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Inclement Weather Policy

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1. POLICY STATEMENT

Adverse or extreme weather affects everyone but the Council needs to maintain the delivery of essential services whilst taking every reasonable precaution to protect the health, safety and well being of our employees. This guidance has been prepared to assist employees by providing clarity on the actions they should take when faced with periods of inclement weather.

All employees of the Council are committed to providing the best possible public services and are expected to contribute to the Council's response to and recovery from, an extreme weather event.

2. PROVISION OF COUNCIL SERVICES

Within the Council, there are a number of services where it is reasonable to expect managers to make specific arrangements for 'business continuity' in the event of an advanced warning of/period of adverse weather. As part of the 'planning process', employees identified as key to provide the service will be identified and arrangements put in place to ensure that they are able to reach their normal workplace.

2.1 Critical and Non-Critical Service Areas

In line with the Council's 'Business Continuity Strategy' there will be service areas deemed as Critical and Non- Critical.

Whilst 'Critical Services' will need to be delivered during any period of inclement weather, there may be areas of non-critical services where normal service delivery can be suspended for a short period of 1 or 2 days without major disruption or inconvenience to service users.

However, every effort must be made to maintain normal service and staff must make every reasonable effort to attend their place of work. In certain circumstances, for example where office accommodation is not accessible, the Group Director may take the decision to suspend certain functions. In these circumstances, employees may be given alternative instructions.

For details of critical and non-critical services, please refer to the relevant Group Directorate Business Continuity Plan.

3. COUNCIL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

During periods of inclement weather, the Council's Strategy and Public Relations department, in partnership with Customer Care and ICT, work around-the-clock to ensure the latest public information is available via the media and www.rctcbc.gov.uk.

While it is appreciated that the main function of the website is to provide the latest news and service updates for residents who wish to access such information via the Internet, it must also be accepted that, during times of emergency, all measures must be considered in order to support staff to, in turn, support the public.

A separate communication strategy has been developed which will be enacted during periods of inclement weather. Further details can be found on the Council's Intranet Site.

4. INCLEMENT WEATHER GUIDELINES

The following procedures apply to all employees of the Council regardless of the proximity of employees' home to their place of work, even if they reside outside the county borough. **Please note that these arrangements do not apply to those employees who may have already pre-booked leave.**

4.1 Normal place of work

- 4.1.1 During periods of extreme weather all employees have a duty to attempt to attend their normal place of work, unless specifically instructed not to do so, by their manager.
- 4.1.2 Taking due regard to Health and Safety, employees should make all reasonable attempts to find alternative means of transport, e.g. obtaining lifts from other employees whose cars are on the road, using public transport where available etc.
- 4.1.3. All employees should dress appropriately for the prevailing weather conditions and normal dress codes/requirements will be suspended during this time.

4.2 Alternative Places of Work

- 4.2.1 Where it is impossible for an employee to attend their designated work place it may be possible to work from an alternative Council office. This does not necessarily mean the premises closest to home and employees should liaise with their manager to identify suitable alternative premises for attendance. **Employees should not 'routinely' attend other Council premises unless directed to do so by management.** If employees are directed to work elsewhere, then they will be expected to undertake their normal work or if this is not possible to offer to undertake work for the service manager on-site.

- 4.2.2. The Council may also determine that it is necessary for staff to be redeployed to other duties to support a critical service or to make good use of an employee's time if they are unable to undertake their normal duties e.g. assist with snow clearance at specific sites, deliver essential supplies to vulnerable people within their community.

4.3 Working from home

- 4.3.1. In some circumstances, dependent on the role and the type of work carried out, the employee may be able to perform their duties from home. Indeed it may be more productive than needlessly spending time attempting to reach the workplace. **This can only be an option if the adverse weather has been forecast and preparations for home working can be made in advance.**
- 4.3.2 Where home working has been approved then the employee will agree with their manager the specific work related items to be undertaken at home and this will be checked as complete on their return to work.

4.4 Leave Arrangements

- 4.4.1. Employees who cannot attend their normal workplace or unable to attend an alternative place of work (as directed by their manager) may choose to take annual leave, flexitime, TOIL or make an application for unpaid leave. Any such request must be approved by the employees' manager.

4.5 Emergency Leave

- 4.5.1 If a period of inclement weather results in the 'sudden' breakdown of 'caring arrangements', then 'Emergency Leave' may apply and **if agreed**, paid time off will be granted for up to the first day absence. If the 'breakdown in caring arrangements' continues beyond the first day, then employees will be expected to make alternative arrangements and attend work as normal. If the employee is unable to attend work after this first day then they can make an application for leave in accordance with paragraph 4.4 above.
- 4.5.2 Emergency Leave may also extend to 'sudden' school closures as follows. A school closes suddenly due to the poor weather conditions but is likely to remain shut due to the on-going weather forecast. In such circumstances, emergency leave will only cover the first day, after which, employees will be expected to make alternative arrangements and attend work as normal or indeed take their own leave. Emergency Leave will not be considered if it is known the previous day that the school will be closed.

