

DISTRICT OF EASINGTON COUNCIL

HOME AND REMOTE WORKING POLICY

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The District of Easington is committed to improving its services and the way they are delivered. It continues to develop a comprehensive range of 'family friendly' employment policies which not only provide the opportunity for employees to improve their individual work/life balance, but also improve the capacity and performance of the Council's workforce in general.
- 1.2 Home and remote working can facilitate the delivery of more convenient, more accessible and more efficient customer-focussed services.

2 Policy

- 2.1 This policy document confirms that this Council supports the principle of home and remote working. However it recognises that such changes to working practices must be regulated by way of a policy and policy statement. Therefore the Council has adopted the following statement :-

'The Council will support home and remote working where such proposals aim to improve service delivery and meet the specific requirements as set out in the Home and Remote Working Policy.'

- 2.2 The Council considers that Heads of Service should adopt a pre disposition to granting requests for home or remote working so long as the provisions of this policy are complied with.
- 2.3 The purpose of this document therefore is to :-
 - Define what we mean by home/remote working
 - Provide a framework for determining if home/remote working is feasible
 - Explain the responsibilities of managers and employees
 - Explain the rights of the Council and its employees
 - Identify the benefits that can be obtained by home/remote working
 - Identify the pitfalls

3 Definitions

- 3.1 Home working - where the nature of the work permits, an employee may be allowed to work at home. A workstation will be established in the employee's home with appropriate technology, sufficient to allow him/her carry out their work more efficiently. In these circumstances the employee's home is formally designated as their place of work. The arrangement for home working may be

long or short term. Whilst the policy defines how such an arrangement must be regulated where an employee formally changes their place of work, there will also be circumstances when a short term arrangement can be justified.

- 3.2 Remote Working - where the nature of the work permits, an employee may be allowed to work peripatetically. Appropriate technology will allow the employee to do his or her work by travelling between locations returning to Council premises perhaps only at the start or finish of the day. It may also be possible for the employee to use their home as a base, if instructions can be accessed remotely. Again, such an arrangement may be long term or short term.

4 Is Home Working feasible?

- 4.1 As a public service organisation, there are currently a limited number of services delivered by the Authority where a home working arrangement would prove either practicable or beneficial. For the vast majority of the Council's employees, there is a consistent need for contact with internal services/resources and the requirement to be available to colleagues and service users. However new technology can provide new opportunities to interact and communicate more effectively from home.

- 4.2 Whilst not all jobs are suitable for home working, each job will be considered on its own merits. Jobs that involve project work or an identifiable output and those that involve batch/repetitive keyboard work may lend themselves to home working where the individual can work independently. Jobs that may not be suitable or practicable are those which provide a 'face to face' information service to the public e.g. staffing a reception, staff who require supervision, supervising others or close contact with colleagues.

- 4.3 Likewise, there are only certain individuals who are suited to home working. Those who are best suited need to be self-motivated, able to work without constant supervision, have good time management skills, flexibility, good communication skills and very importantly, the ability to cope with conflicting demands e.g. balancing home and work. Home working can be particularly valuable in enhancing the employment opportunities of people with disabilities. As well as enabling them to work from home, the use of information technology can overcome barriers within employment.

- 4.4 Examples of situations where short term home working may be appropriate could include, where an employee:-

- has caring arrangements which have broken down at short notice
- needs quiet time to write a report/complete a project
- has a sick relative at home who requires temporary care
- has difficulty getting to work because of public transport disruption e.g. disputes, road closures, severe weather conditions
- has agreed with their Head of Service and Personnel that they are fit to work but due to, injury for example, cannot travel into work
- has agreed with their Head of Service and Personnel that they are fit to work but have a contagious complaint
- has agreed with their Head of Service and Personnel that they are fit for 'light duties'.

5 Is Remote Working feasible?

5.1 There may be certain operations which, through the use of new technology, would facilitate more efficient use of time and resources by delivering them remotely. For example, where work tasks:-

- can be undertaken in a remote location to suit the needs of the user e.g. tenant's home or other accessible location
- can be processed more efficiently utilising technology on site e.g. hand-held technology to process benefit claims/enquiries
- can be prioritised to allow the employee to travel directly to a remote site to start work, without the need to unnecessarily attend the main work site.

