

HOME WORKING POLICY

1. Introduction

The Council recognises the importance of providing a flexible working environment, which maintains high quality services whilst enabling staff to improve their work life balance.

This policy presents practical advice for managers considering introducing an element of home working in their team. It sets out the key considerations to take into account and answers some of the most common questions. This Policy provides a guide as to how home working will operate at Harlow District Council, including setting out the key principles, benefits, and operating framework.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all employees regardless of length of service. Home working is about using the employee's home as a base for work for a majority of their contractual hours.

3. Key Principles

Home working is based on the following key principles:

- You remain an employee of Harlow Council wherever you are based.
- Unless recruited specifically to work at home, no employee will be required to work at home.
- Equipment, documents and materials provided for home working will be based on the needs of the job. Equipment, documents and materials must be returned to the Council if the arrangement ends, if the employee leaves the authority, or earlier if asked to do so. All equipment and materials provided for business use remains the property of the Council.
- Ideally home workers should not work at home for more than 80% (4 days a week) of their contractual hours (based on a full time employee). However if the relevant Head of Service, in consultation with HR, is satisfied that it is in the best interests of the

service, full time home working may be agreed, OR if the employee has a previous contractual right to work from home full time (e.g. TUPE arrangement).

- The Council is responsible under Health and Safety legislation for ensuring that all employees have safe systems and places of work.
- Home workers must share responsibility for their own personal safety and security, advising their line manager immediately of any issues that affect their well-being and report sickness absence in accordance with policy (**See section 16**).
- Temporary arrangements to enable an employee to work from home may be agreed in consultation with HR (e.g. to facilitate their return to work after serious illness, severe weather conditions etc).

Benefits of Home Working

Improved Recruitment and Retention

For example, employees who travel long distances to work, employees with young children or other caring responsibilities.

Improved Productivity

Home working leads to less sickness and absenteeism i.e. uninterrupted thinking time and reduced stress of commuting to work.

More Effective Use of Office Space

There can be at least 30% or more unused desks/computers at any time because of staff undertaking duties away from their administrative base, absent on leave, undergoing training or off sick. Therefore employees can have access to a bank of workstations (commonly referred to as hot-desking).

Reduced Congestion and Cleaner Environment

Flexible and Home working will contribute to reducing congestion on the roads and in turn lead to a 'greener environment', a key objective of the Council.

4. Definition of Home Working

Home working is a formal arrangement where there is a contractual agreement for an employee to work from home for a specified proportion of their contracted hours.

There are various ways that home working may operate, ranging from rare occasions and do not form a routine, to formal arrangements that are agreed by a variation to contract (**see Section 13**)

4.1 Permanent home worker

Permanently home workers: Employees who work from home (ideally no more than 80% of their contractual hours) and make outside calls/visits or attend their workplace for the balance of

their contractual hours. Permanent home workers may not have a permanent workstation but will have access to a bank of workstations (commonly referred to as hot-desking).

Home workers may be provided with a work station at home, if required (**see section 5**). Home workers will have a specific amount of contracted hours allocated to permanently working from home and the remainder of their contracted hours will be allocated for them to work at their administrative base for supervision, team meeting, work issues etc.

Home workers should arrange meetings with clients or other officers away from their home. In exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary for your manager or other officers to meet with you at your home. This should only happen by prior arrangement and with the employee's agreement. Access to your home may also be required to deal with any health and safety concerns or to install, maintain, or repair electrical or other equipment.

If a Home Worker intends to move house, they should discuss this intention with their line manager as soon as possible in order to make the transition as smooth as possible. Harlow Council reserves the right to terminate the arrangement if the new house or its location is considered to be unsuitable for business or health and safety reasons, or if repeated location changes are anticipated.

This applies equally to employees on a full-time or part-time contract, including fixed term contracts.

4.3 Occasional working from home

Taking work home occasionally, on an ad hoc basis, to concentrate on a particular project or task may be suitable in the following circumstances:

- Where a specific task needs dedicated and focused input and/or could be dealt with more efficiently at home e.g. saved travelling time and lack of interruptions.
- Where it is difficult for staff to get in to work e.g. adverse weather (Severe Weather policy).
- A formal written application to work at home is not required for occasional working from home. Managers would need to discuss and agree the arrangement with the employee. Hours worked from home must be recorded.

5. Providing Equipment for Employees Working from Home

For Home working to be effective, employees may need additional equipment such as office furniture & ICT. Managers should look at requirements on a case-by-case basis with the employee concerned, taking advice from Health and Safety or ICT as appropriate. The equipment should be based solely on the needs of the job.

Where possible, the employee's existing equipment and furniture should be utilised. The cost of the equipment is an important factor and will be detailed in the final report (**See section 7**).

Information Technology

Prior to Home working arrangements being agreed, the manager will need assess IT equipment and provision. Management must discuss IT equipment and access to the Council's ICT service with the Senior ICT Manager before any decisions are made. If provision includes a PC, the PC will be password protected and should only be used in connection with Council business.

