Homeworking Guidance

The purpose of this document is to provide comprehensive guidance to managers and staff about homeworking, to ensure employees can work safely and effectively from home and, achieve the best possible outcomes for themselves and the organisation.

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 can experience feelings of isolation. Others find domestic demands distract them from doing their job effectively.

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

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

What if employees are unable to work from home?

Where an employee feels that their home does not provide a suitable working environment, they should discuss this with their manager to enable consideration of alternative arrangements.

Implementing Home Working

Following Scottish Government guidance that "all staff who can homework should", all staff should familiarise themselves with the COVID Resources section of the HR web pages. These pages contain information on a variety of related issues, including a section on Wellbeing. Further links to specific guidance and resources are included in the relevant sections below.

Health and Safety

Managers should ensure that staff working from home complete the Homeworking Risk Assessment and share results with their manager.

Managers should enquire regularly about their employees' wellbeing and seek to recognise early signs of stress.

Further information and advice on working from home can be found on the Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team web page - Working from home.

Workstations – equipment and ICT kit

Line managers must ensure that any risks identified via the Risk Assessment are eliminated or reduced sufficiently. This should be done in consultation with employees to ensure that the home workstation meets the needs of the individual user.

Employees should be enabled to obtain any workplace equipment (e.g. docking station, monitor, chair, etc.) and ICT kit from their office location (where appropriate) which helps with setting up their workstation at home.

Managers are responsible to log any equipment issued to staff to work from home (including desks, chairs).

ICT

In the context of the pandemic ICT is of critical importance and ICT colleagues have provided information and guidance at the following link covering all aspects of ICT for home workers ICT and Home Working

Managers should request any additional ICT kit on the behalf of staff members via the ICT Service Desk.
Requests should be co-ordinated i.e. if several people in a team need a webcam then the manager should submit one request covering each team members request.

Information Security

Information governance should form part of discussions between the manager and employee to ensure suitable arrangements are in place at home to mitigate risk of breaches of confidentiality or 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 information
- Confidentiality of work conversations via phone/Skype/Teams
- Provision of secure containers.
- Protection of home computers and their links.
- Appropriate use of other communication links.
- Disposal of classified waste.

Additional information is available here Information Security Guidance

Communication

Managers should maintain regular contact with their team members and consider how they will keep in touch in a way that ensures regular contact and appropriate levels of support.
Employees should be involved in decisions about methods and frequency of communications with procedures in place to enable direct contact, including sharing of Outlook calendars. It is critical that employees feel part of the workforce and are involved in work issues and decisions and, have opportunity to initiate ad-hoc meetings where required.
The subject matter for communications in addition to current work should include the headings in this guidance where required. A **Homeworking Agreement** should be completed noting the key points of these discussions and any matters arising should be kept by the manager.

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.

Travel

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. Until a change of contract amends the employee's base to be their home, their usual workplace continues to be deemed their work base.

In line with public health guidance, employees should not be asked to undertake non-essential travel or attend face to face meetings, including interviews, where there are reasonable alternative mechanisms. Any decisions to hold face to face meetings should be based on a risk assessment and discussions with the employee and/or their representative

Tax Relief

Council employees who are currently **required** to work at home on a regular basis may be able to claim tax relief for some of the additional expense incurred.

Relief can be claimed for any reasonable expenses relating to the requirement to work from home. Staff should be able to provide records of expenditure.

Expense incurred for things that staff use for both private and business use, e.g. rent or broadband access is not eligible for tax relief.

Employees should check their eligibility to claim tax relief via the form below.
Managers can complete this form on an employee's behalf.
Gov.uk – Check if you can claim work related expenses

If eligible, staff will be directed to a further link where they can make a claim.
A Government Gateway ID is required. This takes approx. 10 mins to set up and the following information is required:

- employee's National Insurance number
- a recent pay slip or P60 or a valid UK passport

For further information relating to claiming tax relief for work expenses please see the Govt website below:
https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home

Information about other sources of financial support can be found on the Mental Health & Wellbeing toolkit > Money.

Management Responsibilities

Highland Council will continue to follow public health and health and safety advice for their specific sectors, and, during the current phase of the Government route map, home working should continue where possible, for staff who have <u>not</u> been identified as "essential" to be in the workplace.

Managers should be aware that they will be managing work in new ways and managing different behaviours (their own and their team members). A key aspect for managers to accept is that employees who are agile will require to be managed by **outcomes** and not by the number of tasks completed or 'digital presenteeism'. Managers should therefore focus on planning the team and individual workloads with tangible outcomes.

Currently there are many employees working from home who would normally work in a traditional working environment or, only work at home on an ad-hoc basis. Some managers may never have worked with a remote team before and leading teams in this new setting will be completely new.

Managing employees who work at home or at another location requires a different approach to those in traditional face to face management.
A short module **Working as a Team Online** is available via My Online Learning within Leadership Management and Change > People Management.

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

Ensuring staff Wellbeing

It is important that managers understand how their team members are coping with remote working and that they show empathy and act quickly to address any difficulties team members have.

Checking in frequently with phone calls, emails, chat and video calls will enable managers to spot any changes in mood or wellbeing. Regular contact will also provide opportunities to ensure team members continue to feel valued and motivated.

Where managers identify that a remote/home worker is not coping, they should know where to signpost the person to and ensure they do so as soon as possible. Managers should also ensure follow up contact.

