

## Home Working Policy

### 1. Scope

This policy applies to all Council employees other than those in schools, who have local arrangements.

The policy is part of a suite of policies and guidance that support mobile and flexible working in Merton

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| Overarching Flexible Working Policy |
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| <b>HR Policies:</b>   | <b>Enabling Policies:</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Accommodation and hot-desk policy</li><li>- <b>Home working policy</b></li><li>- Field working policy</li><li>- Hours of Work Policy</li><li>- Work / life balance guidelines</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Information security policy</li><li>- IT policy</li><li>- Lone worker policy</li></ul> |






### 2. Definition

Working from home is a very different way of working, which requires the employee to work independently using IT systems to remain in contact with managers, work colleagues and/or clients..

Tasks that are suited to permanent or regular homeworking typically include those that are primarily task-based carried out by teams such as council tax and transactional services. However, field workers or office-based flexible workers may also take the opportunity to work from home, either to save travelling time (in the case of field workers), or to undertake work for which face-to-face interaction with others is not required (such as writing a report) and where concentration is not interrupted.

Home working can be carried out on a permanent, regular or ad hoc basis. There are four main categories of home worker:

- 2.1 **Permanent home worker** – Staff who work from home permanently as their main place of work and only come into the office for meetings / training, as required. They are provided with the necessary equipment and technology that enables them to perform their duties at home. Permanent home workers, will not have an allocated desk in a Council building but will be able to access a hot-desk when they need to work from a Council building.

- 2.2 **Regular homeworker** – regular home workers will work from home on a regular basis, for example one or two days a week, as agreed with their manager. When at home regular home workers will access Council systems remotely from their own IT equipment. When in the office regular home workers, will not have an allocated desk in a Council building but will have access to hot-desks in their team zone. As outlined in section 2.4 below, it is important to differentiate between regular home working and ad hoc home working. Regular home working follows a set pattern and may be something that is requested as part of the Council’s work-life balance guidelines, for example to enable an employee to balance work and dependent care more easily and effectively (however, employees cannot expect to be able to undertake such care whilst working).
- 2.3 **Home Based Field Worker** – Home based field workers start and finish most days at home, but spend the majority of their time working in the field, for example visiting residents, businesses or construction sites as part of their role, as required. When at home, home based field workers will be able to access Council systems remotely, either via mobile technology provided by the Council or by using their own IT equipment. When in the office they will not have an allocated desk but will have access to hot-desks. This category of worker should also refer to the field worker policy.
- 2.4 **Ad-hoc Home-Working** – Ad hoc home working is where an employee works from home on an occasional basis when it is appropriate or beneficial to do so. This would typically be on occasions when the diary is clear and work requires concentration and no need to interact face-to-face with others. Another example might be where there is travel disruption due to adverse weather preventing the home to work journey being made.

Ad hoc home-working is most likely to be undertaken by ‘office-based flexible workers’ and fits well with the council’s Flexible Working Principles (see Overarching Flexible Working Policy) as long as it is irregular in nature. In this category, adopting a regular pattern of home working – for example assigning a set day each week as ‘my working from home day’ – does not fit within the principles of flexibility as it is too rigid an arrangement. Where this happens, it should be requested and agreed as ‘regular homeworking’ (see section 2.2 above).

### **3. Home working - procedure and expectations**

***These procedures apply to permanent, regular and field based homeworkers only. Ad hoc home workers should refer to section 4.***

#### **3.1 Expectations**

The expectation of both the employee and manager will be set out in a home working agreement, signed by both parties before homeworking commences.

Employees working from home on a permanent or regular basis should be able to demonstrate they can:

- Work independently and on their own initiative (employees who are frequently late for work, have a high level of absenteeism, or who frequently miss work deadlines may not be considered ready to manage their own day and work schedule)
- Work in accordance with the core hours agreed with their manager
- Motivate themselves
- Complete projects within set deadlines
- Manage workload effectively
- Cope well under any new pressure posed by working at home
- Adjust to new work practices
- Maintain contact with all affected by own work
- Keep their outlook calendar and Lync up to date to show when they are working from home and that they are out of the office
- Comply with the Information Security Policy
- Agree arrangements with their line manager so that the line manager is informed of their whereabouts and can monitor performance
  - sit the office, for example to attend team meetings and training sessions, as agreed with their line manager
- Keep fully up-to-date with organisational news and information via update emails and the staff intranet

Managers of employees who work from home on a permanent basis are responsible for:

