

HYBRID WORKING POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Hybrid working is a form of flexible working that allows employees to split their time between attending the workplace and working remotely (typically from home or another location).

There are many benefits associated with hybrid working such as:

- ✓ Efficiency - better use of space, reduced property estate to manage going forward, and the creation of flexible spaces
- ✓ Productivity – teams working closer together to stay connected and to share knowledge. It can also mean potentially extended hours for services and reduced absenteeism as people can make more choices about where and when they work.
- ✓ Sustainability - reduced carbon footprint – fewer reasons to travel
- ✓ Business continuity - reduced disruption from weather, security, or any future pandemic.
- ✓ Incentives – more appealing when recruiting and retaining employees, reduced training costs
- ✓ Work life flexibility – reduced commute time, more choice and greater trust between employer and employee.

Many employees have shown during the coronavirus pandemic that they can continue to effectively perform while working remotely and have already indicated that they do not want to return to less flexible pre-pandemic working arrangements. This rapid adoption of a new working culture provides an opportunity for the council to permanently implement hybrid working to successfully transform the organisation, contributing to overall performance as well as supporting employees to achieve a positive work-life balance.

PURPOSE

The objectives of our new way of working is to develop promote different ways of working that can support:

- Delivery of our services and
- Employee well-being through a better work-life balance

This policy sets out the council's approach to hybrid working and provide managers with a framework for implementing new ways of working and managing a workforce with reduced office accommodation.

Please note that legislative requirements in relation to statutory right to request flexible working still exists. This applies to those who wish to make a formal request to contractually change their working hours or location on a *permanent basis* under the statutory scheme (employees must have a least 26 weeks' service). Please refer to the Statutory Right to Request Flexible Working Policy for more details.

For most employees, who either wish to alter their working pattern which does not constitute a contractual change or where revised working arrangements are informally agreed with their line manager, this will not constitute a formal statutory request.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council employees.

PRINCIPLES

In order to implement the new operating model, the following principles will be adopted.

- ✓ Customers are to be at the focus of our new working arrangements. The council's workplaces will be set up to better support collaboration, productivity, wellbeing and customer service.
- ✓ Workspace is prioritised for activities, not individuals - flexibility is the norm and fixed desks are kept to a minimum for operational or wellbeing reasons.
- ✓ Employees should work in the most appropriate location for the task they are doing rather than being at a council office by default
- ✓ Employees will be encouraged to work as flexibly as possible whilst always remaining contactable, using a mix of workplaces (offices, working from home, remote working) to best meet service and customer needs, and support staff wellbeing.
- ✓ Employees will be given the equipment they need to support working in a more flexible but affordable way
- ✓ To shift towards a digital first culture that makes the most of the efficiencies hybrid working offers.
- ✓ Ensure a team working culture is in place when developing a hybrid culture to maintain staff development and wellbeing
- ✓ Ensure that new employees to the council are embedded in the organisation through regular contact
- ✓ Face to face contact with customers to be on a prearranged basis.
- ✓ Productivity and performance to be maintained and managed appropriately.

EQUALITIES

The council's commitment to equality of opportunity will be always observed during the operation of this policy. This will ensure that employees are treated fairly and without discrimination on the grounds age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR HYBRID WORKING

Employees may work from various locations including:

Main Office Base – this is where an employee works at the office, which is their main base according to their contract.

Home working – this refers to an arrangement whereby employees work from home on an agreed basis, with the expectation that the employee will attend the office as necessary.

Remote working – this is defined as an informal facility whereby employees carry out work that would normally have been completed at a traditional office, for example an alternative site.

The number of days per week each employee spends attending the council offices will vary depending on:

- Their individual circumstances (home environment may not be suitable)
- The nature of their role (may not be suitable for remote working)
- What is happening within their role and team at any particular time (i.e. team days)
- The needs of the council including the space available at council locations

Workforce flexibility

Given the degree of flexibility that the council's hybrid working arrangements will provide for its employees, it is expected our workforce will also be flexible. Employees may be required to attend the council offices on particular days at the request of their line manager for example: training, face to face meetings (if it is agreed that this is best conducted in person) or if there are capability issues and the employee is on an improvement plan.

