

## Home Working Policy

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## **1. Purpose**

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to provide a framework of understanding about how home working operates at HOS. It is based upon the principles outlined below, which also meet the requirements of all relevant employment legislation and support a new and modern way of working

HOS recognises that for mutual benefit homeworking is an option for many job roles within HOS. We promote flexible working for all staff and will agree to an employee working partly or wholly from home where appropriate. This policy defines what home working means for HOS, what needs to be in place to ensure the wellbeing of employees. It is the HOS's policy to encourage open discussion with employees to ensure that questions and problems can be resolved as quickly as possible.

## **2. Scope**

The policy and procedure apply to all employees and agency temps. For the policy to be effective, it is essential that colleagues and those involved in the management of colleagues are aware of the policy and procedure and adhere to it. Ultimately it is the responsibility of the Senior Leadership Team in conjunction with the Head of Human Resources to ensure that this is the case.

## **3. Core Principles**

HOS will provide appropriate training and support to those involved in the management of colleagues. Any colleague at a management level should satisfy themselves that they understand the requirements of this policy and the related policies and procedures.

HOS will promote best practice in the management of home working. It will regularly review its provisions to ensure that they are legally compliant and reflect best practice.

HOS will support home working, and this will be agreed between the line manager and the individual taking into consideration team and business needs. Individual needs for flexibility will also be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Whilst home working, employees must take responsibility for their work during HOS office hours; the system is reliant on there being trust between managers and employees. This is so fundamental that any breach of trust will be treated very seriously and may be regarded as misconduct. Appropriate action may follow under the Disciplinary Policy.

Working at home is a benefit available to all staff and not a requirement, days must be agreed in advance with the line manager. There will be some circumstances where working from home a viable option is not or where the operational needs necessitate a different approach.

## **4. 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 need dedicated and focused 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 colleagues to get in to work e.g., adverse weather, or a short but unavoidable commitment at home

### **4.2 Hybrid Working**

Working from home 20 to 80 percent of the time on a regular basis, the individual would come into the office for the balance of time. Colleagues permanent place of work would be both an office location and their home address.

Please note that hybrid working is subject to desk availability. Please refer to the desk booking process.

### **4.3 Permanent Home Working**

Working from home 100 percent of the time (see 5.1 with regards to required attendance). This may be suitable where the job can be done just as effectively and efficiently from home.

## **5. Job Roles and Requirements**

HOS believes that some roles lend themselves to homeworking more readily than others under homeworking, roles can be undertaken from the office or home. The balance between office and home working will vary depending on the role and the person concerned, and the days which are office-based days, and which are home-based days will be agreed.

Your principal residence must be within the United Kingdom.

### **5.1 Attendance at the Office**

All colleagues will be required to attend the office or other suitable venue on occasion. Reasons for this may be – but are not limited to; colleague events and/or quarterly directorate meetings, training (where not available or appropriate to be held online), team meetings (if and when reasonably requested by line manager and when not appropriate to be held online), issues concerning performance management.

Senior managers may also need to attend meetings such as Advisory Board, DLUHC Accounting Officer meeting, ARAC etc.

It is anticipated that colleague events and directorate meetings will be a mix of in person and online events, resulting in attendance in the office for these events once

a quarter. A degree of flexibility is required, and HOS will endeavour to give reasonable notice for any request to attend the office or an alternatively suitable venue.

## **5.2 Employees in probation period**

Homeworking will be available to all colleagues, including those in probation

## **6. Home Working in Practice**

Your principal residence must be within the United Kingdom

Requests can be made for a short period of working abroad to be added to a period of annual leave. Each request will be assessed individually and in line with the Working Abroad policy.

Colleagues, where home working is mutually agreed will be asked to complete an agreement that they understand their responsibilities and those of HOS while working at home. This includes the areas covered below. Annex 1 lays out the Home Working Agreement that should be signed by the colleague and the line manager. This will be held in the colleague's personnel folder on the HR system.

### **6.1 Insurance Cover**

Colleagues should ensure that all HOS property is used appropriately and responsibly and that all reasonable precautions are taken to prevent damage and theft. Any damage or theft of HOS property must be reported to the line manager immediately.

Colleagues working at home are covered by HOS's Employer's Liability Insurance and Public Liability Insurance providing the rules of this policy have been followed.

### **6.2 Communication and Contact**

Communication arrangements must be robust. Colleagues working from home should be readily contactable, normally by email, Teams and by telephone, during normal working hours. Home workers must let their line manager or colleagues know in advance (where appropriate) of any times they will be out, seeking permission where appropriate.

We will expect a homeworker to contact their line manager on a regular basis as agreed in advance [i.e., once a day/twice a week]

### **6.3 Information Security**

All colleagues working from home must ensure that they adhere to HOS's policies, procedures, and guidance in relation to Information Security, Data Protection and Freedom of Information.

The home worker will have a direct responsibility for all HOS information material held at their home and must ensure that it is not accessible to non-authorized people (e.g., other members of the household). All colleagues will be expected to follow Housing Ombudsman Service's information security policies and procedures at all times.

#### **6.4 Health and Safety**

The work that colleagues will be carrying out at home is paper-based or computer-based work and in general such work is not high risk. Nevertheless, HOS has responsibilities under health and safety legislation when colleagues are working from home. This includes the requirement to undertake the online Display Screen Equipment training and self-assessment.

Staff will be provided with equipment which is appropriate for their job roles and in line with any reasonable adjustments that an individual has.

Colleagues should refer to the Equipment Policy for any other requirements

#### **7. Attendance and availability for work**

Colleagues must be available and able to work on their contracted days whether they are in the office or working from home unless absence is for an authorised form of leave or sickness. Any variation to this arrangement can only be made by prior agreement with the manager.

Colleagues should remember that the needs of the customer, and the service will always take priority.

Where a colleague is being asked to attend the office at short notice, managers should endeavor to make the call at a time that enables the employee to arrive at their normal starting time. Where this is not possible the employee's travelling time will be considered as part of their working day.

Colleagues should log in to the IT and telephony system to clearly indicate their availability status throughout their working day. This entails ensuring that outlook calendars are kept open, accessible to colleagues and are up to date.

As a rule, colleagues are expected to work in the same way, whether they are in the office or working from home. For example, if they would usually be available to answer the telephone, respond to emails etc. during the hours the service operates (usually between 9.15am – 5.15pm) they will be expected to do this when working from home, unless a change is agreed with their line manager. Whether or not the line manager agrees to a change, will depend upon the circumstances of the request and its impact on the team and service delivery.

In the case of a systems failure, colleagues should contact their manager, who will need to establish the extent of the system failure, the impact on the service and decide on the appropriate course of action. In some cases, this will involve seeking advice from senior management. Managers should activate their business contingency plans as appropriate.

#### **8. Patterns of work**

The days those colleagues work in the office or work from home will be organised, planned, and agreed in advance with their line manager. This will not be in a public place i.e. library or internet café.

The needs of the service will always take priority, however a collaborative approach between management and colleagues is more likely to achieve a mutually beneficial arrangement.

Ultimately the manager will have the responsibility for ensuring that service needs take priority; those colleagues are treated fairly and are trusted to take responsibility for themselves and their work when working from home.

Managers will, in consultation with colleagues, decide a pattern that best meets the needs of the service.

Colleagues who are not permanent home workers must understand that these patterns are subject to change; there is no entitlement to work from home on specific days of the week. Consequently, employees must be ready to alter their working pattern if required and should be wary of making any commitments on homeworking days as these may need to change.

The arrangements for the scheduling of rotas will vary to suit operational needs. Rotas will also need to be reviewed to consider new starters and leavers.

Working from home is not a substitute for caring for dependents. Colleagues are expected to have made alternative arrangements for the care of their dependents during their working day.

## **9. Exceptions from home working**

HOS recognises that there are circumstances where home working may not be possible.

The following are examples of where managers may consider making exceptions. This is not an exhaustive list and advice may need to be sought from HR depending on the circumstances.

### **9.1 Staff who require specialist equipment.**

There will be a priority seating for staff who have special requirements and where hot-desking is not appropriate. However, HOS does not want to prevent them from having the same opportunities as other staff to work from home

In discussion with the individual, and seeking advice, managers should take individual circumstances into account and ensure that staff are treated fairly and according to their particular needs.

### **9.2 Staff whose personal circumstances are not conducive to home working.**

There could be a number of reasons where working at home is not possible for a member of staff, e.g., shared flats/houses, insufficient space, someone else caring for children/relatives in the home, etc. In the short-term, they may need to attend the office more frequently than other colleagues and managers are expected to manage this in consultation with other team members.

## **10. Hours**

The HOS operates a 35-hour working week. The scheme of flexible working hours will continue to operate. Employees will work their contractual hours whether, or not, they are working in the office or from home.

