

Approved JNCC 15 December 2022

**Belfast City Council**

**Workstyles Policy**

## **1.0 Background and introduction**

- 1.1 In May 2022, the 'onboarding' of council services commenced and office-based staff, who were working remotely during the pandemic, returned to the workplace between one and five days each week, in accordance with individual service demands and service recovery.
- 1.2 In June 2022, the government messaging regarding 'working from home' was removed and instead employers encouraged to put in place working arrangements that would best meet the needs of the organisation.
- 1.3 The pandemic has resulted in a considerable shift in the mindset and cultural norms for organisations and its employees. The Council is no exception, and it recognises the importance of developing modern working practices that will enable individuals to maximise their work performance while maintaining a positive worklife balance.
- 1.4 It is also recognised that increased flexibility in respect of workstyles can assist with staff retention, in attracting new talent and in contributing to the council's overall strategic objectives.
- 1.5 A Workstyles Policy has been developed in consultation with the Council's trade unions. It has been developed following benchmarking and evolving best practice and has taken into consideration the views and aspirations expressed in the opinion surveys carried out in June 2021. The policy aims to create a more agile, responsive, effective and efficient organisation which advances business performance, increases customer satisfaction and improves the health, wellbeing and diversity of our staff.
- 1.6 The policy will be implemented from 1 April 2023, on a pilot basis for 18-months and will be reviewed on a six-monthly basis throughout the pilot period. An implementation and review plan will be developed.
- 1.7 The policy will be supported by guidance for managers and employees.
- 1.8 Any revisions to the policy, during the pilot period, will be subject to consultation with the council's Trade Union Group.

## **2.0 Scope**

- 2.1 The policy applies to all BCC employees and where applicable, agency assignees<sup>1</sup>, whose role is defined as hybrid or field, as set out at 6.0.
- 2.2 The arrangements set out in the policy can be adapted as needed should they pose a challenge for disabled people in terms of access, participation

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of the policy where 'employee' 'staff' or 'worker' is referenced this includes a comparable agency assignee.

or support required. Belfast City Council is committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity in all its policies and procedures.

2.6 The policy does not form part of any contract of employment.

### **3.0 Strategic position**

3.1 The Corporate Management Team has determined that individuals should work approximately 60% in the workplace. Therefore, individuals who work five days per week can work remotely two days per week (40%). Other working arrangements will be calculated on a pro-rata basis.

3.2 The implementation of the policy must not impact on the Council's ability to deliver its core business activities, to maintain its excellent levels of customer service, or to have a detrimental effect on individual and/or team performance and staff development.

### **4.0 General information**

4.1 The policy replaces the Temporary Homeworking Protocol introduced in June 2020 to support the arrangements during the pandemic period.

4.2 For employees with formal homeworking arrangements in place, their formal homeworking agreement will continue to apply. Depending on the formal arrangements in place, that is, the number of days an individual currently works remotely, it may be the case that the individual can also avail of the Workstyles Policy.

4.3 Should an individual wish to apply for homeworking or any other flexible working arrangements on a permanent basis they should follow the process as set out in the Council's Worklife Balance Handbook. It should be noted that for the pilot period, if an individual applies for and is approved homeworking on a permanent basis the arrangements as set out in the Workstyles Policy will apply. The arrangements as set out in the Homeworking Information pack (October 2004) will be held in abeyance during this pilot period.

4.4 The remote working arrangement, as set out in the policy is a pilot and it will not impact on an employee's contractual terms and conditions of employment in respect of hours of work or normal working location. The informal arrangement may be changed from time to time based on service, departmental or organisational need.

4.5 Individuals may also be required to attend the workplace, outside of the pilot arrangement, and on a particular day(s) at the request of management. This could include attendance at team meetings, training etc. or where for operational reasons the meetings should be in-person or

where management has determined that work is best conducted in-person.

- 4.6 Individual working arrangements are subject to ongoing review and may be modified or withdrawn for reasons including a change in business needs or performance concerns.
- 4.7 The policy seeks to offer choice to employees. As such, it is recognised that personal circumstances and preferences may influence an individual's decision with regards to remote working and there is no expectation for an individual to avail of the Workstyles Policy or to work remotely. An individual who does not wish to work remotely will be facilitated to do so and a manager cannot force any member of their team. Similarly, if an individual's personal circumstances change and they wish to increase their presence in the workplace this should be discussed with the line manager in the first instance.
- 4.8 Should it be the case that an individual does not have a suitable remote workstation and/or they cannot work safely and securely in their remote setting, the Workstyles Policy will not apply, and they will be required to attend the workplace.
- 4.9 It is important that the Workstyles Policy is applied fairly and consistently across the organisation. To this end a framework for identifying each workstyle will be developed along with supporting documentation for managers and employees.

## **5.0 Principles**

- 5.1 The council's approach to its Workstyles Policy will be based on the following key principles:

### **Service delivery**

The Council will continue to deliver its core business activities, to maintain its excellent levels of customer service, and to provide the best possible outcomes for residents and city visitors both now and in the future.

### **Visibility**

Senior leaders will be visible in the workplace to provide leadership to the organisation.

### **Realism**

While committed to providing modern working practices, managers and employees must be realistic and recognise that flexible workstyle options will not be appropriate for all jobs across all areas of the council.

### **Trust and confidence**

Managers and employees must be able to have trust and confidence in each other's ability to work effectively and perform well, wherever the working location.

### **Training and support**

The council recognises that a more flexible workstyle will bring unique challenges and demands on people managers and individuals who are working remotely. It will endeavour to support managers and employees by providing the correct tools, guidance, and training to maximise the success of the Workstyles Policy.

