Overarching Flexible Working Policy

1. Policy Statement

Merton Council supports flexible working as part of its commitment to delivering efficient, responsive and high quality services, improving working arrangements for staff, and developing a modern and adaptable working culture.

Merton’s vision for flexible working is:

‘Excellent services, delivered with maximum efficiency, by motivated people; through enabling technology, innovative use of work space, empowered staff and modern working practices’

2. Scope

This policy applies to all council employees other than those in schools, who have local arrangements. It is supported by a number of individual policies and protocols which apply to individual circumstances and are outlined in Section 6.

3. Background

Pressure to achieve greater efficiencies whilst maintaining high quality services can only be achieved by fundamentally changing how the council does business and the way in which people work. By better utilising new web, social media and mobile technologies, reviewing how we use our buildings, and adopting a more agile and adaptable approach to work, we will be better positioned to meet the challenges of the future.

Through flexible working, the council is introducing a range of IT solutions, reconfiguring office accommodation and changing working practices to enable staff to work more flexibly. The policies that form part of this document will support staff and managers to work in these different ways in order to maximise benefits for the council, staff and our customers.

4. Benefits

There are benefits to both staff and the organisation from moving to a more flexible way of working.

Benefits for individual members of staff:

- Ability to work in a flexible way that best meets their personal circumstances, subject to the needs of service provision
- Better working relationships within and between teams
- Improved quality of working environment with a wider choice of space to suit different work activities
- Most appropriate technology to carry out their job
Benefits for the council:

- Capital receipts from the sale of buildings
- Reduced costs from rent of leased buildings, and associated business rates
- Reduced utility bills, cleaning, and other running costs
- More effective use of office space and optimum use of buildings
- More teams co-located to facilitate communication, sharing of best practice, cross-service working and effective management
- Reduced staff time spent travelling between offices, associated cost and loss of non-productive time
- A more healthy and motivated workforce
- A working culture that is more resilient and adaptable to change

Benefits for the customer:

- A faster, more responsive and efficient service
- Reduced overheads, meaning that more funds can be devoted to direct service delivery
- Mobile workers will be able to deliver services in people’s homes and other relevant locations where appropriate, with remote access to systems to call up information, input data and produce reports

4. Overarching Principles

There are a number of overarching principles which have been agreed as part of the programme and underpin these policies.

- Flexible working practices are the norm at Merton Council rather than the exception
- Work takes place in the most effective location at the most appropriate time
- Work performance is results-focused, i.e. measured through the achievement of performance objectives, as determined and evaluated through the appraisal process
- Flexible working represents a balance between the needs of the customer, the business, and the employee, not one of these at the expense of the other two
- Work space is allocated to activities and not to individuals – i.e. you choose the workspace that best suits the activity you are doing at any particular time
- Knowledge sharing and open communications will be encouraged within work teams and across the organisation as a whole
- Use of paper-based processes and records will be kept to the absolute minimum
- Through flexible working practices, we will seek to reduce the environmental impact of our work activities
• Flexible working will be built on a culture of trust and a healthy respect for well-being and work-life balance
• There will be a strong focus on collaborative working within and across work teams through innovative use of workspace and technology

5. Different ways of working

There are a number of different ways of working and, as part of the Flexible Working Programme, each role in the Council is categorised according to the five ‘work styles’ described below. It is these work styles that determine technology and location/workspace requirements and the HR policies relevant to each are listed under each work style description.

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| Enabling Policies:                   |
| - Information security policy        |
| - IT policy                         |
| - Lone worker policy                |
| - Remote access policy              |

5.1 **Office-based flexible worker** – Staff who mainly work from an office location but are regularly away from a desk (for example, in meetings) and may work from home or other locations on an occasional basis. Staff in this category would be able to work from any desk using a Wyse terminal and ‘follow-me’ phone access, or be provided with a laptop.
- Accommodation and hot-desk policy
- Home working policy
- Information security policy
- IT policy

5.2 **Field worker** – Staff whose work requires them to be out and about in the borough for a high proportion of their time, only needing to come into the office to attend meetings and work collaboratively with colleagues. They would be equipped with the mobile technology solution that best enables them to access relevant systems or complete work on site or in the field rather than have to come into the office, such as a tablet or lightweight laptop.
- Field worker policy
• Lone worker policy
• Accommodation and hot-desk policy
• Home worker policy
• Information security policy
• IT policy

5.3 **Office-based task worker** – Staff whose role requires them to spend a high proportion (over 80%) of their time in a certain office location undertaking a number of specific desk-based tasks at high volume. Although more likely to be assigned a fixed desk, staff in this category would still need to adopt a clear-desk policy to allow others to use their desk when they are not in the office themselves. Most staff in this category would use a Wyse terminal unless they needed a desktop PC to use a system that cannot be accessed via the Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI), and would have fixed phone access.

• Information security policy
• IT policy

5.4 **Home worker** – Staff who have been specifically set up to work from home and only come into the office on an occasional basis (e.g. to attend team meetings).

• Home working policy
• Information security policy
• IT policy

5.5 **Non IT-User** – There is a fifth work-style which recognises that not all roles within the council require use of IT. The flexible working programme and policies do not apply to these roles.

5.5 **Work-life Balance** – A potential benefit of flexible working is that it can enable better work-life balance for staff, but its fundamental aim is to develop more flexibility in the way people work in order to enable the job to be done at the most appropriate time, place and in the best way possible. It is very important not to confuse this with the Work-life balance guidelines which offer a range of flexible working options to suit an employee’s needs (such as family or care responsibilities), for example condensed hours, reduced hours, term time working etc. Any member of staff has the legal right to request a more flexible working arrangement as part of the Work-life balance guidelines and should refer to these guidelines for further information.

6. **Health & Safety**
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.

7. **Review**
   This policy will be reviewed from time to time as appropriate.

8. **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.