

HOME WORKING POLICY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Epping Forest
District Council

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1. Jobs which may be considered for homeworking

- 1.1 Employees will not be forced into accepting home working, as the option at this stage will be considered on a voluntary basis. For the avoidance of doubt this Policy will cover requests made by employees. This will be kept under review by the Council.
- 1.2 Homeworking can be requested/considered for 1 to 5 days per week. The request can be for ad hoc arrangements, set days or flexible days.
- 1.2 Any home working request will be made and considered through the Flexible Working Policy.
- 1.3 After deciding whether a role is suitable to be considered for home working by the Director/Assistant Director, the manager will consider the employee's Flexible Working/Retirement request and carry out an assessment of whether the employee's home environment is conducive to home working.
- 1.4 It is also important that consideration is given to how the home worker will be affected by the arrangement. In order to assess suitability for the role it may be useful to consider the following:
 - The suitability of an available internet connection (if a suitable, robust and fast fixed internet connection is not available it will not be possible to work from home).
 - Ability to ensure own health and safety in the home environment;
 - Ability to create an appropriate separation between work and home life (and knowing when to stop working);
 - Ability to arrange family commitments to provide a suitable working environment, without disruption (when work is being carried out in the employee's own home it will not be appropriate to combine home working with care of dependents during working hours).
- 1.5 In addition the manager must consider the following practicalities;
 - Ability to resolve problems and concerns at a distance with the line manager (by telephone/email);
 - Ability to communicate effectively with colleagues, and to function as part of a team, while operating remotely;
 - Ability to be self-motivated and to work to agreed deadlines without close supervision and in relative isolation from colleagues;
 - Ability to manage time and organise work effectively and with self-discipline;
 - Flexibility in work management and approach;
 - IT skills and self-sufficiency;
 - Potential for any Data Protection issues.
- 1.6 In addition to the above where it is a manager home working, consideration will be given to the arrangements to be put in place for effectively managing their employees, who may themselves be working from home/another location etc.

2. Approval required for homeworking

- 2.1 Directors in conjunction with Assistant Directors will be responsible for considering and agreeing which, if any, posts within their Directorate/Service Areas are suitable for homeworking. The Director/Assistant Director's permission will be dependent upon a satisfactory risk assessment and consideration of any associated costs which will be carried out by the employee and manager.
- 2.2 The employee must attend the Council's offices as required for contact with colleagues, management meetings, and any training or development courses required.
- 2.3 The Council reserves the right to withdraw home working from an employee, including circumstances where the needs of the service have changed and any concerns relating to the employee's capability/performance/conduct. In cases of changes to service need, staffing requirements etc., notice will be given, in line with the requirements of the contract of employment. In capability/ performance/conduct cases this will not always be necessary.
- 2.4 Where the employee wishes to cease home working, a written request, stating their reasons must be made to their manager. If employees wish to return to office based working there is no automatic right of return, however managers will consider each case on its own merits.

3. Health and Safety/ICT Requirements

3.1 Working at home

- 3.1.1 In every homeworking situation, health and safety arrangements must be in place to ensure that there is effective communication, planning and co-ordination of safety.
- 3.1.2 The Council has a statutory duty to apply the same health and safety standards to people working at home as for staff working in Council offices. Where an employee works for more than half their contracted hours a week at home, either on an ad-hoc or fixed pattern basis, will require a designated and safe area to work in.
- 3.1.3 There are some minimum standards in place for home working. Any employee working at home for any period of time will be required to conduct a VDU assessment. Any issues identified by the assessment will need to be addressed by the manager and/or other authorised person and arrangements may be made with the employee to visit their home to ensure the assessment is correct and any agreed action has been completed. Also the manager and employee will agree the suitability and viability of the home for undisturbed work
- 3.1.4 Employees who require special adaptations at their workstation in the office will be provided with the same special adaptations at home.
- 3.1.5 ICT will specify the minimum technical requirements and keep them under review. The IT hardware provided by the Council will operate the appropriate

configuration for home working. For the avoidance of doubt ICT will always provide the most cost effective solution, which for users where there is not requirement for PC based mobile working will mean the provision of a thin client and monitor.

