Department for
Business & Trade

Government Response to the Report of the House of Lords Home-based Working Select Committee

CP 1510

Government of the United Kingdom

Department for Business and Trade

Government Response to the Report of the House of Lords Home-based Working Select Committee

Presented to Parliament

by the Minister for Employment Rights and Consumer Protection

by Command of His Majesty

February 2026

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Contents

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE HOUSE OF LORDS INQUIRY ON HOME-BASED WORKING

Introduction

1. The Government is grateful to the Home-Based Working Select Committee for undertaking this extensive inquiry into remote and hybrid working. The Committee's report is a valuable contribution to the evidence base in this evolving area of working practices.

2. Whilst the covid-19 pandemic necessitated a rapid shift to remote work, many employers have since chosen to retain elements of home-based working within their standard operations, particularly for office-based roles. As we have emerged from the pandemic, organisations have entered a period of experimentation and refinement, seeking to establish a balance between home and on-site working that meets their needs.

3. We are beginning to see a clearer picture of what home and hybrid working looks like beyond the constraints of a public health emergency, though we expect to see continued adaptation. The Government views businesses' decisions to retain elements of remote working as a reflection of the value that flexibility offers both employers and employees.

4. The Government recognises that flexibility plays a pivotal role in supporting people to balance their jobs alongside their personal needs and responsibilities. We are delivering on our commitment in the *Plan to Make Work Pay*, by introducing changes through the Employment Rights Act 2025 to make it more likely that flexible working requests are accepted.

5. Home-based working is just one of many potential forms of flexible working. Others include part-time work, flexitime, term-time hours, compressed hours, and job sharing. Whilst not all arrangements are feasible in all

circumstances, the changes we are making will encourage employers and employees to work together and think creatively about where flexibility might be possible.

6. The government is not prescriptive about the specific arrangements that employers and employees agree; what matters is that the approach works for both parties. For those facing barriers to employment, flexible working can be essential in helping people enter and remain in work, but the types of flexibility people need will be dependent on their individual circumstances. As such, the government is committed to ensuring that more people can access the flexibility they need, whether that is remote work or other forms of flexibility.

7. Flexibility can also bring real benefits to businesses. It can strengthen recruitment by widening the talent pool, improve retention by enabling staff to remain in work as their life circumstances change, boost morale and productivity, and help organisations become

more agile and adaptable.

8. The Committee's inquiry has highlighted the far-reaching effects of the shift towards increased home-working, with implications for individuals, businesses, local communities and the wider economy. This represents a significant change to working patterns and to many people's day-to-day lives, with impacts extending into areas such as transport, housing, and health. The Government is mindful of these effects, and recognises the importance of understanding them and responding appropriately.

9. In response, the Government will take forward a number of priority actions, including strengthening cross-government research and analysis efforts, and exploring how best to target information and advice to line managers. In addition, as we move into the next phase of delivering the Plan to Make Work Pay, we will look to establish a more structured, official-led stakeholder group. This group, which will bring together key stakeholders and business

leaders, will advise and support implementation, while helping the government drive culture change and shift narratives around flexible working.

10. This paper provides a cross-government response, setting out our position and actions in relation to each recommendation. We will continue to work collaboratively across government to monitor the impacts of new ways of working and ensure that our approach reflects the evolving needs of the economy and society.

11. This paper is arranged thematically. Contributions have been drawn from the departments with policy or operational responsibility for the areas covered by the committee's recommendations, including the Department for Business and Trade, Cabinet Office, Department for Transport, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Health and Social Care, Health

and Safety Executive, and the Department for Education.

Supporting different forms of flexible working

This section addresses the following recommendations from the Committee's report

Chapter 1:

- *When considering policies towards remote and hybrid working, the Government should be mindful that these arrangements are not available to a large proportion of the workforce. Other forms of flexible working may be made available for those who cannot work from home.*

Chapter 3:

- *Where business conditions allow, the Government should promote equitable access to remote and hybrid working, including through awareness campaigns targeting employers. It should focus on sectors, regions, and demographics where the prevalence of remote and hybrid working is lower than it could be, and it should emphasise the*

importance of remote and hybrid working for many disabled people. In its response to this report, the Government should set out its views on how equitable access, where business conditions allow, can be promoted through the use of flexible working clauses in public procurement contracts.

Chapter 5:

- *In response to this report, the Government should explain why the Flexible Working Taskforce was disbanded, and set out its views on reconvening it, which was recommended by some of our witnesses. If the Government considers that the Taskforce should not be reconvened, it should find alternative ways to develop guidance on home working, in consultation with stakeholders.*

Supporting different forms of flexible working

12. The Government agrees that it is important to support access to a range of different forms of flexible working. Employees across Great Britain have a right to request flexible working, which could include changes to their working hours and patterns, as well as home working.

These other forms of flexibility can be particularly helpful for those whose roles cannot be completed from home, and need to attend their place of work.

13.The changes we are making through the Employment Rights Act 2025 will enable collaborative discussions between employers and employees about where flexibility might be possible.

Promoting equitable access to remote and hybrid working

14.Government actively encourages employers and employees to consider how flexible working could work for them. Not all forms of flexibility will be feasible in all circumstances, but across the economy many businesses and employees are finding creative ways to support employees to balance work with their personal lives.

15.Ways of working may limit scope for some forms of flexibility in some sectors. The Department for Education (DfE) has been

working to open up opportunities for flexible working for workers across the sector through a programme focused on embedding flexible working in schools and multi-academy trusts (MATs). This includes the delivery of supportive webinars and the appointment of flexible working ambassador schools and MATs, which champion flexible working and provide bespoke peer support.

16. A toolkit of practical resources has been published to help school leaders implement flexible working and to support school staff to request it. These resources have been produced by school leaders and other sector experts, together with the department.

17. We have also introduced references to flexible working in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document, along with the expectation that schools are to have a flexible working policy in place, making it clear that all schools should be aiming to support flexible working requests where operationally feasible.

