The Sustainable Steps Series

Helping to make the Well-being of Future Generations Act a positive reality

GIG CYMRU NHS WALES | Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru Public Health Wales

World Health Organization Collaborating Centre · On Investment for Health and Well-being

Sustainable Home and Agile Working

Each and every one of us in the Welsh public sector has a part to play in making the Well-being of Future Generations Act a reality, and in '*being the change*' towards the Wales we want for our current and future generations. Our actions today are already impacting on tomorrow; together, let's make sure it's a *positive* impact!

Ni yw'r Newid

Be the Change

Introduction

COVID-19 has changed the way we live and work. It brought about an immediate move to homeworking, where feasible. As we readjust to a COVID-19 pandemic world and beyond, it is likely that elements of this shift in working practice will remain in some form. As we do so, it is important we recognise that home and agile working has different public health impacts on people, their families, local communities, and organisations themselves[1]. Public Health Wales' Home and Agile Working Health Impact Assessment outlines the positive and negative impacts in much more detail. Home and agile working is also an opportunity to act more sustainably – optimising the positive opportunities and preventing the negative impacts and unintended consequences.
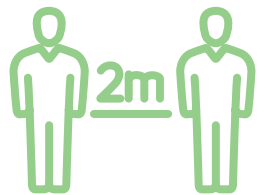
[1] Green L, Lewis R, Evans L, Morgan L, Parry-Williams L, Azam S and Bellis MA. (2020). A COVID-19 pandemic world and beyond: The public health impact of home and agile working in Wales. Summary Report. Cardiff, Public Health Wales NHS Trust.

In Wales we are guided by the [Well-being of Future Generations Act](#); legislation that outlines how we can act more sustainably in the arenas of health, prosperity, resilience, communities, language and heritage, equalities, and Wales' role in the world.

We want a society where living conditions and resources are used to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Many countries are looking to improve the lives of future generations; however, under this duty - where Wales remains the only country to have legislated for the rights of future generations - we all have a part to play as champions of the Act, by choosing to work more sustainably from home and in agile workspaces.

This e-guide provides a raft of ideas and examples to support you to work sustainably at home – whether you're at the start of your journey or are looking for additional steps. All are important in helping us to improve Wales' well-being now and in the future.
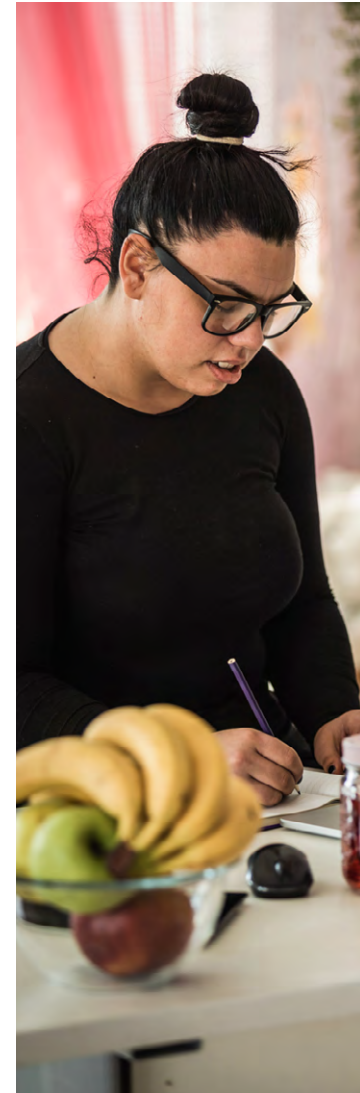
Contributing to Wales' well-being goals

By its very nature, this e-guide contributes to all of Wales' Well-being Goals and the United Nations' Global Goals. The sustainable steps have been arranged in broad categories to make it easier to take action, and hopefully provide inspiration and encouragement!

Wales' Seven Well-being Goals

17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainable steps

Sustainable home workspace

Home and agile working can bring benefits such as increased efficiency and productivity, and time maximisation. However, it can also increase the risk of musculoskeletal conditions and injuries from non-ergonomically designed workspaces, alongside the potential for increased home utilities bills.

