

## STAFFING COMMITTEE

- Date and Time:** Monday 10 July 2023 upon the rise of the Cabinet meeting
- Venue:** Council Chamber - Rotherham Town Hall, Moorgate Street, Rotherham, South Yorkshire S60 2TH
- Membership:** Councillors Alam (Chair), Allen, Ball, T Collingham, and Read.

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### AGENDA

**1. Apologies for Absence**

To receive the apologies of any Member who is unable to attend the meeting.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

To receive declarations of interest from Members in respect of items listed on the agenda.

**3. Exclusion of the Press and Public**

To consider whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any part of the agenda.

**4. Working Location Update (Pages 3 - 27)**

To provide an update on the impact of employee working arrangements following the introduction of the Hybrid Working Policy in October 2021.

#### Recommendations

1. That Staffing Committee note the review of the Council's working Location arrangements.
2. That Staffing Committee approve the implementation of the revised Working Location Policy.

**5. Urgent Business**

To determine any item which the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.



**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Staffing Committee – 10 July 2023

**Report Title**

Working Location Update

**Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?**

No

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

Jo Brown, Assistant Chief Executive

**Report Author(s)**

Lee Mann, Assistant Director Human Resources

**Ward(s) Affected**

None

**Report Summary**

This report provides an update on the impact of employee working arrangements following the introduction of the Hybrid Working Policy in October 2021.

**Recommendations**

1. That Staffing Committee note the review of the Council's working Location arrangements.
2. That Staffing Committee approve the implementation of the revised Working Location Policy.

**List of Appendices Included**

Appendix 1 Working Location Policy

**Background Papers**[Year Ahead Delivery Plan](#)[Chartered Institute of Personnel Development \(CIPD\) Planning for Hybrid Working Staffing Committee meeting 21 September 2021](#)[Workforce Plan](#)**Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel**

None

**Council Approval Required**

No

**Exempt from the Press and Public  
No**

## **Working Location Update**

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 When Council employees first moved to Riverside House in late 2011, desk ratios averaged six desks to every ten employees due to the size of the workforce at the time.
- 1.2 During the COVID lockdowns approximately half of the Council workforce were forced to work from home due to the restrictions and do so using technology to interact with customers, colleagues and access information remotely to deliver Council services.
- 1.3 Since the start of the pandemic, the Council has seen over 2000 new starters join the Council, equivalent to 41% of the workforce. Of these, around 500 are office-based staff.
- 1.4 Prior to the lifting of lockdown restrictions, a new Hybrid Working Policy was approved in September 2021 but not implemented fully until March 2022 when Covid-restrictions were lifted. This focused on delivering the best possible services for residents, whilst also recognising the benefits of staff working more flexibly.
- 1.5 Staffing Committee requested a review of hybrid working arrangements after six months of operational use. This paper sets out the findings of the review following twelve months of use across the Council. The review has been delayed so that a more detailed assessment of desk requirements across the Council estate could be undertaken with a particular focus on capacity requirements for Riverside House.
- 1.6 The title of the Policy has also been changed from 'Hybrid Working' to 'Working Location' in order to better reflect the range of options for staff when attending a work location within the Borough.

### **2. Key Issues**

#### **Review undertaken**

- 2.1 When approving the Hybrid Policy in September 2021, Staffing Committee requested that a review of the arrangements was undertaken after six months of operational implementation and use. Covid restrictions were fully lifted in March 2022, which is when the full implementation of the current Hybrid Policy was undertaken, although many front-line services had continued to be delivered to residents throughout the pandemic.
- 2.2 This meant that the policy review was due back to Staffing Committee in the Autumn of last year, however this has been delayed whilst a more detailed analysis of the desk requirements was undertaken with a particular focus on Riverside House.
- 2.3 Approximately half of the workforce were forced to work from home during the Covid restrictions and lockdowns and although services were maintained through the provision of new technology and tools such as Microsoft Teams, some staff reported feeling isolated, with their mental health and wellbeing being impacted as a result. Younger employees who commenced employment with the Council in their first full-time role since leaving education, also reported that their experience was negatively

impacted – they also reported feeling isolated and missed out of the informal learning experiences from colleagues that in-person contact would have brought. In addition, building professional working relationships and starting out in a new role were highlighted as being adversely affected.

