

# Agile Working Approach and Guidelines



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<b>Author</b>	Jane Pearce, OD Manager
<b>Department - Section</b>	Corporate Services – Human Resources
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# Agile Working Approach and Guidelines

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## Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in staff having to very quickly adapt to new ways of working that resulted in an acceleration in implementing our IT developments and, for the majority of staff, having to get to grips with working remotely. This included embracing new technology, communicating with teams and colleagues in a different way, being more creative in how we deliver our services and allowed many of our staff to improve their work life balance with a reduction in their commute time and being able to work in a more flexible way.

This rapid change in a short space of time has given us an opportunity to reflect on how and where we work and to evaluate our overall approach to agile working, so we don't simply revert to the way we worked previously once all restrictions have been lifted.

Based on feedback through regular pulse surveys, we expect to see regular homeworking as the preferred choice for many individuals and the default workspace for many tasks. Individuals will come into the offices for an average of 2 days a week for meeting with customers, collaboration with others, team cohesion and when it will deliver a better outcome. There will also be space for those who can't work from home, either temporarily or through lack of suitable space at home, to book a desk in the office.

We have been talking about working in a more agile way since 2017, and this approach has now been accelerated due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As part of the Building our Future transformation programme we aim to provide our workforce with the tools, support and confidence to work in an even more agile way to deliver their work.

Agile working at St Albans City and District Council incorporates many different elements of our working practices including our approach, our values and behaviours and our ability to adapt to changing circumstances. This guidance covers how our employees can carry out their role in a flexible way, balancing the needs of our customers, business, teams and individuals.

## Purpose

This approach and guidance has been written to help with the practical aspects of agile working, giving consideration to alternative ways of working, individual flexible working and what we need to consider in terms of support, health and safety and security. It also provides some background information on what we are trying to achieve in our approach to agile working.

Embracing agile working is about both people and culture change. It is about encouraging and supporting changes in the way people work, empowering them to challenge current work practices and introduce new ways of working in order to deliver better services.

Our vision for transforming the way we work through agile working focuses on achieving the following benefits:

- Increasing **productivity** and **continually improving** service delivery
- Focusing on **outcomes** rather than processes
- Improving **work-life balance**
- Improving **reputation** as employer of choice
- Reducing running costs of the council by making **best use of our assets**
- Reducing our **environmental footprint** organisationally and individually

## Scope

This guidance applies to all employees and temporary workers. Some individuals, by virtue of their job role, will have more opportunities than others to work in an agile way. Everyone will have some opportunity to adapt their work arrangements though in terms of either accessing digital solutions and/or being flexible about where and when work can be undertaken.

## Definition

### What is agile working?

The Agile Organisation defined agile working as long ago as 2009.

*‘Agile working is about bringing people, processes, connectivity and technology, time and place together to find the most appropriate and effective way of working to carry out a particular task. It is working within guidelines (of the task) but without boundaries (of how you achieve it).’*

By working in an agile way we can be a modern dynamic workforce that delivers our services from locations other than just the traditional working environment of a desk in a council building. The overriding ethos is that “work is what you do – not where you do it”.

Agile working aims to provide greater flexibility particularly in relation to the time and location employees can work, subject to the requirements of delivering the service and performing individual roles.

Some employees may feel that agile working can’t apply to them however it should apply in differing degrees to everyone. The important thing is to discuss how it can apply to you/your team based on your role requirements and how you can best deliver for your customers. Guidance for these conversations can be found in the Toolkit.

### How does agile working differ from flexible working?

Agile working incorporates flexible working practices, but its aims and scope are different. Flexible working is a work pattern that has been designed for an individual employee, usually to help that person balance work and personal commitments. Unlike agile working, formal requests for flexible working need to be considered in

accordance with employment legislation and are a permanent change to an agreed pattern. Agile working is based on the most effective combination of working tasks, hours, work location, technology and is focused on the needs of the role, team and organisation to deliver to its customers.