- Considering work outputs e.g. how it will be monitored, produced and delivered
- Providing a comparable induction, appraisal, communications, access to learning and development and career development opportunities and team events as other Council employees
- Setting clear work objectives with measurable outputs which must be established and documented, in advance of the arrangement commencing. These objectives will be reviewed through 1 to1s. The line manager will need to establish how the employee will be kept informed of matters that affect them or their work.
- Making clear, in writing, how productivity and performance management issues will be assessed
- Agreeing how they will communicate effectively with the employee and maintain good communication with the home worker at all time, these arrangements should be agreed and regularly reviewed in light of operational experience
- Informing the employee of meetings; training sessions and other events they would expect them to attend and will also ensure that the employee is kept up-to-date with information relevant to their work
- Ensuring that home working arrangements do not have an adverse effect on any particular group of employees. Neither should a refusal to agree home working disadvantage employees from any particular equalities group

### **3.2 Situations where permanent or regular home working may be considered**

Permanent or regular home working may be considered:

- When seeking approval to fill a vacancy (management led)
- In response to organisational change and business transformation (management led)
- At the point of recruitment and selection (management or employee led)
- When a current employee requests permanent or regular home working (employee led – see Appendix A)

Home working cannot be imposed on any existing employee without proper assessment, consultation, and agreement. Posts advertised as “home based” would be exempt from the need for such negotiation and agreement but would be subject to assessment.

### **3.3 Suitability of home working**

Home working will be an option for many employees of the Council but due to the nature of home working, it will not be suited to all posts or all people. The decision about whether an employee or group of employees should be allowed to work at home will rest with the Head of Service. It is not an employee’s right to work from home.

In assessing the suitability of a post for permanent or regular home working, consideration will be given to:

- The cost implications
- The suitability of the job to be carried out from home
- The suitability of the work location within the home
- The suitability of the employees personal circumstances
- Efficiencies of service provision.

For home working to take place on a permanent or regular basis it must be established that the work to be done at home can be completed without regular / frequent face-to-face contact or direct supervision.

Home working is not an alternative to the provision of paid care and will not be considered where an employee is looking to reduce the cost of care by carrying out caring functions alongside home working.

Consideration must be given to the suitability of the proposed location. The location has to be adequate both for practical working and to comply with health and safety legislation. Ideally, the employee should have a separate room or area set aside for home working suitable to complete the work effectively and free from distractions.

### **3.4 Other issues to be considered**



**Performance Management** – employees working from home will be subject to the same performance appraisal measures, processes, and objectives that apply to all other employees.

**Work Patterns** - working hours and patterns, contact times and availability should be agreed in advance. Other conditions of employment, as set out in the contract, apply. If any employee has any concerns with their working arrangements, they must bring the matter to the attention of their manager immediately.

**Contractual Changes-** The manager must ensure that revised contract documentation is issued as necessary from Human Resources to confirm the home working arrangements. A home working agreement must be completed and signed by the employee and their manager prior to home working. A copy is given to the employee and copy will be held on their personal file.

**Pay & Benefits-** Pay and benefits are not affected on the basis that the full-time hours for the post are worked. Part-time employees will be entitled to salary and other benefits on a pro-rata basis.

**Ending the Agreement-** The Council reserves the right to withdraw home working from an employee. However it would not be withdrawn without discussion and notice given.**3.5 Travelling & Vehicle Allowances and Expenses**

The Council will not pay for home based employees to travel from their home to their team based location , or from a work base as determined by the contract of employment to their team based location when they are required to attend the office (at their team based location).

Where an employee travels direct from home to a location outside of the borough, or other place as work other than their team based location for business reasons, the Council will reimburse any reasonable additional travel costs in excess of the cost of travelling, either mileage or public transport.

Any payment arrangements will be reviewed in the event of a change to the nature of the employee's duties and location of work.

### **3.6 Costs**

#### **Employer costs**

The costs to the employee of supporting home working will vary. The baseline costs consist of the equipment that may be required at the employee's home. The costs of setting up a work station should be considered before a manager agrees to home working. All costs relating to the setting up of a home based work station will be funded by the employees' directorate.

The Council will not pay to install a broadband connection or a contribution to the monthly cost of this.

#### **Employee costs**

The employee will not incur any direct costs as a result of working from home. When using a personal telephone for official work purposes a detailed record of official calls should be kept and these will be reimbursed.

There will be no additional allowances for heating and lighting, broadband or other incidentals paid to the employee when they are working from home. However under income tax law if an employee incurs any additional household costs for heating and lighting as a result of working at home they may be able to claim tax relief on these up to an amount, currently £4 per week (£18 per month), without supporting evidence of costs that the employee may incur. An employee may submit a claim form to HMRC for this amount for heating and lighting in relation to home based working on a quarterly basis as part of their claims process.

For more information please see the following website:  
<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/incometax/relief-household.htm>

### **3.7 Use of Personal Equipment for Work Purposes**

In most cases employees working from home will access the Council's IT systems using their own equipment using the Merton Secure Gateway. Council information must only be accessed in this way and must not be held on personal IT equipment unless this has been encrypted by the Council.

