

Homeworking Policy

Version 1
1 May 2000

1. Introduction

Government action and legislation such as the Employment Relations Act 1999, promotes flexibility in workplace practice. Contemporary management practices recognise the changing nature of work and the impact on personal life. Effective personnel policies should balance work, family and environmental factors and which should also lead to better performance and enhanced productivity.

2. Background

2.1 This paper provides the general background to developing a home-working scheme. It sets out the criteria against which applications must be considered, and identifies a number of important issues which require thought before a decision to home work is made both by the Council as an employer and the individual employee.

2.2 The policy should be read in conjunction with the Home-working Guidance Notes (Appendix 1), which outline, in greater detail, the various issues that must be addressed when considering home-working.

2.3 The Scheme is presented as a pilot for review after 12 months. This will the scheme to be monitored and evaluated taking into account the practical issues, costs involved and the effect on productivity and quality of service.

2.4

The pilot will potentially apply to all staff within the Highland Council. However, due to the nature of home-working, only those posts which are deemed feasible, and only individuals who are deemed suitable for this type of working, by reference to the stated criteria, will be eligible to work from home. The total number of posts will also be restricted to a maximum of 12 in the period of the pilot.

3.

Home-working

3.1

Home working consists of working at home rather than at the normal place of work and may involve using electronic systems to accomplish tasks and remain in contact with the managers/supervisor. It could mean working a set number of days a week, a fortnight or in a month on a formally agreed basis, or could include an employee working at home for occasional days or at certain times throughout the year on an informal basis but with management approval.

3.2

The purpose of the Homeworking Scheme is to encourage working at or from home where this is appropriate, and would achieve one or more of the following:

- give extra flexibility in working hours providing potential for increased productivity
- higher quality of work due to improved morale, and fewer interruptions
- improve quality of work life (morale, personal control of work - families/personal life balance).
- improved service delivery by e.g. non-interruptible working time, enabling quicker turnaround of tasks and better quality through improved concentration levels
- reduced costs - lower overheads
- lower absenteeism
- retention/recruitment of employees – (wider pool of recruits e.g. people with disabilities)
- reduced travel problems e.g. transport availability/cost implications
- environmental considerations e.g. petrol emissions
- improved organisational/cost efficiency in property management
- improved management of staff through more effective communications, and encouragement of management by objectives

3.3

For Services assessing the suitability of a post for home working the following criteria would apply:

- is the job suitable for home working?
- does the applicant home worker hold the right personal qualities?
- is it cost effective?
- is the home site suitable?
- will there be adequate administrative/clerical or general support available for the home workers?
- will there be commitment from both manager and participants to making this scheme a success?
- will there be an increase in workload for other employees?
- what are the supervision/reporting arrangements

4.

Conditions of Service

4.1

Home working agreements should be entered into on a voluntary basis between an employee and their manager, and can be agreed on a full-time, job-share or part-time basis.

4.2

Where it is agreed that an employee may take part in home working, his or her revised terms and conditions should be based on the following principles:

- no reduction in grade
- no loss of status
- no loss of career prospects

4.3

Occasional journeys made to the employee's administrative base cannot be claimed as travelling expenses. For business journeys where the starting and finishing point is the employee's home, the principles of the travelling expenses and subsistence allowance will apply (other than where travelling to the administrative base). On termination of the home working arrangement any equipment provided by the Council will be returned.

5.

Operation of the Scheme

5.1

Services interested in introducing formal home working arrangements, will be required to identify posts or specific tasks that would be suitable for home working, taking into consideration issues outlined in the attached Guidance Notes.

5.2 A report from the Director of the Service would then be submitted to the Director of Corporate Services for discussion and consideration for approval, outlining the post being identified as suitable for home working, and providing information which includes:

- aim of home working scheme within the service
- advantages/benefits to be gained and any cost implications

5.3 Managers will require to assess each individual application against specific criteria. If the post is approved as being suitable for home working, then the detailed conditions will be set out for the employee. However, it must be stressed that home working is not a condition of service available to every employee and home working arrangements can only be approved where it can be operationally justified and employees can meet the criteria specified.

5.4 Where it is accepted that an employee will work at home during normal working hours they will be required to demonstrate that they do not have dependant care responsibilities within their stated working hours.

5.5 Line managers must ensure that an effective management process is in place to monitor, supervise and evaluate home working arrangements. A homeworking agreement will be drawn up between the employee and the line manager prior to the start of the arrangement. The employee's contract of employment will be amended to reflect the homeworking arrangement.

5.6 Informal homeworking arrangements, such as working the occasional day or week at home to meet particular deadlines, or to assist in easing an employee back to work after a period of sickness absence may be approved by a Head of Service.

