



Home-based Working Committee

Corrected oral evidence

Monday 9 June 2025

2.15 pm

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Members present: Baroness Scott of Needham Market (The Chair); Lord Farmer; Baroness Featherstone; Lord Fink; Baroness Freeman of Steventon; Baroness Manzoor; Lord Parker of Minsmere; Baroness Watkins of Tavistock.

Evidence Session No. 17

Heard in Public

Questions 162 - 175

Witnesses

I: Sir David Ord, Joint Chairman, Bristol Port Company; Rachael Gillett, Chief People Officer, Compare the Market; Stephen Noakes, Executive Director of Retail, Nationwide.

Examination of witnesses

Sir David Ord, Rachael Gillett and Stephen Noakes.

Q162 **The Chair:** Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to this House of Lords Select Committee on home-based working, and a very warm welcome to our witnesses today. Our session is being broadcast. A transcript will be sent to you in a few days to check for transcription errors and you will be very welcome to send us any supplementary evidence in writing.

I will kick off with the first question in a moment but perhaps each one of you would introduce yourselves the first time you speak. That would be extremely helpful.

I begin with a general question. What is your current policy on working location—office, home-based or hybrid—and how is it evolving? One of the things we are interested in hearing about is what evidence you have used to make decisions as you have been going along.

Stephen Noakes: I am director of retail at Nationwide Building Society. Nationwide has 18,000 colleagues across the UK. I should say first off that over 4,000 of those colleagues work in branches so they would be in that branch environment for five or six days a week typically.

For the balance of the population, we ask colleagues to come into the office two days a week. There are certain exceptions that apply and so it is not all colleagues who are asked to do that, but two days a week is the requirement and that is a requirement we have had since December 2023.

Why do we require two days? Nationwide is a business in which a culture of mutual focus and a focus on the customer is incredibly important. It is very difficult to protect and reinforce that culture in a purely remote environment. So we have moved to two days a week to make sure that there is time for face-to-face connectivity and the balance for colleagues for flexibility. At the moment it is actually working very well for us. We continue to review it, but we have no plans to change it at this time.

Rachael Gillett: I am the chief people officer at Compare the Market, a tech and data business. I am sure you all know the great brand that we have. We ask people to come in 10 days a month. We have not changed our contractual terms. Our contractual terms still remain at five days per month. However, over time, post-Covid, we have come to believe in absolute flexibility and that gives the benefits of collaboration and coming together to innovate. It seems to be working very well and we have high compliance on those 10 days a month as well.

We do not believe that bringing together and solving complex issues can be done at home and we tend to find that bringing people in 10 days a month works in that way, especially for people in their early careers and new jobs. Having that social interaction is imperative. We have lots of

collaboration space now. We found that at the beginning of post-Covid people were coming in on Tuesday and Wednesday, then Thursday. We now find that people are moving to Mondays as well. Fridays are still quite empty. Teams are regulating themselves and working it out for themselves, and it seems to be working very well. We have about 96% compliance among our colleagues.

Sir David Ord: I am chairman and joint owner of the Bristol Port Company, which operates the docks at Portbury and Avonmouth near Bristol. We are very much hands-on operation, inevitably. About 80% of our people are out on the ships or in the warehouses, interfacing with customers and so on. We operate five days a week. We recruit on that basis and our experience during Covid, when we worked all the way through as part of the UK's critical infrastructure, was that a lot of people who by definition had to stay at home found it difficult and frustrating. We had always been five days a week so when Covid ended we reverted to that norm. I can go into detail in due course about the particular reasons in our sector of business.

Q163 Baroness Freeman of Steventon: We are interested in the effects of work location on recruitment, retention and career progression. Could each of you tell us whether you advertise jobs with a particular work location policy and what data you might have on how that affects recruitment, particularly to different sectors? Do you see it affect women, people in minorities or people with caring responsibilities differently? Is there any data on retention or can you say anything about career progression and its effects?

