

Committee for Finance and Personnel

Report on the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland Volume 1

**Together with the Minutes of Proceedings, Minutes of Evidence, Memoranda
and Written Submissions relating to the Report**

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Membership and Powers

Powers

The Committee for Finance and Personnel is a Statutory Departmental Committee established in accordance with paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Belfast Agreement, Section 29 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and under Assembly Standing Order 48. The Committee has a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to the Department of Finance and Personnel and has a role in the initiation of legislation.

The Committee has the power to;

- consider and advise on Departmental budgets and annual plans in the context of the overall budget allocation;
- approve relevant secondary legislation and take the Committee Stage of primary legislation;
- call for persons and papers;
- initiate inquiries and make reports; and
- consider and advise on matters brought to the Committee by the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Membership

The Committee has eleven members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, with a quorum of five members. The membership of the Committee during the current mandate has been as follows:

- Mr Daithí McKay (Chairperson)¹
- Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)
- Mrs Judith Cochrane
- Mr Leslie Cree MBE
- Ms Michaela Boyle ^{2 3}
- Mr Paul Girvan
- Mr John McCallister ^{4 5}
- Mr Ian McCrea ^{6 7}
- Mr Raymond McCartney ⁸
- Mr Adrian McQuillan
- Mr Peter Weir ⁹

1 Mr Daithí McKay replaced Mr Conor Murphy MP with effect from 2 July 2012
 2 Ms Michaela Boyle replaced Ms Megan Fearon with effect from 2 December 2013
 3 Ms Megan Fearon was a member of the Committee from 10 September 2012 until 2 December 2013
 4 Mr Roy Beggs replaced Mr Ross Hussey with effect from 23 April 2012
 5 Mr John McCallister replaced Mr Roy Beggs with effect from 15 October 2012
 6 Mr Ian McCrea replaced Mr David McIlveen with effect from 16 September 2013
 7 Mr David McIlveen replaced Mr David Hilditch with effect from 1 October 2012
 8 Mr Raymond McCartney replaced Mr Mitchel McLaughlin with effect from 6 October 2014
 9 Mr Peter Weir replaced Mr William Humphrey with effect from 1 October 2012

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Abbreviations and Acronyms used in this Report

ADSL	Asymmetric digital subscriber line
ALB	Arm's-Length Body
BCO	British Council for Offices
BP	British Petroleum
BT	British Telecom
CCMS	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DCAL	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Family
DE	Department of Education
DEL	Department for Employment and Learning
DETI	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
DFP	Department of Finance and Personnel
DHSSPS	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
DoE	Department of the Environment
DoJ	Department of Justice
DRD	Department for Regional Development
DSD	Department for Social Development
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
EC Harris	Edward Charles Harris
GB	Great Britain
GSK	GlaxoSmithKline
HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human Resources
IBEC	Irish Business and Employer's Confederation
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
IT	Information Technology
JRF	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
MLAs	Members of the Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
NDPB	Non-Departmental Public Body
NI	Northern Ireland
NICS	Northern Ireland Civil Service
NIPSA	Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
PCs	Personal Computers
PfG	Programme for Government
PwC	PriceWaterhouseCoopers
REC	Recruitment and Employment Confederation
RoI	Republic of Ireland
SEELB	South Eastern Education and Library Board
SELB	South Eastern Library Board
SSL	Secure Sockets Layer
TOIL	Time off in lieu
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
USA	United States of America
VPN	Virtual Private network
WTE	Whole Time Equivalent
3G	Short form of third Generation, is the third generation of mobile telecommunications technolog

Inquiry Terms of Reference

Purpose: The Inquiry will aim to investigate how flexible working practices – including arrangements for how, when and where public servants undertake their work – could be implemented successfully and used strategically for maximum benefit and efficiency in the public sector in Northern Ireland.

Objectives: The Inquiry has the following key objectives:

- To examine the extent to which flexible working is implemented in the NICS, including a critical review of existing policy and practice regarding flexible working time and a survey of cases where developments in technology and workplace design are being used to facilitate the flexible location of work in the NICS.
- To identify lessons from international case studies on how flexible working arrangements have been implemented effectively elsewhere to achieve benefits for employers, employees and potentially for the wider economy and society, including: increased productivity; improved staff morale and commitment; reduced staff turnover and absenteeism; wider recruitment talent pools; reduced levels of economic inactivity; reduced premises costs; promotion of gender equality in employment; and environmental benefits.
- To consider the range of options presented by new technology and workplace design to support flexible working practices, such as mobile working, teleworking, remote conferencing, hot-desking and satellite offices, and to examine approaches to monitoring and managing performance in such circumstances.
- To explore the types of work or job roles within the NICS which are suited to flexible working practices; and
- To consider the critical success factors, challenges, barriers and risks to introducing flexible working and how these can be managed and mitigated as appropriate.

Output: The intention is that the Inquiry will result in a report to the Northern Ireland Assembly containing evidence-based findings and recommendations to the Department of Finance and Personnel and the wider Executive. These findings and recommendations will inform the development of cross-cutting strategic policies and procedures for enhancing existing and implementing new flexible working arrangements across the NICS to maximum beneficial effect, which may also be applicable to the wider public sector in Northern Ireland.

Executive Summary

In referring to the impact that the recession is having on the need to reform the way the public sector is run, a leading authority on flexible working recently observed:

'Major change against a backdrop of funding cuts is the name of the game. The imperatives to achieve greater efficiency, to do more with less, are greater than ever. There has never been a more urgent time to work smarter'¹

This is the context in which the Committee for Finance and Personnel undertook its cross-cutting Inquiry, with the aim of investigating how flexible working practices – including arrangements for how, when and where public servants undertake their work – could be implemented successfully and used strategically for maximum benefit and efficiency in the public sector in Northern Ireland. While the Inquiry examined the full range of flexible working options, including flexible time working, there was a particular focus on the further opportunities for flexible location working, such as working from hub/satellite offices, mobile working and sharing office space.

Arising from its investigations, the Committee notes the weight of evidence confirming the potential benefits of flexible working, whether for the employer, the employee, the economy, the environment or society generally. These include, for example: reduced office accommodation costs; increased productivity; better work-life balance; improved staff morale and commitment; reduced staff turnover and absenteeism; promotion of gender equality in employment; reduced levels of economic inactivity; and environmental benefits. From the international research, case studies on best practice and expert testimony, it is clear to the Committee that it is more a question of *how* rather than *whether* flexible working practices should be applied.

For the benefits to be fully realised in the public sector in Northern Ireland, there is a need for the Executive to take a strategic and coordinated policy approach rather than piecemeal application, especially in relation to the flexible location of work. While cautioning against a 'one size fits all' approach, the Committee believes that the strategic direction and guiding principles must be set at the highest level of government, together with the Department of Finance and Personnel having a central role in guiding and monitoring implementation. In conjunction with this, departments and other public bodies should be provided with a menu of flexible working options from which they can select and tailor solutions to meet business needs at a local level.

The Inquiry has examined the range of good practice steps and change measures needed to ensure successful implementation of a strategic policy, including: establishing the evidence, providing the vision, managing resistance, leading change, engaging staff, assessing jobs for flexibility, managing performance by results, providing smart workplaces, embracing new technology, and training for change. It is evident that the greatest challenge is in gaining commitment at the top level of management and creating a conducive organisational culture – one that challenges existing policies, processes and practices to see if desired outcomes can be achieved in a better way and using fewer resources.

Members believe that circumstances are now right to fully exploit the advantages that strategic application of flexible working can bring to the public sector in Northern Ireland, including the need to maximise efficiency savings while maintaining effective service delivery in a constrained financial climate. The co-ordinated roll out of flexible location working should be seen as an 'invest to save' measure which will support the delivery of a range of other government policies and priorities, not least the reform and modernisation of the public sector. Given that technological, social, economic and environmental drivers will force change

1 Lake, A. (2013), "Smart Flexibility: Moving Smart and Flexible Working from Theory to Practice", Gower Publishing, Surrey, p.207.

in any event, government must now take the opportunity to fully embrace flexible working in order to harness its potential, shape the change to fit business needs and fully realise the benefits. The Inquiry findings and recommendations aim to inform the Department and the wider Executive in taking the necessary steps towards this outcome.

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Given the many facets of flexible working, in terms of the range of options for achieving desired outcomes by being flexible about how, when and where people work, the Committee concurs that a 'one size fits all' policy approach on this matter is not appropriate for the public sector in Northern Ireland (NI). Instead, government departments and other public bodies need to be supported in selecting and implementing flexible working practices which best suit their own individual business needs. (*paragraph 53*)
2. In terms of the flexible location of work, the Committee is strongly of the view that the focus should not be on homeworking in particular but rather on selecting the appropriate remote working options and technologies – including, for example, working from hub/satellite offices, in virtual teams, using mobile devices, and sharing office space – which are right for a given job or team environment in meeting business needs. The Committee also recommends that, as with the other remote working options, where homeworking is applied as an appropriate method, this should be on the basis of careful assessment of job tasks and agreed rules and safeguards, including contact protocols and good practice performance measurement and management. (*paragraph 54*)
3. In general terms, the Committee considers that the weight of evidence from the published literature and case studies strongly indicates that significant benefits for the NI public sector will accrue from applying flexible working practices in a strategic, tailored and coordinated fashion. The potential benefits for public sector employers, employees and the wider economy and society, as applicable, include: reduced premises costs; increased productivity; improved staff morale and commitment; reduced staff turnover and absenteeism; wider recruitment talent pools; reduced levels of economic inactivity; promotion of gender equality in employment; and environmental benefits. In light of this, the Committee believes that the initial outlay from the strategic implementation of flexible working practices should be seen in terms of an 'invest-to-save' measure. (*paragraph 55*)
4. On the basis of the evidence received, the Committee notes the generally held view that the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) has been at the forefront of the introduction of flexible time working practices. The Committee commends NICS as an exemplar organisation in this aspect of flexible working and, given its status as a significant employer in NI, members would encourage the Service to continue to keep pace with developments in this regard. (*paragraph 84*)
5. However, in terms of the flexible location of work, it is apparent that a piecemeal, inconsistent and uncoordinated approach is being taken by departments, which arises from the absence of corporate policy and guidance and is reflected by incomplete data on existing practices. The Committee believes that, unless this changes, NICS will not realise the full benefits from a strategic application of flexible working practices. Members concur that, in the modern era of technological communications, the focus of work is more on *what* is done rather than *where* it is done and consequently, within Northern Ireland public sector organisations, there needs to be a cultural shift away from 'managing by presence' and to 'managing by results'. (*paragraph 85*)
6. The Committee recommends that the Minister of Finance and Personnel brings proposals to the Executive for a new Programme for Government commitment aimed at ensuring that the full range of flexible working practices are used strategically for maximum benefit and efficiency in the public sector. This should include establishing the guiding principles for departments and other public bodies to apply; setting out the menu of options on how, when and where work can be conducted and from which applicable selection can be made at the business area or team level within organisations. The high-level commitment should also be accompanied with an indicative timetable and milestones for delivery. (*paragraph 86*)

7. While members do not presently see a case for legislating for flexible location working in the NI public sector, the Committee recommends that the proposed Programme for Government commitment and guiding principles include an onus on all departments to ensure that the work styles and tasks associated with each NICS job role are assessed at the business area or team level to determine the applicable flexible working practices. The Committee considers that this will help to drive the implementation of the strategic policy within and across departments. (*paragraph 109*)
8. The Committee firmly believes that the strategic implementation of flexible working, facilitated by a corresponding roll out of appropriately designed workplaces, will maximise the property savings to be achieved from the rationalisation of government office accommodation. Given the current budgetary pressures on the Executive and the considerable scope for consolidation of the NICS estate, this should be a key priority for the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP); though members recognise that the rationale for flexible working is primarily about doing things better, whilst being less wasteful with existing resources, rather than solely about reducing accommodation costs. (*paragraph 151*)
9. In terms of enabling flexible location working, the Committee recommends a carefully planned and co-ordinated extension of the workhub/satellite office network across the NI public sector. This should aim to achieve a more joined-up and collaborative approach by public sector bodies to improve the geographic spread of the facilities and enable a greater number and range of public servants to work remotely as applicable, with a view to realising the associated benefits, not least the work-life balance, environmental and economic benefits from reduced travel time. (*paragraph 152*)
10. The Committee is concerned that the public sector in Northern Ireland appears to lag behind other jurisdictions in adopting new technology to support flexible working practices – a concern which is heightened in view of the prominence of local software companies in this market. In the context of the public sector reform agenda and the NICS People Strategy, the Committee recommends that DFP takes the lead in proactively identifying opportunities for adopting and exploiting technological solutions to enable and support flexible/mobile/agile working in a wider range of public sector job roles. (*paragraph 164*)
11. With a view to maximising savings from reduced travel costs in NICS, members believe that internet-based conferencing should be the preferred method for civil servants participating in meetings which would otherwise involve travel outside Northern Ireland. (*paragraph 165*)
12. The Committee recommends that, in support of the proposed Executive Programme for Government commitment and guiding principles for the strategic application of flexible working practices across departments and other public bodies, DFP develops corporate guidance for successful implementation at a local level. This should, in particular, cover the following types of issues:
 - Effecting the necessary cultural changes and overcoming attitudinal challenges, including: preparing the ground; gaining leadership commitment; evidence gathering; awareness raising; managing resistance to change; and securing employee cooperation and flexibility.
 - Addressing practical aspects, including: assessing jobs for flexibility; technology requirements; workplace design; training; establishing the ground rules and behavioural protocols; and performance management.
 - Mitigating the risks, including: management buy-in and top level engagement; strong business cases; employee and union involvement; effective communications; transparency in assessing jobs for flexibility; data security measures; and focus on business needs, results and outcomes. (*paragraph 168*)
13. The Inquiry evidence, including the lessons from other jurisdictions, will offer a useful resource for the Department and Executive to draw on in developing the proposed principles

and guidance for the strategic implementation of flexible working practices across NICS and beyond. (*paragraph 169*)

14. The Committee would wish to see DFP taking lead responsibility for monitoring and reporting on implementation of the proposed measures, thereby facilitating future Assembly scrutiny at a cross-departmental level. In this regard, the Committee would wish to see a responsibility placed on all departments to provide DFP with the necessary data on the application and uptake of flexible working practices in order that the Department can fulfil a central monitoring role effectively. (*paragraph 170*)
15. The Committee firmly believes that implementation of the Inquiry recommendations will support the delivery of a range of the Executive's existing policies and priorities, including:
 - the NICS People Strategy 2013-16 commitments on using technology to support a flexible workforce and on creating workplaces conducive to high performance;
 - the Programme for Government commitment to further reduce the levels of sickness absence across the NICS;
 - the Measuring Wellbeing Initiative;
 - the consolidation of the NICS estate and realising office accommodation savings, including under the Executive's Asset Management Strategy; and
 - the wider public sector reform agenda. (*paragraph 178*)

Introduction

Background to the Inquiry

1. As part of a wider exercise in exploring inquiry options, on 1 February 2012, the Committee for Finance and Personnel received evidence on flexible working from Professor Sir George Bain, whose work in leading the *Independent Review of Policy on Location of Public Sector Jobs* (hereafter ‘the Bain Review’) had examined this area. During his briefing, Professor Bain stated:

‘It is hard for me to see the disadvantages of flexible working...flexibility in general is desirable. To some extent...it is more a question of how one should do this rather than whether one should do it.’²
2. The Committee also noted the advice from Professor Bain that there are many definitions of flexible working but that he favoured the one which stated that flexible working is about allowing employees to be flexible about how, when and where they work and that the public sector in Northern Ireland seemed to focus only on the when and where.
3. The Committee took oral evidence from Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) officials on 14 March 2012 to ascertain the extent to which the Bain recommendations on flexible working and the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Homeworking Policy had been implemented. This evidence highlighted that the NICS does not have a formal strategy or policy on the flexible location of work, in terms of technology and premises, but it does have human resource policies covering alternative working patterns such as part-time and flexitime working.
4. On the basis of this preliminary evidence, members agreed that there was scope to further explore flexible working, including in terms of the current financial climate and how the potential benefits could be realised.³ Following its initial briefing, DFP agreed to provide information on flexible working projects across NICS departments to inform the Committee’s deliberations. However, as outlined later in the report, while the Department was able to provide data in relation to the numbers of employees availing of flexible time working (e.g. part-time, term-time working), it was not possible to provide complete and accurate records for the number of NICS employees availing of locally agreed flexible location working arrangements. The officials were of the opinion that these arrangements are ad hoc in nature and monitoring may lead to a detrimental effect on the uptake of flexible working.⁴
5. The Committee subsequently received an Assembly Research briefing on 28 May 2012, which highlighted a range of case studies on flexible working practices in the private and public sectors. The Committee then considered draft terms of reference for an inquiry into flexible working and agreed to proceed with the Inquiry on 5 December 2012.

The Committee’s Approach

6. Given the need to prioritise other items of Committee business⁵, the inquiry evidence-gathering process was spread across the next Assembly session. This measured approach had the advantage of enabling the Committee to undertake a thorough literature review and receive overview briefings on the benefits and downsides of flexible working before examining individual case studies, commissioning follow up research and focusing the evidence gathering on specific issues.

2 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Flexible Working, 1 February 2012.

3 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Flexible Working: Departmental Briefing, 14 March 2012.

4 Appendix 3 – Memoranda and Correspondence from DFP 6 March 2013.

5 The Committee agreed to prioritise scrutiny of the Public Sector Pensions Bill to ensure that the Assembly passage of the Bill was not delayed.

7. At the outset, the Committee agreed that the Inquiry would aim to investigate *how* flexible working practices – including arrangements for how, when and where public servants undertake their work – could be implemented successfully and used strategically for maximum benefit and efficiency in the public sector in Northern Ireland. Thereafter the Committee progressed with various evidence sessions to inform members’ deliberations on the subject and recommendations which would form the basis of the Committee report.
8. In total, the Committee received 13 oral briefings, including from the following key stakeholders:
 - Professor Sir George Bain;
 - DFP;
 - Women Like Us;
 - Nigel Oseland;
 - Salford City Council;
 - Recruitment and Employment Confederation;
 - Workplace Design;
 - Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA);
 - New Ways of Working;
 - Andy Lake of Flexiblity.co.uk; and
 - Momentum NI.
9. The Committee also published a public call for evidence, commissioned responses from other departments and received two briefings from Assembly Research and Information Service, which included an examination of applicable international experience. In addition, a site visit was undertaken, which incorporated a briefing from DFP officials as well as a practical demonstration of the future@work initiative and a tour of facilities in Clare House, Belfast. This gave members the opportunity to see for themselves the working practices across the civil service as well as future possibilities arising from advances in technology.
10. Many of the oral briefings were taken via video conference or internet based video-link in keeping within the ethos of the Inquiry. This approach to evidence gathering enabled the Committee members to gain practical experience of the available technology and to identify lessons for the Inquiry.
11. At the conclusion of the Inquiry, members agreed the report on 8 October 2014 which contains a range of key recommendations aimed at informing NICS policy and direction in modernising the ways in which civil servants work, which will also support the wider public sector reform agenda.

What is Flexible Working?

12. In embarking on the Inquiry, the Committee was mindful that the term ‘flexible working’ can be defined in different ways and will encompass many different aspects; from the employee who chooses to work flexi-time, through to the fully agile worker who utilises ‘touch down’ offices sited across various geographic locations.
13. According to Jones *et al*, flexible working:

‘...is about being able to work in different places, at and for different times (shift systems, longer and shorter hours) and about being able to work in different ways, using technology and the different skills that people have. It is also about moving flexibility away from a singular perspective towards a notion of ‘shared’ flexibility.

Rather than restrict ideas about flexibility to a small number of policies, we argue that flexibility is about being able to achieve desired outcomes in a range of ways, being flexible about how, when and where people work.’⁶

14. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) define flexible working as ‘a type of working arrangement which gives some degree of flexibility on how long, where and when employees work. The flexibility can be in terms of working time, working location and the pattern of working’⁷
15. The Committee noted that CIPD defined the various flexible working practices in the following terms:
 - Part-time working: work is generally considered part-time when employees are contracted to work anything less than full-time hours.
 - Term-time working: a worker remains on a permanent contract but can take paid/unpaid leave during school holidays.
 - Job-sharing: a form of part-time working where two (or occasionally more) people share the responsibility for a job between them.
 - Flexitime: allows employees to choose, within certain set limits, when to begin and end work.
 - Compressed hours: compressed working weeks (or fortnights) don’t necessarily involve a reduction in total hours or any extension in individual choice over which hours are worked. The central feature is reallocation of work into fewer and longer blocks during the week.
 - Annual hours: the period within which full-time employees must work is defined over a whole year.
 - Working from home on a regular basis: workers regularly spend time working from home.⁸
 - Mobile working/Agile working: this permits employees to work all or part of their working week at a location remote from the employer’s workplace.
16. Similarly, Figure 1 below which contains an extract from the *Smart Working Handbook* by Andy Lake of Flexibility.co.uk, details the many different aspects of flexible working which this Inquiry examines.

6 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: DEMOS Report “Flexible work benefits business and society, but its future hangs in the balance...” July 2011.

7 <http://www.cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/factsheets/flexible-working.aspx>

8 *ibid.*

Figure 1: Flexible Working Options⁹

Smart Working incorporates the full range of flexible working options. These broadly fall into two areas: flexible time and flexible place.

Flexible time options are:

- **Flexi-time:** this typically operates with a 'core hours' requirement, i.e. employees are expected to be working between the defined core hours in the morning and afternoon. Staff surveys show that many employees feel the core hours can be too rigid, and in practice these are often varied by agreement according to circumstances. The trend will be away from defined core hours.
- **Time off in lieu (TOIL):** TOIL is a form of flexible hours working that allows hours to be varied across days, by paying back extra hours worked one day with time off on other days.
- **Annualised hours:** employees are contracted annually to work a set number of hours, which can be worked flexibly over the 12 month period. This is useful for coping with peaks and troughs in work, as well as for meeting personal requirements.
- **Compressed working weeks:** employees work their standard working hours in fewer days – e.g. one week worked in four days, or two weeks worked in nine days. There is a range of patterns of varying complexity.
- **Term-time working:** this enables staff who are parents to work around school terms and holidays.
- **Part-time working:** staff are sometimes recruited on a part-time basis, while others seek to reduce their hours, with pro-rata reductions in pay and benefits. When this is done on a temporary basis, it is sometimes referred to as 'V-Time' (voluntary reduced hours). It is typically associated with parenting responsibilities, but surveys indicate this is an option of interest to older workers who are thinking in terms of phased retirement.

- **Jobshare:** this is a particular form of part-time working, where two (or occasionally more) people share a full-time job.
- **Career breaks:** the option to have a career break or sabbatical to pursue professional or personal development.

Flexible place options are:

- **Working from home:** When employees regularly work from home it is typically for 1-2 days per week. Some roles may be based at home full-time. More mobile staff may work using home as a base rather than, or as much as, using the office as a base. Most staff will probably have at least some tasks that can effectively be carried out from home.
- **Mobile working:** Employees who work in many places need to be empowered and equipped to work when travelling, in public settings, and touching down in offices as needed.
- **Working from other offices:** Smart Working involves working from the most effective location and reducing the need to travel. Staff may choose to work from other offices – offices belonging to the organisation, third party serviced offices or partner/client offices, as appropriate.
- **Working as virtual teams:** to prevent relocation or frequent travel, staff work smarter as virtual teams, using online communications and collaboration techniques.
- **Sharing space in the office:** Employees do not have a permanent desk, but choose a work setting appropriated to the task in hand, e.g. standard desk, touchdown space, quiet zone, confidential room, project room.

In many cases, employees will blend different smart/flexible working options, according to the need of the tasks in hand. Enabling this involves a substantial move away from the idea that an individual applies for and is granted a single

17. While the Committee received evidence relating to all of the above aspects, including the flexible time options, as will be evident in the subsequent sections of this report, there was a particular emphasis on the further opportunities associated with the flexible place/location options.

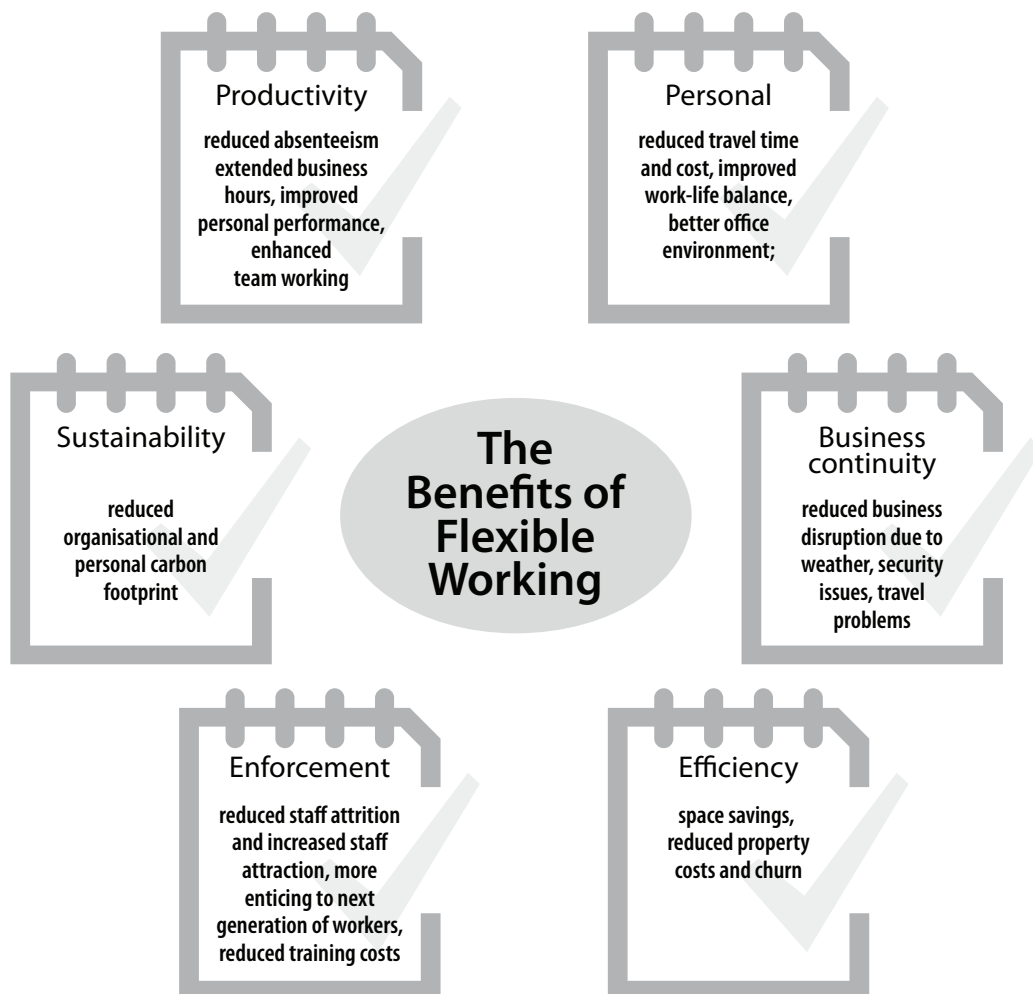
Consideration of the Evidence

18. The Committee focused its evidence gathering on the following five broad themes:
- The case for flexible working;
 - Existing flexible working practices in the NI public sector;
 - Lessons from other jurisdictions;
 - Considerations for the successful implementation of flexible working in the NI public sector; and
 - Linkages with wider Government policies.

The case for Flexible Working

19. In the initial stages of the Inquiry the Committee considered a wide range of research examining the debate around flexible working and a literature review was conducted to bring the published evidence together to establish the strength of the case for flexible working. An outline of that evidence follows.
20. The Committee noted that the stated benefits from flexible working are wide ranging and can apply to employers, employees and wider society. These have been neatly illustrated, for example, in Figure 2 below.¹⁰

Figure 2: The Benefits of Flexible Working



¹⁰ Appendix 5 – Other Papers: Workplace Unlimited “Flexible Working Benefits Collated Evidence and Case Studies”, September 2012.

21. In his latest work on this topic, Andy Lake of Flexibility.co.uk, identified the following five drivers for flexible working, which stem both from the benefits and from external pressures:
- Business drivers (e.g. reducing property costs, reducing absenteeism, improving recruitment and retention, reducing business travel, increasing productivity);
 - Employee drivers (e.g. greater autonomy, reduced commuting, improved work-life balance, better motivation and morale, more diverse workforce);
 - Sustainability drivers (e.g. reduced energy consumption, reduced travel, more local work opportunities, repatriating spending to local communities);
 - Technological drivers (e.g. using technology to overcome geographical constraints, moving work to people – not people to work, gaining competitive advantage, developing an ‘e-culture’); and
 - Legislative and public policy drivers (e.g. legal right to request flexible working, public sector reform and efficiency agenda).
22. In terms of the future direction for organisations, members note that Andy Lake concludes:
- ‘In the longer term, it isn’t a choice. The other factors such as competitive pressures, new technologies and employee aspirations are forcing the pace. Trying to freeze working practices in a mid-twentieth century mould is, effectively, to choose organisational failure.’¹¹*
23. In relation to benefits for business, the Committee noted the findings from a CIPD survey¹², which was published in May 2012 and based on responses from more than 1,000 employers and 2,000 employees. It showed that three-quarters of UK employers feel that implementing flexible working practices has had a positive impact on talent retention, while 73% report a positive impact on motivation and staff engagement.
24. As regards employees, more than half felt that flexible working helped them reach a better work-life balance generally and almost a quarter said that flexible working helped them with their caring responsibilities for children. As well as this, more than a third of those that replied believed flexible working made them more productive and around a fifth said that it reduced the level of sickness absence.
25. The research further found that flexible working can offer innovative solutions to social and economic issues, such as demographic changes, labour market participation and even environmental benefits, as well as the challenges of business competitiveness and saving on plant costs. The businesses identified as good practice case studies in the survey also reported that flexibility helped them to deliver a better service to their customers and to bring in the skills they needed at the right times.
26. The Committee also considered case studies from the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC) report¹³ which highlighted the position of employees who, when given increased control over where, when and how they worked, as well as the tasks they performed, were more motivated, more engaged and had higher productivity. A better work-life balance was also struck.
27. REC stated that the total value of flexible working extends much further, offering macro benefits to businesses and the economy that help secure a competitive advantage for the UK. This success can be beneficial to individual workers through more job opportunities in better performing organisations. REC further stated that the UK’s approach towards a flexible labour market provides a key element of its competitive advantage and helps to attract inward investment.

11 Lake, A. (2013), “Smart Flexibility: Moving Smart and Flexible Working from Theory to Practice”, Gower Publishing, Surrey, p.17.

12 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: CIPD “Flexible working provision and uptake”, May 2012.

13 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: “Recruitment and Employment Confederation Flexible Work Commission Report.

28. A 2011 study by pollsters ComRes, quoted in the REC report, showed that some 82% of MPs and 77% of the public consider flexible working patterns to be essential for the modern economy; and 86% of MPs and 78% of the public consider the encouragement of a flexible labour force to be important for stimulating economic growth.¹⁴
29. The Committee noted that the REC report also highlighted the positive effect that flexible working can have on sickness absence, as well as being a positive driver for increased diversity in the workplace. A case study involving Enterprise Rent-a-Car also illustrated how flexible working could address service needs in a changing market as well as assisting in the reduction in property costs.
30. In terms of flexible time working, members noted that a study carried out by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) found that a confused picture had emerged in terms of employer views on the benefits and disadvantages of part-time jobs.¹⁵ The three most frequently cited benefits - flexibility, cost efficiency and employee commitment - were also amongst the three most frequently cited disadvantages - inflexibility, cost concerns and lack of commitment. The JRF study also suggested confusion over the real benefits and disadvantages of recruiting part-time staff. However, this confusion could be explained in terms of the difference between perception and reality; and employers who regularly employed and recruited quality part-time staff were very positive about the business benefits and cited almost no substantial disadvantages.
31. The JRF study concluded that the major hurdle for growing the part-time recruitment market therefore appears to be persuading more employers to try it for the first time. As staff increasingly request to work part-time, more businesses are experiencing part-time employment at senior levels. It seems likely that positive experience of these part-time working arrangements will lead to increased acceptance, and in turn to additional recruitment for quality part-time roles.
32. In terms of the legislative and public policy drivers alluded to above, the Committee is aware that the right to request flexible working has been enshrined in law from 2003¹⁶. Subsequent regulations have extended this right to carers of children up to the age of 17 and in terms of the right to request a contract variation by employed agency workers who are returning to work from a period of parental leave.¹⁷ Moreover, an enabling Bill is currently progressing through the Assembly which will facilitate the extension of the right to request flexible working to all employees having an appropriate length of service with their employer. The Committee is mindful that, while it can be seen as a reactive approach, such legislation acts as a driver towards flexibility. In addition, the likelihood of new public policy or legislative drivers around older workers and phased retirement have been cited in the context of the abolition of the default retirement age and changes to statutory pension age.¹⁸
33. As regards the flexible location of work, the Committee noted that the Bain Review also outlined the benefits within the wider context of policy on the location of public sector jobs¹⁹. In particular, in defining flexible working in terms of 'the use of technology and workplace design to enable staff to work in a range of locations without being tied to a particular desk', the Review focused on improving service delivery, increasing public sector efficiency and effectiveness and reducing traffic congestion and carbon footprint. It found that statistical information on the take-up of flexible working is limited but that most central UK government

14 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: “Recruitment and Employment Confederation Flexible Work Commission Report”, September 2012.

15 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: Joseph Rowntree Foundation “Building a Sustainable Quality Part-time Recruitment Market”, March 2012.

16 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2003/173/contents/made>

17 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/2991/note/made>

18 Lake, A. (2013), “Smart Flexibility: Moving Smart and Flexible Working from Theory to Practice”, Gower Publishing, Surrey, p.29.

19 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: “Independent Review of Policy on Location of Public Sector Jobs”, September 2008.

departments and agencies have a formal policy on flexible working. In addition, the majority of UK local authorities were piloting or implementing flexible or mobile working.

34. The Bain Review found that the available evidence suggested that flexible working produced substantial productivity gains as well as improvements in staff satisfaction. It emphasised, however, that the introduction of flexible working required strong leadership and radical thinking as well as a cultural change. There were also additional interim costs to be considered. In his oral evidence session with the Committee, Professor Bain pointed out that the Demos report²⁰ had shown that home workers had a 20% higher level of productivity with a 3% reduction in sickness absence and a 27% reduction in the turnover of staff. The Review concluded that flexible working, driven by innovative uses of technology, should be an important feature in a broader relocation strategy.
35. The Original Creative Co-op (British Council for Offices) also reported similar advantages in its May 2010 report - Making Flexible Working Work²¹. The report classed benefits as either tangible, financial or less tangible benefits, which can be further subdivided into organisational and personal benefits such as:
- reduced property costs;
 - reduced churn;
 - smaller carbon footprint;
 - reduced absenteeism;
 - reduced staff attrition;
 - increased staff attraction;
 - longer work period;
 - extended business hours;
 - improved team-working;
 - better business continuity;
 - improved staff performance;
 - improved work-life balance; and
 - improved control of workload and better office environment.
36. The report concluded that flexible working is gaining momentum everywhere in the western world, that the transformation of business is already happening and that UK employers must face up to the challenge of changing work patterns in order to survive.
37. Evidence from the Republic of Ireland (RoI) based New Ways of Working also indicated that flexible working can have an impact on absenteeism figures²². The Committee noted that people who are, for example, recovering from a long period of absence and who may need to recuperate physically at home can work from home on a full or part-time basis. This can assist in a quicker return to work for the individual and helps to contribute to the organisation's productivity and reduce its sickness absence figures.
38. In its evidence, New Ways of Working also advocated the benefits of telecommuting²³. It highlighted an increase in productivity of between 5% - 20%, stating that this could be attributed to a reduction in travel time for employees who were spending their time working as opposed to commuting to and from their traditional office location.²⁴ The evidence also

20 Appendix 5 – Other Papers – DEMOS Report “Flexible work benefits business and society, but its future hangs in the balance...” July 2011.

21 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: BCO “Making Flexible Working Work”, May 2010.

22 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Flexible Working Inquiry: New Ways of Working, 5 February 2014

23 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Flexible Working Inquiry: New Ways of Working, 5 February 2014.

24 *ibid.*

highlighted the need for managers to buy into the e-work concept which, no matter how successful it proved to be, could still run into difficulties if there was management resistance.

39. Collated evidence and case studies published by Workplace Unlimited in September 2012²⁵ reinforces the previously mentioned benefits of flexible working but also illustrate clear, objective, space efficiencies and associated property savings. The research also reinforces claims about less tangible benefits.²⁶ For example, organisations such as BP, DTI, EC Harris, GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), PwC, Rolls-Royce and the Treasury Solicitors all reported that flexible working enhanced knowledge sharing, communication, team interaction and collaboration. In some cases this resulted in better joined-up services, more cross-selling of services, and, ultimately, increased profitability.
40. GSK and EC Harris believe their flexible working environments contributed towards increases in profit of around 12%. Reduction in travel time between the office and client sites, and reduced absenteeism associated with flexible working, have resulted in further increases in productivity. The Committee noted that many of the case studies presented also reported increases in staff satisfaction, despite initial reticence towards flexible working. The staff also welcomed the increased choice, trust and autonomy associated with flexible working environments.
41. On 13 March 2013, the Committee received evidence from Dr Nigel Oseland of Workplace Unlimited. As well as highlighting the overall benefits of flexible working, such as creating a more productive, collaborative and interactive environment, Dr Oseland pointed to the sustainability benefit. In his view, a tangible benefit to the environment can be achieved through not acquiring any more office space or by consolidating existing office space.²⁷
42. Dr Oseland highlighted particular case studies from the Department for Children, Schools and Family (DCSF). DCSF implemented a desk-sharing policy which increased building capacity occupancy from 1,600 to 2,250. The survey results from this case study indicated an improvement in quality of workplace and increased staff satisfaction. This enabled the Department to release an entire building, reduce its carbon footprint, and save £10m per annum in property costs.²⁸
43. The Committee further noted that the Demos report, 'Reinventing the Workplace'²⁹, showed that 70,000 BT employees are now involved in the BT Workstyle Project, one of the largest flexible working projects in Europe. The project allows up to 15,000 employees to work from home with 64,000 able to work flexibly. The outcome of the project was a positive effect on the retention of staff and on cutting costs, with BT able to save €725 million-plus per annum by 2005. This was achieved through a reduction in the company's office estate and the savings, in accommodation costs, from the company's 11,600 home workers. The home workers were also found to be 20% more productive than colleagues who remained in the office. Other notable benefits were that:
- The proportion of female BT employees in the UK who return to work after taking maternity leave is around 96–99%, more than double the national average;
 - Homeworking call centre operators handle up to 20% more calls than their office-based colleagues;

25 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: Workplace Unlimited “Flexible Working Benefits Collated Evidence and Case Studies”, September 2012 September 2012.

26 Appendix 5 – Other Papers - Workplace Unlimited “Flexible Working Benefits Collated Evidence and Case Studies”, September 2012 September 2012.

27 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland: Briefing from Nigel Oseland, 13 March 2013.

28 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: Workplace Unlimited Flexible Working Benefits Collated Evidence and Case Studies, September 2012.

29 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: DEMOS Report Flexible work benefits business and society, but its future hangs in the balance...”, July 2011.

- The absentee rate among flexible workers is down 63 per cent and is now 20% below the UK average; and
 - Teleconferencing has eliminated the annual need for over 300,000 face-to-face meetings, leading to savings of over €38.6 million a year.³⁰
44. Turning to the public sector, the Committee noted that, as part of the Civil Service Reform programme, the Cabinet Office has adopted the ‘Smart Working’ policy approach for Whitehall departments.³¹ This aims to transform the way work is carried out by focusing on the achievement of the following benefits:
- Increasing the effectiveness of activities;
 - Reducing the financial costs of running an organisation;
 - Focusing work on outcomes rather than processes;
 - Meeting the aspirations of staff for an improved work-life balance;
 - Creating office environments that facilitate collaboration and innovation; and
 - Reducing the environmental footprint of working practices.³²
45. The Smart Working policy approach recognises both that work in the 21st century is more about what you do and not where you do it, and that a strategic use of new technologies would enable much of the work to be carried out from many other locations as well as offices.
46. The *Guide to Smart Working in Government* cites the changing working practices in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) which had introduced smarter working in 2007. This started with a move to open plan offices, consolidated in two buildings rather than four. Between 15 -20% of staff working from home or at other locations on some days were able to access exactly the same information and systems as office-based staff. Property savings alone were estimated at £2.5m per year but the Department felt that the main benefit was having working practices that were in line with business needs.
47. The Committee notes that, in line with the other evidence, the *Guide to Smart Working in Government* emphasises the role that managers have in ensuring that flexible working is a success. Inevitably there is a shift away from managing by presence³³ to managing by outputs/outcomes and this will also involve new ways of keeping in contact with staff – e.g. teamwork protocols such as shared calendars – and measuring performance. However, it is also acknowledged that the management skills required to do this have not changed, they only need to be applied differently and more rigorously.
48. Arising from its Inquiry considerations, it was evident to the Committee that there can be a tendency to equate flexible location working solely with homeworking. In the course of the evidence gathering, members questioned witnesses on the potential disadvantages and risks of homeworking and about how these could be managed and mitigated. The risks discussed included a perception of ‘skiving’ by homeworking employees, the potential for employees to be distracted from work by family or other social activities, and the possibility of other employees feeling disenfranchised by not being offered the opportunity to work flexibly.
49. In response, Women Like Us argued that these concerns arise from misconceptions and mostly from employers who have not actually tried flexible working³³. New Ways of Working argued that, in relation to employee disenfranchisement, there must be clear objectives and rationale for introducing flexible working alongside clear and transparent assessment of which

30 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: DEMOS Report Flexible work benefits business and society, but its future hangs in the balance...” July 2011.

31 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: The Way We Work, A Guide to Smart Working in Government, 2013.

32 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: Flexibility.co.uk The Smart Working Handbook, June 2011.

33 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Flexible Working Inquiry: New Ways of Working, 5 February 2014

jobs are suitable for flexible working and also in terms of which people are suitable. They further argued that, with clear and correct monitoring of work outputs, it would be evident how much work is or is not being done within specified time periods.

50. Members were interested to note that, in his evidence, Andy Lake of Flexibility.co.uk highlighted that, from surveys he had conducted, most people did not want to work exclusively from home and that most who did want to avail of homeworking only wanted to do so for 1-2 days per week. He also stated that it was not possible to implement a ‘one size fits all’ policy approach to flexible working and that organisations needed to decide how best to approach it to suit their own individual business needs. Members noted, in particular, the advice from Andy Lake that, as flexible location working encompasses a range of remote working options and technologies, the focus should not be on homeworking in particular but rather on the options suited to a given job role or team environment and that the driver should be flexibility in meeting business needs.³⁴ More generally, Andy Lake has pointed out that:

*‘If the benefits of flexible work are to be realised, then it is **essential to adopt an approach that is strategic and comprehensive**. It should offer an appropriate range of flexible work options, and see that they are properly resourced, managed effectively and apply to all employees subject to the constraints of the tasks they undertake in their work’.*³⁵

51. The Committee is mindful that the research and evidence, both from the literature review and from witnesses to the inquiry, emphasised the many benefits of flexible working. This aligns with the assertion in the original evidence from Professor Sir George Bain that it is more a question of *how* rather than *whether* flexible working should be introduced. That said, members also note that some initial costs are likely in implementing flexible working practices. While these relate mostly to initial capital expenditure, they can include:

- Refurbishment or new build;
- Facilities costs;
- Technology kit and infrastructure;
- Culture change;
- Continuing support; and
- Project Management.³⁶

52. However, it is apparent from the evidence that the outlay in introducing flexible working practices can be considered in terms of an ‘invest-to-save’ measure in view of the resultant savings and other benefits in the longer term.

53. **Given the many facets of flexible working, in terms of the range of options for achieving desired outcomes by being flexible about how, when and where people work, the Committee concurs that a ‘one size fits all’ policy approach on this matter is not appropriate for the public sector in NI. Instead, government departments and other public bodies need to be supported in selecting and implementing flexible working practices which best suit their own individual business needs.**

54. **In terms of the flexible location of work, the Committee is strongly of the view that the focus should not be on homeworking in particular but rather on selecting the appropriate remote working options and technologies – including, for example, working from hub/satellite offices, in virtual teams, using mobile devices, and sharing office space – which are right for a given job or team environment in meeting business needs. The Committee**

34 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Flexible Working Inquiry: Flexibility.co.uk, 26 February 2014.

35 Lake, A. (2013), *Smart Flexibility: Moving Smart and Flexible Working from Theory to Practice*, Gower Publishing, Surrey, p.28.

36 Adapted from Lake, A. (2013), *Smart Flexibility: Moving Smart and Flexible Working from Theory to Practice*, Gower Publishing, Surrey, p.57.

also recommends that, as with the other remote working options, where homeworking is applied as an appropriate method, this should be on the basis of careful assessment of job tasks and agreed rules and safeguards, including contact protocols and good practice performance measurement and management.

55. **In general terms, the Committee considers that the weight of evidence from the published literature and case studies strongly indicates that significant benefits for the NI public sector will accrue from applying flexible working practices in a strategic, tailored and coordinated fashion. The potential benefits for public sector employers, employees and the wider economy and society, as applicable, include: reduced premises costs; increased productivity; improved staff morale and commitment; reduced staff turnover and absenteeism; wider recruitment talent pools; reduced levels of economic inactivity; promotion of gender equality in employment; and environmental benefits. In light of this, the Committee believes that the initial outlay from the strategic implementation of flexible working practices should be seen in terms of an ‘invest-to-save’ measure.**

Existing flexible working practices in the NI public sector

Absence of NICS-wide strategy

56. It was evident from the first departmental evidence session on 14 March 2012 that there is an absence of a formal NICS strategy on flexible working. In fact, in evidence to the Committee, a DFP official acknowledged that ‘an inquiry by the Committee might be very helpful.....in crystallising thinking...’ Moreover, the Department also took the position that ‘coherent central policy [on flexible working] would at least provide a framework, an encouragement, and if you like, an a la carte menu from which business areas could choose to encourage them or at least to provide them with the tool kit to consider it’.³⁷
57. However, the Committee noted that, during a subsequent DFP evidence session on 13 February 2013³⁸ the departmental position seemed to change. When pressed by members about the absence of an overarching strategy which could make it more difficult to monitor the effectiveness of flexible working, departmental officials were somewhat resistant to the need for a strategy to be put in place, stating that they did not see any additional value in having an overarching strategy. The officials listed the flexible working options available to NICS employees as flexible hours, flexi-time, compressed hours, part-time working, job sharing, term-time working, partial retirement and personalised hours.
58. In addition to investigating the absence of an overarching strategy on flexible working, the Committee questioned departmental officials on the NICS Homeworking Policy³⁹ during an evidence session on 13 February 2013. Although the policy was agreed by both management and trade union side in 2009, there was an apparent lack of implementation. In explaining the concern on management side, DFP officials highlighted that the policy (if implemented) could lead to ‘inefficiencies, complexities, layers of bureaucracy and other problems – [which] would take away from business flexibility rather than add to it’. There was great concern that the policy, if implemented, could cause not only more difficulty with regard to business problems, but add cost⁴⁰. The officials added that the policy needed to be reconsidered to focus more on efficiency gains and that this work was being taken forward.

37 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Flexible Working: Departmental Briefing, 14 March 2012.

38 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland: DFP Briefing, 13 February 2013.

39 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: Northern Ireland Civil Service Homeworking Policy, December 2011.

40 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Flexible Working: Departmental Briefing, 14 March 2012.

59. At a subsequent briefing on 15 May 2013⁴¹, departmental officials further stated that they were nervous about the introduction of a homeworking policy as it may lead to a sense of entitlement and an inflexible, bureaucratic system. The officials preferred that homeworking was operated on a local line management basis to deal with individual circumstances that may arise.
60. NIPSA also briefed the Committee on flexible working on 4 December 2013⁴². The representatives stated that NIPSA recognised the need to avail of advancing technologies but that this needed to be done in a way which takes account of the position of the individual worker as well as the benefit to the employer. In particular, there was a concern that flexible working should not impact on the terms and conditions that NIPSA has worked to achieve over the years.
61. NIPSA had sought evidence of homeworking in the NICS, as it had received anecdotal reports raising concern that the approach of an ad-hoc, informal, policy was operated inconsistently and as a privilege of rank. The Committee was advised that homeworking, or teleworking, could help reduce sickness absence rates. NIPSA stated that it was unclear why the agreed NICS Homeworking policy had not been implemented. The Union representatives emphasised that they did not think homeworking was suitable for every civil service position but that there were clear benefits to be derived from it. They also considered that homeworking should be part of a menu of options under an umbrella of flexible working arrangements rather than as part of an overall policy.
62. In its evidence, NIPSA also highlighted the use of the 'work hub', stating that it felt this was an efficient facility which helped make better use of staff time and reduced staff travel and associated travel costs. The Union representatives felt that the work hub facility would work best in rural areas as it would give the greatest benefit in terms of reduced staff travel and would offer more options to those that lived in rural areas but were primarily based in Belfast.
63. In his evidence to the Committee on 26 February 2014, Andy Lake of Flexibility.co.uk, disputed the argument that an agreed policy can lead to less flexibility and a sense of entitlement⁴³. He told the Committee that some discriminatory practices could emerge if it was left to individual line managers to grant, or not grant, permission to work flexibly in an ad-hoc manner. Members were advised that buy-in from the top of any organisation was crucial to the success of flexible working and that officials at the top need to lead by example. Moreover, a vision and a set of principles for flexible working should be signed off at a high level and this would then set out how work was to be conducted at a lower level.
64. When questioned about the concerns of the DFP officials, Andy Lake stated that, to some extent, he agreed that a business that was set up to run on a nine-to-five basis, which had requests from staff for alternative working arrangements, could find flexible working to be complex. As alluded to earlier, he further advised that there was no 'one size fits all' approach to flexible working and each organisation needed to assess both itself and which employees would be suitable for flexible working to ensure that the needs of the business continue to be met. Members noted that, as regards the risk of a sense of entitlement, Andy Lake highlighted that there needed to be flexibility on the part of the employees as well as the employers.
65. Whilst the Committee is mindful that arguments can be made for a more informal approach to flexible working, members voiced concern that, in the absence of a high-level policy, an ad-hoc and disjointed approach was prevailing within NICS, which would hinder organisational evolution and modernisation. Moreover, as a consequence of this informal approach, there

41 Oral Briefing by Department of Finance and Personnel officials on 15 May 2013. <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/finance-2011-2016/minutes/2012-2013/20130515.pdf>

42 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Flexible Working Inquiry: NIPSA, 4 December 2013.

43 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Flexible Working Inquiry: Flexibility.co.uk, 26 February 2014.

is a lack of ongoing monitoring and gathering of data, which would provide evidential proof of efficiencies and effectiveness or otherwise.

66. To add to the Inquiry evidence base and to compensate for the lack of information held centrally about the extent of flexible working practices in NICS, the Committee undertook a cross-departmental survey. Submissions were sought from all departments on the extent to which flexible working practices are being applied, on any good practice cases, and on the number of employees who undertake all or part of their work from remote locations. Twelve responses to the Committee’s request for information were received and the full detail of these can be found in Appendix 4.
67. While the level of detail and format of the departmental responses differed, the limited data outlined in Table 1 below highlights, in particular, the ad hoc and uncoordinated nature of the flexible location working arrangements pertaining across departments at present.

Table 1: Outline data on flexible working in NICS (including some Arms-Length Bodies)

Department/ ALB	Flexible Time Working (formal)	Flexible Location Working	Other Comments
DARD		No figures available; touchdown areas in various locations and DARD direct offices.	Approval is required between the staff, line manager and responsible premises officer. Plans to further explore potential for flexible working as part of DARD HQ relocation.
DCAL	52 (17% of all staff)*	5 (alternative government office); 28 (work remotely from home).	*(defined as flexi-time, term-time, part-time, partial retirement, term-time etc)
Libraries NI		40 homeworking	
Armagh Observatory		25 work all/part of their time from remote locations.	
DEL	28.18%	Ad-hoc arrangements, no figures available. 109 laptop users.	‘Drop-in’ zone created in Adelaide House.
DE	23%	Ad-hoc arrangements, no figures available.	Majority ‘avail of flexible working arrangements’
SELB		No teleworking but staff can access emails remotely.	Wide range of flexible time working practices in place.
CCMS		Ad-hoc arrangements, no figures available.	Family friendly scheme, career break scheme, job sharing and a flexible working hours scheme; Some laptop users, facilitating homeworking when required.
SEELB		No formal policy on teleworking.	A range of HR policies on alternative working patterns, flexi-time, flexible retirement, etc.

Department/ ALB	Flexible Time Working (formal)	Flexible Location Working	Other Comments
DETI	38.6% part-time workers; 32.5% females; 6.1% males	Ad-hoc arrangements; 120 full remote access; 76 Blackberry users.	
DoE		No figures available; some use of satellite offices, future@work business zones and hot-desking; 13% laptop users; remote access 'infrequent'; 321 Blackberry users.	56 staff have 3G connectivity, 57 have ADSL home connectivity and 37 can use their home broadband to connect; has a Digital Strategy 2013-16; a programme of IT projects which 'fully exploit the capabilities of the NICS technical infrastructure and assist delivery of functions and services across the department'. Also, use of instant messaging and investment in video conferencing units.
DFP	862 (out of 3774), 23%.	Ad-hoc arrangements. 1300 (approx. one third of staff) laptop users; 495 Blackberry users.	'Majority of staff have flexi-time'; 128 laptop users have ADSL (a dedicated broadband line at home connecting the user directly to the NICS network); 280 have SSL or VPN (whereby staff use a cable to connect to their own home broadband router); 347 have 3G (enabling connection to the network while on the move). 49 piloting devices such as iPhones, Tablets etc.
DoJ	504 (13%)	No figures available; however, 24 staff work from different offices or are required to travel, therefore 'have IT to enable this'.	'flexible work time available to a large number of staff'
DHSSPS		Ad-hoc arrangements, no figures available.	'no longer aware of individual arrangements' as applications made directly to Shared Services Provider (HR Connect); The Department advocates a maximum limit of 8 days of homeworking in any 4 week period for an officer.
Health & Social Care Sector			No figures available; however 55,000 WTE staff compared to 66,000 headcount – evidence of some flexible working.
DRD	279	45 (out of 2,299) subscribe to teleworking programme at 5 remote office locations.	'majority of staff have flexible working arrangements'
DSD	1,706	Ad-hoc arrangements, no figures available.	'majority of staff have flexitime schemes'

Flexible time working

68. Whilst the extent of flexible working varies across departments it is clear that the NICS, as a whole, is well advanced in relation to the time aspect of flexible working, with a variety of options applied, such as part-time working, term-time working, compressed hours, job sharing, career breaks and flexi-time. The availability of these options depends on the nature of the posts and the suitability of them for flexible working. It is evident that a significant percentage of employees in all departments avail of alternative work patterns. The responses from departments also underlined the importance of applications for alternative working patterns being considered in line with existing NICS policies and the business needs of each post.
69. In its evidence, NIPSA acknowledged just how advanced the NICS is in relation to flexible time working, pointing to the various policies and procedures which it had been involved in negotiating and highlighting that NICS was the pioneer of a lot of flexible time working arrangements in the past.⁴⁴ The Committee welcomes this finding and, as alluded to earlier, members note the likelihood of further developments in this area in future.

Flexible location working

70. Whilst the range of options for time-based flexibility in NICS are firmly established in corporate policy and practice, from the departmental replies outlined below, it is evident to the Committee that there is considerable scope for departments to take a more proactive, systematic and consistent approach to embracing the options for the flexible location of work.
71. The response from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL)⁴⁵ stated that alternative work locations are limited but it does have a teleworking scheme with 5 staff availing of this. The opportunity for homeworking is limited and is done on an ad-hoc basis and, whilst HR does not monitor its use, it is estimated that 10 staff avail of this at least one day per week. DCAL considers that working from home several days per week can represent challenges to the business and individual alike, as it can reduce team working and interaction and can hinder communication generally.
72. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)⁴⁶ stated it has introduced flexible working practices through the flexible location of work to make effective use of its estate. Touchdown areas are provided in a number of its buildings throughout NI. These areas allow an individual who is attending a meeting or event in a particular location for part of the working day to complete the remainder of the day in that location on occasions when it would not be economical or practical to return to the permanent workstation.
73. DARD employees also have access to the DFP 'future@work business zones' which work in a similar way to touchdown areas. This type of approach is an attempt to both reduce building and maintenance costs and facilitate flexible working arrangements. DARD plans to assess the extent to which remote working can be introduced to ensure maximum benefit and efficiency of the workforce and which will include giving the workforce the skills and tools to be able to work effectively in different places, at different times.
74. The Department for Regional Development (DRD)⁴⁷ has had a teleworking scheme in operation since 2007 with remote office stations at 5 sites across NI. The scheme is currently fully subscribed with 45 staff availing of it. The Department's own evaluation of the scheme has shown that the overwhelming majority of staff involved said it had made a positive contribution to their work-life balance and reduced the stress of longer work journeys.

44 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Flexible Working Inquiry: NIPSA, 4 Dec 2013.

45 Appendix 4 – Written Submissions: Correspondence from Committee for Culture Arts & Leisure, 18 March 2014.

46 Appendix 4 – Written Submissions: Correspondence from Committee for Agriculture & Rural Development, 12 March 2014.

47 Appendix 4 – Written Submissions: Correspondence from Department for Regional Development, 19 March 2014.

75. The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)⁴⁸ stated that, although there was no formal home or remote working policy in place, there was discretion for homeworking on a case-by-case basis. It is unclear how many staff have availed of homeworking as no formal records are kept. DEL staff also have the option to use the future@work business zones. DEL stated that it is committed to flexible working practices and will continue to explore initiatives aimed at further development of these practices.
76. The Department for Social Development (DSD)⁴⁹ also stated that it has no formal homeworking policy but that staff who wished to avail of homeworking had encrypted laptops with the facility for remote secure access and a pilot project was underway where documents can be accessed on an iPad.
77. In common with the other replies, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)⁵⁰ stated that it has no formal homeworking policy and that line managers determined requests for homeworking on a case-by-case basis in line with business needs. Currently, 120 staff have full remote access to allow homeworking and staff are also able to avail of remote working via other civil service buildings. DETI advised that, on the face of it, there are many less disadvantages to flexible working but that business needs have to be considered when implementing any arrangement.
78. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS)⁵¹ stated that the only form of remote working it had in operation was an ad-hoc arrangement on homeworking for which it advocates a maximum limit of 8 homeworking days in any four-week period for an officer.
79. The response from the Department of Education (DE)⁵² stated that a guiding and overarching policy is that flexibility should be achieved without any adverse impact on the Department's business needs or on service to the public. Homeworking is on an ad-hoc basis and some staff have encrypted laptops for remote secure access. Members also noted that home-based working was piloted in the Southern Education and Library Board in 2005 across a limited range of Board support services which were deemed suitable. Assessment of suitability for inclusion in the pilot was based on certain requirements.⁵³
80. The Department of Justice (DoJ)⁵⁴ advised that it applies flexible working where possible but has a significant number of employees who are operational and work shift patterns, which do not lend themselves towards flexible working. A small number of staff avail of remote working but this is not centrally recorded and homeworking has been allowed when it is in line with business needs.
81. The reply from DFP outlined the advances in technology which were being introduced throughout NICS, such as: instant messaging; group chat; videoconferencing; outlook web access; and web conferencing. The response also focused on the business zone offices which were targeted at workers whose role requires them to be away from their normal place of work on a regular basis. However, the response stated that this scheme has not been offered as an option for office-based staff wishing to reduce their commuting time, except in exceptional circumstances such as extremely poor weather conditions or during industrial action.

48 Appendix 4 – Written Submissions: Correspondence from Committee for Employment & Learning, 27 February 2014.

49 Appendix 4 – Written Submissions: Correspondence from Committee for Social Development, 21 March 2014.

50 Appendix 4 – Written Submissions: Correspondence from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, 26 March 2014.

51 Appendix 4 – Written Submissions: Correspondence from the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 24 March 2014.

52 Appendix 4 – Written Submissions: Correspondence from Committee for Education, 11 April 2014.

53 Appendix 4 – Written submissions: Correspondence from the Southern Education and Library Board, 27 March 2014.

54 Appendix 4 – Written Submissions: Correspondence from the Committee for Justice, 27 May 2014.

82. On the issue of homeworking, as alluded to earlier, the DFP reply stated that its main concern about the draft 'Working at Home' policy, which had not been adopted, was that the focus is on work-life balance but ignores homeworking as a way of delivering efficiencies. Another concern was that it could lead to inflexibilities for the business with many staff availing of homeworking decisions from line managers without there being due regard paid to the departmental or business needs.
83. In its response, the Department of the Environment (DoE)⁵⁵ highlighted its Digital Strategy for 2013-16 which provides a programme of IT that fully exploits the capabilities of the NICS technical infrastructure and assists delivery of functions and services across the Department. This includes the provision of technology to support remote working as the business requires and to create a more agile workforce.
84. **On the basis of the evidence received, the Committee notes the generally held view that NICS has been at the forefront of the introduction of flexible time working practices. The Committee commends NICS as an exemplar organisation in this aspect of flexible working and, given its status as a significant employer in NI, members would encourage the Service to continue to keep pace with developments in this regard.**
85. **However, in terms of the flexible location of work, it is apparent that a piecemeal, inconsistent and uncoordinated approach is being taken by departments, which arises from the absence of corporate policy and guidance and is reflected by incomplete data on existing practices. The Committee believes that, unless this changes, NICS will not realise the full benefits from a strategic application of flexible working practices. Members concur that, in the modern era of technological communications, the focus of work is more on *what* is done rather than *where* it is done and consequently, within NI public sector organisations, there needs to be a cultural shift away from 'managing by presence' and to 'managing by results'.**
86. **The Committee recommends that the Minister of Finance and Personnel brings proposals to the Executive for a new Programme for Government (PfG) commitment aimed at ensuring that the full range of flexible working practices are used strategically for maximum benefit and efficiency in the public sector. This should include establishing the guiding principles for departments and other public bodies to apply in setting out the menu of options on how, when and where work can be conducted and from which applicable selection can be made at the business area or team level within organisations. The high-level commitment should also be accompanied with an indicative timetable and milestones for delivery.**

Lessons from other jurisdictions

GB case studies

87. In exploring approaches to flexible working in other jurisdictions, the Committee was briefed, via video conference, by officials from Salford City Council at its meeting on 20 March 2013. The Council, which had around 4,000 office-based staff, was trying to reduce property overheads as well as change the way some areas operate and to focus on the work-life balance of staff. While it encountered a significant degree of resistance when it moved towards the introduction of flexible working, the Council required local leadership in driving the change forward.
88. The Committee was advised that, in evaluating the effect of the move towards flexible working, the Council found that individuals have been more productive in a homeworking environment than in an office environment and that there was a reduction in sickness

55 Appendix 4: Written Submissions: Correspondence from Department of the Environment, 29 September 2014.

absence⁵⁶. Costs also reduced significantly through the more flexible approach to the location of people, with some individuals not going into the office for days at a time but still being connected to work through the available technology.

89. When making the move towards flexible working, the Council identified four types of worker, as set out in Table 2⁵⁷.

Table 2: Salford City Council – types of flexible workers

Work Style	Definition
Home Worker	Based at home, spending most of the week away from Council buildings
Fixed Worker	Based at a fixed location for most of the time
Mobile Worker	Works significantly in the community or in many Council or partner locations. Can work from home
Agile Worker	Can operate from any location. Use ICT to allow full remote functionality without the need to go to Council buildings or partner locations

90. The Council officials pointed out that crude assumptions had to be made about the first three types of worker; but that there needed to be more specific thought given to what constituted an agile worker as this often required IT adjustments and ensuring staff had the right equipment.
91. The Council officials explained that the real push behind its flexible working initiative was to get staff into open plan offices and to move away from the idea of having their own desk to taking the next available desk. This was a significant property rationalisation project, spanning more than ten years. In terms of its approach, the Council examined the ratio of staff to workstations and the square metres that each workstation used in a building and attached costs. By using both national performance indicators and a benchmarking approach, it estimated that each workstation in a building costs £1,000 per annum. By rationalising its 'Back Office' function, reducing the Council's estate, and reducing overall floor space and occupancy, the Council was able to identify cumulative savings in excess of £6.5m per annum and savings of over £5m in capital receipts. Whilst the project had encountered significant opposition initially, the Council had engaged staff at an early stage and had made some compromises in this regard while still realising the overall project aims.⁵⁸
92. The officials from Salford City Council also highlighted how the streamlining of office space has led to increased co-operation with partners and to an increase in multi-agency buildings, resulting in an improvement to front-end service delivery. Moreover, they pointed to improved access in the delivery of local government services with the introduction of public access PCs in shared service areas. This helped customers with services such as the payment of council tax as the Council was moving towards more electronic involvement with its customers. In addition, the co-location of library services with other services, such as directing and supporting jobseekers, has led to the preservation of full library services across the city.
93. In his evidence, Andy Lake of Flexibility.co.uk informed the Committee that flexible working is central to the Whitehall efficiency and reform programme and that central government in GB has begun to take a more strategic and coordinated approach in this regard. While this was being driven partly by the need to cut property costs, the prospect of the other

56 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland: Salford City Council Briefing, 20 March 2013.

57 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland: Salford City Council Briefing, 20 March 2013.

58 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland: Salford City Council Briefing, 20 March 2013 and Appendix 4 – Written submission: Correspondence Salford City Council, 20 March 2013.

well-documented benefits was also a motivating factor, including: reducing absenteeism; increasing staff retention; reducing business travel; better staff motivation; improved work-life balance; and more local work opportunities.

94. Members note that the Cabinet Office's *Guide to Smart Working in Government* states that smart working is the only way that the Whitehall Civil Service could provide the same level of service to its customers now and in the future and that there needs to be a sharp focus of management by outcomes. As alluded to earlier, the Guide also includes a case study on the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), which highlighted that, while the Department had initially moved from four to two buildings in 2007, the real push towards smarter working came in 2010 when there was a move towards hotdesking. Everyone, including the Permanent Secretary, work in an open plan office and everyone is able to work remotely, including the option of homeworking. Staff who avail of the homeworking option are able to access exactly the same information and systems as those in the office. There are days when 15-20% of staff work remotely, either from home or other locations, with teams working out the use of homeworking among themselves.⁵⁹
95. The Committee noted several other relevant case studies from the public sector in GB and from which NICS could draw lessons. These included Fife Council and Aberdeenshire Council in Scotland and the Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills, Ofsted, Islington Council and Hertfordshire County Council in England. In the case of Hertfordshire County Council, since 2005, it integrated changed ways of working with its Accommodation Strategy, transformed the working culture and practices to support greater flexibility and mobility and bring about a move to a smaller number of purpose-built offices with team desks and touch-down areas, as well as use of new technology to make this transition and new set-up easier. This led to its 4,500 staff moving from 51 to 5 offices, annual operational cost savings of £3.8 million, property disposals totalling £40 million, reductions in travel and in environmental pollutants and increased staff satisfaction.⁶⁰
96. Finally, in terms of the efficiency and reform programme in GB, the Committee notes the following observation by Andy Lake regarding the wider context and imperative for flexible working:

*'For the public sector in the UK – and indeed over much of the world – the recession has brought very severe financial constraints, and the start of significant reform in the way public services and government are run. Major change against a backdrop of funding cuts is the name of the game. The imperatives to achieve greater efficiency, to do more with less, are greater than ever. There has never been a more urgent time to work smarter. And necessity is concentrating minds as never before.'*⁶¹

Rol Code of Practice

97. During its evidence session with New Ways of Working on 5 February 2014, the Committee noted relevant developments in Rol. A Code of Practice on E-Working⁶² was agreed in the Republic between the Government, the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) and Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). The Code identifies and clarifies the key issues that need to be looked at when an e-working policy is being introduced in businesses and organisations. The Code also encourages the introduction of a formal e-working policy as a way of avoiding difficulties or problems with this new way of working.

59 Appendix 5 – Other Papers - Flexibility.co.uk The Smart Working Handbook, June 2011.

60 Appendix 5 – Other Papers - Independent Review of Policy on Location of Public Sector Jobs, September 2008; and Lake, A. (2013), *Smart Flexibility: Moving Smart and Flexible Working from Theory to Practice*, Gower Publishing, Surrey.

61 Lake, A. (2013), *Smart Flexibility: Moving Smart and Flexible Working from Theory to Practice*, Gower Publishing, Surrey, p.207.

62 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: New Ways of Living & Working, E-Working in Ireland, February 2014.

98. In its evidence, New Ways of Working advised that the selection of the correct people and the correct jobs was vital to the success of flexible working; because if individuals were unable to work independently in an office environment they would not be capable of working away from the office. Managers needed to buy into the e-work concept for it to work properly and it was acknowledged that this may be a big ask for some managers if they are already having to manage staff who work term-time or flexi-time. To overcome the fear of some managers that those working from home are out of contact, New Ways of Working recommended that an agreement is put in place that an individual is available at certain hours should a manager need to contact them.
99. It was contended that the e-working scenario actually leads to more formal reporting to managers, whereby e-workers can be required to send their manager a report on the objectives for the week, a list of the tasks and a progress report on the tasks. New Ways of Working also advocated the use of regular meetings by managers, either on a face-to-face basis or using technology such as Skype. In its view, flexible working had to be structured or it could become chaotic. The group also recommended a termination clause be built into any e-working contract to allow the arrangements to be discontinued easily should it be found that they were not meeting the needs of the business.

USA telework legislation

100. As part of their study of international cases, members considered Assembly research on 'Telework in the US Federal Government', which highlighted issues on the take up of teleworking within federal agencies, particularly those with equivalents within NICS⁶³.
101. The Telework Enhancement Act 2010 requires each federal agency to determine the eligibility for all of its employees to participate in telework and also requires the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to provide guidance and a consultancy service in this regard. The consultants, working in tandem with US Telework Programme managers, assess individual and organisational performance issues that are required to create and sustain a productive and effective telework environment. OPM also provides interactive training and workshops tailored to agency-specific telework programme requirements, which includes training supervisors to enable them to manage remote workers.
102. Teleworking is not a right and participation is voluntary, with each of the federal agencies having the option to draw up its own eligibility criteria for employees subject to operational and business needs. The eligibility of a post is dependent on an individual having demonstrated an acceptable level of performance.
103. The Assembly research found that the 2010 Act requires each agency to establish a telework policy under which eligible employees may be authorised to telework. The federal agencies must consult OPM in the development of their policies and the Act also requires the agencies to provide a telework training programme.
104. The OPM provision of consultants gives agencies the support to ensure that their performance management systems are suitably robust and OPM also provides an oversight role at a federal level. OPM has to provide a report to Congress and to a body similar to the Northern Ireland Audit Office. In terms of lessons potentially applicable to the NI context, the Committee notes that OPM identified a problem with the setting of goals by departments and the absence of standardised government-wide data from payroll providers because of systems capability.
105. Members also note that the challenges for US federal agencies were similar despite the differences in the number of staff employed. Manager resistance, technology challenges, the availability of telework to all employees, performance management, access to senior leadership, office coverage, and budget and funding were problems for all agencies. Case

63 Appendix 6 – Assembly Research Paper: Telework in the US Federal Government, 30 September 2013.

studies were also presented in the Assembly research which offered more in-depth evidence to the Committee.

106. In terms of any friction arising from the fact that some employees are deemed eligible to telework while others are not, the Committee notes that responses from federal agencies stated that this is not a significant problem and any issues that do arise are addressed in consultation with the unions. The agencies promote transparency for employees and ensure that decisions on teleworking are taken purely on business needs and on the suitability of a position for teleworking.
107. On the performance and productivity of teleworkers, responses also highlighted that a teleworker's performance is treated the same way as that of an office worker. An employee's performance can be measured via the outputs and the use of project milestones, key targets, progress reports and team reviews are particularly useful. One of the responses emphasised that, because an employee may be at a desk in an office, it did not necessarily mean that he/she was working and being productive. If it was found that a teleworker's performance was not meeting the required standards, the right to telework could be withdrawn.
108. The Committee also noted an OPM report⁶⁴ on flexible working, published in 2013, which stated that the results clearly illustrated a growing government-wide commitment to incorporating teleworking as a standard practice. The report also showed substantial cost savings, as eight agencies reported closing buildings and offices as a result of teleworking and substantial savings were also reported in terms of travel costs.
109. From the evidence outlined above, it is apparent to the Committee that, in terms of co-ordinated action on the flexible location of work, the NI public sector lags behind the other jurisdictions considered. DFP will therefore be able to draw upon the lessons learnt from the experience elsewhere in supporting the Executive in taking a strategic policy direction on flexible working across the public sector in NI. **While members do not presently see a case for legislating for flexible location working in the NI public sector, the Committee recommends that the proposed Programme for Government commitment and guiding principles include an onus on all departments to ensure that the work styles and tasks associated with each NICS job role are assessed at the business area or team level to determine the applicable flexible working practices. The Committee considers that this will help to drive the implementation of the strategic policy within and across departments.** This issue is further discussed below.

Considerations for the successful implementation of flexible working in the NI public sector

110. From its review of the evidence the Committee highlights the following key elements for the successful implementation of flexible working in the public sector in NI.
- Establishing evidence, managing resistance and leading change**
111. Members are mindful that, despite the weight of evidence on the potential benefits of flexible working, resistance remains as a major barrier. As such, the Committee wanted to explore the approaches and methodologies that can be used to overcome this resistance.
112. The importance of agreeing the vision and building the business case was highlighted in the evidence from Women Like Us and from Andy Lake. The latter has stated that 'to move flexible working successfully from theory to practice, there needs to be a business case built on robust evidence'. This requires a systematic approach consisting of: gathering evidence; consultation; analysing the work people do; calculation of costs and savings (the business

64 Appendix 6 – Assembly Research Paper: Flexible Working: Further Evidence, 12 March 2013.

- case); establishing key metrics; planning and delivering the changes to IT, communications, premises, HR policies, etc; training; and evaluation.⁶⁵
113. In his evidence, Andy Lake also emphasised the importance of support from the top level of management in driving forward the flexible working agenda. He stated that resistance can be overcome by raising awareness, developing a vision and agreeing a set of principles that are signed off at a high level. Once this is done it needs to be communicated and put into practice by senior management and it is only when senior management buy-in is achieved that resistance can be minimised.
114. In the view of Andy Lake, culture change is a vital part in the overall change management process to ensure the success of a move towards flexible working. A lot of work in the public sector is done in a certain way because that is the way it has always been done. As familiarity is one of the hardest cultural issues to overcome, there needs to be a challenge to the existing policies and processes to examine if the same goals can be achieved using less resource. If this is to happen, it needs staff to be open to new ideas but also needs the employer to embark upon a culture change in the organisation.
115. The CIPD Report 'Flexible Working: The Implementation Challenge'⁶⁶ stated that the organisations that had played a part in its research were convinced of the importance of management ability to successfully implement flexible working. They also considered that there was a need for managers to operate in a work culture which helped to promote rather than hinder flexible working. The methods used by organisations to overcome the challenges of implementation include the training of managers, coaching managers to be open minded to alternative working patterns, highlighting successful case studies and ensuring senior management actively support and promote flexible working. The organisations had few people that were permanently home based and had set out ground rules for flexible workers to ensure that they were never isolated and had open lines of communication with colleagues and management.
116. In his collated case studies, Dr Oseland⁶⁷ found that the common thread was that no two organisations were the same and that each one needed to look closely at itself, including an understanding of why it is making a move towards flexible working. There is a need to trust staff working remotely and for buy in from all levels of the organisation, right up to senior management. Dr Oseland believed that middle management was the main barrier when it came to cultural change. Middle managers learn to work in a certain way and seem to struggle when they are informed that things are going to change. This can be overcome though, via training and support.
117. Salford City Council also experienced some level of resistance within the workplace, particularly at management level. In order to resolve these issues the Council adopted a model of change management entitled 'Salford's 8 Steps to Transformation'⁶⁸. This model gave local managers the opportunity to lead the change and to demonstrate to others just how the new work styles could work.
118. An analysis of the evidence and the case studies from the USA shows that strong top-level support is vital for the success of flexible working projects. After encountering an initial strong level of management resistance, the agencies that had introduced teleworking had overcome this through their engagement with management and through training and support being offered on a continuous basis.

65 Lake, A. (2013), *Smart Flexibility: Moving Smart and Flexible Working from Theory to Practice*, Gower Publishing, Surrey, and Appendix 5 – Other Papers - [Flexibility.co.uk](http://flexibility.co.uk) June 2011.

66 <http://www.cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/guides/flexible-working-implementation-challenge.aspx>

67 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland: Briefing from Nigel Oseland, 13 March 2013.

68 Appendix 4 – Written Submissions: Correspondence from Salford City Council, 20 March 2013.

119. It is clear to the Committee from the evidence that the biggest challenge in ensuring the successful implementation of flexible working is in gaining commitment at the top level of management and creating a conducive organisational culture. Indeed, this may be a particular consideration for NICS in view of its piecemeal approach to flexible location working and the initial apprehension expressed by DFP officials during discussion of the absence of corporate policy in this area, as alluded to previously.⁶⁹

Engaging staff

120. In its evidence to the Committee, NIPSA recognised the advantages of flexible working and advocated the use of advancing technologies in the public sector to help people be more efficient in how they work⁷⁰. However, the Union stressed that this must be looked at in relation to the benefit to individual workers as well as to employers. NIPSA also emphasised that flexible working should not be introduced in a way that diminishes the existing terms and conditions of workers.
121. The session with NIPSA also underlined the importance of early and meaningful engagement with trade union representatives, who would be in favour of utilising flexible working in certain circumstances and under particular conditions. NIPSA also took the view that homeworking works better as part of a menu of options available under the umbrella of flexible working.
122. The importance of proper engagement was apparent when the Committee examined the Code of Practice which exists in RoI⁷¹. The Code was developed in conjunction with the employers' association and the trade unions. It was considered that, because both parties were represented at an early stage and right through discussions, this had led to the publication of a durable code with the interests of both parties being clearly outlined in the document.
123. In his evidence, Andy Lake also saw engagement with the workforce as essential to ensuring that they do not perceive the introduction of flexible working practices as an initiative that is being forced upon them. He emphasised the need to convey the message that it is a new way of working, which would fit in better with people's lifestyles and this would achieve buy in from the start.

