Hybrid Working Scheme

This scheme applies to all North West Leicestershire District Council employees, unless stated otherwise, and will be applied fairly and consistently without discrimination on the grounds of marital status, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, nationality, ethnic or national origins, trade union membership or activity, political or religious belief and unrelated criminal conviction.

**Introduction**

The Council recognises that working in a flexible way is essential to the successful transformation of the organisation and contributes to the Council’s performance as well as supporting employees to achieve a positive work-life balance.

The Council’s aim is to support hybrid and innovative working arrangements which still meet the delivery of effective customer-focussed services and the needs of the people of the District of North West Leicestershire.

Supporting employees to achieve greater flexibility requires consideration on where, when and how work is carried out; this underpins the concept of hybrid working. There are many business benefits associated with hybrid working; it can help to increase employee motivation, reduce sickness absence, promote employee wellbeing and attract / retain a skilled and motivated workforce.

This scheme is designed to provide managers with a framework for implementing new ways of working in line with hybrid working but also managing a workforce in the context of having reduced office accommodation. It should be read in conjunction with the Flexibility in Working Styles Principles document. A number of HR policies will also change as a result of this new way of working.

Managers are responsible for driving the aims of this scheme and promoting the required cultural change, which includes having a positive approach to the consideration of hybrid working (subject to the needs of the service) and supporting the implementation of the new ways of working.

**Culture and Behaviour**

The way we work is changing with the need for greater flexibility, increasing demands on the service, the need to meet efficiency targets, zero carbon targets and a further need to attract and retain the best talent in order to deliver even better services as an organisation. Therefore, there is a need to consider the way we work and to move away from traditional methods of working.

In order to embed our working model it is necessary to challenge and change the culture and behaviours which prove to be a barrier. The concept of how we work will be further challenged with reduced office space and will emphasise the need for more effective working practices, management styles, communication and the importance of relationships at work.

Heads of Service and Team Managers will need to work with employees regarding the appropriate business need and associated hours of work with regards to what is relevant to all parties and workable for the service delivery.

This may result in a need to make different decisions for different people at times, taking into account factors such as the needs of the team and service.

Whilst it is important to be mindful of consistency to ensure fairness, embracing hybrid working will mean managers considering workplace requirements as well as individual personal circumstances and work styles when making decisions. We are looking for **“consistency whilst enabling uniqueness”** and appreciate that some teams have more flexibility than others. This is ok.

We also build our culture around our values: Respect, Pride, Trust, Excellence and Growth and the framework of behaviours that underpin those values.

**What is Hybrid Working?**

Working in a hybrid way is about forming a new relationship between employee and the Council, focusing on when and where we work. The focus for hybrid workers is on delivering agreed outcomes, as opposed to the number of hours worked. However, staff still have a total contracted number of hours and how these are worked will vary from person to person. The hours may differ from core business hours, be completed remotely or working in one of the Council or partner’s buildings and will require the use of both virtual and digital working.

**Customer focus remains at the heart of everything we do** and therefore any decisions taken by individuals in terms of working flexibly must meet our customer need, fit with our customer first strategy and support delivery of our agreed outcomes. In addition it is recognised, for those who can work flexibly, that this is a real benefit and one we would wish to continue to support. However, we need to ensure we consider the impact of how we work on ourselves, our team and wider colleagues. Team Managers are responsible for working out a system that works for their team, ensuring customer service comes first, followed by flexibility for employees.

To enable true flexibility in working style, the principles and guidelines are the basic requirement for all staff. There may be further specific requirements agreed locally for some teams and for some staff hybrid working will be more limited as the nature of their role means they are required to deliver a service from a specific location or at a specific time. However we will agree local options to allow as much flexibility as possible for all staff. The flexibility must work both ways – from employee and manager – to maintain customer service in the first instance.

The health and wellbeing of all staff remains very important to us and any concerns or challenges as a result of hybrid working should be raised directly with your manager. We would also encourage staff to balance how they work, potentially taking time during what were normal “office hours” to undertake activities to support their wellbeing and happiness e.g. exercise activities, volunteering and caring.

