

Ferndown Town Council Home Working Policy

Author: Louise Harrison, Town Clerk, Ferndown Town Council, 16 December 2020.

Approved by the Personnel Committee on 18 January 2021, minute reference P/093.

1. Introduction

Ferndown Town Council (Council) is committed to considering requests for non-traditional working patterns, such as home working, where service delivery needs can be met more effectively and the member of staff can be assisted in balancing work with other priorities relating to home, health, interests and the community. Whether the opportunity to work from home is initiated by the member of staff or the Council, the Council will always assess the feasibility of such an arrangement.

Under agreement with the Town Clerk (in the case of the Town Clerk, the Chairman of the Personnel Committee) and where able to work productively, staff may be permitted to work from home on occasion or for agreed periods of time.

Where employees are approved to work from home they need to consider the following skills, which are key to ensuring that their home working can continue:

- time management and self-discipline
- motivation
- self-sufficiency
- communication
- technology

Staff working environment and working practices are subject to the same working standards that are applied to Council's offices regarding confidentiality, access to Council documents and health and safety.

If, on any occasion, Council documents are used in the course of working at home, precautions must be taken to ensure third parties (including members of family, visitors or other persons visiting or residing in the staff member's home) do not become aware of any information which is confidential. Information must not be left unattended when staff are working and when materials are not in use they must be kept locked away in a secure place. Similar precautions must be taken when transporting documents in the course of work.

2. Definition

Occasional home working is when an employee undertakes some of their duties from home on an ad hoc basis. This is usually planned in advance and may be for complete or part days. Examples of the type of work considered suitable for home working include report writing, preparations for meetings, project work etc.

Working from home enables work to be carried out more efficiently in a quiet location and without disruption. It may also prove a more efficient use of time if employees who have been away from their work base for part of day and are closer to their home on

their return journey, complete the working day at home rather than at their normal place of work.

In cases where office facilities are shared, or the employee risks continual interruption, Council may agree that an employee can work from home for a short specified period. Employees should be aware of the potential impact home working could have on teams e.g. isolation from the team, and/or Council activities, a reduction in effective managerial support or supervision.

Due to the nature of individual tasks some roles within the Council are not deemed suitable for home working.

Council also acknowledges that Government intervention will also necessitate staff to work from home in certain circumstances (e.g. COVID pandemic – see below) and this Policy will be superseded by Government legislation.

3. Rules

Home working arrangements should work for both the Council and the employee and staff should make themselves available for their specified hours of work. Staff are required to complete time sheets and submit signed copies to the Town Clerk (or Chairman of Personnel in the Clerk's) for approval every four weeks.

The home working activity has clearly defined tasks, objectives, and needs to be suitable for home working and measurable.

Prior agreement is to be obtained including required hours of work and work location. Requests should be considered on their own merits, considering resources, impact on colleagues and working relationships.

The member of staff does not have other commitments with the Council or elsewhere that would conflict or impair with working at home.

The home worker will be contactable during the agreed times and/or hours of work.

Home working should not be used as an alternative method of meeting carer responsibilities, unless temporary home working arrangements are agreed to aid recovery from a long illness, to cater for a temporary disability that would prevent an employee attending the workplace or caring for children or dependent adults for a short period of time whilst other arrangements are made.

Home working agreements will be reviewed in light of any change of circumstances, whether relating to employee, work they are required to undertake, or the working environment.

There will be no detrimental effect on the level or quality of the service provided by Council.

There will be no increase in workload for office-based colleagues as a result of home working by an individual.

The required hours of work have been agreed by the Town Clerk or Chairman of Personnel Committee and the employee has recorded them on their time sheet.

The home worker will be subject to the Council's normal performance management processes.

Inappropriate disclosure of personal data and confidential information held on the Council's systems will be considered as gross misconduct under the Disciplinary Procedures.

4. Responsibilities and equipment

Employer responsibilities and equipment.

- Health and safety

In line with the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 ("the Act") and Council's Health & Safety Policy, Council will ensure, as far as reasonably practical, the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees, including those working from home. Home workers remain the subject of the Working Time Regulations 1998. Regular breaks should be taken (minimum of 20 minutes if working more than six hours) and they should not work more than an average of 48 hours per week.

- GDPR compliance, security and confidentiality.

Office staff will be instructed that in instances where their colleagues are working from home they will not disclose any personal details e.g. telephone numbers to anyone outside of the Council.

Council must confirm that the proper IT provisions and safeguards are in place.

Employee responsibilities and equipment.

