Flexible Workstyles Framework

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Reading Borough Council
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Version 1.1	A minor addition to text (highlighted). June 24
Version	

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1. Objectives and scope

1.1 The aim of the Council's Flexible Workstyles Framework is to create a more agile, responsive, efficient and effective organisation, which advances business performance, increases customer satisfaction and improves the health, wellbeing and diversity of our staff.

1.2 This framework applies to all staff who work for some or all of the time in a desk-based role.

1.3 This framework focuses on flexible workstyles but there are many other ways of working flexibly. All employees have a right to request a flexible working pattern (e.g. to reduce their hours, change the pattern of hours to compressed or annualised hours etc) and to have their request considered seriously by the Council; regardless of their length of service. This is covered in a separate policy called the Flexible Working Policy.

1.4 The Flexible Workstyles Framework is focused on giving our staff the flexibility to choose, where feasible, where they do their work, whether that's in the office or working remotely. There will be occasions when people need to be in the office e.g.to resolve IT issues, collect equipment, attend training, do new starter inductions, or attend team and staff meetings. For many people, the purpose of coming into the office will be to collaborate with colleagues or to touch down in between meetings/visits etc. Unless there are specific service needs, we do not require staff to come in and sit at a desk to do focused work when they could be more productive working remotely. We also recognise that some staff will continue to work primarily in the office, either because they have difficulty working from home and due to their personal situation prefer to be in the office for some or all of the time, or their job requires them to work in the office.

1.5 The benefits of flexible workstyles are:

For the Council:

- Greater flexibility to meet service needs and improve customer service
- Being innovative and forward-thinking by focusing on outcomes and productivity rather than being present in a fixed office
- Increased diversity of the workforce by enabling access to a more diverse pool of talent
- Potential for a reduction in absence through better work/life balance
- Improved employee retention, motivation and engagement
- Creates an environment of trust between managers and staff
- Positively contribute to climate change through a reduction in commuting so reducing carbon footprint
- Reduces the costs of our office accommodation

For our staff:

- Improvements in overall health and well-being
- Greater flexibility for parents and carers especially over the arrangement of working hours and location of work
- Reduction in commuting and travel expenses
- Modernised working environment and better IT equipment /software
- Increased staff productivity – fewer distractions, improved focus, concentration, creativity and better use of skills

1.6   Please note, working from home is not a substitute for childcare. However, if there is an unavoidable emergency, then the employee should discuss this with their line manager to agree suitable arrangements.

2.   Principles

2.1   The Flexible Workstyles Framework is not prescriptive as there is no one size fits all. These principles provide a framework within which staff and managers can embrace flexible working. The main aim of these principles is to empower and support staff to work where, when and how they choose, to maximise productivity and customer satisfaction. The Council's flexi-time scheme is covered in Section 5 of this framework.

The Council will:	You will:
Create opportunities to enable staff to take control over where, when and how you do your work.	Be accountable for meeting your work commitments and the Council's Customer Service Standards.
Trust our staff to deliver, perform and contribute to the highest standards.	Build the trust of others by ensuring your work gets done to the highest standards
Trust staff to use their judgement and personal organisation skills	Be pragmatic and recognise that it is not always possible to work the way you want. Plan ahead with your manager and share your working patterns so colleagues can contact you.
Support you to find solutions if things are not working	Keep in contact with your manager and colleagues, attend regular 1:1's, fully participate in team meetings, other networking events as well as performance meetings.

Build the infrastructure for all staff to work efficiently and provide the equipment to enable you to do your job	Be responsible for the security and confidentiality of your work and ensure that updates are applied to your lap top etc. when requested.

3.   Working from home or remotely

Working in our homes in an environment with which we are very familiar can sometimes make us less alert to risks and hazards to our health and safety. To help address any potential risks or hazards, there are four main areas staff need to consider with their manager:

- Working environment
- Equipment
- Lone working
- Wellbeing

Home or remote working environment

It is important to consider the space you intend to work in and make best use of that space.