18. Building on this good practice in education, ahead of our changes to the flexible working framework taking effect in 2027, the Department for Business and Trade will look at ways to build on this positive work in education through working with other sectors preparation for flexible working reforms. We will also work to proactively communicate changes, making a range of resources and support available to employers, employees and the organisations that advise and support them. As part of this work, we will consider ways to target communications towards worker groups and businesses who may be less likely to work flexibly now, as well as groups for whom flexibility can play a vital role in making work possible, including disabled people.

Promoting flexible working through public procurement

19. The Government's Social Value Model[1] is a procurement tool consisting of a menu of

social value outcomes and criteria from which departments can select requirements that are relevant and proportionate to their contracts and non-discriminatory.

20.This model enables departments to reward points to suppliers in the evaluation of bids where they can demonstrate they meet the criteria selected. Criterion 6c, where selected, requires suppliers to '*Demonstrate action to identify and tackle inequality in employment, skills and pay in the contract workforce*' and includes a sub-criterion relating specifically to working practices: "*Jobs at all levels are open to flexible working from day one for all workers, where appropriate to the business need*".

Assessing the impact of home based working for different worker groups

21.We recognise the importance of capturing more detailed information, particularly around how different groups, such as carers or those with health conditions, are experiencing home

based working, and will consider the most effective ways to do this.

22.The Department for Business and Trade has previously commissioned and published surveys such as the Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey to understand the take-up and impacts of flexible working on different workers and workplaces. We will continue to take this approach as we work to understand the impacts of recent and upcoming reforms to the flexible working framework, in a similar way to the Post Implementation Review on the extension to the Right to Request Flexible Working published in 2021.

Stakeholder engagement and the flexible working taskforce

23.The previous Government's Flexible Working Taskforce was set up in 2018 with the aim of developing an action plan to increase the availability of quality flexible working across the economy, and the last taskforce meeting

was held in April 2023. It provided advice and expertise to Government and produced guidance on flexible working for businesses.

24. The Government values stakeholders' feedback and has convened numerous roundtables including with businesses, trade unions, and charities, including those within and beyond the original taskforce membership, to gather insights and opinions on flexible working. We will continue to engage with these groups as we consult on new reforms.

25. Beyond this, as we move into the next phase of delivering the Plan to Make Work Pay, we will look to establish a more structured, official-led stakeholder group. This group, which would bring together key stakeholders and business leaders, will advise and support implementation, while helping the government drive culture change and shift narratives around flexible working.

Guidance and business support

This *section addresses the following recommendations from the Committee's report*

Chapter 5:

- *The Government should publish guidance for employers on best practice for management in hybrid and fully remote contexts, including promoting management training.*

- *While employers are ultimately responsible for investing in management training for their staff, the Government has a role to play in incentivising this investment. In this context, the Government should reconsider its proposed cuts to Level 7 apprenticeships or, if not, consider alternative financial incentives for management training.*

- *Despite holding a range of views and policies on remote and hybrid working, employers we spoke to generally agreed that the Government should avoid major further regulatory or legislative interventions on the matter. The Government should*

14

continue to allow employers the flexibility to decide, with their employees, on the working arrangements that work best for them.

- *Government guidance and support can be crucial in helping employers to navigate home working effectively, particularly SMEs. To that end, the Government should publish updated guidance on the different forms of home working and their implications for employers. It should also promote existing guidance and standards from the British Standards Institution to employers.*

Chapter 6:

- *The Health and Safety Executive, working with the Government if necessary, should ensure that its existing guidance on employer responsibilities towards home workers is promoted as widely as possible.*

- *Access to occupational health professionals can ensure employers are aware of their responsibilities, while also supporting the health and wellbeing of home workers. In*

response to this report, the Government should set out the existing support it provides for employers in accessing occupational health, and whether it sees a case for further support.

- *The Employment Rights Bill adds a new requirement that employers can only reject a request for flexible working (including remote or hybrid working) where it is "reasonable" for them to do so. However, it remains unclear how "reasonable" will be defined and implemented in practice. Without a clear and workable definition, there is a risk of years of litigation, which could add further stresses to an already struggling tribunal system. We therefore welcome the Government's intention to work with ACAS on statutory guidance which will define the "reasonable" requirement. As they prepare this guidance, the Government and ACAS must consider the implications of different approaches for the employment tribunal caseload. In doing so, they should consider past precedents from other areas*

of employment law where the term "reasonable" has been used.

- *We heard mixed evidence on the merits of a "right to switch off". Whilst we recognise the risk of blurred boundaries between work and home, employers should not be prevented from contacting their employees if they need to do so. We therefore welcome that the Government now plans to implement the right to switch off through a Code of Practice, rather than legislation, and that it intends to consult before doing so. To ensure employers retain appropriate autonomy, the Code of Practice on the right to switch off should be framed in terms of whether employees need to respond outside of their agreed working hours, rather than whether employers should contact them. As it drafts and consults on the Code, the Government should also consider possible exceptions to the right to switch off, such as for urgent communications or where there is a business need to collaborate across time zones.*

Approaches to regulation, guidance and training

26. The committee's observations on the way businesses perceive the flexible working framework are welcome, and align with feedback we have received - we know businesses value having the autonomy to make decisions about ways of working reflecting their specific needs and operating model. For example, organisations have told us they have specific approaches for staff completing induction or training, and others are considering how in-person or online collaborative time fosters sufficient learning and development opportunities for younger team members. The Flexible Working Framework will remain request-based.

27. We agree with the committee's view that government has a crucial role to play in providing guidance in supporting employers to manage flexible working practices, including home-based and hybrid working. A wide range

of guidance is already available to help businesses understand their responsibilities towards employees, as well as highlighting best practice:

- The Acas Code of Practice on requests for flexible working[2] provides statutory guidance for employers to follow in handling statutory requests for flexible working.

- Acas also provides general guidance on flexible working[3], which is also available at: https://www.acas.org.uk/flexible-working.

- Government guidance on flexible working: https://www.gov.uk/flexible-working.

- GOV.UK - businesses can access core services, information, and guidance on starting up and running a business, including employing people and handling flexible working requests at www.gov.uk/browse/business

28. Alongside this, a range of support is available to businesses, including:

- Growth Hubs provide businesses across England with free one-to-one support and advice. This ensures businesses of all sizes or sectors can access the most appropriate support. Further details are available online at www.growthhubfinder.co.uk.