- Health and safety

Employees are expected to carry out their work in such a way as to ensure, as far as reasonably practical, that there is no risk to health and safety to themselves, members of their family or visitors. The home worker ideally needs to have an identifiable work space where they can partially insulate themselves from domestic activities. There also needs to be adequate provision for the safety and security of all supplied equipment and any confidential data and files. The work area should have sufficient heating, lighting and ventilation for comfort and wellbeing and there should be sufficient electrical sockets available for all work equipment and all cables should be positioned so as not to present a trip hazard.

- Accidents/incidents

Employees must inform their line manager of any accidents or incidents which take place whilst working at home via telephone. The Town Clerk will complete relevant paperwork as per Council's Health and Safety Policy on the employee's return to the workplace.

- Policies and procedures

All work carried out on Council business is covered by the requirements of the Council's policies and procedures, even if this work is undertaken at home.

- Equipment

Staff will have use of Council laptops (with office software, anti-virus software, email and broadband internet connection) and access to the shared electronic folder system as managed by Council's IT contractor.

In the event that Council laptops are damaged, lost or stolen the matter will be reported to the Police and Town Clerk. Every effort will be made to recover it and

if this is not possible there is sufficient security to prevent access to the files, as far as possible.

Remote access

Staff may use remote access to emails and the electronic folder system. Employees must not divulge any information held on the database to any third party.

Finance and insurance

The member of staff is required to ensure that rental or mortgage agreements at the home location allow for home working.

If any equipment owned by the Council is subsequently lost or damaged by an employee that employee shall be expected to pay for its replacement.

Staff are encouraged to claim tax relief for working at home via HMRC.

Access to staff homes

Council's representatives have the right, on request, to visit and gain access to that area of the staff member's home they use for Council's workplace to:

- a) review, inspect or remove any of Council's property, documents, records or other information relating to its business and work; and
- b) to conduct an audit of health and safety provisions.
- c) whilst working from home staff should be contactable at all times - Council reserve the right to contact staff during either the hours as stipulated in their statement of employment or as otherwise detailed.

5. Making a request for home working

The Town Clerk should make a request via email to the Chairman of the Personnel Committee. Other staff should make a request via email to the Town Clerk.

The Chairman of the Personnel Committee or Town Clerk will authorise or refuse the request by email.

If staff wish to appeal against a decision, they may do so by using the Council's Grievance Procedure.

Home working arrangements will be reviewed on an annual basis, or sooner if circumstances change.

Employees must be aware that any abuse of the home working arrangement may result in the withdrawal of the agreement.

6. Home details

Council must be informed immediately of any actual or potential changes to:

- a) the employee's address; or contact number;
- b) occupancy of the property by the employee and/or others;
- c) telephone communications with the property; and
- d) any other changes relevant to the use of the home as a work base.

Staff should make sure that their home insurance has been informed that it is being used for business purposes and that the employee is not in breach of any of the insurers terms and conditions.

7. Confidentiality

All Council information is regarded as confidential and data protection is a top priority of Council; Council takes its obligations under the Data Protection Act and GDPR seriously. Therefore, staff must make themselves aware of Council's policies on data protection and always ensure adherence to them. Staff must take steps to protect company records at all times against loss, unauthorised access, alteration or destruction. Staff must make Council aware immediately if they discover that there has been a data breach.

Staff are required to take special care to secure all records and to prevent unauthorised disclosure of Council information. Customer contact information is particularly sensitive as customers have a legal right to expect personal information held about them to be held in utmost confidence. On behalf of Council it is the employee's legal obligation to ensure these rights are protected.

Precautions must be taken to ensure third parties; including members of the family, visitors or other persons visiting or residing in the home do not become aware of any information which is confidential. Information must not be left unattended when working and when materials are not in use they should be locked away in a secure place. Similar precautions must be taken when transporting documents in the course of work.

If there is any reason to believe that Council information is lost, altered or has been accessed by any unauthorised person, it must be reported to Council without delay. Use of any computer equipment owned by Council, its software and computer discs are limited to staff alone and to business applications. Peripheral equipment such as printer and modem may not be connected to any of Council's computers other than those issued to you by Council. Information personal to staff should not be stored on Council's laptop/computer.

Update March 2021 – COVID

During the pandemic Government guidelines will be monitored and implemented with the agreement of Council's Personnel Committee.

Staff member:

I understand the above policy and the terms and conditions contained within and I agree that they form part of my Contract of Employment.

Signature:

Date:

Employee printed name:

Managers signature:

Date:

Manager's printed name: