

Flexible Working Policy

1.0 Introduction

The traditional view of the office worker as sitting at one desk from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, is quickly vanishing. Medway, as with many other employers, operates a flexible working system, which allows many staff to work hours that suit both the Council's interests, and those of the employee.

Flexible working means allowing the employee more options and freedom with regard to how they work, the hours they work, and where they work. Employees can start earlier, finish later, enjoy longer lunch breaks and generally make their work life fit better with their home life – the 'work/life balance'. Subsequently Medway Council benefits from a happier, more productive and flexible workforce.

Medway Council recognises the need to consider every possible action to increase the flexibility, motivation and engagement of the workforce.

The Council is committed to Work-Life Balance. In support of this a number of procedures have been introduced to help employees to successfully combine work with their caring and/or family responsibilities and enable employees to remain in employment with us.

The Council encourages managers and employees to work in partnership to find new and innovative ways of working which will support employees as set out in this and other schemes.

Medway operates its scheme so that employees may build up hours over a period of time and then take the time they have gained as 'flexi-leave'. Medway also offers a '9 day fortnight', where employees may choose to attend the office for 9 days per fortnight instead of the usual ten, provided the necessary hours are completed.

In addition, Medway allows many of its employees the opportunity to work from home, providing appropriate equipment where necessary. Working from home and working at home are two separate options, and will be explained in this document.

Furthermore, Medway recognises the need to develop the office environment in a way that reduces space and cost, and has a reduced impact on the environment. In providing a complete local government service to the end user, the council understands the need to reduce costs in any way possible.

- **Scope**

This guidance applies to all employees of Medway Council. However, all arrangements are subject to the requirements of the service. It may not be practical for all services to adopt all of these policies due to service delivery. In addition, some categories of employee may not be eligible to benefit from all aspects of this policy.

This policy would not be applicable to school based staff.

3.0 The Flexible Office

Most office workers are used to getting to work and sitting down at their own desk or workstation. It's a very common thing for employees to be seated in one place for year after year. Now Medway is challenging this view of the workplace. Many managers for example, tend to move about a lot attending meetings, visiting other workplaces, travelling around, and so on.

In addition to this, the cost of the workplace environment, in terms of space and power, and the impact on the environment, increases all the time. Medway must constantly be on the look out to reduce these costs. More importantly, customer facing workers need to be working where the customer is rather than where the office is.

In this regard organisations are looking closely at how we work and how we can work better. The flexible office makes us consider all the requirements of each individual, in terms of technology, communication, space, etc, and decide whether the individual can work in a different manner.

Elements of the flexible office include;

- Hotdesking
- Fieldworking
- Homeworking

In general, the nature of the role will dictate whether an employee requires a 'static' desk (i.e. one at which the employee sits during the majority of their working hours), a 'hotdesk', or whether the role is suitable for home or fieldworking. Managers will need to complete the standard form which is available to make such an assessment.

4.0 Hotdesking

Hotdesking is basically where a worker will use any available desk that has been set up for the purpose. The hotdesk may be configured for workers with laptops ie it may have a docking station, screen & keyboard or for workers in departments that have adopted terminal services there may be a PC (or dumb terminal) that connects to Medway IT systems via the 'Terminal Farm'.

This enables any worker who is required to hotdesk to sit at any compatible hotdesk and access all the information they require, thereby allowing them to work at any Medway site, provided a hotdesk is available.

Hotdesking removes individuals' desks and therefore reduces the total amount of office space required. Using the hotdesking system also means that workers need to minimise the amount of paperwork and filing they have. Scanning files is very much the answer. All paperwork can be scanned and the information saved as an electronic file.

In the future, as office flexibility requirements grow within the council, the number of employees hotdesking will multiply. Employees will be able to take a space in a hotdesking area in any council building with the necessary facilities.

The benefits are;

- Reduced office space requirements
- Increased flexibility
- Reduced environmental damage
- Increased employee mobility
- Increased employee experience

Potential problems include;

- Management and communication
- Cultural change and resistance
- Confusion
- Reduction of storage space and increased requirement for scanning.

Managers must ensure that employees have access to their systems when required. This means that any IT programme that an employee uses must be available via the 'Terminal Farm' service. This includes access to scanned documentation.