- Identify the area you want to use
- Is there enough space for work to be carried out comfortably?
- Is there enough light and ventilation?
- Is the space too hot/too cold?
- Can you enter/exit the space without difficulty?
- Is the equipment safe and fit for purpose?

When setting up the area where you will work check the screen is at the correct height and the chair and desk are comfortable. Before you start your work day, check your workstation and make sure you are comfortable.

There is an online course, Are you Sitting Comfortably, which includes lots of helpful hints and tips on how to set up your work station correctly.

You should also read the **DSE guidance on the intranet** and you must complete a **DSE self-assessment form**. You must send the completed form to your line manager who will discuss the outcomes of the assessment with you.

Home Work Space

You may not have the perfect environment or equipment and your workstation set up at home may not be as good as a purpose-designed workstation in the office. However, you should try and set up your work area so that it doesn't put you at risk

of discomfort or developing musculoskeletal disorders. Working from your sofa or bed may seem comfortable initially but could create issues in the longer term. Make sure you have a solid chair with good lumbar support, or consider one of these options:

- Standard desk - Setting up a workstation with a standard desk should reflect the usual set up at work. Make sure you are sitting in a comfortable chair with enough support, and all your equipment is set up correctly and you are not straining any part of your body.
- Standing desk - In the office you may use a standing desk. It is unlikely you will have this at home. But you may choose to replicate this, try using a kitchen top or a table with a riser to support your laptop. Make sure you are not straining any part of your body.

Regular Breaks

As there may be fewer distractions at home, it can be tempting to work for extended periods without a break.

- Set yourself a reminder in your Outlook calendar to prompt you to take at least a five-minute break every hour
- Avoid static, awkward postures by regularly changing position
- Get up, move around or do some simple stretching exercises
- Make a drink and stay hydrated
- Avoid eye fatigue by taking a screen break and changing focus.

Remember not everyone will experience the same issues and you need to plan for those you experience.

Equipment

You will be provided with IT equipment such as a laptop which can be used wherever you are working from.

You can arrange to borrow additional equipment and book collection (usually from the Civic Offices) by using this form.

Equipment provided and paid for by the Council	Expenses not paid by the Council
Laptop or another IT solution	Insurance costs (Council equipment is covered by the Council)
Office chair, display screen, keyboard, mouse (if requested)	Reimbursement for heating and lighting and other utilities
Stationery	Reimbursement of any office furniture or IT equipment that you choose to purchase yourself.

Lone worker safety device (where identified as necessary through a risk assessment)	

In all cases equipment remains the property of the Council and will need to be returned if you leave the Council or move to a new role where home working is not possible. An inventory of equipment borrowed will be maintained by FM and IT.

You should visually check, at least on an annual basis, that any Council equipment you use at home is safe to use including electric plugs, cables and power. A form is available here to assist with this, which must be sent to your manager when complete.   You will need to make sure fuses and sockets are safe to use and any electric equipment is safely secured. Periodic PAT testing, carried out by a competent person, will be required for portable IT equipment which is moved regularly (e.g. laptops, charging cables etc). This will be organised by the Facilities Management team and you will need to bring your equipment in to the offices for testing.

If you experience any IT problems which affect your ability to work remotely (e.g. a broadband outage) then you should contact your line manager to discuss the issue and together you should come up with a reasonable solution that works for you and the service. This could include coming into the office to work, allowing a reasonable timeframe for your journey, or taking leave, flex etc to cover the period. If problems are likely to last for several days then you will need to come into the office to work during that period.

Well-being

It can be difficult to separate work from home life if you are working from home frequently, and it can be easy to slip into feeling you should always be available. It is important to manage your work/life balance and you should regularly talk to your manager to agree expectations around your hours of work and availability.

Working flexibly is a two-way process. There is an expectation that services will be provided between normal working hours (i.e. 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday, or the normal hours operated in your service).   Those who want to work flexible hours outside of this should be able to do so, subject to the needs of the service being met. If you send emails or messages (e.g. using WhatsApp or Teams) outside of normal working hours you should not expect an immediate response, nor ring colleagues unless there is mutual agreement to do so. If a response is required urgently, this should be requested during normal working hours. Only work supplied mobile phones and Council supplied software such as Office365 should be used for work issues.

