



East Herts Council

Home Working Policy

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The council will consider homeworking requests, providing the request suits the individual, role requirement, service needs and the wider organisational needs. This home working policy outlines the obligations for effective and efficient home working whilst maintaining the council's high standards of customer service delivery.
- 1.2 There are benefits to both the council and the employee which include:
- Improved efficiency and productivity
 - Improved recruitment and retention of employees
 - More effective use of office space
 - Reduction in sickness absence
 - Supports work life balance
 - Increased goodwill, morale and motivation of employees
 - Reduction in travel time/commuting
 - Supports the council's Green Travel Plan
 - Supports the council's Equality and Diversity policy

2.0 Scope

- 2.1 This policy and guidance applies to all employees who have a contract of employment with the council. It does not apply to agency workers or contractors.

3.0 Business Need

- 3.1 Homeworking is not an employee right. The council will consider the introduction of a home working arrangement where it is based on business need and is considered beneficial to both the service and the employee concerned.

4.0 Definitions

- 4.1 For the purpose of this policy and guidance a home worker is defined as either:

Regular Home Worker

This applies to employees who work from home at least 2 days per week. They may not have a designated workspace or desk in the office, although they have access to shared facilities, such as team desking.

Field Based/Mobile Worker

This applies to employees who spend more than 20% of the normal working week on council business away from an office or a home base.

Their base could be the home or the office. They have access to shared facilities.

Occasional Home Worker

This applies to employees who are based in the office but have a flexible arrangement that allows them to work occasionally from home. Occasional home working is permitted at the discretion and prior authorisation of their manager and is not subject to the approval process detailed in section 5 below. Occasional home workers must be contactable, during contracted working hours, by phone and email in exactly the same way as if they were in the office.

5.0 The Process for Regular Home Working

- 5.1 To make an application to become a regular home worker, an employee must complete a home working request form (Appendix A) stating how their role is suitable and how it will meet the service and business needs.
- 5.2 The manager should arrange a meeting with the employee to assess the suitability of the post for regular home working. They should complete:
 - **Regular Home Working Suitability Checklist** (Appendix B). This assesses the suitability of the post and employee for regular home working.
 - **Safe Working Checklist for Home Workers** (Appendix C). This assesses the suitability of the employee's home for regular home working.
- 5.3 The impact on the employee, service and team must be taken into consideration as part of the application process. There should be no increase or decrease in workload for colleagues as a result of an employee working from home. All aspects of the employee's current role should be able to be performed.
- 5.4 If following the meeting the manager supports the home working request, the manager should arrange for the employee to complete a DSE / Work Station Assessment (see section 7).
- 5.5 If the manager approves the home working request all of the documents should be signed by the manager and employee and then sent to the Head of Service for final approval.

- 5.6 On receipt of the documents HR will issue the employee with a home working agreement. Enclosed with the home working agreement will be an equipment inventory and operational agreement for the employee and manager to complete and return to HR.
- 5.8 The home working arrangement will be subject to a trial period of three months. A letter of confirmation will be sent after the trial period confirming whether the arrangement has been agreed.
- 5.9 The manager will undertake annual reviews of the home working arrangement to ensure it continues to meet service needs. If it is deemed to not meet service needs; this will be discussed with the employee and notice may be given to end or change the home working agreement.
- 5.10 Where a request for home working is declined or an existing arrangement is changed, the manager should explain to the employee the reasons for this. The employee is able to challenge the decision in accordance with the council's Appeals Policy.

6.0 Conditions of Home Working

Communication and Contact

- 6.1 The home worker will be required to attend council offices at least monthly, during normal office hours, for the following:
- Performance Development Reviews
 - Customer meetings. The home worker is expected to make clear to their manager when and how they will be available to customers of the organisation. This should be in line with office based staff availability.
 - Staff briefings and/or other staff meetings as required
 - Team meetings
 - Training that has been identified through their PDR as supporting their learning and development plan, as well as any mandatory training necessary for their role.
 - Any other occasion where required and notified by the employee's manager.
- 6.2 Managers will ensure that home workers are kept as up-to-date and involved with work developments and changes in the organisation as office based staff.

