

Working flexibly: Our approach



Introduction

We recognise that we live in an ever-changing landscape and that the way we work needs to adapt and flex. Our customer needs are changing and with technological advancements so can our working practices.

For some roles, the need to attend particular locations to undertake work during “office hours” is not required to the same extent and we want to support you to work in ways which best enable you to deliver services for our community.

For those roles, this document sets out the parameters for our approach. It will help you and your manager agree how and when you work and understand how you can vary your hours to maintain a good work/life balance.

Your official work base will be the Council site/s specified in your contract, but you can work from home or another location with the permission of your manager.

How often you work from another location and when you work will vary by team and individual and may vary each week. The expectation is that you will attend the office for some of your working hours and as and when requested by your manager. This might mean you attend the office full time, you may work from the office twice a week, or it may mean you are in the office two or three times one week and not the next.

There will be some roles where it is operationally necessary to work fixed hours and/or from a fixed location. Where this is the case, you will not be able to alter your hours and/or location in the way this document describes.

This document should be read in conjunction with:

- Right to request flexible working policy – in Entitlement for Time Off Policy
- Home working policy

Our Values

At the heart of everything we do are Our Values. We trust that we will all work at times and in ways which best support our teams and customers and that we will learn and adapt as the needs of our customers change. Our new approach should not hinder our ability to work collaboratively within and outside of the organisation but enable us to be more creative in the way we deliver our Services and achieve our wider organisational ambitions.



So, how flexible is flexible?

We deliver a diverse range of services and the degree of flexibility you have to vary the way you work will depend on the job that you do.

How you work will be in agreement with your Manager but in essence it must:

- Meet the needs of our customers and external partners
- Comply with the working time directive
- Work for your team and other teams across the Council
- Be supportive of your wellbeing

You will have a basic working pattern that reflects your contractual hours in the HR system. This will be used to calculate any form of leave or absence and as the basis upon which any agreement on your working hours is undertaken. However, you will be able to vary this to meet work and personal demands. This means that you may work at different times of the day, at different locations and on different days where necessary on a basis agreed by your line manager.

Should you wish to make formal changes to your contractual hours, pattern or working base then you will need to seek authorisation from your manager in consultation with HR (see right to request flexible working policy –in Entitlement for Time Off).

Here are the parameters:

Contractual hours	Over the course of the month and year, you need to work the hours you are contracted to do. However, in some weeks you might work slightly longer or shorter hours depending on work and personal demands.
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Start and finish times	<p>The Council's customer contact hours are 8.45am – 4.45pm.</p> <p>We anticipate that most people will work between 8am – 6pm. However, you can work between 6am and 12 midnight* and spread your work in blocks of time across the day.</p> <p>Unless it is a requirement of your role, you should <u>not</u> work between 12 midnight and 6am. This is to help ensure sufficient rest breaks are taken.**</p>
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Location	<p>Your official work base will be that specified in your contract. However, you can vary this and work at other locations so long as you can perform effectively and safely and adhere to the necessary security and confidentiality requirements in accordance with Council policy.</p> <p>The hybrid working model adopted by the Council allows a lot of flexibility and so it is not envisaged that the Council will generally issue permanent homeworking contracts. However, if you wish to formally change your official work base, then you need to seek agreement by making a request for flexible working.</p>
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Working days	<p>Your basic working pattern will include the days on which you would normally work. You can vary this from time to time and work on another day of the week if your Service can still work effectively and this is agreed by your manager.</p> <p>You will not receive any enhancement for working at weekends, unless this is a 6th working day and you have already worked 37 hours, in which case it must be agreed in advance by your manager.</p>
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*appropriate rest breaks must be taken in line with the working time directive (See Working Well section).

**Enhanced rates of pay apply between midnight and 6am. The enhancements will only be paid where it is a requirement of your role to work at this time and this has been agreed in advance with your manager.

Working time

Do I need to record my hours?

It is not a requirement to record your working hours, though you may do so if you wish.

