HOMEWORKING

GUIDANCE FOR TEMPORARY WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

1. Purpose

1.1   This guidance is to support employees working from home and those managing staff remotely during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

1.2   The introduction to homeworking came very suddenly as a result of lockdown and perhaps many did not expect to be working from home for such a prolonged period. In line with current Stay at Home regulations, many employees will have to continue working from home for all or part of their working week for some time to come. As well as protecting those working from home, homeworking arrangements will also support arrangements for physical distancing in council workplaces and reduce the risk of infection for those required to attend the workplace.

1.3   While these arrangements may be a challenge for many, the council appreciates the flexibility and resilience of staff under difficult circumstances and is committed to providing support to help you continue to work from home successfully and to adjust to any future new normal ways of working.

2. Getting the Right Balance – Approach to Flexible Working

2.1   In this current period of lockdown, it is recognised that many of you again are managing childcare or other caring responsibilities while you also work from home.

2.2   The amended flexible working arrangements, for all employees working fully from home or those dividing work between home and the workplace (blended working), will assist you in achieving the right balance and managing both your caring responsibilities and your duties as an employee of the council. You should discuss with your line manager any amendments that you may need to your work arrangements. This may include a change to your working pattern, hours or alternative duties.

2.3   A key aspect of the revised approach to flexible working for homeworkers and blended working is that work should be carried out at a time that meets the needs of the service and as agreed with your line manager.

2.4   You should aim to complete but not exceed your working hours each week, with the option of flexing your daily working hours by agreement with your line manager. The fixed core times and bandwidths of the existing Flexible Working Hours Scheme will not apply to you, but normally you will be expected to complete a minimum of 4 hours per day at a time agreed with your line manager.

2.5   You may want to start or finish earlier/later one day or take an extended lunch break. Flexibility in the working day would also allow for additional breaks for example to do the school run or attend appointments. Existing local communication/approval arrangements would apply, and you would work the hours back at another time, normally within the same week.

2.6   Where, due to work demands, you work more than your normal daily hours, you should arrange with your line manager to have the time back, normally within the same week. Where it is not possible to give you the time back within the same week, you should

agree with your line manager arrangements to take the time off as soon as possible, avoiding a build-up of time over a number of weeks.

2.7   If working more than your weekly contracted hours becomes a regular feature, you should discuss with your line manager what adjustments need to be made to manage your workload going forward. You and your manager should consider whether your working hours appropriately reflect service need and/or peaks in customer demand, and your line manager should consider if there is a need to reallocate workload.

2.8   You will not be required to formally clock in and out but should ensure that your working arrangements are agreed with your line manager. You should keep your diary and outlook 'out of office' function up to date with your work availability. Sharing your diary with colleagues will help your team to know your availability.

2.9   While working from home, it is more important than ever to differentiate between work time and personal time by:

- sticking to a routine, where possible, when it comes to the time you start and end work;
- if space allows, setting aside a specific, separate area in your home where you can work;
- switching your computer off at the end of your working day and tidying all the papers away;

2.10   You should ensure that any work from home is carried out in line with the working time regulations which require:

- a rest break of at least 20 minutes (this could be your unpaid lunch break) during each working day that lasts more than 6 hours. Your unpaid lunch break must therefore be a minimum of 20 minutes but could be longer in accordance with paragraph 2.5 above and ensuring your daily/weekly contracted hours are completed.
- not less than 11 hours between stopping work one day and starting the next;
- at least one complete day each week when no work is done.

3.   Health and Safety

3.1   The council is responsible for the health and safety of all employees, including those temporarily working from home. The measures the council is taking to ensure work from home is conducted safely include:

Risk Assessment

3.2   You should follow the [Homeworking Checklist](#) to help you to assess your homeworking environment. You should discuss any issues you identify with your line manager at the earliest opportunity. Regular discussion between you and your line manager is important to address any concerns you have about your health and safety while working from home and what measures need to be taken or adjusted to support you. Where appropriate, your line manager will discuss any concerns with the service Health and Safety Adviser.

Work Station Assessment

3.3   You will be familiar with conducting regular Display Screen Equipment (DSE) work station assessments in the workplace. It is important, as far as possible, to carry out a similar work station assessment while working from home. You should conduct a DSE work station assessment when instructed to do so using the DSE work station assessment tool provided. Key points to bear in mind are:

- sit approximately an arm's length away from your screen;
- make sure the top of your screen is roughly at eye level;
- sit with your feet flat on the ground or on a foot rest;
- make sure there is some space between the back of your knee and the chair you are sitting on;
- sit back in the chair, making sure your back is supported.