5.2 Common to both home and remote working are special considerations around the health and safety of employees who are not being directly supervised and which can influence the feasibility of a proposal. These are dealt with in more detail in later sections of the Policy.

6. Applying for Home or Remote Working

6.1 An assessment of home or remote working arrangements can be initiated by management or a request from an employee or group of employees. There is no statutory right to home or remote working for employees or for management to seek to impose such an arrangement. Such arrangements have to be mutually agreed by the employee(s) and the relevant Head of Service.

6.2 To work effectively, it is most important that any new working arrangement meets the needs of the service as well as those of the employee. Both long and short term home and remote working arrangements require prior evaluation and authorisation by the Head of Service. Long term arrangements should be made in consultation with the Personnel Unit since they involve changes to terms and conditions of employment

6.3 Requests should be made in the first instance to the relevant Head of Service. If a request from an employee for home or remote working is declined, the reasons for the refusal should be stated to the employee, in writing as appropriate. If the employee is not happy with the decision and feels they have sufficient grounds for a home or remote working arrangement they may request their application be referred to the Director or Chief officer who will consider the request in consultation with the Head of Personnel. The final decision rests with the Director/Chief Officer.

6.4 If a request for home or remote working is approved, those employees affected will be subject to the same performance measures, processes and objectives that apply to workplace based employees.

6.5 The Head of Service must agree working hours and patterns, contact times and availability with the employee in advance, otherwise existing terms and conditions of employment will apply. The Head of Service must ensure that revised contract documentation is issued as necessary. Pay and benefits are not affected on the basis that the full-time hours for the post are worked. Part-time employees will be entitled to salary and other benefits on a pro-rata basis.

6.6 Where an agreement has been made for an employee to work at home or remotely, both the Council and the employee have the right to withdraw from the agreement if the subsequent prevailing circumstances justify a change and subject to reasonable notice.

6.7 The main stages for assessing home or remote working requests are illustrated in a simple flow chart – appendix 2.

7 Responsibilities

7.1 Head of Service Responsibilities

7.1.1 It is the responsibility of the Head of Service to consider the feasibility of home or remote working in their sphere of operation and in accordance with this policy and the advice therein. It is incumbent upon the Head of Service to periodically review his/her operations in light of new technology in order to identify opportunities for home or remote working. The Head of Information Services will assist in identifying the availability and suitability of new technological products.

7.1.2 The Head of Service should undertake a general risk assessment of the proposed arrangements and ensure that any mitigating actions required to manage any identified risks are implemented. His or her specific Health and Safety responsibilities are set out in para. 2.4 of the Council's Health and Safety Policy. The Health and Safety Manager will assist in assessing any particular health and safety risks.

7.1.3 The Head of Service will prepare a business case for both long term home or remote working requests and opportunities. The business case will take the form of a report, taking account of a general risk assessment, a health and safety risk assessment and a financial analysis of the proposal. A check list of actions that is specific to long term home working arrangements is shown in Appendix 3.

7.1.4 Where home or remote working has been agreed, it is the responsibility of the Head of service to ensure that a proper framework and written agreement is put in place to protect both the employee and the Council.

7.1.5 In situations where a Head of Service has agreed a short term home or remote working arrangement it is not necessary to prepare a business case. It is sufficient for the arrangement to be recorded and for the Head of Service to consider the health and safety risks and keep this under review. However clear reporting lines and an adequate frequency of reporting must be established.

7.2 Employees Responsibilities

7.2.1 If the employee has agreement to work temporarily from home, all that may be required is space for any necessary equipment and somewhere to work. For a more formal, medium to long-term home working arrangement greater consideration will need to be given to setting up an office area and ensuring access to the necessary equipment.

7.2.2 Employees are reminded that they have a duty to cooperate in the implementation of the Council's Health and Safety Policy. The specific

responsibilities are set out in para. 2.6 of that document. This is particularly important for home workers.

7.2.3 If an employee is required to use their home telephone for official work purposes, a detailed record of official calls should be kept for reimbursement purposes.

7.2.4 Where there is agreement on the basis of need and cost effectiveness, the Council will provide any essential equipment to the employee. The equipment will remain the property of the Council, who will bear the cost of installation and removal etc. Where such equipment is provided, the employee must:-

- take reasonable care of it
- use it only for official purposes
- use it only in accordance with any operating instructions
- return it to the Council when requested
- use it in accordance with any existing Council policies, e.g. Internet Access Policy

7.2.5 For long term arrangements where the employee is required to work all or part of the working week at home, the Council will pay for set up costs of essential equipment where appropriate.