6. Trade Union Consultation

The scheme is based on similar approaches taken in other Councils and the Trade Unions were supportive of this policy initiative.

7.

Review

The Director of Corporate Services will monitor the scheme as a pilot and review after a 12 month period.

HOMEWORKING SCHEME – GUIDANCE NOTES

1. INTRODUCTION

In considering the option of Homeworking within a Service the following should be taken into account:

- organisational benefits/advantages
- is the post deemed suitable for homeworking under the specified criteria
- is the individual deemed suitable for homeworking under the specified criteria
- are there any additional costs incurred
- any training requirements to be met
- a suitable home site in relation to health and safety and security arrangements is required
- the need for a homeworking agreement to be established between line manager and employee

2. DEFINITION

Homeworking consists of working **at** home rather than at the normal place of work, and may involve using electronic systems to accomplish tasks and to remain in contact with the manager/supervisor. This could include working a set number of days a week, fortnight, or in a month on a formally agreed basis, or could include an employee working at home for occasional days or at certain times throughout the year on an informal basis but with management approval.

Working **from** home involves an employee engaged in an occupation which requires an ability to use their home rather than an office as the base from which journeys are undertaken.

3. ADVANTAGES/BENEFITS

3.1 Reduced Employment Costs

Premises

Homeworking may help the Council achieve savings in heating, lighting and accommodation costs and may also solve accommodation problems by releasing over-utilised office space. It has a knock on effect for offices that are overcrowded resulting in a quieter and more effective working environment.

Parking spaces can also be better utilised.

3.2 Staff Turnover/Recruitment Costs

Where employees would otherwise have to leave the Service due to their partner's relocation, care commitments versus time/transport arrangements, loss of mobility or general travel difficulties, the option of homeworking can help retain operational continuity, skills and experience.

3.3 Reduce Sickness Absence

Research has estimated that sickness absence is reduced or can be reduced by a significant level as homeworking can allow the employee to readjust to the work environment after a period of absence and also reduce unnecessary journeys.

3.4 Equal Opportunities

Homeworking allows organisations to attract a wider pool of potential employees who might otherwise not be able to apply. These include people who have a disability and whose main difficulty is travelling to and from work for specific times of the day and those with caring responsibilities.

3.5 Productivity and Job Satisfaction

Employees are able to create a quieter, less stressful workplace at home in which they are able to concentrate, work faster, without interruption and are therefore more effective.

Studies on the effects of homeworking state that employees are more productive, reliable and produce better quality work and are likely to have lower sickness absence rates. Homeworkers find they are able to control and time manage work more effectively.

The ability to control quiet working time in order to achieve set targets provides job satisfaction as opposed to frustrated efforts to complete pieces of work in a noisy/interrupted environment.

3.6 Reduced Travel

Many employees resent the hours wasted when travelling to and from the office and find reduced travelling time a huge benefit. It can reduce the stress of travel, or having to cope with problems caused by public transport.

There is also considerable cost savings in terms of daily travel and added advantages of reducing environmental pollution caused by the need to commute.

In terms of enabling employees to apply for part time or job share work to care for dependants - the possibility of a reduction in travel time and cost can make the reduction in hours financially viable – and hence allow employees to stay with the Highland Council rather than terminate their employment.

4. COSTS

The cost of homeworking can vary a great deal. The cost for each individual home based position will vary depending on the equipment available at the home base site and the arrangements that can be reached with the employee.

A baseline cost consists of the equipment that may be required at home, and the costs of networking necessary information between the office and the home. The following are some of the main elements of expense that could be involved

- Telecommunication Systems/Call Handling
- Computers
- Other Business Equipment

Professional advice is available from ICL and the Roads and Transport Communications Unit, on the most viable and cost effective means of computer and telecommunications systems for each homeworking arrangement.

- Other Requirements

Homeworkers will have other requirements which will have a cost factor such as;

- Postage and courier services.
- First aid.
- Fire safety.
- Storage facilities for confidential information/secure equipment.
- Training and Guidance (for the manager and the employee)

5. CRITERIA FOR HOMEWORKING APPLICATIONS

5.1 What posts/tasks are suitable for homeworking?

It would not be possible to provide a definitive list of occupations suitable for homeworking, however, research on homeworking indicates certain job characteristics which lend themselves to home based working. These characteristics are;

- A high degree of written rather than manual work.
- Work performed on an individual basis or with clearly defined areas of individual work i.e. project work, research and report writing, policy analysis, case work, administrative tasks.
- Work which has clearly defined objectives, and is not subject to sudden changes of priorities.
- Work that has performance measurement indicators.
- Work which does not require frequent input from other employees and centrally provided facilities.