Telecommunication needs will be met with either the provision of a mobile phone or through the Council paying the costs of calls identified as relating to work made from the employees home landline. Management must discuss telecommunications with the Senior ICT Manager and cost should be detailed in the final report.

There may be other appropriate equipment. It is the decision of the line manager as to what is appropriate for the service to supply for the type of work that will be performed at home. The costs of the equipment must be taken into account and will be financed by the employing department/service. These costs will be detailed in the Home working recommendation report **(Section 12)**.

Home Working will be subject to electrical testing and a Health & Safety assessment.

All equipment and materials provided for business use remains the property of the Council.

Furniture

To Home work effectively, there may be a need to provide an employee with some additional equipment. This could include office furniture such as ergonomic chairs and desks. Each case should be judged on its own merits by line managers, taking advice from HR and Health & Safety as appropriate.

If the job requires equipment, this should be provided. Any furniture provided must meet Council standards and be procured by the Council.

Furniture requirements will be identified through the completion and review of the initial risk assessment undertaken by the Council's Health & Safety Officer, which must be made prior to an employee formally working from home. The cost of supplying furniture falls on the service. These costs will be detailed in the Home working recommendation report

At all times any office equipment/furniture provided remains Council property. If the employee stops Home working or ceases to be an employee of the Council, the equipment/furniture must be returned to the Council. If the equipment and furniture is not returned to the Council the home worker will incur the costs of the equipment and furniture.

Further details regarding ICT policies and procedures can be located on Infonet under ICT key documents.

6. Employee Responsibilities:

- Informally discuss request with their line manager.
- After this meeting the employee must put their request for home working in writing to their manager setting out the business/personal case. The employee should also identify any potential benefits to the Council.

7. Manager's Responsibilities:

Managers will produce a report for their Head of Service taking account of the following:

1. That the service will not suffer.
2. The impacts on other employees in the section/team have been considered and any change should not disadvantage other employees.
3. The HR implications associated with the proposals and key steps necessary to achieve the necessary contractual changes are attainable
4. Any costs (e.g. technological/computer equipment and internet access) will be covered by real efficiency savings. The report should include the efficiency savings and a financial breakdown.
5. The employee is suited to home working and has the right facilities at home. (This will be subject to a Health & Safety assessment and the requirement for the employee to deal with confidentiality and security issues).
6. The Manager should include within their report a plan to how they will manage the Home worker.
7. Training and support needs: As with all jobs, training and support needs should be identified to meet the job's requirements. It is also important to ensure that home workers do not feel cut off from the usual development and promotion opportunities. Training may include: Annual Personal Performance Plans which should be carried out including setting objectives, setting performance standards, performance feedback etc.

The Head of Service will make the final decision.

There must be a consistent and transparent approach to dealing with applications for home working.

Timescales:

Ideally the manager should meet with the employee within 14 calendar days after the Head of Service has made the final decision.

Initially any decision to agree Home working should be on a trial period for three months.

8. Costs incurred by the Home worker**Domestic Bills**

The Council will not pay for electricity, heating, lighting, or other domestic bills. The savings in travelling costs for the average employee is estimated to be greater than the impact on domestic bills to enable working from home.

Mileage

The contractual arrangements for claiming travel expenses have not changed, except that normal return home to work mileage is deducted before any travel claim may be submitted. Journeys made between home and the Council work place will not be reimbursed.

Council Tax

Working from home does not affect the payment of Council Tax.

Utility Charges

Certain utility companies may consider that the use of a home for work purposes incurs business charges rather than domestic tariff. Home workers should check with their relevant utility companies.

Planning Regulations

Running a business from home requires planning permission only where the home stops being first and foremost a residence. Turning one room into an office, ancillary to the main use of the house would not normally require planning permission. It is accepted that a "planning unit" such as a dwelling house, can accommodate more than one activity and may include activities which are primary and ancillary. The primary use of the planning unit will remain emphatically that of a dwelling house despite the conversion of one of the rooms to a "study/office".

(VI) Income Tax/Personal Tax

The Council cannot know the full personal tax circumstances of its employees and Home workers are advised to discuss their personal tax situation with their tax office.

Insurance - Please see Section 15.

9. Managing Employees who Work from Home

Managing employees who are not in the office every day needs a different method of style of performance management.

Measuring work performance

Define and agree the jobs/tasks to be undertaken:

- the ultimate aim of the job
- the distinct tasks and projects
- the objectives
- the responsibilities
- the accountabilities

Define and agree the expected outcomes:

- the actual tangible work output/s to be delivered
- qualitative measurement systems e.g. define task, projects or objectives the level of detail e.g. outline or final version
- the standards expected

Ensure arrangements are discussed with the employee and are clearly agreed and documented.

Agree regularity of reporting.

Be clear about the expectations on the Home worker to make themselves available for contact.

In discussion with the home worker, the manager needs to decide whether there needs to be changes to manage the work or service. This should be achieved by using performance management arrangements.

Regular contact

- Clear communication systems with home workers are just as important as for the office based worker. Staff working from home could easily feel isolated from the usual communication channels. Keep the home worker updated on office news, both work-related and social; these might include circulars, legal advice, professional and corporate information, copy reports, WIS, personnel notices and health and safety information etc.

