

Smart Working Dumb Designs?

The Council's desire to squeeze more staff into smaller spaces continues as austerity continues. To help achieve this, a new policy is being proposed called Smart Working. According to the draft guidance,

'Smart working is a way of working in which an organisation empowers its employees to work with maximum flexibility and minimum constraints – to optimise their performance and deliver "best in class" value and customer service. It uses communications and information technology to enable people to work in ways, which best suit their needs without the traditional limitations of where and when tasks must be performed. It is based on the concept that work is an activity we do, rather than a place we go.'

Many staff will welcome the chance to work more flexibly and undertake certain tasks at home. If undertaken correctly, Smart Working can be a benefit to the employer and employee.

However, it is important that this is introduced so staff can undertake their tasks when in the workplace. Unfortunately, the design of the first area to introduce the Council's 'Work Place Vision' does not appear to have fully considered the workplace requirements of staff.

It also ignores the specialist nature of the ICT some staff need to undertake their work and the team working that takes place when staff sit in the same locations. The design for the first 'Smart Working' area has been created from somebody's ideal, rather than starting with the needs of the Teams to work there. This 'not so smart' approach has angered some staff. Management are trying to impose a 6 to 10 desk ratio for staff, without checking if that will work. Worryingly it is based on 7 to 10 ratios adopted elsewhere, but management want to push it further in Sandwell.

UNISON has met with staff and will express concerns to management. If there are re-designs in your area that change your working environment, ensure your collective voice is heard by involving UNISON.

Children's Trust Survey reveals Concerns

During the summer, UNISON conducted a survey of members working at Sandwell Children's Trust after numerous members had raised concerns around workloads, stress levels, oppressive management and ultimately the service provided to Sandwell's vulnerable children.

A third of our members responded. Despite the Trust launching in April the results show serious issues remain to be resolved, with some staff stating the service had got worse, rather than better.

Two thirds of respondents said they did not have a manageable workload, with 77% stating they had worked outside their contracted hours to complete tasks.

We have raised these matters with senior management and we hope they will work with the trade unions to resolve our members concerns. The 'offer' to staff, providing 12 reasons to work at Sandwell Children's Trust, recently introduced, is a welcome step in the right direction. Whether it is sufficient to resolve the workload and stress levels burdening staff remains to be seen. Particularly given that the number of children in care has increased by a third in the last twelve months.

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