One Team – One Council is critical to the success of how we operate. Managers will agree with team members the best way to build and maintain a high performing team and all team members are expected to support and participate in any reasonable agreed activity or request related to this.

**Benefits of Hybrid Working**

Research shows that working more flexibly results in a culture whereby staff are motivated, high performing and engaged, increasing productivity which enhances the reputation of the organisation as an ‘attractive employer’.

Other benefits of working in this way for employees as well as the organisation may also include:

* + Improved efficiency and effectiveness.
  + Reduced travel time and costs as a result of commuting.
  + Contributing to less traffic and pollution.
  + Greater job satisfaction.
  + Enhanced quality of life by maintaining a positive work life balance.
  + Greater flexibility for combining work and outside commitments.
  + More effective use of office and car parking space.
  + More flexibility around sickness absence.
  + Recruitment and retention of key skills.
  + Improved opportunity for partnership working.

**Hybrid Working Hours Scheme**

The right to make a formal request to contractually change their working arrangements / hours under the statutory scheme will remain. However, where there is not a contractual change or where there is an informal agreement with the line manager to change working arrangements (which will apply to the majority of employees) there will not be the need to submit a formal request.

The following information replaces the Flexitime Scheme. The scheme allows employees to balance out their working hours over a period of time and doesn’t require employees to have a limited amount of flexitime off in the traditional way. If the time off affects service delivery or the team rota, permission must be sought before that time off is taken.

This scheme enables employees and managers to be far more flexible in how they structure their working week whilst adhering to some focussed principles.

The Team Manager or Head of Service is responsible for ensuring the needs of the customer are met by providing an accessible service during our normal office hours. This can be by appointment, on the telephone, remotely or in person.

Principles:

1. Customer service comes first. Provision must be made for teams to have cover from 8:45am until 5:00pm, Monday to Friday.
2. Managers can organise customer contact arrangements outside the regular office hours if that provides improved service and employees are prepared and able to work at these times.
3. The Council office building will only be open from 07:00 hours to 19:00 hours for office-based working.
4. Employees all have weekly contractual hours. Whilst these may be worked in a flexible way over a period of time, the manager is responsible for ensuring that overall an employee is working their hours.
5. Employees may be required to attend an office base on what might normally be a home-based working period if required for a business priority. This may occur at short noticesuch as in the event of sickness or other unexpected business reasons.
6. Contractual non-working hours or days can only be changed / varied by mutual agreement.
7. Everyone must adhere to the Working Time Directive and not work more than 48 hours per week on a regular basis.
8. Employees must take a minimum of 30-minute break if they work more than 6 hours – this would usually be the lunch break.
9. Employees must ensure that a minimum amount of 11 hours is taken off work between ‘shifts’ – this is usually the overnight break.
10. Employees must have a minimum of a 24-hour break, uninterrupted by work, each week – this is usually the weekend.
11. Time worked needs to be recorded for audit and health and safety purposes. A new timesheet will be developed to record working time.
12. Employees must speak to their manager and discuss if they accrue more than 100% of their weekly contracted hours (i.e. if they accrue an additional 36.25 hours for a full-time employee)
13. Employees must speak to their manager and discuss if they fall into a negative balance of more than 100% of their weekly contracted hours (i.e. if they fall into a deficit of 36.25 hours for a full-time employee)
14. When using additional hours accrued over the weekly contractual hours, this only needs to be agreed with the manager in advance if it will compromise the principles of customer support and/or office cover arrangements.
15. If an employee is found to be abusing this scheme the Council will remove the benefit of working to the Hybrid Working Scheme and standard working hours will be worked.
16. Any surplus or deficit in working time hours when leaving the employment of the Council should be managed during the notice period.
17. Any overtime or additional hours that may be subject to additional payment must be agreed in advance before the hours are worked. These would be exceptional circumstances.

**Managing Absence**

This scheme gives more flexibility in deciding whether time should be recorded as sickness because an employee needs time off to recover, or whether hours can be adjusted to accommodate a small amount of time away from work.