Similarly, there may be circumstances in which employees are requested to work remotely or to work from other workplaces as reasonably required, for instance:

- Operational needs, for example if the council has too many employees attending the council offices
- Emergency planning arrangements such as in response to a flood/fire at the building or for public health reasons due to a pandemic

In such cases employees will be given as much notice as possible.

Working hours and terms and terms and conditions of employment

The terms and conditions and policies that apply to employees working remotely from home will be unchanged from those that they would apply in the workplace, unless a variation to contract is issued which states otherwise.

Under this policy working hours are unchanged and are set out within the employment contract.

Workspaces at the council

The new operating model will see a reduction in workstations being made available at the main office base. Moving forwards teams will be located within 'zones'. The council will operate a hot-desking arrangement whereby staff will be able to book desks via a booking system. At the end of each day employees should ensure that the hot desk is left empty, clean and tidy. The council will provide personal storage lockers for staff, on request.

Some staff may be allocated a permanent desk if their home environment is not suitable and following approval of their line manager.

Technology and equipment

To assist employees working remotely, the council will provide as a minimum:

- Laptop with built in camera & speakers
- Teams compatible duo or mono wired headset

- Wired keyboard (for home use)
- Wired optical mouse (for home use)
- Laptop riser (for home use)
- Desk and chair (if required as part of a DSE/risk assessment)
- Suitable laptop bag

There may be some variances to this, but this will only be on a business need and where supported by an individual risk assessment which everyone will be invited to complete for their working arrangements.

In an event where technical issues are experienced which prevents the employee from working from home or in a remote location, the manager must be informed. The manager will need to establish the extent of the system failure, the impact on the service and decide on the appropriate course of action. In some circumstances, employees may be required to work at the main office.

Health and Safety

The council is liable if the employee suffers an accident or ill health as a result of working from home, however the Health and Safety at Work Act also places obligations on the employee to 'take reasonable care for the health and safety of himself and of other persons ...' which in this instance, would include those within the household.

The council has limited control over the home therefore to manage the risk employees will complete a homeworking self-assessment which is reviewed every 12 months or sooner if there are any changes. The self-assessment may cover, but is not limited to:

- lone working
- desk area
- display screen
- fire and electrical safety
- stress & welfare
- manual handling
- slip, trips and falls
- security

The assessment will identify any risks and what the manager, working with the employee, can do to mitigate against them. Employees must notify their line manager if:

- You feel any discomfort due to working remotely (such as back pain)
- You believe there are any work-related health and safety hazards
- Any work-related accidents occur in your home

Managers will escalate the matter to the Health and Safety Officer to address what action can be taken.

Data Protection

Employees who are working remotely are responsible for keeping information associated with the council secure at all times and are under a duty to:

- *Practise good computer security* – employees working from home operate through the council's systems so that personal and customer data is adequately protected.

Employees should not send emails to personal email addresses or print documents at home using personal printers. Any printing should be carried out at the council offices.

- *Be mindful when holding confidential/sensitive conversations* – employees may be sharing home working space with other family members or friends or working in public locations. Try to hold conversations where they are less likely to hear you and try and use headphones if possible. Never have confidential conversations in public.
- *Ensure work related information is safeguarded*
 - Employees should position laptops so that others cannot see the screen
 - Never leave laptops unattended in remote locations
 - Keep all hard copies of work-related documentation secure, including keeping documents locked away at all times except when in use
 - Any data/print outs that need to be destroyed should be done so securely

Communication

Hybrid working is based on effective communication and is critical to its success. Communication needs to be managed to ensure good information flow, increase knowledge gaps and enable effective team working.

