

Flexible working and returning to the office

I have seen a lot in my 38 years within the various incarnations of Place (anyone remember Technical Services), but it still seems remarkable that we have come to the current situation regarding the introduction of the agreed flexible working guidance within Place.

Fortunately, with the intervention of HR, we now have an initial agreement.

Where are we now

A stage 1 grievance was issued to Peter Watton and a subsequent meeting two weeks ago failed to resolve the issue or find much common ground in implementing the agreed HR guidance.

UNISON and HR have agreed on the interpretation of the flexible working guidance and this has now been accepted by Place Management.

From now on and on the Hybrid return to the office you will follow these basic principles:

- If you were on the old flexi time scheme you will be covered by all of the new flexible working guidelines.
- If you did have flexi and your job has not changed since the start of the pandemic, “needs of the service”, “advertised hours”, “available for the client” are not acceptable reasons to withdraw any of the guidelines.
- Where you had flexible start and finish times before, the same scheme applies now. As before you do not need to ask permission to have flexible start and finish times or a specific reason to do so. With the removal of core times, it would make sense to inform your manager if you are going to start after 10am or leave before 4pm.

- You do not need to work 7.5 hours a day. For your wellbeing, the guidance says you should try and balance your 36 hours every week.

But the guidance, UNISON, HR, and our members recognise that we don't live in a perfect world where your in tray empties every week by 3.45pm. So, the guidance is clear, that your hours should balance over the whole month.

- Where you have to work longer hours to complete a task, meet targets or you choose to do so, then you agree with your manager when you get that time back – How this works in practice needs further clarification with HR as sections are implementing various interpretations of this. Some sections for example are allowing you to request a day off to take your time back for a specific reason. Others are insisting you work your 7.5 hours every day, not a minute more.

What's Next

Further meetings are planned with HR to clarify how and when you can take the extra hours you have worked back. Where we have more work than hours in the month, I can see no reason that you cannot request a day off rather than run your hours back to zero with shorter days.

If you have not had flexible working in the past due to shifts or work constraints, we are due to discuss how more flexibility can be introduced into these roles.

Gerry Stovin
UNISON, Assistant Branch Secretary