

Northern Ireland



**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®**  
We invest in people Gold

# AGILE WORKING POLICY

**Working together.  
In an agile way.**

Creating a work environment which supports our business and our people. Where we are empowered to manage our time and deliver our work, based on our core values of Respect, Integrity, Partnership and Excellence

[FINAL V1.0 DEC 2022]

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Social Care Council) has developed an Agile Working Policy to support it in delivering its business to a high quality standard across all of its functions, while creating flexibility and agility for staff.

This Agile Working Policy describes the values, behaviours and principles which underpin the Social Care Council's approach to agile working, and how it supports staff to work in an agile way.

All staff are contracted and based at the Social Care Council's office premises. However, the Social Care Council permits agile working in accordance with the principles, working practices, values and behaviours set out in this Policy.

The Social Care Council recognises the importance of enabling and empowering staff to work in a way that harmonises their work life balance, while ensuring the needs of the business are met, that staff work collaboratively, and teams connect across the organisation.

## 2. PRINCIPLES OF AGILE WORKING

All staff will adhere to the principles of our Agile Working Policy -

- Our work base is our office premises;
- Our Terms and Conditions of work and related policies continue to apply regardless of where we carry out our work;
- We will ensure delivery of our business to a high quality as a key priority;
- We will demonstrate our values in the way we work (respect, integrity, partnership and excellence) and through working to these values support our organisational culture to thrive;
- We will ensure we remain connected with our teams at all times to promote and maintain synergy and collaboration between all colleagues;
- We will all be responsible for looking after our health and wellbeing, and complying with the guidance and processes of the Social Care Council to support its workforce;
- We will demonstrate both personal and collective leadership at all times;
- We will demonstrate good communication and build strong relationships between managers and staff;
- We will demonstrate kindness in our approach to ourselves and to others

## 3. VALUES AND BEHAVIOURS

For our Agile Working Policy to work - we must ensure that our core values are at the heart of it, and that our behaviours at all times contributes to a positive agile

working environment, where every person is enabled and empowered to demonstrate maturity in the way they best manage their time, their support for others and looking after themselves.

### Values

#### **Respect** -

We will respect our colleagues and not make assumptions or judgements about each other or other teams

#### **Integrity** -

We will be honest in our approach and in what we do, trusting our managers, our teams and each other

#### **Partnership** -

We will support each other within and across teams. In availing of our agile policy, we will ensure we take into account the need to deliver our business to a high standard and the needs of others in our teams and across the organisation

#### **Excellence** -

We will be accountable for our performance and our behaviours, supporting others when they need help so that collectively we deliver our common goals and objectives to a high standard.

### Behaviours

In addition to our core values, staff in the Social Care Council will at all times ensure that -

- We demonstrate kindness and compassion to ourselves and to other staff across all teams;
- We support our organisational identity and culture as an organisation that cares for each other and delivers for the sector;
- We will be proud of who we are and of our team and the organisation;
- We will make personal efforts to connect with other staff including new staff when they are appointed to make them feel welcome and part of our organisation;
- We will use our diaries and technology to show our activities and availability so that we are open, accessible and contactable;
- We will plan ahead to manage our time and our workloads effectively.

## **4. POLICY STATEMENT SUMMARY**

This Policy enables everyone to work from another location other than the office premises. Most often the other location is a person's home, or it may be other

locations including HSC premises. Staff may work from the Social Care Council's premises every day of their contracted working week.

As all staff are contracted and based at the Social Care Council's premises, staff are not permitted to work remotely every day of their contracted working week<sup>1</sup>.

The next section sets out the working arrangements to support agile working in the Social Care Council.

To ensure the successful working of this Policy, it is essential that staff take ownership of this Policy, understand and commit to making it work. This Policy will be kept under regular review through Pulse Surveys and staff engagement events. It will *also* be formally reviewed annually and will use data in relation to performance, culture, and feedback from the regular reviews. The Policy will be adopted and modified if that is deemed necessary to ensure it continues to support our business need and an agile workforce.