Team based communication

Communication within hybrid teams needs to be intentional as ad-hoc conversations (where a lot of informal learning and knowledge sharing generally takes place) may be reduced. To redress this, all members of the team should be consulted and encouraged to establish agreed principles of communication such as:

- *Regular team meetings* - teams can meet either physically, virtually (or both) to ensure that communication is inclusive for everyone.
- *Designated team days* - ideally this could be in the office or located in a mutually convenient location
- *Social gatherings* – this may work for some teams, eating out, coffee breaks etc
- *Group chats* – enabled through various social media channels such as Whatsapp

Individual communication

Managers can maintain contact such as:

- *Regular 1:1 meetings* – mutual dialogue allows managers to pick up successes or any performance issues as well as talking about wellbeing and personal development. This can be done via video call, telephone or face to face.
- *Agree check in procedures* – managers may wish to agree in advance the frequency and method for checking in with employees on a daily basis. Managers should make themselves available by telephone to employees to respond to any questions in a timely manner.
- *Employee wellbeing* – just because employees are not physically present, it doesn't mean that they are no longer part of the team. Keeping in touch with remote workers is important so that they feel informed and included.

The employer has a duty of care to the employee. It is therefore important, given the reduction in office presence that the manager watches out for signs that the employee is unhappy, demotivated or feeling isolated.

Managing Performance and Output

Hybrid working requires a good level of communication, organisation, trust and working together in order to ensure that arrangements put in place do not have an impact upon the quality of work or targets that the service is required to meet. Having an adaptable management style will ensure managers take advantage of opportunities to improve the services offered and support employees with different work arrangements. Managers cannot expect to gain flexibility of employees and then to manage in a strict and rigid way.

The new way of working for managers will provide more focus on managing 'outputs' as opposed to 'presenteeism'. Managing remotely should not be any different when managing staff in a traditional office location. Managing performance is integral to the manager's workload and regular one to ones should take place using mutually agreed methods. Please refer to the 'Managing Performance – Guidance for staff' for more details.

The capability process remains in place to tackle poor performance and if there is a performance issue then this should be discussed with the employee, ideally during a face-to-face meeting. Please speak to HR for support regarding this.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS OF HYBRID WORKING

Lone Working

As a remote worker employees should follow Lone Working Arrangements located on the intranet and ensure that colleagues know where and when to expect them to be a particular location.

Reasonable Adjustments

Managers should be mindful about employees having a registered disability under the Equalities Act 2020 for which reasonable adjustments should be put in place/or need to be put in place in order for the employee to be able to carry out their duties without them being disadvantaged. This is particularly important when allocating fixed desks.

In most circumstances, managers will already be aware of the employee's disability and any adjustments that have been put into place where relevant.

Where managers are not already aware of an existing disability that has been declared it may be necessary to refer to occupational health /and or carry out a health and safety risk assessment.

Managers should contact Human Resources for advice.

Financial Assistance

Additional costs such as energy costs, broadband and furniture not approved by the council will be met by the employee and not paid by the council. In many cases costs are offset by the reduction in commuting costs.

Employees may be able to claim tax relief for any household expenses incurred as a result of working from home, provided the expenses are solely work related. To claim tax relief, see the Government's guide www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home.

Insurance

Council owned equipment

Items of equipment belonging to the council will be covered by the council's insurance whilst they are in the employee's home and when in transit. Employees must take reasonable care of council owned equipment when taken away from council premises. Employees may wish to contact their home insurance company regarding the nature and extent of the use of their home for work purposes, as home working may have an impact upon the employee's home insurance policy.

Employees working from home are covered by the council's Employer Liability Scheme.

Travel

Employees should always consider the most efficient mean of travel in terms of time and efficiency to meet the council's green agenda.

The designated council location as set out in the contract of employment contract is considered the employee's work base.

*Ordinary commuting is usually travel between an employee's home and their normal place of work, and/or the return journey for which mileage is not claimable. Any mileage claimed in the course of work duties must be reduced by the length of the *ordinary commute journey (known as the lessor rule for tax purposes).

The total mileage can be claimed for journeys relating to approved training, that are in excess of the commute journey.