Assessing job tasks for flexibility

124. The Committee noted the range of views expressed in the evidence on how best to determine the applicability of flexible working practices to given job roles, work or tasks. During an evidence session in February 2013, DFP officials were keen to underline the argument that particular types of work are more applicable and suitable for flexible working practices. Officials argued that certain posts, such as IT jobs, could be classed as *'outcome-based jobs...and therefore, as a manager, I do not need to see someone in a location, or at their desk, to feel confident that my organisation is performing well, because we can design performance indicators around a service-level agreement'*⁷²
125. Evidence from Women Like Us highlighted certain jobs for which other forms of flexible working will be more appropriate than homeworking. For example, homeworking can be more appropriate for roles that are not client facing or do not have a dynamic team culture. However, a job in financial services may be more appropriate for an annualised hours approach when there are peaks and troughs over the course of the year. It was further argued

69 Oral Briefing by Department of Finance and Personnel officials, 15 May 2013. <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/finance-2011-2016/minutes/2012-2013/20130515.pdf>

70 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Flexible Working Inquiry: NIPSA, 4 December 2013.

71 Appendix 5 – Other papers: New Ways of Living & Working E-Working in Ireland, February 2014.

72 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland: DFP Briefing, 13 February 2013.

- that it is a matter for each organisation to decide which flexible working option better suits which role and it is important to have a range of different options.⁷³
126. Women Like Us also highlighted a barrier to successful implementation of flexible working arising from a lack of understanding about job design and how to shape jobs to meet the delivery of outputs. It was argued that this can be overcome by, amongst other things, focusing on job design processes at recruitment stage, and by employers indicating from first recruitment stage, i.e. advertisement stage, that they are open to flexibility within new roles.
127. Evidence from Salford City Council highlighted the different types of work styles that can dictate flexible working opportunities. The importance of these styles is that each one was different; Council officials stated that it was important to take account of the difference in styles and to ensure that appropriate technology was in place for each one to do their job effectively.⁷⁴ This view was shared by NIPSA who stated that teleworking/homeworking is not necessarily suitable for every position within an employer the size of NICS or the public sector.
128. Dr Oseland's evidence also emphasised that different roles are more suitable for flexible working than others. For example, processing work, where people do not have to be at their desks for their results to be measured, would be easier to monitor rather than creative work. For its part, New Ways of Working emphasised that, of equal importance to selecting the right job, is selecting the right people. New Ways of Working stated that there are certain jobs, or aspects of a job, that contain characteristics which would be more desirable for flexible working.
129. The Committee notes that, in his evidence and literature on this issue, Andy Lake took a somewhat different tack. He advised that everyone should, 'in principle, be considered eligible for flexible working, without assumptions being made about people or roles'. In every type of public service there can only be a limited number of working practices (e.g. mainly office based, mainly mobile, site specific, working at certain times) and types of work (e.g. process work, knowledge work, case work, interactive work, external/internal facing). In this regard, he has explained that:
- 'Breaking down the work styles and the tasks that people do means that the infrastructure and appropriate range of workplaces can be developed that allow people from different services to work effectively in many more locations than they do at present, and at more appropriate times for the people they deal with, while at the same time having access to all systems and information'.⁷⁵*
130. By adopting this approach it has been shown that flexibility can be applied to certain aspects of public sector roles which would be less obviously suited to flexible working, such as those of teachers, doctors and firefighters.⁷⁶ Flexibility should therefore only be constrained in terms of the particular tasks associated with a given job. The Committee recognises that, while in some cases 100% of a job will suit flexible working, in other cases it may only be parts of a job, in terms of specific tasks, which are suited to given flexible working practices and which may comprise a small proportion of the time worked. Members are of the view that these considerations should, ideally, be established at pre-recruitment stage.

73 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland: Women Like Us Briefing, 27 February 2013.

74 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland: Salford City Council Briefing, 20 March 2013.

75 Lake, A. (2013), *Smart Flexibility: Moving Smart and Flexible Working from Theory to Practice*, Gower Publishing, Surrey, p.212.

76 *ibid.*

Minimising Conflict

131. Arising from the evidence, members were conscious of the possibility of conflict between employees, in terms of those who were and were not offered flexible working opportunities. In considering the risk of engendering envy between employees, New Ways of Working advised that, if employees are managed correctly, and have produced the results required by their positions, then such envy should, in theory, be lessened.
132. New Ways of Working also highlighted the importance of having adequate reason to introduce flexible working and having clear objectives for doing so. This may involve a statement of intent to offer flexible working only after jobs have been properly identified as being suitable for flexible working. The process for doing this must be clear and transparent to ensure that any bad feelings are mitigated and that clear selection criteria is used for all staff.
133. In his evidence, Dr Oseland highlighted how important it is to know how to manage people who may either work flexibly or work from home. He believed that the key to this is the way in which managers are trained to manage people by results rather than by being present in an office. Dr Oseland also highlighted the need to address the fairness aspect which should be considered when offering employees flexible working. He stated that, as this option may not be suitable for all staff, it was important to offer the right to flexible working whilst also giving alternatives which will be suitable for different staff as well as applying a clear vision, guidelines and rules to ensure people understand the reasons as to why they are deemed as not being fully flexible.⁷⁷

Managing performance by results

134. Reference has been made already to the need for a cultural shift away from ‘managing by presence’ and to ‘managing by results’ within the public sector in NI. In the initial stages of the Inquiry, the Committee noted a perception that there needed to be additional monitoring of the performance of mobile or remote workers and that this can add a burden on managers, thus taking away from business efficiency which is considered a positive result of flexible working. Members were keen to examine this perception more closely and to explore how such flexible workers can be managed properly to ensure productivity and to avoid adding burdens which would compromise business efficiency.
135. New Ways of Working outlined different approaches to measuring workplace productivity in the context of flexible working, stating that performance management should be based on results and outcomes rather than presence in the traditional office environment. It was suggested that, in the early stages of flexible working, there perhaps needs to be more formal reporting to management but this does not need to be overly complicated as long as it is focused on objectives and progress.
136. Dr Oseland also argued that managing performance by results rather than inputs can be achieved quite easily, highlighting case studies where companies achieved greater profitability following the introduction of flexible working. He informed members that there are metrics available which can measure productivity and pointed to the availability of software which could monitor the activity of a particular IP address for example.
137. The evidence and literature from Andy Lake provided further insights into this area, emphasising that an organisation needs to focus on its outputs and that this focus should already be a huge part of people management anyway. Indeed, Andy Lake has pointed out that:

‘There is a principle involved here – if you’re finding it hard to think how to measure output if someone’s out of the office, there’s almost certainly something wrong with your performance management already. It indicates an uncertainty around what people are meant to be doing,

77 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland: Briefing from Nigel Oseland, 13 March 2013.

*and in knowing exactly what a good result is...having more people working in different places and at different times should be seen as an opportunity to tighten things up and get more systematic.*⁷⁸

138. It was also argued that, whilst this is undoubtedly easier to implement in a sales/target based job, it is not an insurmountable task to introduce it into the public sector if it can be structured and broken down into a series of projects which have clear objectives and outcomes. The focus of performance management needs to move away from time input to productive output.⁷⁹
139. Andy Lake highlighted the following three steps to be taken:
- think about the type of work that is involved and the kind of measurements that can apply (he provided a typology in this regard for application across sectors and occupations);
 - apply measures of quantity and quality for the outputs; and
 - consider any additional issues arising from measuring the amount and quality of work when such work is done at different places or times when line management does not have immediate oversight (e.g. the need to focus initially on outputs rather than wait on outcomes).⁸⁰
140. It was further noted that emerging technologies can assist in monitoring the performance of remote/agile/mobile workers. Examples included Microsoft Link, instant messaging and conference calls, all of which can make people more visibly available.

Providing smart workplaces

141. The Committee noted the literature on good practice workplace design in facilitating flexible working and the potential benefits which can accrue in terms of employee productivity. Given the current budgetary pressures on the Executive, however, members placed a more immediate focus on the potential efficiency savings from the consolidation of government office accommodation arising from flexible working supported by appropriate workplace design.
142. Reference has already been made to case-study evidence in GB and USA on the reduction in property costs that can be achieved from the implementation of flexible working practices. Under the Departmental Reform of Property Management Plan, DFP has a lead role in terms the vacating of existing leased office space and the fitting out of office space to Workplace NI standards. However, the Committee has discovered that there is significant scope for a consolidation of office space within NICS. This is evident from a recent DFP's assessment which indicated that only 20% of current NICS office space meets workspace utilisation targets⁸¹. The Committee sees this as being particularly important in light of the Inquiry evidence highlighting that the traditional office is typically occupied only around 45% of the time.⁸²
143. In terms of ensuring the successful implementation of flexible location working within the NI public sector, members are mindful of the evidence from Andy Lake, who cautioned against the reduction in property costs being seen as the main reason for the introduction of flexible working. He acknowledged that it can be a main driver but felt that citing a reduction in property costs as the sole factor may lead to people feeling disgruntled. His advice was that it would be better to emphasise from the start that flexible working is about doing things

78 Lake, A. (2013), *Smart Flexibility: Moving Smart and Flexible Working from Theory to Practice*, Gower Publishing, Surrey, p.125.

79 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Flexible Working Inquiry: Flexibility.co.uk, 26 February 2014.

80 Lake, A. (2013), *Smart Flexibility: Moving Smart and Flexible Working from Theory to Practice*, Gower Publishing, Surrey, pp. 173-174.

81 Appendix 3 – Memoranda and Correspondence from DFP 8 August 2014.

82 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: *The Smart Working Handbook*, Flexibility.co.uk, June 2011.

better, whilst being less wasteful with existing resources. While accepting this point, the Committee is also mindful of the advice that, depending on the starting point and ambition of an organisation, property savings of 50% or more are achievable through a strategic approach to smart working, including an aim to maximise property rationalisation.⁸³

144. In his evidence, Andy Lake also advised that a smart working environment should contain a mixture of different spaces, with each addressing the needs of particular workers. This set up would include meeting spaces, break-out rooms, quiet rooms and multipurpose areas with the aim of ensuring that the space available is used most effectively. Similarly, Dr Oseland espoused the need to introduce different types of office space within a flexible working environment to offer a choice for employees. He advised that it was best to *'try to balance the open plan with semi-partitioned spaces and perhaps introduce a quiet room.....create spaces in which people can get away from the large open plan spaces and break it up...by offering occasional homeworking, people can get that report done.'*⁸⁴
145. Brian Thompson of Workplace Design briefed the Committee in May 2013 on the principles of good workplace design and how these could be applied to the Workplace NI accommodation principles. He highlighted the importance of understanding the business needs of the organisation that will occupy the workspace and that it is these needs which should drive the design of a workplace. He also reinforced the importance of having space which is flexible, adaptable and addresses a variety of work settings, as well as the importance of environmental conditions in the workplace - e.g. air quality, lighting and controllability of the environment.
146. As part of the Inquiry, the Committee considered the 'Key Workplace NI Accommodation Principles' that are applied to new or refurbished NICS offices and which place an emphasis on open plan offices as well as touchdown spaces and 'hot-desking'. Members noted that NICS is actively considering the issue of workplace design through the future@work business zones, touch-down spaces and hubs available at some locations. It was evident from the literature that, while there are many different models of workhubs and this is a fast evolving area – including in terms of third-party providers – they can offer an effective solution both in terms of facilitating flexible location working and reducing office space. In addition, the economic regeneration role that workhubs can play in supporting businesses, particularly in rural areas, has been recognised, with evidence that 'well-located workhubs attracted local home-based businesses'.⁸⁵ Members also acknowledge the potential for these facilities to assist in overcoming the barrier to remote working in rural areas arising from broadband capability issues.
147. The Committee wrote to DFP on several occasions to obtain more information on the existing NICS workhubs, including up-to-date figures on user numbers. In December 2013, members were informed that there were two formal future@work business zones – Castle Buildings (Stormont Estate, Belfast) and Marlborough House (Craigavon) – which facilitate staff in working remotely as part of their job (although other less formal arrangements and facilities are also in existence). Two other business zones, at Causeway Exchange and Clare House in Belfast, are no longer available, as they have been removed to facilitate various pressing accommodation needs within each of these buildings. DFP Properties Division, however, is currently undertaking a review of the Department's existing Belfast city centre office accommodation to assess the viability of providing business zone type facilities at more locations.⁸⁶

83 Lake, A. (2013), *Smart Flexibility: Moving Smart and Flexible Working from Theory to Practice*, Gower Publishing, Surrey, p.232.

84 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland: Briefing from Nigel Oseland, 13 March 2013.

85 Lake, A. (2013), *Smart Flexibility: Moving Smart and Flexible Working from Theory to Practice*, Gower Publishing, Surrey, pp. 101-102, 222-223.

86 Appendix 3 – Memoranda and Correspondence from DFP 19 December 2013.

148. The Committee was further advised that business zone user statistics are not held for Castle Buildings, as many staff and visitors using the facilities, both formally and informally, were already in the building for other reasons. The facility in Marlborough House was used a total of 1,968 times between January 2013 and November 2013, an average of 179 times per month. The monthly average for comparison between May 2011 and December 2012, was 126 visits. Members also understand that there are no restrictions as to what grade can use the facilities and the decision lies with line managers, taking into account business requirements.⁸⁷
149. From the responses to the Inquiry from other departments, it is evident that there are some other satellite office facilities across the NICS. Employees can use these when they are away from their traditional office environments – for example, DARD staff can work at the various DARD Direct offices throughout NI. However, such facilities appear to be open to a relatively small number of users and are to be used for short-term working opportunities based on business needs.
150. It was evident to the Committee that there is a need for more complete data to be collected on workhub user numbers; Marlborough House was the only facility able to provide monthly statistics. Members also note that there is scope for further geographical spread, which is perhaps a factor in the relatively low usage figures. The low figures may also be attributed to the absence of a centrally driven policy and guidance, with decisions being left to line managers.
151. **The Committee firmly believes that the strategic implementation of flexible working, facilitated by a corresponding roll out of appropriately designed workplaces, will maximise the property savings to be achieved from the rationalisation of government office accommodation. Given the current budgetary pressures on the Executive and the considerable scope for consolidation of the NICS estate, this should be a key priority for DFP; though members recognise that the rationale for flexible working is primarily about doing things better, whilst being less wasteful with existing resources, rather than solely about reducing accommodation costs.**
152. **In terms of enabling flexible location working, the Committee recommends a carefully planned and co-ordinated extension of the workhub/satellite office network across the NI public sector. This should aim to achieve a more joined-up and collaborative approach by public sector bodies to improve the geographic spread of the facilities and enable a greater number and range of public servants to work remotely as applicable, with a view to realising the associated benefits, not least the work-life balance, environmental and economic benefits from reduced travel time.**

Embracing new technology

153. Throughout the Inquiry, members were continually reminded of the impact that existing and emerging technology will play as NICS takes forward flexible working. In some of the initial evidence received, concerns were highlighted with data security issues, particularly around new mobile technologies. Concerns centred on the security of data on devices, particularly if an individual was using their own personal device to avail of flexible working.
154. On this latter point, in its evidence to the Committee, NIPSA stated that it did not agree with the use of personal computer facilities on behalf of employers, due to concerns with governance. NIPSA felt this type of practice places more responsibility on the employee and may lead to disciplinary issues should proper procedures not be in place. The NIPSA officials felt that any such use would therefore require clear guidance showing the levels of responsibility and where that responsibility lies, preferably following consultation or negotiation on the use of personal equipment. The Union also voiced concern with existing

87 Appendix 3 – Memoranda and Correspondence from DFP 19 December 2013.

IT provision and the historical problems of introducing new technologies into NICS (i.e. the inability to get the systems right on previous occasions).

155. In addition to exploring such concerns, the Committee was keen to take evidence on how new technology presents new options to support flexible working practices such as mobile working. In this regard, in May 2014, members received evidence from Momentum NI, the federation for ICT organisations in NI⁸⁸. In acknowledging that the public sector may have a particular data security concern, Momentum NI explained that these can be overcome as well-proven technology and tools exist to cover any security issues. In its view, there was nothing, from a technology standpoint, to stop the public sector from implementing flexible working, the major issue was from a cultural, change management and personnel point of view.
156. Another problem highlighted by Momentum NI was that, when it came to adopting new technology, NI seemed to lag behind and was seen as risk averse. Arising from the security worries, there seemed to be a reluctance to introduce technology until it was deemed to be completely proven and also a reluctance to move away from paper systems.
157. In terms of the security concerns, Dr Oseland's evidence also highlighted the use of 'thin client technology' which may provide an extra level of security in relation to data. This is a desktop appliance with no hard drive where all sensitive data is stored at a central location.
158. Salford City Council also touched on security of information in its evidence to the Committee. The Council uses encryption on devices to ensure security of data and homeworkers use appropriate software to work through a secure link with appropriate firewalls, a link which ceases at the end of each work session. The Council also has data management officials who monitor security and are tasked with keeping abreast of the changing methods in dealing with data security.⁸⁹
159. In terms of the opportunities from new technology, the Committee was informed by one of the Momentum NI member companies that its technology was not just about IT systems but was about bringing savings through the transformation of a business and how it works with changes in the working practices and processes. It was pointed out that, in order to ensure that people are brought on board with the changes, they need to be engaged from the start to feel a sense of ownership, and training and support needs to be provided on an ongoing basis.
160. In its evidence, Momentum NI also demonstrated how one of its member companies has provided health trusts in England with a software solution which ensures that district nurses have access to all the information needed when carrying out patient appointments in the community, including patient history. The nurses can then use the technology to update records during or after the appointment rather than having to return to the office to complete these tasks. This has resulted in nurses being able to visit two extra patients per day.
161. In keeping with the theme of the Inquiry, the Committee conducted several of its evidence sessions via web and video conferencing technology. In addition to testing the technology itself, the Committee sought data from DFP on the use of video conferencing by NICS departments and on both the associated savings to date and the potential savings from further rollout. In its response, DFP advised that, while departments have been using video conferencing for many years, there has not been a cohesive NICS strategy or approach to this issue. Members noted that, as part of the NICS Unified Communications Initiative, there was investment in infrastructure to bring together existing and future video conferencing units into an integrated telepresence network which will also link to desktop and phone based video users.⁹⁰ However, in terms of data on usage and savings, DFP stated:

88 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Flexible Working Inquiry: Momentum, 14 May 2014.

89 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Evidence: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland: Salford City Council Briefing, 20 March 2013.

90 Appendix 3 – Memoranda and Correspondence from DFP 9 March 2012.

‘The procurement and therefore justification of video conferencing units is the responsibility of the department and business area which makes use of the facility. It is therefore down to the relevant department to track the benefits derived from the installation of the equipment. From a central perspective we can identify how many times a video unit has been used and who it has connected to, but we cannot tell how many staff have been involved at each end or the exact amount of travel that has been saved.’⁹¹

162. DFP was, nonetheless, able to provide some examples to indicate usage and savings potential. It advised that the video conferencing unit in Rathgael House, commissioned on 12th June 2012, had been used 52 times by January 2013, resulting in a significant saving in staff time and travel cost. This included 18 calls to Edinburgh, 6 calls to Sheffield, 6 calls to Cardiff and 3 to Dunfermline. While each of these calls could have saved the price of a flight, DFP was not in a position to tell how many staff were involved for each video session. However, in term of other examples, the Department was able to advise that the video conferencing units utilised by NI Direct staff for daily team meetings were used a total of 194 times from June 2012 to January 2013, saving over £12,000 in travel and saving over 500 hours in travel time (based on one person travelling).⁹²
163. Arising from these findings, members believe that there is scope for a more co-ordinated practice across all NICS departments of making maximum use of web or video conferencing to realise savings by reducing travel time and costs and subsistence costs. The Committee also sees a need for public bodies to move towards enabling the more modern approach of internet-based technology (e.g. Skype) rather than video conferencing technology which can encounter compatibility issues and appears to be less popular. In addition, there is a need for more complete data to be collated, both on the costs of civil servants attending meetings away from their normal places of work, particularly outside NI, and on the use of video/web conferencing technology, as a basis for measuring future savings from more strategic use of the technology.
164. **The Committee is concerned that the public sector in NI appears to lag behind other jurisdictions in adopting new technology to support flexible working practices – a concern which is heightened in view of the prominence of local software companies in this market. In the context of the public sector reform agenda and the NICS People Strategy, the Committee recommends that DFP takes the lead in proactively identifying opportunities for adopting and exploiting technological solutions to enable and support flexible/mobile/agile working in a wider range of public sector job roles.**
165. **With a view to maximising savings from reduced travel costs in NICS, members believe that internet-based conferencing should be the preferred method for civil servants participating in meetings which would otherwise involve travel outside NI.**

Training for change

166. The need for appropriate training was emphasised in the evidence that the Committee received. Training would be required throughout an organisation to ensure that all staff are aware of their role and how the organisation wants flexible working to be implemented. From the evidence, it would seem that the training would need to focus particularly on middle management to ensure they are engaged from an early stage.
167. New Ways of Working recommended that e-workers are included in workplace training to ensure that they are given their place accordingly, to avoid any social isolation and to encourage a team focus. Similarly, in his evidence, Andy Lake cautioned against setting up flexible working arrangements which may isolate employees and advised that training should provide for methods of including employees in social events or meetings with other

91 Appendix 3 – Memoranda and Correspondence from DFP, 6 March 2013.

92 Appendix 3 – Memoranda and Correspondence from DFP, 16 May 2013.

employees at regular intervals. Also, middle managers and team leaders require training in managing change as they are the people that will be at the sharp end of the change.

168. **The Committee recommends that, in support of the proposed Executive Programme for Government commitment and guiding principles for the strategic application of flexible working practices across departments and other public bodies, DFP develops corporate guidance for successful implementation at a local level. This should, in particular, cover the following types of issues:**
- **Effecting the necessary cultural changes and overcoming attitudinal challenges, including: preparing the ground; gaining leadership commitment; evidence gathering; awareness raising; managing resistance to change; and securing employee cooperation and flexibility.**
 - **Addressing practical aspects, including: assessing jobs for flexibility; technology requirements; workplace design; training; establishing the ground rules and behavioural protocols; and performance management.**
 - **Mitigating the risks, including: management buy-in and top level engagement; strong business cases; employee and union involvement; effective communications; transparency in assessing jobs for flexibility; data security measures; and focus on business needs, results and outcomes.**
169. **The Inquiry evidence, including the lessons from other jurisdictions, will offer a useful resource for the Department and Executive to draw on in developing the proposed principles and guidance for the strategic implementation of flexible working practices across NICS and beyond.**
170. **The Committee would wish to see DFP taking lead responsibility for monitoring and reporting on implementation of the proposed measures, thereby facilitating future Assembly scrutiny at a cross-departmental level. In this regard, the Committee would wish to see a responsibility placed on all departments to provide DFP with the necessary data on the application and uptake of flexible working practices in order that the Department can fulfil a central monitoring role effectively.**

Linkages with wider Government policies

171. The Committee notes that the Inquiry findings relate directly to other government policies and priorities. For example, the linkage to the NICS People Strategy 2013-16 is clear in terms of both the Innovation in Delivery commitment to ‘explore the use of technology to support an agile, flexible and mobile workforce’ and the Workplace commitments to ‘...make the most effective use of enabling technology’ and to ‘...ensure that staff work in environments that are conducive to high performance’.⁹³ Members are also mindful of the linkage with the current drive towards public sector reform by the Minister of Finance and Personnel. The recently-established Public Sector Reform Division within DFP will assist in delivering the aim of providing innovation in service delivery and challenging the way things have been done previously in order to identify and effect improvements, address budgetary pressures and resolve some of the social issues that have affected NI. Members note, in particular, that the work programme for the Division aims to ‘fully exploit the innovative use of technology and improved methods of working to deliver flexible and joined up services’...⁹⁴
172. The relevance of the Inquiry findings to various PfG priorities and commitment is also apparent. For instance, the DARD response to the Inquiry highlighted linkage in terms of the PfG commitments to ‘Advance the relocation of the Headquarters of DARD to a rural area

93 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: Northern Ireland Civil Service People Strategy 2013-16.

94 Appendix 3 – Memoranda and Correspondence from DFP, 23 December 2013.

- by 2015', which falls under Priority 2: Creating Opportunities, Tackling Disadvantage and Improving Health and Wellbeing.
173. The role which flexible working practices can play in reducing sickness absence, as highlighted in the evidence discussed earlier, is an aspect which DFP should be especially interested in exploring in its capacity as lead department for delivering on the PfG commitment to 'Further reduce the levels of sickness absence across the NICS' under Priority 5: Delivering High Quality and Efficient Public Services.
174. Members would therefore highlight this as an area for further investigation by DFP, particularly given the high cost of sickness absence in the NI public sector (estimated at over £150m per year)⁹⁵, coupled with the current budgetary pressure on public finances and the fact that the PfG milestone to 'Reduce the average annual days sick absence per employee to 9.5 days' in 2012-13 was not achieved. Moreover, from recent progress reports against PfG commitments, it is anticipated that the 2013-14 sick absence target will also not be met – 10 days is anticipated as opposed to the target of 9 days.⁹⁶
175. The Committee considers that another potential policy linkage could be made to the Minister of Finance and Personnel's Measuring Wellbeing Initiative. "Wellbeing" is now being used to measure economic performance and as a determinant of social change. This enables government to better understand the trade-offs between economic, social and environmental factors and to focus policy making on what really matters to its citizens. The Minister has stated that this approach will enable some of the higher wellbeing measures to be embedded into new and ongoing initiatives, such as Public Sector Reform.⁹⁷ Members see a relevance in terms of the work-life balance benefits from flexible working, as discussed earlier, and the associated increase in people's quality of life and wellbeing.
176. A further policy linkage which is clear to the Committee is in relation to the Executive's Asset Management Strategy and associated Departmental Reform of Property Management Plan. The inquiry evidence has demonstrated the potential to realise substantial savings from a reduction in office space arising from the implementation of flexible working practices supported by a move to best practice workplace design. In this regard, the Committee has highlighted the findings that only 20% of current NICS office space meets workspace utilisation targets and that the traditional office is typically occupied only around 45% of the time.
177. Finally, the Committee also believes that there is an opportunity, as part of the implementation of the Review of Public Administration and the reduction of councils from 26 to 11 in 2015, for savings to be realised through the application of flexible location working practices, with potential for consolidation of accommodation arising from the use of smart working environments and sharing of office spaces, including between local and central government. Evidence to the Inquiry, including from case studies such as Salford City Council, highlighted how successful outcomes can be achieved with this approach.
178. **The Committee firmly believes that implementation of the Inquiry recommendations will support the delivery of a range of the Executive's existing policies and priorities, including:**
- **the NICS People Strategy 2013-16 commitments on using technology to support a flexible workforce and on creating workplaces conducive to high performance;**
 - **the PfG commitment to further reduce the levels of sickness absence across the NICS;**
 - **the Measuring Wellbeing Initiative;**

95 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: Northern Ireland Audit Office, Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Public Sector, 23 April 2013.

96 Appendix 5 – Other Papers: COFMDFM Correspondence, 18 September 2014.

97 Appendix 3 – Memoranda and Correspondence from the Minister of Finance and Personnel, 27 February 2014.

- **the consolidation of the NICS estate and realising office accommodation savings, including under the Executive's Asset Management Strategy; and**
- **the wider public sector reform agenda.**



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Appendix 1

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday, 1 February 2012

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Conor Murphy MP MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Leslie Cree MBE MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr David Hilditch MLA
Mr Paul Maskey MP MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Sinead Kelly (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Dominic O'Farrell (Clerical Officer)
Ms Aine Gallagher (Bursary Student)

Apologies: Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr William Humphrey MLA
Mr Ross Hussey MLA

10:05am The meeting opened in public session

Agreed: that Agenda items 4, 5 and 6 are recorded by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly website.

4. Flexible Working – Evidence Session from Professor Sir George Bain

The Committee heard evidence from Professor Sir George Bain in relation to flexible working. The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: that staff will prepare draft terms of reference for an inquiry into flexible working.

Agreed: that Research Services will be asked to examine potential case studies of interest.

Agreed: to request an initial oral briefing from DFP to establish the extent to which the Bain recommendations on flexible working and the NICS Homeworking Policy have been implemented.

10:48am Mr Adrian McQuillan left the meeting

11:00am Mr Adrian McQuillan re-joined the meeting

12:48am The Chairperson adjourned the meeting

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 14 March 2012

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Conor Murphy MP MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr David Hilditch MLA
Mr William Humphrey MLA
Mr Ross Hussey MLA
Mr Paul Maskey MP MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Sinead Kelly (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Dominic O'Farrell (Clerical Officer)
Ms Aine Gallagher (Bursary Student)

10.04am The meeting opened in public session.

Agreed: that Agenda items 4, 5 and 6 are covered by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly website.

6. Flexible Working – DFP Evidence Session

The Committee took evidence from the following DFP officials: Derek Baker, Director of Personnel for the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS), Corporate HR, DFP; Robert Fee, Information Strategy and Innovation Division, Corporate Services Group, DFP and Philip Irwin, Head of Properties Division, Corporate Services Group, DFP. The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

11.37am Adrian McQuillan left the meeting.

11.44am William Humphrey left the meeting.

11.46am Mitchel McLaughlin returned to the meeting.

11.56am Ross Hussey returned to the meeting.

12.00pm Leslie Cree left the meeting.

12.00pm Paul Maskey left the meeting.

12.01pm Judith Cochrane returned to the meeting.

12.06pm Adrian McQuillan returned to the meeting.

Agreed: that DFP will provide information on flexible working projects across NICS departments for the purpose of informing the Committee inquiry.

12.40pm The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 30 May 2012

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Conor Murphy MP MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr David Hilditch MLA
Mr William Humphrey MLA
Mr Paul Maskey MP MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Dominic O'Farrell (Clerical Officer)
Miss Aine Gallagher (Bursary Student)

Apologies: Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA

10:04am The meeting opened in public session.

8. Flexible Working- Research Briefing

Members received a briefing from bursary student, Aine Gallagher, on flexible working.

12:14am Mr Humphrey left the meeting

12:14am Mr Hilditch left the meeting

Agreed: that the Committee would consider draft Terms of Reference for a Committee Inquiry into flexible working at a later date.

The Committee thanked the bursary student for her contribution to supporting the work of the Committee and wished her well for the future.

12:46pm The Chairperson adjourned the meeting

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 5 December 2012

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr David McIlveen MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)
Mr Colin Pidgeon (Research Officer) (Agenda items 5 & 6 only)

Apologies: None

10:10am In the absence of the Chairperson the deputy Chairperson opened the meeting in public session.

Agreed: that Agenda item 4 is recorded by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly website.

7. Flexible Working Inquiry – Consideration of Draft Terms of Reference

The Committee noted evidence and research papers on Flexible Working, which had been received earlier in the year, and considered a draft Terms of Reference for the Inquiry.

12:17pm Mr McCallister joined the meeting.

12:23pm Mr Weir left the meeting.

12:26pm Mr McQuillan left the meeting.

12:30pm Mr Weir joined the meeting.

12:31pm Mr Weir left the meeting.

Agreed: that the draft Terms of Reference for the Inquiry, as amended, will be kept under review as the Inquiry progresses.

Agreed: that the draft signposting notice for newspapers would be published with a twelve week deadline for submissions.

Agreed: to begin scheduling oral evidence from witnesses included in the initial list of stakeholders, which had been developed from the preliminary evidence and research received to date.

12:39pm The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 13 February 2013

Clare House, Airport Road West, Belfast

Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Leslie Cree MBE MLA
Ms Megan Fearon MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)
Mr Gavin Moore (Bursary Student)

Apologies: Judith Cochrane MLA
David McIlveen MLA

10:10am The meeting opened in public session.

Agreed: that Agenda item 5 on the Flexible Working Inquiry is recorded by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly website.

Members received a 'Future at Work' demonstration and a tour of Clare House.

11:38am The meeting resumed.

5. Flexible Working in the Public Sector – DFP evidence session

11:38am Mr Weir returned to the meeting.

The Committee took evidence from the following DFP officials: Paul Wickens, Chief Executive, Enterprise Shared Services (ESS); Robert Fee, Enterprise Design Authority, ESS; Barry Lowry, Director IT Services, ESS; and Mark Bailey, Head of Pay and Policy, Corporate Human Resources. The session was recorded by Hansard.

11:55am Mr McCallister returned to the meeting.

12:21pm Mr McQuillan left the meeting.

12:28pm Mr Bradley left the meeting.

Agreed: that the DFP officials will provide additional information as agreed during the session. The Committee also requested a written response to issues not covered during the evidence session.

12:38pm The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 20 February 2013

Room 29 Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Leslie Cree MBE MLA
Ms Megan Fearon MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr David McIlveen MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)
Mr Gavin Moore (Bursary Student)

10:05am In the absence of the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson opened the meeting in public session.

5. Committee Work Programme

Flexible Working Inquiry

The Committee noted that Emma Stewart, the Director of "Women Like Us", will brief members at next week's meeting via a sound conference call.

Agreed: the Secretariat will prepare a list of issues for discussion, which will be shared with Emma Stewart in advance of the evidence session.

10:31am The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 27 February 2013

Room 30 Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE MLA
Ms Megan Fearon MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr David McIlveen MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

In Attendance Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)
Mr Gavin Moore (Bursary Student)
Dr Robert Barry (Senior Research Officer) (Agenda item 5 only)

10:06am The meeting opened in public session.

7. **Flexible Working in the Public Sector – Evidence from Women Like Us**

As part of its inquiry into this matter, the Committee took evidence from Emma Stewart MBE, Director of Women Like Us, via a sound conference call. The session was recorded by Hansard.

12:17pm Mrs Cochrane left the meeting.

12:21pm Mr Girvan left the meeting.

12:23pm Mr Girvan returned to the meeting.

Agreed: the witness will provide follow-up information as agreed during the evidence session.

12:32pm The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 13 March 2013

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Leslie Cree MBE MLA
Ms Megan Fearon MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr David McIlveen MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

10:04am The meeting opened in public session.

Agreed: that Agenda item 4 is recorded by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly website.

4. Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector – Evidence Session with Nigel Oseland

The Committee took oral evidence from Nigel Oseland, Workplace Unlimited and co-author of "Flexible Working Benefits: Collated Evidence and Case Studies". The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

10:12am Mr Girvan joined the meeting.

10:24am Mr McQuillan joined the meeting.

10:30am Mr Weir left the meeting.

10:35am Mr Weir returned to the meeting.

10:35am Mr McCallister joined the meeting.

Agreed: that the written evidence relating to the Inquiry, as well as the oral evidence, is placed on the Assembly webpages once it is considered by the Committee as this will help to inform any further witnesses providing evidence to the Inquiry.

11:48am The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 20 March 2013

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr David McIlveen MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA
Ms Sandra Overend MLA, Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Item 10 only)

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Megan Fearon MLA

Agreed: that Agenda items 5 and 6 are recorded by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly website.

7. Flexible Working Inquiry – Evidence from Salford City Council

The Committee took evidence from David Horsler, Customer and Support Services, Salford City Council via videolink. The session was recorded by Hansard.

11:15am Mr Weir left the meeting.

11:20am Mr Weir returned to the meeting.

The Committee agreed to take correspondence next.

12:41pm The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 10 April 2013

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE MLA
Ms Megan Fearon MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr David McIlveen MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: None.

10:06am The meeting opened in public session.

Agreed: that Agenda items 4 and 5 are recorded by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly website.

5. Flexible Working Inquiry – Evidence from the Recruitment and Employment Confederation

The Committee took evidence from Tom Hadley, Director of Policy and Professional Services, Recruitment & Employment Confederation and Ben Farber, Senior Policy Advisor, Recruitment & Employment Confederation via conference call. The session was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: that the conference call facility would not be used as a method for taking further evidence in relation to the Inquiry.

10:59am Mr Weir left the meeting.

11:00am Mr Cree left the meeting.

11:02am Ms Fearon left the meeting.

11:05am Mr McQuillan and Mr Girvan left the meeting.

11:05am Ms Fearon joined the meeting.

11:17am The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 1 May 2013

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE MLA
Ms Megan Fearon MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr David McIlveen MLA

10:11am The meeting opened in public session.

Agreed: that Agenda items 4 and 5 are recorded by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly website.

6. Flexible Working Inquiry – Assembly Research Briefing

The Committee received a briefing from Assembly Research on the research paper, Flexible Working: Further Evidence.

11:16am Mr Weir returned to the meeting.

11:25am Mr McCallister left the meeting.

11:35am Mr McCallister returned to the meeting.

11:40am Mrs Cochrane joined the meeting.

Agreed: that the researcher would provide additional information as requested during the briefing.

Agreed: that the research paper would be copied to DFP for response to each of the issues and areas for consideration highlighted in the paper.

Agreed: that further evidence sessions would be scheduled to conclude the Inquiry.

11:56am The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 4 December 2013

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Michaela Boyle MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE, MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr Ian McCrea MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Dominic Bradley MLA
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA

10.16am The meeting commenced in public session.

Agreed: that agenda items 5 and 6 are recorded by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly's website.

4. Flexible Working Inquiry – Assembly Research Briefing

The Committee received a briefing from Assembly Research on the following research papers: 'Telework in the US Federal Government'; and 'Technology for flexible working: sources of evidence'. In relation to the latter, it was noted that a further source of evidence would be the Professor of Telecommunications at the University of Ulster's School of Computing and Information Engineering, who has expertise on the emerging technologies to support flexible working.

Agreed: to schedule evidence via video-conferencing from relevant US federal agencies in addition to evidence on the technology for flexible working.

5. Flexible Working Inquiry – Evidence from Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance

The Committee received evidence on the Flexible Working Inquiry from the following Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) representatives:

- Kieron Bannon – Assistant General Secretary of NIPSA;
- Billy Lynn – Chairperson of NIPSA Civil Service Group Executive Committee.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

10.51am Paul Girvan left the meeting.

10.55am Paul Girvan rejoined the meeting.

11.05am Michaela Boyle left the meeting.

11.10am Ian McCrea left the meeting.

11.15am Michaela Boyle rejoined the meeting.

Agreed: to request data from DFP on the breakdown of homeworkers/teleworkers in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, including gender breakdown, and also up-to-date figures on the usage of the 'satellite hubs' across Northern Ireland.

11.30am The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 5 February 2014

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Michaela Boyle MLA
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE, MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr Ian McCrea MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Joe Westland (Clerical Supervisor)
Miss Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Daithí McKay (Chairperson)

10:11am The meeting commenced in public session.

The Clerk informed members that both the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson would not be available at the beginning of today's meeting and invited nominations for a temporary Chairperson.

It was proposed by Mr Weir and seconded by Mr Cree that Mr McLaughlin takes the Chair of the Committee until either the Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson joined the meeting. Mr McLaughlin duly took the Chair.

10:12am The meeting moved to closed session for a preparatory preview of today's business.

10:15am The meeting returned to open session.

Agreed: that agenda items 4, 5 and 6 are recorded by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly's website.

4. **Flexible Working Inquiry – Stakeholder Evidence via video-link**

10:16am Judith Cochrane joined the meeting

10:20am John McCallister joined the meeting

The Committee received evidence on the Flexible Working Inquiry, via video-link, from the following witness:

- Riona Carroll – New Ways of Working.

10:30am Paul Girvan joined the meeting.

10:35am Dominic Bradley joined the meeting.

10:40am Peter Weir left the meeting.

10:47am Peter Weir rejoined the meeting.

10:50am John McCallister left the meeting.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: that the witness will respond in writing to any follow up queries from the Committee.

10:50am Dominic Bradley took the Chair

12:00pm The Deputy Chairperson adjourned the meeting

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 26 February 2014

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Daithi McKay (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE, MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr Ian McCrea MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Joe Westland (Clerical Supervisor)
Miss Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)
Ms Pamela Dugdale (Assembly Researcher) – Agenda item 5

Apologies: Ms Michaela Boyle MLA

10:12am The meeting commenced in public session.

4. **Flexible Working Inquiry – Stakeholder Evidence via video-link**

The Committee received evidence on the Flexible Working Inquiry from the following witness:

- Andy Lake - Director, Flexibility.co.uk

The session was recorded by Hansard.

10:25am John McCallister joined the meeting.

10:25am Peter Weir joined the meeting.

10:40am Ian McCrea left the meeting.

10:45am Judith Cochrane left the meeting.

10:45am John McCallister left the meeting.

12:32pm The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 14 May 2014

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Daithí McKay (Chairperson)
Ms Michaela Boyle MLA
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE, MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr Ian McCrea MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Joe Westland (Clerical Supervisor)
Miss Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)

Agreed: that agenda items 4, 5 and 6 are covered by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly's website.

4. **Flexible Working Inquiry – Briefing from Momentum NI**

The Committee received a presentation on the Flexible Working Inquiry from the following witnesses from Momentum NI:

- Ken Moran, Board Member, Momentum NI;
- John Martin, Project Manager, Total Mobile, Momentum NI; and
- Ronnie Geddis, Sales Director, Total Mobile, Momentum NI.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

10:20am Paul Girvan joined the meeting.

10:25am Peter Weir left the meeting.

10:30am Peter Weir re-joined the meeting.

10:31am Judith Cochrane joined the meeting.

10:36am Michaela Boyle joined the meeting.

10:38am Ian McCrea joined the meeting.

10:45am Paul Girvan left the meeting.

10:47m Paul Girvan re-joined the meeting.

12:46pm The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 11 June 2014

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Daithí McKay (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Michaela Boyle MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE, MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr Ian McCrea MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Joe Westland (Clerical Supervisor)
Miss Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA

10:07am The meeting commenced in public session.

Agreed: that agenda item 5 is covered by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly's website.

7. Flexible Working Inquiry: Telework in the United States of America Federal Government – Assembly Research Briefing

The Committee received a briefing on Telework in the USA Federal Government from Assembly Research.

Agreed: that follow up research will be undertaken on various issues discussed during the briefing.

11:50am The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 2 July 2014

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Daithí McKay (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Leslie Cree MBE, MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Joe Westland (Clerical Supervisor)
Miss Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Ms Michaela Boyle MLA
Mr Ian McCrea MLA

10:07am The meeting commenced in public session with Dominic Bradley, Deputy Chairperson in the Chair.

Agreed: that agenda item 4 is covered by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly's website.

7. Flexible Working Inquiry – Consideration of issues from the evidence (Closed Session)

The Committee considered a working draft report on the Flexible Working Inquiry, which set out the issues arising from the evidence.

11:52am Peter Weir re-joined the meeting.

11:56am Dominic Bradley re-joined the meeting.

12:18pm Peter Weir left the meeting.

12:19pm Peter Weir re-joined the meeting.

Agreed: that a further draft of the report will be prepared for members to consider after summer recess.

12:45pm The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 24 September 2014

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Michaela Boyle MLA
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE, MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr Ian McCrea MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Joe Westland (Clerical Supervisor)
Miss Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA

10:06am The meeting commenced in public session.

Agreed: that agenda item 7 is covered by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly's website.

5. Flexible Working Inquiry – Initial Consideration of Draft Committee Report

The Committee considered a revised draft Committee Report on the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: that a final draft Report will be prepared for formal consideration at an upcoming meeting.

11:44am The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

[EXTRACT]

Wednesday, 8 October 2014

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Michaela Boyle MLA
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr Ian McCrea MLA
Mr Raymond McCartney MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Joe Westland (Clerical Supervisor)
Miss Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Leslie Cree MBE, MLA

10:12am The meeting commenced in public session.

10:14am The Committee went into closed session.

4. **Flexible Working Inquiry – Final Consideration of Draft Committee Report**

The Committee considered the draft Committee Report on the Flexible Working Inquiry.

Agreed: that paragraphs 1-11 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that paragraphs 12-18 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that paragraphs 19-52 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that paragraphs 53-55 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that paragraphs 56-67 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that paragraphs 68-83 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that paragraphs 84-86 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that paragraphs 87-109 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that paragraphs 110-123 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that paragraphs 124-140 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that paragraphs 141-152 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that paragraphs 153-165 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that paragraphs 166-170 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that paragraphs 171-179 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that the Executive Summary, as amended, stands part of the Report.

Agreed: that the Appendices 1 to 6 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: That the report be the first Report of the Committee for Finance and Personnel to the Assembly 2014-15.

Agreed: That the Committee Report on the Inquiry into Flexible Working be printed.

Members noted that a draft plenary motion for a debate on the report will be considered at next week's meeting.

Members further noted that, following proofing and formatting, the printed report would be issued to all MLAs in advance of the Assembly debate, but will be embargoed until the start of the debate in plenary.

10:25am The Committee returned to open session for the remainder of the meeting.

11:45am The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

Mr Daithí McKay MLA

Chairperson

Committee for Finance and Personnel

15 October 2014

[EXTRACT]



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Appendix 2

Minutes of Evidence

1 February 2012

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Conor Murphy (Chairperson)
 Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)
 Mr Leslie Cree
 Mr Paul Girvan
 Mr David Hilditch
 Mr Paul Maskey
 Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
 Mr Adrian McQuillan

Witnesses:

Professor Sir George Bain *Expert Witness*

1. **The Chairperson:** You are very welcome. The Committee had expressed an interest in looking at this area of your work. Decentralisation and relocation have been caught up in the economic downturn along with other issues affecting the Executive, including the reduction of the block grant. There was a strong sense from the Committee that flexible working could perhaps continue to be explored in the current financial climate and could lead to better working conditions for civil servants, less travel and more people being deployed in regional centres rather than in the centre in Belfast. The Committee is pleased to hear evidence from you, and we will be considering whether we take it forward in an inquiry. Perhaps you will make some opening remarks, and then I will allow members to explore the matter with you.
2. **Professor Sir George Bain:** Thank you very much. I thought that I might speak for 15 minutes and then leave the rest of the time for questions and, hopefully, answers. My first answer is to manage your expectations. I am not an expert on the subject. It was one chapter in a report on relocation, as the Chairman said. I chaired a report for the Westminster Government in 2001, which gave the legislative background to employees having the right to request flexible working; however, that was a long time ago. A great deal has happened since the report in 2008. Moreover, when people look at the disconnect between my work and life they laugh that I am in this area. I imagine that that can probably be said for most Assembly Members as well. I thought that the best thing I could do this morning was try to facilitate a discussion rather than give “Evidence” with a capital E. The first thing in doing that is to provide a short note to structure a discussion.
3. There are, of course, many definitions. I like the one that states that it is about allowing employees to be flexible about how, when and where they work. That seems to sum it up. Here, we are mainly concerned with when and where; how used to be dealt with in the literature on job enlargement, job enrichment and autonomous work groups, usually in manual working areas. This morning I have a hunch that we will concentrate mainly on when and where. I have listed the practices in the report, so I will not go through them all. The excerpts from the report show the different practices in paragraph 6.2.2, including mobile remote working, touchdown, satellite offices, home-working, teleworking, and hot-desking. Even people of my generation tend to know what most of those words mean.
4. It is interesting that you are thinking of an inquiry, because the public sector is already quite well represented, both across the water and in Northern Ireland, with various aspects of flexible working. You are aware of the Northern Ireland Civil Service document dealing with working at home. There are various projects, such as Network Northern Ireland, which is networking virtually all the civil service buildings. I do not know whether that has been completed; it was supposed to have been completed shortly after our report was finished.

5. I have listed three categories of things that stop flexible working. The first is infrastructure costs. One of the things that comes out of the literature is that it is useful to walk before you run and to have a pilot project rather than a massive initiative. There is often considerable upfront investment: putting in Wi-Fi and networking requires significant investment, which can make the cost benefits problematic. Secondly, some jobs do not lend themselves to flexible working, and I list some of them in the report. Unless you have pretty well-defined objectives and measurable deliverables, if you do not require supervision or interfacing with customers and clients, and all the other things that I list, it will be difficult to have flexibility for such jobs. Similarly, the people who would not thrive on flexibility are those who lack self-discipline and motivation and perhaps good time management. You have to be technologically literate, and although most people under 40 these days are, older people may not be. Many people who work at home find that it is sometimes difficult to cope with the isolation and the lack of social contact. Those are some of the things that stop it.
6. I have listed several advantages, which I assume are well known to you and which I imagine are driving your interest. It improves work/life balance and facilitates staff recruitment and retention. When we first talked about the legislative right to request flexible working around the turn of the century in 2000 and 2001, it was pushed by unions but not generally enthusiastically welcomed by employers. That quickly changed, however, because they quickly discovered that once you had flexibility, the range of people you could recruit was much wider. Hence it ceased to be a class-war issue and became much more an issue that both sides could see. It improves satisfaction and reduces costly absenteeism, which is an issue of some interest in the public sector. It improves service delivery, and when you want to deliver a service beyond the normal hours of business, that is a plus. Some of the things that drove the relocation report were an improvement in space utilisation and a reduction in accommodation costs. I visited PricewaterhouseCooper's new building behind the Waterfront Hall. The company employs hot-desking in that building. For the sake of argument, it has 500 consultants — do not hold me to that figure — and 300 desks. People come and go, and the space that that company has is much less than would be required to provide everyone with their own office or desk.
7. Some of the big things that the Chairman mentioned and that drove the report was a reduction in travel time, transport costs and carbon footprints and an improvement in efficiency and productivity. In the literature people give figures such as a 20% improvement in productivity and so on. Most of that is pretty useless; the figures are usually taken from small samples and each case is different.
8. When we put the report together — the secretary to the inquiry was Olive Maybin, whom some of you will know — we included just case studies. I am sure that there are many more such examples now. Each case was quite specific. Page 106 of the report — I have chosen public-sector examples — shows an example from a UK Department. The big problem in that Department was linking London and Sheffield; putting in video conferencing greatly helped in sorting that out. One does not have to think too hard about the link here between Derry/Londonderry and Belfast and other places. Something similar could be done here.
9. Page 110 gives an example from Hertfordshire County Council. The last three paragraphs spell out what was achieved including:

“a reduction in office space and workstation... of approximately 16 per cent.”
10. The council also found:

“work travel has seen a reduction of 10 per cent; work miles have reduced by 9,000” .

11. One of the most interesting examples is on page 113, as it is a Northern Ireland example. It looked at Macmillan nurses, with whom we will all be familiar in one way or another. That case study involved the use of digital pens and digital pads to enable the nurses to file their reports on each of their patients by simply pressing a button and sending them to head office rather than having to come back to base to have the reports typed up.
12. I think that you have been provided with appendix c to the report, which includes a few more case studies. The one that I would choose is an English example from the East Riding of Yorkshire Council. Page 190 provides a series of bullet points. I will not read those out, but they show the sorts of things that the council found that resulted from the use of flexible working. Those figures are much more interesting and reliable than broad generalisations about 20% being saved here or there. It shows what was done on absenteeism, productivity, the recruitment of staff, rent arrears, etc. It has concrete benefits.
13. I will leave you to leaf through the case studies. However, I want to touch on one other area before I draw my presentation to a close — the critical success factors. Again, those came out of the case studies. One thing is stakeholder involvement. By stakeholders, one means employees, customers and users. Almost all the literature suggests that you will not get very far with a top-down approach; it has to be done through a collaborative and consultative approach. Secondly, and most importantly, an example must be shown by senior leadership, and unless the very top management levels are prepared to work in that way and set the example, it will not work. It is like open-plan offices. Someone decides that an organisation must have open-plan offices, and everyone occupies those offices except senior management. Such a set-up usually does not work very well. Thirdly, there must also be support for middle managers, because flexible working means managing and supervising outputs and deliverables rather than inputs. To take an example from academic life: as a head of a department, I did not care too much whether staff worked at home, in the library or anywhere else for that matter, as long as the work was done. At the end of the day, the questions that they had to answer were whether they had got their teaching done and whether they had had good ratings from the students. They also had to be able to show their latest book or paper. There was a clear deliverable and, frankly, it is often easier to write papers and books away from interruptions than it is in the office.
14. That creates a new kind of culture: do not tell me how hard you work or how many hours you put in; just show me what you have done. Of course, it means that you need a job that has such a deliverable, but it is a completely different method for middle managers to supervise. My dad, who was a manual worker on the railway in Canada, had to punch in and punch out. That is how they managed people; if they were late, they were fined and so on. This is completely different.
15. I have already mentioned my fourth point: pilot schemes preceding large-scale projects is probably a generalisation that applies in many areas. Finally, cultural change. Many of these projects seem to be part of a wider scheme of cultural change in an organisation, a willingness to innovate and accept that work is about what we do and how we do it, not where we do it.
16. I will conclude by talking about future policy. As the Chairman said at the beginning, and as the secretary informed me, you are considering whether to inquire further into this area. It is not for me to tell you whether you should have an inquiry, but I thought that I might make a couple of reflections. It is hard for me to see the disadvantages of flexible working. It is not quite a motherhood concept, but flexibility in general is desirable and has most of the advantages that I listed earlier.
17. To some extent, if I am right, it is more a question of how one should do this

- rather than whether one should do it. Often inquiries, at least many of the inquiries that I have been involved in over the years here in Northern Ireland and across the water, have been more a question of “should”; asking whether we should reallocate jobs from Belfast to other areas and so on. Moreover, there is no shortage of evidence or examples to consider; there is a growing body of literature and there are case studies. I am sure that, since we looked at this four years ago, the number of case studies here in Northern Ireland in the private and public sectors will have increased greatly.
18. It seems to me that, if the Committee were minded to inquire further, its inquiry would not be of the same nature as those that I chaired. As I told the Committee, in those cases you are chosen because you are ignorant and people are looking for a blank slate on which they can make an impression, somebody who could perhaps mediate between strongly held points of view. The Committee’s inquiry would not be of that nature; it would be one where there was probably not a great conflict over the concept of flexible working. You would be trying to draw on the expertise of people who had done it, who knew how to go about it and who knew where the pitfalls were.
19. My observation is that if you wanted to proceed with this, it would be quite different, for example, from the inquiry from which this chapter is drawn.
20. **The Chairperson:** Thank you very much indeed. You mentioned the benefit of improved efficiency and productivity. There is some question about where the previous plans have gone, particularly the home-working policy. There is some suggestion that the unions have been taking that issue up again. If the Department of Finance and Personnel were to drive this out, it would take a very hard-nosed look at efficiency and at cost implications. That seems to dictate its thinking, much more than possible benefits to the individual or other, what it might consider, woollier measurements to improve people’s lives. What scale do you think this needs be on across the public sector for it to start to generate measurable efficiencies in a place this size?
21. **Professor Sir George Bain:** I am not sure that I can answer that, because, as I said and as you appreciate, it is about costs and benefits. It depends on whether the costs are relatively small. When I came here this morning, for example, I switched on my phone and found that I am on the network, so I know that this place has Wi-Fi etc. Therefore, the cost of doing something in an environment such as this would be relatively small compared with doing it in, for the sake of argument, County Tyrone, where you would have to start introducing Wi-Fi.
22. Let me stress one point. The Demos report, which I left in my case, is written from a certain social perspective whereby the benefits to employers, it is argued, are greater than those to employees. An employer who gets an employee to work at home does not have to pay for lighting, heating, desk space etc; that is true. On the other hand, an employee who works at home has probably opted to do so because it has considerable advantages for them, particularly if they care for children or aged parents. I thought that the main driver for this would be the Committee, since the Department of Finance and Personnel is the ultimate employer — is that the right phrase? — of civil servants in Northern Ireland. I think that the Department would take a very hard-headed view. Page 190 says:
- “productivity of home workers is 20 per cent higher ... 3 per cent reduction in sickness ... 27 per cent reduction in staff turnover”.*
23. Those are the things that leap out. As you will appreciate, measuring employee morale and commitment and providing a greater sense of work/life balance are much softer dimensions.
24. **The Chairperson:** As you were saying, one of the difficulties is the connection infrastructure, which is OK in Belfast and such places. However, we have a largely rural population, and people have

- to travel to centres of work. Was there any examination of the idea of localised centres? Rather than travelling to large centres, is there an opportunity, as part of flexible-working arrangements, to use existing government or publicly owned facilities in towns and villages in order to allow people to work in their own area as opposed to their home, where they may not have Wi-Fi or the capability to connect?
25. **Professor Sir George Bain:** Very much so. It is easy to think of the concept of satellite offices and touch-down centres germinating. Take an area such as Crumlin, which I do not live far from. Although travelling from Crumlin is not a major thing, I would not have thought that the area has a great deal of infrastructure as such. In fact, I often find it difficult to get a signal on my phone there. You could easily imagine setting up a small satellite office or a touch-down place there to which people could travel from one or two or a few miles away rather than having to come here, which took me an hour this morning, although that was at a bad time of day, of course.
26. There has been a tendency in Northern Ireland and elsewhere to have one-stop shops for all government services. Part of the idea in the report was to combine those one-stop shops with flexible-working arrangements. If you have a one-stop shop in an area, you do not have to go to different offices to get benefits or this, that and the other; you go to one place. It is not a major leap to imagine such places also having office space, desk space or hot-desking so that people would not have to travel elsewhere to work. That is why that chapter appeared in the report. It was interesting that it was not fuddy-duddies like me who actually thought of it; one of the younger members of the secretariat said that we should look at it. If we are talking about transferring employment out of Belfast into the periphery to reduce the carbon footprint and travel time, one idea is to shut down a building on the Stormont Estate that is, perhaps, past its sell-by date and build another one somewhere else. In fact, you do not have to build another building. You can shut down the building that is past its sell-by date and, because of flexible working, you can either utilise a small existing operation or, indeed, perhaps, no operation at all. That is why chapter 6 eventually appeared in the report. Initially, some older members of the commission thought that it was outside our terms of reference. It is funny: when I re-read that to prepare to come here today, I was thinking, of course, about just how much it actually was part of our terms of reference four years ago.
27. **Mr D Bradley:** Good morning, Professor. Thank you very much for your presentation. In your report on relocation you consider flexible working. What are the main issues in integrating flexible working and relocation? Does one complement the other? Should flexible working be advanced with one eye on relocation or vice versa?
28. There are implications for the future design of the public-service estate; you touched on that in your previous comment. What do you consider the implications for the future?
29. **Professor Sir George Bain:** When I visited Newry, we had a long chat about our work on the report. To answer the first part of your question: yes, relocation and flexible working are completely complementary. In fact, in a certain sense, without nitpicking, I suppose that it is almost a definitional point as to whether it is relocation. If you think about all the people who queue in traffic each morning from Newry to Belfast, and vice versa, and you introduced flexible working for at least some of those people, you would have much less traffic on the motorway, reduced travel time, et cetera. Therefore, I suppose that you are relocating the work, not necessarily the person. However, that is a quibble. The two, I believe, are completely complementary. One would drive the other.
30. With regard to the estate — again, I am a little rusty on that now — one of the things that drove the report when the

- then Minister of Finance and Personnel, now First Minister, commissioned it was the nature of the public-sector estate; particularly some of the buildings at Stormont, which, I believe, are well past their useful life. Of course, rebuilding them here or elsewhere would require major capital expenditure; you know that better than I. Relocation was seen as, perhaps, part of the answer.
31. As I said, when we started, it was seen as more a case of, OK, we can move x number of jobs from Stormont to x, y or z outside the conurbation of Belfast. As we went on, as you can see from the report, we spoke to property developers and specialists in places such as Enniskillen and Omagh to see whether buildings were available there to which people could be transferred. Of course, the situation has moved on dramatically in the past few years. If that were to proceed, the question of talking to property developers and experts in Omagh, Enniskillen, Strabane and such places does not really arise to the same extent unless you consider the Chairman's notion of a small satellite office somewhere. That was one of the big barriers to relocating. With the possible exception of Derry/Londonderry, there were few suitable buildings to which you could transfer people. Therefore this subverts it.
32. I rang Olive Maybin yesterday to find out about our "office"; Olive and the other members of the secretariat use desks in Clare House in the Harbour estate. It is not quite hot-desking; they have their own workstations. There is a kind of future at work. I downloaded the 'Northern Ireland Civil Service Reform and the future@work'. I will leave a copy with you. A few years ago, it looked like a working environment from science fiction. There was telepresence; you could meet people who were in London or Moscow as if they were in the room with you. There was no need to fly anywhere. A great deal is already being done in that area. As I hinted, the danger for the Committee might be that it is reinventing the wheel when so much
- is being done — even in this building — and elsewhere that one could draw from.
33. **Mr D Bradley:** From what you say, a great deal is being done on flexible working. Would it be appropriate for the Committee to look into the inter-relationship between that relocation and the public-service estate? According to what you say, those three elements are inter-related.
34. **Professor Sir George Bain:** What the Committee looks into is its own call. However, I would be surprised if you could look at one without the other. When Shane and his colleagues got in touch with me, their e-mail contained one of the issues that is driving this. The Committee wants to know, first, how it can save on accommodation costs; and, secondly, how it can improve productivity. I assume that in the Committee's initial thinking there was a connection between whether you need all this square footage of accommodation and whether you could accomplish your objectives with a smaller footprint. That is very hard to answer specifically, but, in general, you could almost certainly accomplish your objectives with a smaller footprint. You would have to look at how much smaller, where and how. The two are irrevocably linked.
35. **Mr McLaughlin:** Hello again, George. Two issues interest me. I have had a long fascination with emerging technologies and how they would affect the work/life experience. The first issue that I have come across in my role as an MLA is gender equality. Some married women in middle management were recognised as people who should be promoted to the betterment of the civil service and were offered promotion, but that would have required them to travel from Derry to Belfast. Therefore they had to decline the opportunity. That issue could have been addressed by working from home or by satellite office.
36. In the early days of the Assembly, it was encouraging to see Peter Robinson, as Finance Minister, put an early focus on the issue. However, I am not convinced

- that we have embraced the concept in a systemic way and that the intervening years have seen all Departments taking it on board. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why we should consider taking a look at this entire experience. In fact, I could easily extend that, perhaps through the RPA, to local councils, where you bring government to the people. That is not a concept about relocating offices, and it is not an argument about the capital cost of building new structures or about taking from one part of the region to give to another. The issue is about accommodating workers to give them much more job satisfaction and a better work/life balance as well as the environmental benefits from reducing the carbon footprint, which has often been cited.
37. Therefore in addition to those positive arguments, I also add the issue of equal opportunity, which has affected female civil servants for a considerable time and has put them in the unenviable position of having to decline opportunities for promotion because it would mean moving away from their homes to work.
38. **Professor Sir George Bain:** That is right. A theme that came through loud and clear during the inquiry from which this chapter is drawn was the difficulty that married women in particular have with accepting promotion beyond a certain level because it would require them to move.
39. Although that idea has potential, much would depend on the nature of the promotion. If the promotion was to a position that consisted largely of managing people, it would be hard — unless the situation was similar to the Macmillan nurses' and you were managing them virtually through the web rather than the traditional daily interaction with staff — to see how you could do that properly without moving.
40. That does not detract from your point that there is a large number of jobs, even at a very senior level, that could be done a certain number of days a week without moving being necessary.
- I have an example of that, although it is hardly definitive proof: when the low pay inquiry was launched in the late 1990s, the then permanent secretary of the Department of Trade and Industry was a woman called Catherine Bell. She was married, had kids and was one of the relatively few female permanent secretaries in the UK Civil Service. Do not hold me to the exact details, but she worked at home two days a week and spent three days in the office so that she could interact with people. Two days of the week she was at home working, where you could easily get her via e-mail or phone. She has since retired, but I imagine that if she was in the position today you would probably get her on a television screen.
41. It is easy for me to say, as I have just done, that there would be difficulties for certain kinds of jobs. However, it is also interesting how, when you put your mind to it, you can overcome some of those difficulties, even for a post such as permanent secretary. You might think that a permanent secretary would need their own office and backup, but the arrangement worked very well 12 or 13 years ago. I imagine that the number of "Catherine Bells" in the UK Civil Service has increased dramatically, both in the sense of being women in senior positions and of having some kind of flexible working.
42. **Mr McLaughlin:** Yes, and travelling one or two days is still better than travelling five. That is one of the areas in which we can develop our thinking on any possible inquiry.
43. The second point is that there may be more progress on this than we realise, because none of us has the full picture. The visit to Clare House some years ago was very interesting, because they were actually futuring; it was not so much about day-to-day practice as about realising potentials. They had gathered up much of the technology, such as the digital pens and the teleconferencing tools et cetera. That has continued to develop, as have the cost parameters, although I am not sure whether that is up or down. I assume that as it gets

- more mainstreamed it gets more cost-effective.
44. The BT Riverside Tower in the centre of town has a remarkable facility that demonstrates international teleconferencing. It is real-time and realistic.
45. **Professor Sir George Bain:** It is one of the case studies.
46. **Mr McLaughlin:** They played a little trick with a guy in Dublin where they poured a cup of coffee and offered it to people. It demonstrates what can be done.
47. However, I do not see a systematic approach; I do not see the pilot schemes leading to a further roll-out of this in different areas. A facility has been developed in Omagh as part of the investment after the bomb where it has the nearest equivalent to a satellite office. People can come in from different departments and levels of local government and plug in, put in their password and use the portal to their home base. They can bring the service to the local population on an appointments basis. I am not sure that that has fully embraced its wider potential. The Committee should look at it to give it a new focus. I suspect that we have all become a bit blasé about developments around us without grabbing the potentials and taking it as a more proactive policy. In your work, have you a view on whether there is a proactive exploration of that potential or is it a slow burner?
48. **Professor Sir George Bain:** As a preface to answering your question, I have not looked at this since the report was submitted. Therefore, you have to guard about what I am about to say, which is that my impression would be exactly what your remarks suggest. There are developments here, there and everywhere, but no one has a complete picture. In fact, initially, on the note that I prepared under “Extent”, I thought that I could go to something and find it very quickly — X% of people are covered by this scheme or Y% by that scheme, but I could not find it anywhere. That does not mean that it does not exist, but it is not readily available. Therefore, I struck that out very quickly.
49. I am looking — this is the ultimate act of self-promotion — at pages 114 and 115 of the report. Three or four years ago, we made eight recommendations about what the Northern Ireland Civil Service should do. I will not go through them, but, as I say self-promotingly and pompously, I suggest that a starting point might be to see how many of them have been implemented, assuming that you thought that those suggestions were good in the first place. My hunch is very few. Picking up on what the Chairman said, recommendation 3 suggested that the Civil Service develop a network of regional satellite offices. Has that been done? From what you say, I assume not. We know that recommendation 4 has not happened or I would not be sitting here today talking about it. I guess that recommendation 6 has been implemented in the sense that you have a policy on home-working; but there were several suggestions.
50. Mitchel, your point has been taken. I said at the beginning that I am not an expert and I do not pretend for a moment to have much more than a layperson’s view of this; there might be someone in Belfast or somewhere else who does. My hunch is that it is very itchy-bitsy. There are developments here and there; some of them are extremely interesting, such as the BT one, but no one has an overall view. An inquiry might focus on that. You are all much better informed about how to drive government than I am; however, my hunch is that, unless there is a central driver at Stormont at the political and Executive level and a supremo to drive it as part of a policy that the Committee or the Assembly devises, it will probably remain itchy-bitsy and not develop coherently.
51. **Mr Cree:** Being just over 40, I, too, tend to be a bit sceptical now. There have been many flavours of the month over the years. We work to make them exact sciences and then move on to something else. The most recent business one that I was involved in was

- total quality management (TQM), which was going to revolutionise the world. I do not think that it has.
52. **Professor Sir George Bain:** It enriched quite a few consultants. *[Laughter.]*
53. **Mr Cree:** It certainly did.
54. **Mr McLaughlin:** There is no such thing as a total negative.
55. **Mr Cree:** The latest version of the answering machine has options to press 1 for this, 2 for that, 3 for the other and 99 if you want to end a call. That seems to be the solution. In fact, having had the misfortune to try to contact a Department recently, I was intrigued by the answer machine saying: "I am sorry. No one is available to take your call now. Please call back later". The message was as simple as that. How on earth do you measure productivity in that scenario? The issue hinges on contracted hours versus productivity or outputs. I am not sure that we can measure that for a great many jobs, even when supervised. Take away the supervision role and what replaces it? Given that it has been some time since your report, might this be a flavour of the month that is disappearing over the horizon?
56. **Professor Sir George Bain:** I do not think so, although I accept your point. I used to be principal of a business school in London. Management fads are quite interesting. Somebody once wrote an article describing such fads as being a bit like fashions: they never really go permanently out of style. Things that were around in the 1930s bloom, everybody rushes in, and then they disappear only to reappear in the 1950s, albeit relabelled. TQM is a good example of that, as is job enrichment.
57. This is a much more fundamental concept. I went to the London Business School in 1989 and was there for eight years. The finance professors — you know, the people who recently ruined the world — were at the cutting edge of technology; they had huge mathematical models and suchlike. There was no e-mail; that did not start until 1993 or 1994. However, it was not a fad; it has revolutionised how we do business.
58. Take the paper that I presented to the Committee as an example. I said that I would set Tuesday aside, collect my thoughts and if I can I will get together a couple of pages to give to the Committee before I appear. At 4.45 pm yesterday, I e-mailed this, and — boom — you got it. Just 10 years ago, I would probably have had to hire a taxi. I guess we would have had the fax machine, but it would not have been the same.
59. This is fundamentally different; it is a complete underpinning. One does not quite know where it will end, but I do not think that it is a fad, although there are fads in it, such as some of the apps and so. I am not sure that I am retired, but I have been away from Queen's for eight years now. A year before I left, I could type very well because my mother had insisted that I learn how to type and have shorthand, but I was computer-illiterate. A year before I retired, I started getting myself geared up knowing that I would lose all my support systems. My major qualification today is not my PhD from Oxford; it is my typing qualification from Success Commercial College in Winnipeg, which makes everything else possible. I could not live without it. I have an iPad, an iPhone and a desk computer, without which I could not operate. I will be 73 this month, and if you were to speak to someone much younger than I am, they would echo that much more loudly. As politicians, it must have revolutionised how you interact with constituents, permanent secretaries, civil servants and so on.
60. I do not think that it is a fad like total quality management; it has actively changed how we do business. I am very interested in history and like to look back on the great defining moments such as the industrial revolution. I will probably not live to see it, but it is not an exaggeration to say that, 100 years from now, people will be calling this the information technology revolution. It will have completely changed how the world operates in the same way that Isaac Watt Boulton and similar people

changed how the world operated in 1776. It is here to stay, which is not to say that we, and the Committee in particular, should not be very sceptical of little flavours of the month. I look at the huge information technology projects that have been put into the health service and so on, about which I know very little except what I read in the papers. Most of them over-run time, budget and everything else and often end in disaster. This, however, has fantastic potential.

61. **Mr Cree:** Thank you. We all struggle with technology. I regret not doing the stenographer's course; in my time that was someone else's job. You have the makings of a good politician because although you answered the first part, you have not dealt with the second part. Do you think that it is possible to measure productivity in output, bearing in mind that even a supervised state does not do that?

62. **Professor Sir George Bain:** No, I do not. In my briefing notes, the second bullet point in 3(c) refers to the following as barriers:

"jobs that (i) lack clearly defined objectives, measurable outputs, milestones or timescales; (ii) require close supervision; (iii) require frequent face-to-face contact with customers or colleagues".

63. If you are selling in a shop, you will not be a remote worker, although many people are remote in the sense that we now buy

64. online. I would never dream of buying a suit online, although that may just be my generation; I want to go into a shop to feel it, look at it and so on. Your shot across my bows is a good one because although I stick by what I just said, it does not mean that, in 2050 or 2090, 95% of people will not be flexible in the sense of being remote. Flexible means more than that; their working hours, among other things, may be flexible. It is not that they will be remote; they will still be required to interact.

65. I do not know what the limit is, but, as I said, some people would not react well

to it, and some jobs employ people in all sorts of work patterns. Supermarkets are an example. They use annualised hours and term working for mums and dads who have kids at school. It is hard to see how if you are working in Tesco by the airport you will not be employed in the shop; you will not be employed at home. However, if you were invoicing or doing back-office stuff, there is probably no reason why you could not be employed at home as long as you had access to the systems.

66. **The Chairperson:** OK. Paul's question will be the last; we are slightly behind time. Interesting though this is, we have other witnesses waiting.

67. **Mr Girvan:** Thank you, professor, for your presentation this morning. Flexible working is a culture that has long existed in the civil service. I know one civil servant who has about seven coats that he leaves over the back of chairs so that folk know that he is still there and that he will be back, but whether he picks something up today, tomorrow or next week is another thing. I see areas of difficulty: one is legislation that prohibits working at home; another is rating. If you use your home as an office, should that area be designated as commercial space? Certain considerations need to be given to allow us to expand this. I am a great believer in using technology. It was not available to us even five years ago because broadband had not been rolled out in Northern Ireland to the extent that it is now.

68. There are also planning restrictions and difficulties with whether the office is seen to be ancillary to the use of the home as a home. To go back to a point that the Chairman made, instead of Departments having their own office space, there could be a space for all Departments to use. A working space could be as flexible as the people who use it. That concept has not been adopted by officials who wish to have an element of protectionism for their Departments. We have to overcome that.

69. The private sector has probably gone furthest with that approach. It knows that if somebody is not working they are not being paid. It has tended to give that out to people who work on commission, for example, so that it can demonstrate that those people are paid for the work that they do. From a civil service point of view — this brings me back to Leslie's point — it might cost more to monitor what home-working staff are supposedly doing than what you save in the outworkings. I am a great believer in the concept, although we need to do much more work on it. We are further on than we were a few years ago, but much more could be done and a great deal more savings could be achieved. People will have greater job satisfaction. It comes back to the point that Mitchel raised about people being able to take promotion without having to worry about travel and other factors that preclude them from advancing their career.
70. **Professor Sir George Bain:** Since time is pressing, I will make two very quick points. I take the point about civil servants. I remember, while doing this report and others over the past few years, when Bruce Robinson was head of the civil service, you could meet him in three or four different places. He just had a desk, and he would plonk himself down in DFP or across the road or wherever. The difficulties that you raise relate to the previous question. There is health and safety, and rating and security, which is particularly important for government. They all present problems. I was completely unaware of the home-working document. Even from glancing through it, it is obvious that the civil service has thought through most of the issues. There are sections on the difficulties that you might run into with changing the rateable value of your home. On the other hand, as every academic knows, you could write off some of it for tax. There are health and safety aspects. Then, of course, if you are working in a sensitive area, because you are handling personal data or it is a matter of state security, there are huge questions. We have seen how easy it is to lose data and how it can end up on a rubbish tip.
71. **Mr Girvan:** Or left behind.
72. **Professor Sir George Bain:** You can leave it behind in a taxi. All those questions have to be looked at very carefully. This may be a sensitive example, but if we were thinking of someone working in London for MI5, I doubt that he or she would be working at home but rather in a controlled and secure environment.
73. **The Chairperson:** OK. Thank you very much, Professor Bain. That was very interesting.
74. **Professor Sir George Bain:** I look forward with interest to see where you end up.
75. **Mr McLaughlin:** We will be working from home. *[Laughter.]*
76. **The Chairperson:** Probably because of the decision of the electorate.
77. **Professor Sir George Bain:** Perhaps you could close down the Assembly and just appear on screen. That would be much more efficient.