- 3.1.6 Employees using their own home PC or laptop to connect to the Council via VPN, are responsible for ensuring it has up to date anti-virus protection and firewall, and also any operating system patches are up to date. Failure to comply with either of these requirements will result in the connection being refused.
- 3.1.7 Employees using such personal equipment (and also using unmanaged EFDC equipment such as tablets) must also note that the level of access granted to them as the device is not managed by EFDC will result in the inability to access GCSX mailboxes. ICT will endeavour to support connection via VPN from all common hardware configurations, but this cannot be guaranteed.
- 3.1.8 IT support will be available and training will be provided. This training will be agreed between the employee and manager prior to any work arrangements being changed.
- 3.1.9 In the event of equipment, connection, communication failure the employee will be required to attend the office to work, complete suitable work off line or take lost time as annual or flexi leave, which will be in agreement with the manager.

3.2 **Setting Up a Work Area at Home**

- 3.2.1 Time should be planned for the setting up of practical home (and mobile working arrangements if in conjunction with home working). This process includes:
 - the ordering and installation of the appropriate IT solution, or IT connectivity solution, which would include either a softphone, mobile or desk phone depending on the role; and
 - the provision of any necessary Health and Safety assessment/training and IT training
- 3.2.2 Procedures for reporting and resolving problems (e.g. equipment failures, accidents) need to be agreed and fully understood by all parties concerned. A period of adaptation is often required for home working arrangements to bed down successfully. This period will also allow time for the employee to obtain any necessary clearances from mortgage lenders/landlords, home insurance companies etc. and to make any other relevant changes to domestic arrangements.

3.3 **Maintenance of equipment and safety standards**

- 3.3.1 The employee is responsible for the care of any equipment that is provided by the Council, and for the working environment. Employees must check the equipment regularly for signs of damage etc and report any problems immediately to their Line Manager. If Council equipment is damaged with no reasonable explanation (as determined by the Director/Assistant Director) employees may be required to contribute to the cost of replacing the item.

- 3.3.2 The Council will require periodic access to the employee's home for inspection of its equipment at reasonable notice. At least a couple of days' notice will be given by the manager in advance of the inspection.
- 3.3.3 It is the Council's responsibility to monitor health and safety, and this will be done periodically by the manager.
- 3.3.4 Employees must ensure that their Buildings and House Contents Insurance is appropriate, and must ensure that they notify their insurer that they are working from home. They shall provide proof of appropriate insurance cover. The employee will be responsible for any damages in the event that their insurance cover is not adequate.
- 3.3.5 ICT support of Council hardware will be based on a 'return to base' principle, if after consultation with the ICT Helpdesk it is agreed that a unit has failed the employee will need to return it to the Civic Offices for exchange/repair. Any support in excess of this will be provided on a best endeavours basis.
- 3.3.6 ICT will not support the employee's internet connection; it is the responsibility of the employee to raise faults with their provider. ICT support will only cover the hardware provided, any installed software and the physical (or wireless) connection of the device to the broadband router.
- 3.3.7 Home workers should not normally have meetings with customers/clients in their home and should arrange any meetings at a suitable alternative location instead. Meeting with their line or other senior manager would be permissible at home.
- 3.4 **Working in the office for home workers**
- 3.4.1 The Council has a statutory duty to protect the health and safety of employees. It is recognised that fixed desks should be provided for individuals in the following circumstances:
- (a) Where a special adaptation has had to be made to a desk. This will generally mean that the individual will have to use the desk when in the office but this should not preclude others using the desk when the employee is out of the office.
 - (b) Where there is a requirement to use a particular piece of ICT hardware or software on a desktop. Again this will mean the individual must use this desk when in the office but should not preclude others using the desk when the employee is absent.
 - (c) Home based employees visiting the Council's offices will have facilities made available to them for research and meetings, but a work station or desk will not be provided unless they are only working from home for part of their contracted hours. In this situation, they may be required to share a desk or work station with other home workers, or part time staff.