- Help to Grow: Management is a national training programme which consists of a practical curriculum with one-to-one support from a business mentor, peer-learning sessions and access to further support through an alumni network, with the aim of equipping small businesses with the tools to grow and enhance their productivity. Launched in 2021, this intensive course has already helped over 11,000 small business leaders.

- More information can be found at https://helptogrow.campaign.gov.uk/

29. The Department for Business and Trade will build on this guidance and support ahead of changes to flexible working taking effect in 2027. We are taking a phased approach to developing, testing and implementing these reforms, with a timeframe that will enable extensive consultation and engagement on new guidance and support for businesses.

30. The Committee also asked about management training related to home and hybrid working. Some support and training is already available in this area, such as the Help to Grow: Management programme.[4]

31. Regarding level 7 apprenticeships, we have seen apprenticeship starts by young people under 25 fall by 40% over the last decade. The government wants to ensure that public funding is prioritised towards those at the start of their working lives, rather than those already in work with higher levels of learning and qualifications. That is why, from January 2026 these will only be funded for apprentices under the age of 22, and those under 25 who are

care leavers or have an Education, Health and Care Plan. Overall, there is good availability of alternative routes to upskill at this level and we continue to encourage employers to invest in upskilling their workforces where right for them.

32. However, the Committee is right to draw attention to the importance of line management capability in supporting effective and inclusive approaches to flexible working. We have launched a consultation on flexible working and a core aim of this is to gather insights on what training, guidance and support employers would find most effective. This evidence will inform the resources and support we develop to support businesses to build familiarity with these changes before they take effect.

Guidance for employers

33. The Government shares the Committee's view and is working closely with HSE on employer responsibilities towards home workers. HSE has existing guidance for Home

Workers which includes those who work at home long term and those who routinely split their time between their workplace and home. This guidance helps employers understand that they have the same health and safety responsibilities for all workers.

34. HSE will promote this guidance through a Communications Campaign with a multi-channel approach using HSE digital channels, stakeholder channels, and media to raise awareness, improve dutyholder capability and emphasise legal compliance.

Access to occupational health services

35. We recognise the importance of occupational health (OH) in supporting employers to meet their responsibilities and safeguard the health and wellbeing of all workers, including those working from home.

36. Existing support includes guidance and resources provided by HSE, which help employers understand their duties under health and safety law and offer practical advice

on managing health risks for remote and home-based workers. HSE's online tools and sector-specific guidance cover topics such as risk assessment, mental health, and ergonomics for home working, ensuring employers can implement proportionate measures without unnecessary burden.

37.Employer expenditure on OH services, including training and advice, is already generally considered an allowable business expense for tax purposes, reducing the cost barrier for organisations seeking to invest in workplace health.

38.SMEs often lack formal OH provision, which can leave line managers without the confidence or tools to support employees effectively. Thus, the Department for Work and Pensions is delivering a funding boost through the Occupational Health Line Manager Training project, which will deliver accredited Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) training for line managers in small and medium businesses until the end of March

2026. Reviewing the findings from this scheme during 2026 will help to inform future policies in this area.

39. Evidence from the 2024 DWP Employer Survey shows that most SMEs (86%) agree they have a responsibility to support employees to be physically and mentally healthy. However, only around a fifth (21%) provide training for line managers on improving employee health and well-being.

40. This initiative is a step towards addressing that gap by better equipping more managers, promote early intervention, and support inclusive employment, including for home-workers who may face additional challenges such as isolation or ergonomic risks.

41. Among SMEs who do provide this line manager training, over three quarters (79%) say it was effective in preventing employee ill-health.

42. The Government will continue to consider the effectiveness of these measures and explore further opportunities as part of its wider strategy to improve workplace health and reduce health-related work inactivity.

The new reasonableness test

43. Through the Employment Rights Act and regulations to follow, we are introducing a 'reasonableness test' to encourage employers to accept flexible working requests that can reasonably be met. In practice, this means that if an employer rejects a request, they must explain why they consider that it is reasonable, in relation to one or more of the eight business reasons for rejecting a request, already set out in legislation.

44. The reasonableness test will be grounded in the business reasons for rejecting a flexible working request. These form part of a long-established framework, which employers are now familiar with.

45.The law will not provide a definition of reasonableness, because what is reasonable will depend on the facts of each situation. This approach is common across a number of areas of employment law, and enables fair decision-making. For example, the reasonableness of a decision to reject a request based on costs might depend on both the costs connected to the request, and the resources available to the employer to implement it.

46.We do not foresee the measures would cause a significant impact on the tribunal caseload. The measures we are introducing should instead lead to better decision making first time around.   Over the period since the right to request flexible working was extended to all employees in 2014, on average there have been 126 cases taken to tribunal per year, which makes up 0.1% of the overall number of Employment Tribunal cases DBT, 2024, Impact Assessment: Making Flexible Working the Default).

47.As the committee notes, we work closely with Acas who have a statutory Code of Practice on requests for flexible working, as well as detailed non-statutory guidance. Acas will consider revising this Code of Practice to include guidance on the new reasonableness test when the flexible working reforms are finalised. This would involve a full public consultation, enabling employers, workers, trade unions and other stakeholders to feed in views to guidance on reasonableness before changes take effect.

The Right to Switch off

48.We welcome the Committee's recognition of the risks associated with blurred boundaries between work and home. We also agree that employers should retain appropriate autonomy and must be able to contact employees where there is a legitimate need to do so. Policies supporting employee work life balance should be proportionate, workable across different sectors and forms of employment, and support

both worker wellbeing and business needs.

49. The government will continue to progress policies aimed at alleviating stress in the workplace. We will take on board the recommendations of the Committee as we look at the importance of wellbeing and work life balance in the modern world of work.

Civil Service Working Practices

This section addresses the following recommendations from the Committee's report

Chapter 6:

- *The Government should continue reviewing the relationship between its 60% office attendance mandate for civil servants and its other policies, particularly reductions in the size of its office estate. These policies may conflict with one another, and if they cannot be reconciled, the Government may need to decide which it wants to prioritise.*

- *In parallel, the Government should lead by example by ensuring good hybrid working practices within the civil service—focusing in particular on ensuring that in-person attendance achieves collaborative benefits. For example, government departments could encourage their teams to set anchor days, and should ensure their offices are designed with*

adequate spaces for meetings. The organisation and design of government offices should also be considered carefully when civil service jobs are relocated.

