Merton - Home working Policy

1. The purpose of home working

At Merton we are committed to adopting modern flexible working practises - where appropriate to do so.

Home working offers a number of benefits including:

- Improved service delivery;
- Greater productivity/efficiency;
- Reduced costs;
- Retention/recruitment of disabled people;
- Retention/recruitment of employees with caring responsibilities;
- Reduced travel problems and environmental impact;
- Savings in property costs

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Council employees other than schools, who have local arrangements.
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3. Definition

Home working consists of working based at home rather than at the normal place of work and may involve using IT systems to perform work and to remain in contact with managers and employee. It is carried out to an agreed work pattern on a, permanent, regular, part-time, temporary or ad hoc basis.

Not all jobs are suitable for home working, however any job may be considered on its own merits. Jobs that involve project work or an identifiable output, or those that provide services within the community may particularly lend themselves to this type of work. Jobs that will not be suitable are those provide a direct service to the public at a fixed location that, e.g. staff on reception.

Managers must ensure that home working arrangements do not have an adverse affect on any particular group of employees neither should a refusal to agree home working disadvantage any particular group.

4. Procedure and expectations

4.1 Expectations of home working employees:

Employees should be able to demonstrate they can:

- Work independently and on their own initiative;
- Motivate themselves;
- Complete projects within set deadlines;
- Manage workload effectively;
- Cope well under any new pressure posed by working at home;

- Adjust to new work practices;
- Maintain contact with all affected by own work.

Expectations of managers for home working arrangements:

- Managers need to determine how work will be monitored, produced and delivered

- Home workers should have comparable induction, appraisal communications, access to learning and development and career development opportunities and team events as other Council employees.

- Clear work objectives with measurable outputs must be established and documented, in advance of the arrangement commencing. These objectives will be reviewed through 1 to1s. The line manager will need to establish how the employee will be kept informed of matters that affect them or their work.

- For home working to take place it must be established that the work to be done at home can be completed without regular/frequent face-to-face contact or direct supervision.

- The manager must make clear, (in writing) how productivity and performance management issues will be assessed.

4.2   Situations where home working may be considered

Home working may be considered for many reasons:

- When seeking approval to fill a vacancy (management led);
- In response to organisational change and business transformation (management led);
- At the point of recruitment and selection (employee led);
- When a current employee requests home working (employee led).

However, home working cannot be imposed on any existing employee without proper assessment, consultation, and agreement. Posts advertised as "home based" would be exempt from the need for such negotiation and agreement but would be subject to assessment.

4.3   Suitability of home working

Home working will be an option for many employees of the Council but due to the nature of home working, it will not be suited to either all posts or all people. In assessing the suitability of a post for home working, consideration will be given to:

- the cost implications;
- the suitability of the job;

▪ the suitability of the work location within the home.

The decision about whether an employee or group of employees should be allowed to work at home will rest with the Head of Service. It is not an employee's right to work from home.

Home working should not be viewed as an alternative to paid dependent care.

4.4 Other issues to be considered

Performance Management – employees will be subject to the same performance appraisal measures, processes, and objectives that apply to all other employees.

Work Patterns - working hours and patterns, contact times and availability should be agreed in advance. Other conditions of employment as set out in the contract apply.

If any employee has any concerns with their working arrangements, they must bring the matter to the attention of their manager immediately
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Contractual Changes- The manager must ensure that revised contract documentation is issued as necessary from Human Resources to confirm the home working arrangements. A home working agreement must be completed and signed by the employee and their manager prior to home working. A copy is given to the employee and copy will be held on their personal file.

Pay & Benefits- Pay and benefits are not affected on the basis that the full-time hours for the post are worked. Part-time employees will be entitled to salary and other benefits on a pro-rata basis.

Ending the Agreement- The Council reserves the right to withdraw home working from an employee. Managers will regularly review appropriateness for the business. If there is a service need requiring home working to be withdrawn reasonable notice will be given.

4.5 Arranging to work from home

Consideration must be given to the suitability of the proposed location. The location has to be adequate both for practical working and to comply with health and safety legislation. Ideally, the employee should have a separate room or area set aside for home working suitable to complete the work effectively

4.6 Costs

The costs of home working will vary. The baseline costs consist of the equipment that may be required at home and the costs of networking information between the office and the home. The costs of setting up a 'work station' should be considered before a manager agrees to home working.

All related costs will be funded by the employees' department. There will be no heating and lighting allowance paid to the employee when they are working from home.

If a business case for (permanent) home working is agreed the Council will contribute £10 towards monthly broadband costs.