4. Change of Circumstances

- 4.1 All working arrangements should balance the requirements of the service, customer, employee and the Council.
- 4.2 If circumstances change, the arrangement may need to be reviewed. Managers should be informed immediately if circumstances are likely to change in any significant respects in order for the future impact on the working arrangement to be considered and assessed. This includes when an employee is appointed to a different role either within their current Directorate or Council. If the new role is not suitable for home working, as determined by the Director/Assistant Director, all Council equipment will be returned.
- 4.3 Employees who are home based should not move their residence without informing their line manager. The manager will decide whether the proposed new home location is acceptable to the Council based on the criteria of effective service delivery. If employees relocate to an area not acceptable to the Council their home based working arrangements will terminate. Where employees move home to an acceptable location, they will bear the cost and responsibility for the removal of any furniture and equipment used for home working.
- 4.4 A review would be appropriate if:
- the needs of the Council/customer changed, e.g. the nature of the job changes and it is no longer suitable for working away from the workplace
 - there is a change within the team which requires a review of each member's role
 - there are performance/conduct related issues
 - the employee intends to move house (the suitability of the proposed new premises must be assessed)
 - the home becomes unsuitable for working, for example, a change in family circumstances.
- 4.5 In the event that the employee resigns or the home working arrangements cease, any furniture and ICT equipment owned by the Council remains the property of the Council and must be returned. A mutually convenient time for the collection of any Council property will be arranged and collection of such property will be at the Council's cost. All reasonable costs incurred in removing the property from the employee's home will be reimbursed. The manager in conjunction with ICT will ensure all the Council's equipment is returned and in reasonable condition.

5. Variation of Terms and Conditions

- 5.1 Following all the checks, and if both parties have agreed to the introduction of home working, a change in work arrangements could represent a variation to the substantive terms and conditions of employment, unless otherwise agreed as part of a permanent change in service provision. In practical terms once the individual and manager have agreed the new arrangement then the manager will need to ensure that the Flexible Working/Retirement Acceptance Form is completed and send it to HR. If required HR will confirm the agreed variation in contractual terms in writing which will set out the provisions applying to the new working arrangements.

5.2 Unless there are changes to working hours, which will mean for example that salary and annual leave entitlement are calculated on a pro-rata basis, or a change to an employee's place of work, all other contractual terms will remain the same. Employees will still be required to follow existing procedures for example in reporting sickness and requesting holiday, i.e. Managing Absence and Annual Leave Policies.

6. Pay

6.1 Salary levels will not be altered by the change from office working to mobile/remote working. Any allowances or special payments will continue provided the agreement to work away from the workplace does not invalidate the reason for payment.

6.2 Home based employees will be eligible for inner fringe allowance, regardless of whether their home is within the district.

6.3 Employees who are home based will continue to be employed by the Council, and are not eligible for self-employed taxation status.

7. Mileage

7.1 Employees working the whole of their time at home will have their homeworking address as their contractual place of work. They will be entitled to claim home to office mileage if called to a meeting or to work at any Council Office. They will also be entitled to claim home to site mileage/meetings etc.

7.2 For employees working the whole of their time at home, the Council will only reimburse a maximum of 40 miles return travel (i.e. 20 miles each way) between home and the Council Offices. If the employee lives a greater distance from the Council Offices than this the excess for visits to the District will be borne by the employee.

7.3 The actual payment set out in 7.2 will be based on the highest casual rate of mileage. Any cost incurred by an employee on public transport based on the circumstances in 7.2 will be capped at the same monetary value.

7.4 Employees working less than their whole time at home will have a relevant Council address as their contractual place of work. All mileage will be in accordance with the Council's Car and Cycle Allowance Policy.

7.5 Travel direct from home outside of normal day to day activities, such as attending external training events, conferences etc. is likely to be outside of the geographic area of the district. In this situation the provisions set out in the Council's Car and Cycle Allowance or Subsistence Policies will apply.

8. Contribution towards Costs

8.1 The Council's current telephone system is able to be used from private numbers, mobile or land lines which will mean claiming for telephone expenses will be limited. However, the Council will reimburse all work related

calls from a private phone on receipt of an itemised bill detailing work calls if required.

8.2 The employee will be responsible for the following costs:

- Broadband connection
- Consumables
- Furniture, unless items are assessed as a reasonable adjustment
- Any additional costs incurred in terms of energy and other utilities at their home,
- Any existing and ongoing rental on equipment belonging to them such as the phone line for access to internet,
- Any additional costs in home content/building insurance.

