Dover District Council

Remote Working Policy

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Introduction:

This document is the Remote Working Policy for Dover District Council. The Council is committed to improving the working lives of its employees and to encourage a healthy work life balance. In order to provide the best services to our customers and residents, it aims to ensure that all staff work in the most effective and efficient way possible in an appropriate work environment which optimises productivity and performance. For some services and individuals this will mean a mixture of home and office working, for some it will be primarily office based due to the nature of their work and for some this will include remote working in the field.

The Council has made significant investment in developing it's ICT infrastructure and has a digital agenda aimed at facilitating remote working, functionality and availability. This policy is intended to support and facilitate remote working arrangements where these support effective service delivery. In addition, this policy will contribute to the Council's overall climate change agenda, in a reduction of staff commuting to the offices.

- Wherever possible, choice will be given to the employee as it is recognised that personal circumstances, preferences or the role undertaken by the employee may influence their ability with regard to remote working.

- The Council has the right to review any existing remote working arrangements (in line with this policy) and to vary an existing arrangement.

- Managers and employees should discuss and agree on the level of flexibility that is most suited to the job and meets the service need. Situations will vary but in order to achieve consistency, consideration should be given to:
    - Service delivery
    - Ability of the public to access the service
    - Performance and productivity
    - Ability to work safely
    - GDPR & Data Protection

- Remote working is intended to bring benefits to the organisation, whilst also bringing benefits to staff through more flexible working arrangements, reduced commuting times and costs and a better work/life balance.

- The Council intends to make the majority of office areas subject to "hot desking", in order to operate its buildings more efficiently and cost effectively. In light of this, it is likely that not all employees will have their own designated desk but will be able to access a desk in a relevant area should they need or want to work in the office. Those people whose roles require them to be entirely office based will have a permanent desk.

- Where roles require face to face contact with customers, this must always be prioritised to be offered in the Whitfield offices to enable customer access.

1. Purpose & Aims:

This document sets out the policy and procedures for remote working at Dover District Council (DDC). This Policy incorporates (and replaces) the previous Home Working Policy Statement and Guidance documents but does not replace the Flexible Working Arrangements Policy & Procedure or the Flexible Working Hours Policy.

The Council's aims are to:

- Increase the effectiveness of our Services
- Reduce the costs of running the council through making best use of assets;
- Meet the aspirations of staff for an improved work-life balance;
- Create office environments to allow collaboration and innovation;
- Reduce the environmental footprint of the Council's working practices.
- Give Employees more choice about where and when they work, subject to business considerations;

2. Scope:

Where possible, this policy will apply to all employees within the organisation, regardless of seniority. The extent of remote working will vary according to the job role. The Policy will be applied fairly and consistently to all staff employed in the Council to ensure that our approach promotes and protects equality of opportunity in both service delivery and employment at all times, in line with corporate polices and training, whilst taking into account service delivery.

It is essential that managers and employees alike enter into the spirit of remote working within the constraints of normal service provision. As each service offering is different, a 'one size fits all' approach can't be applied. It must be remembered that the final decision will be based on the impact it has on the Service, therefore not all outcomes will be the same.

3. What is Remote Working?:

Remote working is the term used to describe how employees can work away from the office from any location, whether it is from a different Council building, in the Community, from home or a combination of these. It is about allowing individuals to work in an environment that best suits them as well as the job role so that the work is completed in the most appropriate place, at the best time, and in the best way, to deliver the service to our customers, whilst always ensuring compliance with GDPR & data protection principles.

Employees also have a statutory right to request Flexible Working, which might mean amongst other options, reducing hours, compressing hours into a shorter working week

or working hours outside of a standard working week. This is dealt with in the Flexible Working Arrangements Policy & Procedure.

Although not all of the roles within the Council can be fully remote, there is considerable scope in many cases for some form of remote working. The different ways in which remote working can be undertaken is dependent on the demands and needs of the role and service, the individual's preferences and circumstances and the service an employee is engaged in.

Employees may not have a fixed working station within the Council, but adequate desks and equipment will be available for staff within the offices to access as they need to.

4. Associated Policies:

Irrespective of workplace, employees remain subject to all existing corporate and employment policies. However, for those working remotely, attention is drawn in particular to the following:

Corporate Information Governance Group policies

GDPR/Data Protection

Health & Safety

Code of Conduct

5. Manager Responsibilities:

- Treat each request to work remotely on its own merits and in accordance with the checklist set out in this policy.   This will include the potential impact on other team members, the level of regular contact/interaction required, hours required for customer contact (both internally and externally)
- Assess whether the home or remote location and environment is suitable and appropriate for the employee to work from, in consultation with Corporate Health & Safety as necessary
- Assess the sensitivity and confidentiality of the work to be undertaken from home and ensure that all necessary measures can be put in place to protect information
- Ensure that a remote working risk assessment has taken place (through e-learning), where appropriate, prior to any home working commencing and to raise any issue with Corporate Health & Safety;
- Ensure that an annual review of the risk assessment is undertaken and ensure that any necessary electrical testing of equipment is carried out
- If considered necessary, agree a trial period of at least 4 weeks.

