Banked Hours Scheme Guide

1. Purpose of the scheme

The Banked Hours Scheme supports a flexible approach to working time. It allows employees, where this is suitable for their role and agreed with their manager, to vary when they work their contractual hours and to bank additional hours worked so they can be taken back at another time. The scheme is intended to help employees balance work and personal commitments while maintaining effective, accessible and customer-focused services.

The scheme relies on trust, clear communication and accurate record keeping. It should be used sensibly and consistently, with service needs coming first.

2. Who the scheme applies to

The scheme applies to employees whose role and service area can support flexible working arrangements. It may not be suitable for every role, team or working pattern. Managers are responsible for confirming how the scheme applies within their service area and what flexibility can be supported while maintaining service delivery, team cover and customer access.

Banked hours do not create a contractual right to work additional hours or take time off whenever requested. Arrangements remain subject to manager approval, service needs and the employee's contractual working hours.

3. Key principles

- Contractual hours must still be worked overall.
- Customer service, team cover and business priorities must come first.
- Employees should not routinely build up large balances without prior discussion and agreement.
- Managers should monitor workloads and ensure additional hours are appropriate, necessary and proportionate.
- Employees must record working time accurately and keep their banked hours record up to date.
- Time away from work using banked hours must be agreed in advance where it affects service cover or is for more than half a working day.
- The scheme should not be used to avoid recording sickness absence, annual leave or other forms of leave where those arrangements are more appropriate.

4. Recording banked hours

Employees must record their times worked each working day on the approved banked hours spreadsheet or template. The manager will decide where banked hours sheets should be stored and may request to review them at any time.

Where additional hours are worked, employees should add a brief comment explaining the reason, particularly where the hours are significant or unusual. For example: covering urgent service demand, attending an agreed evening meeting, dealing with a planned deadline, or providing agreed cover for absence. Commentary should explain the work reason for the additional hours, not just repeat the times worked.

Employees who eat at their desk must still record an appropriate break. A lunch break or rest break should not be counted as working time unless the employee is genuinely required to work through that period and this has been agreed with their manager.

5. Building up or going into deficit

Employees may build up or go into deficit by up to the equivalent of their weekly contracted hours, with manager oversight. For a full-time employee working 36.25 hours per week, this means a maximum positive or negative balance of 36.25 hours. For part-time employees, the limit is their own weekly contracted hours. This flexibility is subject to business need and is intended to allow employees greater flexibility in their working hours, provided there is no detriment to the Council, its services or service delivery.

If an employee is approaching the limit, or if additional hours are building up quickly, they must discuss this with their manager as soon as possible. This helps identify workload pressures, agree priorities and avoid excessive working hours.

6. Taking banked hours

Banked hours may be taken flexibly and the scheme is not prescriptive about how they are used. For example, employees may agree a longer lunch break, a later start, an earlier finish, or time away from work in hours or full days. There is no fixed limit on the number of hours or days that may be taken at one time, provided the employee has sufficient banked hours available and there is no impact to service delivery.

All requests remain subject to business need and must be agreed with the manager in advance, taking account of service delivery, customer access, team cover and agreed work commitments. Employees should ensure their diary and any appropriate booking system reflect the agreed time away from work. Time taken without agreement may be treated as unauthorised absence.

7. Responsibilities

Employee responsibilities

- Keep the banked hours record accurate, up to date and accessible to the manager.
- Record actual working time, including breaks, leave and absence correctly.
- Seek agreement before working significant* additional hours where possible.
- Add clear comments where additional hours have been worked.
- Discuss workload pressures early rather than building up significant hours retrospectively.
- Request time off using banked hours in advance and ensure the request is approved before taking the time.
- Use the scheme in line with its purpose and not as a substitute for sickness absence, annual leave or other leave arrangements.

Manager responsibilities

- Confirm local expectations for working hours, team cover and service availability.
- Review banked hours records regularly, including through one-to-ones.
- Authorise additional hours where there is a clear work need.
- Challenge unexplained, excessive or retrospective balances where appropriate.
- Ensure employees take appropriate breaks and do not work excessive hours.
- Consider whether high balances indicate workload, capacity or wellbeing issues.
- Ensure requests to use banked hours are considered fairly, consistently and in line with service needs.
- Seek HR advice where there are concerns about misuse, inconsistent application or complex circumstances.

* Significant additional hours are hours that are more than occasional or minor, are building up regularly, or may indicate ongoing workload or capacity pressures.

8. Leave, absence and other situations

Annual leave

Annual leave should continue to be booked and recorded in the usual way. Banked hours should not normally be used in a way that prevents employees from taking their annual leave entitlement.

Sickness absence

Banked hours should not be used as a substitute for sickness absence where an employee is too unwell to work. If an employee is sick, they should follow the normal

sickness reporting process. Where an employee feels well enough to work but needs a short adjustment, such as a later start, this may be agreed with the manager where appropriate.

Medical appointments

Employees should make reasonable efforts to arrange medical appointments outside working time where possible. Where this is not possible, employees should speak to their manager in advance and agree how the time will be managed. Banked hours may be used where appropriate and agreed, but medical treatment that leaves an employee unfit to work should be recorded as sickness absence.

Bank holidays

Bank holidays should be recorded in line with the employee's normal working pattern and the Council's HR and payroll processes. If an employee works on a bank holiday with prior agreement because the service requires it, the manager should ensure the correct adjustment or entitlement is recorded.

Travel time and breaks

Normal travel between home and the usual workplace is not working time and should not be included in the banked hours record. Employees must also record breaks accurately. If an employee eats lunch at their desk but is not required to work during that period, it should still be recorded as a break.

9. Misuse of the scheme

The Banked Hours Scheme is a discretionary working arrangement and may be withdrawn or restricted where it is not being used appropriately. Examples may include failing to keep records up to date, recording inaccurate hours, building up significant hours without agreement, taking time off without approval, or using banked hours in a way that undermines service delivery or other HR policies.

Concerns should normally be addressed through early conversation and management support. Where concerns continue, managers should seek HR advice before taking further action.

10. Good practice checklist

- Agree team expectations for availability, office cover and customer contact.
- Update banked hours records at least weekly.
- Use short, clear comments to explain why additional hours were worked.
- Discuss balances during one-to-ones, especially where they are increasing.
- Take breaks and avoid routinely working excessive hours.
- Plan time off using banked hours in advance wherever possible.
- Use annual leave, sickness absence and other leave arrangements where they are the correct route.

- Ask HR for advice where the situation is unclear or sensitive.