Stephen Noakes: I will touch on each of those areas. First, on recruitment, in an environment where pretty much everyone else in the sector is offering some type of hybrid working, there is no doubt that flexibility is a key part of the recruitment offer. In addition to that, it also helps us in resourcing certain shift patterns in telephony. It is far easier to do early mornings and late evenings when you do not have a commute to consider on top of that.

On retention, you do need to be careful—let me bring this to life. In line with the rest of the industry, we have a challenge with retention for colleagues coming into the organisation in their first year, particularly in telephony. In many instances, those colleagues are trying to get used to work and they are also getting used to serving and responding to customer needs and using telephony systems. Doing that remotely is incredibly difficult. So what we have now in what we call our 'grad bays' is a model where we have returned to the first six weeks being fully in the office. On the back of that, we have seen the retention go from a situation where we were losing 30% of colleagues in those first few weeks to one where that is now down to just 3%. So you do have to be careful about the way that you apply the policy cohort by cohort.

On career progression, there is no real data to suggest particular challenges, but again you do need to flex policies given the fact that it is now hybrid. I will bring a couple of points to life. The first is career paths.

One of the exception areas that I touched on earlier—colleagues who do not need to come into the office two days a week—is our mortgage consultants. Pre-pandemic, they would have been based in branches, but through the Covid period we found that the most popular slot, unsurprisingly, for customers is early evening when branches are closed. So those colleagues are now home-based. For colleagues joining our organisation as customer representatives—which used to be the key stepping stone before people went on to branch manager—those roles are still available in the organisation. But, for the 4,000 colleagues who work in my team and are in those branches, they are just less visible, particularly for those who joined more recently. We need to do more of a job to make sure that there is visibility on those career pathways.

Particularly for the underrepresented groups, for whom there may be fewer role models at senior level, networking and sponsorship is incredibly important for career progression. In an environment where everyone used to be in the office, it was easier to do that, but colleagues now need to be more proactive to make sure that they have that mentoring, and quite often reverse mentoring, to help colleagues with their development.

Also, yes, we do recruit with location-specific guidance. That will vary depending on the role within the organisation.

Rachael Gillett: We focus firmly on being an inclusive employer irrespective of who the individual is. In recruitment, we are very clear when we start the process that the minimum number of days in the office is 10 days a month. If someone does not want to do that, that is their choice, and we have lost some people through that process. We think it is a very reasonable offer and it works for us. I think that is very important. It has to work for the employee and us as a business as well.

I think we are very attractive. We do not have a problem recruiting at all. We are very fortunate. We have two locations: London and Peterborough. The distance is not that far between the offices—it is 47 minutes on the train. So recruitment does not cause any issues for us at all—applicants aren't a problem. But certainly, in the tech community, we have lost some people through the stance of a minimum of 10 days a month.

Sir David Ord: We always advertise terms and conditions, one of which is five days a week and, to date, we have not had any significant problem with recruiting. We did have a problem immediately post-Covid but, as we all know, the labour market has eased considerably since then. We find that, when we do recruit, if somebody does not like the terms and conditions, then there is the door and we will find somebody who can handle it.

Baroness Freeman of Steventon: Rachael, how do you handle career progression? Do you have any data on whether working some of the time out of the office affects people's career progression?

Rachael Gillett: I do not believe that does. I think the fact we have this mix of what I call 50-50 in the building means that it does not hinder anybody. Some people come in five days a week because that is their choice if their home circumstances do not allow them to work from home—they may be living with parents or something like that for instance—so they want to come in five days a week. From a career progression point of view, I do not see it as being a problem at all. We are all always in together—Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday are our days together—and I can see people progress. But it depends on the role. If you are business partnering with someone, you cannot do that from home; you need to be in and there are more benefits to doing that in some of the support areas of our business as well.

Q164 **Lord Farmer:** David, with Avonmouth docks one has physical work in one's mind. Are your employees very much locally homed? When you employ people, do you find them coming from the local area?