- Calculate and understand your household's carbon footprint. WWF has a helpful [carbon footprint calculator.](#)

- If possible, replace light bulbs or light fittings to energy efficient lighting - they use less energy and last a lot longer than incandescent lighting and can help lower your energy bills

- Turn off your lights when you leave a room

- Open up your blinds to let in as much natural light as possible

- Put on an extra layer of clothing instead of turning on the heating

- Wear fingerless gloves to keep your wrists warm while working on cold days

- Source your energy from renewable energy providers, and support, where possible, community renewable energy generation schemes

- Insulate your home if possible, you can lose [25% of heat](#) through the roof of an uninsulated home, so insulating your loft or roof is a great way to lower your heating bills

- Purchase second-hand or repurposed workspace furniture or furniture made from recycled materials or ethically sourced materials (materials grown and manufactured in ways that use fewer natural resources, and respect nature, animals and people)

- Check how to sit at your desk correctly - visit the *Chartered Society of Physiotherapy* or contact your local Estates and Facilities team for advice

- Add small pot plants to bring nature to your workspace to help improve mental well-being. Some popular office plants include: the snake plant, spider plant, English ivy and gerbera daisy

- If you're working from places other than your home or office, try to choose a place that uses natural light and/ or green energy, is close to home and/or easily accessible by walking or cycling. Ask the landlord if they use ethical suppliers. Are they committed to reducing and recycling waste? Can they provide local produce in season or Fairtrade products such as tea and coffee?

- Some of the sustainable steps above and *simple behaviour changes* around the house, can save significant amounts of energy, carbon and money

Please also have a look at our Helping Nature to Flourish resource, which outlines some things that we can do to incorporate biodiversity into our workspace
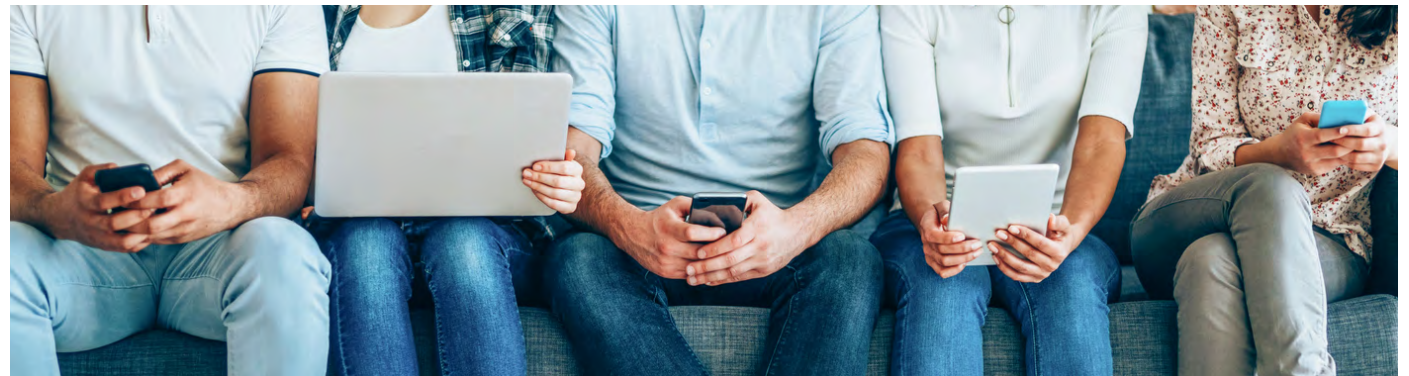
Sustainable IT

Home and agile working can bring about a better utilisation of IT solutions to support and enhance the delivery of work outcomes. However, digital exclusion and lack of digital literacy or low levels of digital literacy could prevent these solutions from being optimised.

- Use your phone, tablet or computer for notetaking

- Turn off your device when not in use - the *average UK home* wastes between £50 and £86 each year by leaving appliances on standby

- Think before printing, and if needed, always use double-sided printing and refillable ink cartridges

- Use rechargeable batteries in work devices where possible - as well as saving you money, rechargeable batteries are far better for the environment

- Turn-off your devices at night, including your WIFI box

- Use a sustainable search engine - sustainable search engines donate some of their profits to environmental projects, such as tree planting or ocean cleaning, or they donate to environmental charities

- Research free online digital literacy skills classes and resources to help improve IT skills

- Buy second hand reconditioned computers, laptops and phones to save money and stop resources going to landfill

Sustainable mental well-being

Home and agile working can bring benefits, for example, promotion of work-life balance and enhanced autonomy and control of when and where someone works; but it can also diminish social interaction and create or increase social isolation and stress. It can also be challenging to safeguard vulnerable groups of people.

- Ask yourself *how you're feeling?* Public Health Wales' support and advice may help

- Take regular breaks and eat away from your desk

- Whilst on calls, take the opportunity to turn it into a standing or walking meeting

- Take time to reflect and ensure colleagues' mental well-being is also being looked after. The Health and Care Professions Council has produced a reflective practice guide which is useful in supporting this. Reflective practice | (hcpc-uk.org)

- Work with compassion. Here's a useful toolkit from the Samaritans that can help

- Take time to be physically active every day

- Encourage wildlife into your garden with a mix of plants, shrubs and wildflower areas - it's relaxing to watch the birds and insects when you take a break outside

- Spend time outside, in your garden or local community – get lots of fresh air and daylight

- Practice daily mindfulness

- When open, use your local cultural facilities, e.g., libraries, museums, galleries, parks, leisure centres during your lunchtime

- Familiarise yourself with your employer's occupational health support

Please also have a look at our How are you doing? and our Helping Nature to Flourish resources.