- 2.4 As the Council returned to more normal ways of working, clarity began to be sought by both managers and individual employees, in terms of expectations around their working arrangements. This included queries about the number of days that they would need to be based from work locations across the borough, to enable them to provide the best possible services to residents, whilst still making use of the technologies and new ways of working that Covid restrictions brought about.
- 2.5 From the lifting of restrictions the Council's Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) and Wider Leadership Team (WLT) have focused on being visible to all stakeholders, both internal and external, providing leadership and supporting staff in and across the borough.
- 2.6 Many Council services require face to face delivery, in order to deliver best outcomes for residents and customers. Social Care & Early Help within Children and Young People's services continue to provide face to face support for children and families within the localities of Rotherham, which helps them to build trust and develop strong, lasting relationships and makes it easier in certain circumstances easier to make connections and find common ground. Meetings are often more focused and productive as there are fewer distractions and it is easier to encourage engagement. The return of face-to-face meetings within the Contact Team is an example of where the benefits of direct interaction between children and parent(s) is essential in the development of building relationships and parenting.
- 2.7 As part of continually improving services, the HR Consultancy Team has provided increased face to face working with internal customers in line with their business needs, where physical attendance ensures improved or more efficient contact and communication. For example, providing support and advice in person in the education settings, where due to the nature and complexity of cases it is the preferred option of schools that these meetings are undertaken on site face to face. Another example is at Hellaby depot where a physical presence is more beneficial on a regular basis, to work together on high volume, detailed information, team building, whilst at the same time improving and building on our customer relationships.
- 2.8 Within Adult Social Care, the Access Team returned to office-based working at the point that covid restrictions were lifted, on a rotational basis, which improved case discussion and team working. Colleagues are based at Riverside House and undertake face to face meetings with service users within Council buildings. The Integrated Discharge team were on site at Rotherham Trust throughout the pandemic and this continues to be the working practice. Localities teams undertake face to face meetings with adults and their carers and mirror the practice applied within CYPS.
- 2.9 The review that has been undertaken, has considered feedback from the Employee Opinion Survey of 2021, performance outcomes and further feedback emerging from both service events and team meetings, in addition to discussions that have taken place with elected members and the Trade Unions.

- 2.10 Also feeding into the review have been the monthly assessments of occupancy levels across the Council’s workplaces. In Riverside House, occupancy levels are averaging circa 40%. However, it should be caveated that occupancy checks are undertaken on single days and may not include those staff who are using meeting rooms or who use the workplace as a touchdown space when working at other locations within the Borough.
- 2.11 From the combined feedback, it is clear that there is the need to ensure an ongoing balance between ensuring that first and foremost, the Council is able to deliver high quality, effective services to residents, making better use of its operational assets, with having a degree of flexibility that many staff appreciate.

**Benefits of working from a broader range of locations**

- 2.12 Management of employees working to the principles of the Working Location Policy requires clear, open communication from both the manager and the individual employee. Whilst a more flexible working location model can facilitate a happy and engaged workforce, more efficient workplaces with lower operational costs and an improved organisational culture, it can create challenges in terms of working collaboratively and blur the lines between work and home life.
- 2.13 Regular engagement is essential to managing employees working autonomously requiring frequent communication through well-established channels. Some managers have expressed concern over the lack of in-person interaction with staff and the detrimental impact this may have on team building, staff support and service delivery.
- 2.14 A key benefit of having more flexibility in terms of working locations is to provide an engaged, diverse and skilled workforce who feel empowered to adopt new ways of working to meet the needs of all customers. National research undertaken by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), indicates that 59% of employees feel they are more productive working under these arrangements and 62% feel communications and the culture of the organisation has improved.
- 2.15 The 2021 employee opinion survey results support CIPD’s findings, showing an increase in a range of indicators and overall employee engagement went up to 71%, 3% higher than in 2019. Engagement is a good indicator of how connected employees are to the organisation and in helping it to achieve its goals.

Employee Opinion Survey Question	2021	Difference from 2019
I am able to organise and prioritise my work in order to get jobs done on time	80%	-1
I understand the One Rotherham Values	76%	+2
I have a clear understanding of the standard of performance expected of me	91%	+2
My line manager trusts me to do my job properly	93%	+4
I am satisfied with my physical working environment	75%	+13

I am able to strike the right balance between my work and home life	71%	+6
I have enough information to do my job well	80%	+4
Information is available to me so I can keep up to date about what the Council is doing	76%	+8

- 2.16 In addition to staff engagement, the current recruitment market is increasingly candidate-led and for some roles, more flexibility in working location can be a key attraction strategy which also helps to widen the geographical talent pool the Council can recruit from (where the role can be performed with a mix of office attendance and homeworking).
- 2.17 Increased use of technology that facilitates staff to undertake their duties from a large number of working locations across the borough, including from within the heart of communities, potentially provides an opportunity to reassess service operations and how services are delivered to residents in their locality.

