



# **WORKING FROM HOME POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

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This Working From Home Policy was adopted by the council at its meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

## **1. Introduction**

Ashington Town Council is committed to promoting flexible working to facilitate effective and efficient working. This policy outlines the circumstances under which the Council will allow employees to work from home. It also details the actions required to facilitate a home working arrangement.

Home working is about using the employees' home as a base for work instead of the employee coming into the workplace.

## **2. Defining Working from Home**

Flexible or Hybrid homeworking is defined as time split between home and the office when an employee undertakes some of their duties from home on an agreed basis. This is usually planned and may be for complete or part days.

There may be times when the Council requires homeworking to meet business need during times of emergencies or as required by law. This is not defined as "flexible" homeworking.

Working from home enables work to be carried out more efficiently in a quiet location and without disruption. It may also prove a more efficient use of time if employees who have been away from their work base for part of day and are closer to their home on their return journey, complete the working day at home rather than at their normal place of work.

In cases where office facilities are shared, or the employee risks continual interruption, there may be agreement that an employee can work from home. This may include agreeing to home working on a regular basis or for a fixed period e.g. two weeks as well as shorter ad hoc periods. Managers and employees should be aware of the potential impact home working could have on teams e.g. isolation from the team, and/or Council activities, a reduction in effective managerial support or supervision.

Many jobs may be considered for working from home. Any job that does not require time spent in one location or high visibility (eg to operate machinery or to deliver face to face customer care), may be adapted for home working. Jobs that involve project work or identifiable output, or those which provide services within the community, may lend themselves to home working.

Consideration should also be given to the impact on and inter-relationship with other jobs, access by the public, access to/by colleagues, access to required information, technology, costs, and savings.

The following job characteristics may lend themselves to home working:

- ✓ Defined output tasks
- ✓ Discrete projects or functions
- ✓ Autonomous jobs
- ✓ Jobs requiring frequent travelling
- ✓ Jobs requiring high periods of concentration

Due to the nature of individual tasks some roles within the Council are not deemed suitable for home working.

## **3. Benefits of Working from Home**

There are several benefits to home working. For the Council these include:

- ✓ Supporting a work-life balance
- ✓ Contributing towards the reduction of the Councils CO2 emissions by reducing unnecessary employee commuting
- ✓ The recruitment and retention of valued and skilled employees for whom the ability to work at home is the preferred option
- ✓ Well-motivated staff who feel that they work for an organisation that is prepared to be flexible and which trusts them
- ✓ Potentially increased output and quality of work due to fewer distractions than working in an office environment
- ✓ Accommodation of the requirements of disabled employees or employees with temporary health conditions
- ✓ Promotion of a positive image as a good employer
- ✓ Potential to reduced costs in terms of travelling allowances

The benefits to the employee include:

- ✓ Increased discretion in the management of their work and personal time
- ✓ Increased motivation
- ✓ A saving of travel time and costs
- ✓ The ability to work without distraction
- ✓ Improvements in work-life balance issues
- ✓ Feeling positive about the contribution to reducing CO2 emissions by reducing unnecessary commuting

While there are many advantages of home working, a detailed assessment needs to be made, by both the employee and the Council, as to whether the individual will be a suitable home worker and whether the role to be performed can be performed whilst working at home.

#### **4. Conditions**

- Home working arrangements should work for both the Council and the employee.
- Home working arrangements will only be considered following the completion of an employee's probationary period.
- Wherever possible requests for home working should be at least two weeks before the employee wishes to start the arrangement.
- In general, the Council will be supportive of employees working from home providing core business needs can still be met, and that the employee can meet all the requirements of their role from home.
- The working environment should be distraction free with work time for working.

- Where a request for homeworking is made by the employee, they will be responsible for setting up a safe and suitable workspace at home and providing appropriate office furniture and equipment.
- Where homeworking is at the request of the Council, i.e. during COVID, the Council is responsible for providing the necessary office furniture.
- Risk assessments of the home working environment, in line with legal requirements, must be undertaken.
- Requests should be considered on their own merits, considering resources, impact on colleagues and working relationships.
- Employees working from home must be available during normal business hours and should be able to answer calls and emails during the same day. When working from home employees are responsible for ensuring they are contactable during normal working hours. This should be a mobile phone for which an allowance is paid. Microsoft Teams and/or Zoom are also an acceptable means of being contactable, in addition to email.
- It is not considered necessary for those working from home to require supplies of stationery etc. Large volumes of printing and collating of documents should be carried out on Town Council premises.
- Regular communication and team check-ins when working remotely is essential to prevent isolation.
- Under no circumstances should home working be used as an alternative method of meeting carer requirements.
- Home working agreements will be reviewed where there are change of circumstances, whether relating to employee, work they are required to undertake, or the working environment.

