Ways of Working (WoW) Policy

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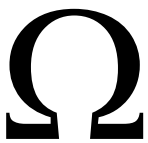

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Purpose	To ensure that managers and employees understand the council's Ways of Working, whilst at the same time, ensuring that they continue to meet legal, operational and individual requirements.		

This policy links to:

- Our Council Plan
- Walsall Proud
- Sickness Absence Policy
- Disciplinary Policy
- Flexi Time and TOIL Policy
- Home Working Safety Management Standard
- Code of Conduct
- Email and Internet Usage Procedural Guidance
- Information Governance Policy Framework
- Video Conference and Recording Guidance
- Right to Request Flexible Working Policy
- Equality and Diversity Protocol
- Organisational Development Strategy
- Workforce Strategy
- Behaviour & Standards Framework
- Performance Policy
- Probation Policy
- Reimbursement of Personal Expenses Policy
- Mobile Device Acceptable Use Procedure
- Data Breach Handling Procedural Guidance
- Accommodation Policy
- Remote Working Outside of the UK Guidance
- Ways of Working Procedures
- Domestic Abuse Workplace Guidance

This list is not exhaustive.

For further advice or guidance on this policy, or if you would like this information in another language or format please contact:

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Walsall Council is PROUD. We are proud of our past, our present and for our future. The council is committed to reducing inequalities and ensuring all potential is maximised and its employment policies, procedures and guidelines are designed to support this vision and deliver the council's priorities.

1.2 The council is committed to creating an environment that provides opportunities for all individuals and communities to fulfil their potential. This policy provides a framework in which employees will be supported to deliver the council's priorities in line with the council's expected behaviours and values; professionalism; leadership; accountability; transparency and ethical.

1.3 The council's values and behaviours are at the core of everything the council deliver and through a culture of continuous improvement the council will increase performance, efficiency and champion the design of services to meet the needs of customers. As a digital by design council, employees will be empowered to deliver new ways of thinking and new ways of working, encouraging innovation and creativity in a learning environment. The council is committed to technological investment to deliver transformation in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its services, both internally and externally.

1.4 This policy framework promotes the council's strategic priority of internal focus ensuring all council services are customer focused effective, efficient and equitable, and helps embed the behaviours and values expected of all employees as part of the Behaviour and Standards Framework.

1.5 Council employees have a duty to demonstrate principles of equality, diversity and inclusion across all interactions ensuring compliance with council policies, procedures and relevant legislation. The council adopts a zero tolerance approach to discrimination and will not accept any form of unlawful or unfair discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender, gender identity, marital or civil partnership status, race, ethnic origin, colour, nationality, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief (or no religion or belief), sexual orientation, class or social background, political belief or Trade Union affiliation. We are committed to equal opportunities and aspire to have a diverse workforce, and an inclusive workplace culture, all of which enable better outcomes for our employees and the local residents we serve. Employees should refer to the equality and diversity protocol for further information.

1.6 This policy provides a framework to support the council's flexible approach to work. The council's ways of working uses the activity based working approach

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('the right location for the right job') enabling employees to work wherever they need to in order to fulfil the requirements of their roles and deliver the councils priorities and outcomes. The council recognises both the business benefits and the wider social and environmental benefits of flexible ways of working, as well as the employee benefits of offering flexible working to support employee work-life balance.

1.7 This policy provides a framework for managing our ways of working and clearly sets out expectations and accountabilities, ensuring that ways of working are managed in a considered, safe and productive manner focusing on performance outputs and that they continue to be beneficial for all parties involved including the residents of Walsall.

1.8 Ways of working policy promotes trust in our employees, making them accountable to deliver the requirements of their roles, empowering employees to choose how, where and when they undertake tasks achieving the best possible performance outcomes, and serving customers in the most effective way (in line with service needs). Managers are supported and developed to effectively manage performance and employees are appraised on outcomes and service delivery rather than the amount of time spent in the office or perceived effort.

1.9 Our customer focused ways of working principles are;

- Customer focused ways of working that are designed to deliver the best outcomes for our residents;
- An outcomes based approach that centers on 'work is what you do, not where you do it';
- Employees will work flexibly based on customer and operational service needs, being accountable and remaining focused on delivering the council's outcomes and priorities;
- Managers will manage within a flexible hybrid environment, being accountable for performance management of individuals and the team(s), setting objectives and monitoring delivery, regular communication and employee development, and health and wellbeing support.