### **Key considerations**

- 2.18 Feedback from the Employee Opinion Survey and from engaging directly with colleagues across the Council has highlighted issues with regard to feelings of isolation and a lack of support. This aligns with a number of reviews conducted by CIPD and other organisations that highlight the risks that can be associated with homeworking, including mental health issues, an inability to separate work from home life and inadequate support from colleagues. This can be a particular issue with new starters to an organisation who risk losing opportunities to meet colleagues face to face and orientate themselves with the culture of an organisation. Longer term, a lack of inclusivity due to working location arrangements may also present risks of a two-tiered workforce; where those who are not regularly attending the office may feel they have less opportunities for career development and advancement.
- 2.19 During the pandemic, the Council saw reduced levels of sickness absence in directorates where officers worked predominantly from home (Finance & Customer Services and Assistant Chief Executive's). The reduced absence levels continued throughout 2020 but began to increase again during the second year of the pandemic, with absence rates returning to pre-pandemic levels by the beginning of 2022. The reduced absence levels across the circa 50% of the workforce that were able to work from home was more than offset by increased absence levels in frontline services, resulting in the corporate absence rate increasing from 10.55 days lost per FTE in Q4 19/20 to a peak of 13.91 days lost per FTE in Q1 22/23. The Council is currently seeing sustained decreases in absence levels as the impact of Covid and the additional support to managers and staff in dealing with absence in a consistent and supportive way.
- 2.20 The first principle of the Working Location Policy is ensuring the Council delivers the best possible services for residents. Teams need to ensure they meet regularly to maximise opportunities for collaboration and creative problem solving, within and across teams. Although this can be done virtually, feedback from many services has highlighted the value of regular face to face interactions and the benefits this brings. All



managers should ensure Working Location practices are regularly reviewed alongside their teams to ensure performance is optimised.

- 2.21 With the introduction of Hybrid Working arrangements, there has been increased scrutiny from stakeholders and customers on the potential impact on Council performance and a range of performance measures have been reviewed, particularly where a comparison can be drawn to the same performance measure pre-pandemic.
- 2.22 Whilst performance activity remains strong and milestones are being met on the whole, perceptions and confidence of stakeholders is important and particularly, connecting the visibility and delivery of the Council and council staff is equally important to ensure continued confidence.
- 2.23 At the introduction of the current Hybrid Working Policy, the decision was taken not to update the contractual workplace location for staff that can work from alternative locations, including home, for a proportion of the week to retain the requirement to attend the workplace as and when required due to business need. To mitigate against any implied contractual term due to custom and practice, the Policy states within the management and employee responsibility sections, that any working arrangement is subject to regular review depending on business need and can be changed.
- 2.24 During the development process for the current Hybrid Working Policy and since launch, regular discussions have taken place with South Yorkshire Local Authorities to share their approach and insights on implementing a more flexible working location proposal. Working Location arrangements in other local authority settings have also been reviewed as part of the lessons learned activity.
- 2.25 Other council in the neighbouring areas have instigated similar arrangements.

### **Impact on Asset Management Plans**

- 2.26 Work has been undertaken to assess the impacts on the Council's estate strategy, including revisions to desk requirements within Riverside House and an assessment of how the space could be used differently.

## **3. Options considered and recommended proposal**

### **Discontinue the Hybrid Working Policy**

- 3.1 Hybrid Working arrangements could be discontinued across services with employees returning to pre COVID working arrangements. This would increase staff visibility, facilitate connection, collaboration, creativity and help build relationships in the office.
- 3.2 However, it is not recommended that this approach is taken due to the continued delivery against the Council Plan milestones and activities and the potential negative impacts it would have on employee engagement and productivity. There may also be negative impacts on the recruitment and retention of employees, particularly in the current competitive recruitment market. In turn, this would impact upon the Council's aspiration to become an employer of choice and to increase the diversity of its workforce (Council Plan actions OCO5a, b & c).

There is a recognition that there are benefits to being able to deliver Council services from a wide range of council locations, including from within the heart of the borough's communities.

### **Maintain current approach**

- 3.3 The current application of the Hybrid Working Policy is overseen by Directorate Leadership Teams and has had a positive impact on staff engagement, which is reflected in the employee opinion survey results.
- 3.4 No grievances or disciplinaries related to the current Policy have occurred and Trade Union Representatives have not raised any issues or concerns.
- 3.5 To allow maximum flexibility for managers and staff, the current managerial approval process and six-monthly review of working location arrangements could be maintained and oversight be undertaken by the Workforce Strategy Board, reporting into the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT periodically) and to Staffing Committee as required.
- 3.6 However, this option is not recommended because it is recognised that further clarity is required on the expectations of the Policy, given feedback from both managers and individuals. Visibility of staff delivering services and connecting to communities and each other remains the primary focus of the Policy, yet in its current form, it does not provide this clarity.