See the Attendance Policy for more detail.

**Working hours and Bank Holidays**

Time off for bank holidays will be automatically recorded on iTrent. Under the new way of working, an employee may choose to work at home on a bank holiday, subject to the needs of the business and manager agreement. If this is the case, an adjustment needs to be made in iTrent via HR.

If, to meet service requirements and by mutual consent, an employee is asked by the manager to work on a statutory bank holiday, or if the service is operating on a bank holiday and it is your normal working day,usual terms and conditions provision for overtime and time off will be given.

**Medical appointments**

It is expected that employees will take reasonable steps to ensure that absences for medical appointments of any kind are kept to a minimum, and that every effort is made to minimise service disruption. A sensible approach should be taken by the employee and the manager. The employee should, wherever possible, arrange appointments with minimal disruption to service – this may mean not booking an appointment on their ‘rota’ day or during busy periods.

This is not always possible with some more specialist appointments so flexibility and understanding on both sides is needed.

Most medical appointments should take place in non working time, however there is a statutory requirement to allow time for certain medical appointments and these will be honoured. Employees may be asked to provide supporting evidence of their appointments.

**Managing by Performance and Output**

The new ways of working will mean there is a need to manage by performance / output as opposed to presenteeism.

Managers should focus on the ‘outputs’ and not how and when the employee works to achieve what they need to do. For example, an advantage of hybrid working can be that the employee chooses the hours worked across the day, if this fits in with the needs of the service. Without the need to travel into the usual place of work, an earlier start can be made, or the employee might choose to work later into the evening. With a focus on outputs, the person should be able to plan their work in the most effective way.

The Council recognises that this is a change for many who will be more used to staff being in the office regularly or on a daily basis and recording time in the traditional way. The basic principles of management still apply but managers will need to ensure that there are additional protocols in place, some of which are covered below:

Managing hybrid working will not only require creative thinking, but also a good level of communication, organisation, trust and working together in order to ensure that the arrangements put in place do not have an impact upon the quality of work or the targets that the service is required to meet.

Having an adaptable style of management will ensure managers can take advantage of opportunities to improve the services offered and empower employees with different work styles and methods. Managers cannot expect to gain from the flexibility of employees and then to manage in a strict and rigid way.

Managing employees who work in this way should not be radically different from managing them in their previous place of work. However, it is important not to have an ‘out of sight, out of mind’ approach, whereby just because employees are not physically present, they get overlooked.

It is therefore important for managers to establish some ground rules with teams and employees when they move towards hybrid working.

A support hub is available on Learning Pool for managers and employees to help adjust to these changes.

**Maintaining Communication**

# Regular one to ones/Reflections

It is important to continue regular, monthly, one to ones with employees to discuss their progress on the agreed objectives and keeping them informed on developments within the team and organisation. Clear objectives/ targets/ deadlines and performance standards should be agreed with all employees including those who are hybrid workers. Ensuring that hybrid workers are included in training and personal development opportunities such as career progression and promotion is vital.

# Agree ‘check-in’ procedures.

Managers may wish to agree in advance the frequency and method for checking in which can be by telephone, by email, arranging a face-to-face meeting or a catch up via Microsoft Teams in addition to monthly one to ones. Managers should also make themselves available to employees and respond to any questions they may have in a timely manner.

# Employee’s Welfare

Just because employees are not physically present, it does not mean that they are no longer part of the team. It is essential to include them in any messages and to invite them to meetings or events. Keeping in touch with employees who are hybrid workers is important so that they feel informed and included.

The employer has a duty of care to the employee. It is therefore important to watch out for signs that they may be switching off, becoming de-motivated or feeling isolated.

**Performance Management**

If problems with performance arise, it is important to provide specific feedback on the areas of concerns and provide the employee with an opportunity to discuss any issues they have and to agree a way forward. Ideally, feedback should be given during a face-to-face meeting but if this is not possible, this may be done by Teams or over the telephone at a mutually suitable time. See Capability Procedure for more details.

