

FLEXIBLE HOMEWORKING

MANAGERS GUIDE

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The enforced homeworking arrangements as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown have provided the council with the opportunity to consider how it can best approach flexible working in the future. For this reason, the council will undertake a formal review of Flexible Working over the coming months.
- 1.2 While this review is conducted, it will be necessary for a number of employees to continue to work from home full-time or to divide working time between home and the office (blended working) while the council remobilises in line with the Scottish Government's route map for coming out of lockdown. Therefore, a decision has been taken to formalise amended flexible working arrangements for all employees working fully from home or doing blended working with immediate effect. These arrangements are temporary pending the completion of the current flexible working review.

2. Flexible Working and Customer Demand

- 2.1 While the existing flexi-time scheme was suspended for all employees working fully from home or doing blended working, this did not mean the removal of flexible working. The opportunity to build up flexi-time over a number of weeks and to take flexi leave has not been available to this group of staff but flexibility across the working day and week has increased to allow staff to accommodate personal circumstances and during the initial phases of lockdown to enable staff to undertake caring responsibilities.
- 2.2 It is this flexibility in the working day and working week that the council seeks to retain going forward to support current homeworking arrangements. However, it is apparent that while the initial phases of lockdown required flexibility to address employees' personal circumstances, particularly caring responsibilities during school closure, there is a need to ensure that flexible working arrangements have service need and customer demand at the core.
- 2.3 The removal of the fixed core hours and bandwidths of the existing flexi-time scheme means that line managers must agree flexible working arrangements with each employee. While taking account of personal circumstances and preferences, arrangements need to be in place which ensure that work is carried out at a time when there is a corresponding service need and to ensure appropriate levels of cover are in place to maintain service delivery.
- 2.4 Line managers should agree with each employee their expected working hours, ensuring that a minimum of 4 hours per day are completed at a time corresponding to peaks in customer demand. The minimum daily hours to be completed during peaks in customer demand may be reduced where an employee normally works less than 4 hours per day.

3. Flexible Working Week

- 3.1 While working flexibly across their day and week as agreed with their line manager, employees will be expected to complete but not exceed their contracted working hours. It is recognised however that customer demand may at times lead to an employee working more than their weekly contracted hours.
- 3.2 Where this occurs the line manager should agree with the employee when they can have the time back, normally within the same week. Where it is not possible to give the employee the time back within the same week, the line manager should agree with the employee arrangements to take the time off as soon as possible, avoiding a build-up of time over a number of weeks.
- 3.3 Where working more than weekly contracted hours is a regular feature, the line manager should consider what adjustments need to be made to manage workload going forward. The following questions should be considered:
- Does the employee need support in prioritising workload?
 - Do the working hours appropriately reflect service need and peaks in customer demand?
 - Is an adjustment required in resource allocation?

4. Flexible Working Day

- 4.1 Having agreed expected working hours with their line manager, including when a minimum of 4 hours per day must be completed the employee will have the flexibility to adjust start and finish times and break times. Flexibility in the working day would also allow for additional breaks for example to accommodate the school run or attend appointments. Existing local communication and approval arrangements will apply.
- 4.2 Where an employee works a shorter day they should ensure that they will be able to work back the hours at another time, normally within the same week. Where this is not possible, perhaps due to an unexpected need for time away from work towards the end of the working week, the employee should seek approval to work back the time as soon as possible. Such instances should however be the exception and must be agreed with the line manager in advance.
- 4.3 Where an employee has advance notice of a requirement for time off, and it is unlikely that they will be able to complete their weekly hours by working flexibly, they will normally be required to use annual leave.

5. Communication

- 5.1 Good communication is key to the success of flexible working arrangements, particularly where employees are working remotely.
- 5.2 Line managers should know when each of their team members is available for work and should support communication of work availability across their team. Employees should be encouraged to keep their diary and outlook out of office function up to date with their work availability and to share online diaries across teams.
- 5.3 One-to-one contact with remote workers by telephone or video conferencing should take place at least weekly. Such weekly meetings will allow you to discuss with employees their work priorities, how they will be accommodated within their working

week and any adjustments needed to previously agreed working arrangements to meet peaks in customer demand or personal circumstances.

6. Managing Performance and Outputs

- 6.1 It is important that employees clearly understand what is expected of them and line managers should set clear, measurable standards of performance and work plans.
- 6.2 Setting clear expectations is particularly important when managing staff remotely. Line managers should agree with each employee what can reasonably be achieved each week while working from home, setting priorities and considering how work that cannot be done from home will be managed.
- 6.3 The communication arrangements set out in section 5 will enable line managers to assess whether an employee is working effectively from home and at times that result in the needs of the service and customer demand being met.
- 6.4 Any concerns around an employee's performance or working arrangements should be raised with the employee at the earliest opportunity with a view to making necessary adjustments.
- 6.5 The removal of the formal clocking system (which enabled retrospective monitoring of time) should not in itself give rise to abuse of working hours and there is an expectation that managers do not replace the previous time recording system with their own local arrangements.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The success of the amended flexible working arrangements for those working from home full-time and blended working will rely on:
- Good communication between managers and their teams;
 - Trust between managers and their teams; and
 - Clear, measurable standards of performance and work plans.
- 7.2 Effective use of the amended flexible working arrangements provides an opportunity for the council to capitalise on the benefits that many services have seen from the enforced homeworking arrangements including increased productivity and reduced sickness absence as well as providing employees with a work-life balance that supports the council's commitment to employee wellbeing.
- 7.3 Managers are encouraged to support employee preferences and requests for flexing working arrangements where possible while ensuring effective service delivery at times that meet customer demand. The experience of managers and employees in delivering a flexible service while working from home as the council remobilises following lockdown will inform the wider review of flexible working across the council.