### **Review and revise the Policy – Recommended Option**

- 3.7 The recommendation is to revise the Hybrid Working Policy to ensure that there is visibility of staff within the borough, providing more opportunities to connect with communities and with each other. This option has been built on feedback captured across stakeholders.
- 3.8 Amongst the changes recommended, is the proposal to change the name of the policy from Hybrid Working Policy to Working Location Policy, as hybrid seems to imply that there are only two working locations - home or the individual's usual place of work, when in fact there is the opportunity to work from many different places across the borough and within the heart of communities.
- 3.9 One of the main benefits of the Policy is achieving the balance between autonomy and collaboration. Specific days could be set for in-office work to focus on collaboration activities.
- 3.10 At present under the Policy, Strategic Directors are required to ensure that the services they are responsible for have appropriate working arrangements and through their Directorate Leadership Teams determine the working arrangements that best deliver outcomes and services. The vast majority of employees are contracted to a specified office location and should remain available to attend as required subject to business need. In addition, the more flexible approach at 3.2 has led to different interpretations and perceived unfairness in terms of the application of the policy in some areas.
- 3.11 In order to reiterate the benefits of workplace attendance, including opportunities for collaboration, inclusion, development, performance and leadership visibility, an

expectation of a minimum office attendance will be applied. The recommendation is to stipulate a minimum three days' attendance at a work location across the borough (such as attending meetings with partners on behalf of the Council or working in communities).

- 3.12 The three days' minimum requirement would apply to all full time staff (pro-rata for part time employees), subject to the requirements of the role, service need and Directorate Leadership Team oversight. Any exceptions to the application of the minimum attendance levels should be agreed by Strategic Directors through Directorate Leadership Teams based on application of the Working Location Policy principles, with oversight at Workforce Strategy Board. The implementation of the changes to the Policy will continue to be monitored by Directorate Leadership Teams and through asset management undertaking occupancy surveys, with a particular focus on Riverside House.
- 3.13 The Policy at Appendix 1 has been updated based on the recommended option in this report. Key changes include:
- The change of policy from 'Hybrid Working Policy' to 'Working Location Policy'. The change reflects the variety of settings that are available for staff to work throughout the Borough, rather than the binary options of home or office working.
  - A minimum of three days' attending a work location in the Borough for full time staff (pro-rata for part time employees), subject to the requirements of the role and service need.
  - Employees should be flexible to attend any Borough wide working location as determined by the service.
- 3.14 Staff have worked hard during pandemic to continue to deliver services in very challenging situations and as the Council has moved back to more usual ways of working, the importance of being visible and connected to the place remains the primary focus. At the same time, it is also recognised that flexibility enables the Council to have engaged staff who continue to deliver more, year on year for communities.

## **4. Consultation on proposal**

- 4.1 Consultation has taken place with recognised Trade Unions.

## **5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

- 5.1 Strategic Directors will be accountable for monitoring the implementation across their services and ensuring the best possible service is maintained for service users and customers.

## **6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications**

- 6.1 There are no direct procurement implications associated with the recommendations in this report.
- 6.2 Whilst there will potentially be savings to be generated through a reduction in the Council's Assets due to a reduced need for office space, there needs to be consideration of any potential impact of increased costs in equipment to support

homeworking, though decisions will need to be assessed on a case by case basis and based on insight from home working and DSE risk assessments.

## **7. Legal Advice and Implications**

7.1 Legal Services were engaged early in respect of the drafting of the Policy and advised specifically in respect of the impact upon reasonable adjustments. Current Policy has now been in place for around 2 years, some employees may argue that this has now become an implied term so could face challenges if the Council force any changes.

## **8. Human Resources Advice and Implications**

8.1 A detailed assessment of the workforce impacts is set out in detail in the main body of the report.

## **9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults**

9.1 The use of Working Location arrangements will continue to have a positive impact on service delivery, increasing staff engagement and with benefits for productivity.

## **10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications**

10.1 In making any decision the Council is required to have due regard to its equalities duties and in particular with respect to the Equality Act 2010, section 149, part 11 of the public sector duty:

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and eliminate any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act,
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who are a protected characteristics and persons who do not share it and to
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

10.2 The recommendation will be monitored so as not to have any adverse impact on anyone with one or more protected characteristics, namely age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

## **11. Implications for CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions and Climate Change**

11.1 The introduction of the Policy has meant reduced emissions from commuting in the Borough, and the introduction of the recommended approach will maintain commuting levels at lower than pre-pandemic levels for Council staff.

11.2 A separate review of the Council's estate, including potential to rationalise based on occupancy rates and maximising service delivery, is currently under review. This may present opportunities to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions generated by Council buildings in the longer term.

**12. Implications for Partners**

- 12.1 At service specific level, managers will be required to consult partner organisations on the impact of any agreed Working Location arrangements involving delivery of services with partner organisations, subject to maintaining the best possible service for residents.