If you are working on a project which is likely to result in a lot of additional hours, then you are encouraged to keep a record to help manage your time with your manager and ensure that you take the appropriate time off in lieu.

The HR system can be used to record your hours for this purpose.

If your manager is concerned about your performance or working hours, then you may be asked to make a more formal record.

Can I take a regular day off?

If you are working on a project (or piece of work) which is causing a temporary increase in the hours that you work, you may be able to take time off in lieu in day blocks, with advanced approval of your manager.

You will not be able to bank time to take a regular day off. If you work slightly longer on one day, the expectation is that you will adjust your hours across the remainder of the week to recoup this time. For employees who do not undertake project work, your manager may, on occasion, agree that you may work longer days and have a day off at a later date, but this would be based on the needs of the service and it is not expected that this would be on a regular basis.

It is your responsibility to make sure you do not work significantly in excess of your contractual working hours and that you recoup time throughout the month/year. Unless you have been working on a specific project and have advanced agreement from your manager, you will not be able to request payment for any time accrued should you leave the Council's employment.

Can I just work the same hours every day?

Of course. You can have a fixed working pattern if this is what you would prefer. Your working pattern should be agreed, in advance, with your line manager.

It is recognised that there will be fluctuations in work throughout the year in most roles. If you have a fixed working pattern this does not prevent you from working slightly shorter or longer days on occasions to meet these variations in workload.

What can I count towards working time?

Travelling time	You can include travel time within your work time if you are travelling to meetings for example but where you travel directly to and/or from home you must deduct your normal travelling time (your home to official workplace journey) from this.
Lunch and other extended breaks	Unless otherwise specified in your contract your lunch break or other extended breaks are not counted as working time. You are encouraged to take regular short (5/10 minute) breaks from your screen which can be counted in your working time. Under employment legislation you must have a minimum of a 20-minute break after working 6 hours. It is Council policy that this break should actually be for a minimum of 30 minutes
Routine medical appointments	Attendance at routine medical appointments such as doctor, dentist or opticians' appointments should not be counted as working time.
Hospital appointments	If you attend a Hospital, Ante Natal or cancer screening appointment, where appointment times are fixed without discretion, you can count the actual time taken as working time, provided this does not exceed the contractual hours for that day.
Public duties	You are entitled to paid time off for public duties and this can count towards your working time. See Entitlement For Time Off Policy for further details.
Trade union duties	Time worked as an accredited Union representative can count towards working time but must not exceed your daily contracted hours.

Where I work

Can I work from home all the time?

It is anticipated that Council employees will attend the office for some of their contractual hours each week. The number of hours and pattern of office attendance should be agreed with your manager.

There may be occasions when you work at home for a full week, but it is important that you maintain a connection with the workplace, and you will be expected to attend the office on a regular basis.

You could be asked to attend on any of your working days and you should ensure that your arrangements on days when you work at home are flexible enough to allow this.

What needs to be in place for me to work from an alternative location?

You will need to work from a suitable place, where you are free from distractions. You should ensure that you have a stable broadband internet connection with sufficient bandwidth to enable video conferencing.

You must ensure your proposed work base is covered by the Council's employer's liability insurance and is allowable in line with your own insurance and mortgage or tenancy agreements.

Where your role allows, you can work from any location, within the UK, that enables you to work effectively. You should always have due regard to data protection and ensure that you put appropriate measures in place to protect Council equipment and any confidential or personal data that you have access to in your role.

You should ensure that you have read and are familiar with the Digital Services Remote Working Policy.

When working from another location you are under a duty to:

- keep all documentation under lock and key at all times except when in use; and
- use a unique password for the laptop and any other digital devices
- arrange for any confidential hard copy data to be shredded and disposed of at a Council office site and to be kept securely until this can be done.

The laptop and other equipment provided by us must not be used by any other member of the family or third party at any time or for any purpose.

Where you are working from the same location for any extended period of time or on a regular basis you must ensure that you have completed a Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessment to protect you from ill health or injury.