Managers and workers must also ensure that they make use of the scanning or DIPPing arrangements within the workplace. All necessary documentation must be scanned to reduce the need for paper within the office environment. A failure to manage paper systems will simply result in a proliferation of unnecessary paper files and systems.

5.0 Fieldworking

Fieldworking is appropriate for workers who need to be out of the office for much of their time, for example, surveyors or environmental health workers. In order to ensure that such workers are kept in touch with colleagues, appropriate communication channels must be set up. This might mean using mobile communication and email facilities, set up by IT. It is important that the technology is right for the position. In this way, fieldworkers will spend more time carrying out the most important aspects of their roles, rather than sitting in an office.

It is expected that many fieldworkers will also be hotdeskers.

Fieldworkers are those who may have a home or council office base, but spend a significant proportion of their time working with service users at or near their homes or onsite (for example where building surveyors need to visit premises).

Technology is vitally important with fieldworking. Depending on the need and role, fieldworkers may need tablet pc's, mobile phones with email connectivity, or laptops with wireless connectivity. It is a management responsibility to ensure adequate and functional equipment is supplied to all fieldworkers. It is the employee's responsibility to take reasonable care of that equipment and to use it only for work purposes.

There are numerous health and safety issues relating to fieldworkers. In particular, the risk of potential violence or abuse from the public is commonplace. Managers and workers should familiarise themselves with the Medway lone working policy and undertake generic and individual risk assessments.

6.0 Homeworking and Working at Home

Homeworking describes a system whereby a worker can undertake his or her work either partially or wholly from their home. Some employees may be based at their home and travel to other sites as required.

The benefits of working from home to the employee are:

- Less travel expenses and time
- Better work/life balance
- Quiet environment to work in
- More flexibility for caring arrangements
- Allows more freedom over working time

The benefits to the employer are;

- Reduced office space and costs
- Reduced travel costs
- Increased productivity (as evidenced by research)
- Positive recruitment and retention.
- Improved motivation
- Supporting Equal opportunities policy

There are also the benefits to the Medway area from reduced pollution and reduced road congestion.

There are also a number of potential problems for the employer in allowing employees to work from home;

- Cost of setting up equipment (depending on role)
- Potential for staff to abuse the privilege
- Arranging meetings
- Co-ordinating and assessing work
- Selection of suitable positions

- Insurance and health and safety issues
- Various technological issues.

We should also not forget the possible negative aspects for the employee;

- Feeling of being disconnected from colleagues and lack of social contact
- Changes to workplace practices
- Lack of managerial guidance

However, it is important that such a move would ensure that office space costs are kept to the absolute minimum. Therefore, it is important that we consider fully the possibilities of introducing working from home to as wide a number of staff as possible.

Homeworking guidelines

This scheme sets out the issues which need to be addressed by both the manager and the employee if a homeworking arrangement is to be put in place.

Whilst the Council seeks to support alternative ways of working all such decisions will be made in the light of operational requirements of the Directorate, customer service and the needs of other employees within the Directorate.

Homeworking arrangements will be introduced where there can be a demonstrable benefit for the work of the authority. Individual arrangements, if agreed, will commence on mutually convenient dates as agreed between the employee and his/her manager.

For the purpose of the Council scheme, homeworking is defined as work at or from home for 50% or more of the employees normal working week. There are two main types of homeworking:

- working at home – where the person uses their home as their office for part of the week. This could be an ad hoc arrangement for writing reports etc, or the individual could be based permanently at home for part of the working week with the necessary equipment (PC, phone etc).
- working from home – where people whose work is mainly peripatetic are based at home instead of travelling from home to the office and then back out again. This can save on business mileage and provide more efficient use of time.

Getting agreement to Homework

To work effectively, homeworking has to meet the business needs of the service as well as those of the individual. Homeworking must be agreed between management and the individual in each case, and be subject to overall agreement by the Assistant Director. Any application to homework will be considered against the criteria below and if approved will be on a trial basis for an appropriate time. Each trial will be evaluated in order to assess its success.

