

**Assistant Chief Executive's  
Human Resources**

# Working Location Policy

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**July 2023**

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## **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](#)

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26/04/2021	n/a	First Edition	Ian Henderson
15/06/2021	n/a	Review of principle wording	Ian Henderson
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