If you need specialist equipment as an adjustment to a disability for example, and you wish to work in an alternative location where you do not have access to this equipment, then you should discuss this with your line manager in the first instance as your ability to work safely and effectively may be affected.

Where you are varying your work location from your contractual work base you must agree this with your manager in advance. Any permanent or long-term temporary moves must be discussed and agreed with your manager in consultation with HR as you may need a variation to your contract, and you will need to submit a flexible working request. As the hybrid model adopted by the Council offers a lot of flexibility it is not envisaged that the Council would generally issue permanent homeworking contracts.

Do I need to attend a Council site if I find unexpectedly that I cannot complete my work effectively at another location?

You must notify your line manager if you experience system, internet or other problems that prevent you from working.

Where the fault is due to Council owned equipment it must be reported to Digital Services.

If the fix of any issue is likely to exceed 2 hours you need to make arrangements with your manager to conduct alternative work or come into the office. If this is not possible then you will be required to take time off which may mean using annual leave, lieu time or unpaid leave.

If the fault is being experienced by all staff, a decision will be taken by your Service Manager (or line manager) as to whether you need to come into the office. This will depend on the nature of the fault.

Is there anything else I need to consider when working from another location?

You must not use your own home for meetings. This includes meetings at your home with members of your own team as this would not be covered by the Council's insurance.

Printing should not be done outside of a Council site unless absolutely necessary and due regard must be given to data storage and security. Larger printing jobs should be done at a Council site. If you need to arrange for an item to be posted, you should contact a member of the office based team and arrange for postage from a Council site. Items should not be posted from your remote location.

Working well

Whilst flexible working brings a lot of benefits, it may also mean that you start or keep working at times which may not help you maintain a good work life balance or support your wellbeing, particularly when work is not restricted to one location. You are therefore encouraged to have clear distinctions between work and personal time.

Make sure that you take regular breaks and that you are clear about when your working day begins and ends and communicate this to your colleagues. You should avoid checking emails during non-work time.

You can help eliminate interruptions to your breaks or personal time by communicating clearly with colleagues about when you are logging off for lunch or at the end of the day, using your Team settings to show when you are available and when you are not available and marking your planned start, finish and break times in your outlook calendar.

What breaks must I take?

All working arrangements must comply with the Working Time Regulations as follows:

- You should not work more than 48 hours a week. (The normal working week for the Council is 37 hours a week and we would expect the majority of fulltime staff to work close to these weekly hours).
- You should have at least one 30-minute break* after working 6 hours
- You must have a minimum of 11 hours rest between the end of one working day and the beginning of another. i.e. if you finish work at 9pm, you should not start work the next day before 8am.
- You must have at least one non-working day each week (or 48 hours continuous rest in 14 days)

*this is the minimum break time specified by the Council

Can people contact me at any time of the day?

The Council's customer contact hours are 8.45am – 4.45pm. You should use the settings in Teams to manage your availability outside of these times. It is suggested that communication to colleagues is restricted to email after 6pm, even where someone is showing as available, unless agreed by all parties. You may be sent emails at any time of the day, but this does not mean that you have to read them or respond outside of your normal working pattern.

Can I log on remotely and undertake work whilst on annual leave or during a bank holiday?

We know that some people like to keep a check on their emails whilst they are on annual leave, but this is not encouraged nor endorsed by the Council. Your leave is to support your wellbeing and is for your own health and safety and is to provide you with a sustained period of rest and relaxation. You should not undertake work during a period of annual leave or on a bank holiday unless it is an emergency situation which has been requested by the Council, or, in the case of bank holidays, you are contractually obliged to do so, for which you will be given compensatory time off.

What happens if I'm ill?

If you cannot undertake work due to ill-health, then any day's absence will be recorded as sickness on the HR system. You will not need to make this time up at a later day. If you choose to leave work early or start work late due to feeling unwell but do not record this as a formal absence, then you would need to make this time up as you will have worked a shorter working day.