### Our Other Policies

This Agile Working Policy does not sit in isolation. The Social Care Council has a range of other Policies in place to support staff's working arrangements and work life balance. These include -

- Flexible Working Policy
- Flexi Time Scheme
- Leave Pack
- Family Pack
- Special Leave and Carers Leave
- Capability Policy
- Terms and Conditions of Contract.

## **5. AGILE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS**

### **Working in an Agile Way**

All Social Care Council staff are based at the organisation's premises however staff may opt to work in an agile way throughout the week.

**If staff wish to avail of this Policy, they should confirm this by way of an email to their line manager, confirming that they have read and understand the Agile Working Policy and will be compliant with it. Managers should forward a copy of the email to the Head of Business Services where it will be kept in a restricted folder on the X-Drive. A template email is attached at Appendix I.**

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<sup>1</sup> Managers have discretion to allow an exception to this for a short term period - this is explained further at section 5

In doing so, staff must not work less than 20% of their working week in the office and should make every effort to manage their time, their workloads and work life balance in the spirit of this Policy.

Staff, managers and teams should communicate openly and regularly to ensure office based activities are managed effectively, and that diaries are populated with activities and availability, including work location.

Planning, communication, accountability, maturity and trust are key to successful agile working.

If staff need to work outside of this arrangement for exceptional reasons and for a short period of time, they should engage their line manager in the first instance. The line manager will take into account the individual's circumstances, the needs of the team and delivering the business and if an exception can be accommodated then this will be for a specified and agreed period of time.

### **Working Hours**

It is important that all staff look after their health and wellbeing and that the way in which they manage their time and workload is conducive to a healthy work life balance. Staff are not encouraged to work long hours and are encouraged to take breaks throughout the day. While many staff will wish to work traditional hours of 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, staff are enabled to work between the hours of 6.00 am and 8.00 pm (Monday to Friday excluding Bank/Public Holidays) to allow them to balance home life and other commitments. Office opening hours remain 7.00 am to 7.00 pm.

In managing your working day, it is essential that you liaise with your manager/team so that everyone knows when you are available - and that work commitments are delivered e.g. attending a meeting, or covering a rota, etc.

When working in an agile way staff should ensure that their working day enables a minimum 12 hour break e.g. a person starting work at 7.00 am should not work later than 7.00 pm. Or a person starting at 6.00 am should not work later than 6.00 pm.

Staff must not work outside 6.00 am to 8.00 pm Monday to Friday without their manager's prior approval. The frequency of this should be agreed so that it is by exception and not the norm. Likewise working at weekends is not encouraged – however if this is required, as an exception, it should be approved by the relevant manager and for a specified and agreed period of time.

Staff are not expected to carry out additional hours of work outside of their contracted working hours.

### **Working in the Office**

The Social Care Council has invested in its office accommodation to support collaboration, connections and cross team working. The premises are equipped with hybrid technology with desk and meeting room space being 'shared space'. When

coming into the office staff are required to pre-book the type of space they require using the agreed booking system.

While staff can opt to use the office premises for many reasons, the organisation has agreed that staff must attend the office for the following reasons -

- All-staff events such as Townhalls
- Monthly Team meetings
- One to ones and Quarterly Check-Ins
- Induction
- Training
- Collecting goods (e.g. office consumables/post)
- A specific business of your job or team
- Meeting and connecting with team members
- Ensuring there is a team presence from the function to support the business
- IT set up.
- Where staff are specifically requested to do so by their manager

### **Caring and Other Responsibilities**

This Policy is not a replacement for child care or other caring responsibilities and staff should engage the other policies which are in place to assist those with caring responsibilities and for special leave.

This Policy does however support those who need to be agile in their working day to support caring and other responsibilities - for example the 'school run' during the day or attend a support meeting for someone that they care for. All staff are empowered to fit such commitments into their working day with good communication and planning with your manager and team, and taking into account working hours and business requirements.

### **New Staff and Agile Working**

New members of staff require additional support (this can also include someone starting a different job/task within the organisation).

Welcoming a new member of staff to the organisation is everyone's responsibility. It is important that new staff understand who we are, our values and our culture from the outset - and all staff are required to demonstrate their collective leadership by making an effort to welcome new staff.

Induction is carried out in person (reverting to online when it is appropriate and timely).

