



## Working at Home Guidance

HRG 082

### Human Resources Guidance

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<b>Title:</b>	<b>Working at Home Guidance</b>
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<b>Review date:</b>	February 2011
<b>Application</b>	This policy and procedure will apply to all Council employees with the exception of those employed within schools that have delegated powers.
<b>This document replaces:</b>	Pilot Homeworking – May 2008

### The Context

1. Swindon Borough Council has supported and promoted a range of flexible working policies and practices for many years. These include job sharing, part time hours, term time working and annualised hours. The Council allows flexible working for many employees providing significant scope in balancing work and personal commitments.
2. Swindon New Ways of Working is about:
  - Enabling improved customer outcomes and the delivery of better, more cost effective and sustainable services in our communities by:
  - Transforming our working styles, use of technology and physical working environment,
  - So that we achieve best use of our assets, improve our working lives and achieve greater individual, team and organisational performance.
  - A fundamental part of the New Ways of Working programme is to deliver locality working. These 'locality centres' will bring together a range of staff from across the Council and partner agencies to deliver improved services to our local communities.

## **Introduction to Working at Home**

3. Working at Home is a type of flexible working where an employee can work at home, rather than the office or at another site. There are a range of jobs suitable for working at home e.g. reading documents, using technology remotely but not all jobs are suitable for working at home.
4. New ways of working requires a change in culture and attitude amongst managers and staff, which requires training and support. Considerable investment has been made in ICT and other supporting technology to enable effective working at home. The Council is committed to providing the necessary support as it sees more flexible working as an essential part of new ways of working and service delivery. At the same time, the Council remains committed to ensuring that appropriate management and support systems are in place for all staff and in particular that the health and safety of employees is not compromised in any revised working arrangements. Some key checks and balances therefore need to be undertaken before agreeing to someone working at home. These are essential requirements to help protect the interests of the employee and the Council.

## **Who the guidance applies to?**

5. This Guidance sets out the detailed arrangements which will be put in place in order to support more flexible forms of working for field and flexible workers. It forms part of a suite of policies and guidance in relation to new ways of working. There is no requirement for employees to work at home. The normal place of work will remain the office or site. There will be no additional payments made for office furniture and equipment, heating, lighting and insurance costs for those who choose to work at home. Travel between an employee's home and normal place of work is "ordinary commuting" and travel does not qualify for travel expenses – please refer to Travel and Subsistence Policy.
6. This guidance does not apply to staff who are permanent home workers, who work from home almost all the time but only come into the campus for occasional meetings or training. For these employees please contact Human Resources for advice as there are contractual arrangements that would apply.
7. Before working at home you must discuss this with your line manager. The first stage of the assessment needs to relate to the duties undertaken. It must be demonstrated that an individual working at home will not be detrimental to the responsiveness or quality of services.

## **Objectives and Benefits**

8. The Council allows working at home to benefit employees and the organisation, and must be operated without prejudicing service provision, the Council's statutory duties and employee safety and welfare. As service delivery must always take priority, working at home will not be appropriate to every post in the Council.

New Ways of Working will help the Council achieve the following key outcomes:

- Refurbished physical environment which will provide a more pleasant working environment
- Improved service delivery and productivity
- Greater flexibility of working hours and ownership of your working life
- Happier employees resulting in reduced absenteeism and improved recruitment and retention
- Reduced infrastructure cost
- Multi-Agency Working in localities - Locality working is designed to meet a wide range of local needs for children and families and will provide a base for other locality working teams to touchdown or to be based from. This means residents will have easier access to services which will allow us to intervene earlier and nip potential problems in the bud.
- Reduced Carbon Footprint – less business travel as a result of the ability to work from locations closer to customers and clients

**By working at home the employee can:**

- Reduce commuting time and expense
- Adopt more flexible working hours
- Improve the balance between work and home commitments
- Work in an environment of choice while still meeting the needs of the service
- Work more effectively on tasks requiring high degree of concentration

**Issues to consider when working at home:**

- you can feel isolated
- you may miss the social side of work
- you may find that you are working longer hours to complete a task
- Neighbours, family and friends may be a distraction if they do not recognise the work commitment and the change in work-life balance may erode the clear distinction between home and work. Working at home is not a substitute for caring responsibilities.