- Ensure that they remain available during working hours and times for their teams, regardless of their place of work
- Treat all employees equitably with regards communication, access to Line Manager, promotion and training opportunities, regardless of where they are working
- Attend training on how to manage remote workers.
- Give staff reasonable notice should the manager wish them to be present in the office. This would not usually be on the same day unless there is a genuine office emergency.
- Maintain regular contact with employees working remotely
- Agree working hours and patterns, contact time and availability with the employee in advance. Unless otherwise agreed working hours will remain the same when employees commence remote working.

6. Employee Responsibilities:

- Employees who work from home should ensure that they have a suitable environment in which they can focus on work and maintain productivity and this will be agreed with their Line Manager in accordance with this Policy.
- To enter into a remote working agreement with their manager (in the form attached to the Guidance Document)
- Employees must ensure that they can work free from disruption, e.g. by having adequate care arrangements in place for dependants who may be at home during working hours. They should also ensure they have an appropriate and risk- free physical space to work in.
- Ensure completion of the risk assessment form prior to the commencement of any home working
- Ensure that they are fully contactable during their working hours and be available at all times during their work hours to attend an alternative workplace at the request of their line manager. This includes pre-planned and reasonable short notice requirements;
- Ensure that they undertake their work during the times pre-agreed with their line manager and agree any changes to this in advance with their line manager;
- Inform their line manager as soon as possible in the event of accidents, incidents or dangerous occurrences whilst working remotely and ensure that it is logged as soon as practicable, but within 24 hours
- Report any sickness in line with the usual absence reporting procedure, as set out within the Sickness Absence Management Policy
- Ensure that they adhere to any and all confidentiality requirements in respect of Council business with particular reference to data protection principles and the Council's Information Governance Policies
- To attend their usual place of work for IT software updates and IT training, where required
- Have due care and attention of the IT equipment provided for use at home.
- Those working remotely will be required to ensure that suitable and clear communication channels e.g. mobile phone signals, broadband connectivity etc are in place to enable

them to carry out their work effectively and for colleagues/customers to contact them at home.

- Responsibility and liability with regards to home working rest with the employee to notify their house insurer, mortgage lender, landlord, local authority or other such body as necessary. The Council will not accept any responsibility for an employee who suffers any detriment, loss or legal action as a result of not obtaining any necessary permissions.
- Employees should continue to meet the debit/credit hours arrangements and record their hours as agreed on the flexi system, in accordance with the Flexi-time policy
- Ensure electronic diaries are up to date and available for colleagues and where necessary, Members
- Ensure regular breaks are taken and screen breaks are appropriate
- Notify your line manager as soon as possible if you experience any IT issues when trying to access the remote working system. The employee and manager can then agree how best to proceed which may include having to attend the office on that occasion
- Inform your line manager of any changes that mean it may be appropriate to review/ amend remote/home working arrangements
- Childcare should be in place during the time which home working employees spend working at home. Home working provides a flexible way of working to fit around child care commitments or other responsibilities but it should not be used as an alternative to child care.
- Employees will continue to work in accordance with the Council's Flexi-time Policy and working hours should be pre-arranged and agreed with line managers

- Employees working remotely should be dressed appropriately for their day, i.e. where staff are required to attend meetings (either remotely or in person), they must adhere to the Council's standard of appearance as set out in the Employee Handbook

7. Health, Safety and Wellbeing:

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 states that an employer shall ensure, so far as it is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees. This extends to staff who work remotely.

Employees have a responsibility for their own and others health and safety while they are carrying out work activities regardless of the work location in accordance with the Council's Health and Safety Policy.

A fully completed and signed Remote Working Agreement (see guidance) and Health and Safety Remote Risk Assessment (will be carried out before an agreement is made for an employee to work remotely. This will need to be carried out again at least annually or if any substantial changes are made to the working environment or arrangements. Employees must fully participate in completing the necessary risk assessment paperwork

and review this with their manager. This must be signed off by the manager before formal remote working arrangements are put in place.

When working from home, employees must ensure they have a suitable workspace with adequate security, storage, seating, space and screening from noise in the rest of the home. There must also be adequate ventilation and lighting. Employees will provide this equipment at their own expense, and if this is not possible they should work from an office location.

Managers will be expected to meet regularly with their staff working remotely. These meetings are likely to be held remotely but with the agreement of both the employee and their manager these meetings can be conducted in the employee's home, if necessary. Otherwise those meetings will take place at Council premises.

Employees must comply with normal lone working procedures to ensure that their whereabouts are known when working in the field.

Working remotely or from home brings with it the potential to be tempted to work extended hours. It is important that working patterns and level of hours is not detrimental to health and wellbeing. It is part of an employee's responsibility to ensure that their manager is informed about the number of hours they work and to comply with the Working Time Regulations. Hours worked should be recorded within the Tractile Flexitime Management system.

Employees must not have meetings in their home with clients, customers, or officers from other agencies, and should not disclose their home address or telephone number.

8. Associated costs:

Employees working from home are covered by the Council's Public / Employer's Liability insurance, provided the employee is carrying out their duties.

Wherever possible, employees should use Avaya, Microsoft Teams or their Council issued mobile phone to make calls. In the event this cannot be done, the cost of business phone calls will be met by the Council.

The Council will not pay for any additional costs incurred by employees using their home for work (with the exception of reasonable phone call costs as outlined above) unless there is a statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010.

Any ad hoc costs/expenses incurred whilst working from home (e.g. postage) should be claimed through the EKP expenses claim form online. However, staff should, in the first instance, use normal Council processes and procedures to avoid incurring additional costs.

Home workers or those working remotely cannot claim travel expenses for the regular commute from home to the office e.g. for attending regular one to one meetings and team meetings.

The Council will pay mileage in accordance with the existing mileage policy which can be seen here (link to be added)

9. Equipment and Connectivity:

- Employees are required to have their own broadband at home.
- All ICT hardware items will remain the property of the Council and must be returned should the remote working arrangement cease or employment with the Council ceases.
- Remote working employees will normally be expected to use their own desk and chair, subject to a risk assessment. Specialist equipment will only be provided to staff should a risk assessment deem this necessary and this has been approved by Corporate Health & Safety; however, this equipment will be provided at the place where they predominantly work and not across multiple sites.
- Sustained remote working will not be agreed if there is insufficient space to accommodate all equipment necessary to effectively perform their duties at home.
- The Council will maintain its own equipment, but will not be responsible for maintaining an employee's own equipment e.g. electrical sockets and other parts of the employee's domestic electrical system, which are their own responsibility. Should a problem arise with Council owned equipment, usual ICT policies and procedures will be applied.
- All DDC electrical equipment must be PAT tested annually, in line with the Council's electrical equipment testing procedures. Items should be brought into the office at pre-agreed times for this testing to be conducted, where reasonably practicable.
- Officers should carry out printing from the offices. However, where this is not possible, any request for home printing arrangements must be agreed by the relevant Head of Service and the Council's Information Governance team. The Council will not pay for any equipment or supplies to enable home printing.
- Any stationary necessary should be procured in the usual way and collected from the offices.
- The IT, telephone and communications equipment needed for home or flexible working will be determined by ICT/Digital Services who may, if appropriate, arrange for its installation and removal when needed, based on the type of role being carried out.
  - Council supplied equipment must be used primarily for work purposes, reasonable personal use of Council equipment is permitted.
  - Council supplied equipment must not be used by family or friends
  - Non-Council equipment must not be connected to Council equipment, unless first approved by ICT
  - Where equipment is provided, employees must take reasonable care of it, use it only in accordance with any operating instructions and return it to the Council when requested or when employment ends.
  - ICT support will be available for home, flexible or field workers, but only during normal office hours. If equipment has to be serviced in the IT offices then the remote worker will be required to bring it in to the offices.

10. Information Security:

- All employees have a duty not to disclose confidential information or use it for any purpose other than the Council's business.

- GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 must be complied with in relation to the security of information and employees are subject to the Council's Data Protection Policy. Employees should also have regard to any guidance issued by the Council's Data Protection Officer. The Policy aims to establish an effective governance structure to ensure that the council takes information management seriously and all staff understand their responsibility to handle all data in line with this policy.

- The Council's data must be kept safe and secure at all times. Measures might include:

    o forbidding access to data and work files by household members;
    o a secure filing cabinet;
    o facilities for confidential disposal (for example shredding) of paper-based records;
    o secure premises;
    o compliance with the Data Retention Schedules and Disposal Policy;
    o compliance with the IT Security Policy (password, encryption, no password sharing, changing passwords at regular intervals etc.).

- Employees must not provide their personal address or personal contact details to customers/clients or third parties associated with the Council. Meetings between customers/clients and employees at home are prohibited.

- Staff must have completed the e-learning Cyber Security module before they are able to work from home

- Employees should ensure that screens and documents cannot be overlooked by other people when they are working remotely on laptops and that meetings or phone calls that involve personal data cannot be overheard.

- Employees must take care of equipment, software, files and any other information to make sure it is not lost. It is particularly important to ensure that other people (in the home or whilst working off site) are not able access confidential or personal information.

11. Business Continuity:

Line managers are responsible for ensuring business continuity (in line with the service and Corporate Business Continuity policies) and must ensure that in the event of an emergency or disaster, officers are able to conduct their service as well as is reasonably possible. This may involve staff being asked to return to the offices or to work at home more regularly, depending on the type of emergency.