14 March 2012

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Conor Murphy (Chairperson)
 Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)
 Mrs Judith Cochrane
 Mr Paul Girvan
 Mr David Hilditch
 Mr Ross Hussey
 Mr Paul Maskey
 Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
 Mr Adrian McQuillan

Witnesses:

Mr Derek Baker *Department of Finance
 and Personnel*
 Mr Robert Fee
 Mr Philip Irwin

78. **The Chairperson:** The next session is on flexible working, into which we have agreed to hold an inquiry. The purpose of this session is to receive an initial briefing from the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), and it is likely that the Committee will want to hear from DFP again as its inquiry progresses. With us today are Derek Baker, director of personnel; Robert Fee, from the information, strategy and innovation division; and Philip Irwin, head of the properties division. Gentlemen, you are very welcome.
79. We had a previous session on this issue with George Bain, and you will probably have been provided with the Hansard report of that session or at least have seen a copy of it. There is particular focus in this area on flexible working, and we want to explore it further. I invite you to make your opening remarks. We have received a briefing paper from you and a reminder of our session with George Bain.
80. **Mr Derek Baker (Department of Finance and Personnel):** Thank you, Chairman, and good morning. I will not say much by way of opening remarks. You have our briefing paper, so I will just make a couple of points.
81. For the purposes of definition, our understanding of flexible working is that it focuses on the flexible location of work, as opposed to alternative working patterns such as part-time or term-time working. That is why I have brought my colleagues Robert and Philip with me. Philip can deal with premises issues and Robert with the technology issues that would support flexible working on those terms.
82. Secondly, I know that the Committee's interest in this subject might have taken Sir George Bain's review as its starting point. However, the review's recommendations have never been formally accepted as policy by the Executive; consequently, we do not have a formal relocation strategy for the public sector that would provide a context. That is not to say that flexible working cannot be taken forward in isolation, but we do not have the contextual background for it.
83. Moreover, at present DFP, whether in the areas of technology, premises or personnel policies, does not have a mandate for reaching into the wider public sector; we have no locus in determining such matters, for example, in the health service, the education sector, the PSNI or local government, and we are not resourced to do so. That is not on our agenda at present. Needless to say, my colleagues and I liaise with the wider public sector, but we do not have a directional influence.
84. My final opening comment is that the Civil Service does not have a formal policy on flexible working, although some of the building blocks that could inform and facilitate such a policy — we might hear more about those from my colleagues — are there. Specifically and organisationally, the creation of IT Assist as a common IT shared services provider across all Civil Service Departments and the rolling out of

- Network NI as a single IT infrastructural platform facilitates much of that. Moreover, in the absence of a major funding programme, Philip and his team have done some opportunistic work on premises. We do not have a policy or a formal strategy on the issue, although that is not to say that we should not have. An inquiry by the Committee into that might be very helpful to us in crystallising thinking in that area. That is all I have to say by way of opening remarks.
85. **The Chairperson:** Thank you. We have a broadly similar view. The Bain report was about relocation, but there was no Executive agreement on taking that forward. However, with that, other measures were suggested, such as people working from other locations rather than the issue of part-time work or the status of someone's employment; this was about the location from which they could carry out their employment. In that sense, we are probably in broad agreement on the definition.
86. You said that an inquiry would be useful, which is its intention. From our perspective and from evidence from DFP officials, we can see that some of the building blocks are now in place as regards IT, particularly with IT Assist. From a previous evidence session, we know that office design has allowed people to accommodate others at workstations so that they can carry out work for whatever section of the Department or Departments they work for. I suppose that DFP is taking a laissez-faire approach: allowing it to happen organically in Departments without any cohesive strategy. In the absence of that, it is not hard to see why you do not have directional influence over other public-sector organisations, because if it is not happening in Departments, how would you necessarily influence others to make it happen?
87. We intend to take evidence to confirm our view, but we see it as an area where there is not really any contention, both as regards office accommodation development and IT development where there are opportunities for that. The Department might not have looked at a formal policy, but it is looking at formal policies in relation to cost savings.
88. **Mr Baker:** We are.
89. **The Chairperson:** Is that an aspect?
90. **Mr Baker:** It could be. You have characterised it absolutely correctly: we do not have a formal policy, so how can we reach out into the wider public sector? The opportunities are there. We are always looking for opportunities for cost savings, and Philip may want to say something about premises. In looking at premises, we are looking at cost savings. The Committee is probably aware of our objectives and our targets to reduce the overall size of the footprint, and that will be achieved not just by reducing overall numbers of Civil Service staff but by changing space standards and allowing for more flexible working. It would be difficult to put a cost on it. However, as regards more efficient working, when new opportunities arise, facilities are put in place in buildings to provide touch-down opportunities for staff. I am located in Belfast city centre, for example, but when I come to the Stormont estate to meet my Minister or to appear before the Committee, I can touch down at various locations here, I can plug in my laptop and work happily from here, and I can get access to all my records and filing systems. That is part and parcel of what is going on on the premises front. I will defer to Philip, who can tell you what we are doing about space standards and so forth as regards targets and cost savings.
91. **Mr Philip Irwin (Department of Finance and Personnel):** That is slightly different from flexible working. On the property side, everything is driven by trying to reduce our costs and trying to consolidate the estate. Where we can, we exit buildings when leases expire or when we have break-clause opportunities to do so, and we move those people elsewhere in our existing estate. When we do a refurbishment or take a new space, we have specific standards of 10 to 12 square metres

- per workstation when we fit out a space, which would be more densely populated than the existing estate.
92. We gave information in our briefing paper on the flexible space that we put in in Marlborough House. That was not a project in its own right, in a sense; it was driven by a consolidation project where we were moving people from elsewhere in Portadown into the building. In refurbishing the building, we took a corner in which to put down flexible working stations, and we have operated it as a little pilot study to capture information on how many people would be interested in using such space and trying to assess that over time.
93. It has been specifically aimed at mobile workers, so there is demand for this from people whose job takes them out and about as part of their normal activities. It has been targeted at agricultural inspectors, education inspectors and so on, who are out and about. When they have done their day's work, they can, rather than head back to base in Belfast, go to a location that is closer to where they are and perhaps get papers for what they need the next day, have access to the computer network and so on. To date, it has not been targeted at people who do a normal office-based role in Belfast and who have a fairly significant commute. That introduces many other policy and personnel issues. If we were to target staff in that way, we would need a formal policy on how and when to operate it. You will see from the briefing paper that there has been demand among the staff that we have targeted — mobile workers. It was introduced in May last year and has increased month on month almost since then.
94. **The Chairperson:** In the absence of any policy from you, other Departments are doing that. For instance, DRD officials were using regional Roads Service offices to do Department work two or three days a week instead of travelling to Belfast. You are piloting a specific area around workers who travel, but, over the years, it has been happening in other Departments. Is there any attempt to gather information on that?
95. **Mr Baker:** No is the answer. You are absolutely right that it is happening. For example, a major portion of my staff work in Waterside House and in Orchard House in Derry. I have people who normally commute to Belfast from the north-west, but, on occasions, they can touch down in Waterside House and work from there. Their telephone extension is switched to there, and it works very well. However, we are not formally gathering information on the extent to which that is happening across all Departments, and we are not formally evaluating the benefits of it for individual staff.
96. **Mr D Bradley:** You said that the Department has no formal strategy, but does it have a view of flexible working? For example, does the Department see advantages in it and does it see where we can go with it?
97. **Mr Baker:** Yes, there is no question that the Department sees its potential. For some years, largely led by people who work with Robert in the information services and innovation division, we have been trying to develop a vision for how new technology, coupled with developments in premises, can facilitate new ways of working for the benefit of staff and, more important, for the benefit of our customers. I am sure that some members of the Committee have visited the future@work facility at Clare House to show where this technology might take us. There is a clear view of the benefits that can accrue from the new technology; we have been rolling that out, and strategies are in place for its use. Robert, you might want to talk about some of the things that are in the pipeline to promote that.
98. **Mr Robert Fee (Department of Finance and Personnel):** In the absence of an official flexible-working policy, we look at technology from different angles. We have been doing work on unified communications, including IP telephony, where we can switch people's extensions to wherever they happen

- to be. There is instant messaging and presence, and the work that we are doing on videoconferencing. That is all tightly integrated.
99. That opens up the potential for people to work from any place where they can gain access to the network. The building blocks are there, but we cannot make the business change. All we can do, through initiatives such as future@ work where we show the technology, is demonstrate the art of the possible to business, because it is business that needs to take up the ball and run with it and change how it operates.
100. **Mr D Bradley:** You see the potential in the relocation of public jobs, the redesigning of the estate and so on. If there is that potential, and Departments are already involving their staff in that work, there is a need for an overview to bring all those factors together into a strategy.
101. **Mr Baker:** I do not disagree; that is eminently sensible. To pick up on a point that Robert made, there is an important issue here. The Civil Service is not a homogenous business; there are hundreds of types of business, from MOT inspection to meat inspectors to running social security offices. Each business is very different, and each may or may not lend itself to flexible working. Some people have to be in a particular location: you cannot poke around under a car from home; you have to do it at the MOT centre. In many respects, the decision on the feasibility of flexible working must be taken at a business area level.
102. I agree with you that a coherent central policy would at least provide a framework, an encouragement, and, if you like, an à la carte menu from which business areas could choose to encourage them or at least to provide them with the tool kit to consider it. Decisions will be different in every business area, but it is possible to get more coherence into our approach.
103. **Mr Cree:** I am glad that Mr Baker mentioned the customer, as the customer is often left out. Although I appreciate the need to use modern technology and to facilitate staff in the most effective and efficient manner, provided it is monitored, how can I be assured that you are not talking about the technology simply being an answerphone message? I told Professor Bain that it is often the case that there is no one to take your call and you are asked call back later. That is no use at all.
104. **Mr Baker:** I agree.
105. **Mr Cree:** Does that mean that it will not happen any more?
106. **Mr Baker:** It does not just happen in the public sector. I agree entirely that it is attractive to say that we need to use new technology to provide a service to the customer, perhaps online, but we have to acknowledge that many people are not online and would prefer either face-to-face or telephone contact, and research has shown that. That is reflected in some of the new customer channels that we are trying to develop. The Committee has visited NI Direct in the Causeway Exchange and knows how that operates.
107. I take your point entirely. I cannot give you a universal answer for the whole Civil Service; it comes back to my point that these decisions must be taken business area by business area depending on the nature of the business and its interaction with the customer. It is not, to use the cliché, “one size fits all”.
108. **Mr Fee:** Some of what we are doing with unified communications attempts to target those issues. If the instant messaging and presence systems, which are integrated with the telephony system, are exposed to the operator, the operator should see that someone is available before transferring the call to them.
109. **Mr Cree:** That rarely happens.
110. **Mr Fee:** Well, exactly, because we are in the process of rolling this out, but that is where we want to get to with it. We are talking about flexible working. With the technology that we are deploying, we have the theoretical capability to

extend the corporate telephone network into someone's home. Therefore, a case officer who happened to be at home would show as available if they were logged into the system and an operator could transfer the call to that individual. In that respect, we have the potential to build a virtual call centre, not only for people sitting in one physical location but across the network and even into people homes. The building blocks are being put in place for that.

111. **Mr Cree:** The primary focus of our attention should be the customer.
112. **Mr Fee:** I totally agree.
113. **Mr Baker:** I want to make a follow-up point to that. I suppose that it is a bit of an anecdote, but I think that it goes with the flow of your point. Sometimes, we do things with the best intentions that intuitively seem right but which can have unintended adverse consequences. This example is not directly in the area of flexible working, but it is relevant. For good reasons, we have permitted alternative working patterns to develop in certain business offices and have allowed people to undertake part-time or term-time working. Individual managerial decisions have allowed staff to access those alternative working patterns, and, hey presto, we found that staff were not available at the right times to deal face to face with customers in front-service offices such as jobs and benefits offices. We have had examples of where we have gone far too far in allowing alternative working patterns, and that militates against effective business and customer service. We need to be careful.
114. **Mr McLaughlin:** I am sorry that I missed the start of your presentation. However, you will be aware from earlier comments that this is meat and drink to me. This is good work, and I was doing a bit of remote desk working myself.
115. It is not intended that the business zone scheme will be optional for staff. Is there a direction of travel in that regard, or have people considered the matter and decided that staff should not be able to opt into that scheme? You gave us an example of an individual who, if he or she was logged in at home, could be regarded as being available.
116. **Mr Baker:** I will ask Philip to comment on that in a moment. I think that that is the general direction of travel. We acknowledged earlier that we do not have a clear policy or strategy direction on flexible working that is articulated and written down; it is more opportunistic and has been developed on an ad-hoc basis. However, it is the direction of travel, and as premises are refurbished or —
117. **Mr McLaughlin:** Or not travel.
118. **Mr Baker:** Well, yes. As premises are refurbished, the opportunity is taken to put in place the kind of touch-down facilities that are useful for staff. We have those in Causeway Exchange in Belfast city centre, and even the older example of Royston House, where I work, has those. Some Committee members will have visited what I suppose is regarded as our flagship premises in Clare House, and we also have those facilities in Marlborough House in Craigavon and Castle Buildings in the Stormont Estate. We are putting touch-down facilities in place. The technology allows people to log on, and the facilities accommodate those who are perhaps travelling from different parts and need to spend time in a certain location. It is more opportunistic working than explicit strategy. Philip, do you want to add anything to that?
119. **Mr P Irwin:** That is absolutely what it is at the moment. Just before you came in, we said that we have targeted Marlborough House, the biggest of the four or five premises, at mobile workers and those who are out and about as part of their daily jobs. We have not introduced that as an NICS-wide policy for those who live in that part of the world to save them a commute to Belfast, and there are probably several reasons for that. For a start, we may not be able to cope with the deluge of applicants, and we also have to be careful that we do not end up adding

- costs. We have put those facilities into three or four premises on an opportunistic basis. A project was taking place in those locations anyway, and it was relatively cost-effective to use space that was not otherwise being used. If it suddenly went NICS-wide, we would have to be careful to look at the savings that we can accrue, as there is no point in having two desks, with someone going two days a week to one and three days a week to the other. If we have a core of people who base themselves away from their normal base for a time, we would have to introduce some form of desk sharing at their original base; otherwise we would be just adding to the size of the estate. There has to be a cost focus on this, as well as a focus on benefits from operational and staff points of view.
120. Before we took this out formally across the Northern Ireland Civil Service, the policy issues would need to be hardened up.
121. **Mr McLaughlin:** Fair enough. You have identified an obvious cadre of workers who are out of their offices for a considerable portion of their working time who certainly will benefit. However, it seems to me that the technology would support other areas and opportunities. Even through a pilot scheme, we could test the practicalities and the cost benefits or otherwise. I do not know whether “ad hoc” or “opportunistic” is the best description, but there are other potentials, given the improvements. We have tried and tested hot desking, for example, in this region as well as elsewhere. We should look at all the opportunities, working within, as you say, the prudent management of resources and testing what is practical and beneficial, particularly for citizens interfacing with services. You want people to have contact with government to the widest possible extent. We also want to look after the welfare, rights and entitlements of our staff. I would like to see people examine how we can broaden this out into other areas of exploration, perhaps initially on a pilot project. Let us explore all the potentials while we are at it rather than just some of them.
122. **Mr Baker:** I agree. Those are absolutely legitimate objectives that go with the flow of what we are doing.
123. **Mr McLaughlin:** I think that they do.
124. **The Chairperson:** This part of the costing may not be so easy to calculate, but you have to factor in time spent commuting and time lost through congestion on the roads, particularly in travelling in and out of Belfast, as people have the opportunity to work from more remote locations. Can you be more precise about what you mean by ad hoc and opportunistic? For instance, can planners go into a DFP facility and work there, or does it happen only within Departments? People will tell you about Department of Agriculture or Road Service offices that are only half-filled. Can officials from other Departments use them as hot-desk facilities?
125. **Mr Baker:** Generally, yes. With some of the facilities that Philip talked about, any official from any Department can go in and use them. However, we do not — sorry; I do not. I do not know whether Philip does — gather hard information centrally about daily occupancy rates of, for example, a DARD or DRD office and whether it is available for use as a touch-down facility for other staff. However, the facilities that exist can be used by all government officials. People from any Department can come into Royston House, where I work, and work away for a few hours.
126. **Mr P Irwin:** Those facilities are actively promoted as being available to everyone, which is fine.
127. **The Chairperson:** To travelling workers?
128. **Mr P Irwin:** People around Belfast use Clare House, for example, all the time because of its handy location. If you are going in and out of Bangor and you need to get onto the network, it is a good location. There probably are other ad-hoc arrangements between individuals and other Departments that happen all over the place that suit people. However, I suppose that no formal communication of information on all the various offices that Departments control and manage is

- available to other Departments. As I say, it is probably done on an ad-hoc basis.
129. **The Chairperson:** How difficult would it be to collate that information across your three sectors, even in a ballpark way? If the Committee is to conduct an inquiry into the matter, it would be very helpful to have some information to see what is happening across Departments. As I say, it does not have to be detailed with regard to who is working where. Do Departments avail themselves of that? Is it happening? What sort of rates are there? As a starting point, it would be helpful for us to identify what pilot schemes are going on. They are, in effect, pilot schemes even though they have not been designed or put into function as such. They are happening in certain places. Your pilot scheme for people who access Marlborough House is successful because increased numbers are using it. Is there any opportunity to collate that information across Departments?
130. **Mr P Irwin:** That specific information is probably not held. That is why, in Marlborough House, we have a scheme for which people have to register, and every time they come in or out we can capture the information. If ad-hoc and one-off arrangements are happening in various Departments, that information is probably not being captured and held. It is probably done very informally.
131. **Mr Baker:** If someone from another Department pops into Royston House to camp out for an hour or two, we do not capture that information formally. However, that is not to say that if the Clerk wanted to engage with us to identify the kinds of information or data that might be useful, we could not see whether we could mount a special exercise to do a bit of a round robin and see what we could helpfully collate for the Committee. I am more than happy to work with the Clerk on that issue.
132. **The Chairperson:** Fair enough.
133. **Mr Hussey:** You say that you cannot record that data. Is there not a system by which people, particularly staff, use a card to get in and out of buildings? If that is the case, can some system be implemented that will record those data?
134. **Mr Baker:** Security arrangements differ from building to building. Some of them have swipe cards. Where I work, in Royston House, there is a swipe-card system because of the personnel records and so on that are held there. However, in other buildings, such as Castle Buildings, people use the touch-down facility, which is in reception, so they do not get into the premises.
135. **Mr Hussey:** Last week, we were in Bedford Street. The building had a swipe system for entry
136. **Mr Baker:** I suppose that the short answer is that not every building has a swipe-card system. There are just different arrangements.
137. **Mr P Irwin:** Even in those that have a swipe-card system, people may know that you are in the building, but it will not record information on whether you used the touch-down facility or had a meeting with someone.
138. **Mr McLaughlin:** It is not a question that you cannot capture it but that you do not capture it at the minute.
139. **Mr Baker:** Yes, absolutely.
140. **Mr McLaughlin:** If we decide to capture it, the swipe card is one available technology. Someone gets into the system and he or she is recorded, and that person logs out of the system when he or she is finished. You know exactly when that is. It can be done. However, we are not at the stage of quantifying it. Presumably that will be one of next stages. I am trying to help you with this, you know. *[Laughter.]*
141. **Mr Baker:** Perhaps a few pound signs of investment will come along with it.
142. **The Chairperson:** OK. Thank you very much. Derek will stay to brief us in the next session. I thank the other two gentlemen for their evidence. The Committee Clerk can liaise with you on other information. We will take the matter further.

13 February 2013

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Daithí McKay (Chairperson)
 Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)
 Mr Leslie Cree
 Ms Megan Fearon
 Mr John McCallister
 Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
 Mr Adrian McQuillan
 Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Mr Mark Bailey *Department of Finance
 and Personnel*
 Mr Robert Fee
 Mr Barry Lowry
 Mr Paul Wickens

143. **The Chairperson:** I welcome to the meeting Paul Wickens, who is the chief executive of Enterprise Shared Services; Robert Fee, who is from the Enterprise Design Authority; Barry Lowry, who is the director of IT services at Enterprise Shared Services; and Mark Bailey, who is head of pay and policy for central human resources in the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). One of you should kick off and make an opening statement.

144. **Mr Paul Wickens (Department of Finance and Personnel):** Good morning, and thanks for taking the time out to visit the building. You have the briefing paper, so I will not say much by way of opening remarks, but, as the Assembly's research paper recognises, flexible working arrangements include a range of options in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). As well as variations in working patterns, flexible working is about being able to work in different places and in different ways.

145. In our paper, we provided information on the various flexible working arrangements that are available in the NICS. We also provided examples of how technology and workplace design are being used to facilitate flexible

working or, as you heard, what we call "agile working". Robert will take you through some of the technology that supports flexible working, while Barry is on the IT side of things and Mark is on the HR side. We are happy to take any questions that you may have.

146. **The Chairperson:** Paul, I found the paper that we got on 1 February particularly useful. Thank you very much for the tour and for everything today. In my line of work, I use an iPad and try to keep up with technology. The efficiency that that introduces to your day-to-day life is fantastic.

147. Earlier, we talked about providing members of staff with iPads, and so on. People already have laptops, the majority of people have computers and a broadband connection, and a lot of people are now buying tablets. Rather than having another cost for the taxpayer, what savings can be made by ensuring that staff use their personal resources for business use?

148. **Mr Wickens:** You are right. Until now, we have provided the technology and the infrastructure to all who require it. There are reasons for that, not least of which is information assurance and security. You may remember the incident that happened way back, when we lost some laptops. One of the implications of that was the provision of encrypted laptops and devices to ensure that if anything like that happened again, we would not be left potentially exposed.

149. You are right, and the trend now is towards asking that kind of question. The jargon for it is BYOD — bring your own device. We are actively contemplating a pilot to look at the implications of that. Barry, do you want to say a little bit about that?

150. **Mr Barry Lowry (Department of Finance and Personnel):** Yes. The private sector used the concept of bring your own

- device very successfully. However, I have to say that the private sector has a slightly different set of issues from those of the public sector. In the public sector, our equal obligations to the public are, first, to provide them with the best possible service where we do transactions with them, and, secondly, to look after their data carefully.
151. We spend an awful lot of money in the NICS making sure that the data that we hold are not leaked and do not escape from the system. One of the reasons why everybody who has some degree of mobility in their work gets an encrypted laptop is that if that laptop were lost, it would be very difficult for someone to read the data that are on it.
152. **The Chairperson:** Can you explain the point about encrypted laptops? What is the cost of doing that? Can you get your personal laptop upgraded to be encrypted for a relatively low price?
153. **Mr Lowry:** Yes, you can. The difficulty, though, is that if someone lost their personal laptop or iPad, we would be obliged to effectively disable it. We have the technology to do that remotely. If, for example, an official were to lose their BlackBerry, we could remotely disable and kill it, as we call it. If that is someone's personal device, you obviously get into difficulties, because that personal device might have the only copy of their child's graduation photographs, their favourite music or something like that. You then run into difficulties, where you may have to ask yourself, "If I were to completely wipe your device, what would actually happen? What are my legal responsibilities, or even my good employer responsibilities, for the things on your device that belong to you?"
154. There are also issues when a device becomes faulty. If the device is the only means by which you can work and it becomes faulty, how will we ensure that, very quickly, you can continue to work? In IT Assist, we obviously have all sorts of contingencies for that. If you lose your government device, we can get you a new one within hours. However, if it is your own device and it is configured in a certain way, we obviously cannot promise to do that. There are also issues with insurance, and so forth, if the device is stolen in the line of business.
155. So, it becomes a very complicated issue for a public sector authority to address. The private sector is slightly different. In the private sector, the information assurance issues are not so vast, because it is very rare for a salesman, for example, to hold sensitive public data on his device; it is usually just company information. They will sign a contract up front to say, "I will use my device, and my employer will give me some sort of recompense for doing so. If I lose the device, I understand that my employer will wipe it." So, they are actually very good at coming up with rules for bring your own device. However, it is very complicated for us to address at the moment.
156. **The Chairperson:** Do you have to have the device encrypted? Is there any way that a device can operate off the cloud, so to speak?
157. **Mr Lowry:** Yes, there is. There is a facility that the industry calls "sandbox". That means that part of your device is encrypted and can be used for doing business. As Paul described, that is the sort of thing that we want to look at in the pilot. Is there a way in which we can be more relaxed about someone using their own device, without causing any risks to or concerns about information assurance?
158. **The Chairperson:** As Leslie said in the previous session, the technology has been there for years. I think that the risk has been holding it back. We heard the high-profile cases of somebody leaving their suitcase on a train, etc, and the fear of that has been crippling for five or six years.
159. **Mr Lowry:** Yes, and it is right that we take that risk very seriously.
160. **The Chairperson:** Absolutely.

161. **Mr Lowry:** I am sure that you are aware that there are lots of best practice guidelines, but they say that you can accept a degree of risk in certain ways of working if you have done other things to mitigate such risk. We are really trying to do that. We are trying to develop technologies to mitigate the risk in a different way. So, instead of saying that it is absolutely not permitted to use a personal device or iPad for your public sector business, we want to say that we will permit you to do so, provided that you fulfil this criteria or that we can mitigate the risk in a different way.
162. **The Chairperson:** I think that it is fair to say that the Civil Service has the infrastructure in place for flexible working, but would it be fair to say that there is no overarching strategy in place?
163. **Mr Wickens:** We have a number of policies — Mark can jump in on this — that cover all the different aspects of flexible working that we think we need at this point. You are right that there is no one overarching policy called “a flexible working policy”. There are separate policies that cover all the different aspects of this, which we think are more than adequate at this point. Do you want to add to that, Mark?
164. **Mr Mark Bailey (Department of Finance and Personnel):** Yes. Some of these are covered in the paper to the Committee. I will not go through them all, but there is a wide variety of flexible hours of work arrangements for part-time, partial retirement and term-time for those who want to spend more time with their children in the summer. There is even just flexitime for hours worked during the day. So, we believe that there is a lot there. Paul is absolutely right to say that they are not all pulled into one policy. I think that we are wrestling a bit with not being sure how much value doing that would add, because, subject to business needs, people are still able to work different hours.
165. We in corporate HR are tasked with implementing policy on behalf of all the NICS Departments. They come to us with their needs and requests. However, we are not getting Departments saying that they need a lot more flexible working policies. They are asking us for that only in some customer-facing areas, where some Departments provide services to the public outside the nine-to-five day; for example, at evenings, weekends and on public holidays. Our policies can deal with that at the minute, but it can be quite inefficient and expensive because it typically involves overtime, which is more difficult to get staff to cover. So, we have Departments suggesting that we look more at flexible working that has staff available more cost-effectively outside nine-to-five hours and at weekends, and so on.
166. **Mr Weir:** Are you getting any resistance from the unions on that? Union officials can be quite protective about when overtime applies and its payment rates, such as time and a half. I can see the potential for them to get a bit nervous because anything that is “cost-effective” for the public purse could be read as reduced money for their members.
167. **Mr Bailey:** Absolutely, and it is early days. We have not had substantive engagement. I am just saying that Departments have raised the issue, literally within the past few months. In particular, with universal credit on its way and with its potential to massively reform an area, there is an interest about this more flexible working. We are only starting discussions with trade unions, but you are absolutely right to point out that that will be a difficult discussion.
168. **Mr Wickens:** I have been engaged with trade unions recently about needing to effectively remove flexible working hours in one very small business area so that we can build and fulfil a public-facing need more effectively, which is the very point that you raised. That is where we engage and consult with the unions about what is needed and about how we can get to an answer that suits us all.
169. **Mr Cree:** Following on from that, it is important that staffing levels are adequate outside what are regarded

- as normal working hours. You have a balancing act to perform between achieving that and extending the number of hours.
170. **Mr Wickens:** The other side of that is not having people sitting unproductively at times when, effectively, there is no outward facing or internal work to do. So, the issue is trying to balance both those things.
171. **Mr Cree:** Sorry, Chair — your question.
172. **The Chairperson:** Going back to the issue of the overarching strategy, as I look at this, I think that there are opportunities for value for money, efficiency and savings deliveries. Given that IT and technology are ever progressing, surely it makes sense to have such an overarching strategy. Is it in the pipeline?
173. **Mr Wickens:** I can give you an example of where we are actively doing something. As we were walking around this building, one or two of you commented that it did not seem that busy. If they were all here, we would have about 380 people in the building. Obviously, a lot of them are out and about at various times. I am going to move some groups out of this building and move others in from other buildings to increase the density here to about 460 people. That is part of our normal policy of increasing the density of the workplace, and it is part of the flexible approach that we have. I think that space will increase from 10 square metres to 12 square metres a person. So, by moving different groups about, I will increase the density here.
174. Alongside that, I will be able to shut down two leases on two other buildings. That will save us £1.4 million a year. The reason why we can do that is because we have all these flexible approaches, which are supported by the architecture and infrastructure that we have. We call it the “Martini approach”, because any time, any place and anywhere people can come and connect in any building. So, moving a group from one building to another is less onerous now than it might have been in the past. That is part of our active, ongoing implementation of current policy, which generates massive efficiencies for us as a public sector body.
175. **The Chairperson:** So, are there no plans for an overarching strategy?
176. **Mr Wickens:** There are no plans for one.
177. **Mr D Bradley:** Obviously, there are benefits to flexible working. For example, staff benefit from reduced travel time. Quite often, that time is used as productive working time, which also benefits the Civil Service. As you said, there are benefits from the point of view of property, in that you should need less office space. However, there is a limit to the travel time that can be saved, the extra productive time that you can get and the amount of space that you can save. So, it is a matter of our reaching those limits. Where are we on the journey to reaching them?
178. **Mr Wickens:** I cannot remember the actual detail, but I think that the Programme for Government has a specific target for reducing the amount of office space by a certain number of square metres. If I say the number, I will get it wrong, but we can come back to you on that. From tracking it in the Department’s balanced scorecard, I know that we are well on track to meet that objective. So, we have set ourselves targets, which have been agreed in the Programme for Government, and we are tracking them and continue to make good progress against them. To answer your question, we have not hit any of the potential hard limits, and we are not close to hitting any of them.
179. **Mr D Bradley:** As the Chair said, if you do not have an overarching strategy, is it not that much more difficult to track, monitor and measure the distance that you have travelled or the progress that you have made?
180. **Mr Wickens:** All the different constituent parts of the policy, such as the strategy and the implementation, reside in DFP, and a large part of it resides in Enterprise Shared Services. We recently

moved the properties division into Enterprise Shared Services so that we are closely aligning; for example, Barry's IT shared services, the HR Connect side of things, Account NI, properties division and NI Direct, which is our citizen-facing website. So, by merging those into one organisation, we are managing the situation very tightly. That is then reported up the line as key metrics to the DFP board. So, again, as Mark said, I do not see any additional value in having, or even in people demanding, an overarching strategy. You will have your own view on that, and you may make recommendations that we will have to consider, but that is the current position.

181. **Mr D Bradley:** Do you agree that there is an optimum level of benefit that can be achieved from all this? Beyond that, it is a matter of add-ons as technology develops.
182. **Mr Wickens:** There is always the law of diminishing returns to consider. Is it really worth going for that last 20% when you already have 80% of the value? I do not think that we are close to getting to the 80% mark yet. So, if we are thinking about reducing the size of the office estate, looking at the style of working in offices to try to get it more like what you have seen in this building, where people use collaborative work spaces and there is lower density — although the density may be higher in the number of square metres a person — the answer is, yes, we still have a lot of work and things to do before we get anywhere close to that.
183. **Mr D Bradley:** OK. Thank you.
184. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Obviously, we talk about the cultural lag, and I understand perfectly the issues that are at the core of that. However, I have some frustration, in a sense. Leslie made the point elegantly enough that technology is advancing, but this technology has been around for a long time, albeit that it is advancing and becoming ever-more accessible. However, for a relatively small region, I wonder at times whether there have been missed opportunities. I recognise that there are very difficult negotiations
- and discussions with the unions. Certain practices have survived the digital age that should not have, such as handwritten entries, double entries and, as is sometimes the case with digital records, treble records.
185. In bringing government to the people, including having civic centres where people can access any Department, are we actually moving in a contrary direction? NI Direct, for example, means that you have a centralised web-based process. We discussed the absence of or reduction in the amount of face time that people get with officials or the people who are dealing with their cases. We could have joined-up government in local government, as well as in the Assembly, by having, for example, local civic centres where people come in, log in and meet clients, perhaps having made arrangements over the various telephony processes that we have. They could then have good, productive face time that would be the appropriate and proper response. For me, that also speaks to the need to have an overarching strategy and to move in that direction and to maybe developing a counterculture, if you like, to the one that exists at present. Let us start to challenge people to do things differently and to do them in a way that actually brings government down to the level where people can walk in off the street and say, "I want to talk to so and so", or, "I want to deal with such and such an issue. Who do I speak to?" In many circumstances, that might be local government, but it could also be some of the Executive agencies or Departments.
186. **Mr Wickens:** Absolutely. Moving NI Direct into the Enterprise Shared Services family and organisation again backs up a Programme for Government commitment to increase access to online services. I am now the senior responsible owner for that. The very point that you are making is about the counterculture of developing online services and trying to shift people from the face-to-face channel towards using online services. That will take time. We

- know that. We talked earlier about young people being very comfortable with the devices that are at the end of their fingertips, but what about other sectors of the population? We have a strategy called Digital First that is very much about recognising that we want to move towards the digital channel and digital transformation. It is looking right across the public sector in some instances. So, you are right on that one.
187. However, we also have what we call assisted digital, which recognises that there are people who are not yet ready or able to use the digital channels. So, we have to continue to provide contact centre support. That could be face-to-face chat, web chat on the computer or going into your library and having somebody do it on your behalf. We are doing all those things. We have a digital inclusion team looking at all those different possibilities to support over a period of time the migration from the way that we are used to doing business to the way that we think we need to do it more efficiently and the way that a lot of people are demanding that we do it.
188. I think that you can get into some interesting challenges. You may recall that pre-NI Direct, the Consumer Council surveyed the local population. It found that, when they are dealing with government, consumers do not know or care whether they are involved with a central Department, agency or the local council. They do not understand it; it is a technical thing in the background. They just want something fixed. Going towards a single approach such as NI Direct, where approaches, processes and services are accessible through the website, means that you are hiding those physical structures. So, it actually moves much more towards what you are suggesting.
189. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** I have seen, in what I have to admit is a very limited number of circumstances, on the continent that local government takes the lead, and I see that they are experimenting with that in the South. Usually, it involves someone who is recognisable as a council official but who is familiar with all the networks and agencies. They provide the gateway or handshaking process that allows people to step off the street and deal with their problem with the appropriate agency. They do not have to pick their way through button 4 or button 5. There is a real person there, who, in the Twenty-six Counties, is usually a council official. In fact, that is their function. They are not an expert in anything other than advising people who they should talk to and who should deal with their problem and, hopefully, ensure that they come out the door with it solved.
190. **Mr Weir:** To follow up on Mitchel's point, I know that that approach is being used in the Republic. Similarly, I know of a Member being on a trip maybe six or seven years ago in Scotland who saw a similar system there. The Republic and Scotland, and, I suspect, parts of England, had at that stage moved towards public service centres where there was an integration of central and local government services in a one-stop shop.
191. Has there been any movement away from that concept since then? I appreciate what you said about moving from the technology, but we seem to have been slow to embrace that face-to-face interaction in Northern Ireland and take it as a concept. I suppose that one of the aims of Northern Ireland Direct in that more remote connection is, as you said, that people do not particularly differentiate between or care about different government agencies and offices or the level of government.
192. However, there does not appear to be any degree of embracing or even piloting a system such as those that operate elsewhere in which there can be much more direct face-to-face contact and some level of office function shared across Departments. Leaving aside the interaction between local government, central government and various agencies, a constant complaint about administration in Northern Ireland is that Departments often operate with silo mentalities. If you go down certain main streets, particularly in Belfast,

- you will see one government building of one Department, and perhaps the next building is from another Department and then maybe two down is another government building. That is all very well for supplying employment for areas, but it is perhaps not the most efficient use of resources.
193. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** It does not sound like joined-up government, for a start.
194. **Mr Weir:** I think that that is true. We have heard for the past decade or more the accusation that there is an insufficiently joined-up government approach to administration. Has the review of public administration meant that any thought has been given to interacting? Economies of scale may make that easier, but there is also a service disconnect between local and central government.
195. I appreciate what you say about the online side of things, which is clearly a movement in the right direction to join that up. I appreciate that all this may be moving slightly outside the issue of flexible working hours, but it is linked to providing an efficient service to the public of greater usage of, or movement towards, a public service centre.
196. **Mr Wickens:** You mentioned Scotland, where they seem to have been very successful in certain instances with the concept of the one-stop shop. Our locus and remit as a central government Department is to try to get joined-up government across the 12 Departments. I think that we have made vast strides in that, and you saw some of the capabilities that we demonstrated today.
197. The sort of infrastructure that we have here has also allowed us to have conversations outside the core NICS family with agencies and other parts of the public sector. I have met members of local councils and members of various health structures and organisations, and we have shown them the capabilities that we have. NI Direct is saying — I suppose with its tentacles reaching outwards — that if you are doing that and we are doing that, should we not be talking to each other? We have started talking to each other. The concept of the one-stop shop requires a different approach. Perhaps that is for you to consider.
198. **Mr Weir:** All those things are good with regard to the direction of travel. However, I think that there is a bit of frustration about the speed of travel. The things that I mentioned and that Mitchel mentioned have been in place in other jurisdictions for at least seven, eight or 10 years. At that stage, there was talk of having more joined-up government in getting those things together, but progress seems to be a lot slower than it ought to be. As you said, various discussions are taking place, but there does not appear to be a great deal of concrete being put in place.
199. **Mr Wickens:** The remit of Enterprise Shared Services focuses more on the back-office capability than on front office. NI Direct is, I suppose, the citizen-facing element.
200. **Mr Weir:** I appreciate that, and it may be an unfair question because it might be directed at an area that is outside your remit. However, I think that DFP needs to look at that and try to take that on board in the wider sense, even if it is not necessarily your team.
201. **The Chairperson:** Four future@work business zones are listed: three in Belfast and one in Craigavon. The Craigavon centre has seen a lot of use. Why is that the case? I would have thought that one further west would have made more sense for those who live further from Belfast.
202. **Mr Wickens:** You are probably right in the sense that there is more opportunity for us to roll out that type of facility to more buildings, and I do not have a problem with that. It is a matter of where we are today, and where we want to get to. We have people based in Orchard House in Derry, and they are using a pseudo touchdown zone; I am not sure whether it is a formal one. Robert, do you want to add anything to that?

203. **Mr Robert Fee (Department of Finance and Personnel):** It is certainly not a formal one. Part of the issue is simply finding the right time to do it and the right building to do it in. Properties division would be best placed to know when it is time to have that type of intervention.
204. **The Chairperson:** What type of resource are we talking about for these zones? How many units or stations?
205. **Mr Fee:** It depends. Some of them are quite small and some of them may have a dozen workstations or more. A number of things need to come together for them to work. Somebody on site has to be willing to look after it, manage the people in and out and make sure that the security and integrity of the building, and so forth, is sound. A number of local arrangements need to be sorted out. There is no reason why further business zones could not be established.
206. **The Chairperson:** With regard to advertising new posts in Departments, are we at a stage yet where you have advertised a post and said that it is envisaged that it will mainly be a post where members of staff can work from home, or is it still the case that they will be appointed and later consulted about flexibility?
207. **Mr Bailey:** It depends very much on business needs, because it does happen at the minute in certain pockets. As part of the recruitment process, there are different terms and conditions. Someone mentioned the schools inspectors — it might have been Paul, when we were talking downstairs. The schools inspectors in the Department of Education are recruited on a home-based contract. They are based at home and that is where they operate from, because it does not make sense to drag them all to Bangor each morning before they go out to the schools. They would be in the Department of Education's offices only very occasionally, and they would not have a dedicated desk there. So there are some of those arrangements, but it would very much be driven by the business need. There are not many posts in the Civil Service that are like that. It is only where there is a specific requirement. However, it can and has been done.
208. **Mr Cree:** That poses more questions than it answers. Looking at the broad-brush approach, there are always two aspects in this: one is internal and the other is external. From what I have learned this morning, you are dealing more with the internal workings of the Civil Service. That is of interest to me, and I want to see that becoming more logical and efficient. If you do not mind me saying so, the external aspect is the one that really matters overall. It seems to me that there is a fiefdom in the Departments; somebody mentioned silos. They do their own thing. That is an impediment to progress. If you want to bring in a system that is of benefit, you have to sell that to all the Departments. First, is there some sort of forum whereby all the permanent secretaries get together, voice their opinions and come up with a consensus on the way forward? Secondly, a very interesting line in the briefing paper flags up:
- “too much flexibility can have an adverse impact on business arrangements.”*
209. That is quite profound, but it is true. How do you know when you reach that point, or, hopefully, before you reach it?
210. Thirdly, with regard to the actual hardware that Barry was talking about, we had an example recently when we were looking at laptops to try to reduce Committee packs and the sheer volume of paper. The papers in front of me today are not at all representative — usually, it is quite a job to carry them about. We had, more or less, decided on going for the iPad because it met most of the criteria, but then the new Microsoft Windows device came out, and that will save us a considerable sum of money compared with changing systems, so we are going for that now. That is an example of how technology just appeared. We made the decision and, suddenly, the technology changed. It will continue to change.

211. I like the idea of bring your own device. With the changing technology and the wide variety of devices — I do not know how many there are now, but there is quite a variety of choices — how can you possibly address that? Fourthly, Paul mentioned going from 380 to 460 members of staff. That is an increase of about one third. You already have a problem with car parking. How will you cope with that?
212. **Mr Wickens:** I will take each of those elements in turn. In respect of the permanent secretaries, you are probably aware that they meet together formally every Friday morning. It is known as the permanent secretaries group, and it has a number of subgroups. For example, there is one on online services, which I report to for NI Direct. So, permanent secretaries discuss wide-reaching issues that span the Departments. I can give you an example of where they are starting to drive change across the piece. The head of the Civil Service recently issued a mandate for NI Direct that basically said that Digital First is the way in which we will do things. I spoke about that earlier. If there are any services in your Department that you are looking it, it should be Digital First through this channel, and we are doing it on a joined-up basis. So a mandate was issued by the head of the Civil Service with the full agreement of the permanent secretaries group. That is being delivered through one of the groups that I chair. It is happening.
213. On the second question on flexible working versus business need, I will touch on the example that I mentioned earlier. We have one particular area where we have just let a contract. As part of NI Direct, we are bringing some private sector staff in, and they are delivering part of the contract for us. If I look at the contact service representatives that they have and the level of productivity — I use that phrase in its widest sense — and compare that with the level of productivity that we would traditionally have enjoyed, you start to look at the effects that something like flexitime has. Flexitime in that specific instance works against productivity. It runs counter to the culture of trying to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. We are taking that head on, and we are having the discussion with the unions about what we can do. We recognise that, where business need dictates something, we will have the hard conversations on that.
214. With regard to the laptops, who supports what, and bring your own device, who knows what new device will come out tonight? Barry might pick up on that in a moment.
215. On the last point about increasing the number of people in this building, I was joking earlier. We put cones against five spaces earlier, and it caused all sorts of ructions with the staff because car parking here is available on a first-come, first-served basis, regardless of grade. That is a deliberate ploy, so directors do not have a reserved car parking space. The fact that you got special privilege today caused a few chuckles. It is a real issue for us. We will have to get additional car parking space. We do not have any room to expand around the premises. We have talked to the company next door, but that is not suitable. We are now looking at other possibilities. We had one part of the B&Q car park available to us in the past. We will look at other options, but we need additional car parking space. Barry, do you want to respond to the question on the devices?
216. **Mr Lowry:** It is a good question. We tend to track what is happening in the market. The Microsoft Windows 8 device that you talked about is known to us, but they have not developed the business version of that yet. However, as you pointed out earlier, other companies such as Hewlett-Packard have. We are looking at those, and we are seeing whether that would fulfil the need of the tablet and the laptop, which would save money to the public purse. In the past, where we have standardised, we have been able to save money. We have built an elaborate and secure BlackBerry infrastructure because, at that time,

- BlackBerry was the only safe device that you could use on a restricted network.
217. **Mr Cree:** It is not now.
218. **Mr Lowry:** Absolutely.
219. **Mr Cree:** It has gone the other way.
220. **Mr Lowry:** Funnily enough, the industry would say that BlackBerry is about to push on again with some of the new technologies.
221. **Mr Cree:** It is going to have to, because it is at the bottom.
222. **Mr Lowry:** We will track that as well. We have to manage the tension in respect of how our own staff are productive. Not only do we have to try to use technology to make our staff as productive and effective as possible, but we have to defend how much we spend on that. We will regularly be asked questions by the likes of the ‘Belfast Telegraph’ about how many officials in the NICS have iPads, for example. They do not ask that question so that they can write a story to say that the NICS is being very innovative in how it does public business. We always have to make sure that we have very strong business justification. Leslie, you gave a very good example about how we can use iPads to reduce the mountain of wasted paper and have a positive effect on the environment. That is one of the things that we have incorporated into the concept that Paul talked about earlier.
223. I would like to pick up on a point that was made earlier about bringing together central government and local government. It is a fair criticism that Departments have tended to work in silos, but Northern Ireland is possibly the most advanced country in Europe in so far as all staff in its 11 Departments use the same network not only for data, but for voice. We have been the subject of various articles because we are so far ahead.
224. One of the opportunities that is available to us now — the Department of the Environment has been very innovative in picking up on this — is that
- we can attach the councils to the same network. We can create a possibility where someone can do business with government without knowing whether it is local government or central government. I described earlier the pilot with Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon where we will do that. In order to roll that out wider, we will need councils to agree that it is a good thing to do. That will require political leadership as well as government leadership, but the point that I am making is that we have used the technology to at least create those choices and introduce those debates. At that point, it is not really our issue; it becomes a wider issue.
225. **Mr Cree:** Mac and Microsoft do not get on together. Microsoft is the predominant system in use in government and local government. How are you going to resolve that dichotomy? You will have to choose one, obviously.
226. **Mr Fee:** There are incompatibilities between Microsoft and Apple Mac, but there are incompatibilities with lots of IT systems. The way forward for IT is around open standards. If we can push our suppliers towards those open standards, things should start to interoperate. One of the keys to all that is the web browser, and using browser-based technology and applications that will work across different platforms. Those are the sorts of areas that we are starting to home in on and look at.
227. To date, our infrastructure has been very much based around Windows. We view that as not acceptable, going forward. We are going to have to introduce some level of choice, but it cannot be a totally free and open choice that allows anybody to turn up with any device that they happen to like and think that they can plug in. We have got to be able to manage and control that, and kill it whenever we need to. There are hard choices that need to be made, but we are actively looking at all of that.
228. **The Chairperson:** There is reference to the ‘Working at Home’ policy paper on page 6 of the briefing paper. It states that the Civil Service agreed the policy

- in 2009 but is not implementing it, for a number of reasons. Why did it agree the policy in the first place?
229. **Mr Bailey:** That is a fair question. A lot of discussions went on in developing the policy. I was not directly involved at the time, but it appears that, as the policy developed, it grew and grew and mushroomed, and became more and more complicated. Ultimately, when the policy was finally agreed and we stepped back and looked at it, DFP, certainly, was very concerned that the things we have talked about — inefficiencies, complexities, layers of bureaucracy and other problems — would take away from business flexibility rather than add to it. There was great concern that the policy, if implemented, could cause not only more difficulty with regard to business problems, but add cost.
230. There was a lot of focus on the work/life balance aspect and being able to work from home rather than the office, but not enough focus on the efficiencies that could be delivered. There are a couple of practical examples in the paper about having two desks, which we have talked about before. As it is written at the minute, anybody who would go through the process and make use of that policy would have a desk or workstation at home, and a workstation in the office. That is a doubled cost. Furthermore, the approval processes are clearly not right. We were talking about a line manager, potentially, approving it, and not taking account of a strategic business need. Home working might be OK for me, or for someone who works for me, for the next year, but we have to have control on that, as it carries on. That person might feel that they have an inherent right to home working, but business needs could change, or they could move to another job. We need to be able to manage that properly.
231. Your question is very valid. I think it was one of those things that evolved over time. It developed and took on a life of its own. When we stepped back from it, we realised that it was not the right thing for the Civil Service, and, as a result, it has not been implemented.
232. **The Chairperson:** Have you tried to put in place a new policy?
233. **Mr Bailey:** For the reasons that we described earlier, there has not been an intention to do that. When we stepped back and looked at the broad range of existing policies, we felt from a business point of view that they worked, because home working does happen on an informal, ad hoc basis. I mentioned the example of schools inspectors, but it happens beyond that. There are other individuals and groups of staff for whom businesses and Departments have agreed that it makes sense, but there is no formal, overarching policy covering all Departments.
234. **The Chairperson:** Has no consideration been given to putting in place a policy for working at home?
235. **Mr Bailey:** Not at this stage. If businesses —
236. **The Chairperson:** Surely if there was a need to do it in 2009, that need remains.
237. **Mr Bailey:** Earlier in the discussion, I mentioned that corporate HR responds to policies that businesses ask us to develop. We are responsible for taking Departments' views on board, prioritising their policies and rolling those out. I, genuinely, am not getting feedback from businesses and Departments that this is something that they particularly want at this stage. If they did, and they felt that there was a business benefit, we would look at it again.
238. **The Chairperson:** Surely it should be led from the top down, not the other way around.
239. **Mr Bailey:** Well, corporate HR is not the top; we do not control Departments. We are there to service Departments. We help to develop policy on behalf of all Departments. Every year, the HR directors' group — there is an HR director in each Department — feeds into us and identifies the areas that it would like us to consider from a policy point of view. We take feedback

- from Departments on their needs. Clearly, there are other factors, such as legislative changes, on which we have to take leadership, and we need to implement those. There could be political views that we need to implement as well. It is a gathering of all of those. At this point, we do not have a sense of the need for a home-working policy. However, if that changes, it is clearly something that we would look at.
240. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Mark gave us an indication, almost from a management perspective, about emerging problems and the numbers that indicated that the rationale for ceasing to implement the policy came from the top. We then discussed the fact that you are not getting any lobbying or advice from any of the divisions of the Departments. Is that a consensus position, or are there individual cases that, although they might be minority applications, are not being responded to because there is not a uniform corporate demand?
241. **Mr Bailey:** At the minute, in Departments and certain branches, there are individuals who, on occasions, work from home. However, it is being managed locally; it is not pulled into some corporate overarching policy. When we developed that policy, our concern was that it was so complicated and detailed that it would militate against what it was aiming to do. We should have been trying to improve flexibilities but the policy, as drafted, went the other way and made it more complicated for people. If there is a sense that we need to look at it again, we will. However, as we stated at the start of this discussion, when we look across all the flexible working arrangements that we have, I do not get a strong sense from any Department that something is missing.
242. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** I am trying to establish whether there is an ongoing monitoring and gathering of data. Any Department or business manager could apply the principles to more localised circumstances. Is anyone gathering up whether every Department is doing that? Is 20% or 10% of the business conducted in that way? What is the evidence? Is it a growing trend? Is it a reducing trend? Is it completely laissez-faire because the central drive has been removed?
243. **Mr Bailey:** I am not aware of the gathering of such data. I do not believe that is happening is at the minute. I could not tell you how many people are home working. I would have to ask Departments for their individual information. Other pieces of data are much easier to monitor. We can tell you how many people work part time and term time. That is recorded on the system, and you can run a report. However, home working is much more arm's length. I would not be able to do that without an active enquiry to Departments.
244. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Could we, on the basis of experience, say that particular types of work are more applicable and suitable?
245. **Mr Bailey:** Absolutely. We can certainly do that.
246. **Mr Lowry:** I will give you an example, because I actually run one of the areas where it works. IT Assist, as you probably know, is an in-house shared service centre. Most of our staff are made up of IT professionals. I am not representative of them; a lot of them are much younger than me, and we engage with them through a staff forum. One of the things that they were keen to do, and which we were keen to explore with them, was to reduce their travel into work. Obviously, I want my staff to be healthy and fit and not to be burdened by too much travel. We explored regional offices around the Province, and we talked to business areas. Some of the offices belonged to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and some of them belonged to the Social Security Agency. They gave us space in those offices. We were able to facilitate staff who were working in the likes of Castlederg, Fermanagh, and so on, to work a couple of days a week from satellite locations, and then come into work for team meetings and that type

- of thing. We took that through a proof of concept and then conducted a review of it. It demonstrated that the staff were much happier. Sickness absence dropped. Productivity improved as well.
247. Obviously, IT is an area of work where you can design outcome-based jobs and, therefore, as a manager, I do not need to see someone in a location, or at their desk, to feel confident that my organisation is performing well, because we can design key performance indicators around a service-level agreement with the Departments. We can actually see that our performance has gone up since we introduced that. We are also doing well against other indicators.
248. However, not every job in the Northern Ireland Civil Service can be designed in that particular way. I think that the trick is to demonstrate those exemplars to the rest of the business, and let it seize on opportunities to use that type of system in their areas of business and gain benefits as well. We talked about future@work. For example, at Marlborough House, I know that a lot of agriculture inspectors now use that facility rather than go back to Dundonald House, and that means they can spend more time out at farms and less time running to and fro between farms and headquarters. They are being very innovative in how they adapt to the technology that we make available.
249. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** That is very informative, and positive as well. It is what I was hoping to hear. Could I go back and ask what I originally intended to ask? *[Laughter.]* I am very interested in this. What about workplace standards, new fit-outs and refurbishments? How is that project going and what are the positives and negatives of that experience?
250. **Mr Wickens:** Any new building that we take over, or any refurbishment that we do, is always carried out to what are now called Workplace NI standards. That is the kind of facility that you see here: higher density desks, open plan layout, and things like that. That has become business as usual. Earlier, we talked in the corridor about how people are naturally resistant to change. They will get used to something today but, tomorrow, when they are doing something else, they will not want to be taken away from it. However, generally, it is going very well and we are reducing the size of the office footprint and saving money for the public sector, which frees up money for the front line. The staff, for the most part, are coming along with us on that.
251. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** What you might have regarded as resistance to change has not impeded the roll-out of the Workplace NI standards?
252. **Mr Wickens:** There will always be individuals who are inconvenienced, and you have to deal with that. You are obliged to deal with some of them in a formal way. If someone has a genuine disability and cannot travel from one place to another, they will obviously be considered on that basis. However, for the most part, it is working well. I am moving people out of Causeway Exchange, down here, up to Rosepark House on the Stormont estate. So we have a shuffle going on. The net result of that, as I said earlier, is saving £1.4 million a year. We saved two leases. Is everyone genuinely happy about that? No, they are not, but it is a business decision and we are doing our best to work with staff as we take it forward.
253. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** OK. Thank you.
254. **The Chairperson:** Thank you very much. We may forward some written correspondence on certain issues. Thank you again for your hospitality.

27 February 2013

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Daithí McKay (Chairperson)
 Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)
 Mrs Judith Cochrane
 Mr Leslie Cree
 Mr Paul Girvan
 Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
 Mr Adrian McQuillan

Witnesses:

Mrs Emma Stewart *Women Like Us*

255. **The Chairperson:** I welcome our next witness to the meeting via telephone. Mrs Emma Stewart is the director of Women Like Us. We have a very nice photograph of Emma on the screen.
256. **Mrs Emma Stewart (Women Like Us):** Thank you very much for having me; I apologise that I cannot be there in person.
257. **The Chairperson:** Emma, please feel free to make an opening statement, after which members will take the opportunity to ask questions.
258. **Mrs Stewart:** Women Like Us warmly welcomes the Committee's inquiry. We are particularly interested in your focus on recruitment practices and their effect on flexible working. The way in which the public sector and the private sector evolve their working practices on that is the issue we think needs most attention.
259. Women Like Us has recruited for just under 2,000 businesses in the UK, predominantly in London, and we have about 40,000 candidates on our books. We have a wealth of experience of what can influence and affect an employer's approach to flexibility in the workplace in their employment and recruitment practices. Our whole ambition is to evolve and develop a more flexible, quality labour market.
260. **The Chairperson:** Thank you, Emma. We are keen to examine the challenges, barriers and risks to the introduction of flexible working. How can those be managed and mitigated appropriately?
261. **Mrs Stewart:** We carried out a piece of research last year for which we interviewed 1,000 employers about their attitude to flexibility in the workplace, and particularly their attitude to recruiting people into more flexible, quality part-time roles.
262. A number of findings emerged from that research. First, there is a huge perception issue as to whether it is good or not good for business practices when it comes to productivity, efficiency, and so forth.
263. Secondly, there are significant operational barriers that businesses need to overcome. There is an issue around a lack of understanding of job design and how line managers and recruitment teams shape roles to meet the outputs that need to be delivered while moving away from a nine-to-five model.
264. Thirdly, there is concern among employers that, if they were to offer more flexible and/or part-time roles at a higher level, they do not know where to find the candidates. That is quite ironic because, as I am sure you will be aware, a significant number of people want to work in that way.
265. Those were the three key findings of our research. There are several ways to overcome those difficulties. First, there needs to be a far greater focus on promoting the business case for flexibility and at the point of hire. There is a lot of work that can be done with small businesses. For larger businesses, the efficiency case is important, but we know that it also drives higher retention rates and enables businesses to recruit from a

- wider talent pool. It increases employee engagement and increases productivity. The evidence is there, but it needs to be articulated in a clearer way to businesses, using practical case studies and examples that they can relate to. We need more role models in business to step up and explain how they work and how that benefits their business.
266. Secondly, recruitment practices need to really engage with the job design process. When an in-house recruiter or a line manager is looking at hiring, how they shape that role and how job design is addressed is significant. A lot of businesses need support in that.
267. Thirdly, on access to candidates, if employers are really going to engage in this agenda, at the point of hire, they need to put in their adverts that they are open to flexible candidates and that they are open to flexibility within roles. Not all roles can be done within reduced hours, but flexibility can be based on hours, location or on the nature of a contract. Unless employers create more visibility about their interest to acquire candidates in that way, they will not attract the candidates because our experience is that people are very unlikely to apply for a role if they think that they will have to be the one to negotiate flexibility at the point of hire.
268. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Good afternoon. Thank you for your assistance. In examining the potential for flexible working in an organisation such as the Assembly, with its oversight of 11 Departments, what does experience tell us about flexible working arrangements in the workplace as opposed to home working arrangements? Does one have any particular advantage over the other?
269. **Mrs Stewart:** In our experience, it very much depends on the individual Department. You need to have flexibility within flexibility, so home working can work if you have a role that is not client facing or that does not have to operate in a very dynamic team culture. In other Departments, flexibility in hours could be of greater benefit. For instance, in financial services, we know that there are peaks and troughs over the course of the year, and doing annualised compressed hours lends itself quite well to those roles. It is a big question, and the answer is that it is very much about getting under the skin of what are the business drivers for the various Departments and divisions that you oversee and what will be the most effective process for them. It is about having a raft of options and being open to exploring all of them.
270. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Does working in the business location have an inherent advantage over home working?
271. **Mrs Stewart:** The evidence shows that there are pros and cons with either. Home working can be quite isolating for some individuals. It can disconnect them from the way that a business operates, but, equally, it can save on travel time, and it can open up opportunities for experienced and talented candidates who might otherwise be limited in the amount of time that they can spend in a physical environment. In the workplace, as I said, if you are working in a very dynamic team culture or if you have a client-facing role, there is a need to be in the office. Ultimately, the pros and cons for the individual and the business come down to how efficiently that role can be managed. Both options are viable, but I do not think that there is distinct evidence that points to one option or the other.
272. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Do flexible working arrangements, either in the business location or at home, provide any relief at all on the issue of the glass ceiling that female workers, in particular, experience? I am thinking about candidates for senior management appointments, which require attendance at headquarters, and so on, being unable to take up those opportunities because of home responsibilities.
273. **Mrs Stewart:** The issue of the glass ceiling is huge here. I will break down your question to a couple of levels. We have certainly seen that one of

- the major reasons why women do not progress and break through the glass ceiling is that there is a lack of flexibility for them, be it at home or in the office, to be able to adapt their work to fit it around family commitments. There is a huge stigma the higher you get up the career ladder — if you are working flexibly, you are seen to be lacking in commitment. We know that that is not true. The way to tackle that is to create role models. Our business last year published the UK's first top 50 power part-timers. It comprises chief executive officers, chief operating officers and a whole range of individuals who work absolutely at the top of their game — they are predominantly women — but do it in fewer than five days a week. That has already had a significant impact on business perception of that. If we want to get more women on board, we need to get a better pipeline of women in business. If we are to get a pipeline of women in business, we need to facilitate better flexibility in the way in which they are able to operate. That is not just about a concessionary element of flexibility in existing roles; it is about creating a more agile labour market in which they can move around and up and can progress to other roles.
274. Ultimately, the issue of home or office boils down to a question of trust. It is about how we judge performance. If we judge performance on output as opposed to physical location in the office, we can start to change that culture.
275. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Thank you very much. That was very helpful.
276. **Mr Girvan:** Good afternoon, Emma. I want to focus on the challenges and risks associated with introducing flexible working. How can those risks be mitigated and dealt with? Why are there risks? There is a fear among some that the introduction of flexible working could lead to additional skiving.
277. **Mrs Stewart:** There are huge misperceptions about the risks of flexible working. As part of the research that we did last year, we asked employers whether they had recruited people into more quality part-time flexible roles. The positive benefits were all based on those that had, and all the negativity was directly aligned to those that had not tried it. That highlighted to us that the employers that embrace this agenda are, in the main, predominantly positive about the benefit to the business. The majority of anxieties are from people who have not embraced it. There is an important message about challenging perceptions. There is still a lot of confusion among businesses. We asked employers to say what could be the benefit and what could be the risk. They gave the same answer for both: flexibility was seen as a benefit, because you could get access to your employer at a range of different times; and it was also seen as a risk, because that meant that you might not be able to get access when you needed it. There is a lot of misperception. It is about communication, and cultural and attitudinal change in teams. There needs to be a focus on line managers. We argue that training line managers in workforce development and flexibility is a key part of this.
278. **Mr Girvan:** Thank you, Emma. Has a body of work been undertaken to identify suitable jobs for flexible working to be introduced? We are having a little bit of a problem at the moment with cover at accident and emergency units by consultants. Some have deemed their work practice to be flexible. Have you done a body of work to identify the jobs that are suitable for flexible working?
279. **Mrs Stewart:** We have not done that ourselves. I am aware of a piece of research that was undertaken by an independent practitioner through an organisation called Working Families. I can send you details of that. It looked at the UK Civil Service's openness to flexibility with existing employees and the challenges that it faces at the point of hire in relation to certain roles. It identified a definite mismatch.
280. I am not aware of any sectoral approach or an approach to specific roles. We would argue that we need to establish a

- default position whereby all roles should be open to flexibility unless they are proven not to be suitable.
281. **Mr D Bradley:** Good afternoon, Emma. What are the elements that usually militate against flexibility?
282. **Mrs Stewart:** Again, I would say that it is often down to attitudinal anxieties among business managers or line managers. There are issues in the recruitment industry, in that there is no commercial driver for recruiters to embrace part-time alternatives when they work with employers because they are doing the same amount of work for half the commission. If businesses are using external brokers to find candidates, the recruitment industry as a whole is generally not likely to push back and ask them why they have not considered flexibility. That relationship needs to be looked at.
283. As I said, there are operational barriers as well. There are some very tangible issues. Many corporates that we deal with have said that they would be open at the point of hire to looking at people on reduced hours. However, they allocate budgets based on headcounts and, if they do not use up the budget, they lose it. So, again, there are some complex issues here that just need to be tackled quite carefully.
284. **Mr D Bradley:** Do you recruit people to work mainly in the traditional office setting, or is there room for people to work from home?
285. **Mrs Stewart:** We do both. I would say that 80% of the vacancies that we have dealt with over the years have been office based and 20% home based, but there is an element of flexibility across both types. Most of our work is focused on the professional part-time and flexible roles, which would obviously influence the fact that more of them are based in offices. However, a lot of flexibility is often negotiated further down the line.
286. Our argument is that there are a lot of part-time roles in non-professional industries such as care workers, cleaners, and so forth, that clearly need to be done in physical locations. However, the nature of the market dictates that only 3% of vacancies in the UK are part time and offer over £20,000 pro rata. There is a huge lack of opportunities in that sector. The professional industries are the areas on which we want to focus.
287. **Mr D Bradley:** I know that your organisation is called Women Like Us, but do you find that there is a demand among men for flexible working?
288. **Mrs Stewart:** Absolutely. We are called Women Like Us because we run a range of careers guidance and employability programmes for women with children, but we also run two recruitment businesses: an agency and a job site, which is called Timewise. We do that explicitly because we recognise that this is not just a women's issue.
289. The majority of caring for young children in the home is still done by women and, therefore, they are predominantly the ones who are most affected. In fact, the social analysis of what needs to be done to improve living standards among low- to middle-income families shows that women's work is critical. However, just under a third of our 40,000-odd candidates are, in fact, now men. Particularly with younger-generation men, there is an ambition to work in a more agile way. Again, if you look at the creative industries or at certain tech areas, you see that the classic nine-to-five is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. It absolutely should not be seen just as a mothers' issue. It is an issue for all kinds of people. For businesses, it is an issue about enabling employers to have access to the best possible talent.
290. **Mr D Bradley:** Finally, what type of occupations do you deal with most? Is it professional, manual, or a mixture of both?
291. **Mrs Stewart:** We predominantly focus on the professional occupations. In the recruitment work that we do, we start advertising roles at about £18,000 pro rata, part-time and flexible, and we go

- up to about £120,000 or £140,000 pro rata. We do run engineering roles, other non-traditional roles and some manufacturing roles, but predominantly professional roles. We handle a lot of public sector roles as well. However, we are not a sector-based agency; we are an agency that specialises in flexibility and part-time work, so we are open to any industry.
292. **Mr D Bradley:** Thank you very much, Emma.
293. **The Chairperson:** Emma, can I ask you a question about the potential saving to the public purse? When you are working from home or are engaged in flexible working, there will perhaps be less need for office space and fewer mileage claims in some posts. I know that there are civil servants who work nine-to-five in Belfast and who come from further west and may be travelling four hours every day. Secondly, is there increased productivity? If you take that example, if those workers were working closer to home or at home, they would perhaps use some of that four-hour travel period to complete more work on a day-to-day basis.
294. **Mrs Stewart:** Yes; I agree with everything that you have just said. There are savings across the board, but I think it is important to look quite broadly at what those savings could be. They could be on office space or on travel claims, but, in a more holistic way, the evidence shows that businesses that enable people to work more flexibly and from home have a more productive and efficient staff, which, ultimately, creates far more savings. They also have a more engaged staff, so they make savings in higher retention rates. I think it was the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development that estimated that the average turnover cost per employee is between £8,000 to £12,000 for senior managers and directors. If you are able to offer people flexibility that means that they can fit work with family life, the evidence shows that you are likely to retain your staff for longer. The other point I would make on savings is that it is not just about flexibility and
- working from home. It has got to be about looking at whether it is possible to design shorter-hour roles so that, if you have a team of 25 full-timers but somebody leaves and you identify that that role could possibly be done on a 21- or 24-hour basis, you would clearly be bringing efficiencies into your department by looking at job design more creatively.
295. **The Chairperson:** Obviously, aspects of the private sector are much more advanced than the public sector. Will you outline what private sector approaches will be applicable to the public sector?
296. **Mrs Stewart:** I would not necessarily say that it is more advanced. I think that is the perception, but the reality is often that the same perceptions exist across the two. There are benefits that can be mirrored. Large corporations face the same challenges as large public sector organisations in overcoming attitudinal change within individual teams. The challenge with the public sector is that what can work in your favour — namely the leverage you have in equality duties, social value, and the social drivers for embracing those approaches — can also sometimes prohibit quick, innovative change.
297. I think that the nature of a lot of work in the public sector lends itself to flexibility, and we know that the public sector is very good at enabling its workforce to be flexible. I think that the focus needs to be put on recruitment practices. That is where the private sector is beginning to open up and embrace a more flexible approach. A lot of the work that is being done in the UK at the moment by a group on flexible working, led by the head of Lloyds Banking Group, is really focusing on driving through this business case and looking at how recruitment practices can change. That group is made up of about 20 leading corporates in the UK. However, I think that everyone still has a long way to go.
298. I would like to make one other point, which is that the public sector has a significant role in influencing the private sector as a procurer. It is an employer,

but it can also procure the services of lots of small businesses. If there is an ambition to open up and stimulate greater flexibility in the Northern Ireland workforce, there needs to be some focus on what leverage can be placed on your supply chain in the procurement processes that you undertake.

299. **The Chairperson:** Thank you, Emma. I have one final question. Do you ever foresee a day when MPs or MLAs will engage in more flexible working or working from home?
300. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Some people think that we do that already.
301. **Mrs Stewart:** I would like to see job shares. There is a bit of a drive for that at the moment. The obvious answer is that you just have to look at the shortage of women in Parliament here and even in the London Assembly to see that flexibility is a huge barrier. I think that you can job-share those roles. To be serious for a minute, at ministerial level, there is a genuine debate going on about whether working practices in Parliament should be changed. My experience of working with Ministers in London suggests that the working hours are incredibly prohibitive and not family friendly, but I think that, once voted in, there is definitely scope for job-sharing Ministers. I think that there is a difficulty to overcome about the population voting for two people who have one view. That is something that probably needs more thought.
302. **The Chairperson:** Emma, this has been absolutely fascinating. Thank you for your contribution. I wish you all the best.
303. **Mrs Stewart:** Thank you very much.

13 March 2013

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Daithí McKay (Chairperson)
 Mr Leslie Cree
 Ms Megan Fearon
 Mr Paul Girvan
 Mr John McCallister
 Mr David McIlveen
 Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
 Mr Adrian McQuillan
 Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Dr Nigel Oseland *Workplace Unlimited*

304. **The Chairperson:** I welcome Nigel Oseland to the Committee. Please make any opening comments on the inquiry and give your own perspective on it.
305. **Dr Nigel Oseland (Workplace Unlimited):** I will give you a bit of background to put the issue in context. I am a workplace strategist, a change manager and an environmental psychologist. I started my career as a civil servant.
306. **The Chairperson:** We will not hold that against you.
307. **Dr Oseland:** I worked in government research for the Building Research Establishment. I have worked with various consulting practices. I would have been appointed mostly to help people to implement flexible working or agile working. Two years ago, I established my own practice.
308. **The Chairperson:** Given your knowledge of the case studies outlined, what would the inquiry need to focus on in establishing how flexible working can best be implemented strategically in the public sector here?
309. **Dr Oseland:** The key issue is to understand why you are doing it. Over the past few years, the flexible working and agile working agenda
- has been hijacked by property and facilities management as a space-saving technique, and it was not initially intended as that. It was intended as a means of changing the culture, supporting different work styles and creating a different working environment that better supported the way that people worked.
310. You need to establish what you are trying to get out of it and not get trapped into being totally concerned about saving space and money. Do not get me wrong: it will save you space and money, but there are probably easier ways of saving space and money than going through a change process and implementing agile and flexible working. It is quite a journey to take people on. So, have a clear vision, be strong that you want to do it and then start to think about how you would implement it.
311. **The Chairperson:** Do you agree that a lot of it is common sense? People sometimes take four hours to drive to a meeting when that business could have been conducted over the phone, on FaceTime or using technology. That is just one example.
312. **Dr Oseland:** There are lots of examples. The paper that members have seen on flexible working benefits came about as a result of my clients asking, "What are the benefits? Why should we do it?" So I thought that I would bring some case studies together. As you see, there are many benefits. It is about creating a more productive, collaborative, interactive environment. It is about reducing the time wasted through travel, and not necessarily business travel. It may be that you reduce the time travelling between meetings and locations, but if you offer homeworking or occasional homeworking as an option, studies have found that staff like that. They are reducing their travel costs and travel time, and some of the

- studies have also found that people who homework tend to work for slightly longer. If they have saved two hours in travelling time, they will put some of that time back in, get the job done and work until the task is complete rather than thinking that they are doing a nine-to-five shift.
313. The other big benefit, which has not been talked about over the past few years during the recession, is sustainability. There is an old adage that the greenest building is the one that you do not build. If we can stop acquiring more space or consolidate the space that we use so that we are heating and managing less space, that can only be good for the environment as well as issues such as reduced travel.
314. **The Chairperson:** The paper makes a couple of references to Ernst and Young and GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), which mention the benefits of high visibility between employees and clearer lines of sight. Will you elaborate on that?
315. **Dr Oseland:** There is almost a mixed message. One concern about implementing flexible working is how you manage people if they are not in the building and are homeworking. That always comes up as an issue. You would need to address how you train managers to manage people by results rather than by presenteeism. Those studies picked up on the fact that because they created a different environment, as part of the package it would have been a more open-plan environment. There would have been fewer offices. There would have been small, quiet rooms, and the managers would have sat out in the open-plan environment, and so on. They are reporting that those space changes help them to have more access to managers. However, that has to be balanced. Do not just send all your people home. That is not the right answer either. If you allow occasional homeworking, you need to think about how you manage your people slightly differently. There is some good Ofsted case study work that is worth reading, which has presented on how to manage remote workers.
316. **The Chairperson:** Are there any particular case studies that you want to highlight to the Committee?
317. **Dr Oseland:** For you guys, I guess I could focus on the public sector ones. I touch on some of them — for example, the Department for Children, Schools and Families, as it was called then, and the case study of its building, Petty France. That is a relevant case study for you. The paper refers to a co-authored guide on flexible working, funded by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC), ‘Working Beyond Walls’. The OGC is now the Government Property Unit. There are some good case studies in that publication, such as the Treasury building on Horse Guards Road. If I were you, I would focus on those public sector case studies.
318. There are also good lessons to be learned from quangos or companies that were Civil Service and are now in the private sector. I am thinking of organisations such as BT. In the early days, it did a lot of research to understand whether homeworking and flexible working worked for its organisation. A lot of the good metrics came out of some of its early studies. Its mentality was different from what it is now. It is in a brave new world now, but it went through quite a change process to get to where it is today, and some good lessons have been learned.
319. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Any kind of change in culture is very challenging. I am impressed with the examples that we have seen, particularly of the open-space approach and the flexible working arrangements, in so far as they have been introduced. As for the challenges and the positives that you have highlighted, what challenges must be overcome? What are the downsides that need to be managed?
320. **Dr Oseland:** I tend to split them into two areas. The first is the practicalities. Do you have the right technology that enables people to work remotely? That is standard. Is the space arranged to support agile working, and is there sufficient ancillary space, including

- breakout space and informal meeting areas? These are all ingredients of a good, flexible working environment.
321. Heavily paper-based offices, and dealing with their storage problems, is still one of the biggest issues that we come across when we carry out a change process. As companies are becoming paperless — or, rather, paper-light — it is becoming easier to implement agile working.
322. The big thing about flexible working is that you tend to have to leave your desk clear at the end of the evening so that it is available for other people to use. However, if you are heavily paper-based, that can cause issues that you need to be able to manage. Those are the technical and practical aspects that you need to deal with.
323. The second area is the attitudinal aspects, which include things such as trusting staff to work remotely and, as I mentioned, whether you are able to manage them working remotely and whether there is buy-in from all levels of the organisation.
324. Typically, we might find that senior executives would buy into agile working because they can see the benefits in productivity and cost savings. At the grassroots level, people get it because they believe that their work/life balance will be better, and they believe that they will be more productive because they can work from home and can write a report without any distractions. However, we find that we struggle when it comes to people in middle management. I empathise with middle managers because they learn how to manage on the job in a particular way and work themselves up through the ranks. Then we go in and say that we are going to change things and do them differently. I spend a lot of time and effort in getting middle managers on board, training them and making sure that they understand the downsides of flexible working, which is that because you cannot see people, you do not know whether they are being productive and effective. A lot of middle managers can do it, but sometimes they believe that it requires more of an effort for them.
325. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** What about data storage and security?
326. **Dr Oseland:** I am not an expert in that area, but it used to be an issue four or five years ago. I tend to work alongside technologists so those issues do not seem as prevalent as they used to be these days. People still talk about it, but I have worked with public sector organisations in the London boroughs, and there seems to be a trend. My experience is that the trend seems to be moving towards thin client technology, which seems to have an extra level of security, rather than network PCs. It also means that people do not need a laptop and might be able to log on from their own devices, either a PC or a tablet. The companies that I have dealt with tell me that there is sufficient security to allow that to happen and that it is almost safer than carrying a laptop around with information on it. Things are changing, but that is not my area of expertise.
327. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Gender equality is an issue, even with more traditional workplace practices. You mentioned the work/life balance. Some years ago, the concept of a glass ceiling for women made a big impression on me. When it comes to promotion opportunities, the tendency is to move towards the centre, and there is a need to relocate or travel to work to where headquarters staff are located. Have you encountered that in your study, and is the flexible working process inherently more gender-friendly?
328. **Dr Oseland:** I think that it is gender- and age-friendly. BT undertook a study in which it found that more mothers were returning to work for them than the average. I know people who have set up organisations to get mums back into work, and those mums might want to work from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. It has the flexible working philosophy embedded in it. It is not about working nine to five every day; it may be about doing shorter hours or compressed hours. It may be that you want to do three days of eight or nine hours, and

- that would be your working week. If you can marry up people doing different shifts and part-time arrangements, there are space-saving benefits as well.
329. Other studies have shown that agile/flexible working is good for staff retention. People like it so they tend to stay with an organisation. It allows for changes in personal circumstances, and other companies have said that it attracts a newer generation of worker who may have different views than some of us on the work/life balance.
330. **The Chairperson:** Will you comment on the open-plan environment? What are its pros and cons? When I have tried to work at home, I have had to hide away in a corner of the house where there are no noises or distractions. There is correspondence from a civil servant about this in our papers today. A lot of people cannot cope in that environment, so how do you accommodate it?
331. **Dr Oseland:** That debate is going to go on and on. We are talking about flexible working, of which open plan is a component, but the two are separate issues. I do not think that we, as an industry, have ever answered that open-plan versus less open-plan environment. We do not even like using the term “open plan” because it has derogatory connotations. We tend to talk about landscaped offices, and so on. We try to introduce different types of space with a flexible working environment. It is about choice of work setting. We try to balance the open plan with semi-partitioned spaces and perhaps introduce more quiet rooms and even more telephone booth-type rooms. Alongside that, we try to create spaces in which people can get away from the large open-plan spaces and break it up. As you said, by offering occasional homeworking, people can get that report done.
332. You might think that cafes would be a noisy and disturbing environment, but we have found that they are less disturbing because you are not with your colleagues, you are not listening out, and you do not feel as if you are being overheard. Actually, a noisy cafe environment can become quite a private space in a funny sort of way.
333. I am starting to do more research on topics such as personality differences and how personality affects the kind of working environment that we are used to. We know from research that more introverted people, for example, prefer calming, quiet spaces. They like doing detailed work, and they need that kind of environment. We also know that at the other extreme, extroverts like buzzy, stimulating environments. They are social animals and like to be with people. If you look at revenues and benefits or finance departments, for instance, you will find that different types of people prefer different environments. I do not think that we have ever recognised that truly because it is another level of complication.
334. You are absolutely right. I think that it is about providing choice and different work settings that support the space. You need to start by doing an analysis of what people do. You need to understand how they work now, and you need to work with them to try to understand how they might work in the future. From that, you can understand what their work activities are and where they are most productive performing those work activities. Then you can start to build up the space around that requirement.
335. **Mr D McIlveen:** Thanks, Nigel, for your presentation. Your paper states that flexible working seems to reduce absenteeism. That seems to be the pattern that had been highlighted. How can companies and organisations set that against ensuring that productivity remains high? What would be the benchmarks for that?
336. **Dr Oseland:** I will tackle the absenteeism issue first. Bear in mind that this paper is a collection of case studies, which tend to be the most positive. To my knowledge, no one has done a good, independent piece of research that looks at the pros and cons of open plan or flexible working. Case studies tend to focus on the positive, so we can look back on only the positive.

337. Organisations tell me that a reduction in absenteeism happens, for example, when people have a dental appointment and do not necessarily have to take half a day's leave or even half a day's sick leave. What they will do is work in the morning, attend their dental appointment and then go home and do more work. They may lose an hour out of the day rather than having to take half a day's leave.
338. Similarly if people have a bit of a sniffle, they may not want to travel to the office because it is not necessarily a good idea in case they gave everyone else the cold. However, they are quite happy to do some process work, e-mails or reading at home. That is where a lot of the work on reduced absenteeism comes about. People do not take sick leave because they do not feel that they need to because even when they are feeling under the weather, they can still do some work.
339. Travel disruption and the weather are slightly different issues, but if people can work from home, they will not spend a couple of hours trying to get into an office when they do not need to.
340. **Mr D McIlveen:** How is productivity gauged?
341. **Dr Oseland:** Productivity is, as we know, quite difficult to measure. In fact, a lot of people say that you cannot measure it. I disagree; I think that you can measure productivity, but it is difficult and time-consuming. The productivity metrics will be different for different organisations and even for different teams within organisations.
342. At one extreme, a measure of productivity is profitability. A few companies in the cases studies quoted gains in profitability — GSK, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and EC Harris — which they put down to a flexible working environment. Extraneous factors will be involved in that. Productivity and profitability are not just down to the environment. There are other factors such as motivational issues and the market. However, there are metrics. It is obviously different in a public sector organisation. If it was a corporate organisation, you could look at things such as utilisation rates, fees, ratio of overhead to fee earners. Lawyers are great because they put everything on a six-minute time sheet, so you know when they are productive and when they are not. There are metrics, but it is quite difficult.
343. **Mr D McIlveen:** Are those the sort of metrics that Centrica was using? I think that 96% of people working flexibly outperformed their office-based counterparts.
344. **Dr Oseland:** I think that the Centrica example was a perception. A lot of people will ask their staff whether they feel that the environment has made them more productive. I think that the Centrica result was based on a perception rather than a measure.
345. **Mr D McIlveen:** On the estate side of any company or organisation, have you identified drawbacks in reducing property portfolios? Are there advantages to workers having a base as opposed to working exclusively from a home environment?
346. **Dr Oseland:** I have never promoted going heavily on the homeworking. You need balance. You still need a base for bringing people together for training, mentoring, collaboration, interaction, instilling loyalty and all those good things. Some companies have perhaps pushed the homeworking too far and have lost those things. I know of one company that says that it now wants to get people back into the office. I do not want to name the company, but they know that they have pushed homeworking too far. So it now has a campaign to see how it can bring people back in to the office. You do not want people working in isolation. At the end of the day, you are all part of a single organisation, and there has to be that bonding and that gel. There is a balance, which is why we talk about occasional homeworking as and when required and do not make it the main option.