Managing unexpected or unplanned events

What happens if I need to take time off at short notice to care for dependents or for other emergencies?

We know that there will be occasions where you may be unable to work the hours you had expected to do so, due to situations outside of your control. We hope our approach to flexible working will support you to manage these situations.

If you have worked additional hours you can keep hold of these for medical appointments and to use in emergencies. However, the retention of any additional hours needs to be agreed with your manager, in advance, and appropriate limits set. It is not envisaged that anyone would keep over a week's worth of contracted hours at any time.

Where you do not have time accrued and cannot adjust your hours across the week to accommodate emergency situations, you may owe the Council time. Please keep in contact with your manager, where this occurs, and agree with them how you will make up the time. This could include working additional hours, where there is sufficient workload, using annual or unpaid leave or a combination of these.

It is not envisaged that anyone would use more than 6 days (pro rata for part time staff) in a leave year to respond to emergency situations.

During exceptional circumstances (such as the pandemic) the Council may allow additional flexibility where staff are unable to work their full working hours, please consult your line manager or HR, if these events occur.

Accommodating medical appointments.

You will generally be expected to accommodate routine medical appointments (doctors, dentist, opticians etc) within your working week and adjust your hours accordingly i.e. work longer hours shortly before or after the appointment to make up the time. With the agreement of your manager you can retain a small amount of credit to use for medical appointments to help you manage these. The retention of any hours needs to be agreed with your manager, in advance, and appropriate limits set. It is not envisaged that anyone would keep over a week's worth of hours at any time for use for medical appointments and there should be a clear rationale for any time retained for this purpose.

If you attend a Hospital, Ante Natal or cancer screening appointment, where appointment times are fixed without discretion, you can count the actual time taken as working time, provided this does not exceed the contractual hours for that day.

Maintaining professional standards

Flexible working can support you to manage your personal demands and assist you in managing any fluctuations in work. It is important to remember to keep your team up to date when you are and are not working and to keep in regular communication with colleagues when you are working from different locations.

If you are unable to attend work as expected, then you should let your manager know as soon as possible and in accordance with your regular working pattern. Don't assume it will be ok just to start later one day or finish early or choose at the last minute to work from another location. Whilst you may have more flexibility to work at different times and at different places, this still needs to be in agreement with your manager.

Attendance at training and team meetings

It is expected that you will attend training or work meetings that take place during your basic working pattern (i.e. the working pattern that you have on the HR system). These events could be virtual or require your physical attendance at a Council site or other location. Any changes to your working pattern will only be taken into account if these have been formally agreed with your manager and your working pattern changed on the HR system.

What happens if contractual hours are not worked?

The flexibility you have to vary your hours is a benefit to both you and the Council. It helps us to manage any fluctuations in work and helps you to accommodate personal circumstances. However, you must ensure that you are working the hours for which you are being paid i.e. your contractual working hours. If it is found that you are not working your contractual hours, then this may ultimately result in disciplinary action.

Disciplinary action may also be taken where an employee is in breach of the Council's disciplinary standards which could include falsely claiming to have credit, falsifying records or claiming to be working when they are not.

Is there anything else I have to consider?

Our approach to flexible working enables you to vary the time you work and the locations from which you work but you will always have a basic working pattern and official work base in place. If you want to work from a particular location or at specific times on a regular basis you

will need to request a formal contractual change under the right to request flexible working. Please see the Entitlement for Time off policy for further information.

If you work from home or other locations on an ad hoc basis then please ensure you have read and are familiar with the requirements in the home working policy.

Health and safety

Any ad hoc or permanent requests to work an alternative work pattern or in an alternative location must always be deemed suitable taking into account health and safety legislation and undertaking a risk assessment as needed.

Managers are responsible for ensuring safe working arrangements for all employees in accordance with working time regulations.

If you have an accident at home, whilst you are working, this should be treated as an industrial accident and must be reported and recorded like any other accident at work. Further information on accident reporting is available on the intranet.

