**Napo guide to office relocations based on experiences of Family Court Section (FCS) members**

This guidance is based on the experience of Family Court Section members whose offices once numbered over 100 and now stand at about 45. Most moves have been into empty property owned by the Crown. Two teams have moved into court buildings. FCS members work flexibly with laptops/tablets and Blackberries all of which are internet enabled.

All information on children’s case files is electronic. Paper documents are scanned and saved and in theory, Cafcass operate paperless offices with a drive now to reduce printing which also reduces the risk of data protection breaches. Post is now handled remotely where it is scanned and added to case files. Alerts are sent to the allocated practitioner to advise of changes to the files.

Many staff operate at a considerable distance from an office. They are required to attend the office for Performance Learning Review meetings, team meetings and to undertake office duty but can risk assess and decide where it is best to meet service users. Sometimes, premises such as Children’s Centres local to the service users are borrowed.

If change is happening in your workplace:

* Keep accommodation on the agenda for both national and local union meetings. Ask about plans, leases coming to an end, changed business needs.
* If changes are planned and TU partners informed, ask about the impact on service users and how this can be minimised. Will there be more home visits (which are resource intensive for staff) or supported/reimbursed travel costs for service users?
* Ask to accompany business managers to inspect prospective new workplaces and ask to see the plans for the building which the landlord will have provided in advance.
* Ask to see the employer’s business template for office requirements. This will have room dimensions and layouts. Ask what changes would be planned for the building.
* Ask who is to be based here to ensure that staff have the required legal minimum space to work in.
* Ask about car parking spaces. Probation/Cafcass have no obligation to provide free car parking for staff but have often done so. If this is removed it can lead to considerable hardship and upset for staff who then have to pay.
* Ask about the needs of staff with protected characteristics under the Equality Act. The employer may not know who these staff are even where the employer has provided adjustments. It is particularly important to accompany members to individual consultation meetings. Staff with mobility issues may need to have priority for car parking spaces. Ask about lifts and think about means of evacuation. A Personal Evacuation Procedure may be necessary for those with mobility issues. Staff who use specialist software may need quiet space to work in to minimise interference.
* Ask about general welfare provision. Seek to have sufficient rest areas, eating areas and break out spaces, private meeting rooms, especially if the plan is for open plan working. Ask about lockers for staff if the plan is for open plan working. Run through your workplace inspection guidance to anticipate what might bring concerns.
* If the move will result in staff working more remotely, raise the likelihood of staff becoming isolated which can result in the loss of a team identity.

There should be general consultation meetings with staff followed by individual consultations. Trade Union partners should seek to attend both. Some staff may wish to change their working hours, for example, a parent who currently drops children at school and has a short journey into work will have difficulty if the new office is 20 miles away (e.g. start later and finish earlier or re-arrange hours to minimise child care costs.)

Transitional arrangements: For a minimum of 2 years, the employer should pay for excess travel costs to new office (mileage from home to new office less home to old office.)

Moving into existing MoJ premises.

* The above applies. It is important to ask to see the plans for the building. Ask how many staff are currently based there and what changes are necessary to accommodate increased numbers to ensure that the rooms or building generally is not over-crowded. Speak to union members who currently work in the premises to ask about current concerns about the building and issues which may arise from increased staff.

**Nicki Kenny, co-chair of Napo Family Court Section, co-chair of Napo Health and Safety Committee, June 2015**