9. Hours of work

9.1 Employees who are home based will be expected to fulfil their weekly contractual hours of employment with the Council, and if they work flexitime, the normal procedures will apply, unless individual working arrangements are agreed in advance with their manager.

9.2 All home based employees will be required to complete a standard monthly recording sheet for submission to their manager. During working hours, employees will be expected to be available for contact by their manager to discuss work related issues, including target setting and performance management, unless otherwise agreed. Equally, employees with child care and other caring responsibilities are required to make appropriate arrangements for the care of their dependants whilst they are working at home.

9.3 ICT support will only be guaranteed to be available in normal working hours, outside of these times, it will be provided on a best endeavour basis.

10. Accident reporting from home

10.1 Employees must report accidents involving an injury at work to their manager so that this can be recorded in the Council's accident database. They should consult their GP if they are concerned about the injury. The accident form and guidance can be found on the intranet.

11. Managers' responsibilities

11.1 Managers will;

- Consider requests for home working and assess the suitability of the role for home working.
- Consider any associated costs of providing special adaptations or equipment.
- Ensure that the Checklist is completed and all the arrangements have been considered.
- Carry out a risk assessment of the accommodation and work arrangements. Also periodic checks and monitoring.
- Feedback the results to the employee, so they can implement any improvement or modification required.

- Liaise with HR to ensure the contractual arrangements are confirmed, likewise if the arrangements come to an end.
- Carry out a full induction process for employees newly recruited who are to work from home, this will usually take place in the Council offices and may involve a period of time working from the office before homeworking commences.
- Liaise with ICT regarding the appropriate equipment required for working from home.
- Ensure that the employee has received information, instruction or training on relevant Health & Safety matters, including use of desk based and portable computer equipment (as appropriate) and action to take in event of failure of equipment.
- Agree arrangements with the employee for the provision of work, communication, regular contact, supervision, performance management and the number/frequency of visits to their work place and Council premises.
- Maintain managerial direction as appropriate during working hours
- Notify the Council's Insurance Officer of the home based working arrangement, to ensure that the employer's liability, third party and all risks insurance cover is in place. Also if/when the arrangements come to an end.
- Ensure that staff are re-issued with the Data Protection Policy and staff are aware of their responsibilities.
- Ensure a process for documenting paper files/documents removed from the Council's offices.

The above actions will be proportionate to the amount of time working at home.

11.2 Performance Management

11.2.1 Usual practice should be followed when managing an employee working from home for a significant proportion of their time, i.e. regular reviews take place, clear SMART objectives are agreed with suitable targets and performance measures to work towards are in place. Emphasis should be placed on defining measurable outputs for the post before working in a new way begins.

11.2.2 At least two performance review meetings each year are required to evaluate work completed in addition to regular feedback. This will include a mid-year and year-end review which will form part of the PDR process. Performance reviews will focus on outputs, objectives achieved and staff development. It is expected that these reviews will take place in the Council's office.

11.2.3 Employees working from home 1 or 2 days the usual practices of performance management i.e. regular 1-2-1 meetings will take place.

11.3 Communication and Contact

11.3.1 Managers will have the same responsibilities for ensuring that they are in regular contact with employees who work away from the office. Managers will need to ensure that a clear structure is in place to maintain communication, share information, offer management support and to avoid any sense of isolation. This will include any cover arrangements for leave etc.

- 11.3.2 Arrangements should be in place to ensure that home workers receive information at the same time as office-based staff.
- 11.3.3 Staff will continue to be required to attend meetings or other functions as necessary in one of the Council offices. This should be an understood and accepted part of working in a new way.
- 11.3.4 Care should be taken to ensure that communication with customers and stakeholders is maintained to the same standards as for office based staff