Whilst agile working often benefits both the employee and the employer, the agreement to work in an agile way is guided by business needs and performance requirements.

## **Principles**

Agile working is about taking a more comprehensive and strategic approach to modernising working practices. It is based on the following principles:

- Driven by customers' needs and supports delivery of agreed outcomes
- Employees are managed by performance and outcomes rather than presence
- Flexibility is the norm rather than the exception. It is assumed everyone is capable of working in an agile way irrespective of role or person
- Work takes place at the most effective location and time, relevant to the task, outcome required, customer, individual and team needs
- Workspace varies for different roles and is allocated to the delivery of activities, not people
- Collaboration and connectivity can take place anywhere and are critical to success
- Traditional and new approaches are continuously challenged to make sure they are fit for purpose

## **Responsibilities**

Introducing more agile working practices will involve developing a modern, adaptable work culture, building on learning of what has worked prior to and during the pandemic. It is not about doing things in the old way with some new technologies and redesigned offices – it is about new ways of working using new tools, new processes, and new approaches to management and teamwork.

It is important to recognise that developing this culture and ensuring that the changes become embedded is a collective responsibility, not one that can be imposed from above and therefore needs involvement and commitment from all levels of staff across the Council.

Developing our agile working culture cannot be carried out in isolation nor be achieved overnight. It will involve engaging and working with all staff throughout the transformation programme to make changes to workplaces, technologies and processes to ensure they support agile working.

This transition to greater agile working will include a combination of:

- Establishing the expectations for the new work culture
- Supporting staff through the changes

- Agreeing protocols for new working practices
- Management and staff training through workshops and online learning

What underpins the transition is the need to challenge the way we currently do things and think about how the move to agile working offers us the opportunity to do things differently.

Managers will need to engage with their teams to analyse what they currently do and how they work, consider how they could do things differently in the future and identify opportunities offered by more agile working practices.

## Defining our Approach

### Work styles and flexible working practices

In many cases, employees may blend different agile and flexible working options, according to the need of the tasks in hand. This involves a substantial move away from the idea that an individual applies for and is granted a single particular alternative workstyle that is set out contractually. It is important to take a team approach so that agile working arrangements can be planned to cover the service needs as well as promote more flexible working arrangements for employees.

### Factors to consider

Choosing which style of work is appropriate will depend on:

- Analysing the tasks involved in the job role, in terms of how effectively they can be done at different times and in different locations
- Understanding the impact of any changes on customer delivery and/or on teamwork, ensuring neither is negatively impacted
- Considering preferences of the employee and being able to meet their aspirations
- Exploring the potential of agile working choices to reduce the financial and environmental footprint

### Work style analysis

Managers will check roles against the 'hybrid' role descriptor and only where it will not work for a role, that role will be assigned as an 'anchored' role as follows:-

**Hybrid role** – a job which in the main can be completed in a flexible way, both in terms of location and hours

**Anchored role** – a job that has to be completed during set hours and/or location for the majority or all delivery

Managers will then work with their teams and individual team members to have conversations about the service delivery, team working and customer needs to consider how hybrid arrangements could work where considered appropriate (see Toolkit for conversation guidance).

Working arrangements across teams will be agreed collaboratively using the Team Charter approach – see Toolkit.

Managers will then discuss individual working preferences to overlay this against the assigned role type and understanding gained in conversations above, to agree how much flexibility there is to meet both the council's and the individual's needs.

Make sure you engage in these conversations having thought about how you can make hybrid arrangements work while still delivering for your customers.

## Workspace

As part of the transformation programme, we aim to create modern and flexible workspaces that support agile working; increasing the adaptability of space, encouraging collaboration across the organisation and making the Council an attractive place to work. Agile working should also enable individuals and teams to use a wider range of working environments beyond the traditional office.

While one of the aims of agile working is to utilise current office space more efficiently and to save costs by eliminating wasted space, it is also an aim to access other available spaces to provide alternative workspaces which balance the needs of modern flexible workers, the business and the health and wellbeing of all our workers.

