Home-working Policy

London Borough of
Barking & Dagenham

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1. Introduction

Council Policy

The Council is committed to providing a modern, flexible work environment to support the efficient delivery of its services.

This means looking at new approaches to how and where employees work, and moving away from the traditional concept of a permanent base and/or desk for all employees. These will support the delivery of more efficient services, whilst helping employees to manage their work-life balance and to attract and retain staff.

Home-working will be considered where this meets the operational needs of the Council, its customers and employees.

Definition

Home-working covers a range of situations where employees may work from home for all or part of their working week. This includes working:

- at home as the main place of work
- from home as the base e,g. to visit the workplace, clients and service users
- at home on a flexible basis with time split between home and the office
- at home occasionally e.g. to carry out a piece of work

Home-working is dependant on information technology and telecommunication links to the workplace, colleagues and service users.

Benefits

Home-working can provide a range of benefits for the Council and its employees, including:

- Increased productivity
- Reduced costs / accommodation needs
- Reduced travelling / travel costs for employees
- Improved work-life balance, with flexibility as to the hours and times worked
- Greater flexibility to cover emergencies e.g. transport disruptions
- Greater job satisfaction for employees
- Improved recruitment and retention

Key principles

The availability of new technology provides an opportunity for managers and staff to review how work is organised within teams and at new ways of working; the key principles that will help enable a successful outcome are to:

- i) Consider the needs of internal and external customers and service users;
- ii) Involve all team members when reviewing how work is organised;
- iii) Be open to new ideas and to give these a chance to succeed;
- iv) Think about what support is needed and take advice;
- v) Review the situation if arrangements do not work as expected.

It is important to consider the potential impact of home-working arrangements on the service and other employees e.g. maintaining cover and taking leave etc and the following principles will also apply:

i) Home-working is subject to the needs of the service and will be reviewed regularly (at least annually);
ii) Home-working will be subject to a trial period to ensure there is no adverse impact on service delivery or to other employees;
iii) Home-working is on a voluntary basis only and employees will not be paid for travel to and from home to Council premises/work meetings/trainiing or for electricity/telephones etc);
iv) Home-working is subject to satisfactory risk assessment, which will normally be carried out by the employee who must
   - demonstrate that they can provide a safe and secure working environment at home and internet connections able to support work systems and
   - notify their manager of any changes to the work environment;
v) Employees are not allowed to look after children or others for whom they have caring responsibilities at the same time as working from home; work and caring arrangements must be kept separate;
vi) Employees must complete the Management Information training on i-learn (and any updates) at: http://lbbd.learningpool.com/course/view.php?id=140
vii) Employees must comply with the "Employee's Code of Conduct" and Council policies and procedures etc when working from home

1. Home-working - planning

General

Home-working requires a different approach to managing work, monitoring performance and maintaining relationships with colleagues.

The main consideration is how home-working impacts on service delivery and team working and it may not be suitable for some areas / job roles. Home working is on a voluntary basis only and is subject to regular (annual) review.

Planning

Managers should regularly review with staff how work is organised and the cover required at peak periods, as well as the arrangements for emergencies such as transport disruptions or where IT connectivity fails etc. (These should be set down in writing and included with the induction for new employees).

Employees need to know in advance when home-working may be considered e.g. what work can be done from home and IT needs etc. This information will also be helpful when considering applications under the statutory right of employees, (with 26 weeks continuous service), to request flexible working.

Job roles / work

The most suitable job roles where home-working may normally be considered include those which:

- Work independently, have a high level of self-management and do not require close supervision
- Work out of the office / workplace each day (at meetings, site visits, with customers or working at other locations)
- Do not require constant access to files, IT databases or other confidential information (unless these can be accessed via secure links e.g. Citrix)
- Do not require face to face contact with the public e.g. reception

  Note: Employees must not in any circumstances use their home for meetings with clients / service users.

Examples of when home-working may normally be considered include:

- Where the employee is now working flexibly and "hot-desking"
- As part of an agreed flexible working arrangement when moving into open plan / shared work accommodation
- To complete specific pieces of work (to meet urgent deadlines)
- As a reasonable adjustment for disabled staff
- As part of phased return to work from long-term sickness (to meet the new 'Statement of Fitness to Work from the DWP and where agreed by managers after taking advice from Occupational Health)
- During office moves
- There is disruption to public transport or bad weather or industrial action (where the employee already works from home as part of an existing working arrangement and/or agreed in advance with the line manager)
  See the guidance at: http://lbbdstaff/HR/Pages/Weather.aspx
- Other disruptions to public services (pandemic flu)
- As part of an agreed flexible working arrangement (dependent on the job role) e.g. under the statutory right to request flexible working

Security of data / information

Employees are responsible for the protection and safety of work information outside of the workplace. They must ensure that all data and information, electronic or paper documents are kept secure and cannot be accessed by any other parties. Failure to do so will be considered a serious matter and dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

3. Home-working – implementation

Managing employees

Managing employees working away from the workplace requires a different approach with performance measured by result rather than by attendance.

