

15 January 2024

Stepping up minimum office attendance is a slap in the face for hard-working civil servants

The latest initiative to increase attendance at workplaces is a slap in the face to many hard-working public sector workers and amounts to the government reneging on promises that were made during the pandemic, PCS has told the Cabinet Office.

PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka made it clear in a letter to minister for the Cabinet Office John Glen that we feel the drive to get all civil servants to attend a workplace at least 60% of the time is “unnecessary, unreasonable and irrational.”

Mark highlighted the fact that during the Covid-19 pandemic, our members adjusted brilliantly in the most difficult of circumstances and worked tirelessly to help keep the country running. They were lauded as heroes by the government who promised to build back better. Before the end of the pandemic, we were assured by the Cabinet Office that hybrid working would become normalised in the future.

The latest initiative to increase attendance at workplaces is therefore a slap in the face for those public sector workers and amounts to the government reneging on promises that were made during the pandemic.

The letter also referred to our survey, which was completed by more than 16,000 members and showed that the move is deeply unpopular with our members. These are their views:

- 38.64% said the move to 60% attendance at offices would make them consider leaving the civil service; a further 28.55% were unsure.
- 59.78% of respondents said it would place them under more stress and less able to look after those they care for; a further 15.78% were unsure.
- 40.16% said they felt that being forced to attend the office more frequently would disadvantage them because of their sex, disability or age; a further

13.51% were unsure.

- 100% said that they would face increased weekly travel costs as follows: £0-25 (51.41%); £25-50 (25.92%); £50-£75 (11.23%); £75-£100 (4.76%); over £100 (6.68%)
- 100% said they would lose valuable time travelling to work unnecessarily due to the following daily commute: 5 - 30 minutes (26.28%); 30 - 60 minutes (39.62%); 60 to 90 minutes (21.34%); 90 to 120 minutes (7.43%); more than 120 minutes (5.33%)
- 36.27% said that the move would create problems with desk space.
- 83.16% said hybrid working had made them more productive.
- 71.98% said they would support a nationally agreed hybrid working policy.

These figures clearly do not bode well for staff morale. It is clear that the approach being taken is likely to be discriminatory and will cause further financial problems for our members at a time when many are already struggling from an acute cost of living crisis. Nor does it bode well for the future of the civil service which will find it increasingly difficult to attract staff given this retrograde step.

Mark concluded his letter by calling on the minister to enter into negotiations with us on a national collectively bargained framework governing hybrid working across the civil service and its related areas to “prevent inflaming industrial relations further”.

We will be publishing guidance for reps and members on this issue shortly.