

Assistant Chief Executive's Human Resources

Hybrid Working

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Contents

1	Introduction	2
2	Principles of hybrid working	2
3	The Potential Benefits	4
4	Scope	4
5	Hybrid Working	5
5.1	Hybrid Working Styles	5
6	Allocation of Equipment	7
7	Costs	7
8	Responsibilities	7
8.1	Corporate responsibility	7
8.2	Management Responsibilities	8
8.3	Employee Responsibilities	8
9	Health and Safety	9
10	Data Protection, Security and Confidentiality	10
11	Insurance, Mortgage and Tenancy Arrangements	11
12	Council Tax and Business Rates	11
13	Review and Revision Arrangements	11

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.

Hybrid working builds upon previous flexible working policies and supports a culture of working wherever, whenever and however is most appropriate to get the work done.

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

Our approach to hybrid working also links to the Council's vision to address 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 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 hybrid working. The different ways in which hybrid working can be undertaken is dependent on the demands and needs of the role, the individual's preferences and circumstances 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 recognising that all decisions regarding hybrid working will start from what provides the best possible outcomes and services for our residents, service users, customers and stakeholders.

2 Principles of hybrid working

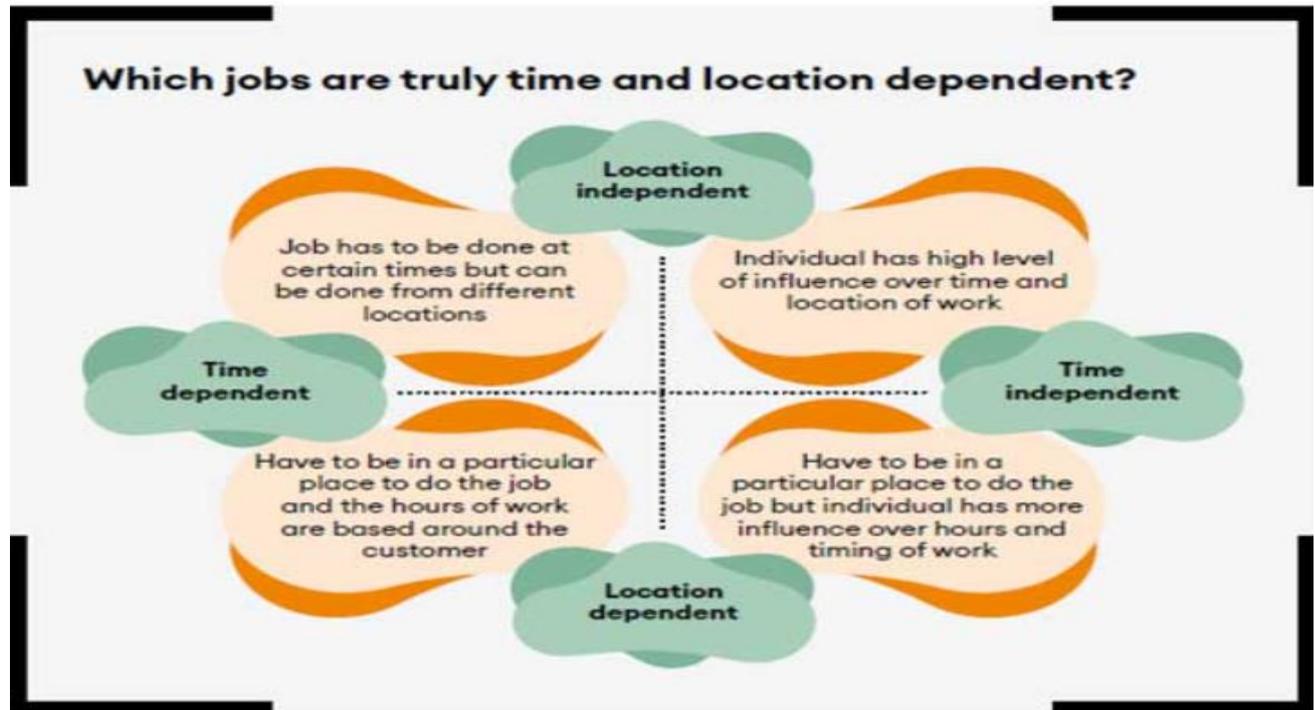
Introducing hybrid working practices will involve developing a new work culture. It is not about doing things in the old way with some new technologies and redesigned offices – it is about new ways of working using new tools, new processes, and new approaches to management and teamwork. This requires different types of behaviours and different expectations about how work is done.

Plans to allow increased 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 (see diagram)

and plans to work from an alternative location or time is informal and subject to ongoing review of its operational effectiveness.

Final decisions in relation to hybrid working will be taken by Strategic Directors to ensure that services and outcomes remain high.



The hybrid working principles in the Council include:

- Plans to allow increased flexibility of where and when work is carried out **must ensure the best possible service is 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 (see diagram)
- All plans to work from an alternative location or time is **informal and subject to ongoing review** of its operational effectiveness
- **Related costs or savings** are factored into all team's plans for hybrid working
- **Leadership and engagement of teams** is critical to planning assumptions
- **Inclusivity** – unless an agreement has been made for face to face attendance, 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.