Employees working from home are still subject to the same performance measures, processes and objectives that apply to their colleagues. To ensure that this is applied fairly and consistently, it may be helpful to break down the duties and tasks of the job and / or look at output as defined pieces of work.

It is important to be clear from the outset as to what is required in terms of the work to be completed and timescales for doing so and for remaining in contact.

Practical considerations

There are a number of practical considerations that managers and employees need to consider and agree from the outset, including the:

- Work to be undertaken and timescales for completion
- Arrangements for maintaining contact with the manager/colleagues and attendance for;
  - team meetings, 1 to 1's and supervision
  - training or development
  - Corporate/departmental staff briefings
- That the employee must have completed the mandatory Management Information training on i-learn (and any updates)
- Employee's responsibility to provide a suitable IT connection to support work systems
- Employee's responsibility to provide a safe and secure work environment and to separate work and caring responsibilities
- Employee's responsibility for complying with IT security and data protection requirements, and e-mail, internet and social media usage guidelines
- Employee's responsibility for completing and returning the "Safety Self Assessment for Homeworking"* to their manager for a risk assessment, (* see the links to the Health and Safety Intranet pages at Section 4)
- Employee's responsibility to comply with the "Employee's Code of Conduct" and Council policies and procedures etc when working from home
- Arrangements when IT fails or connectivity is lost e.g. what other work can they do if they cannot access the Council's IT systems
- Times where employees can be contacted at home, which may be different to normal office hours, (and times they cannot be contacted)
- Circumstances and times where the Council may need access to the employees home e.g. to check the initial set up, data/information security and IT connectivity etc
- Employee's responsibility to check and ensure that they are "covered" on their household insurance for working from home
- Employee's responsibility to check and obtain approval from their mortgagee or landlord and insurer (buildings and contents) to work from home
- Arrangements for reporting illness/accidents
- Arrangements when home-working may be suspended/cancelled

The arrangements should be confirmed in writing and subject to a pilot period after which the manager should review the outcome with the employee.

Pilot period

It is important to be clear from the outset as to purpose and arrangements i.e.:

- Duration of the pilot period
- Arrangements being piloted
- Any support to be provided (e.g. a chrome book / work lap-top / phone etc)
- Arrangements for reviewing the outcome and measuring "success"

The timescale should be sufficient to give the arrangements chance to succeed e.g. 4-6 weeks, but must not be left "opened ended" so they become accepted practice

by default. Alternatively, if it is clear that the arrangements are not working or need adjusting, then this needs to be addressed promptly and should not be left to the end of the pilot period.

Managers must review the outcome, (including any impact on the service and colleagues), with the employee before agreeing any arrangements, which will be for a fixed period only and subject to review.

Approving home-working arrangements

Home-working arrangements should only be agreed for a fixed period of up to 12 months only after which period they must be reviewed. The arrangements must be set out and confirmed in writing.

Any changes to or reduction in hours will require a change to the employee's contract of employment and these must be forwarded to the HR Service Centre to process and go on their personnel file.

Requests from employees - statutory right to request flexible working

The statutory right applies to employees, (not agency workers), who have worked for the employer continuously for 26 weeks before applying.

Employees wanting to apply to work from home must follow the arrangements set out in the "Statutory Right to Request Flexible Working", which is available on the HR Intranet site at: http://lbbdstaff/HR/Pages/flexible.aspx

There is no right to flexible working or to work from home but requests should be considered sympathetically, subject to the needs of the service and implications for other employees.

Where the application is not approved, the employee will have a right to appeal to their Divisional Director, or if they did not agree to the application, another Divisional or Corporate Director whose decision is final.

Monitoring

Applications under Statutory Right to Request Flexible Working" to work from home will be monitored and reviewed annually to ensure that the arrangements are applied fairly and consistently across the Council.

4. Advice and Support

Further information on home-working, including FAQ's, risk assessments and the statutory right to request flexible working, can be found on the HR Intranet pages at:

http://lbbdstaff/HR/Pages/Risk-Assessment.aspx
http://lbbdstaff/HR/Pages/Display-Screen-Equipment.aspx
http://lbbdstaff/HR/Pages/Lone-Working.aspx
http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns%5Cindg226.pdf

Human Resources will automatically update the Procedure to comply with any changes to legislation or ACAS guidance and notify employees of the amendments.

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
Call direct on 020 8215 3000

Out of hours emergencies only
Phone: 020 8594 8356
Fax: 020 8227 3470
Email: 3000direct@lbbd.gov.uk
Web: www.barking-dagenham.gov.uk

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