



Chester-le-Street

District Council

**POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR HOME/REMOTE
WORKING**



Human Resources
Employee communication



Working together to fulfil the needs of our communities

Homeworking Policy and Procedure

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In recent years, advances in information and communications technologies have provided opportunities for increasing numbers of employees to work from home rather than the traditional office base.
- 1.2 It is the aim of this policy and procedure 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. This policy and procedure supports strategic goal 5 -“to operate modern and inclusive employment policies and strategic goal 7 – “be an employer of choice” of the Human Resources Strategy
- 1.3 This document is intended to set out clear guidelines to ensure that employees who wish to be considered for homeworking are aware of what is actually involved, the potential benefits, the criteria for determining suitability for homeworking, their responsibilities and the process for requesting homeworking.
- 1.4 This policy and procedure applies to all employees of the Council, regardless of status and whether occupying a permanent or temporary post or in full-time or part-time service.

2 HOMEWORKING – BENEFITS.

- 2.1 The Council and the individual can benefit from homeworking. Benefits may include;
 - increased flexibility and job satisfaction in that employees can manage their own workload and time
 - greater freedom for employees to arrange their working time around other commitments
 - savings on travelling time and costs
 - the ability to work without distraction possibly increasing output, for example to complete a written report or specific project
 - retention of valued and skilled employees who have domestic commitments
 - well motivated employees who feel that they work for an organisation who is prepared to be flexible and trust them
 - possible savings in accommodation costs.
- 2.2 There are a number of different ways of homeworking used by organisations. The most appropriate to the Council is ‘office-based’ homeworking whereby the employee’s main base is the office, however, the employee may work at home some of the time, e.g. for agreed hours, days or weeks.
- 2.3 Homeworking need not be a permanent working arrangement. It may be used to cover special projects, peaks in workload, emergencies etc. In addition, homeworking may operate on a part or full time basis.

3 ELIGIBILITY FOR HOMEWORKING.

- 3.1 Not all posts or individual employees may be suited to homeworking. For example, jobs that provide a direct service either to the public (e.g. Cashiers, Housing Assistants) or to internal service users (e.g. Receptionists, Cleaners, etc.) are unlikely to be suitable. Furthermore certain employees may find it difficult to work from home because of the differing demands placed upon them. Approval for homeworking will be dependent upon factors such as the nature of the job, duties and responsibilities, the employee's home environment, the employee themselves and whether they are likely to be suited to homeworking, the cost of homeworking, the number of employees already working from home and the organisation's ability to cover the post and deal with any operational difficulties.
- 3.2 All requests for homeworking will be considered on their own merits and any arrangements will need to meet the needs of the Council as well as those of the individual. A business case for home working must accompany any application, outlining the benefits both to the service team and the customers as well as the individual employee. This must also be supported by the employees manager. Employees engaged in the initial temporary home working pilot will be required to re-apply for home working in line with the requirements as set out within this policy.
- 3.3 As a guide, those employees who are likely to be more suited to homeworking should be able to:-
- work without close supervision
 - be self reliant and able to cope with isolation
 - organise working time and be able to meet/work to deadlines
 - demonstrate self motivation and discipline
 - provide suitable accommodation to work from home
 - ensure the confidentiality and/or security of their work
 - maintain regular communication with their manager
 - cope with the additional pressures of balancing work and any domestic responsibilities.
- 3.4 Homeworking is not intended to be used as a substitute for normal childcare or other caring arrangements. Employees working from home must ensure that they have suitable alternative care arrangements in place to cover their contracted hours of work. During contracted hours of work, children must be supervised by another appropriate adult.
- 3.5 In emergencies or certain domestic crisis, homeworking may be appropriate instead of an employee needing to use flexi leave, annual or special leave. Such arrangements will only generally be considered in exceptional circumstances and will be for short, infrequent periods. Employees must gain the consent of their manager to such arrangements.

4. MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES.

4.1 Homeworking places differing requirements in terms of managing employees. In order for homeworking to work effectively, managers will need to place a greater emphasis on objectives, targets, outputs, monitoring and review. Managers need to be able to trust employees, manage from a distance and ensure that employees are kept up to date and motivated whilst working from home.

