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Adnoddau Dynol

Cyngor Rhondda Cynon Taf, gweithio gyda chi, gweithio gyda'n gilydd

**gweithio'nwell**  
**workwell**

Human Resources

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, working with you, working together

# Temporary Agile Home Working Framework Guidelines



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## 1. PURPOSE

- i. The necessity to introduce temporary homeworking for many of its employees during the Covid pandemic has allowed the Council to recognise the benefits that working more flexibly, can present for both the organisation and its employees. Consequently, this has created new expectations and desires and has shown that homeworking can work very effectively and productively.
- ii. Employees have clearly advocated their support, via wellbeing questionnaires, of their desire to continue to work from home with office attendance at least some of the time moving forward.
- iii. The purpose of this temporary framework document is to provide an understanding of how the temporary agile home working arrangements can continue to operate successfully and support a new blended modern way of working.
- iv. This framework looks to provide more detailed information around what agile home working means and what needs to be in place to ensure the working arrangement is both a successful and safe one for the Council and its employees. All employees who participate in this way of working are required to comply with the responsibilities as set out below.
- v. This framework will be utilised for the next 18 months when subject to a continued reduction in Covid rates; the introduction and evaluation of self service and a review of the office attendance pilot; the Council will review all matters around agile homeworking and look to reach a final position for agile homeworking moving forward, in consultation with our recognised trade unions.

## 2. SCOPE

- i. The framework applies to all employees who are deemed able to undertake their role at or from home. It is essential that employees and managers are responsible for making themselves aware of the framework and adhering to it at all times.
- ii. No employee will be deemed exclusively a home-based worker so there will be no change to the Council's responsibilities as an employer or of employees' responsibilities to work to required policies and processes.
- iii. **Within the exception of point 9 below, this framework is not designed to impact on the existing arrangements for those staff groups that are required to attend a work location every day.**

### 3. ARRANGEMENTS FOR AGILE ATTENDANCE AT THE OFFICE (INCLUDING PILOT)

- i. The balance between office and home working will vary depending on the role, however as part of this ongoing review **if they so wish**, staff attendance at the office can be for up to 2 days a week. However, any such attendance is subject to the office accommodation arrangements detailed further below.
- ii. Offices are open on a daily basis for staff to attend, subject to agreement/request from their line manager. Upon arrival, usual Health and Safety at work procedures need to be adopted such as signing in for security, fire record and COVID contact tracing purposes.
- iii. While working from an office, staff will be required to adhere to the additional guidelines set out for returning to the offices during the Covid pandemic such as maintaining a safe social distance, use of sanitiser and good hand hygiene and wearing facemasks in areas where required to do so.
- iv. Local arrangements are in place to create a clear desk policy in the majority of our offices and when staff are attending offices, they will be required to clean their desks/equipment upon arrival and also before they depart.
- v. Existing offices are being re-purposed as meeting rooms to provide more opportunities for staff to come together in different group sizes and/or provide spaces for confidential discussions.
- vi. Existing and new meeting spaces are being made available across sites to allow staff to attend offices for collaborative working, project working or face to face meetings where virtual meetings are not ideal. Local arrangements are already in place to book meeting rooms/spaces in offices and staff are requested to book spaces in advance to avoid the possibility of arriving at an office and finding a meeting room occupied.
- vii. The Council is developing a trial site for 'hub' working where staff from any Service Area will be able to book meeting rooms/workspace irrespective of whether or not it is their substantive fixed place of work. The idea of a hub is that staff can meet based upon the geographical nature of the project or team that is coming together.
- viii. The office hub solution will be located close to a town centre and will be configured to provide a mix of different meeting rooms/spaces to accommodate flexible use and will comprise a mix of formal meeting rooms, less formal meeting rooms, informal meeting spaces using appropriate furniture together with the formal office desk for occasional desk-based activities.
- ix. During the trial hub, a meeting room booking system will be used that will allow staff to identify the size of room, location, resources and availability via a desk-based system and/or application on their phone.

- x. It is hoped that the first office hub will be up and running by the end of the summer and until such time, staff are asked to make best use of their normal offices/meeting rooms as they would have done before the pandemic.
- xi. Council offices will also have a number of workstation areas to address any requests to attend the work site for wellbeing reasons and/or training/development support.