The Council is not responsible for the maintenance, replacement, or repair of any personal equipment that is used, including broadband lines. Once access to Merton's website has been gained, IT support can be provided; prior to this contact should be made directly with the broadband provider. When using a personal telephone for official work purposes a detailed record of official calls should be kept and these will be reimbursed.

If employees are unable to work at home due to failure of personal equipment they should discuss at the earliest opportunity alternative working options with their line manager, these may include:

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- coming to the office to work
- working in another suitable location
- use of leave/flexi time
- alternative work that doesn't need access to systems or use of IT

### **3.8 Council Equipment**

Where equipment has been provided by the Council to enable the employee to work effectively at home this will remain the property of the Council. The equipment required will vary from case to case. The line manager in conjunction with IT will make final decisions on what is needed. Where equipment is provided the employee must:

- take reasonable care of it and keep it secure;
- use it only for official purposes during working time;

- use it only in accordance with any operating instructions;
- return it to the council when requested;
- use it in accordance with any existing Council policies.
- log it on regularly to receive security and AV (anti-virus) updates

Before an employee commences home working if they are using Council equipment they should be briefed by a member of the IT department to ensure they are familiar with the operational functions as part of the hand over.

### **3.9 Health and Safety Policy**

It remains the joint responsibility of the line manager and the individual employee, irrespective of where staff work, to ensure that appropriate and proportionate measures are taken to ensure the health, safety and welfare of staff and others working in their teams. These measures include information, instruction, supervision and training. Managers and staff have a duty to comply with these standards.

**Induction and training** - As a minimum, permanent home workers must have undertaken Health and Safety training, including the use of display screen equipment. Before agreeing to home working, managers should consider any further training necessary.

**Use of display screen equipment** - All employees working at home will be required to complete a Display Screen Equipment assessment which can be found at [http://intranet/dse\\_self\\_assessment](http://intranet/dse_self_assessment). This should be completed before commencing work and be reviewed annually, or immediately after any significant change of situation.

**Risk Assessment**- A risk assessment needs to be undertaken and recorded. It should be reviewed on a regular basis, usually annually, depending on the resultant risk.

**Inspection** - The Council retains the right to check the employee's work areas in their own home for Health and Safety and information security purposes. The need for such inspections will depend on the nature of the work undertaken.

**Reporting** - Accident / near miss reporting procedures apply equally to incidents arising in the employee's home

**Meetings** - Meetings with service users and employees of other agencies must not be held at home. Meetings with other employees at home should be avoided.

**Working Time** - Where the agreed working pattern allows for flexibility, both manager and employee should monitor to ensure excessive hours are not being worked. It is important that working patterns and hours are not detrimental to the employee's health, and comply with the Working Time Directive and a suitable exemption to the 48 hour week is signed, where applicable.

**Lone Working** – Employees working in the field should also refer to the Lone Working Policy that can be found on the intranet at [http://intranet/corporate\\_policy\\_documents](http://intranet/corporate_policy_documents)

Further information on home working can be obtained from the following HSE leaflets:

[www.hse.gov.uk/pnbns/indg226.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pnbns/indg226.pdf) (home working)

[www.hse.gov.uk/pnbns/indg143.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pnbns/indg143.pdf) (manual handling)

[www.hse.gov.uk/pnbns/indg36.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pnbns/indg36.pdf) (display screen equipment)

### **3.10 Security use of the Council's systems and Information**

The employee must ensure that information and equipment are kept securely. Line managers must be satisfied that all reasonable precautions are taken to maintain confidentiality of material in accordance with the Council's ICT policy <http://intranet/ict-policy-v01.pdf> and Information Security Policy <http://intranet/is-policy>

Hard copies of private and confidential material must be kept to a minimum when working at home and kept in lockable secure storage at all times. This material must be disposed of securely when it is no longer needed.

### **3.11 Insurance**

The Council's existing insurance policies (both public and employer's liability) will continue to operate and cover the employee.

Home working employees are advised to take out a household insurance policy if they do not currently have one. If the employee has insurance it is a condition of any home working agreement that they inform their household insurers of the arrangements.

### **3.12 Mortgages and Tenancy Agreements**

Employees working from home must inform anyone with an interest in the property (e.g. Building Society, Bank and Owner) of the position.

### **3.13 The Application Process for permanent of regular home working**

**Step 1.** The line manager discusses the proposals with the employee. The line manager may need to discuss with colleagues proposed arrangements.

**Step 2.** The employee completes the home working application form.

**Step 3.** In order to evaluate the employee's suitability managers will have checked

- The home working application form
- Health and safety/suitability checklists

- Person specification
- Job description and,
- Performance record

In particular managers will have to take into account any reasonable adjustments that may be necessary in the case of a disabled employee, for example a suitable chair. This will allow managers to ensure that each application for home working is considered fairly.

