

## Home Working Policy

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# 1. Introduction

Eden District Council is committed to promoting flexible working in order to facilitate effective and efficient working. This policy outlines the circumstances under which the Council will allow employees to work from home. It also details the actions required to facilitate a home working arrangement.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to all employees of the Council.

## 3. What is Home Working

### 3.1 Definition

Home working is about using the employees home as a base for work instead of the employee coming into a workplace. The Home Working Policy is one of a number of policies under the Work Life Balance initiative.

### 3.2. Benefits of Home Working

There are many benefits to home working.

For the Council these include:

- Reduced accommodation costs and better use of existing premises and resources;
- Contributing towards the reduction of the Councils CO2 emissions by reducing unnecessary employee commuting;
- The retention of valued and skilled employees for whom the ability to work at home is the preferred option;
- Well motivated staff who feel that they work for an organisation that is prepared to be flexible and which trusts them;
- Potentially increased output and quality of work due to fewer distractions than working in an office environment;
- Accommodation of the requirements of disabled employees or employees with temporary health conditions;
- Promotion of a positive image as a good employer; Potential to reduced costs in terms of travelling allowances.

For the employee these include:

- Increased discretion in the management of their work and personal time; Increased motivation;
- A saving of travel time and costs; The ability to work without distraction;
- Improvements in work-life balance issues.

While there are many advantages of home working, a detailed assessment needs to be made, by both the employee and the Council, as to whether the individual will be a suitable home worker and whether the role to be performed is appropriate.

### **3.3 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:

#### **3.3.1 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 needs dedicated and focussed input and/or could be dealt with more efficiently at home eg saved travelling time and lack of interruptions;
- Where it is difficult for staff to get in to work eg adverse weather, a short but unavoidable commitment at home, or field work is being undertaken out of the office near to home.

#### **3.3.2 Regular Home Working**

Working from home for a percentage of the time on a regular basis, the individual would come into the office for the balance of time. This may be suitable in the following circumstances:

- Where the function of the post requires little face to face contact with colleagues and/or clients;
- To facilitate a more flexible work pattern, perhaps to accommodate other demands;
- Where an individual plans his/her work arrangements to enable the achievement of defined outputs each week/month from home;
- The job involves frequent/regular outside visits.

#### **3.3.3 Permanent Home Working**

Working from home 100% of the time, or spending a percentage of time working from home and making outside visits for the balance of time. This may be suitable in the following circumstances:

- Where the job can be done just as effectively and efficiently from home;
- Where ICT systems exist, or can be created, to support the job at home;
- Where communications systems exist, or can be created, to support the job, and the employee effectively
- The job involved frequent/regular outside visits.

### **3.4 Suitability of Home Working**

#### **3.4.1 Posts**

Many jobs may be considered for home working. Generally speaking any job that does not require time spent in one location or high visibility (eg to operate

machinery or to deliver face to face customer care), may be adapted for home working. Jobs that involve project work or identifiable output, or those which provide services within the community, may in particular lend themselves to home working. Consideration should also be given to the impact on and inter-relationship with other jobs, access by the public, access to/by colleagues, access to required information, technology, costs and savings etc.

The following job characteristics may lend themselves to home working:

- Defined output tasks;
- Discrete projects or functions;
- Relatively autonomous jobs;
- Jobs requiring frequent travelling;
- Jobs requiring high periods of concentration.

### **3.4.2 Employee Characteristics**

Having established the suitability of the job for home working the suitability of the employee needs to be considered.

Home working does not suit everyone. Office dynamics and informal information flows may have a significant impact on the employee's performance. Some employees may develop better in a traditional office environment, and those without very much experience in their role are likely to need closer supervision which would not be possible if they were working from home. Individuals may also have a distorted view of home working – often “rose coloured” – with little recognition or understanding of the potential drawbacks, and it is important that both the advantages and the disadvantages are considered. A trial period may be appropriate in order to gauge suitability before any longer term arrangements are put in place.

Helpful personal qualities are likely to include:

- Self-motivated;
- Self-disciplined;
- Enjoy the challenge of working on their own;
- A flexible approach;
- Able to organise working time effectively; Able to work without direct supervision;
- Confident to work away from the office environment;
- Able to work on their own without day to day social interaction with colleagues;
- Able to travel to meetings and site visits;
- Able to „switch off“ from work and maintain a proper balance between working and non-working hours.