If you are working outside of normal working hours, you may find it helpful to add a message to your emails along these lines:

I work flexible hours and may send emails outside of the normal working day, However, there is no expectation that they are responded to at those times.

We would encourage you to talk to the colleagues you frequently communicate with to understand their flexible working arrangements and be respectful. There is no expectation from the Council for you to open, read or respond to e-mails outside of the normal hours operated by your service.

Communication

It is more important when working remotely to keep in touch and maintain regular contact with team members and colleagues. You should do this by phone, email or video calls, checking in with others regularly and keeping your contact details up to date. Regular use of Microsoft Teams keeps staff connected. Good communication channels, both formal and informal, are ways of keeping in touch and can also help minimise the sense of working on your own and any feelings of isolation. Here are some suggestions for maintaining contact with colleagues and with what's happening at the Council more generally:

- Using Microsoft Teams for 1-1 meetings, team meetings, informal catch-ups etc
- Joining the Council's Facebook group
- Reading Borough Council intranet
- Service Now portal for any IT issues
- Weekly information email sent to all staff on a Friday
- Monthly Wellbeing Newsletter
- Periodic face-to-face meetings in the office with colleagues

More information and resources on working remotely are available on the intranet here and on the **RBC Learning Pool Working Remotely and at Home page**.

Accidents/Incidents and Near misses

Any accident that occurs while you are working from home, which is directly related to your work, needs to be reported to your line manager and then logged on the accident/incident/near miss form (available on the intranet in DASH within the Useful Links section).

Lone working

When you are working from one of our buildings, surrounded by your team and colleagues, lone working only generally applies when you are working out in the community or visiting service users. If you are combining working from home with working out in the community or visiting service users, it is important that you continue to adhere to the lone working policy and procedure which can be found

here. Lone worker safety devices are provided to staff where this is identified as a requirement through a risk assessment.

Other Considerations

<u>Insurance Arrangements</u>

You should inform your household insurer if you are working at home to ensure your buildings and contents insurance is not invalidated. When working at home on Council business, personal and public liability cover will be provided by the Council.

If you are a tenant rather than a home-owner, you may also need to refer to your tenancy agreement or landlord for advice, to ensure you have their agreement for the partial use of premises for work purposes.

<u>Tax Implications</u>

There should be no change to your income tax position due to homeworking. Homeworking by choice does not qualify for tax relief.

<u>Travelling/Mileage Claims</u>

All claims for travelling/mileage must be made in accordance with the Council's current policy, and must be authorised appropriately. Under HMRC rules, mileage which is 'ordinary commuting' between your home and your permanent office base cannot be claimed (your permanent office base is shown in your contract of employment).   If you travel from home to a temporary workplace (e.g. to visit a client at their home or visit a customer's premises), then claims must be based on what the normal journey would have been from your permanent workplace, or the actual journey travelled, <u>whichever is the lesser</u>.

Example 1
- You travel 12 miles from home to a temporary workplace
- The journey from your permanent office base to a temporary workplace would have been 4 miles
- You can claim 4 miles

Example 2
- You travel 4 miles from home to a temporary workplace
- The journey from your permanent office base to a temporary workplace would have been 12 miles
- You can claim 4 miles

<u>Security and Confidentiality</u>

The same standards of security and confidentiality that apply when you are office based must be maintained when you are homeworking. Attention must be paid to ensuring the security of IT equipment and documents supplied by the Council. All

confidential paperwork/files etc must be secured and disposed of securely and you must adhere to service guidelines on data protection (e.g. bring confidential paperwork into the offices to be disposed of confidentially when you next visit the office and use online filing/storage wherever possible). Specialist software (e.g. Adobe Writer for PDFs) can be requested from IT to help with redacting confidential information in documents if needed. You must also ensure that you complete any mandatory e-Learning modules on data protection, information governance or cyber security as directed by your manager. The e-Learning portal can be accessed here.

