings try and not to schedule back to back meetings. When commuting between locations for meetings travel time was always considered, however when it is a virtual meeting there is a likelihood that in between time will not be factored in. Employees need this time to be able to de-brief and re-focus.
- At the end of the day ensure you switch off and ‘shut down’ the laptop. It will be far easier to glance and check emails again later in the evening if the laptop is still on and not shut down.
- Use what was your commuting time from work, to walk the dog, exercise or anything that will determine that the working day has ended.

Build in self care

Those extra flights of stairs and the walk from the parking to your base were a built-in way of keeping employees moving. It is important that you are able to look after your mental health and wellbeing and finding a routine of self-care that works for you. It may be that you try and do your daily exercise class before or after work as part of what would have been your commuting time. Or you may be able to work flexibly to fit in a virtual or face to face class in throughout the day, or even a lunch time walk. Speak to your manager at your regular 1 to 1 meetings and agree what would work for the team and you individually.

Consider some of the following:

- When work is over, be sure you switch off to avoid burnout. Think about having 'core hours' which people you work with are around for.
- Go for a walk or outside where possible to get some much needed vitamin D.
- Work from a different location a morning or two a week, this could mean moving locations in your house.
- Suggest to your manager that you would like to have a 1 to 1 meeting whilst walking so that you can meet in person.
- Make agile working work for you. Change where you sit, put on music, whatever helps you work.
- Continue to monitor your working time to ensure that you monitor the hours you work, and make sure that your manager is aware of any issues that may arise.
- Rather than feeling obliged to attend all the meetings that you are invited to, consider and discuss with the organiser whether to attend for part of the agenda items only, rather than the full meeting.
- Set aside and block out time in the online diary for the completion of work, break times and lunch breaks. Always keep your online calendar up to date so that colleagues are aware of when you are available.
- Write a daily to-do list. Set out a list of realistic, achievable tasks to keep you focused.

Keeping in touch

When regularly working from home, it is important that employees remain connected and engaged with their working teams and services despite the physical distance. A lack of engagement or connection to the team and service has an impact on morale, mental health, productivity and retention so this is a very important aspect of home working to get right, with the underlying principle being that home workers should feel as integrated and connected to the team as those who are on site or office based.

It is important that you read the Meeting Etiquette guide, as there are still standards that need to be adhered to whether you are attending a face to face meeting or a virtual meeting.

Consider some of the following:

- Stay in conversation. Contribute regularly to team chats/group emails so you don't drop off the radar. Ask about what people are working on and share what's on your to do list. Being physically separated means you miss the 'kitchen or printer chats' so this is a means to keep informed
- Ensure that you and your manager schedule in regular 1 to 1 meetings and these can be face to face or virtually. You may want to suggest meeting and walking if that works for both parties.
- Foster relationships. Make time for non-work chats as you would in the workplace and use video calling to maintain face-to-face contact or even Jabber.
- Be clear in your communication. Speaking in person gives you visual and audio cues that help you communicate. Conversing remotely removes a lot of that extra information so make your communications extra clear and concise.
- When you are communicating virtually in any setting make sure that your camera is on. There is a tendency that you don't want anyone to see you but it is important that you have your camera on in order for everyone to feel part of a team. You wouldn't hide away in a face to face meeting?

- It may be necessary for you to communicate the rest of your team your working pattern and what you are working on so that everyone is clear.
- It may be an idea to meet up as a team for a lunch or a team walk to ensure that feeling of integration and reduce the feeling of isolation.
- Ask for support when needed. Speak out when you need assistance, further training or support. Your manager, colleagues and you are part of a team and should be supporting each other, especially remotely.