The introduction of home based working should not cause an adverse effect on the level and quality of service.

5.2 Identifying employees for which homeworking would be suitable

5.2.1 The success of homeworking depends on the homeworker holding the right personal qualities and skills and, with appropriate monitoring and support, systems being in place.

The following are some of the characteristics that would be considered in approving an employee's application to take part in the homeworking scheme;

- Self motivation
- Self reliance and discipline to work without direct supervision.
- The ability to complete work to scheduled deadlines.
- Initiative, flexibility and time management skills.
- Ability to cope with reduced social contact and isolation.
- Ability to cope with additional pressures or working in the home where the demands of family life are difficult to ignore.

The above characteristics should be measurable and provide guidelines in terms of establishing evidence to support an individual application. They should also be used to monitor and review the continued viability of homeworking.

5.3 Choosing suitable location at home

Consideration has to be given to the suitability of the proposed location. The work site has to be adequate both for practical working and in terms of health and safety legislation. Ideally the employee should have a separate room or area set aside for homeworking which will be sufficient in terms of accommodating all the necessary furniture and equipment.

5.4 Health and Safety

Health and safety legislation that applies in an office generally applies in a homeworking situation. Ergonomics become even more important as quite often homeworking can involve continuous working periods longer than would be undertaken in an office environment. All applications for home working should arrange for a health and safety risk assessment to be carried out by the Corporate Services' Health and Safety Team. Contact Liz Hughson: (01463) 703095

5.5 Security

Security arrangements should be adopted and clarified in the homeworking agreement to ensure:

- Security and confidentiality of Highland Council equipment and information.
- No access of family and friends to work.
- Provision of secure containers.
- Protection of home computers and their links.
- Appropriate use of other communication links.
- Disposal of classified waste.

5.6 Insurance

The Highland Council's Employers Liability and Personal Accident insurance will cover homeworking provision as long as a risk assessment has been completed, and the employee has an amended contract of employment to denote their homeworking status.

5.7 Property

There will be no change to Council Tax or Domestic Rates. Domestic rate is only affected if the employee is carrying out a business from their home.

5.8 Dependant Care

It is not considered appropriate to combine homebased working with dependant care. As such homebased working should not be viewed as an alternative to paid dependant care.

6. **MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES**

Once suitable posts and employees have been identified and approved for homeworking, arrangements should be put in place to ensure a smooth transition from office based working to homeworking.

Managing employees who work at home or at another location requires a different approach to those in traditional face to face management. An operational agreement will be put in place. It will be used in the monitoring and evaluation of the homeworking pilot.

The following issues should be agreed and used as part of the induction for employees entering into the homeworking scheme;

- Clear tasks and objectives.
- Procedure for assessing/monitoring performance and output.
- Contracted hours and how to record hours worked.
- Communication and reporting procedures.
- Arrangements for face to face meetings.
- Future training and development to be agreed through personal development plans.
- Ordering, delivery and installation of necessary equipment.

Employees entering into a homeworking agreement will need to receive an amended contract of employment.

Selection process should be seen to be fair and reasonable and in line with the Highland Council's Equal Opportunities Policy. Reason for refusal of an application should be conveyed to an employee.

7. EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

It is the responsibility of each employee to take reasonable care to ensure safety, and security of equipment and to maintain the working environment to the agreed health and safety standards.

Any equipment supplied by the Council should be used for the Council's work only. This is particularly important with respect to computer equipment due to the risk of introducing computer viruses.

Employees will be responsible for ensuring any necessary confidentiality as per the agreed homeworking operational agreement.

Employees who work at or from home will be covered by the terms of the Council's code of conduct.

Employees will be required to inform their home and contents insurer that extra IT equipment has been provided and that they are homeworking.

As there is a need to balance work and home life, employees should inform their friends and family about their homeworking arrangements to ensure that there will be minimal interruptions.

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APPLICATION TO HOMEWORK

Please read the information contained within the Policy and Guidelines on homeworking before you complete this form. If you require guidance please speak to your Line Manager or your Area Personnel Adviser or Personnel Advisers based at HQ.

SERVICE:

SECTION:

NAME:

POST:

LINE MANAGERS NAME:

Please tick box where appropriate

1. Is your work performed on an individual basis or with clearly defined areas of individual work?

Yes

No

2. Can it be carried out without continuous face to face contact with other people?

Yes

No

3. Can essential face to face contact be organised into, e.g. 1 day a week?

Yes

No

4. Can the work be managed by results to meet targets agreed with Line Manager?

Yes

No

5. Can information necessary on a daily basis be accessed by telephone or electronically?

Yes

No

6. If your work is highly time sensitive, can it be delivered electronically or within hand delivery distance of the end user?

