Hybrid Working Scheme Guide

This guidance sets out the Council's approach to hybrid working, including expectations for managers and employees, working hours, communication, performance, wellbeing, health and safety, information management, travel, equipment and costs. It will be reviewed regularly to ensure it remains aligned with current legislation, Council policies and operational requirements.

1. Introduction

The Council supports flexible ways of working that help us deliver effective, customer-focused services while supporting employees to achieve a positive work-life balance. Hybrid working is an important benefit for employees, offering greater flexibility in how they organise their working lives, where this can be balanced with the needs of the service. It works best when it is built around our values of Respect, Pride, Trust, Excellence and Growth, and when managers and employees work together to agree arrangements that meet service needs, support wellbeing and help teams perform well.

However, some services will not be able to operate on a hybrid basis because the nature of their service delivery requires work to be carried out in person or from a specific location.

Supporting employees to achieve greater flexibility requires managers and employees to consider where, when and how work is carried out. This is the basis of hybrid working. When implemented well, hybrid working can increase employee motivation, support wellbeing, reduce sickness absence and help the Council attract and retain a skilled and motivated workforce.

Heads of Service and Team Managers should work with their teams to agree how services can best be delivered for internal and external customers. Decisions about working arrangements, including working hours and location, should be guided by service priorities, customer access, team cover and the most effective way for the team to achieve its outcomes. This may mean different arrangements are needed for different teams, depending on the nature of the service they provide.

2. What is Hybrid Working?

Hybrid working is about where work is done, not how it is done. The focus for hybrid workers is on delivering agreed outcomes, while continuing to work their contracted hours and meet service needs. Working arrangements may vary from person to person and team to team and could include working remotely, working from a Council or partner building, or working in person with colleagues and customers where this best supports the service.

Customers remain the heart of everything we do, any decisions about flexible or hybrid working must meet customer needs, support our customer-first approach, enable delivery of agreed outcomes, consider the impact on the individual, the team and wider colleagues, and balance flexibility with the need to maintain effective service delivery. Heads of Service and Team Managers are responsible for agreeing arrangements that work for their teams, with customer service coming first and flexibility considered alongside service needs.

Hybrid working does not replace the value of working together in person. There will be times when being physically present is the most effective way to support service delivery, customer needs, new starters, learning, team collaboration, problem solving, relationship building and wider organisational priorities. Employees are expected to be flexible and attend the workplace when required to support these needs.

Managers should set the tone for hybrid working and lead by example. Where managers expect their team to attend the workplace for service delivery, collaboration or other reasons, they should also make appropriate arrangements to be present and visible themselves, unless there is a clear service or operational reason why this is not possible.

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 or not available as the nature of their role means they are required to deliver a service from a specific location or at a specific time. However, local options will be agreed to allow as much flexibility as possible for all. The flexibility must work both ways – from employee and manager – to maintain customer service in the first instance.

The health and wellbeing of all employees remains important. Any concerns or challenges because of hybrid working should be raised directly with line managers. Employees are encouraged to balance how they work, including using appropriate flexibility to support wellbeing where this can be accommodated without impacting service delivery, team cover or customer needs.

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.

3. Hybrid working principles and expectations

For the purpose of this scheme, hybrid working means a working arrangement where an employee works from more than one location, which may include home, Council premises or another location. Hybrid working does not remove the requirement to work contractual hours, meet service needs, maintain availability, protect Council information or comply with health and safety requirements.

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 many employees) there will not be the need to submit a formal request.

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 customers both internal and external are met by providing an accessible service during our normal office hours. This can be by appointment, on the telephone, remotely or in person.

3.1 Principles

1. Provision must be made for teams to have accessible 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, always ensuring individual safety.

3. Employees all have weekly contractual hours. Whilst these may be worked in a flexible way, the manager is responsible for ensuring that overall an employee is working their hours and delivering service objectives.

4. Some employees may also use banked hours (see banked hours scheme), where this is agreed and appropriate for their role and service needs. Details about how banked hours operate, including recording, approval and use, are set out in the Banked Hours Scheme.