- Work has **less impact on the environment**, reducing the Council's carbon footprint and making the best use of its assets.
- **Performance is managed on results and outcomes** rather than presence
- An **open, fair, and consistent** approach is applied within teams based on service needs, residents, and personal preference
- **Decisions in relation to hybrid working are approved by Strategic Directors.**

3 The Potential Benefits

It is anticipated that the expansion of hybrid Working will offer benefits to our residents, service users, employees, and the Council.

The key benefits of hybrid working are as follows:

- Increases productivity, enabling employees to manage their working day more efficiently and focus more effectively on a piece of work, where concentration is important, by avoiding the interruptions that are part of the office environment
- reduces unnecessary travel time, and related cost
- lowers our carbon footprint, through reduced emissions from reduced travel
- creates an environment which allows employees to achieve an improved work life balance, increase their wellbeing, health and happiness, reducing stress and provides greater job satisfaction, motivation, morale and engagement
- improves the recruitment and retention of skilled and experienced employees by offering a range of work styles to match individual work preferences; and
- reduced absenteeism and related costs.

4 Scope

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

Decisions in relation to the nature and extent of hybrid working will be taken by Strategic Directors to ensure that all arrangements start from the perspective of ensuring the Council the best possible service to the Borough.

The policy enables both managers and staff to gain a better understanding of hybrid working and understand the basic principles, which can then be considered and applied to specific roles. The policy covers all hybrid working 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 Hybrid Working

Hybrid working provides staff with more options with regards to where, when, and how they undertake their roles by introducing more 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 is based on the concept that work is an activity we do, rather than a place we go to.

It must be noted however, that there is no expectation for staff to work at home and managers cannot force 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 hybrid working 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 hybrid 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 the successful adoption of this new way of working.

5.1 Hybrid Working Styles

The matrix below defines the four workstyles as a guide for Council staff, as defined under the Hybrid Working Principles, to clarify the concept of hybrid working. It can empower employees to work where, how, and when they choose, subject to service needs.

- **Fixed location worker** - Workplace based employees who operate from an office or shared work setting. A Fixed Worker will typically remain at a workstation or place of work for most of the working day. They will only be allocated a fixed workstation in limited circumstances due to the nature of the job or specific workstation requirements.
- **Flexible worker** - The role is not tied down to one location, employees can successfully and regularly carry out their activities from a mixture of appropriate facilities. For example, to attend meetings, work from home, council buildings or on the move according to the needs of the job that day.
- **Home worker** - employees carry out most of their work at their home. However, they are still required to attend work locations as required to ensure the best possible outcomes and services and this may include meetings, supervisions etc in council premises.

- **Mobile worker** - Most of their time is spent either visiting people, attending meetings, or carrying out work across various external sites, e.g. field workers.

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.

Hybrid working must not affect the provision of services and therefore managers must ensure that they and their teams have systems in place to maintain suitable service presence as required, and to monitor the level of available front line staff on duty at any one time.

An initial discussion will be held with teams and individual employees, to ensure they fully understand hybrid working arrangements, service requirements and most importantly, consider the best practical and operational arrangements for working in this way. Expected work outputs for the teams and the individual employees and the arrangements for communication, support and housekeeping rules need to be in place before hybrid working commences. Clear and realistic objectives should be agreed between the manager and the employee to enable performance to be managed by agreed outcomes rather than presence.

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

Although hybrid 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 the individual's working pattern, 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 hybrid working 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 when they are working from home.

6 Allocation of Equipment

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

Personal adapted equipment such as chairs, monitors, desks etc. will be provided to an individual should a risk assessment deems this necessary.

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 be also be available to employees who should contact the 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 procedure.
- The Assistant Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development is responsible for reviewing, updating, and amending this policy and procedure to reflect 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 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 hybrid working 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 on a hybrid basis 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 to 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.
- Jointly agreeing with the employee their hybrid working style and how this 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 hybrid working arrangements should take place to ensure arrangements are working and delivering required outcomes.

8.3 Employee Responsibilities

Employees who are participating in hybrid working are responsible for:

- Complying with this procedure in a reasonable, constructive, and appropriate manner.
- Jointly agreeing a hybrid working 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 hybrid working arrangements, whilst remaining focused on the needs of service.
- Maintaining regular contact with their manager and team.

- Working within the agreed "housekeeping rules" (appropriate work area for 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 IT 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.

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.

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 will 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.

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 hybrid working 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 fixed 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 hybrid 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 hybrid working arrangement 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 the hybrid working arrangement 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 homemaker 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 Framework](#)
- [Health and Safety](#)

- [Lone Working](#)

Date Revised	Date Approved	Summary of Changes	Author
26/04/2021		First Edition	Ian Henderson
15/06/2021		Review of principle wording	Ian Henderson
11/08/2021		Updated roles and responsibilities	Lee Mann