4.2 It is recommended that managers jointly agree objectives and methods of working with an employee prior to commencing homeworking. The manager will need to:

- plan and schedule work
- set and agree clear objectives with suitable targets and realistic performance measures
- agree tangible and agreed work processes and procedures
- establish effective ways of monitoring performance and providing regular feedback
- carry out risk assessments and ensure that these are reviewed and monitored on a regular basis.
- carry out performance development reviews/appraisals and where necessary arrange appropriate training courses, e.g. prioritising workloads, time management.
- ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for the collection and delivery of work
- monitor and manage sickness leave and annual leave in line with the Council's policies and procedures
- hold regular reviews with the employee, not less than monthly, to ensure that the employee is kept up to date on work matters, review performance and ensure that health and safety arrangements are being complied with.
- meet any initial set up costs arising from an employee undertaking home/remote working, as well as payment of the home working allowance.

4.3 In considering requests for homeworking, managers need to give careful consideration to the impact of any working arrangements on the rest of the team/department. Prior to approving a request for homeworking, the proposed arrangements should be discussed with all parties concerned.

5. KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR HOMEWORKING.

Location

5.1 The Council will not place any restrictions on where an employee's home is located, however employees working from home will need to be flexible as they may on occasion be required to attend work when they would normally be working from home. If an employee moves home whilst homeworking, they must advise the Council as homeworking arrangements will need to be reviewed.

Work Area

- 5.2 The amount of workspace required will vary according to the needs of the job. The provision of a separate room within the home to work in is not essential. However, in agreeing to any requests for homeworking, managers must ensure that work can be carried out in a safe manner and that the employee is able to achieve separation from their home life. This will be achieved by a visit to the employee's home and a risk assessment of the arrangements for homeworking.

Equipment

- 5.3 The equipment required for homeworking is likely to vary from case to case and will need to be considered on an individual basis. The Council will provide any essential equipment deemed necessary, for example, PC, printer, modem, dedicated telephone line, etc. This equipment will remain the property of the Council, who will carry the cost of moving, installing and maintaining any equipment. The cost of providing equipment will be met from the Service Team budget.
- 5.4 Employees who are provided with equipment are responsible for the following;
- ensuring that reasonable care is taken of it
 - it is used only for official purposes
 - it is used only in accordance with any operating procedures
 - it is returned to the Council when requested
 - it is used in accordance with any existing policies (E.g. Internet and E-mail Policy, Data Protection)
 - it is made available for maintenance to be carried out by the ICT team as and when requested.
 - ensuring that no software is installed without the approval of the ICT team.
 - ensuring they comply with the Council's policies in relation to the use of ICT equipment
- 5.5 The IT section will provide normal support and assistance to the end user in relation to council provided ICT equipment. This support and advise will include the assistance on the broadband connection. The ICT service will endeavour to provide assistance and resolution to support calls over the telephone or via remote connection to the end user PC. IT support will be provided through the normal IT support service contacts. Upon cases where IT staff are unable to remotely resolve problems, it will be necessary for IT to recall ICT equipment to the ICT section for a more detailed investigation, resolution or replacement of equipment.
- 5.6 In some cases employees may have their own office equipment, employees wishing to use their own personal equipment must seek the prior agreement of their manager. The Council will not be responsible for the maintenance costs, replacement or repair in the event of any loss or damage to any personal equipment that is used. Under no circumstances should employees use their own personal IT equipment for home/teleworking purposes.
- 5.7 Employees who use their home telephone for work purposes will be re-

imbursed for the cost of any calls at the applicable rates. A detailed record of any business calls should be kept for this purpose. A claim should be submitted at the end of each month to the Exchequer section.

- 5.8 Office supplies will be provided by the Council and are available from the Reprographics Supervisor.

Health and Safety

- 5.9 Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, there are obligations on both employers and employees, including homeworkers to protect the health, safety and welfare of employees.
- 5.10 The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to carry out a full risk assessment of any activities carried out by homeworkers. The employee's immediate line manager is responsible for carrying out a full risk assessment using the form attached in Appendix A. If the line manager feels unable to carry out the risk assessment, additional support and guidance is available from the Health and Safety team. For employees using Display Screen Equipment, a separate risk assessment must also be carried out. This should be carried out by the relevant Health and Safety adviser. All completed risk assessments must be forwarded to the Health and Safety team for approval. A copy of approved risk assessments should be placed on the employees personal file. All risk assessments should be repeated on an annual basis.
- 5.11 Homeworkers will need to provide access to their home for their workstation to be checked, for installation, maintenance and PAT testing of equipment. This will be arranged by appointment with the employee. **Service Team Managers will be responsible for meeting the costs of PAT testing.** Maintenance of electrical sockets and the domestic supply are the responsibility of the homeworker.
- 5.12 Homeworkers should not as a general rule meet with clients, associates or colleagues in their home, with the exception of their manager who may need to visit from time to time. Any meetings or appointments should be arranged to take place at the employee's normal office or place of work.
- 5.13 If an employee has an accident whilst homeworking it should be reported in the normal manner.
- 5.14 On a daily basis, homeworkers should either e-mail or telephone their line manager to advise of their start and finish times. In addition, employees on the Council's flexible working hours scheme, should record details of their working time on a reconciliation sheet on a weekly basis to ensure that records are kept up to date and can be monitored regularly.
- 5.15 In certain instances, it may be necessary to establish lone working procedures to ensure that in the event of an accident/incident whilst the employee is working from home they can get appropriate assistance.