**The Proposed Working at Home Environment**

9. The employee must carry out an assessment of their home environment before working at home – please refer to Appendix 1. This includes a Health and Safety assessment and can be undertaken using a checklist approach and may be possible to do on line. In addition, the employee has the right to invite an accredited trade union safety representative to carry out an inspection of their home.

The employee must discuss the completed assessment with their manager. The manager must address any risks that have been identified before the employee works at home.

10. The employee's home must be able to provide a suitable work environment. There may also be issues regarding the location of the employee's home which affect the viability of working at home e.g. whether broadband is available.
11. If the employee moves home, it will be necessary for the manager and employee to determine whether the working at home arrangement can continue from the new location. The employee would be required to complete an assessment of their new home.

### **Security**

12. The working at home assessment must consider security measures for the purposes of the protection of equipment, electronic data and paper-based documents held and used in the home environment.

### **Health and Safety Issues**

13. The Health and Safety at Work Act and subsequent regulations cover employees working at home as well as workplace-based employees, and include:

- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992
- Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1998
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health 2002
- Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995

Regardless of the location, if an employee is working for the Council, they are covered by the health and safety legislation. A manager must be satisfied that any risk in the home environment has been adequately assessed and that equipment provided for work is safe to use. The employee working from home will also have a duty of care to be responsible for their own safety.

14. It must also be noted that Health and Safety have the right to visit employees working at home as well as carry out inspections in workplaces e.g. in relation to accidents at home, follow up action based on assessments etc

### **Equipment and Supplies**

15. Employees who require use of a computer and access to Council systems in order to perform their duties will, depending on individual circumstances and the nature of their working at home arrangement, be provided with the necessary equipment.
16. The Council will not provide broadband to allow an employee to work at home. This will be the responsibility of the employee.

17. All equipment provided by Swindon Borough Council will be PAT-tested and annually thereafter. The Council will not take responsibility for any other electrical equipment, sockets or the domestic supply in the employee's home.
18. Use of Council computers for personal purposes must be in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct and ICT & Information Security Policy and employees working at home must be made familiar with these and other relevant documents.
19. Where employees are provided with stationery equipment and supplies they should order via the normal arrangements. They will be responsible for the collection of such supplies, taking into account the considerations of safe manual handling.
20. Employees must notify any faults with equipment to their manager or the IT helpdesk on ext 4900 or 0870 0103242 (for external callers) as soon as possible who will make appropriate arrangements for repair or replacement. Employees will be required to return any equipment they have at home to the civic campus for repair.

### **Insurance and Taxation**

21. Employees must ensure that equipment is secure and safe and that equipment in employees' cars is locked in the boot and not left unattended. Where items are left unattended in a car (or anywhere else), there is no insurance cover in place.
22. All items are insured whilst on Council premises. In the event of any claim arising, an excess of £500 is applicable and this is paid for by the Department involved.
23. It is the responsibility of the employee to notify their own insurance company (or their landlord's) of their plans to work at home in order to avoid the possibility of invalidating their home insurance policy. Appendix 2 provides an example of a standard letter to insurance providers. Appendix 3 contains a similar letter intended for mortgage providers/landlords.
24. It is extremely unlikely that there will be any change to an employee's Council Tax or any liability for business rates. Business rates could only be levied where an employee has an area of their home dedicated exclusively to their work. Where the business use of a part of the home is subsidiary to the normal domestic usage the rates should not be levied. Any queries should be addressed to the local rating authority.
25. In the rare event of an employee deciding to use a room wholly for work purposes, there may be tax implications. Further information can be found on the Inland Revenue website at <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/>

## **Trial Period/Regular Reviews**

26. It is important that employees working at home have regular reviews with their managers in order to ensure that the working at home arrangements operate satisfactorily for both employee and manager. New employees should have a period of time based in the office before working at home commences.