7.2.6 It is expected that employees will agree the organisation of their work and deadlines to be achieved with their line manager. Employees must be available to managers by phone, at least, or by fax, e-mail etc. when required. Any changes to the agreed arrangements, required by either the employee or the line manager, must be communicated in advance.

7.2.7 Employees must ensure that information and equipment are kept securely. In particular, private and confidential material must be kept secure at all times. Line managers must be satisfied that all reasonable precautions are taken to maintain confidentiality of material in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Data Protection Policy.

7.2.8 In relation to home working, it is also the responsibility of the employee to ensure other household members are aware of the Data Protection Policy and abide by it. Any breaches of the Council's Policy, whilst the data is in the protection of the employee, may result in Disciplinary Action being taken against that employee, whether the security breach was specific to them or a third party

7.3 *Line Managers' Responsibilities*

7.3.1 The line manager will define the outputs expected of the employee whether the arrangement is short or long term and will monitor performance on a regular basis against the agreed outputs. He/she will inform the employee of meetings they are required to attend in the office and will also ensure that the employee is kept up-to-date with all information relevant to their work and the Unit.

- 7.3.2 It is essential that good communication is maintained at all times between the employee and his/her line manager. This is particularly important for maintaining contact with remote workers. The line manager and employee should plan and agree how they will communicate effectively with each other. These arrangements should be regularly reviewed in the light of operational experience. Line Managers' specific Health and safety responsibilities are set out in para. 2.5 of the Council's Health and Safety Policy.

7.4 *Council Responsibilities*

- 7.4.1 For formal arrangements where the employee is required to work all or part of the working week at home, the Council will pay for set up costs of essential equipment where appropriate. Heating and lighting allowances are not payable under this arrangement.
- 7.4.2 The Council will monitor the application of this Policy and will periodically review it in the light of operational experience and in consultation with the Trade Unions.
- 7.4.3 The Council will ensure its Health and Safety Policy Statement is implemented.

8. **Benefits of home and remote working**

- 8.1 There are both advantages and disadvantages to home and remote working. These are set out in detail in Appendix 1. Whilst each case must be assessed on its own merits, there are clearly many work situations that can benefit from new and innovative working arrangements. Further, Heads of Service should be proactive in assessing new ways of working and new ICT provision that might facilitate home or remote working and that in turn improve performance and work/life balance.

9. **Health and Safety**

- 9.1 The Council recognises its duty as an employer to protect the health, safety and welfare of its employees, and this applies whether they are working in a conventional workplace, remotely or at home. 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 the workplace need to be balanced against the time, trouble, cost and physical difficulty of taking measures to reduce or avoid the risk. There is detailed official guidance to enable employers to determine if they have fulfilled their duties.
- 9.2 Suitable and sufficient health and safety risk assessments of all work activities should be carried out, including those undertaken at home or at a remote location. Risk assessments will identify any hazards that are present and will then assess the extent of the risk. The Health and Safety unit will advise managers on health and safety risk assessments.
- 9.3 Whilst managers need to review all relevant health and safety risks in each individual case, the key areas are likely to be:
- (a) Personal Safety – ensuring the employee's whereabouts are known at all times when at work and following visits to clients etc and that there is a system to ensure they have returned safely.

- (b) Stress – lack of regular support and feedback from colleagues and supervisors can be a cause for concern, for example.
 - (c) Workplace hazards resulting from establishing a safe office type environment in the home – computer workstation assessments etc.
- 9.4 Likewise, the employee must take care of their own health and safety and that of anyone else who might be affected by what they do. For those working remotely, this could include Council tenants in their own homes.
- For those working from home, this could include family members, visitors etc.
- 9.5 Other issues that require consideration in relation to health and safety include:-
- home workers should not be expected to be available at all hours simply because their 'office' is in their home
 - home workers should not be allowed to work until exhausted simply because technology is available at all times
 - the principles of the working time directive need to be adhered to, including an unpaid rest break of at least 20 minutes if working consecutively for 6 hours or more.
- 9.6 For the security and safety of all employees working at or from home, they must not hold meetings in their home with customers or officers from other agencies, or divulge their home address.