#### 4. CORE PRINCIPLES

- i. During this temporary arrangement, the Council will promote best practice in the management of agile home working. It will regularly review its provisions to ensure that they are legally compliant and reflect best practice.
- ii. The Council will support the principles of this hybrid working arrangement (home/office). In line with communications from the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to date, homeworking will continue to be the main option for staff until the review date. However, taking into consideration staff wellbeing feedback, team development opportunities, there will be times where staff **will be required to attend an office location for team meetings or key service/project work and this will be arranged between the line manager and the individual. Staff will be given notice to attend the office unless an emergency situation arises which requires their expertise.**
- iii. Employees must take responsibility for the completion of their workload and this agile work arrangement is about outputs from staff rather than time management. As this arrangement is based on the concept of mutual trust between employer and employee, any fundamental breach of that trust will be treated very seriously and may be regarded as misconduct/gross misconduct. Appropriate action may follow under the Council's Disciplinary Policy. If any misconduct is found, the agreement to work at home may be withdrawn.
- iv. There will be no change to the employees substantive fixed centre and the shorter distance rule contained with the Council's Travel and Expenses policy should still be applied. Therefore, any journeys to or from your fixed centre from the home address are not subject to expenses.

#### 5. JOB ROLES

- i. It is acknowledged that some roles lend themselves to homeworking more readily than others.
- ii. There will be situations where an employee may need to attend the office on a more frequent basis and these should be agreed with the manager as part of a review on the employee's individual circumstances.

## 6. EMPLOYEES IN A PROBATION PERIOD

- i. In most cases, it is recommended that managers plan for employees to come into the office rather than working from home during their first weeks in post.
- ii. This may mean reorganising working arrangements for other team members who may be needed to support the new employee by coming into the office and/or asking other members of the team to work from home on particular days.
- iii. The decision on when a new employee can work from home will be the decision of the manager taking into consideration performance, work allocated and personal needs.

## 7. AGILE HOME WORKING IN PRACTICE

### 7.1 Location

- i. If an employee is working from home, the expectation will be that this will be from the home address supplied to the council. If employees wish to work from any other location this will be by exception only e.g., caring responsibilities and must be agreed by the Head of Service/Director.
- ii. In order to work from home there must be appropriate utilities such as secure internet connection and electricity. The location must also be secure in terms of the confidential nature of the work and also for the equipment provided.
- iii. **Employees will NOT be permitted to work from a location outside of the UK in any circumstances. No equipment can be taken anywhere other than the agreed work locations. Undertaking work from a second home/holiday locations in the UK is also NOT permitted.**

### 7.2 Insurance cover

- i. Employees should ensure that all Council property is used appropriately and responsibly and that all reasonable precautions are taken to prevent damage and theft. Any damage or theft of Council property must be reported to the line manager immediately.
- ii. Employees working at home are covered by the Council's Employer's Liability Insurance and Public Liability Insurance in the same way as if they were working from an office providing the rules of this policy have been followed.
- iii. Staff may also need to inform their home insurers/mortgage lender of this temporary arrangement.

### **7.3 Communication and contact**

- i. Communication arrangements must be open and robust. Employees working from home should generally be readily contactable, normally via teams, email and by telephone, during their work pattern. Whilst working from home is based on the concept of mutual trust, employees must keep their calendar up to date from a staff welfare perspective with read only calendar access being provided to managers to undertake their welfare role. Where staff have to deal with a personal matter during the working day, then this is allowed as it forms part of the mutual trust arrangement. However where such time is needed we would request that staff mark up their calendar '**out of the office**' as this will allow managers/colleagues to be aware that they are unavailable and avoid any unnecessary phone calls or concern whilst they are dealing with a personal situation.
- ii. Home working etiquette should be followed, please see Appendix 1

### **7.4 Information security**

- i. All employees working from home must ensure that they adhere to the Council's policies, procedures and guidance in relation to Information Security, Data Protection and Freedom of Information.

### **7.5 Health and Safety**

- i. Staff will be provided with equipment which is appropriate for their job roles and in line with any reasonable adjustments that an individual has.
- ii. Any other equipment requested outside of the standard equipment provision will need to be considered once a clear business reason has been made by the individual.
- iii. Managers must ensure that a DSE Assessment is carried out by employees working from home to ensure that they have the correct equipment required to perform their job role. Relevant safety policies in this respect can be accessed via the RCT Source.
- iv. If a staff member cannot work safely at home, then they will be required to work from an appropriate office.

### **7.6 Additional household expenses**

- i. The Council will not pay any additional household costs as home working arrangements are deemed a mutual benefit. However, employees are entitled to claim tax relief from HMRC when working from home. The employee is responsible for making this claim. Please see HMRC Website.

