

# THE HIGHLAND & WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

## Homeworking Guidance

Document Control

Document last saved: 8 April 2024

Version	Changes	Author	Date
1.0	First release	M Thomson	08/04/25

### Introduction

The Board recognises that there may, on occasion, be circumstances when it would be more beneficial or flexible for staff to work at home, either on a permanent basis, or in order to complete a particular task, for example a special piece of work. However, it is not possible to offer homeworking to all staff as the requirements of some jobs will not be suitable for such arrangements.

Homeworking is part of the Flexible Working Policy and as such any homeworking agreement will be monitored and evaluated taking into account the practical issues, costs involved and the effect on productivity and quality of service.

This guidance 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 Board as an employer and the individual employee.

### What is homeworking?

Homeworking is when employees do their job from home, either occasionally or as a permanent working arrangement. It requires a working relationship that is based upon trust and encourages employees to manage their own work.

Homeworking is a type of flexible working which, depending on the agreement between the Board and employee, can be also used in conjunction with other arrangements e.g. as flexible hours, working part-time, term-time working or the employer's core hours.

However, homeworking and other forms of flexible working do not have to be used together. For example, the Board could stipulate that a homeworker works the same working pattern as office-based staff.

Home working consists of working at home rather than at the normal place of work and will involve using technology to accomplish tasks and remain in contact with the department. It could mean working full time at home; 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.

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

- 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; accessibility to full time work if you have a disability)

- 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
- reduced environmental impact e.g. petrol emissions
- improved organisational/cost efficiency in property management
- improved management of staff through more effective communications, and need to manage by outcomes

## **Applying to work from home**

A Flexible Working Application form (Appendix A) should be supplemented with a Homeworking Application (Appendix B) to apply for homeworking. This should be made to the line manager and will be considered under the Flexible Working policy with the following information:

- aim of homeworking provision within the service advantages/benefits to be gained and
- any cost implications.

The opportunity to work from home is not an entitlement and can only occur by formal agreement between the Assessor and an employee. A homeworking arrangement is a formal arrangement with the working arrangements clearly documented. The line manager is responsible for ensuring that the requirements under these guidelines have been satisfied prior to approving an application for a homeworking arrangement. All of the working conditions at the home based worksite need to be negotiated and thoroughly documented.

Careful planning and consultation is needed to maximise the benefits to the Board and the employee.

Employees' should first discuss with their line manager before completing a Flexible Working Application form (Appendix A).

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 dependent care responsibilities within their stated working hours.

Line managers must ensure that an effective management process is in place to monitor, supervise and evaluate homeworking 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.

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 line manager.

The Board reserves the right to withdraw their approval for homeworking if they believe its use is being abused or for any other reasonable needs of the employer to carry out its business.

## **Criteria for homeworking**

When assessing the suitability of a post for homeworking the following criteria would apply:

### **Nature of the post**

An early step for a line manager in assessing whether to encourage, allow or refuse a request for an employee to work from home some or much of the time should be to weigh up if the job is suitable for homeworking. Many roles might be, but not all are.

Certain job characteristics are more suited to homeworking;

- 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.

### **Can the applicant comply with specific criteria?**

To employees, homeworking can seem like an attractive option when trying to balance work and home demands, but both employees and managers should be fully aware it does not suit everyone. To be successful, staff working from home need attributes to cope with working on their own. Some full-time homeworkers miss contact with other people, and feeling isolated can be a problem. Others find domestic demands distract them from doing their job.

Homeworkers ideally need to be:

- happy to spend long periods on their own
- self-disciplined and self-motivated
- confident working without supervision
- able to separate work from home life.

### **Is it cost effective (using qualitative as well as quantitative criteria)?**

Criteria should include:

- Equipment for the home, set up costs and staff time:
- Staff working from home in office-related roles are likely to need a desk, chair, computer, Broadband, phone and storage for any materials.
- Depending on their role and how frequently they work from home, they may also need a printer, specialist equipment, a shredder for confidential documents and a lockable cabinet for confidential documents.
- The employer and employee might agree that the employer should supply these. Or, the employee might already have all, or some, of them which are suitable for business use, and they may come to an agreement.
- Other set-up costs could include installing IT and any other equipment, the health and safety risk assessment of the place of work in the home and any planning permission to work from home

### **Is the home site suitable?**

Homeworkers need a safe and reasonable space, security and privacy in which to work, and for office-type tasks an internet connection able to support work systems.

- will there be adequate administrative/clerical or general support available for the home workers if required?
- is there a commitment from both manager and participant to making homeworking a success?
- Will there be an increase in workload for other employees?
- How will output be measured?

All arrangements for monitoring, supervision, setting workloads, etc., should be agreed with the employee's line manager in line with normal procedures.

## **Implementing Homeworking**

### **Health and Safety**

Health and Safety legislation/regulations that apply 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 applicants for homeworking should complete the workstation self-assessment checklist (available in the electronic library) on the use of display screen equipment, (with appropriate training) and online DSE workstation assessment questionnaire. It is the manager's responsibility to ensure that hazards and risks identified are eliminated or reduced sufficiently. This work should be done in consultation with the employee to ensure that the workstation meets the needs of the individual user.

### **Security**

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

- Security and confidentiality of Board 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.