4.6 Health and Safety Considerations

4.6.1 In certain cases it may be necessary for senior management to instruct employees not to attend work. This may occur, if for personal safety reasons, the employee cannot attend their normal workplace and is unable to attend an alternative workplace (as directed by their manager). It is anticipated that this would be the exception rather than the rule and that all other alternatives will be fully explored before consideration of giving an instruction not to attend work. **In all cases this will be at the discretion of the Service Director.**

4.6.2. Employee groups that may be considered for this exemption are as follows:

- employees who are pregnant and have made the Council aware of this,
- employees who are disabled under the Equality Act 2010 and that disability make it unreasonable for them to attend work during adverse weather conditions.
- employees who have a health condition, which is known to the Council, which makes it unreasonable for them to attempt to attend work during adverse weather conditions (employees in this category should have already been identified and should be working under a specific risk assessment).

4.6.3 To gain exemption, employees who are covered in 4.6.2 must inform their manager of their particular circumstances. The Inclement Weather Conditions Register must be completed (Application Form attached at Appendix One) as soon as they are aware they have a condition which may fall into this category.

A decision on whether an employee is able to attend work **cannot be made** unless this form has been completed prior to an incident of inclement weather. If an employee has not completed the form and does not attend work, they will have to take their own leave, flexitime, TOIL or make an application for unpaid leave. Any such request must be approved by the employee's line manager.

An application for exemption under the Inclement Weather Conditions Register **cannot be made retrospectively** i.e. if the application form has not been completed.

Even if an employee completes the application form, there is no guarantee that time off will be approved. In every case, an employee has to contact their manager to obtain clarification **prior** to taking any time off. If this clarification has not been obtained, then the employee will have to take their own leave, flexitime, TOIL or make an application for unpaid leave. Any such request must be approved by the employee's line manager.

Managers Responsibility

There may be circumstances where it is necessary for an employee to complete the form in respect of a short term disability. In these circumstances it is imperative that these situations are reviewed where necessary, and at least on an annual basis.

4.7 Closure of Council Buildings

- 4.7.1 The Council is kept regularly updated by the Met. Office if periods of inclement weather are forecast. Should 'inclement weather' occur during office hours then the Chief Executive, in conjunction with the Director of Human Resources and Group Director - Environmental Services will make a decision as to whether employees should be sent home early from work.
- 4.7.2 If the decision is that employees should leave work early then an appropriate message will be relayed via managers. With the exception of employees within service areas identified as critical for 'business continuity' purposes, all other employees should leave their place of work in an orderly manner.
- 4.7.3 Senior Managers on site at the time will ensure that:
 - all staff employed by the service vacate the building,
 - notify the site manager (if applicable) when all staff have vacated the building,
 - ensure that the site is secure or that arrangements are made to secure the building.
- 4.7.4 If an individual determines to leave work early prior to any formal decision being made, then time will not be granted in retrospect.

4.8 Management Considerations

- 4.8.1 As part of the process, it is critical that Managers who are contacted by employees should keep a record of the conversation with the employee, recording their name, time of call and details of their plans or any specific arrangements made.

4.8.2 As part of 'business continuity' management teams should consider speaking to those employees who own or have access to a 4 x 4 vehicle and those employees may be requested to provide reliable transport in times of severe weather or emergencies. This can be to transport essential employees or supplies to areas that would be hard or impossible to reach in normal vehicles and/or in support of other critical Council services, such as the emergency duty team within Community Care. Designated drivers of 4 x 4 vehicles will be requested to take the vehicles home with them and make themselves available for other duties in the event of extreme weather.

4.9 Prolonged Periods of Inclement Weather

4.9.1 In extraordinary circumstances, adverse weather may persist over a period of several days or weeks. In such an event this guidance will be reviewed and further instructions given as required. It may be necessary to invoke the Council's emergency planning arrangements.

5. **RESUMPTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY**

5.1 It is envisaged that most disruptions to service will be relatively short in duration and post disruption recovery will be possible without any special arrangements. Where appropriate, employees will be expected to clear any backlog of work as quickly as possible on returning to normal duties without additional cost to the Council.

5.2 It may however be appropriate or necessary in exceptional circumstances to extend opening hours, provide service or open offices at weekends or relax the flexible working limits. This will only be considered where there is a compelling business case and will be at the discretion of the Group Director in conjunction with the Director of Human Resources.

6. **REIMBURSEMENT OF TIME**

6.1 During periods of inclement weather, employees will receive their contract hours for each day(s) where:

- the employee attended their normal place of work
- the employee attended/ was deployed to an alternative work location as directed by their manager.

6.2 Employees who due to health and safety considerations were instructed by their manager not to attend work will also receive their contract hours for each day(s).

- 6.3 Should employees be instructed to leave their normal place of work during working hours then again they will receive their contract hours for each day(s).

7. ABUSE OF SCHEME

The successful implementation of this guidance relies on trust and co-operation between management and employees. If any employee abuses the trust management have placed in them by falsifying time worked, or claiming payment whilst absent from work, this will be considered gross misconduct and will result in disciplinary proceedings.