

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Human Resources Department



Agile and Home Working Policy

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INTRODUCTION

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council recognises the need to develop modern working practices that enable employees to maximise their performance whilst maintaining a good work life balance. Agile and Home Working are the terms used to describe how employees can work flexibly from any location, whether it is a council building, in the community, from home or any combination of these.

The Council is seeking to strike a new balance between employees work commitments, the amount of accommodation needed and the faster pace of personal and working lives.

The Council expects both managers and encourages employees to identify opportunities where working in a different way can be successfully implemented and maintained either for groups of employees or individuals in order to improve organisational and individual performance so that services to the public can be enhanced and costs potentially reduced.

This Policy outlines the ways employees can work flexibly from any location whether it is from a Council building, in the community, from home or any combination of these to achieve these aims.

2. SCOPE OF POLICY

This Policy applies to all Council employees of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, however it is recognised that agile and home working will not be viable in certain service areas/departments. As such any applications in these areas will be subject to management approval. There are local arrangements in place for Elected Members and school based staff and are therefore exempt from this policy.

This Policy provides a framework for consistent and fair practice on the issues to be taken into account when considering agile and home working arrangements.

The nature of agile and home working will depend on the job undertaken and considerations will include the impact on customer access to services.

The Council is committed to ensuring that all policies are reflective of the Equalities Act 2010 and support all employees regardless of disability, sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, and age. These are called 'protected characteristics'. This Policy should therefore be used with a view to ensure that the Council continues to support all employees equally and does not disadvantage anyone with a protected characteristic.

If you are in doubt about any aspect of this Policy, please consult with the Human Resources Department.

3. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Agile or home working will generally be authorised providing it benefits the Council as defined in section 5 below and does not impair service delivery.
- Home workers will be issued with the appropriate equipment and support required for them to work efficiently and effectively as detailed in section 12 below.
- "Home" is one specified location, agreed between manager and employee and subject to assessment of suitability prior to agreement.

- The decision about whether an employee or group of employees should be allowed to work from home will rest with the line manager and/or Head of Service.
- There must be clear objectives and measurable outputs which are set and regularly reviewed between the line manager and employee.
- Individual applications to work from home can be made by employees via the Council's Flexible Working Policy and all applications will be considered in line with this Policy. It is not an employee's right to work from home.
- An employee cannot be made to work from home unless home working forms part of the individual's terms and conditions of employment.
- During home working hours, the employee must ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for dependants who may be present at the home. Working from home and looking after children at the same time will not be permitted and normal childcare provision need to still apply.
- Home working should not be viewed as an alternative to paid dependent leave.
- Agile and home workers will be expected to comply with all Council policies and procedures.
- Terms and Conditions of Employment are unaffected by agile or home working arrangements.
- For administrative purposes, including the claiming of travel expenses, employees working in an agile way will retain a designated contractual work base.
- Expenses are not payable for home working, employees may wish to claim a taxable benefit from HRMC.
- The provisions within the Council's flexi leave scheme continue to apply as normal.
- Electronic diaries must be kept up to date and open access granted to line managers and team members.
- The usual reporting procedures in the event of sickness absence and accident/incidents remain in place.
- Agile and home workers will be expected to attend designated meetings, learning and development sessions and appointments, as necessary to meet the needs of the service.
- Any form of alleged misconduct, abuse or non-compliance of the requirements of the Agile and Home Working Policy and Procedure will be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Policy.

4. DEFINITIONS OF AGILE/HOME WORKING

Agile Working

Agile working allows employees to influence how they carry out their role and promotes varying levels of flexibility within the workplace.

It is based on the concept that 'work is an activity we do rather than a place we go to.'

The different ways in which agile working can be undertaken are dependent on the demands and needs of the Council. The categories of agile workers are:

- **Mobile Worker**

Employees who have a more mobile workstyle are usually able to work from a variety of locations. Mobile staff have a designated base (as do flexible workers) but are generally working out in the County Borough (i.e. home visits, site visits etc) for approximately 80% of their time. This group of staff have less of a requirement to be at a base and may choose to undertake office duties from another building that may be closer to their current location, or from home.

- **Flexible Worker**

Flexible workers are those who spend most of their time (approximately 60% of their time) working in an office environment although may frequently be away from a desk attending meetings, working from other Council buildings or working occasionally from home. Similarly, employees who tend to spend a lot of time in client's homes will also be 'flexible'. In this respect, a high proportion of staff will be categorised as flexible and the degree of flexibility is to be determined by the member of staff and their line manager.

- **Static/Fixed Worker**

Those who fall into the low mobility range are generally at a desk for approximately 90% of their time. They rarely attend meetings or work from alternative locations. This type of working may be fixed in the office or fixed at home, depending on the role.