347. If you do your analysis and go into an organisation and find that the space is used for only 50% of the time, which is typical, those people are already mobile. If they are not at their desk, they are somewhere else. They might be somewhere else in the building — we call that internally mobile — and they might be at meetings or collaborating with colleagues in a different part of the building. Therefore, they are already mobile. You are then providing them with the kit appliance to support that: for example, making sure that they have the right space and the right technology.
348. If you go into an organisation and you do your utilisation studies and they are already sitting at their desk for 70% to 80 % of the time, that is a different situation. How can you introduce agile flexible working there? You have to look at the homeworking front, and that is a different game altogether. It is much better when the organisation is already mobile, and you are going in and supporting it and making it formal, rather than when you are trying to push towards mobility. However, you would be surprised: even with a lot of public sector organisations, the utilisation is down at 50% or 60%, and that gives scope for implementing desk-sharing.
349. **Mr D McIlveen:** I am touching on the point that Mitchel raised about the glass ceiling, and so on. Is there a risk, or have any studies been done around the effects on teamwork? It would be feasible that some roles have to be done in the office; they cannot be done outside the office.
350. **Dr Oseland:** Of course.
351. **Mr D McIlveen:** Have any studies been done on the impact on those who have the luxury — if you can call it that — of working at home and those who do not?
352. **Dr Oseland:** I have not seen anything published on that, although it does come up. It is more about equity or equality. If you offer homeworking to one part of your team, they could say that they cannot do it because they do not have the space at home or they have dependants at home and it would be a disruptive environment. There is a fairness issue, and that has been raised. With regard to flexible working, you have the right to ask to work flexibly, but you do not have the right to work flexibly. If your role suits such arrangements, and your manager is comfortable with it, he or she will allow you to do it. I do not think that that has been fully studied: it is more anecdotal evidence. When it comes up, you try to appease those people in other ways. There may be some alternatives for them. They could still work remotely, but maybe in a library, a café or something.
353. **The Chairperson:** What are your views on companies moving away from flexible working? There has been recent press coverage concerning Yahoo! and Google.
354. **Dr Oseland:** I am a little bit disappointed with Marissa, and I have not got to the bottom of it. The statement was that she stopped authorising homeworking. I do not know whether she is still allowing some kind of flexibility and agility in the office space, but it seems that she has a particular issue with homeworking. The way that it was managed was probably a bit misguided. At the end of the day, flexible working is all about trusting your staff to work when and where they are most productive. It is about getting the most out of them and, in return, giving them a better work/life balance, and so on. To put an edict out that you cannot do it and that if you want to home work, you are not right for the company seems a little bit strong. Interestingly, other people have come out and taken their own stance. Richard Branson blogged about it, and he thought that she was misguided. However, he accepts that some people like homeworking and others just do not get on with it. At the end of the day, it is about choice and balance, and I think that he was quite level-headed about it.
355. A couple of years ago when there was bad snow in Washington and the whole of the public sector in DC closed down for about two weeks, Barack Obama made a statement to say that he did not want that to happen again and that they

- needed to get their people tooled up to be able to work from home occasionally and to work remotely. There will always be different views on it. I would not be in the business of promoting agile working if I did not believe that it was beneficial; I just would not do that. This goes back to my opening statement. It is not just about saving space and money, so if you are doing it just for that reason, you are probably going to get into some kind of trouble later on. You have to have the intention that you want to change the way that people work and the culture.
356. **The Chairperson:** Which countries have got it right or are moving in the right direction in respect of the public sector embracing flexible working and homeworking?
357. **Dr Oseland:** As I say, I think that you have to go and look at the book that I mentioned, 'Working Beyond Walls', and at some of the case studies. As I say, all the ones that have been published tend to be quite positive, so it is quite difficult to unearth the bad news. I think that what tends to happen is that flexible working does not get implemented if it is not likely to work. You tend to do a feasibility study, where you look at the pros and cons — I guess that this is part of that — and you might then do a pilot study, where you test it on a small portion of your population, maybe 50 or 100 people, to see how they get on with any new technology and how the managers cope with managing those people. So, you test it at a small level before you roll it out. As people tend to go down that route, there are no bad stories, because it is never implemented if they do not think that it will work.
358. As you can see, there are plenty of success stories. The Department for Children, Schools and Families case study is a good example.
359. **Mr Cree:** I certainly found the case studies very interesting, but it is not an exact science, is it? In the EC Harris example, it moved to new headquarters because it thought that the corporate image was very important. That is quite a different thing altogether. We have a similar situation here where one of our Departments is moving to new headquarters. Perhaps the people there should all work from home. That might be a way of saving a lot of money.
360. **Dr Oseland:** I have to say that I do not think that that is the right solution.
361. **Mr Cree:** I say that with my tongue in my cheek.
362. Then there is the one from Morgan Stanley where one of its employees said that she enjoyed being in the office so much, she did not want to go home.
363. **Dr Oseland:** That was one of the comments in a questionnaire.
364. **Mr Cree:** It is interesting.
365. **Mr Girvan:** That says more about her home.
366. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** You wonder what kind of home she comes from.
367. **Mr Cree:** You cannot go there.
368. In the summary at the end, you say:
"flexible working is easily justified by the property savings alone".
369. I think that that is right. You go on to say:
"the additional benefits are considered a more significant driver for flexible working – they are just more difficult to demonstrate."
370. That is the big issue when you try to look at it in a general sense; it is very difficult to do that. Do you see a situation emerging where flexible working will become a management technique rather than just an experiment? I think that all these explain, perhaps unkindly, why it has just been an experiment so far.
371. **Dr Oseland:** I think that it is unfair to say that they are just experiments. I take your point that this is a document of case studies, and as I said, it is not independent research; these are case studies. I accept that only the good news tends to get reported. When you

- hear about the bad stories, it is normally anecdotal or, as I said, it tends to get nipped in the bud before it even gets to implementation, because you normally get a feel that it is not going to stack up and work. However, there are lots of companies out there doing flexible working. This is not new. We looked at doing it in IBM in the early 1990s. Frank Duffy introduced it as a concept, and it has been around for nearly 40 years.
372. **Mr Cree:** It is actually a bit longer than that. I was involved in it in the 1980s, but it was more or less a novelty then.
373. **Dr Oseland:** Exactly. It has taken people a long time to get used to the fact that it is a viable solution and it works. I think that part of the reason why it works now and did not, say, five or 10 years ago is the technology. There was a lot of belief that the technology would enable and deliver, but it did not. However, I think that we have resolved that now. Now, the issue is more about the people. We have sorted out the technology; it is now about hearts and minds and changing the way in which people work. Let us go on that journey. Lots of large organisations do it successfully. It is unfair to say that it is an experiment. It has been proven in a lot of places. We do not have that full breadth of independent research.
374. **Mr Cree:** At the end of the day, it has to be a trade-off. Productivity is quite distinct from savings on property costs, running costs and all those sorts of things. That is really where it has to be. Do you agree?
375. **Dr Oseland:** I do. It always comes down to that. People tend to focus on the property savings because you can measure that. The finance director or the treasurer or whatever like those kinds of numbers: they can see them. When you start talking about improving interaction, collaboration and work-life balance, and you say that people are going to be happier and more productive, you are absolutely right: it comes down to the productivity question and whether you can measure it. Your colleague raised that issue. I believe that you can.
- There are smatterings of evidence to suggest that it is positive. I would like to be able to quote you a more detailed and independent study, but it is not there. There is an element of belief and trust that it will work. I understand that. As I said, you kind of collect your own data. You do your utilisation studies, and you look at the technology. It is almost about whether you are ready for change. You have to understand whether your own organisation is ready for a change. You need to ensure that you have all the tools and the attitude and everything lined up to allow you to do it. You kind of have to do it within your own sphere. Every organisation is different. Some of the issues that we come up against are so important for one organisation, but when you talk to another organisation, they are just not on its radar. My advice is to listen to your own people, do your own study and see whether it is right for you.
376. **Mr Girvan:** Thank you for your paper. A lot of the case studies are related to private sector business. Knowing the private sector, it will not implement something unless it has some measurable outputs and it deems it to be successful. Some people believe that, in the public sector, you are paid well and whether you perform or do not perform, you get your pay anyway. That issue gets mentioned to you. People in the private sector sometimes get frustrated as a result of that. Some of those who do manual jobs cannot take up the advantage of flexible working. Some people in the public sector cannot have the flexibility of saying, "I am working from home today. I can log on to the computer, I can go away and do whatever I have to do, and I will be back." I am not saying that there are not mechanisms in place to ensure that they are working, but how do you deal with those who are disenfranchised because of that? There has to be some way of dealing with it. We have not put enough work into the public sector to identify when we are getting results from people. That is the problem.

377. We undertook a bit of work in another organisation that I am involved with. We found that, with 15% fewer staff, we received 20% more production in a year. We then identified what had been going on for the past number of years. It was whether people had been working harder lately or whether they were just working smarter. That is what we found. A lot of them seemingly felt that they were very busy before, but they were not actually achieving anything. It was the case of, "That is the way it has always been done; that is the way we have to do it." The private sector seems to have embraced it in some areas in which it knows that it can control it. If a salesman is not performing, he is not getting his bonus. Therefore, it is quite simple to deal with it. Most salesmen would probably be classed as having flexible working because they are in their own car and are maybe travelling here, there and everywhere. If they get a result, that is it. However, I am saying that it is not quite the same in the public sector, and we are looking at it from a public sector point of view.
378. **Dr Oseland:** Sure, but there are plenty of examples in the public sector where it has been successful as well. I have mentioned a couple, but you should also read 'Working Beyond Walls'. Actually, to some extent, a lot of the flexible working that has been adopted by the corporate organisations has been pushed by the Government. Obviously, there are austerity measures in place and they are looking for large savings, but I do not necessarily think it is the public sector following corporates. Corporates have adopted flexible working over the past few years because they have seen it happening in the public sector and thought, "Why can't we do it?" I would not necessarily put the public sector down by saying that it is following. In some cases, it is leading, and there are some really good examples of where it has been pushed.
379. How you deal with the disenfranchised people is all about the change process and communication. It is about having that clear vision and setting down the guidelines and rules so that people understand, if they are not able to be fully flexible, why that is. Perhaps it is the nature of their work, and there may be ways around it. What is quite interesting is that we always used to think that the people involved in processed work need to be at their desk in the office, whereas, actually, now there are organisations saying that, if it is processed work, they can monitor and measure it, so they do not have to be at their desk in the office, because it is easier to measure than things like more creative work, or people attending meetings one after the other, and so on. It is starting to change, but I do not have an answer to the question of disenfranchisement. I think it is unfair to say that the public sector is following. I think that, in some cases, the public sector is leading the way in flexible working.
380. **Ms Fearon:** My question is in relation to homeworking. Do you think there will be any added cost to the employee in home insurance, increased rates and liability if their home is being used as a business centre? In your experience, does that put people off converting to homeworking, or do businesses subsidise that?
381. **Dr Oseland:** You need to be careful and seek legal advice on that. A lot of organisations have not gone down the route of telling people that they are home workers now. What they have done is said that they are going to provide a flexible working environment, and that people have the choice to work in the office, occasionally work from home or work on the move, and so on. As soon as you designate their home as their place of work, it is all about health and safety checks, and they may actually be liable for some kind of business tax, and so on. So, seek legal advice. Most companies simply say that it is a choice to occasionally work at home; it is not that you are now a home worker. If you are going to make people home workers, it is a whole different ball game, so you would have to take different advice on that.

382. **The Chairperson:** Nigel, you referred to Barack Obama and the United States earlier. Are you aware of any legislation at federal level there that requires public sector jobs to be assessed for remote working?
383. **Dr Oseland:** No, I am not aware of any.
384. **The Chairperson:** I have another question as well. In another session, there was reference to software that can be used to measure productivity when people are working from home. Will you elaborate on that and how effective it is?
385. **Dr Oseland:** There is software available that looks at, for example, activity on a particular IP address, and monitors whether the machine is active, in effect. I worked with a company — a bank — that had installed that across its computers. We did check it, because my concern is that, just because you are at your desk, you do not need to be processing; you might be thinking or reading. We do other activities; we do not just type all day. So I was concerned that it was not representative of productivity. You might argue that it is the creative bits, when people get together and collaborate, where we are most effective, and the emails and the writing up is secondary almost, but that is another debate. Anyway, we did test it. We did things such as observation studies, where we looked, for example, at the time that people were spending at their desk and away from their desk. There was a correlation between occupancy activity and PC activity. Obviously PC activity was lower than actual occupancy, because people do not spend 100% of their time typing. However, that does not actually answer your question. You asked whether it is related to productivity. We used PC monitoring to measure occupancy utilisation. The jury's out on whether PC activity means productivity, as such. For the reasons I have just said, it is not just about output, it is about quality of output. Keyboard activity does not necessarily mean high-quality activity.
386. **The Chairperson:** I think it is a question of trust, as well, between the employer and the employee. Have there been any cases where employees have had a webcam on top of their computer at home so that the employer can keep an eye on them?
387. **Dr Oseland:** I have not seen that one. As I said, it has been about the processing. There is an element of distrust there. I do not know; perhaps if your role is one of processing, and by having that software on the PC, you do get occasionally to work from home, maybe you would be willing to do that. However, when we used the software, we were not allowed to have individual activity reports. Data is presented only at a team, function or group level. Data tends not to be given at the individual level, for privacy reasons. If you are thinking of going down that route, you may have to look into that further.
388. **The Chairperson:** Thank you very much, Nigel. That was excellent.
389. **Dr Oseland:** I hope that that was useful.

20 March 2013

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin (Acting Chairperson)
 Mrs Judith Cochrane
 Mr Leslie Cree
 Mr Paul Girvan
 Mr John McCallister
 Mr David McIlveen
 Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Mr David Horsler *Salford City Council*

390. **The Acting Chairperson:** I remind members that the session is being recorded by Hansard. Given the amount of electronic activity, can we ensure that mobile phones are switched off as they interfere with the transmission and recording of proceedings?
391. We will hear from David Horsler, customer support services, Salford City Council; and Jonathan Burt from Salford City Council. There is a secretariat paper, and there are issues there for areas of discussion and a slide presentation kindly provided by Salford City Council. I invite our colleagues and witnesses this morning, David and Jonathan, to make a short opening statement.
392. **Mr David Horsler (Salford City Council):** Good morning. I must apologise as Jon Burt has been called out and we have had technical problems this morning. If there are any specific issues that I cannot answer and that he can, I will note them and come back to you.
393. **The Acting Chairperson:** David, can you give us some background to the reasons why you adopted this approach and the experience and benefits that you see from it?
394. **Mr Horsler:** Certainly. I will be very brief, as I know that time is short. By way of background, Salford is a city on the western edge of greater Manchester, and it has about 250,000 inhabitants. We have more than 6,000 staff, excluding teaching staff, of whom 2,000 work with the community and in home care, for example, so our office-based number is 4,000-ish. A great deal of work has been done on relocating and looking at accommodation for those staff.
395. Through the slide show that I provided for you, I have attempted to identify the three varying priorities for the reasons for undertaking a review of work styles and buildings, etc. Currently, and this is, I think, driven primarily by our financial situation, the third property management perspective is the dominant approach. We are trying to dramatically reduce our overheads for property holding and recover, as far as possible, capital receipts to cover our borrowing requirements. However, we have also attempted to use property management and work-style management as a way of changing the way certain parts of our council operate. A number of smaller units — for example, our human resources unit — have completely restructured themselves over the past few years, and we have used the way that they work, their style of working and the physical conditions within which they work to enable new ways of working.
396. Also, we are cognisant of the fact that, generally, employees require more of a work/life balance. Therefore, enabling people to work from home or even to be home workers has been an important aspect of a competitive recruitment environment. A significant number of our call centre workers, for example, work from home, some of whom live hundreds of miles from Salford. If I stop there and open it up for questions, I think that that might be a productive way forward.
397. **The Acting Chairperson:** Thank you very much, David. To help the Committee with its task, will you outline how the council established the performance baselines

- so that it could measure the qualitative or quantitative benefits?
398. **Mr Horsler:** Quantitatively, that has been relatively easy. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy has, for some time, had a benchmarking approach to a number of property issues across all councils, and we have, over time, had national performance indicators on some of those. Most importantly in our case, we looked at the ratio of staff to workstations and the square meters that a work station uses in a building, and we then attached costs to those. Our current estimate is that every work station costs us £1,000 a year, which is a significant reduction over the past three or four years.
399. Qualitatively, it is much more difficult. I do not think that we are sophisticated enough to know what impact it has on recruitment and retention, for example, particularly in an environment where the general trend is for us to significantly reduce our workforce anyway. The broader dynamic in our workforce makes it, I think, almost impossible to see whether we are improving the way that people feel about working for the organisation.
400. **The Acting Chairperson:** Have you experienced any resistance? Workplaces, I suppose understandably, have a well-established culture. Was there any resistance at management level or within your workforce to the change?
401. **Mr Horsler:** Yes, we have had significant resistance. The change management model that I outlined at the beginning of the slide presentation has, I think, been a touchstone for the way in which we have attempted to address that. We have been looking for local leadership to pick up the baton of workplace change and for early adopters in all situations to lead the way forward. We have then demonstrated to other people just how it can work.
402. We have had two key issues, the first of which is the vast amount of storage — mostly paper storage — that individuals have. Three years ago, we estimated that 15% of all our floor space was covered by filing cabinets. Therefore, enabling and encouraging people to work in a much more paperless environment has been a significant cultural, as well as technical, challenge for us. The other issue is what I call nesting, where people want to own physical space in a workplace. If there are more people than workstations, we need people to be disciplined in clearing vacant workstations as they leave, and they have to be prepared to come back to a different workstation later in the day. For some people, that has been very difficult on a personal level.
403. **The Acting Chairperson:** Thank you very much, David. That has been very useful and helpful. I will now invite my colleagues to join in with questions.
404. **Mr Cree:** Good morning. How do you measure the productivity from the work that you have done.
405. **Mr Horsler:** Personnel productivity?
406. **Mr Cree:** Yes.
407. **Mr Horsler:** Some specifics are quite easy to measure. Most of our home workers, for example, work on a largely transactional basis, either answering telephone calls or doing transactional work on benefits and so on. That work is very measurable, and our overall finding is that people are more productive in a home-working environment than they are in the office, particularly those whose home situations mean that breaking up their working day to enable them to, for example, collect their children, is an important part of the way that they want to work.
408. We have also identified a reduction in sickness absence. It is difficult to determine whether that is a reduction in sickness or a reduction in the recording of people who are absent, because of their flexible working patterns, as sick. However, there certainly has been a reduction.
409. We looked at the totality of what it costs to host somebody at work: the running

- costs of the buildings, IT equipment, energy usage, car mileage etc. By taking a much more flexible approach to where people are located, those costs have reduced significantly. Most people, for example, are now capable of working from any PC in the council and from their home PC through the use of Enterprise Anywhere. A number of people, and I include myself in this, will not come in to work for days at a time but are connected to work. That results in, for example, identifiable carbon management savings.
410. **The Acting Chairperson:** Is Enterprise Anywhere a universal software package?
411. **Mr Horsler:** Enterprise Single Sign-On (ESSO) Anywhere is at the sharp end of Microsoft Office, but it is commercially available.
412. **Mr McCallister:** My question is about the types of posts and jobs that are suitable and unsuitable. Did the opportunities open up much when you rolled this out? Were you surprised at some of the roles and jobs in which you could offer flexible working, or were they fairly standard?
413. **Mr Horsler:** In our presentation, you will see a set of definitions that we use to differentiate between types of work styles. It is possible to work differently with all those work styles. However, you have to understand that there are differences. Home workers are, in some senses, very easy, because they work at home most of the time, but, behind that, there are a number of requirements: health and safety, payments, making sure that the kit is hardwired to the city council rather than working through iffy internet connections etc. So the council makes an investment in home workers. It costs about £1,500 upfront per person to get their kit installed etc.
414. Fixed workers are classically administrative/clerical staff who do not really move around a lot but tend to be diluted throughout the organisation. We do not have typing pools or any modern equivalent. We have to understand that those people will probably use the same desk most of the time. However, in our broader calculations, because those people tend to mingle with mobile workers in particular, our norms of eight work stations per 10 staff also apply to them.
415. We have to be aware of the welfare needs as well as the operational needs of staff in new workplaces. So, for example, galley kitchens and separate places to eat, so that people do not have to eat at their desk, are critical to the success of this.
416. **Mr Weir:** I will follow on from John's point. You identified different work styles that may be applicable to different roles or jobs. When you were implementing this, to what extent did you have a preconception of who would fit into what role? When you implemented it, to what extent did you find that you had to make adaptations having found categories that you had not necessarily thought could fit into particular pigeonholes?
417. **Mr Horsler:** The first three work styles shown on the slide are home, fixed and mobile. In some senses, we have made very crude assumptions about who fits into which. With the fourth work style, the agile workers, you have to be much more specific because you have to create an agile work environment for them. That often requires adaptations to ICT systems and making sure that staff have the right type of kit. Are they laptop users or do they need something less than a laptop, such as an iPad? You have to be very specific and design around the work style of agile workers. We run an analysis tool over those groups of staff. I do not think that we have that many people who are truly agile. However, we are involved in a project with all of our adult social workers, which will be the biggest group of staff to move down that line.
418. **Mr D McIlveen:** Thank you, David. When did the council start to roll out this concept?
419. **Mr Horsler:** We started taking it very seriously in 2010. The driver was the comprehensive spending review, which

- identified that we would have to make significant savings over the ensuing three or four years. Property was an area that had never been seriously tackled in seeking to make cost savings. In discussions with the trade unions, they asked us to look at anything that was not job-related to make those savings.
420. **Mr D McIlveen:** It is probably fair to say that, at times, none of us likes change. At times, the public sector is probably more resistant to change than everybody else. I guess that, at some point around 2010, a conversation had to take place with a number of your staff members who were already in post. So they had already been interviewed and taken up a largely office-based position. They were then told that they had the option of their post being home-based as opposed to office-based or maybe — I do not know — even that that was an obligation. I wonder about staff who were already in post and found themselves in the position of being able to be based at home such as, as you quite rightly mentioned, people who have a front line, customer-facing role. Was there any friction from a teamwork perspective? Did you find any members of staff who found themselves in this position almost by accident? Somebody may have said, “I am in an office-based position. Had I known that, at some point in the future, I would be home-based, I would have applied for a different post in the council.” Was there any resistance, friction or other negative impact on teamwork?
421. **Mr Horsler:** It is important to understand that most of the process that we have undertaken so far has not really been about staff moving from desk-based to home-based working. Rather, we looked at desk-based roles, in which people have their own desk, probably their own office, certainly their own filing cabinets and probably a lot of empty space around them. The process has been about moving those people into multi-use, open-plan offices, in which people have to find a desk in the morning, which is not theirs, set themselves up
- and, if they go out for a meeting in late morning, have to do that again in the afternoon. That has been the real push so far.
422. There has been significant opposition to that, much of which has been argued out in professional terms. Certain staff may argue that their opposition comes down to their professional ethos or the way that they work. Lawyers, for example, might say, “We have to surround ourselves with paper at all given times and preferably have 18-inch piles of it at least on our desks. You cannot be a lawyer unless you work like that.” We have tried to work round that sort of defence. Our legal term is shared with Manchester City Council and works over two sites. We still have several store rooms full of deeds and various other bits and pieces, but that is by the way.
423. We have almost come to the end of our opportunities for this “squeezing-up” approach in our big offices. We are having to start to look at the way that we deliver services nearer to the customer. A lot of that will be much more disruptive to people’s perception about the type of work that they do. One of the projects that we are developing physically is the conversion of one of our outlying libraries into a joint library and job centre. We are asking our staff not just to share with staff who work for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) but to create a joint front end with DWP. Therefore, library staff will also direct and support jobseekers. It is because we have taken the low-hanging fruit that we are now moving into that area, and it will be much more problematic.
424. **Mr D McIlveen:** I just want to be clear in my understanding: has the council, in response to any resistance from staff, had to compromise or make any changes to its original plan? If productivity remains consistent and costs go down, it is a no-brainer. However, if you find yourselves having to speculate to accumulate, that carries a heavier risk. Did you ever have a plan in place that was costed and looked very nice on paper but then have to

- move the goalposts as a result of staff resistance?
425. **Mr Horsler:** Yes, we have. We have always tried to consult at a very early stage, and, from a crude change management/property management point of view, I think that we sometimes underestimated some real service delivery hurdles, particularly with childcare. We have had to try to fully understand how what we considered to be an adequate set of interview rooms for children and families does not work in practice because competing families or family members are in much closer proximity than they would have been in our previous property structures. So we have had to adapt and look at ways of physically changing buildings, and so on, as we have gone through. However, there have been pushes as well as compromises.
426. **Mr Girvan:** Thank you, David. You spoke earlier about the removal of filing cabinets and said that more data would be held in electronic format. How can you be sure about the security of that data when people are running around with laptops containing very sensitive information rather than holding that information on a central site? I also have a question about security and those who work from home. In Northern Ireland, as a consequence of certain computers going missing, people have had to be moved from their homes. How do you secure the information?
427. **Mr Horsler:** We use a lot of encryption. In particular, any personal information will be encrypted on the users' devices. However, the corollary to that is that some people, traditionally, run around with hard copy in their briefcases at the same time. So, in some senses, we were moving from a totally secure situation to a less secure one. There is a balance to be struck. Home workers or those using Enterprise, as far as I understand it, work via a very secure link through our firewall. A hole is created in the firewall for the purpose of an individual session and ceases at the end of that session. However, when working through Enterprise, people are not working on their own PC but on council servers. That means that data from the council is not coming outside, if that makes sense; it is merely the image of data that comes outside.
428. We are conscious that it is a process rather than a solution, and our data management people are looking at new ways of dealing with that. Some of our current testing with adult social workers focuses less on the cultural use of the data and more on its technical use, including whether you freeze parts of the data on to mobile devices rather than giving live access to all of it and then come back and log in.
429. **The Acting Chairperson:** David, will your next steps and co-operation on planning with key partner organisations entail a relationship based on, say, council premises, office space and so on, or might the process involve the council's services working out of new and different locations?
430. **Mr Horsler:** It will involve both of those things. I think that co-location, co-location, co-location is the motto now. We are sharing back office accommodation with our partners, and we expect, for example, that our large general hospital will move some of its back office accommodation to share one of our core sites over the summer. It will take up to around 400 to 500 workstations to that site, which will allow the hospital to deliver more services in the space that it has vacated. Our view is that, across the city, we should be creating back office campuses that are shared by as many organisations as possible.
431. We are also looking at front-end service delivery. We have five or six years' experience now of local investment finance trust (LIFT) centres for health. I do not know whether those mean anything to you, but they are widely available across England. We built those new centres, which are PFI newbuilds, in Salford, to include not only health facilities but libraries, front desk customer services and so on.

432. Although the LIFT financing model has now disappeared, we hope to build at least another two of those multiagency buildings. One of those will be where I am, in Swinton, which is Salford's public sector hub. The other will be built in one of the more deprived estate areas called Little Hulton. If those come off in the next two or three years, we will have a network of shared front ends stretching across the whole city.
433. **The Acting Chairperson:** David, I want to return to an earlier question that was put to you. I presume that there is political support and endorsement in the council for the strategy, but have you been able to demonstrate that, on the client side, there is satisfaction that there is improved access in the delivery of local government services?
434. **Mr Horsler:** Yes. We would claim success in a couple of areas. The first is in what we call "channel shift", which is about encouraging people to move from face-to-face contact to electronic contact with the city council. All our shared outlets have booths for people to interact with the council. So rather than necessarily expecting everybody to use their PC at home, we use public access PC's in shared service areas, including the provision of tuition and support, to get people to move towards a more electronic involvement with the council. The payment of council tax, for example, through electronic means is increasing at a significant rate.
435. The second success, which has political sensitivity, is that our library usage has gone up dramatically where we have co-located libraries with other services. Given the many libraries run by local government that are under threat across the country, and the political repercussions of that, Salford is in a position now in which it feels justified, in cost and usage terms, in maintaining its full branch library service across the city.
436. **The Acting Chairperson:** David, this has been very helpful. We are very grateful to you for giving us your time. I thank you and your colleagues. We may wish to follow up on some issues through correspondence as we continue our deliberations. If it is acceptable, I would appreciate being able to write to you and keep in touch as we pursue this process.
437. **Mr Horsler:** That would be absolutely fine. As well as being able to investigate further areas with you, I can give you backup data, if that is what you require.
438. **The Acting Chairperson:** We are very grateful, David. Thank you very much and good morning to you.
439. **Mr Horsler:** Good morning to you. It has been a pleasure. Thank you.

448. **Mr Tom Hadley (Recruitment and Employment Confederation):** I am happy to give you some feedback on that. Most of the recommendations apply equally to the public and private sectors. One of the big findings of the report was the management and leadership implications of embedding flexible working practices. For us, it all boils down to setting clear performance objectives. So, when we talk about the flexible working agenda, in reality we are often talking about good performance management and setting clear objectives for people. In some ways, where people work and how they choose to work is less important than being able to meet their targets and keeping that regularly under review. We have some great case studies in the report that show where flexible working has not worked, people have not been able to meet their targets because it has not suited them, and things have been reviewed and changed subsequently. So, that whole management and leadership side of things applies equally to the public and private sectors.
449. Some of the drivers for flexible working, including the financial benefits for employers, apply equally to the public and private sectors in terms of location and the saving on childcare costs. The final thing that we found in the report was that the benefit of embedding flexible working is that it is a way of bringing skilled workers back into the labour market with slightly different working hours, for example. That is pretty much engrained already in the public sector, but it continues to be one of the drivers.
450. The final area that is interesting is that, when you look at flexible working in its broadest sense — people working part time, condensed hours et cetera — the effective use of temporary and contract staff is a theme in the private sector that we think can apply in the public sector. By that, we mean, rather than carrying a large workforce in some niche areas, being able to bring in highly skilled contractors and interim managers when there is a real need.
- That is one of the benefits that a lot of the private sector companies that we spoke to flagged up. That is something that, increasingly, we might see in the public sector. We think that the cost-effective use of flexible staff and the ability to bring in the right people for a particular project will continue. Ben, I do not know whether there are any other findings that you think will apply to the public sector.
451. **Mr Farber:** There are other potential benefits to be realised. There are a few more statistics that apply and could be extrapolated across both the public and private sectors, such as the fact that, according to a Confederation of British Industry (CBI) survey, 75% of employers believe that the various methods of flexible working have a positive impact on talent retention. As Tom said, one of our case studies was with Enterprise Rent-A-Car. It found that its staff retention went up 10% from 71% to 81% after the introduction of homeworking. There is no reason why those sorts of gains could not be achieved in the public sector as well. For example, there is nothing inherently different about private sector call centre workers and public sector helpline workers.
452. A Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) survey found that 50% of employees across both the public and private sectors think that flexibility helps them achieve a better work/life balance. So, there are those kinds of benefits and, likewise, savings in respect of the carbon footprint, office space, utilities and technology. There are other ways of operating too; for example, the commission has looked at phased retirement quite a lot. How do we retain older workers who may be looking to retire but move them onto a more flexible way of working and ensure that they transfer their skills and knowledge to the new generation of workers? There is no reason why that question cannot be echoed in the public sector.
453. **The Chairperson:** What has been the trade unions' response to your report? How do you try to bring the trade unions

- and workers along with you in some of these proposals?
454. **Mr Farber:** We actually had a fairly positive response from the Trades Union Congress (TUC). Off the back of this project, we started working with the Department for Work and Pensions on the code around extending the right to request flexible working, which we know will come in later this year when the legislation is enacted. The trade unions were broadly supportive. The crux of the report is not about using temps and contractors. That is an element of it, and we are saying that there are benefits to be gained from that. However, the report was looking across the whole piece. We are still talking about employment flexibility, such as compressed hours and working from home. All those kinds of things will keep people in work. The trade unions understand the basic message. Earlier, I said that 82% of employers said that flexibility is keeping people in work. That is fundamental. I do not think that the trade unions are really going to oppose measures that keep people in work. It has to be said that we did not get any particularly negative feedback from the trade unions.
455. **Mr Hadley:** The report flags up some very positive case studies in which trade unions have worked very collaboratively with employers in the private sector. People have looked at having to change working practices, such as moving to a four-day week. Ultimately, that has enabled factories, for example, to continue working rather than going to the wall. People actually like those condensed hours and have been reluctant to go back to a five-day week afterwards. So, there have been some really good examples of trade unions working collaboratively with employers on different ways of working.
456. One thing that this report reflects is the fact that a lot of the flexible work agenda is driven by the workers. It is not just about employers looking at the different ways that it will suit them. A lot of it is driven by individuals who like having flexible working arrangements and the autonomy that different working arrangements provide. It is certainly not a one-way street, and, as Ben mentioned, we are very keen to continue engaging with the trade unions on this agenda.
457. **The Chairperson:** The report also makes reference to tax and welfare systems. In your view, how could those be changed to encourage flexibility in employment?
458. **Mr Hadley:** Some of the feedback that we have had from a lot of our members, namely recruitment agencies, is that some parts of the tax system as it was — we know that the changes will help in this regard — have acted as a barrier to people taking on temporary work. We had lots of examples, over many years, of jobseekers turning down opportunities for part-time work or temporary work because it would take them a long time to get back into the benefit system. With some of the changes that are kicking in now, we think that that will change. There has always been a frustration among our members that that type of temporary or flexible assignment, which can be a stepping stone to permanent jobs for those who want them, are often not taken up because of legitimate concerns from workers that they cannot do a three-week assignment, as it will take them ages to get back on benefits. We think that some of the changes to the tax system will help with that.
459. Ben, are there any other issues that you want to mention about the relationship with the tax system?
460. **Mr Farber:** Tom covered the impact on some of the lower or more entry-level roles. At the higher end, the changes to the IR35 legislation and the crackdown, as it could be seen, on the use of freelancers and so on in the public sector is a backward step. As Tom touched on earlier, those highly skilled individuals could be used for brief projects, perhaps in creative, design, technology, marketing or communication roles that you may not need on a full-time basis. Some of the movement and noise from Government seems a bit anti the use of that kind of flexible, highly

- skilled resource. We are not really in favour of that. That is a regressive step.
461. We have sent you our discussion paper. We have prepared a few comments if you would like us to go through those.
462. **The Chairperson:** Yes; that would be useful, thanks.
463. **Mr Farber:** I mentioned call-centre jobs as the type of role that might be suitable for flexible working, and many Departments tend to operate helplines and things like that. Roles that have measurable, quantifiable outcomes are suitable, and call centres, which have targets for calls picked up, the length of calls and so on, map very well to a homeworking environment. A good example of that is Enterprise Rent-a-Car, which put in place a whole new system. I will just quote quickly from the case study. It states:
- “home workers have a weekly catch up over the phone with their manager and monthly performance appraisals are also carried out over the phone.”*
464. That is done in a virtual, online environment. The case study goes on to state:
- “They are able to listen back to their calls with their manager and have virtual team meetings ... Home workers can always see who else is online”.*
465. They can also use instant messaging. So, there is still a kind of community environment, even though everyone is at home and is reaping the work/life benefits of homeworking. There are roles where the workload is measurable that perhaps lend themselves more immediately to certain types of flexibility. One of the key messages that we got from Enterprise Rent-a-Car was simply that open communication and transparency with your employees and managers is key to success in that sort of environment.
466. Another point is that homeworking does not always have to be all or nothing. I think that there is fear from managers that moving to flexible working is a huge paradigm shift and a leap into the unknown that could all go horribly wrong. That is clearly the wrong way to perceive it. As Tom said, you could do pilot programmes and trials. You can also measure outcomes, and, if those are successful, you can roll them out more widely. We saw that with the Co-operative Group, which did exactly that with some of its finance functions. It did some small trials, after which success was measured, and it saw a drop in staff absence and increases in staff satisfaction, and we will look at how we will expand that more broadly. It does not have to be an all-or-nothing approach. That is a key point to take on board.
467. **The Chairperson:** Is it your view that flexible working is a no-brainer for productivity? In most of the cases that you looked at where flexible working was introduced, did productivity go up by a significant percentage?
468. **Mr Farber:** Yes; pretty much. Tom cited some examples, but I will give you one in more detail. BT initially took its creative design teams out of the office and sent them home to work. It found that, because everyone was away from each other, it lost some of that hub or collective consciousness of creativity, and it ended up bringing everyone back together. It is not always a no-brainer, and there will not always be guaranteed increases in productivity. The majority of employers to whom we spoke had only positive things to say about flexibility when it is done right. The capacity is there. If it is poorly managed and there is no communication with workers who are working compressed or reduced hours or from remote locations, there will be potential pitfalls. However, that is the case with any management strategy. So, if it is well managed, well thought out, and well measured and assessed, it is pretty much a no-brainer.
469. The other element that we have not touched on is that it displays trust in your employees if you can say, “You do not have to come in and work 9 to 5 if you want to work 10 to 3”, or, “If you have done all your work, we trust you in the sense that, as long as you are

- achieving the broader outcomes, you do not have to sit at your desk for those eight hours a day.” That is a positive message to employees that they are more of an equal and that it is not just about manager and employee but that we are in this together making a company or a government Department work as well possible.
470. **Mr Hadley:** I will make a couple of comments. There is still a way to go, and one of the conclusions was to champion flexible working. Some of the concerns from workers were quite interesting, as were some of the recent events — *[Inaudible.]* — the commission. For example, there is a perception that part-time workers will not be able to progress in the organisation. Something has to be done to pick up on that example, so that people who work part-time can progress to senior roles in their organisation. There is a very tangible link between the whole flexible working agenda and gender equality in senior positions. Those debates are running in parallel, and we are very keen to feed into that.
471. I will make a final point about the broader debate on good recruitment. For some of the companies that we spoke to, it was about challenging the status quo and asking why some of those jobs cannot be more flexible. Why can we not look at job design and job description? That is quite an interesting debate, because a lot of companies and public sector employers have been doing the same thing and recruiting for the same roles and projects for many years. It is time to review this and take stock, perhaps shaking things up a little to look at how we can make some of those jobs more flexible in their design. We continue to work on those areas, and we are very happy to provide regular updates on our discussions with employers and recruitment experts.
472. **The Chairperson:** The issue of risk management has been raised during our inquiry, particularly regarding data security. There is almost an inevitable clash between flexible working or working from home with confidential information, whether it is in a private company or in the public sector or government. How do you make that work? There is a degree of risk the more you send confidential information out to remote settings as opposed to working at a central location.
473. **Mr Farber:** I will be honest and upfront: we did not cover that area in detail. More broadly, the technology is there to ensure that there will always be accountability. The Recruitment and Employment Confederation has a lot of flexible working, and I regularly work from home or out on the road. However, if I need to access, for example, our main database of members, I can only do that from within a virtual environment, and I have to log in. Anyone who is trying to trace who has accessed what will always be able to see that I did it. UPS is another good example. I have a good friend who works for that company, and she has to carry in her purse two remote key codes that give her a code every three minutes if she needs to log in to her e-mails. So, you can put in place some pretty firm barriers to ensure that there is always a traceable trail of who has accessed what.
474. More broadly, as we move into cloud computing and away from centralised data storage, regardless of where people are working, the actual data is stored in inherently more remote places. Technology will presumably catch up to mitigate many of those problems. It is not an area that we discussed in detail, I have to confess.
475. **The Chairperson:** Tom and Ben, that was useful. I thank you both for contributing to the Committee’s inquiry.
476. **Mr Farber:** Thank you.
477. **Mr Hadley:** Thank you.

29 May 2013

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Daithí McKay (Chairperson)
 Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)
 Mr Leslie Cree
 Ms Megan Fearon
 Mr John McCallister
 Mr David McIlveen
 Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
 Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Mr Brian Thompson *realestateworks Ltd*

478. **The Chairperson:** I welcome Brian Thompson, from realestateworks Ltd. Brian, do you want to make an opening statement before we move to questions?
479. **Mr Brian Thompson (realestateworks Ltd):** Yes. For the avoidance of doubt, I will start by saying what I am not. I am not a professional researcher, social scientist, psychologist or sociologist. I have a property advisory background, often for public sector organisations. During my time as an adviser, I became increasingly aware of the, arguably, unhealthy attention to economy versus effectiveness of space. I was motivated, therefore, to encourage the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors to ask me to write a research report on the linkage between the workplace and productivity because productivity was also appearing increasingly on organisations' agendas.
480. **The Chairperson:** OK. Can I ask you first, Brian, if, on a lovely day such as today, it would not be better to take the Committee meeting outside? Would we not be more productive in doing so?
481. **Mr Thompson:** Yes. I think that having the flexibility to work in different locations at different times, according to the agenda, the issues to be discussed and the environment is a wholeheartedly worthy objective.
482. **The Chairperson:** Do many businesses do that? Today, I was thinking that we are always talking about how offices are spaced out. Some people work better outside on sunny days. It improves their mood and, perhaps, productivity. I wonder whether any businesses have set tables and chairs outside, so that, on good days, employees can go outside. They would appreciate that.
483. **Mr Thompson:** I know some organisations that have the benefit of being in offices with rooftop space, which, on days such as today, would be at a premium. To be slightly more serious; it is also the case that there is a very large body of evidence to confirm a link between natural light — daylighting, as opposed to artificial lighting — and organisations' effectiveness. Indeed, there is also some interesting research linking greenery and natural colours with productivity and performance.
484. **The Chairperson:** You talk about natural light and daylight, which we do not get much of in this Building. I know that many people use substitute devices. Are they of any use in the workplace? What is your view on them?
485. **Mr Thompson:** Can you clarify what you mean by "substitute devices"?
486. **The Chairperson:** I mean micropods, which you turn on to light. They substitute for ultraviolet rays and are quite popular in some businesses.
487. **Mr Thompson:** I have known some organisations to use them. Personally, I am a little bit sceptical about their benefits, particularly with regard to long-term sustainable productivity. That is a common theme with many initiatives that organisations may be tempted to undertake. There might be an initial

- peak in performance improvement. However, the trick is to achieve sustainable performance improvement. The extent to which “gadgets”, let us call them, can achieve that is, probably, debatable.
488. **The Chairperson:** There is a debate about open-plan versus cellular office environments. Is it better to have a mixture? I know that some people thrive in an open-plan environment in which they are interacting constantly, whereas other people cannot stand it. They need to go into a corner to have some privacy and are more productive that way. Is it better to have the best of both worlds?
489. **Mr Thompson:** Yes. The argument regarding open-plan versus cellular environments is of limited benefit. The key issue is to provide a facility that caters for a variety of needs and that, critically, can be adapted quite readily over time to cater for the changing needs of an organisation. That fact, in itself, suggests that a design that is more open and flexible is more appropriate simply because it allows change to be undertaken more readily. I also think that the productivity debate should not be divorced from the debate about efficiency of space.
490. **The Chairperson:** Do you think that the public sector and government in general take the issue seriously enough? Obviously, there is some scepticism about productivity, particularly with regard to working from home. There could be software in place to monitor that productivity. Some people might take the view that if they cannot see what employees are doing, they are, probably, skiving. Do you have a view about whether leadership needs to be to the forefront in this as much as anything else?
491. **Mr Thompson:** Yes. The issues of management style, culture and leadership arise frequently as barriers to the implementation of flexible working. To answer your question on whether government takes it seriously; from my experience, if I widen it to include the public sector, the public sector takes it very seriously. One challenge, however, is in predicting and quantifying the benefits that can arise from adopting a more flexible working environment and practices. Having said that, there appears to be an increasing body of knowledge and experience, growing literally week by week, from organisations that have adopted it successfully. Perhaps one area in which the public sector does not excel is in sharing knowledge and experience within itself and across countries.
492. **Mr D Bradley:** In your research, you say that workplace design should not be divorced from the subsequent management of the workplace. Will you explain what you mean by that?
493. **Mr Thompson:** I am glad you raised that point because it is probably an area of research that has not been covered adequately, to my knowledge. By the comment, I mean that the sustaining of improved performance is inextricably linked to the way that facilities are managed on an ongoing basis. Unfortunately, too much focus in procurement, or facilities management services, is on cost rather than quality. I would point to the reference in the report to the Hawthorne experiments and the Hawthorne effect, which confirms that the mere fact of paying attention to the occupier’s needs can itself be a motivating force. I think that the facilities management industry could usefully learn from that theory and evidence and become more customer focused in its approach to sustaining improvements.
494. **Mr D Bradley:** The arguments made for open-plan office space include the promotion of good communication and teamwork. Is that claim sustained by evidence that you have recovered in your research?
495. **Mr Thompson:** There seems to be a large body of evidence confirming that personal interaction, whether planned or unplanned, can be a contributor to the effectiveness of organisations. The open-plan versus cellular debate has to recognise that there can be some

- downside to open-plan, particularly around noise and disturbance, whether that is visual or aural. This merely implies that one has to recognise that there are potential downsides and that one should put in place appropriate protocols and processes for managing the open-plan environment, which, in some instances, can appear more like a school playground than a place of work.
496. **Mr D Bradley:** The Chair mentioned earlier that rather than have a black-and-white situation in which there is either open-plan or cellular, some new office designs offer more private spaces alongside, or within, the open-plan system to suit the particular work styles of individuals or their needs at any particular time. Do you agree with that model?
497. **Mr Thompson:** Absolutely. I think very few organisations undertake tasks that can be most efficiently performed by people sitting in banks of desks without the ability to meet with colleagues in large or small groups, or, indeed, find smaller space for private study. I think that what the argument comes back to, however, is the need to understand the business of the organisation that will occupy the space. Otherwise, one might readily fall into a situation where the design determines the way space is used and the organisation operates, rather than organisational activities and processes driving the design of the space.
498. **Mr D McIlveen:** Thank you for the report, Brian. On page 14, it states that what constitutes:
- “a productive workforce will depend to an extent on one’s functional position.”*
499. That automatically makes alarm bells ring, when you are starting to personalise from employee to employee and are, effectively, saying that one may adapt very well to that type of working environment and the other may not. Is there any matrix in place so that you can easily identify the type of work space that will most benefit the majority of employees? Obviously you would want to make sure that radical changes to
- the workplace would not actually have a negative effect on the majority of your employees. How do you feel you could best identify or discriminate between who is or is not most adaptable to that type of workspace?
500. **Mr Thompson:** I think that there is no substitute for actually asking people what working environment best suits their needs. I am conscious that some academic research pours scorn on the idea of actually talking to people and placing great weight on their views and opinions, but I think that the most effective transformations, or transitions, of the workplace inevitably start with dialogue with users and taking the users through the journey of moving to a new working environment or even a reorganisation of the existing environment. I think that evidence shows, however, that the vast majority of people within an office environment have a requirement that is fairly standard for their prime place of work, but what they often want in conjunction is the ability to move to alternative work settings where the job need arises.
501. **Mr D McIlveen:** What if you have a Department — particularly within the public sector, which is obviously the area that we are focusing on at the moment — with a high turnover of staff? I am coming back to what it says about individualising it into one person’s functional position. If you found yourself in a Department with a high turnaround of staff, and that dialogue has taken place with the staff who are there at the time and who you want to adapt the changes around, how would you deal with that ever-changing situation? Would you suggest that the physical environment of the office had to change for the staff?
502. **Mr Thompson:** I think that one has to be pragmatic about the nature, extent and timing of dialogue with users. If there is to be a transition or transformation of the workplace, there is undoubtedly a need for a baseline to be taken, which would involve appropriate consultation with users. Irrespective of the degree of staff turnover, I think there is much

- to be said for taking the pulse of the organisation perhaps every six or 12 months in order to understand how well the working environment is continuing to support the organisation, not least because its objectives and technology may evolve over time, as might the management hierarchy. Perhaps a regular MOT should be undertaken as well as the first service.
503. **Mr D McIlveen:** I have one final question, and it is on a different issue. I do not have the page reference, but I note that you mentioned the office as a point of interaction for people. Where the environment of the office changes, particularly with flexible working, how do you ensure that interaction is maintained?
504. **Mr Thompson:** Your future@work proposals appear to recognise that this is an issue and have put in place the technology to assist communication between individuals and between line managers and their staff. I know there are many alternatives and variants, but I would prefer to think of flexible working as a model that enables people to work remotely when appropriate for the task, the implication being that there will be a semi-permanent home office of sorts, which will also allow for necessary social interaction. In summary, I think one has to work harder at it, and positively make an effort, because it is all too easy to forget people who are working remotely and make an assumption that they are doing what is expected of them.
505. **Mr Cree:** Thanks. I was interested in the demise of the facilities management function, which I recall in the 1970s, too. Would it be true to say that you regret its demise?
506. **Mr Thompson:** I regret its more recent focus on operation and technical matters rather than, let us say, strategic and long-term or customer-oriented matters. The term remains the same but the focus of its performance has arguably changed to become one of maintaining the systems and backbone of facilities in the background, whereas in my view, the facilities management function should be much more up-front and visible and, as I said before, customer-focused.
507. **Mr Cree:** I think the danger is that we try to make an exact science out of too many things now. I did not see any reference to sick building syndrome in the report. Did you find any evidence of that in your study?
508. **Mr Thompson:** There is a section in the report dealing with the various environmental factors in an office. It covers issues such as air quality, humidity levels, daylighting, and so on, and all of those have variously been put under the wrapper as reasons why sick building syndrome has occurred. Importantly, the research shows that those factors, if managed appropriately, can either improve or inhibit productivity and performance. Although the term “sick building syndrome” has perhaps become a thing of the past, the causes of it undoubtedly remain today and still need to be managed as effectively as they were in decades gone by.
509. **Mr Cree:** I did not see any reference to this, but, finally, is there any merit in continuous improvement or total quality management (TQM) as a motivator in the present day?
510. **Mr Thompson:** Let me first address why it is not in my report. As you may have noticed, the report was specifically about the impact of the working environment on productivity and performance. My views on TQM, continuous improvement and other such initiatives are that they can become ends in themselves. Those operating such systems need to be reminded continually of the required outputs of an organisations to avoid the danger of process taking over. When such initiatives are applied correctly, they can be usefully allied to initiatives to improve the workplace.
511. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Brian, you are very welcome. This is very interesting. The Assembly, over the past four mandates, has been looking at Civil Service accommodation needs and

- dealing with a considerable legacy of productivity, poor communication, silo mentalities, absenteeism, an ageing property portfolio and modern technologies emerging. We had a formal policy called Workplace 2010 that was designed to solve all that. It collapsed amid poor responses from the workforce. There was resistance to change, particularly to the idea of open-plan offices. We have some large-scale, office-based private sector organisations in this region, but they are not the mainstay of our economy, because the public sector is the biggest employer. Are there exemplar projects that you have become aware of or have looked at, or that we could look at? We are still wrestling with all those problems. We are about to embark on a process of reconfiguring the Departments, which will create a significant opportunity to deal with some of the issues. The big issue is whether we know exactly where we are taking the project. You cited a couple of examples in which an intensive communication project did not deal with all the issues and ran into significant consequences. Can we look at a project that has actually worked?
512. **Mr Thompson:** One project, or initiative, that I have become familiar with is the Aberdeenshire Council's Worksmart initiative, which involves a significant rationalisation of office accommodation. Crucially, one of the core objectives of the initiative is to improve the performance and productivity of the workforce. Following some research into the views of managers and those affected by the ongoing changes in what is a live project, I understand that the vast majority of line managers surveyed considered the performance and productivity of those affected to have improved markedly, in particular the amount of face-to-face contact that public sector employees had with customers or users of those services.
513. I mention that project particularly as it is a live project, and there is arguably more benefit in learning lessons from a live project than from one that perhaps took place two or three years ago and on which the book was closed. That is not least the case because some issues, such as enabling technology, seem to move rapidly. Although it is useful to look at exemplar projects that are out there, from my understanding of the skills, capabilities and knowledge of the Northern Ireland public sector as a whole, I think that you would be able to make a reasonably good fist of the opportunity, starting immediately.
514. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Yes, we will see. Are shared services part of this live project?
515. **Mr Thompson:** I do not know the answer to that, but I expect that the rationalisation of activities within departments of what is a very large council would almost inevitably involve a degree of sharing of common services. However, that would need to be investigated further.
516. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** OK. We have an ongoing review of public services, which will result in a reduction in the number of councils in the relatively near future. Of course, that will mean amalgamations and enlarging councils' functions and devolving some additional powers from the Assembly. Therefore, it could be that this is a timely indication, and I find your report very interesting, including its unflinching focus on the problems that emerge as well the advantages.
517. **Mr Thompson:** I found very little objective commentary in the market when it came to productivity and the workplace. A number of research reports that are out there were ultimately sponsored or driven by organisations with a vested interest in selling products such as furniture, telecommunications, lighting systems —
518. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Yes, we are familiar with that here as well.
519. **The Chairperson:** I have a couple of final points to make, some of which the Committee raised earlier, Brian. The first is in regards to the key Workplace NI accommodation principles that are being applied for new or refurbished

- Civil Service offices, and aligning those with the research findings on the key success factors for increasing the:
- “likelihood of the workplace impacting positively on the productivity of its occupiers”.*
520. How do you think we are performing on that?
521. **Mr Thompson:** So that I understand the question, are you asking how the Northern Ireland accommodation principles are aligned with what I identified as the key success factors?
522. **The Chairperson:** Yes.
523. **Mr Thompson:** The existing accommodation principles are arguably more around space-management principles than more widespread accommodation principles, given the references in the accommodation principles to desk sizes, storage space, space per workstation and desk-sharing ratios. Of course, if the focus is to be predominantly or exclusively on efficiency, principles such as those are absolutely correct. However, my starting point was around the effectiveness or productivity of a workplace. That necessarily involves looking at a number of other factors or drivers towards productivity. For example, constant themes in the research for key success factors for a more productive workplace would be around the design of the space, by which I mean flexibility, adaptability and a variety of work settings. The key success factors also mentioned a number of environmental conditions in the workplace around air quality, lighting and controllability of the environment. Another key success factor was around the issue that we have already touched on, which is customer-focused facilities management.
524. It is not altogether surprising that the key success factors do not align with the accommodation principles, because they were designed to do slightly different things. Where that perhaps takes you is to think about augmenting the accommodation principles with an associated set of design or workplace principles that ensure that a more holistic approach is taken to workplace redesign.
525. **The Chairperson:** You mentioned air quality. What further can we do on ventilation and improving air quality? How cost-effective would that be when comparing cost with productivity?
526. **Mr Thompson:** I do not think that there is a simple answer to that, although if my memory serves me correctly, I referred to a piece of research that indicated a very rapid payback when it came to improving air quality to achieve payback on the investment, but it very much depends on the circumstances.
527. **The Chairperson:** Is that something that the public sector recognises?
528. **Mr Thompson:** I am not sure whether investment appraisals are sufficiently sophisticated to take business benefits into account. In fact, I am absolutely convinced that business cases are not sophisticated enough at the moment to take business benefits into account. Therefore, investment in air conditioning or other such infrastructure will typically be looked at against reduction in utility costs and payback based on that rather than on any other outcome.
529. **The Chairperson:** Finally, on the application of the future@work concept, including the business zones in the Civil Service, how might they be supported or informed by some of the lessons arising from this piece of research?
530. **Mr Thompson:** There are a few lessons that the research points towards that would be relevant to the future@work concept, or, indeed, any significant change in working practice or models. One issue that I have touched on already is around user engagement and the need for that to be at an appropriate time, conducted in an appropriate way but also prolonged throughout the change programme that needs to be put in place.
531. I also have a fear that the future@work concept might be seen as a technological solution to business or organisational problems. One would

need to be wary of falling into the trap of believing that technology will solve more fundamental problems in an organisation.

532. I will refer to some things that I have experience of that are happening in the wider market with business zones. From my understanding at the moment, the business zones are Northern Ireland Civil Service offices that are available to central government employees. There are examples of central government and local government combining their property assets to make available a pool of assets to users of all organisations within that pool. I can see that being a natural evolution if there is a will, and if technology allows it. It makes entire sense logically and rationally for the public sector to share public sector assets irrespective of the ownership of those assets, where it makes sense for ad hoc meetings or dropping into a space where one can carry out one's work without travelling and consuming energy and emitting carbon.

533. **The Chairperson:** Brian, it has been a very useful contribution. Thank you very much.

4 December 2013

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Daithí McKay (Chairperson)
 Ms Michaela Boyle
 Mr Leslie Cree
 Mr Paul Girvan
 Mr John McCallister
 Mr Ian McCrea
 Mr Adrian McQuillan
 Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Mr Kieran Bannon *Northern Ireland Public
 Service Alliance*
 Mr Billy Lynn

534. **The Chairperson:** I welcome to the Committee Kieran Bannon, assistant general secretary, and Billy Lynn, the chairperson of the Civil Service group executive. Please make a brief opening statement, and then we will go straight into questions.
535. **Mr Kieran Bannon (Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance):** Thank you very much for the opportunity to give evidence to the Committee. Members have our paper. I apologise for our lateness in getting that to you. We were trying to pick up on some of the evidence that had already been presented to the Committee in order to focus in on particular issues.
536. Although we can understand a management-orientated approach to looking at areas such as flexible working, and the advantages that can be gained from it in a raft of different ways, we recognise that advancing technologies should be adopted and used in the public sector, including the Civil Service, in Northern Ireland. However, that has to be married with the benefit to employers and individual workers. Therefore, when consulting or negotiating with employers across the public sector, much of what we do is aimed at ensuring that the balance is struck and that flexible working is not introduced in such a way that it diminishes the terms and conditions that we have built up over years for our members.
537. Of course, there are many issues that we have taken forward with the Civil Service and public services under the banners of “work/life balance” and “family-friendly policies”. Indeed, if you listen to the advertising blurb on radio or TV when the likes of the Civil Service is recruiting, great play is made of term-time working and flexible working arrangements. However, we have not had an easy course in advancing such policies. In fact, we have ended up in industrial tribunals trying to gain access to term-time working, for example, although it is a policy under flexible working facilities in the Civil Service. We did not always enjoy that.
538. After listening to the Assembly researcher, I think that there is certain resistance at management level and in some sectors of senior management. In our paper, for example, we mention that we spent considerable time negotiating a homeworking policy with officials, but it was never put on to the HR Connect system, which is used to advertise jobs. If we agree something, it is put on to the human resources portal, but after the negotiations concluded on homeworking, it did not appear on the portal, and, in fact, it never did. That is as far back as 2009. We have never been given an explanation, but officials could give an explanation to the Committee when they appear before it. We do not necessarily agree with everything that is said about homeworking. There is no evidence available. We have asked for evidence about homeworking because the claim made to us was that it operates on an informal, ad hoc basis. We know that to be the case, but it is not quantifiable. We are told by corporate HR that individual Departments do not hold information on the number of staff

who avail themselves of homeworking. Anecdotally, we would say that it is a privilege of rank and does not apply more widely. In general terms, we have cited a number of existing policies on flexible working. From our perspective, an option such as homeworking does not necessarily work best when part of an overall policy. Rather, it works better as part of a menu of options available under the umbrella of “flexible working arrangements”, which can be chosen at any time when there is an appropriate need for a particular type of flexible working. As I said, there are a number of such facilities.

539. Homeworking or teleworking, as it is also referred to, has a number of benefits, not just for the employer but for the individual. Look at, for example, difficulties with “reasonable adjustments” in the case of a disabled worker. Rather than facilitating a reasonable adjustment in an office situation, a disabled worker’s home may be adapted, so it is simply a matter of getting the appropriate technologies in place. The Committee is always interested in sick absence. Teleworking, as part of flexible working arrangements, can also bring a benefit through encouraging people back to work, rather than employers taking the big-stick approach to sick absence. Of course, you have to look at each individual set of circumstances. So we can see a range of benefits. However, in our discussions with the Civil Service, we picked up on some issues. One that was mentioned a few moments ago is the isolation of individuals. We have also raised issues about how people are managed from a performance and development perspective. In an office situation, a person can be developed to a greater extent. All those issues need to be addressed.
540. Homeworking was not introduced in the Civil Service despite the fact that we had entered into an agreement with the Civil Service on that. We understand that it was a decision taken at a very senior level in the Department of Finance and Personnel. Reasons for that decision

were given to the Committee by officials in February, but we do not necessarily hold that all of those circumstances are evident in every case, so we need to look at that.

541. We do not suggest that homeworking or teleworking is necessarily suitable for every functionality in an employer the size of the Civil Service or public sector in Northern Ireland. A box clerk in a Social Security Agency office is not necessarily able to avail himself of teleworking or homeworking, but those in other facilities can. Over the years, a number of such arrangements have been in place in the Civil Service. In particular, some inspectors work from home and are headquartered locally — in other words, there is an official building to which they have to report on certain occasions and at certain times. So such facilities already exist.
542. An issue that came up at an earlier Committee evidence session with civil servants and others was the potential for staff to use their personal computer facilities on behalf of the employer. We do not advocate that at all. It is partly a governance issue. We see it, in some respects, as a Department moving away from corporate responsibility and placing more responsibility on an individual. Such a situation is prone to lead to, for example, disciplinary action, if proper procedures and security arrangements for IT systems are not in place. No doubt, those issues could be overcome. We support having hubs, for example. There is already some facility in the Civil Service whereby staff can call into a hub when out on business rather than having to travel back to the office. That is efficient from a number of perspectives: time, travel and a potential reduction in travelling costs, which are currently paid in a number of instances to staff on official business. So the hub facility can make better use of an individual’s time.
543. We have some concern about IT. We make the point that we should keep up with technologies, but our experience of systems in the Civil Service has not been good. DSD, one of the largest Departments, has had major problems

with the IT systems introduced there over the years. Also, dare we say it, we still have concerns about HR Connect. I think that people have just given up the ghost when it comes to complaining about it, yet that lack of complaints will be presented by civil servants as evidence of things getting better. People are fed up complaining, because nothing seems to be done. Mr McQuillan made the point about accessibility. You need to get systems right, not just in the sense of having wide geographical accessibility to broadband but so that the system supplier gets it right in the first place. That is an important issue for our members.

544. **Mr Weir:** Thank you for your useful and illuminating presentation. In your submission, you mention the resolution adopted at the 2013 NIPSA Civil Service group conference. One thing puzzles me slightly given that, broadly, albeit with some reservations, you appear to see the benefits of flexible working. Maybe I am reading too much into this, but the motion referred to the conference's concern at the Committee holding an inquiry. Is there a particular reason for concern? Depending on what the inquiry concludes, you can express your support, opposition or something in between, so I am intrigued by the reference to concern. Maybe you would deal with that point first.
545. **Mr Bannon:** It was possibly a timing issue more than anything else, in the sense that certain issues were being raised in parts of the Civil Service. DSD, for example, in light of the welfare reform agenda, wanted to introduce certain practices and procedures under the umbrella of flexible working, without proper consultation with us. Our members would have regarded that as a forced agenda. So, at the same time as certain practices were seen to be being forced on employees, the Committee was looking into very similar issues. I think that, in February, the civil servants referred to universal credit, for example. In fact, there was a recruitment exercise in the Civil Service, and some of those practices were written in to the competition, again without consulting us. It ended up having to be removed.
546. **Mr Weir:** For anybody looking in from the outside, there is a terminology issue. There are at least a couple of different names for the same thing. You mentioned homeworking or teleworking, and your motion referred to mobile working. By mobile working, do you mean homeworking, or is it wider than that? Concerns were expressed about hot-desking, and you referred to reservations about how performance could be monitored and managed. The motion's wording is a little ambiguous, so will you expand on your concerns about mobile working and hot-desking and how, potentially, you see those being addressed?
547. **Mr Bannon:** The concerns were based on a combination of factors. The motion also referred to Workplace 2010, and although we have seen its demise, much of what was on that agenda remains with us: for example, accommodation standards have not been agreed. We used to have agreed accommodation standards in the Civil Service, but they were walked away from. The hot-desking issue surfaced under Workplace 2010. We were concerned about the conclusions reached to advance that in the Civil Service and when the surveys were being done. To some extent, this goes back to the previous evidence, in the sense that we would have challenged the data being used to justify hot-desking. We believed that the form of hot-desking being referred to would not have provided sufficient facilities for our members to provide the services that they do. That was the issue —
548. **Mr Weir:** So, more than anything else, you were concerned about the practical implications of the way in which hot-desking was put forward rather than the notion of it per se?
549. **Mr Bannon:** We were concerned about some elements of the notion per se as it was presented by the civil servants under the Workplace 2010 policy. If that were to change, our attitude to hot-desking may well change as well.

550. **Ms Boyle:** Thank you for your presentation. I have a number of questions about the use of personal computers for business. You mentioned your natural concerns about governance and moving away from corporate responsibility. You said that the issues and concerns could be overcome. Is there any evidence of how they have been overcome or rectified in other areas?
551. **Mr Bannon:** When I was referring to our concerns being overcome, it was more about clarifying levels of responsibility and where that responsibility would lie. We do not see it lying with the individual. With consultation or negotiation with us about the use of personal equipment, there may be the potential to overcome the issues, but it would require clear guidance showing the levels of responsibility and where that responsibility lay, and it must not be a matter of diverting corporate responsibility to individuals.
552. **Ms Boyle:** The hubs would assist in that. My colleague Adrian McQuillan mentioned rural areas. Accessing a hub would be a major problem for some, particularly my constituents. How many hubs do we have? Are they just offices in towns?
553. **Mr Bannon:** That is the concept, but the idea is to locate them more in rural areas because of the concentration of Civil Service jobs in the greater Belfast area. The hub notion would work better in rural areas.
554. **Ms Boyle:** You mean moving them away from cities and into rural areas.
555. **Mr Bannon:** Yes, because that is where people would be on business when out of their main office. Rather than having to waste time and money travelling back to the office, individuals could use a hub in which the necessary technology was available. That would help the areas that you referred to and with which I am familiar. Provided that the IT facility was available, people could hook up to the systems in rural areas.
556. **Ms Boyle:** I am just thinking of the announcement made this week in my area, Strabane, which identified it as the potential hub for west Tyrone and the north-west.
557. Chair, I have one more question that is outside what we are discussing, if you will allow me. Does your organisation have a gender breakdown of those working flexitime or from home?
558. **Mr Bannon:** No, we do not. To go back to the evidence given earlier, it seems to be a situation that pertains in the Civil Service, potentially more so since HR Connect came on board. There is limited availability of data. We have no idea of how many people are availing themselves of the informal, ad hoc home-working arrangement, because it is not a formal policy. It has not been introduced as such. We have no idea how many hubs are out there, but we have heard of people using hubs in a few areas. Not having access to the data is part of the difficulty. I think that the vast majority of civil servants avail themselves of flexible working hours, so I do not think that it is a gender issue, but there may well be a gender or disability issue in things such as home working.
559. **The Chairperson:** We can request that information from the Department, Michaela. It might well be that it does not have it, but, if that is the case, we can get that on the record.
560. **Mr McQuillan:** Michaela touched on some of my questions, but I want to elaborate a bit on the hub facilities. From what you know about them, what additions or improvements could be made to make it easier for people to avail themselves of the service? Do you have any information on them at all?
561. **Mr Bannon:** We have very little information on them other than from conversations that we have had with individuals. Some said that they have used a facility of that nature. We do not know how sophisticated the hubs are. Certainly, there are facilities in some areas. I had my own laptop

- with me when I was at a meeting with management side, who suggested that I could hook in somewhere. As it happened, I could not, so we are not sure how sophisticated the hubs are or how many there are.
562. **Mr McQuillan:** We also need to know from management what facilities are available at the hub, as well as the condition of the hub for the people who will be working there.
563. **Mr Bannon:** Yes. We do not know, for example, whether it is in a general office environment. Although as I said, the project itself no longer exists, the standards that were intended to be brought in under Workplace 2010 were those of an open-office environment, so we do not know how conducive it is for individuals to be in an open environment to do their particular area of work. I know that the head of Enterprise Shared Services (ESS), Mr Wickens, happened to make some comments about that when he was giving evidence in February, and he expanded into accommodation-type issues. One of the issues with the Workplace 2010 standards was that they were fairly common standards applied uniformly. We found that that did not work, again because it depended on the functionality that you were undertaking. If you were somebody who was just using a laptop and files, that might have suited, but if you had large plans or whatever to look at, the standard one-size-fits-all approach does not work. That is part of the problem that we see around the accommodation aspects.
564. **Mr McQuillan:** Another danger for unions is that there seems to be a resistance to change.
565. **Mr Bannon:** That notion arose, but I will pick up on one of the other examples that were given by some of the officials. I will say two things: first, much of what is on the agenda now around flexible working arrangements, such as term-time working, flexible working and things of that nature were put on the agenda by the union. It was not the employer who walked in one day and said, “By the way, we have got a good idea, let’s do this”. It was because the union put it on the agenda that management were prepared to enter into discussion with us, and we ended up, thankfully, with agreements in those areas. Therefore, we think that we are fairly proactive.
566. The officials presented an example almost as though there was resistance from NIPSA to flexible working. The example was not mentioned by name by the officials, but it concerned a situation in which we had telephony staff — a predominantly female group — who for years were not able to avail themselves of the system of flexible working hours in the Civil Service. We spent many years trying to get that under family-friendly and work/life balance policies and eventually achieved it. We now face a situation whereby those individuals are being told that the system is to be removed from them, on the basis that they happen to co-work with BT staff in a Civil Service building. The BT staff do not have the flexible working arrangements that we have — they work a different shift, or whatever — so our members are being told that they will have the flexible working hours system removed from them. That was presented, although it was not described in that way to you, in the evidence given by the civil servants. It was almost presented by them as though it was an area in which they were trying to do something but unions resisted it. In fact, the civil servants were trying to do something negative.
567. **Mr I McCrea:** Most of the members present represent areas that are more rural than urban. Two thirds of my constituency is rural. Given the difficulties in accessing broadband and whatnot, although the situation is a lot better than it was, there is more work to do. That is in the pipeline.
568. You have a lot of rural dwellers, so how will the hubs work in practice? People will have to travel to an area where there is a hub. In the west of the Province, between mid-Ulster and west Tyrone, you will have a battle as to whether

- you should put it on the Cookstown/Magherafelt side or in Omagh.
569. **Mr McQuillan:** Coleraine. *[Laughter.]*
570. **Mr I McCrea:** We will not go down that route. This is to try to save people from having to travel a distance to work, but how does it work in rural areas? I see difficulties with it, although I am supportive of the concept.
571. **Mr Bannon:** We do not want to get into that type of argument over whether, say, the hospital should be in Enniskillen or Omagh. We do not want to take that approach. However, you could look at it in a different way. You are asking a question, and we are presenting it as it relates to something that exists at present, but let us look at it in a different way and talk about the dispersal of public sector jobs. If we could get away from the concentration of public sector jobs in the Belfast area, we would not necessarily face some of the problems that we do. We are looking at this with blinkered vision at the moment because of what exists. However, there is the question of whether it should exist. If we decentralise to a larger degree, those facilities will be available, not as hubs in particular areas, for which you have to toss a coin to decide where, but through a natural process. The jobs are concentrated in Belfast at the moment, so people are travelling out on business, and that is why there is a need for a hub.
572. **Mr Cree:** I have some short points to make. You mentioned the difficulties with background and said that there is perhaps a lack of trust. What are the main difficulties between the unions and HR at present?
573. **Mr Bannon:** Do you mean between the unions and HR Connect?
574. **Mr Cree:** Yes.
575. **Mr Bannon:** The IT systems themselves suffered difficulties when being set up, and, as such, took a lot longer than was anticipated to get going. HR Connect was advertised as providing a better service. However, the service that it provides is not as good as that provided by the system that existed beforehand. There are a lot of difficulties. I am a bit hesitant to elaborate, because I am not here to give evidence about HR Connect as a system.
576. **Mr Cree:** No, but it clearly has a bearing on the issue.
577. **Mr Bannon:** It has a bearing because we are looking at people who provide systems, either IT systems or services. I mention that because the previous evidence that was given referred to third parties being involved in providing advice, guidance and everything else. It sounded to me as though HR Connect is advertised as being all-singing and all-dancing. However, that has not been our experience. It sends out wrong information, and, even from the point of view of security, information is sent to the wrong people sometimes or to people who happen to have a similar name. That information would sometimes be considered to be confidential, private or personal information. Those things are still happening.
578. **Mr Cree:** You have mentioned family-friendly arrangements a few times. Can you define those, please?
579. **Mr Bannon:** Family-friendly arrangements fall into the broad definition that I started with; that is, they are able to meet both the business need and the need of the individual. Therefore, we should have policies that facilitate, primarily from an equality point of view, the balance between a working life and a home life. It is essentially that. It is something that the Civil Service is proud of advocating that it does. It says that it has a lot of family-friendly arrangements in place.
580. **Mr Cree:** Can I interpret that, to make it simple, as working only a certain number of hours per day?
581. **Mr Bannon:** Not necessarily.
582. **Mr Cree:** It is more vague than that.

583. **Mr Bannon:** The number of hours that a person works in the day can have a bearing on it, yes.
584. **Mr Cree:** Here is my last point. Yesterday, we learned about the high incidence of stress in sickness absence. Do you believe that flexible working can help to alleviate that situation, or might it exacerbate it?
585. **Mr Bannon:** If the approach taken is that you have a menu of options under the general umbrella of flexible-working arrangements — term-time working and other arrangements — that can be drawn on to suit certain circumstances. We see that as an advantage. However, if it is an enforced policy that simply states that everyone must work weekends or public or privilege holidays from now on, that will be a negative.
586. **The Chairperson:** The new Civil Service ‘People Strategy 2013-16’ includes a commitment to:
“Explore use of technology to support an agile, flexible and mobile workforce.”
587. Does NIPSA have a corporate view, so to speak, on that commitment, given that it apparently has opposition to mobile working? Did NIPSA sign off on that particular strategy with the Civil Service?
588. **Mr Bannon:** We had sight of the people strategy by way of a document secondary to the overall Civil Service HR strategy. Within that, there was a people strategy. We had sight of both documents and had the opportunity to respond to both. We are prepared to talk to an employer about any matter. That what we are here for: to negotiate on those matters. Therefore, we do not close down anything automatically. We close down when there is an imposition or something is introduced without proper consultation and negotiation. We are aware that the officials indicated that discussions had started about flexible working with NIPSA. That was the statement made in February. What they have done is say that would like to talk to us about flexible working, but that has been the height of it. A few things have filtered through in isolation, rather than as a corporate or overall policy, on how the Civil Service wants to move forward. We got something recently about changing from taking off Easter Monday and Easter Tuesday to taking off Good Friday and Easter Monday. That was suggested under the banner of flexible working. We say that that is a very small, piecemeal thing. If they want to talk to us about flexible working, that should be done in a structured way. There has not actually been —
589. **The Chairperson:** Do you think that the Department takes the whole issue seriously enough?
590. **Mr Bannon:** I will have to be careful in what I say. *[Laughter.]* Industrial relations are fairly sound. Management seem to take an awful lot of time talking among themselves. Then, when they come up with an idea, we are presented with it and asked to come back with a response by next Friday — that type of thing. It is perhaps not as bad as that, but I say it to illustrate the point. We should be part of the process as we go along. Corporate HR is a unit in DFP that negotiates with NIPSA on Civil Service-wide issues, such as the staff handbook and terms and conditions. The individuals there have said that they want to talk to us about flexible working. We have had a few informal chats about it. We understand that Corporate HR is consulting with Departments at the moment on a number of things that are primarily being driven by DSD —
591. **Mr Billy Lynn (Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance):** Yes, universal credit and welfare reform.
592. **Mr Bannon:** It is consulting on a wider basis with Departments. It has committed to having those discussions with us when it comes to some views on those matters. We expect that to happen. However, sufficient time should be allowed for it.
593. **The Chairperson:** Are there any examples of good or best practice elsewhere? Colin referred to the United States example, but are there particular examples that you are aware of that —

594. **Mr Bannon:** We would not say so. In fact, we have been saying to the Civil Service of late that, over the years, the Civil Service in Northern Ireland was the pioneer of a lot of flexible working arrangements and the equality agenda. Unfortunately, Billy and I have working for 30-odd years on trade union matters in the Civil Service, and it took some time.
595. **Mr Lynn:** Try 40.
596. **Mr Bannon:** I was speaking for myself.
597. Once we got there, we did some very good pioneering work in the Civil Service. We have almost become complacent about that again and sat on our laurels. Maybe there is something on the turn again. People used to look to the Civil Service, and why not? It is a significant employer in Northern Ireland.
598. **The Chairperson:** Billy and Kieran, thank you both very much.

5 February 2014

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Ms Michaela Boyle
 Mrs Judith Cochrane
 Mr Leslie Cree
 Mr Paul Girvan
 Mr John McCallister
 Mr Ian McCrea
 Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
 Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Ms Riona Carroll *New Ways of Working*

(The Acting Chairperson [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair)

599. **The Acting Chairperson:** Good morning. We are receiving stakeholder evidence via video link.
600. **Ms Riona Carroll (New Ways of Working):** Good morning.
601. **The Acting Chairperson:** My name is Mitchel McLaughlin, and I am the Acting Chair, so if you see me moving during the course of the meeting you will know that the Chairperson or the Deputy Chairperson has arrived.
602. **Ms Carroll:** No problem.
603. **The Acting Chairperson:** I apologise for the slight delay. We will kick off, if you do not mind.
604. Given the experience that you have developed, will you tell us from your perspective what the main opportunities to come from rolling out the new form of flexible working are? And what are the main barriers?
605. **Ms Carroll:** The main opportunities have to be things that are easily measurable and quantifiable; for example, the reduction in time spent going to work and the reduction in an organisation's carbon footprint. I have some figures here that are quite surprising. I did some work with Ordnance Survey Ireland

some time ago. By having 12 members of staff working from home two or three days a week, they eliminated an average of 2,205 kilometres of travel a day. That is the equivalent of 1,378 miles. The travel eliminated throughout the year was 190,181 miles, and the unproductive time spent travelling that was eliminated was 5,786 hours in the year. That was for just 12 people — a lot of them had long journey times, admittedly — but it had a huge impact on the environment and the use of people's time. Consequently, they are at work. If you are travelling three hours to get to work and three hours home, work itself cuts off [*Inaudible.*]. The travel time becomes freed-up time.

606. Another very specific opportunity that has been identified through experience rather than theory is increased productivity. That is obviously related to the reduction in travel time [*Inaudible.*]. It will vary from person to person and from job to job, but, on average, reports of between a 5% and 20% increase in productivity are quite common.
607. Another important factor, which I have experienced myself but is sometimes overlooked, is that, by working from home on a full-time or part-time basis, people who acquire a disability can continue to be economically active, contribute to the organisation and keep their job. An example of that is someone whom I know who used to work for Eircom and has since retired. He suffered a minor stroke, which prevented him from travelling to work because of the difficulties of getting from A to B and using public transport. When he recovered sufficiently, he was able to continue his work from a home base, remain economically active and contribute to the organisation. Having to travel every day was simply out of the question, because he could not do so.