Yes

No

7. What type of work do you undertake within your Section?

.....
.....
.....
.....

8. What percentage do you spend during your work (estimate)?

I. USING A COMPUTER?

Less than 15% 15% 30%

45% 60% 75%

90% 100%

7.1 II. MEETING WITH PUBLIC AT YOUR WORK PLACE?

Less than 15% 15% 30%

45% 60% 75%

90% 100%

III. MEETING WITH PUBLIC OUTSIDE THE OFFICE OR CARRYING OUT WORK AWAY FROM YOUR OFFICE?

Less than 15% 15% 30%

45% 60% 75%

90% 100%

IV. MEETINGS INTERNALLY WITH COLLEAGUES AT YOUR WORKPLACE?

Less than 15% 15% 30%

45% 60% 75%

90% 100%

7.2 V. OTHER – PLEASE SPECIFY

.....

9. What distance do you commute each day to and from your office or normal place of work?

0 – 5 miles 5 – 10 miles 10 – 20 miles

20 – 30 miles More

10. Total time commuting to and from your normal place of work ?

0 – 30 minutes 30 – 60 minutes 60 – 90 minutes

More

11. About You.

Do you possess the following characteristics, or have the potential to do so with training?

		YES	NO	YES WITH TRAINING
1.	Self reliance and discipline to work without direct supervision?			
2.	Self sufficiency/cope with social isolation?			

3.	Good time management skills?			
4.	Good communication skills?			
5.	Supportive family?			
6.	Suitable space at home for office space?			
7.	Self motivation?			

12. About your Home

Do you have a space which could be dedicated to home working and which addresses the criteria set out in the guidelines?

Yes No

Do you have a telephone?

Yes No

Would you like to know off – speak to other staff who home work and give them your name/number to exchange ideas, problems etc?

Yes No

13. Further Information

Please give any further information you consider important to the consideration of your application to homework.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

HOMEWORKING OPERATIONAL AGREEMENT BY THE
HOMEWORKER AND LINE MANAGER

DATE:

SERVICE:

SECTION:

NAME:

POST:

LINE MANAGER:

1. CORE TIME

The applicant will generally be available during the following times.....
.....
.....

If other, please specify.....
.....
.....

2. REGULAR PATTERN OF WORK

The homeworker will undertake the following regular pattern of work
.....
.....

If other, please specify.....
.....
.....

3. MAXIMUM AND MINIMUM HOURS FOR HOMEWORKING

The homeworker will work at home for a maximum of hours and a minimum of hours in a four week period.

4. CREDITS FOR SICKNESS AND HOLIDAYS

The homeworker will be credited with the following hours for sickness and holidays – 7 hours per day other

If other please specify and give reasons.....
.....
.....

5. REPORTING TO LINE MANAGER

The applicant will report to their line manager.

Daily Weekly As Required Other

If other, please specify.....
.....
.....

6. ATTENDING MEETINGS WITH LINE MANAGER

The applicant will attend meetings with their Line Manager and other members of their Section (note that this should be at least monthly and any travel or associated expense will be paid for by the homeworker).

Monthly Fortnightly Weekly

7. ABSENCE COVER

The applicant will ensure that all necessary information is available to the office based staff or other homeworkers during a period of absence such as holidays.

8. HOME TELEPHONE NUMBER

It is appropriate to give the following people the applicant’s home telephone number.

Only staff of the Highland Council The public that the homeworker chooses Anyone

Please give reasons:

.....
.....
.....

If for example the applicant only wants Council Staff to have their telephone number, staff should be made aware of the fact, and their home number should not be given out.

9. ALLOCATION/RETURN OF WORK

Work will be allocated by the Line Manager and returned by the homeworker in the following manner.....

.....
.....
.....

10. HOMEWORKING PART TIME/FULL TIME

The homeworker will be working from home:

Full Time Part Time - Fixed

Other, please specify

.....
.....
.....

11. POST

If the homeworker is required to post items of correspondence the following arrangements have been agreed:

- i. The homeworker will fax/email correspondence to official base to be signed and sent in mail.
- ii. The homeworker will be allocated a float of stamps, envelopes etc and will record all postages in a post book.
- iii. The homeworker will generally use system (i) above, but in exceptional circumstances will use system (ii) above.

Other, please specify

.....
.....
.....

12. EQUIPMENT

Identification of equipment necessary to work from/at home

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.....
.....
.....

Information to be updated at each Line Manager/Employee Meeting.

Date:

Attendees:

TASKS AND OBJECTIVES

PROCEDURE FOR ASSESSING/MONITORING PERFORMANCE AND OUTPUT.

For monitoring purposes the Line Manager should retain a copy of this form