## **4. Requests to Work from Home**

The process for dealing with requests to work from home consists of two steps. Firstly, the individual's application is assessed by their Chief Officer, focussing on whether their post and personal characteristics are suitable for home working. The

second step of the process is to assess the home environment of the employee to identify whether it is suitable for home working.

## **4.1 Application Process**

Employees wishing to be considered for home working should complete the application at Appendix 1 and submit this to their Chief Officer for consideration.

The relevant Chief Officer will be responsible for considering applications to work from home in a fair and consistent manner, taking account of the Councils Equal Opportunities Policy. One of the most important factors to consider is the individual employees role in providing a service to the people of Eden. A focus on specific job tasks should identify those tasks that can be performed away from the main office. The following issues should be taken into consideration:

- Service provided and impact upon the individual's work load and the work of the team;
- Does the job require long periods of uninterrupted mental concentration?
- Does the job require a lot of ad hoc communication between the groups of staff?
- Can the work be measured in terms of output, or if not, is it possible to come to an agreement with the employee about the amount of time particular outputs will take?
- What will be the effect on services to the public?
- Can the work readily be undertaken at home?
- How can the work be monitored?
- How should contact be made?
- What equipment would be required?
- What costs would be incurred?
- Is the employee likely to be suited to home working? (see earlier section on Employee Characteristics)

It is the Councils policy to view any requests for home working in a positive light and the Council will, wherever possible and practicable, agree to the employee's request.

If the request is accepted in principle, a health and safety assessment of the home working environment must be carried out (see section titled "Assessing the Home Environment") before a Home Working Agreement can be drawn up.

If the Chief Officer is not able to accept the application at this step, s/he should provide the employee with a written response to their request including details of the reasons for rejecting the application.

## **4.2 Assessing the Home Environment**

An employee who works from home is afforded the same protection under health and safety legislation as an employee who is office based. It is therefore vital to ensure the home working environment is suitable before any home working agreement is reached.

The employee needs to take personal responsibility for the health and safety aspect of home working. An employee needs an environment at home which offers the following:

- Suitable “office” space, ideally a separate room but at least a dedicated space;
- Freedom from interruptions and distractions; Security and confidentiality;
- Ability to meet Health and Safety requirements;
- It is not considered appropriate to combine home based working with dependant care. Employees will be required to demonstrate that they do not have dependant care responsibilities within their contracted working hours. In addition to this employees need to be aware that the Council reserves the right to ask them to attend Council premises at short notice.

In order to ensure that s/he has all the relevant information, the Chief Officer may wish to meet with the employee and their manager to discuss the application prior to reaching a decision. Advice from the HR section is also available to assist Chief Officers in considering home working applications.

If an application for home working has been accepted in principle by the relevant Chief Officer, the employee concerned should complete a Health and Safety Home Worker Self-Assessment Checklist (see Appendix 2) and submit this to their Chief Officer. If this assessment identifies any particular risks it will be the responsibility of the Chief Officer, Manager and employee to discuss ways in which the risks may be minimised or eliminated. The home environment must be deemed to be safe to work in before a home working agreement can be drawn up.

### **4.3 Home Working Agreement**

Providing that a request to work from home has successfully passed the two step assessment process outlined above, a home working agreement should be issued to the employee (see Appendix 3). This will be issued by the HR section along with any amendment to contract that may be required (see the Contractual Terms section later in this policy).

The employee will be asked to sign and return a copy of the home working agreement and this will be retained on their personal file.

## **5. Management of Home Working Agreements**

To ensure that a home working employee is working effectively and feels part of the wider team it may be necessary for their manager to adapt his/her style of management from the conventional one based on day-to-day contact .

Further guidance in relation to managing home working can be found in the *Manager’s Guide to Home Working*, however this section highlights some of the main practical considerations.

## 5.1 Communication to and Management of Home Working Employees

Clear communication systems with home workers are just as important as for the office based worker. The Council has a number of electronic communication methods which would be available to home workers, however managers may need to consider how to ensure home working staff receive information that office based staff receive on a face-to-face basis.

To make the scheme work effectively, there needs to be trust between the employee and the manager. However, such trust should not be a substitute for clear indicators of what managers and staff expect from work.

## 5.2 Provision of Equipment

Where appropriate, the Council may provide, install and maintain equipment to assist with home working. Factors taken into consideration in determining appropriateness may include the frequency of home working and whether the need for home working has been generated by the Council or the employee.

