

Newton Abbot Town Council



Home Working Policy



HOME WORKING POLICY

Date of adoption at Full Council	23 rd September 2020. Minute 20/09(564)
Reviewed	6 th September 2023
Next Review Date	September 2024
Reviewed by	Policy & Resources Committee

1. INTRODUCTION

Newton Abbot Town Council is committed to promoting flexible working in order to facilitate effective and efficient working. This policy outlines the circumstances under which the Council will allow employees to work from home. It also details the actions required to facilitate a home working arrangement.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all employees of the Council. Home working is about using the employee's home as a base for work instead of the employee coming into a workplace.

While homeworking is categorised as a type of flexible working, employees should not assume that other aspects of flexible working (such as amended hours) are automatically part of a homeworking arrangement.

Employees must be aware that any abuse of the home working arrangement may result in the Council taking disciplinary action.

3. PURPOSE

There are benefits and good reasons for home working.

3.1 Benefits to the Town Council

Reduced accommodation costs and better use of existing premises and resources; contributing positively towards the Council's response to Climate Emergency by reducing unnecessary employee commuting; continuation of service delivery in the event of an emergency or government restrictions preventing access to Newton's Place; the retention of valued and skilled employees for whom the ability to work at home is the preferred option; well-motivated staff who feel that they work for an organisation that is prepared to be flexible and which trusts them; potentially increased output and quality of work due to fewer distractions than working in an office environment; accommodation of the requirements of disabled employees or employees with temporary health conditions; and promotion of a positive image as a good employer.

3.2 Benefits to the Employee

Increased discretion in the management of their work and personal time; increased motivation; saving of travel time; the ability to work without distraction; provision of safe working environment avoiding risks of spreading or contracting a contagion (e.g. COVID-19); improvements in work-life balance issues.

3.3 Overview

While there are many advantages of home working, a detailed assessment needs to be made, by both the employee and the Council, as to whether the individual will be a suitable home worker and whether it is appropriate for the tasks to be performed effectively.

4.0 TYPES OF HOME WORKING

There are various ways that home working may operate, ranging from rare occasions that arise and do not form a routine, to formal arrangements that are identified as such in the contract of employment:

4.1 Occasional Home Working

Taking work home occasionally, on an ad hoc basis, to concentrate on a particular project or task may be suitable in the following circumstances; where a specific task needs dedicated and focussed input and/or could be dealt with more efficiently at home e.g. saved travelling time and lack of interruptions; where it is difficult for staff to get in to work e.g. adverse weather, or a short but unavoidable commitment at home.

4.2 Regular Home Working

Working from home for a percentage of the time on a regular basis, the individual would come into the office for the balance of time. This may be suitable in the following circumstances; where the function of the post requires little face to face contact with colleagues and/or clients; to facilitate a more flexible work pattern, perhaps to accommodate other demands; where an individual plans his/her work arrangements to enable the achievement of defined outputs each week/month from home; or where the job involves frequent/regular outside visits.

4.3 Permanent Home Working

Working from home 100% of the time or spending a percentage of time working from home and making outside visits for the balance of time. This may be suitable in the following circumstances; where the job can be done just as effectively and efficiently from home; where ICT systems exist, to support the job at home and the employee effectively or where the job involves frequent/regular outside visits.

5.0 SUITABILITY OF HOME WORKING

5.1 Posts

Many jobs may be considered for home working. A job that does not require time spent in one location or high visibility such as a face to face customer service role may be adapted for home working. Jobs that involve project work or those which provide services within the community, may be more suited to home working.

Consideration should be given to the impact on the inter-relationship with other colleagues; jobs in the office, service to the public, access to required information, technology, costs and savings etc. Some job characteristics may be more suited to home working, for example; those with a defined output; discrete projects or functions; relatively autonomous jobs; jobs requiring frequent travelling and those tasks requiring high periods of concentration.

5.2 Employee Characteristics

Having established the suitability of the job for home working the suitability of the employee needs to be considered. Home working does not suit everyone. Office dynamics and informal

information flows may have a significant impact on the employee's performance. Some employees may develop better in a traditional office environment, and those without very much experience in their role are likely to need closer supervision which would not be possible if they were working from home. Individuals may also have a distorted view of home working – often “rose coloured” – with little recognition or understanding of the potential drawbacks, and it is important that both the advantages and the disadvantages are considered. A trial period may be appropriate in order to gauge suitability before any longer-term arrangements are put in place.

Helpful personal qualities are likely to include; self-motivated; self-disciplined; enjoy the challenge of working on their own; a flexible approach; able to organise working time effectively; able to work without direct supervision; confident to work away from the office environment; able to work on their own without day to day social interaction with colleagues; able to travel to meetings and site visits; able to “switch off” from work and maintain a proper balance between working and non-working hours.

6. REQUESTS TO WORK FROM HOME

The process for dealing with requests to work from home consists of two steps. Firstly, the individual's application is assessed by the Town Clerk focussing on whether their post and personal characteristics are suitable for home working. The second step of the process is to assess the home environment of the employee to identify whether it is suitable for home working.