## **8. ATTENDANCE AND AVAILABILITY FOR WORK**

- i. Staff must be available and able to work on their contracted days in accordance with the needs of the service whether they are in the office or working from home. As such any full day absence should be for an authorised form of leave or sickness. Any variation to this arrangement can only be made by prior agreement with the manager.

## **9. HOURS OF WORK**

- i. Whilst this arrangement is in place, the current flexible working hours scheme will remain suspended and our current arrangement based on the concept of mutual trust between us as the employer and our employees will continue.
- ii. Subject to service or team needs as described above, this will allow staff the flexibility to organise their workloads to meet any caring or wellbeing demands, whilst still providing Council services from an agile/home working perspective.
- iii. Subject to point (ii) above, staff will continue to take ownership of this arrangement by ensuring that between themselves they cover the 8.30 to 5 public operating times and other established working hours necessary to meet the needs of the service e.g., evening or weekend work.
- iv. Whether or not, they are working in the office or from home, it is important to take appropriate breaks when working from home and the basic principles of taking a break after 6 hrs should be adhered to.
- v. Whilst the Council's formal flexi-time scheme will remain suspended, based on feedback from unions, staff and managers, the Council does recognise that there will be times where service demands will require staff to work above their contractual hours. If this cannot be managed within the working week then subject to approval time can be taken as Time off in Lieu (TOIL).
- vi. Where such cases arise, then subject to approval by the Head of Service or delegated manager, this can be agreed. Unlike the formal TOIL policy, there is no restriction on when the hours have to be taken back, apart from at any one time, a TOIL balance cannot exceed 37 hours (pro rata for part time workers).
- vii. In exceptional circumstances and with the agreement of their Director, these additional TOIL hours can be paid up if the use of TOIL would be counterproductive to the role being undertaken.



## 10. PERFORMANCE

- i. Working from home requires some changes in the relationship between employees and their managers. As a result, there are different responsibilities for all staff. All responsibilities are set out below.

### **Employees will:**

- a) Agree working arrangements with their manager (and in consultation with other team members where appropriate).
- b) Ensure their Outlook calendar is up to date.
- c) Comply with the IT security and data protection requirements.
- d) Take responsibility for creating a safe working environment when working from home.
- e) Take responsibility for completing the required work outputs, actions and activities in line with the performance framework for their job and their team and service standards.
- f) Take reasonable care of their own health and safety and follow the Display Screen Equipment Guidance and other health and safety arrangements and procedures.

### **Managers will:**

- a) Ensure that safe working practices are understood by employees and that they have the tools they need to do their jobs effectively.
- b) Ensure that all employees have agreed the working practices and working hours to ensure the well-being of their employees is maintained whilst working from home.
- c) Ensure, in consultation with other managers, that working arrangements mean we do not exceed our desk capacity on any one day when working from the office.
- d) Plan which members of staff are working in and out of the office on any given day.
- e) Ensure the wellbeing of their staff whilst working from home and maintain regular communication with home working staff.
- f) Ensure staff are given clear work expectations based on required outputs, actions and activities relevant to their job and their team and service standards.

### **Managers will ensure that their staff:**

- a) Have access to the appropriate technology and equipment to work effectively both in the office environment and from home.
- b) Have access to appropriate training and support to work effectively in the new ways.

- c) Take responsibility for creating a safe working environment when working from home.
- d) Have access to appropriate equipment to assist in the creation of a safe working environment when working from home.
- e) Have their individual circumstances and requirements (particularly where an employee has a disability) taken into account, including the needs of newly appointed staff, trainees and apprentices who may initially need to come into the office more often for support rather than working at home.
- f) Have access to a continuous performance review process which includes regular 1:1 conversations and/or supervision.
- g) Ensure that information governance and health and safety requirements are adhered to at all times.

## **11. EXPENSES AND TRAVEL**

- i. It is anticipated that, in the majority of cases, the costs of working from home will be offset by the savings in the cost and time of commuting to work, and the benefits of an improved work/life balance. Therefore, any additional costs incurred by working at home will not be met by the Council.
- ii. If employees are required to travel for work, on a working from home day, then the Council's Travelling Expenses Policy will apply in the normal way.

### **Blended Working Etiquette**

‘How we do our jobs is more important than where we do them from’ (Joe Garner, CEO, Nationwide, BBC Today Programme). Many companies are considering alternative arrangement to office working. Since the start of the pandemic, we have all had to adapt rapidly to a changing working environment. Here are some hints and tips on how to get the best from working from home for both the organisation and you.

