Home Working Scheme Policy

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1.   Policy Statement

1.1.   The Home Working scheme is in place to assist in achieving a work-life balance as part of the City and County of Swansea's Flexible Working Policy.

1.2. As with other forms of flexible working there is no automatic right to Home Working.

1.3. The benefits of Home Working can include: -

- employee retention,
- increased productivity and
- reduced costs of accommodation and other overheads.

1.4. Not all work is suited to this sort of scheme so availability will be based on the:

- suitability of the employment and person to Home Working
- demonstrable benefits and measurable outcomes for the service
- the post involved,
- the needs of the service, and
- the proposed work place.

1.5. The needs of the service will always be the paramount consideration.

1.6. The success of the scheme will depend on trust, reasonableness and co-operation between managers and employees. Home Working is to be treated in exactly the same way as if the employee was working in the office.

1.7. Home workers will be treated no less favourably than any other member of staff, with regard to Council policies and procedures or terms and conditions.

1.8. When an employee begins Home Working they must give a commitment to continue the arrangement for at least one year (subject to a trial period). The employee will be notified of any initial set up costs. An employee who terminates the agreement early may be required to repay, pro-rata, the initial set up costs, if any, to the Council. Where the Council ends the arrangement early then no cost will be incurred by the employee.

2. Scope

2.1. This policy applies to all current and prospective employees other than those in Educational Establishments with delegated powers.

3. What is Home Working?

3.1. The HSE (Health and Safety Executive) defines "Home Workers" as those people employed to work at home for an employer.

3.2.   To be defined as a Home Worker within the HSE a member of staff must be entered into a formal agreement to work predominantly from home. A member of staff is not a Home Worker if they work at home temporarily, e.g. taking a portable computer home with them.

Home Working is voluntary and a member of staff cannot be made to work from home.

3.3.   Home Working is therefore the name given to the practice whereby employees formally undertake work from home or another suitable location, whether it is on an occasional or longer term basis. Employees may use a computer and telephone line to carry out part, or all, of their job.

3.4.   Any approved scheme will be subject to a trial period of three months which may in some circumstances be extended.

4.   Occasional "ad hoc" Home Working arrangements

4.1.   The Council recognises that there may be occasions where it may be appropriate or necessary for employees to carry out certain types of work from their own home on an occasional or ad hoc basis. Computer work will be a frequent example of this.

4.2.   Permission must be granted by the line manager after the employee confirms:

- their working conditions are safe
- the data they are working on is safe and secure
- any work provided equipment is PAT tested
- bringing new electrical equipment into their home is not going to present a risk to anyone else in their home.

4.3.   This confirmation should be recorded by the manager and signed by the employee.

4.4.   Employees working from home should take personal responsibility for their own health and safety. If an employee feels that working at home is/may be affecting their health e.g. headaches, backache, then they must inform their manager who will then withdraw permission.

4.5.   It is the employee's responsibility to work safely and report any risks to their manager, including reporting any defects that arise in the equipment provided.

4.6.   If this pattern becomes more regular or is likely to continue on a more formal basis then the provisions set out in the remainder of this policy must be adhered to.

5.   Conditions for Home Working

5.1.   Home Working may be suitable where:

- Budget provision is available / can be made available to fund any initial investment required.
- The work content of the post is analysed as being suitable for Home Working
- The employee and their circumstances are considered to be suitable for Home Working
- The premises to be used for Home Working are deemed suitable for the work to be done following a health and safety risk assessment inspection
- Where the employee requires sustained access to the Council's ICT applications (other than occasional access to email, for example), the employee has access to an adequate Broadband connection.

5.2. Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers are required to do a risk assessment of the work activities carried out by Home Workers. Completing a risk assessment involves identifying the hazards relating to the Home Worker's work activities and deciding whether enough steps have been taken to prevent harm to them or to anyone else who may be affected by their work. A risk is the chance, great or small, that someone will be harmed by a hazard. A hazard is anything that may cause harm.

5.3. Home workers themselves can aid this process by identifying potential hazards.

5.4. Home Working may be a reasonable adjustment offered to disabled employees subject to the circumstances of the individual and the requirements of the job.

6. Terms and Conditions of the Home Worker

6.1. Normal terms and conditions will apply to all Home Workers unless otherwise specified below.

6.2. All direct costs of the scheme, where justified, will be met by the Council. The Council's existing Liability Insurance Policies provide adequate cover for public and employer liability.

6.3. The Home Worker's place of work will be dual-centred (e.g. the Guildhall/Civic Centre and the individual's home). Travel expenses will not be paid between the two.

