

# Homeworking Scheme (Interim)

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<b>Date</b>	<i>11 March 2021</i>	<b>Version number</b>	2	<b>Document status</b>	<i>Final</i>
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<b>Governance Committee</b>	<i>CMT</i>	<b>Date approved</b>	<i>1 April 2021</i>
<b>Review date</b>	<i>31<sup>st</sup> March 2021</i>		

## Strategic Alignment

*Improving the Council's Resource Base – A Workforce Strategy that is built around the needs of the Council (as a single resource base) to deliver the priority outcomes, ensuring future workforce requirements, new skills and innovative approaches, and succession planning are recognised.*

<b>Consultation process</b>	<i>Trade unions will be consulted on the scheme at the appropriate points.</i>	
<b>Stakeholders</b>	<i>Contacts identified for each service</i>	
	<i>Joint Trade Unions</i>	
	<i>Service Managers</i>	
	<i>Employees</i>	
<b>Distribution</b>	<i>Heads of Service, HR Business Partners</i>	

## Change record

<b>Date</b>	<i>11 March 2021</i>	<b>Author</b>	<i>Michelle McGuinness</i>
<b>Change made</b>	<i>Acknowledgment of impact of restrictions on childcare Changes to application of business mileage</i>		

## **Contents:**

1. Introduction
2. Scope
3. Application of Homeworking Scheme
4. Operating Principles:
  - a) Environment
  - b) Equipment and IT Support
  - c) Technology
  - d) Working Hours
  - e) Expenses
  - f) Health and Safety
  - g) Wellbeing of Employees
  - h) Managing Virtual Teams
  - i) Taxation, Insurance and Mortgages
  - j) Security of Information
  - k) Attendance at Offices
  - l) Sickness Absence
5. General
6. Review and Evaluation
7. Variation to Contract of Employment
8. Useful Links

## 1. Introduction

This interim Homeworking Scheme has been developed to provide detailed information and guidance to managers and employees in relation to supporting an agile workforce as part of the Council's COVID-19 recovery process and future strategic plans, including the rationalisation of assets, the creation of community hubs and the progression of Digital NL ambitions.

The scheme enhances the current provisions which are outlined within the Council's Smarter Working Policy and Guidance Note in particular for management-initiated requests for smarter working locations.

Management initiated requests for smarter working must follow the appropriate process as outlined within the Council's Smarter Working Policy and Guidance Note however it is accepted that it may not be necessary to meet with every employee on an individual basis as advised within the guidance.

This scheme will be subject to regular review to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and may be adapted to suit the future requirements of the Council.

This scheme was initially introduced for an interim period from September 2020 – March 2021 but will now be extended for a further year to accommodate the ongoing Covid19 restrictions and to allow for the vaccination programme to be fully implemented.

## 2. Scope

This scheme will apply to all employees whose role falls into one of the categories detailed below:

- (a) **Homeworker** - an employee whose work base is home and who can undertake 80% or more of their work from home with the occasional requirement to work at a site or office location.
- (b) **Agile Worker – Home based** – an employee whose work base is home but who require to work from sites, offices or depots to undertake less than 50% of their work.

## 3. Application of the Homeworking Scheme

The relevant manager will assess whether or not a post meets the requirements to be categorised as a Homeworker or Agile Worker – Home based. A manager must ensure that they discuss with the employee any changes to their current working location and address any issues that may be of concern.

Any concerns regarding the categorisation of a post should be raised with the relevant line manager in the first instance.

## 4. Operating Principles

The operating principles outlined below apply to all employees whose role has been categorised as a Homeworker or Agile Worker – Home based.

### a) Environment

The working environment for an employee requiring to work from home will need to be assessed by the employee and line manager at the earliest opportunity and if not suitable, alternative arrangements for the employee to work from an office location should be sought. All employees will be required to complete the appropriate Home Working Assessment and DSE Assessment, which is outlined in the Health and Safety Section below.

Agile Workers will be able to utilise flexi desk facilities when required to conduct office-based duties.

Where employees have reasonable adjustments in place these should be reviewed to ensure they are suitable and appropriate for their new working environment. This review should be undertaken by the employee and their line manager using the reasonable adjustment protocol. The same procedure should be used for any employee who in the future acquires a disability or long-term health condition and requires reasonable adjustments to be made. For more information go to:

[www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/disabilityconfident.or](http://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/disabilityconfident.or) <https://my.nl.co.uk/knowledge-base/the-equality-act-2010/#reasonable-adjustment-protocol>

Where an employee is unable to work from home, managers should do their utmost to accommodate them working from an office or site location. Managers should discuss their individual circumstances and ensure these are taken into account in any decision made. If, and only in exceptional circumstances, accommodating them in an office or site location is not possible, further advice should be sought from the Employee Relations team.