The following items of equipment may be appropriate:

Occasional home working	Remote access to the Council IT servers.
Regular home working	As above plus a PC/laptop and mobile communications.
Permanent home working	As above plus a printer, desk, chair, secure filing cabinet and dedicated phone line.

In relation to maintaining the equipment it may be necessary for the employee to bring the equipment in to the Council's offices or to allow someone to visit them at home in order to carry out the relevant maintenance.

Any Council equipment installed at the home workers home remains the property of the Council and can be recalled at any time.

The Council will provide IT helpdesk support during standard working hours (this does not include a home visit). The Council will also take responsibility for the repair/replacement of lost, damaged or stolen equipment, provided the employee has taken appropriate precautions to safeguard the equipment.

Upon the termination of the home working agreement, employees must return all Council equipment.

## 5.3 Insurance

The Council will provide third party insurance for employees working from home. It will also provide insurance cover for any Council equipment located at the home of the employee.

Whilst working from home is unlikely to have an impact, employees are advised to notify their landlord/mortgage and insurance companies of the fact that they will be working from home.

## **5.4 Health and Safety**

Home workers are afforded the same health and safety protection in law as office based staff. As such all Council health and safety policies and procedures will apply to home workers. This includes the requirement for employees to report any work- related accidents and to undertake regular DSE assessments.

## **5.5 Data Security**

Employees who work from home are required to comply with all IT security and confidentiality requirements of the Council. This includes acceptance and adherence to the Internet and Email Acceptable Use Policy.

The home worker will have a direct responsibility for all Council information material held at their home and must ensure that it is not accessible to non-authorized people (eg other members of the household).

## **5.6 Working Hours**

The flexible working hours scheme will apply to home based staff in the same way that it does to office based staff. Any flexible working pattern should be considered as part of the initial application and any subsequent requests to change those arrangements should be made according to the existing procedures.

Arrangements and payment for working more than the normal weekly contractual hours will be in accordance with the appropriate national terms and conditions of service.

The hours worked will not exceed those in the contract of employment and in any case those applied through the Working Time Directive.

## **5.7 Visits to the Home Worker**

Arrangements should be made to permit the manager and other appropriate Council officers to visit the home worker at home for purposes connected with work. This should be by prior arrangement and at a mutually convenient and reasonable time.

Due to the health and safety risks, the Council would not expect or advise employees to allow members of the public to visit them whilst working from home.

## **5.8 Contractual Terms**

If the employee is an occasional or regular home worker, there will be no requirement to issue a variation to the substantive contract of employment.

The contracts of employment for permanent home workers will need to reflect the fact that their normal place of work is home. It should be noted that employees whose normal place of work is home may still be expected to attend one of the Councils offices from time to time (eg to attend team meetings).

All other terms and conditions of employment remain unchanged by a home working application.

## **5.9 Expenses**

For occasional and regular home workers, car mileage expenses will only be paid for those miles travelled which are over and above the number of miles which the home worker would previously have incurred by having to travel into the office and return home on a daily basis, i.e. their normal commuting journey.

For permanent home workers, car mileage expenses would be payable for work-related journeys beginning and ending at the home base.

The Council will reimburse home working employees for any business calls via any dedicated telephone line.

The Council will also reimburse home working employees for mail costs on production of receipts. Stationery should be ordered through the usual channels and collected from Council premises by the home working employee.

## **5.10 Dependant Care**

It is a condition of the home working agreement that arrangements for dependant care have been made in order to allow the employee to work from home without disruption. Any changes to dependant care arrangements that will impact on an employee working from home must be reported to the Chief Officer immediately and could lead to a review of the agreement.

## **5.11 Review of a Home Working Agreement**

Any home working arrangement should be reviewed periodically (at least once a year). This will allow both parties to assess whether the arrangement is still appropriate.

## **5.12 Termination of a Home Working Agreement**

A home working agreement can be terminated, by either party, by giving three months notice. This may be varied in exceptional circumstances.

Where the agreement relates to occasional or regular home working, the employee will return to office based working on termination.

Where the agreement relates to permanent home working, advice should be sought from a Human Resources Adviser as the termination of the home working agreement may have wider consequences to the contract of employment.