6.4. Normally no premium payments will be made for work performed outside standard working hours or normal office hours.

6.5. Any overtime involving premium payments must be agreed beforehand.

6.6. Employees should be aware that if a room in a house is used solely for business or if a Home Worker claims for business expenses relating to domestic premises there may be a liability for capital gains tax.

6.7. Home Workers will also need to check their mortgage agreements or house deeds for restrictive covenants. If they are renting they should seek their landlord's permission.

6.8. The Council strongly recommends employees seek professional advice.

6.9. The Home Worker will ensure that the requirements of the Council's Data Protection Policy are met and that the Information Management and Security Guidelines are observed. At the place of residence or in transit, the protection of Council information will be the responsibility of the Home Worker.

7. Health and Safety

7.1. Managers are legally responsible for ensuring, as far is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and well being of any Home Worker and others who may be affected by their work (e.g. children in the home).

7.2. If a dedicated place of work is needed at the home (e.g. spare bedroom, corner of the lounge) in order to carry out professional responsibilities, this area must be treated as a place of work during working hours, and a subject of a formal risk assessment.

7.3. Where resources are available a competent DSE assessor can visit the Home Worker's residence to carry out an initial DSE assessment. Following the initial assessment, a self-assessment approach can be adopted for subsequent DSE assessments. The self assessment questionnaire can be completed by the Home Worker and discussed with Line Management. Only if problems are identified at this stage do DSE assessors visit the Home Worker's residence

7.4. Assessing the risks in each Home Worker's house can present problems for management due to insufficient time and resources to complete such a task. For Business Services working with computers it is reasonable to ask a competent Home Worker to carry out a DSE self assessment and discuss the results with their Manager. Only if problems are identified at this stage do DSE assessors visit the Home Worker's residence

7.5. A clear demarcation between the health and safety responsibilities of the employer and the Home Worker should be understood at the outset. The employer is responsible for the maintenance of any electrical equipment supplied but not the electrical system of the Home Worker's residence.

7.6. The following should be carried out as regularly for Home Workers as for office based staff.

- Risk Assessments
- DSE Assessments
- Portable electrical appliance Inspection and Testing

7.7. Consideration of the health and safety aspects of Home Working has been confined to thinking about hard issues, such as electrical safety, fire safety, ventilation, manual handling, lighting, ventilation, workstation set-up and poor posture, display screen equipment, and whether there are any lone working implications. These issues can usually be resolved through a home site inspection, risk assessment by a Manager, DSE Work Station self assessment by the employee. Further advice and guidance can be obtained from the Corporate Health and Safety team as necessary.

Other considerations in the risk assessment process can include pets, vulnerable people and children.

Home Workers must notify their Manager if they or a member of their household becomes pregnant. A pregnancy risk assessment should be completed by the employee and given to and assessed by the Line Manager, which considers the pregnancy period. The process should be repeated when the child is born, and again at quarterly inspections to take account of the child's development.
Where relevant, these provisions will equally apply in the case of an adoption.

Whilst they are working, it would also be expected that the Home Worker give details of the following:

- childcare arrangements (for children under the age of 16)
- vulnerable adults also residing at the property.

7.8. Particular consideration should be given to a Home Worker's health and wellbeing. Stress and isolation are acknowledged and the risk assessment should identify effective measures to reduce the effect of these.

7.9. Health and safety information must be given to the Home Worker through a training session on DSE usage, including advice on resting eyes, lighting levels and direction, and VDU positioning. The Home Worker should also be shown how to use the equipment in the first aid box (if provided).

7.10. The training for Home Workers should address the importance of posture and taking breaks away from the screen. It should also include details of exercises to aid comfort, the effect of glare and where lighting should be directed.

7.11. Any incident affecting Home Workers needs to be communicated to and recorded by the employer. This includes accidents and any 'near miss' occurrences. Home workers must be instructed to follow the corporate accident reporting procedures.

8.   Manager responsibilities

8.1.   Where an employee is a Home Worker, Managers must

- Ensure the specific hours and measurable outcomes are agreed before the arrangement starts. This is in order to ensure that employees complete the task in hand and do not exceed the Working Time Regulations.
- Ensure any necessary training is undertaken.
- Maintain regular communication with employees, establishing a regular pattern of telephone / e-mail communication to keep in touch.
- Always acknowledge the receipt of any communication from a Home Worker and remember to give feedback on work and praise where due.
- Measure and monitor the work output of the employee.
- Involve the Home Workers in any consultation / discussion about work procedures that goes on in the office.
- Ensure that there is an "open line" of communication to everyone in the team.
- Actively promote a sense of belonging to the team and to the section.
- Provide a regular opportunity for communication which is not solely work-related e.g. participation in social gatherings or outings or telephone conversations which have an element of social chat.
- Ensure that all the usual procedures for appraisal and development are adhered to. One to one sessions must be carried out with the Home Workers and they must feel that they have as much opportunity for development within the organisation as other staff.
- Ensure Home Working employees are afforded the same opportunities for career development as other employees.

