

Homeworking Policy

1. Background

Consideration for family life is at the core of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's (HWCB) values, not only for our service users but also for our employees. Aside from our core values, HWCB believes that the promotion of flexible working practices can increase staff motivation, promote work-life balance, reduce employee stress and improve performance and productivity.

With the increase in flexible working connected to service delivery there may be occasions where there is a need to complete elements of work from home or from venues other than the employee's main base.

A homeworking arrangement should meet business needs and the employee's needs so that it is favourable to both.

2. Objectives

This policy details the expectation of staff and managers and relates to all staff (permanent and temporary) in regard to working from home. Flexibility and communication are the key expectations of both staff and managers.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all employees. It does not form part of employees' terms and conditions of employment; it does not affect existing terms and conditions and may be subject to change.

Applications for homeworking will be granted where the employee's line manager is satisfied that the needs of the business can continue to be met while the employee works from home.

Homeworking must be cost-effective and ensure that there is no significant increase in workload on colleagues. The work done by the employee must be capable of being done from home.

4. Policy

4.1 What is homeworking?

There are different types of homeworking that this policy covers. They are:

- Flexible homeworking with time spent between an employee's base (office) and home.

- The office as the main place of work with occasional working from home.

4.2 When can an employee work from home?

It is not envisaged that office-based staff will work from home unless:

1. Weather conditions become dangerous and employees are placed at risk commuting to and from an office base.
2. Business continuity plans are implemented due to a systems failure.
3. There is a valid reason for working from home, which has been agreed and approved, in advance, by your line manager.
4. Office based workers are mandated to work at home in line with national guidance as a result of a national or global pandemic.

5. Working Time

Workers must make themselves available for contact during their contracted hours and must instruct colleagues on how they can be contacted.

When working from home, home workers should also comply with the Working Time Regulations 1998 where applicable such as:

- Take an uninterrupted rest break of at least 20 minutes when working more than 6 hours.
- Take eleven hours' continuous rest between each working day.

Any HWCB property that is used at home by the employee (IT equipment, mobile phones, etc.) belongs to HWCB and will be maintained by us. It is the responsibility of the homeworker to take reasonable steps to ensure that HWCB property is taken care of and to advise HWCB if maintenance is required. HWCB laptops and mobile phones are covered by HWCB insurance for use out of the office.

Confidentiality and data protection are to be adhered to at all times. Home-based employees must be conscious of their workspace at home and who may have access/sight of this space.

HWCB must ensure that the employee fully understands all their responsibilities with regard to confidential data. The employee must sign a written statement of the responsibilities they are undertaking towards the security of the data.

6. Using an HWCB provided laptop

When working at home, employees must adhere to the following, specifically with regard to HWCB equipment and information stored:

- Other family members or visitors to the employee's home who use the computer must never have access to confidential data.
- The device should have a password-protected screen saver.
- Consider the physical security of the PC - vulnerability to theft or unauthorised access.
- Computer equipment should never be left unattended when logged in and switched on.
- Computer equipment must be kept in a secure place when not in use.
- Ensure that up-to-date virus protection is in place and updated regularly.
- Care should be taken that confidential data cannot be overseen by unauthorised third parties including other members of the family / visitors to the employee's home.
- Ensure that other modems are not attached to the computer, as this invalidates the organisation's "code of connection" and places the system at risk.
- Ensure proper disposal of printouts of confidential data generated at the employee's home.
- Ensure the employee does not use the data for any purpose other than that authorised.
- Ensure that no data is held on the computer hard drive where the employee has dial-in access.

It is compulsory for all employees who are home-based to carry out a homeworking risk assessment (including a Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessment), to ensure that they have a safe and reasonable space to work. A risk assessment can be obtained from your line manager.

HWCB also needs to consider whether homeworkers have a safe and reasonable space, security and privacy in which to work. A homeworking risk assessment is mandatory for home-based employees but may be necessary for employees who also work from home occasionally. Line managers should consider this before approving any homeworking requests.

Homeworking may invalidate an employee's home contents insurance policy. Employees are required to check the policy prior to applying and, if successful, provide a copy of the policy wording and schedule to their line manager if their application is granted.

7. Visits to HWCB Premises/Visits to the Employee's Home

Individuals who work from home for a lengthy period of time, which could be for one of the reasons cited in 4.2 above, will be asked to attend the HWCB offices from time to time, if necessary, for purposes such as training, assessment and team briefings. There will be advanced notice given.