Sustainable lunch

Home and agile working can make it easier to prepare and eat healthy food, and provide opportunities to harness natural daylight and be physically active during lunchbreaks. It can, however, make it easier to snack and eat unhealthy foods. This coupled with the potential for being more sedentary, could lead to increased risks of obesity.

- Regularly prepare home-cooked meals

- Reduce your meat and dairy intake and try and have a vegetarian or vegan day at least once a week

- If buying a take-out, purchase locally from sole traders, farmers' markets, small businesses, social enterprises, and community interest companies

- Buy minimally packaged foods and reuse containers

- Buy fair, ethical, sustainable and seasonal food and drink

- Reduce your food waste by preparing only what you need or make *creative use of leftovers*

- Compost your food waste. Here's a guide from The Royal Horticultural Society

- Use a dishwasher instead of handwashing – it's water-efficient

- Take part in #PlasticFreeFriday. Why not share on social media what you're doing to live without or reduce throwaway plastic one day a week

- When you're out and about, don't forget to take your refillable water bottle and travel mug

- *Grow your own* fruit and vegetables - you can use window boxes, patio pots and even grow indoor salads and herbs if you haven't got the garden space

- Get an allotment - you can swap fruit and vegetable surplus and get fit while growing your own

Please also have a look at our Reducing our Waste Measurements resource, which details what we can do to go low carb(on)

Sustainable commuting / travel

Home and agile working can bring about reduced car use through lower levels of commuting, which could have co-benefits for the environment. It also provides opportunities to do more walking and cycling, before or after work and at lunchtime. It could, however, bring about risks to the frequency, availability and future viability of public transport for those who are required to work at a specific location.

- Active travel by walking and cycling as much as you can will boost your physical and mental health and reduce pollution levels to help improve air quality

- Use public transport instead of the car, where possible

- When it's time to replace your car, consider whether you need one at all or investigate an electric or hydrogen powered vehicle to reduce your carbon emissions

- Look for local car share schemes or hire a car - some hire companies provide electric vehicles

- Enjoy the health and well-being benefits of walking and cycling around your working day - use the *Car vs Bike Calculator* to calculate the cost savings as well as the environmental and health benefits

Please also have a look at our Walking our Talk resource, which highlights some of the practical ways in which we can contribute to Wales' well-being by travelling actively and sustainably

Your stories...

*Here we've highlighted the experiences and tips of
some colleagues from across Wales' public bodies.*

" I'm quite enjoying the home working,
being able to sign off at 5 and be
home by 5:02 is far better than the
hour crowded train commute home.
I've also saved money on train tickets
and driving back and forth from the
train station. "

" I'm enjoying being able to spend more
time with the family and go out on
longer walks/runs. "

" I've had the flexibility to fit my
30-minute walk in during the day...
get that hit of vitamin D. "

" I've enjoyed home working particularly
not having the commute. I have made
a conscious effort to doing 'something
every day' through January - be it
walk/ run/ cycle etc. it's a great way to
encourage me out on a cold, wet and
dark evening after work!! "

" I'm enjoying working from home. I do
miss my cycle commute, but I try to
go for a walk during my lunchbreak to
make sure I leave the desk and move
about. It's nice to be able to log off and
not have a long commute home. I set
an alarm to make sure I finish on time
at the end of the day (otherwise I seem
to develop a habit of working a bit extra
every day). A walk or cycle after work
helps me separate work from home. "

" I've found I'm eating healthier having
access to a fridge full of fruits and less
food going to waste. "

" I haven't printed any work materials
since leaving the office in March 2020! "

" Since the New Year I've been making
time for a 30-minute walk and am
actually missing it on the rare occasion
I can't go. I've lost half a stone since
New Year. "

"

I'm finding working from home has both positives and negatives. I'm really enjoying the fact I've only got a 2-minute commute to my study, which gives me more time in the morning and afternoon to go for a walk or catch up on a few jobs. I tend to start early and take a longer lunchbreak so I can get outside for a walk in the sunshine. I find this beneficial as it gets me away from the desk and moving about. When all your meetings are at your desk it's easy to sit in the same position for hours on end (which I've found isn't good for my back, shoulders or neck!).