2.0 Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all council employees / workers.

2.2 With the exception of; school based employees / workers where the governing body has delegated authority and for whom separate arrangements apply.

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3.0 Definition

3.1 Ways of working describes how employees / workers work flexibly from a range of workstations, meeting rooms or collaboration spaces within a council building, out in the community, with customers or partners, from employee's homes, other suitable locations or a combination (hybrid) of these based on the customer and business need.

4.0 Principles

4.1 Walsall Council recognises the benefits of being an agile organisation with a flexible approach to work and as such promotes and encourages flexible ways of working where these are appropriate, practical and meet the needs of the business. The application of various elements of the council's ways of working policy will always be subject to service needs first and foremost, and any arrangements for working in a flexible (hybrid) way will depend on whether or not the role can be done effectively and efficiently from an alternative / home base and will meet customer / business need in addition to other considerations such as health, safety, employee wellbeing and data protection. There will be roles where, for example, face to face contact is always necessary or essential equipment is at the office base and therefore flexible (hybrid) working will not be possible.

4.2 The council will apply this policy fairly, consistently and non-discriminately and its application will be based on both service and individual need in line with the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. The council will consider reasonable adjustment requirements for employees with disabilities, as recommended in a display screen equipment (DSE) assessment or by an occupational health specialist and agreed with the manager where this has been deemed necessary. This may include a specialist chair, adjustable desk / workstation and / or other equipment. These arrangements do not automatically exclude employees from working flexibly across locations including home based working. Each situation will need to be considered on a case by case basis and risk assessed accordingly.

4.3 All employees will have a designated office location(s) (such as the Civic Centre / C&G Depot / Locality Buildings) which will be defined by their manager / service area, regardless of the way of working.

4.4 All employees will be expected to attend an office location(s) as and when required, irrelevant of their way of working and must be able to accommodate such requests during their working hours, this includes short notice requests (where practicable) e.g., in order to meet the requirements of other council policies.

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4.5 Ways of working provide the Council with a flexible approach linked to service delivery, as such the council's requirements on how ways of working are implemented may change from time to time.

4.6 Terms and conditions of service remain unchanged and all council policies and procedures will apply regardless of the way of working.

4.7 The council reserves the right to withdraw flexible (hybrid) ways of working if this is deemed necessary. Reasons for this could include;

- The needs of the service are not being met or change;
- The employee is abusing the arrangement;
- The employee cannot meet work objectives;
- There are performance management concerns;
- The arrangement no longer allows health and safety requirements to be met. For example, as a result of a house move the new property is deemed unsuitable following a risk assessment or where alterations to an existing property have an adverse impact upon the safety of the workspace;
- The employee is unable to comply with the policy (e.g. insufficient broadband provision at home) or other council policies or procedures;
- The need to provide additional support to the employee, in relation to their health, safety and wellbeing, attendance and time keeping, training or one to one support, as part of an employment process e.g. disciplinary, capability;
- The arrangements cease to be viable.

This list is not exhaustive.

4.8 Where an employee's role is not deemed to be flexible (hybrid) they may still submit a request for home working in accordance with their statutory right to make a flexible working request (refer to the right to request flexible working policy).

4.9 Digital and Technology Services (DaTS) will provide advice and guidance to managers and employees on equipment and system setup and will provide a return to base support service (home visits will not be conducted).

4.10 Employees are responsible for collecting new/repaired or returning faulty equipment requiring DaTS intervention, it is the employee's responsibility to collect / return the equipment to the office base for collection, repair, investigation, maintenance and this should be done without delay. Any time delay (caused by the employee) in returning faulty equipment for repair that

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prevents the employee working will need to be covered by the employee (e.g. through the use of flexi / annual leave / unpaid leave).

4.11 Employees may live and work anywhere in the UK provided they are able to do the job required of them and can meet the demands of the service (including office attendance and face to face meetings as applicable). This will be different for each service and type of role and be determined by the service / manager.

4.12 Requests for remote working outside of the UK may only be approved in exceptional circumstances for a period not exceeding 3 months (90 days) within a tax year (April to April). Where remote working outside of the UK is agreed a 'temporary remote working agreement' must be completed and signed by both the employee and manager (refer to the remote working outside of the UK guidance).