Home Working

Home working consists of working based at home rather than at the normal place of work and may involve using IT systems to perform work and to remain in contact with managers and employees. It is carried out to an agreed work pattern on a permanent, regular, part-time, temporary or ad hoc basis.

Not all jobs are suitable for home working, however any job may be considered on its own merits. Jobs that involve project work or an identifiable output, or those that provide services within the community may particularly lend themselves to this type of work. Jobs that will not be suitable are those who provide a direct service to the public at a fixed location e.g. staff on reception.

Full Home Working –The employee's home becomes the main or sole base for work activities. This form of working will only be authorised in particular circumstances and in relation to specific posts.

Partial Home Working – Where an employee regularly works a percentage of the week from home and the rest of their time divided between the office and other designated sites.

Ad-Hoc Home Working – Where an employee irregularly works at home for a specific purpose or to meet work deadlines for a set period of time e.g. to complete a report.

Line managers must ensure that any agile or home working arrangements do not have an adverse effect on any particular group of employees neither should a refusal to agree home working disadvantage any particular group.

5. BENEFITS OF AGILE/HOME WORKING

Agile and home working offer a number of benefits including:

- Improved service delivery.
- Greater productivity/efficiency.
- Reduced costs of property costs and other overheads.
- Retention/Recruitment of employees with caring responsibilities.
- Retention/Recruitment of disabled people.
- Reduced travel problems and environmental impact.

6. CRITERIA TO BE USED FOR AGILE/HOME WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

The line manager will consider each post individually taking into account any potential impact on the service area, including consultation of customer needs and the effect on work colleagues.

The line manager will determine which work style the role could fit into based on business needs and the identified work styles; the line manager will make a decision on what work style is appropriate. The following will be considered:

- The effect on ability to meet customer demand.
- The ability to organise work among existing employees.
- The impact on work quality and performance.
- Planned structural change to departments.
- The rotas of individual departments.
- Whether the job can only be carried out in an office environment (hot desking could also be considered).
- Performance related issues (performance must be at least maintained or improved).
- The wellbeing of the individual.

7. EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

Employees should be able to demonstrate that they can:

- Work independently and on their own initiative.
- Understand and comply with this policy and all supporting policies and guidelines.
- Motivate themselves.
- Complete projects within set deadlines.
- Manage workload effectively and adhere to the working time directive and flexi-time guidelines.
- Consider their own health and safety and be able cope well under any new pressure posed by agile or home working.
- Advise their line manager if their domestic arrangements change or if the agile or home work is adversely affecting their role or health.
- Carry out an annual DSE assessment. A copy of the user assessment form can be found in the Homeworking Self Assessment Checklist in Appendix 1
- Attend meetings and training as and when required.
- Maintain appropriate contact with their line manager and colleagues as per normal circumstances.
- Liaise with their insurance company to ensure compliance.

- Immediately report any loss or theft of equipment or documents to their line manager and the Information Security Officer.
- Report system defects to the ICT Department.
- Immediately report a security breach or incident to their line manager and the Information Security Officer.
- Should an employee become aware of any loss of personal data or a breach of the data protection legislation they must report the incident to their line manager and the Data Protection Officer immediately in accordance with the Data Protection Breach Policy.

8. MANAGER RESPONSIBILITIES

Line managers are responsible for ensuring that:

- Agile and home workers understand and comply with this policy and all supporting policies and guidelines.
- The employee is fully trained on the equipment and technology provided.
- They keep in touch with the employee as regularly as they would under normal circumstances, as far as reasonably practicable.
- The employee does not become isolated and arrangements for regular communication are in place.
- Ensure the employee is included in all scheduled team meetings and does not suffer a detriment due to the agile or home working arrangements.
- The working arrangements are reviewed with the employee during supervision and appraised meetings and in the event that the status of the working arrangement alters in any way (i.e. change in domestic arrangements, moving house, changing jobs).
- The employee's wellbeing is not adversely affected.

9. RECORDING WORKINGTIME WHILST AGILE OR HOME WORKING

Employees who are agile or home workers and are on flexible work patterns (i.e. flexi time) must use the HR21 system to record their daily working pattern. This can be done by either signing in and out electronically with their clocking card at designated terminals within the Council building that they are working from (i.e. agile workers) or by accessing the HR21 portal via their PC or laptop (i.e. home workers). Clock-ins must be registered in the morning when they arrive at work/sign in to start work and at the end of each day when leaving work/before signing off. Employees must also record any breaks that are taken during the working day.

Further information can be found in the Council's Timekeeping and Attendance Policy.

10. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Line managers and employees must agree measurable outcomes and what constitutes effectiveness for their service areas. This should cover issues such as productivity, quality of work, service standards and timeliness. These will need to be considered and reviewed by the line manager at regular periods. Line managers must complete all performance appraisal meetings as outlined in Focus On Your Performance, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's Performance Management Framework including regular team and one to one meetings with staff in order to manage performance. Please refer to the Performance Management guidance document for Managers.

11. TRAINING AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

An employee's career development and training opportunities should not be adversely affected by their working arrangements. It is the line manager's responsibility to ensure that employees receive the appropriate training.

12. HOMEWORKING SELF ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

Where a position is identified as suitable for home working, it is the employee's responsibility to ensure that their home offers a safe, suitable working environment. The employee will be asked to complete a Homeworking Self Assessment Checklist of their proposed home work environment, covering areas such as ventilation, temperature, lighting, space and flooring, to ensure the space is suitable. The Council is not liable to rectify any issues identified in the home through the Homeworking Self Assessment Checklist process. A copy of the Homeworking Checklist can be found in Appendix 1.

Both line managers and employees have a responsibility to ensure that conditions are safe and suitable for the employee. If home working is authorised the line manager is responsible for ensuring that the employee carries out the appropriate homeworking self assessment checks.

Line managers are responsible for assessing work activities being undertaken by the employee to identify any potential risks/hazards that may exist. The Council reserves the right to prevent home working where it identifies potential risks/hazards (e.g. Data protection concerns, inappropriate system/information access).

13. EQUIPMENT

Line managers will determine the equipment required to enable effective agile or home working (e.g. laptop, mobile phone). This equipment must be used in line with the Council's ICT policies and H&S guidance on DSE.

Where an employee requires specialist equipment in the office because of a workplace assessment, consideration will need to be given to whether this support can be incorporated into the home working environment on a case-by-case basis. Whilst the Council will consider providing specialist equipment, it reserves the right to withhold home working agreement if the provision of specialist equipment is deemed inappropriate.

All equipment, materials or stationery supplied by the Council will remain the property of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, used for work purposes only and returned to the Council at the end of the home working arrangement.

The line manager will make final decisions on what is needed. Where equipment is provided the employee must:

- Take reasonable care of it.
- Use it only for official purposes.
- Use it only in accordance with any operating instructions.
- Return it to the Council when requested.
- Use it in accordance with any existing Council policies.

14. INFORMATION SECURITY

Agile and home workers are responsible for the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information assets. Information assets take many forms including, but not limited to, information which is:

- Stored on computers
- Transmitted across networks
- Printed out
- Written on paper
- Stored on removable media
- Sent via email
- Spoken in conversation e.g. by telephone
- Stored in databases

The Council's Information Security Policy, Privacy Standards Policy and supporting operational policies **MUST** be adhered to at all times whilst agile/home working.

The Remote Working Policy **MUST** be adhered to ensure the effective and appropriate use of the Council's ICT equipment when used away from the main offices. The policy applies suitable controls to help prevent security breaches or negative consequences. In summary, Agile workers must not work on personal ICT equipment or connect unauthorised equipment to their Council devices. Nobody else is permitted to use work devices.

It is essential that employees work in a space that is private. It is important that computer screens are kept private and if you are having conference calls or video meetings, agile workers must be aware of other members of the household that might overhear. Hard copy papers taken home must be stored securely e.g. papers should be stored together in a bag or box away from other members of a household. ICT equipment and paper documents that are transported must be securely stored in the boot of a car – out of sight of an opportunist thief.

Employees must return equipment and documentation to their main office premises as soon as they are no longer required for the completion of specific tasks to ensure they can be stored or disposed of in accordance with the needs of the service and corporate policy and procedures.

15. COMMUNICATION AND SAFETY

Regular contact should be maintained between the employee and line manager, who will agree between them whether this will be via Microsoft Teams, email or telephone. Where the role necessitates, a work mobile phone will be provided as part of the ICT equipment.

Home workers must not meet clients or representatives at their home nor give their personal phone numbers, addresses etc to clients/customers. If an employee needs to meet clients or colleagues during working hours, they must arrange for this meeting to take place on council property.

16. INSURANCE

The Council will be responsible for any necessary insurance of equipment supplied and employee liability insurance.

Home working may affect the home and contents insurance policies of the householder. Employees are advised to check with their insurance providers if changes need to be made to their policies and make any necessary adjustments before undertaking any homeworking. Payment of any additional premiums is the employee's responsibility and will not be reimbursed. The Council will not accept liability for damage caused to the home or its contents, or any personal items.

17. POLICY COMPLIANCE

Failure to observe the standards set out in this Policy may be regarded as serious and any breach may result in disciplinary action, which may include dismissal or removal of the agile or home working arrangement.

APPENDIX 1 – HOMEWORKING SELF ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST



Homeworking self
assessment checklist