## **Individual Meetings**

27. Managers must ensure that employees working at home have the opportunity for one-to-one meetings with them as often as other team members, and at least monthly. In this respect it may be advantageous to pre-book meetings. Meetings must not be held in the employee's home. Regular face-to-face management supervision must take place at least monthly.

## **Management Issues**

28. A list of responsibilities relating to employees working at home is provided in Appendix 4.

## **Management Monitoring Procedures**

29. Prior to the commencement of working at home, the employee and manager need to agree the following key areas:

- Clear work objectives and measurable work outputs
- Monitoring of performance
- Security and confidentiality issues
- Health and safety issues arising from the assessment
- Communication procedures

## **Setting Targets**

30. The manager and the employee need to establish mutually agreed targets so that the employee is clear as to what is expected when working at home. The manager can use those targets to monitor how the employee is progressing in terms of quality and quantity of work and if they need any assistance, training or support.

## **Sickness**

31. Sickness must be reported in accordance with the normal Sickness Reporting Procedure. Guidance and forms are available on the intranet on <http://sbcint/sicknessabsencemanagement>

## **Accidents**

32. Accidents must be reported in accordance with the Council's Accident Reporting Procedure. Forms and guidance are available on the intranet on [http://sbcint/safety/health\\_safety-topics/health\\_safety-accident\\_incident\\_management.htm](http://sbcint/safety/health_safety-topics/health_safety-accident_incident_management.htm)

## **Hours Worked**

33. Colleagues and managers need to know when an employee working at home is available to contact. Times when the employee cannot normally be contacted must also be made clear.
34. Normal procedures for agreeing working times and patterns should be followed for employees working at home as for other employees. Employees will be required to complete flexi-sheets where appropriate. Any extra hours worked outside the normal/agreed hours of work must be agreed in advance with the manager, and working hours must comply with the Working Time Regulations.

## **Learning and Development**

35. Employees who choose to work at home will have equal access to learning and development as office-based colleagues. They will also be required to take part in the Council's intouch appraisal process.

## **Communication Procedures**

36. The employee and manager also need to agree communications procedures prior to commencement of working at home, including the following where applicable:
- An appropriate system of regular communication
  - How supervision will take place and regular reviews
  - Use of technology for keeping in touch e.g. email and telephone
  - Management of personal and wellbeing needs, learning and personal development opportunities

## **Regular Contact**

37. The manager must define how often employees working at home will attend their office and contact the office by telephone or e-mail. It is generally considered good practice to spend some time in the office on a regular basis to maintain contact with the team, colleagues and Council.
38. Employees' private home telephone numbers and home addresses must not be divulged. Although dedicated work telephone numbers may be issued.

- 39. Employees working at home should use the electronic outlook calendar so that colleagues and managers have access to their calendar at all times. They must also use a telephone message taking facility and apply “out-of-office” messages to their email when not working.
- 40. It is important to establish a system to ensure that their manager or colleagues can ascertain that they have returned safely back home from site.
- 41. Managers must ensure that employees working at home are kept up to date with Council developments e.g. core brief.
- 42. It is also considered good practice to ensure that trades unions have the same degree of access to employees working at home as to office-based employees.

### **Team Meetings**

- 43. Employees working at home must attend all team meetings at times that take into account their working hours. At all times managers must ensure that working at home arrangements do not adversely affect other team members who continue with office-based working arrangements.

### **Termination of Working at Home**

- 44. There may be cases where the continuation of working at homes becomes inappropriate. The Council may in certain circumstances, for either personal or operational reasons, wish to return employees to an office-based environment. Managers must discuss with employees the reason(s) behind any decision to stop working at home.

### **Further Advice and Assistance**

- 45. If further advice and assistance is required this can be obtained as appropriate from the appropriate directorate of the Council e.g. IT&S Services, Facilities Management etc
- 46. In terms of HR issues please contact the HR First Response on ext 4343 or 0800 032 5642.