Office attendance in the civil service

50. The Government recognises working flexibly is essential in supporting the civil service priority of ensuring continued, effective and productive delivery of the work carried out by civil servants across our full range of services.

51. We believe there are some forms of work which are best done in the office and some activities are better supported when colleagues are together. In November 2023, Heads of Departments across the civil service reached a collective decision that 60% minimum time spent working at a government building or on official business offers the best balance for most employees. This approach allows teams and departments to maximise the benefits of hybrid working and get the best from working together.

52. In certain circumstances, this may not be achievable where departmental headcount exceeds available estate capacity. In such cases, departments are working closely with the Government Property Agency to ensure that future estate provision is sufficient to support hybrid working with the aim of enabling the 60% attendance minimum.

53. When determining the office attendance expectation, departments considered estate capacity both for their individual departments and where these are co-located and found there to be sufficient capacity in the estate. As we deliver greater efficiency and transformation in the civil service, the government recognises that having an estate that reflects the requirements of a smaller civil service and modern public services will be essential. We will continue to review the estate requirements based on workforce planning and developing portfolio plans to meet those needs and deliver departmental business.

Leading by example in the civil service

54. The Government Property Agency (GPA) delivers property and workplace solutions across government and actively engages with departments to discuss modern ways of working. This includes sharing best practice, the managing the challenges of adopting hybrid working practices, as well as broader discussion around the value and benefit of working in the workplace.

55. Managers have a number of considerations when determining how their team can work best together when they are working in-person, hybrid and remotely, which may for example include working practices like establishing anchor days. These enable teams at a local level to consider, discuss and agree how they can support the needs of the business while also getting the most out of their face to face collaborations and team routines.

56. A wide range of approaches of hybrid working are already adopted across the Civil

Service due to the diverse nature of roles. The Government recognises there is more we can do to deliver great places to work and ensure we are providing civil servants with a range of spaces and modern technologies that best support them to be effective in delivering and serving the UK public. The Government continues to seek and listen to feedback from civil servants to help inform the design of government offices (through our Workplace Design Guide[5]) to ensure we have the right blend of settings and services that can support civil servants to complete a range of activities.

57. The Government understands that ways of working will continue to evolve. Through GPA we maintain our commitment to proactively address emerging challenges and develop the necessary enablers, support, and guidance to ensure the civil service can continue to transform and modernise.

Health and disability

This section addresses the following recommendations from the Committee's report

Chapter 2:

- *The Government should publicise the mental health benefits and risks associated with remote and hybrid working through a campaign directed at workers. It should also emphasise the Health and Safety Executive's advice for individuals on the best practice for mitigating risks, as contained within the "Stress and Mental Health" section of its guidance.*

Chapter 3:

- *The Government should set out in its response to this report how it is ensuring that the Access to Work scheme provides the required support for disabled people. In doing so, it should describe how this will enable disabled people to work effectively at home.*

- *The Government should fund research into the mental health implications of remote and*

hybrid working. This should gather data which establishes links between people's mental health and their working patterns. Where possible, it should aim to provide evidence of causation of objective mental health outcomes without relying on self-reported information.

- *The Government should fund research into the physical health implications of remote and hybrid working. This should use rigorous evidence, such as administrative health records and data gathered through randomised controlled trials. It should consider how remote and hybrid working vary due to job design, the autonomy and support which is given to workers, and individual and organisational contexts.*

Chapter 7:

- *In response to this report, the Government should set out whether remote and hybrid working are being considered as part of existing initiatives concerning the employment of people with disabilities and long-term health conditions. In particular, it should explain*

whether and how remote and hybrid working relate to the plan to "Get Britain Working" and the Connect to Work programme.

Understanding the risks and benefits of home working for mental health

58.The government recognises the Committee's concerns about mental health benefits and risks associated with remote and hybrid working. To raise awareness of these risks, improve duty holder capability and emphasise legal compliance, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) will promote its Home Worker Guidance through a communications campaign with a multi-channel approach using HSE digital channels, stakeholder channels, and media.

Understanding the physical and mental health implications of home working

59.We recognise there is an evidence gap on the specific physical and mental health implications of home working. DBT will liaise with analysts across Government to explore this issue further and will consider how best to

collect evidence on this.

60. In addition, the Keep Britain Working Programme[6] is considering how employers and government can work together to reduce health related economic inactivity and build healthier, more inclusive workplaces. The Review is now entering the 'Vanguard' phase, where employers will work together to test and refine best practices for reducing sickness absence, improving return to work rates, and including disabled people in the workplace. While remote and hybrid working isn't a specific focus, the Vanguard phase will more broadly look at how workplace adjustments and flexible work arrangements may support those with health conditions to stay in work.

61. In addition, a Workplace Health Intelligence Unit (WHIU) will be established to develop the growing evidence base on what helps employees stay in work, and if they do take a sickness absence, what support can help them return to work.

62. Findings from existing government initiatives to strengthen evidence about work and both physical and mental indicate there could be value in exploring this area further. Research commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Health and Social Care[7] has found that 58% of workers reported that in the past 12 months they had either gone to work or worked (including working from home) when they didn't feel well enough to do so. An area for future exploration is examining whether remote working is linked to higher or lower rates of people working while unwell.

Access to Work

63. The government acknowledges the importance of ensuring that disabled people have equal access to employment opportunities and affirms its commitment to enabling disabled people to work effectively from home. We continue to encourage and support employers to accommodate workplace adjustments and to be able to

create inclusive and accessible workplaces.

64. In many cases, home working is a free adjustment that employers can make to ensure that a disabled person can take up employment with them. We see that the key step in ensuring widespread access to support is to educate and draw attention to the role, responsibilities and options employers have with respect to workplace adjustments.

65. Access to Work is a government grant scheme that provides support to disabled people to enter or stay in work. Because the scheme applies to any workplace, including the home, it can support disabled people can work effectively in remote or hybrid arrangements.