As every new job is different it is likely that new members of staff will require face to face induction for a duration of between one and six weeks before being set up with remote access for agile working. This should be discussed with your manager directly given the nature of the role, level of experience and level of support required.

Team members are required to be part of a new member of staff's induction.

## **Capability**

From time to time staff can struggle with their job for many reasons – changes to the job, workload, training needs, home-life challenges, etc. As with all aspects of our flexible working policies, agile working requires open, honest and compassionate conversations between staff and their line manager. It may be necessary to change the mode of flexible working for periods of time to enable the manager to provide additional support to staff who require it. Those staff may be asked to attend the office on a more frequent basis, including on a full-time basis until matters are resolved to the satisfaction of the line manager and member of staff.

## **Non-Compliance**

If staff fail to comply with this Policy, managers have the right to withdraw access to the Agile Working Policy. This can be for a specific or indeterminate period of time. In these circumstances staff will be required to attend work in the office premises for all of their contracted hours/days.

# **6. HEALTH AND SECURITY**

## **Working Time Regulations**

Since staff may be out of direct contact with line managers during periods of agile working, the digital diary/scheduler should be kept up to date with information recorded on hours worked, type of business activity and breaks taken and whether the individual is working from the office or another location.

It is important that the working pattern and level of hours are not detrimental to health. Staff must keep his/her line manager informed of the number of hours worked and to ensure that the limits set by the Working Time Regulations are not exceeded. Employees should take regular breaks, including a lunch break of at least 30 minutes.

## **Assessing the Agile Working Environment**

There are a number of health and safety requirements that must be fulfilled before a location can be deemed suitable for agile working. Specifically, individuals wishing to carry out their work under the Social Care Council agile working flexible working scheme must comply with recommendations provided.

Agile working using computer equipment for a large part of the day should be carried out in a suitable environment. This includes:

- a desk on which a personal computer or laptop can be safely rested
- a chair that has a straight back and adjustable height if possible
- an appropriate level of lighting for the task.



## **Smoking**

Under the Health and Safety Act 2006, if a part of a private dwelling is used solely as a place of work and other people who do not live in the building, for example clients or staff, attend that part of the house in connection with the work that is carried out there; the area is required to be smoke free.

## **Alcohol and Substance Abuse**

While working (regardless of the location) alcohol must not be consumed. Staff can seek support and further information regarding alcohol and substance abuse in the Social Care Council's Alcohol, Substance Abuse Policy.

# **7. INFORMATION AND IT SECURITY**

## **Agile Access System**

The Social Care Council has a secure agile access system (BSO Technology secure gateway) called F5. This system allows access to the Social Care Council network drives, Microsoft Office, email/scheduler and a number of the commonly used web-based applications (including Socrates, Decision Time and the staff Intranet).

Staff who wish to work in an agile manner will be expected to have a reliable broadband internet service in their home should that be part of their agile working locations.

The Social Care Council has provided corporate mobile devices to some staff, as a tool for online e-mail access and managing Outlook calendars.

All devices should always be kept secure and charged during working hours.

It is staff's responsibility to ensure you bring your devices, chargers and other equipment as necessary (e.g. headsets) with you as you move between the office and your other agile working location.

## **Security of Information and Confidentiality**

All Social Care Council records must be managed in line with the Social Care Council's policy.

Observing proper security procedures is of paramount importance as an agile worker. What is stated in this Policy is a minimum standard of security and is applicable irrespective of the type of work being undertaken. If sensitive matters are being dealt with during an agile working period, added security measures should be undertaken. In all cases, staff are responsible for observing appropriate security procedures.

Staff must ensure that Social Care Council information is not disclosed to unauthorised third parties when undertaking agile working.

When using computer equipment, individuals should ensure that the screen and keyboard are locked after a few minutes of inactivity. If a computer is left unattended, the screen lock must be activated manually before leaving.

Social Care Council information should never be left on the hard disks of tablets or laptop devices. All electronic records must be removed or transferred to the appropriate Social Care Council records folder on the network drive or within the Socrates CRM system.

Particular care must be taken with hard copies of documents. They should never be left in a location that provides easy access to third parties. Hard copy material which has been temporarily removed from the office should be locked away when not in use and returned to the secure storage area in the office at the earliest opportunity. Staff are required to advise their manager **in advance** if they are taking home any hard copy material.

