



Report to: Council  
Date of Meeting: 28 June 2007  
Report From: Head of Organisational Development  
Title of the Report: Home Working Policy  
Agenda Item Number: **9**

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**1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present to members the attached Home Working Policy for approval.
- 1.2 In addition this report will also update Members on the outcome of the Home-Working Pilot, which members requested take place prior to approval of a Home Working Policy.
- 1.3 In response to the pilot, the report outlines three options to appraise and recommends the third option to Council, which is to introduce a formal policy and procedure for home/ report working, on the basis of the number of licences purchased for the pilot, resulting in opportunities for a small number of employees to take advantage of home working.
- 1.4 In support of this the attached Home Working Policy and Procedure outlines the criteria for approval of home working and the circumstances of when this may be appropriate as well as the procedure for applying to work from home.
- 1.5 In addition the procedure addresses other issues such as health and safety, ICT equipment, security and confidentiality issues, insurance, health and well being and lone working and a home working allowance.
- 1.6 The proposals outlined in this report address employees of the council in terms of home working. Elected members will be addressed separately in terms of access to ICT through separate proposals which will be submitted by the Council's ICT Manager on behalf of the Modernisation Working Group.

## 2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1 The Corporate Management Team, Service Team Managers, Trade Union and employee representatives have been fully consulted on the Draft Home Working Policy and Procedure. Those employees, their line managers and members involved in the pilot have all completed evaluation forms in respect of the pilot. Scrutiny members have also been consulted on the outcome of the pilot and suggested way forward.

## 3. CORPORATE PLAN AND PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The Council's draft home-working policy and procedure supports Priority 7 of the Council's Corporate Plan, Maximising Efficiencies, by ensuring that the Council has effective mechanisms for flexible working.
- 3.2. The aim of the policy and procedure is to assist Council employees achieve improved work-life balance by providing employees with the opportunity to work from home where this arrangement is deemed suitable.
- 3.2 The attached home working policy and procedure satisfies the following Department of Communities and Local Government Priority Outcomes R21 and R22 for home and remote working :-

R21	ICT support and documented policy for home/remote working (teleworking) for council members and staff.
R22	Access to home/remote working facilities to all council staff that satisfy the requirements set by the Council's home/remote working policy.

## 4. IMPLICATIONS

### 4.1 Financial Implications and Value for Money Statement

- 4.1.1. In order to put in place home working arrangements for staff, Information Technology infrastructure has been implemented to allow officers to connect to the council computer network from home and gain access to council information systems.

The capital investment needed to implement the technology for home working was £34,803 This investment was paid out of Implementing Electronic Government funding. This funding has procured :-

- a) The secure remote access solution needed to ensure the internal network is protected from the Internet.
- b) Technology to run the council's internal systems and applications over a home broadband connection.
- c) Laptops for the officer and members who took part in the pilot.
- d) The initial number of Tablet PC's and Digital Camera's for Revenues and Benefits.

- 4.1.2. The revenue costs for the home working are £4,538 per year.

4.1.3. The technology for the home working solution has also been used to enable council officers to gain access to the council's computer systems from other remote locations. For example, the Revenues and Benefits service have used the facility to enable council officers to assess housing and council tax benefits from remote locations, such as their home or at community centers. The technology has also been used to enable a number of satellite offices to connect to the authority, including :-

- a) Roseberry Grange Golf Course.
- b) Pelton Fell.
- c) Town Centre Office – Regeneration Office.
- d) Dragonville – 3 Lifestyle co-ordinators officers.

#### 4.2 Legal

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

#### 4.3 Human Resources

There are no direct Human Resources implications as a result of this report, although indirect implications are linked to work life balance and recruitment and retention of employees.

#### 4.4 Other Services

There are implications for other services that make use of the technology for remote working, including Revenues and Benefits, Leisure and Regeneration. These services make use of the home and remote working technology to gain access to the council's computer system.

#### 4.5 Diversity

This policy and procedure complies with the Council's commitment to equality and diversity. Care has been taken in drafting this policy and procedure to ensure that the Council do not unjustifiably discriminate against any minority group. The policy and procedure will be required to undergo a diversity impact assessment in due course by the Equalities and Diversity Project Team.

#### 4.6 Risk

The main risk associated with not approving the attached policy is that the Council may find it more difficult to retain existing employees and to attract new employees to work for the Council.

If members choose to withdraw the Information Technology infrastructure used for home and remote working, the Revenues and Benefits, Regeneration and Leisure service teams would be unable to connect the satellite offices identified in section 4.1.3 to the council's computer systems. The ICT

Manager would be required to seek an alternative solution for connectivity of these satellite offices.

#### 4.7 Crime and Disorder

There are no known implications for Crime and Disorder.

#### 4.8 Other Implications

There are no other known implications as a result of this report.

### **5. BACKGROUND, POSITION STATEMENT AND OPTION APPRAISAL**

#### **5.1. Background and Position Statement**

5.1.1 A draft Home-working Policy was considered by the Council's Corporate Management Team in July 2005. Following consultation with trade union and employee representatives, the draft policy was then submitted to Council in December 2005 where Members raised a number of issues and queries regarding home-working.

5.1.2. The recommendation from the Council Meeting held was that a home-working pilot should be conducted for a fixed period, prior to formal approval of a Home Working Policy.