608. **The Acting Chairperson:** Thank you very much. Will you give us your experience of the code of practice? How was it developed and how does it work in practice? Are there any particular improvements that could or should be made?
609. **Ms Carroll:** Yes. The very important *[Inaudible.]* about the code of practice is that it was developed by people with experience of *[Inaudible.]* in conjunction with the employers' association the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (Ibec). Very importantly, it was also endorsed by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). The Communication Workers' Union (CWU) was part of it, too, and is represented on the board. *[Inaudible.]* the interests of the employers, which is obviously very important that you support *[Inaudible.]* experience in the practicalities of e-working *[Inaudible.]* otherwise *[Inaudible.]*.
610. It was also noted in conjunction with that that *[Inaudible.]* sent a briefing document to the Committee, and the views that it expressed reflect very much the views that the trade union people have reflected in formulating the code of practice. The code of practice is a quite durable document *[Inaudible.]* quite durable *[Inaudible.]* interests of all parties involved establishing working in a fair and sustainable way.
611. **The Acting Chairperson:** OK. Thank you very much, Riona. I will bring in some of our Committee members now.
612. **Mr I McCrea:** I am a DUP member of the Committee. In selecting the jobs that are suitable for flexible working, are there certain attributes and skills that you feel are important? How do you test that?
613. **Ms Carroll:** Selecting the correct jobs, and the correct people in tandem with that, is very important. Let us put it simply: if people are incapable of doing their job independently in an office environment, they will certainly not be capable of doing it relatively independently when away from the office *[Inaudible.]* environment. *[Inaudible.]* a question of the jobs themselves. There are certain characteristics of jobs that would be desired *[Inaudible.]* to put it very specifically and straightforwardly, if you are in continuous touch with the public, particularly on an ad hoc basis such as in a reception area, obviously that is *[Inaudible.]* working, but *[Inaudible.]* the jobs that I worked in with people over the years, you would usually see a lot of information *[Inaudible.]*. Reference sources are becoming more and more available online, within networks, etc.
614. If you *[Inaudible.]* that could include, for example, one lady who was working *[Inaudible.]*. She was entering *[Inaudible.]* into the system. The way that that worked was that she attended the office one day a week. She would then bring the documents home with her and do the entries during the week. Hers was a very good job for e-working, because it was very easy to quantify how much work she was doing. If she was *[Inaudible.]* 100 invoices in the office, *[Inaudible.]* 80 at home, there was obviously a problem. Queries could always arise that she would have to deal with, but that was a very nice *[Inaudible.]* evaluation.
615. Other jobs *[Inaudible.]* home work, as far as I am concerned, would include people who a communications regulator — somebody processing applications for mobile licences. All of that was done electronically, so it did not matter where she was or whether she was in the centre of Dublin or in Tipperary, because she could do it anyway.
616. Again, there was quantifiable issue there, because if she was doing 10 in the office and only seven in similar circumstances at home, it was a bit *[Inaudible.]*. On the other hand, if she was doing 10 in the office and 13 at home, that was obviously a good thing.
617. A lot of senior people, particularly in the private sector but also in the public sector, would e-work to do report writing, which you associate with senior people. A lot of people would e-work perhaps

- one or two days a week because they needed to sit down and get the job done with relatively few interruptions. As long as the reference materials are at hand, and that is becoming increasingly the case [*Inaudible.*] Internet access [*Inaudible.*] internal network over secure connections, etc. However, you cannot take a job in isolation and say that [*Inaudible.*] for e-working. The person is also a major factor, because if people cannot work unsupported in the office, they will certainly not be able to work relatively unsupported from home.
618. **Mr I McCrea:** The code of practice on e-working states:
- “the suitability of the e-worker’s line manager should also be considered, having regard to the need for skills in distance management.”*
619. How do you determine that?
620. **Ms Carroll:** In my experience, managers need to buy into the e-work concept. If a manager is resistant, the situation becomes difficult, and no matter how well the e-worker is performing, if the manager is uncomfortable with the situation, there may difficulties.
621. On a basic level, I have seen difficulties arising with managers failing to acknowledge no increase in productivity, which was proven [*Inaudible.*] staff members. It was because the managers [*Inaudible.*] were not comfortable working with email and electronic documents. There are still such people, who may be older and have just not got used to using keyboards or doing emails. [*Inaudible.*] I was doing an evaluation, and part of the process was to send out questionnaires to managers at the end of each month to get their views on how the evaluation was going. Let us say that there were 10 managers. I would send out the forms by email, and in eight cases they would come back by email completed. However, in the case of two managers who were not happy with it, their questionnaires were printed out, and I would get the evaluation forms handwritten and by post. That showed, in my opinion, that those people were not comfortable with the technology.
622. It is a big ask for some managers if they already manage people working term time, doing flexi work etc. It is quite a big ask for managers then to take on an e-working scenario. Managers need to be enthusiastic and to be reassured that because somebody is working from home does not mean that [*Inaudible.*] where they want. That is not the case. The more [*Inaudible.*] required to work within the normal parameters. [*Inaudible.*] There should be an agreement in place that they are available at certain hours, and managers should take account of that.
623. They should also include e-workers in all activities, including the allocation of work, even though they are out of the office. Sometimes, managers tend to look over and see that so-and-so is not there and give the work to somebody else. Then the people left in the office end up getting more work than they should just because somebody is e-working. Managers need to include the e-workers in all aspects of professional life, including work, as well as in the social aspects of being involved in the team and organisation.
624. It is an extra ask for managers, but if they are comfortable with the concept of what the organisation is trying to do, with its objectives, and with the technology required [*Inaudible.*] often that extra little step, and if the right employee is e-working — not someone who is unreliable, undependable and needs support — he or she will very often be happy to go that extra step to improve productivity and achieve the objectives of the organisation.
625. **Mr Weir:** I will follow on from Ian’s question. There is sometimes some reticence in embracing flexible working, particularly home working, owing to the issue of performance management — how managers adapt to managing the performance of remote e-workers. What are your thoughts on any differences in approach that would be needed for e-workers, as opposed to those in the much more traditional office environment, when it comes to performance management?

626. **Ms Carroll:** The e-working scenario may [*Inaudible.*]. It is not like seeing somebody sitting there at a desk; rather, they actually see what is produced. My experience has been that, in an e-working scenario, there needs to be a lot more formal reporting to management than there would be if someone were based in an office whom people could see, because the manager will normally very quickly cotton on if a difficulty arises for someone working in the office, or if the person who is working in the office has difficulty, they can sort that [*Inaudible.*]. It is more difficult to do that in an e-working scenario.
627. Generally, what is done is that there is [*Inaudible.*] reporting on the part of the e-worker. That does not have to be complicated; it does not have to take hours to do or to read. At the end of every week, for example, the e-worker would be required to send to the manager a report on what the objectives for the week were, what the tasks were and where progress has been made. If there are difficulties, they can be sorted out at an earlier stage rather than let them go on, allowing problems to become bigger ones. Reporting has to be much clearer and more formalised, without being over-complex.
628. Another thing that happens very frequently is that managers will — they really should — keep in touch with e-workers by having regular meetings with them, or even by linking up as we are doing now, via Skype, to ask whether there is a problem. If somebody sitting in the office at home encounters a technical difficulty — for example, if [*Inaudible.*] Word documents has become a big problem — a person in the office could sort it [*Inaudible.*] very informal basis. What some organisations do as well is that they have on their internal websites an area for e-workers, where common difficulties [*Inaudible.*]; for example, sorting out a difficulty with a printer [*Inaudible.*] where common trouble-shooting issues and their solutions are posted. However, reporting and communication are key. It does not have to be complex, but it has to be clear.
629. **Mr Weir:** From that point of view, there is some irony there. Whereas we are looking for more flexible working and working from home, there is some irony in the contrast. Perhaps both the reporting mechanism and the interaction directly with line managers arguably has to be a bit more structured and formalised than it would be otherwise, because the opportunities to go to the end of the corridor where the manager is on a more ad hoc basis are diminished.
630. **Ms Carroll:** Yes. [*Inaudible.*] flexible work has to be structured; otherwise, it can be chaos. Somebody thinks that you are doing something and somebody else thinks that you are doing something else. In all fairness to managers, [*Inaudible.*] because, let us face it, it is easy for a manager to handle a situation in which he or she sees people. Managers can allocate work, etc. The e-worker situation has to be more structured and formalised. Better planning needs to take place. Certainly, there must be very close monitoring to see whether there is a problem.
631. This can be difficult for people for a short period, but once the system begins to flow, it should become very easy. If it does not become very easy, the situation can be reviewed.
632. **Mr Weir:** There seems to be a paradox here, in that, at least initially, e-working can place an additional burden on the line manager. Are there also advantages for line managers? They have to be arguably slightly more directly hands-on, so can it mean that there is a greater level of familiarity with their staff and with the tasks that need to be performed? The concern is sometimes expressed that line managers can become semi-detached from people, but here they have to be a bit more structured in the way that they deal with them. Does it give the line manager a greater level of direct involvement?
633. **Ms Carroll:** Yes, probably, a bit. If we go back [*Inaudible.*] the people who are

e-working, and the skills that they have *[Inaudible.]*. If the selection process works, and that is very important for jobs and people, the system should flow nicely. However, where there is a problem at the selection phase, there can be problems. The thing to remember in the whole e-work *[Inaudible.]* is that there should always be, in any e-working arrangement contract, *[Inaudible.]* reporting takes place. There should also be *[Inaudible.]* a termination clause. In some cases, it just does not work or people want to work e-work for the wrong reasons. Instead of becoming an advantage to the organisation and a management system for the manager, it becomes a disadvantage, and things go astray. It is very important that there be a trial period that is long enough to be realistic — for example, four or six months — and a termination clause, whereby if the e-working scenario is not working out, it can be terminated.

634. **Mr Cree:** I wish to ask you a question on e-working initiatives. How can they best be evaluated, including baseline data and other information? How do we collect all of that for subsequent evaluation?
635. **Ms Carroll:** The evaluation can be difficult enough. Sometimes *[Inaudible.]* goes on the *[Inaudible.]*, so how it is working from the point of view of the manager and the e-worker. Some jobs that people do are easily quantified. Assuming that the organisation's objective is at least to maintain current levels of productivity and hopefully increase them, where there is a situation in which, for example, somebody inputs data, *[Inaudible.]* invoices or *[Inaudible.]*, it is easy enough to quantify the amount of work that is done. You start when they are in the office. If they do, on average, 50 a week — *[Inaudible.]* figure — and, when they are at home, they do a total of 70 a week, obviously, you have an increase in productivity. Where the job is less easy to quantify is, for example, when somebody does a report. We have all come across it. Sometimes, you sit down and do a report in a day, half a day, or whatever. At other times, it can take you three days, simply because of its complexity or because you may not be in the right form for doing it. What is easily quantified *[Inaudible.]* is beautiful, because you have got the information. On the other hand, there is often a judgement call to be made on behalf of the manager and the e-worker. It is just not altogether crystal clear. People will use their judgement and experience to evaluate how the e-working is going. Is that all right?
636. **Mr Cree:** That is fine. I think that what you are saying is that it is absolutely crucial that the baseline data be known to everyone.
637. **Ms Carroll:** Yes. When you start, it must be known. That will be done on review of output in the office in the three months prior to the introduction of e-working. There would then possibly be a wobbly phase when people are starting off. They might *[Inaudible.]* two weeks. Problems arise *[Inaudible.]* communications infrastructure and everything else. After around a month, things will have settled down. It should soon be clear how the situation before compares with the post-e-working situation.
638. **Ms Boyle:** Good morning, Riona. You have touched on some issues around training practices. Can you elaborate on how training requirements are evaluated and managed and on how that works between office and home?
639. **Ms Carroll:** Let us begin by looking at possible home workers. If they need training in their actual job, they are not skilled. It is assumed that their professional skills are independent and good. There could be training, even for people who are very skilled at their job — for example, in the whole area of handling IT equipment such as hardware — so that if they have a problem with a printer jamming or running out of toner, they know how to sort it out. It might be assumed that they know already. However, when you work in an office environment, there is usually somebody to come along and do those sorts of jobs for you. *[Inaudible.]* training, which

- is for standardisation of equipment *[Inaudible.]* for the IT people. I could be at home working with a Hewlett Packard printer, and you could be at home working with a Samsung printer or whatever it is. They are all different. The standardisation of equipment makes life a lot easier for the IT people, as they can put up on the website common problems that arise and how to solve them.
640. Other forms of *[Inaudible.]* that are frequently needed *[Inaudible.]* are managing their time. In a home situation, at the beginning people work very long hours, they wear themselves out and then start working badly or start working short hours. So time management is one of the areas that could be important.
641. Self-discipline is also important: if you are going to work, you will be leaving the house and will be getting some exercise between the house and the car or the bus. There is also a bit of sociability. However, if you work at home and have a family to mind in the evening, it is very easy to get into a situation where you are going into the office at home in the morning, coming out in the evening and going straight into making dinner, washing dishes et cetera. The social element can become lacking from your life. It is very important that people keep a social element if they are not going to the office and meeting people. People have to keep themselves active socially and not become hermits who do not go out of the house from one Saturday to other when they do the shopping.
642. **Ms Boyle:** On the practice of working from home, have you ever encountered envy from other employees? Sometimes, people will abuse their time management when they are working from home. For example, they might pick the children up from school, go shopping or meet friends during the day. How is that managed?
643. **Ms Carroll:** *[Inaudible.]* If you have family duties to see to, as most people do, home working makes it easier to deal with situations where you have to pick up children or go to the dentist et cetera. That is also related to the reduction in absenteeism in that you do not have to take an entire day off to do something. There cannot be envy.
644. People still have to do their jobs. If they take half an hour off to collect the children, they will have to make up that productivity elsewhere. There have been cases of people saying, "So and so can work where they want and when they want." You have to keep a disciplined regime and complete the tasks required.
645. **Ms Boyle:** How is that managed and policed so that such abuse does not exist at home?
646. **Ms Carroll:** It largely depends on the person who has been selected for home working; they must be responsible and know what they have to do. If they have to take time off to do something, they should communicate that with their manager and say, "Is it OK if I am not available between 10.00 am and 11.00 am?"
647. Ultimately, *[Inaudible.]* having a certain amount of work to do, reporting to your manager at regular intervals about how you stand with your work. The work has to be done, and if someone takes advantage and takes extra time off, it should become fairly visible because they will not be getting their work done.
648. Personal choice is very important. If you have somebody who skives off regularly when they are in the office, they will probably skive off more when they are at home. You chose the right people, and, if their motivation is positive, that abuse should not happen.
649. **Ms Boyle:** So it is very much up to the individual.
650. **Ms Carroll:** It is, ultimately. It is also up to the work that the individual produces: if they are not producing, there is a problem. There are no magic answers to that question.
651. **Mr Girvan:** Thank you for being present this morning. There seems to be reluctance, perhaps not just from

- management but from unions, on the matter because of maybe one member of staff who feels that they are being disenfranchised because they are not being offered the opportunity to have flexible working. How have you overcome that or how do you feel that we can overcome it?
652. **Ms Carroll:** First, it has to be objectively introducing home working *[Inaudible.]* If it is to reduce space *[Inaudible.]* If it is to increase productivity and to foster family-friendly initiatives *[Inaudible.]* Having said that, I am always afraid that when you say it is a family-friendly initiative, people think that they can work and mind children at the same time, which is totally out of the question, from all points of view. You cannot possibly do it. It is as simple as that.
653. Not every job or every person is suited to e-working, so it has to be introduced with a clear statement that, after analysis of suitable jobs, the following jobs would be eligible. It has to go through a clear and transparent process, but the person has to be assessed as suitable as well. Something that is often overlooked is that the person has to have a suitable place in the home to work: you cannot do a day's work sitting at the table. Certain criteria have to be met. After that, there are usually certain quotas or percentages introduced, if there are suitable people to do it.
654. As in any case, there is often a judgement call as to how to react, but it has to be clear and transparent. There are a lot of criteria that have to be met for somebody to be suitable for e-working, including the provision of a suitable workspace in the home. *[Inaudible.]* and you only need five to be working, the manager would have to decide who the five are *[Inaudible.]* and maybe roll the situation out further so that more people could be included as they go along. Again, it is a question of judgement. There is no absolutely neat solution to it.
655. **Mr Girvan:** On the point that you made about management making those types of decisions, is there any compulsion to engage with the union to ensure that management has appointed the right people and is not just doing it for a point of favouritism, which does happen? You end up with a whistle-blower coming along and saying, "We know that so and so has been offered flexible working and during their flexible working they are having appointments with their doctors, going to the dentist, getting hair appointments, attending a beautician — some of us might need to do that —
656. **Ms Boyle:** Or the barbers.
657. **Mr Girvan:** Some of us might need to do that more often than others. Because of that, there is a necessity for unions to be engaged so that fairness is seen.
658. **Ms Carroll:** I imagine that, in drawing up the criteria for e-working, there will be a case for the unions to *[Inaudible.]* because it could be seen as *[Inaudible.]* However, if somebody is going to hairdressers, beauticians and gyms *[Inaudible.]* it should quickly be seen that they are not getting the work done. Reasonable work would be allocated and would have to be done within a certain time. It would not be practical on a sustainable basis for someone to indulge in leisure activities and get their work done at the same time, unless there is a huge underestimation of how much work can be done within a certain time. If somebody is abusing the situation, it should become clear quite quickly as long as it is monitored corrected.
659. **The Acting Chairperson:** Thank you very much, Riona. That was very helpful, indeed. The Committee appreciates your courtesy and the information that you gave us. We will review this session, and, if you do not mind, if there are issues that we want to correspond with you on, we will be in touch. Thank you very much for your time. Take care.
660. **Ms Carroll:** It is a pleasure. Thank you very much.

26 February 2014

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Daithí McKay (Chairperson)
 Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)
 Mrs Judith Cochrane
 Mr Leslie Cree
 Mr Paul Girvan
 Mr John McCallister
 Mr Ian McCrea
 Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
 Mr Adrian McQuillan
 Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Mr Andy Lake *Flexibility.co.uk*

661. **The Chairperson:** Members, I welcome to the meeting Andy Lake, who is the director of flexibility.co.uk. Andy, you are very welcome. Can you hear us OK?
662. **Mr Andy Lake (Flexibility.co.uk):** Yes. I can, now. Thank you very much for inviting me.
663. **The Chairperson:** Andy, I wonder whether, before we go to questions, you would give us a brief overview of your work on and involvement in flexible working, particularly the document that members have before them, which is titled 'The Way we Work: A Guide to Smart Working in Government'.
664. **Mr Lake:** Yes. I have been working in the field for nearly 20 years now. Flexibility.co.uk began life as part of a European R&D project funded under the framework programmes. The project looked at telework for people with disabilities, in remote rural areas, in the construction industry and so on. Initially, 'Flexibility' was a monthly paper journal looking at all aspects of other projects and business innovation, and it just kept on going with sponsorship from various organisations and the European Commission. Eventually, it became self-financing and was spun out as a separate company. Apart from
665. A couple of years ago, we produced 'The Smart Working Handbook', which had sponsorship from a number of leading organisations and is still downloadable from the website. As a result of that, a number of organisations have asked for it to be customised as their internal guidance. In due course, the Cabinet Office approached me. It said that it was pretty much what it would like to do and asked whether we could customise a version of it or talk to all the relevant Departments in the UK Government — the English Government — and get a lot of case studies. This is the version that has approval but is not yet published. A summary version is also being prepared to provide quicker guidance. I am working with a number of large organisations, such as utilities and several councils. I have also done remote training for the Iranian Civil Service. That seems quite random, but, a few years ago, it published a teleworking decree, as it saw remote working as essential to modernising its government. There is movement under way among governments of all kinds to try to modernise the way that they work. Working better with less resource is the key to what it is about.
666. **The Chairperson:** Do the Westminster policies — the Civil Service reform plan and national property controls etc — drive smart and flexible working in Whitehall Departments? Are they driving flexible working as much as they can, or do you find resistance among civil servants there? Here, we have heard civil servants make comments that

- indicate a resistance to going down that road.
667. **Mr Lake:** I think that there is a definite drive towards it across Departments. There is always a process of understanding exactly what it is. Everyone comes to the table with their own idea of what flexible working is from their experience. Often, people have quite a narrow view on the basis of what they have experienced. I do not mean narrow-minded, but they see it as being about work/life balance and flexible working by exception, rather than trying to get the whole organisation to be more flexible as the norm.
668. Departments are, as you know, quite autonomous and have their own arrangements for property, HR, procurement and technology, so it is very much the case that a set of multi-speed and diverse things are happening. The overarching drive from within Whitehall is part of the efficiency and reform programme under which this initiative sits.
669. One of the driving factors in government, as in many other organisations, is to reduce property costs, but it is not the only one. If you start a project from that basis, everyone becomes disaffected from the start. They feel that they are losing something, whereas the whole approach should be about how we can do things better while being less wasteful of the resources that we have acquired over the years or even centuries.
670. **Mr Cree:** Good morning, Andy. My question is one of the most obvious ones. Managing performance focuses on results and outcomes. How can that be achieved? What are the difficulties?
671. **Mr Lake:** In a sense, that is one of the most fundamental questions. When people go through this process, it is important to reflect on how they manage now. Managing performance by results, understanding what your outputs should be and understanding the outcomes that you want in the longer term are essential to all management. When I take workshops, people often say, “This is what we do anyway”, but then ask, “How do you do it?”. Interestingly, people in a sales role or some kind of field role tend to be much clearer on this because they are often very target driven. Many in field work do this naturally. The challenge is bringing it into a white-collar office environment where people are much more used to managing by presence. They think that, if they look over someone’s shoulder or call someone into their room and have a quick chat, they are managing performance. It is partly about being more structured and breaking down activities that you think you do anyway into a series of projects with definable objectives and outcomes. There are a lot of techniques for developing that approach. Of course, certain roles, such as those of the processing variety, are much more amenable to being divided up easily, whereas someone in a social work role may feel that it is impossible, but it is not. Various councils have led the way and asked themselves how much they do and what they expect people to achieve within a certain time. One of the input measures is the amount of resource, so they get a feel for the average. I do not really like the league table and target approach. This is much more subtle and needs to be worked out as a team.
672. **Mr Cree:** As you say, some will be easier to monitor than others, Andy. For which jobs is it most difficult to monitor performance?
673. **Mr Lake:** Sometimes, in roles of a more reactive nature, certain people have to troubleshoot and deal with unexpected crises and so on. Again, it is a question of looking at the wider picture to see what one would normally expect. One key issue is that people feel that, if someone is remote, they are out of contact, but that is changing. In the current situation, if someone is not at their desk, in a meeting or visiting someone, they are, effectively, out of contact, but with new technologies, someone working from home or working in the field — working

- anywhere — is available through the technologies that we now use. Many organisations use Microsoft Link or similar to keep in touch. These are unified communications mechanisms whereby you can contact through instant messaging and set up instant conference calls wherever you are. Being out of the office does not mean being out of touch. Properly managed, it means, I think, being more available than before.
674. **Mr Cree:** I guess the big problem for some managers is this: how do we know that our staff member is working all the time?
675. **Mr Lake:** That touches on a number of fundamental points. Do you want to measure someone's value to your organisation by the time that they work or by their results? Obviously, a member of staff will work for a certain of time, and, within that period, you will set objectives that will take up a certain time. However, I think that focusing on the time input rather than the productive output is part of the old world of work that we need to move away from.
676. **The Chairperson:** It kind of reminds me of politicians. You do not see them at work, but you judge them on their outcomes as opposed to monitoring them day in, day out.
677. **Mr McQuillan:** Good morning, Andy. How can we ensure that there is a commitment at the top level of any organisation to flexible working?
678. **Mr Lake:** Support at the top is crucial. I have seen quite a number of organisations start down the road of flexible working, and those at the top said the right words but did not put them into practice. That is when things start to fall apart. I will give a challenging example: if you are moving to a smart working environment and say that space will be allocated according to need rather than status, you can, for example, get rid of private offices and turn them into meeting rooms and so on, but how would a chief executive or Minister react to that? If you have people at the top who say that it is good to have people working flexibly but then get really upset and ask, "Where is everybody today?, you have a problem. They have to lead by example.
679. Usually, one of the first things that I do when I go into an organisation is work with senior management to raise awareness; look at what other organisations are doing; look at the issues; get buy-in; and develop a vision and a set of principles that are signed off at a high level, as you see from the handbook. That becomes a kind of touchstone for how work is organised at a lower level and how decisions are made about that.
680. **Mr McQuillan:** Thanks, Andy. Are there any lessons that we can learn from the case studies that you have carried out?
681. **Mr Lake:** Yes. One of the most important things, after getting that high-level vision, is getting the people who work in the sometimes separate fields of property, technology and HR — the people disciplines — working together as an integrated team. Quite often, I have seen people who are getting something going, but the technology people, although on the right track, have their own road map. The technology department may have a five-year strategy or a contract with an external provider, so, for them, certain things are pretty much set in stone and they will not shift on those. Although they have agreed to introduce flexible working, they want to do so in their own time. Getting everyone working together to introduce a coherent programme to support the cultural changes needed is often one of the most difficult things to achieve.
682. **Mr McQuillan:** I suppose that it is important to the whole project that that happens early on.
683. **Mr Lake:** Yes, it is. The structure and governance of the change project are quite important. It is important to have someone at a sufficiently senior level say, "Enough of this style of working; let's all do this together."

684. **Mr D Bradley:** Good morning, Andy. If a company or Department was starting afresh to implement smart or flexible working, what, in your experience, would the initial key steps be?
685. **Mr Lake:** At the back of the handbook, I set out a sample generic timeline of the steps needed. First is awareness raising and establishing the vision principles. Then, there is gathering evidence and seeing how people work now, what resources are they using, to what extent offices are occupied, what technologies are used and what the mobility needs are. After that, you need to engage the workforce in the process so that this is not something that is happening to them. We need to ask them, "If you had the right set of tools and a bit more flexibility to organise things in a way that you think is more rational and would fit in better with your kind of life, could you do what you do better? The results that you get out of that process are quite amazing .
686. My experience of the public sector is that it is full of committed, intelligent, caring and creative people, who spend a lot of their time doing things that they feel are not entirely necessary. There are systems and processes through which they do things. They do them because they have always been done, or because they are worried about stepping out of line or being held accountable to various people for doing something wrong. They know that things can be improved. So part of the way to make a success of this is to engage people's creativity and energy in redesigning the way in which they work. I go through with them a process that I call the "can test", which challenges assumptions of necessity. I ask them why they do something at all and why they do it in a certain place or at a particular time. We then look at how it can be done in a way that is much lighter on resources and so on. People come up with some quite empowering answers. However, part of the process of reaching that point is getting managers to trust their staff to work in a way that offers a bit more choice about where, when and how they work. They can do that if they are happy to manage by results.
687. **Mr D Bradley:** You described the more traditional workplace setting and how it is managed "by presence" as opposed, I suppose, to management at a distance. In the traditional setting, one would think that such management makes it easier to avoid fragmentation, isolation, loss of team spirit and, in some cases, a threat to the work/life balance. How do you ensure that those elements are not part of the smart or flexible working plan?
688. **Mr Lake:** You are right to point out that there are some dangers. Your focus could be entirely on homeworking, for example, which our surveys of organisations show that most people do not want to do. If you ask people whether they would like to work at home, you find that those who say that they would want to do so for one or two days a week. Only a very small number want to work three to five days a week from home, even though it can, sometimes, be an efficient way to organise things. One has to be careful not to set up arrangements whereby people are artificially fragmented and dispersed. In a normal kind of flexible/smart working arrangement, people see one other more often than they had imagined, or perhaps feared.
689. When a team is together, the idea is to have team spirit. However, office structures, with ranks of desks, are not very well suited to collaboration. Spaces for collaboration, such as a break-out space, a project room or a formal meeting room, where people can get together and to which they have good access, are often lacking in government offices. So, by having people share desks, because desks are often underused, and having a range of different settings, people are more able to go to the kind of places that are appropriate for the collaboration that builds team spirit.
690. There are techniques for managing more disperse teams. I do not think of a distributed team merely as the people

- who are out in the field; it is everybody who is in that team. Regardless of where you work, you are part of the one team, and you are all distributed. You have to learn to work more with the new technologies and rethink how meetings are conducted. We often find that people complain of a meetings culture: they spend half their time arranging meetings. How can you start to deconstruct meetings and do things in a different way? Take, for example, never having a meeting to share information — share the information online beforehand. I am sure that all of you have been to meetings at which you heard information for the first time. You cannot make a decision on it, so you arrange another meeting. You sit in on some meetings for an hour, two hours or three hours just for the 10 minutes that are relevant to you. It is about thinking about how you can use the new technology more creatively to call somebody in, remotely, for the 10 minutes that they need to be there. Those are the kinds of things that can help to change the way that teams work.
691. **Mr D Bradley:** Thank you very much, Andy.
692. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Good morning, Andy. Thank you very much. The question of change management when moving from traditional working practices and existing portfolio of accommodation to the default position of open space is reflected in your document. Is it always possible to retrofit existing buildings, or is it your experience that, sometimes, we have to look for alternative accommodation and dispense with some of the existing accommodation?
693. **Mr Lake:** That can be a choice. Sorry, I am hearing a slight echo when I speak, so I am tripping up a bit with my own words.
694. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** You have to be careful with your words.
695. **Mr Lake:** It is often not possible to retrofit historical buildings because you cannot make the internal changes needed. However, Whitehall has done some creative things with some of the older buildings there. They use what were private or small team offices as meeting rooms, project rooms and so on. It is often very difficult to deal with many of the offices built between the 1960s and 1990s because they do not have the wiring and so on that is needed. In such cases, it can be better to get out of them and go to somewhere more purpose-built. There are a lot of great examples of purpose-built buildings. The environment is quite exciting for people to work in, and the buildings are more suited to the new ways of working.
696. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** We have had some limited experience of smart working here in the North. There are significant factors involved here, such as institutional resistance and workforce resentment of, say, the open-plan concepts, and, as such, those difficulties have been hard to programme out.
697. Does experience require that we should start with the best exemplar that we have to demonstrate that it works and delivers greater efficiencies, output and, I suppose, competitiveness, depending on the type of work environment, and then convince the managers who have yet to be convinced that investment in bespoke building design might be required instead of going through phased refurbishment?
698. **Mr Lake:** I think that that is a good idea. Visiting places that are doing it well can be a first step. Setting up some kind of model office in an existing building that shows the layouts and facilities that people would have and getting some teams to fast-track the new ways of working can be very influential.
699. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Workplace culture is a significant issue, particularly in the Civil Service, where there tends to be career longevity, with people, on leaving education, working in the same type of environment for perhaps decades. Have you found that to be a significant problem to overcome?

700. **Mr Lake:** In some organisations. People talk a lot about the different generations of the workforce and about the new generations coming through being more au fait with new technologies and being much happier to work and become friends with people whom they do not see daily. Although I think that that is true, it has not been my experience that the older workforce is necessarily resistant. A lot of the people driving some of the changes are people in their mid-50s — such as me — to retirement age and even beyond, and the people developing the new technologies are often older as well.
701. Familiarity is one of the hardest cultural things to get over. Flexible working and smart working are not all about remote working. They take other forms as well. With people increasingly working beyond retirement age and wanting to have phased retirement and the like, other kinds of flexibility can be appealing.
702. We have done surveys on how much people want particular kinds of flexible working and found that those who want part-time or reduced-hours working the most tend to be the over-45s rather than younger parents, which is what one might assume. I think that that is because parents probably already have the part-time working that they want. Therefore, the ways in which to address different kinds of change in different parts of the working population are quite an important component.
703. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** You argue that the evidence for smart working as demonstrated by its outputs should overcome any reservations or resistance to the step change.
704. **Mr Lake:** Yes, I think so. To be fair, a lot of resistance has been identified among, in particular, middle managers and team leaders. They are often in the position in which, having done a professional job well for years, they feel that they have not had training in managing change. An ideal project will have a central resource that will go out and work with the people who have to be at the sharp end of change, in order to help them through the practical changes that they will be looking at and help them design new ways of working. That resource will be in place to support them as they get those new practices bedded in.
705. The ‘Field of Dreams’ approach, whereby you build it and they will come, does not really work. I always think about a number of projects that built a platform for flexible working, with a new working environment and new technologies, but then it did not quite happen. That is when, perhaps late in the day, organisations call in someone like me to help with the cultural change, because they forgot that bit. Having that culture change in the change management process is vital.
706. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** I think that we have learnt that first lesson ourselves through experience. Thank you very much.
707. **Mrs Cochrane:** I am interested specifically in the potential for sharing workspaces across different Departments, local government bodies and other public bodies. How much of that has gone on in GB so far? Are other benefits associated with buildings being better utilised other than reduced costs? Is there any evidence of government starting to work less in silos because there is interaction at times, even informally, between people from different Departments?
708. **Mr Lake:** Very much so. Desk sharing is one of the biggest fears, because it really attacks something that is quite emotionally central to people. On one level, it is about territory. People think, “This is my territory, and you are taking my desk away”, or “You are taking our storage away”, or something like that. However, it can also be felt like an attack on identity. People think, “This is where I have my work personality” or “This is my team and the people with whom I associate”. Therefore, it is important to recreate a team identity in the new guise. Desk sharing is becoming almost ubiquitous in the UK public sector. In central government,

- it is known by various names, such as “non-territorial working”. Pretty much throughout local government, it is either there or on its way.
709. Does it have the advantages that you mention? I think that the case studies show that it has many advantages. Obviously, using space more effectively is quite important. In the case studies, only around 40% of desks are being used on average during the working day — between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm, not counting lunchtime. Those are the kind of figures that we are seeing. That is an enormous amount of waste. It is resource that could be spent on something else. People are persuaded by those kinds of arguments when they see the evidence. The booklet from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is on how it is using its new project areas. Those are very good for bringing together and getting team identity from people who come in from a variety of different Departments.
710. I am sure that you have many cases in many Departments and throughout local government of teams being dispersed across multiple sites. One of the wins that you often get from a project when you move to that kind of working is being able to bring people to a single base, even if they do not work there all the time. That is a big bonus for many managers, and for the teams themselves.
711. **Mr Girvan:** Thank you, Andy, for being here. I have not necessarily bought into the whole flexible-working approach. I see it as a skivers charter in some way. However, I believe in the smarter-working aspect, for those who have the ability to do it.
712. What mechanisms are there to ensure that all the technologies are secure and safe when being used in remote settings? How can things be married to ensure that that happens?
713. **Mr Lake:** That is quite an interesting one. Government deals with very sensitive information. The Cabinet Office has been working on new definitions of different security levels. Therefore, it is a question of finding forms of working and technology appropriate to the security needs. Some things might be too sensitive to take off the site, so that can sometimes be used as an objection to smarter working as a whole.
714. It is a question of finding the proportionate response. The Whitehall advice is that it is a question of managing risk, not blocking everything that you might do.
715. It is also quite interesting that one of the pioneers of flexible working and smart working is the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ). When you think about it, intelligence organisations and the military constantly take very sensitive information all around the place. Therefore, the techniques are out there. It is just a question of how we do something in a white-collar office environment that we already know how to do.
716. **Mr Girvan:** That can sometimes be seen as a reason not to do it. Some organisations will simply say that the security risks are too great. By that, I mean the risks to data security. Therefore, they do not offer the opportunity, because it seems like too much work to try to deliver it. Have you encountered any of that resistance?
717. **Mr Lake:** I have. I do not know that I should mention specifics. I know of one government organisation that has moved quite substantially towards smarter working. However, one element of it has not as yet. Its thinking is, “We have to deal with very difficult and sensitive public security issues, so we will continue to work in our traditional ways for the moment and look at the appropriate solutions for us”. It is very resistant to sharing space with other parts of the organisation. I can see the wisdom in that when it comes to sharing the regular places where people work, where things may be overheard, but it is now sharing some common areas — some of the other activity-based work settings that I mentioned. You can take people along at their own speed, but

- there may be occasions on which you genuinely just cannot do it.
718. **The Chairperson:** As I mentioned earlier, senior officials in the Department of Finance and Personnel have a number of concerns about flexible working. Can you give us a quick view on three of their concerns? First, they are concerned that too much flexibility can have an adverse impact on business arrangements; secondly, that a formalised home-working policy risks creating a sense of entitlement and inflexibility on the part of employees; and, thirdly, that informal, ad hoc arrangements where line managers exercise discretion is preferable.
719. **Mr Lake:** That is very interesting. To some extent, I agree with all those statements, based on how flexible working has been done so far. The process whereby somebody applies for a flexible-working arrangement that gets set in stone — that is an exception from normal working — means that you cannot construct a strategy on that basis. You are working from the basis of a default norm of 9.00 am to 5.00 pm working in the office being how you do business, and then one person is to have one alternative arrangement and someone else a different alternative arrangement. All of that adds up to complexity and, to my mind, a bit of incoherence. It can also lead to some discriminatory practices, because one line manager will accept one thing, but another line manager will not accept the same. There could be two people sitting next to each other, one with caring responsibilities and one without, and the former gets some kind of flexibility, which is seen as a benefit.
720. The proper approach is to move forward, try to get away from the default, traditional norm and think how, in the new world of work that is emerging, with more-flexible possibilities for where people work, we can create something that works for our team, with people working in different ways at different times rather than something being nailed down as a permanent contractual arrangement.
721. **The Chairperson:** Finally, the Committee is looking at the issue of the number of public service workers' sick days across our various Departments, as it is a concern. A number of areas need to be considered, and page 40 of your report refers to healthy working. It mentions the sick days lost, unhealthy working environments and stress. Having sick family members or sick children in a household can also have an impact. Is there recognition that flexible working can be part of the public health agenda? Obviously, workers with more time have more time to be healthy. One big issue that we all face at the minute is the increased health spending projected over the next 10, 20 and 30 years. For example, diabetes rates are going up quite considerably across the North, year on year. Can healthy working be a key part of the agenda?
722. **Mr Lake:** It can. Quite a number of studies link flexible working to better health outcomes. In particular, it can reduce stress and have beneficial effects for people who have problems with blood pressure and the like. Some studies indicate that the forms of flexible working that give greater autonomy to the person are most effective for reducing stress. That is something that ties in with the culture of trust, which I mentioned, and the feeling of being empowered rather than feeling that what you are doing is in some way different from the norm and may be causing problems for other people in the office. Involving empowerment is also quite important.
723. One of the other things I find interesting from a policy point of view is that the most dangerous thing that you will do in your working day — unless you are a soldier, policeman, miner, fireman or something like that — is travel to and from work. That does not really come into the figures somehow. It does not count as a work-related accident if you are injured or killed going to or from work. I strongly associate reductions in commuting, which is also a source of stress, with a health agenda.

724. **The Chairperson:** Andy, that is all from us for now. Thank you very much for your time. It has been a very productive session and will go some way to improving our final report.
725. **Mr Lake:** Thank you for inviting me. I wish you well in your endeavours.
726. **The Chairperson:** All the best. Goodbye.

14 May 2014

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Daithí McKay (Chairperson)
 Ms Michaela Boyle
 Mrs Judith Cochrane
 Mr Leslie Cree
 Mr Paul Girvan
 Mr John McCallister
 Mr Ian McCrea
 Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
 Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Mr Ronnie Geddis *Momentum*
 Mr John Martin
 Mr Ken Moran

727. **The Chairperson:** I welcome Mr Ken Moran, board member of Momentum, Mr John Martin, project manager for Total Mobile, and Mr Ronnie Geddis, sales director for Total Mobile. You are all very welcome to the Committee. Do you perhaps want to take us through the presentation that you have provided for the Committee before we move to questions?

728. **Mr Ken Moran (Momentum):** Indeed. Good morning. Thank you for inviting us to the Committee. My name is Ken Moran. I am a board member of Momentum. For those of you who do not know Momentum, we are the non-profit organisation in Northern Ireland specifically in the IT and digital sector, with a specific focus on small and medium enterprises. Our remit is to try to grow the indigenous information technology sector in Northern Ireland by providing it with access to markets, funding and other initiatives to help it grow.

729. There are pros and cons to mobile working. We are going to look at a case study. If you look at some of the advantages of mobile working, which have all been available in the private sector for the past 10 or 15 years, it is

very clear that there is no technology blocker to looking at flexible and mobile working in the public sector, because all of the technologies that are needed to facilitate it are well proven and well established. However, there is likely to be a cultural issue with mobile working. When our company introduced mobile working, for example, the initial blocker to that was whether people would actually work from home. Would people actually work remotely? What happens if they are not in the office and cannot be managed face to face?

730. Look at some of the advantages in things like an improved work/life balance. If, for example, a young parent in the public sector has an emergency with their child, are they going to have to take the day off to look after that child? Is that going to increase absenteeism? Do they have the ability to take two hours out and then work from home? It is all about trying to provide the technologies to allow people to have a better work/life balance.

731. There is also the ability to retain key staff. I think that we are going to see that changing, because, as younger people come into the public service, they are going to be more familiar with the flexible and mobile working that they use personally, including things like social media. As this age changes, I suspect that we are going to see more demand for more flexible working from new entrants into the public service. That leads on to the attraction of better candidates. If the organisation is not able to provide the technologies and tools to allow people to implement their preferred work/life balance, you are not going to attract those people into the public service. They are going to go somewhere else where they can achieve that work/life balance.

732. One of the issues relating to mobile working is a communication strategy. As

- I said at the start, the perception could be that if you give people mobile working they are not going to work. That is obviously not the case. I personally am a mobile worker. I work for a company in Maidenhead. I have a home office. I find that I actually work more at home. I work when I want at home. I start earlier. I can take a break. I can work later. It is all about providing the flexibility for people to do the work at the time they need to do it best.
733. I suggest that a key concern from the public sector's perspective is data security. However, again, I stress that the technologies and tools exist to cover that. There are private sector organisations working in areas such as defence that have highly sensitive data. Even though they may not be private sector, there will be organisations that are deploying technologies that are capable of protecting and managing data all the way through from confidential to secret etc. Bluntly, I think that data security is a bit of a red herring. It is not a real issue.
734. Obviously, another issue to look at is training. How do we ensure that the people who are using mobile technologies are exploiting them properly? There is also the currency of equipment issue with mobile devices such as BlackBerrys, iPads, smartphones and desktops. However, fundamentally, it is all about people. It is not about technology. There is nothing to stop the public sector today implementing remote working and flexible working for its staff that will cover off the data security requirements and the performance requirements. It is very much a cultural piece and a change management and personnel management piece.
735. Unfortunately, we have had a last-minute cancellation, so I am not going to talk through this piece of the presentation. The Committee has the slides. We will take questions on it at a later date, but unfortunately the chap who was due to present it, Fergus Sweeney, has had a last-minute cancellation. Apologies to the Committee for that.
736. We are now going to introduce a case study that will show you what it could look like in real life. It is not a hypothetical or theoretical discussion but one about what mobile working would look like in healthcare, for example. I am going to introduce John Martin, who is the business development manager from Total Mobile.
737. **Mr John Martin (Momentum):** Good morning, everyone. My role in the company is one of managing our partners who resell our technology. It is technology that is developed here in Belfast. The vast majority of our business — over 90% — is exported out of Northern Ireland. Companies such as Capita, Civica, Vodafone and BT resell our solutions, technology and software, so we are certainly recognised as leading in the market.
738. Total Mobile is active in local government and healthcare. We have taken the area of healthcare to use as an example this morning. Our solution runs on iPads, Windows tablets, smartphones and so on across a range of devices. It is not a one-trick pony. Some people bring out applications that only run on one device. Our solution runs across all different devices, because the market is changing all the time and what is right for one person may not be right for another person. There is flexibility there.
739. As for what it actually does, it links securely. As Ken mentioned, the security is very important. In healthcare, you are talking about patient records. In other areas, you may be talking about other sensitive information. So, it absolutely must be secure. We have been through lots of testing with different bodies to make sure that that has been addressed.
740. Essentially, what happens, with a district nurse, for example, is that the appointments and so on are created in the main patient systems within the hospital itself, and that appointment information is then sent out from the main patient system to our solution, which runs on an iPad or similar, so

- the nurse has all the information they need about the appointment, who they are seeing and when they are seeing them. They also have the case history of that patient, so they know all of the symptoms and problems that the patient has had in the past. They have access to the notes that other nurses and so on have taken when they have been out to see the same patient. In addition to that, they have all the electronic forms that they need to fill in.
741. I do not know if anybody knows a nurse or anything like that, but according to our analysis when we start those projects off, nurses can have anything up to 50 or 100 different paper forms to fill in during their working day. The amount of paperwork that nurses have to cope with is just horrendous. They are meant to be spending time with patients, not processing paper. That is what we are addressing when we implement our solutions. The output of all that is taking all those paper forms out of the process and capturing the information once on the device. They do not need to go back into the office, or wherever it is, to sit down in front of a computer and type the notes up again. That is all done automatically in the background. As soon as they finish with that patient, they hit a button — bang — and it is in the main patient record system.
742. That brings so many benefits across a whole range of areas. It is typically two hours a day that nurses are filling in and processing paperwork, sitting in front of the computer, when, really, they should be with patients. That typically translates — it depends on the nurses' functions and the roles that they fulfil — to two extra visits to patients a day. That is transformation. We are releasing probably a quarter of a nurse's working day to spend giving extra care, shortening waiting lists and seeing people more frequently and for longer. It makes a massive difference not just on the nursing side but on the admin side, because it frees up back-office staff to do more things and to reduce paperwork. Typically, what happens is that the paper file sits somewhere for a period of time; it could be a day, a week or maybe longer. It may sit in somebody's in tray because they have a massive backlog. With our solution, that information goes straight into the system, so when a colleague has to treat the patient the next day, they have access to up-to-date information, not something that is maybe a day or a week out of date. You can imagine the clinical benefits of that.
743. That leads me on to a more specific example: Bristol Community Healthcare, which is naturally based in Bristol. We are always looking for good statistics and good measures of success, so it was great that Bristol took a lot of time and care with that before and after the project was implemented. As you can see, there are some quite stark figures. I was personally very surprised to see the changes that the system brought through.
744. At the outset of the project, Bristol only had evidence of a care plan, which is a record of the treatment given to a patient, completed on paper 40% of the time, and it was not on its computer system at all. Now, that is on the whole back-office system 85% of the time. I think that that is incredibly radical and, in some respects, quite frightening.
745. Again, Bristol has gone from having patient consent forms or records of patient consent one in seven times to just over nine out of 10 times. From a legal liability point of view, trusts and organisations would, I suspect, be quite badly exposed if something happened after the event. So, again, they are covering themselves for a number of aspects.
746. Getting back to the cultural side of things, we are talking about not just the patients but the staff delivering the service. As you can imagine, morale is not particularly high in the health service. We hear that quite often in the press. One of the last measures that I will share with you is how the staff in Bristol felt about the system. Bristol has gone from having only half of its people thinking that they are valued and can do

- a good job to nine out of 10 believing that they can do a good job, because they have the right tools and the right information to deliver the service effectively. Quite often, staff who go out do not have access, or full access, to patient notes. Arriving with a patient and not being as well informed as you would want to be must be a big challenge for healthcare professionals.
747. The next case study that I will cover is Virgin Care. Virgin Care was awarded a contract to provide community healthcare in the Surrey area. The system here will grow to about 700 or 800 users, which is quite a considerable size when you compare it with that of normal trusts. Again, it measured the difference between before and after, based on our technology and solution. There was a 30% increase in face-to-face time with patients, which is very similar to the increase in Bristol. At the end of the day, you are talking about the same healthcare professionals delivering very similar services. Again, it is getting roughly two additional visits per nurse, per day. That is every day for every nurse. To give you an idea of the impact, I think that the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has in the region of 3,500 community nurses, so imagine being able to give each one of those 3,500 community nurses two extra visits a day. That is an incredible benefit.
748. There was also a 60% reduction in processing paperwork. These are healthcare professionals who want to treat and spend time with patients. They do not want to fill in paper forms and sit in front of a visual display unit (VDU) updating patient record systems. That is not how to get the best value out of those people.
749. Delays in getting clinical information onto the system, which we talked about earlier, were reduced, as were scheduling times. My mother is waiting for a cardiac assessment. She has been told that it will be about two months before she even gets a letter about coming to see somebody for an appointment. So, it is about getting things processed and handled faster in the system. There are vital clinical outputs and benefits to be had from something like this.
750. There were improvements in referral handling and the scheduling of work as well. When people use a paper-based system, something physical has to be exchanged. However, if you are working in an electronic world, you can react when something happens. If a patient falls ill in the morning and is admitted to hospital, but you have scheduled a nurse to go out to see that person in the afternoon, how do you get in contact with them and so on? Again, with our solution, you can update or recall a visit and allocate the nurse to something else. So, again, it allows you to be much more reactive and dynamic in how you handle and optimise your workforce.
751. Finally, this slide visually represents what the software looks like. A big part of the impact and the buy-in from end users — the healthcare professionals — is about usability. The people using the technology have certain expectations. There is an incredible penetration of smartphones. I think that up to 60% or 70% of all mobile phone users have a smartphone. I do not know what the penetration of tablets in households is, but it is certainly well above 50%. So, people expect the same experience when using technology in work. Traditionally, big enterprise systems are quite clunky, difficult to use and everything else. We have really gone out of our way to make this software as user-friendly as possible. There is a consumer feel to operating the software, and it is technically intuitive, so you do not need weeks and weeks of training because it is so complex. It gives the right information to users in a very simple format.
752. You will see such things as the ability to capture digital signatures or to take a photograph. The tissue viability nurse team in Bristol use that. They will take a photograph of a leg wound, which, to us, is a bit gory, but, for them, it is incredibly useful. Think about trying to describe a leg wound and then comparing, in words, that description with how the

- wound looks a week later, versus taking a photograph and visually seeing that. When your colleague is carrying out a similar assessment a week later, it can make an incredible difference, even to the point where you can annotate the photographs and mark up specific areas of interest, and so on. So, it is very, very useful. Again, just to give you an idea, that is the Android version on the left and the iPad version on the right. It is simple, easy to use and gives people the right tools, technology and information to do their job. That concludes my presentation case study.
753. **The Chairperson:** OK, gentlemen. Thanks very much. It is a very interesting concept, and there is no reason why more of these ideas should not be developed to try to realise savings in the public sector.
754. This is, I suppose, one of the usual questions about risk. In recent years, there have been a number of cases on the issue of risk, and data security has gone up the agenda here and across the water. John, you referred to data security and the cost. If you look at areas such as defence, you see that this has already been put in place. Is there any additional cost? If we were to ensure that such a system was adequately protected and locked down to ensure that there was minimal risk, does that mean that there would be an increased cost?
755. **Mr Moran:** It would probably be better if you answered that.
756. **Mr Martin:** It is built into the software. So, all that security is embedded into the system itself. The data on the devices is encrypted to 256-bit advanced encryption standard (AES) — that is very techie — which is a very high level of encryption. The traffic between the device and the synchronisation back to the main system is also encrypted to the same standards.
757. **Mr Ronnie Geddis (Momentum):** The old paradigm would be to put a SIM card in a laptop to get access to a back-end system. If that laptop went missing and somebody broke into it, they would be able to access all the back-end systems. So, although the device is mobile, it is not secure. That has been the old paradigm particularly in health. The new mobile devices have absolutely no connection to the back-end system. It is a push-pull. If anybody stole a device, it would be physically impossible for them to access any back-end systems. It is a new way of working. It is completely different from the old way of delivering solutions. So, they are actually more secure than a laptop with even a smart card or whatever.
758. **The Chairperson:** Can any system be 100% secure?
759. **Mr Geddis:** Where there is a will, there is a way. However, the risk is minimal, when compared to the benefits that mobile working delivers. John talked about the trusts. From a financial point of view — to put it in monetary terms — we are talking about, for every 1,000 nurses, an average saving of £5 million a year, which is significant.
760. **The Chairperson:** Will the application be regularly updated? A concern that we have is that different parts of the public sector will invest in such software and then we find a few years down the line that it is already out of date. How do you protect against that? What steps is the private sector taking to ensure that that is not an issue for those investing?
761. **Mr Martin:** Probably the fastest-moving part of the IT industry is mobile technology. Generally, technology used to move at the pace of the enterprise. Mobile technology moves at the pace of the consumer, which is probably a refresh rate of once every six months. We have a massive team of developers continually moving the product forward. As new operating systems come out, we will move our application onto those and release new versions of the product to take the benefits of them. We are continually moving on and bringing out new versions of the software. We are on Total Mobile version 5 at the moment. We are already in the planning phase for

- version 6. There are releases in between major updates as well. It is an ongoing process. In this space, in particular, you absolutely must keep moving forward.
762. **The Chairperson:** What is your assessment of the local health service's uptake of that kind of technology?
763. **Mr Martin:** There has been interest. We have a pilot with the Belfast Trust at the moment. That is in the early stages, but it will come into play over the next few months. We are in discussions with two of the five Northern Ireland trusts. There has been interest for exactly the reasons you have just seen; the benefits are there to be had. They want to provide a better service and be more efficient.
764. **Mr Geddis:** It has to be said that Northern Ireland tends to lag behind. It is not a risk-taker. It waits longer than other places for the new technology to be developed before it jumps. We have been in business for 30 years, and 90% —
765. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Do we wait until it breaks?
766. **Mr Geddis:** Yes; we wait until it breaks. Ninety per cent of our business is not in Northern Ireland because of that reason. We would not be in business if we did not go out to other places. That sounds a bit critical, but it is not fast-moving. It does not make decisions quickly enough. It worries about things such as security too much instead of just doing it and learning as you go. It tries to dot every i and cross every t. Sometimes, you have to jump with new technology, try it out, do pilots and move quicker.
767. **Mr Martin:** People are naturally concerned about security, but nobody talks about the paper files that go missing every day, such as those that are left in the boot of a nurse's car that gets broken into and stolen. They open the car door, and the wind blows all the patient records down the street. That is never reported or mentioned, but if somebody loses a laptop, everything goes crazy in the press. It is much more secure. I argue that we are probably not aware of how many paper records go missing every day.
768. **Mr Girvan:** Thank you very much. I apologise for being late. I appreciate that we are maybe not good at embracing new technology in every instance. I always try to think about what would happen in the private sector. It would be keen to drive something forward that was going to give efficiencies. I am not talking about savings; I am talking about efficiencies, such as making the best use of people. That is what needs to be focused on and demonstrated in pilots.
769. I am thinking back to something I saw when I was in a hospital setting in Germany, probably five years ago. They make use of telemetry to a great degree. Each bay has a pickup, and the nurses wear them. As soon as they walk into a bay, it is recorded on a computer; they do not have to write it down. It is recorded on a computer when they walk in. When they take bloods, temperatures and all those readings, it automatically does it; they do not have to write it on a sheet. It automatically takes that back. Medication cannot be given unless it is scanned. That is not rocket science; it is fairly straightforward.
770. **Mr Martin:** Your postie has been using mobile technology for over five or 10 years now: when you sign for special delivery, they hand a device over. The private sector has been using mobile technology for quite some time. It is moving fast. Sometimes that confuses people about what to pick and when to jump in. There may be a new, better one coming out next month, but, if you wait until next month, there is another one coming out three months down the line, so when do you go?
771. **Mr Girvan:** You have to go in some time. The health service's delay in getting some of the patient files into an electronic format has created its own difficulty. Having access to that field environment, such as in the home, should help. There has been a delay in trying to get that brought forward.

772. Did you say that you are running a pilot in Belfast?
773. **Mr Martin:** Yes.
774. **Mr Girvan:** How long will it run?
775. **Mr Martin:** We have kicked it off over the past month or two, so we are building the solution for Belfast, which will then roll out to a number of areas. It is early days.
776. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** I know what your field of interest and expertise is. Is health a particularly suitable focus?
777. **Mr Geddis:** It is for anybody whose main job is to go out and inspect anything, fix anything or have case studies. It is particularly useful for district nursing because there is a lot of paperwork. It is for people in the field, but the system is being used by gas engineers, plumbers, joiners and those in housing maintenance, and environmental health officers. Anybody in the public sector who goes out into the field, records data and then has to go back to the office to type into the computer is a user for our application. However, there are particularly big savings in health.
778. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** I was thinking of a nurse meeting an individual patient or client one to one, so the usual data-sharing obstacles do not occur. That is a working contract, if you like; it is the delivery of service in a more effective way. Are there other applications in the public sector? We have been discussing the idea of digitising the process. The big issues that come up are security, storage and data sharing. If you are dealing with health, that may not be the obstacle it would be in other areas because it is between consenting partners: the patient who needs the support and service and the person delivering it.
779. **Mr Martin:** It can certainly be used in a very wide range of areas. I had a review call yesterday. We have a project with the Isle of Man Government, which is going live at the moment with their Department of Infrastructure. A week or two later, the Manx Electricity Authority will use our solution to do meter readings. They are now looking at bringing it into social care, environmental health and all sorts of areas across the Isle of Man Government. People are using it in very disparate areas to make the process of going out and collecting information more efficient.
780. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** The pilot in Belfast is very important. Will it include the data storage facility as well, and is there reassurance with whatever necessary backup?
781. **Mr Martin:** Absolutely.
782. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Is that supplied by a private sector contractor, or is it part of your in-house —
783. **Mr Martin:** That is our staff in conjunction with the supplier of the main patient record system in Belfast.
784. **Mr Geddis:** Any data collected by any mobile system will generally update the back-end system already there. As soon as that is updated, it is available for everybody and shared.
785. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** Is that a physical facility, or is it a cloud storage system?
786. **Mr Geddis:** We can do both, but Belfast is on-site.
787. **Mr Martin:** All the data is within the control of the Belfast Trust.
788. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** How do you cope with the well-known problem of black spots?
789. **Mr Martin:** The great thing is that we have been the architects from the very start. Our solution is an application that runs on the device, so we are not logging in through a web browser and need connectivity —
790. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** OK, so if you live in Fermanagh, you are safe enough?
791. **Mr Geddis:** As long as you can have connection — it could even be at home with your Wi-Fi — to get the visits for the day on your device. Once you leave

- home, you can work all day long and never connect to the back end.
792. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** And as soon as you come back into connection, it uploads?
793. **Mr Geddis:** As soon as you walk into a connection area, it just pops out and populates the back end again. That is one of the big advantages. The users do not have to worry about connectivity; it is just like your mobile phone. If you have mobile phone connectivity, this will sync with the back-end system. It is one of the key things. It is not just Northern Ireland; everywhere has bad connectivity.
794. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** I suppose that we can figure out a way of paying people what we owe them, because they are not getting paid. That might be a very good solution to the other aspect of the problem. It is an excellent project, and it feeds in, very positively, to this wider discussion. You are correct that it is very slow. I think that everybody recognises the benefits, but people appear to be reluctant to take the plunge.
795. **Mr Martin:** It is also a cultural challenge. People love paper. It is a big change in mindset to get people to release paper; however, once they see the benefits, they never want to go back. That is for sure, once they make that change. It allows you to bring in new ways of working as well. It does not just replicate how the business process works today; you can do new and better things as well. It allows you to introduce business change.
796. **Mr Geddis:** Most of our projects have included a transformation. Manager is not just about IT; it is about transforming the business. Most of the savings come from transforming the business, not just because we put a bit of technology into people's hands. I would like to be able to say that we were responsible for it all, but we are a technology that facilitates change in an organisation. We allow people to do things that they feel they could never do before. It changes your working practices and processes. It changes how you go out, first thing in the morning, and go straight to work, to your first job or visit, instead of going into the office. There is a whole gamut of areas around mobile working. It is not just about the technology, but the easier and better it is, the quicker the returns on investment.
797. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** The technology has been around, and this is the applied technology. People will resist change for many reasons that have nothing to do with any kind of knowledge, concerns or vulnerabilities that they see in their processes. What do they say when you are trying to convince them that this is the right thing to do in their interests and in patients' interests?
798. **Mr Martin:** You have to get them on board; you have to get them, as part of the team, to look at this and win them over as part of the project. Give them the right training and support and involve them in the project so that they feel part of it and are contributing to it. Then, when they are designing how the system will hang together and work, get them on the working parties. Then they feel part of it and feel that they have had input.
799. **Mr Geddis:** Our experience in the NHS in England is that staff are crying out for it; they are looking for technology. They want to be valued and to be given new technology to do their job.
800. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** How did the pilot come about? Presumably, it indicates that you were talking to people and some of the procurement authorities have responded. Is that what happened? Is this going somewhere?
801. **Mr Martin:** Yes. The idea is that, if this proves the point, it will absolutely be rolled out in a much wider context. That will be subject to making sure that there is sufficient evidence gathered to form a strong business case that will support that.
802. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** I did not form that question properly. Is the Department authorising this, or is it a

- trust that is exploring it and then you are relying on the trust to convince people further up the food chain?
803. **Mr Geddis:** It is a trust. I think that that is the issue. Currently, this is an IT project as opposed to a business project, but I believe that it needs to be business-project driven.
804. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** It should be policy driven as well.
805. **Mr Martin:** There is no doubt. We have spoken to the Department and have attended the Northern Ireland Confederation for Health and Social Services (NICON) conference and other events in that sector. We are very familiar with the situation and have started a lot of conversations about mobile working. There is a lot of interest in it. Everybody broadly accepts that the benefits are there to be had. It is just how you go about it, and some people are moving faster than others.
806. **Mr Geddis:** I think that, because of the volumes involved, we have to face up to the issues: people worry about the cost. This is not relatively cheap, but the benefits, after it has been implemented, are significant. Getting the initial budget has been a barrier.
807. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** I know that you are only building the pilot scheme now, but will it be of sufficient size to demonstrate the cost benefits? The more micro it is, the less obvious the savings will be.
808. **Mr Martin:** Absolutely. How we approach the pilot has changed a little bit. It was going to be with a couple of very specific teams in the community nursing groups. However, it has now been decided that we will do something that sits across all the users in the numbers that will be rolled out — 50 to 100, that sort of timescale and size. That is more than enough to prove that the economies of scale are there and to get the business matrix that would stand up to the business case.
809. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** With regard to wider applications other than health, how can we inform ourselves of them, and how effective have they been? I presume that there is global potential.
810. **Mr Geddis:** We are only talking about ourselves at the minute, but those are our terms of reference. We have projects in America in Arkansas, Kentucky and Florida. As I said earlier, we have gas engineers, plumbers, joiners, environmental health officers, building control officers, social care workers working in children's and adult care. It is applicable across the piece. We have developed this to work right across a council for every worker; even pest control officers are using it in some councils. Our first customers were direct labour organisations looking after housing maintenance in Edinburgh City Council, where 300 operatives were going out every day in their vans with their parts to fix boilers and electricity in people's houses. It progressed on to more white-collar, more businesslike solutions. It is anybody who goes out with a clipboard who, as well as doing their work, has to record what they do.
811. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** We have had several conversations like this over the past number of years, and it is worth considering how we can start to pull this together again, as it is a bit disjointed. At Executive level, there appeared to be a willingness to explore the use of technological and information-handling advances. However, it does not seem to be a connected-up process in itself, even though that is what they are theorising about. The Committee has had several different reports from different aspects of this, and perhaps we should try to join that together to see where the project is going, if anywhere.
812. **The Chairperson:** We will put that into the report.
813. **Mr Cree:** Yes, I am sure that we will do that. Gentlemen, I found the hospital examples very interesting. You quoted the example of someone with a wound. Do the pilots include an audio recording? You made the point that someone could have looked at the wound, and that they could look back on

- it to refresh their memory of the salient points. However, it seems to me that an audio recording of that time would complete the exercise. Someone could simply have a little device and record quietly into it, and the job is done, period.
814. **Mr Geddis:** The issue with that, and it is quite a big issue, is that an audio file is quite large, so transmitting the data can be expensive and can take time. The solution can do audio, but sometimes it is the practicality of the data packet and sending it back and forward. As it improves, and if we can compress it more, we would be able to do that.
815. **Mr Martin:** It would also depend on the device that you are using. Apple has a product called Siri that can interpret your verbal commands and so on, but Siri is an online service. Therefore, whenever you talk to it, it is talking to computers and then back down again to translate what you are saying.
816. **Mr Geddis:** You would have security issues around information governance, particularly as the data would be transferring to a server outside the UK, and that would not comply with NHS standards. Therefore, it is not allowed until the policy changes. However, it is physically possible to do it.
817. **Mr Cree:** Going back to my generation, I used to carry a pocket memo, which I found very useful. Is it possible to have some system where that could be downloaded at leisure?
818. **Mr Geddis:** It is, yes.
819. **Mr I McCrea:** I thought that you were going to refer to chalk and a slate.
820. **Mr Cree:** That is your period; I do not go back that far. *[Laughter.]*
821. **Ms Boyle:** Thank you, Chair. I apologise for arriving late for your presentation; however, I read it on my tablet. It was very interesting. My question is about your work in the health sector and other public bodies. When I read the presentation, I thought about the work that the PSNI does and what they do in the South with text alert and things like that if there is a missing child and how expedient it is that they can work on that. Do you work with the PSNI on that? Is there scope for that, or is it a security issue?
822. **Mr Geddis:** I am sorry to say that we have been trying for years and have got nowhere.
823. **Ms Boyle:** Really?
824. **Mr Martin:** It is funny, because part of the conversation that I had with the Isle of Man Government yesterday was that the police service there is asking to use the technology. So, at a road traffic accident, the police officer could take out their iPad or whatever technology they have, record all the witness statements, get digital signatures, take photographs of everything and get it straight into the system.
825. **Mr Geddis:** I think that security is being used as an issue that they are worried too much about.
826. **Ms Boyle:** In the wider context, you could catch the culprit or the individual much more quickly.
827. **Mr Martin:** We looked at the market two or three years ago, and I got the sense that it was a bit like turkeys voting for Christmas. Your traditional officer goes out, does an eight-hour beat shift and, because they capture everything on paper, has to come back to the office and spend two hours, at overtime rates, processing their paperwork. So there was no massive drive or support.
828. **Ms Boyle:** Those are hours that could be spent at the front line.
829. **Mr Girvan:** They like the two hours' overtime.
830. **Mr Martin:** I am sure that that is not necessarily the case.
831. **Mr Geddis:** It would benefit from mobile working. They have their own security issues, which have to be looked at individually. The devil is in the detail, but it is definitely an area that could benefit

- from gathering data on technology rather than writing it down.
832. **Mr Martin:** I heard a radio advertisement recently where the PSNI said that it was using smart phones, and it was allowing its community officers to stay out longer.
833. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** I heard that too just last week.
834. **Ms Boyle:** There is always room for improvement.
835. **Mr Geddis:** They might be doing something, but it is not with us.
836. **The Chairperson:** There seems to be an issue, and Mitchel referred to it, about the wider public sector. You said that we are always the last to fall into line or to get up to speed with technology. Have you had any engagement with the Central Procurement Directorate to ensure that it has a full understanding of the benefits to try to mainstream some of it?
837. **Mr Geddis:** We have presented to most Departments at some stage over the past 18 months to make people aware of what we can do.
838. **Mr Martin:** We have got round most of the Departments; we have worked with some of the folks in Clare House and had some conversations there. Until fairly recently, the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the public sector were restricted to BlackBerry only. That restricts some of the solutions that you can deploy in mobile working, whereas, now, looking around the table at the variety of devices and operating systems, it is clear that that is changing fast.
839. **The Chairperson:** Why was it restricted to BlackBerrys?
840. **Mr Geddis:** Blackberry was the only approved device in the UK by CSG.
841. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin:** I think that it was because the CIA used it.
842. **Mr Geddis:** However, that changes. BlackBerry as a company has struggled; it may not be around in the same guise in a number of years' time. You cannot have an entire government with its mobile strategy based on a technology that is dying because it has not kept up to date with the newer technology. It is a bit like the technical police telling you what you cannot do. It is a bit OTT, to be honest.
843. **Mr Martin:** All of Northern Ireland operates at IL3, which is a restricted level of security. It can be slightly lower in other areas of the UK public sector, but, at the moment, the only approved mobile device for that is the BlackBerry. That is determined by the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) and a department in it called CESG.
844. **The Chairperson:** Do you sense that the culture to which you refer is beginning to thaw, or are you concerned that it will still be a problem for the next couple of years?
845. **Mr Martin:** It is definitely thawing; perhaps not as fast as we as suppliers would like, but it is thawing. There is an expectation from users, citizens and patients. When a nurse or somebody from Roads Service turns up with bundles of paper, and they are sitting with their iPad hooked up to the internet with access to all this technology while somebody from the public sector is sitting there with all this out-of-date technology, questions are asked, "Why are you not working more efficiently? Why can you not do that? My Sky engineer did it all on an iPad yesterday, why can't you?".
846. **Mr Geddis:** We have a theory that, in a few years' time, there will be no such thing as "mobile working"; it will just be "working", because it will be the norm. This is travelling at tremendous pace. Everybody is using them now. As John said, you want the experience that you have on a Saturday or Sunday night at home when you walk in on Monday morning. It is not just in the public sector in Northern Ireland; it is quite widespread. This has been around only since January 2010, but it has revolutionised businesses since people

wrote the software for it. These are still early days, to be honest, but attitudes are definitely changing.

847. **The Chairperson:** OK. That was very interesting. Thank you very much, gentlemen.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Appendix 3

Memorandum and Correspondence from DFP

Department of Finance & Personnel correspondence dated 09 March 2012

Assembly Section

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Mr Shane McAteer
Clerk
Committee for Finance and Personnel
Room 419
Parliament Buildings
Stormont

9 March 2012

Dear Shane,

I understand that the Committee has agreed that flexible working should be the subject of a Committee Inquiry and has invited Departmental officials to give evidence on flexible working at its session on 14 March. In particular, the Committee is interested in the extent to which the recommendations in the Independent Review of Policy on Location of Public Sector Jobs (the Bain Review) in respect of flexible working and the NICS Homeworking Policy have been implemented. The Committee intends to agree Terms of Reference for its Inquiry following this session.

It is important to note that the Bain Review has not been formally considered by the Executive, nor has it been adopted as policy either for the public sector generally or the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) specifically. The Minister for Finance and Personnel's publicly stated position regarding the Bain Review is that the Review was undertaken at a time of very different financial circumstances. He has stated that the budgetary situation has changed significantly since then and, in the current financial climate and in light of the spending pressures facing all departments' administration budgets, he has taken the view that spending £40m on a pilot programme for relocating public sector jobs (as recommended in the Bain Review) is not affordable. There is no Executive programme regarding the relocation of public sector jobs and no central budget earmarked for such purposes, although the Minister has stated that it is open to each Minister, department or public body to make a case regarding the location or relocation of facilities or jobs subject to the normal considerations of business need, value for money and affordability.

DFP does not have a mandate, nor is it resourced, for overseeing issues affecting the location of public sector jobs or flexible working in the wider public sector, which obviously employs many more people than the NICS (the NICS accounts for approximately 12% of all public sector employment in Northern Ireland).

There is no specific programme or strategy in the NICS focusing exclusively on flexible working or on implementing the recommendations on flexible working contained at paragraph 6.8.2 of the Bain Report (a number of those recommendations are predicated on the existence of a public sector relocation strategy, and such a strategy has not been adopted by the Executive). Nevertheless, there have been a number of developments in the areas of use of technology and premises, and others are planned, which are relevant to the recommendations and which support, either directly or indirectly, flexible working as envisaged by the Bain Review.

Turning firstly to the application of new technology, relevant initiatives include the successful roll out across all NICS sites of Network NI (as anticipated in the Bain Review). Coupled with the creation of IT Assist (the NICS shared service for the provision of IT services), this means that staff can connect their laptop to the NICS network and work remotely online at virtually any NICS site. Specifically within DFP, for example, which has premises on a number of sites in Belfast, Bangor and the Stormont Estate, this means that DFP officials have the facility temporarily to “touch down” at any DFP premises outside of their normal office location as necessary.

The introduction of a common secure access service also allows staff with the right equipment to gain access to departmental IT services from non-NICS locations such as home. This service includes:

- access via 3G mobile;
- access via departmental provided Broadband (provided for key users or when guaranteed service level is required); and
- access via a member of staff's own home broadband connection.

The NICS has embarked on an initiative to update the ageing NICS telephone network. The new system is called IP Telephony (IPT) and introduces a range of new services and facilities such as extension mobility which allows staff to log into their telephone extension from any location that has IPT and a facility which links an extension with a mobile phone so that staff can receive calls while on the move. IPT runs on Network NI and is a key component of the NICS **Unified Communications Initiative**, which itself will be a key enabler for flexible working. IPT also facilitates the introduction of video phones. This is a major infrastructure project and to date it has been deployed to over 11,000 staff making the NICS IPT deployment the largest anywhere on the island of Ireland. The project will take 12-18 months to complete.

The NICS BlackBerry service is another key component to enable flexible working. The BlackBerry permits easy access to corporate e-mail and documents while off site. More importantly, when combined with IPT the device can act as an extension of the corporate telephony system.

Instant Messaging and Presence is another key component of the NICS Unified Communications Initiative. This technology is integrated into the IPT environment and runs on desktop and laptop computers to provide a number of features:

■ **Instant Messaging**

Instant messaging is nothing new, but this is a corporate NICS version and provides a simple alternative to e-mail for short messages. This would be particularly useful for individuals working from home or teams working across different locations.

■ **Group Chat**

Group chat is similar to Instant Messaging but involves a whole team simultaneously.

■ **Voice**

The voice element is the same as IPT so staff use the same extension number, but via a headset attached to their PC. This is of particular importance for flexible working as it extends the corporate telephony environment to wherever the member of staff is working from.

■ Presence

Presence is another key enabler for flexible working. The system will automatically detect when a member of staff logs into the system and will show them as “available”. The status will change when on the phone, away from the computer or at a meeting. Staff can override the status settings. This system supports flexible working as it provides disparate teams with information on availability, for example to take a call or answer a query.

■ Video

The software will allow the transmission of video via a suitable PC based webcam. The video will integrate with the NICS video phone and video conferencing technology.

This technical solution is currently in final testing and is due to enter service in the next month or so.

Telepresence is in effect high quality video conferencing. The NICS has been using video conferencing for many years. However, there has not been a cohesive NICS strategy or approach to this issue. As part of the NICS Unified Communications Initiative there is investment in infrastructure to bring together existing and future video conferencing units into an integrated telepresence network which will also link to desktop and phone based video users. This solution is due to go into testing in the next few months and will hopefully enter full service by Autumn 2012.

Outlook Web Access allows staff to have browser access to their e-mail from any PC on the NICS network. In addition, Roaming Profiles allow staff to log into any PC and gain access to their desktop. This will offer flexibility in terms of the location of work.

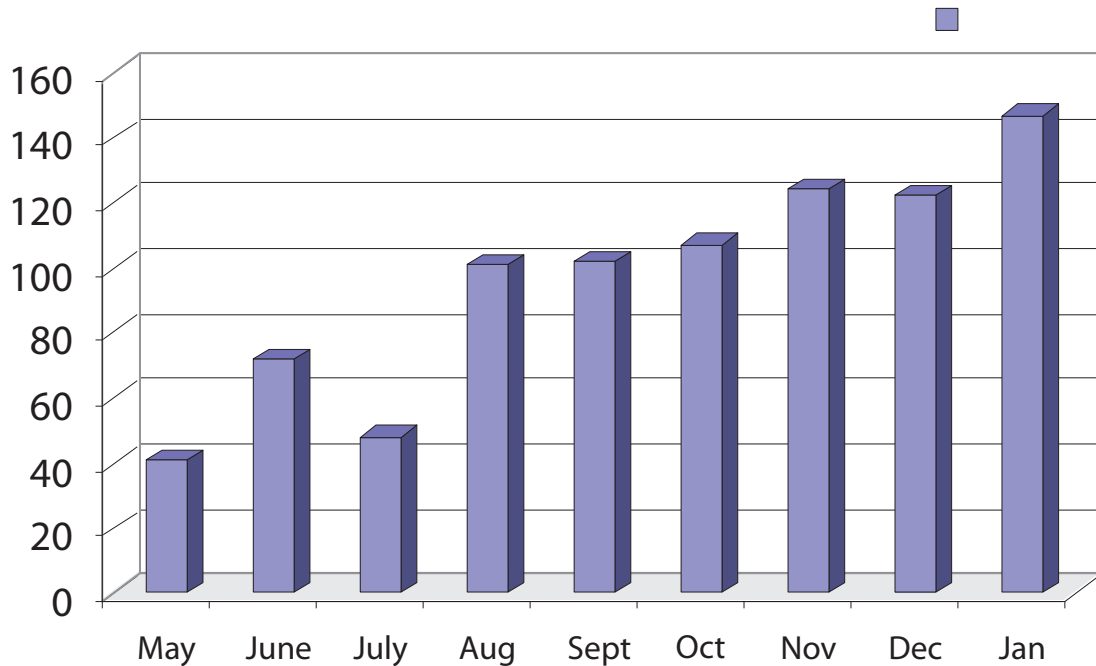
Other initiatives which are under way and which have a relevance to flexible working include a pilot of Web Conferencing, with a particular focus on how to manage the security risks, a review of a tablet device which can be linked to the NICS BlackBerry environment and an investigation of secure wireless. Work is also under way with a technology called Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) which could eventually allow staff to use any PC – even their own – to gain access to Government systems.

The above technologies support many different business scenarios. However, together they form a “toolkit” which could support any flexible working strategy.

In terms of managing the civil service estate to support flexible working, a pilot regional satellite office was installed in Marlborough House in Craigavon in May 2011. The office provides 20 workstations, 6 of which have networked computers attached. The remainder offer network points where staff can connect their laptop to the NICS network. The satellite office also offers printing facilities and a small break-out area and a tea-point. Entrance to the business zone is controlled by the front-desk staff in the building, with access available only to staff registered in the business zone scheme. To date the scheme has been targeted at workers whose role requires them to be away from their normal place of work on a regular basis. Such staff are typically schools inspectors, agricultural inspectors or environmental inspectors whose headquarters buildings are located in Greater Belfast or Bangor.

The chart below shows the usage levels of the business zone at Marlborough House since its opening in May 2011.

Marlborough House Business Zone Activity



The business zone scheme also allows those registered to access other flexible working zones in Clare House (Harbour Estate, Belfast), Causeway Exchange (Belfast City Centre) and Castle Buildings (Stormont Estate). Currently around 230 staff are registered in the scheme, with the majority from DFP, DE, DARD, DOE and DEL.

It is important to note that the business zone scheme has not been offered as an option for office-based staff wishing to reduce their commuting time, except in exceptional circumstances such as extremely poor weather conditions or during industrial action. It is not anticipated that this policy will change without detailed consideration of the management and business issues that would arise should the concept be broadened.

A small zone similar to that in Marlborough House has been set up in the main reception area of Castle Buildings in the Stormont Estate to support officials whose headquarters location is outside the estate but who may have to visit Stormont, for example to support Ministers or appear at Assembly Committees.