HWCB has the right to visit the employee's home for purposes relating to work, including Information Governance and Health and Safety matters. Any request to work from home will be subject to the employee agreeing to visits from their line manager to their home.

Moving home

If employees move home, the homeworking arrangement will be reassessed. If the HWCB considers that the house move would make, or has made, homeworking unsuitable, this may result in the homeworking period coming to an end.

8. Health and Safety

To comply with health and safety legislation, HWCB will ensure the health and safety of homeworkers in the same way as those staff based at the office.

8.1 The following standards will be adhered to:

- Equipment and systems of work in the employee's home are safe.
- The employee's workstation will be safe.
- The employee will inform the CEO promptly of any accidents or dangerous occurrences that happen while they are working from home.
- Training on the safe use of equipment, including DSE, will be provided.
- Risk assessments will be conducted in relation to the individual's duties.
- Homeworkers will agree to work in a safe manner and adhere to health and safety instructions issued by HWCB.
- First aid equipment will be provided by the Company for the homeworker. Employees are covered under the Company's accident insurance policy in their home.
- A specific risk assessment will be done on employees who inform HWCB that they are pregnant. In order for this to take place, homeworking employees who become pregnant should notify their line manager of their pregnancy immediately. More details about what to do is available in the Maternity Policy.

9. Homeworking requirements

Employees must agree, in advance, their working from home arrangements with their line manager.

9.1 The following Homeworking requirements apply:

- 9.1.1. When requesting to work from home the employee must detail why there is a need to work from home, what work will be undertaken and what hours they will be working.
- 9.1.2. Employees will work from an authorised location that has been approved in advance by their line manager.
- 9.1.4. Dependent care (caring for children, relatives or friends) cannot be provided during working hours and alternative arrangements should be made.
- 9.1.5. Data protection, confidentiality and health and safety measures must be in place and documented in a risk assessment.

- 9.1.6. Staff working from home must be contactable via email and telephone during core hours (stated in contracts) but this does not eliminate the need to work their full contracted hours.
- 9.1.7. Should working from home be in addition to an employee's contracted hours then the TOIL procedures should be followed if the employee is eligible to accrue TOIL (i.e. before any additional work is undertaken) the TOIL is authorised, in advance by a line manager.
- 9.1.8. Managers are expected to support staff while working from home as they would while they are in the office.
- 9.1.9. In order to monitor the effectiveness of working from home managers may ask to see what work has been completed.
- 9.1.10. All work undertaken using information technology must meet HWCB requirements. Please refer to the relevant IT policies and the Data Protection Policy.
- 9.1.11. The employee's base remains their designated office.
- 9.1.12. If homeworking becomes unsuitable due to employee conduct or performance, the homeworking arrangement may be terminated immediately. Further disciplinary action may also be taken in line with HWCB policy.

While homeworking is generally categorised as a type of flexible working, employees should not assume that other aspects of flexible working (such as amended hours) are automatically part of a homeworking arrangement.

10. Tax Allowance

Employees may be able to claim tax relief for additional household costs if they have to work at home on a regular basis, either for all or part of the week. This includes if they have to work from home because of a pandemic.

Employees cannot claim tax relief if they choose to work from home.

Additional costs include things like heating, metered water bills, home contents insurance, business calls or a new broadband connection. They do not include costs that would stay the same whether they were working at home or in an office, such as mortgage interest, rent or council tax.

HWCB will **not** claim Tax relief on behalf of the employee for working from home. Tax relief claims are solely the responsibility of the employee.

Employees are able to make a claim directly to HMRC for the allowance for working from home by clicking on this link <https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home>. The questions are straightforward but employees will need to sign up for a government gateway login if they have not previously registered with HMRC.

11. Timescales

With immediate effect.

12. Linked Policies

- Confidentiality Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Employee Code of Conduct Policy
- Flexible Working Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Lone Working Policy
- HWCB Staff Handbook

13. Legislation

- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992
- Equality Act 2010

14. Approval

The HWCB Board will review and approve this policy and make any amendments to this policy on an annual basis to ensure continued legal compliance.

15. Monitoring and Review

The effectiveness of this policy, and its procedures, will be monitored and amended as and when necessary by the Chief Executive Officer. Significant changes will require the approval of the Board of Directors. They will also be reviewed periodically as part of our continuing review of organisational policies.

Policy review date November 2022