- 5.16 Employees should ensure that they take suitable breaks as required by the Working Time Regulations.

Security

- 5.17 Employees must ensure that all information and equipment are kept secure at all times. Line Managers and employees are responsible for ensuring that any confidential work that is undertaken is kept confidential, stored securely and where necessary disposed of safely. If required, secure filing equipment will be provided for homeworking. Employees working from home should only release their address or telephone number for work purposes to employees of the Council. In addition, the loss or theft of any Council equipment should be reported as soon as possible.

Insurance

- 5.18 Equipment provided by the Council for homeworking will be covered by the Council's insurance arrangements. However, any personal equipment that an employee chooses to use will need to be covered on the employee's home contents insurance policy.
- 5.19 Employees working from home will continue to be covered by the Council's Employer's and Public Liability Insurance arrangements, however in the case of Public Liability Insurance it is recommended that employees ensure that their home contents policy provides public liability cover. This is a standard clause in most home insurance policies..
- 5.20 Employer Liability Insurance provides cover should an employee suffer an injury in the course of their employment and whilst carrying out the Council's business.
- 5.21 Public Liability Insurance provides cover where a third party suffers a loss or injury as a result of the negligence of the Council, its employees or agents working on their behalf whilst carrying out their duties.
- 5.22 Employees working from home should check with their insurance company that they are covered to work from home and also inform them that they are doing so. The Council reserves the right to verify insurance documentation.
- 5.2.3. Should the property where home working is to be carried out, not be the property of the employee concerned (ie they are not the legal owner of the premises, permission must be sought from the owner for home working to take place and evidence of this must be provided to the Council.

Mortgages and Tenancy Agreements

- 5.23 Employees working from home should ensure that anyone who has a pecuniary interest in their property is informed that they are working from home (e.g. Bank, Building Society or Landlord).

Council Tax, Business Rates and Capital Gains Tax

- 5.24 In most cases, homeworking is unlikely to have any impact on the level of Council Tax payable on your property, however employees should still check

with their Local Authority.

- 5.25 Homeworkers are advised that if a room is solely designated for work purposes and they claim any tax relief or capital allowances then this arrangement may have potential tax implications, particularly in relation to Capital Gains Tax. Employees will remain personally liable for any Capital Gains Tax or business rates that may arise from claiming any tax relief from the use of a designated room for business purposes. Further advice on business rates and Capital Gains Tax is available from your local Tax Office.

Any costs incurred relating to any of the above, are the employee's individual responsibility.

Expenses

- 5.26 Employees may claim mileage or other travel expenses on business journeys from home to work sites, subject to this not exceeding the travel costs which would normally be incurred to these sites from the employee's main office base. All claims for expenses should be submitted in the normal manner and be approved by the employee's manager.

Homeworking Allowance

- 5.27 In order to cover the additional costs of working from home, such as heating, lighting, power and insurance premiums, a tax and NI free allowance may be payable up to a maximum of £104 per annum (DTI/Inland Revenue guidance). The allowance will vary depending upon the nature and frequency of the homeworking arrangements agreed.

6. APPLYING FOR HOMEWORKING.

- 6.1 Employees who wish to be considered for regular homeworking should make a request in writing to their line manager specifying the following;
- the reason for the homeworking request.
 - how the duties of the post and which duties of the post can be achieved effectively at home without direct supervision, access to colleagues, management of staff, etc.
 - if the request is for a a specific period of time, determine how long and why
 - the benefits to the Council and for the employee of agreeing to the request.
 - date of commencement.

Where an employee is unable to make a request in writing, they may make a verbal request to their line manager.

- 6.2 On receipt of an application, the manager will seek to arrange a meeting with the employee within 28 days of receiving a request to discuss the practicality of this.
- 6.3. Before approving a request for homeworking, the line manager should seek approval to the request from the relevant Service Team Manager.