Although homeworking can be facilitated on an informal and occasional basis, the NICS has not proceeded to implement the formal draft Working at Home policy in light of concerns expressed about the potential impacts of the proposal at senior level in DFP. The main concern is that the rationale for the policy as drafted focuses in the main on work/life balance issues but ignores the need for homeworking to deliver efficiencies that might be generated in the context of more flexible working practices. The policy as drafted envisages staff being permitted to work from home whilst maintaining permanent work stations at their normal place of work, whereas the cost efficiencies of homeworking will primarily be realised through the release of permanent work stations in a structured way, thus freeing office space. Other concerns include the business inflexibilities that could arise from large numbers of staff benefitting from individual line manager decisions to permit home working, without having regard to the more strategic needs of the department or business; the difficulties that are now starting to emerge in some departments' business areas because of the extent of alternative working patterns that have been permitted for individual members of staff and the consequent inability of departments to redeploy staff in light of business need; and, quite simply, the length and inherent bureaucracy of the draft policy. Whilst homeworking

is currently permissible on an informal and locally agreed basis from time to time, it is considered that the draft Working at Home policy needs to be reconsidered and recast to avoid unintended consequences and to focus more securely on efficiency gains, and officials have been asked to do this.

In conclusion, the NICS does not have a formal flexible working strategy, although some of the elements that might underpin such a strategy in terms of the application of new technology and use of premises are in place and are being developed further. The Bain Review looked more generally at the public sector, and at present DFP has not taken on a role in co-ordinating policy in respect of technology, premises or human resources to promote flexible working across the wider public sector.

Yours sincerely,

Norman Irwin

Department of Finance & Personnel correspondence dated 01 February 2013

Flexible Working Inquiry

From: Christine Pauley

Date: 1 February 2013

Summary

Business Area: Enterprise Shared Services.

Issue: This paper provides an update on flexible working in the NICS.

Restrictions: None.

Action Required: To note in advance of the session on 13th February.

Background

1. The Committee has requested information and data on flexible working in the NICS, which members could explore further in the course of their deliberations on the Flexible Working Inquiry. This update covers the areas highlighted by the Committee in its letter of 9th January 2013.

Key Issues

Examples of the different types of flexible working in operation across the NICS, including flexible arrangements for how, when, and where public servants undertake their work

2. The Northern Ireland Civil Service regards itself as an employer that recognises the importance of having a wide range of terms and conditions that support staff in all aspects of their working life and specifically allow staff to balance their work commitments with life responsibilities.
3. It is evident from the Research and Information Service Research Paper on Flexible Working, 28th May 2012 that the NICS does have a significant amount of flexible working arrangements. We already have arrangements that allow for a wide variety of working hours, patterns and locations, including teleworking and working from home. While this is to be commended, the NICS recognises that we have done more than most employers and it is acknowledged that too much flexibility can have an adverse impact on business arrangements.
4. The flexible working arrangements available in the NICS are as follows:
 - Flexible hours or flexitime;
 - Compressed hours;
 - Part-time working which includes job sharing and term time working options;
 - Partial retirement; and
 - Personalised hours.
5. **Flexible hours or flexitime** is identified in the Research Paper as a flexible working arrangement. The main purpose of the NICS Flexible Working Time (FWT) is to provide a more flexible system of attendance for staff. Staff are able to vary the times of arrival and departure from work, the length and timing of their lunch break and to take time off if they work extra hours. There is, however, a guiding and over-riding principle that this flexibility

should be achieved without adverse effect on the overall efficiency of Departments or on service to the public.

6. While the majority of civil servants work full time and have the facility of FWT, the facility exists for staff to avail of a flexible working arrangement. This type of flexible working can be defined as a pattern of work which differs from the traditional 9 to 5, 5-day week on the employer's premises. For several years, the NICS has offered a number of alternative working patterns, such as part-time working and compressed hours as well as flexible working (flexitime) to its employees and these options have proved quite popular among staff, although more female staff work part time.
7. **Part time working** is a generic term that captures all reduced hour arrangements including term time working, job sharing, compressed hours and personalised hours. Additionally, employees who have caring responsibilities have a legal right to request flexible working and the Department must formally consider these. The Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, which came into effect on 6 April 2003, introduced specific rights to balance family and employment responsibilities. Flexibilities such as term time working promote work-life balance by enabling parents with school aged children to spend more time with their children over the school holidays. All NICS staff, not only parents, may apply for term time working under the policy.
8. **Partial retirement**, which formed part of a wider government-led pension reform initiative, was introduced in the NICS from 1st March 2008, with the general aim of allowing older staff to ease into retirement, where this could be accommodated by management. Partial retirement policy is not yet included in the HR Handbook but has been availed of by NICS staff, male and female equally, since its introduction. Partial retirement allows an individual who reduces their pensionable earnings by at least 20% (by reshaping their job through a reduction in working hours and/or level of responsibility) to take some or all of the pension they have built up, while continuing to work. The job reshaping necessary is at the discretion of management, in line with business need, and is a permanent change, although exceptionally a further reduction in pensionable pay may be accommodated, again if in line with business need. Departments are obliged to consider all applications for job reshaping, but there is no obligation to agree to an employee's request to reshape their job for partial retirement and departmental business needs take precedence.
9. From an IT perspective, no central record is maintained about how flexible working is being implemented, as this is an issue for each government department and each business area within that department. However, we are aware of examples of flexible and agile working in different departments including:
 - Schools Inspectors in the Department of Education who are home based;
 - Planning staff in the Department of the Environment who use video conferencing to allow staff to work closer to home and to manage teams in remote locations;
 - Business Consultancy Staff in the Department of Finance and Personnel, whose work style is a mixture of home, office (hot desking) and on-site, undertaking assignments;
 - NIDirect staff hold daily team meetings between Belfast and Derry/Londonderry via video conferencing;
 - Department of Finance and Personnel IT staff in IT Assist who have adopted an element of teleworking to allow them to work closer to home; and
 - Staff from a range of departments who use the Future@Work Business Zones.

An update on the extent to which flexible working has been implemented across the NICS

10. Of the 25,960 staff currently employed in the NICS (as at 1st April 2012), 6,186 work part-time (4,682 female and 1,504 male). With an aging population and consequently an aging workforce, it is expected that more people will take up flexible working options in the coming

years. Partial Retirement is proving equally attractive to male and female employees and there are 302 males and 310 females currently partially retired.

11. From an IT perspective, there is no official record kept of the amount of flexible working which is undertaken by staff. The best indicator is the number of laptops and remote access connections that have been provided. Of the 18,000 NICS staff supported by IT Assist, 3,870 have laptops, of which 500 have ADSL (a dedicated broadband line in a staff home connecting the user directly to the NICS network), 586 have SSL (staff use a cable to connect to their own home broadband router) and 871 have 3G (enables staff to connect to the network while on the move). There are also 2,074 Blackberry users, allowing staff to receive emails while out of the office and a pilot is currently underway with tablet type technologies, using the Blackberry Playbook (58 users). Some staff have a combination of these devices, i.e. some staff have an ADSL connection in their home as well as a 3G card for when they are on the move and may even have the SSL (home broadband connection) as a back up in case of the failure of the ADSL line.

Examples of technology and workplace design being used to facilitate the flexible location of work in the NICS; this should include, for example, an update on “The Future of Work” facility and information on the role and potential of Network NI in facilitating greater use of flexible working practices

12. **NetworkNI** is now fully rolled out across all NICS sites, it provides better service levels, substantially increased bandwidth, and makes it easier for staff to work from different locations.
13. **IT Assist** is the in-house IT provider for the NICS and provides a wide range of services including desktop, helpdesk and datacentre services. From a flexible and agile working perspective, IT Assist has introduced consistency and a common approach across all NICS departments.
14. **Secure Remote Access (SRA)** is a set of technologies which provide a common and consistent approach to allow staff to access the NICS network from remote locations, including home. The methods of access include ADSL, SSL and 3G (see definitions paragraph 11). All of these services are available via PC/laptop equipment provided by IT Assist at the request of the relevant Department.
15. **Encrypted Laptops** are the main method for mobile staff to gain access to the NICS network, systems and services. Encryption is used in conjunction with a security token to protect access to the device and the data contained thereon.
16. **BlackBerry Service** is used as the main means of providing secure access to NICS services such as email from a smartphone device. Work is underway to investigate alternative devices such as tablets.
17. **Unified Communications** is a key enabler for flexible and agile working. It comprises a range of tools, including email. The main components include telephony, video conferencing and instant messaging and presence, as follows:
- **IP Telephony (IPT):** The NICS embarked on a project to replace its aging telephony environment with technology which would exploit the investment in NetworkNI. The IPT project has been rolled out to over 16,000 users across 105 sites. The project is still ongoing and has another 12 to 18 months to run. From a flexible and agile working perspective, IPT delivers a number of key capabilities including extension mobility which affords the user the ability to log into any phone anywhere on the network. A further capability is called ‘single number reach’ which allows a call to be automatically transferred to a user’s mobile if it is not picked up via the desk phone.
 - **Video Conferencing:** The NICS has been using video conferencing for many years. However, with the introduction of NetworkNI and IPT, the NICS has taken the opportunity

to integrate video conferencing with the main telephony environment to create a single infrastructure. The new video conferencing infrastructure delivers much better quality, better reliability and ease of use. Multiway video conference session can be established which can include external locations connected via ISDN or the Internet. From a flexible and agile working perspective, the ability to schedule reliable video conferencing sessions using a mix of technology creates the potential for distributed teams. Since the new Video Conferencing infrastructure was installed on 1st June 2012 there have been 753 video sessions lasting an average of 47 minutes¹.

- **Instant Messaging and Presence:** Instant Messaging and Presence is another key enabler for flexible and agile working. It comprises of four key PC based tools namely Instant Messaging; Presence; Voice, and Video. Instant Messaging allows quick messages to be sent between individuals or groups. Presence indicates if a member of staff is available for communication and the Voice and Video capabilities integrate into the main telephony network and the video conference environment to create an integrated Unified Communications solution. The Instant Messaging solution can be used on any PC which is connected to the NICS network, including PC's which connect via Secure Remote Access, for example staff who are working from home.

18. **The Future@Work Facility** in Clare House was created to showcase many of the NICS Reform Projects and introduce NICS staff to potential new working environments. The environment has been repurposed to demonstrate Unified Communications technologies to NICS Staff, with over 25 demonstrations delivered in the past three months. This trend is set to continue throughout 2013.
19. **Future@Work Business Zones** are a number of locations allowing workers who travel extensively or work remotely as part of their jobs to access normal office services - computer network, printers, telephone systems etc. Formally, there are four future@work Business Zones; Clare House, Causeway Exchange, Castle Buildings, and Marlborough House (Craigavon). The greater Belfast zones were established as model showcases for the development and creation of similar hubs in strategic sites (where staff could work for part of their time).
20. Interest in the Business Zones, especially Marlborough House, has increased. Official membership is now 320 NICS staff. Time and travel and subsistence costs have been saved and feedback from staff has been extremely positive. Several staff have joined solely for Business Continuity Planning purposes.
21. Business Zone visitor statistics are held for Marlborough House and Causeway Exchange. None are kept for Castle Buildings and Clare House as many staff and visitors using the facilities both formally and informally were already in the building for other reasons. The Causeway Exchange statistics are of those who solely sign in to log on and do not take into account staff and visitors using the area for formal and informal meetings.

Business Zone	Total visits	Dates	Monthly Average	Min Miles Saving	Min Time Saving
Marlborough House	2,528	May11–Dec12	126.4	3,792@ 45p = £1,706.40*	94.80 hours**
Causeway	132	Oct10–Sep12	5.5		

* Monthly Stat- Based on 1 single journey saved to HQ in Belfast - approx 30 miles. A return journey would be a mean 7,584 miles costing £3,412.80.

** Monthly Stat - Based on approx single journey of 45 minutes (a return journey saving of 189.6hours).

1 As of 15 January 2013

22. The Marlborough House regional zone in Craigavon is most used. Over 1,000 staff visits were recorded within the first 9 months of opening and almost 1,500 visits within the first year. Many Business Zone members have a Lisburn or greater Belfast office base, but regularly work remotely as part of their normal daily duties in the Craigavon/Armagh area. The smallest distance staff can save is approximately 30 miles and approximately 40 minutes, however many have had to make their journey to Belfast twice a day hence saving 60 - 120 miles and 1½ hours per each usage visit.
23. **Workplace design - Workplace NI Standards:** In the past, NICS accommodation has traditionally been tailored to the function being undertaken by the division or directorate occupying the space, e.g. individual offices were created depending on the grades of the staff occupying the space. This resulted in inflexible accommodation, with inefficient use of space. As part of the Workplace 2010 procurement process, a standard was adopted for modern, flexible, open-plan office accommodation. The key principles of this standard are attached at Annex 1. All refurbishment work or fit-out of new space is now undertaken to these standards. The resultant space is highly flexible and allows for the transfer of staff from one building to another without the need for dedicated refurbishment work.
24. **A Business Continuity Planning Guide** has been developed as part of the IS Strategy, setting out the new opportunities presented by the changing IT landscape within the NICS including NetworkNI, IT Assist services; Secure Remote Access; and Unified Communications.

An assessment of how flexible working is benefitting the NICS

25. From an IT perspective, the business case and decision to deploy technology to support a more flexible or agile work style, is a matter for the individual business in departments. There is, therefore, no central register of benefits which are derived from the technology deployed. However, examples of benefits include:
- The video conferencing unit in Rathgael House, commissioned on 12th June 2012, has been used 52 times² including 7 calls to Harrogate, 21 calls to Edinburgh and 6 calls to Cardiff resulting in a significant saving in staff time and travel costs;
 - The video conferencing units utilised by NIDirect staff for daily team meetings have been used a total of 194 times from 1st June 2012 to 15th January 2013, saving over £12,000 in travel and saving over 500 hours in travel time (based on one person travelling); and
 - The average usage of the Marlborough House regional zone (see paragraph 21) indicates a monthly saving of around £3,400 in travel costs and 190 hours in time.

Information on the recent review of Special Leave policy which examined alternative working patterns

26. **The NICS Special Leave Policy** is about approved time away from work that is not covered by annual leave or sickness absence. It can be a concession at the discretion of management or an entitlement if covered by legislation but it is not about alternative working arrangements.

Information on the agreed NICS Home Working Policy and an update on progress in implementing the policy

27. The NICS agreed a **'Working at Home'** policy with the Trade Union late 2009. Although home working is already facilitated within NICS on an informal and occasional basis, following concerns of the potential impacts raised at a senior level in DFP, the NICS has not proceeded to implement the formal policy. The main concern is that the rationale for the policy focuses in the main on the work/life balance issues but ignores the need for home working to deliver the efficiencies that might be generated in the context of more flexible working practices.

2 As of 15 January 2013

28. The policy, as drafted, envisages staff being permitted to work from home whilst maintaining permanent work stations at their normal place of work, whereas the cost efficiencies of home working would primarily be realised through the release of permanent work stations in a structured way, thus freeing office space. Other concerns include the business inflexibilities that could arise from large numbers of staff benefitting from individual line manager decisions to permit home working, without having regard to the more strategic needs of the department or business; the difficulties that are now starting to emerge in some departments' business areas because of the extent of alternative working patterns that have been permitted for individual members of staff and the consequent inability of departments to redeploy staff in light of business need.
29. Whilst home working is currently permissible on an informal and locally agreed basis from time to time, it is considered that the draft 'Working at Home' policy is inappropriate as it pays insufficient attention to the business need.
30. The technology exists to support all types of part time working arrangements and home working but only where there is a clear demonstrable business need and ultimately it is up to Departments to decide.

Next Steps

Information on any consideration being given to future areas for flexible working across the NICS

31. The NICS IS Strategy, which was agreed by all Departments and signed off by the Information Governance Board in 2011, identified the need for a project on flexible working. The scope of the project included consideration of HR policy issues, development of a range of options for Remote Access and implementation of a range of Unified Communication Technologies, including IPT and video conferencing.
32. The projects which make up the IS Strategy have a number of inter-relationships and inter-dependencies. For example, it was recognised that the Flexible Working Project had a considerable inter-relationship with the Unified Communications project which would deliver major IT capabilities which could support flexible working. From the scope outlined above, significant progress has been made on delivering a variety of options for remote access including departmental-provided ADSL services for key workers and the ability to use home broadband services. In addition, significant progress has been made on the delivery of the Unified Communications project.

Key Workplace Northern Ireland Accommodation Principles

- Workspace to be predominantly open-plan in nature with good access to daylight.
- Modular furniture and storage solutions to be used to aid flexibility and optimum use of space. Normal workstations will be sized at 1600mm x 800mm.
- Average space standard in general office environments of 10 to 12m² per workstation (defined as the area devoted to a desk, chair, personal and team storage, local circulation space and proportional allocation of support spaces). Space standard in processing centre-style environments to be 8 to 10m² per workstation measured in the same way.
- Team file storage to be provided at an average of two linear meters shelf space per person. Additionally one linear metre of personal storage normally provided by means of an under-desk pedestal or nearby drawer. Offsite storage to be utilised for any additional storage requirements.
- Support spaces to be provided including the provision of reception areas, tea points, service areas (printing, copying, vending etc.), touchdown areas and breakout spaces. These may be semi-enclosed to aid functionality.
- Other cellular support spaces, including meeting rooms, conference rooms, store rooms, first aid rooms and IT communications rooms to be provided. The number and size of meeting rooms will be proportionate to the number of staff in a building. The role of smaller rooms will be particularly key in complimenting the open workspace, providing opportunities for drop in privacy.
- Printing and copying to be achieved through centralised, high quality multi-functional devices (printer/copier/scanner) to reduce the inefficiencies and environmental impacts of existing arrangements.
- Provision of connectivity for specialist communications equipment (e.g. tele-conferencing, video-conferencing) within specific meeting rooms.
- Specialist facilities to be provided as necessary outside the average space standard. These include provision of ministerial suites, emergency planning rooms, public offices, necessary specialist on-site storage, showers and catering. The level of catering will be dependent on location and size of building and the level of departmental subsidy provided. Provision will typically be along the following lines:
 - 'Deli'/coffee bar type facilities where there are 250-699 occupants;
 - Full restaurant facilities where there are 700+ occupants.
- Accommodation to be configured in a manner which allows Departments to allocate desks to staff on a 1:1 basis or in a desk-sharing arrangement as required by evolving workplace policies.

Enterprise Shared Services Presentation dated 13 Feb 20133



Unified Communications

A presentation for the DFP
Committee

Robert Fee
Enterprise Design Authority
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Flexible Working

- Within the NICS flexible working tends to mean things such as:
 - Flexi time
 - Part time
 - Term time
 - Career Breaks
 - Special leave
 - Flexible working patterns

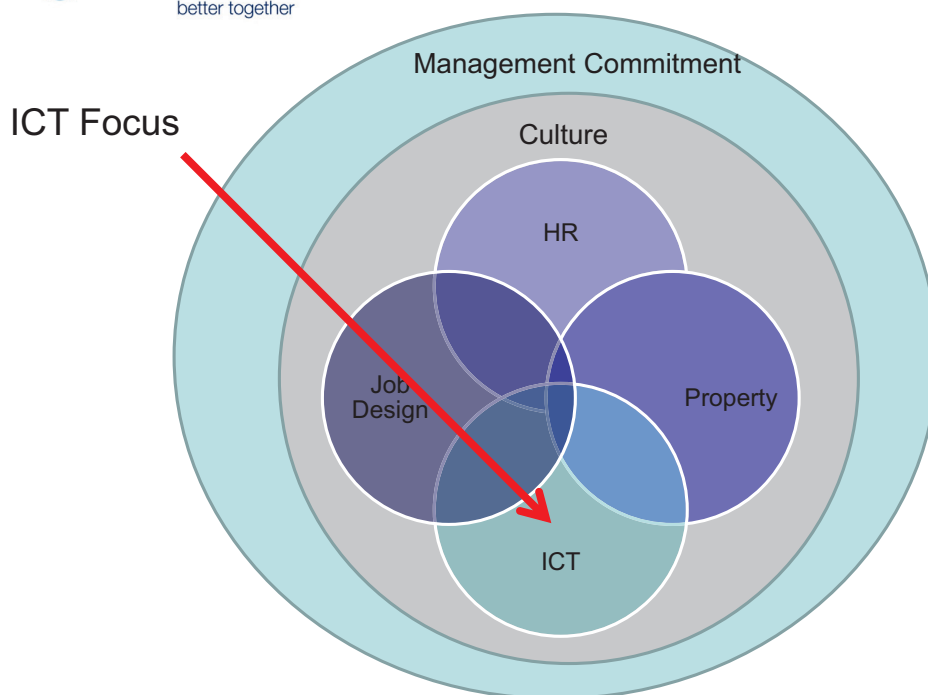




Agile Working

- Agile working is about work styles. The ability to work from any location at anytime.

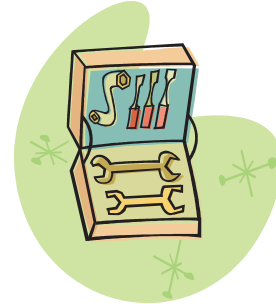
“Agile working is about bringing people, processes, connectivity and technology, time and place together, to find the most appropriate and effective way of working to carry out a particular task. It is working within guidelines (of the task) but without boundaries (of how you achieve it)”.
Paul Alsop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





NICS Technology toolkit to support Agile Working

- NetworkNI
- IT Assist
- Secure Remote Access
 - 3G Mobile
 - Home ADSL
 - Personal Broadband
- BlackBerry Service
- Unified Communications (UC)



A set of technologies which can be combined to support agile working patterns and work styles



UC Consists of...

Main Components

- Email
- Voice
- Voicemail
- Presence
- Instant Messaging
- Telepresence \ VC
- Audio Conferencing
- Video calling
- Online meetings
- Application integration

Extended capabilities

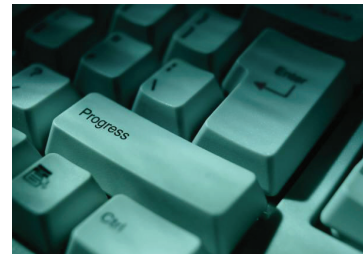
- SMS
- Mobile UC
- Social media integration
- Integration with Internet based services such as Jabber Video and Skype
- Inter business federation





Key Benefits

- Replacement of aging technology
- Business Continuity
- Better communication and collaboration
- Support for flexible and agile working
- Integration capabilities



IP Telephony (IPT)

- Telephony modernisation project
- Leverages investment in NetworkNI and ITAssist
- Rolled out to over 16,000 users
- Another 12 to 18 months to run
- New features made available including
 - Extension mobility
 - Single Number Reach
 - Access to voicemail via Outlook
 - Meetme conferencing facilities
 - Better information on callers and call history
 - Better voice quality





Video

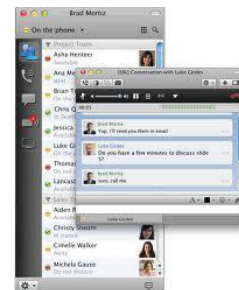


- Integration of existing and new video conferencing capabilities
- Leveraging the investment in NetworkNI, IT Assist and IPT
- Significant improvements in quality and ease of use
- Integration of video capabilities including room based systems, PC based systems and video telephony
- Consistent and easy connection to external sources and locations
- Better reporting and statistics



Instant Messaging and Presence (IM&P)

- Features include:
 - Instant Messaging
 - Presence
 - Voice integration with handset
 - PC Based Voice
 - HD Video
 - Voicemail Integration
 - Ability to participate in multi-way video conferences in HD
 - Leveraging the investment in NetworkNI, IT Assist and IPT





Demonstration

- Basic video telephony
- Basic Instant messaging
- Group IM
- Conference call
- Group video
- Scenario based demonstration



Department of Finance & Personnel correspondence dated 06 March 2013

Assembly Section

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Mr Shane McAteer
Clerk
Committee for Finance and Personnel
Room 419
Parliament Buildings

Stormont Our Ref: CFP207/11-15
6 March 2013

Dear Shane,

Flexible Working Enquiry

The purpose of this minute is to provide the information in relation to the areas highlighted in your letter of 18th February.

- 1. Paragraph 11 of the DFP briefing paper states that there is no official record kept of the amount of flexible working, in terms of IT, undertaken by NICS staff. How might this be addressed going forward and to inform the development and monitoring of any future strategy?**

It is extremely difficult from a central IT perspective to monitor the level to which flexible or agile working is being utilised. Indicators that we have at our disposal include the number of:

- a. Laptops issued;
- b. Secure Remote Access facilities activated;
- c. BlackBerry devices that have been issued;
- d. Video Units added to our infrastructure; and
- e. Times the Video Units are used.

However, none of these indicators will disclose how much value is generated from the use of these facilities. This can only be accounted for at a business level. For example, a business case must be produced in order for a member of staff to acquire a laptop. It is therefore up to the business to ensure that benefits are being generated from the use of that device.

From an HR perspective, records are held on such things as the number of part time workers, term time working etc. However, no records are currently held on locally organised and agreed flexible working arrangements, which tend to be very ad hoc in nature. Implementing some form of monitoring regime could have a detrimental effect on the uptake of flexible and agile working.

2. Do staff have to meet certain criteria to have access to the Zones and, if so, is this too restrictive (i.e. paragraph 19 of the briefing paper refers to “workers who travel extensively or who work remotely”)?

Staff do normally have to meet certain criteria regarding mobile working and travelling as part of their standard duties and I refer to guidance on the f@w intranet Business Zone http://online.nigov.net/index/reform/future-at-work/business_zones.htm.

Issues which would need to be considered in extending the zones for wider usage include:

- Control of access - numbers wishing to use the facilities against what is available;
- Security access - concerns of how staff are to enter the buildings - current NICS access security protocols demand that staff have authorisation for buildings only as required;
- IT equipment available - only mobile staff have laptops - PC equipment needs to be widely supplied;
- Overall management of zone resources (day to day running of the zones, booking in, security of resources, housekeeping etc); and
- Current size of business zones and resources available would limit numbers.

3. What efforts has DFP made to examine how other public sector organisations have addressed these issues and implemented effective homeworking policies?

During the development of the NICS Working from Home policy, consultation took place with organisations developing their own home working policies, including Belfast City Council. In light of the comments made by the Committee and the concerns raised at a senior level within DFP, DFP's Corporate Human Resources will contact Belfast City Council and liaise with other public sector organisations to see how they have addressed these issues and the extent to which they have implemented effective homeworking policies.

4. In addition to some of the references at paragraph 9 of the DFP briefing paper, are there any other employees in Departments or arms-length-bodies that could be termed as “Mobile Workers” (those who do not require a designated office desk)? What type of technology is in place for these workers in their day to day work?

This information is not recorded anywhere centrally and would need to be requested from departments. Such information in relation to Arms Length Bodies would be obtained through the relevant sponsor departments.

Services which enable mobile and agile working such as Secure Remote Access and Instant Messaging are available to all NICS Departments and Agencies¹ who take services from IT Assist. Certain field workers in departments such as DARD, DOE, DRD and DFP may have alternative mobile devices such as ‘ruggedised’ laptops. However, these devices are secured and managed in the same manner as standard devices and have the same connectivity capabilities.

Arms length bodies who do not take ICT services from IT Assist may have alternative technologies in use, but those technologies and the security thereof would be a matter for the Arms Length Bodies and the relevant sponsoring department.

1 The possible exception might be Department of Justice, which due to security restrictions might not be able to avail of all services

5. In relation to the use of video-conferencing and realised savings, has any assessment been made of the potential savings that could be achieved across the NICS if video-conferencing was fully utilised as a substitute for staff travelling to and from meetings both within and outside this jurisdiction?

The procurement and therefore justification of video conferencing units is the responsibility of the department and business area which makes use of the facility. It is therefore down to the relevant department to track the benefits derived from the installation of the equipment. From a central perspective we can identify how many times a video unit has been used and who it has connected to, but we cannot tell how many staff have been involved at each end or the exact amount of travel that has been saved. For example, we know that the video unit in Rathgael House has been used 54 times since June 2012. This includes 18 calls to Edinburgh 6 calls to Sheffield, 6 calls to Cardiff and 3 to Dunfermline. Each call could have saved the price of a flight, but what we can't tell is how many staff were involved for each video session. This level of detail can only be gathered by the business using the facility.

6. In relation to paragraph 24 of the DFP briefing paper which refers to a "Business Continuity Planning Guide", are there any examples of the flexible working opportunities being applied for business continuity purposes - for instance, in the case of the flooding of Dundonald House in June 2012?

As a DFP service, the example we have provided relates to IT Assist, part of Enterprise Shared Services, which provides ICT Infrastructure services to over 18,000 NICS staff. Around 250 technical and administrative IT Assist staff are located primarily in Craigtantlet Buildings, the basement of which was flooded following the deluge of rain on the evening of Wednesday 27th June 2012. Following the failure of the mains electrical supply, the generator at Craigtantlet Buildings was switched on and this powered the building until Friday morning, when continuing problems meant that the generator had to be shut down and the building evacuated. On Friday at lunchtime the IT Assist Business Continuity Plan (BCP) was invoked and an emergency meeting held.

At this meeting IT Assist Management made the decision that, as there was likely to be limits on available office space, all staff who were able to work from home and had the necessary communications facilities should do so with immediate effect. This included approximately 30 technical support staff who provided out-of-hours cover plus a number of management staff. Prior to the flooding crisis, IT Assist already a pilot teleworking scheme in place, with identified mutual benefits not only for staff in terms of travelling time but also for management in terms of productivity. The BCP decision was also made that all staff who were involved in the IT Assist teleworking pilot should use all of the available places to maximum capacity. A summary of the IT Assist teleworking locations is given below.

Locations (5)	No of Teleworking Staff
Marlborough House, Craigavon	8
Innishkeen House, Enniskillen	4
Orchard House, Londonderry	3
Magherafelt, Roads Service Office	2
Holts Building, Newry	7
Total	24

In the event, accommodation was identified for 150 of the 250 IT Assist staff in four main locations: Rosepark House, Goodwood House, Rathgael House, and Castle Buildings. This included the IT Assist Help Desk which was spread over two locations. From the viewpoint of the IT Assist staff, operating from their new location was very straightforward. Staff just logged onto their own laptop or PC which they had brought with them. The new IP Telephony

system also helped business continuity by allowing staff to bring their own extension number with them. Throughout the early stages of the crisis, an emergency help desk was provided at all times and by the following Monday morning, staff were in the process of moving to their new locations. Teleworking again proved invaluable at this time, as a remote worker in Newry for a very short time fielded all help desk calls while contingency measures were put in place. Customers were only aware of a very minimal disruption to operations and service level targets very quickly returned to normal.

Hot desking facilities were also provided in Rosepark House, which enabled home/tele workers to communicate and interact in person with their managers and peers, when required. It is unlikely that, without the home-working, teleworking and hot-desking facilities put in place, IT Assist would have been able to restore services to virtually full capacity in anything like the same timescales, enabling critical business to be maintained throughout the NICS.

7. With reference to paragraphs 31 and 32 of the DFP briefing paper, has the “Flexible Working Project”, which was recommended in the NICS IS Strategy, been established and what is the timeline in this regard?

The project referred to in the IS Strategy had significant interdependencies on a number of other IS Strategy projects, in particular the Unified Communications project, which has made good progress so that, while the flexible working project itself has not been formally mobilised, significant progress on enabling flexible and agile working has been made. The NICS IS Strategy is the subject of a ‘mid term’ review and we will look again at the scope and timing of this project, which may also be informed by the outcome of the Committee’s inquiry.

8. Further information to clarify the Programme for Government targets in relation to vacating office space.

The target for estate consolidation is not a Programme for Government target, but rather sits at the DFP Business Plan level. The target in the DFP Business Plan for 2012/13 was to vacate 2,000 square metres of office space and this has been achieved.

9. Information on the pilot scheme in relation to “Bring your own device”.

The whole area of Bring Your Own Device brings with it considerable challenges, particularly in the areas of security and data protection. The NICS has created a Mobile Device Strategy to establish a vision and set short to medium term actions. As part of this, we have established a proof of concept to test a number of aspects relating to the security and manageability of mobile devices. This includes looking at a Mobile Device Management (MDM) solution, combined with methods of device identification, authentication and encryption. The expected outcome will be the ability to offer staff a greater choice of mobile device, while still ensuring the integrity of our network and the security of any data held on, or accessed by, the mobile device.

10. Information on work on-going to address the need for staff to work more cost-effectively in customer facing areas outside the normal 9-5 working day.

DFP’s Corporate Human Resources is still gathering information from departments about their requirements, which need to be defined in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Judith Finlay

Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer

Department of Finance & Personnel correspondence dated 16 May 2013

Assembly Section

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Mr Shane McAteer
Clerk
Committee for Finance and Personnel
Room 419
Parliament Buildings

Stormont Our Ref – CFP 233/11-15

16th May 2013

Dear Shane,

Flexible Working Inquiry

Thank you for your letter of 3rd May and the Assembly research paper 'Flexible Working: Further Evidence'. Please find attached at Annex A the Department's response to each of the issues and areas for consideration highlighted in the paper.

Yours sincerely,

Judith Finlay

Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer

DFP Response to Issues and Areas for Consideration in Assembly Research and Information Service Briefing Paper March 2013

Report reference	Issue/Area for Consideration	DFP Response
Page 8	CFP may wish to examine whether NICS recruitment practices support flexibility in this way.	Noted.
Page 12 Table 1	DFP's 1 Feb paper significantly focuses on the ability of NICS staff to work flexible, part-time, term-time or compressed hours. CFP may wish to establish if NICS policy takes account of the relationship between working-time preferences and workers' performance.	<p>The ILO research paper, upon which the Assembly researcher draws, acknowledges that while there may be a direct relationship between flexible workplace practices and organisational performance, the means by which this occurs is less well understood. It theorises that the organisational climate itself may act as a mediator, and that the use of such practices may generate a positive organisational climate, which in turn can enhance performance.</p> <p>The Northern Ireland Civil Service offers a wide range of flexible working arrangements to accommodate staff preferences and to help staff achieve a work life balance. Evidence from the NICS staff survey indicates that the majority of staff are satisfied with their work life balance and agree that the NICS offers good terms and conditions, including alternative working patterns.</p> <p>Staff performance is managed through the NICS Performance Management System, which focuses on managing performance through setting objectives for agreed performance and outputs. NICS guidance on Performance Management states that these objectives for performance should be agreed between the jobholder and the line manager and should reflect what the Jobholder can reasonably be expected to deliver. It also states that job holders should not be unfairly treated because of any flexible working patterns.</p>
Page 12 Table 1	CFP may wish to establish if DFP has evidence on the level of time-based conflicts within the NICS and what measures might be taken to lessen them.	The results of the most recent NICS staff survey in 2011 show that most staff are satisfied with the NICS general terms and conditions of employment, including opportunities for alternative working patterns, with less than one in ten staff not satisfied.
Page 12 Table 1	CFP may wish to establish whether DFP currently has evidence on NICS staff absences that are related timebased conflicts or working-time preferences.	<p>While stress related absence can be broken down into work related and non work related, there is no further breakdown of the figures.</p> <p>The NICS provides Stress Management Guidance to provide information for all employees on recognising the signs and symptoms of stress at work and to identify the roles and responsibilities of individuals, line managers and Departments in combating work related stress. Advice to managers includes the need to "consider the wider range of flexible working practices as a means of resolving difficulties, either in the short or longer term".</p>

Report reference	Issue/Area for Consideration	DFP Response
Page 12 Table 1	CFP may wish to establish whether DFP currently has evidence on NICS staff productivity to inform understanding of the impact of current NICS practices so that any change may be monitored	Staff productivity in the NICS is measured at line manager and business area level through a range of means, including Personal Performance Agreements, Service Level Agreements, Corporate and Business Area Scorecards and any other local measurement of outputs e.g. cases processed.
Page 13 Table 1	DFP's 1 Feb paper states that the NICS regards itself as an employer that recognises the importance of having terms and conditions that support staff to balance their work commitments. CFP may wish to establish if DFP has evidence on the relationship between NICS staff satisfaction and work-life balance	The results of the most recent NICS staff survey in 2011 show that most staff are satisfied with their work-life balance, with less than a fifth of staff who say that they do not achieve a good balance between their work life and private life.
Page 13 Table 1	DFP's 1 Feb paper highlights the flexibilities available to NICS staff but does not specifically provide information on staff control over variations in their work schedules. CFP may wish to establish if DFP has evidence on whether NICS staff have an appropriate degree of control over their working schedules	<p>The ILO paper, from which the Assembly Research Paper draws this concept, comments that "by their nature, flexible working hours may minimise the interference of family obligations with work productivity".</p> <p>The May 2012 Research and Information Service Research paper on Flexible Working acknowledges that there are a significant amount of flexible working arrangements available within the NICS. The majority of civil servants have the facility of Flexible Working Time, while almost a quarter work part time and a number of others avail of various other flexible working patterns, including partial retirement and compressed hours. Just over one in five of the civil servants supported by IT Assist have a laptop which enables them to work in various locations.</p> <p>Evidence from the NICS staff survey indicates that the majority of staff are satisfied with their work life balance and agree that the NICS offers good terms and conditions, including alternative working patterns.</p>
Page 13 Table 1	CFP may wish to consider whether the current NICS flexible working arrangements are employer- or employee-centred.	<p>The Northern Ireland Civil Service has developed a wide range of policies which support staff in all aspects of their working life and specifically allow staff to balance their work commitments with life responsibilities.</p> <p>There is, however, a guiding and over-riding principle that this flexibility should be achieved without adverse effect on the overall efficiency of Departments or on service to the public.</p>

Report reference	Issue/Area for Consideration	DFP Response
Page 13 Table 1	CFP may wish to consider the potential impact of changes in practice on sickness absence rates in the NICS.	The identification and measurement of potential benefits from flexible working is a matter for each government department and individual business areas within departments.
Page 13 Table 1	CFP may wish to ask witnesses for evidence whether the current NICS arrangements could further enhance public sector resilience in Northern Ireland. For example, DFP has conducted an assessment of the recent disruption to public service delivery as a consequence of severe weather events – such as the snow and flooding in 2012.	DFP does not have a remit for the wider public sector, whether in the areas of technology, premises or personnel policies. However, the need for Business Continuity Planning (BCP) is widely accepted throughout the public sector and BCP guidance for the public sector is provided on the OFMdfM website. Within the NICS, a Business Continuity Planning Guide has been developed as part of the IS Strategy, setting out the new opportunities presented by the changing IT landscape within the NICS, including Network NI, IT Assist services, Secure Remote Access and Unified Communications. As acknowledged in the Research Paper, an example of how flexible working opportunities have been applied for business continuity purposes is the flooding of Craigantlet Buildings in June 2012, as detailed in the DFP response to the Committee in March 2013.
Page 14 Table 1	CFP may wish to establish whether DFP can provide baseline data on energy usage across the public estate to allow patterns following policy changes to be tracked.	DFP can provide baseline data for energy usage by building across the office estate, if required. However, the Department is unclear as to how compressing hours for some staff will impact on energy consumption, unless all staff in the building reduce their hours and the entire building or floors within a building can be closed. Also, DFP is currently implementing a series of actions across the office estate aimed at reducing energy consumption. It would therefore be difficult to ascertain whether any changes are the result of the DFP actions or any additional ‘flexible working’ arrangements.
Page 14 Table 1	CFP may wish to seek evidence from DFP about the issue of recruitment, retention and training costs in the NICS. Is there a difficulty with ‘hard-to-fill vacancies, for example, which might be lessened by adopting greater workplace flexibility.	Noted. NICS Departments remain an attractive career choice and there are a very limited number of specialist posts which could be deemed as ‘hard to fill’.

Report reference	Issue/Area for Consideration	DFP Response
Page 14 Table 1	CFP may wish to explore with witnesses the performance-management/retention implications of moving to output-based rather than hours-based work.	<p>The ILO paper, from which the Assembly Research Paper draws some of its data, finds that as flexibility (telework, flexitime) increases, so turnover reduces and that unmet needs for workplace flexibility were found to be a prominent driver of turnover.</p> <p>The NICS offers a wide range of flexible working arrangements. The NICS does not hold any evidence linking turnover to flexible working. Turnover during the Financial year 2011/12 (the latest year available) was 3.1%.</p> <p>The NICS Performance Management System focuses on managing performance through setting objectives for agreed performance and outputs.</p>
Page 22	CFP may wish to explore with witnesses the extent to which eligibility for flexible working impacts on employee relations, and the scope for managing those impacts.	The wide range of NICS policies that enable NICS staff to have a flexible approach to their working day have been developed in consultation with Trade Union side. The majority of staff are eligible for Flexible Time working and almost a quarter work part-time, with others availing of various other flexible working patterns, including partial retirement and compressed hours.
Page 23	CFP may wish to explore with witnesses how the barriers identified in the OPM survey might be overcome.	<p>The Research Report acknowledges the evidence presented to the Committee about the technology being used to facilitate the flexible location of work in the NICS and accepts that “the technology barrier is not insurmountable”.</p> <p>The examples of flexible and agile working provided in the DFP paper in February 2013 demonstrate that, where there is a clear business need, agile working of various types have been successfully implemented throughout the NICS.</p>
Page 24	CFP may wish to explore the issues of baseline information and benefits realisation with witnesses.	<p>From an IT perspective, the business case and decision to deploy technology to support a more flexible or agile work style, is a matter for individual business areas in departments. There is, therefore, no central register of benefits which are derived from the technology deployed. However, examples of benefits include:</p> <p>The video conferencing unit in Rathgael House, commissioned on 12th June 2012, has been used 52 times (at Jan 2013) resulting in a significant saving in staff time and travel costs;</p> <p>The video conferencing units utilised by NI Direct staff for daily team meetings have been used a total of 194 times from (June 2012 to January 2013), saving over £12,000 in travel and saving over 500 hours in travel time (based on one person travelling); and</p> <p>The average usage of the Marlborough House regional zone indicates a monthly saving of around £3,400 in travel costs and 190 hours in time.</p>
Page 25	CFP may wish to explore the timeframes for the realisation of potential benefits from flexible working with witnesses.	Timeframes for the realisation of potential benefits from flexible working are a matter for each government department and individual business areas within departments.

Report reference	Issue/Area for Consideration	DFP Response
Page 25	CFP may wish to explore with witnesses the forms of performance management that underpin effective flexible working practices. Secondly, CFP may wish to engage with DFP on the appropriateness of the current NICS performance management system for supporting flexible working.	The NICS Performance Management System focuses on managing performance through setting objectives for agreed performance and outputs, which are agreed between the jobholder and the line manager.

Department of Finance & Personnel correspondence 19 December 2013

Assembly Section

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Mr Shane McAteer
Clerk
Committee for Finance and Personnel
Room 419
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Stormont

19 December 2013

Dear Shane,

Flexible Working Inquiry

1. Thank you for your letter of 6 December in relation to the Flexible Working Enquiry.
2. The Committee has asked for:
 - **Data on the breakdown of homeworkers/teleworkers in the NICS, including gender breakdown; and**
 - **Up-to- figures on usage of the 'satellite hubs' across Northern Ireland.**
3. There is no central record held of the number of homeworkers or teleworkers in the NICS. An indicator, however, is the number of laptops and remote access connections that have been provided.
4. Of the 18,000 NICS staff supported by IT Assist, around 4,000 have laptops, of which 431 have ADSL (a dedicated broadband line in a staff home connecting the user directly to the NICS network), while 1064 have SSL or VPN (staff use a cable to connect to their own home broadband router). 1173 staff members also have 3G (this enables staff to connect to the network while on the move), while there are 2,232 Blackberry users (which allow staff to receive emails while out of the office). A pilot is currently underway in relation to tablet type technologies, using the Blackberry Playbook and there are currently 59 participants. 41 staff are also using other forms of tablet as part of a separate pilot. This is not broken down by gender.
5. Please note that there are staff that have a combination of these devices, i.e. some have an ADSL connection in their home as well as a 3G card for when they are on the move. They may even have the SSL (home broadband connection) as a back up in case of the failure of the ADSL line.
6. There are currently two formal future@work Business Zones - Castle Buildings and Marlborough House (Craigavon) – which facilitate staff to work remotely as part of their job (although other less formal arrangements and facilities are also in existence). Two other Business Zones in Causeway Exchange and Clare House are no longer available, as they have been removed to facilitate various pressing accommodation needs within each of these buildings. Properties Division however is currently undertaking a review of existing DFP Belfast City Centre office accommodation, to assess the viability of providing Business Zone type facilities at more locations.

7. Business Zone visitor statistics are not held for Castle Buildings as many staff and visitors using the facilities, both formally and informally, were already in the building for other reasons.
8. The facility in Marlborough House was used a total of 1968 times between January 2013 and November 2013, an average of 179 times per month. The monthly average for comparison between May 2011 and December 2012, was 126 visits.

Yours sincerely,

Gearóid Cassidy

Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer

Public Sector Reform Division Correspondence – 23 December 2013

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Mr Shane McAteer
Clerk
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Stormont

23 December 2013

Dear Shane,

PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM DIVISION: REMIT AND FUNCTIONS

In preparation for the session with the Finance and Personnel Committee on 15 January please find attached a briefing paper on the remit and functions of the Public Sector Reform Division.

Yours sincerely,

GEARÓID CASSIDY
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer

PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM DIVISION: REMIT AND FUNCTIONS

From: Colin Sullivan
Date: 23 December 2014

Summary

Business Area: Public Sector Reform Division (PSRD)

Issue: The purpose of this paper is to provide an early overview of the new Public Sector Reform Division with background information on the unit and its remit.

Restrictions: None

Action Required: To note ahead of the evidence session on 15 January 2014

BACKGROUND

1. The Public Sector Reform Division (PSRD) is embedded within the Strategic Policy and Reform (SPaR) Directorate of DFP. The SPaR Directorate is a new directorship created, by the Minister, to take forward high priority activity, not least, to lead and support activity designed to improve our public services. Committee Members will be aware that many of the current cross-cutting reforms in the civil service fall within the responsibility of the DFP Minister.
2. A Director has been appointed and is currently building a small, multidisciplinary team to develop and progress a work programme. The PSRD will encompass the work activity of the Performance and Efficiency Unit (PEDU) but it will take on many different additional and more diverse roles.
3. The initial team comprises staff from DFP and other departments, including economists, statisticians and programme managers. It is anticipated that the Division will always be a smallish focused unit of staff drawn from across the public sector but ultimately the size of the unit will depend upon the uptake of the Division's activity.
4. The Division's work programme is being informed by researching best practice approaches that have merit from other parts of the World, through its contacts and relationships with other Government departments and their arms length bodies and by reaching out and listening to others in both the private and voluntary sectors who have views on the reform of public services.

RATIONALE FOR REFORM

5. Committee Members will be aware that the financial constraints facing the Executive are expected to continue over the medium term with the latest forecasts suggesting that public sector current expenditure across the UK will fall by 7.1% in cash terms and 11.6% in real terms between 2014-2015 and 2017-2018. Figures for Northern Ireland are not available over this extended timeframe but NI Resource DEL expenditure is planned to fall by 2.1% in real terms between 2013-2014 and 2015-2016.
6. Beyond the financial imperative, Northern Ireland society continues to grapple with a host of challenges like poor standards of public health and underachievement in areas of education. These longstanding, seemingly intractable social problems, have been the subject of significant levels of investment over the years and a range of different public sector responses, but with only limited progress.
7. The Minister has been keen to emphasise there is now a need for new and innovative thinking on how to address both the budgetary pressures facing the Executive, as well as, helping to resolve some of the social issues that have blighted Northern Ireland for too long. The Minister wants to support the transformation of how we work to deliver world class services that meet the future needs of our citizens.

WORK PROGRAMME

8. PSRD will seek to work collaboratively with departments, business areas and frontline staff in developing further reforms in respect of the delivery of local public services, as well as, improvements to existing plans for reform with a focus on reducing costs and enhancing the quality of public services.
9. It is important to stress at the outset that NI Departments and Ministers will retain primary responsibility for planning and implementing reforms in their respective areas with the division having a supporting and advisory role by seeking to bring expertise to those issues.
10. PSRD methodologies will include:
 - innovation/ideas generation;
 - economic review and appraisal;
 - project/programme management; and
 - internal consultancy.
11. The small core team will be supplemented by staff on temporary secondment from the relevant department and/or business areas, as required, not least those with front line experience of service delivery. Joint working between the PSRD and Departments will be key to maximising the potential for public sector reform. To facilitate the joined-up use of internal consulting across the civil service, DFP's

Business Consultancy Service (BCS) has now been amalgamated to sit within the PSRD Management structure. It will also be important that experience and expertise of improving service delivery from outside the public sector is utilised, when appropriate.

12. Ideas and innovations for improving our public sector can come from many sources - from those working within a given service, from elsewhere within our system or from international best practice from an individual country or multi-national organisations. For example, a recent visit to Estonia gave the Minister and his team insights on how that country was transformed the way they deliver government services using digital technology.
13. Those who work in specific areas of the public sector are often well placed to propose solutions. However, identifying a good idea is only the start of a process to develop and adapt it and then implement it in the local setting. The Minister's intention is that a key role for PSRD will be to form a bridge between best practice ideas and those who currently manage specific services so as to generate new solutions for specific aspects of public sector reform.
14. Innovations generated by staff and development by specifically composed teams, working in specially designed environments and tasked with particular public sector or social policy reform challenges, is being explored by PSRD. The Danish Mindlab and NESTA, based in England, are two examples. A recent visit to Denmark helped us understand the necessary steps in developing a similar unit here. Minister wants the PSRD to learn from world class leaders by fully maximising the sharing of knowledge and best practice and to use it to best advantage for everyone in Northern Ireland.
15. The DFP Minister has visited OECD in Paris to learn more about their work on Public Sector Reform and he is exploring how an external body such as OECD could help to guide those charged with reform in Northern Ireland. The Minister is keen to engage with his Ministerial colleagues on this topic.

APPROACH TO REFORM

16. The approach of the Public Sector Reform Division (PSRD) in delivering each part of its work programme will depend on the nature of the reform under consideration, but is expected to include the following:
 - **Innovation Labs/Ideas Factories**- dedicated "safe" spaces which are opportunities for collaboration involving key stakeholders, including the public, in a process of co-creation, crafting new solutions to the challenges of public service delivery;
 - **Task & Finish Groups** - small multi-disciplinary teams with relevant expertise tasked to tackle a piece of work and report back in a short timescale;

- **Process Improvement Techniques** – the application of various methods including Systems Thinking, Lean, Six Sigma, and Agile to improve service delivery;
 - **Benchmarking, Research & Analysis** – ongoing examination of reform programmes in the rest of the UK, the Republic of Ireland and best practice countries to identify initiatives that could be taken forward within NI;
 - **Financial incentives**- provision of ring-fenced funding to support identification and planning of reform initiatives, as well as, the initial investment which may be required to progress service reforms.
17. How the PSRD operates would be expected to evolve over time as a reflection of its work programme. For example, it could also undertake a co-ordinating role in monitoring and reporting on the level of progress in implementing reforms across the public sector as well as facilitating the deepening of reform between Departments and other parts of the public sector.
 18. Along with the Minister, senior staff within PSRD, have been engaging with key stakeholders including business/industry, Community and Voluntary sector leads to listen to their views and comments on the opportunities for delivering reform in the NI Civil Service, arms length bodies and local councils. This activity is on-going.
 19. The work programme which is currently being developed for the Public Sector Reform Division aims to fully exploit the innovative use of technology and improved methods of working to deliver flexible and joined up services. This should build on the success of the past, recognise good performance and look towards spending more on prevention giving customers, and staff alike world class affordable services they can be proud of.

Letter from Minister for Finance & Personnel

27 February 2014



**From the Office of the
Minister of Finance & Personnel**

Daithí McKay
Chairperson
Committee for Finance & Personnel
Parliament Buildings
Stormont

**DFP Private Office
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Your reference:
Our reference: SUB/90/2014

27 February 2014

Dear Daithí

MEASURING WELLBEING IN NORTHERN IRELAND

In 2010, the Office of National Statistics (ONS) commenced a programme of work to measure national wellbeing. The aim of this programme was to extend understanding of how the UK was progressing by using measures which reflect social and environmental wellbeing and go beyond the traditional macro-economic measures such as GDP.

Following extensive consultation, a framework for measuring national wellbeing was developed covering various aspects of society such as the economy, health, education and what we do. This is presented in a summary interactive wheel, along with more detailed analytical reports. The most recent version of the summary wheel was published in September 2013 and currently comprises ten domains and 41 indicators.

Following the Carnegie conference, *Measuring What Matters*, held in September 2013, which you and I jointly supported, I requested that NISRA collate and publish the Northern Ireland data for the indicators from the ONS interactive wheel. The report, published this morning, contains data for as many of the 41 indicators as is possible. Where gaps exist and where it has been possible, Northern Ireland data has been included from compatible, if not exactly comparable sources. No new data have been collected for this report, rather it gathers together in one place, information which has already been published or is easily accessed from relevant sources.

The published report contains a Northern Ireland wheel infographic to include Northern Ireland data in addition to UK data as published in the September 2013 UK Wheel. In the body of the report, the data for each domain has been summarised in another infographic, drawing together the relevant points with some explanatory text below. The report has been developed primarily as an online publication and is best

viewed in that format. Where data sources are not directly comparable, this has been indicated by a dotted pattern on the wheel and in the report. The report is available on the NISRA website at the following link:

<http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/archive/uk-national-well-being-measures-northern-ireland-data-february-2014.pdf>

Comparisons of the data between Northern Ireland and the UK show that in general, results for Northern Ireland are similar to those for the UK. There are, however, some notable differences:

- a higher proportion of the working age population in Northern Ireland has no qualifications;
- the Family Resources Survey shows that household income is lower in Northern Ireland;
- males and females in Northern Ireland have shorter healthy life expectancies;
- the Crime Surveys in Northern Ireland and England and Wales show that crimes against the person are at a lower level in Northern Ireland; and
- recent ONS publication on Personal Wellbeing reported that Northern Ireland respondents were more positive in three of the four individual wellbeing indicators than other regions of the UK.

The wellbeing measures approach outlined will complement the existing priorities contained within the Programme for Government (PfG) and will offer us all as Assembly members the opportunity to focus policymaking on what really matters to people.

By framing our measurement around wellbeing, government can better understand the trade-offs between economic, social and environmental factors. This will enable some of these higher wellbeing measures to be embedded into new and ongoing initiatives, such as Public Sector Reform, and ultimately inform decisions to improve outcomes for citizens.

Yours sincerely

SIMON HAMILTON MLA

Department of Finance & Personnel correspondence dated 26 March 2014

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Mr Shane McAteer
Clerk
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Stormont Our Ref: CFP/311/11-15

26 March 2014

Dear Shane,

Flexible Working Inquiry

Thank you for your correspondence of 4 March which following on from previous contributions from DFP regarding the situation in the wider NICS, has requested information on the extent to which flexible working practices are being applied within DFP

The flexible working arrangements available to staff working in the NICS are:

- Flexible working time (flexi time);
- Compressed hours;
- Personalised hours;
- Part-time working (including reduced hours and job sharing);
- Partial retirement; and
- Term-time.

The majority of staff have access to flexible working time (flexi time) which provides for a more flexible working day. Staff are able to vary the times of arrival and departure from work, the length and timing of their lunch break and to take time off if they work extra hours.

The table below provides summary information relating to staff working patterns and particularly to the other formal flexible working arrangements:

Working Pattern	Full time	Compressed Hours	Personalised Hours	Part-time working	Partial Retirement	Term-time	Total
No. of staff	2912	22	10	599	158	73	3774

A total of 23% of staff within the Department currently avail of some form of formal flexible working arrangement in relation to the hours they work.

There is no formal Home Working Policy within DFP; however there are informal adhoc arrangements in place, which vary across business areas. There are around 1300 staff (approx one third of staff employed in DFP) who have laptops, of which over 128 have

ADSL (a dedicated broadband line in a staff home connecting the user directly to the NICS network), while almost 280 have SSL or VPN (staff use a cable to connect to their own home broadband router). Almost 347 staff members have 3G (this enables staff to connect to the network while on the move). In addition, there are around 495 Blackberry users (which allow staff to receive emails while out of the office). Of the 495 with Blackberrys approximately 49 are on a pilot with devices such as iPhones, Blackberrys, Tablets etc.

It should be noted that there are staff who have a combination of these devices, i.e. some have an ADSL connection in their home as well as a 3G card for when they are on the move. They may even have the SSL (home broadband connection) as a backup in case of the failure of the ADSL line.

Some examples of local flexible working arrangements in DFP are:

- Business Consultancy Staff, whose work style is a mixture of home, office (hot desking) and on-site, when undertaking assignments;
- NIDirect staff, who hold daily team meetings between Belfast and Derry/Londonderry via video conferencing;
- IT staff in IT Assist who avail of satellite working, most of whom do this on a minimum of one day per week; and
- Use of the Future@Work Business Zones.

I trust this additional information is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Gearóid Cassidy

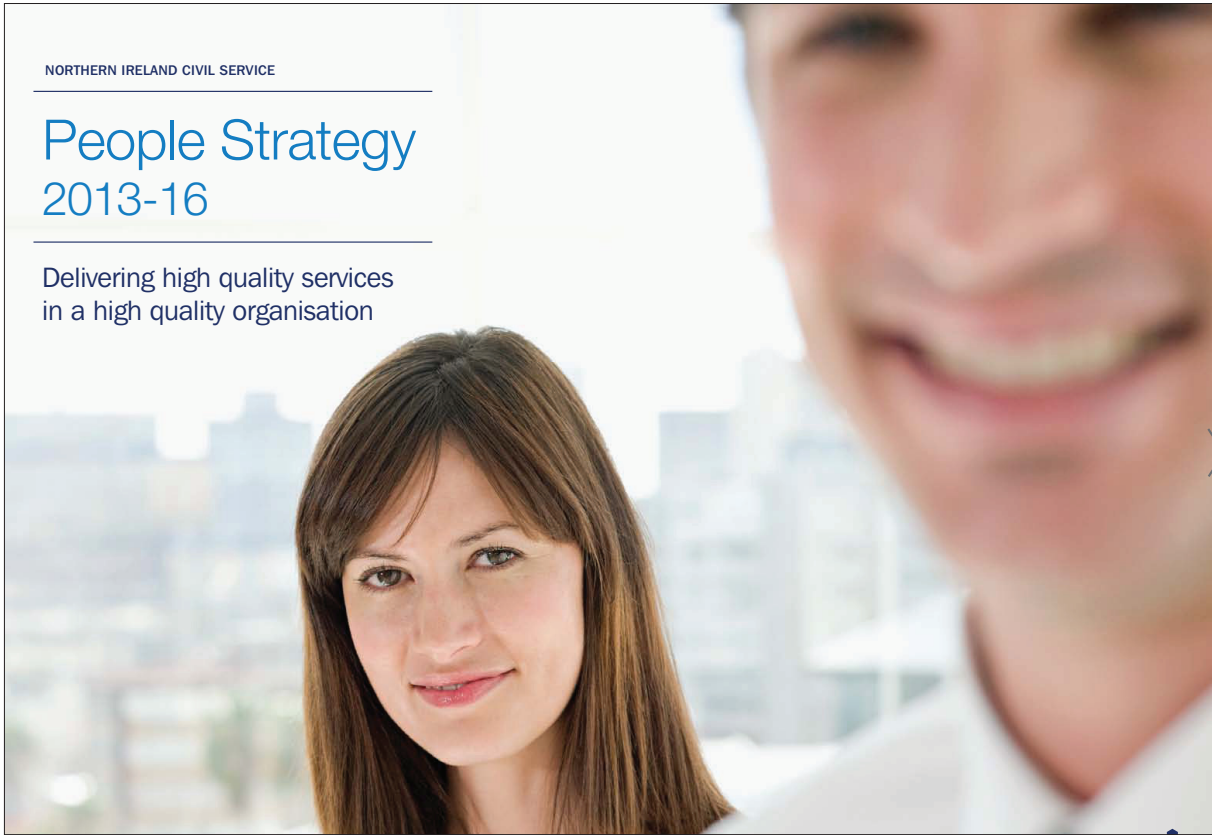
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer

Northern Ireland Civil Service People Strategy: 2013-16

NORTHERN IRELAND CIVIL SERVICE

People Strategy 2013-16

Delivering high quality services
in a high quality organisation



NICS PEOPLE STRATEGY | 2013-16

Introduction by Dr Malcolm McKibbin, Head of the Civil Service

The role of the NICS is to serve the Government of the day, deliver the Executive's Programme for Government and ensure it is fit to serve future Governments efficiently and effectively.

To meet those challenging objectives we need to:

- adhere to civil service values of impartiality, honesty, integrity and objectivity;
- demonstrate strong and effective leadership;
- engage positively with Ministers and support them in the delivery of their Executive and departmental priorities;
- be politically aware and capable of working well in a devolved administration ;
- work constructively in a complex and dynamic environment;
- be professional, adaptable and innovative;
- work collaboratively across and beyond Government boundaries; and
- be committed to the delivery of customer focused and value for money services.

To deliver excellent public services we need excellent public servants. Our new People Strategy will help us deliver excellence in all we do. I commend it to you all.



MALCOLM McKIBBIN



Foreword by Colin Lewis, NICS HR Director



In my travels around departments I have personally learned from you of your tremendous work and achievements. Throughout my career, both in the private and public sectors, I have seen the Northern Ireland Civil Service consistently achieve a great deal, as you have gone about your business of serving Ministers and the public. This is due to the efforts of each and every one of you. You have much to be proud of.

As we face new challenges in delivering the Executive's priorities and improving our raft of public services, I am pleased to present this latest People Strategy. This strategy seeks to chart our route to improved business performance through developing an enhanced working experience from being a civil servant. In both these respects I see this Strategy as an important tool. Amongst its stated commitments is to achieve an empowered workforce focussed on delivering improved business results.

Simon Hamilton MLA, the Finance Minister, recently spoke of the value and the contribution we as civil servants make to the Executive. He believes we all should feel empowered to bring new ideas and better ways of working to how we do our jobs.

People Strategy 2013-2016 is the product of a rigorous self-assessment of our approach to and relationship with our people: you. It will be supported by an Annual People Plan for each of the next three years. Also it takes on board the results of the 2011 Staff Attitude survey and reflects the priorities and opinions of Permanent Secretaries, HR Directors, and Business Partners. We will consult with the Trade Unions on its delivery.

You are the key to all our future business success and it must be said that there are benefits for you also. The Strategy seeks to create the environment where we each recognise and celebrate our strengths and successes, and in which we learn and are determined to improve ourselves. Historically the Service has a strong track record in generating ideas, delivering operational services and providing value for money. So I have high hopes that this Strategy will further enable you to focus on where we can achieve improved delivery of our services today and into the future.

This is an ambitious and challenging Strategy, designed to apply to and be embraced by, everyone in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. It is also direct

and to the point, focussing on our ultimate goal of improved business delivery. However I am confident that with your support and engagement as part of an empowered workforce, it will deliver all of its stated commitments.

People are the heart of this organisation. Together we have the potential to deliver even better quality services to the public in Northern Ireland.

COLIN LEWIS
NICS HR Director

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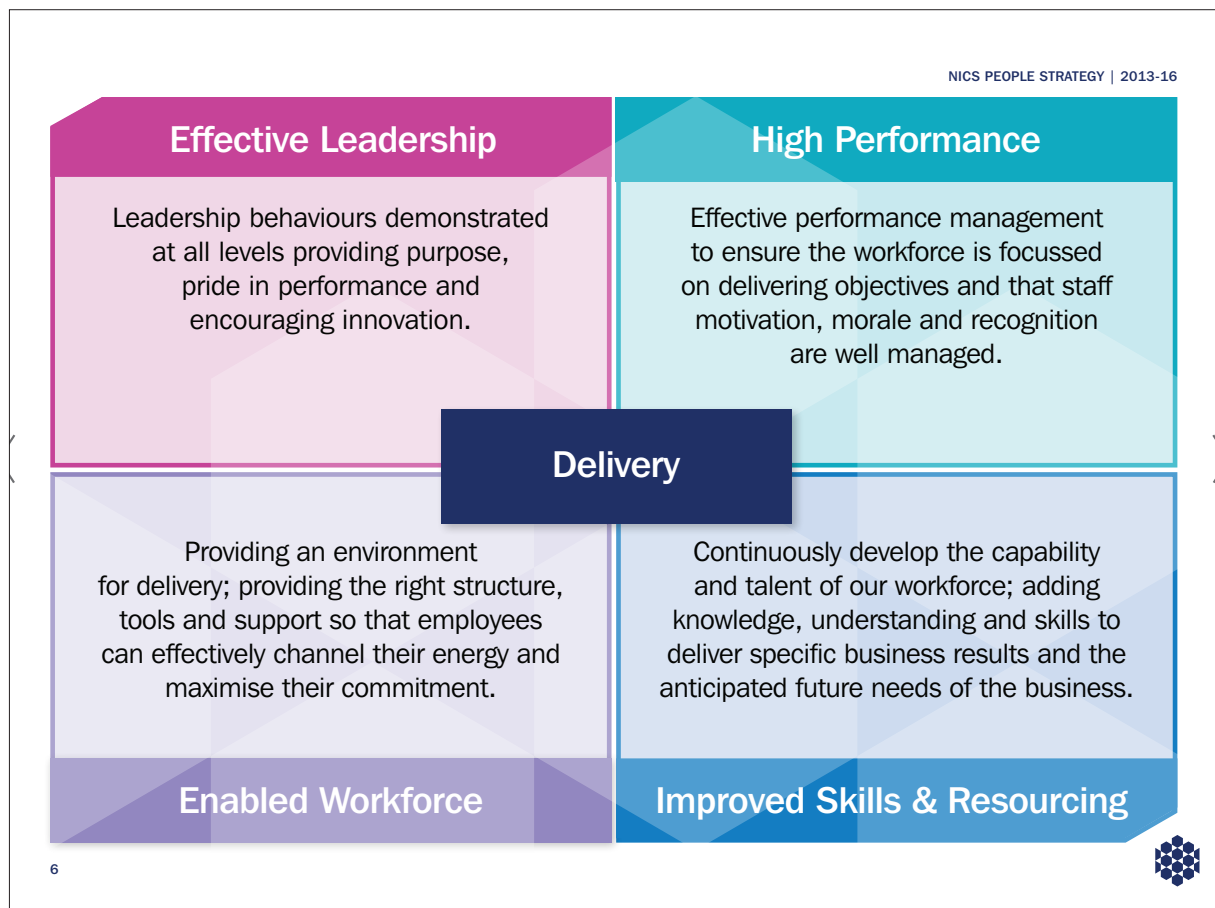
A strategy that:

- helps the NICS deliver better services to the public and be a more effective place to work;
- is confident of delivering its stated commitments;
- makes sense and is to the point;
- is ambitious and challenging;
- is seen to be more than an HR strategy; and,
- applies to and is embraced by everyone in the NICS.



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Effective Leadership

For our people to be effective in their roles, we need positive leadership behaviours demonstrated at all levels. Leaders will provide a sense of purpose, commitment to delivery and pride in performance. The NICS will develop and value leaders that embody the principles of public service and are seen as role models, setting clear actions and objectives for their staff, being visible to staff across their part of the Department, taking a personal interest in developing others and maintaining the personal standards they expect of others.

Commitments	We will:
Direction & Purpose	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure all staff have clear output-focussed objectives linked to departmental/divisional/branch business plans. 2. Create a plan on a page that all staff can understand. 3. Commit to share with all staff reports on progress against business plans.
Growth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Define and publish new behavioural competences for leaders. 2. Establish innovative approaches to leadership development including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (i) mentoring and coaching programmes; (ii) structured programmes tailored to grade and career stages; (iii) refresh and build upon the Heads of Profession network ensuring professional communities support a workforce skilled for 2016 and beyond.
Engaging with Staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure a personal connection between leaders and their teams through ongoing programmes to include road shows, job shadowing sessions, webcasts and online forums. 2. Lead and sponsor programmes that celebrate and value success.

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High Performance

The most effective performance management is fundamental to ensuring that the workforce is focussed on delivering the NI Executive's priorities. It provides the basis for managers to agree and assess performance against clear objectives as well as providing a positive mechanism for channelling staff motivation, driving talent management, assessing and raising morale and valuing excellent work. It is critical that we are able to identify poor performance and ensure that mechanisms are in place to deal effectively with this in a timely way.

Commitments	We will:
Talent Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce mechanisms for identifying and nurturing talent, including staff movement to facilitate and support career development.
Performance Management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Start to change the culture around performance reviews, supporting managers in a range of relevant activities in recognising good and poor performance as well as specific training around providing feedback and handling difficult conversations. 2. Introduce a narrative-based 2 Box system for assessing performance. 3. Incentivise timely completion. 4. Introduce a more streamlined approach and process to the management of poor performance.
Recognition & Reward	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce methods of reward and recognition for high achievers and those staff that go the extra mile. 2. Devise and implement pay awards for 2014 and 2015.

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Improved Skills and Resourcing

In developing the workforce for the future there is a need to manage changes in workforce roles and skills. This requires a commitment to continuously develop the capability of our people; their knowledge, understanding and skills to deliver specific business results and prepare for the anticipated future needs of the business. It also requires us to respond to the staffing related concerns of the business - not only in terms of the filling of posts with the right people with the right skill at the right time, but also the process by which staff are deployed to and released from posts as the needs of the business change over time.

Commitments	We will:
Knowledge & Skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support effective resourcing and focussed personal development planning by introducing a new Core Competence Framework that represents the competences, knowledge and behaviours required of the workforce. 2. Conduct a targeted skills audit across the business, exploring skills that underpin existing and known future business needs. 3. Develop solutions to close gaps which are highlighted in the skills audit. 4. Ensure divisional business plans set out people development requirements.
Internal & External Resourcing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce new ideas to add greater pace into the recruitment, promotion and transfer processes. 2. Review entry standards for new recruits. 3. Create a model redeployment scheme to manage large scale movements of staff. 4. Identify and introduce working flexibilities that better meet future departmental business needs, cognisant of employment terms and conditions.
Innovation in Delivery	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Augment existing capability (staff knowledge, experience and skills) through partnerships, secondments and interchanges. 2. Explore use of technology to support an agile, flexible and mobile workforce.



Enabled Workforce

To meet the demands of the NI Executive's priorities and the expectations of the public, the NICS needs to ensure that staff can make the most telling contributions. We should therefore provide a work environment which enables employees to 'go the extra mile'. An enabled workforce is one which has the right structure, tools and support so that employees can channel their energy, avoid frustrations, support each other and maximise their commitment.

Commitments	We will:
Engagement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Undertake a benchmarking activity to understand engagement techniques within other organisations. 2. Establish a forum between departments and involving staff groups to exchange ideas relating to employee engagement, including wider use of existing staff support networks.
Wellbeing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage staff to take an active interest in their health and wellbeing and continue to promote the NICS WELL programme. 2. Look to provide a range of employer funded interventions. 3. Introduce new methods for reducing sickness absence.
Workplace	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a plan to ensure staff are working in environments that are conducive to high performance. 2. Set out a 3 year plan to make the most effective use of enabling technology.



Commitments Delivery Overview (1)

	YEARS		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP			
Direction & Purpose	Ensure all staff have clear output-focussed objectives linked to departmental/divisional/branch business plans. Create a plan on a page that all staff can understand. Commit to share with all staff reports on progress against business plans.		
Growth	Define and publish new behavioural competences for leaders. Commence work to establish innovative approaches to leadership development including: - mentoring and coaching programmes; and - structured programmes tailored to grade and career stages.	Finish work to establish innovative approaches to leadership development including: - mentoring and coaching programmes; and - structured programmes tailored to grade and career stages.	Refresh and build upon Heads of Profession network ensuring professional communities support a workforce skilled for 2016 and beyond.
Engaging with Staff	Ensure a personal connection between leaders and their teams through ongoing programmes to include road shows, job shadowing sessions, webcasts and online forums.	Lead and sponsor programmes that celebrate and value success.	

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Commitments Delivery Overview (2)

	YEARS		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
HIGH PERFORMANCE			
Talent Development		Introduce mechanisms for identifying and nurturing talent, including staff movement programmes.	
Performance Management	Start to change the culture around performance reviews, supporting managers in a range of relevant activities in recognising good and poor performance as well as specific training around providing feedback and handling difficult conversations. Introduce a narrative based 2 box system for assessing performance. Incentivise timely completion.	Build on the change in culture around performance reviews and introduce a more streamlined approach and process to the management of poor performance.	
Recognition & Reward	Begin to devise a pay award for 2014.	Implement a pay award for 2014. Devise a pay award for 2015. Introduce methods of reward and recognition for high achievers and those staff that go the extra mile.	Implement a pay award for 2015

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Commitments Delivery Overview (3)

	YEARS		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
IMPROVED SKILLS AND RESOURCING			
Skills	Support effective resourcing and focussed personal development planning by introducing a new Core Competence Framework that represents the competences, knowledge and behaviours required of the workforce. Ensure divisional business plans set out people development requirements.	Conduct a targeted skills audit across the business, exploring skills that underpin existing and known future needs.	Develop solutions to close gaps which are highlighted in the skills audit.
Internal & External Resourcing	Introduce new ideas to add greater pace into the recruitment, promotion and transfer processes. Identify and introduce working flexibilities that better meet future departmental business needs, cognisant of employment terms and conditions.	Review entry standards for new recruits. Create a model redeployment scheme to manage large scale movements of staff. Build on and embed working flexibilities that better meet future departmental business needs, cognisant of employment terms and conditions.	
Innovation in Delivery	Augment existing capability (staff knowledge, experience and skills) through partnerships, secondments and interchanges.	Explore use of technology to support an agile, flexible and mobile workforce.	



Commitments Delivery Overview (4)

	YEARS		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
ENABLED WORKFORCE			
Engagement	Undertake a benchmarking activity to understand engagement techniques within other organisations.	Establish a forum between departments and involving staff groups to exchange ideas relating to employee engagement including wider use of existing staff support networks.	
Wellbeing	Encourage staff to take an active interest in their health and wellbeing and continue to promote the NICS WELL programme. Identify and start to introduce new methods for reducing sickness absence.	Look to provide a range of employer funded interventions. Further develop and embed new methods for reducing sickness absence.	
Workplace	Set out a 3 year plan to make the most effective use of enabling technology.	Create a plan to ensure staff are working in environments that are conducive to high performance.	



Strategy Outcomes

OVERALL CONTRIBUTION

The People Strategy will contribute to delivery of the NI Executive's priorities through focussing on developing a high performing workforce.

1. Measures will be established for each delivery project

2. HIGH LEVEL INDICATORS

Effective Leadership

- Confidence in line management increased.
- Increase staff satisfaction with senior management.

High Performance

- 95% of Personal Development Plans (PDPs) and Personal Performance Agreements (PPAs) and End of Year Reviews completed on time.

Enabled Workforce

- Staff satisfaction score increased.
- Sickness absence reduced in line with Ministerial Targets, 8.5 days by March 2015.
- Employee engagement index improved.

Improved Skills & Resourcing

- Staff satisfaction with learning and development increased.
- Line Management satisfaction with learning and development increased.

The People Strategy will seek to ensure a 10% improvement in baseline scores for each indicator from the 2011 Staff Survey by March 2016.

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Glossary

This glossary provides a description of some of the terms used in the NICS People Strategy.

Annual People Plan - the document setting out in detail how we will deliver over the current business planning year on the commitments and actions identified under the NICS People Strategy.

Benchmarking - the process of gathering information about other organisations to compare against your own organisation and use that information to identify improvements in performance.

Core Competence Framework - the framework that sets out the core competences and personal behaviours expected of staff in grades from Administrative Assistant to Grade 6 (and analogous). It is designed to provide a foundation on which to build key corporate and Departmental HR processes such as recruitment, training & development, performance management and promotion.

Enabling technology - technology that allows someone to perform a task or to improve his or her overall performance.

Engagement techniques - ways of establishing meaningful contact or connection with others.

Heads of Profession network - a network made up of people appointed to the role of Head of Profession for one of the 24 professional groupings recognised within the NICS. The purpose of the network is to build capacity and capability across the NICS by providing a forum for Heads of Profession to engage with one another and also a mechanism for Corporate HR (DFP) and departmental HR Directors to engage with professions on common issues.

NICS WELL - the multi-level health and wellbeing programme for the NICS.

Redeployment - in the NICS, redeployment means the movement of staff in a surplus situation to other suitable posts within the same, or in some cases another, department.

Resourcing - in the NICS, resourcing means ensuring we have the right numbers of staff with the right skills and abilities to achieve our business objectives.

Skills audit - a process used to identify the skill gaps in an organisation. The outcome informs a training needs analysis that identifies where development and training is needed.

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Department of Finance & Personnel correspondence dated 08 August 2014

Assembly Section

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Mr Shane McAteer
Clerk
Committee for Finance and Personnel
Room 419
Parliament Buildings

Stormont Our Ref CFP/346/11-15

08 August 2014

Dear Shane,

DFP Performance Against PFG and Business Plan Targets

Your letter of 19 June refers.

Firstly, the Committee for Finance and Personnel requested an assessment of the extent of office space deemed either as inefficient or vacant across the Northern Ireland Civil Service estate.

A space utilisation target of 9-11m² per workstation has been set for all administrative buildings, both owned and leased. This compares with an average of c.18m² per workstation across the Benchmarked Office Estate (BMO). The target figure will be applied to all new or substantially refurbished buildings and is made up of the workstation area itself plus a proportion of the shared areas in the building e.g. circulation, storage, meeting rooms etc. Data from the 13/14 financial year is still being analysed. However, it would indicate c.60 of the 302 holdings which comprise the Benchmarked Office Estate would meet or exceed the 11m²/workstation target. This represents around 20% by area (NIA) indicating there is potential for considerable consolidation of the estate. Lease vacations represent a major opportunity to achieve consolidation and generate financial efficiencies. A series of individual projects are currently being developed under the Reform of Property Management Project to improve the efficiency of the office estate. These projects will require significant capital investment to procure new or enhance existing buildings to accommodate employees vacating leased premises. The new or refurbished accommodation will be open plan in nature replacing the existing highly cellular and inefficient office layouts. The projects will be taken forward as an invest to save initiative with an aim to achieve a payback in a period of between 5 -10 years. Given the changing nature of the office estate there will always be some vacant accommodation as organisations move in and out of buildings. As of 31st March 2014 there was c.15,500m² vacant throughout the BMO estate. This represents c.3% of the BMO estate. The equivalent rate in England is 2.5 % (2013).

Secondly, the Committee for Finance and Personnel requested an analysis of the results of the latest customer satisfaction survey against the previous year and arising action points.

The 2013 DFP Customer Feedback results set the baseline data on an agreed set of core questions, and it is therefore not possible to provide comparable results for the previous year.