Before COVID-19 I always had to finish work by a certain time to be home for my dog. I did find when I initially started working from home I didn't finish on time and ended up doing longer days. To stop this, I now set an alarm to make sure I finish on time at the end of the working day and take my dog out for a walk. I do miss my cycle commute (although I could only do this during spring to autumn), but I have more time to go for a cycle in the evenings. My dog spends all day sleeping in my study (on the bed settee), so I guess he also benefits from me working at home… and I won't need to buy any more dog beds!

Last summer I had time to water the plants before work and spent some of my lunchtimes doing a bit of gardening, my garden looked the best it ever had and the amount of wildlife I saw was amazing. I felt like I'd had time to do my bit for nature,

although I think the various lockdowns helped with this as I would usually be away on weekends, instead of working in the garden!

I'm also eating healthier – I'm finding it's easier to do this when you've got access to fresh fruit and veg in the fridge – or maybe it's the fact my husband prepares my lunch. We're using a bit more electricity at home, but the cost is more than offset by the savings made by not commuting.

I did start my role with my organisation during Covid, so I've missed the opportunity to meet people at the water cooler/ coffee area etc. Luckily, I joined a very friendly, welcoming team, so it was easy to get to know everyone and feel part of a team.

I think COVID-19 has shown us that we don't actually have to travel to an office to undertake our roles. I find I'm more productive at home, but in all honesty I'm lucky I don't have any distractions apart from a snoring Labrador. I don't think I'd feel the same if I had to fit home schooling in alongside work. As we come through the pandemic, I think I would like a blended approach with the majority of time spent homeworking and the odd day in the office. We have had to give up our spare room for my study, as my husband also works from home in our 'other' study, but it's a small price to pay for the benefits home working has provided.

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Want to learn more?

Sustainable home workspace
Here's a useful resource from the WWF on promoting sustainable living.
Have a read about why the everyday choices we make all have impacts on our planet.

Every year, at 8:30pm on the last Saturday of March, millions of people across the world take part in Earth Hour to raise awareness of the issues facing our planet. But Earth Hour is more than just an Hour for the planet - it's a movement for *our future*. And it's more than just a symbol of support - it's a catalyst for urgent change. Find our more here.

The planet is in crisis - from climate change to the pollution in our oceans and devastation of our forests. It's up to all of us to fix it. You can take your first step with the WWF's environmental footprint calculator.

Sustainable mental well-being
Working with Compassion has been designed to provide people with facts and information, alongside real tips and actions which can be used in your daily working life. This toolkit can assist you when talking to or helping someone who is experiencing poor mental health or emotional distress. Showing compassion – towards yourself and others – is a skill that can be learned, and this toolkit by Samaritans Cymru can help you develop those skills.

How are you doing? is a suite of resources curated by Public Health Wales that promotes a mindful check-in around people's social connectedness, physical health and mental health and well-being, and supports people in taking positive actions in these areas.

Thriving with Nature is a guide that's been produced by the WWF and the Mental Health Foundation to help you make the most of natural spaces through the seasons for your mental health and well-being.

Sustainable lunch

Home composting is the most environmentally friendly way of dealing with kitchen and garden waste, plus it produces compost that can be used as an excellent soil improver. Here's some advice from The Royal Horticultural Society about composting.

It has never been easier to buy Fair Trade products. And helpfully, Fair Trade Wales has put together some information of what to look out for and where to buy Fair Trade products in Wales.

Meat Free Monday is a not-for-profit campaign which aims to raise awareness of the detrimental environmental impact of intensive animal agriculture and industrial fishing. The campaign encourages people to help slow climate change, conserve precious natural resources and improve their health by having at least one plant-based diet day each week.

The Vegan Society has a useful guide to help you try a vegan diet.

Friends of the Earth has produced useful tips on how to live without plastic one day a week. #PlasticFreeFriday.

Sustainable commuting and travelling

World Car Free Day is a global event held around the 22nd September every year. Highlighting environmental issues, it encourages drivers to give up their cars for a day and use public transport, ride a bike, or simply walk. Car free days can unlock a whole new approach to movement and mobility.

Bike Week, delivered by Cycling UK, is an annual celebration to showcase cycling. Thousands of people all over the UK enjoy the simple pleasure of riding a bike.

Cycle to Work Day is the UK's biggest commuting event. It is for everyone. It doesn't matter if you haven't cycled in years or have never cycled at all. This is just about giving it a go.

Join the conversation

We would like to hear about the actions that you are taking to work sustainably at home or in an agile workspace. It would be great if you could also share with and inspire others by posting photos on social media using #BeTheChangeWales.

Together, we can 'be the change'!

Simple **acts** can have big **impacts**