66. This includes specialist equipment and assistive technology for home-based work environments, with grants covering ergonomic furniture, adapted IT equipment, and assistive software. The scheme also offers support workers, such as British Sign Language

interpreters or job coaches, which can make employment viable for self-employed people working and running a business from home. In addition, mental health support services are available, offering confidential advice and coping strategies.

67. Access to Work has not been substantially changed since its introduction in 1994. There is a strong case for updating the role it plays in making work accessible for disabled people. We set out our plans to improve support for employers in the Pathways to Work Green paper, published in March 2025. We also set out how we want to highlight the role of employers in creating accessible and inclusive workplaces as well as how government can shape the market for aids, appliances and assistive technology, to reduce their cost and spread their adoption.

68. The Green Paper launched a consultation to inform the future direction of Access to Work. The consultation has now concluded and we are considering responses. We will set out our

plans, including timings and how we intend to continue to work with stakeholders, in due course.

Supporting disabled people to stay in and progress in work

69. The government understands the challenges that people with health conditions are facing, and is continuously seeking initiatives to support them in returning to employment.

70. As the Committee has highlighted, different forms of flexibility, and particularly home working, can play a crucial role in supporting disabled people to stay in work.

71. The previously mentioned employee/self employed workers survey (2024-2025)[8] commissioned by DWP and DHSC found that when employees with health conditions were asked about workplace adjustments, 28% of respondents had working from home as a workplace adjustment. Working from home was also an adjustment that participants would

like more of, chosen by 19% of respondents.

72. A similar DWP Employee/Self-employed Worker report published in 2023 also found that 8% of respondents who had used an occupational health service stated their reason for this was seeking 'Advice on working from home'.

73. This government is also supporting disabled people to enter the labour market through the Connect to Work programme, a voluntary, high-fidelity Supported Employment programme, connecting work, health and skills support across all of England and Wales. Connect to Work will support those, primarily, currently outside the workforce and facing greater labour market disadvantages, to get into work and to stay in work.

74. In Connect to Work, participants are given a dedicated specialist employment support adviser who works alongside them to understand their career goals and help them to address any specific barriers to employment.

The adviser seeks good labour market matches for the participant – including consideration of different working patterns and ways of working. The employment adviser works with both the employer and the participant to ensure that the transition into work is smooth and that the workplace is inclusive.

75.Connect to Work also explicitly supports employers to enable disabled employees to work flexibly. Employment Specialists work directly with employers to identify and implement reasonable adjustments, including low-cost changes such as flexible working patterns. The programme also promotes inclusive recruitment, onboarding and workplace practices, helping employers understand what adjustments may help someone thrive in their role.

Digital Infrastructure and Cyber Security

This section addresses the following recommendations from the Committee's report

Chapter 8:

- *The Government should increase long-term investment in digital infrastructure. While we welcome Project Gigabit, the Government should clearly articulate how it will deliver its targets and commit to funding it further into the future. It should develop a long-term plan for improvements to business connectivity, including in rural areas with limited access to digital infrastructure. In doing so, it should draw on international best practice such as from Sweden, Spain, and Norway.*

- *The Government should improve digital access and the development of digital skills. It should communicate the benefits which improved connectivity can confer to businesses and communities through the Digital Inclusion Action Plan. It should promote the development of employment skills for young people, such as using computers to*

perform tasks which may be challenging with smartphones. This includes assisting employers with providing digital training for their staff, while communicating that employers should take responsibility for developing workers' skills and adapt to a generation which prefers to use smartphones.

- *We welcome the guidance provided by the National Cyber Security Centre, including the advice tailored for SMEs. The National Cyber Security Centre should continue to treat remote and hybrid working as a priority as it develops and communicates this guidance.*

- *The Government should further promote the guidance of the National Cyber Security Centre on cybersecurity, particularly as it relates to remote and hybrid working. It should consider how this can be incorporated into its existing activity in the area, including engagement with industry and the forthcoming national cyber strategy.*

Chapter 9:

- *The Government should set out how its approach to Artificial Intelligence relates to remote and hybrid working. In doing so, it should explain how it is addressing the possible risks which Artificial Intelligence poses to service-sector jobs.*

Long-term plan for improvements to business connectivity

76. The government recognises the importance of access to a fast and reliable broadband connection and is committed to ensuring 99% of premises receive gigabit coverage by 2032.

77. Commercial delivery in a competitive market has and will remain essential to the delivery of the overall gigabit ambition. We will continue to work in partnership with industry to deliver this rollout and will maintain a stable pro-competition regulatory environment to encourage private investment.

78. In our proposed Statement of Strategic Priorities (SSP) for telecommunications, the management of radio spectrum, and postal services, we set out that business connectivity should be treated as priority by the regulator and that "Ofcom should continue to ensure that businesses across the country, including those in rural areas, are able to access the fast, reliable, and resilient broadband services they need to thrive". We are currently reviewing the responses to our consultation on the proposed SSP and will publish our response in due course.

79. Project Gigabit aims to deliver gigabit-capable broadband to UK premises that are not included in suppliers' commercial plans.

80. As of the end of September 2025, over 1.3 million premises in rural and hard to reach communities across the UK had been upgraded to gigabit-capable broadband through government-funded programmes. More than one million premises are included

within £2.4 billion worth of signed Project Gigabit contracts.

81.The UK is now among the fastest builders of gigabit-capable broadband networks in Europe. While some European nations began fibre deployment earlier, the UK now ranks second overall for the total number of premises passed[9]. This reflects the combined impact of significant commercial investment and targeted government intervention through Project Gigabit.

82.Consistent with approaches used in Sweden and Norway, our programme has supported connections to public buildings in hard-to-reach areas alongside wider procurements and voucher schemes, improving local access to gigabit-capable services.

83.Whilst there is no funding available currently for the rollout of mobile telecommunications infrastructure outside of the Shared Rural Network programme, we continue to monitor

progress of commercial rollout closely, as we remain committed to our ambition that all populated areas across the UK have access to standalone 5G by 2030.

84. We are undertaking a Mobile Market Review to better understand how we can go further in supporting the sector to deliver widespread high-quality connectivity. We will publish a Call for Evidence to support the review in the coming months.