## **5. Responsibilities**

### ***Employer Responsibilities***

**Health & Safety** - In line with the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 ("the Act") and their Health & Safety Policy the Council will ensure, as far as reasonably practical, the health, safety, and welfare at work of all employees, including those working from home. The Council reserves the right to inspect home working premises to ensure that the Act, current risk assessments and Council policies and procedures are being adhered to. Reasonable notice will be given to employees before any inspection.

**Hours of Work** – Homeworkers must be mindful to take adequate rest breaks to maintain a work-life balance when working from home. Regular breaks, not working excessively long hours, and maintaining boundaries between work and home are essential. In regards breaks, as a minimum:

- A break of at least 20 minutes in any continued 6 hours working period.
- A daily rest break of at least 11 continuous hours, i.e. the time between stopping work one day and beginning work the next day, and.
- At least one complete day each week when no work is done.

**Insurance** - The Council accepts liability for accidents which are proven to have been caused by the authorised use of equipment provided by them in line with any instructions issued.

**Data Protection, Security & Confidentiality** - Council employees will be instructed that in instances where their colleagues are working from home, they will not disclose any personal details e.g. telephone numbers to anyone outside of the Council.

Council employees working from home must ensure secure networks and not public Wi-Fi, storing documents securely, and being mindful of screen visibility.

**Running costs and expenses** – Where the employee is choosing to work from home, the Council will not contribute towards costs – for example, heating and lighting, office furniture. The Council will provide the equipment required to work from home.

### ***Employee Responsibilities***

**Health & Safety** - Employees are expected to carry out their work in such a way as to ensure, as far as reasonably practical, that there is no risk to health and safety to themselves, members of their family or visitors. This includes hours of work and rest breaks.

**Insurance** - Home working may have an effect on domestic insurance policies. Employees wishing to work from home must inform their insurance company of the change in circumstances and the use, and identity, of equipment owned by the Council. An employee's mortgage provider may need to be informed. Employees living in council or privately rented accommodation should notify their property owner and/or examine the terms of their lease. Any equipment belonging to the employee but being used for Council business should be operated in line with any instructions issued. It is reasonable for the Council to assume that this done.

**Accidents, Incidents & Dangerous Occurrences** - In line with the Council's Accident Reporting Procedure, employees must inform their line manager of any accidents, incidents or dangerous occurrences which take place whilst working at home. The initial report should be via telephone with the appropriate paperwork being completed on the employee's return to the workplace.

**Policies and Procedures** - All work carried out on Council business is covered by the requirements of the Council's policies and procedures, even if this work is undertaken at home.

**Data Protection, Security & Confidentiality** - Arrangements for home working should ensure that the employee can maintain the security and confidentiality of documents within the home environment whilst complying with Data Protection legislation and the Council's Press and Media Policy. Employees should use Council laptops and systems to perform their duties at home. Council employees working from home must ensure secure networks and not public Wi-Fi, storing documents securely, and being mindful of screen visibility.

**Remote Access** – To enable remote access, employees can use their Council issued laptop and Google Account allowing full remote working with collaboration tools including Microsoft Teams, Outlook, Word, and Excel. All Data Protection, security and confidentiality measures and policies must be adhered to.

**Council Tax** - If the area of the house being used for home working is also used by the rest of the family at other times there are no implications regarding Council Tax. However, if the area is used solely for business and is not available to the family there may need to be a change of definition. In such cases the employee should check the details with the Billing Authority.

**Taxation** - Employees choosing to work from home are not entitled to tax relief on additional outgoings. As there is no requirement to work from home there would be no tax relief on any proportion of the costs for heating, lighting and rent on rooms used for business purposes.

You may be able to claim tax relief for additional household costs if you must work at home on a regular basis, either for all or part of the week. This includes if you must work from home because of coronavirus (COVID-19).