- 6.3 The home worker must be contactable, during contracted working hours, by phone and email in exactly the same way as if they were in the office. The manager and employee must take joint responsibility to ensure that regular contact and communication between the home worker and the rest of their team is maintained.
- 6.4 Regular pre-planned meetings will be held between the home worker and their manager in order to maintain their work performance and enable appropriate support to be provided. Frequency and duration of home visits by managers should be agreed when home working first commences. Any visits made on an ad hoc basis should provide five days' notice.
- 6.5 There may be a requirement for the home worker to provide access to their home, such as for routine maintenance and equipment repairs

Working Hours

- 6.6 The home worker remains subject to the Working Time Regulations 1998 with the requirement to take regular breaks and not work more than an average of 48 hours per week, in any 17 week period. All employees must take a minimum break of 20 minutes every six hours.
- 6.7 The home worker will be required to record their working patterns daily, including their hours worked at home. This should be accessible by their manager. Time sheets should not record time travelled to work as office based staff are not permitted to do so.
- 6.8 Business meetings and customer visits must be arranged at a suitable venue away from the home worker's home. Under no circumstances should home workers meet with customers at their home.
- 6.9 Home working must not be a means of combining work with caring responsibilities. Employees with caring responsibilities must have proper care arrangements in place during their contracted working hours.

Performance

- 6.10 Clear objectives/targets/deadlines and performance standards must be agreed and met in accordance with the council's Performance Development Review Scheme (PDRS).
- 6.11 If agreed performance targets are not met over the agreed period of time, the home worker will be required to work from an office location. Please see section 14.

7.0 Health, Safety and Welfare

- 7.1 The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has produced “guidance for employers and employees on health and safety and home working”. This explains the employers’ duties towards home workers and should be read in conjunction with the council’s health and safety policy.
- 7.2 Managers will ensure that home workers are subject to an annual review that will take full account of all the health and safety issues associated with home working and make adjustments to working arrangements as necessary. DSE / Work Station Assessments should be reviewed as and when necessary.
- 7.3 All employees who work from home have a duty to ensure that they work in a safe manner and that they follow all health and safety instructions issued by the council. The home worker must report any health and safety concerns to their manager.
- 7.4 Employee’s homes will be visited where health and safety concerns have been identified or recorded on the display screen and workstation self-assessment. Accompanied visits may be made within the designated working hours and the appointment should be agreed in advance between the council and the employee. A record of any inspection visits/risk assessments should be sent to HR and made available as appropriate for inspection purposes.

Avoiding Isolation/Stress

- 7.5 In some circumstances home workers can feel isolated or stressed. Managers should ensure that employees are in regular contact with colleagues. Home workers must attend team meetings in a face-to-face capacity. Managers should contact their employee, via email and telephone, daily.
- 7.6 Employees are also able to use the Employee Assistance Programme or visit Occupational Health.
- 7.7 Employees should read this section in conjunction with the council’s Lone Working Policy.

8.0 Equipment and Office Supplies

- 8.1 The council will ensure that all equipment supplied to regular home workers to carry out their duties, is suitable for the purpose intended, with due regard to health and safety.

- 8.2 The specification of equipment to be provided will be dependent upon the definition of the home worker and the duties of the employee. The manager should request from IT the equipment required and this must be signed off by the Head of Service. The range of equipment that could be provided, includes:

Regular Home Worker: Monitor, keyboard, mouse, zero client and voice over internet protocol (VoIP) phone. The full IT kit will not be supplied until the employee and their manager have confirmed as part of their trial period that homeworking is agreed for a minimum of 12 months.

Field Based Worker: A data enabled portable device with a docking station where appropriate, monitor, keyboard, mouse, zero client, mobile telephone, scanner (on request), car kit (on request), and VoIP phone.

Occasional Home Worker: Access to a pool laptop and other equipment* as deemed necessary (*upon approval from the Head of Service).

