

Hybrid working policy

1. Policy statement

- 1.1 The council recognises the need to develop modern working practices to enable employees to maximise their performance and productivity to deliver the corporate strategy and associated council services, whilst maintaining visibility and accessibility as a front-facing public service provider.
- 1.2 Where these services can only be provided by staff working at a particular location or facility, the requirement for staff to be present at that location will remain.
- 1.3 Hybrid working is an agile way of working that enables the council to empower the workforce to work more flexibly by embracing new ways of working supported by technology. Hybrid working makes it easy to access information remotely, work from a variety of locations, including in the community whilst promoting a more joined up front-facing public service that ensures the needs of the customers are best met. The goal is to make our hybrid flexibility work for the organisation and our employees providing balance and wellbeing at no cost to workplace culture and productivity.
- 1.4 Our approach to hybrid working is based on the contractual workplace i.e. from the Harlow district, reflecting the need for staff to be present in the district first and foremost. The expectation is for all staff to ensure operational service cover is provided and maintained across their relevant corporately set directorate or service specific hours. With careful planning and a degree of best practice evaluation, Council staff are offered the opportunity to undertake hybrid working recognising that decisions regarding hybrid working will start from what provides the best possible outcomes and services for our residents, service users, customers, and stakeholders.
- 1.5 For most employees, contractually their base (normal place of work) will be a Harlow Council office or site. The council's definition of and approach to hybrid working is based on hybrid working primarily being undertaken from the **council workplace** as the normal place of work. This means that the council continues to have the contractual right to require any member of its staff, correspondingly alongside the duty of its employees as required by business/service need, to be present in the council workplace including if there are any concerns about efficiency, effectiveness or safety of hybrid working arrangements, the council has the final determination on work location and working arrangements.
- 1.6 Hybrid working relies on staff engagement and how managers engage with each member of their team to ensure the successful adoption of this way of working.

- 1.7 The council will advertise all job roles on the basis that they are open to hybrid, alongside flexible working, options unless there are specific business reasons not to do so. It is recognised that with a labour market approach to recruitment, the emphasis on hybrid working may vary to reflect the type of role and job market, dependent on business need. This will be explained in the recruitment process within the definition and approach outlined above in paragraph 1.5, above.
- 1.8 This policy assists in addressing 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 reduced travel make a direct contribution to this.

2 Scope of the policy

- 2.1 This policy applies to employees of the council regardless of whether they are fixed-term, permanent, full, or part-time. It is recognised that due to the diverse nature of roles within the organization, work patterns will vary and that this will need to be considered when applying this policy.
- 2.2 The hybrid working principles as outlined in this policy encompasses the working arrangements for all workers, including agency and temporary workers but only employees are eligible to apply for formal flexible working arrangements (separately detailed in the [flexible working policy](#)).
- 2.3 Hybrid working is an essential element of the council's:
- strategy for adapting to, and thriving in, the new working environment
 - recognition of the accommodation and space available within council buildings
 - commitment to supporting a positive work-life balance for our employees
 - employment conditions where it meets the council's business needs

There are three hybrid working categories for roles in the council as outlined in section 3 below, alongside home working (with occasional office working).

- 2.4 If a hybrid worker requests to work from another location in the UK that is not their home, this should be discussed and agreed in advance with their manager. All elements of this policy would apply in these circumstances and the hybrid worker would be expected to be readily available to attend the workplace at short notice, should it be required.
- 2.5 Living and working outside of the UK is **not** permitted under the hybrid working policy. IT equipment cannot be taken outside of the UK, as detailed in the [ICT acceptable use policy](#), which is supported by the limitations of the processing and transfer of data outside of the UK. This is underpinned by significant tax compliance risk and cost implications to the council and/or the member of staff, alongside the inability to readily attend the contractual workplace in the Harlow district.
- 2.6 Where employees have contractual flexible working arrangements already in place these are not changed by the contents of this policy or the supporting documents.

- 2.7 The aim of this policy is to provide a framework for consistent and fair practice considering the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 and promotes equal opportunities for all on the issues to be considered when implementing and managing employees who are working in a hybrid way. It is written to ensure that no one receives less favourable treatment on the protected characteristics of their age, disability, sex (gender), gender reassignment, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, pregnancy, and maternity.