85. We are also taking steps to make it easier for mobile network operators to rollout their infrastructure and invest in their networks. This includes reviewing, via an upcoming call for evidence, where the government can relax planning rules to support 5G deployment.

Digital access and the development of digital skills

86. The Government published the Digital Inclusion Action Plan in February 2025 which set out government's first steps to help more

people access the benefits of technology and online services, reducing digital exclusion across the UK. By improving digital skills, connectivity, and confidence, young people are more likely to do better at school; those looking for work can find better job opportunities and earn more; and people can more easily access the services they need, including the NHS.

87. To help more digitally excluded people benefit from being online, the Government has:

- Launched an ambitious Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund - worth £11.9m to fund 85 innovative digital skills and support schemes across every region of England, including £1.47m for the Devolved Governments. These community-led initiatives will help people get the skills and access to devices and improve their lives. Projects supported include the Engineering Development Trust which will pilot a free online platform delivering flexible digital skills training to young

people aged 16–21 in the West Midlands and North East; as well as The Nature Story project by Wildscreen which will empower young people, especially those not in employment education or training, to develop digital storytelling skills by providing access to digital tools, professional editing software, and community support.

- Worked in partnership with business and the telecoms industry to improve digital access. A number of telecoms companies signed up to deliver industry pledges in the Digital Inclusion Action Plan to bring free or subsidised data, broadband, skills and devices to digitally excluded consumers. The number of social tariffs available has increased ten-fold over the past decade. There are now 35 mobile and broadband social tariffs available on the market and 85% of eligible households are able to access a social tariff with their current provider. More needs to be done to increase awareness and uptake of

social tariffs and the Government will work with partners to ensure people are aware of the support available. To improve access to devices for people who cannot afford to purchase their own, we launched the IT Reuse for Good Charter, encouraging organisations to set up their own device donation schemes.

- Committed to enhancing support for Essential Digital Skills to help ensure adults have the digital skills they need for life and work. All eligible adults in England can access fully funded Essential Digital Skills Qualifications and Functional Skills Qualifications under the digital entitlement. To ensure the essential digital skills offer remains relevant in the context of rapidly evolving technology, such as AI, the Department for Education has announced via the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper that it will review the National Standards for Essential Digital Skills.

- Committed to updating the national curriculum following the independent Curriculum and Assessment Review's final report on 5 November to prepare young people for life and work in a changing world. This will embed digital, media and AI literacy across the curriculum, introduce a refreshed, broader, computing GCSE, and integrate digital content into other subjects. These actions are expected to increase the teaching of digital literacy and encourage more young people to consider computing qualifications, bolstering the future pipeline of digital talent.

- Commissioned a series of reports from FutureDotNow to improve understanding and awareness of how digital upskilling can benefit individuals, employers, communities and UK productivity. These were: 'The Ripple Effect' on the social value of digital skills; 'Learning that clicks' which explores how to motivate workers to upskill; 'Embedding AI into the Essential Digital Skills Framework', which offers

evidence-based recommendations for updating the current EDS Framework; and 'The Economic Impact of Closing the Work Essential Digital Skills Gap' which examines the fiscal gains of digitally upskilling the UK workforce.

Supporting businesses to manage cyber security risks in the context of increased remote and hybrid working

88. The cyber security of the UK economy and society is a priority for the government. We are taking robust action to ensure the public, businesses and essential public services are resilient to cyber threats. This includes the Cyber Security and Resilience Bill, which will boost protections for the essential services we rely upon for our everyday lives. In particular, the Bill will improve the cyber security of organisations which provide the key services businesses rely on, such as cloud computing, IT management and cyber security services. Ultimately this means UK businesses - and

their staff who work from home - will be more secure and resilient.

89.Remote working has reshaped the threat landscape, with every home network now part of an organisation's security perimeter. The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) regularly engages with business and produced a wide range of advice and guidance to help organisations stay safe online following the shift to home working. Educating staff is an important aspect of keeping a business secure. Businesses should put a clear IT policy in place that guides employees on following best security practices. The NCSC urges all organisations to consult its advice and take steps now to help prevent the serious disruption a cyber attack can bring.

90.The government will continue promote NCSC guidance on cyber security to businesses across the economy, large and small, via campaigns, direct engagement and other communications. The government's business.gov.uk website provides businesses

with easy access to trusted information, expertise and services from the government. This includes personalised information for start-ups and established businesses looking to improve their cyber resilience. The website actively signposts businesses to the NCSC Cyber Action Toolkit, with NCSC cyber security guidance also embedded in the business.gov.uk triage.

91. This year the government will publish a new National Cyber Action Plan that will set out how we will respond to the growing cyber threat and work with industry to further raise cyber resilience levels across the economy.

Artificial Intelligence and remote and hybrid working

92. AI is transforming the world of work and has the potential to drive economic growth. We must position the UK to capture and retain the economic value from AI through innovation that helps boost productivity and raise living standards. We know the importance of supporting individuals and businesses through

the transition by enabling access to good jobs, lifelong skills development, and secure livelihoods. That is why we need to prepare for a range of futures involving both benefits for the UK economy and workers and job displacement. We must act now to ensure the UK is well-placed to benefit from this transition, and be ready to adapt as new evidence emerges.

93. Government is already investing in skills, supporting SMEs, and building on the foundations of the Get Britain Working White Paper, Industrial Strategy and SME Plan. But we must continue to work across departments, with experts, and industry to ensure our policies enable AI-driven economic growth and a fair transition for workers.

94. Within Professional Business Services, Artificial Intelligence and other technologies offer the opportunity to improve productivity but also the potential to disrupt long-established systems and ways of doing business. As a result, we outlined a series of

measures within our PBS Industrial Strategy sector plan to help PBS companies respond to this, with a particular focus on helping PBS SMEs adopt technology to retain long term competitiveness. The UK Government has committed through the Spending Review over £150 million to fund five transformative programmes to further encourage PBS technology adoption and build a highly-skilled and digitally-literate domestic PBS workforce.