5.1.3. The Home Working pilot commenced in February 2006 and involved four employees and two elected members.

5.1.4. Evaluations and review meetings were conducted throughout and upon completion of the pilot and a report was then subsequently submitted to the Council's Corporate Management Team in October 2006 for discussion concerning the outcomes from the pilot conducted.

5.1.5. The feedback from those involved in the pilot was generally that the pilot had been beneficial, particularly in respect of improved work-life balance for those employees involved. (See Appendix A for main outcomes from the pilot.) Organisational benefits were more difficult to identify in respect of the pilot undertaken, with the exception of Revenues and Benefits where the pilot had demonstrated increased productivity in terms of the number of claims processed. It must be noted however, that there were no detrimental effects on service provision reported as a result of the pilot.

#### **Options Appraisal**

5.1.6. The Council's Corporate Management Team considered the evidence available from the pilot in relation to the success of the pilot, the benefits and the costs. Three separate options were considered as outlined below:

Option 1 - Option 1 included removing the technology for any home / remote working;

Option 2      Option 2 included extending the current provision for home working however this option involved substantial additional costs;

Option 3      Option 3 was to continue with provision for home/ remote working on the basis of the number of users within the pilot, at no additional cost to the Council.

5.1.7. Corporate Management Team considered that the most appropriate option would be to support home/ remote working on the basis of the current arrangements and licenses previously purchased (Option Three).

5.1.8. In addition the recommendation to be included in the Council's Home Working Policy was that employees would be required to apply for home working, with the requirement to set out a business case linked to the service they provide, prior to approval being given.

5.1.9. It was also considered more appropriate for the ICT Manager to consider the issues relating to elected members and ICT equipment separately from the approval of a Home Working Policy for Council employees. This will be considered by the Modernisation Working Group.

5.10. These proposals and recommendations have been considered by Elected Members of Scrutiny who were supportive of this approach.

5.1.10 The attached draft Home Working Policy has been revised with regards to the above changes and proposals. In summary the policy and procedure also covers:

- Eligibility for home working and how to apply
- The responsibilities of managers, employees and others
- Considerations for determining the suitability of home working including health and safety issues, equipment purchasing and maintenance, security and confidentiality issues, insurance requirements and a home working allowance.
- The termination of any home working arrangements

## **6 RECOMMENDATIONS**

6.1. It is recommended that members approve the attached Home Working Policy and Procedure subject to the proposals outlined within this report.

## **7. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1. Home-working: Guidance for Employers and Employees on Health and Safety', produced by the Health and Safety Executive, June 2006
- 7.2 Draft Home-working Policy
- 7.3 Evaluation Questionnaires completed by pilot participants
- 7.4 Corporate Plan 2006/09

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**15 June 2007**

**Version 1.0**

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## Appendix 1

### Benefits identified by employees

- Improved work-life balance
- Increased flexibility and ability to manage workload more effectively
- The pilot has enabled one employee to move to full-time working rather than be part-time
- Improved performance, including quicker response times
- Increased productivity, particularly in the case of the Benefits Assessor involved in the pilot.
- Ability to focus and concentrate on tasks
- Home-working makes Chester-le-Street District Council more attractive as an employer
- Increased employee morale and motivation
- Reduced demand on car parking within the Civic Centre
- Savings in terms of cost and time from reduced travel to work
- Potential cost savings in respect of business travel and office accommodation
- Improved customer service as a result of increased productivity, quicker response times and improved employee morale.

### Benefits identified by elected members

- Ability to access Officers, Council reports and the Intranet
- Immediacy of communications
- Wireless router has proved more effective than traditional broadband

### Benefits identified by colleagues

As part of the evaluation of the pilot, feedback was also sought from the managers and fellow employees of those involved in the pilot. The feedback received has been positive and supportive of home-working as a means of flexible working, however it is acknowledged that due to the size of the Authority and the fact that many teams are quite small, it may not be feasible to accommodate a number of employees working from home in the same team. Whilst it is felt that home-working can be effectively implemented, management discretion will clearly be required in determining whether to approve requests for home-working.

### Difficulties or problems encountered during pilot

There have been some minor problems in respect of ICT equipment, however the ICT team has been quick to respond and rectify any problems.

One employee involved in the pilot did have an initial problem with not having a direct telephone line, however this was resolved through the provision of a mobile phone.

Home-working is unlikely to be feasible on a full-time basis due to the need to attend meetings at the main office base on a regular basis.

One employee had to withdraw from the pilot after a number of weeks due to staffing difficulties within their service team, which meant that it was no longer practical or operationally possible to work from home.

Members have commented on limited functionality. Whilst they have been able to access and read information, it would be helpful if they were able to interact more. In addition, it was suggested that the provision of a printer and USB pen would be a benefit.

One of the members involved in the pilot has experienced some difficulties around the use of e-mail, particularly around having e-mail accounts for home and work.

### **Supervision and contact during the pilot.**

All of the employees involved in the pilot were in regular contact with their supervisors/line managers and felt that they received adequate support during the course of the pilot. The line managers of those involved in the pilot felt that good contact was maintained throughout the pilot.

In summary, all of the employees involved in the pilot and their line managers have found the home-working pilot an extremely positive and beneficial means of working and all are keen that the Council's draft home-working policy and procedure is adopted by CMT and Council.

In respect of the members, both found the pilot helpful and valuable as a way forward for Member support, however Councillor Westrip has suggested that it would be helpful to consider members separately from the home-working policy and procedure as the issues are more concerned with communication off site, i.e, between the member's base (work or home) and the Council.