When using a screen:

- sit with your screen face on, central and not in direct glare;
- don't work for too long in front of a screen – make sure you take breaks away from your screen for at least 5 minutes every hour;
- if you've got work that doesn't involve using your screen, use that to break up the time you are on your screen;
- make sure that you change position every 15 minutes or so to avoid bad posture, which can lead to aches and strains;
- get up and move around or do some stretching exercises;
- if your eyes are getting dry, make sure you are blinking regularly. If that doesn't help, consider using eye drops.

Wellbeing

3.4   It is important that while working from home, you take care of your mind as well as your body. You may feel bored, frustrated or lonely. You may also be feeling low, worried, anxious or concerned about your own health or the health of those close to you.

3.5   It is important to remember that it is normal to feel this way and that everyone reacts differently. Please remember that the current situation is temporary and, for most people, these difficult feelings will pass.

3.6   Further guidance on caring for your wellbeing is available on [Mytoolkit](#)

3.7   Further support is also available through the [Employee Assistance Programme](#)

3.8   A safe and welcoming environment, where everyone feels respected and valued is of upmost importance to the council. However, working from home and/or use of video conferencing can make some individuals feel vulnerable. If you feel this way, please speak to your line manager, other senior officer or Human Resources.

Employee Responsibilities

3.9   It is important that you take care of your own health and safety too by:

- keeping in regular contact with your line manager to tell them about any health and safety risks or any homeworking arrangements that need to change;

- assessing your workstation by following the [Display Screen Equipment User Procedures and Guidance](#)
- taking regular breaks away from the computer;
- taking annual leave ensuring there is time when you are not available for work;
- keeping in touch with colleagues to avoid feelings of isolation;
- telling your line manager if you are feeling stressed or anxious;
- doing something to stay mentally and physically active when not working;
- reporting any work-related accidents that occur within your home in accordance with normal [Accident Reporting](#) arrangements.

4.   Allowances

4.1   Employees who do not normally work from home can claim an allowance back from HMRC to help cover the extra costs incurred as a result of homeworking. The link to the Government site is [here](#).

4.2   To claim these expenses, you need a Government Gateway user ID and password. You can create a user ID if you do not already have one.

4.3   Creating a Government Gateway ID usually takes about 10 minutes. It works best if you have:

- your National Insurance number; and
- a recent pay slip or P60 or a valid UK passport

4.4   Further information on claiming (including how to claim by post) can be found at the end of this document.

5.   Office Equipment at Home

5.1   Many employees were able to take office equipment (laptop or PC, monitor, keyboard and mouse) home before the lockdown. Where this was not possible you should speak to your line manager to see if it can be collected or delivered to your home.

5.2   Working from home for a longer period may mean that you need to think about what equipment will be required to continue homeworking. Your line manager will discuss your equipment needs with you to decide how they can be filled.

6.   IT Support

6.1   IT Services will continue to provide IT support to employees who are working from home. Where employees experience hardware, software or network issues they should log a request with the IT service desk on the IT self-service portal or by contacting IT on 01506 282828. Tell IT whether you are using your own IT equipment or a council laptop/PC.

7.   Keeping in Touch

7.1   It is important that you are in regular contact with your line manager and arrangements to hold regular one-to-ones by telephone or video conferencing should be agreed between you and your line manager. While the council's People Strategy recommends that one-to-ones are held at least every 4 weeks, it is recommended that contact with remote workers should be much more frequent, at least weekly.

7.2   You and your line manager should agree what can reasonably be achieved while working from home, set priorities for work and consider how work that cannot be done from home will be managed. It is important that you clearly understand what is expected of you while working from home in order to minimise any uncertainty and to ensure you can work to the best of your ability.

7.3   It is also important to keep in touch with team members, other colleagues and wider contacts. Being in regular contact with colleagues will help to avoid feelings of isolation.

8.   Attending the Office

8.1   It remains the position that where work can be done from home, it should be done from home. However, that position might change at relatively short notice or it may be that an aspect of your role cannot be done from home and you will need to go to the office. If this is the case, your line manager will discuss with you arrangements for going to the office, how to complete a workplace induction and what arrangements have been put in place to keep you safe in the workplace. You should also consider what arrangements could be put in place for caring responsibilities and transport to the office (avoiding public transport where possible) should the need arise.

9.   Annual Leave

9.1   Particularly during these challenging times, it is important that you look after your wellbeing and make sure that you take time away from work.