3 **Remote working environment**

- 3.1 Employees and workers must have the technical capability to work remotely and have a workspace conducive to working efficiently. Distributed ICT equipment may differ in format therefore equipment needs to be setup appropriately and safely. A stable and secure internet connection is required for uninterrupted connectivity, the recommendation from Microsoft is 40mbps for uninterrupted function.
- 3.2 Regardless of where you are working, in the office or remotely, your workspace and working practices should be professional and interruptions should be managed and minimised to allow you to focus on the job.
- 3.3 Consider what can be seen on video calls and use branded backgrounds. You should always be presentable and ensure your camera remains on for both internal and external video meetings.
- 3.4 The ability to work remotely is not a substitute for childcare, carer, and domestic responsibilities. It is the responsibility of employees to ensure adequate provision is in place to avoid conflict with work performance when working remotely.
- 3.5 Where a member of staff is unable to access appropriate broadband capacity to carry out their role, it is expected that they would work from the office.
- 3.6 Employees must take care of any equipment provided. It remains council property. Employees should notify the ICT helpdesk if any faults occur with their issued ICT equipment and their line manager if it is other issued equipment.

4 **Work styles**

- 4.1 The standard model of hybrid working within the council is based on hybrid working being primarily undertaken from the council workplace, as referred to in paragraph 1.5 above. The following workstyles are provided as a guide for council staff on ways of working within the council that to meet the council's business needs accordingly:
- fixed location-based roles
 - community operational roles
 - hybrid roles
 - home worker
- 4.2 Fixed locations roles:

- A fixed worker will typically remain at a workstation or place of work for most of the working day.
- Where the key roles and responsibilities must be performed from a specific location. This could be because specialist equipment is needed, or because the role requires the postholder to deliver services directly to residents or to support staff operations from a specific location.

4.3 Community operational roles

- Where the roles and responsibilities are being delivered or take place in local communities, on a specific sites away from the council workplace or remote working, this work being front facing 'community based' or 'operational' in nature.
- These roles may involve resident or client meetings, visits, inspections, project work and reports in the local community where the service users are, not where the 'office' is.
- Some work will be undertaken from the council workplace or a home/remote location.

4.4 Hybrid roles

- Hybrid working is a blend of home and office workplace attendance. Where a role is not restricted to one singular location. Employees can successfully and regularly carry out the role and work activity from a mixture of home and office or other suitable workplaces.
- The balance of working between home and office working will be set by the requirements for team delivery. Employees and workers alike are expected to participate in any relevant office cover or office attendance rotas.
- We still need to come together face-to-face to maintain team working and business relationships, to support each other, particularly new starters and less experienced colleagues and have more informal and impromptu conversations to find solutions to the work challenges we face.
- It is important that you do attend in person when requested (see 8 below for more information).
- Hybrid working is not either home or office working with irregular and infrequent attendance in the workplace or undertaking home working – it is balanced working.
- The council is committed to exploring increased flexibility for staff with a balanced hybrid model to enable delivery alongside providing for staff.

4.5 Home worker roles

- Home worker employees carry out most of their work at their home.
- However, they are still required to attend work locations as required to ensure the best possible outcomes and services and this may include meetings, supervisions etc. in council premises.
- 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.

- For more information see the [home working policy](#).

5 Split between attending work and working remotely

- 5.1 It is expected that employees will be present in the council workplace based on business needs, see [hybrid working toolkit](#) for more details.
- 5.2 It is expected that a full-time employee will usually attend the council workplace for a **minimum** of 2 of their working days per week (pro rata for part time staff). The number of days per week each employee spends attending the workplace compared with working remotely will vary and be in accordance with team rotas, office coverage and depending on:
- the business needs of the council
 - their individual circumstances
 - the nature of their role and team duties and responsibilities
 - what is happening within their role and team at any time and the needs of the directorate, including the space available at specific work locations
- 5.3 As outlined above, contractually for most council employees their base of work is the council workplace. Whilst working remotely has its benefits, working in collaboration amongst colleagues with a physical presence in the office is beneficial for:
- building individual and team development
 - having detailed or focussed long meetings, discussions, or debates
 - building and maintaining positive working relationships
 - face to face collaborative working
 - creativity or idea generation
 - undertaking line management duties
- 5.4 Face to face contact with colleagues also has mental health and wellbeing benefits for you.

