

Good practice statement on office working arrangements

About NAWRA

The [National Association of Welfare Rights Advisers \(NAWRA\)](#) is a membership organisation for advisers and organisations across the UK. NAWRA represents advisers from local authorities, the voluntary sector, trade unions, solicitors, and other organisations that provide advice on benefits and tax credits. Currently, more than 250 organisations are members of NAWRA. We aim to challenge, influence and improve policy and legislation by building a national network of advisers who share ideas and good practice.

Background

There has been a widespread move towards hybrid working and office space downsizing in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This good practice statement is a guide to office requirements for welfare rights staff that aims to ensure that professional standards can be upheld. It also highlights some potential pitfalls to avoid.

Good practice statement on office working arrangements

Welfare rights staff often deal with highly sensitive information from clients facing complex difficulties, usually in much the same way that Social Services clients present. In so far as is possible, a welfare rights staff team requires dedicated private office space to work together in a supportive and confidential environment.

Where welfare rights advisers may be required to 'hot desk' or share space with other teams it is incumbent on the employer to consider the following:

- Client confidentiality and maintaining client trust in the service; the appearance of data confidentiality is just as important to maintain trust from clients.
- Data security and compliance with GDPR, including the personal liability of staff and access to data by employees who have not been DBS checked. It is the responsibility of the employer to put in place measures, including staff training and re-training, to protect data, particularly in the light of new ways of working.
- Adequate storage space for reference materials and subscriptions to online resource materials to enable all workers access from wherever they are working.
- Protection from noise and interruptions (this can come from other employees, visitors, or members of the public) including a suitable area for quiet work or supervision meetings etc.
- Space to discuss sensitive and upsetting cases, such as those involving terminal illness, with colleagues without being overheard.
- Keeping the team together to allow everyone to draw on pooled knowledge and experience in order to provide the best service for clients.
- Avoiding conflicts of interest by ensuring that services are located away from other teams where an actual or perceived conflict could result.

Whilst we have endeavoured to consider the main issues surrounding the new ways of working this list is by no means exhaustive or limited to the above.

We hope that welfare rights managers and organisations will find it useful to support their case for dedicated office space.