**Equipment** - Equipment required for home working will depend on the nature of the work being undertaken. The type and extent of equipment beyond the Council issued laptop, monitor, keyboard, and mouse will be based on the risk assessment. If any equipment owned by the Council is subsequently lost or damaged by an employee that employee shall be expected to pay for its replacement, if not covered by insurance.

## **6. Making an application for home working**

An employee requesting occasional or regular home working should do so via the Executive Officer and should complete the application form and risk assessment form (Appendix 1). Employees are encouraged to complete the form electronically providing as much information as possible. Where the Executive Officer is requesting to work from home, the same information should be provided to the Personnel Committee.

The Executive Officer, or the Personnel Committee will take a decision based on the information included in this policy and discussion with the applicant.

If the risk assessment highlights any cause for concern the Executive Officer/Personnel Committee should seek Health & Safety advice before any further action is taken.

The Executive Officer/Personnel Committee will sign the application and risk assessment form and return a copy to the employee whilst advising them of the decision on their application. This will normally be within two weeks of the request being submitted.

If an employee wishes to appeal against the decision, they may do so by using the Council's Grievance Procedure.

## **7. Reviewing working from home arrangements**

Home working arrangements will be reviewed on an annual basis, or sooner if circumstances change.

Council employees must be aware that any abuse of the home working arrangement may result in the Council taking disciplinary action.

Line managers have responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the working from home arrangements to ensure they are working for both the employee and the council. This should include periodic check-ins and reviews.

## **8. Monitoring and review of this policy**

The Executive Officer shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

Any proposed amendments will be presented to the Council for approval.

## Appendix 1 Working from Home: Risk Assessment

To be reviewed annually or if circumstances change

### 1. **General**

- ☐ Completed a DSE assessment?

### 2. **Chair**

- ☐ Is the chair height adjustable?
- ☐ Is the back rest adjustable in height & tilt?
- ☐ Does the chair have a five-staff base?
- ☐ Is the chair comfortable?
- ☐ Do you need a footrest?

### 3. **Desk / work surface**

- ☐ Is the area large enough for all the equipment and the full range or tasks to be undertaken there (Employees should adopt a clear desk approach)?
- ☐ Is there sufficient clearance beneath the area for thighs and knees and to stretch the legs?
- ☐ Have you sufficient space to access your desk as well as more space around it?
- ☐ If you use a document holder is it positioned at same height and distance as your monitor?

### 4. **Keyboard**

- ☐ Is there sufficient space in front of the keyboard to place a wrist rest?
- ☐ Are all the keys present and in working order?

### 5. **Mouse**

- ☐ Is there sufficient space adjacent to the keyboard for the mouse to be used comfortably?
- ☐ Is it positioned close to the keyboard to prevent overextending or cramping of the wrist?
- ☐ Do you have a mouse mat?

### 6. **Screen**

- ☐ Is the monitor positioned firstly in front of you?
- ☐ Is the monitor positioned at the correct height? (when looking horizontally eyes should be resting just below the top of the screen)
- ☐ Does the screen tilt and swivel easily?
- ☐ Is the image on the screen clear and stable?

### 7. **Environment**

- ☐ Are there any manual handling issues relating to you working from home?
- ☐ Is the work area free from trip hazards – including the tidying of cables and leads?
- ☐ Does the route to your workplace involve using a loft ladder?



- ☐ Are there access problems if you carry large or heavy items?
- ☐ Is the general lighting adequate?
- ☐ Can you eliminate strong light sources / reflections?
- ☐ Is the temperature and ventilations adequate and free from draughts?
- ☐ Is the work area free from distracting noise?
- ☐ Will your home working activities involve significant use of the telephone?
- ☐ Are you intending to use a mobile phone for this purpose, or will you have access to a land line?
- ☐ In relation to your electrical equipment is there any evidence of damage to plugs or leads?
- ☐ Is there any evidence of overheating?
- ☐ Are combustible materials kept away from sources of heat?
- ☐ Do you have a smoke alarm fitted?
- ☐ Do you know what action to take in the event of a fire?

**8. I.T. Equipment**

- ☐ I have a suitable broadband internet connection and good wi-fi or a cable to the router?