4.7   Council Equipment

Equipment required to enable the employee to work effectively at home will be provided by the Council. Items of equipment commonly used include PC, printer, fax machine, Broadband Connection, mobile phone,
lockable filing cupboard, and items of stationery. This equipment will remain the property of the Council. The equipment required will vary from case to case. The line manager will make final decisions on what is needed. Where equipment is provided the employee must:

- take reasonable care of it;
- use it only for official purposes;
- use it only in accordance with any operating instructions;
- return it to the Council when requested;
- use it in accordance with any existing Council policies.

4.8   Use of Personal Equipment for Work Purposes

The Council is not responsible for the maintenance, replacement, or repair of any personal equipment that is used. When using a home telephone for official work purposes a detailed record of official calls should be kept for reimbursement purposes.

4.9   Communication

It is essential that good communication is maintained at all times between the employee and their line manager. The line manager and employee should plan and agree how they will communicate effectively with each other. These arrangements should be agreed and regularly reviewed in light of operational experience.

The employee must agree arrangements with their line manager so that every week the line manager is informed of their whereabouts and knows what they are doing. The line manager will inform the employee of meetings, training sessions and other events they would expect them to attend and will also ensure that the employee is kept up-to-date with information relevant to their work.

4.10   Health and Safety Policy -

Induction- As a minimum, home workers must have attended Health and Safety training, including the use of display screen equipment. More guidance is available on the Intranet

http://intranet/corporate_guidance_on_dse_07___use_of_portable_computers.doc

Before agreeing to home working, managers should consider any further training necessary.

Risk Assessment- A risk assessment needs to be undertaken and recorded. It should be reviewed on a regular basis, usually annually, depending on the resultant risk.

All employees working at home will be required to complete a DSE assessment before commencing work to be reviewed annually, or immediately after any significant change of situation.

Inspection- The Council retains the right to check the employee's work areas in their own home for Health and Safety and information security purposes. The need for such inspections will depend on the nature of the work undertaken.

Reporting- Accident / Near Miss reporting procedures apply equally to incidents arising in the employee's home.

Meetings- Meetings with service users and employees of other agencies must not be held at home. Meetings with employees at home should be avoided.

Working Time- Where the agreed working pattern allows for flexibility, both manager and employee should monitor to ensure excessive hours are not being worked. It is important that working patterns and hours are not detrimental to the employee's health, and comply with the Working Time Regulations.

Use of Computers- If the employee is likely to use a computer for a significant part of their duties whilst working at home, Display Screen Equipment self-audit must be undertaken by the employee and passed onto the manager. The manager should decide whether additional control measures are required.

Further information on home working can be obtained from the leaflet: www.hse.gov.uk/pnbns/indg226.pdf
(home working)

For further information on Health and Safety please refer to the following leaflets:

www.hse.gov.uk/pnbns/indg143.pdf
(manual handling)

www.hse.gov.uk/pnbns/indg36.pdf
(display screen equipment)

4.11   Security use of the Council's systems

The employee must ensure that information and equipment are kept securely. In particular private and confidential material must be kept in lockable secure storage at all times. Line managers must be satisfied that all reasonable precautions are taken to maintain confidentiality of material in accordance with the Council's ICT policy. http://intranet/ict-policy-v01.pdf

4.12   Insurance

The Council's existing insurance policies (both public and employer's liability) will continue to operate and cover the homeowner. Home working employees are advised to take out a household insurance policy if they do not currently have one. If the employee has insurance it is a condition of any home working agreement that they inform their household insurers of the arrangements. A copy of the current household insurance policy should be kept on the personal file.

4.13   Mortgages and Tenancy Agreements

Employees working from home must inform anyone with an interest in the property (e.g. Building Society, Bank and Owner) of the position.

4.14   Council Tax and Business Rate

It is highly unlikely that there will be any change to an employee's council tax or any liability for business rates. If the employee has any doubts, these should be discussed with their line manager.

4.15   Travel

Journeys made form home to work/work to home will not be reimbursed, as is the case for all Council employees regardless of where or how they work

4.16   Learning & Development

Working from home is a very different way of working, which requires the employee to adapt quickly to working independently and on their own for most of their working day. There will be less support from colleagues and daily contact with their line manager (although regular communication is essential).

Recommended learning and development includes:

Induction - It is good practice for new employees to spend some time in the office environment to familiarise themselves with the organisation and with colleagues before working from home. The manager will arrange for the home worker to spend a suitable period in the office during their induction period.

IT- before an employee commences formal home working, it is essential for them to attend a briefing session with a member of the IT department to

ensure that they are equipped to maintain all telecoms, computers, and home office equipment. Please contact the IT helpdesk

Health and Safety Awareness - As a minimum, home workers must have attended Health and Safety training on home working which will include DSE assessments. Before agreeing to home working, managers should consider what further training may be necessary.

