



HR-01/2021

Updates to Employment Policies

Over the last few months, work has been undertaken to refresh and revise several the Councils' employment policies in response to Covid-19.

On the 1 April 2021 the Council approved changes to the following policies. The key changes to these policies are summarised below.

- [Employee Code of Conduct](#)
- [Acceptable Use of ICT](#)
- [Homeworking Scheme \(Interim\)](#)

It should also be noted that on the same date, the Council approved the new [Supporting Attendance Policy and Procedure](#) that applies to all staff (except those employed under teaching conditions). Further information regarding the implementation of this policy will be provided separately but an overview has been provided within this update.

Please ensure that the content of this Circular is brought to the attention of all employees by circulating this circular or prominently displaying a copy on your Service notice boards.

Thank you for your assistance with this matter.

Head of People & Organisational Development

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Employee Code of Conduct

The review of the Employee Code of Conduct recognised that whilst the key principles and objectives are still applicable, the code was written and agreed at a time when homeworking was not common amongst the workforce. It was therefore necessary to incorporate new information that would support employees working from home. The code has been updated to include the following information:

- The section on privacy and confidentiality has been updated to provide advice on working from home, including consideration of the environment employees work in, security of information and the professional behaviour that should be displayed when attending or holding meetings from virtual platforms within the home.
- The section on personal presentation has also been revised to ensure that employees understand the requirement to dress appropriately whilst working from home and advises that a business casual approach continues to be the Council's preferred dress code.
- A new section on Alcohol and Drugs has also been added to the code to ensure that employees, including those working from home, understand that it is not acceptable to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs or to consume either during working hours including during unpaid breaks.
- Finally, it was recognised that the current code did not refer to other policies that set out expected standards of conduct and behaviour and therefore these policies have now been listed within the revised code.

The revised Employee Code of Conduct can be accessed [here](#)

Acceptable Use of ICT Policy

Whilst the Acceptable Use of ICT Policy is reviewed by Business Solutions on a regular basis, the pandemic has driven an increased requirement to focus on compliance and legislative requirements, aligned to the significant volume of employees now operating Council owned ICT from their own homes. The key changes to the policy are:

- The principles of the policy have been updated to reflect the technologies currently being used both within and out with the Council and the additional requirements resulting from the increase in employees working from home.
- The Digital and IT Strategy have been considered in ensuring a safe framework for using ICT without exposing the Council or its employees to unnecessary risks.
- The policy has been updated to reflect changes in legislation e.g. Data Protection Act 2018, social media and the use of Microsoft 365 and associated collaboration tools.

The revised Acceptable use of ICT Policy can be found [here](#)

Homeworking Scheme (Interim)

As the recovery from Covid -19 has been slower than originally anticipated and the vaccination programme is unlikely to reach the majority of the population until the Autumn at the earliest, the Council's Homeworking Scheme (Interim) has been extended for a further twelve months from the end of March 2021 which is when the initial six months comes to an end. This allows the Council to maintain the safety and wellbeing of its employees, whilst determining its future model for office accommodation. Employees participating in the scheme will be issued with the appropriate temporary variation to their contract to reflect this position.

The Scheme has also been amended to reflect the concerns raised by the trade unions and employees regarding business mileage and working time.

The revised Homeworking Scheme (Interim) can be found [here](#)

Supporting Attendance Policy and Procedure

Work is underway to implement the new Supporting Attendance Policy and Procedure, which was approved by the Council on 1 April 2021. The new policy and procedure will ensure a simpler, more robust approach to absence, with clear stages that provide employees and managers with consistent expectations as to how sickness absence will be managed, with a focus on preventing absences from becoming long term. The policy and procedure also provide significantly more guidance and support on early intervention measures that must be taken in relation to an employee's mental health & wellbeing to prevent an absence from becoming protracted.

A learning framework for managers has been developed and has been made available to all line managers through [LearnNL](#). The framework provides a combination of e-learning, and masterclass sessions on the key aspects of the policy as well as other related topics such as work-related stress and supporting employee's mental health and wellbeing. The training is intended to support line managers in the practical application of the policy and procedure.

Information about the new policy and procedure, the available training, and the supporting toolkit has been issued through Corporate Communications and Line managers are strongly encouraged to participate in the training in order to ensure that they embrace and understand the new policy and procedure and associated processes that are required to be followed to support attendance at work and address poor attendance in a consistent and fair manner.

Heads of Service should also encourage participation in the training and ensure senior managers understand their role in supporting and improving attendance levels across the Council. The trade unions will also be invited to undertake the e-learning and participate in the masterclass sessions.

The new Supporting Attendance Policy & Procedure can be found [here](#)