### **Insurance**

The Board'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.

### **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.

## **MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES**

Approval process for homeworking (in relation to individual applications) should be seen to be fair and reasonable and in line with the Board's Guidance on Flexible Working and the Boards Equal Opportunities Policy. Reason for refusal of an application should be conveyed to an employee.

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.

Line managers must ensure that an effective management process is in place to monitor, supervise and evaluate homeworking arrangements. An operational agreement will be put in place to facilitate the monitoring and evaluation of the homeworking.

Managing employees who work at home or at another location requires a different approach to those in traditional face to face management. E-Learning training for Managing Flexibility should have been completed prior to undertaking management of flexible working options to ensure knowledge and understanding of skills that need to be developed and utilised to ensure effective management of a homeworking situation.

## **Induction**

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.
- Arrangements for Employee Review and Development Plan.

Employees entering into a homeworking agreement will need to receive an amended contract of employment. This should be arranged by the Business Manager.

## **EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES**

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

Any equipment supplied by the Board should be used for the Board's work only. Adherence to the Highland Council's Acceptable Use Policy is mandatory.

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 Board'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.

## **Conditions of Service**

Homeworking agreements should be entered into on a voluntary basis between an employee and their manager if identified through criteria analysis with homeworking as a suitable flexible working option, and can be agreed on a full- time or part-time basis.

If homeworking is not required on a full time basis 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 employees' home, the principles of the travelling expenses and subsistence allowance will apply (other than where travelling to the administrative base).

For certain posts, the Board may determine that the normal place of work, or 'base', is the home of the employee. Any variation to this would constitute a variation to the terms and conditions of the employment.

If the post is deemed suitable for 'homeworking' on a full time basis and the employees home is recognised as the administrative base then principles of travelling expenses and subsistence allowances will apply.

On termination of the homeworking arrangement any equipment provided by the Board will be returned.

# The Highland & Western Isles Valuation Joint Board Flexible Working Application Form

You should use this form to make a request to work flexibly. Before completing this form you should read the guidance note *Flexible Working – Guidelines for Employees*. This note is available in the electronic library or from your line manager. The form may then be saved and printed or emailed.

Completed forms should be forwarded to your line manager. Line managers should ensure applications are forwarded to the Central Administration Team.

<b>Name:</b>		<b>Job Title:</b>	
		<b>Payroll No:</b>	
<b>Service:</b>		<b>Name of line manager:</b>	

**Describe your current working pattern (days/hours/times worked):**

**Describe the working pattern you would like to work in future (days/hours/times):**

I would like this working pattern to commence from the following date:	
I think this change in my working pattern will affect my employer and colleagues as follows:	
I think the effect on my employer and colleagues can be dealt with as follows:	
<p><b>Declaration</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I understand that I can only make 2 applications for Flexible Working in any 12-month period.</p>	

<b>Signed:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	
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# HIGHLAND & WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

## 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 HR.

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?**

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

**I. USING A COMPUTER?**

Less than 15%	<input type="checkbox"/>	15%	<input type="checkbox"/>	30%	<input type="checkbox"/>
45%	<input type="checkbox"/>	60%	<input type="checkbox"/>	75%	<input type="checkbox"/>
90%	<input type="checkbox"/>	100%	<input type="checkbox"/>		

**II. MEETING WITH PUBLIC AT YOUR WORK PLACE?**

Less than 15%	<input type="checkbox"/>	15%	<input type="checkbox"/>	30%	<input type="checkbox"/>
45%	<input type="checkbox"/>	60%	<input type="checkbox"/>	75%	<input type="checkbox"/>
90%	<input type="checkbox"/>	100%	<input type="checkbox"/>		

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

Less than 15%	<input type="checkbox"/>	15%	<input type="checkbox"/>	30%	<input type="checkbox"/>
45%	<input type="checkbox"/>	60%	<input type="checkbox"/>	75%	<input type="checkbox"/>
90%	<input type="checkbox"/>	100%	<input type="checkbox"/>		

**IV. MEETINGS INTERNALLY WITH COLLEAGUES AT YOUR WORKPLACE?**

Less than 15%	<input type="checkbox"/>	15%	<input type="checkbox"/>	30%	<input type="checkbox"/>
45%	<input type="checkbox"/>	60%	<input type="checkbox"/>	75%	<input type="checkbox"/>
90%	<input type="checkbox"/>	100%	<input type="checkbox"/>		

**V. OTHER – PLEASE SPECIFY**

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

0 – 5 miles	<input type="checkbox"/>	5 – 10 miles	<input type="checkbox"/>	10 – 20 miles	<input type="checkbox"/>
20 – 30 miles	<input type="checkbox"/>	More	<input type="checkbox"/>		

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

0 – 30 minutes	<input type="checkbox"/>	30 – 60 minutes	<input type="checkbox"/>	60 – 90 minutes	<input type="checkbox"/>
More	<input type="checkbox"/>				

**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

**Do you have a Council Mobile Phone that can be used to receive authentication codes to access the network securely?**

Yes  No

**Do you have a personal Mobile Phone that you agree we can send authentication codes to in order to access the Highland Council Network securely?**

Yes  No

**Would you like to know of – speak to other staff who homework 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.

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