#### **b) Equipment and IT Support**

Employees categorised as a Homeworker or Agile Worker – Home based will no longer have an allocated office desk and will conduct previous office-based duties from home. The following package shall be provided and maintained by North Lanarkshire Council.

- a. Provision of laptop PC and software.
- b. Provision of “key fob” facility for access to Council systems.
- c. Access to network printer as necessary
- d. Mobile phone where necessary.

A chair monitor and ancillary equipment (for example foot rest, wrist support, riser etc.) will be provided by the Council as required and in line with the appropriate Health and Safety assessments. Employees will be provided with a one-off tax-exempt payment of up to £100 to accommodate the purchase of equipment that cannot be provided by the Council, such as a suitable desk. Employees will be asked to produce a receipt to evidence that they have purchased equipment.

Use of council technology and systems such as internet, telephone and email are primarily for business use. However, the council operates a framework of openness and trust and recognises that in certain circumstances, particularly where there is a need to communicate urgently, it may be appropriate for employees to use council facilities, for example to send personal messages externally or receive them from an outside source.

The terms of the Council’s Acceptable Use of ICT Policy, Information Security Policy and the Data Protection Act will continue to apply.

All equipment provided remains the property of the Council and must be returned upon request. Access to the employee’s home may be required for this purpose and arrangements will be discussed in advance to agree a mutually agreeable time.

A record of what equipment an employee has at home should be kept on myTeam.

It will be the employee’s responsibility to ensure that the broadband facility, provided and maintained by the employee, is sufficient to support all necessary IT connections and equipment essential for connection to the relevant Council databases. Where there is any

break in this service liable to last longer than two hours, then the employee should arrange to attend work at a local office or site. If their broadband is not sufficient or they do not have any within their household, this should be discussed with their line manager and may mean alternative arrangements are made for them to work from an office or site.

### **c) Technology**

The use of technology underpins any home working arrangement. It needs to be fit for purpose, accessible, reliable and useful. It should include all elements that the employee needs to do their work from home, and this should be provided with appropriate guides or training to support engagement.

Equipping employees to work at home through online learning, good IT support and timely updates is essential for the successful implementation of the scheme.

Only Council approved devices and software should be used for work related activities.

Employees should be provided with the appropriate packages to allow them to conduct meetings from home if required, i.e. Microsoft teams or Skype. These meetings should be conducted confidentially and away from other household members.

Relevant ICT policies and guidance should be referred to as appropriate. Please see further guidance [here](#).

### **d) Working Hours**

An employees working hours at home should largely mirror those normally undertaken in the office, unless otherwise agreed by the line manager. These working hours can vary to accommodate work life balance arrangements, if agreed with the line manager and in line with the Smarter Working policy.

Employees involved in this scheme can still apply to change their working hours or pattern on a permanent or temporary basis through the Council's Smarter Working Policy.

If you are currently entitled to flexi time, this will continue, unless otherwise advised by your line manager. All working hours should be recorded electronically via the time and attendance module on mySelf.

Employees should ensure, where possible, to limit interruptions during their working day, unless previously agreed with their line manager. Under no circumstances should they undertake any other responsibility e.g. childcare, during the hours they have agreed to work. However, where childcare arrangements are not available due to Covid19 restrictions, managers are asked to take a flexible approach to working hours and patterns to accommodate these situations.

Employees working in an agile way can experience a blurring of lines between work and personal time and line managers should monitor and regularly review working times to ensure they remain in line with employee contracts and the Working Time Regulations.

The basic rights and protections that the Working Time Regulations provide are:

- a) A limit of an average of 48 hours per week which a worker can be required to work.
- b) A right for night workers to receive free health assessments.
- c) A right to 11 hours rest a day
- d) A right to a day off each week or two days over a fortnight

d) A right to an in-work rest break if the working day is longer than 6 hours. The Council requires employees who are working more than 6 hours to take the minimum of 30 mins break.