Other training requirements may include:

- Appropriate IT skills
- Communications and time management skills
- Cultural change and contact with others
- Personal development for employees working at home
- First aid, fire safety and accident reporting
- Managing stress
- Information security awareness
- Lone working

4.17   Applying for Home working – (Employee led)

Step 1.   The employee completes the Home working application form, setting out their proposals for working arrangements. (Appendix 1)

Step 2.   The form is sent to the Line Manager who then discusses the proposals with the employee**.** (Appendix 1, 2, 3)

Step 3.   In order to evaluate the employee's suitability managers will have checked (Appendix 1,2,3)

- The home working application form
- Health and safety/suitability checklists
- Person specification
- Job description and,
- Performance record

In particular managers will have to take into account any reasonable adjustments that may be necessary in the case of a disabled employee. This will allow managers to ensure that each application for home working is considered fairly.

Step 4.   The line manager will then present the business case to the Head of Service.

The Line Manager will advise the employee in writing whether or not the application is agreed, including reasons for non-approval if applicable.

Step 5.   The line manager will then finalise the working arrangements and the date the employee will commence home working, taking into account any equipment or other resource issues.

Step 6.   The line manager completes the Home working Agreement and sends it to the employee. A copy should be sent to the relevant Departmental HR team. The line manager should notify colleagues of the agreed working arrangements.

5   Further advice and support

Further help, advice and support is available from:

Yomie Darby, Human Resources - 020 8545 4145
(yomie.darby@merton.gov.uk)

Corporate Learning – 020 8545 3383
(mailto:corporate.learninganddevelopment@merton.gov.uk)

Adam Viccari, Health and Safety – 020 8545 4803
(adam.viccari@merton.gov.uk)
IT help desk – 020 8545 3563

HOMEWORKING FORMS

Appendix 1   Request to work from Home (Form)

Appendix 2   Managers Health and Safety (checklist)
For Homeworkers

Appendix 3   Suitability (checklist) for Homeworker

Appendix 4   Homeworking ICT questionnaire (Form)

Request to work from Home

You should read the Policy on Working From Home carefully and ensure that you understand its terms before completing this form. If you need further clarification of any aspect of the policy please ask your line manager, or HR.

Part 1: to be completed by the applicant and forwarded to the line manager

Name:	
Grade:	
Job Title:	
Home address:	
Home telephone number:	
Work extension number :	
Department:	

1)   I wish to apply to work from home on a permanent basis. I understand that I will be provided with the necessary IT equipment required to enable me to work from home.

2)   I wish to apply to work from home for [Select number] days per month. I understand that I will be provided with the necessary IT equipment required to enable me to work from home.

I confirm that I have read and understand the terms of the Homeworking Policy

Please detail home working arrangement (including how the Council will benefit from the proposed arrangements):

……………………………………………………………………………………..

……………………………………………………………………………………..

……………………………………………………………………………………..

…………………………………………………………………………………….

Signed……………………………………………Date ……………………….

Managers H & S Checklist for Home workers

This checklist has been devised as a guide to aid managers in complying with their duties to protect the health & safety of their employees contracted to work at / from home. This checklist is not designed to be exhaustive and there may be items, which do not apply.   Given the unique nature of individual's homes and jobs it is not possible to prescribe every hazard that may be encountered and there may be other or more specific hazards, which you will need to take into account, which are not covered by this checklist.

VDU / Laptop Use

❖   Has a risk assessment been carried out where computers and laptops are being used for 2 hours or more during the working day for work purposes? (*Self-assessments are acceptable provided the user*
has had the necessary information / training)

❖   Have recommendations from assessments been implemented?

❖   Have all users of desk-top / laptop computers been trained or otherwise informed of the following:
• hazards associated with computeruse (including laptops)?
• importance of good posture?
• importance of taking regular micro-breaks away from the screen?
• how to set up their workstation correctly?
• Arrangements for obtaining an eye-test / VDU spectacles?

Manual Handling (if applicable)

❖   Has a risk assessment been carried out for all manual handling activities?

❖   Have recommendations from manual handling risk assessments been implemented?

❖   Has the employee concerned received manual handling training on safe handling techniques?

❖   Has suitable and sufficient equipment been provided to aid manual handling activities, where these are unavoidable?

Working Environment Slips, Trips & Falls

❖ Have all potential slip or trip hazards been identified in the home?

❖ Have suitable and sufficient measures been taken to reduce the risk of a slip / trip accident by, e.g.
• ensuring adequate lighting is provided?
• ensuring suitable arrangements for storing items are in place?
• ensuring any trailing leads are tied up by, for example, using cable ties?
for example, using cable ties?

Lighting

❖ Is the lighting suitable and sufficient ?
❖ Is the workstation sited to avoid glare /reflections?
❖ Does a blind need to be installed to eliminate unwanted glare?
❖ Is there a need to provide task lighting, e.g. a desk lamp?