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 notice such 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 if required further advice is available from HR.

8. Employees **must** take a minimum of 30-minute break if they work more than 6 hours, this would usually be the lunch break. These cannot be taken at the beginning or end of the working day.

9. Employee expectations

- Agreeing working arrangements with their manager.
- Remaining contactable during agreed working time.
- Recording working time accurately.
- Attending the workplace when reasonably required.
- Maintaining confidentiality and protecting Council information.
- Completing any required health and safety assessments.
- Raising concerns early where hybrid working arrangements are affecting service delivery, wellbeing or performance.

Hybrid working arrangements should be monitored and reviewed regularly to ensure they continue to meet service needs, support employee wellbeing and are applied fairly. Managers should consider equality impacts when agreeing or reviewing arrangements and seek HR advice where there is uncertainty.

4. Maintaining Communication

Hybrid working requires managers to give more thought and planning to how employees are kept informed, updated and included. Managers should consider how information will be shared consistently, how team members will stay connected, what communication works best for the team and service, when face-to-face meetings, team days or shared office time would be beneficial, and how arrangements support team cohesion, collaboration, wellbeing and effective working relationships. Hybrid working does not replace the value of working together in person.

Hybrid working can increase the tendency for diaries to become filled with back-to-back meetings. Managers and employees should plan meetings thoughtfully, allow time for breaks, preparation and follow-up, and avoid over-filling diaries where possible. Protecting time between meetings supports wellbeing, focus, decision-making and effective service delivery.

4.1 New starters and early career employees

Managers should give particular consideration to the needs of new starters and employees in the early stages of their career when agreeing hybrid working arrangements. Hybrid working arrangements, including expectations about in-person working, should be discussed and agreed between the manager and the new starter before they begin employment, ideally during the recruitment process, so that expectations are clear to everyone from the outset. Spending time in the office and sharing a workspace with colleagues can help employees build relationships, understand the team and organisation, and feel connected to the workplace.

This is especially important where employees are learning a new role, developing confidence or benefiting from the informal development that comes from working alongside more experienced colleagues. Managers should consider when in-person working would support induction, coaching, knowledge sharing, learning by observation and wider team integration, and employees are expected to be flexible in attending the workplace to support this.

4.2 Regular one-to-ones and 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.

4.3 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.

4.4 Employee welfare and inclusion

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.

5. Managing Performance and Output

Managing performance in a hybrid working environment should focus on agreed outcomes, service delivery, quality of work and the employee's contribution to the team, rather than simply where someone is working. Hybrid working is built on trust, clear expectations and regular communication.

Managers should agree clear objectives, standards, timescales and availability expectations with employees, and review these regularly through one-to-ones and ongoing conversations. Employees should be supported to plan their work in a way that helps them be effective, while continuing to meet service priorities, customer needs and agreed outcomes.

Flexibility should support both the employee and the service. Where working patterns vary, managers and employees should ensure that contractual hours are worked, customers and colleagues can access the service when needed, and team cover is maintained.

Managing hybrid working well requires communication, organisation, trust and working together. Arrangements should not negatively affect the quality of work, team working, agreed targets or the standards the service is required to meet.

Managers should take an adaptable and supportive approach, using hybrid working to empower employees while keeping service delivery at the centre. The flexibility offered through hybrid working should be balanced with clear expectations, fairness and accountability.

Managing employees who work in a hybrid way should not be radically different from managing employees based in the workplace. However, managers should ensure that hybrid workers are visible, included, supported and not overlooked because they are not always physically present.

Managers should agree practical ground rules with teams and employees, including availability, communication, attendance at the workplace, standards of work, review arrangements and how any concerns will be raised and addressed.

Learning and support are available to help managers and employees adjust to hybrid working arrangements, including resources available through the learning system.

If concerns about performance arise, managers should provide clear and specific feedback, explain the impact on the service or team, and give the employee an opportunity to discuss any issues and agree a way forward. Feedback should normally be given through a supportive conversation, ideally face to face where appropriate, or by Microsoft teams or telephone where this is more suitable. The Capability Policy and Procedure should be followed where required.