6.4. An application and business case, should then be submitted to the Head of Organisational Development who will discuss this further with the relevant Chief Officer prior to final approval.

7. DETERMINING SUITABILITY FOR HOMEWORKING.

7.1 All applications for homeworking will be considered on their individual merits. An application form for home/remote working is attached at Appendix B, which should be completed and passed to the employees line manager for consideration. Assistance can be provided in completing this form by the Human Resources Team or If required, the form can be provided in various media/formats e.g. large print, Braille, audio tape, etc.

7.2 In determining suitability for homeworking, managers should consider the following;

- the employee's past performance to establish whether there are any indications whether or not the employee possesses the necessary skills and qualities to undertake homeworking.
- whether the nature of work, duties and responsibilities carried out by the employee are suited to homeworking.
- the management arrangements for homeworking.
- the impact of homeworking on the rest of the team/department.
- the suitability of the employee's home arrangements to enable them to work from home.
- the cost of homeworking arrangements.

7.3 The final stage for approval of home working will require the application to be submitted to the Head of Organisational Development, along with a business case supported by the Service Team Manager.

7.4 Once homeworking has been deemed appropriate, the manager must ensure that a full risk assessment of the employee's home is undertaken.

7.5. The employee should be notified in writing and/or verbally as to whether their request for homeworking has been accepted or refused within 28 days of the initial meeting with their manager. The outcome of any request should be supported by business reasons and approved requests should specify the exact details of the homeworking arrangements. The Human Resources Team will draft an amended contract for the employee detailing the homeworking arrangements.

7.5 All approved arrangements for homeworking will initially be subject to a trial period of 3 months to establish suitability. Upon satisfactory completion of the trial period the arrangements may be made permanent or extended for a specific period of time depending upon the employee's initial request.

7.6 In determining whether the pilot has proved successful, the following criteria will be assessed as a minimum :

- Cost benefit/efficiency savings
- Improvements in work-life balance
- Greater flexibility in service delivery

7.7 Where a request for homeworking is refused and the employee is not satisfied that their request has been given due consideration, they have the right of appeal to the relevant Chief Officer. Appeals should be made in writing wherever possible or verbally where appropriate to the Head of Organisational Development within 14 days of the employee receiving notification of the outcome of their request. Appeals will be considered and responded to within 14 days of receipt. This decision will be final.

8. TERMINATION OF HOMEWORKING AGREEMENT.

8.1 Homeworking agreements may be terminated by either the employee or employer by giving one month's notice in writing or verbally if required and should specify the reasons for the termination of the agreement .

8.2 Upon termination of the homeworking arrangement, any equipment provided by the Council should be returned with immediate effect to your manager.

8.3 Breaches of conduct will cause cessation of the arrangement immediately and could result in disciplinary proceedings.

9. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY

9.1 Chester-le-Street District Council is committed to promoting equality and valuing diversity in both service delivery and employment. Care has been taken in drafting this policy and procedure to ensure that the Council do not unjustifiably discriminate against any minority group. This policy and procedure supports the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy and has undergone a diversity impact assessment by the Council's Equality and Diversity Project Team.

9.2 Requests for home/remote working will be recorded and monitored on an annual basis to ensure all employees are afforded equality of opportunity in terms of work-life balance.

10. MONITORING & REVIEW

10.1 The policy and procedure will be monitored on an ongoing basis by the Human Resources Team, and in any event will be reviewed every 24 months or earlier if legislative changes dictate.

10.2 The criteria specified in section 7.6 will be used as a means for determining the effectiveness of home-working within the Council.

HOME WORKING – RISK ASSESSMENT.

(Appendix A)

The Council's responsibilities towards any employee carrying out work for the Council at home is exactly the same as for employees who are based at one of the Council's Offices. The following checklist should be completed to identify any issues that need further action.

Name of Employee Address Home Tel. Number	Name of Manager/Supervisor Post Title Department/Team Date of Assessment
--	---

Areas to be considered	Standard Required	Acceptable Yes/No	Action Required
General Area			
Are there any slipping or tripping hazards?	No trailing cables, damaged carpets or floor coverings. Is housekeeping of a good standard i.e. avoid storage of boxes, files, equipment, etc. within the working area where they may pose a tripping hazard.		
Telephone	A telephone must be available for the employee to use, especially in an emergency situation.		
Children	Children should not be allowed to use Council equipment and extra care must be taken to prevent access.		
Training	Employees should be trained in hazard spotting, working with display screen equipment and how to set up their workstations correctly. Is any additional training required to carry out his/her task safely?		
Lighting Is natural lighting sufficient? Is task lighting required? Is the lighting likely to cause glare problem?	The level of lighting should be adequate for the task. If necessary task lighting should be supplied. Further advice should be sought from Health and Safety. Will blinds or curtains help reduce the problem?		
COSHH Is the homeworker required to use any hazardous substances?	The homeworker must be supplied with the appropriate COSHH assessment and be trained in the correct use, storage, etc.		