- 8.3 IT access is available via download of the freely available VMware Horizon client, which can be found by visiting <https://mydesktop.eastherts.gov.uk>. Further instructions about installing the client software and logging in are available from the Intranet.
- 8.4 Broadband connection will not be provided by the council; home workers are expected to use their personal broadband connection.
- 8.5 The council will consider additional or specialist equipment for employees with specialist requirements as part of the assessment of eligibility for home working. In particular, employees may need adaptations to accommodate a disability as recognised under the Equality Act 2010.
- 8.6 Employees will be provided with the equipment (either posted to the employee's home address or collected from the office) but will be required to install it themselves. Instructions will be provided with the equipment and over the phone advice will be available via the IT Helpdesk.
- 8.7 The manager will maintain a signed inventory of council purchased equipment supplied to the employee, and a copy of this should be sent to HR to be placed on the employee's personal file and to Facilities so that they can maintain a register of when equipment needs to be PAT tested.

- 8.8 The employee is responsible for the ordering and collection of supplies from the office. The employee should make arrangements with their manager to collect and send work related post, if applicable.
- 8.9 All equipment supplied will be PAT tested to meet current safety standards and must be re-tested annually in line with legislation. Facilities will notify employees when their equipment needs to be PAT tested and the employee will need to make arrangements to bring their equipment to the office to enable the testing to be done. The council will not accept responsibility for any electrical supplies to IT equipment.
- 8.10 Home workers must undertake a basic visual inspection of the equipment they have been supplied with. The visual inspection does not involve the testing of electrical supply. The inspection sheet can be found under forms on the Health and Safety section of the intranet.
- 8.11 All equipment and software supplied by the council will remain the property of the council and must be returned in good condition should the home worker revert to an office-based role or leave the council.
- 8.12 The council will be responsible for replacing lost, stolen or damaged council equipment unless the damage or loss occurred as a direct result of an employee's negligence. The employee has a duty of care to immediately report all identified hazards/defects/damage to the manager for replacement/repair.
- 8.13 All equipment provided by the council is for council work only. The equipment should be operated in conjunction with the instructions and training provided, and in line with the relevant policies. The council reserves the right to make a deduction from pay for any maintenance/repairs/replacements required due to the misuse or negligence by the employee.
- 8.14 Equipment to be used at home and in the office should be taken directly to/from the employee's home/office, and not left in an unattended vehicle.

9.0 Confidentiality and Security of Data

- 9.1 The council will ensure that appropriate technical security measures are in place and provide suitable equipment to protect the information used by the employee.

- 9.2 It is the responsibility of the home worker to safeguard information in line with the council's policies on data protection, email and internet use and the code of conduct.
- 9.4 Before agreeing to home working, managers must discuss and be satisfied with the arrangements the employee has for keeping equipment and data safe in their homes and on their computers. IT staff can provide advice where required.
- 9.5 If the work involves confidential or personal information, any waste paperwork must either be brought into the workplace for shredding or shredded at the employee's home.

10.0 Tax, Insurance, Mortgage and Moving Home

10.1 Home workers will:

- Inform the tax office that they are working from home. They cannot claim tax relief on their council tax, but may be able to claim relief on lighting and heating costs. The amount will depend on the size of bills and the number of rooms in the house. Claims should be made direct to the local tax office. The exclusive use of one room in the home for work purposes is likely to attract capital gains tax when the house is sold.
- Check tenancy/mortgage agreements to ensure homeworking is permitted. Mortgage lender/landlord should be informed, in writing, that they will be working from home.
- Inform their insurance company to avoid the risk of invalidating their home insurance policy and to ensure equipment is covered. The policy schedule must be shown to their manager prior to home working. Employees will not be required to pay business rates as a home worker and employee of the council.
- Inform their manager if they move house. The continuation of home working will be subject to the location and facilities of the new home being acceptable. A review of the DSE/Work Station assessment will need to be conducted.