95. Complementing the sector plans, Government is developing tailored sector skills packages in partnership with Skills England and industry, including £187 million in our 'TechFirst' digital skills and artificial intelligence learning package, providing learners with opportunities to progress through non-academic as well as graduate routes.

96. We will also work with businesses and industry bodies to develop and implement Jobs Plans for each of the Industrial Strategy priority sectors, including professional and financial services. These will provide a clear

direction of travel for national and local government and industry to develop the domestic workforce together and facilitate the sector-level and local collaboration necessary for business to invest further in skills pipelines.

97. DfE is committed to teaching young people to think critically and act thoughtfully armed with the digital literacy they need to thrive in the modern world. This learning includes how to use data to complete tasks and solve problems, as well as learning about bias in technology. The Government will also replace the computer science GCSE with a broader offer that reflects the entirety of the computing curriculum and explore the development of a level 3 qualification in data science and AI to cement the UK's position as a global leader in AI and technology. The purpose of this will be to ensure that more students are equipped with the knowledge and skills required to understand and use emerging technologies in their future studies and careers, and to support our commitment to expand education

pathways, set out in the cross-government AI Opportunities Action Plan.

98.Over the medium term, it will be important to prioritise research and analysis in ways that allow us to understand the impacts of the range of measures introduced through the Employment Rights Act. In practice, this is likely to mean focussing on access to different forms of flexibility rather than focussing on remote working in isolation. We will consider the potential role of commissioned research to generate new evidence in this area.

Public Transport

This section addresses the following recommendations from the Committee's report

Chapter 7:

- *It is concerning that decisions and preferences on remote and hybrid working often reflect the cost and duration of commuting, rather than the effectiveness of different working patterns. In its response to this report, the Government should explain whether and how its transport policies will achieve reduced commuting time and costs. This should address how wider transport planning takes account of shifts in demand caused by remote and hybrid working, including potential increases in the taxpayer subsidies which are required.*

- *The Government should address the lack of alignment of the public transport system with hybrid working patterns by improving the operation of flexible season tickets. It should assess the overall cost-effectiveness of making them available across all public transport networks. Where these are financially viable, it*

should increase awareness of them, including where there is no limit to the number of these tickets which can be purchased. Making these available would ensure that hybrid workers have the option of attending workplaces more often and more affordably.

Reducing commuting time and costs

99.The government is taking action to drive public transport usage by improving bus and rail services and investing to improve reliability. Most transport appraisals have journey time savings in them; it's a fundamental part of the analysis for capacity improvement policies. More specific plans for improving commuter experiences across different transport networks are set out below.

100.For buses, we are providing over £3 billion from 2026/27-28/29 to support local leaders and bus operators across the country to maintain and improve bus services, which includes funding to extend the £3 bus fare cap until March 2027 to ensure bus travel is

affordable and people can access better opportunities.

101. This includes multi-year allocations for local authorities under the Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG) totalling nearly £700 million per year, ending the short-term approach to bus funding and giving councils the certainty they need to plan ahead to improve services for local communities.

102. We know that increased levels of congestion on our roads result in slower speeds and increased bus journey times. This means buses cost more to run, and become less attractive to passengers, in turn leading to further congestion if passengers instead choose to travel by car.

103. Local areas can use their LABG funding to introduce measures to help improve bus journey times, such as bus priority schemes. They can also use this funding to introduce their own local fares measures to reduce the cost of bus travel further.

104.For rail, we are also overhauling services through the creation of Great British Railways. The Railways Bill, introduced to Parliament on 5 November 2025, will streamline the current fragmented system and establish GBR as a 'directing mind' for the industry, unifying track and train under one body. This will make rail travel simpler, more flexible and passenger focused.

105.In the Autumn Budget 2025 regulated rail fares were frozen for the first time in 30 years to help rail passengers with the cost of living. According to analysis produced and internally assured by DfT, the fares freeze is expected to save existing rail passengers £600 million in 2026/27. The freeze is also assumed to stimulate new journeys, so the net cost of the policy will be significantly lower than this.

106.For roads, the government is also investing in the road network to improve how efficiently and safely traffic can run. . We are helping local authorities to fix the local road network

and have increased local highway maintenance funding by £500 million this financial year compared to 2024-25, bringing the total to nearly £1.6 billion.

107.The spending review announced £24 billion of capital funding between 2026-27 and 2029-30 to maintain and improve motorways and local roads across the country.

Public transport usage data and planning

108.The government continues to monitor the emerging trends regarding home working and the challenges and opportunities these changes bring for the transport network – both in how it is currently run, but also how we plan and build future infrastructure and services.

109.The Department for Transport has an ongoing programme of research to ensure that transport modelling and appraisal are based on the latest evidence, including changes in working patterns and travel behaviour. This includes research exploring the interaction of

transport and economic activity, understanding how increased home working may have impacted the valuation of travel time, and ensuring transport models continue to reflect the latest travel behaviour.

110.To plan transport, currently we use different models for different modes:

- For roads, the National Transport Model provides a good overview of personal travel demand and its impact on the highway network. While this was informed by the National Travel Survey in 2015, there have been high level updates following the pandemic in 2023 (including overall trip rates by trip purpose).

- For rail, MOIRA is the standard rail modelling tool. This is based on recent outturn data – for example, there is already a version of MOIRA which includes the December 2025 rail timetable changes. The passenger demand data is based on actual annual ticket sales data and is updated twice a year.

Their forecasts of future year demand are based on the latest OBR/ONS economic forecasts.

- Outside of Heavy Rail, public transport provision is usually planned using local network models developed by the local transport authority. While some local authorities have already built or are building models based on post-Covid conditions, the time and cost of such work means that there is still some reliance on models developed pre-Covid. DfT addresses this within the published Transport analysis guidance: TAG Unit M4 "Forecasting and Uncertainty"[10].

- These models take into account data from the annual National Travel Survey, which provides detailed information on the mode, distance and time spent commuting, as well as a wide range of other data sources, utilising existing "big data" as well as undertaking bespoke surveys.

111.Many people do not have the option to work remotely, and so remote working is not the only driver of changing travel patterns; some initial evidence suggests that increases in cost-of-living and transport affordability now have a bigger influence[11]. With transport costs making up 14% of household spending, the Department is focused on policies that will provide real savings and directly limit inflation by holding down a major component of everyday costs[12].