### **General Points**

- Get dressed every day for ‘work’ whether you are in the house or in the office.
- Have clear boundaries about when the working day starts and ends, turn off your laptop and ‘phone at the ‘end’ of the day and don’t be tempted to look at emails later on!
- Don’t feel that you have to be ‘present’ all the time if you are absent due to sickness or on leave you must turn off your work tools.
- Do not feel guilty about the benefits of home working. Embrace the flexibility that it gives you as an individual as the organisation also embraces the increase in productivity and the savings that it brings.

### **Workstation**

- If possible, have your work equipment somewhere other than your relaxing spaces in the home or have it packed away so that you effectively ‘go’ to work every day, keeping some separation in the home.
- Again, where possible make sure you have your screen set up at the right height, distance etc (DSE assessment)
- Make sure your information can be kept confidential from others in your home where relevant.
- Make sure your equipment is kept in a safe and secure place.
- If you are working in a shared space try to have somewhere that you can pack away your equipment at the end of the day/weekends.

### **Communication**

- Make sure that your manager is aware of your working pattern, i.e., office, home, meetings etc.
- Teams, email and the telephone can all be used to keep in touch and it is up to you to manage this alongside your work (see below).
- Have regular contact with your manager and team members to keep in touch.

- Put aside time to catch up in person with team members/colleagues to ensure those relationships are maintained, including non-work-related contact as you would in the office.
- Remote conversations can be misinterpreted especially when delivering a difficult message, focus on sensitivity and kindness.

### **Managing contacts**

- Use your calendar to book meetings and time to do other work. This pulls through onto teams showing you as 'red' busy.
- If you are not available, on a break or doing another piece of work change your indicator colour on Teams.
- If someone calls you and you are busy, refuse the call and ensure that you call them back when available.
- Manage your contacts to expect that meetings are virtual unless stated otherwise.
- If you are on a Teams meeting and the telephone rings, allow it to go to voice mail unless you have finished your meeting.

### **Managing Time**

- You are not required to keep a formal record of your working time. However, you may wish to do so to ensure that you maintain an appropriate work life balance.
- Make sure you have a lunch break daily.
- Aim to go outside and have some fresh air daily.
- Have regular breaks from the screen to move and stretch
- Organise virtual meetings with a break in between of at least 15 minutes do not get into the habit of back-to-back meetings.

### **Virtual Meetings Introductions**

- Where meetings are more formal the meeting organiser or a nominated person should invite introductions.
- In meetings always have your camera turned on at least for introductions. You can then agree whether cameras should be on or not. You would not attend a meeting in person and keep your back to the room so share the same courtesy virtually.
- If someone is having connection problems, your camera and sound can be turned off to maximise the connection. If someone is sharing information cameras can also be turned off.
- State the purpose of the meeting and the intended time, try to keep to this as others may have additional meetings to follow.
- Be clear about housekeeping/comfort breaks dependant on the time span of the meeting.

- Agree how everyone can interact in the meeting to ensure they all are involved but do not talk over others. For instance, 'Hands up' managed by the nominated lead.

### **Backgrounds/Visibility**

- Dress appropriately for the meeting that you are in. For example, casual office wear should be visible.
- Try to have a plain/impersonal background or use a standard background. Be aware of privacy issues and consider what you want to share with the group you are meeting with.
- Remember that although your picture on the screen appears very small to you, others may see a full screen and will be able to see far more detail such as family photos or items on your shelves.

### **Maximising sound**

- Where there are multiple participants in the meeting, stay on mute unless you need to speak.
- Use earphones/headsets this reduces background noise.
- Try to be in a private area for meetings, if not possible, make others in your shared space aware when you are in a meeting.
- Make sure that you are present and aware in a meeting. It may be appropriate to check emails etc. but be aware that everyone can see you!

### **Sharing Information**

- If you intend to share information, close down any documents/apps that you do not need.
- Try to practice sharing beforehand to ensure that you are sharing what you intend to.
- Make sure that shared documents are easily visible to others as they may appear smaller on the shared screen.
- Remember to stop sharing when you have finished!

### **Finally**

- Remember that you are not working from home but you are at home working.
- Although you are saving travel time to work, you are not expected to add this to your working day.
- Feel confident to manage the contacts as you would in the office.
- Use the flexibility being at home gives you while achieving your working goals in your contracted hours.