6 Working hours

- 6.1 For days on which employees are working remotely or attending the workplace, their normal hours of work will continue to be their normal contracted working hours. Employees should discuss and agree with their line manager in advance what their working arrangements will be if there is a temporary adjustment to these (say to complete a piece of project work) and the team should be aware of when an employee is available and working.
- 6.2 Team Charters will be set by line management after agreement with Assistant Directors. Team rotas will form part of the delivery of the team charter and should be in place be periodically reviewed aligned to the requirements of service provision – see [hybrid working toolkit](#) for more details.
- 6.3 It is important to make use of tools such as shared calendars and out-of-office

messaging, utilising Teams, and telephony status to help colleagues be aware of who is working and when.

- 6.4 Employees should ensure they undertake their working hours, nevertheless they should ensure they are not overworking: - downtime from work is essential. To help maintain overall wellbeing, employees should take adequate rest breaks.
- Take 30 minutes off for lunch each day (where your working hours are over 6 hours).
 - Even when busy, it is essential to find the time to take a break.
 - Ensure the time between stopping work one day and beginning the next is not less than 11 hours.
 - It is important to move from the workstation at regular intervals to walk around and keep moving.

7 The need for the workforce to maintain flexibility

- 7.1 Given the degree of flexibility that our hybrid working arrangements provide, we also expect our workforce to be flexible as service needs can change; working arrangements will always be subject to change in line with service requirements. For example, to attend in-person training and for meetings that your manager or Assistant Director/SMB have determined are best conducted in person.
- 7.2 In introducing hybrid working, teams must be mindful of the needs and advantages of teams coming together in person, to support organisational culture and learning and foster a sense of inclusivity and belonging.

8 Taking individual circumstances into account

- 8.1 The council recognises that hybrid working can bring challenges and that it may not be appropriate to all individuals depending on personal circumstances. Where hybrid working is not possible, we will allow full office-based working. The council encourages employees to speak to their line manager in such instances.
- 8.2 Employees may have challenges in ensuring their working environment at home is operational (e.g. due to space restrictions and not being able to meet the DSE requirements for home working) or not having the appropriate childcare or caring arrangements in place or a failure in their IT broadband links. These examples mean that remote working is difficult for individuals and as a result may result in them needing to attend the workplace.

9 Disabilities and reasonable adjustments

- 9.1 The council recognises that as a responsible employer, we have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees. In the context of hybrid working, potential adjustments could include allowing the employee to:
- work from home all or most of the time, even if colleagues are expected to split their time between attending the workplace and remote working

- split their time between attending the workplace and remote working, even if hybrid working is not available for their working style
- 9.2 Employees should always discuss with their line manager, supported by Human Resources, about any reasonable adjustments that may be required to undertake their work, including working in a hybrid context.
- 9.3 A referral to Occupational Health or the completion of an Access to Work application will usually be necessary to clearly detail reasonable support requirements the council can assist with.
- 9.4 An employee's agreed reasonable adjustments, which details their workplace adjustments, should be reviewed if a significant change occurs. Adjustments often still apply even if the employee changes roles or managers within the council, but a review with the support of HR and where appropriate, Occupational Health is always advised.

10 Managing mixed workstyles

- 10.1 Managers are required to adapt their management approach and work collaboratively with all workstyles whilst they and their team members are in the office or working remotely:
- Communication plans should be agreed in advance and include the expectations of the manager regarding the delivery of services. This is not just on role delivery more generally but should include consideration for collaborating and maintaining effective working relationships. Communication plans should be compatible with the needs of the team and consider directorate service levels and communication links with connected teams supporting the achievement of operational requirements. It should also cover how to ensure workers do not feel isolated.
 - Regular team and one-to-one meetings should be held face to face within all teams, to include reviews of individual performance. Effective communication is the responsibility of everyone in the team, especially when teams are not all together all the time.
 - It is important that the manager does not lose sight of overall performance levels and gathers where necessary feedback and evidence to support personal performance plan (PPP) recommendations and reviews. All hybrid workers should continue to deliver the full requirements of their role and perform at the same standard as their peers working full time at their workplace. They are also required to adhere to all the council's policies and procedures in the normal way, as if they were working from the workplace.
 - Further details can be found in the [hybrid working toolkit](#)

11 Data protection

- 11.1 You must ensure that any confidential information, either paperwork or electronic files are kept secure maintain their responsibilities under the Data Protection Act (2018) see [GDPR](#) for more information.