Sir David Ord: Yes. Something like 25% live in the local postcode.

Lord Farmer: There is a history of dockyard working there—so you have families and that sort of thing. It is quite an ancient business, compared to Compare the Market and even Nationwide, which is also a factor in your employment, I take it.

Sir David Ord: It is and, of course, many of our groups work different hours. Some roles are driven by the tides; some are driven by the arrivals of ships; and some are driven by how effectively yesterday went. If we handled something yesterday and it has to be finished off, then they have to perform even if it is 0400 on an awful rainy February day. So we have to be flexible and employees have to be flexible, and therefore there is a culture that one has to develop which is to get on with the job and do a good job. Speed is our criterion. The faster we can turn around the ships, the better for everybody, so we are quite driven.

Q165 **Lord Fink:** How do you evaluate the impact of the working location on things such as collaboration, team cohesion and management oversight? Are there any tools you have found useful to facilitate remote communication?

Stephen Noakes: I am happy to pick that up. We do a regular culture survey that looks at the engagement across the colleague organisation. The ability to collaborate both within and outwith teams is one of the key questions. We have seen a marked improvement in that since we adopted the hybrid approach, moving away from the situation where, for many, they were largely working at home through the Covid period.

In addition, we help both colleagues and team leaders with learning interventions that help them be as effective as they can be when they are in a remote environment because it definitely requires some changes in how you operate. From a tech perspective, like many, we use Microsoft Teams, but we have also been dropping in additional technology. Team leaders previously, when colleagues were always in the office, would quite often be shoulder to shoulder with them with another set of

headphones on, listening to their calls with a customer and seeing the screens come up. They can still do that—they can look at the calls and hear the voice—but we have now introduced screen recording so they can have both screens and voice to allow them to do better coaching for those individuals working remotely.

Rachael Gillett: We also have an engagement survey for all employees twice a year. We have changed our questions to find out about working from home and working in the office. Collaboration in the office has been very important to us. We have a very small number of legacy employees—older long-term employees on contracts—and we know that their engagement is significantly lower than that of those people who come into the office. They find it harder to engage, so we have now taken the approach of hybrid, not fully remote, contracts going forward.

We are a tech business. We have stepped up our communication considerably, with things such as our CEO doing a “live” every two weeks, where he fully communicates with the whole organisation and the executive team takes live questions. We have done that post-Covid. We have Teams, we have Slack, we have our intranet and we do a lot of virtual events, but we do take the opportunity, when people are in, to bring them together. We have quarterly strategy updates with as many people as we can get in the room. Some people dial in, but most people will come in for those events. My view is that the more communication you can do, the better when you have hybrid contracts, definitely, and people working in a hybrid way.

Q166 **The Chair:** Sir David, you said that obviously you had to keep the place running during the pandemic—it was critical infrastructure—but presumably you had some back-office functions where people were at home.

Sir David Ord: We did, yes.

The Chair: Did you find any difficulties with the management, the engagement and so on?

Sir David Ord: From both employee and employer, the mood of that period was that difficulties would be overcome, so there was a greater understanding of what was required. We were certainly very sensitive to those, particularly younger people, who were finding it difficult at home. We said that, if they preferred, they could come in, and quite a few of them did, for obvious reasons. If you are stuck in a bedsit in the city, it can get a bit lonely, and a lot of our employees do find the social side, the collegiate side, of the business quite attractive. Lots of groups go and do things after the workday, and we encourage that culture. So, yes, it is always a challenge with people who are under pressure—operational pressure—but in many ways it puts other issues out of their minds. People sometimes quite welcome having to focus on something other than what the wife is up to or what the baby is doing or whatever.

Rachael Gillett: I would echo that. Social interaction is important. Having been employed for many years, I have met many great people through work, and I think it is important that people do come in and have that social side as well. We do a lot of social things for people when they are in the office. It is very important.

