

REMOTE WORKING POLICY

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Councillor Bowman
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Summary and Recommendation:

The report seeks the agreement of the Executive to a new policy which sets the Council's framework for the introduction and operation of various forms of remote working.

It is recommended that the Executive approves the attached draft Remote Working policy to become effective as soon as possible.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Since 2005/6 the Council has set up several pilots to trial remote working, which include :

- permanent home working,
- occasional home working
- mobile working.

Executive last considered Remote Working on 24 October 2006. It is now considered important to regularise the framework that the Council has in place for remote working, so that it can be used as a normal part of work management arrangements when needed. The requirement to meet Government Direct Code of Connection (Coco) by 30 September 2009 is an additional driver to ensure that remote connections to the Council's network comply with national standards. Remote working is now considered to be an important component of the Council's business continuity arrangements. A Council policy for this will safeguard the Council's operations.

2. ARGUMENT

2.1 Local authorities as well as many other public and private sector organisations are taking advantage of technological changes to introduce more flexibility in how work is carried out. Their motivations for doing this include improving customer service, sustainability, productivity, efficiency, recruitment and retention, widening the groups of employees able to take jobs, particularly people with disabilities or caring responsibilities, work/life balance and business continuity.

2.2 Remote working in its various forms is already in operation in a number of authorities. Barnsley MBC introduced remote working into its regulatory services teams in 2007/8. The teams contained 212 staff and the council planned to reduce the desk space by 72. The council, having monitored how its staff were

spending their time, realised that 50% was non-productive. Increasing productive time by 10% through remote working produced an efficiency of £751K in a full year.

Basingstoke and Deane, a district council, introduced mobile working for 200 employees to achieve productivity gains and improve customer service. The HR Manager said " We are very supportive of work-life balance and giving people the opportunity to work in a far more flexible way. This offers real benefit for the staff, while effectively meeting business need and making better use of office accommodation."

- 2.3 In 2005 this Council embarked on the first of a series of trials of remote working (occasional home working), by identifying and setting up five volunteers, who were approved by their line managers, to carry out Council work from home occasionally. Equipment and management arrangements were put in place to support the remote workers, all of whom also worked from Council buildings for the main part of their working lives.
- 2.4 The Council evaluated the experience, advantages and disadvantages, of this first trial after approximately six months. The Council then went on to try remote working through introducing technology which allowed mobile working. In this model of remote working a Council employee, whose role was mainly working outside the Council's offices, would leave from home to visit a number of customers in their own homes, and returning home to carry out follow up administrative tasks without using a Council work space on a daily basis.
- 2.5 A variant of this model could have been for the employee to use a hot-desk at one of the Council's offices – Copeland Centre, Moresby Parks, Egremont, Cleator Moor or Millom, depending on where was most convenient.
- 2.6 Another remote working pilot set up in 2008 has enabled an employee previously based in the Copeland Centre to be working full-time from home.
- 2.7 The pilots have provided a significant amount of learning both positive and negative. In summary: the positive experiences have allowed employees to be more productive (meet more customers, process more cases, complete tasks more quickly and to a higher quality), drive fewer miles for business purposes and be more accessible to service users. The negative aspects have arisen from some initial difficulties setting up remote working (technology issues, availability of IT staff to support more remote workers and employees settling into continuing remote working). An initial evaluation of these trials showed that there were productivity gains in both models. Among the benefits were:
 - More time spent with customers;
 - Reduced travelling time and costs
 - More flexibility in carrying out Council work and other responsibilities
 - More quality time to complete tasks requiring concentration.

There were few disadvantages, but there were a few challenges which require resolution for remote working to run smoothly:

- Managers of remote workers have to make different arrangements from those for managing workplace-based employees.
 - Using the technology is key to success and the Council's IT team must be able to support remote working arrangements.
 - Contact arrangements for customers with remote workers could be more difficult or costly, unless routine procedures for customer contact are made clear.
- 2.8 The Council's accommodation pressures, as well as the beneficial impacts on a range of policy objectives (efficiency, sustainability, accessibility, flexible employment, business continuity) mean that Remote Working remains an option which the Council should have available.
- 2.9 Business continuity is becoming a greater concern for all organisations. Remote working is often suggested as a measure that can strengthen business continuity, and the Council may receive requests now or in the future from employees to work at home in circumstances of personal or organisational emergency. Although no decisions have been taken about the advisability of this sort of arrangement, the proposal to put in place a Remote Working policy, setting out the principles of remote working in future, will clarify the position for the Council and its employees.
- 2.10 Most organisations, including Copeland Borough Council, have employees who regularly take work home to complete in their own time, because of deadline pressures or to benefit from a quiet environment. This is outside the scope of existing Council policies on working arrangements. It is not anticipated that the proposed Remote Working Policy will impact greatly on these employees, as unofficial homeworking in free time is informal and relies on good will, rather than being an expectation of employees. However if the Remote Working Policy comes into effect, it would be possible to offer such employees technological improvements and security.
- 2.11 The proposed draft policy is recommended as the basis of the Council's remote working in future.

3. OPTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED

Option 1 – not to develop Remote Working any further. At the time of the last discussion at Executive in 2006 there was considerable concern regarding its appropriateness for the Council.

However with agreement of the Executive at that time the pilots were continued and developed, and they have provided some reassurance on points that Members were questioning. In addition technology has developed quickly since the last decision and is now able to contribute more to making Remote Working arrangements more robust (through more powerful, cheaper, portable kit, and systems that allow remote communication and management more easily).

Option 2 – to seek Executive agreement to having a policy in place and procedures developed to allow Remote Working to be pursued in those areas for which it is appropriate.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 This is an early step in developing greater flexibility of place and working arrangements for Council employees. The world of work has changed considerably since the Executive last considered the issue of Remote Working. The technology has become more suitable and there are now many examples of local authorities adopting Remote Working as a means to improve customer service, productivity and efficiency.
- 4.2 There are several drivers on the local and national stage which are encouraging the Council to allow more flexibility in working arrangements (for example the new rights of parents to change work contracts to allow time for caring responsibilities), to which this policy would contribute. The Council would be able to gain benefits from improvement in customer access, productivity, environmental performance, efficiency, economy as well as flexibility in employment considerations and business continuity.
- 4.3 It is therefore recommended that Executive approves the attached draft Remote Working Policy.

5. FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOURCES OF FINANCE)

- 5.1 It is intended that the costs of remote working would be borne through service budgets, existing or future. Until there is a clearer idea of demand, it is difficult to predict the financial implications exactly.

The costs of setting up a full-time home worker would be around:

One off (PC, licensing, printer, office furniture etc)	£880
Monthly (broadband, telephone line, contribution to heating, lighting)	£50 pm

Savings would arise from reduced car mileage allowance, productivity gains and possibly reduced desk space required.

- 5.2 The other resource implications would be from management time to organise remote working to be set up and sustained with new arrangements for communication and performance monitoring. IT staff time would be required to advise and support remote workers, which could be additional to what is required to support employees in Council workplaces. It will be necessary to monitor the impact of demand levels on IT support staff, should remote working become more prevalent.
- 5.3 In addition further work will be needed to do more work on the detail of management guidance on how remote workers will be managed. Risk assessment and adherence to other Council policies would be essential in underpinning any remote working arrangements.

6. PROJECT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 Introduction of remote working within a service will be subject to the Council's project management arrangements and resourced from the service concerned.
- 6.2 Management of risks inherent in remote working is a key step in ensuring the success of remote working, safeguarding both the Council's interests and the employee's well-being.

7. IMPACT ON CORPORATE PLAN

- 7.1 A number of the Corporate Implementation Plan objectives would be supported through remote working:
- Information security project (1.3)
 - Helping to reduce our carbon footprint (1.3)
 - Improve our performance (1.5)
 - Increase the quality of customer experience (2.5)
 - Improve customer access to Council services (2.5)

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Draft Remote Working Policy

List of Background Documents:

List of Consultees: Corporate Improvement Board
Trades Union local representatives
Corporate Team
HR Manager
IT Manager
Contracts and Projects Manager

CHECKLIST FOR DEALING WITH KEY ISSUES

Please confirm against the issue if the key issues below have been addressed . This can be by either a short narrative or quoting the paragraph number in the report in which it has been covered.

Impact on Crime and Disorder	It is likely that more mobile Council workers being out in the community would have a beneficial impact on community safety.
Impact on Sustainability	Reduction in business miles driven would help the Council to reduce its carbon emissions.
Impact on Rural Proofing	Employees working more in service users' homes would increase access to services for people living in rural areas

Health and Safety Implications	There is a requirement for managers of remote workers to consider the implications on their health and safety of these new arrangements.
Project and Risk Management	See paragraph 6
Impact on Equality and Diversity Issues	Some employees would be supported in increasing the flexibility of their working arrangements which could enable a wider range of people to work for the Council
Children and Young Persons Implications	N/a
Human Rights Act Implications	More flexibility through remote working could help more people with families to combine work and family life more successfully.
Monitoring Officer Comments	No further comments
Section 151 Officer Comments	This policy provides a framework to manage the Council's remote working approach. Section 5 sets out current financial implications. If remote working were to involve significant numbers of employees, there would be additional IT support costs but there should be compensatory savings in accommodation and these would need to be considered if/when this occurs

Please say if this report will require the making of a Key Decision NO

APPENDIX A

DRAFT REMOTE WORKING POLICY

1. Purpose and Scope

The Council's policy on remote working is designed to enable employees to work in places away from the Council's main offices safely, securely, effectively and efficiently. It applies to:

- 1) those employees whose managers have decided that employees working remotely will support the delivery of business objectives; and
- 2) employees who have applied for and been approved to work remotely for work/life balance reasons.