6.1. Application for Home Working

Employees wishing to be considered for home working should raise a request with the Town Clerk for consideration - Appendix 1 outlines a Request for Home Working.

The Town Clerk will be responsible for considering applications to work from home in a fair and consistent manner. One of the most important factors to consider is the individual employee's role in providing a service to the residents of Newton Abbot. A focus on specific job tasks should identify those tasks that can be performed away from the main office. The following issues should be taken into consideration:

Service provided and impact upon the individual's workload and the work of the team. Therefore, the following issues should be taken into consideration;

- ❖ Does the job require long periods of uninterrupted mental concentration?
- ❖ Does the job require a lot of ad hoc communication between the groups of staff?
- ❖ Can the work be measured in terms of output, or if not, is it possible to come to an agreement with the employee about the amount of time particular outputs will take?
- ❖ What will be the effect on services to the public?
- ❖ Can the work readily be undertaken at home?
- ❖ How can the work be monitored?
- ❖ How should contact be made?
- ❖ What equipment would be required?
- ❖ What costs would be incurred?
- ❖ Is the employee likely to be suited to home working?

If the request is accepted in principle, a health and safety assessment of the home working environment must be carried out before a Home Working is agreed.

6.2. Assessing the Home Environment

An employee who works from home is covered by the same protection under health and safety legislation as an employee who is office based. It is therefore vital to ensure the home working environment is suitable before any home working agreement is approved.

The employee needs to take personal responsibility for the health and safety aspect of home working and therefore needs an environment at home which offers the following:

- ❖ Suitable dedicated “office” space;
- ❖ Freedom from interruptions and distractions;
- ❖ Security and confidentiality;
- ❖ Ability to meet Health and Safety requirements;
- ❖ It is not considered appropriate to combine home based working with dependent care. Employees will be required to demonstrate that they do not have dependent care responsibilities within their contracted working hours.
- ❖ Employees need to be aware that the Council reserves the right to ask them to attend Council premises at short notice.

Appendix 2 outlines a Health and Safety Home Worker Self-Assessment Checklist. The home environment must be deemed to be safe to work in before a home working agreement can be approved.

6.3. Home Working Agreement

The employee will be asked to sign and return a copy of the home working agreement and this will be retained on their personal file.

7. MANAGEMENT OF HOME WORKING AGREEMENTS

To ensure that a home working employee is working effectively and feels part of the wider team it may be necessary for their manager to adapt his/her style of management from the conventional one based on day-to-day contact .

7.1. Communication and Management of Home Working Employees

Clear communication systems with home workers are just as important as for those based in the office. The Council may need to consider how to ensure home working staff receive information that office-based staff receive on a face-to-face basis.

To make the scheme work effectively, there needs to be trust between the employee and the manager. However, such trust should not be a substitute for clear indicators of what managers and staff expect from work.

7.2. Provision of Equipment

Where appropriate, the Council may provide, install and maintain equipment to assist with home working. This may depend upon the frequency of home working and whether the need for home working has been generated by the Council or the employee.

~~Occasional and more regular home working would require remote access to the Council's IT server and a laptop. Permanent home working would require the addition of a mobile telephone, printer, desk, chair and secure filing cabinet.~~

Remote Access – To enable remote access, employees can use their Council issued laptop and office 365 account allowing full remote working with collaboration tools including VOIP, Microsoft Teams, Outlook, Word and Excel. All Data Protection, security and confidentiality measures and policies must be adhered to.

The Council will provide IT helpdesk support during standard working hours (via telephone/email contact to the helpdesk). The Council will also take responsibility for the repair/replacement of lost, damaged or stolen equipment, provided the employee has taken appropriate precautions to safeguard the equipment.

Any Council equipment installed at the home workers home remains the property of the Council and can be recalled at any time. Upon the termination of the home working agreement, employees must return all Council equipment.

7.3. Insurance

The Council will provide third party insurance for employees working from home. It will also provide insurance cover for any Council equipment located at the home of the employee.

Whilst working from home is unlikely to have an impact, employees are advised to notify their landlord/mortgage and insurance companies of the fact that they will be working from home.

7.4. Health and Safety

Home workers are covered by the same health and safety protection in law as office-based staff, therefore all Council health and safety policies and procedures will apply to home workers. This includes the requirement for employees to report any work-related accidents.

7.5. Data Security

Employees who work from home are required to comply with all IT security and confidentiality requirements of the Council. This includes acceptance and adherence to the Council's Remote Access Policy.

The home worker will have a direct responsibility for all Council information material held at their home and must ensure that it is not accessible to non-authorized people (e.g. other members of their household).

7.6. Working Hours

The working hours will apply to home-based staff in the same way that it does to office-based staff. Any flexible working pattern should be considered as part of the request to work from home. The hours worked will not exceed those in the contract of employment.

7.7. Visits to the Home Worker

Arrangements should be made to permit Council officers to visit the home worker at home for purposes connected with work. This should be by prior arrangement and at a mutually convenient and reasonable time.

Due to the health and safety risks, the Council would not expect or advise employees to allow members of the public to visit them whilst working from home.