12. Employee's Responsibilities

12.1 Employees must:

- Comply fully with this policy and procedure.
- Attend the Council offices, or other designated venue, for management and team meetings, and training as required.
- Maintain a safe working environment in which to carry out the work of the Council.
- Report any concerns about equipment or working procedures immediately.
- Ensure that their IT equipment is maintained in good working order, and notify their manager immediately if there is a failure in either the equipment and/or the service. In the case of a failure involving Council equipment they notify the ICT Helpdesk.
- In the event of a communications/equipment failure either be prepared to attend the office to work, complete suitable work off line (in agreement with the manager) or take lost time as annual or flexi leave. Work should cease if failure with the equipment could lead to posture being compromised and/or other work related injuries.
- Report any accidents involving injury at work to their manager, so that it can be recorded in the Council's accident database and consult their GP if they are concerned about the injury.
- Obtain confirmation from their landlord/mortgage provider that they are aware of their intentions to work from home and grant access to the Council to view confirmation.
- Notify their home insurance provider that they will be working from home and grant access to the Council to view permission.
- Allow their manager or any other person authorised by the Council access to their home for the workplace assessment and for regular visits.
- Comply with the Council's HR policies including Managing Absence Policy with respect to the reporting of sickness, the Flexi Scheme, annual leave and performance management.
- Comply with all of the Council's ICT policies.
- Comply with the relevant Safety Policies including Work Station Assessments and Lone Working.
- Comply with the Data Protection Policy.

13. Security

- 13.1 Physical security of the proposed home office area forms part of the health and safety assessment procedure. It is the joint responsibility of managers and employees to ensure any adaptation required is completed before any work at home begins. The ongoing responsibility for following security procedures diligently rests with the employee.

- 13.2 Council technology and paperwork must be secured. All parties should be aware of the potentially increased risks (e.g. of theft or criminal damage to Council owned equipment and data, and risks to personal safety) associated with home working and should take all practicable steps to minimise these.
- 13.3 It is the employee's responsibility to ensure all normal data protection requirements are complied with, there are no breaches of confidentiality within the domestic environment and there is no inappropriate personal use of Council supplied equipment (including the telephone line).
- 13.4 In particular, Council owned IT equipment must not be used by anyone other than the employee (e.g. family members). Council provided ICT equipment must also only be used for Council business. All usage such as Internet browsing will continue to be monitored.
- 13.5 As the Council moves to new ways of working there will be an increase in technology being used away from the office environment. Sensible precautions should be taken to ensure that ICT hardware and data remains secure.

14. Security of Information/Data Protection

- 14.1 The Data Protection Act has implications on home working. If the Council does not comply with the act it could be fined directly by the Information Commission for any serious breach of the Data Protection Act. So it is essential employees are aware of the implications surrounding:
- Ownership of data
 - Access to data by family members and others
 - Electronic data at home and transferring this
 - Paper data/equipment and transferring/transporting this.
- 14.2 Employees must have read and considered the Council's Data Protection Policy.
- 14.3 Employees are also responsible for ensuring that sensitive/confidential information (hard copy or electronic) and equipment are transported and kept securely. When handling information they should follow good practice including:
- Treating all information in a confidential manner such as protecting information by passwords or encryption
 - Paper files should only be stored at home whilst they are being worked on and securely filed when not in use
 - Having security measures in place for dealing with document waste and the locking of their home, office and computer
 - Storing equipment so that it is not a risk to the home-worker or others visiting their premises.

15. Insurance, mortgages and tenancy agreements

- 15.1 Employees should ensure their building/contents insurance is not invalidated by the use of the premises as a place of work, or by the use of Council equipment.
- 15.2 The Council will remain responsible for any loss of or accidental damage to officially-supplied equipment and furniture, provided that it does not result from negligence on the part of the employee or their family members, and that security procedures have been complied with (see above).
- 15.3 Employees must not have meetings with customers/clients in their home and should arrange any meetings at a suitable alternative location instead. An employee may not be covered for accidents to other customers/clients entering their house on business and should check this point with their insurance company.
- 15.4 Employees should write to their mortgage provider or landlord to inform them they will at times be working from home to ensure that the occupation of the home is not subject to terms and conditions or covenants which will prevent any work being undertaken in the home.
- 15.5 If significant structural work is envisaged to adapt the home for remote working, planning permission may be required from the local authority. This would be the employee's responsibility and the Council would not contribute to any costs incurred.

16. Review

- 16.1 A review of this Policy will take place by December 2017.

17. Further Guidance

- 17.1 Further guidance on the operation, interpretation and application of the Smart Working Framework is available from HR.
- 17.2 Where relevant, each of the Smart Framework Policies has its own HR and Manager Toolkit which provides additional guidance, template letters and aids. The Toolkits can be found on the intranet.