

Flexible Working - A Guide for Managers

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Introduction

Twenty years ago, there was a widespread belief among commentators that the defining feature of the future UK labour market would be radically reduced working hours and increased leisure time. Fast forward to today, the year in which mobile is set to overtake desktop to access the Internet, and work and leisure hours have become blurred by our increasingly 'mobile' lives.

Jobs are being done on the move, at any time of day, in almost any location.

You know as managers how far 'Flexible Working' has progressed from five years ago. We now have developed creative ways to work flexibly that has led to improved service delivery, while giving work life balance to staff. Flexible working has been recognised as increased quality of outcomes through diversity of skills, and improved ability to attract talent. In order for flexible working to continue to work effectively, managers will need to place a greater emphasis on objectives, targets, outcomes, monitoring and review. Flexible working is most effective when organisational, customer and individual needs overlap. Work is something you do, not somewhere you go.

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The guidance below is intended to assist managers to implement a corporate approach to flexible working by highlighting areas to consider. This guidance is not meant to be prescriptive, as effective flexible working procedures will differ across the various services/teams in WCC. This is due to the variety of jobs, environments and roles within WCC.

Whilst the user needs are important, the business requirement must drive the solution. The key point to make is that all decisions must be made objectively and without any bias. The flexible working approach should provide a platform for future growth so that the longer-term requirements of the organisation are considered.

HR & OD Workforce Strategy 2014 - 2018

The HR / OD's purpose is to ensure that the Council has the workforce that it needs to deliver its objectives, that it is motivated, developed, and works to ensure that delivery and that the services provided within those objectives reflects the needs of the different groups and communities who live in Warwickshire. Click [link](#) to Workforce Strategy.

Flexible Working & the 6 Workforce Strategy themes

It's important to understand how Flexible Working interacts with the 6 deliverable themes of the Workforce Strategy and also the links to the Council's core competencies. Flexible Working has to support the way we work to enable the Council to deliver services in an efficient, cost effective and customer focused way.

1. Leadership

All leaders need to role model Flexible Working to adapt quickly and flexibly to new demands and drive change. Also, to continuously improve the way services are delivered through the effective use of innovation and technology.

2. Productivity

Increasingly behaviour change has to take place to drive continuous improvement through Flexible Working, smarter working and more importance on outcomes. Leading to health and well-being benefits such as reduced stress.

3. Collaboration

We need a clarity of joint vision and purpose when working collaboratively, which Flexible Working can enable. All leaders can empower and support people to work collaboratively across organisational boundaries.

4. Efficiency

Flexible Working will help you review working methods to implement effective change for benefit of customers. We need changes in behaviour to challenge constructively and develop more commercial thinking. We need to consider how Flexible Working will

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impact on the operational influence of strategic changes on resources. Flexible Working will help with managing staff attendance as it can help to reduce sickness absence rates.

5. Flexibility

Flexible Working will help deliver services by translating strategic objectives into effective operational actions. Flexible Working will identify the generic IT skills needed to work flexibly. Flexible Working makes the best use of working arrangements to meet the needs of the service.

6. Agility

Flexible Working will lead to smarter workforce planning to make best use of the workforce and the talent available to deliver the changing service requirements. Flexible Working will help to align priorities for learning and development with the changing organisational priorities.

WFW [DP041](#) Flexible Working eLearning

To support staff and managers to understand flexible working better we have developed this eLearning module on WILMa. The aim of the e-learning Flexible Working module is to provide a comprehensive overview to flexible working, aims to raise awareness of the benefits of Flexible Working to your service, yourself and most importantly to improving service delivery to your customers. It is only a starting point and there is other support available with workshops, policies and guidance documents to help you with your journey.

Corporate Accommodation Standard

The Property Rationalisation Programme is driven by the need for a consistent use of building space. The need for the efficient use of overall floor space, open plan working, shared office space, change in office culture, pointed to the necessity for a Corporate Accommodation Standard. You can access the Corporate Accommodation Standard document via this [Link](#).

Underlying Principles of the Corporate Accommodation Standard

To realise the benefits of working in the shared office space changes are necessary to get the best from the Corporate Accommodation Standards. A set of underlying principles are necessary to make the transition from working in an old office accommodation to working in the “new” office space, as follows:-

Different thinking - focus on sharing resources

- shared desks & fuzzy boundaries
- clear desks & welcoming areas
- reduced physical storage

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Different thinking - trust & empowerment

- flexibility assessed on roles (not individuals)
- clarity on Flexible Working agreements
- activity based working - right space at right time

Different thinking - technology

- key information is available any time, any place, any where
- get the best from technology - new channels for communication

The “new” office space will be open plan with new furniture including chairs and will operate a clear desk policy. Each team member will be given a locker with a plastic box to secure their Laptop/Tablet and other personal items. There will be reduced storage with each team member having one locker and one shelf in a tambour unit. There will be shared workspaces and team zones including flexibility to share desks in other team zones. There will be one Resource Room and Kitchen for all teams within the open plan area. Dependent on the space available there may be a collaboration room, activity based working zones and quiet rooms.