**Home Working Application Form**

Name	
Job Title	
Department / Section	
Manager	
Chief Officer	

Current Days and Hours of Work:

I wish to apply to be considered for home working and propose the following working arrangements:

Address at which home working would take place:

This application is for a permanent / temporary \* period.

\*delete as necessary.

If the application is for a temporary period, please state the relevant dates:

Do you feel your home working would have an impact on the service you provide or the colleagues in your team? If so, how could this be minimised?

Home working is not suitable for employees who have caring responsibilities at home during normal working hours. By submitting this application you are confirming that you are not planning to combine home working with caring commitments.

Signed:

Date:

Once complete, please submit this form to your Chief Officer for consideration.

## Health and Safety Home Worker Self-Assessment Checklist

Name	
Job title	
Department/Section	
Address	

Hazard	Checks to be made	Yes	No	Comment
Fire	Is the work area tidy?			
	Are waste materials regularly disposed of?			
	Are exits routes clear?			
	Does the employee have an escape plan?			Know what to do in an emergency
	Is a smoke alarm fitted?			Alarm must be tested and maintained in accordance with manufacturer's instructions
Electrical Equipment	Any apparent damage?			Cracked/loose casing on plugs and computer equipment, missing screws etc
	Any evidence of overheating?			Look for discolouration
	Any obvious damage to leads or cables?			
	Are all the cables secure in all plugs?			Has all equipment been PAT tested?
Slips, Trips and Falls	Floor covering sound and without defects?			
	All walkways clear of trip hazards eg trailing cables?			
	When seated at a desk can legs and upper body move together without twisting?			
Working Environment	Is the temperature adequate?			
	Is the ventilation adequate?			
	Is there adequate lighting, including any necessary task lighting?			

<b>Hazard</b>	<b>Checks to be made</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Manual Handling	Do the employee carry out any manual handling activities?			Attach risk assessment if answer is yes
Display Screen Equipment	Do the employee use DSE for more than 2 hours a day or more than 1 hour continuously?			Carry out DSE assessment on an annual basis if yes
Mobile Phones	Will the work involve the use of a mobile phone?			
Site Visits	Will the work involve visits eg to a construction site?			If yes, refer to existing departmental site visit risk assessments
Lone Working	Is there a requirement for a call in procedure?			If yes then establish a procedure and monitor use
	Has the employee's mobile phone number been given to their manager?			
	Does the employee require a personal attack alarm?			
	Is the employee aware and fully conversant with the Council's Lone Working Policy?			If not, ensure copy is provided to employee
COSHH	Does the home work involve the use of hazardous substances?			If yes attach risk assessment
Accidents / First Aid	Is the employee familiar with the accident reporting procedure?			Provide employee with accident reporting form
	Does the employee have adequate first aid facilities whilst working at home?			Employer to provide a first aid kit if not
Wellbeing	Has the employee previously suffered from discomfort, stress or ill health which they believe to be as a direct result of work?			If yes, discuss further to assess whether home working is suitable
Security	Is the final exit door secured by mortice deadlock to BS3621 standard?			

Hazard	Checks to be made	Yes	No	Comment
	All other external doors similarly secured?			
	Are all accessible windows secured by key operated window locks?			
	Is there the ability to lock laptop and confidential files away when not in use?			

Miscellaneous Items/Comments:

Signatures:

Employee

Date

Manager

Date

Home Working Agreement

Name	
Job title	
Address where home working will take place	
Phone number at address where home working will take place	
Council mobile phone number	
Date on which the home working agreement will commence	

Home Working Arrangements Agreed:

Is the Agreement:

Permanent / Temporary\* – please specify end date:

\*delete as necessary

Equipment Provided (including serial numbers)

Employee Declaration:

- I will be responsible for completing and recording annual health and safety checks at my home working location;
- I understand that the requirement for me to adhere to the Councils policies and procedures is unaffected by the fact that I will be working from home;
- I agree to allow access, by prior arrangement, to my manager, IT staff, portable appliance testing staff and any other Council employee who requires access to perform their duties;
- I understand that the home working agreement is not a substitute for childcare or other caring responsibilities and that adequate provisions must be made in respect of these;
- I understand that I may be required to attend a Council office from time to time during my home working hours (eg to attend a team meeting);
- I understand the provision for the home working agreement to be cancelled by myself or the Council.

Please sign to confirm that you have read, understood and agree to the conditions relating to the home working arrangement:

Signed

Print

Date