By way of background, the last “corporate” DFP Customer Satisfaction Survey was undertaken in 2009 – this approach did not provide business areas with enough detailed feedback to enable exploration of improvements to the business and from 2010 it was decided that each DFP Directorate/ Agency would collect customer feedback in a manner and time that was appropriate to the service they provided.

However, in order to gain some level of consistency, we needed a mechanism to co-ordinate feedback, report on actions taken as a result and provide trend data on satisfaction levels – to this end, a cross-departmental working group, led by a senior official from the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA), considered current activity, existing good practice and a proposed approach in relation to gathering customer feedback data. Departmental Board endorsed the working group recommendations and from April 2012 it was agreed that:

- (i) Business areas would continue to tailor customer feedback exercises to meet business need with design(s) most appropriate to their business;
- (ii) All customer feedback exercises would include the agreed DFP core questions; and
- (iii) Annual feedback would be co-ordinated and discussed at Departmental Board, before publication on the DFP website.

It should be noted that not all business areas conducted a customer survey during 2013, however this has always been viewed as a convergent process and the expectation is that all business areas seek customer feedback in alternate years, as a minimum.

The 2013 customer feedback results indicate that around 90% of our customers are either satisfied or fairly satisfied with the overall service provided and the politeness, knowledge and professionalism of our staff. These results were discussed at Departmental Board in February 2014 and it was agreed that the Directors / Chief Executives of each business area should conduct detailed analysis at a local level (taking account of customer complaints data) and ensure that, going forward, any resulting actions are added to their respective Improvement Plans, which are monitored corporately for progress on a quarterly basis.

Finally, the Committee for Finance and Personnel requested copies of accreditation reports on Centres of Procurement Expertise (COPEs). I will write to you separately on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Gearóid Cassidy

Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer

Committee for Finance and Personnel

Gearóid Cassidy
DFP Assembly Section
Clare House
303 Airport Road West
Belfast BT3 9ED

19 June 2014

Dear Gearóid,

DFP Performance against PfG and Business Plan Targets

At its meeting on 18 June 2014, the Committee for Finance and Personnel was briefed by departmental officials on DFP's performance against Programme for Government (PfG) and business plan targets 2013-14.

In the course of the session DFP officials undertook to provide both an assessment of the extent of office space deemed either as inefficient or vacant across the Northern Ireland Civil Service estate and an analysis of the results of the latest customer satisfaction survey against the previous year and arising action points.

Officials also undertook to enquire into providing the Committee with copies of accreditation reports on Centres of Procurement Expertise (COPEs).

Given that the normal response deadline will fall after the Committee's last meeting before the summer recess, I would appreciate your response by the extended deadline of Thursday, 7 August 2014.

Yours sincerely,

Shane McAteer

Shane McAteer

Committee Clerk

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Northern Ireland
Assembly

Appendix 4

Written Submissions

Working Families response

Working Families written evidence to the Committee for Finance and Personnel Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland.

1 Summary

- 1.1 Working Families is the UK's leading work life balance campaigning charity. We run a free legal helpline for parents and carers who need advice about employment rights at work and about a fifth of our callers seek advice about flexible working. We also work with employers to benchmark best practice. We conduct research about the business benefits of flexible working and about the impact of work on family life. We run a network to support around 2,000 parents of disabled children who work or wish to work.
- 1.2 Our evidence is based on our understanding of the mutual benefits of flexible working for business, for families and for the wider economy and society. In particular, we have undertaken research about flexible working in the public sector which led to recommendations, now implemented, that all civil service jobs should be advertised on a flexible, part time or job share basis, unless there are sound business reasons why they cannot be.
- 1.3 We also provide evidence on the critical success factors, challenges, barriers and risks to introducing flexible working and make suggestions on how these may be managed and mitigated.

2 International case studies on flexible working benefits.

- 2.1 In Working Families' view, the business case for flexible working is well evidenced in the UK. Working Families' Chief Executive, Sarah Jackson, has chaired a Department for Work and Pensions working group to promote flexible working to private sector employees. Employer organisations, along with the TUC, CIPD and recruitment agencies have together agreed the business case (copy attached in Annex A). More recently, the UK's Business Department impact assessment in the Government's response to the Modern Workplaces Consultation identified monetised benefits from extending the right to request flexible working to all employees as follows: "Average annual benefit to employers from higher productivity (£36.8m), lower labour turnover (£8.4m) and reduced absenteeism (£1.4m)"¹.
- Over a ten year period, the extension of flexible working rights is predicted to produce a net benefit of £116.66m.
- 2.2 Working Families own research has demonstrated that there is a positive correlation between flexible working and individual performance² and that this was true both for the quantity and the quality of the work produced. The majority of employees also reported that flexible working had a positive effect in reducing and managing stress levels. A key lesson from that research – conducted with seven large organisations over a two year period – was that flexible working was seen as an appropriate method of working and culturally acceptable when it was available to all employees regardless of their personal circumstances. Greater cultural resistance was found in organisations where the actual take up of flexible working was dominated by certain types of employees, such as parents of young children. This finding has supported our call for the extension of the right to request flexible working to all employees; this is the best way to deliver workplace cultural change so that flexible working becomes an acceptable way of working, rather than a concession to particular groups.

1 Consultation on Modern Workplaces – Government Response on Flexible Working: Impact Assessment. BIS. November 2012

2 Flexible Working and Performance: Summary of Research. 2008 Working Families and Cranfield University School of Management

- 2.3 Working Families' annual "Top Employers for Working Families" benchmarking exercise and awards enables us to showcase examples of how flexible working arrangements have been implemented effectively. Organisations are beginning to measure the impact of flexible working arrangements. Some examples from our 2012 finalists in the "Best for Flexible Working Awards":

American Express' staff survey has enabled them to measure the success of their flexible work brand – the results are showing increased productivity and engagement, lower staff turnover and absenteeism. Savings have also been made through real estate optimisation and wellbeing has increased as staff have used flexibility to find a good work life balance.

Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust allows all employees the right to request flexible working, and have implemented a training programme to help staff make a request and enable managers to more confidently manage and decide requests. In their staff survey, the trust received the highest national score amongst all similar NHS Trusts as the employer who was best at helping staff balance their work and home life.

Northern Trust (a financial services company employing 1,400 across Europe, Middle East and Africa) believes that their flexible working culture "generally leads to better performance and more effective working and our staff appreciate and value that we trust them to get on with the job wherever they are located." With an average tenure of seven years, their culture is maintained as people advance.

- 2.4 Working Families research on flexible working in senior roles, both in the public and private sector, has demonstrated the range of jobs that can be worked on a less than full time 9-5 basis, but one size does not fit all³. Flexible working can be used as a tool for retaining women in senior roles as our work with law firms⁴ demonstrates. For example, offering home working and job sharing opportunities may be more suitable than part time work in transactional roles.

3 Options presented by new technology and workplace design to support flexible working practices, and approaches to monitoring and managing performance.

- 3.1 Working Families has evidence from our Top Employers Awards 2012 of innovative practice leading to new ways of working. For example:

Accenture, a global professional services company, has rolled out an innovative programme of video-conferences technologies to provide viable, alternative ways to hold face to face meetings. This has led to an increase in both meeting attendance and productivity, as well as demonstrable employee engagement feedback.

Citi, a large banking group employing over 8,500 people in the UK, leveraged the London 2012 Olympics as an opportunity to embed flexibility as a "must have" not a "nice to have" way of working throughout the organisation. They produced an online resource that allows teams to plan working patterns, invested in remote technology so that 96% of employees can now access systems remotely, provided drop in clinics to provide employees with assistance about the technology they needed for effective working and introduced "test days" before the Olympics during which workers were encouraged to take up "agile working" and allowed the organisation to test for any issues.

The Ministry of Justice (Government Department employing over 70,000 people) also piloted flexible working options in advance of the Olympics. For example, many staff adjusted their hours in the office, more homeworking was allowed and staff were encouraged to work from local courts nearer to their homes. Both staff and managers reported benefits in terms of work life balance and being more productive. An IT upgrade will enable more staff to access IT from

3 Hours to Suit Parts I and II: Flexible Working at Senior and Managerial Levels. Working Families 2007

4 Legal Lives: Retaining talent through a balanced culture. Working Families 2008

remote locations. Pool laptops are not just assigned to senior staff – it is clearly stipulated that they must be shared fairly so that the whole team may benefit from homeworking.

- 3.2 However, we are pleased that the inquiry is drawing attention to the issue of monitoring and managing performance in circumstances where staff may not be co-located with their managers, or where the hours of work may not match with expectations about high performance. There is some evidence that all hours of work are not equal, and that those who stay late in the office appear more “committed” than those who arrive early, but also leave early (for example, to collect children from childcare). Our research (Flexible Working and Performance) found a general belief among respondents that adopting flexible working practices could harm their careers and that visibility in the office was key to progression. This may help to explain the widespread use of informal flexible working arrangements as employees hesitate to formalise arrangements if they fear a negative impact on their careers.
- 3.3 It is vital, therefore, that employers who wish to embed flexible working cultures consider how they measure performance through a focus on outputs rather than hours worked. Our research on family life⁵ found that a long hours culture in the UK causes stress and resentment and a culture of “presenteeism” is particularly disadvantageous to women with childcare responsibilities.
- 3.4 Our benchmarking work with top employers has also identified a need to re-examine performance measurement as fewer flexible workers receive the top performance grades than other workers. Research by the Institute of Employment Studies⁶ has shown that employers give performance grades for a host of reasons, only one of which is actual performance and that, as a consequence, people with flexible patterns, women in senior grades, people with disabilities and people from minority ethnic groups all do worse in the performance management process.

4 Types of work and job roles in the Civil Service suited to flexible working practices

- 4.1 In 2009 Working Families carried out a survey of jobs advertised on the Civil Service Gateway and produced a report of our findings⁷. We examined recruitment practices through the prism of the public sector equality duty which includes a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity between men and women, including in recruitment policies. With around 40% of women working part time, we were interested in whether jobs were equally open to men and women. Our “secret shopper” exercise established what it was like for an individual wanting to apply for work on a part time or job share basis in the Civil Service. We examined 70 jobs advertised over a five day period and found 50 were advertised as full time only, only two were advertised as part time only and 18 were offered on a full time, part time or job share basis. A further analysis of the 50 full-time only jobs advertised revealed some willingness among departments to consider part time workers, but we were concerned that the way that the jobs were advertised may have dissuaded part time workers from applying.
- 4.2 Our research concluded that the Civil Service had a predominantly full-time hours culture for new recruits and that there was little evidence that departments had considered the business needs for posts before advertising. The jobs we considered ranged widely from administrative to managerial roles. We identified some good practice, but even those offering job-share roles were often vague about how it would work for an individual applicant. We concluded that the statutory gender equality duty had not translated into consistent recruitment practice for individuals applying for part time or job share roles in the Civil Service. This may reduce women’s chances of employment, and fail to maximise the employer’s chances of finding the best person for the job.

5 Time Health and the Family. Working Families 2012

6 Institute of Employment Studies “Equality in Performance Review” 2001

7 We need to talk about...hours: Job advertising in the Civil Service. Laura Dewar for Working Families 2009

- 4.3 We are extremely pleased that the issues we raised have been taken seriously by the Civil Service. In the response to the consultation on Modern Workplaces, the UK Government has an aspiration for the Civil Service to be an exemplar in flexible working. Changes to the e-recruitment system (CS Jobs) means that there is a default setting for Civil Service vacancies that states “This job/these jobs are available for full-time, part-time or flexible working arrangements” and “Departments that wish to deviate from this have to complete a robust business case”⁸. We recommend that this policy applies also for the Northern Ireland CS.

5 Success factors and challenges for flexible working

- 5.1 Working Families’ experience of promoting flexible working practices over several decades leads us to conclude that there are many factors which determine the success of flexible working practices, but the most important are understanding the business case, promoting a flexible working culture particularly through management training, and strong role models promoting consistent messages across the organisation.
- 5.2 Any flexible working pattern needs to fit with the business needs of the organisation. It is a strength of the statutory right to request flexible working that it requires a balance between employee asks and business requirements, so that an employer should only turn down a request for one of eight statutory business reasons. However, the business case should not be considered only at the point at which a request is made. It is our view that there should be a challenge to the full-time assumptions about how we work, and that all jobs should be considered as available to flexible ways of working, unless there is a sound business case why not. Many individuals cannot work full time, due to health issues or caring responsibilities, but their talents are wasted because too many of the part time jobs advertised are low paid, low quality jobs with little prospect of progression. Only by opening up all available jobs to flexible working patterns will employers be able to maximise their recruitment pools and UK will be able to use all the talent available. This requires improvements to job design and advertising: employers need carefully to explore each job’s outputs and consider whether it may be worked on a part time or job share basis, or what scope there is for working remotely, or flexitime. Working Families, working with the Private Sector Working Group to promote flexible working, has produced a strapline for advertisements “Happy to talk flexible working” which we hope to pilot with employers in 2013 to encourage both parties to consider the qualities required for the job and the necessary outputs, and then agree a way of working that suits both employer and employee.
- 5.3 Establishing and promoting a flexible working culture requires organisational commitment. Our research (Flexible Working and Performance) builds on a substantial evidence base that line managers act as barriers or enablers to successful flexible working. Research reveals that managers often lack confidence in dealing with requests for different patterns of work, and that they may need additional training in managing flexible workers both individually and in the team environment. The evidence on performance management of flexible workers (see paragraph 3.4 above) suggests that policies need to be reviewed in the context of all employees, so that employees who are less visible in the workplace do not miss out in terms of promotions or the allocation of projects. Policies may not specify visibility as a necessary criteria for success – but practice may be implicitly enforcing this. It is necessary to ensure that all policies support the flexible working culture.
- 5.4 Workplace culture change takes time. In 2006 we produced a road map for organisations to move from legislative compliance to having a culture where work life balance truly supports all employees⁹. The road map suggested that, once the business case for flexible working has been established and understood within an organisation, a board level “champion” needs to be found. A “champion” is needed who is passionately committed and positive about flexible working, who “walks the talk” by showing that at the top level performance is not

8 Modern Workplaces Consultation – Government Response on Flexible Working. BIS. November 2012.

9 Moving Mountains: the culture change challenge. Working Families 2006

negatively impacted by a different pattern of work, and who continues to stress and support the business case. High level, visible role models also need to be supplemented by a clear communication strategy that keeps work-life balance messages in the forefront of employees' minds, backed up by access to information and training.

Working Families

March 2013

Annex A

As agreed by the Promoting Flexible Working to Private Sector Employers Working Group.

Business case for flexible working

Flexible working benefits organisations as much as it does individuals. Employers who provide flexible working can gain from higher retention rates, an increased ability to recruit from a wider talent pool, and greater employee engagement and productivity.

While the evidence indicates direct benefits to employers flowing from the availability of flexible working, these are clearly optimised when flexible working is made available as part of a wider package of engagement approaches by which employers demonstrate the value they attach to employees and their well-being, as the MacLeod review, 'Engaging for Success'¹⁰, makes clear.

Higher retention leads to a reduction in costs

- 42 per cent of employers said flexible working practices had a positive effect on recruitment and retention (particularly of female staff), thus saving on recruitment, induction and training costs.¹¹
- A Confederation of British Industry survey found that 53 per cent of employers report that flexible working practices had a positive effect on recruitment and retention.¹²
- Eighty-six per cent of mothers with access to five or more family-friendly arrangements went back to work after childbearing, compared with 42 per cent of those with no such arrangements.¹³
- During a financial crisis, flexible working can also bring other advantages to organisations such as lower overhead costs and the possibility of decreasing staff hours rather than making redundancies.¹⁴

Increased ability to recruit from a wider talent pool

- 42 per cent of employers reported that flexible working had a positive effect on recruitment in their establishment.¹⁵ Nearly 40 per cent of existing employees said the availability of flexibility was important for them when initially deciding to work with their current employer.¹⁶
- A further report¹⁷ found that firms offering family friendly practices can attract better recruits.

-
- 10 MacLeod, D. and Clarke, N. (2009), 'Engaging for success: enhancing performance through employee engagement'. Report for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.
- 11 Hayward, B; Fong, B, and Thornton, A. (2007) 'The Third Work-Life Balance Employer Survey: Main Findings', BIS Employment Relations Research Series No 86; and Hooker, H., Neathey, F., Casebourne, J. and Munro, M. (2007) The Third Work Life Balance Employee Survey. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Research series No. 58.
- 12 Confederation of British Industry (CBI) (2010) Employment Trends Survey: Easing Up
- 13 La Valle, I.; Clery, E; and Huerta, M (2008) 'Maternity rights and mothers' employment decisions', DWP Research Report No 496.
- 14 House of commons all-party parliamentary small business group report.
- 15 Hayward, B; Fong, B, and Thornton, A. (2007) 'The Third Work-Life Balance Employer Survey: Main Findings', BIS Employment Relations Research Series No 86; and Hooker, H., Neathey, F., Casebourne, J. and Munro, M. (2007) The Third Work Life Balance Employee Survey. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Research series No. 58.
- 16 Hooker, H., Neathey, F., Casebourne, J. and Munro, M. (2007) The Third Work Life Balance Employee Survey. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Research series No. 58.
- 17 Holmes K., Ivins C., Y axley. D, Hansom J., Smeaton D, (2007) 'The Future of Work: Individuals and workplace transformation', Equal Opportunities Commission
-

- 'Generation Y' – people born after 1977- are much more likely to choose to work where there is flexibility. In a global survey of final year MBA students, 90 per cent cited work-life balance as a key factor in determining commitment to their employer.¹⁸

Greater employee engagement amongst staff; greater loyalty to the organisation

- 58 per cent of employers thought that the provision of work-life balance practices had a positive effect on employee relations.¹⁹
- Flexible workers (33 per cent) were significantly more likely than non-flexible workers (22 per cent) to be very satisfied with their current working arrangements.²⁰
- 89 per cent of employees thought that 'having more choice in working arrangements improves workplace morale'.²¹
- A British Chambers of Commerce survey²² of employers found that over 70 per cent of respondents noted some or significant improvement in employee relations as a result of offering flexible working arrangement compared with only 26 per cent who noted no improvement.
- A Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development survey²³ found that employees who are satisfied with their work-life balance and those on flexible contracts are more engaged with their work than those who are dissatisfied or not working flexibly. It found that those on flexible contracts tend to be more emotionally engaged, more satisfied with their work, more likely to speak positively about their organisation and less likely to quit than those not employed on flexible contracts.
- Employees who were using some form of flexible working were more committed to their employer and reported better psychological health.²⁴
- In a qualitative study of SMEs, employees of those organisations which offered flexible working valued their employers' approachability, and expressed appreciation of the fact that their employer would listen to their requests with an open mind and a flexible outlook. Employees said that flexibility made good business sense, promoted motivation and effort, and deserved a reciprocal response.²⁵

Increased productivity

- 57 per cent of employers reported positive effects on employee motivation and commitment at the establishment with the introduction of work-life balance practices, 41 per cent said this for productivity, and 38 per cent said the same of absenteeism.²⁶
- Research by Cranfield University School of Management and Working Families looking at the impact of flexible working arrangements in seven large private corporations found that

18 Coopers and Lybrand (1997) International Student Survey Report.

19 Hayward, B; Fong, B, and Thornton, A. (2007) 'The Third Work-Life Balance Employer Survey: Main Findings', BIS Employment Relations Research Series No 86; and Hooker, H., Neathey, F., Casebourne, J. and Munro, M. (2007) The Third Work Life Balance Employee Survey. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Research series No. 58.

20 Hooker, H., Neathey, F., Casebourne, J. and Munro, M. (2007) The Third Work Life Balance Employee Survey. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Research series No. 58.

21 Hooker, H., Neathey, F., Casebourne, J. and Munro, M. (2007) The Third Work Life Balance Employee Survey. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Research series No. 58.

22 British Chambers of Commerce (2007) Work and Life; How business is striking the right balance

23 Truss, C., Soane, E. and Edwards, C. (2006) Working life: employee attitudes and engagement. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development research report London.

24 Houston, D. and Waumsley, J (2003), 'Attitudes to flexible working and family life'. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

25 Dex, F and Scheibl, F (2002), Smaller organisations and flexible working arrangements. Joseph Rowntree Foundation/Policy Press.

26 Hayward, B; Fong, B, and Thornton, A. (2007) 'The Third Work-Life Balance Employer Survey: Main Findings', BIS Employment Relations Research Series No 86; and Hooker, H., Neathey, F., Casebourne, J. and Munro, M. (2007) The Third Work Life Balance Employee Survey. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Research series No. 58.

the majority of flexible workers, their co-workers and their managers reported that there was either a positive impact or no impact on individual performance. This was true for both the quantity and quality of work produced.²⁷

- Research from the British Chambers of Commerce found that 58 per cent of small to medium sized enterprises reported improvement in productivity (46 per cent some improvement, 12 per cent significant improvement).²⁸
- During any major disruptive incidents (eg fire, the loss of key utilities such as heating in offices, security alerts including terrorism), organisations with innovative ways of working have a better guarantee of ‘business as usual’, which would be denied to those reliant on a central office base. This ‘Disaster Recovery’ provision can be critically enhanced by a flexible working programme which allows employees to work from home, other buildings or customer premises, for example.²⁹
- Research into flexible work practices at SMEs found no evidence that there had been serious long-term additions to managers’ workloads where flexibility had been offered.³⁰

Tailoring hours to suit business demand leads to reduced costs

- The opportunity to tailor advertised roles to reduced hours when there is a business demand to do so was considered a key benefit of taking on staff part-time by 59 percent of small businesses in the Federation of Small Businesses Employment Survey (2009).³¹

27 Working Families and Cranfield University School of Management (2008) Flexible Working and Performance: summary of research.

28 British Chambers of Commerce (2007) Work and Life: How Business is striking the right balance.

29 EOC (2007) Enter the timelords: Transforming work to meet the future. Final report of the Equal Opportunities Commission investigation into the transformation of work.

30 Dex, F and Scheibl, F (2002), Smaller organisations and flexible working arrangements. Joseph Rowntree Foundation/Policy Press.

31 Federation of Small Businesses Employment Survey. (Over 3,000 FSB members; conducted in June 2009. The majority of respondents were micro businesses with 1 – 4 employees.)

Law Centre NI response

Thanks for the invitation to submit evidence in respect of the above issue. On this occasion we will not be submitting evidence as it does not fall within our remit.

Good luck with the work.

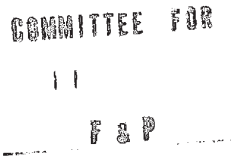
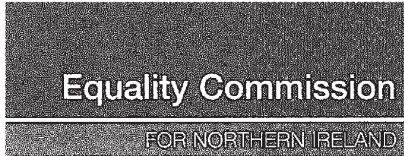
Best wishes

Les

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Equality Commission response



Equality House
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Belfast BT2 7DP

www.equalityni.org

Our ref: EJC/JS

10 April 2013

Shane McAteer
Committee Clerk
Assembly Committee for Finance
and Personnel
Room 419 Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
BELFAST BT4 3XX

Dear Shane

Re: Inquiry into Flexible Working

Thank you for your letter of 21 March 2013, received on 25 March 2013, reminding me of the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland which the Committee is undertaking.

I write to confirm that the Commission is not in a position currently to make a submission, but I would like to take this opportunity to wish you well with the Inquiry. I look forward to reading its findings and recommendations in due course.

Yours sincerely

Evelyn Collins CBE
Chief Executive

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✉ E mail: ecollins@equalityni.org

Chief Commissioner: Michael Wardlow



Chief Executive: Evelyn Collins CBE

NIPSA Briefing Paper

Briefing to the Committee of Finance and Personnel On its Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) represents approximately 45,700 public sector workers in Northern Ireland. This includes approximately 20,500 non industrial staff working in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and its sponsored bodies. NIPSA therefore welcomes the opportunity to present evidence to the Committee for Finance and Personnel on its Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland.

Much of the focus on evidence taken to date has centred on NICS arrangements, policies and procedures in relation to flexible working. This primarily relates to working arrangements and IT capacity. While some of the evidence given to the Committee also considers the possibility of greater joined up Government and how technological advances may facilitate centres covering both central and local government, this short briefing relates to the NICS mainly.

It is fair to say that NIPSA recognises the benefit and value of advancing technologies and how these can both enhance the working lives of its members and the services they provide to the community of Northern Ireland. NIPSA does not believe that such technological advances should be used to diminish the pay, terms and conditions of its members. Technology should therefore be utilised to effect efficiency gains by streamlining processes and providing greater access to government service for the public we serve.

The Committee may wish therefore to note a resolution adopted at the 2013 NIPSA Civil Service Group Annual Delegate Conference which stated:-

“Conference is concerned at the Assembly Committee for Finance and Personnel inquiry into Flexible Working. It is expected that the inquiry will lead to recommendations to inform the development of cross cutting strategic policies and procedures and implementation of new flexible

working arrangements across the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Conference is conscious of the fact that a number of options being considered are those which were resisted by Trade Union Side under the failed Workplace 2010 project. These include mobile working, hot-desking and possible system based monitoring and management of performance.

Conference calls on the Executive Committee to ensure that any attempt to introduce new flexible working arrangements do not result in poorer terms and conditions of service or diminished health and safety protections for members. While Conference recognises the benefits of modern technologies for members and the added flexibility this can offer, Executive Committee must ensure flexible working arrangements are only advanced and introduced where equality of opportunity and family friendly arrangements are protected and not based on the diminution of terms and conditions and/or a loss of posts and career advancement.”

There already exists within the NICS a number of policies and procedures that contribute to greater flexibilities such as flexible working hours, term time working, part-time and job sharing arrangements. Many of these are in place with NIPSA having pursued their introduction through negotiation and which are founded on family friendly principles. It is important therefore that any proposed extension to further flexibilities is capable of addressing business needs in the context of the equality agenda pursued by NIPSA and which seeks to address and maintain worklife balance.

One issue that was addressed, which following protracted negotiations resulted in a flexible working arrangement, was a homeworking policy. Despite the time and effort invested in these negotiations by both parties, NICS management failed to make the

policy operative, contrary to the principles of the NICS Whitley Constitution on agreements reached.

NIPSA has never received an explanation as to why the policy did not become operative. However we note that reasons were provided to the Committee in evidence presented by NICS Management on 13 February 2013. In addition we note the claim that homeworking operates on an ad-hoc/informal basis. NIPSA believes that this practice may well result in privilege by rank and that few junior grades have been able to avail of the ad hoc/informal facility. Having read the reasons presented to the Committee NIPSA believe it is not true to suggest a negative impact on business areas of the NICS, as homeworking would only be approved where it was effective and efficient to do so.

Another issue that appears to have been raised is the possibility of “personal for business use”, ie where staff may be expected to use their personal IT facilities. NIPSA would not advocate such an approach for a number of reasons such as data protection, system maintenance, accessibility and system security. These are all the responsibility of the employer ultimately and should not be transferred to individuals (beyond where individuals have statutory responsibilities). It could not be the case that an individual becomes personally responsible for the loss of data and data security etc in a way that increases the potential for disciplinary measures to be initiated.

One facility that has some potential is the use of centres (hubs) that can be utilised by staff while on official business away from their permanent station. Some

arrangements already exist where staff can connect to IT facilities rather than requiring them to return to their permanent work location. This has the benefit of increased time management, potential reduced travel costs and greater flexibility for the individual from a worklife balance perspective.

This is a brief paper in advance of meeting with the Committee on 4 December at which time NIPSA will be pleased to expand during discussion.

November 2013

Committee for Health, Social Services & Public Safety response

Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Room 410,
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From: Kathryn Bell
To: Shane McAteer, Clerk of the Committee for Finance & Personnel
Date: 18 February 2014
Subject: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland

At its meeting on 12 February 2014 the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety considered your correspondence regarding the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland.

The Committee agreed that it was content for you to contact the Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety directly for the information you require.

Kathryn Bell

Clerk
Committee for Health Social Services and
Public Safety

Committee for Employment & Learning response

Committee for Employment and Learning

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To: Shane McAteer, Clerk to the Committee for Finance and Personnel
From: Cathie White, Clerk to the Committee for Employment and Learning
Date: 27 February 2014
Subject: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland

Shane,

At its meeting on 26 February 2014 the Committee for Employment and Learning considered a response from the Department for Employment and Learning regarding the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland and agreed to forward it to the Committee for Finance and Personnel for information.

I should be grateful if you would bring this to the attention of your Committee.

Regards,

Committee Clerk

Enc.



Department for
**Employment
and Learning**

www.delni.gov.uk

Mrs Cathie White
Clerk to the Committee
Committee for Employment and Learning
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Our Ref: COR/055/14

20 February 2014

Dear Cathie

At the meeting on 5 February 2014 the Committee for Employment and Learning agreed to forward the correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel regarding its Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland to NICS Departments for comment.

The Committee has requested information on the extent to which flexible working practices are being applied, on any good practice cases, and on the number of employees who undertake all or part of their work from remote locations (i.e. away from the traditional office environment).

My Department fully supports work life balance and aims to offer flexibility to staff, taking into account business need. The Department has a large number (28.18%) of staff with alternative working patterns in place and has a larger proportion of both male and female staff working part-time in comparison to the wider NICS. The 2013 Equality Profile for DEL shows that 39.6% of female staff work part time in comparison to 30.7% in the rest of the NICS. A higher proportion of male staff (8.6%) also work part time in DEL in comparison to those in the rest of the NICS (5.6%).

Although there is no central Home/Remote Working Policy in operation across the NICS, Departments have discretion, on a case by case basis and subject to normal business considerations, to implement working from home on a temporary basis. DEL supports staff if they wish to work remotely in local offices on an ad hoc basis where there is capacity, to increase flexibility for those staff living in those locations. Due to the ad hoc nature of these arrangements, DEL does not formally record this information and I am therefore unable to provide the number of employees who avail of them.



people:skills:jobs:

In addition to accommodating alternative working patterns and remote/home working, DEL also aims to make best use of existing technologies to facilitate remote/flexible working and is keen to continue to exploit new technologies to further support more flexible working practices. There are a number of technological initiatives in place that staff can utilise to work more flexibly such as drop in zones, use of laptops, video conferencing and telephony.

As part of DEL's commitment to the new NICS smarter and more flexible ways of working under the Workplace NI and future@work initiatives, a drop in zone was created in Adelaide House. The zone, which has been equipped with three PCs, one docking station, and a printer, allows all NIGOV users to log in to their accounts.

Staff are currently able to request a laptop instead of a desktop PC and this can then be used in both the traditional office environment or remotely. DEL currently has 109 staff who can remotely access work using their laptop in this way. Video Conferencing is also available to staff to eliminate the need for unnecessary travel. DEL has 5 mobile video conferencing units and there are a number of static video conferencing units across the Northern Ireland Civil Service which may also be used by staff by appointment. It is also anticipated that desktop video conferencing will be rolled out to all DEL staff at Grade 7 level and above by May 2014. In terms of telephony, all DEL staff now use the Internet Protocol Telephony (IPT) system for voice telephony services. Using this system, staff can log into any phone anywhere in the network and use their own telephone extension. Some staff have also been provided with a mobile phone or Blackberry for use away from the office.

DEL is committed to supporting flexible working practices within the Department and will continue as a Department and in conjunction with the wider NICS to explore initiatives to further develop flexible working practices.

I trust the Committee find this helpful and I look forward to receiving the findings and recommendations from the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

FIONA STANLEY
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer

Committee for Education response

Committee for Education

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To: Shane McAteer
Clerk to the Committee for Finance and Personnel

From: Peter McCallion
Clerk to the Committee for Education

Date: 7 March 2014

Subject: Flexible Working Inquiry

Shane,

You wrote to all statutory committee clerks on 31 January 2014 seeking feedback on the uptake of flexible working in departments etc.

The Education Committee subsequently wrote to the Education and Library Boards; the Department of Education; and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools as requested. Some responses are appended.

As discussed, I am content for you to make all further contacts with DE and relevant Arms Length bodies in this regard in future and for the Committee for Education to be copied in to the relevant responses.

Thanks

Peter McCallion
Committee Clerk

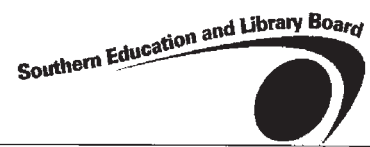
Enc.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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Mr P McCallion
Committee Clerk
Committee for Education
Room 241, Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
BELFAST BT4 3XX

6 March 2014

Dear Mr McCallion

Re: Flexible Working Inquiry

I refer to your letter of 14 February 2014 and apologise for the delay in responding.

The Board currently has a wide range of flexible working practices in place available to both teaching and non-teaching staff. The Board does not facilitate teleworking but staff can access emails remotely. Teleworking for school based staff would not be a practical option.

Please find enclosed a booklet detailing family friendly working schemes available to non-teaching staff.

Yours sincerely

Gavin Boyd
CHIEF EXECUTIVE (Interim)

Enc
/LMcC

Ref: SB/GW

5 March 2014

Mr P McCallion
Clerk
Committee for Education
Room 375, Parliament Buildings
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3XX



Chief Executive: Jim Clarke

Dear Peter

Re: CFP Flexible Working Inquiry

I refer to your correspondence dated 14 February 2014 to Mr Jim Clarke, Chief Executive, CCMS which has been forwarded to me for response.

In the first instance I can advise you that, similar to the NI Civil Service, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools does not have a formal policy on the flexible location of work in terms of technology and premises.

The Council however does have a Family Friendly Scheme, a Career Break Scheme, a Job Sharing Scheme and a Flexible Working Hours Scheme for CCMS officers.

Whilst no formal review of these policies has been undertaken, it would be the Council's view that they have been implemented successfully within the organisation and have had a positive impact on officer morale and commitment.

In addition to these formal procedures, the Council has also operated flexibility in relation to officers work locations. A number of officers have access to laptops which facilitate working from home arrangements when required.

The Council is currently reviewing its technology needs and it is intended as part of this review to purchase laptops with docking stations to further facilitate working arrangements.

In your correspondence you also make reference to the Flexible Working by Teachers Employed in Catholic Maintained Schools. As you are aware there are a wide range of policies relating to flexible working for teachers agreed through the Teachers Negotiations Machinery. CCMS officers advise school leaders and boards of governors in relation to the implementation of these policies however the Council does not have access to statistical information in relation to the numbers of teachers accessing such policies.

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1a Miller Street, Derry, BT48 6SU
Ph: 028 7126 1931
Fax: 028 7127 1368

Website: www.onlineccms.com

Ref: SB/GW
4 March 2014
Mr P McCallion
Page 2



Chief Executive: Jim Clarke

I hope the above information is of some assistance to you in responding to the Flexible Working Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Suzette Bracken
Head of Human Resources, Finance and Governance (Acting)

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**SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION
AND LIBRARY BOARD**

Chief Executive: Mr Gregory P Butler B Ed M Ed MPA

Peter McCallion
Committee Clerk
Committee for Education
Room 241
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

28 February 2014

Dear Mr McCullion

CFP Flexible Working Enquiry

With reference to your letter dated 14 February 2014 regarding the above.

Although the Board has previously explored flexible working in its broader sense, it does not have a formal policy on 'tele-working'.

In a similar manner to other Boards and Civil Service departments in general, the Board has a range of HR policies relating to , for example, alternative working patterns, flexi-time, and flexible retirement.

I hope this explanation is satisfactory.

Yours sincerely

Gregory P Butler
Chief Executive


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Useful Contacts

<p>Mr John Curran Education & Library Boards Management Side Secretary Tele: 028 3751 2381 Email: john.curran@selb.org</p>	<p>Mrs Alison Millar NIPSA Trade Union Side Secretary Tele: 028 9066 1831 Email: info@nipssa.org.uk</p>
<p>Mrs Lily Kerr UNISON Trade Union Side Secretary Tele: 028 9077 0813 Email: l.kerr@unison.co.uk</p>	<p>Mr B McCreight GMB Trade Union Side Secretary Tele: 028 9031 2111 Email: Billy.McCreight@gmb.org.uk</p>
<p>Ms Alison Gribben AT&GWU Trade Union Side Secretary Tele: 028 9023 2381 Email: agribben@tgwu.org.uk</p>	<p>Mr Robbie McGreevy BELB Human Resources Manager Tele: 028 9056 4000 Email: RobbieM@belb.co.uk</p>
<p>Mr Gerry Lavery NEELB Human Resources Manager Tele: 028 2565 3333 Email: Gerry.Lavery@neelb.org.uk</p>	<p>Mrs Mary Walker SEELB Human Resources Manager Tele: 028 8241 1411 Email: mary.walker@seelb.org.uk</p>
<p>Mr Patrick Keating SELB Human Resources Manager Tele: 028 3751 2200 Email: pat.keating@selb.org</p>	<p>Ms Helen Duffy WELB Human Resources Manager Tele: 028 8241 1411 Email: helen_duffy@welbni.org</p>
<p>Ms Deirdre Vaughn Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards Senior Principal Officer - Equality Tele: 028 9049 1461 Email: deirdre.vaughn@scelb.org.uk</p>	



GUIDE TO WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN THE EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARDS

February 2006

Managing Work-life Balance

The business benefits of alternative working patterns along with other work-life balance policies have been highlighted earlier in this booklet. The line manager is the first contact for staff wishing to change to an alternative pattern. As such, managers should actively consider ways in which the requested alternative pattern may be accommodated within their section and if it cannot, they should consider whether any other form or pattern of work would be practicable.

When managing and working with work-life balance policies it is important to take into account the following points:

- ♦ it benefits the organisation and individuals if people feel comfortable to approach you with their requests;
- ♦ people cannot always control their personal circumstances;
- ♦ all applications have to be considered fairly and in accordance with the agreed procedures;
- ♦ other people, some of whom live alone, can also have caring and other responsibilities, but everyone has a life outside work;
- ♦ if you cannot agree to a request, always consider what is preventing you from doing so;
- ♦ what are the line manager's and individual's responsibilities, within this request?
- ♦ consider how the person might feel in making such requests;
- ♦ ensure all requests are considered on an individual basis;
- ♦ Human Resource staff are there to **support** you in making a decision;
- ♦ your reasons for making the decision, whether it is favourable or not, need to be transparent and you will have to justify your decision to the applicant; and
- ♦ ensure that some requests are not treated more favourably than others.

Equally, staff should carefully compare their needs against the needs of the section and consider which pattern would be the most beneficial to both themselves and the section. In all cases where a member of staff proposes reducing their working hours or applying for extended unpaid special leave etc. they should seek advice from their Human Resource department on the consequential change to their salary and pension and other possible implications.

This guide can be made available, on request, in alternative formats including in large print, on computer disc, by email, in Braille, on audio-cassette and in minority languages to meet the needs of those people who are not fluent in English.

Designed by Suzanne Briggs
Staff Commission for Education & Library Boards

Produced by Reprographics Unit
Western Education & Library Board

Occupational Adoption Leave and Pay will entitle eligible employees to take paid leave when a child is newly placed for adoption by an adoption agency. Adoption Leave and Pay will be available to individuals who adopt, one member of a couple where a couple adopt jointly (the couple may choose which partner takes adoption leave). The provisions are similar to those granted under the maternity provisions.

Parental Leave - JNC Circular No. 120

Parental leave of 13 weeks (**unpaid**) is available to all employees who have or expect to have parental responsibilities. This entitlement is available to the biological parents; foster parents; adoptive parents prior to placement; grandparents with a significant parenting role; step-parents; and same sex partners.

The entitlement is extended to 18 weeks (**unpaid**) for employees who are receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for a child for whom they are responsible.

Parental Leave is available for the purposes of caring for a child:

- ♦ up to the age of 8; *or*
- ♦ in the case of adoption, for 8 years following placement for adoption or up to the age of 18, whichever is soonest; *or*
- ♦ up to the age of 18 for those employees who are receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for a child for whom they are responsible.

The terms and conditions under which parental leave may be taken are set out in Circular No. 120.

Home-based Working

An inter-board policy has been developed on Home-based Working. The policy includes an information pack which provides guidance to departments/sections to help them consider the possibility of this type of working within their functional area. Home-based Working pilot schemes are underway in the Southern and Western Boards. More information is available from your Human Resource section.

FOREWORD


The Joint Negotiating Council (JNC) is committed to the development of employment policies and procedures to ensure the promotion of equality of opportunity.

As part of its programme of work aimed at the promotion of equality of opportunity it conducted a major review of the work-life balance policies in existence across the five Education and Library Boards. The review found that, while flexible work patterns are being operated, awareness of the available options is not widespread. The JNC concluded that:

- ♦ the availability of work-life balance policies should be better publicised;
- ♦ a greater awareness was required amongst line managers of the benefits of such policies; and
- ♦ greater co-operation between management and the trade unions in the operation of such policies was required.

The JNC's work-life balance policies have been updated to reflect best practice. This booklet will hopefully give staff and managers a useful insight into the range of opportunities available to reach a better balance between work and outside life.

I hope you find it useful.



John Curran
Management Side Secretary
Education & Library Boards

Introduction

Achieving a balance between the demands of work and the demands of our non work-life is a challenge for most of us and presents real problems for many people. Getting the balance right between work and the other things in life, whether it is caring for children or elderly relatives, studying, working in the community or even just a chance to meet up with friends, can be difficult to achieve. Getting it wrong can lead to stress and unease. Finding and sustaining a balance between our work and other commitments is crucial to our well-being and there are solutions available.

Since the early 1990s the five Education and Library Boards have had in place job-share and part-time working arrangements. These policies were often referred to as 'Family Friendly' and tended to reinforce the perception that such policies are for working parents with young children. However, choice, control and flexibility in working conditions and personal fulfilment outside work are equally important to employees who are - *married, single, male, female, parents, carers, those without dependants, regardless of grade or age.*

What is Work-life Balance?

Work-life balance therefore involves seeking a balance between an individual's work and their life outside work. Helping employees to achieve a better balance between work and life is an important way of supporting business delivery and enhancing an individual's performance.

scheme depending upon service stipulation and declared intention to return to work. If an employee does not return to work for the three month period the board will be entitled to recover 12 weeks at half pay. For those employees not intending to return to work, Statutory Maternity Pay will be payable for the next 12 weeks.

Every pregnant employee has the right to paid time off to attend for ante natal care and must produce evidence of appointments if requested.

Maternity Leave - JNC Circular No. 118

In order to be granted paternity leave you must be the biological father of the child and/or be married to or the partner of the child's mother and expect to have responsibility for the upbringing of the child. You must be taking time off to support the child's mother or care for the child.

Staff who meet the above requirement, irrespective of service, are entitled to 1 weeks paid leave at full pay (maternity support leave¹).

Staff who have **26 weeks** continuous service by the end of the 15th week before the expected week of confinement are entitled to an additional weeks leave, paid at the current rate of Statutory Paternity Pay if they meet the qualifying requirements.

Leave for Adoptive Parents - JNC Circular No. 119

Provided that an employee has complied with the notification procedure he/she will be entitled to 26 weeks ordinary adoption leave. This may be paid or unpaid (depending on eligibility), followed immediately by up to 26 weeks additional unpaid adoption leave.

An employee may qualify for Occupational Adoption Pay and/or Statutory Adoption Pay. Employees in the boards enjoy an enhanced scheme depending upon service stipulation and declared intention to return to work.

If an employee does not return to work for a period of at least three months following adoption leave, the board will be entitled to recover 12 weeks at half pay.

¹ Staff other than the partner of the child's mother (e.g. father, sister, mother) may apply for maternity support leave (one week at normal pay) if the mother nominates them as carer in these circumstances.

Special Leave

Special Leave is not an automatic right in all circumstances and you can be asked to cover part of an absence, through other leave provisions if it is appropriate. There are two main categories of Special Leave:

- Entitlements e.g. Paternity Leave, Bereavement Leave; and
- Other discretionary leave e.g. Special Leave (with or without pay) dependant on the individuals circumstances.

Employment Act 2002

Under the Employment Act 2002 working parents who are employees have new and additional rights, intended to allow them to be able to spend more time with their young children. The new statutory measures in force in Northern Ireland since 6 April 2003 include:

- up to 26 weeks paid maternity leave and a further 26 weeks unpaid leave to expectant mothers;
- two weeks paid paternity leave for working fathers;
- adoption leave and pay, similar to maternity and paternity leave for parents adopting a child who is newly placed with them;
- facility for parents with children under the age of 6 or disabled children aged under 18 to request flexible working arrangements.

As a result of these legislative developments a substantial review of the existing Joint Negotiating Council circulars was undertaken. The following revised circulars have been issued.

Maternity Leave Provisions - JNC Circular No. 117

Provided that an employee has complied with the notification procedures she will be entitled to 26 weeks maternity leave. This may be paid or unpaid.

If an employee has at least 26 weeks continuous service at the end of the 15th week before the expected week of confinement they are entitled to a further 26 weeks additional unpaid maternity leave.

An employee may qualify for Occupational Maternity Pay and/or Statutory Maternity Pay. Employees in the Boards enjoy an enhanced

Work-life Strategies:

- view flexible working as something to benefit both the organisation and the employee;
- place **joint** rights and responsibility on employees and managers to find workable solutions;
- embrace the needs of people at different stages of the lifecycle;
- recognise the diversity in the workplace;
- respect equality of opportunity of all; and
- emphasise the business **and** social benefits to be gained.

Work-life balance is about looking at:

- how much time people work;
- when they work;
- where they work;
- breaks from/in work;
- choice and security in work; and
- balance in the relationship between working time and time outside work.

Work-life balance can help achieve:

- better customer service;
- improved productivity and performance;
- less stress, absenteeism and illness;
- improved return on investment in training;
- better staff morale;
- improved recruitment and retention;
- increased innovation and creativity;
- a more diverse workforce; and
- greater equality of opportunity.

This booklet seeks to draw together the wide variety of ways in which staff may, while remaining in employment, reach a better balance between work and outside life. It is therefore a document aimed at ensuring both managers and staff are aware of the opportunities available; can make better informed decisions; and have realistic expectations about what is and is not possible. It is, however, only an overview and much more detailed information on Joint Negotiating Council Circulars and other associated policies etc. is available from the board's Human Resource section.

Job Sharing Scheme

Job Sharing is a particular form of part time working where two people agree to divide the duties of the full-time post between them. The manager gets the benefit of full cover for a post, while the individuals are able to work together to share the hours for the post. The full-time salary and accompanying terms and conditions of service are divided proportionately between the job-sharers. Staff who are job sharing will be provided with the same opportunities for training as full-time staff.

Alternative Working Patterns

Most people's idea of an alternative working pattern is someone who works part-time i.e., only mornings or perhaps job shares with a partner to cover a full-time post. However, it is much more than that.

For example, term-time is a flexible working arrangement which allows part-time and full-time staff to take unpaid leave, normally during the school holidays. The salary and accompanying conditions are abated to reflect the reduction in working hours smoothed out over the year and paid in twelve monthly payments.

An alternative working pattern is open to all employees subject to the operational needs of the board. It is important, however, that the proposed working pattern will meet the business needs of the board/

section and practicalities such as opening hours of the building, opening hours to the public etc. are taken into account. Under these arrangements an agreement to amend the working pattern will result in a permanent change to the contract of employment.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended, it is a requirement to make reasonable adjustments for employees who have a disability. This includes changing working hours where they are a substantial disadvantage to the person with a disability.

Flexible Working Hours (Flexitime)

Flexible Working Hours (FWH) provides a flexible system of attendance for staff. The number of hours which people work on FWH is the same overall as those worked under fixed times. There is scope however for individuals to vary their times of arrival and departure from work, to vary the length and timing of their lunch break and to take time off if they work extra hours. This flexibility should be achieved without adverse effect on the overall efficiency of departments or on an individual's service to the public.

The same opportunity is now provided to staff who work agreed alternative patterns to agree individual flexi hours, where practicable.

Leave Provisions

In addition to whatever working pattern you follow, another way in which you can further enhance your work-life balance is through leave, both annual leave and, where appropriate, special leave.

- Staff who work full-time receive 12 days public/statutory holidays per year.
- Staff who work an alternative work pattern receive a proportion of the full-time equivalent.

Annual Leave

Every member of staff has an annual leave allowance. Annual leave is intended to give staff time off for relaxation and leisure. It is in the interests of everyone that staff should have periods of rest and recuperation and you should use your full entitlement within each year.

Committee for Agriculture & Rural Development response

Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

Room 244
Parliament Buildings

Tel: +44 (0) 28 905 21475

From: Stella McArdle,
To: Shane McAteer, Clerk to the Committee for Finance and Personnel
Date: 12 March 2014
Subject: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland

1. At its meeting on 11 March 2014, the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development considered correspondence from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in relation to the Committee for Finance and Personnel's Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland.
2. The Committee agreed to forward the following extract to your Committee for information.

Correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel on its inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland.

DARD is a Department with a high number of office based staff coupled with staff who spend a varying degree of their working week between the office and out in the field on a range of inspection / testing duties. As a Department we currently make use of the existing flexible working arrangements such as part time working, term time etc and, in recognition of the nature of the work and associated business needs, the Department has also introduced flexible working practices through the flexible location of work, making effective use of the DARD estate.

The Department provides touchdown areas in a number of buildings across Northern Ireland for use by staff who have a business need to be in a location other than their permanent workstation. A touchdown area is a space in a building which offers office facilities for short term working.

The availability of these areas allow an officer who is attending a meeting or event in a particular location for part of the working day to complete the remainder of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development day in that location in instances in which it would not be economical or practical to return to the permanent workstation.

The DARD Direct offices have been designed to offer such facilities in Enniskillen, Dungannon, Omagh, Magherafelt, Coleraine, Newtownards, Ballymena, Mallusk, Newry, Armagh and Downpatrick. The offices each have touchdown areas to accommodate 3 staff, with the exception of Dungannon and Downpatrick each of which has facilities for 1 member of staff. In addition, there are facilities available in Orchard House, Londonderry, in the CAFRE campuses and in Dundonald House headquarters.

The use of touchdown areas requires agreement between the member of staff, his/her line management and the Premises Officer responsible for the specific building.

Department of Finance and Personnel future@work drop-in Business Zones are also open to DARD. Three are based in the greater Belfast area with one in Marlborough House, Craigavon. These facilities are for staff who travel as part of their business requirements and similar

to the facilities DARD offers, can be used to negate unnecessary travel to a permanent workstation when an officer is in the locality for business reasons.

This pro-active approach in relation to flexible location of work aligns with the Department's Estate Management Framework which seeks to maximise the use of the estate, contribute to a reduction of building and maintenance costs plus consideration of facilitating a flexible working approach.

Looking ahead, successfully implementing flexible working arrangements also dovetails with our response to the PFG target to advance the relocation of DARD HQ to a rural location. As part of our considerations of the relocation, the Department plans to assess the extent to which flexible arrangements including remote working can be introduced to ensure maximum benefit and efficiency of the workforce. This includes giving the workforce the skills and tools to be able to work effectively in different places, at different times.

This approach is aimed not only at providing flexibility for the workforce but also, through the use of modern and emerging information practices supported by technology, providing opportunities to transform the way business is conducted using technology that best suits the job and at a time that best suits our customers and stakeholders.

DARD acknowledges that the key objectives of the proposed research are comprehensive and the department is keen to contribute to the initiative and to

avail of the learning and knowledge gained. We welcome the intention to use these findings and recommendations to inform the development of cross-cutting strategic policies and procedures for maximising flexible working arrangements across the NICS, particularly if it leads to accelerated adoption of the approach.

Stella McArdle

Clerk, Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

Committee for Culture, Arts & Leisure response

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

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You can now follow us on Twitter: @NIACALCommittee

From: Peter Hall, Clerk to the CAL Committee
Date: 13 March 2014
To: Shane McAteer, Clerk to the F&P Committee
Subject: DCAL response to Flexible Working inquiry

Shane

At the meeting on 13 March 2014 the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure considered the response from the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure to the Committee for Finance & Personnel's inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector.

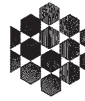
Members of the Committee agreed that I forward this response to you for the attention of the Members of your Committee.

Regards,

Peter Hall

Clerk to the Committee

Enc.



Department of
**Culture, Arts
and Leisure**

www.dcalni.gov.uk

AN ROINN
**Cultúir, Ealaíon
agus Fóillíochta**

MÁNNYSTRE O
**Fowkgates, Airts
an Aisédom**

Our ref: **COR/35/14**
Your ref: **C02 /14**

5 March 2013

Mr Peter Hall
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Committee for Culture Arts & Leisure ,
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Peter,

RE; COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL INQUIRY INTO FLEXIBLE WORKING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR.

I refer to your letter of 10 February 2014. The information you have requested is set out in the attached Annex and covers DCAL and responses from its ALBs. It is structured around the key information requested by the DFP Committee i.e.

- (a) the extent to which flexible working practices are being applied;
- (b) any good practice cases; and
- (c) the number of employees who undertake all or part of their work from remote locations (i.e. away from the traditional office environment).

Pat Wilson
DCAL Assembly Liaison Officer

Enc



A confident, creative, informed and healthy society

DCAL

Extent of flexible working practices

In common with all NICS departments, staff in DCAL have access to opportunities for alternative working patterns including flexi time, part time, term time, partial retirement etc. Currently we have 52 (17%) staff working alternative working patterns.

In accommodating these alternative working patterns much will depend on the nature of the work, particularly in relation to the extent of direct service to the public such as in PRONI. The size of the branch and the grade of the member of staff are also taken into consideration. Flexible working is available for staff at all grades but a greater number of those staff on alternative working patterns (e.g. part time , term time) are in Executive Officer 1(E01) , Executive Officer (E02) Officer ,Administrative Officer (AO), and Administrative Assistant (AA) grades. Monitoring and managing performance is addressed through regular review by managers and NICS staff appraisal processes. Ensuring sufficient staff are available in the office at any given time needs to be carefully managed.

Good Practice Cases

DCAL's Fisheries Protection Officers are a good example of flexible working patterns. Based across 6 different offices throughout the North, they work any 42 hours within the working week as agreed with their line managers. As they are primarily field officers most of their work is outside of the normal working environment and outside normal office hours. Health and Safety is a major factor to be considered and DCAL has provided a Lone Worker Safety and Employee Management System enabled through the lone worker's mobile phone that is activated should the lone worker be encountering higher than normal risk activity.

This means that we make the best use of the officers to meet DCAL business needs as much illegal activity will take place outside of the normal 9 to 5 working day. Staff at the other fishery offices also operate to suit business needs, and whilst many are based at office locations, they also carry out a lot of work outside the office and operate outside of the normal 9-5 hours.

Work from remote locations (i.e. away from the traditional office environment).

Alternative work locations are limited. Apart from the department's satellite locations (the fisheries stations and PRONI) DCAL has a teleworking scheme which enables DCAL staff to work from an alternative government office. 5 staff currently make use of this scheme.

We provide opportunities for working from home although this is limited and on an ad hoc local arrangement agreed between line managers and their staff. Currently there are 28 staff who have an encrypted lap top and can connect via Home or NICS broadband onto the NICS Network and work remotely from their home. HR do not monitor the frequency of use of this facility but estimate that approximately 10 staff work at least one day per week from their home rather than come to the office. Some of these arrangements are provided as reasonable adjustments under the Disability Discrimination legislation to manage long term health conditions.

Working from home if done on several days per week presents challenges to both the business and the individual as it can reduce opportunities for engagement with staff, opportunities to working collaboratively as part of a team and can hinder communication generally.

Libraries NI

1. The extent to which flexible locations of work are currently available within their business (such as remote working from Home, teleworking from different offices)

The vast majority of Libraries NI staff are frontline staff delivering services directly to the public in 98 libraries across the region; for these staff there is no flexibility for remote working or teleworking. However, flexible locations of work are available for middle or senior manager positions or for back office/corporate work.

Libraries NI have a matrix structure operating across different locations, all with network access. For the most part all libraries have been grouped into business areas and districts, co-terminus with the proposed new council boundaries. To take account of the matrix structure, the changing demands on delivery and efficiencies of services, some staff employed in key service priority roles and managers with area and/or operational responsibilities are required to work flexibly between locations and are facilitated to do so by the pervasive network access. In addition, some higher grade manager posts have the facility to work from home. Homeworking opportunities are linked to laptops being assigned and VPN access. Currently VPN Client access is available to approximately 40 people.

2. Any good practice cases

In order to support business needs within the matrix structure, some key service priority teams work from different offices/branches to cover the entire region.

3. The number of employees who undertake all or part of their work from remote locations (i.e. away from the traditional office environment)

No employees undertake all of their work from remote locations. The majority of middle/senior managers undertake part of their work away from their base location. Some staff, due to the nature of their work will undertake part of their work in locations other than their base location. This will be subject to business needs e.g. events, delivery of programmes etc.

4. Options presented by new technology and workplace design to support flexible working practices, Up to date technology facilitates and supports flexible working practices.

All locations are covered by a secure network, email and web access, telephone and video conferencing, smart phone (email access) and hot-desking are all available and the approaches to monitoring and managing performance in such circumstances.

Work is monitored through output and outcome measures, not input measures. Monitoring and managing performance is addressed through regular review with managers and staff appraisal. Targets are monitored on a regular basis through regular meetings with managers and progress is reported formally on a quarterly basis.

The nature of many work activities across frontline services does not lend itself to specific start and end time periods.

5. The critical success factors, challenges, barriers and risks to introducing flexible working and how these can be managed and mitigated as appropriate.

The critical success factor is the Digital environment / infrastructure - investment in tools and technologies that support people to work remotely, assume responsibility for fulfilling their role, and needs to be clearly defined to gain experiences and build capacity. The Communication strategy is key to ensure staff at all levels receive and understand the appropriate messages. Challenges include the impact on already constrained resources and the pressure on relationships.

It is useful to define competencies and motivational profile required to undertake remote working. It provides opportunities to gain critical development experiences. Other challenges

can be mitigated by consideration of opportunities for training, coaching / mentoring strategies.

Armagh Observatory

1. **The extent to which flexible locations of work are currently available within Armagh Observatory (such as remote working from Home, teleworking from different offices)**

Flexible working locations are available to staff within Armagh Observatory. The IT infrastructure enables staff to access emails via the internet when they are off-site. This typically occurs when observing overseas or travelling for work purposes.

2. **Any good practice cases**

The use of video-conferencing and tele-conferencing to facilitate meetings involving representatives from various locations.

3. **The number of employees who undertake all or part of their work from remote locations (i.e. away from the traditional office environment)**

Available to approximately 25 staff on an occasional basis.

4. **The range of options presented by new technology and workplace design to support flexible working practices, such as mobile working, teleworking, remote conferencing, hot-desking and satellite offices, and the approaches to monitoring and managing performance in such circumstances.**

Technology has assisted in widening the availability of flexible working arrangements. However the benefits of working from a traditional office environment should not be overlooked e.g. regular communication between colleagues, increased accessibility, increased engagement.

5. **The types of work or job roles within the ALB which are suited to flexible working locations Astronomers, PhD students, Director, Computer Systems Manager, Operations Manager may be suited to occasional use of flexible working locations.**

6. **Critical success factors, challenges, barriers and risks to introducing flexible working and how these can be managed and mitigated as appropriate.**

Critical Success Factors:

- Carefully managed policy and procedures
- Trust

Challenges:

- Ensuring sufficient staff are available in the office at any given time
- Ability to manage flexible working locations
- Performance monitoring

Barriers:

- Not available to all staff – could be seen an inequality
- Reduced engagement with staff working remotely

Risks:

- Reduced productivity – although research demonstrates this is often not the case
- Reduced collaborative working

Reduced communication throughout the organisation

NIMC

NIMC maintains remote working links for two key staff in order that business may be undertaken when it is not possible to attend the office. Currently this is a risk mitigation matter rather than for flexible working. NIMC is also considering remote links to assist staff access office information when they are undertaking visits to museums.

National Museums

National Museums does not operate a formal policy however it can accommodate adhoc requests to work from home as and when required. The nature of our work is such that it is focused on the main museum sites (including stores) and therefore the greater imperative is for staff to be available to the public.

Sport NI

Currently Sport NI has a Flexible Working Policy which is aligned to the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Staff members have the right to make a Flexible Working application in terms of their working days, hours and work patterns.

Sport NI has two main locations House of Sport, Belfast and Tollymore National Outdoor Centre (TNOC) in Newcastle. Generally, members of staff are situated in either of the two locations. However, there are times when staff will move to either location for the purpose of meetings, training, site visits etc. Both sites are set up so that staff can work seamlessly from their laptops and access the internal network. At times video conferencing or calls will be arranged if appropriate to minimise travel.

For those staff at management level and above, there is the option to work from home if necessary. However, this is ad hoc and determined by current business needs and requirements. Any staff that would request a day to work from home would need to have prior authorisation from their line manager and this would be on an 'ad hoc' basis. The purpose of this would be to focus on business critical work or to ensure full concentration and completion of a task or project. This can be successful if managed effectively and it remains on an 'ad hoc' basis. The nature of the work that the organisation fulfils requires integration within the organisations people, systems and stakeholders so it is not a practice that is widely used very often.

Arts Council

ACNI have only one location (Belfast office where all staff are based) and no working from home policy.

NI Screen

Within its Work-Life policy, NI Screen has a range of Flexible Working Arrangements in place to enable its employees to balance their home and work commitments. These are:

- Career Break
- Part-time Working
- Carer's Leave
- Parental Leave
- Adoption Leave

- Working from Home

NI Screen's Work-Life Policy currently enables all eligible staff to apply for a flexible working option and the organisation has a statutory duty to consider all requests made by eligible employees in accordance with the legislation. Eligible employees may request the following:

- A change to the hours they work
- A change to the times when they are required to work
- To work from home

Most jobs in NI Screen are not suitable to be carried out on a permanent basis from flexible locations as they involve collaboration between colleagues and communication with the industry. Staff on occasion undertake their work from remote locations depending on circumstances, and we currently do not have any employees who do this on a regular basis. The improvements in technology, in particular advances in smart phones and tablet computing have made it easier for NI Screen's staff to engage with work either from home or from remote locations when needed.

All senior staff have access to work emails at all times (some through work mobiles and some through personal mobiles), and will respond to emails when working at events and meetings away from the office.

The development executive role requires scripts to be read and at times this will be done from home and can be accessed through electronic means.

Foras na Gaeilge

Foras na Gaeilge offers a level of flexibility in terms of work practices, including flexi-time and part-time and term-time working patterns where feasible.

The facility is available to all staff to work in other offices. Working from home is agreed on an individual basis for certain projects

There are five offices in total on the island of Ireland. All but one of the offices has Video Conferencing facilities and this is used for meetings, up to Board Sub-Committee level, to reduce the need for inter-office travel.

All senior managers have been furnished with 3G Mobile devices with phone/e-mail access and secure remote access to files.

The dictionary editor regularly works away from his office in Gaoth Dobhair (Gweedore). The CEO, Deputy CEO and the Director of lexicography regularly work away from their main office as do some of the managers.

Foras na Gaeilge has always been mindful of the strategic challenges - and opportunities - of working across multiple office sites and thus when it was directed by the North/South Ministerial Council to open its Office in Gaoth Dobhair (which it did in 2010) particular attention was devoted at the planning stage to the requisite management structure for such an office and to the roles which would be most suitable for such an office, thus the office's emphasis on dictionary and editorial work, for example, much of which is conducted in discrete parcels which lend themselves to easier performance management.

Ulster Scots Agency

The Ulster Scots Agency has two offices, connected via a Virtual Private Network so they are working together in real time.

The Agency employs two Development Officers and two Education Officers. All four are mobile and have been furnished with laptops to enable them to work offline. When these officers return to the office they can synchronise their laptops to update files and documents.

Senior Managers have remote access to the system, and mobile devices that enable them to work outside of the office environment.

Seven staff have been issued with mobile phones that also allow them to send and receive e-mails.

The Agency does not have any staff working from home or from alternative locations at present, apart from the Development and Education Officers. They use technology to enable key staff to keep in touch while out of the office travelling to/from and attending meetings.

Waterways Ireland.

Waterways Ireland offer flexi-time, part-time working and term-time working.

The majority of Waterways Ireland (WI) staff are employed as a direct manual labour force, and many of the facilities covered in this query could not apply to them.

Waterways Ireland has multiple sites all over Ireland. This means that many employees, particularly Managers, are required to travel to other locations. These staff have been provided with Blackberry devices to allow them to access and send e-mails wherever they are located.

Employees can use the remote access facility to access the WI system from other Waterways Ireland offices. Many offices have facilities for visiting staff such as spare desks and PCs or a desk/room where a laptop can be used.

Teleconferencing is available at all WI key sites and employees who do not have the facility at their normal location are invited to the nearest WI location with the facility, to take part in teleconferences with colleagues from other areas.

Employees working remotely are in constant communication with colleagues and managers working on team tasks and objectives, allowing performance to be monitored and measured even when they work away from their normal base. Effective communication and training, particularly for line managers is vital for controlling the workflow and for managing performance.

Waterways Ireland has three employees who each work from home one day a week. The three work in the Professional Technical and Administrative cohort and have remote access to the Waterways Ireland IT system and the use of a mobile phone for work purposes.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

Pat Wilson
DALO
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Causeway Exchange
1-7 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7EG

Our Ref.: C02/14

10 February 2014

Dear Pat,

Committee for Finance and Personnel Inquiry

At the meeting on 6th February 2014, the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure considered correspondence received from the Committee for Finance and Personnel regarding their inquiry entitled Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland.

Members agreed that I forward this to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure for consideration. Also, that it is circulated to the Department's Arm's Length Bodies for their response.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Peter Hall
Clerk
Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

Enc.

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure
Room 344, Parliament Buildings, Ballymiscaw, Stormont, Belfast BT4 3XX
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Department for Rural Development response

Central Management Branch

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Facsimile: (028 905) 40064
Email: alan.doherty@drdni.gov.uk

Your reference: DALO 24C/3/2014
Our reference:

Shane McAteer
Clerk to the Committee for Finance & Personnel
Committee Office
Room 419
Parliament Buildings
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

19 March 2014

Dear Shane

Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland

The Clerk to the Committee for Regional Development has asked me to respond directly to your memo of 31 January 2014 seeking the views of Statutory Committees on the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland.

I have consulted Departmental officials, who have made the following points:

The Department currently has some 2,299 staff, the majority of whom enjoy Flexible Working arrangements. Of these, 279 avail of formal alternative working patterns. Applications for alternative working patterns are considered in line with statutory guidelines and NICS policies and DRD strives to support alternative working patterns where there business opportunities to do so.

The Department also operates and runs a successful Teleworking programme, which has been in place since 2007. This involves remote office stations secured at five sites across Northern Ireland. They are at Omagh, Londonderry, Portadown, Newry and Seaforde. Currently the programme is fully subscribed with 45 Departmental staff making use of these arrangements. This facility allows staff the flexibility to conduct their duties at a location which is much more convenient than their normal office.

The Department has conducted a review of this arrangement, with the overwhelming response from those using the facility confirming that it contributed positively to their work-life balance and reduced the potential for stress caused by longer journeys into work.

There is a wide range of alternative working patterns available under NICS Work-Life balance provisions. These include flexitime, compressed working hours, part-time working, job-sharing, personalised hours, term-time working, home working and partial retirement. Although there is currently no formal home working policy in place in DRD, some ad hoc arrangements do exist.

I hope that the above points are of assistance. I have copied this response to the Clerk to the Committee for Regional Development.

This letter is fully disclosable under FOI.

Yours sincerely

Alan Doherty

Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer

Salford City Council Presentation Slides

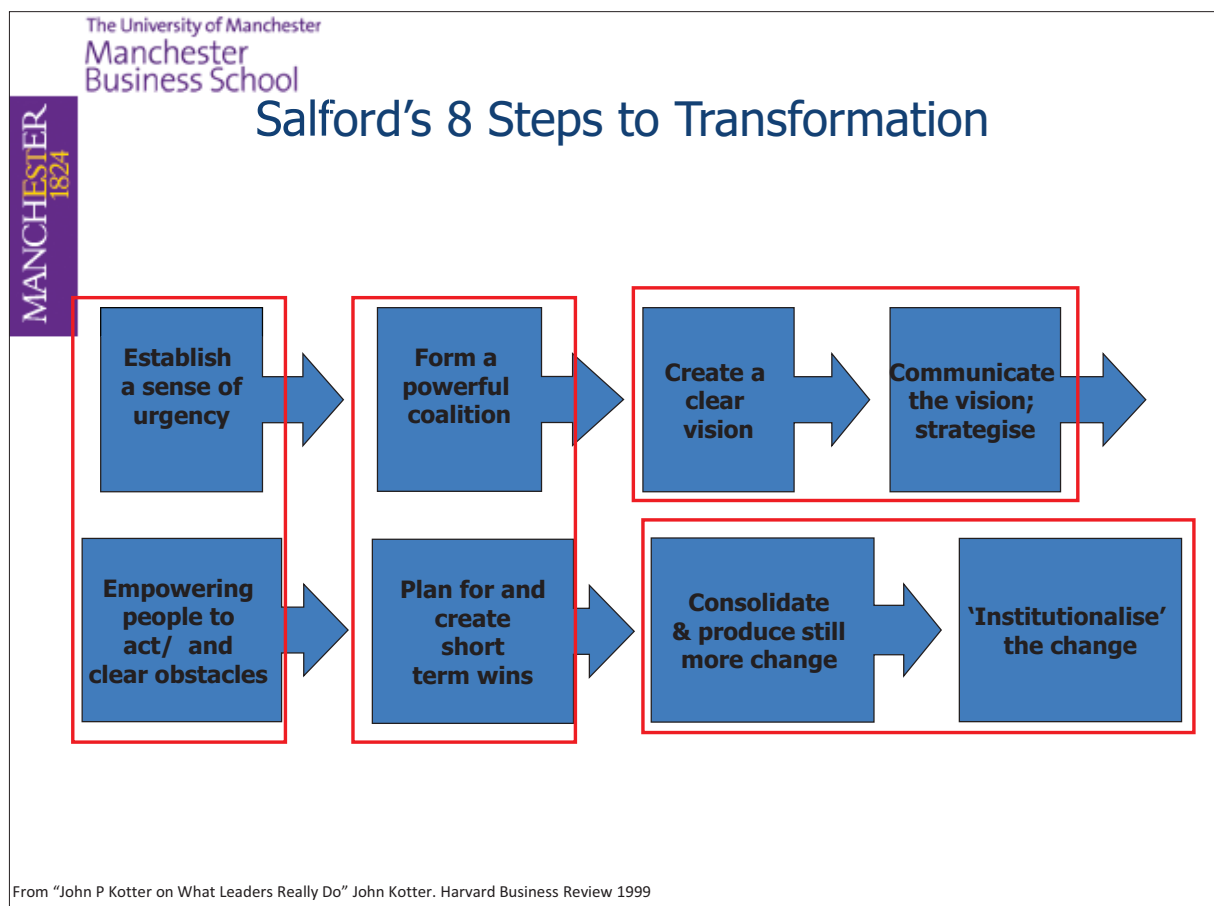
To identify lessons from international case studies on how flexible working arrangements have been implemented effectively elsewhere to achieve benefits for employers, employees and potentially for the wider economy and society, including: increased productivity; improved staff morale and commitment; reduced staff turnover and absenteeism; wider recruitment talent pools; reduced levels of economic inactivity; reduced premises costs; promotion of gender equality in employment; and environmental benefits.

3 perspectives

1. The lens of change management
2. The workstyles approach
3. The property management perspective

Change Management

- Flexible working as a vehicle for changing the organisation.



Establish a sense of urgency

- Opportunistic closure of 2nd largest office building 2010/11 (£650k p.a. running costs)
- CSR - High savings target
- Opportunity to reduce loss of jobs

Empowering people to act / and clear obstacles

- Looking for “early adopters” – who do we know is up for it?
- Boosting the local manager
- Empowering people to innovate

Form a powerful coalition

Urgency creates a challenge to leadership

- Senior member and officer buy-in
- Programme drive (integrate into existing change programmes)
- Co-ordinating the Enablers (HR, Property, ICT)

Plan for and create short term wins

- Getting “proof of concept”
E.g. agile pilots (audit team, HR service, environmental protection)

Be prepared to invest large resources for small gains

Being flexible – encouraging self-help and bottom-up

Create a clear vision

A vision of capacity to transform and expectation of transformation.

An understanding of the systemic nature of the journey already embarked on.

Communicate the vision; strategise

- Build the strategy from demonstrable achievement - aligned with the vision
- Extrapolate from the known to the ambitious
- Get some simple “standards” into the cultural artefacts of the organisation (e.g. 8:10 workstation ratio, 1 linear metre storage per person)

Consolidate and produce still more change

- Spread the technology fast – Enterprise 2, agile communication (OCS/Lync and VOIP).
- Modern workspaces – show them off.
- Keep up the pace
 - Moderate target = 60 % of office staff to move location @ 8:10 ratio = further 34% reduction in office space. (2011/12)
 - Back office consolidation in core sites.
 - Shared front office: where the customer is. Community budgets, life chances etc.





'Institutionalise' the change

- Delivering the benefits
 - Quantitative
 - Qualitative
- Establishing new cultural norms
- Does it meet the new “urgency”?

Workstyles

- Flexible working as a manifestation of global change in how people work – technical response to environmental factors.

Work Styles

	WORK STYLE	DEFINITION
	HOME WORKER	Based at home, spending most of the week away from council buildings
	FIXED WORKER	Based at a fixed location for most of the time
	MOBILE WORKER	Works significantly in the community or in many council or partner locations. Can work from home
	AGILE WORKER	Can operate from any location. Use ICT to allow full remote functionality without the need to go to council buildings or partner locations

The Technical response

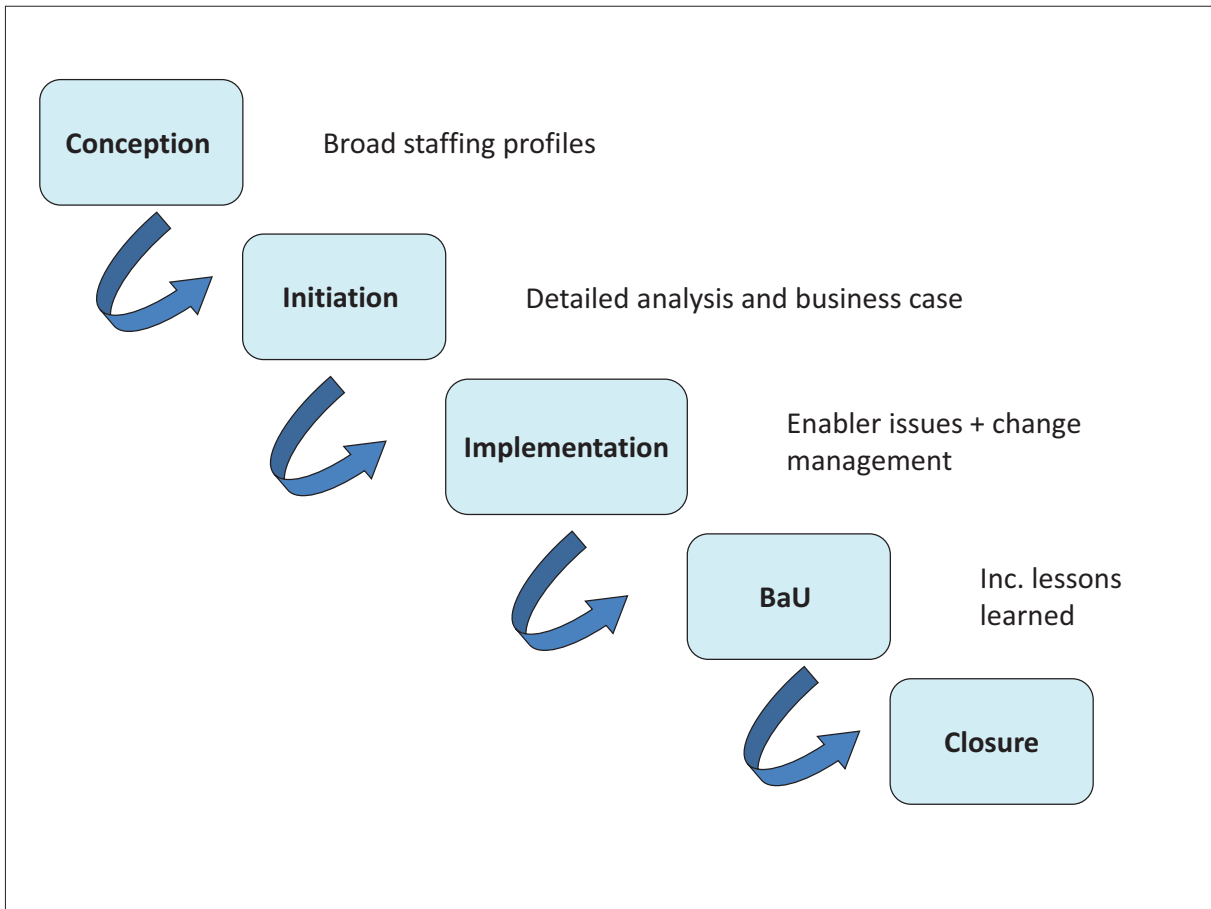
- Efficient Environments
- Mobile Technology
- New ways of working and managing

How?

Deliver local - act on the specific issues (team by team),

1. Analysis
2. Proposals – making the business case
3. Project delivery (ICT, Property, HR, OD)
4. Business as usual – is this really possible?
5. Review

You are constrained by the weakest link in your delivery chain.



Human Resources – an example

- The “compelling event” – service transformation
- Leadership – innovative, involving, driven
- A sense of excitement
- Attractive solutions – property, ICT
- Organisational development - “bending the stick”

- Harvesting the benefits

There should be benefits for all

For you

- Reduce environmental impact
- Lower travel costs
- Work / Life balance
- Better working environments
- Reduced stress
- Empowerment
- Self management
- Flexible approach to working inc pro active diary/time management.
- improved attendance
- Increased productivity- can log on anywhere
- Reduced travelling times/travelling at off peak times
- Become more visible
- More responsive service
- More contact with managers

For the council

- Save office space & lower maintenance costs
- Reduce environmental impact
- Lower travel costs
- Major productivity improvement
- Increased response time to queries
- Improved attendance
- Flexible working
- Loyalty
- More productive workforce
- Retention and recruitment
- Providing a better service that meets the needs of the customer
- Reduced absenteeism
- Improved productivity
- Minimise staff turnover
- Virtual working
- Better organisation to work for

Property Management

- Flexible working and property rationalisation

Property Rationalisation – Salford City Council

Project originally started in 2001 – increased momentum from 2010

Outputs (1) – Back office rationalisation

Size of the estate

2005 – 4 Core Sites and 52 buildings

2012 – 2 Core Sites and 28 buildings

2013 – 1 Core Site and >20 buildings

Overall Floorspace down from 45,000sq m to 18,000sq m 2001-date – includes significant reduction in on-floor storage (was 15% of space)

Occupancy down from 18 to 7.5 Sq m per person 2001-date



Savings

- Cumulative per annum savings in excess of £6.5 Million
- £5Million+ in capital receipts
- Significant reductions in backlog maintenance
- Portfolio more fit for purpose and highly adaptable
- Further savings planned as agile working extended



What are the next steps?