Further information relating to the Working Time Directive can be found at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1998/1833/contents/made>

No additional payments will be made for any work undertaken out with the Council's core hours, other than in extenuating circumstances. For example, where, due to Service requirements, employees are asked to work more than five hours out with the core hours, the employee shall receive the appropriate enhancement to their pay. The core hours are 7 am to 8 pm Monday to Friday.

For those who are categorised as Homeworker or Agile Worker – Homebased and are working from home but required to attend a specific meeting or site visit and then return home, the travelling time will be included in their working time, however it is not anticipated that this will impact on productivity. If an employee is attending an office for a day to carry out normal duties or attends on a regular basis as part of a rota, the journey from home to office will be classed as a commute and travelling time will not be included in the working day.

#### **e) Expenses**

For those who are categorised as Homeworker or Agile Worker – Homebased and are working from home but required to attend a specific meeting or site visit and then return home, business mileage will be calculated from home but for those living out with North Lanarkshire Council it can only be claimed from the first boundary of the Council area nearest to the employee's home.

If an employee is attending an office base for the day to carry out normal duties or attends on a regular basis as part of a rota, the journey from home to office will be classed as a commute and business mileage cannot be claimed.

Expense claims should be submitted via mySelf and authorised via myTeam. Line managers should ensure employees have appropriate business insurance for work related journeys when travelling in personal vehicles.

#### **f) Health and Safety**

A Homeworking Risk Assessment and Display Screen Equipment (DSE) risk assessment should be undertaken for each home workspace at the beginning of the home working arrangement and reviewed periodically thereafter. [Guidance](#) will be provided for how these risk assessments should be undertaken and outcomes fed into the line manager for appropriate action.

The employee should undertake the relevant online learning to ensure they are clear on the need for good DSE and workstation layout and posture.

The Council will ensure that the proposed home workplace is adequate through the aforementioned assessments, both for practical working and in terms of the relevant health and safety legislation, prior to the commencement of smarter working.

The employee has a responsibility to maintain safe systems of work and a safe working environment at all times. If an employee proposes to make any changes to their home workplace that would impact on any risk assessment, they should notify their line manager. Advice is available from the Council's Safety and Wellbeing team.

It is the Council's responsibility to ensure all employees are aware of requirements in relation to the safe installation and use of equipment within the home working environment and any necessary training will be provided.

Homeworkers and Agile workers – Home based should be made aware of the incident reporting system and procedures and report any work-related incidents. See [here](#) for more information.

### **g) Wellbeing of Employees**

Employee wellbeing is crucial at all times and particular elements should be considered for those working from home:

- (a) Employees should be encouraged to take regular breaks and exercise and to structure their working day.
- (b) Managers/employees should be encouraged to create intentional space for celebrations and social connection. Creating virtual spaces and rituals for celebrations and socialising can strengthen relationships and lay foundations for collaboration and encouraging good team dynamics.
- (c) Loneliness and isolation can be factors when employees spend a lot of time working from home. Line managers should maintain regular contact with their teams both individually and in a group and look out for signs that their mental health may be deteriorating. Managers should react quickly to concerns and ensure that employees feel listened to and are pointed to relevant support mechanisms.
- (d) Managers should consider how to build the resilience of employees working from home; this may be through virtual coaching or mentoring, online learning and encouraging teams to discuss their experiences about how to be most productive and effective at home.
- (e) Further guidance for managers and employees on maintaining good health, safety and wellbeing whilst working in an agile way can be found [here](#).
- (f) Managers should seek advice from the Employee Relations team if they are concerned about an employee's mental health.

### **h) Managing Virtual Teams**

Whilst there are some challenges with home and agile working, there are also opportunities to work in new and exciting ways, increase work life balance and embrace technology. Line managers should be more intentional in how they motivate and manage their teams. It is also important that managers do not contact employees out with their normal working hours or make unnecessary contact throughout the working day. However, managers reserve the right to review the use of key fobs and electronic diaries whilst employees are working from home.

Managers should:

Establish rules of engagement – set expectations of the frequency, means and ideal timings of communication with them as individuals and in their teams. Agree regular meetings to review workload and planned work for the following period between check-ins.

Regularly check on communication between team members to ensure they are sharing information and touching base as necessary.

Utilise a variety of communication technologies to keep employees linked in and engaged. These can include email, telephone, video conferencing, instant messaging and chat.

Encourage individual teams to establish their own norms – ways they find best to communicate with each other – this might be Yammer, Skype or other forms of chat endorsed by the Council.