Q167 **Lord Parker of Minsmere:** I have a question in two parts, if I may. I have a follow-up question for you, David, and then a different question for Rachael and Stephen.

Sir David, thinking about your back-office staff—the 20% of your workforce you were just talking about—what approach do you take if any of them exercise their right to request flexible working, including hybrid working, because they do have the legal right? How do you respond to that for the 20%?

Sir David Ord: Unless there is a health-related or bereavement issue that explains their request, we say no.

Lord Parker of Minsmere: Thank you. Now I have a different question for Rachael and Stephen. Now that you are in a pattern of what I guess has been over time a growing degree of hybrid, how are you managing your physical workspace in 2025 and getting the best value from what the Americans would call your real estate?

Stephen Noakes: First, on the branch side and with the commitment to keeping those branches open, we are continuing to invest and making sure that they are fit for purpose. As far as the balance of the estate is concerned—and we have eight key locations around the country—we regularly look at occupancy data to make sure that our property is right-sized for the demand from colleagues.

At the moment, Tuesday through Thursday, which is when colleagues have a higher preference for being present in the office, occupancy runs at about 62%. Typically, we see about two-thirds of that on a Monday and slightly less on a Friday. Friday is when it is very difficult to get many colleagues back in the office.

As a consequence, we have changed the footprint. We had a second facility, in Swindon, where we had a very big campus. We have now closed that second facility because we can accommodate the needs of all colleagues within the campus environment. In Wakefield, we have closed one of the wings. On the flip side, in London, where post the move to hybrid we saw much higher demand, we have reopened another facility. Today, we have a facility in Threadneedle Street and a second one in Holborn.

Rachael Gillett: It is slightly easier for us. Peterborough is a big site. People do come in on Tuesday, Wednesday and then Thursday. We are seeing more people coming on Mondays now. Our Fridays are the same as Stephen Noakes described. We have about 50 people in our Peterborough office on Fridays. London is more challenging because it is a smaller office. People are working out when they can come in, when the

teams come in. So we are seeing more people come in on Mondays. We do not say, "These are the days when you have to come in". We generally have enough space. There are some days when it is at the peak and it does not quite work for us, but teams are working it out. We use door-pass data to monitor occupancy. People may say they cannot find a desk but when we look at the data, we see that there are desks. We did run a booking system for desks. We have removed that recently to try to let people come in and see what happens. We are trialling that system at the moment and it seems to be working a lot better than having people book desks and then decide not to come in or come in late, and so on. Now it is first come, first served.

Q168 Lord Parker of Minsmere: Have either of your companies had any ideas about how to displace the tumbleweed on Fridays and what use you can make of the office space, which is big enough to accommodate everybody on the days when people do come in? We are interested in how to obtain value from office space.

Stephen Noakes: There is a real challenge on Fridays. I know you have had evidence from a number of academics about that. Even pre-Covid, the average attendance in the office was four point something. Fridays were always quiet. So you are trying to push against a behavioural pattern that has been built in for an extended period.

To the point that Rachael called out earlier on, we do encourage colleagues to come into the office for connect sessions. There will be all-colleague calls, which are clearly much better done where everyone is in the same environment, but they are not very popular if we try to do them on a Friday. I think we just need to recognise that that is probably a challenge that will always be quite difficult.

Lord Parker of Minsmere: I completely buy that. If I ever set up a company that needs physical space, I will make it work just on Fridays and make deals with you to use your office space for next to nothing. Thank you.

The Chair: Apart from the hot desking, have you made any other changes? Some of our witnesses have talked about changing the nature of the office space, making it more of a barista culture as I think somebody described it.

Rachael Gillett: Yes, we have done quite a lot in our offices, for example with the seating arrangements, to make them more comfortable. Post-Covid, we offer a free breakfast every day. That was to encourage people to come back in. It is very popular. There are a lot of other benefits as well. One of the reasons we did it was to help people with the cost of living. Our offices are lovely. People are very lucky to have great offices. We have invested more in them to make them look better and feel better, with facilities such as free breakfasts, ice cream vans on the campus in the summer and so on.