4.   Working in the office

Whilst the Flexible Workstyles Framework is focused on giving our staff the flexibility to choose where they do their work, there will be occasions when you need to be in the office e.g.to resolve IT issues which cannot be fixed remotely, to collect equipment, to attend in-person training and for new starter inductions. You may also be required to attend meetings in the office that your line manager has reasonably determined are best conducted in person.

Most of our offices operate a desk-sharing system, whereby we provide a bank of workstations which are usually allocated on a directorate or service area basis. Please speak to your line manager about the arrangements for your service. In a small number of cases, staff will be allocated a specific desk where they require special equipment or adaptations to help them do their job which is personal to them and which is not easily portable.

At the end of each day on which you are attending the office, please ensure that you leave the desk clear, clean and tidy. Your laptop and any personal items should not be left on desks overnight.

If you are going to be away from your desk for two or more hours, please clear the desk so that someone else can use it.

You will have access to a lockable cupboard and/or a digital locker. At the end of each day on which you are attending the office, please ensure that your laptop and other equipment are either taken with you or secured away in a locked cupboard. In most cases lockers must also be cleared when you have finished work for the day.

Further information about working in the offices and the facilities available is provided in the Council Buildings Handbook.

5.   Flexi-time

Most staff covered by this policy can use the Council's "flexitime" scheme, where you can work your total number of contractual hours but are permitted flexibility as to when you begin and end a day or shift. Flexible working patterns can reduce

unauthorised absences from work and employee stress, and in turn promote a good work-life balance and improve performance and productivity.

Flexitime should not interfere with service delivery requirements or your job duties and line managers can override or adjust flexitime arrangements to meet the needs of the business.

How flexi-time works

Flexi-time allows you to vary your hours around the core working periods (see below). Flexi-time is different from Time Off in Lieu (TOIL) where you are asked by your manager and agree to work overtime which is reimbursed as TOIL. Separate provisions apply for TOIL which are covered in the Overtime Policy.

You can work extra hours and use these later to take time off work as flexi-leave as long as you have the work to enable you to do this. You can, if you wish and if appropriate, accrue a surplus of hours to take later, up to a maximum of 10 hours within the flexitime period (which is usually four weeks). Any surplus hours can be rolled over to the next four-week period, provided that the 10 hour maximum is not exceeded.

You are not usually allowed to take time off that has not been accrued unless agreed with your manager (e.g. for emergency caring requirements). In other words, you would not be allowed to use flexitime to work less than hours in a day or take flexi-leave when you have not worked the time in advance to accrue this time off.

You will need your manager's consent in advance to take off a whole or half day of flexi-leave. A maximum of one day flexileave to be taken in any four week period Flexi-leave does not need to be recorded on iTrent.

Hours of work

The core working periods during which you must normally be at work are 10am to 12pm and 2pm to 4pm, Monday to Friday. You can work flexibly outside of these hours if service delivery requirements and your job duties are met.

You must take a minimum of 30 minutes for an unpaid lunch or to have a rest break if you are contracted to work six or more hours on that day.

The Council must ensure that we comply with working time limits so that employees who do flexitime do not exceed reasonable working hours. Further information is available in the Working time regulations guidance

APPENDIX 1

Tips for making flexible workstyles succeed

1. **Be Organised** – as you might not be returning to the same location every time you need to be very organised with your files.

You may need to carry the documents and resources you need with you so if possible, file as much electronically. Dump the junk and get rid of all unnecessary clutter. The last thing you want to do is be carting around heavy bags!

Get familiar with Microsoft 365 tools and make the most of them e.g. OneDrive. You need to get into good habits that help you be more agile. If you are working in different locations on different days you need to be able to set yourself up quickly, access the files you need when you need them and be able to work with the minimum of fuss and disruption.

There are also security aspects to consider, making sure documents are saved in the right locations so they are secure and backed up.

2. **Be Engaged** – one of the problems with not being sat next to the same person every day is that you can feel isolated and lose connectivity with the rest of your colleagues. At times, especially if you are working away from the office, you need to work hard at staying in touch. It's very tempting to put off making that call to your manager (or popping to their desk to see them) but if you don't you will soon feel isolated and out of touch and you will find your job much harder.