Areas to be considered	Standard Required	Acceptable Yes/No	Action Required
Heating Is heating available? Is it adjustable? Can room temperature be easily maintained?	A minimum temperature of 16°C is required, but individuals will probably have their own comfort level.		
Ventilation Is adequate ventilation available?	Windows should be able to be opened if necessary, but should not cause draughts.		
Electrical Equipment Has all portable electrical equipment supplied by the Council been PAT tested and is a sticker displayed on the equipment? Are sufficient numbers of electrical outlets available? Conduct visual checks on electrical equipment i.e plugs, cables, etc.	All electrical equipment should be inspected and tested prior to being loaned to the employee. It should then be inspected on an annual basis and records of any testing kept. It is the employees responsibility for the maintenance of the domestic electricity supply, however the home should be checked for obvious hazards such as home-made extension leads, damaged sockets, etc.		
Work Area What size is the work area? Access and Egress	Sufficient space should be available to carry out work safely. As a guide, 1.1 cubic metres is the recommended minimum space per person. Is there adequate access and egress from the work area? Damaged floorboards or carpets, uneven floors, etc may cause trips.		
Fire Are smoke detectors fitted? Are escape routes accessible?	A minimum on one smoke detector should be installed on the ground floor.		
Security Is there secure storage of files, documents and equipment?	Depending upon the nature of the work, the room may need to be fitted with a lock or the employee supplied with a secure and fireproof cabinet for safe and secure storage of files, documents, etc.		
Manual Handling Has a manual handling assessment been completed on all homeworking activities?	If the homeworker is likely to be moving or lifting heavy objects, then a manual handling assessment must be completed and if necessary training provided.		

Areas to be considered	Standard Required	Acceptable Yes/No	Action Required
First Aid	<p>Employees should have access to a first aid kit in the home and if appropriate have training in basic first aid.</p> <p>Procedures should be in place for reporting accidents and dealing with any incidents, e.g. contact numbers, how to raise the alarm, etc.</p>		
Display Screen Equipment Has a DSE risk assessment been carried out?			
Workstation Is equipment supplied by the Council adequate, suitable and in sound condition? Is the equipment set up correctly?	<p><i>Laptops should ideally only be used for occasional use. Employees whose work involved significant use of computers should be provided with a suitable keyboard and monitor or personal computer.</i></p> <p>Has the employee the relevant training to use the computer?</p>		
New and Expectant Mothers	A separate risk assessment must be carried out for both new or expectant mothers.		

If any of the above criteria change i.e loss of heating, lighting, changes to working area, they should be reported to the relevant Line Manager or Supervisor, who will make a decision regarding whether arrangements for homeworking need to be temporarily removed pending suitable conditions being resumed.

Signed by Manager Date

Signed by Employee Date



Chester-le-Street District Council

APPLICATION FORM FOR HOME/REMOTE WORKING.

Note to the Employee

Please note that your request may take up to 14 weeks to consider before it can be implemented. You should therefore ensure that you submit your application to your manager well in advance of the date you wish it to take effect from. The more information you can provide regarding your request the easier it will be for your manager to consider your request.

1. Name:	_____
2. Directorate:	_____
3. Post Held:	_____
4. Grade:	_____
5. Proposed Start Date for Home/Remote Working	_____
6. Proposed End Date (trial periods only)	_____

Please describe your current working pattern (days/hours/time worked):

Describe the home/remote working arrangement you would like to work in future (days/hours/times worked) and what other working patterns you would be willing to consider;

(continue on a separate sheet if required)

I would like this working arrangement to commence from (Date) _____

Impact of the new working arrangement

I think this change in my working pattern will affect my employer and colleagues as follows:

Accommodating the new working arrangement

I think the effect on my employer and colleagues can be dealt with as follows:

Signature: Date:

Please pass completed application form to your manager.

Employer's confirmation of receipt of application for home/remote working (to be completed and returned to employee)

To:

Department:

I confirm receipt of your request for home/remote working on _____

I will be arranging a meeting to discuss your application within 28 days of receiving your application.

Signed _____

Date _____