The Chair: Can I have a job?

Rachael Gillett: You are very welcome. Making the environment so that people want to come in is very important. Also, we provide free charging for cars as well now. That has been very popular and gets people in.

Stephen Noakes: On that point about other changes in offices and collaboration spaces, I have heard other organisations talk about head-up and head-down work. When people are home based, they can do more head-down activity. They can pursue it themselves. Head-up work requires connectivity and collaboration. Therefore, we do need to make sure that, when colleagues are coming in, the office environment is suitable for that collaboration. That means opening up more meeting rooms and—going back to the challenge with booking—making sure you have a very slick booking process where colleagues can avail themselves of the facilities.

Q169 **Lord Farmer:** I am interested that people are going in five days a week, four days a week or going from three to four, but everybody is keeping Friday from home. Do you find a difference in the quality of work on Fridays compared to the rest of the week? I know it is difficult to evaluate when it is done from home rather than in the office, but do you have any evidence of a rather more laissez-faire attitude to work on Fridays?

Stephen Noakes: I do not, actually—I think that is because, within our approach and the two days a week, there is time for connectivity, but there is flexibility and colleagues recognise that. We do not see any change in productivity on a Friday. There is no noticeable change in our call centre abandon rates across the course of the week.

Rachael Gillett: I probably would be hard pressed to answer that because we are not a call centre. We do not have the kind of monitoring process that Nationwide has. I can judge only my own department. My team is available. They know they need to be available. We have our “lives”—our CEO communication—on a Friday and they have extremely high attendance. People are around. So, no, I do not think so, but it is a Friday and pre-Covid we had a lot of people working from home on a Friday so it is the norm for us as well.

Q170 **Baroness Watkins of Tavistock:** Before I ask my formal question, what do you do about health management for those who are working from home? Do you provide the equipment that they use?

The Chair: We are going to come on to that in a later question.

Baroness Watkins of Tavistock: I beg your pardon. I will go straight to my question, then. How does the working location affect customer satisfaction? Do you know whether you can find that out or is it too difficult to measure the difference?

Stephen Noakes: You can definitely get some sense of it. Nationwide has been number one compared with our high street peers for customer satisfaction for the last 13 years, and no doubt there are a number of elements to that. Continuing to offer channels of choice for customers is one part of that satisfaction—plus we are committed to keeping our

branches open. So we now have over a hundred locations where we are the last branch in town. That is definitely an element of satisfaction, but customers clearly engage through digital and telephony channels as well. To deliver great satisfaction through those channels, you need colleagues who are supporting them to be engaged and have the right level of skills and experience. I would argue again that you can only achieve some of those learning interventions and develop the right culture face to face, so it is important to have that.

I can look at the relative satisfaction scores in our bespoke survey. Typically, we get the highest score in branch—up in the 90s. Our digital position is below that and in telephony we are in the mid-80 territory. Often, however, that is also to do with the technology. For instance, a number of the customers who call our phone lines are digitally active and it is just that the service is not available through the digital channel. So there is already failure demand there; it is not the fault of the colleague. That is something that we are looking to solve as the tech road map moves forward. Making sure that you have the right hybrid approach and the ability to continue to skill up colleagues and engage them appropriately is a key part of our success.

Baroness Watkins of Tavistock: You mentioned the 80%. Is that satisfaction rate similar to your competitors?

Stephen Noakes: In telephony, there would be others—there are other great telephony operations. First Direct for example would probably have scores above 80% because that business model is one that they have adopted for several years.

Baroness Watkins of Tavistock: So it might be the point in time.

Stephen Noakes: In branch, we are head and shoulders above the next nearest, but we are closer to our competitors in telephony.

Rachael Gillett: It is quite an easy answer for me. We are a tech business. Our customers deal with us online so this can be done from home or in the office—both ways—and we have a small team that deals with our customers, so we do not have that challenge.