**13. Risks and Mitigation**

- 13.1 Continuing to provide the flexibility of Working Location arrangements, subject to service need *and* workplace attendance, will ensure staff remain engaged and mitigates against any attraction or retention issues.

**Accountable Officer(s)**

Jo Brown, Assistant Chief Executive

Lee Mann, Assistant Director HR

*Report Author: Lee Mann, Assistant Director HR*

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**Assistant Chief Executive's  
Human Resources**

# Working Location Policy

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**July 2023**

**Contents**

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Principles of the Working Location Policy.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>The Potential Benefits .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Scope.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Location Working .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Allocation of Equipment.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Costs .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Responsibilities .....</b>	<b>7</b>
8.1	Corporate responsibility .....	7
8.2	Management Responsibilities .....	8
8.3	Employee Responsibilities .....	8
<b>9</b>	<b>Health and Safety.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Data Protection, Security and Confidentiality .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Insurance, Mortgage and Tenancy Arrangements .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Council Tax and Business Rates.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>Review and Revision Arrangements .....</b>	<b>12</b>



## **1 Introduction**

The Council recognises the need to develop modern working practices to enable employees to maximise their performance and productivity to deliver the Council Plan, whilst maintaining a good work life balance. In addition, new technologies are making it easy to access information remotely, work from a variety of locations, whilst promoting a more joined up service.

The Working Location Policy builds upon previous flexible working policies and supports a culture of working wherever, whenever and however is most appropriate to undertake work activity within the requirements of the role and service need.

This does not just cover working hours and locations, it is about being responsive and adaptive to service needs and advancements in technology. The Working Location Policy provides flexibility, particularly in relation to the time and location employees can work, subject to the requirements of the service and individual jobs roles.

Our approach to Working Location also links to the Council's vision to support the climate emergency, placing emphasis on the importance of sustainability and the health and wellbeing of both staff and the community. The benefits of improved work life balance, employee engagement and retaining a proportion of reduced travel make a direct contribution to this strategic priority.

Although the nature of most of the roles within the Council cannot be classed as totally agile, there is considerable scope in many cases for some form of flexibility in relation to working location. The different ways in which this can be undertaken is dependent on the demands and needs of the role, and the service an employee is engaged in. It is possible, with careful planning and a degree of best practice evaluation, for staff to carry out their duties from a variety of different locations, including from within the heart of communities, recognising that all decisions regarding working location will start from what provides the best possible outcomes and services for our residents, service users, customers and stakeholders.

## **2 Principles of Working Location**

Working Location practices set out in the policy are an evolution of hybrid working practices that have been in place across the Council from March 2022.

There is an expectation of attendance at a Council work location (including when attending meetings or appointments on behalf of the Council at non-Council sites) within the Borough for a minimum of three days for full time staff, subject to the role requirements, aims to ensure the Council connects its employees to the place resulting

in the best possible service provision and our customer focus as a first and primary principle.

The Working Location Policy enables staff to deliver the best results and outcomes for communities by enabling them to work from a variety of work locations across the borough. It also enables the Council to respond to our Employee Opinion Survey results that more flexibility on working locations is appreciated by staff and can be a contributing factor to better health, wellbeing and work-life balance, whilst making the best use of our available workspace for staff. The Working Location Policy enables a mix of face to face working and quiet focus time, to deliver a high performing and collaborative environment that is focused on customers and communities.

Allowing flexibility of where and when work is carried out must ensure the best possible outcomes and services are maintained for residents and service users, both now and in the future.

The work delivered by services, teams and individuals should be assessed against time and location dependency prior to any agreements taking place and plans to work from an alternative location or time is informal and subject to ongoing review of its operational effectiveness. Every worker will be provided with the IT equipment to do their role and meeting rooms will be assessed and equipped with appropriate equipment, based on the likely use of the room and equipment may be repurposed where needed.

There is acceptance that there will be some exceptions agreed by the Strategic Director and relevant Assistant Directors, where a worker will need to be office-based for more days or fewer days, in addition to acknowledging there are some roles that cannot be based anywhere other than in a council building.