7.8. Contractual Terms

If the employee is an occasional or regular home worker, there will be no requirement to issue a variation to their contract of employment.

The contracts of employment for permanent home workers will need to reflect the fact that their normal place of work is home. It should be noted that employees whose normal place of work is home may still be expected to attend one of the Council's offices from time to time (e.g. to attend team meetings). All other terms and conditions of employment remain unchanged by a home working application.

7.9. Expenses

For occasional and regular home workers, car mileage expenses will only be paid for those miles travelled which are over and above the number of miles which the home worker would previously have incurred by having to travel into the office and return home on a daily basis, i.e. their normal commuting journey.

For permanent home workers, car mileage expenses would be payable for work related journeys beginning and ending at the home base.

The Council will also reimburse home working employees for mail costs on production of receipts, however, stationery should be ordered through the main office and collected from Newton's Place by the home working employee.

Running costs and expenses – Where the employee is choosing to work from home, the Council will not contribute towards costs – for example, heating and lighting.

7.10. Dependent Care

It is a condition of the home working agreement that arrangements for dependent care have been made in order to allow the employee to work from home without disruption. Any changes to dependent care arrangements that will impact on an employee working from home must be reported to the Town Clerk to allow a review of the agreement.

7.11. Review of a Home Working Agreement

Any more permanent home working arrangement should be reviewed at least once a year. This will allow both parties to assess whether the arrangement is still appropriate.

Newton Abbot Town Council

APPENDIX 1

Home Working Application Form

Name _____

Job Title _____

Current Days and Hours of Work: _____

I wish to apply to be considered for home working and propose the following working arrangements:

Occasional* _____

Regular* _____

Permanent* _____

**Delete as necessary and specify the days/times as appropriate*

Address at which home working would take place:

Do you feel your home working would have an impact on the service you provide or the colleagues in your team? If so, how could this be minimised?

Home working is not suitable for employees who have caring responsibilities at home during normal working hours. By submitting this application, you are confirming that you are not planning to combine home working with caring commitments.

Signed:

Date:

Once complete, please submit this form Town Clerk for consideration.

Health and Safety Home Worker Self-Assessment Checklist

Name _____
Address _____

Hazard Checks to be made

Fire

- Is the work area tidy?
- Are waste materials regularly disposed of?
- Are exits routes clear?
- Does the employee have an escape plan?
- Does the employee know what to do in an emergency?
- Is a smoke alarm fitted? The alarm must be tested and maintained in accordance with manufacturer's instructions

Electrical Equipment

- Any apparent damage?
- Cracked/loose casing on plugs and computer equipment, missing screws etc
- Any evidence of overheating? Look for discolouration
- Any obvious damage to leads or plugs?
- Are all the cables secure in all plugs?
- Has all equipment been PAT tested?
- Slips, Trips and Falls Floor covering sound and without defects?
- All walkways clear of trip hazards? e.g. trailing cables
- When seated at a desk can legs and upper body move together without twisting?

Working Environment

- Is the temperature adequate?
- Is the ventilation adequate?
- Is there adequate lighting, including any necessary task lighting?
- Manual Handling Does the employee carry out any manual handling activities?
- Display Screen Equipment Doe the employee use DSE for more than 2 hours a day or more than 1 hour continuously?
- If yes, Carry out DSE assessment on an annual basis

Mobile Phones

- Will the work involve the use of a mobile phone?

Lone Working

- Is there a requirement for a call in procedure?
- If yes, then establish a procedure and monitor use
- Has the employee's mobile phone number been given to their manager?
- Does the employee require a personal attack alarm?
- Is the employee aware of the Council's Lone Working Policy?

Accidents / First Aid

- Is the employee familiar with the accident reporting procedure?
- Provide employee with accident reporting form
- Does the employee have adequate first aid facilities whilst working at home?
- If not, Employer to provide a first aid kit

Wellbeing

- Has the employee previously suffered from discomfort, stress or ill health which they believe to be as a direct result of work?
- If yes, discuss further to assess whether home working is suitable

Security

- Is the main exit door secured by mortice deadlock?
- Are all other external doors similarly secured?
- Are all accessible windows secured by key operated window locks?
- Is there the ability to lock laptop and confidential files away when not in use?

Signatures

Employee

Date:

Town Clerk

Date:

Employee Declaration:

I will be responsible for completing and recording annual health and safety checks at my home working location; I understand that the requirement for me to adhere to the Council's policies and procedures is unaffected by the fact that I will be working from home; I agree to allow access, by prior arrangement, to my manager and any other Council employee who requires access to perform their duties; I understand that the home working agreement is not a substitute for childcare or other caring responsibilities and that adequate provisions must be made in respect of these; I understand that I may be required to attend the Council office, Newton's Place 43 Wolborough Street Newton Abbot, from time to time during my home working hours (e.g. to attend a team meeting); I understand that the provision for the home working agreement may be cancelled by myself or the Council.

Please sign to confirm that you have read, understood and agree to the conditions relating to the home working arrangement:

Signed

Date