112.Over the last decade, taxpayer subsidy for the rail network increased following increases to the cost base and reductions in rail ridership during and after the pandemic. More recently, the net subsidy for rail services has reduced, but the industry needs to go further to improve financial sustainability including by reducing the net services subsidy to around £1bn by 2028/29.

113.The Department continues to focus on growing revenue, controlling costs and reducing net subsidy. Rail passenger services

subsidy is expected to reduce by over 50 per cent from £2.4 billion in 2024-25.

Adapting ticketing systems to support flexible travel

114. The government also recognises the fundamental change of commuting patterns, and is committed to ensuring fares and ticketing systems adapt so passengers can travel affordably and flexibly. As part of our wider support for passengers, regulated rail fares were frozen in the Autumn Budget 2025, the first freeze in 30 years, saving existing rail users an estimated £600 million in 2026/27 and putting money back in the pockets of hardworking people.

115. Flexible season tickets are a key part of our strategy to support hybrid workers. They were introduced in July 2021 to support commuters who travel two or three days a week. This provides a minimum 20% discount against the equivalent monthly season ticket. The level of

discount varies by route, reflecting existing fare structures.

116.We appreciate the Committee's concern over the flexible season tickets, and their impacts on workplace attendance. We are planning on reviewing the overall cost-effectiveness of flexible season tickets. Any expansion must balance affordability for passengers with the financial sustainability of the railway, which is currently supported by a significant taxpayer subsidy, almost half of total income in 2023/24 compared to under a quarter in 2018/19. It is important that flexible season tickets must be designed to avoid increasing subsidy requirements or undermining revenue needed for investment in services.

117.We are also taking steps to improve awareness and usability. This includes ensuring passengers understand that there is no limit to the number of flexible season tickets they can purchase and promoting these products through operator websites, apps, and

station materials to reach hybrid workers who may not be aware of the potential savings.

118.The creation of GBR will also make rail travel simpler, more flexible, and better suited to modern commuting patterns. This includes expanding Pay As You Go with contactless to additional stations and trialling digital ticketing solutions such as GPS-based check-in/check-out systems.

Data and Evidence

This section addresses the following recommendations from the Committee's report

Chapter 1:

- *The UK has some of the highest levels of home working in the world, reflecting its services-led economy, cultural norms and experience during the pandemic. The Government should monitor the economic and social consequences of this over the long-term, particularly any impact on the UK's global competitiveness.*

Chapter 6:

- *The lack of data on how many home workers request their arrangements through a statutory flexible working request casts uncertainty over the impact of the Government's legislative plans in this area. The Government should collect and publish updated survey data on the extent to which employees who work from home have requested this arrangement, and if so, whether they did so informally or formally.*

Chapter 7:

- *The Government should remain alert to possible wider changes caused by remote and hybrid working. It should conduct further research to aid its understanding, and adapt its policies in relevant areas to address these changes.*

Chapter 9:

- *Further research should be conducted on the long-term effects of remote and hybrid working. Where these do not immediately relate to Government priorities, academics may be well placed to do this research. The Government should assist them by providing funding and facilitating access to longitudinal data.*

Data collection and further research to understand the impacts of home based working

119.We share the Committee's view that it is important that government continues to monitor the effects of changing ways of

working over the years ahead through both research and data collection.

120. The post-implementation review of the 2024 reforms to flexible working, alongside the monitoring and evaluation of the Employment Rights Act 2025, will form part of this by considering how access to flexibility more broadly, including home working, is supporting labour market participation among groups who may face barriers entering and staying in work.

121. As the Department with lead responsibility for flexible working, the Department for Business and Trade will engage across Government to shape flexible working policy and evaluate its impacts where data and research are available. Where gaps remain, the Government will seek to strengthen its evidence base by incorporating more targeted questions into periodic surveys to better capture informal practices. Departments will be engaged to review the data they currently hold, clarify future data requirements, and assess opportunities for cross-government

evidence sharing and collaborative research.

Data collection on statutory and informal flexible working requests

122.Collecting robust data on the types of flexible working and how they have been requested can present challenges. Many flexible working arrangements are informal and often not systematically recorded in HR systems, limiting the availability of reliable administrative data. In addition to this, while surveys do not often distinguish between statutory and non-statutory requests, survey respondents may not be aware of whether their request falls under the statutory framework, and so there may be some limitations to this approach.

123.To help address this, Government will look to include more specific questions in periodic surveys to better capture informal practices, working jointly with departments as they clarify their data needs and consider the scope for

cross-government evidence sharing and research.

Cross-government coordination

Several recommendations within the committee's report include establishing new ministerial responsibilities connected to policy development, data collection and research related to home based working. *This section addresses the following recommendations from the Committee's report*

Chapter 1:

- *Remote and hybrid working have wide-ranging implications across a number of areas, meaning that both Government policy and responsibility for data collection sit across multiple departments and agencies. The Government must ensure that policies relevant to home working are co-ordinated across departments.*

- *To inform its understanding and policymaking, the Government should allocate ministerial responsibility for the co-ordination, across departments, of data on the prevalence and*

impact of remote and hybrid working. We consider that this coordination role could also encompass data on other trends relevant to the future of work.

Chapter 3:

- *As in other areas, the Government should allocate ministerial responsibility for the gathering of more detailed data on the practical effects of remote and hybrid working for people with different characteristics and working and living circumstances. This should incorporate breakdowns by sector, role, disability, ethnicity, gender, age, region, and household composition. It should also include the implications of remote and hybrid working for career progression.*

Chapter 7:

- *As in other areas, the Government should allocate ministerial responsibility for the co-ordination of data across departments on the implications of remote and hybrid working for productivity growth. It should give particular attention to areas where this relates to*

mission-led objectives, such as increasing employment.

Coordinating policies across departments

124.Whilst ownership of Employment Rights, including flexible working policy, sits within the Department for Business and Trade, this inquiry has illustrated that this is a cross-cutting issue with implications for policymaking across a range of areas. We will continue collaborating across government to shape flexible working policy and evaluate its impacts. This will include considering routes to improving evidence sharing and data collection.

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