Rights to visit the home worker

- The manager needs to agree the circumstances in which a visit to the home worker might be necessary or desirable and gain agreement from the home worker to permit such access.

10. Insurance

It is Home workers responsibility to ensure they are covered by their own insurance:

Home workers should:

- Check whether or not their own personal buildings or contents insurances are affected by using part of their home for a business purpose. If in any doubt they should contact their own insurance company or advisor. Home workers should also ensure that any lease, mortgage arrangements or tenancy agreements are not affected. Enquiries concerning the Council's insurance policies should be directed to the Senior Insurance Officer.
- Ensure that any vehicle used for work purposes is insured in respect of business use. Anyone in doubt about the adequacy of their insurance should contact their insurance company or advisor. In some cases an additional premium may be charged. The law makes the driver responsible for ensuring that proper insurance is in force. The Council does not hold any insurance for the benefit of employees driving privately owned cars.
- Immediately advise their Manager of any loss or damage to Council property. All losses involving theft or malicious damage should also be reported to the police and the police reference taken.
- Advise their Manager of any injuries to themselves or to a third party, which occur whilst carrying out their official duties as a Home worker.

11. Health and Safety

Harlow Council has a duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of its employees under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and this applies whether employees are working in an office, at home or remotely. This general duty is qualified by the principle of "so far as is reasonably practicable". In other words, the degree of risk in a particular job or workplace needs to be balanced against the time, trouble, cost and physical difficulty of taking measures to avoid or reduce the risk.

12. Health and Safety Issues for Employees Working from Home

The manager and individual employees have a responsibility to ensure that adequate health and safety arrangements for working from home are in place. Areas that need particular consideration are:

- Use of work equipment, particularly computers.
- Ensuring the work environment is safe for the employee and does not create hazards for family members.
- Work related stress, which could arise from feelings of isolation or difficulties with separating their work from home.

A Health and Safety Risk Assessment and DSE Workstation Assessment will be undertaken by the Council's Health & Safety Officer before an employee starts working from home, with further risk assessments undertaken thereafter at least every three years. Managers should review the risk assessment annually at the PPP meeting.

Furniture and equipment may be provided, as appropriate, in line with needs identified in the risk assessment. Where it is not possible or appropriate to do this, an employee will not be able to work at home.

It is the Council's responsibility to ensure that the employee working from home has been supplied with a fire extinguisher. The fire extinguisher should be stored in an accessible location, visible, away from children, but close by to the potential risk i.e. computer, laptop.

The fire extinguisher should be serviced annually by the Health and Safety department.

13. Terms and Condition for Employees Working from Home

Managers will be required to complete a 'Change to Terms and Conditions' form for home workers. Home workers will receive a variation to contract letter from Human Resources, which will detail the contract conditions relating to Home working.

Home working agreements will initially be on a trial basis for a period of 3 months during which time a review will be conducted. If the decision is to cease the arrangement, this decision will be discussed with the employee and the employee will revert to their previous working arrangements and terms and conditions relating to the previous arrangements at the end of the trial period.

Alternatively home working may be extended and continue to be reviewed or the arrangement will become permanent. If the arrangement is extended or becomes permanent the manager will be required to complete a change of terms and conditions form and Human Resources will send a variation to contract letter to confirm.

14. Contingency Plans in the Event of Failure of Systems

In the event of a system failure which renders the home worker unable to perform part or all of their duties, the following options should be prioritised and agreed **in advance** by the line manager and the employee:

- Travel to the office to carry out the duties.
- Undertake other paper based work, if appropriate and sufficient in quantity.
- Take flexi time.
- Take the time off and work in lieu (at an agreed time) when the system becomes functional again.

- Take annual leave.

15. Data Protection

It is the responsibility of the Home workers line manager to ensure that:

- Where an employee has access to personal data about individuals, whether held on computer or in manual files, the Corporate Information Officer (who has lead responsibility for Data Protection) must be consulted to ensure that this is covered under the Data Protection registration and that adequate security measures will be taken to protect the data.
- The home-worker must comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act and the Council's employment policies at all times.
- The employee will seek prior written authorisation to remove any Council file/data to home. This must be obtained from the line manager and a return date agreed.

16. Report of sickness absence?

The Council's normal arrangements for reporting sickness (see Sickness Absence Management Policy) still apply.

17. What if an employee or manager wants to change a home working arrangement?

If, on a permanent basis, home working may involve significant cost, and may also mean permanent changes in office arrangements, an employee has no automatic right to alter or end the home working arrangement once any trial period has been successfully completed.

The Council would not alter or end the arrangement without at least one month's notice and a meeting will be arranged with line management, the employee and Human Resources to discuss such arrangements.

Any alterations will need to be discussed and, where possible, a mutually acceptable arrangement arrived at.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Policy Author: | Nigel Delbarre, HR Manager |
| Approved & Authorised: | |
| Dated authorised: | March 2013 |

Revision History

Date of this revision:

Date of next planned revision:

| Revision date | Summary of Changes | Changes marked |
|---------------|--------------------|----------------|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |