

## Trendy but Daft

Branch Secretary Steve Beardsmore Puts Forward the Case against Agile Working

You may have noticed that the latest buzz words on which Dudley Council are basing their philosophy of work and service delivery are Agile Working. If you question the reasoning behind these words, managers will respond with the mantra 'Agile working requires agile minds' ignoring their own closed minds when it comes to any criticism of this the latest fad from the management gurus.



Agile working is based on three pillars. Firstly, only seven work places will be allowed for every ten staff employed. Secondly, no staff below Assistant Director will have their own office or desk—yes, that's right, a Labour Council believes that only Assistant Directors and above are entitled to the dignity of their own desk or work space. Finally, there is an expectation that many if not all staff will spend some of their time working from home.

A pilot scheme has been run by Human Resources at Regent House; under it only the Assistant Director has an allocated desk and office. Everyone else has to make do with what ever they can grab. Desks cannot be personalised; photos, files, papers, etc, must be cleared away each night and the desks left bare for the next day's occupant. Even if we ignore what this does to a person's self-esteem because people do like to have their own space, the system is incompatible with the effective delivery of services. I have had to wait for up to fifteen minutes while the person I had come to see was located. Under the previous system I would have simply walked to the desk where I knew they would be sitting. Many services are delivered by teams with problems solved and plans of action agreed collectively. How can this happen when it cannot be guaranteed that staff will sit together? Some staff require specialised furniture and computer equipment and there are unconfirmed reports of staff working on the floor because of the lack of desks and chairs.

On top of this the authority intends to move to a

paperless system with severe restrictions on the number of files staff can transfer. Unfortunately, the same restrictions do not apply to the practicalities of service delivery, with staff at Mary Steven's Park in particular complaining that many vital documents will be lost.

As to home working, the practical problems are numerous. Firstly, many people

have the totally justifiable wish to keep their work lives separate from their home lives. Even if staff are willing to work from home, the problems just keep on building up: Who will do the risk assessment? What if the person's domestic relationships do not allow for home working? What if their mortgage or tenancy agreements prohibit home working? Who is going to pay for the extra insurance, heating and electricity? What will happen if circumstances change and someone who could work from home finds that they are no longer able to do so? Will they be in breach of contract?

Will promotion and even appointment to posts be subject to being able to work from home? At the moment the authority says it has no plans to make working from home compulsory. Unfortunately, the words 'at the moment' are the most important ones in that statement.

It may be that Agile Working will go the way of Performance Related Pay and Compulsory Complete Tendering as well as all the other nonsense with which the management industry has wasted our time over the years. Sadly, Agile Working will not leave the Council with enough accommodation to house staff when they realise what a stupid idea it is. But then that's the real reason for introducing it, the council will be able to flog off 30% of its accommodation.

Unison will continue to press for one workspace for every full time equivalent member of staff.



calling all **UNISON** members

# CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PARTY

## FRIDAY 21ST DECEMBER

### 4PM UNTIL 6PM

**JUBILEE SCOUT HALL, LADIES WALK  
SEDGLEY, DUDLEY, DY3 3UA**



Featuring Pat the Clown and his Magic Circus Show, there will be Party Games, Party Disco and plenty of balloons to make balloon models. The performance will end at 6pm.

If you are a UNISON member and have children/grandchildren aged between 3 - 7 years who would like to attend, then please contact the office on 01384 233870 to book your free place. We can only offer places for 60 children, so it will be on a first-come, first-served basis. All places should be secured with a £3 per child deposit, returnable on arrival. There must be an adult remaining with the child for the duration of the party.