Role Assessment

The models within ‘Flexible Working’ will not suit every type of role. Managers should make an objective assessment of the suitability of posts and individual circumstances giving due regard to individual and service needs, as well as the potential benefits to individuals and the council.

The assessment should consider the

- Suitability of the role and service needs.
- Cost effectiveness of remote/flexible working.
- Suitability of the working environments.

Not all jobs have the scope for ‘Flexible Working’. Many of the jobs in the Council are concerned with providing a direct service to the public, in a fixed location, whether this is a person’s home, library or office.

Roles which do not demand time spent entirely in one specific place, may be suitable for consideration.

Traditional management techniques that rely on close physical supervision will become impractical with flexible working. The following key areas will need to be addressed to develop trust between managers and employees, together with the need for clearly identified work objectives and outcomes together with continual dialogue and feedback.

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Key management issues to consider will include:

- Communication & Support
- Performance Management
- Working Patterns and Processes
- Health & Safety

It must be demonstrated that the move to 'Flexible Working' will not be detrimental to the speed or quality of services provided or to the efficient working of the team.

Top Tip

- **Technology can be an enabler in flexible working but should not be the driver. Consider changes in process first before deciding on a technological solution.**

Generally, roles which are suitable for 'Flexible Working' will have the following characteristics:-

- A high level of knowledge rather than manual work.
- Few physical requirements (for example face-to-face contact at a fixed location, manual handling, bulky equipment or storage requirement).
- Clearly defined outputs/outcomes.
- Milestones and timescales clearly outlined so work can be planned and performance monitored.
- Clear methods of communication.

Flexible working will provide the opportunity for employees to have some flexibility in determining their own working pattern. The working arrangement of this will need to be discussed and agreed beforehand.

Work which involves high levels of frequent travelling, whether commuting from home to base, or travelling between client bases, may also benefit from flexible working'.

Factors that will need to be explored:-

- How the service will be affected
- How the working patterns of other team members fit with flexible workers in the team
- Being available for face to face contact, or communication with staff who might be managed by a flexible worker
- The individual's personal needs and circumstances to enable them to work for Warwickshire e.g. parental responsibilities, carer responsibilities, and work/life balance.
- The potential isolation of long periods of flexible working
- The need to keep in touch with work and wider issues
- The need to attend meetings, seminars and training courses

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- The elements of the work which cannot be done completely whilst working flexibly.
- How you will manage the team if some of your working area is open to others as hot-desking.
- Any specific individual requirements for equipment/accessibility/workplace adjustments

Communication & Support

This is a vital component for flexible working to be effective. It is essential that regular communication is maintained, to ensure that individual isolation is reduced and that flexible workers and on-site colleagues continue to feel part of the organisation and team. Communication isn't one way – flexible workers have an equal responsibility to communicate with their manager and colleagues. It is recognised that good communication with partners and customers will be vital to consider as part of any flexible working implementation.

Methods of communication should ensure that there are both formal and informal opportunities for staff to share information. Below are some examples: -

- Regular supervision as per group protocols.
- Regular joint meetings such as attendance at team briefings/meetings or peer meeting.
- Regular defined attendance at the office base.
- Regular telephone, Instant Messaging and email contact.
- Electronic calendar to be kept up to date with movements.

Top Tips

- **Consider using facilities such as a whiteboard to create a visual display of where people are working on a daily basis (don't wipe clean until all staff have been traced!)**
- **Consider using Group Calendars**

Protocols and clear guidelines should be established for:-

- the decisions that employees can make on their own away from the main office base and those that need to be referred to the manager/team;
- arrangements for flexible workers to have a timely receipt of internal documents and mail etc., including urgent messages which could affect the service being provided;
- flexible workers to make a timely response to others' e-mails, Instant Messages or phone calls, ensuring corporate standards are met;

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- set contact times for flexible workers to be available to respond to e-mail/telephone messages and receive redirected calls from the main office;
- what the office-based team members will tell service users/customers about the whereabouts/availability of flexible workers to avoid them appearing remote/difficult to access or being contacted at inappropriate times;
- the action a flexible worker is to take if they require to speak to a manager when not in the office;
- whether employees will record working hours and the method for doing this;
- the action(s) an employee should take if he/she feels isolated or unable to cope with the workload or work planning.