Keep in regular contact with your team, sit with them when you can, go to team social events but most important of all if you can't interact face to face, use the phone or Teams chat or meetings, not just email, wherever possible to engage with your teammates.

3. **Be Equipped** - to maximize your ability to work flexibly you will need to have the right equipment and make proper use of it. Understand what is available (both hardware and software) and learn how to use it. Try to attend any training offered as it will be invaluable in helping you get the most out of any resources.

Learn how to access your files remotely from wherever you are and keep up to date with announcements on new software which is being made available and issued for staff to use.

4. **Be Visible** – Don't be tempted to hide yourself away too much.

It is useful to find a quiet space to get an urgent task done that you need to focus on – this is exactly what agile working is about; make the most of being able to work in the most productive place for the task at hand.

If you are working remotely then make sure you are visible to your team and line manager via phone/Teams calls and email.

Make sure your team knows what your plans are, where you are planning to work and what your current work and deadlines are. Communicate regularly with your team and your manager, agreeing your outputs and delivering on them.

We encourage all Line Managers to trust and empower their team members to manage their time effectively and achieve the tasks and objectives set for them. Managers must carry out 1-1s with their staff at least every 4-6 weeks and should check-in regularly with staff on an informal basis as a way of keeping in touch.

5. **Be Productive** – Consider what activities you prioritise and focus your time on. Are you busy with the right things? Are you focussing on things that make a difference to you, your team, Reading and our customers?

One useful technique is to jot down at the start of each day everything you have in your head that you feel you need to get done. Review that list, prioritise it and select the top 5 to 10 tasks that you really need to get done, moving all other task to a second list. Only tackle the other items when these are finished.

Try not to be distracted by emails and calls when working on important tasks – it is not productive or time efficient to be constantly distracted from the task at hand. Consistently stopping and starting a task will mean it takes much longer to complete overall.

6. **Be Focused** – Focus on the output that is required of you.

Make sure you understand from your line manager what is expected in terms of competencies/behaviours and objectives. This must be your priority and will be the main way your performance will be measured. Don't be distracted by emails and non-critical items, especially emails which you were cc'd in to.

Plan times in your day for dealing with emails and let your colleagues know when you will be available for calls or when you will be in the office. Regularly update your Teams status to flag when you are available.

Make sure to take short, regular breaks as this will help you to clear your head and encourage you to be more focused, with a clearer head upon returning to the task at hand.

7. **Be Aware** of when you are at your most productive. Everybody is different and works in a different way. Some people genuinely are morning people and others afternoon people. Flexible workstyles allow you to plan your day to do the more focussed tasks when you are at your peak.

Save the more mundane and easier to do tasks (such as calls or emails) for when your creativity is lower.

Be aware of when you are flagging and plan to take breaks, drink plenty of water and eat regularly to maintain your energy levels. You will be amazed about how much more you get done by listening to your body and understanding its energy cycles.

Similarly, if you identify yourself as an extrovert then make sure you're engaging in enough social interaction to stay happy and productive, or if you're more introverted then don't be afraid to take yourself away to a quiet corner for part of the day.

8. **Be Flexible** – agile working is all about flexibility, but it only works if all your colleagues are equally flexible and considerate to each other. Try to avoid "beach towelling" a desk or work area if you are away for a period of time (e.g. in meetings all morning).

Tidy your work area and put your files away after you have finished using a workspace so others can use it. Don't book rooms if your meeting could be done round a table in a breakout area.

Make sure that if a meeting is no longer going ahead that you remove your reservation of the workspace so others can use it.

9. **Be Comfortable** – You may be working in different locations from day to day. It is important you get yourself comfortable and can set up your working environment quickly, so you don't lose time and don't strain yourself.

Learn how to adjust the chair to the settings that suit you best, sit square to the desk or working area and try not to hunch especially when using a laptop.

Avoid spending prolonged periods of time in the same seating position; go for short walks around your work area to avoid stiffness, aches and pains.