As desk-based tasks can increasingly be carried out from anywhere, the need in offices is less for individual task-based workspace, and more for:

- Spaces for collaborative working
- Touch-down spaces for people working on the move
- Spaces for hybrid engagement equipped with appropriate technology to connect virtually with remote colleagues/ customers and partners
- Project work areas

## Decluttering and storage

A key constraint on the introduction of agile working is a perceived dependency on paper documents, storage and other physical resources. While there are some statutory obligations to retain paper documents, the reasons for using and generating paper are becoming less and less compelling in an age of electronic based working.

The use of electronic processes and appropriate on-line storage and filing is essential to agile working, enabling more effective working from any location. Managers and staff should feel empowered to continuously challenge traditional and new approaches to work, making sure they are fit for purpose but don't suppress agile working practices.

## Working remotely

There are various forms of remote working possible for our employees, the key ones are captured below:

### Home

Home working is actively encouraged. For many, the home is an effective work location and should be considered as normal as working in an office environment. Staff must consider the right work-setting for the task in hand and this may change from day-to-day, hour-to-hour or task-to-task. What's right for one person does not

mean it's right for everyone. Many employees view home working as a real benefit, but it isn't for everyone. For example, some staff may have other family members who work from home or may not have suitable space available. Arrangements for home working should be mutually agreed and beneficial between the manager and employee (see work style section). The considerations need to include customer needs, service delivery and teamwork requirements alongside individual preferences.

When employees are working from home, it is important that the home working environment is set up properly, with appropriate space and equipment. It is necessary for everyone to be aware of the regulations that need to be observed and how to optimise their remote workspaces ergonomically. It is important that working from home is not a less efficient experience compared to working in the office so that productivity levels are maintained. When working at home, staff should remain fully contactable and be able to connect to the required office systems and processes. See Toolkit for further information.

### **Off site**

In addition to home working and traditional office spaces, work may be able to be carried out in 'third party places', for example: client offices, organisational partners, shared offices, other public buildings, libraries etc.

External wireless hotspots such as hotels, coffee shops, conference centres and public buildings will often offer their customers free access to public Wi-Fi. This may be a convenient way to quickly check emails or catch up on work but public free to access wi-fi is inherently insecure so avoid using this wherever possible.

Staff accessing the network via external Wi-Fi hotspots should always use trusted shared spaces which need a password to join the wireless network. Always be mindful of information security and confidentiality when working from alternative locations.

### **Field Work**

You may be travelling around during the day using a number of work locations.

The main issues with working on the move relate to confidentiality, security, safety and health. Safety concerns relate both to personal security and safety (e.g. using portable equipment while driving, or the risk of theft). All staff are encouraged to carry laptops and similar devices in an inconspicuous bag to avoid drawing attention to the equipment and to keep it out of sight if, in exceptional circumstances, you have to leave your equipment unattended. If you are ever the victim of crime and challenged for your equipment you should always give this up. See ICT Use and Security policy for details.

### **Key considerations**

Whatever your working style, you should never give out your home address, personal phone number or arrange to meet with clients or colleagues at your own home. You should also be aware that when travelling on work business, you will still need to make sure that someone at work knows where you are going and when you



have returned safely therefore staff must ensure Outlook calendars are up to date and appropriate access to calendar content is provided to your colleagues. See advice on this in the Toolkit.

Further information on lone working can be found in the corporate Lone Working Policy and Guidance or in your local operational guidelines.

### **Use of personal furniture and equipment**

Employees can choose to use some of their own furniture/equipment to carry out their activities whilst working from home, remotely or in the office. For example, this may be preferable if the employee already has a suitable workspace, desk and chair in their home, use a certain monitor that they are familiar or do not wish to have additional equipment in the home.

If employees use their own furniture/equipment for council work, then their own insurance should specifically cover this. In this respect, financial reimbursement for damage or loss of personal equipment will not be provided by the Council.