9.2   In recognition of the current challenges, agreement was reached in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, that key workers would be able to carry over a maximum of 4 weeks unused annual leave from 2020, with two weeks to be taken in 2021 and 2 weeks in 2022. All other employees were able to carry over 2 weeks with one week to be taken in 2021 and one week in 2022.

9.3   In order to support the delivery of essential services, as well as caring for your own wellbeing, it is important that you use a proportionate amount of your annual leave over the relevant leave year. Your line manager will discuss with you to identify when you intend to take annual leave (including any carried over leave) to ensure adequate service provision and proportionate use throughout the year. Further guidance on the use of annual leave during 2021 and 2022 can be found here

10.   Sickness Absence

10.1   If you are ill and unable to work you should follow normal sickness absence reporting procedures by contacting your line manager:

- at the earliest possible time on the first day of absence with due regard to local operational requirements;

- on the 4th day of absence;

- on the 7th day of absence;

- thereafter, the employee must maintain contact as agreed with the line manager.

11.   Equality Considerations

11.1   If due to a disability or any other special circumstances any adjustment to working arrangements is required, you should discuss your needs with your line manager.

12.   Learning and Development

12.1   Your learning and development continues to be a priority while you are working from home. You can access your My Learning account on [Mytoolkit](#).

13.   Terms and Conditions of Employment

13.1   Unless agreed otherwise, your total weekly hours and normal pay will apply while working from home. All other terms and conditions of employment will remain unchanged and all council policies will continue to apply during temporary homeworking arrangements.

14.   Information Security and Data Protection

14.1   It is important to ensure that arrangements for information security and data protection in line with the council's [Information Governance Policy](#) are adhered to when working from home. Further guidance on [information security](#) and [data protection](#) is available on Mytoolkit. Any concerns relating to information security or data protection should be discussed with your line manager.

15.   Home Insurance, Mortgage or Rental Agreements

15.1   You should check with your home and contents insurance provider that you have cover for work from home and whether devices used for or provided for work are covered.

15.2   You should check your mortgage or rental agreement to ensure you are allowed to work from home and obtain permission if necessary.

16.   Manager Responsibilities

16.1   When managing remote employees line managers must:

- discuss and agree when the employee will be available for work, ensuring support and flexibility;
- discuss and agree arrangements for keeping in touch;
- discuss how work/life balance will be managed including taking regular breaks and switching off from work at the end of the day;
- ensure employees are aware of rules around storage of information and data protection;
- ensure employees understand what is expected of them and know how their performance will be managed while taking account of personal circumstances;
- ensure employees know who to contact if they are having problems while working from home or their personal circumstances change;

16.2   Further [guidance](#) on managing employees who are working from home can be found on Mytoolkit.

17.   Review

17.1   The arrangements for temporary homeworking will be kept under constant review and amended in line with any changes in Scottish Government guidance.

17.2   Individual homeworking arrangements will also be kept under constant review by your line manager while the council establishes its new normal way of working.

Human Resources
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CLAIMING TAX RELIEF ON WORKING FROM HOME EXPENSES

If you are working from home you can apply for a reduction in taxable pay of £6 per week. This means:

- you need to be paying tax (which for most people means earning over £12,500 per year) and;
- the actual additional amount most employees would receive is £1.26 per week.

How to Claim

If you normally do a self-assessment form you can claim on it.

For most people, it will require filling in a P87 form. This can be done online (requires you to have or set up a Government Gateway user ID) or by post, you can find a printable copy of the form at https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-income-tax-relief-for-your-employment-expenses- p87

You will be asked for your employer's name and PAYE reference, and your job title. For postal P87s, you'll also need your national insurance number. If you don't know your number, it is on your payslip.

In the online form, there are two boxes:

1. Amount paid by you. HMRC has stated that provided you've had increased costs, just put a total amount that's equivalent to £6 per week for the period you've been working from home and that's fine, you won't need to show receipts.

2. Amount paid to you by your employer'. If your employer hasn't paid you a working from home allowance or reimbursed your homeworking expenses, just put £0.

If you're claiming through the postal form, you'll need to add a 'Using your home as an office' expense manually in the 'Other expenses' section.

You can claim retrospectively on expenses you have had. So, if you're only at home due to COVID-19, it might be best to wait until you're back at work (or a few months anyway) then make the whole claim at once. Your tax code will likely be adjusted so you pay less tax over the year, as opposed to you getting a direct refund.

Once you've submitted the claim, if you do it online you may hear back within a couple of weeks. However, if HMRC is under pressure it may take longer.