10. Other general considerations

10.1 Data Protection and Security

- 10.1.1 The Data Protection Act covers personal data held on computer, but also extends to manual records. The Act requires data to be processed fairly and lawfully. That it is accurate, relevant to the activity and not excessive, and is kept secure.
- 10.1.2 In keeping data secure, the total management of security is to be considered i.e. not just technical measures but also physical considerations such as procedures, reliability of staff etc. Breaches of confidentiality and integrity can occur in several ways. For example, laptops/hand-helds may be lost or stolen, information on screens may be seen by others, careless use of passwords leading to unauthorised access to information, information in transit over the internet (unless encrypted) may be read by others etc. The Information Services Unit can advise on ways of keeping data secure.
- 10.1.3 Employees must ensure that information and equipment are kept securely. In particular, private and confidential material must be kept secure at all times. Line managers must be satisfied that all reasonable precautions are taken to maintain confidentiality of material in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Data Protection Policy.
- 10.1.4 In relation to home working, it is also the responsibility of the employee to ensure other household members are aware of the Data Protection Policy and abide by it. Any breaches of the Council's Policy, whilst the data is in the

protection of the employee, may result in Disciplinary Action being taken against that employee, whether the security breach was specific to them or a third party.

10.2 *Insurance*

- 10.2.1 Items of equipment belonging to the Council are covered by the Council's Insurance arrangements, i.e. equipment securely stored in the employee's home carries insurance cover (this needs to be specifically identified). This cover is also available whilst such equipment is in transit in the employee's car, given that reasonable care is taken and the car is not left unattended.

10.3 *Employer's Liability*

- 10.3.1 Employees working at or from home are covered by the Council's Employer's Liability Policy. Any work related accidents must be reported immediately to the relevant line manager/supervisor in accordance with the Council's guidelines.

10.4 *Public Liability*

- 10.4.1 Although covered by the Council's Employer's Liability Policy, employees working at home are advised to ensure their home contents policy has adequate public liability cover. This is a standard clause in most home insurance policies. If an employee does not have such cover then they must notify his/her manager who should seek appropriate advice from the Democratic Services Unit.
- 10.4.2 Employees shall provide to the Council written confirmation that their house buildings and/or contents insurance cover is adequate and suitable for the purposes of the home working arrangement. Where appropriate, written consent of the landlord or house owner will also be required.

10.5 *Mortgages and Tenancy Agreements*

- 10.5.1 Employees working formally at or from home on a regular basis must inform anyone with an interest in the property (e.g. Building Society, Bank, Landlord) of the new arrangement.

10.6 *Council Tax and Business Rate*

- 10.6.1 There will be no impact on the level of Council Tax or Business Rates assessed for the Employee's property.

10.7 *Mileage Allowance*

- 10.7.1 During home working, mileage or other travel costs will be payable on business journeys from home to the work site, subject to this not exceeding the travel costs which would have been incurred to these sites from the normal office base.
- 10.7.2 Similarly, remote workers will be paid mileage allowance for business journeys. If the remote worker's base is their home, then the same principle will apply.
- 10.7.3 It will be necessary for the manager and the employee to agree the detail of this in each individual case. All arrangements must comply with the Council's existing policy.

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APPENDIX 1

Benefits of home/remote working

Advantages/Benefits

- contribution to improved work-life balance
- increased flexibility in service provision
- more effective use of staff resources
- contribution to equality and diversity - recruitment and retention
- contribution to reduction in time off through sickness
- attracting and retaining employees/skills/experience
- flexible approach to working arrangements for those with temporary and/or permanent disabilities
- flexible approach to working arrangements for those with temporary and/or permanent caring commitments
- alleviation of specific accommodation problems - premises, parking etc.
- making the best use of available technology
- more committed and motivated workforce who will demonstrate increased productivity, reliability, loyalty and will embrace change

Pitfalls of Home/remote working

Disadvantages/Challenges

- need to maintain communication and feedback with home/remote workers
- need to maintain corporate and team culture
- need to ensure home/remote workers have equal opportunities for training, development and career progression
- need to ensure effective appraisal
- need to know that work is being completed/targets met
- need to provide suitable and reliable technology
- need to protect employees health and safety and general well being.