Baroness Watkins of Tavistock: But do you believe that the way you are running your business is giving you sufficient customer satisfaction that you want to go on with the way you are doing it?

Rachael Gillett: Yes, absolutely.

Baroness Watkins of Tavistock: Thank you—that is helpful. Sir David, how do you manage your customer satisfaction?

Sir David Ord: I guess by how many customers come through to me being upset, which is zero. We have a very effective team. Everybody has their customers in various operations. People get upset if their ships are delayed. What can we do about the weather? Nothing. Sometimes clients have to wait for a berth, which they do not like, but, generally speaking,

we have an amazingly loyal customer base and we try to speak to them. We do not communicate through the internet or emails unless it is routine stuff, so our people try to get rapport and a personal relationship with them, and it seems to work.

Q171 **Baroness Featherstone:** Now that everyone is working from home, companies still have a responsibility for staff well-being, among lots of other stuff. How do you see working location affecting your responsibilities towards your staff, such as communications, health and safety, equipment, well-being, staff development, and that sort of thing?

Rachael Gillett: I think a question about equipment came up earlier. We provide all our employees with desks and proper office chairs, and, if someone has a reasonable adjustment in the office, we mirror that at home for them. They must be comfortable and we offer different sizes of equipment for different types of houses and where someone may live as well.

Most of our training is online but we do take the opportunity to bring people together for big events and training and development for people about six times a year, especially for our people leaders because they can learn from each other and do workshops. That happens on site, which is good, but most of our other training is online or in person where necessary.

Baroness Featherstone: Do you carry out risk assessments in people's homes or just go by what they say they need?

Rachael Gillett: There is a way of doing it and it will be assessed. Someone may have a special chair, for example. One of my team broke her back, so she has a special chair, and we have been out to her home to assess whether she has the right equipment. I think it is probably easier for us with the number of employees we have and the location as well.

Stephen Noakes: We have a similar approach to workplace adjustments—an approach that has been established over a number of years in the office environment—and it is now extended in the same way that Rachael has described for colleagues working from home.

The approach to home-based working needs to be underpinned by several other people policies that support work-life balance, flexible working and well-being more broadly.

I talked about our exception list up front. Some colleagues may be unable to get into the office for an interim period or long term. Reasons may be, for instance, caring for a family member with a long-term illness, or mobility challenges, and we will continue to make sure that those colleagues are supported through the exception approach.

Baroness Featherstone: Have you developed these approaches in your own companies or is there somewhere you can go to see what you should be doing? Are there no guidelines anywhere?

Stephen Noakes: There are no guidelines. Most industries will have industry bodies that offer the opportunity to share best practice. This is not an area that is particularly competitive, so understanding what others are doing, what is working well and what others have learned is always very valuable. Those opportunities exist.

Baroness Featherstone: You are very good firms but, for not-so-good firms, do you think something like minimum standards should be introduced? Should there be any government interference in this area?

Stephen Noakes: I might have a question about the danger of overregulating. We have to ensure flexibility but I might have a concern about regulation. Let me go back to my point about colleagues joining telephony for the first time. If the requirement was only two days a week in the office and they could not be in the office more frequently through that induction period, that would, I would argue, not be good for those individuals because they would be more likely to leave the business, and it certainly would not be good for the organisation. Care is needed with how policies are applied.

Rachael Gillett: I agree with that. There is nothing wrong with a guideline. A guideline is sufficient and you could take best practice from what works for different types of companies. I always approach it as being responsible to our employees. Since they come into the office and also work at home we can talk to them if a reasonable adjustment is needed. We are 1,000 people so for us it is easier to understand, but guidelines are helpful. I would not wish for anything else.

Q172 **Lord Farmer:** I come back to Rachael Gillett's comment about visiting a colleague's home. It seems to me that with health and safety laws today, if an employee working from home had an injury or an ill-health problem, which they could connect to you or the workplace, there could be a cause for a complaint or a claim. Does that not require you to check out the environment in which they are working? They might have the right desk and the right chair but are they at the top of a very steep staircase or something? All I am saying is that, to protect yourselves from claims, is there not a requirement to go and see the environment first?