**Step 4.** The Head of Service will evaluate and agree the application.

The line manager will advise the employee in writing whether or not the application is agreed, including reasons for non-approval if applicable.

**Step 5.** The line manager will then finalise the working arrangements and the date the employee will commence home working, taking into account any equipment or other resource issues.

**Step 6.** The line manager completes the Home Working Agreement and sends it to the employee to sign and return. A copy should be sent to the relevant Departmental HR team. The line manager should notify colleagues of the agreed working arrangements.

#### **4. Ad-Hoc Home working**

**4.1** Ad hoc homeworking fits well with the flexible working principle of being able to choose the work space that best suits the activity you are doing at any particular time and is based on the premise that employees can take responsibility for deciding how and where to do their jobs most effectively in order to deliver on their performance objectives.

It requires trust, openness and transparency on the part of the employee and line manager that homeworking will be appropriate, not excessive, and not detrimental to performance or service delivery. There is no absolute right to work from home and managers have discretion to limit or prevent home working in specific individual cases where trust or performance has been compromised.

It is important that employees make it clear to their manager and colleagues when they are working from home and maintain good and regular communications via Outlook, Lync and/or by telephone.

#### **4.2 Use of IT**

Employees working at home on an ad hoc basis need to access the Council's IT systems using their own equipment (or a Council laptop if they have been provided with one) via the remote gateway. No costs incurred as a result of ad hoc home working will be reimbursed.

### **4.3 Health and Safety Policy**

It remains the joint responsibility of the line manager and the individual employee, irrespective of where staff work, to ensure that appropriate and proportionate measures are taken to ensure the health, safety and welfare of staff and others working in their teams. These measures include information, instruction, supervision and training. Managers and staff have a duty to comply with these standards..

**Use of display screen equipment** - Employees wishing to work from home on an ad hoc basis at home will be required to complete a Display Screen Equipment assessment which can be found at [http://intranet/dse\\_self\\_assessment](http://intranet/dse_self_assessment). This should be completed before commencing work and be reviewed annually, or immediately after any significant change of situation.

**Reporting** - Accident / Near Miss reporting procedures apply equally to incidents arising in the employee's home.

**Meetings** - Meetings with service users and employees of other agencies must not be held at home. Meetings with other employees at home should be avoided.

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### **4.4 Secure use of the Council's systems and Information**

The employee must ensure that information and equipment are kept securely. Line managers must be satisfied that all reasonable precautions are taken to maintain confidentiality of material in accordance with the Council's ICT policy <http://intranet/it-policy> and Information Security Policy <http://intranet/is-policy>

Hard copies of private and confidential material must be kept in lockable secure storage at all times. A lockable hot-box will be provided for use in the office and can be taken home if required.

### **5. Review**

This policy will be reviewed from time to time as appropriate.

### **6. Further advice and support**

Further information, including comprehensive guidance for staff and managers and useful contact details are available on the Council's Flexible Working Intranet Pages.

## Appendix A (to Homeworking Policy)

### Considerations before making a Request for Permanent or Regular Homeworking

1. How will homeworking will fit in with the requestor's lifestyle — it may appear attractive not to have to come into the office, but working on at home can be solitary and is different from working in an office where the person may have more regular interaction with work colleagues.
2. Inevitably, there will be some invasion of privacy. The organisation may need to visit the person's home. Although this is rare, as typically IT equipment will need to be brought into the office for upgrades rather than technical staff visiting homes, the home worker needs to feel comfortable about any visits which are required as failure to allow access may lead to disciplinary action.
3. Keeping domestic and working life separate is not easy and employees are encouraged to consider how they will persuade others in the house not to interrupt. Access to work on a computer and/or work files must be restricted.
4. Employees will need to agree a work schedule their manager. The employee will need to manage their time to ensure that the work is completed satisfactorily and on schedule and they will need to feel comfortable in terms of self-management of time. Failure to meet deadlines may result in formal action and it might be necessary for the employee to return to the office on either a temporary or permanent basis.
5. Although the costs of travelling to work will decrease, your home expenses for heating and lighting may increase. The organisation will not make a contribution towards increased costs.
6. It is unlikely that the type of work would give rise to a claim for business rates from the local council, but it is the employee's responsibility to check the policy with them. Merton Council will not be responsible for any such costs, nor for any capital gains tax payable should your house be sold.
7. If the requestor's house is owned through a mortgage, it is advisable for them to check with the lender to ensure that that there are no issues regarding homeworking. It is also advisable to check that any equipment etc. will be covered by household insurance. If it is not, then it is the employee's responsibility to inform Merton Council before starting work from home so that proper arrangements can be made. Should thefts occur and the employee has failed to inform the Council, they may be held personally liable for replacing any stolen or damaged equipment.