Managers should seek advice from Human Resources where they are unsure how to address performance concerns, where further support may be needed, or where formal action may be appropriate.

5.1 Agency workers

Agency workers may work on a hybrid basis where this is appropriate for the assignment and has been agreed by the relevant manager and the supplying agency. Expectations about working location, in-person attendance, availability, communication and service delivery should be clear from the outset. Agency workers working in a hybrid way should be managed consistently and fairly, with the same focus on clear objectives, quality, conduct, attendance, accountability and agreed outcomes as other members of the team. Any concerns about performance should be addressed promptly with the agency worker and, where appropriate, the supplying agency, in line with the terms of the assignment and the Council's arrangements for managing agency workers.

5.2 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.

Hybrid working can provide helpful flexibility in the event of an emergency or where an employee needs to manage dependent responsibilities. This should be approached sensibly and with understanding, while also considering the needs of the service, whether the employee is able to carry out their role effectively during that time, and whether the arrangement could place the employee, a dependent, colleagues or customers at risk.

See the Attendance Management Policy for more detail.

5.3 Working hours and Bank Holidays

Time off for bank holidays will be automatically recorded on the HR and Payroll system. 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 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.

5.4 Medical appointments

Hybrid working can provide some flexibility to attend medical appointments and reduce disruption where appointments cannot reasonably be arranged outside working time. Employees are expected to make reasonable efforts to arrange appointments outside their working time wherever possible and to minimise any impact on service delivery. Where an appointment must take place during working time, employees should discuss this with their manager as early as possible and agree how the time will be managed, taking into account the nature of the appointment, service needs and any statutory requirements.

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

Where an appointment must take place during working time, employees should discuss this with their manager as early as possible and agree how the time will be managed. 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.

6. Travel arrangements

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 a n employee's permanent work base.

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.

7. Confidentiality and Information Management

The hybrid worker must carry out work for the Council in a suitable and appropriate location during working hours. Employees must ensure that the location they are working from is appropriate for accessing Council systems, documents and information, and that confidentiality can be maintained. They 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. Confidentiality should also be maintained where work-related conversations are taking place.

The same rules around confidentiality, information security and appropriate use of Council systems apply in all working locations, including home, Council premises, partner sites or other approved locations. Employees must continue to comply with all relevant Council policies, procedures and guidance wherever they are working.

8. Health and Safety

Health and safety responsibilities apply in all working locations, including home, Council premises, partner sites or other approved locations. Employees must continue to follow all relevant Council health and safety policies, procedures and guidance wherever they are working, including completing any required assessments and raising concerns with their manager promptly.

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

8.1 Personal Security

Personal security expectations also apply in all working locations. Employees should ensure that their working arrangements are safe and appropriate, that colleagues and managers know when and where they are working where this is relevant, and that they follow all Council policies and guidance relating to lone working, personal safety and safe working arrangements.

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.

8.2 Changes in Circumstances

Hybrid working arrangements are based on employees being able to attend their designated workplace in line with the requirements of their role.

Employees who choose to move home should consider the impact this may have on their ability to travel to and from the workplace. A change in home address does not automatically entitle an employee to a reduction in their workplace attendance requirements or a permanent increase in homeworking arrangements.

Where an employee's circumstances change, the Council may consider requests for alternative arrangements on a case-by-case basis, taking into account business needs, operational requirements, and the employee's individual circumstances. However, employees should not assume that such requests will be approved.

9. Insurance

9.1 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 softwareand 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.

9.2 Personal Equipment

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

10. Expenses

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

* the Council does not require employees to work from home and operates a hybrid working arrangement for all employees.

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.

The same expectations for the safe, secure and appropriate use of Council equipment and technology apply wherever employees are working. Equipment must be used, stored and transported responsibly, and employees must follow all relevant Council policies, procedures and ICT guidance in all working locations.

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

11. 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.