Rachael Gillett: We have not had that requirement. The way we approach it is that we employ adults and they will tell us their situation. They are very sensible people and we provide them with really good equipment. If there is a problem—if someone has had an injury, whether outside of work or at work—we take that special care and would support them. We have not had that issue to date.

Baroness Featherstone: There would be no liability issues then.

Rachael Gillett: No.

Stephen Noakes: No, and in terms of practicality we are in the same situation—with 18,000 colleagues across the UK and 4,000 in branch, that would potentially mean 14,000 potential home visits. If there were very serious cases, that is where occupational health would come in and

quite often that would mean a visit with the line manager to the individual colleague's working location at home, but those circumstances would be more the exception rather than the rule across the board.

Baroness Featherstone: Your organisations are relatively large. I am wondering what the situation would be for smaller organisations that might not be as professional about it.

Rachael Gillett: Yes, I understand that.

- Q173 **Baroness Manzoor:** Can I pick up on both Lord Farmer's point and the question? Where would legal liability sit? It has not been tested in the courts yet, has it? What if somebody tripped over a wire and you have given the desk and everything else? Have you made any provisions for that sort of thing? It is their own negligence, but are you liable for people on those two days when they are working at home?

Rachael Gillett: It would depend on the situation and the circumstances.

Baroness Manzoor: You have had no problems.

Rachael Gillett: No. Let us hope nothing like that happens, and if it does—

Baroness Manzoor: I just wondered—where does the legal liability sit? Obviously, if they were in the workplace—

Stephen Noakes: We have not had any instance of that kind and I am not aware of anything in the industry more broadly, or actually particularly across industry.

- Q174 **The Chair:** To turn it on its head a bit, because we have heard quite a lot about the well-being and safety of people working from home and you have talked about reasonable adjustments and so on, I wonder whether you have people coming into the office only a couple of days a week and you are hot desking more—is it getting harder to look after them in the workplace because they are not sitting at the same desk? I am just posing the question.

Stephen Noakes: Those colleagues who have workplace adjustments and might need a high desk or a special chair, that equipment would not be put into the hot desk pool. It would be bespoke for them. Although the colleague might be in the office for only two days a week, their desk and so on would still be reserved. We can still make sure that people are protected in the way they need to be.

Rachael Gillett: We are all creatures of habit. You will find that people will find a way of sitting in the same desk in the same place if they can. In our larger office, that is possible. In our London office, it is less easily possible, but when I go in and want to find someone, I find they are usually in the same place or the same area, so it tends to work out.

The Chair: Lord Farmer, do you want to draw this to a close?

Q175 **Lord Farmer:** If you could make one recommendation to the Government about remote and hybrid working, what would it be?

Stephen Noakes: Clearly, the Government will be interested in driving economic activity in an environment where hybrid working is now commonplace. I know that, in previous evidence, there was a call for broadband infrastructure, particularly in rural locations, and I echo that call.

We have already touched on taking care with overregulating, and I do think there is a risk there, which I would also flag.

Rachael Gillett: I echo that but add that I think businesses should be able to define what works for them and their customers. That is important because, as you have just heard today, we are three very different businesses and overregulation would be a challenge. We should be able to consider and look after our people, which I think we all want to do from three different business perspectives—but allow us to make those decisions.

Sir David Ord: Leave us alone. On the last point on health and safety—which is our total focus, having a rather dangerous situation—even when an employee has been utterly silly, the company is still liable for providing a safe workplace, so we would still be responsible. Health and safety is probably the number one aspect of our daily, hourly life and we put a huge amount of time, money and focus on it for obvious reasons.

The Chair: I thank all three of you very much. I found this session fascinating. It has been really helpful to us. Thank you very much indeed. I will bring this session to a close.