

# The new normal

➤ As face-to-face meetings and travelling into the office has declined, *Pensions Age* asks for your tips to make working from home run that bit more smoothly



## Virtual meetings

Turn on the video! Whether it be a formal client update, a team meeting or an informal catch-up with a colleague, having the ability to read a person's expression, see their gestures and combine all of this with a voice makes the conversation much more personal, engaging and dynamic. It may seem more awkward in principle but in fact, it's the opposite.

*River and Mercantile Solutions, co-head Ajeet Manjrekar*

Speaking on video calls can be tiring. The faces staring back at you don't always react when you need them to, you don't always know when you can speak, and sometimes lags on calls can make the process tiresome. Nodding along, smiling and reacting puts speakers more at ease.

*CEM Benchmarking analyst, Joao Barata*

Make sure there are 'vanilla' dial-in options for the Luddites out there and have a back-up option conference call facility just in case you need to abandon the video function. Make sure you have a good speaker/headset so that you are loud and clear. How close are you getting to the camera? Maybe prop up the laptop on a couple of dictionaries to get the right angle.

*Sacker & Partners partner, Joanna Smith*

## Timing

The days of marathon all-day trustee meeting are over – temporarily at least. We are seeing boards consider what the



## Technology

Meeting papers had already gone online for many schemes and trustees were using tablets in meetings to access papers. Where this technology is being used for the first time, it will be important to familiarise trustees with what is available online and with any options in the meeting pack software to annotate documents and make notes if they need to. During meetings speakers should be clear about which documents/pages they are referring to seeing as looking at a colleague's tablet to see the page numbers is no longer an option!

*Sacker & Partners partner, Joanna Smith*

When working remotely, such as the majority of trustees currently are, you need a tool set that works consistently, and brings together all of your work needs into one place to enable efficient and collaborative decision making. This should include the ability to access up-to-date information, not just on their live funding levels, but how this will be impacted through potential evolving market scenarios.

*Redington chief technology officer, Adam Jones*

## Security

Security obviously needs considering from an IT perspective but home printing needs thought too. During 2018 when GDPR was new, trustee boards were focusing on scanning in or destroying duplicate paper copies, especially anything that was being kept at home. Now the whole industry is largely based from home, thought should be given to the secure destruction of any confidential information in hard copy – bringing it back to the secure shredding facilities in the office, once that is possible, is one option.

If you know that legal documents will need to be executed then it is wise to make a plan for doing this well in advance. Many are using secure electronic signature software for the first time but those who need to use a 'wet ink' process are well advised to check the process with their lawyers and check the printer and scanner can cope, well in advance of any deadlines.

*Sacker & Partners partner, Joanna Smith*

right length is for virtual trustee meetings and then split them up into manageable time slots focused on particular issues. This can have the advantage of making meetings focused and productive – even if more diary management is needed.

**Sacker & Partners partner, Joanna Smith**

Have a definite action plan for the day. If you are not careful you can spend all your time doing nothing but work. Give yourself a list of things that can be realistically achieved in your day. Work hard and get these things done – and then give yourself a well-deserved break.

**Salvus Master Trust head of sales, Bill Finch**

With many UK employees working remotely, it's easy to overlook the value in taking regular breaks. Employers should be encouraging their teams to book out slots in their diaries and step away from their desks for short periods of time throughout the day. Staying safe while observing some sort of daily exercise is important for physical and mental health.

**Unum UK HR director, Natalie Rogers**



### Boundaries

You don't have to be 'online' to be working. You can be offline and take that time to focus on a piece of work that needs attention without being distracted by your inbox or Microsoft Teams chat. Once you have completed your tasks, then you can come back online and focus on responding to your emails.

**CEM Benchmarking analyst, Joao Barata**

It is important to know when to stop. I start early every day, and at 5.30pm my

son and I go for a bike ride. That doesn't mean that I won't come back and log back on to my laptop – but it does mean that I have told myself that my working day is over, and that whatever I do after that I am doing 'voluntarily'.

**Salvus Master Trust head of sales, Bill Finch**

Working remotely for long periods of time can lend itself to bad working habits. For example, late-night emails can make employees feel pressured and can be a trigger for workplace stress. Leading by example is the best way to promote healthy work/life balance.

**Unum UK HR director, Natalie Rogers**



### Team

I have found it really useful to be part of a virtual team meeting at the start of each working day. Quite apart from the opportunity to discuss ideas and share experiences, it is reassuring to be reminded that we are not ploughing a lone furrow, and that there is a bunch of people out there who have got your back.

**Salvus Master Trust head of sales, Bill Finch**

Obviously if we were all in our offices there would be many conversations happening (on work and non-work topics) in the kitchen and around the office. Colleagues would pop by to ask a quick question or a steer on a particular issue or give a quick update on something. We need to make sure these conversations happen virtually now and not just by email. It is of course incredibly important to exchange ideas with colleagues and make sure more junior

colleagues are supported. We are using video conference technology for this purpose as well as 'formal' meetings.

**Sacker & Partners partner, Joanna Smith**

Take time to ask 'how are you coping?' and listen to the answer. Members of our exec leadership team have been calling staff from across the business, who they may not have ever met, just to let them know that everyone matters.

Keep the channels open and don't make it all about work. We have created a virtual pub with different rooms where staff can gather for a chat, in or out of work time. We all meet there on a Friday following an all-team, end-of-week briefing. We start and end the week with a briefing to keep everyone in touch with each other and the business. Furloughed staff are encouraged to join too.

Take extra care of furloughed staff. Many may be left with a feeling of being inadequate by the fact they have been furloughed.

**AHC head of engagement strategy, Karen Bolan**

Now more than ever, it's vital that employers are tuned in to how their employees are feeling whether they are working remotely, remain on site or have been furloughed. Symptoms of stress can appear physically, behaviourally or cognitively via a noticeable dip in performance and productivity, but it can be hard to identify the signs, particularly from a distance.

Get to know each team member so you can spot when there is a change. When you see each other pretty much every day, a change in people's appearance or moods are more obvious. When working remotely, be aware of how they speak on the phone, the tone of their emails and keep an eye on performance. And where appropriate, use video tools for meetings to help feel more connected with your team and watch for any warning signs.

**Unum UK HR director, Natalie Rogers**