9.   Employees responsibilities

9.1.   Employees must:

- Treat Home Working as though they are in the office
- remain contactable at all times during normal working hours
- be able to attend the normal workplace at short notice
- not let their personal circumstances / home environment interrupt work
- attend the workplace for staff briefings, training etc.

9.2.   In order to be considered suitable for Home Working, employees must demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Self motivation
- Self discipline

- Ability to work without close supervision
- Time-management skills
- Flexibility, resilience and self-reliance
- Communication skills – in particular when using email or phone
- Ability to manage the challenge of isolation
- Ability to research and solve problems or work related issues independently.

10.   Application for Home Working

10.1.   While it can seem a very attractive option it is important to consider the implications of this type of working very carefully before making an application.

10.2.   Before making an application, employees must ensure that they fully understand the scheme and have read the health and safety guidelines and Home Working agreement.

10.3.   Applications need to be made in line with the principles stated in the Flexible Working Policy.   However, as further information and consideration needs to be submitted to a Home Working application than is required for other forms of application, employees are required to submit the form attached to this policy.

10.4.   Applications should be made to the employee's Line Manager. Final approval needs to be sought from the relevant Head of Service in consultation with Human Resources if appropriate.

11.   Considering a request for Home / Teleworking

11.1.   The Line Manager should assess the following:

- The suitability of the post for Home Working
- The suitability of the individual employee
- The suitability of the proposed workplace.

The following factors should be taken into account when considering a request for Home Working:

- Will all the necessary ICT systems be accessible from home?
- Is direct contact with clients / customers a requirement of the post?
- Is direct contact with other employees a requirement of the post?
- Does the post include the supervision of other employees?
- Do adequate monitoring arrangements exist?
- What is the impact on other employees?
- Mentoring
- The impact on the service delivery to clients and overall costs/ benefits

- Overall assessment of suitability of the post
- How will the work be delivered to the home?

The suitability of the individual employee:

- Quality of work and training requirements
- Output of work
- Disciplinary Issues
- Reliability
- General Suitability
- Ability to make choices and take control
- Ability to work alone
- Ability to cope with new ways of working

The suitability of the proposed workplace:

- Is the proposed workplace suitable for Home Working?
- Does the proposed workplace meet Health and Safety requirements?

11.2.   Once the full assessment has been completed the Manager will decide whether to recommend the employee for Home Working to the Head of Service and will give full reasons for this decision.

11.3.   The forms relating to assessment of suitability should be completed by the Manager and full records kept of the reasons for any decisions.

11.4.   The selection of a Home Worker is an important management function and should not be treated lightly.

12.   Application refused

12.1.   If an employee wishes to appeal the outcome of their request they have the right to appeal. Any appeal must be made in writing within 14 days of being notified of the decision. The appeal must state the grounds on which the employee wishes to appeal and should be sent to Human Resources.

12.2.   The employee's appeal will be considered by the Head of Service and a decision will be conveyed to the employee by Human Resources within 14 days of the appeal being received. If the employee is a Third Tier Manager, the appeal will be heard by the relevant Director or independent Head of Service.

12.3.   If the appeal is successful, the employee and the Manager will need to consider what arrangements need to be in place for when the working pattern is changed.

13. Application agreed

13.1. If the application for Home Working is accepted, the employee should be informed of the outcome in writing by Human Resources detailing the next stages of the process.

14. Setting up of the Home Worker

14.1. The setting up of Home Workers can be a long process; this information should provide a step by step guide to the process.

14.2. Any necessary changes required to the accommodation identified during the initial risk assessment, for example installing a smoke alarm, should be agreed with the employee before set up commences.