The Working Location principles in the Council include:

- **Connecting our people to our place for better outcomes**, ensuring that we deliver the best possible service for the Council's customers as a first and primary principle.
- Teams should ensure they have **presence in the Borough at Council sites**, across all five working days of the week and managers should ensure that this is in place.
- Decisions in relation to **Working Location exemptions** are agreed by Strategic Directors in line with policy.
- **Employees should be flexible** to attend their contractual place of work as determined by the service
- All plans to work from an alternative location or at a different time is **informal and subject to ongoing review** of the operational effectiveness

- **Related costs or savings** are factored into all team's plans for Working Location arrangements.
- **Leadership and engagement of teams** is critical to planning assumptions
- **Inclusivity** – utilisation of face to face attendance and virtual meetings should be used.
- Rather than replicating how we have previously delivered our work together, a **commitment to flexibility** and being constantly open to challenging ourselves in relation to **new ways of working** and delivering services is required.
- **Performance is managed on results and outcomes** rather than presence
- An **open, fair, and consistent** approach is applied within teams based on service needs and residents.
- **There is support, understanding and buy-in** from Strategic Directors, Assistant Directors and Heads of Service to help manage the message and deal with exceptions appropriately.
- Where Working Location can be applied, **the default minimum attendance in the Borough will be three days** (pro-rata for part time employees) subject to the requirements of the role

### 3 The Potential Benefits

It is anticipated that the application of the Working Location Policy will enable greater benefits to the communities of the borough, due to staff working from a range of work locations that help to build their knowledge, relationships and connect them more meaningfully to both the people and the place.

It will also enable a balance to be met between the benefits employees may experience whilst working from home with the benefits of being in the workplace, including closer team working, opportunities for collaboration and supporting the health and wellbeing of colleagues.

The key benefits of the Working Location Policy are as follows:

- Enabling teams to better connect to communities and to one another, undertaking their roles in wards and from work locations that facilitate more face to face working and the building of relationships
- A focus on the needs of residents and ensuring services are performing at an optimal level
- Undertaking roles from work locations, provides greater opportunities for teams to work more productively together, to support each other and to enable individual needs (development, support and health and wellbeing) to be addressed. Providing flexibility for employees to manage their working day effectively, ensuring that they are able to focus on delivering what is required by their role, for the benefit of communities.
- Ensuring some flexibility to reduce unnecessary travel time, and related costs.

- Helping to lower our carbon footprint, through reduced emissions from reduced travel.
- Creating an environment which allows employees to retain the benefits of work life balance in conjunction with increased interactions with colleagues in a workplace setting.
- Helping to ensure that the organisation is able to offer some flexibility which is an important benefit for the recruitment and retention of skilled employees.

## **4 Scope**

The Working Location Policy applies to all Council employees working at any level within the organisation and the nature and extent of Working Location arrangements will depend upon the job undertaken. Considerations will include the impact on the ability to meet service demand and employee welfare.

The nature and extent of individuals' Working Locations will be determined by the principles outlined within Section 2, with those eligible under the Working Location Policy arrangements, expected to be present within the Borough at least three days per week (pro-rata for part-time employees), with a spread within teams across the five working days of the week.

Exemptions to this will be determined by Strategic Directors in line with the policy principles, to ensure that all arrangements start from the perspective of ensuring the Council provides the best possible services to the borough.

The policy enables both managers and staff to gain a better understanding of the Working Location Policy and understand the basic principles, which can then be considered and applied to specific roles. The policy covers all Working Location arrangements and there is an expectation that sharing desk space will apply, unless this is deemed necessary to undertake the job role or as part of a reasonable adjustment.

## **5 Working Location**

The Working Location Policy provides staff with options with regards to where, when, and how they undertake their roles through opportunities to flex locations and times of work whilst ensuring that the needs of the service are best met. It allows staff to influence how they carry out their role and promotes varying levels of flexibility within the workplace.

It must be noted however, that there is no expectation for staff to work at home and managers cannot require any member of their team to do so. It has been recognised that personal circumstances or personal preference may influence an employee's

decision with regards to home working. In such cases where an individual does not want to work at home, other elements of the Working Location Policy can still be considered, for example, working outside the traditional 7am to 7pm parameters (subject to building access times), working at Riverside House or other Council/Partner premises.

A more flexible working environment not only relies on IT infrastructure, but also on staff engagement and how managers engage with each member of their team to ensure it is successful.

Strategic Directors will ensure that the services they are responsible for have appropriate working arrangements and through their Directorate Leadership Teams determine the working arrangements for teams that best deliver outcomes and services.

The Working Location Policy must not affect the provision of services and therefore managers must ensure that they and their teams have systems in place to maintain suitable presence as required, aligned to the Working Location principles, and to monitor the level of available front-line staff on duty at any one time.

Arrangements should be reviewed regularly through service performance data at team meetings and individual Performance and Development Reviews and regular one to one discussions.

Methods of communication should be agreed to ensure all parties are fully informed, using a combination of virtual, electronic, face to face conversations, emails, telephone, and team meetings/briefing etc.

Although under the Working Location Policy, workers will not necessarily work between the 7am to 7pm parameters (unless the role dictates this), it is essential to plan and agree a work schedule so that colleagues are aware of individual working patterns, where they are located and know when and how to contact them. The hours of work must be agreed in advance allowing employees who are using their homes as part of their Working Location arrangements, to have a right to privacy out of hours and be able to separate their working and home lives.