5.0 Accountabilities

5.1 Managers are accountable for the following;

- Applying this policy and procedure consistently, fairly and objectively in accordance with the council's aim and priorities and clearly demonstrate the council's management behaviours and values, seeking further advice and guidance from HR where necessary;
- Identifying opportunities and consider requests for, and promote and support the different way of working, where it meets the council's objectives;
- Managing and monitoring performance outcomes of all employees/workers including those working in a flexible (hybrid) way and ensuring any corrective management actions are progressed as necessary;
- Monitoring and supporting the health and wellbeing of all employees/workers including those working in a flexible (hybrid) way and ensuring on going and regular contact and any supportive interventions are progressed in a timely and sensitive manner (where relevant);
- Supporting and maintaining communications with all employees / workers including those working in a flexible (hybrid) way fostering and promoting an inclusive working culture.
- Ensuring collectively with the employee that all relevant risk assessments are completed including a home suitability assessment and DSE assessment;
- Ensuring that Information Asset Owners understand the ways of working policy and how it affects the information assets stored, accessed and managed;
- Ensuring collectively with the employee that working conditions include the most appropriate use of technology to reduce the production of paper or

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manual records and that records management and data protection requirements and processes are in place to comply with the obligations of that service area;
- Ensuring that an IT and workstation inventory is maintained for any items that leave council premises and that they and the employee are aware of the responsibilities on each to return / retrieve any such equipment when the flexible (hybrid) working arrangements cease;
- Ensuring they are familiar with the home working safety management standard;

5.2 Employees are accountable for the following;

- All employees should support the delivery of the council's aim and priorities, clearly demonstrating the council's behaviours and values;
- Actively engage in employment practices and processes in which they are involved and ensure they understand this procedure, seeking further advice and guidance from managers where necessary;
- Proactively ensuring that regular communications (as required) are maintained across teams, with colleagues, peers and managers supporting an inclusive and connected working culture;
- Managing their working time and location(s) to deliver required performance outcomes in a customer focused way in line with service / manager requirements. Employees / workers are responsible for ensuring they attend office location(s) as and when required by the council, their manager, the service, and their performance deliverables;
- Complying with all council policies, procedures, the Code of Conduct and Information Governance Policy Framework and to adhere to the same working standards regardless of the way of working;
- Ensuring collectively with their manager that all relevant risk assessments are completed including a home suitability assessment and DSE assessment, ensuring any issues identified are flagged to their line manager;
- Ensuring collectively with their manager that an IT and workstation inventory is maintained for any items they use outside of council premises and that they take responsibility for the safe return of such items when the flexible (hybrid) working arrangements cease;
- Ensuring they follow and abide by any service level processes or guidance for compliance of confidentiality and records management or retention;
- Ensuring that their contact details such as emergency contact numbers, home address and post codes are always up to date and accurately maintained in council systems;
- Complying with the advice and requirements of this policy and procedure.

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6.0 Ways of Working

6.1 Ways of working enables a workplace culture where employees can make use of a variety of locations and technological tools to deliver their work in the context of efficient and effective service delivery and being customer focused.

6.2 When working in council office location(s) employees will be required to follow any corporate booking system(s) in place at the time to book a variety of workspaces including meetings rooms and collaboration spaces (unless their team has a dedicated space managed by the team). For further information refer to the Corporate Landlord intranet pages.

6.3 The council operates a clear desk policy, when working in a council office all employees should ensure that the workspace they have used remains free of documentation, personal belongings and is left clean and tidy at the end of use / end of the day. A clear desk policy should also be followed by flexible (hybrid) / home workers, (refer to the ways of working procedures, section 4.6 – 4.11 Clear workstation and screen).

Flexible (hybrid) working

6.4 The reasons for working in an office when working flexibly could include;

- Customer engagement;
- Induction and introductory meetings;
- Collaboration and problem solving;
- Team building / meetings;
- A professional requirement for supervision;
- Professional development and training;
- One to one support / APCs;
- Performance Management;
- Meetings where body language is important (negotiations, difficult situations / conversations etc.);
- Administration (dealing with post, scanning, access to hard copy records etc.);
- Event management;
- Where certain job duties cannot be performed remotely;
- Connectivity;
- Wellbeing (to support mental, social, emotional and physical wellbeing)
- To address any specific concerns that may arise and ensure appropriate support is being provided;
- To focus if the home setting does not allow for this;

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- To permanently or temporarily ensure health and safety standards are being maintained;
- As an agreed reasonable adjustment.