Heating / Ventilation

❖ Is the heating suitable and sufficient?
❖ Is the employee subject to unpleasant draughts?
❖ Is there access to a window and can it be easily opened and closed?
❖ If radiant heaters are being used, is the employee aware of the risks?

Space

❖ Is there suitable and sufficient space for the employee to carry out work comfortably and safely?
❖ Has sufficient space for the storage of files, equipment etc, been allocated?

Noise

❖ Is the workplace free from distracting noise?

Electricity

❖ Has an electrical safety check of all equipment provided by the employer been carried out prior to the commencement of work?
❖ Has the employee been advised to carry out a visual inspection of plugs and leads on a regular basis?

(A visual inspection should involve looking for:
• damage to the plug e.g. cracks, loose pins signs of overheating,

• damage to leads e.g. breaks in insulation, exposed wires, poor connection)

❖ Has the employee been advised to avoid overloading of sockets by use of adaptors?

❖ Is the employee aware that under no circumstances should he / she carry out electrical repairs / testing and that this can only be done by a competent person i.e. an electrician.

Fire

❖ Has a fire exit / escape route been clearly identified in the event of a fire / emergency?

❖ Is the fire escape route kept free of obstructions and combustible material at all time?

❖ Is combustible material e.g. paper, flammable substances stored away from sources of radiant heat?

❖ Is there a means of fire-detection in place e.g. has a smoke detector been installed?

Equipment

❖ Have all users been trained in the correct use of equipment provided by the employer?

❖ Is the employer aware of the arrangements for reporting problems with equipment?

❖ Where heavy bulky equipment needs to be transported, have suitable aids been provided to facilitate this?

Suitability checklist for Home workers

Assessment by Manager

(For joint discussion with employee in conjunction with application form)

NAME:

DEPARTMENT:

SECTION:

JOB TITLE:

THE WORK	COMMENTS:
Is the work self-contained/how much of it can be carried out away from the office?	
Is the work measurable? (eg report writing/project work)	
If the employee uses a computer, do the work activities allow and is the user aware of the need to take appropriate breaks for VDU work?	
Does the work require very frequent supervision and checking?	
Does the employee have existing health issues which could be affected by homeworking arrangements? Occupational Health advice and input may be necessary if this is the case.	
How will the employee cope with reduced social contact? Are measures in place to ensure that regular contact is maintained with the employee?	

THE WORK ENVIRONMENT	COMMENTS: 15
Is the home environment conducive to work and not subject to frequent interruptions/distraction/noise?	
Is there a suitable surface with adequate room on which to place a computer and/or all other essential work items to allow a comfortable safe work arrangement?	
Is there adequate storage to maintain confidentiality and ensure security of council property?	
Use of paper. Will paper documents be taken home, created at home or printed out? Will this information be confidential or restricted? How will it be stored? How will it be disposed of securely?	
Other people in the home. What is the risk that they will have access to confidential information? How will access be managed?	
Portable storage media. Memory sticks and other portable media must not be used to transfer confidential or restricted information.	
THE TEAM	
What will be the effect on the level and quality of the service?*	
What will the effect of this proposed flexible working pattern be on the rest of the team? Has it been discussed with them? Are there any issues to be resolved*?	
Will this pattern of working impact on appropriate and fair cover in the office? E.g. telephones/visitors	

THE MEMBER OF STAFF	COMMENTS:
Are they able to be self-motivated and self-disciplined?	
Are they able to work with minimal direct supervision?	
Can outputs be maintained if the proposed new flexible working pattern is agreed?	
What are the business/efficiency benefits to the Council?	
Will there be any financial savings as a result – please specify.	

Homeworking ICT questionnaire

Please forward this form when complete to the IT Service Desk.

Your name	
Your line manager's name	
Your department and section	

Which applications / services will you need to use at home?

	(✓)		(✓)
MS Office (Word, Excel etc.)............		Work email................................	
Access to network files / folders........		Internet	
Intranet..		....	
....		....	
....		....	

Using what type(s) of computer would you work from home? What operating system(s) is/are used (e.g. Windows XP)?

	(✓)		
Merton-owned PC............		Operating system......	
Merton-owned Laptop		Operating system......	
Your own PC		Operating system......	
Your own laptop		Operating system......	

Do you have Internet access at home?

	(✓)		(✓)		(✓)
Yes - broadband		Yes – Dial-up		No	

Do you use wireless access at home (Yes / No)?.. [ ]

Date form completed:	
Signature	

Option 1

I have read, understood and agree to Merton Council's policy and guidelines on homeworking

I accept the offer to work from home and accept that this offer may be withdrawn subject to the appropriate notice provided by my line manager.

Signed: **Employee:**	**Date:** **Date:**
Signed: **Agreed by (line manager):**	**Date:**
Agreed by (Director/Head of Service	**Date:**