If an employee wants to apply to work at home or from home, the employee and manager will need to consider:

- whether the job is suitable for homeworking taking into account the nature of the work the employee does;
- whether the employee has suitable accommodation at home and the implications for their caring and/or family responsibilities;
- whether the employee is likely to be effective as a homeworker. This will depend on the employee's disposition – some people need the discipline of being in the office and would miss the contact with other people. Isolation can be a real danger;
- what impact homeworking might have on the efficiency/effectiveness of the office, section, area of work and customer service;
- the implications for immediate colleagues, including, if applicable, people who are managed by the prospective homeworker.

An employee needs to apply in writing to their manager well in advance of wishing to work from home to enable management to carefully consider the request. A recommendation regarding homeworking from the manager will be considered by the Assistant Director. The employee will be notified in writing of the AD's decision by her/his manager. The decision will be final. The manager will be responsible for ensuring that all of the issues raised within this scheme are properly addressed.

The selection criteria for employees requesting home working will initially be based on the operational requirements of the service and subsequently the detailed nature of the employee's caring and/or family responsibilities.

If a request to homework is approved then the following will apply:

Equipment

The Council will provide any essential equipment. This equipment will remain the property of the Council who will bear the cost of the equipment. However, this equipment will need to be configured by Medway ICT before it is transported to the home environment. Medway ICT do not install home equipment or provide home visits, and support services will only be provided from the Gun Wharf site. Any equipment requiring repair will therefore need to be returned to the ICT team on the Gun Wharf site. Employees must take reasonable care of the equipment and use it only for official purposes and in accordance with any operating instructions.

Additional employer costs for homeworking should not be incurred. Therefore, if an individual is provided with equipment at home, they should be expected to share equipment at work. In some circumstances, the provision of a laptop will facilitate this.

Health and Safety

Employees working at or from home have the same duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act as all other employees. Managers also have the same duty to ensure the Health and Safety of these employees as for other employees. Employees must take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of anyone else who might be affected by their actions and omissions. There are additional requirements where an employee is based at home for part of their normal working week and needs a PC (personal computer) workstation to be established in their own home for use on Council business. They must agree to abide by the Council's Corporate Health and Safety Code of Practice. Managers must ensure the Code is implemented. This will include ensuring that a basic risk assessment is carried out by the employee. Bespoke risk assessment literature is made available for managers and employees to complete this task.

Homeworkers must not carry out work meetings in their home with customers, or officers from other agencies, to prevent the risk of violence/difficult situations with such persons. If homeworkers need to attend site meetings direct from home they must notify their line management of their itinerary. Homeworkers should also be asked to agree with their manager whether the risks of violence/difficult situations justifies a telephone call to the office by the homeworker at the end of the working period to confirm safe completion of the visits.

Homeworkers should not divulge their home address or telephone number to anyone except immediate colleagues. The 141 facility should be used by homeworkers using their home telephone for work calls in order to protect the confidentiality of their home number. The 141 facility prevents anyone you are calling from using the 1471 to trace your telephone number.

Any injury which occurs to a homeworker whilst working should be notified to the Line Manager. The line manager should arrange completion of the Council Accident Report Form, and then forward it to the Health and Safety team. Similarly, any accident to any person which arises out of, or in connection with, the work at home should be reported in the same manner. If the accident involves a major injury the Line Manager must contact the Health and Safety team as soon as possible.

ICT Support

ICT support is provided by the ICT team. All requests for service and support are to be logged with the Service Desk on 01634 332228. This will ensure that the request is logged for

monitoring and tracking purposes and is directed to the appropriate personnel.

ICT support requests will be subject to prioritisation/escalation procedures and responded to in the timescales agreed in Directorate service level agreements. System failure will be given priority over all other activities. However, all equipment must be returned to Gun Wharf for repair – Medway ICT do not visit home workers at their home.

Security

Employees must ensure that information and equipment are kept securely. In particular, private and confidential material must be kept secure at all times and not saved on personal PCs or memory sticks and line managers must be satisfied that all reasonable precautions are taken to maintain confidentiality of material in accordance with the requirements of the standing financial orders.

Insurance

Working at or from home may affect the home and contents insurance policies of the householder. Employees must inform their insurers before commencing home working.

Items of equipment belonging to the Council can be covered by the Council's insurance arrangements, i.e. equipment securely stored in the individual employee's home carries insurance cover (needs to be specifically identified), but this cover is not available whilst such equipment is in transit in the employee's car. All reasonable care should therefore be taken in these circumstances.