10.2 The council's liability policies indemnify the council, its staff and members from claims arising from their official duties. This includes homeworking. If an employee suffers injury, or personal property is damaged, the council will not meet any costs unless legally liable. Home insurance policies usually have a public liability extension.

10.3 The payment of council tax will continue to be the full responsibility of the employee working at home.

11.0 Expenses

11.1 Regular home workers are entitled to a tax free allowance of £216 per annum, based on HMRC limits, as re-imbusement for such expenses as heating, lighting and electricity. This is paid on a monthly basis. In the event that the employee is unable to work for more than one month, the council reserves the right to suspend payment, until such time as the employee is able to resume working from home.

11.2 If employees do not have a work mobile phone or VoIP phone; the council may reimburse the costs of business calls made from an employee's personal mobile/home telephone.

11.3 Where an employee is required to travel for work, travel and/or subsistence payments will be paid in accordance with normal conditions of service. Home workers may not claim for journeys to an East Herts office base.

12.0 External Difficulties

12.1 There may be occasions when circumstances, beyond the home workers' control, mean that work cannot be carried out. For example, a power cut or loss of internet. It is expected that the home worker should identify other duties that could be carried out at home. Where this is not possible the home worker would be expected to come into the office to work.

13.0 Reporting Illness/Incidents

13.1 Employees working from home must report any sickness or incidents in accordance with the council's Absence Management Policy. Following sickness absence, a return to work interview will be conducted either by telephone or face to face.

14.0 Termination and variation of a regular home working arrangement

14.1 Regular home working is subject to a three month trial period. Due to the financial implications of setting up a regular home worker, where the trial period is successful the employee will be required to remain a regular home worker for a minimum of 12 months, (excluding the trial period) before they can give notice to terminate the home working arrangement. In exceptional circumstances the council may agree to

the employee returning to office based working before the end of the 12 month period should they request to do so.

- 14.2 If the home worker wishes to change or end their home working agreement, they must write to their manager to request this change. They must give one month's notice.
- 14.3 If there is evidence that health and safety issues are being ignored, the manager must consult with the Health and Safety Officer, who may in consultation with the Head of HR and OD request the suspension of the arrangements.
- 14.4 It is the manager's responsibility to record and take action regarding work performance. If the agreed performance targets are not met over the agreed period of time, the home worker will be required to work from an office location to ensure appropriate supervision and support. Performance issues will be dealt with in line with the Managing Performance Policy.
- 14.5 Changes in service provision and business needs will sometimes result in home workers being required to work from an office location either permanently or more frequently than they do currently. In this instance, employees would be consulted at the earliest opportunity and given one months' notice to either terminate or change their home working agreement.
- 14.6 Where a home worker is appointed to a new job, the home working arrangement will be reviewed to see if the new post meets the home working criteria. If the new post is unsuitable for homeworking, the arrangement will be terminated following one month's notice being given. Home working will only continue if a new agreement is reached.

15.0 Policy Review and Amendment

- 15.1 This Policy shall be reviewed after three years or sooner in line with legislation and best practice.

HOME WORKING REQUEST FORM

Note to the employee

It will help the council to consider your request if you provide as much information as you can about your request. It is important that you complete all the application form.

When completing sections 3 and 4, think about what effect working from home will have both on the work that you do, your service and on your colleagues.

Once you have completed the form, you should forward it to your manager and send a copy to HR.

1. Personal Details:

Name:

Job Title:

Service:

Manager:

2a. Describe your current working pattern (days/hours/times worked):

2b. Describe the working pattern you would like to work (number of days working from home):

2c. I would like my home working request to commence from:

Date:

3. Impact of working from home

I think that working from home will affect the service and my colleagues as follows:

4. Accommodating working from home

I think the effect on the service and colleagues can be resolved as follows:

Signed

Dated... ..

REGULAR HOME WORKING SUITABILITY CHECKLIST

Name: _____ Manager: _____

Service: _____ Job Title: _____

The manager is required to complete the suitability checklist in conjunction with the employee. This needs to be considered together with the employee's home working application.