Electronic files must always remain secure on the Social Care Council laptop/tablet and where appropriate a password protected screen saver should be deployed which will prevent unauthorised access to Social Care Council information.

Staff should refer to the relevant ICT Security Policies.

### **Passwords**

Screens must be locked at all times when not in use (CTRL + ALT + DEL). Passwords should be maintained securely, not shared with anyone and not written down where they can be seen and accessed by others.

## **8. SECURITY AND CARE OF EQUIPMENT**

Social Care Council equipment should never be left unattended, particularly in public places. While in transit, all equipment should be kept away from view and locked away where possible. Equipment must not be used in an environment where there is a greater level of risk from theft or vandalism. The use of Social Care Council computer equipment during agile working is also subject to the Social Care Council guidelines and policy on the use of technology devices.

Particular care should be taken to ensure that authorised Social Care Council equipment are kept in a safe and secure environment at all times. Devices must also be kept away from sources of heat and strong magnetic influence. Personal storage devices/locations such as personal cloud storage, one drive, USB/Memory sticks/Writable CD's must not be used to store Social Care Council information. Lost or damaged devices must be reported to the Database Manager.

### **Maintenance of Equipment**

Social Care Council equipment supplied is covered by a maintenance contract through BSO ITS and this covers laptop/tablets, device software and work mobile phones. You are required to ensure you take all necessary steps to keep this equipment secure and in good working order. However the organisation will ensure that costs relating to reasonable adjustments will be met as required under the Disability Discrimination Act.

## **9. SUNDRIES AND OTHER EXPENSES**

Staff working in an agile way are subject to normal rules on expenses set out in the Social Care Council travel and subsistence policy. As the Social Care Council's office is the designated work base HMRC does not permit claims for home to work base travel. For information on Travel and Subsistence please refer to the Social Care Council's Travel and Subsistence Policy.

The Social Care Council will not make any payments towards internet connections, equipment costs or any accommodation or energy costs incurred at the agile working location.

### **Printing**

If staff need to print documents they should do so when in the office. The Social Care Council encourages everyone to reduce the volume of hard copy work and papers produced and to use its electronic records management systems instead.

### **Stationary and other Supplies**

If a member of staff needs stationary and other supplies to support them in their agile working these should be supplied from the office store or on request through Business Support (goods and services are purchased through PaLS). If a member of staff requires additional equipment for health and safety reasons e.g. appropriate seating, then a risk assessment can be arranged before any products are procured through PaLS.

### **Insurance**

The Social Care Council will be responsible for any necessary insurance of equipment supplied by them and the employee liability insurance for use of the equipment. It is the responsibility of the member of staff to have adequate home buildings and contents insurance. The Social Care Council is not liable for damage caused to the home or its contents.

## 10. Equality Screening

This policy has been screened for equality implications as required by Section 75 and Schedule 9 and of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and is assessed as having no serious impact on the Section 75 groups, therefore it is not considered to require a full impact assessment. Equality Commission guidance states that the purpose of screening is to identify those policies which are likely to have a significant impact on equality of opportunity so that greatest resources can be devoted to these.

## 11. Monitoring and Review

This Policy will be kept under regular review through Pulse Surveys and staff engagement events. It will *also* be formally reviewed annually and will use data in relation to performance, culture, and feedback from the regular reviews. The Policy will be adopted and modified if that is deemed necessary to ensure it continues to support our business need and an agile workforce.

This Policy was approved by the Social Care Council Board on 7 December 2022 and will be formally reviewed again in December 2023 - or sooner if deemed necessary.

[FINAL V1.0 - DECEMBER 2022]

### **Draft Email to Request Opting In to the Agile Working Policy**

This is to confirm that I, [insert your name], wish to commence agile working in line with the Social Care Council's Agile Working Policy from [insert date].

I can confirm that I have read and understand the Agile Working Policy and will ensure that I remain compliant with the Policy at all times.

*Send your email to your Line Manager*

*Line Managers should acknowledge receipt of the email to the team member and forward the email to the Head of Business Services where it will be saved in a restricted folder.*