Please also see Wellbeing section below for a list of support resources available and useful tips for ensuring wellbeing while working from home.

Employee Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of each employee to take reasonable care to ensure their own health, safety, and wellbeing; 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 in line with the Council's ICT Acceptable Use Policy (AUP). Adherence to the Highland Council Acceptable Use Policy is mandatory.

Employees will be responsible for ensuring any necessary confidentiality.

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 minimal interruptions.

Wellbeing

Positive wellbeing is critical to staff working productively, not least when staff are based at home, away from their usual place of work, line manager and work colleagues.

Managers have a <u>duty of care</u> to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of staff, and must ensure staff have sufficient support and access to the range of wellbeing resources listed below.

Employee Assistance Programme – offers free confidential support 24hrs/365 days. This is available to both employees and their families. Managers can refer staff to support (with staff consent) or staff may wish to self-refer.
MHW toolkit
My Online Learning – **Preparing for the new normal**
MHW/Bullying & Harassment Contacts
Violence & Aggression reporting (link tbc)
Breath Awareness (audio)
Guided full body relaxation (audio)
Tips for Working from Home

Some additional tips to help ensure the wellbeing of all staff are included below.

Stay connected – to your manager, team and other colleagues, both formally and informally. Discuss and agree appropriate method(s) and frequency.

Take a break – make time for a tea/coffee break and remember to stop and have some lunch, as if you were in the workplace. You may have previously caught up with colleagues for a coffee and chat during a break or met a friend for lunch – consider how you can do these things virtually. Even better, get out for a walk if you can.

Protect your time – make effective use of Outlook calendars and Out of Office function – allocate time to tasks and try to stick to the plan. Let others know if you may not be able to respond straight away as well as preferred methods of contacting you (and when).

Move regularly – try not to sit for too long and take regular breaks away from your screen.
Get up and walk about, get a cup of coffee or some water. Remember that you rarely sit for long periods in the workplace so try not to fall into this habit at home. Try standing for your next Teams meeting.
Even standing up, stretching your arms and circling your shoulders, then sitting back down can help!

Walking meetings – can you meet up with a colleague (socially distanced) and walk while you talk?

You don't need to be together – you could each/all be walking somewhere separate!
Try to make use of daylight hours and get outside for a quick walk if possible. Talk with your manager about how you can work more flexibly allowing you to enjoy some time out during the day (where possible)

Make time for "commuting" to your next meeting – avoid back to back meetings where possible
Make time for breaks. If you are setting up meetings, why not schedule them for 20 or 50 mins instead of a full half hour or hour – your attendees will be grateful of some time to gather their thoughts before their next meeting.

Find a balance – flexibility versus putting pressure on yourself

Staff are also encouraged to **communicate socially** or join support networks

Annual leave

Holidays are essential for our health and wellbeing. Regular breaks help us build resilience and avoid us feeling overwhelmed and "burn-out".

Managers are asked to approve leave requests wherever possible and ensure adequate cover to facilitate leave.

Manager and Employee Checklists

The following checklists should be used to ensure that all steps have been taken to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of staff working from home.

STAFF CHECKLIST		
Topic	**Link**	**Comment**
A Overview		
Have you completed the mandatory Display Screen Assessment (DSE) online module?	My Online Learning	
Have you completed a DSE self-assessment in relation to your new workstation set up and shared this with your manager?	My Online Learning	
Have you completed the Working from home online module? **Preparing for a new normal > Working from home**	My Online Learning	
B Health and Safety		
Has a health and safety risk assessment been carried out and discussed with your manager?	Risk Assessment	
Have you considered and/or discussed any wellbeing issues or potential issues with your manager?	Mental Health and wellbeing toolkit	
C Communication		
Have you and your manager agreed the method, frequency and discussion topics for communication? This will form a **Homeworking Agreement.**	Homeworking Agreement	
D Workstation equipment and ICT		
Do you have the workstation equipment and ICT kit you need to carry out your job effectively?	ICT and Home Working	
E Information Security		
Are arrangements in place to ensure Information Security?	Information Security Guidance	
F Travel		
Have arrangements for travel where required, and the avoidance of travel where possible been discussed with your line manager?		
G Tax Relief		
Have you checked eligibility to claim tax relief?		

MANAGER CHECKLIST

Topic		Link	Comment
A	Overview		
Have you completed the **Preparing for a new normal** (mandatory e-learning module and assessment)?		My Online Learning	
Have you ensured all team members have familiarised themselves with the COVID 19 Resources section?		COVID Resources	
B	Health and Safety		
Has a health and safety risk assessment been carried out for each member of staff?		Risk Assessment	
Have all staff completed an individual DSE self - assessment and shared this with you?		My Online Learning .	
Have you agreed frequency of checking in and/or discussion about any potential wellbeing issues with individual staff members?		Mental Health and wellbeing toolkit	
C	Communication		
Have you agreed the method, frequency and discussion topics for communication with team members? This will form part of the **homeworking agreement.**		Homeworking Agreement	
D	ICT and workstation equipment		
Do all team members have the workstation equipment and ICT kit required to carry out their work safely and effectively?		ICT and Home Working	
E	Information Security		
Are arrangements in place for your team to ensure Information Security?		Information Security Guidance	
F	Travel		
Have arrangements for travel and the avoidance of travel been discussed with team members?			