Current financial climate demands more savings which can't be delivered solely from optimised use of back office space

Need to look at;

- Wider asset base and collaborative engagement
- Proactive challenge linked to the council's wider objectives

Current Climate

- Massive pressure to make financial savings across the public sector
- Challenges both on revenue and capital

Drivers

- Service delivery and service protection
- Cost savings
- Localism Agenda
- Collaborative working - Council and Partner Organisation Key Aims and Objectives

Focus now needs to shift to operational properties

Methodology

- Leadership and broad engagement critical
- Divide the area into neighbourhoods – manageable areas, either single or multiple wards
- Comprehensive review of all Council assets
- Include public sector partner’s properties - Health, Education, Police, Fire, Third Sector, Central and Local Government etc.
- Understand local issues, current service provision and future need.
- Focus on required outcomes critical



Outputs (2) – Locality Plans

- Roadmap for delivery
- Concise “member friendly” document
- Realistic, practical and affordable solutions
- Short term targets – the “low hanging fruit”
- Medium term targets – partnership projects/service change
- Long Term targets – major capital projects/regeneration
- Supporting financial model with estimated capital receipts and revenue savings
- Bedrock of Asset Management Planning and process



It won't contain all the solutions and delivery timescales will be dictated by a range of factors but it provides options and challenges to existing thinking

Speak to Partners

- Health
- Children’s and Adult Services
- Further Education providers
- Neighbourhood Management Teams
- Housing Providers – ALMOs, RSLs, Housing Trusts
- Emergency Services
- 3rd Sector and Local interest groups

Salford City Council



You will have a jigsaw puzzle. The tools to solve it...

- Sharing properties and collaborative partner working
- Fit for purpose service accommodation
- Agile working solutions
- Disposals
- Assets transfers to community groups



- Improved Service Delivery
- Revenue savings
- Capital Receipts
- Non-financial benefits

Linkages

- Asset Management Plan
- Improved decision making
- Improved Facilities Management
- Energy management
- Statutory Compliance

Swinton Gateway

- £5m shared health, Council and third sector building in a former Council occupied office building. Clinic, library, back office, third sector occupants
- Reuse of an otherwise redundant office building



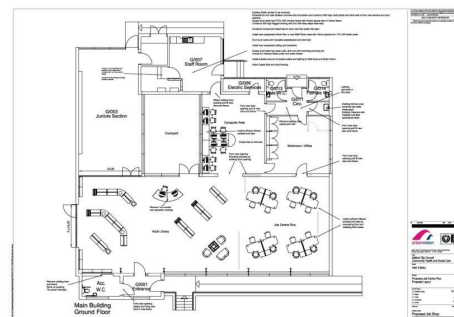
Salford City Council



Irlam Library

- £45,000+ refurbishment
- Creation of a mixed use facility with a public library, Job Centre Plus and Housing Trust sub-office
- Substantial annual rental income and running cost savings

Salford City Council



Broughton Hub

- £9m shared use community hub.
- Library, children’s centre, community rooms, youth club, trampoline hall, police office and MUGA
- Former library was released as a community asset transfer



Salford City Council



Committee for Social Development response

Committee for Social Development

Room 284,
Parliament Buildings,
Stormont,
Belfast BT4 3XX

Tel: 028 9052 1864

To: Shane McAteer, Clerk to the Committee for Finance and Personnel
From: Kevin Pelan, Clerk to the Committee for Social Development
Date: 21 March 2014
Subject: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland.

At its meeting on the 20 March 2014, the Committee for Social Development agreed to forward a response from the Department for Social Development to the Committee for Finance and Personnel regarding its Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland.

Dr Kevin Pelan

Ext 21864

Enc.

Human Resources Division

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Dr Kevin Pelan
Clerk, Committee for Social Development
Northern Ireland Assembly
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Parliament Buildings
Belfast BT4 3XX

Your Ref: 017/2011/2/SK

12 March 2014

Dear Kevin

Your correspondence of 12 February 2014 to DSD Private Office regarding Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland has been passed to me to respond.

The Department for Social Development (DSD) currently has approximately 7427 staff and the majority enjoy Flexitime schemes. Of these, 1706 staff also avail of alternative working patterns (AWP).

Applications for alternative working are considered in line with statutory guidelines and NICS policies and DSD strives to support AWP where there are business grounds for doing so.

There is a wide range of AWP's available under NICS Work-Life balance provisions including flexitime, compressed working hours, part-time, jobsharing, personalised hours, term-time working, home working and partial retirement. Although there is no central remote/home working policy across the NICS some provision exists within DSD. However, due to the ad hoc nature of these arrangements DSD does not record this information.

In order to facilitate home/remote working some DSD staff have been supplied with encrypted laptops and have the facility for secure remote access. Good working practices also include teleconferencing and keeping in touch or accessing documents remotely via Blackberry devices. Also, a pilot is currently being run by IT Assist where documents can be securely accessed on an iPad.

I hope you find this information helpful and if you need further detail we would be happy to assist.

Yours sincerely

Maeve Walls

Human Resources Director

Western Education & Library Board response



Mr S McAteer
Northern Ireland Assembly
Committee for Finance and Personnel
Room 144
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

Our Ref: BM/MMC/GF

Date: 21 March 2014

Dear Mr Mc Ateer

Home Based Working Pilot Scheme/s

I refer to your letter of 12 March 2014 and would advise that Home Based Working was piloted in the SELB in 2005 across a limited range of board support services deemed suitable.

A pilot exercise was not however undertaken in WELB on the basis that connectivity and other start-up arrangements which would have had to be put in place at that time to facilitate the pilot proved too costly against a backdrop of financial stringencies.

The pilot exercise in the SELB involved trialing Home Based Working across the following services, Curriculum Advisory and Support Services (CASS), Internal Audit and Maintenance. The assessment of suitability of board services and individual employees within those services for inclusion in the pilot was based on the following general requirements:

- the job role requiring minimal face-to-face communication or physical contact at the work base;
- autonomy of role;
- easy use of technology;
- minimal need for specialized equipment;
- controllable work flow and definable output.

In order to fully appreciate the issues associated with implementation of the Pilot and gauge lessons to be learnt from its roll-out, it is proposed that it may be beneficial for the Committee, to engage one of the senior SELB Officers who was involved in exercise. For this purpose Mr John Curran, Management Side Secretary has been nominated to act as the point of contact. In advance of any such discussion it should be highlighted

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however, that some of the information provided will reflect working arrangements 8.5 years ago, when technology and work practices may differ from today's environment.

In conclusion and in order to provide a current perspective, the Education and Library Boards took a decision, subsequent to Home Based Working having been trialed in the SELB, that as a consequence of the announcement that the new Education and Skills Authority for Northern Ireland was imminent, it would be the wrong time to implement the Scheme. The rationale behind the decision was that the Scheme would potentially change the work base locations of a significant number of staff whose posts were deemed to be "at risk" and this could be problematic at a time when major organisational change was imminent within Education.

Yours sincerely

BARRY MULLHOLLAND
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety response

FROM THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH,
SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY
Edwin Poots MLA



Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

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Mr Daithi McKay MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance and Personnel
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Our Ref: AGY/164/2014

Date: 24 March 2014

Dear Mr McKay

Thank you for your letter of 28 February 2014, seeking information on flexible working in my Department and the wider Health and Social Care sector.

I should point out that the arrangements for flexible working in the wider Health and Social Care are subject to the provision of round the clock services. Notwithstanding this essential provision, employers have developed flexible working arrangements which include:

- part-time working, where a person works to a pattern and number of hours by mutual agreement;
- job sharing, where two or more people share the responsibilities of one or more full-time job(s), dividing the hours, duties and pay between them;
- flexi-time, where employees can choose their own start and finish time around fixed core hours;
- annual hours contracts, where people work a specific number of hours each year, with the hours being unevenly distributed throughout the year;
- flexible rostering, using periods of work of differing lengths within an agreed overall period;
- term-time working, where people work during the school term but not during school holidays;
- school-time contracts;
- tele-working, where people work from home for all or part of their hours with a computer or telecommunication link to their organisation;
- voluntary reduced working time, where people work reduced hours by agreement at a reduced salary;
- fixed work patterns where, by agreement, days off can be irregular to enable, for example, separated parents to have access to their children and flexible rostering;
- flexible retirement.

Further detail of the current arrangements is available in Sections 34 and 35 of the NHS Employers Handbook at:

[http://www.nhsemployers.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/AFC of service handbook .pdf](http://www.nhsemployers.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/AFC%20of%20service%20handbook%20.pdf)

The actual number of staff who avail of these various flexible arrangements is not readily available but the number of WTE staff (55,000) versus the Headcount figure of (66,000) is evidence that some of these arrangements are being taken up by staff.

Extent to which flexible working practices are being applied in the Department - see spreadsheet with various tables attached at Tab A:

Since all flexible working applications go directly to the shared service provider (HRConnect) we would no longer be aware of the details of individual arrangements.

The only remote form of flexible working would be ad-hoc home working arrangements.

Home working is a voluntary and co-operative arrangement between a line manager and an individual officer which involves the officer carrying out some of their duties while working from home on an ad hoc basis. This would allow some employees to work from home on an ad hoc basis to complete a particular piece of work and would not require that the officer complete a formal application. The Department advocates a maximum limit of 8 days of home working in any 4 week period for an officer. Any home working necessitates appropriate information security and Health and Safety arrangements. Such ad-hoc arrangements are subject to local agreement and are not monitored centrally.

For your information I have included a link to our local flexible working options guide:

[Flexible Working Options Guide](#)

Edwin Poots MLA
Minister for Health Social Services and Public Safety

Tab A

Assignment Category	Count of Employee Number
Compressed Hours 5 over 4	9
Compressed Hours Other	8
Full-Time	446
Personalised Hours	2
Reduced Hours	118
Term Time - Full Time	6
Term Time - Reduced Hours	4
Grand Total	593

Assignment Category	% of Staff
Compressed Hours 5 over 4	1.5%
Compressed Hours Other	1.3%
Full-Time	75.2%
Personalised Hours	0.3%
Reduced Hours	19.9%
Term Time - Full Time	1.0%
Term Time - Reduced Hours	0.7%
Grand Total	100.0%

Working Pattern	% of Staff
Compressed Hours 5 over 4	1.5%
Compressed Hours Other	1.3%
Personalised Hours	0.3%
Reduced Hours	19.9%
Term Time - Full Time	1.0%
Term Time - Reduced Hours	0.7%
Total Alternative Working	24.8%
Full-Time	75.2%
Grand Total	100.0%



Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

An Roinn
**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

GUIDE
TO
FLEXIBLE
WORKING
OPTIONS

Working for a Healthier People



FOREWORD BY THE PERMANENT SECRETARY

The Department's original Flexible Working Options Guide was introduced in 2001 in response to new technologies, new opportunities, a greater pace of life and greater family and domestic demands. Such patterns of change have continued to gather pace and in addition there have been various changes in relation to employers' statutory obligations. It is important to ensure that the way we work today is reflective of this situation and this guide provides an update on the options available to staff.

The availability of flexible working options is one example of the Department's employee-friendly policies and is intended to cater for staff who may wish to spend more time **outside** work, and also for those for whom the issue is not how much time to spend at work, but **when** and **where** to work. Flexible working opportunities can benefit everyone concerned. For employees the opportunity to balance their job with responsibilities outside of work has clear advantages. For the employer the benefits can include increased staff morale, increased retention of skilled staff and reduced absenteeism.

While the Department will provide any help it can in balancing work and non-work commitments, it is important to recognise that the Department's business must be delivered. It must be stressed that no flexible working pattern will be viewed as an entitlement, but rather an option which may be available should the circumstances of a particular branch allow it. Policies will be applied in the fairest possible way in order to strike the balance between the needs of the Department and staff.

DR A MCCORMICK

CONTENTS

1. Introduction to flexible working options including definitions.
2. Details of individual flexible working options;
 - Flexi-time;
 - Compressed Working Time;
 - Part-time working;
 - Job-sharing;
 - Personalised Hours;
 - Homeworking.
 - Term-time working
3. Guidance for managers when dealing with flexible working applications.
4. How will flexible working affect my pay, terms and conditions of service etc.
5. How do I apply for flexible working?

INTRODUCTION TO FLEXIBLE WORKING OPTIONS

This guide aims to outline the Department's position on flexible working, to define the range of flexible working patterns which are available and to provide staff with information on the implications of flexible working for pay, pension rights, leave entitlements etc.

While the guide offers general information on flexible working options, staff in Personnel Management Branch will be happy to provide more detailed information on individual cases if required. It should be noted that whilst the Department will make every effort to accommodate requests for flexible working, it cannot guarantee a successful outcome to all applications. Further information on the options available can also be accessed at [NICS Carers](#). Other relevant information eg. paternity, maternity and adoption leave can be accessed in the [Family Friendly Guide](#).

What are flexible working options?

A flexible working option can be defined as a pattern of work which differs from the traditional 9 to 5, 5-day week on the employer's premises.

For several years the Department has offered part-time working, job sharing and flexitime to its employees and these options have proved quite popular among staff. This guide aims to re-publicise these options while describing the wider range of flexible working arrangements now on offer.

The options on offer are:

- ❖ **Flexitime;**
- ❖ **Compressed Working Time;**
- ❖ **Part-time working;**
- ❖ **Job-sharing;**
- ❖ **Personalised Hours;**
- ❖ **Homeworking;**
- ❖ **Term-time Working**

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FLEXITIME

Definition

Flexitime allows employees to vary their daily hours of work around 'core' hours. It allows individuals to choose the times they start and finish work and they can vary the length and timing of their lunch break (both within an agreed framework). The scheme also allows the carry over of any **excess** or **deficit** in hours accrued or owed beyond one **accounting period** (four weeks) and ultimately allows staff to take time off for the extra hours they have worked.

How does flexitime work?

Flexitime has several key features:

- **Coretime** – coretime is the part of the day when all employees should be present, unless their absence is authorised by management. There are usually four hours coretime during the day (e.g. 10.00am to 12pm and 2.00pm to 4.00pm, or 10.00am to 12.30pm and 2.00pm to 3.30pm, or 9.30am to 12pm and 2.00pm to 3.30pm);
- **Bandwidth (incorporating flexible bands)** – is the span over which the flexitime system operates i.e. the earliest starting time and the latest finishing time. It is usual for most offices to be open between 8.00am and 6.00pm (a total of 10 hours);
- **Flexible Lunch Break** – is generally any break of between half an hour and two hours (depending on the parameters of the scheme in operation) between 12 and 2pm. A minimum lunch break of 30 minutes must be taken by any staff working more than six hours in the day to comply with Health and Safety regulations;
- **Accounting Period** – is the 4-week period over which employees must reconcile the hours they have actually worked with their contracted hours. This reconciliation very much depends on the accurate completion of flexi sheets which are subject to supervisory checks;
- **Carry overs** – at the end of each accounting period there can be a maximum carry over of credit of 3 standard days (i.e. 22 hours 12 minutes for staff working normal 5-day week office hours) or a maximum carry over of debit of 2 standard days (i.e. 14 hours 48 minutes for staff working normal 5-day week office hours);
- **Flexi leave** – staff may take up to 3 days flexi leave (as either half or full days) in any one accounting period, provided that they do not exceed the maximum permitted debit of 2 standard days at the end of that accounting period.

The following diagrams show typical examples of flexitime schemes:

Bandwidth



Flexible Hours 8.00-10.00am	Core Time 10.00am-12.00pm	Flexible Hours (Lunch) 12.00pm-2.00pm	Core Time 2.00pm-4.00pm	Flexible Hours 4.00pm-6.00pm
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Flexible Hours 8.00-10.00am	Core Time 10.00am-12.30pm	Flexible Hours (Lunch) 12.30pm-2.00pm	Core Time 2.00pm-3.30pm	Flexible Hours 3.30pm-6.00pm
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Flexible Hours 8.00-9.30am	Core Time 9.30am-12.00pm	Flexible Hours (Lunch) 12.00pm-2.00pm	Core Time 2.00pm-3.30pm	Flexible Hours 3.30pm-6.00pm
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Flexitime is covered in greater depth in Chapter 1.12 of the NICS Staff Handbook.

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COMPRESSED WORKING TIME

Definition

This system allows employees to 'compress' their working week into fewer than the traditional five working days, without reducing the number of overall hours worked. Although this option can be said to be similar to flexitime in principle, it differs in that it is a formal arrangement where an individual is off work on a set day each week or fortnight, so enabling regular domestic commitments to be met.

How does 'compressed working time' work?

Compressed working time allows staff to compress their full working hours into four or four and a half days rather than five; or into nine days instead of ten. This has the effect of giving them time off every week or fortnight. It is expected that officers who wish to work Compressed Working Time will agree a regular pattern of attendance e.g. Monday to Thursday. However there is the possibility that officers can, with the agreement of their line manager, make ad-hoc adjustments to this pattern. For example, an officer working a regular Monday to Thursday pattern can substitute a Tuesday as their day off instead of Friday. However, on a similar basis, individuals may be expected to make ad-hoc adjustments to their working pattern to meet business requirements e.g. attendance on a training programme.

Depending on the working pattern, and the hours in which an office remains open, there may be limited scope for officers to combine flexitime with compressed working time. However this can be negotiated between the officer and the line manager. The hours should be agreed between employees and their line manager well in advance. The following examples illustrate how the system can work:

Example

An administrative/clerical worker is required to work a 37 hour week (net). For the majority, this would involve working a pattern similar to the traditional 9.00am – 5.00pm Monday – Friday. Compressed working time might allow an individual to work:

<i>4 x 9 hour 45 minute days i.e. 8.00am – 5.45pm</i>	=	<i>39 hours</i>
<i>Less 0.5 hours per day for lunch</i>	=	<i>2 hours</i>

Total hours worked	=	37 hours
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If this pattern is worked from Monday to Thursday, the officer would be able to have Friday off.

Another similar pattern based on a 37 hour week (net) is as follows:

<i>9 x 9 hour days</i>	=	<i>81 hours</i>
<i>(e.g. 8.00am – 5.00pm or 9.00am – 6.00pm)</i>		

<i>Less 1 hour per day for lunch (5 days)</i>	=	<i>5 hours</i>
<i>Less 0.5 hours per day for lunch (4 days)</i>	=	<i>2 hours</i>
<i>Total hours worked</i>	=	<i>74 hours</i>

If this pattern is worked over a two week period, the officer would be entitled to one day off per fortnight.

These are only two examples of compressed working time. Each branch or business area is free to develop, in conjunction with its staff, a pattern that suits both the needs of the business and staff.

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PART-TIME WORKING

What is part-time working?

There is no universal definition of part-time working. Government statistics define it as working less than 30 hours per week, but in practice, it means working anything less than the normal full-time contracted hours for a particular job. In the NICS, part-time is defined as any work pattern less than the standard 42-hour week.

How does part-time working operate?

The NICS guidelines on part-time working are contained in CSC 29/87 and its addendum and the Department's policy on part-time working operates within that framework.

It is essential that any part-time arrangement is designed to suit both the needs of the organisation i.e. the individual branch involved and the employee in such a way that is viable. Officers cannot be expected to carry out the same duties in a part-time capacity as they had done previously in a full-time post. The work pattern may be half days, shorter days, reduced number of full days or a combination of all these options. The employee's salary is calculated in proportion to the number of hours worked.

Together with the traditional part-time working patterns of 'mornings only' or 'afternoons only', staff may be able to work as little as one day per week, or as many as four days per week, under the scheme. Some typical examples of part-time working are as follows:

- Working some full days – 4, 3, 2, or even 1 day a week;
- Working some full and some half days – $1\frac{1}{2}$, $2\frac{1}{2}$, $3\frac{1}{2}$, $4\frac{1}{2}$ days a week;
- Reducing the hours worked each day but still attending 5 days a week – mornings only, afternoons only or working all morning with an earlier finish in the afternoon.

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JOB SHARING

What is job sharing?

Job sharing involves two or more people sharing the duties and responsibilities of one full-time post and provides the opportunity for staff to work reduced hours in a post that might not be suitable for part-time work.

How does job sharing work?

The NICS guidelines on job sharing are contained in CSC 29/87 and its addendum and the Department's policy on job sharing operates within that framework.

The patterns of job share are normally dependent on the individuals and their manager, however a typical range of job sharing options include:

- Split day – one partner works each morning and the other works each afternoon;
- Split week – one partner works the first half of every week and the other works the second half;
- Alternate weeks – one partner works one week while the other works the next week;
- Part-week one partner works one or two days and the other works four or three days in a week;
- Job splitting – where a job is split into component parts and each sharer takes responsibility for the separate parts. This can be useful where a job calls for a diverse range of skills that can be easily identified and which might not be easy to find in any one employee.

In all of the above cases, it is beneficial to have an overlap period where both partners are working in order to communicate information and facilitate the hand-over.

While staff wanting to job share will be responsible for finding a job share partner themselves, in some circumstances, PMB may be able to help.

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PERSONALISED HOURS

Definition

Personalised hours is an arrangement whereby an officer comes to an agreement with their employer regarding the number of hours they are to work, and the pattern in which they are to work them. This pattern may or may not involve a reduction in hours either on a long term or temporary basis.

How do personalised hours work?

Employees are given the opportunity of designing their own working pattern either permanently or for a specified period. At the end of the period, an employee has the option to return to full-time working or to renegotiate a new work pattern. If applicable, the employee's salary is reduced on a pro-rata basis according to the number of hours worked. The reduction in working hours can be achieved by shortening the working day, shortening the working week or a combination of both. There are 3 main ways in which personalised hours can be used:

- a. **Reduced working week** – in this arrangement, the officer reduces his/her weekly work time. This is a regular arrangement either on a short term or permanent basis, agreed between the individual and the officer.

Example 1

An employee works a full-time week from Monday to Friday. He has been asked to direct a play involving a group of children which will involve rehearsals on a Friday and production of the play on a Saturday for a 6 week period. The officer can only agree to this offer if he can work a 4 day week for the period in question and requests that he can reduce his working hours by 1 day (Friday) each week.

- b. **Flexible weekly hours** – in this arrangement, the individual will be contracted a set number of hours per week, however the pattern of work may change from one week to the next. This may range from a minor alteration changing the starting time by 30 minutes or one hour, to working a totally different number of hours each day to meet personal needs. To accommodate the needs of the business, this pattern should be planned as far as possible in advance between management and the employee.

Example 2

An officer, who is already contracted to work 30 hours per week (net), is the main carer for an elderly relative who is required to attend hospital 3 times a week at variable days and times. The elderly relative has mobility difficulties and needs to be accompanied to the hospital. In these circumstances, the officer could arrange to work 2 full days of nine hours (net) and 3 days at 4

hours (net) each. The three shorter days could allow the officer to carry out their domestic responsibilities, with starting/finishing times being varied accordingly.

Example 3

An officer, who is already contracted to work a 32.5 hour week (net), wishes to leave his/her children to school in the morning and to pick them up from school in the afternoon. The officer then wishes to return to work for the remainder of the afternoon. A pattern of Mon-Fri 9.30am – 2.30pm and then 3.30pm to 5pm (without a lunch break) is agreed between the officer and branch management.

- c. **Staggered hours** – in this arrangement, the officer is again contracted to work a set number of hours, however the pattern of work is fixed from week to week.

Example 4

An officer, who is already contracted to work 30 hours per week (net), is the main carer for an elderly relative who requires assistance with personal needs during the day. The officer wants to attend to these needs personally. In these circumstances, the officer arranges with his/her branch management to work the requisite number of hours in two daily shifts from 8.00am – 11.00am and then from 3.00pm – 6.00pm, Monday to Friday (without a lunch break). This is a regular arrangement.

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HOMEWORKING

Definition

Homeworking is a voluntary and co-operative arrangement between a line manager and an individual officer which involves the officer carrying out some of their duties while working from home on an ad hoc basis.

How does homeworking operate?

Employees agree with their line manager to carry out certain specific duties from home. This would allow some employees to work from home on an ad hoc basis to complete a particular piece of work and would not require that the officer complete a formal application form. The Department advocates a maximum limit of 8 days of homeworking in any 4 week period for an officer

Example 1

A branch is required to draft a strategy document following receipt of consultation comments from various interested parties. It is agreed between the branch manager and the officer tasked with this responsibility that this piece of work will take a total of 15 working days to complete. Certain aspects of this task do not require that the officer be present in his/her branch and it is agreed that these elements of the job can be completed at home. The officer and line manager agree that he/she can spend 7 days homeworking to assist in the completion of this task, with the understanding that the draft strategy will be finalised within the original timescale.

Example 2

An officer has 4 reports to complete within a 4-week timespan. It is agreed with his/her branch manager that these can be completed on 4 separate homeworking days (1 taken each week) over a 4 week period.

The skills required

The success of homeworking depends on having the following personal qualities and skills:

- ***Self motivation, self reliance and discipline to work without direct supervision;***
- ***The ability to complete work to scheduled deadlines;***
- ***Initiative, flexibility and time management skills;***
- ***The ability to cope with reduced social contact/ interaction;***
- ***The ability to cope with the additional pressures of working in the home where the demands of family life may be difficult to ignore.***

Importance of discipline and planning

To be a successful homeworker, you need to learn to deal with less structure and more freedom in completing your work.

Homeworking requires careful planning and discipline. This means you must:

- **Get organised** – try to set a work schedule for the days you plan to work from home;
- **Develop a routine to your day at home;**
- **Keep in touch with your office** – you must make yourself available during your agreed business hours in the same way as your office-based colleagues. Also keep your line manager informed about any difficulties you encounter at an early stage rather than waiting until you are back in the office;
- **Organise domestic commitments** – you must make arrangements for your domestic commitments, such as childcare, during your working hours in the same way as office based staff.

Equipment and costs incurred while homeworking

In line with Departmental policy, if IT equipment is required to carry out working at home, it is the responsibility of the Line Manager to ensure that the equipment is provided prior to the commencement of homeworking. Departmental IT Security Operating Procedures (paragraph 9.11) advise that private home computers should only be used for official business with the express permission of the Assistant Departmental Security Officer (ADSO). Without such permission, Managers must not therefore allow an officer to work at home where equipment (IT or other) is required but such equipment is not available. Where equipment is provided, it must be to the same specifications as those applied in the office.

You will need to ensure that all protectively marked data whether stored on paper, disk or CDROM is locked away when not in use. Laptop computers should also be stored securely when not in use. Care should be taken to ensure that members of the family and/or visitors cannot see any protectively marked information whilst you are working on it. If the material to be worked on attains a protective marking of “Confidential” or above, advice should be sought from the ADSO. The procedures outlined in [CIRC DHSSPS SEC 2/2000](#) should be followed where practical.

Further information relating to equipment and security issues can be found in circular [HSAW 37](#) and on the security section on the [IT intranet page](#).

Officers are initially responsible for any associated financial costs such as telephone, fax, or e-mail charges, but the Department will reimburse officers for these costs in accordance with [Part 4, Chapter 7 of the NICS Staff Handbook](#)

Health and Safety

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act, the Department has a responsibility to take reasonable care for the health and safety of homeworkers. Consequently, it will be necessary to undertake a documented risk assessment of the homeworking area. A Circular detailing guidance on health and safety issues associated with homeworking together with a risk assessment checklist to be completed **prior to the commencement of homeworking** is available on the intranet under Health and Safety – see [HSAW 37](#) . In addition, Circular [HSAW 38](#) provides details of the Health and Safety considerations when using a laptop.

Who is homeworking suitable for?

Clearly homeworking will not be suitable for all jobs. Therefore an assessment of each job or particular duty will need to be undertaken before homeworking can be approved. It may not be suitable for those jobs which require face to face contact or interaction with clients or customers e.g. secretaries, medical staff etc.

Before applying for homeworking, you must consider carefully the negative as well as the positive aspects of homeworking. Some potential benefits for employees to consider are as follows:

- ***Greater personal responsibility;***
- ***Discretion over arranging working time;***
- ***Possible greater job satisfaction.***

Some other potential aspects to consider are as follows:

- ***Homeworking cannot be used as a solution for childcare arrangements;***
- ***Isolation from the office;***
- ***Domestic intrusions and interruptions.***

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TERM-TIME WORKING

The Policy

Term-time working is a NICS wide policy and is set out in detail in guidance available in the [Hours and Attendance Section of the NICS Staff Handbook \(Chapter 1: Annex 4\)](#). There are several key differences between term-time working and the other Departmental flexible options detailed in this Guide, in particular, the strict timetable governing applications for term-time working and the fact that applications are only approved for one year at a time. This section outlines the key features applicable to term-time working and staff should note that Section 4 of the Guide is the only other section directly relevant to term-time working. **Applications for term-time working should be made on the form specifically for this purpose which is available at [Hours and Attendance Section of the NICS Staff Handbook \(Chapter 1: Annex 4\)](#) . Further guidance relating specifically to term-time working is also available through this link.**

What is term-time working?

Term-time working is generally viewed as a form of part-time working which enables parents to spend more time with their school-age children **during any school holiday period**. However, all NICS staff, not only parents, may apply for term-time working under this policy, although all absences are restricted to school holiday periods only.

How does term-time working operate?

Applications are approved **for one year only, from 1 April to 31 March**. Staff who wish to avail of term-time working for more than one year, must reapply each year. **The closing date for applications is the first working Friday in January each year**. Staff may apply to have any school holiday period covered by term-time working and must outline in their application the periods during which they wish to be absent from work (in blocks of complete weeks). An absence may start on any day of the working week. Only in exceptional circumstances can the dates of absence be changed after the term-time working arrangement has been formally accepted. Where staff wish the term-time working absence to be preceded by, or followed by, annual leave/flexi leave this should also be detailed in the application form. Such leave may only be taken in a block before and/or after the period of term time absence- it cannot be used to bridge periods of term time working absence. Any such annual/flexi leave will be paid in the normal way.

Staff may also apply for a variation to their normal working pattern for the duration of the term-time arrangement, however anyone wishing to apply for a permanent change to their working pattern should follow the Department's normal part-time working application procedures.

Example 1

An officer wishes to take all the Summer Holidays off along with 2 weeks annual leave:

Absent for all school summer holidays	=	8 weeks
plus 1 week annual leave immediately prior to this	=	1 week
and 1 week annual leave immediately following this	=	1 week
Total time off	=	10 weeks

Example 2

An officer wishes to take all the summer, Easter and Christmas School Holidays off:

Summer holidays	=	8 weeks
Christmas holidays	=	2 weeks
Easter holidays	=	2 weeks
Total time off	=	12 weeks

How would term-time working affect my pay?

Successful applicants will have their salary reduced in accordance with their periods of absence (excluding any periods of annual leave) and paid in 12 equal monthly instalments.

Other implications of term time working

The general effects of all part- time working patterns on pensions, annual leave and public/privilege holidays etc are outlined in Section 4 of this Guide. However, staff are advised to consult the guidance at [Hours and Attendance Section of the NICS Staff Handbook \(Chapter 1: Annex 4\)](#) which details the specific effects of term-time working.

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GUIDANCE FOR LINE MANAGERS WHEN DEALING WITH APPLICATIONS FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING

If applications are made under the provisions of the Employment (NI) Order 2002 this section is not applicable. See [CSC 6/04](#) and [ER 36 Flexible working: a guide for employers and employees](#) for details.

The success of flexible working within the Department is very much dependent on the commitment from line managers. It is essential that flexible working practices should be seen as beneficial to both the individual and the business in order to encourage their uptake and integration into the working environment of the Department's culture.

Some of the business benefits of encouraging flexible working are:

- ◆ **Increased productivity** – giving individuals the opportunity to balance work and domestic responsibilities has been shown to increase the quality of the working life for the employee. In turn, this can lead to increased motivation, greater job satisfaction, improved job performance, increased productivity and ultimately job performance;
- ◆ **Reduced absenteeism** – there is evidence to suggest that flexible working arrangements can lead to a reduction in absenteeism, as staff have the flexibility to adjust their working pattern to meet their domestic responsibilities;
- ◆ **Loyalty and retention** – staff turnover and training represents a significant cost to each business area within the Department, therefore working practices which encourage the retention and loyalty of trained, skilled staff have to be beneficial; and
- ◆ **Achieving a balanced workforce** – the NICS is committed to achieving as balanced a workforce as possible. By increasing the availability of flexible working practices, this is likely to encourage greater participation of women (who are still regarded as the primary carer in the family) and disabled staff, who might otherwise have left the Service as their life circumstances changed. Additionally the availability of flexible working at more senior grades may encourage a greater desire amongst these groups to self-nominate for promotion;

When asked to consider an application for flexible working, managers should ensure that they consider it fairly and consistently and make an objective and fair decision which could stand up to legal scrutiny if necessary. This can be done as follows (note that separate guidance to deal with applications for term-time working is available through the following link: [Hours and Attendance Section of the NICS Staff Handbook \(Chapter 1: Annex 4\)](#)):

-
- Look for ways to accommodate the request rather than finding a means for turning it down.
 - Ensure that the needs of the business are fully considered. While it is recognised that there may be circumstances when it is not possible to grant an application, managers will be expected to provide a comprehensive written justification for their decision.
 - Ensure that the needs of other staff in the business area are taken into account.
 - Take into account the extent to which hardship will arise if the application is refused, including taking account, where appropriate, of the views of the Welfare Officer.
 - If a manager receives more than one application for flexible working simultaneously, and considers that only one can be accommodated at that time, priority should be given to those applications citing the following reasons:
 - the officer is mainly or solely responsible for the care of a child/children under school leaving age;
 - the officer is mainly or solely responsible for the care of an aged or infirm relative;
 - the officer has other welfare or domestic considerations which put continued full-time employment at risk;
 - the officer is near retirement age (i.e. 57 years or over);
 - the officer has serious health problems.

Consideration should be given initially to whether or not the request can be accommodated within the current post. This should be approached from the standpoint that all jobs can accommodate flexible working and it is the manager's responsibility to justify his/her assertion that the post is not suitable. Managers should consider the following action:

- Splitting or restructuring the duties of the post on a permanent basis to accommodate the flexible work pattern of the officer.
- Leaving the duties of the job intact but loading it differently in order to take into account any reduction in the officer's hours.
- If having decided that it is not feasible to accommodate the officer's requested flexible work pattern within his/her existing post, can an alternative working pattern, acceptable to both you and the officer, be accommodated in the post?
- If no alternative working pattern in the post is acceptable, consideration should be given to accommodating the officer's requested arrangement or a mutually

acceptable alternative pattern elsewhere in the branch.

- If none of the above options are feasible, provide **robust justification of the decision on the application form**, inform the applicant of the decision and liaise between the officer and Personnel Management Branch to assist in identifying a suitable post elsewhere in the Department or other Departments in the NICS.

Homeworking

Where an officer wishes to work from home, you will need to ensure that a risk assessment of the officer's home is carried out.

Managers should also keep a record of the number of ad hoc days worked from home by their staff.

It should be stressed that Personnel Management Branch will closely monitor the applications for flexible working, both successful and unsuccessful, to help ensure the scheme's fair and consistent operation. Line managers will be expected to justify and document all decisions taken in the application process, and to forward this documentation to PMB if required.

A flow chart is attached giving guidance on how managers should deal with an application for flexible working.

Term-time working

This guidance and the following flowchart are not applicable to term-time working. Separate guidance on term-time working application processes can be accessed through the following link: [Hours and Attendance Section of the NICS Staff Handbook \(Chapter 1: Annex 4\)](#)

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HOW WOULD FLEXIBLE WORKING AFFECT ME?

Only forms of flexible working which involve a reduction in your weekly hours will have an effect on your salary, overall leave entitlement, terms and conditions etc. However, dependent on the pattern worked, there may be some technical adjustments to the way in which your leave entitlement is calculated. More detailed information relating to the specific effects of term-time working can be accessed through the following link [Hours and Attendance Section of the NICS Staff Handbook \(Chapter 1: Annex 4\)](#)

HOW WOULD FLEXIBLE WORKING AFFECT MY PAY?

Only a form of flexible working which involves a reduction to less than a 42-hour week will affect your salary.

Pay for part-time workers and job sharers is calculated on a pro rata basis, which means that it will be reduced in proportion to the reduction in hours (see the example below). You will continue to pay National Insurance contributions unless your gross monthly pay falls below £356. A break in National Insurance contributions may affect your entitlement to certain social security benefits, such as full state retirement pension and statutory maternity pay. Anyone concerned about this should contact their local Social Security Office for more information.

The table below gives the gross monthly pay for a variety of salary levels and work patterns (tax and National Insurance contributions have not been deducted). The "Fraction of Salary Payable" column shows what proportion of the full time salary you would receive. More detailed calculations, based on your individual circumstances, can be provided on request.

Gross Monthly Pay by hours worked, at three salary levels

<u>Work Pattern</u>		<u>Fraction of Salary Payable</u>	<u>£11,000</u>	<u>£20,000</u>	<u>£40,000</u>
			<u>Full Time</u>		5/5
Full Days (part week)	4 day week	4/5	£733.33	£1,333.33	£2,666.67
	3 day week	3/5	£550.00	£1,000.00	£2,000.00
	2 day week	2/5	£366.67	£666.67	£1,333.33
	1 day week	1/5	£183.33 *	£333.33	£666.67

Part Days (5 day week)	4 hour day	20/37	£495.50	£900.90	£1,801.80
	3 hour day	15/37	£371.62	£675.68	£1,351.35
2-way Job Share		1/2	£458.33	£833.33	£1,666.67
Term- time	Summer holidays off (eg. 8 weeks)	44.2/52.2	£776.18	£1411.24	£2822.48
	Summer, Christmas and Easter Holidays off (eg. 12 weeks)	40.2/52.2	£705.94	£1283.52	£2567.04

*National Insurance contributions affected

HOW WOULD FLEXIBLE WORKING AFFECT MY CIVIL SERVICE PENSION?

There are two aspects of pension calculation to be considered:-

- (i) the **final salary** on which pension is based. If you were to retire while working reduced hours, your pension would be calculated on the basis of the full-time equivalent of the salary you are receiving at the point of retiring.
- (ii) the **reckonable service** that counts towards the pension. Someone working reduced hours will build up reckonable service slower than someone working full-time. This is because the rate of build up is determined by the number of hours worked.

EXAMPLE

The following table shows the difference in pension and lump sum payments between a person who has worked 40 years full-time and a colleague who has worked 35 years full-time and five years for three days a week.

Example of the effects of Flexible Working on Pension and Lump Sum (based on classic pension scheme)

Full Salary (Full-Time Equivalent)		Full-time ¹	Part-time ²	Difference
£11,000	Pension (p.a)	£5,500	£5,225	£275
	Lump Sum	£16,500	£15,675	£825

£20,000	Pension (p.a)	£10,000	£9,500	£500
	Lump Sum	£30,000	£28,500	£1,500
£40,000	Pension (p.a)	£20,000	£19,000	£1,000
	Lump Sum	£60,000	£57,000	£3,000

¹40 years full time

²35 years full time plus 5 years for 3 days a week i.e. 38 years reckonable service

HOW WOULD FLEXIBLE WORKING AFFECT OVERTIME?

In general, overtime rates of pay are grade dependent and can also be affected by the number of hours an individual is contracted to work each week (known as “conditioned hours”). In all cases, premium payments for attendance on Saturday and/or Sunday are unaffected.

Full-time staff are conditioned to work 42 hours per week and attract normal rates of pay for overtime. Overtime payments for staff who work a 42-hour flexible working pattern, for example compressed hours, will therefore be unaffected.

In general, staff choosing to work less than these conditioned hours will be paid overtime at single time rate only (plus any appropriate premium payments), until full-time conditioned hours have been reached. Again, this is dependent on grade. Any additional hours worked in excess of 42 hours will then attract normal overtime rates of pay for the grade.

HOW WOULD FLEXIBLE WORKING AFFECT MY LEAVE ENTITLEMENT?

Annual Leave

As with pay, annual leave allowance is calculated on a pro-rata basis; that is, in proportion to the number of days/hours worked. All leave allowances are recalculated by PMB when you commence a flexible working pattern of less than 37 hours per week (net). PMB would be happy to give further information on an individual basis.

Example 1 (Full Days)

A full-time officer entitled to 25 days per annum wishes to change to part-time working of 3 full days per week

Annual leave entitlement becomes $\frac{25}{5} \times 3 = 15$ days per annum

Example 2 (Compressed Working)

Staff working a compressed working time pattern of 4 days per week or 9 days per fortnight (where each day consists of the same number of working hours) will have their annual leave entitlement calculated on the basis of annualised hours (but expressed in days) as outlined below:

Normal full-time working pattern

*Each Working Day = 7.4 hours (net)
for staff working a 5-day 37 hour week (net)*

Annual leave entitlement is 185 hours = 25 x 7.4 hour days

Compressed working pattern of 4 days per week

*Each Working Day = 9.25 hours (net) for staff working a 4-day 37 hour week (net)
Annual leave entitlement is 185 hours = **20 days** each day being 9.25 hours (i.e. 185/9.25 hours)*

Annual leave entitlement/conversion for staff working unusual compressed or part-time working time patterns may be expressed in annualised hours.

Example 3 (Part Days)

Annualised hours

A full-time officer is entitled to 25 days annual leave per annum. They reduce their hours to 3 days of 6 hours and 2 days of 5 hours.

*Total hours worked = 28 hours net
25 days at 7.4 hours = 185 hours*

Annual leave entitlement becomes $\frac{185 \times 28}{37}$ = 140 hours per annum

Flexi Leave

Access to flexi-leave will obviously depend on whether your working pattern involves working flexitime. The amount of flexi-leave you can take in any accounting period and the maximum you can carry forward to the next period is calculated on a pro-rata basis according to the number of hours worked. PMB would be happy to provide individual details, if requested. Staff working compressed working time and flexi-time will need to consider their standard working day hours when calculating their excess/deficit/carry over totals.

Paternity/Maternity/Adoption Leave

Fathers working reduced hours are, where eligible, still entitled to statutory paternity leave of one week or two consecutive weeks, the first two days' of which are paid at contractual level. Similarly mothers working reduced hours are entitled to 26 weeks ordinary maternity leave (for those meeting certain qualifying conditions, the first 18 weeks may be payable at the contractual rate). The parents of adopted children, where eligible, are entitled to 26 weeks ordinary adoption leave. In cases where a couple are adopting a child, they may choose which partner takes adoption leave. In all cases the level of pay received may be affected by the number of hours worked. As this varies very much with individual circumstances, PMB would be happy to give more detailed information on an individual basis.

Special Leave

Applications for special leave are assessed on a case by case basis within set guidelines and should be made in the usual way.

Public and Privilege Holidays

There are currently 12 Public and Privilege holidays per year. For flexible workers whose working pattern involves them working less than the standard 42-hour week, the entitlement is calculated in proportion to the number of days/hours worked. For staff working compressed working time, public and privilege holiday entitlement will be calculated on the same 'annualised hours' basis as annual leave entitlement.

EXAMPLE

A job-sharer working five days per fortnight would be entitled to 6 Public and Privilege Holidays. If, in any given leave year, 8 Public and Privilege Holidays fell on days normally worked, then the deficit of 2-days would have to be made up by surrendering annual leave or by working on days when not normally required to work. Alternatively if only 5 days Public and Privilege Holidays occurred, the person would be credited with an additional day off.

The above example gives some indication of how public/privilege holiday arrangements work in practice. However, as the situation varies considerably with individual circumstances, staff must agree their entitlement with their line manager; PMB would be happy to clarify your position with you and, if necessary, your line manager.

Sick Leave

For staff on flexible working patterns who are present every weekday, sick leave absences are counted in the usual way. For staff that are not in the office every day, sick leave is calculated on a pro rata basis, as shown in the following example.

EXAMPLE

You are working three days a week, Monday – Wednesday, and you are absent on sick leave from Monday of week one, and return to work on Tuesday of week two; you have not attended work for eight days. Because of your part-time working

pattern, only the actual four working days missed, are recorded as sick absence by PMB.

Managing attendance triggers and Occupational Sick Pay entitlements are also adjusted accordingly.

HOW WOULD FLEXIBLE WORKING AFFECT MY PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT?

As a flexible worker, your performance will continue to be assessed each year.

As with other members of staff, those working flexible patterns have their performance assessed against the objectives agreed at the beginning of the year. These objectives should be drawn up to take account of any reduction in hours that a flexible working pattern might entail. Assessments of staff who work a flexible working pattern should reflect **how they have carried out their duties and met their objectives**. The number of hours worked or the pattern in which they have been worked is irrelevant.

HOW WOULD FLEXIBLE WORKING AFFECT MY PROMOTION PROSPECTS?

Those on flexible work patterns are encouraged to self-nominate for promotion with the assurance that, while a position accommodating a preferred work pattern cannot be guaranteed for successful candidates, every attempt will be made to accommodate requests for working hours and/or patterns which differ from the traditional 9 to 5, 5-day week.

For example, to ensure that part-time workers and job sharers receive the same opportunities as others, the Department does not reserve specific part-time posts. Instead, the potential for posts to be occupied by part-time workers or job sharers is considered in every case with the onus resting on line managers to justify the need for full-time working.

Promotion is based solely on merit and factors such as hours worked or work patterns do not form part of the selection criteria.

HOW WOULD FLEXIBLE WORKING AFFECT MY ACCESS TO TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT?

Training and development is every bit as important to flexible workers as they are to staff working traditional patterns and/or full-time hours. Wherever possible, it is hoped that staff working a flexible work pattern could adapt their pattern to accommodate training, but if they find it difficult to attend particular formal training courses they should raise this with their Training and Development Officer to see if alternative arrangements can be made.

Where someone working a flexible job pattern opts for a training course which requires attendance beyond their normal working hours, they can be paid for the additional hours or can take them at a later date as time off in lieu.

In addition, where attending a course means that a parent/carer needs to make alternative arrangements for childcare or care of an elderly, ill or disabled dependant, the Department will reimburse any additional expense which it considers reasonable. This facility is also available for full-time staff.

HOW WOULD FLEXIBLE WORKING AFFECT MY MOBILITY?

Staff working a flexible pattern under 42 hours per week (or 37 hours net) will be classified as non-mobile even if they are serving in a mobile grade.

HOW WOULD FLEXIBLE WORKING AFFECT MY TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE?

Apart from the issues referred to above, terms and conditions of service do not differ significantly from those for traditional patterns and/or full-time hours.

REVERSION TO STANDARD WORKING PATTERN

Where possible every effort will be made to accommodate a flexible worker wishing to return to a standard working pattern. However, you should give PMB as much notice as possible of your intention so that the branch has every opportunity to meet your request. Although every effort will be made to facilitate changes, PMB's capacity to do so will be influenced by such things as the availability of suitable posts.

Should the Department find it necessary to change your flexible working arrangements, then you will:-

- (i) be given full reasons for the change;**
- (ii) be given at least three months prior warning; and**
- (iii) be offered the next opportunity to return to your original flexible work pattern (though clearly there is no guarantee that such an opportunity will arise).**

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HOW DO I APPLY FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING?

The Department is committed to encouraging and accommodating flexible working for all its staff, wherever possible. For details on application processes for term-time working see [Hours and Attendance Section of the NICS Staff Handbook \(Chapter 1: Annex 4\)](#)

Every step will be taken to accommodate your application for flexible working within your own branch unless your line management have concluded that it is essential that the post be filled full-time. (An alternative to the working pattern you request would only be offered if this is not possible.) . Where the latter is the case, PMB will make every effort to place you elsewhere in the Department or, failing that, in another Department or Agency. Some working patterns are more difficult to accommodate than others so staff are strongly advised to indicate any acceptable alternatives or flexibility on their application form. In addition staff should be aware that identifying alternative posts can be time consuming and difficult. Whilst PMB will make every effort to find an alternative post (where this is necessary), there is no guarantee that a suitable post will be available.

To apply for flexible working, please contact the Career Advice section in PMB and ask for an application form, or alternatively the application form can be downloaded by [clicking here](#). Once you have completed the form you should return it to your line manager who will assess whether your request can be accommodated within your current post/branch before forwarding the form to PMB. The flow chart on the next page sets out the process step by step.

Legislation

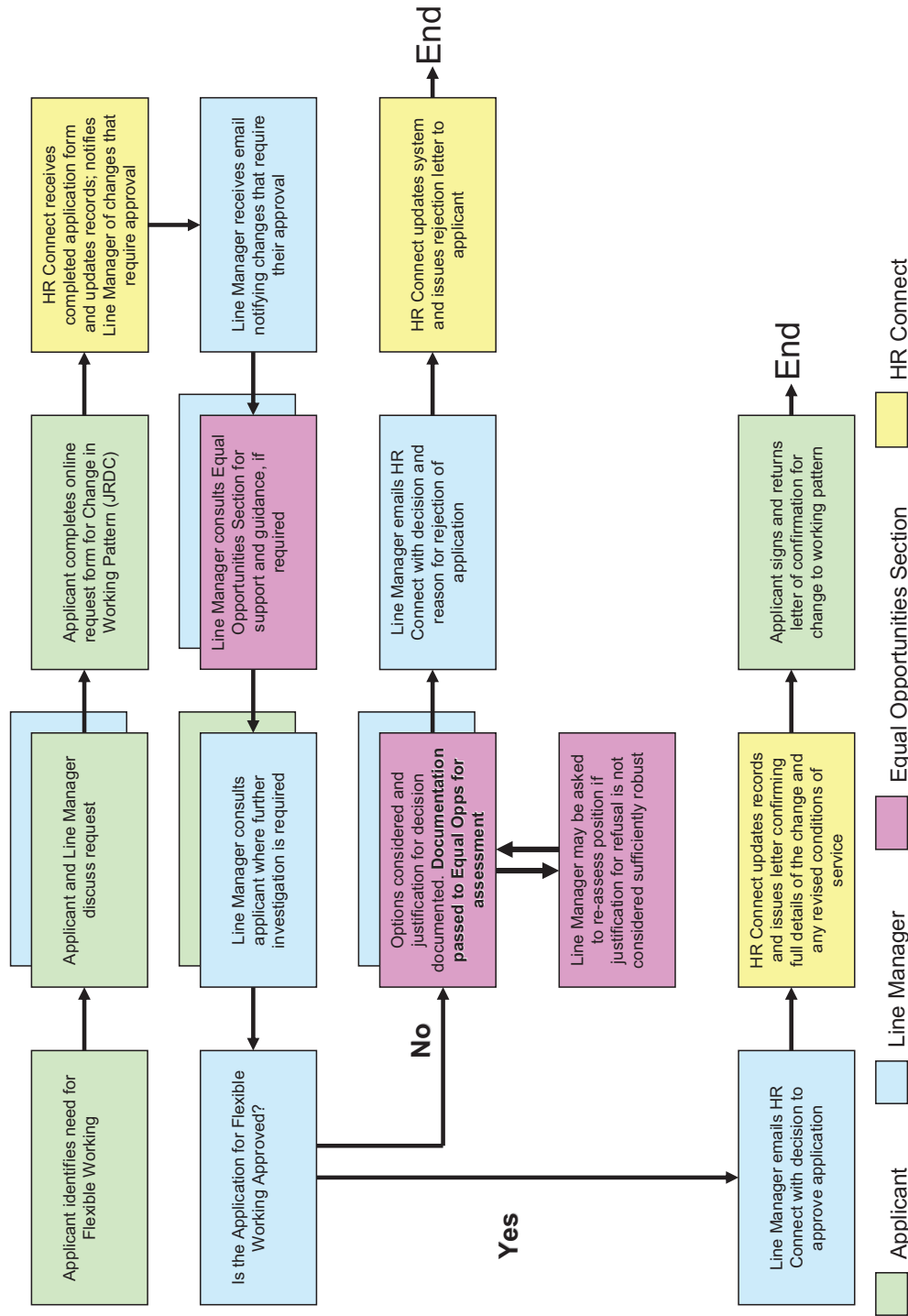
Legislation introducing specific rights to help employees balance their family and employment responsibilities came into effect on 6 April 2003 and was further enhanced in April 2007. There is now a legal requirement for employers to give serious consideration to all requests for flexible working (made under the legislation) from eligible staff. This can be either a member of staff with a child under the age of 6 (under 18 in the case of a disabled child) or a member of staff with caring responsibilities for an adult. There is no obligation on the employer to grant the application. Business needs must be taken into account when making and considering such requests.

Further information outlining the eligibility criteria, procedures etc can be found in [CSC 6/04](#). The Department for Employment and Learning has produced guidance for employees and employers and this can be accessed at [ER 36 Flexible working: a guide for employers and employees](#)

The process for applications made specifically under the terms of the Order is different to Departmental procedures. Application forms for such requests are available from PMB on request.

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FLEXIBLE WORKING APPLICATION PROCESS – JOB RELATED DATA CHANGE (JRDC)



Department of Enterprise, Trade & Investment response

From: David McCune
Date: 26 March 2014
To: Shane McAteer
Clerk to the Committee for Finance and Personnel

Finance & Personnel Committee Inquiry in Flexible Working in the NI Public Sector: Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment

1. Your 31 January 2014 memo to all Clerks refers.
2. The briefing below sets out how flexible working arrangements are used in DETI.
3. The use and scope of flexible working within DETI is similar to that in the NICS as a whole. Flexible working can take many forms but all involve some alteration to the normal full-time working pattern. There are numerous ways in which staff can deviate from the normal working pattern, where this meets business need. The main alternatives are:
 - part-time;
 - job sharing;
 - compressed hours;
 - career break;
 - flexi-time;
 - time off in lieu (TOIL)
 - term-time; and
 - partial retirement

A phased return facility is also regularly used to assist staff returning from sick absence.

4. When compared to the NICS at 1 January 2013, the percentage of part-time workers in DETI at 38.6% was slightly higher than the NICS average of 37.4%. The overall percentage of females in DETI who were on an alternative working pattern was 32.5%, compared to 31.6% in the rest of the NICS. At the same date 6.1% of DETI males had an alternative working pattern, compared with 5.8% in the rest of the NICS.

Home-working and working from remote locations

5. The NICS does not have a Home Working Policy however, in DETI, as in other Departments, on occasion an officer may ask for some flexibility in this regard and it will be for his/her manager to consider whether or not the request can be accommodated, from a business perspective, for a limited period. Any such arrangement would only be considered on an ad-hoc basis and cannot be agreed as a permanent arrangement or formal change to the officer's existing working pattern or contract of employment.
6. Through the use of technology a number of DETI staff do have the capacity to work remotely away from their normal office location, including their home. This is not to accommodate home working as such, but enables the officer to have access to both departmental systems and documentation etc at home. This permits them to do preparatory or follow-up work when they are required to work away from their normal workplace, and also assists them to work outside normal office hours, where this is necessary for business purposes. The ability to

work remotely is also a crucial part of the Department's Business Continuity Planning (BCP), should the normal working location be unavailable in an emergency situation.

7. At present some 120 DETI staff have the capability for full remote access allowing them to work from home or in some cases other field locations via a 3G connection. 76 staff DETI staff are Blackberry users which does not enable full remote working but does give the officers access to emails and other Outlook facilities.
8. Technology also enables DETI staff to avail of the facility to work remotely in other NICS buildings by logging on to any available computer.

Advantages of flexible working

9. There are numerous advantages to allowing staff flexible working arrangements, including:
 - Increased employee morale, engagement, and commitment to the organisation
 - Better work-life balance
 - Increased staff retention/reduced turnover of valued staff
 - Reduced absenteeism
 - Less time spent commuting
 - Lower stress levels
 - Increased productivity
 - Develops image as an employer of choice with family-friendly flexible work schedules
 - Extended hours of operation for departments such as customer service.

Disadvantages of flexible working

10. On the face of it, there are many less disadvantages to flexible working, particularly from the individual's perspective, but also from the employer's perspective, provided that, when a flexible working arrangement is being agreed, the needs of the business are fully considered. Any arrangement needs to ensure that business needs and customer service, be that citizen facing or providing services to other civil servants, is maintained, or even enhanced, through flexible working. Challenges can also arise in relation to communication, team working, performance management and potentially social isolation. Managers and staff therefore need to ensure that these issues are identified as a risk and managed appropriately.

Flexible working in the future

11. Flexible working is, clearly, already well established in DETI with almost 40% of the workforce currently benefiting from some form of flexible working arrangement. In DETI, and the NICS as a whole, the demand for flexible working has been led by employees, in particular female staff who derive a real benefit from it in terms of childcare responsibilities, particularly in the early years. Looking forward, however, the development of new technologies is likely to continue to change how we work and allow us more flexibility in deploying resources. The NICS 2013/16 People Strategy recognises this and, in its commitment to innovation and delivery of services, it commits the NICS to exploring the further use of technology to support an agile, flexible and mobile workforce to enhance business delivery and customer service.

David McCune

DETI DALO

Southern Education & Library Board Response

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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Mr S McAteer
Clerk to the Committee for Finance and Personnel
Room 144 Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

27 March 2014

Dear Mr McAteer

Home Based Working Pilot Scheme(s)

I refer to your letter of 12 March 2014.

Home-based working was piloted in the SELB in 2005 across a limited range of Board support services which were deemed suitable.

The pilot exercise in the SELB involved trialling Home-based working across the following services, Curriculum Advisory and Support Services (CASS), Internal Audit and Maintenance. The assessment of suitability of Board services and individual employees within those services for inclusion in the pilot was based on the following general requirements:

- the job role requiring minimal face-to-face communication or physical contact at the work base;
- autonomy of role;
- easy use of technology;
- minimal need for specialised equipment;
- controllable work flow and definable output.

In order to fully appreciate the issues associated with implementation of the pilot and to gauge lessons to be learnt from its roll-out, it is proposed that it may be beneficial for the Committee to liaise with one of the senior SELB Officers who was involved in the exercise. For this purpose, Mr John Curran, Management Side Secretary has been nominated to act as the point of contact. In advance of any such discussion it should be highlighted, however, that some of the information provided will reflect working arrangements 8.5 years ago when technology and work practices may differ from today's environment.

I understand that the other Education and Library Boards did not engage in home-based working in light of the announcement that the new Education and Skills Authority for Northern Ireland was imminent. The rationale behind the decision was that the scheme would potentially change the work base locations of a significant number of staff whose posts were deemed to be "at risk" and this could be problematic at a time when major organisational change was imminent within Education.

Yours sincerely

Gavin Boyd
CHIEF EXECUTIVE (Interim)

LMCC

Further Committee for Education response

Committee for Education

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To: Shane McAteer
Clerk to the Committee for Finance and Personnel

From: Peter McCallion
Clerk to the Committee for Education

Date: 11 April 2014

Subject: Flexible Working Inquiry

Shane,

You wrote to all statutory committee Clerks on 31 January 2014 seeking feedback on the uptake of flexible working in departments etc.

The Education Committee subsequently wrote to the Education and Library Boards; the Department of Education; and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools as requested. A response from the Department of Education is appended for your information.

As discussed, I am content for you to make all further contacts with DE in this regard in future and for the Committee for Education to be copied in to the relevant responses.

Thanks

Peter McCallion

Committee Clerk

Enc.

Peter McCallion
Clerk to the Committee for Education
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BELFAST BT4 3XX

Tel No: (028) 9127 9849
Fax No: (028) 9127 9100
Email: veronica.bintley@deni.gov.uk

Your ref: PMcC/SMcG/1195

4 April 2014

Dear Peter

Inquiry Into Flexible Working In The Public Sector In Northern Ireland

Thank you for your letter of 14 February requesting information on the extent of flexible working in the Department of Education (DE). I apologise for the delay in responding.

There are currently 656 staff working in DE and the majority avail of flexible working time arrangements. These allow staff to vary their arrival and departure times, to vary the length of their lunch break and to take time off if they work extra hours. There is however a guiding and over-riding principle that this flexibility should be achieved without adverse effect on the overall efficiency of the Department or on service to the public. The NICS Code of Practice on Flexible Working Time is set out in the NICS HR Handbook.

Applications from staff to work alternative working patterns are considered in line with statutory guidelines and the relevant NICS policies; DE makes every effort to facilitate such applications where there are business grounds for doing so. Approximately 23% of DE staff have formal alternative working patterns, which include part time working, compressed hours, personalised hours, job sharing, term-time working and partial retirement.

Some staff work from home or from a remote location on an ad hoc basis, and some home working arrangements are put in place as reasonable adjustments under the Disability Discrimination Act. In order to facilitate working from home and/or a remote location some DE staff have been supplied with encrypted laptops and have the facility for secure remote access. In addition, staff can keep in touch with the office and access documents remotely using Blackberry devices.

Yours sincerely

Veronica

Veronica Bintley

Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer

Momentum Presentation Slides & background information

Inquiry into Flexible Working in the public sector in Northern Ireland

Industry Presentation 14th May 2014

- Ken Moran, Board Member – Momentum
Ken.Moran@objective.com
- John Martin, Project Manager - Total Mobile
john.martin@totalmobile.co.uk
- Fergus Sweeney, Founder – Business IT models
fergus@businessitmodels.com



Background

Momentum is the voice of the Digital Sector in Northern Ireland, representing our common interest in promoting and developing the sector both locally and internationally.

The direction of Momentum is shaped by our voluntary board which is made up of elected representatives from our membership organisations.



The discussion

Advantages

- Improved Work Life Balance
- Ability to retain key staff
- Attraction of better candidates
- Reduction in absenteeism
- Reduction in estate costs

Issues

- Communications strategy
- Data Security
- Training
- Currency of equipment

“Keep it human. People bring change, not ICT”

Flexible Solutions Architecture - Structure

SPECIFICATION

Business Models

Business Needs and Solution Designs

PROVISION

Business Systems

Operational Systems and Data

COMMUNICATION

Networks

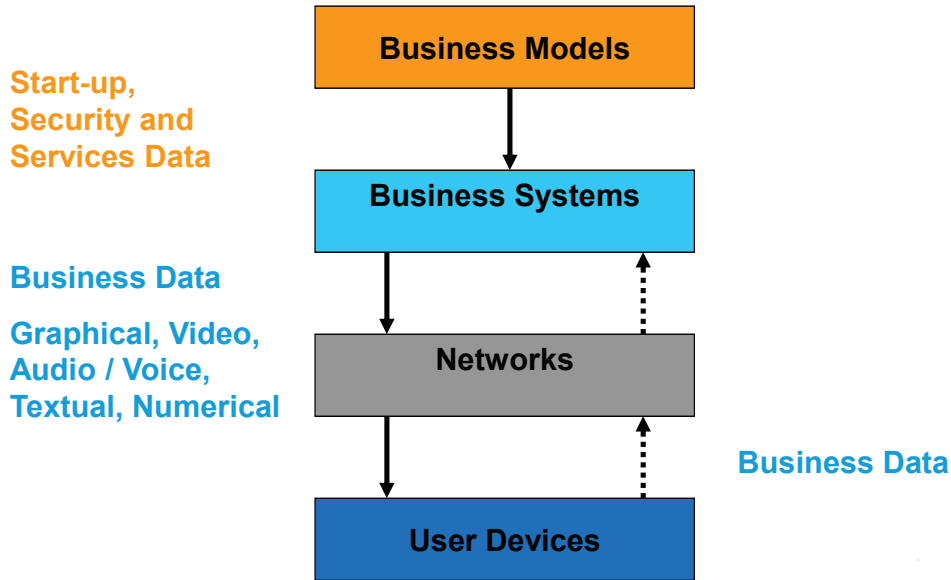
Internet, Mobile, Satellite ...

RECEPTION

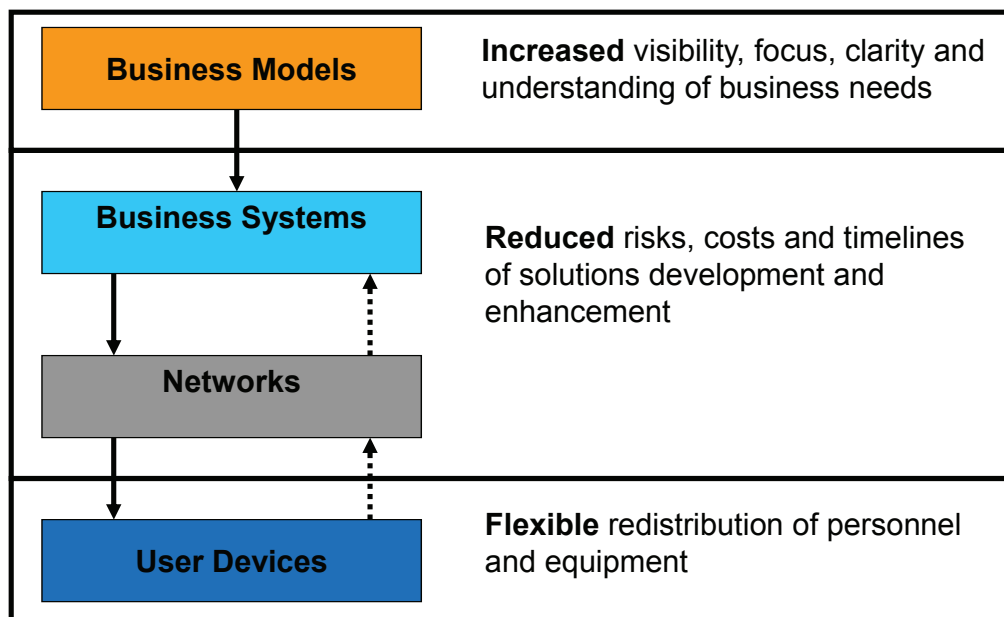
User Devices

PC, Telephone, Mobile, Camera, Sensor ...

Flexible Solutions Architecture - Interconnection



Flexible Solutions Architecture - Benefits



TotalMobile (in Healthcare)



What is it?

A mobile working solution that works on your Apple, Android or Windows tablet

What does it do?

Links securely to the main hospital and patient systems providing patient appointment information, patient history and electronic forms

Who uses it?

Hospital Trust staff including District Nurses in the Community

How does it help?

- Typically frees up 2 hours per day per nurse
- More patient time
- 2 additional visits per nurse per day
- No paperwork, less administration & more up to date records
- Less travelling



Bristol Comm. Healthcare



TotalMobile implemented in 2013

Used by Community and District Nurses covering a range of services

How have they benefited?

	Before	After
evidence of a care plan completed and stored on electronic clinical records system	40% on paper 0% on system	85% on system
% of patients with consent form completed and stored on electronic record system	15%	92%
"I am confident about doing my job to a standard I am happy with"	52%	87%

Virgin Care



TotalMobile implemented in 2013

Community Healthcare Contract in Surrey area

How have they benefited?

- 30% increase in face-to-face time with patients
- Almost 2 additional visits per nurse, per day
- 60% reduction in time spent on paperwork
- 50% improvement in time clinical records input time
- 75% improvement in visit scheduling time
- 33% improvement in referral handling and scheduling time



Background Information on Participants

Business IT models

Business IT Models is an NI based start-up founded on 35+ years of experience in provision of Enterprise ICT Solutions in the UK and overseas. Business IT Models specialise in a model driven approach to Business Analysis, Systems Design, Development and Operation by providing an innovative methodology, set of standards, and companion software tool. The combined product helps reduce the risks, costs and timelines of business analysis and systems design, the first two key planning steps in the solutions development cycle.

Objective

Objective is a specialist provider of Information Management solutions to over 400 companies around the world (not sure if we need to credentialise ourselves, so will take the majority view)

The Objective solution to support flexible working practices will allow the NICS to:

- Securely share its sensitive information both with NICS personnel (remote and home workers, employees on secondment to other organisations, employees working outside Northern Ireland – Invest NI, for example); and with third party partner organisations (health, third sector, for example).
- Access and share this information from any internet connect device – laptop, desktop, smartphone or tablet.
- Fully audit who is sharing what with whom – providing a level of Information Governance that consumer-grade file sharing solutions don't provide.
- Comply with CESG and Cabinet Office requirements in relation to data sovereignty and information classification protocols.

TotalMobile™

Founded in 1985, Belfast-headquartered TotalMobile Ltd. is recognised as the international mobile expert. With a wealth of industry experience, including more than 130

UK-based professionals, it offers innovative software solutions that revolutionise the way in which national and local governments as well as private firms make efficiency savings.

TotalMobile has invested millions in research and development, to create the TotalMobile for Healthcare solution. It allows healthcare providers to save money while doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals have more time to spend with patients, enabling users to improve patient safety and care quality via a simple native app, on all mobile devices and platforms.

About the TotalMobile for Healthcare solution

TotalMobile for Healthcare is a mobile working solution which allows healthcare professionals working on mobile devices, such as smart phones and tablets, to update patient information and record medical tasks at the point of patient contact.

TotalMobile overcomes challenges in connectivity by allowing staff to securely login to the application offline, for devices temporarily without a signal, ensuring they are as productive as possible. There are also a range of security measures in place to not only secure data on the device, but also during transmission to back-office systems, so information such as electronic patient records are never exposed even if a device is stolen.

TotalMobile is low-cost, easily deployed, quickly implemented and delivers a rapid return on investment without the need to replace current infrastructures. Without the need to purchase forms or digipens, and with at least an hour saved in administration, paper and travel per user per day, the benefits are immediate.

Committee for Justice response

Committee for Justice

Room 242
Parliament Buildings

Tel: +44 (0)28 9052 1629

E-mail: committee.justice@niassembly.gov.uk

From: Christine Darrah
Clerk to the Committee for Justice

Date: 27 May 2014

To: Shane McAteer
Clerk to the Committee for Finance and Personnel

Committee for Finance and Personnel Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland

At its meeting on 3 April 2014 the Committee for Justice noted a response from the Department of Justice in relation to the Committee for Finance and Personnel's Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland.

It has now come to light that the response had not been sent to the Committee for Finance and Personnel as had been assumed under the new arrangements for correspondence between Committees and Departments and I therefore attach a copy for the information of the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

Christine Darrah

Clerk to the Committee for Justice
Enc

Committee for the Environment response

Committee for Finance and Personnel

Room 419
Parliament Buildings
Tel: 028 9052 1843

From: Shane McAteer
Clerk to the Committee for Finance and Personnel

Date: 31 January 2014

To: All Clerks, Statutory Committees

CC: Clerk Assistants

Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland

The Committee for Finance and Personnel has been conducting an Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland. This aims to investigate how flexible working practices – including arrangements for how, when and where public servants undertake their work – could be implemented successfully and used strategically for maximum benefit and efficiency in the public sector in Northern Ireland. The Terms of Reference for the Inquiry are **attached** for your information.

Given the cross-cutting nature of this issue, the Committee agreed to seek submissions from each statutory committee. In particular, it would be helpful if each committee could obtain information from their department on the extent to which flexible working practices are being applied, on any good practice cases, and on the number of employees who undertake all or part of their work from remote locations (i.e. away from the traditional office environment).

I would be grateful for a response from each committee by **21 March 2014**.

Further information on the Inquiry as well as evidence received by the Committee to date can be found at the following link:

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/2011-2016/finance-and-personnel/inquiries/inquiry-into-flexible-working-hours/>

Shane McAteer
21843

Committee for Finance and Personnel Inquiry into Flexible Working Draft Terms of Reference

Title: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland

Background: As part of a wider exercise in exploring inquiry options, the Committee for Finance and Personnel received evidence on flexible working from Professor Sir George Bain on 1 February 2012 and from Department of Finance and Personnel officials on 14 March 2012. This evidence highlighted that the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) does not have a formal strategy or policy on the flexible location of work, in terms of technology and premises, though it does have human resource policies covering alternative working patterns such as part-time and flexitime working. On the basis of this preliminary evidence, the Committee agreed, in principle, to undertake an Inquiry into flexible working and this decision was further informed by receiving an Assembly Research briefing on 28 May 2012.

Purpose: The Inquiry will aim to investigate how flexible working practices – including arrangements for how, when and where public servants undertake their work – could be implemented successfully and used strategically for maximum benefit and efficiency in the public sector in Northern Ireland.

Objectives: The Inquiry will have the following key objectives:

- To examine the extent to which flexible working is implemented in the NICS, including a critical review of existing policy and practice regarding flexible working time and a survey of cases where developments in technology and workplace design are being used to facilitate the flexible location of work in the NICS.
- To identify lessons from international case studies on how flexible working arrangements have been implemented effectively elsewhere to achieve benefits for employers, employees and potentially for the wider economy and society, including: increased productivity; improved staff morale and commitment; reduced staff turnover and absenteeism; wider recruitment talent pools; reduced levels of economic inactivity; reduced premises costs; promotion of gender equality in employment; and environmental benefits.
- To consider the range of options presented by new technology and workplace design to support flexible working practices, such as mobile working, teleworking, remote conferencing, hot-desking and satellite offices, and to examine approaches to monitoring and managing performance in such circumstances.
- To explore the types of work or job roles within the NICS which are suited to flexible working practices and
- To consider the critical success factors, challenges, barriers and risks to introducing flexible working and how these can be managed and mitigated as appropriate.

Output: The intention is that the Inquiry will result in a report to the Northern Ireland Assembly containing evidence-based findings and recommendations to the Department of Finance and Personnel and the wider Executive. These findings and recommendations will inform the development of cross-cutting strategic policies and procedures for enhancing existing and implementing new flexible working arrangements across the NICS to maximum beneficial effect, which may also be applicable to the wider public sector in Northern Ireland.

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Your reference:

Our reference: CQ 18/14

Sheila Mawhinney
Clerk to the Environment Committee
Northern Ireland Assembly
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Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3XX

Date: 14 March 2014

Dear Sheila

You are aware that the Committee for Finance and Personnel has been conducting an Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland to investigate how flexible working practices could be implemented successfully and used strategically for maximum benefit and efficiency in the public sector in Northern Ireland. The intention is that the Inquiry will result in a report to the Assembly containing evidence-based findings and recommendations to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and the wider Executive. These findings and recommendations will inform the development of crosscutting strategic policies and procedures for enhancing existing and implementing new flexible working arrangements across the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) to maximum beneficial effect, which may also be applicable to the wider public sector in Northern Ireland.

Shane McAteer, Clerk to the Committee for Finance and Personnel, wrote to all Assembly Clerks on the 31 January seeking information from respective departments on the extent to which flexible working practices are being applied, on any good practice cases, and on the number of employees who undertake all or part of their work from remote locations (i.e. away from the traditional office environment).

It is important to record that during its inquiry the Finance and Personnel Committee has already received detailed information from DFP officials (Enterprise Shared Services) on the NICS IT Infrastructure which allows for staff to work from a range of locations. This infrastructure includes the:

- the roll out across all NICS sites of Network NI. Network NI provides a single, dedicated, high-speed, network service connecting all NICS locations to deliver voice, video and data communication in support of a modern public sector.
- The creation of IT Assist for the delivery of common IT systems and services to support the business objectives of the NICS. IT Assist provides NICS staff with access to a wide range of high quality services such as Desktop, E-mail, Internet Access and Blackberry and professional help on common IT services between 8am and 6pm every day.
- Secure remote access
- 3G Mobile which provides for faster information transfer rate and mobile broadband access.
- Home ADSL
- Personal Broadband
- Blackberry service

For the purposes of this response, the department has used the definition of flexible working contained in the Bain Report on Location of Public Sector Jobs which has been considered by the Committee for Finance and Personnel as part of its inquiry. The Bain Report states that ‘... Flexible working is understood to include the use of technology and workplace design to enable staff to work in a range of locations without being tied to a particular desk.’ It includes such modes of working as:-

- **Mobile/remote working:** where an individual would usually have an office base but would also be equipped to work from a range of locations (e.g. hotel, airport,) and/or avail of “touch down” space at satellite offices.
- **Touchdown working:** an arrangement that supports short-stay, drop-in style working in which individuals do not need an allocated work station as their work involves being out of the office for much of the time.
- **Satellite offices:** where one or more offices or sites are equipped for use by staff on a flexible basis, usually as an alternative to commuting. This may be an extension of another site within the organisation’s portfolio or an office shared with other organisations and it may offer such facilities as meeting rooms, networked workstations, printing and photocopying.
- **Home working:** where individuals are based at home for all or part of their working time and are provided with the necessary equipment and support to enable contact with colleagues and customers.
- **Teleworking:** where work is performed at a distance over a network such as the telephone or internet (e.g. sales, technical support, and helplines).
- **Hot-desking:** where individuals do not have a permanently allocated workstation but there is a designated area where they can work at one of a number of workstations’.

In respect of the practices in DOE, I can report that DOE has a **Digital Strategy for 2013-2016** which provides a programme of IT projects which fully exploit the capabilities of the NICS technical infrastructure and assist delivery of functions and services across the department. This includes providing technology to support remote working as the business requires and to create a more agile workforce to meet the demands of a digital economy. I set out in the following paragraphs indicators of flexible working practices in the department.

Laptops/Remote Access

Approximately 13% of staff (354) have been provided with laptop facilities these users have a number of options available to gain remote access to the DOE systems. Currently 56 staff have 3G connectivity which provides access from any location, 57 have ADSL home connectivity and 37 can use their home broadband to connect in. A small number of laptop users have access to more than one of these facilities which means that less than one third of laptop users have remote connectivity. Remote access to the departments systems is infrequent. However not all laptop users need to connect remotely to carryout daily responsibilities. 321 Blackberries have also been deployed across the department which allows staff to receive emails while out of the office.

Instant Messaging

DOE has rolled out the basic Jabber and Instant Messaging across the department and for those staff with laptops enhanced Jabber functionality is provided which includes soft phone (telephone calls over the internet), voicemail, desktop video and desktop sharing capability. DOE is leading with this rollout of this innovative technology which will be used for more efficient messaging and better use of the telephony for example in the use of tele conference calls.

Video Conferencing

DOE has already invested in a number of new Video Conferencing units for specific business areas to take advantage of the new service. This is reaping benefits by contributing to financial savings in respect of travel claims, more effective use of staff time and improving work/life balance. Business Groups within the department make very good use of the facility to hold discussions with stakeholder groups throughout Ireland and the wider UK such as Scottish Environmental Agency, DEFRA, the Big Lottery Fund, Driver Vehicle Standards Agency, the Department of Transport. Teleconferencing with specific committees and groups has saved the need to travel to meetings in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland.

DOE Office Locations

DOE has offices located across Northern Ireland with over 52% staff working in offices outside of Belfast, in most cases the staff who work at these offices also live within a reasonable commuting distance. In addition this geographical spread of office locations allow staff within DOE, through the use of Network NI services to work from 'satellite offices' i.e. away from their main office however within their own Business Group, for example NIEA staff can use computer facilities at regional offices. In a similar way staff from regional offices can use 'hot desking' facility when working at headquarters offices in Belfast. A small number of staff make use of future@work Business Zones at Marlborough House, Craigavon.

The department looks forward to the findings and recommendations of this enquiry. I trust this information is of assistance, should you require anything further please contact me directly.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Richmond

DALO

[by e-mail]

Open Volume 2

Open Volume 3



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