It is not anticipated that all Council employees will be able to work remotely. The decision on who will work remotely will be made by Heads of Service giving priority to business needs.

2. Definitions

Remote Working is defined as:

- 1) **Mobile Working** -where employees spend much of their working time outside the Council's premises on site or in service users' premises, and return home or to a Council office to process information or download customer data. This is often associated with hot-desking.
- 2) **Home Working** -where employees are able or required under the terms of their employment contract to work from home for the majority of their working time.
- 3) **Occasional Home Working** – employees who have their managers' agreement to work from home on a limited basis to undertake specific pieces of work or to improve logistic efficiency.

3. Business Reasons for Remote Working

The advantages to the Council of increasing flexibility of employees' working arrangements (place and time) include:

- ... Customer service - able to provide service to the Council's customers more conveniently at places other than in the main offices;
- ... Productivity – remote working can increase quantity and quality of work, through allowing more customer-facing time or fewer interruptions.
- ... Environment – opportunities to reduce business miles by better journey planning through omitting unnecessary trips to Council offices;
- ... Finance – opportunities to reduce costs in office accommodation and miles driven for business;
- ... Employee motivation – remote working can be more flexible and allow work/life balance to be improved. This can support recruitment and retention.

4. Policy on Remote Working

1. Copeland Borough Council recognises the potential advantages of remote

2. The decisions on which roles can be carried out remote from the Council's places of work will be made by the relevant Head of Service, with advice from the direct line manager, the HR manager and the ICT manager. It is anticipated that remote working will be agreed where:
 1. A financial case for remote working can be made;
 2. The employee is able and willing to work remotely;
 3. Customer service is enhanced by remote working;
 4. There is no detriment to the environment from remote working;
 5. Service productivity will not be adversely affected.
 6. Adequate security and separation from domestic activities can be achieved.
3. Heads of Service will also take into account factors relating to individuals' suitability to work remotely, for example with very much reduced supervision, in isolation and in premises that are not equivalent to what the Council provides.
4. The Council will provide equipment and training, including a dedicated landline telephone, in its use for remote workers to enable them to work remotely. IT equipment provided must be used in accordance with the Council's relevant IT user policies amended to meet Government Connect C-Co requirements. Remote workers are required to safeguard the Council's equipment and information, and prevent unauthorized access or use.
5. If remote working is to be carried out as full home working, the Council will pay an allowance towards the costs of heating, telephone and insurances, at a level to be reviewed every year. If remote working is occasional home working or mobile working, only the cost of official telephone calls made from home will be reimbursed.
6. To support employee morale and avoid isolation among remote workers, line managers must make additional arrangements to ensure that they are in frequent contact with them. This will be by personal visit, dedicated telephone landline, email or mobile phone. It is required that remote workers will be present for team briefings, performance management discussions and training opportunities. Remote workers should be in touch with the section on a daily or more frequent basis and attend team meetings at least monthly.
7. Line managers of remote workers must agree with the remote workers additional ways of monitoring work carried out remotely. This can be done through casework numbers, project plans, diary sheets, written reports or electronically through secure meeting systems and system access logs. Line managers will ensure that Council policies and procedures are understood and adhered to by remote workers.
8. Line managers must carry out a risk assessment for each employee working remotely, including of the employee's home, if that is where remote working is to

9. All the Council's policies and procedures will apply to employees working remotely as they would if working at a Council office or other place of work.
10. The Remote Working Policy will be subject to full Equality Impact Assessment in due course, and the Council will take account of the impact of the various types of remote working on enabling equal access to services.
11. Termination of the remote working arrangement is at the manager's discretion linked to work demands, employee request, under-performance, work reorganization or departmental reorganization.

Doubt over this Policy

Queries about this policy should be referred to the Head of Policy and Performance, ICT Manager or HR Manager.

Review of this Policy

The operation of this policy will be reviewed by Corporate Team at least annually and more frequently if it is necessary by reason of circumstances.