It is expected that standard office hours will continue to be 09.15 -17.15 for most services. Staff will therefore be required to work hours that facilitate and enable the operation of the services.

Hours can be worked flexibly in line with service needs and with the agreement of the line manager to achieve a better work life balance. Managers will therefore need to consider the suitability of flexitime within the operational demands of the service.

Where flexitime is operating, the scheme will be applied as set out below. Managers may make minor changes to meet particular needs.

Flexitime is not restricted to days worked in the office; Consistent extra hours need to be agreed with line managers.

Flexi-time scheme:

- a) Bandwidth hours: 08.00 – 18.30 unless otherwise agreed with your manager via a flexible working request
- b) Core time: 10.00 and 16.00 unless otherwise agreed with your manager via a flexible working request
- c) A normal working day unless pre agreed
- d) Lunch break: There is no set time for lunch but a break of at least 30 minutes must be taken; for standard office hours this would normally be between 12.00 and 14.15.
- e) Flexi-day: A maximum of two flexi days (pro-rata for part-time staff) in a month may be taken off by prior arrangement with the manager.
- f) When taking a half day or full day of flex leave this should be recorded on the HR system and approved by the line manager
- g) Carry over of hours in credit or debit: The allowance of 14 hours worked above, or below accountable hours may be carried over between accounting periods. This figure is pro-rata for part-time staff.
- h) Additional hours: These are hours that have been previously agreed to be worked outside the bandwidth.
- i) Timesheets: It is good practice that a timesheet be completed each day to the nearest 5 minutes. They should be approved by line manager and available for examination when required.

## **11. Sickness Absence**

Where an employee is unable to work due to sickness, they must on the first day of absence, contact their manager at the earliest opportunity.

As a guide working from home is not to be used as a substitute for a working in the office day, when an employee feels “under the weather” i.e., they feel unable to make the journey into the office but feel able to continue their normal work from

home. Last minute changes could impact on other team members and are therefore difficult to accommodate.

It is however recognised that there may be times or circumstances where such requests may be agreed by exception. In their discussion the manager should consider the hours the employee expects to be able to work and their likely output before determining whether it is appropriate for the employee to work from home in this situation. It is also imperative that the employee has the necessary equipment at home to be able to do this (i.e., laptop etc.).

An employee who has reported in as sick and will have it recorded as such, is not expected to work either in the office or at home. Managers should be respectful of this.

## **12. Performance**

Working from home relies on outcome-based management. This means that staff are managed based upon their results. To achieve this staff are expected to deliver outcomes within their contractual hours. The arrangements for how hours are worked will be agreed in advance with line managers.

This approach will require a strong commitment by managers and employees to plan and ensure that regular 1-2-1 meetings take place and relevant targets are used to represent the outcomes required.

Working from home requires some changes in relationship between employees and their managers. As a result, there are different responsibilities for all staff. All responsibilities are set out below.

### **12.1 Employees will:**

- a) Agree working arrangements with their manager (and in consultation with other team members where appropriate)
- b) Ensure that their manager knows when and where they are working at all times
- c) Ensure their Outlook calendar, Microsoft Teams presence, and telephone presence is up-to-date, and their working status is known at all times
- d) Meet agreed work objectives, deadlines, and monitoring arrangements, with a focus on outcomes and achievement
- e) Take care of HOS equipment such as laptops, particularly when travelling or working from home. Any loss, damage or theft must be reported to the manager and the police if appropriate.
- f) Comply with the IT security and data protection requirements
- g) Complete the Responsible for Information eLearning training module, and all other mandatory data protection related training.

- h) Take reasonable care of their own health and safety and follow the guidance in the online Display Screen Equipment training, and other health and safety arrangements and procedures

### **12.2 Managers will:**

- a) Ensure that safe working practices are understood by employees and that they have the tools they need to do their jobs effectively
- b) Ensure, in consultation with other managers, that working arrangements mean we do not exceed our desk capacity on any one day.
- c) Plan which colleagues are working in and out of the office on any given day. This will necessitate thinking creatively about how home working could work for their staff.