If you do not have or want to use personal equipment, the Council may be able to loan you some Council equipment. As each user will have different requirements please discuss with your line manager who can assess your needs and requirements using the Workplace and Display Screen Equipment Self-Assessment (completed on STAN).

Please note that you are not permitted to use personal devices (PC, laptop, tablet, phone etc) to access the council's systems. See the ICT Use and Security Policy.

### **Staying in touch**

One of the major concerns that people have about agile working is about maintaining the integrity of teams and preventing isolation. Good communication planning can help overcome this as well as effective use of technologies for remote meetings using phone and video conferencing. Managers and staff should agree on the level of contact and how and when this contact will be made at a team and individual level, this can be included in the Team Charter. See Communication Guidelines in Toolkit.

### **Team cohesion**

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 can be overcome with planning, openness and good communication. For agile working to be effective, it is important to develop a motivated team with a strong sense of connection and work ethic.

When working in different locations and at different times, social relationships need to be maintained and appropriate online / offline mechanisms need to be developed, such as buddy schemes for new recruits, regular team meetings, team development activities, staff briefings, collaboration days etc.

### **Data Security & Information Management**

Maintaining the security of the information we work with is vital and those working away from a council office are responsible for the security of the data they keep and

should comply with all relevant legislation, just as if they were working in the council office. Managers must agree early on with their staff as to how confidential or sensitive information will be handled when working in agile ways which include off site and homeworking.

The following principles apply: -

- Confidential or sensitive conversations/work should not be carried out whilst in any public areas
- Other individuals (including family members) should not have any access to personal data either on paper or as electronic records
- All printed or other paper records must be safely locked away when not in use
- Confidential waste should be disposed of in the normal way (using confidential waste bins in the office)
- All council data stored outside of the council's network, must only be stored on council systems and/or encrypted council owned devices. Council data must not be stored on any personal devices and/or staff must not send work related emails to their personal email address
- If staff are using a laptop or other portable device, they must be aware of the additional security risks if leaving this device unattended (See ICT Use and Security policy)
- If staff become aware of any loss of council data they must take action as set out in the [Data Protection incident policy & procedure](#)

It is the responsibility of all employees to ensure that information is handled correctly and not used for personal benefit or gain. It is a mandatory requirement for all staff to complete the Personal Data & Information Requests and Cyber Security eLearning and training, and all staff are required to keep up to date on good information management and security practice regularly.

### Health & Safety

The employer's duty of care is the same wherever employees are working, whether in the employer's workplace, at home, on the move or in some other working environment. In general, when it comes to health and safety, the aim is to enable rather than prohibit – that is where possible to enable staff to work safely wherever is the most effective and efficient location to get the work done.

Employees need to be responsible for ensuring their workspace/station is fit for purpose and that they follow the health & safety tips and guidelines provided. Further information can be found on the [health and safety pages on StaffNet](#).

Where there has been a shift to more employees working from home, workspace and display screen equipment (DSE) guidance and the ability to self-assess has been made available to support staff. Ensuring your workstation is correctly set up at home will help individuals achieve a reasonable posture whilst working on a laptop or computer at home. See Toolkit for further advice and signposting.

### Costs – home working

No reimbursement for household bills will be provided. This includes but is not limited to internet, heating, lighting, water, landline connection etc. Although financial

assistance will not be provided, employees may find that they are still financially better off when considering personal commuting and lunch costs.

If individuals feel that they are adversely financially impacted by working at home we will aim to ensure they can work in a suitable office space on a regular basis.

### **Tax Relief – home workers**

Tax relief for household bills may be available to employees who are permanent remote workers (i.e. where their contract states their location for employment as “home”). Agile working with hybrid arrangements including both office and remote working does not change the contractual place of work.

For more information on tax relief, individuals should contact HRMC directly or refer to government guidelines for details on [claiming tax relief](#) . Arrangements were made by HMRC during the pandemic for claiming this tax relief in an easy and quick way while the government’s work at home guidance was in place.

