



#WorkLifeWeek

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Pre-pandemic I was working a typical 9-5 office job surrounded in client files piled high on my desk and taking up floor space in metal cabinets. There was nothing wrong with that; that is all I had ever known.

The pandemic hit and, while as a legal service provider we were able to remain open, on account of my step-son having Covid symptoms, I began a period of isolation as the first lockdown hit. I thought back then it would just be 2 weeks of working from home but it's now been 2 ½ years and here I am, sitting in my "home" office almost exclusively working from home.

2 ½ years ago I recall having to leave work to isolate with just my laptop and a handful of paper files. I had no work phone, dictation machine, no proper desk at home and still working from paper files meant I didn't have easy access to everything I needed to do my job from day to day. While I had expected to be back working in the office following my period of isolation, I found out I was pregnant and so I began shielding and spent almost all of my pregnancy working from home. This enabled

me to comfortably work close up to my due date, which would have been problematic if I was having to attend the office every day. By then, I had created an office in my spare room equipped with everything I needed to work from home and by then all my work had moved to our digital system so there was no reliance on paper files.

Allington Hughes encouraged and supported home or hybrid working from early on in the pandemic as measures were put in place within the offices to reduce all contact to a minimum. Laptops, mobile phones and other accessories were provided to enable colleagues to work from home where they could. I was also very lucky to have great admin support who ensured that any post that arrived at the office was scanned into the system and everything filed correctly so that our working practices were as efficient as possible.

I commenced a very short period of maternity leave in fact within just 3 weeks of my son's birth I was back doing my first KIT day. That was my choice. I was at the time in the middle of a leadership and management course and some of

the course dates fell during my maternity leave. If it wasn't for being able to work from home and the course being online I wouldn't have had the opportunity to do the course.

While my return to work was early it was still gradual and to a large degree on my terms. I personally felt that not having to take a long break from work and have the shock of returning to the office, being overwhelmed to be back and feeling that emptiness of having to leave my son was huge. Pre-pandemic almost certainly this kind of flexibility wouldn't have been quite so normal and accepted. I'm not quite sure how returning to an office everyday having had my son would have affected my mental health. I know almost certainly that without the support of Allington Hughes to continue to work from home even as we came out of lockdown I wouldn't have had the same opportunities available to me but more so that I wouldn't have even thought about home working in the same circumstances pre-pandemic.

For me above all else being able to work from home while my son is still so little allows me to be present for him. We have breakfast and play together without the morning rush to get out of the door and I am here to have lunch with him if he's not out with Nain. Being home also allows me to prepare food for the evening, attempt to tidy up and avoid the time of a commute home so that I have more spare time to spent with my son after work.

Undoubtedly, as with so many companies, the pandemic propelled us forward with a more flexible working set up. Allington Hughes embraced the changes and have Agile and Hybrid working policies in place, which they promote, and support.

I am very fortunate to be in a role that enables me to provide the best and most efficient service to my clients from home and to have that supported by Allington Hughes. Having the freedom to work more flexibly particularly being a working mum hugely supports my mental health but also gives me the drive to be the best that I can be at work too. Allington Hughes promotes a family ethos because after all family is our priority and promoting that work/life balance for the benefit of colleagues is a priority to Allington Hughes.



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