The checklist must be signed by both the manager and employee. This should then be signed off by the Head of Service and sent to HR to be kept on the employee's personal record.

The Post	Suitability Yes/No	Comments
Capable of being done from home without having an adverse impact on the quality of service or on other employees.		
Capable of being done without on-going face to face contact with other staff or direct supervision.		
Self sufficient in terms of administrative support.		
Have clear objectives and measurable outputs.		
Requires limited supervision and checking.		
Is not dependent on large numbers of paper files or other work- based records/equipment that cannot be accessed from other locations.		
The work can be performed on an individual basis e.g. drafting/writing reports, planning/reviewing/ researching, computer programming, data entry, word processing.		
The Employee		
Are they self motivated, have self reliance and discipline to work without direct supervision?		
Do they have the ability to complete work to scheduled deadlines?		
Do they have initiative, flexibility		

and time management skills?		
Do they have the ability to communicate well by telephone and in writing?		
Do they feel they are able with reduced social contact and isolation?		
Is the employee flexible so that team/service needs can be met; this might include working from the team location rather than home to cover absence of other colleagues at short notice.		
The Home		
Is the home environment conducive to work and not subject to frequent interruptions/distractions/noise?		
Does the employee have childcare arrangements in place (if applicable)?		
The Team		
Will the arrangement impact on appropriate and fair cover in the office e.g. telephones, visitors?		
Is the team flexible so that the team/ service needs can be met?		
Have the team been consulted on the arrangement and if so are there any issues to be resolved?		

Signed (employee): _____ Date: _____

Signed (manager): _____ Date: _____

Signed (HoS): _____ Date: _____

SAFE WORKING CHECKLIST FOR HOME WORKERS

Name: _____ Manager: _____

Service: _____ Job Title: _____

Home address: _____

Post Code: _____ Date Completed: _____

Please complete this form for regular home working. It will be used to assist the council in safeguarding your health and safety whilst you work at home. This needs to be considered by your manager together with your home working application.

A DSE / Work Station Assessment must also be completed. Please note if you are using potentially hazard substances a COSHH assessment is also required.

The checklist must be signed by both the manager and employee. This should then be signed off by the Head of Service and sent to HR to be kept on the employee's personal record.

Where you answer 'No' please give further details in the comments column.

General Health & Safety and Emergencies	Yes/No	Comments
Do you have a room at home which will be used specifically as an office base?		
Is the work area tidy, free from obstructions including waste materials?		
Is combustible material e.g. stationery, stored away from sources of heat?		
Are you aware that you must comply with the normal procedure for reporting accidents/incidents or work related illnesses (i.e. as if you were office-based)?		
Do you have a specified contact(s) at work in the event of an emergency?		
Electrical Equipment (Please note that the council is only responsible for equipment it has supplied. Equipment, electrical sockets and other parts of your domestic electrical system are your responsibility.)		
Have you received training/information in how to use any equipment or software in your work?		
Has all council equipment been tested? (Must		

be retested periodically in line with the local policy)		
Manual Handling and Slips Trips & Falls		
Have you received information and/or training providing guidance on manual handling and avoiding slips trips and falls?		
Are work areas and walkways clear of tripping hazards e.g. trailing cables, boxes?		
Well-being		
Are you in good health, not suffering from any discomfort or ill health, from working at home (including stress)?		

Please use this space to make any further comments:

Issue/Problem	Recommended Action, Person Responsible and Date for Completion	Priority Rating (Urgent, Important, Useful or Desirable)

Signed (employee): _____ Date: _____

Signed (manager): _____ Date: _____

Signed (HoS): _____ Date: _____

IMPORTANT:

- If there are any changes in your health or you make any adjustments to your working conditions, you should inform your manager as a new self-assessment may need to be undertaken
- Expectant mothers – please notify your manager as soon as possible of your pregnancy as an additional risk assessment will need to be undertaken.

The manager must review this assessment of the risks which may arise from the work activity and the workplace. The manager (acting as the employer) has specific responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and subsequent statutory regulations.