Employer's Liability

Employees working at or from home are covered by the Council's Employer's Liability Policy.

In the event of accident or injury at home, it may, however, be very difficult to prove negligence on the part of the Council because an officer working at home would be primarily responsible for his/her own working environment. Any accidents must be reported.

Public Liability

Although covered by the Council's Employer's Liability Policy employees working at or from home are advised to ensure their home contents policy has public liability cover for at least £1 million. This is a standard clause in most home insurance policies. If an employee does not have such cover then his/her manager should seek appropriate advice from the Insurance Section.

Mortgages and Tenancy Agreements

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

Mileage Claims

During homeworking, mileage will be payable on business journeys from home to work site subject to this not exceeding the mileage which would have been incurred to these sites from normal office base.

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 Car Allowance Scheme.

Tax

Staff are advised to contact their local tax office for any tax advice on the implications of homeworking, such as whether tax relief may be allowed on the proportion of a week they occupy a room at home for work purposes and on its maintenance.

Staff are advised to contact their local Council to find out if working from home affects their council tax.

Managing Performance and Communication

It is essential that good communication is maintained at all times between the employee and his/her manager. The manager and employee should plan and agree how they will communicate effectively with each other. These arrangements should be agreed in writing and regularly reviewed in light of operational experience. Any changes to planned programmes must be notified in advance to the manager and other relevant employees.

To assist in providing good communication the facility of e-mail should be available on the equipment to be used by employees. This provides an instant messaging facility and, therefore, to utilise this service effectively both for the individual member and the Service the following must be performed each working day: -

Systems must be checked at the start of every working day without fail

- Thereafter during the day must be checked when necessary, but to be in accordance with Directorate practice, should be a minimum of 4 times per day at regularly spaced intervals during the day
- The manager should agree time recording arrangements for homeworking and also a work programme. It is the responsibility of the Manager to ensure a full and balanced work programme is available to the employee, to monitor this on an ongoing basis and to keep appropriate records, etc.

Terms and Conditions

Managers must agree working hours and patterns, contact times and availability with the employee in advance. Otherwise, normal conditions of employment as set out in the employment contract apply.

If any employee has any concerns with their working arrangements, they must bring the matter to the attention of their manager without delay.

The Council reserves the right to withdraw homeworking from an employee, subject to reasonable notice.

Managers must ensure that revised contract documentation is issued as necessary.

Managerial Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the manager to ensure that a proper framework and agreement is set in place to protect both the employee and the Council. The manager remains responsible for the supervision of the employee throughout all of the employee's working hours.

Advice and Guidance

Advice and guidance on the effective implementation of this procedure is available from your HR Adviser.

7.0 Flexi-time scheme

The council has a flexi-time scheme, the details of which are as follows:

Standard Working Day

The standard working day is the number of hours normally worked on each day.

Core Time

These are the hours when an employee shall normally be required to be at work. These will be specified as appropriate in the scheme agreed for a service.

Bandwidth

The hours between which an employee may work and accrue flexi-time.

Accounting Period

The four week period over which hours worked are totalled.

Working hours

Hours of work may be varied within the specified bandwidth operating for the service.

Flexi leave

Where sufficient credit hours have been accrued, flexi-leave may be taken following agreement by the line manager. The amount of flexi-leave allowed in an accounting period will **never** exceed 2 days. No more than one day may be carried forward from one accounting period to the next

No payment will be made in respect of any credit hours.

Lunch break

Employees must have a break of at least 30 minutes no later than 6 hours from commencing work.

Recording time

Flexi-time should be recorded for the hours when employees are present and engaged in work. Absences due to annual leave or sickness should be recorded at the standard number of working hours.

Flexi-leave must be agreed in advance and recorded on the individual flexi-time record sheet. There is no automatic right to flexi-leave.

Overtime working

Overtime and credit hours are quite separate. Overtime working must be authorised in advance by the Director or Assistant Director and a proper record of hours worked maintained. Any paid overtime worked will not count towards flexi-time.

Nine-day fortnight

Subject to service requirements, Directors/line managers may formalise the flexible working process within their service by agreeing to allow employees to take two pre-agreed "flexi" days per accounting period. The employee must accrue sufficient credit time during the accounting period to enable him/her to take these 2 fixed days and to fulfil their contracted hours.