Flexible workers must attend County Council offices to attend regular supervision/team/service meetings, as requested by their line manager and/or for training sessions or simply for team communications.

Top Tip

- ***Set regular meeting dates in advance of working flexibly so that individuals can plan around these.***

Performance Management

The main requirement of managing flexible working is to manage results/outcomes rather than the process. This means that managers should identify how individual performance is to be monitored and maintained. Ideally this will include the following:-

What needs to be done differently?	What will remain the same?
Set and agree clear and tangible objectives with suitable targets and realistic performance measures	Monitor and manage sickness leave and annual leave in line with the Council's policies and procedures
Detailed planning of the work to be done and roles	Incidents/accident that occur whilst flexible working need to be reported in the normal manner.

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Establish effective ways of monitoring performance and providing regular support, feedback and appraisal of work produced	Employees should ensure that they take suitable breaks as required by the Working Time Regulations and WCC Flexible Working Policy
Clarify the operational processes and procedures · Ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for the collection and delivery of work	Mileage claims or other travel expenses on business journeys will be submitted in the normal manner and be approved by the employee's manager.
Review how effectively the flexible worker is communicating. Are they keeping up to date on work matters? Are they providing responsive feedback to all relevant parties.	Carry out systematic performance development reviews/appraisals at appropriate intervals and where necessary arrange appropriate training courses, e.g. prioritising workloads, time management.

Individual Employee Needs

There are many different reasons why people might want to work in a flexible way. At an individual level, this might be related to a disability which makes daily attendance at an office difficult or childcare or other caring responsibilities which would be assisted through spending part of the week at home. However, home-workers must separate domestic and work activities and commitments as far as is reasonably practicable. It must also be clear when staff are working or not working due to liability issues when accidents occur.

Personal Characteristics

Individuals involved in working flexibly would need to develop the following:-

- Good communication skills, to ensure that necessary communication can be effectively carried out in a structured way.
- Good time management skills.
- The ability to work unsupervised away from the structure of the office.
- Good assertion skills, to ensure that they are able to ask for help when needed and to establish boundaries between home and the rest of life
- A self-focused approach and an ability to work with minimal supervision and support.
- An ability to work with minimal social contact.
- Be capable of balancing work and domestic responsibilities.
- A flexible approach to both work scheduling and the need to maintain office contact.

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Top Tip

- ***Discuss these areas prior to establishing a flexible working approach – plan in development activities which could support the individual in developing and honing these skills.***

Practical Issues

At an operational level, the following should be agreed and recorded:-

Core Working Times

There will be core times that managers will need to ensure that there is a service available for their customers. Flexible working may provide employees with greater flexibility with working hours; e.g. Family Support staff may find it appropriate to make customer calls outside of office hours, if this suits the employee and customer, and is agreed with the manager under the Council's Flexible Working arrangements. Although flexible working may allow the employee to take advantage of this flexibility, an employee's total contractual hours are not affected by flexible working arrangements. Employees must agree an appropriate working pattern, and any variation, with their managers in advance, so that planning for any cover can be more easily managed. Further, managers need to ensure flexible working does not lead to excessive hours being worked. A system for recording hours spent at work may be appropriate to avoid excessive working hours. This should be identified when agreeing core working times. A timesheet is available on the intranet under 'Flexible Working'.

Refer to the Flexible Working policy for high level guidance in this area.

Additions or changes to the contract of employment

Where a manager has any queries related to contractual changes then they should contact their HR Advisor.

Trial Period

An initial trial period for the flexible working arrangement should be agreed between the employee and their manager, at the end of which the success of the new arrangements should be evaluated. The Flexible Working Policy recommends a period of 12 weeks.

Health and safety

Under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSWA) employers have a duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees. This includes employees working remotely and flexible workers when undertaking WCC business. Most of the

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regulations made under HSWA apply to flexible/remote workers as well as to employees working at a fixed work location. These include, for example:

- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations.
- Health & Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations
- Provision and use of Work Equipment Regulations.

WCC Health and Safety policies are put in place to enable WCC to meet legal compliance. The manager is responsible for ensuring that the following are completed before flexible working arrangements commence so as to ensure we meet our legal and WCC requirements:-

- Flexible Working Agreement
- DSE e-learning module and self-assessment on WILMa
- Flexible working risk assessment form
- Home working risk assessment form (if a contracted home worker)

Further details and guidance can be found on the intranet under Helping you Work, Health & Safety, A-Z, [DSE](#) (link). Once the forms and risk assessments have been completed in conjunction with the employee, you will need to keep a copy and give the employee a copy.