6.5 Whilst working in a flexible (hybrid) way employees are reminded they should adhere to all council employment policies and procedures, including the requirements of the Working Time Regulations and the council's flexi time and TOIL policy. Any abuse of these, or any other council policies or the ways of working arrangements will be viewed as very serious and may lead to disciplinary action.

6.6 Employees who find themselves in the position of having to respond to an urgent, unexpected domestic demand should consult with their manager (as they would do in a fixed office location) and, where relevant and in agreement with their manager, complete their time recording according to the hours actually worked.

6.7 If an employee is unable to work due to sickness absence, they must follow the council's sickness absence policy. Employees will be required to participate in a return to work interview and sickness absence review meeting (if applicable) after a period of sickness absence as set out in the sickness absence policy.

6.8 Employees must report to the office as requested by managers for any work related meetings, performance reviews / APCs, absence review meetings, face to face supervision, workshops and training. These meetings can also be held electronically (via telephone or video conferencing e.g. MS Teams) as appropriate, determined by the manager or as a reasonable adjustment.

6.9 Employees should use all available technology to ensure they communicate their presence and availability clearly with colleagues and management, such as ensuring their MS Outlook / Teams calendar is up to date and reflects times when they are and are not working.

6.10 Employees should be using the out of office automatic replies facility in MS Outlook /Teams when not working during standard office hours and on non-working days (including annual leave, flexi leave etc.).Out of office replies should have a specific end date (not be open / ongoing) to give an indication of when the employee will be available and should also include who to contact as an alternative if the email / query is urgent.

6.11 Employees should ensure that their MS Teams status is set appropriately so that colleagues / customers can check availability before calling to avoid disruption. Avoid blocking times in calendars that indicate 'busy' all the time

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and when using your diary to plan work activity remember to update your status so that you show you are able to receive calls as you would in an office environment whilst working.

6.12 As the council works flexibly employees may receive emails when others are working, however employees are not expected to respond if it is outside of their normal working hours. Flexible (hybrid) / home working does not mean there is any expectation on employees / workers to be available 24/7. Employees are encouraged to think about the times they are sending emails and, where useful / considerate to others, use the email delayed delivery function.

6.13 Employees should be mindful of best practice and appropriate use of emails, such as, copying only appropriate people into emails, using descriptive subject headings, double checking recipients are correct before sending and maintaining Council standards of behaviour during email exchanges (i.e. tone and language used in emails).

6.14 In meeting service needs some employees will be required to hold face to face meetings with customers/service users and shouldn't be reliant solely on telephone, online or emails and should manage customer expectations through regular and ongoing contact.

6.15 Etiquette on MS Teams meetings:

- cameras should be turned on for MS Teams to support connectivity and wellbeing unless there is a specific reason for them not to be on, where meeting organisers / chairs / management ask for camera's to be on for specific meetings this is a reasonable management request;
- use appropriate background images or blur vision to minimize background distractions;
- stay muted while not talking and use the virtual hand icon rather than interrupting unless the meeting organiser / chair has requested an alternative approach (a more informal approach may be suitable for smaller meetings but not practical for large groups);
- use the chat feature to ask questions, make suggestions or share resources to reduce crosstalk or disruptions unless the organiser / chair indicates otherwise;
- employees are expected to act professionally in line with council policies and procedures and maintain the council's behavioral standards during all MS Teams meetings. Employees are reminded meetings, both internal and external may be recorded and that they are representing the council during all exchanges.

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6.16 When making work related calls (phone or MS Teams) employees working remotely should ask others to leave the room or they should go elsewhere to make the call, where possible. Employees should ensure that the volume is not loud enough for others to overhear and use a headset where possible.

6.17 It is not acceptable to make work related calls or to dial into a MS Teams meeting whilst driving even if using hands free devices. Due care and attention should be paid to the road whilst driving.