Employees must note that the ability to work from home is not a substitute for childcare or similar carer responsibilities and it is their responsibility to ensure adequate provision is in place, to avoid conflict with work performance should they be working from home.

## **6 Allocation of Equipment**

Council employees will be provided with the necessary ICT equipment and technology to work in a flexible way.

Personal adapted equipment such as chairs, monitors, desks etc. will be provided to an individual should a risk assessment deem this a necessary reasonable adjustment and will be assessed on a case by case basis.

Homeworking and DSE risk assessments should be completed where there is a change to the working environment, including the frequency of office attendance. Risk assessments should be reviewed on an annual basis and actions discussed between the employee and their manager.

Please also see section 9 – **Health and Safety**

## **7 Costs**

The employee will not be eligible to claim expenses for home working and should weigh up the benefits of any home working when considering that no reimbursement for household bills will be provided. This includes but is not limited to, broadband, heating, lighting, water, landline connection etc. and, although financial assistance will not be provided, employees may find that they are still financially better off when considering personal commuting and lunchtime costs.

Tax relief for household bills may also be available to employees, who should contact HMRC directly for more information. This is entirely a private matter to be settled between the individual employee and the tax authorities.

## **8 Responsibilities**

### **8.1 Corporate responsibility**

- The Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service) on behalf of the Council carries overall responsibility for ensuring that the Council has the appropriate processes in place which adequately and appropriately support its employees, regardless of what working pattern or arrangement they have.
- The Human Resources team is responsible for providing advice, guidance, and training on this Policy.
- The Assistant Director of Human Resources is responsible for reviewing, updating, and amending this Policy and procedure to reflect any changes in legislation or employment practice in conjunction with the trade unions.
- Strategic Directors are responsible for establishing their own arrangements to ensure:
  - Effective, fair and consistent implementation of the policy
  - Continued focus on high performing service delivery; and
  - Engagement with their employees on these arrangements

- Strategic Directors are responsible with and through their Director Leadership Teams to ensure the principles of this Policy are maintained and that there is no degradation in service due to any increased flexibility in working arrangements.

## 8.2 Management Responsibilities

Managers are responsible for:

- Ensuring flexibility, openness, and constructiveness in relation to discussions and agreements about Working Location with employees within their area of responsibility, whilst remaining focused on the needs of the service.
- Making arrangements for both regular individual and team meetings, ensuring regular communication is maintained between themselves and team members, providing support for employees and implementing ways of measuring and monitoring work output that have been mutually agreed.
- That the relevant technology is used to ensure inclusive meetings can be conducted more flexibly where appropriate and in line with service needs i.e. a mixture of physical and virtual attendees involving all available colleagues irrespective of their work location.
- Setting and monitoring defined performance measures for their team and individual employees in line with the Council's Performance Development Review and regular one to one supervision.
- Allowing employees who are using their homes to work from have a right to privacy out of working hours and the ability to separate their working and home lives.
- Meeting their duties in relation to health and safety by undertaking appropriate risk assessments and acting on any areas of concern for employees who they are responsible for.
- Communicating with the employee their Working Location arrangements and how service continuity will be achieved.
- Ensuring good communication with employees and agree clear communication lines and methods. This includes arrangements for employees to report sickness absence.
- Regular reviews of the Working Location arrangements should take place to ensure arrangements are working and delivering required outcomes.

## 8.3 Employee Responsibilities

Employees who are participating in Working Location Policy arrangements are responsible for:

- Complying with this Policy in a reasonable, constructive, and appropriate manner.
- Jointly agreeing a Working Location arrangement with their manager. When agreeing how this will be achieved, careful consideration should be given to all the necessary requirements to determine how / if their post can adopt this style of working.
- Being open and constructive in discussing and agreeing Working Location arrangements, whilst remaining focused on the needs of the role and service.
- Maintaining regular contact with their manager and team.
- Working within the agreed "housekeeping rules" (appropriate work area for working if working at home etc) and abiding by all the Council Policies (available on the intranet) whilst working in this way.
- Optimising meetings to minimise the amount of travel time when working off site.
- Complying with Health and Safety policy and procedures by participating in and undertaking risk assessments; carrying out any necessary actions to minimise risk; maintaining a safe working environment and taking reasonable care of their own safety
- Complying with confidentiality, data protection and internet security policies.
- Ensure that all reasonable care is taken of all Council supplied ICT equipment
- Reporting immediately once known, any loss, theft or damage to Council ICT equipment or the loss of confidential information.
- Consulting and, in some cases, getting written agreement from any necessary parties, such as landlords, insurance, or mortgage companies, regarding home working.

## 9 Health and Safety

Employees have a responsibility for their own and others health and safety while they are carrying out work activities regardless of the work location in accordance with the Council's Health and Safety Policy.