- 11.2 Equipment provided by the council must be used for work- related purposes and must not be used by any other member of your household or third party at any time or for any purpose. See the [ICT acceptable use policy](#) for more information.
- 11.3 Employees who are working remotely are responsible for keeping information always associated with the council secure. Specifically, remote workers are under a duty to
- practise good ICT security, including using a unique password for your work laptop and any other devices you use for work
 - keep all hard copies of work-related documentation secure, including ensuring that documents are always locked away except when in use
 - ensure confidential waste is returned to the council as soon as possible for destruction and not disposed of with household rubbish or in other locations
 - ensure that work-related information is safeguarded when working in public spaces, for example by:
 - positioning your laptop so that others cannot see the screen
 - not leaving your laptop unattended
 - not having confidential or business-sensitive conversations in public spaces

12 Hybrid working principles for use of space

- 12.1 The council is committed to ensuring as many work areas as possible support the requirements for interaction and collaboration in open plan working as well as allowing for case confidentiality, delivery and focus, with the provision of IT equipment, acoustic barriers and meeting rooms. High level filing cabinets and partitions should not be used across teams to delineate areas unless identified as required by facilities management, for example for noise absorption.
- 12.2 To improve the security and confidentiality of information, a clear desk policy for papers and removable storage media and clear screen policy for information processing facilities should be maintained. See section 10 of the [ICT acceptable use policy](#).
- 12.3 To optimise space use and reduce costs, the council is working towards providing standardised furniture across all directorates, unless specific equipment is required and in place to remove or reduce a disadvantage related to someone's disability.

13 Insurance

- 13.1 Hybrid workers should check with their building and content insurance provider that their home insurance is not invalidated by working from home, or by the storage and use of council equipment there.

14 Sickness

- 14.1 When working remotely, employees should not work if they are unwell. If an employee is sick and unable to work, the council's sickness absence reporting procedure applies as it would if employees were attending the workplace.

Please refer to the [sickness absence management policy](#) for further details on reporting absence.

15 Expenses

- 15.1 Employees are not eligible to claim expenses for home working.
- 15.2 Employees may be able to claim tax relief for any household expenses incurred because of working from home, provided the expenses are solely work related. If you wish to benefit from this tax relief, see [the government's guide on claiming tax relief for your job expenses](#). This is a private matter and is to be dealt with directly, not through the council.
- 15.3 Your contractual base of work is stated in your Statement of Employee Particulars. Business mileage between an employee's home and their permanent place of work is considered by HMRC to be ordinary commuting (i.e. private travel) this therefore does not fit the council criteria for claiming mileage. Costs of ordinary commuting are not allowable for tax purposes. It is the council's policy that ordinary commuting mileage is deducted from any business mileage claim submitted to the council.

16 Health and safety

- 16.1 Employees have a responsibility for their own and others health and safety while they are carrying out work activities regardless of work location in accordance with the council's [health and safety policies](#).
- 16.2 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. Any necessary equipment and furniture that is identified as part of this assessment will need to be considered to ensure the setup is correct. 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. Please refer to the [display screen equipment section](#) on Kaonet.
- 16.3 Employees working at home or council offices with low occupancy should consider how their safety can be ensured in the event of illness, accident, injury or other event. Arrangements for maintaining an appropriate level of contact between them and their manager should be discussed and agreed so that the manager can raise an alarm if necessary, in the event they are unable to make contact with the employee as expected.
- 16.4 Employees should undertake the home working [risk assessment](#) annually and liaise with their line manager and the Health and Safety team as appropriate.
- 16.5 Employees must notify their line manager and complete a report to Health and Safety if:
- they believe that there are any work-related health and safety hazards or potential risks that need to be reported

- they have been involved in an incident or accident at work or had a near miss then you and your line manager must complete an [appropriate form](#), as soon as possible, the same as if they were working in the office.

17 Requesting flexible working

- 17.1 This policy is for hybrid working, but there are many other forms of flexible working.
- 17.2 The council's flexible working hours' scheme will remain in place and employees should record their working time in the usual way, please refer to the [flexible working policy](#) for more information.

18 Abuse of right

- 18.1 If the council believes that an employee is abusing the provision made under this policy, then the council has the right to review and revoke hybrid working and where appropriate instigate disciplinary proceedings in line with the disciplinary policy.

Version number	Creation date	Changes made	Changes made by:	Authorised	Date of changes
1	January 2024	New policy	Assistant Director Governance, HR & Legal	WLT	Date of first review 2 years