Depending on what the concerns are, Managers may wish to seek further advice from Human Resources.

**Travel arrangements**

Employees should consider the most efficient means of travel in terms of time and the amount of mileage incurred. Therefore, planning journeys in advance is essential.

Travel between an employee’s home and their work base (ordinarily the Council Offices) and/or the return journey is not claimable.

The designated council location as set out in the contract of employment, is considered an employee’s permanent work base.

In order to minimise travel to save travel costs, time and carbon footprint, employees should consider whether the journey is necessary or whether an alternative method – e.g. remote meeting – could be used instead.

The total mileage that can be claimed for journeys relating to approved training courses, is outlined in the Training and Development Policy.

**Confidentiality and Information Management**

The hybrid worker must carry out work for the council in a suitable location during working hours and must not allow members of their family or third parties who are not employed by the council to access or use the council’s equipment or data. Additionally, confidentiality should be maintained where work related conversations are taking place.

Employees who work in a hybrid way are responsible for keeping all documents and information associated with the council’s business secure at all times. Specifically, agile workers are under a duty to:

* + Keep all confidential documentation and data belonging to the council securely.
  + Set up and use unique passwords for the computer and any other digital device in accordance with the council’s ICT policies.

# Health and Safety

The employee and the Council are subject to the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974), regardless of where the work is carried out. The Council must, as far as is reasonably practical, ensure the employee’s health, safety and welfare at work.

If a work-related accident occurs whilst the employee is working remotely or from home it must be reported in accordance with the usual procedures via the portal:

<https://app.uk.sheassure.net/bassetlaw/p/she>

# Personal Security

All meetings with work colleagues, managers or customers should take place via Microsoft Teams or where necessary at an office / external work location. Such meetings must not take place at an employee’s home.

Employees working remotely and from home must adhere to the Lone Working Policy and should ensure that colleagues know where and when to expect them at a particular location.

**Insurance**

Council Owned Equipment

Items of equipment belonging to the Council are not covered by the Council’s insurance whilst they are in the employee’s home and when in transit, with the exception of portable computer equipment.

Portable computer equipment (laptops, surface pros, notebooks and tablet computers, removable satellite-navigation systems, digital cameras and smartphones and associated software and programs) is covered whilst in employees’ homes and whilst in transit.

Employees must take all reasonable care of Council owned equipment taken away from Council premises. Employees may wish to contact their home insurance company regarding the nature and extent of the use of their home for work purposes, as working at home may have an impact upon an employee’s home insurance policy.

Employees working from home are covered by the Council’s Employer Liability Scheme. However, employees do have a duty to take reasonable care within their own working environment.

Personal Equipment

Any personal equipment used by the employee for work purposes shall not be covered by the Council’s insurance.

**Equipment and Technology**

The Council is responsible for the provision and upkeep of equipment and technology that it provides to employees to enable them to work in a hybrid way.

Discussions relating to equipment and IT requirements should be had between the employee and line manager. If the result of a DSE (display screen equipment) assessment is that some different furniture is required, arrangements will be made for equipment or furniture in the home on a case by case basis. All IT equipment should be sourced via the ICT Team.

PAT testing (portable appliance testing) should be undertaken as required. Employees will have to bring equipment into the office for testing when requested.

**Additional Costs**

The council will allow an employee to claim (as a one off) up to £100 for a new desk and £100 for an office chair to enable to employee to set up a DSE compliant workstation at home. This should be claimed, with receipts, via iTrent.

Additional costs such as heating costs, lighting, electricity will be met by the employee and not paid by the Council. If an employee is incurring additional costs as a result of hybrid working, they should discuss with their manager in the first instance.

Government information on claiming tax relief for additional household costs if you have to work at home on a regular basis, either for all or part of the week can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home>

Additional household costs include things like heating, metered water bills, home contents insurance, business calls or a new broadband connection.

They **do not** include costs that would stay the same whether you were working at home or in an office, such as mortgage interest, rent or council tax.