6.18 Employees should answers calls promptly, setting up voicemail and call forwarding to others in the team, when unable to answer a call. Service areas will have applicable standards for answering calls and responding to queries, which employees should adhere to and service provision must be maintained as if employees were in a fixed office location, this includes telephone cover across standard business hours and the utilisation of hunt groups on MS telephony to ensure calls are not missed.

6.19 Employees should build space between meetings, with recommended 25 or 50 minute meetings being set (instead of 30/60 minutes) to help ensure meetings aren't running back to back with protected times for lunch / breaks, to prevent long periods of DSE work and to encourage physical movement during the working day. Employees should plan their working time to ensure optimum productivity, using some blocked out 'focus time' during the week helps to ensures some 'meeting free' space, however this needs to be balanced with being available to customers / colleagues in line with service delivery.

6.20 Employees are encouraged to plan and use annual leave as required to ensure they are having appropriate and sufficient breaks from working (this can be particularly difficult when working from home) and are discouraged from accessing work information during such breaks (it helps to keep laptops out of sight during non-working days).

6.21 Employees are reminded that there are e-learning resources, e-books and audio books accessible via the Learning and Development (L&D) pages of the intranet should they need support with time management or organisational skills etc.

Travelling and subsistence

6.22 Walsall Council will reimburse employees for costs incurred on travel, subsistence and other expenses in the course of official council business in accordance with the reimbursement of personal expenses policy, subject to the provisions outlined below.

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6.23 For flexible (hybrid) workers, the designated base for the purpose of travel claims will be their designated office location.

6.24 Mileage or other travel costs will not be payable on journeys from home to the fixed work base or designated office base for ordinary commuting, including where employees are required to attend the office for meetings, supervision, training etc. (This includes where the employee is a flexible (hybrid) worker).

6.25 When travelling directly from home to meetings, including site visits / client visits / customer visits and vice versa, home to designated office base and / or designated office base to home mileage must be deducted;

- Employees only need to consider adjusting mileage claims for two journeys - the first journey of the day (home to first meeting) and last journey of the day (work location to home);
- If the mileage for either journey is greater than that between home and the designated office base, then the excess mileage can be claimed;
- If the mileage for either journey is less than that between home and designated office based, then there is no mileage to be claimed;
- For all other business journeys during the working day the actual mileage travelled can be claimed.

(This is due to HMRC rules, which does not allow for tax relief on journeys considered to be ordinary commuting).

6.26 In addition employees will not be permitted to claim car park expenses when travelling to their designated work base for work related meetings etc.

6.27 Work to home and home to work travel must be done in employee's own time, when travelling to their designated work base, i.e. ordinary commuting (including having to visit the office for a meeting, supervision, training etc.);

- If working at home at the beginning of the day before attending work, then employees must clock out at the beginning of their journey to work and clock in when arriving.
- When leaving work to work at home at the end of the day, then employees must clock out at the beginning of their journey home and clock in again when arriving at home to start work.
- Business travel after the first journey to work and before the last journey home is permitted within works time.

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6.28 Where travelling to site visits, client visits, customer visits, service users etc… from / to a home location;

- If you clock in at home and commence part of your working day and then subsequently travel to a location then you do not need to clock out for this journey – it is considered as part of your working day.
- If you have not commenced work at home prior to the journey, you should not clock in work until you arrive at your destination. The only exception is where travel is excessive (for example a client visit which is out of borough), the additional time (excluding the normal traveling time to designated office) may be recorded with management approval.
- If as part of your working day you have travelled to a location and then return home to continue work then you do not need to clock out for the journey home – it is considered part of your working day.
- If as part of your working day you have travelled to a location and will not be continuing to work once you return home, then you need to clock out before the journey home.

Utilities

6.29 Employees will be responsible for the cost of utilities (i.e. heating or electricity), phone lines (including their own broadband), lighting, ventilation equipment, running costs and any additional cost to home insurance, and will not be reimbursed by the council. However, employees may be able to claim tax-relief from the government, see the below link for further information: https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home

6.30 It is the employee's responsibility to ensure all such services are in place to adequate effect in order for them to be able to effectively perform their role and comply with health and safety requirements. Where the employee is unable to ensure provision of such in order to effectively carry out their role to the required standards (including when there is a significant outage of services), they will need to make arrangements to return to work at an office / alternative location until normal service resumes. Alternatively, if short term the manager could consider approving leave / flexi requests subject to the needs of the service.