10. **Be Active** – flexible workstyles give you the ability to be much more mobile and work in the location most appropriate for the task at hand. This will allow you to be more active during the day, which in turn will help you stay alert and productive.

Take regular breaks and socialise with your colleagues over coffee and lunch – do not be tempted to eat at your desk, it makes you less, not more, productive.

11. **Be security conscious** – Flexible workstyles allows you to choose when and where you are going to work from within reason, this could be at a café, park or visiting family. You need to think about who may be listening into your conversation if you are on a virtual meeting; can people see your screen or papers you may have with you.

You must think about confidentiality and data protection when you plan your day i.e. don't arrange a meeting if you plan to work from a public space.

APPENDIX 2

Managing flexible workstyle: tips for managers

When people are working in a flexible way, managers will be exercising their management skills in a different way. Most of the core skills are the same e.g. organising workloads, supervision, motivating and engaging, team building, ensuring quality and performance management, troubleshooting, listening and initiating improvements. The difference lies in the way managers interact with their team members and how they measure work performance. The following sections provide a broad framework of things to consider helping you get the most out of your teams in a flexible world.

Moving away from presenteeism to managing on outputs

The key to making flexible workstyles succeed is to accept that visible presence is often a poor guide to a person's productivity and outputs. Outputs can be measured wherever a person is located and at whatever time they might be working. If your management style is not already focused on results, you will need to adapt:

- **Targets**. Managers who manage on outputs not presenteeism do so by having clear key performance indicators (KPIs) and targets for staff. Be specific on what you expect and when, and let the individual decide how to deliver that.
- **Trust** people to do their work even if you can't see them doing it. Trial periods can help e.g. daily updates for people working in a flexible way to embed different behaviour. Trust doesn't happen overnight. You must work with your teams to build this over time. A discussion with your team is a good place to start.
- **Technology**. Recognise that staff need the right tools to embrace flexible workstyles and to know how to use them. Internal briefings and training sessions are key. Making good use of calendars can really help.
- **Tasks**. Which tasks require interaction and which don't? How can work be clustered to optimise performance and space?
- **Empathy**. Listen to your staff and their wants and needs, don't dismiss things out of hand, just because it's not how you would do things.
- **Flexibility**. Enable staff to work in an agile way to achieve the goals of the business, be clear and consistent with your reasoning if sometimes you can't accommodate flexible workstyles choices.

Remember - there is no 'one size fits all' solution. Every job is likely to have its own set of considerations, dependent on the nature of the work and the needs of the customer, service or function.

Tips for implementation

- Use performance discussions and 1-1s to review flexible workstyles arrangements in the same way you review performance on tasks. You should be having 1-1 meetings with every member of your team at least every 4-6 weeks. See the <u>Performance Management Policy</u> for more details of our performance management framework.
- Start by breaking the job down into a list of duties and tasks, and then list the main outputs of the job.
- It may help to consider the employee's workload in terms of defined pieces of work e.g. writing a report, developing a project.
- Meet with your team members and agree specific objectives in a defined performance period. It could be a week, month, or six-months depending on the nature of the job. In most jobs it would be up to the employee as to how they plan individual days, as long as they meet any requirements on being contactable.
- Monitor progress and measure performance just the same as if they were office based. Be clear with staff on your expectations on contact while working remotely.
- Manage by exception – this means only performance manage staff on time where it is believed that there is a problem rather than monitoring all team members' hours as a matter of course.
- Give regular feedback on performance and positive reinforcement of achievements.
- If the business needs change, flexible workstyle arrangements need to be reviewed. The key to success is flexibility on both sides.
- Look at what work requires physical interactions, what can be done online, what needs quiet time?
- Use shared calendars. Managers need to know when their team members are working and when they are not available.
- Be smarter about meetings. What are they for? Who is required? Can people join remotely?
- Discuss with the team and be clear who needs to be available and when e.g. for the weekly team meeting.
- Discuss with the team whether there needs to be any baseline office presence.
- Maintain team spirit through virtual away days or lunches, to re-connect remote workers.
- Provide clear briefings on technology available.