

Hybrid Working Scheme FAQ's

Here you will find the answers to the most commonly asked questions asked about the Hybrid Working Scheme

1. Why is it called a scheme?

In recognition of the benefits of working in a hybrid way, the Council has introduced a scheme which clearly details the requirements and expectations around working in this way.

2. Why have we changed the current scheme?

The scheme must be kept under review to ensure that it is fit for purpose particularly when the Council is continually evolving and to ensure that staff remain focused and motivated and have the correct levels of interaction with managers, colleagues, and other stakeholders to allow for their development.

3. When does the refreshed scheme commence?

The refreshed scheme will commence on Monday 1 April 2024. There is likely be a lead in time in some services and your line manager will advise if this is the case.

4. What are the key changes to the refreshed scheme?

The key changes are:

- Reference to Covid has been removed.
- Your main base will be your office base and not your home.
- Participants of the scheme will be required to work 10 days from home and 10 days in the office in every 20 working days (pro-rata for those who work less than 35 hours per week). The days must be worked consecutively in a rota of Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and then Monday, Tuesday of the following week.
- The entitlement to £100 to buy equipment for the home has been removed.
- A Hybrid Working Agreement must be signed by all participants of the scheme agreeing to the regulations and requirements that are necessary to allow employees to work from home safely.

5. Who is able to participate in the scheme?

The hybrid working scheme is available only to those employees, whose posts are deemed suitable for working in this way. This will be determined by the appropriate Chief Officer.

6. What if my Chief Officer says my post is not suitable for Hybrid Working?

There is no contractual right to work from home or right of appeal against the decision not to include your post in the hybrid working scheme, however you should ask to speak to your manager so that you can fully understand the reasons for this and discuss if there is any other flexibility around your role that could be considered.

7. I am currently on a temporary smarter working arrangement, what will happen to this?

All temporary smarter working arrangements will be reviewed with a view to making more permanent arrangements. However, it is anticipated that requests to reduce the number of the days in the office will be rejected unless there are medical or exceptional circumstances that require to be considered.

8. Why do the days have to be consecutive?

This is to ensure teams have a period of time together that allows for natural collaboration, communication, and development. It will also ensure that service areas are continually staffed in the office environment allowing for personal contact where required and for those who wish to return to the office full time, to feel comfortable in doing so.

9. Does visiting sites or other Council buildings count as an office day?

No, if you are required to visit another Council building or site as part of your normal duties during one of your days in the office, you should return to your office base after your visit has finished. You should treat your days in the office similar to that which was in place prior to the pandemic.

10. I am often on site for full days and am able to work from there as opposed to travelling back and forward to an office, how will this now work?

You should discuss this with your line manager, but there should be no change to the way you work to provide the service, however you should only be working from your home when the work pattern permits. In the majority of cases this will mean that you are working from home for 10 days out of 20.

11. Is there any scope to change the requirement to work five days consecutively?

No, however the scheme will remain under review and changes made where deemed necessary.

12. I cannot attend the office for more than six days due to childcare, what can I do about this?

Working from home is not a contractual entitlement and it is your responsibility to ensure that you are able to attend work for the hours outlined within your contract of employment. However, you have the right to request a change to your working hours or pattern through the Council's Smarter Working Policy. It should be noted however, that it is unlikely that a request to reduce the number of days worked in the office will be approved unless there are medical or exceptional circumstances to be considered. In addition, when working from home, you are required to make arrangements for the care of any children or other dependants who rely on you for support or care when you are working from home.

13. I am 3rd/4th Tier Manager, is my post in the Hybrid Working Scheme?

All 3rd and 4th Tier Manager posts will be considered to participate in the scheme in the same way that other posts will be considered. Your Chief Officer will advise you if your post is eligible or not, however there may also be a requirement for you to work more time in the office than the required 10 days due to the nature and seniority of your position within your team and flexibility around your working pattern and days is expected.

14. How do I request to work from home permanently?

You can apply to work permanently from home through the Council's Smarter Working Policy, however it is unlikely that this request would be approved for business reasons and would only be considered if there are medical or exceptional circumstances that need to be taken into account.

15. What medical conditions allow you to work from home on a permanent basis?

It is unlikely that a specific medical condition would justify a permanent home working arrangement, it is more about how your current health impacts on your ability to attend work.

16. I don't want to be part of the Hybrid Working Scheme, but my post is eligible.

You do not have to participate in the Hybrid Working Scheme and will be required to return to your office base full time. You should discuss this with your line manager who will put the appropriate arrangements in place to allow this to happen.

17. Regarding the minimum of 10 days per 4-week period in the office, will this be pro-rated based on contractual hours for part-time employees?

Yes, it will be pro-rata depending on the days/ hours you are contracted to work. So, if you work 17.5 hours per week over five mornings, you would be required to work the same rota as a full-time employee. However, if you work 17.5 hours over 2 or 3 days, you divide those hours by 5 (days) and multiply by 10 (days) you are required to attend the office. In this example you would be required to work 35 hours in the office (5 days) in every 20, but again these must be consecutively worked in agreement with your line manager.

18. I work a condensed working week; how often will I be required to attend the office?

This should be agreed with your line manager; however the general rule of thumb is that you should work half of your working days in any 20 working days in the office in a consecutive pattern covering Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and the following Monday, Tuesday. There may be slight variations to this to suit the needs of the service area in which you work.

19. How will the 10 days in the office be monitored and what happens if I don't attend for 10 days?

This will be monitored by your line manager. Anyone who is not attending the office on the required days and who does not have an alternative arrangement in place agreed by their line manager, will be removed from the Hybrid Working Scheme and required to work in the office full time.