Access to property

6.31 The council reserves the right to visit employees in their home at agreed times for work-related purposes, including health and safety matters. It is a condition of our ways of working arrangements that an employee agree to such visits for the purposes of work related matters, (where these cannot be dealt with

through an office visit or electronic communications or doing so would not be appropriate) such as;

- delivering and collecting work, equipment, furniture or any other council property;
- performance monitoring and feedback;
- ensuring health, safety and security;
- any other work-related purposes where appropriate;
- Meetings in line with other employment policies which give the right to trade union representation (e.g. sickness absence reviews).

7.0 Managing Ways of Working

7.1 Regular supervision must take place between the manager and the employee / worker to discuss workloads, outputs, outcomes and maintain structured discussion and feedback. In addition, managers should ensure contact is maintained to provide appropriate health and wellbeing support to flexible (hybrid) workers to ensure they continue to feel included and connected as part of the team. Further information on managing flexible (hybrid) teams is available on L&D intranet pages (including Bookboon resources) and Connected Working intranet pages.

Agree ways of working

7.2 Managers should make sure that employees understand fully what is expected of them in their role and how they are expected to work with others. In order to effectively manage service / operational and individual performance, it is really important that managers clearly set out performance targets and outcomes. Managers should be clear about how the team will work together, how the team update each other and how frequently, as this maintains a sense of structure and continuity for all. For example daily huddles, weekly check-ins, regular one to ones and team meetings.

7.3 A daily / weekly virtual huddle is good for keeping connected as a team, to check in on wellbeing as well as work updates, and these should be frequent but needn't be long.

Set expectations and build trust

7.4 Employees should be given the ability to self-manage based on the needs of the service and given regular constructive feedback on developments and issues relating to their way of working and their workload. It is helpful if feedback on performance is regular and continual and part of normal day to

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day manager / employee discussions. Managers should encourage connectivity amongst the team outside of specifically set meetings / huddles.

7.5 It can be difficult for managers who rely on assessing performance by what they see employees doing, or overhearing telephone conversations, or by the number of hours spent in the office. Managers should be clear about expected outcomes and ensure these are clearly understood, trusting the employee to get on with work and raising issues where they have concerns. The focus should be on delivering results and outcomes in relation to objectives rather than traditional observations.

Agree how work performance will be supervised, monitored and measured

7.6 The manager and employee should agree when, where and how they meet to review performance and undertake supervision, whether this be in the office or elsewhere, (bearing in mind the confidentiality of information being discussed), or via telephone / MS Teams, if it can be demonstrated that this is an efficient and effective method. Managers should utilise face to face meetings where there are health, safety and wellbeing factors and also when discussing matters that the employee may require support with and in order to monitor body language and adjust delivery of the message as necessary.

Communication and feedback

7.7 Managers should communicate regularly, not just to allocate / check work or when things go wrong, but to share information, updates and learning from other meetings / projects, and the team should be encouraged to do the same. Sharing praise and recognition is also important.

7.8 Make time for social conversation to foster team relationships and reduce feelings of isolation and encourage the use of video calling to maintain face to face contact. Encourage social interaction with colleagues during breaks / lunchtime, such as virtual coffee breaks and quizzes, where team members can choose to participate should they wish.

7.9 Remote conversations can easily be misinterpreted as it is harder to read body language, tone of voice and other visual / audio cues. Stay mindful of this when delivering difficult messages or feedback and always think should this be a face to face meeting.

7.10 Managers and colleagues will need to be more aware of signs of stress:

- Are individual's irritable, frustrated, angry or confused?

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- How do they seem on screen? Have they been visible?
- Listen out for tone of voice through emails and telephone calls
- Are they struggling with work?
- Do they know when to shut off? Look at the hours they are working and keep an eye on the times emails are sent.

7.11 It is vital that employees do not feel disconnected, isolated or abandoned by their manager / team, as this can affect stress levels and mental health. This means employees and their managers may have to make extra effort to keep in touch due to the different ways of working, and not rely solely on emails to communicate. To support inclusivity and team development , managers are encouraged to have face to face team meetings on an ongoing basis (frequency to be set dependent on service) even where there is no specific need in order to support connectivity and team morale.

Supporting health and wellbeing

7.12 Managers should make employees aware of:

- how they can be reached in an emergency;
- how they can get support from colleagues, and;
- who to contact in the absence of their line manager.