Information Compliance

The measures taken to protect information when working outside the office should be the same as those taken in the office. Material must remain in the worker's personal care and normal precautions to ensure confidentiality and security should be in place. Documents, memory sticks and discs should be stored securely when not in use. You may be asked to use particular security measures for pieces of equipment. All laptops, tablets and memory sticks will be encrypted. Toshiba tablet users will use fingerprint recognition software to store material within a 'safe' folder.

Equipment

Essential equipment will be provided where considered necessary to the job and/or where necessary to ensure communications are maintained. The equipment provided will remain the property of the Council and staff will be expected to take all reasonable care and use it only for official purposes.

Tax Implications

The Inland Revenue regards equipment and facilities provided at home as available for private use. In order to overcome any tax liability in respect of this it is essential that any equipment provided remains the property of the Council and is unavailable for private use. For further information please read the [TAX FAQs](#) on the Staff, Partners and Practitioners Internet site under HR A to Z, in the MFW A to Z section.

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Insurance

Home-workers should check with their own insurance companies that the cover provided through their own household policies is adequate and is not invalidated by working from home. See the Staff, Partners and Practitioners Internet site under HR A to Z, in the MFW A to Z section for guidance on [insurance](#) provided by WCC.

Mortgage and Tenancy Agreements

While unlikely to impact on individual mortgage or tenancy agreements, contracted home-workers are advised to check with their mortgage lender/landlord that there are no specific restrictions on the use of the home. Individuals must ensure that occupation of the home is not subject to terms and conditions which prevent home-working.

Council Tax and Planning Permission

Using part of the home as an office will not result in business rates being applied. Similarly, there should be no need to apply for planning permission for 'change of use' in the home, unless this is likely to have significant impact on the surrounding environment (for example regular lorry deliveries).

Travel and Subsistence

Flexible workers will use the office as designated in their contract as their main place of work. Contracted home workers will use their home as place of work. Please refer to the Travel Code of Conduct on the HR pages on the intranet for rules on payment of travel and subsistence.

Broadband, Heating, Lighting and Electricity

For flexible workers, no allowance will be payable in respect of broadband, heating, lighting and electricity used at home. Where work calls are made on private telephones, staff can claim reimbursement of costs subject to prior agreement with your manager and proof of calls made.

ICT Support

Technical support and assistance will be provided through the ICT support desk. Arrangements for accessing this will be agreed beforehand.

Terms and conditions

The general terms and conditions of employment for flexible workers are the same as for office-based employees. Refer to the Flexible Working Policy for high level guidance in this area.

Admin Support

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Managers should consider what arrangements have to be set up to ensure that there are appropriate facilities for employees who need to photocopy, mail distribution, stationery, taking phone calls, faxes etc.

Data Protection

Where a formal meeting or contact is required with clients, service users or other parties, care should be exercised in respect of providing private information such as home address or telephone number. Meetings should not take place at an employee's home address.

Appendix 1 Manager's Checklist for flexible working

Questions	Yes/No	Comments/Actions to take
Policy		
Have you understood the Flexible Working Policy? Do you have any questions?		
Have you prepared your business case which clearly outlines the benefits to be realised?		
Roles and Process		
Does the nature of the work easily lend itself to the setting of work targets and performance monitoring?		
Will the proposal to working flexibly have any impact on service delivery or the remaining employees in the office?		
How might your current processes change under flexible working?		
Have you considered protocols and guidelines for how your team will operate under flexible working?		
What core time is required to successfully deliver your service?		
Are there any system requirements that make the arrangement difficult? i.e. Mosaic		
Have you agreed working patterns with each team member, and do these support your core times?		

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Communication & Support		
How many of the team are going to be working flexibly – have you agreed how the team will interact with each other?		
Have you agreed a regular time for the team to meet that everyone can attend?		
Have you considered how you will access team members when you need information?		
Have you discussed and agreed communication protocols within your team operating in a hot desk environment?		
Performance Management		
Have you established how individual performance will be monitored? Has this been shared and agreed with the team?		
Have you set up regular supervision sessions with each team member?		
Have you discussed and arranged development activities to support the individual in making the transition to flexible working?		
Practicalities		
Do any of the team need to sign a flexible working agreement for the provision of equipment or changes to working patterns?		
Have you agreed to use the time sheets to record working hours and TOIL?		
Do your staff work with sensitive personal information on a regular basis and can arrangements be made to ensure this is appropriately stored when flexible working?		
Health, Safety & Wellbeing		
Have you completed a flexible working agreement with the employee?		

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Have you completed a flexible working risk assessment with the employee?		
Have you completed the DSE e-learning module and self-assessment system which is available on WILMa?		
Has the suitability of alternative working locations been considered?		

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