Consider virtual team building activities and plan ways to update and engage with your teams regularly.

Employees working in at home or in an agile way should be reminded that they will continue to be governed by and must adhere to the Council's policies and procedures including [Employee Code of Conduct](#) and [Supporting Attendance](#).

Further support for managers can be accessed on [LearnNL](#).

#### **i) Taxation, Insurance and Mortgages**

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs Office (HMRC) state that employees working with home as their base can claim tax relief where their employer has not paid work related expenses. It is the employee's responsibility to make this claim, which can be made online and in relation to the current tax year only. This can be done through an [online P87 form](#) through your Government Gateway account or by filling out a [postal P87 form](#). (Insert link to HMRC).

Employees will be responsible for seeking confirmation from domestic insurance companies that their domestic insurance policies have been noted, or adjusted, if necessary. It is not anticipated that there will be an additional cost to home insurance for working from home.

Working at home may have implications for an employee's mortgage or lease arrangement. Consequently, employees are obliged to advise their mortgage provider or landlord that they are working at home.

#### **j) Security of Information**

The employee will be responsible for the security of all Council information, files, documents, etc. in their possession and for ensuring there is no unauthorised access to such information. All information held should be treated in confidence, should not be inappropriately disclosed, and should be in accordance with the Council's Acceptable Use of ICT Policy, the Council's Policy on Data Protection and the Council's Policy on Information Security. Advice is available from the employee's line manager and on myNL.

Employees should be reminded of their need to complete the statutory online learning courses on Data Protection Essentials and Information Security Awareness.

Employees must ensure that they do not share sensitive or personal information under any circumstances outside of the secure Council systems. Use of WhatsApp, Zoom or other similar messaging tools or personal email should not be used.

It is not recommended that employees retain paper records at home and should consider scanning materials to save digitally. Retention arrangements for these records should also be considered.

Where employees require to discuss confidential matters, they should ensure their environment allows for this and/or they have appropriate equipment such as headsets to reduce the risk of conversations being overheard. Where these measures are not in place, employees should discuss this with their manager at the earliest opportunity.



### **k) Attendance at an Office/site**

The Council reserves the right to request the attendance of the employee at different work locations to carry out service provision as agreed with their line manager, for operational requirements. In circumstances where the employee is required to attend at a different location from their designated work base, travelling expenses will be reimbursed in accordance with standard procedures.

### **l) Sickness Absence**

Where an employee's agreed working day commences before the normal 8.45am start time, employees will be required to make contact with their line manager to advise them of their absence by no later than 9.30 am.

Where an employee's agreed working day commences after the normal 8.45am start time; employees will be required to make contact with their line manager within an hour of their scheduled start time or within or within such other timescales as may be specified by individual Services.

Should telephone contact with their line manager not be possible then notification of the absence should be advised to the line manager or nominated officer by e-mail at their earliest convenience, and the line manager will then make contact with the individual at the first available opportunity

## **5. General**

Employees participating in the Smarter Working Policy will continue to be governed by the Council's policies and procedures.

A small pool of laptops will be made available to employees if, for whatever reason, there is a breakdown in the normal working arrangements. These laptops are intended for short term usage only and will be issued at the discretion of the appropriate line manager.

## **6. Review and Evaluation**

This interim Homeworking Scheme will run until the end of March 2022 and will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

The conditions of this scheme may be subject to amendments following the outcome of reviews and evaluations and in respect of any Council wide policies or initiatives.

## **7. Variation to Contracts of Employment**

Changes to an employee's contract to facilitate homeworking or agile working on a temporary or permanent basis will be consulted on and agreed upon by all parties, giving appropriate notice of the change.

A contract variation will be issued to confirm the change to the terms of the employee's contract and should include the equipment provided by the Council for the purposes of home working and arrangements for its return as appropriate.

## 8. Useful Links

Below are some useful links to further information and guidance on agile and home working.

<https://mynl.co.uk/knowledge-base/working-from-home-2/>

<https://nlclearingacademy.co.uk/working-from-home/>

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm>

<https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home>

<https://www.shponline.co.uk/lone-working/home-working/>

<https://www.nllife.co.uk/workwell-nl-mental-wellness-home-page/>

[https://mynl.co.uk/wpfd\\_file/mental-health-wellbeing-strategy/](https://mynl.co.uk/wpfd_file/mental-health-wellbeing-strategy/)