7.13 Managers should keep their calendars visible, where possible and maintain a virtual open door. Managers should ensure that employees receive the appropriate training and support to enable effective ways of working. Managers should also hold regular team meetings with time to check on wellbeing.

7.14 Managers should remind employees of the health and wellbeing support available from the council's employee assistance programme (EAP) and occupational health services, as well as the availability of the council's mental health first aiders. Further details of how to access these services and other support is available on the HR intranet pages.

7.15 Managers may consider as a temporary measure fixed office working where necessary to support employee well-being (mental, social, financial, physical and emotional wellbeing e.g. support for employees experiencing domestic abuse).

Changes to the ways of working arrangements

7.16 There may be occasions where the ways of working arrangements need to be changed at short notice due to absent team members, surge in workload,

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specific projects, system or process changes etc., which require an office presence. The manager has the flexibility to change arrangements when necessary to enable service delivery needs to be met. However, where possible reasonable notice should be given, especially for planned events (e.g. team events, meetings).

7.17 Employees who are currently being monitored under another council policy such as performance, sickness absence, disciplinary or probation, may need to be based for the majority of their working time at a fixed office location where they have direct access to colleagues (as appropriate) and / or a manager to allow their workload to be monitored and appropriate support to be provided.

Managing working time

7.18 Managers should monitor employees to ensure they are not under or over working. Some employees who work remotely can feel the need to work harder to justify their position. A manager who recognises that an employee is over-working should have a quiet word, encourage the employee to take breaks and not work excessive hours. Managers should also monitor the buildup of flexi time being accrued as well as ensuring employees are effectively managing annual leave and are taking appropriate work breaks.

7.19 Managers and employees can agree when work can be performed subject to meeting the needs of their customers and maintaining business operation. Where employees have to provide a service during standard office hours, they should be available and contactable within these hours. The employee should also make themselves available to attend the office as and when required (during their working hours), this may be for pre-arranged meetings but also at short notice, where essential to comply with other council policies (e.g. alcohol and drug testing or management fact finding meetings).

7.20 Flexible (hybrid/home) working should not be used as a substitute for having appropriate childcare / pet care / dependent caring arrangements. Alternative care arrangements should be made as would be the case if the employee were office based.

7.21 It is also important to remember that if an employee is working remotely from home that does not mean they are available 24/7.

7.22 Managers should ensure employees are aware of and follow the required processes for how to record working time, how to book leave and report absence, so this can be consistently applied following the normal procedures, where possible.

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7.23 Any abuse of ways of working arrangements, particularly flexible (hybrid) working, will be viewed as very serious and may lead to disciplinary action.

Performance management / addressing unsatisfactory performance

7.24 Performance management of flexible (hybrid) employees should be consistent with that of fixed office employees, all should be treated fairly and not discriminated against. Assessment of performance should be focused on outcomes / data insights and whether or not objectives have been met.

7.25 Where a manager has any concerns they should have an informal discussion first as this may clear up any misunderstanding and address any issues. The manager can then provide support if necessary, which may include a temporary return to a fixed office location.

7.26 If performance does not improve the manager may need to act further in accordance with the performance and ill health capability policy. Where an employee's performance is not acceptable, the manager should consider whether a return to work in a fixed office location either on a temporary or permanent basis (where practical) would be beneficial as part of a performance action plan to support necessary improvements.

8.0 Managing arrangements and risks (Ways of Working Procedures)

8.1 All flexible (hybrid) workers will be required to complete a DSE assessment and home suitability / simple risk assessment form based on their home working location(s) and these must be kept up to date if the employee changes the place they work from (e.g. moving home or the room they work in). For further information, refer to the ways of working procedures, section 2.0 Health and Safety.

8.2 The manager is responsible for ensuring an IT and workstation inventory list is completed and maintained for all items given to the employee for their use remotely / at home. The manager and employee should retain a copy of the inventory list and are collectively responsible for ensuring the return of all equipment on termination. For further information, refer to the ways of working procedures, section 3.0 Equipment, furniture and consumables.

8.3 The Ways of Working Procedures include further information on the following areas and should be read in conjunction with this policy;

- Health and Safety;
- Equipment, furniture and consumables;

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- Information and data protection;
- Risk and insurance.

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