Due consideration to lone working arrangements should be explored fully between the line manager and employee to ensure safe working arrangements are in place.

***Home working and DSE risk assessments must be carried out if any part of an employee's working style requires them to work from home. This will need to be carried out on an annual basis or at the point of any substantial changes made to the working environment or arrangement if this occurs sooner.***

Employees must fully participate in completing the necessary risk assessments and review this with their manager. When working from home, even if it is only on an ad-hoc basis, the employee has a responsibility to ensure they have an appropriate



workspace with adequate security, storage and screening from activities and noise in the rest of the home. There must also be adequate ventilation and lighting.

Where employees use other Council locations to work, they should familiarise themselves with the local arrangements for managing health and safety. They should ensure they are aware of fire safety arrangements to ensure they are fully conversant with the actions to be taken in the event of discovering a fire or on hearing the fire alarm signal and ensure they adhere to the local signing in and out arrangements.

Employees must not carry out work meetings in their home with customers, elected members, or officers from other agencies. If homeworkers need to attend site meetings direct from home, they must notify their line management of their itinerary. Employees will also be asked to agree with their manager whether the risks of violence/difficult situations justify a telephone call to the office by the employee at the end of each appointment to confirm the safe completion of the visits.

Any accident that occurs whilst working from home, in connection with work activities, needs to be reported to the H&S team in line with normal reporting procedures.

Managers should seek advice regarding any specific concerns around health and safety issues as sign off for any Working Location will not take place until all the Health and Safety requirements have been appropriately addressed.

## **10 Data Protection, Security and Confidentiality**

Maintaining the security of the information we work with is vital and those working away from a council office are responsible for the security of the data they keep and should comply with all relevant legislation and Council policies, just as if they were working in a Council office.

Access to Council systems and the processing of data must only be done on approved devices and the employee is responsible for the security of equipment, files, and any other information in their possession, including the transportation of such items whenever outside of the Council office environment.

Managers must agree early on with their staff as to how confidential or sensitive information will be handled when working in Flexible Location ways.

Principally managers must ensure their staff:

- Know their responsibilities under the Data Protection Act and the Council's Security policies
- Do not send work related emails or sensitive data to the employee's home email addresses
- Employees do not store work related files on an employee's personal computer

- Any loss of equipment or information is reported immediately to the employee's line manager
- Never leave a computer with personal confidential information on screen or leave a computer 'logged on' when unattended
- Confidential or sensitive conversations/work should not be carried out whilst in any public areas
- Other individuals (including family members) should not have any access to personal data either on paper or as electronic records
- All printed or other paper records must be safely locked away when not in use
- Confidential waste should be disposed of in the normal way

## **11 Insurance, Mortgage and Tenancy Arrangements**

Computers and other items of equipment provided by the Council as part of the Working Location arrangements will be covered by the Council's insurance policy.

Home workers are required to contact their own insurance company to inform them that they will be working at home. This does not usually result in an increase in premium and it is unlikely that working from home will affect cover.

Liability insurance arranged by the Council will operate once risk assessments are completed satisfactorily; Risk control measures identified because of risk assessment must be addressed prior to Working Location arrangements commencing.

Employees working at or from home are covered by the Council's Employer's Liability Policy. Any accidents must be reported immediately in accordance with the Council's reporting guidelines. Although covered by the Council's Employer's Liability Policy, employees working at or from home are advised to ensure their home contents policy has public liability cover for at least £1 million. This is a standard clause in most home insurance policies. Before commencing home working, employees should advise mortgagees or landlords that they intend to work at home.

The Council will not be responsible for any additional costs as a result.

## **12 Council Tax and Business Rates**

It is extremely unlikely that there will be any change to an employee's Council Tax or any liability for business rates. Business rates could only be levied where a homeworker has an area of their home dedicated exclusively to their work (e.g. a study with PC, filing cabinet etc.)

Where the business use of a part of the house is subsidiary to the domestic usage (e.g. a desk in the corner of a living room) then rates should not be levied. Should an

employee have any concerns, they should address their queries to their local council.

### 13 Review and Revision Arrangements

Arrangements made between line managers and employees should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they remain suitable for the employee and service delivery outcomes. This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis by Human Resources.

Employees should familiarise themselves with the following Council Policies:

- [Flexible Working](#)
- [Information Governance Policy](#)
- [Health and Safety](#)

Date Revised	Date Approved	Summary of Changes	Author
26/04/2021	n/a	First Edition	Ian Henderson
15/06/2021	n/a	Review of principle wording	Ian Henderson
11/08/2021	22/09/21	Updated roles and responsibilities	Lee Mann
April 2023		Review of full policy and principles.	Lee Mann

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