### **12.3 Managers will ensure that their team:**

- a) Understand that for employees who are not permanent home workers it is not compulsory to work from home, but that it is an available benefit
- b) Have access to the appropriate technology to work effectively both in the office environment and from home
- c) Have access to appropriate training and support to work effectively in the new ways
- d) Take responsibility for creating a safe working environment when working from home
- e) Have access to appropriate support equipment to assist in the creation of a safe working environment when working from home
- f) Have SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely) objectives, priorities and targets which can be measured in line with the Performance Reviews, as well as clarity about the outcomes expected of their job role
- g) Have their individual circumstances and requirements (particularly where an employee has a disability) taken into account, including the needs of newly appointed colleagues, trainees and apprentices who may initially need to come into the office more often for support rather than working at home
- h) Have access to continuous performance review process which includes regular 1:1 conversations and/or supervision
- i) Ensure that information governance and health and safety requirements are adhered to at all times

### **13. Recruitment**

Working within a home working environment requires particular skills. It is therefore important that these are incorporated into JD/PS when making new appointments.

As services move to home working the following criteria should then be applied and assessed as part of the normal selection process.

#### **13.1 Managerial posts**

The HOS home working policy means that staff may be managed remotely. Managers must therefore be able to:

- tailor their management style as appropriate to the needs of dispersed teams/ employees
- understand and apply different strategies for the effective management of performance by outcomes
- set clear SMART objectives for colleagues within a working environment
- address conflicting needs of colleagues in a fair and equitable manner that engenders confidence and trust

#### **13.2 All other posts**

The HOS home working policy allows colleagues to work from home. To be able to do so you must:

- demonstrate your ability to complete targets/objectives through independent working and problem solving,
- Make effective use of time management and prioritising skills

#### **13.3 HOS website**

The careers page on the HOS website will be updated to reference the home working strategy. Interview panels should however be prepared to provide a fuller explanation of how home working operates within the team.

#### **13.6 New starters**

The induction and probationary procedures should be applied to new employees in accordance with the respective policies. Managers will however need to ensure that these employees receive an induction that incorporates the Home Working Policy and Protocols and how these operate within their service area.

### **14. Expenses and travel**

#### **14.1 Equipment**

The equipment policy details which home working equipment HOS considers essential for home working safely. It details the eligibility criteria and pre-approved maximum reimbursement costs.

Where there is a medical reason or reasonable adjustment to enable the employee to carry out the duties of the post, this will be addressed via the online DSE assessment for homeworking. Requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

## **14.2 Travel expenses**

Travel between an employee's home and a permanent workplace is not considered business travel and therefore expenses for such journeys cannot be claimed. An employee's permanent workplace is considered to be that which is stated in their contract of employment.

Where an employee has approval to work from home and their employment base remains unchanged, then travel expenses to and from their normal office base may not be claimed. Travel to any temporary workplace may be claimed.

For employees who have their contractual base office changed to "home", and who travel to and from any temporary workplace, including to any company office or client site, in the performance of their duties, may claim business travel expenses for such journeys. It should be noted however, from a tax perspective, that a temporary workplace may become a permanent workplace if the employee attends regularly or follows a pattern.

## **14.3 Tax Guidance**

It is anticipated that, in the majority of cases, the costs of working from home will be offset by the savings in the cost and time of commuting to work, and the benefits of an improved work/life balance. Therefore, any costs incurred by working at home will not be met by the HOS.

Colleagues should refer to HMRC for any tax guidance for homeworkers.

**AGREEING A HOME-WORKING ARRANGEMENT**

**Employees and Agency Temps**

**Name:**

I agree to entering into a mutual benefit home working arrangements and will adhere to, and be aware of, the following:

**1. Health and Safety**

The hours to be worked at home must be agreed formally and must comply with the employee’s contractual hours of work.

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act, colleagues working at home are required to take reasonable care of their own health and safety and to comply with all aspects of HOS’ health and safety policies.

**2. Work related stress**

Colleagues need to be aware of time management issues and social isolation. It’s important to maintain good communications systems and formal means of contact with their line manager and colleagues to avoid feelings of isolation.

**3. Accidents / Near Misses at work**

Colleagues who sustain an injury or have an accident while working from home are required to follow HOS’ accident procedures for reporting such incidents.

**4. Personal Details and Safety**

Colleagues are advised not to reveal their home address and telephone number to other colleagues of HOS. If a postal address needs to be given out, it should be HOS’ office. Only HOS landline or mobile telephone numbers should be given out and where practically possible using HOS’s equipment.

I have read and understood the Home Working Policy.

**Colleague Signature:** .....**Date:**.....

**Line Manager’s Name:** .....

**Line Manager’s Signature:** .....**Date:**.....

**Days to be worked at home:**      **M**      **Tu**      **W**      **Th**      **Fr**