### **Phone reception and Wi-Fi**

If wanting to work in a hybrid way, employees must ensure they have an adequate mobile phone reception and an appropriate internet connection to allow them to work seamlessly from home. Employees are advised to contact their internet provider to ensure that the terms and conditions of their internet/broadband package cover provision of internet connection for business use at home.

### **Insurance**

The council’s existing liability insurance is not limited to covering a particular place or building and there are no exclusions or limitations in cover for staff working at home or on the go. However, it is important to ensure that reasonable care and precautions have been taken to minimise accident, injury, loss or damage and before any ways of working change. The relevant health and safety policies and risk assessments should be undertaken to ensure that precautions have been satisfied.

In terms of personal motor insurance, employees are reminded that if they use their private vehicle for work, they have the appropriate business level of insurance.

If employees will be undertaking any type of home working, it is advisable that they check their own household insurance that they intend to work from home as it could affect the terms of their own insurance. Some household insurance providers may charge an additional premium if homes are used for business purposes. Each insurance has its own attitude to business use at home and the council will not provide any allowance for personal household insurance.

Employees who are working from home regularly are required to check that no restrictions apply in mortgage or tenancy agreements.

### **Working Time**

One of the benefits of agile working is that it can help create a positive work-life balance. For example, it can ease the daily commute and/or help employees manage family, caring or domestic responsibilities during lunch breaks or directly before and after they are working. Staff should ensure that whilst working from home they do not work excessively more or less hours on a regular basis and should aim

to work their contracted hours, albeit on a flexible basis. More information can be found on the gov.uk website: <https://www.gov.uk/maximum-weekly-working-hours>

Depending on the nature of your role and how your team deliver services to your customers, you may have more or limited flexibility around your hours. This should be discussed with your manager and as a team to achieve a balance between the customer needs, business requirements and your personal preferences where possible. See Toolkit in appendix for advice around such conversations.

### **Absence and healthy working**

Alongside other initiatives to promote a healthy workplace, agile working practices can help reduce absence and in particular reduce stress. A significant proportion of absence from work is due to minor ailments that make commuting and sitting in an office with colleagues inappropriate but manageable if working from home. Being able to work from home on these occasions can have a significant impact on 'sick leave'. In these instances, employees should speak with their line manager to agree if working from home is a viable option; staff should not feel obliged to work from home if they are sick - if the staff member is not well enough to work from home then the normal sickness absence procedure applies.

Staff should also ensure that annual leave is taken on a regular basis for their personal wellbeing and to ensure they have adequate rest from work throughout the year.

### **Environmental sustainability**

One of the primary components of the carbon footprint of work relates to travel. Travelling thousands of miles each year for work/meetings that can be effectively carried out using video or telephone conferencing is an unsustainable and unproductive thing to do. Decisions about where we work, where we expect our colleagues to work, and the ways in which we communicate can increase or reduce our need for travel, our energy consumption and consumption of physical resources.

Using agile working principles, managers and staff can help to reduce both their own and the organisation's environmental footprints, by only travelling for work/meetings when face to face engagement is necessary to achieve the best outcome.

## **Monitoring and review**

This approach and associated guidance will be reviewed at least every 3 years or sooner if required by changes to approach or relevant legislation.

It is expected that the approach will develop and adapt as we learn what works best. Updates are likely to happen more frequently than proposed above based on learning and feedback as we transition in these new arrangements.

## **Associated documents and further information**

Relevant guidance is available in the following documents on StaffNet (the intranet) and through links to external sources:-

Agile Working Toolkit for staff and managers

[Claiming tax relief - HMRC](#)

[Data Protection Incident - policy & procedure](#)

[ELearning - Personal Data & Information Requests and Cyber Security](#)

[Health and Safety](#)

[ICT Use and Security policy](#)

[Workplace and Display Screen Equipment Self-Assessment](#)