14.3. Managers must:

- Check that the issues have been resolved or that action has been agreed that will resolve these before Home Working commences.
- Identify and order any ICT equipment, telephone handsets and communication links that are required. This should be carried out in conjunction with the ICT section and the orders placed in the normal way.
- Identify and order furniture and any other equipment. This is may include a desk, chair, lamp if needed, fire extinguisher and first aid kit. Consideration should be given in the first instance to utilising the employee's existing furniture. Other equipment may also be required depending on the nature of the work including reference books where appropriate.
- Set up a system for managing the Home Worker's time as the flexi clocking system will not be available while they are at home. For Home Workers who are still spending a substantial amount of time in the office, adjustments to the flexi system may be appropriate. For full time Home Workers an excel flexi trust sheet will be more appropriate.
- Agree monitoring arrangements and targets with the employee.
- Ensure that the employee has been told that they should inform utility providers, insurance companies and mortgage providers of their intention to work at home. It is unlikely that it will have any impact upon costs provided the full information is disclosed and it is made clear that no customers will be visiting the home.

14.4. There may be some delay while the equipment is supplied and the broadband link is arranged.

15. When ready to commence Home Working

15.1. Before Home Working commences, Managers should arrange a meeting with the employee. During this meeting, Managers should:

- Discuss the Home Working Agreement in detail with the employee to ensure that they understand it. The agreement should then be signed.
- Arrange hours of work - although the scheme is intended to allow flexibility in working hours, a normal working pattern will usually need to be agreed but is also subject to ICT availability. For example, a person may wish to work early mornings and late afternoons in order to fit in with caring responsibilities. If this is agreed it would form the normal working pattern and any variation in this should be agreed with the Manager in advance.
- Agree contact arrangements. It is considered good practice for the employee to email their Manager when they start and finish work and for the Manager to respond.
- Discuss any requirements for attendance at the office for team meetings and training or to cover peaks in workload.
- Advise the employee of any procedures that are different for Home Workers.
- Advise the Home Worker about Health and Safety guidance on the intranet site.
- Carry out the Full Health and Safety Risk Assessment. A DSE Assessment should also be carried out, where appropriate.
- Make a diary note to carry out the necessary review before the end of the trial period.

16. Monitoring system

16.1. Employees should:

- Record calls coming in and review and assess work done.
- Work should be documented and sent to the Line Manager.

16.2. The situation will be reviewed (on an individual basis) when:

- New applications are received by the Head of Service.
- An existing Home Worker moves house.
- An existing Home Worker is promoted/ transferred.
- If none of the above applies, then the review will be on an annual basis.

16.3. The way that performance is monitored will be different for Home Working employees. There will be a change of focus towards monitoring of outputs, i.e. the quantity and quality of work.

16.4. There will be less focus on controlling methods of work and employee's time, however the employee will still be required to work for a set number of hours and to complete flexi trust sheets.

16.5. Changing to managing outputs may require some consideration and alteration in working practice. This should be considered and discussed with the employee before Home Working is agreed.

16.6.   Managers will need to set clear, realistic and fair performance targets which the employee fully understands. The Manager should then monitor compliance with these targets.

16.7.   For some types of work monitoring information may be available in the form of system reports, however for other posts individual tasks may need to be set and timescales monitored. Alternatively, some form of task / time recording procedure may be necessary.

16.8.   As when monitoring the performance of any member of staff, a reasonable approach should be taken and the reasons for any variation in productivity should be taken into account.

17.   Applying for another post

17.1.   If a Home Worker is promoted/redeployed/seconded to another post that is deemed to be suitable for the same Home Working arrangement, then the conditions identified in section 5 should be reassessed.

17.2.   It is the responsibility of the Home Worker to ascertain the suitability of the new post for Home Working before applying for the post.

18.   New employees

18.1.   New employees will normally be required to work in the office for an initial training and assessment period before commencing Home Working. It will be unusual for a Home Working request to be considered during a probation period and will only be granted in exceptional circumstances.

19.   Training

19.1.   Training is likely to be a crucial element of successful Home Working. The method of training used should be chosen to reflect the needs of the individual. Training might include computer packages, videos, distance learning. In addition to job specific training, general training in time management, priority setting, office systems etc. may be useful.

20.   Sickness absence

20.1.   Sickness absence should be reported in the normal way with paid sick leave only applying to the normal working week. Only whole or half days should be recorded as sickness absence.

21.   Policy monitoring

21.1.   The Council will monitor the application of this policy and has discretion to review it at any time through the appropriate consultation mechanisms.

21.2. Responsibility for the implementation, monitoring and development of this policy lies with the Head of Human Resources. Day to day operation of the policy is the responsibility of nominated officers who will ensure that this policy is adhered to.

Version Number	Details of Change	Date
1.0	Introduction of Single Status	1st April 2014

City and County of Swansea
Dinas a Sir Abertawe