20. My manager is concerned about me working beyond my working hours when working from home, is this an issue?

Whilst there is an understanding that on occasion you may be asked or wish to work later than your working hours to undertake a specific task this should not be the norm. Employees are encouraged to work their normal working hours, to ensure that they have a good work life balance and are looking after their own health and wellbeing.

21. My manager is concerned about my performance at work at home and wants me to attend the office more often, do I have to?

Yes, if your manager has advised you that they are concerned about your performance whilst working from home, then they have the right to request that you attend the office as deemed necessary.

22. My manager is against home working and is making it difficult for us to work from home?

If your post has been identified as being suitable for inclusion in the Hybrid Working Scheme, then you will be able to work in this way unless there is a valid business reason as to why you cannot. You should contact a member of the Employment and Policy Team to discuss this matter further.

23. Will coreless flexi still be available to those participating in the Hybrid Working scheme?

Yes, the coreless flexi process will continue as normal and will continue to be approved by your line manager at the exigencies of the service. Please note, you cannot use a period of flexi-leave and coreless flexi on the same day.

24. Is the four-week period the same as the current flexi period?

Where possible, as this will allow for easy management of time by both managers and employees.

25. Are we still using Myself to clock in and out of work?

Yes.

26. What if someone is on annual leave, sickness absence or special leave, do they need to complete their 10 days at another time?

There would be no requirement to meet the minimum requirement of 10 days in the office in these circumstances unless there was a business requirement to attend the office out with your normal office days.

27. If a manager asks an employee to go into the office out with an agreed pattern to undertake a specific task or attend a meeting, how much notice is the manager required to give?

If it is not one of the agreed 10 days, then it would be reasonable to provide a day's notice, however managers would be asked to provide as much notice as possible. There may also be occasions when little notice will be given but this should be in exceptional circumstances.

28. Has the refreshed scheme been approved by the trade unions?

The trade unions have been consulted on the scheme.

29. Should new employees be asked to attend more than 10 days in the office as this might help them?

This is something that should be considered and implemented by the line manager.

30. How long will this scheme be in place?

The Council considers that this scheme will be in place permanently, however it will always remain under review during its lifespan to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and meets the requirements of the business.

31. I am on a smarter working pattern; will this change when working in a hybrid way?

No, any smarter working arrangements that have been **permanently** agreed and are in place will remain.

32. Will I receive an allowance when working from home to cover my broadband and utility bills?

No. If you are struggling financially, you should speak to your line manager who can also arrange for you to work in the office more often or permanently.

33. Will there be enough space in the offices to allow employees to return for 10 days?

Yes. Employees will be required to hot desk within their designated service area and how this will operate will be determined by your line manager. There may be some employees who require a specific seat on a permanent basis and again this will be determined by the line manager based on individual circumstances.

34. Will pool cars be available to use when in the office?

Pool cars may be available for use and your line manager will advise if you are able to access these. There is no corporate pool car system with all previous pool cars being allocated to individual Services to use. The number of vehicles is the same as before the pandemic and we have less people in the office on any one day so there should be more than enough vehicles for people to use. If there are any issues with accessing vehicles, then this should be raised through your line manager.

35. I have a chair at home or in the office that was purchased for me to support my back, will another one be supplied for either home or office?

The requirement for specific equipment should be discussed with your line manager and the Reasonable Adjustments Protocol followed with a Tailored Adjustment Agreement Form completed, retained on file, and reviewed on a regular basis. Any equipment purchased by the Council for your use at home, remains the property of the Council.

36. I am aware that my colleague lives on their own, how do we ensure their safety on the days they are working from home?

If you are living on your own and working from home on a regular basis, you should advise your manager and agree arrangements for keeping in touch on a regular basis. You should also ensure that your emergency contact details are updated on iTrent and provided to your line manager. Other supports, as required, can be agreed between you and your manager.

37. What are the implications for individuals with specific equipment to support their health issues, will equipment be made available both in the office and home?

Where there is a requirement for specific equipment, your line manager will follow the Reasonable Adjustments Protocol and determine what additional equipment is required, if any, to allow you to safely carry out your work from both the office and home. Where the

cost of the equipment is considered unreasonable and impractical, you will be required to work from the office on a permanent basis. In some instances, you will be asked to contact Access to Work (<https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/apply>) who can assist with providing equipment and support to allow you to attend work.

38. Why do I need to complete the DSE Assessment and where do I find one?

Under the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 we need to make sure that your working environment is suitable and safe for use of display screen equipment. We need employees to carry out a self-assessment to meet this requirement. The DSE self-assessment for hybrid workers will be made available as a survey on iTrent. You can find this when you login to mySelf with surveys being at the bottom of the screen.

39. What happens once I have completed the DSE Assessment?

Once you have completed your self-assessment it will be returned to your manager to read and take any appropriate action. If there is anything within your self-assessment that requires further action, the safety and wellbeing team can provide assistance with this.

40. I've heard that the offices aren't going to be ready for the new work pattern on 1 April, how will this affect me?

Plans are underway to ensure that the offices are ready for staff returning to more days in the office and these include the provision of adequate seating, meeting, and breakout spaces. However, as it is unlikely that all office spaces will be ready for the 1 April a lead in time of approximately 3 months is anticipated. Your line manager will discuss any interim plans with you if your office area is not ready on 1 April 2024.

41. What if I don't like working from home or the office as it is affecting my health or ability to do my job?

You should discuss any concerns you have with your line manager in the first instance.

42. I've heard Covid cases are on the rise, how will this affect the refreshed scheme?

A rise in covid cases will not impact on the scheme unless the government or public health deem it necessary to impose certain restrictions again.

43. My question is not on this list?

If you cannot see the answer to your question, you should contact your line manager in the first instance, and if they are unable to answer, then send your question to EmploymentPolicyTeam@northlan.gov.uk and someone will get back to you.