### **Managing performance**

The introduction of a more flexible workstyle will mean, on occasions, moving away from physical supervision to managing outputs / performance and supporting individuals. Individuals will need to know what is expected of them and how they will be managed when working remotely.

### **Supporting external and internal organisational strategies**

The introduction of this policy will assist the organisation in meeting its internal and external priorities, including climate, resilience, and sustainability and worklife balance.

## **6.0 Employee profiles**

- 6.1 The default position for the council will be a place based, role dependent working style model.
- 6.2 Identification of a workstyle is the responsibility of each Departmental Director.
- 6.3 For the purpose of the Workstyles policy roles will be identified as one of the following:

### **Static worker (in the main the worker is in a fixed location)**

An employee who spends the majority of their time working within an office location, or a centre or a depot, or are out daily in the public domain as a front-line worker and where there is a clear operational or business need for them to be present within council premises or within the council area and without the possibility of remote working.

### **Hybrid worker**

An employee who spends the majority of their time working within an office location, (that is, approximately 60% as determined by CMT) but with the possibility of remote working subject to operational and business need, service demands and a suitable remote workspace.

### **Field worker**

An employee who uses an office or remote location as a base but predominately works in the field. There is a clear operational or business need for them to provide a service by operating in a mobile way for the majority of their time.

- 6.4 Given what is set out above, the workstyles policy will only apply to individuals who fall within the profile of a hybrid or field worker.
- 6.5 As set out at 4.5 regardless of an individual's employee profile, they may be required to attend the workplace, outside of the pilot arrangement, and on particular day(s) at the request of management. This could include attendance at team meetings, training etc. or where for operational reasons the meetings should be in-person or where management has determined that work is best conducted in-person.

## **7.0 Arrangements for remote working**

### **7.1 Remote working location**

- 7.1.1 For the purpose of the policy, it is expected that an individual's remote working location will be their residential address.
- 7.1.2 It is not expected that individuals will work outside of Northern Ireland. In addition to the potential impact on tax and national insurance, there are a number of HR, technical and digital issues to be considered. Given this, a request to work outside of NI will need to be considered on its own merit.
- 7.1.3 Individuals are required to provide their remote working location on the home / remote workers self-assessment form [further information in respect of this is set out at section xx, 'Health and Safety']. Individuals must notify their line manager of any change of address and complete a new self-assessment form and DSE checklist.
- 7.1.4 Individuals are not permitted to work in settings such as cafes, co-working spaces, libraries, etc. where council confidentiality could be compromised.
- 7.1.5 The ability to work remotely is not a substitute for childcare or other caring responsibilities. Individuals are required to have adequate provision in place to avoid conflict with work performance when working remotely.

### **7.2 Flexible Working**

- 7.2.1 The council's Flexi-time Scheme as set out in the Worklife Balance Handbook will continue to apply, if appropriate, and individuals should use the clockwise system to record their hours worked when working remotely.

### **7.3 ICT, equipment, and furniture**

- 7.3.1 It is considered that the introduction of a more flexible workstyle is mutually beneficial and that the costs and benefits of working remotely will cancel each other out. Consequently, it is not intended that the council will provide individuals with equipment or furniture for the purpose of working remotely.

7.3.2 The use of laptops, provided during the pandemic, will continue to support the working model. In all cases, all equipment will remain the property of Belfast City Council.

7.3.3 As set out at 4.8 individuals when working remotely are required to have a suitable workstation where they can work safely and securely.

#### **7.4 BCC policies, confidentiality, and security**

7.4.1 Individuals are required to comply with all current council policies, procedures, guidelines, agreed working practices and any relevant collective agreements.

7.4.2 Individuals are required to adhere to the rules on the processing of personal data and ensure the security of all personal information being processed, as set out in the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act (DPA)2018.

7.4.3 Individuals should familiarise themselves with the guidance on [Homeworking and Data Protection](#).

7.4.4 It is vital that individuals are vigilant against cybercrime, both for the security of council information and for the security of their own personal and financial information.

7.4.5 Individuals should familiarise themselves with the [guidance on security when homeworking](#).

#### **7.5 Communication**

7.5.1 Individuals must be contactable during their working day by their line manager and by colleagues.

7.5.2 Individuals should ensure that their Outlook calendar is shared with their team and is kept up to date.

#### **7.6 Annual leave**

7.6.1 Annual leave should be applied for in the same way as it would if the individual was in the workplace. It is important that individuals take annual leave throughout the year not only to support operational planning but also for their own health and wellbeing and worklife balance.

7.6.2 Further information on annual leave can found in section 4 of the [Worklife Balance Handbook](#)

## **7.7 Sickness absence**

7.7.1 Individuals should not work if they are unwell / unfit. Regardless of working location, if an individual is unwell / unfit for work they should follow the absence reporting procedure in accordance with the Attendance Policy and Booklet.

## **7.8 Remote working costs**

7.8.1 Individuals will be responsible for all costs associated with their place of residence for example, heating, lighting and broadband.

7.8.2 Individuals will be responsible for any home insurance to cover loss or damage to personal property in use while they undertake work duties.

7.8.3 Individuals may need to inform their household insurer if they are working at home to ensure that buildings and contents insurance is not invalidated.

7.8.4 Individuals may need to refer to their tenancy agreement or landlord for advice to ensure that they have agreement to use the premises for work purposes.

## **7.9 Mileage claims**

7.9.1 Mileage claims for car users will be in accordance with the Car User Policy.

## **7.10 Health and well-being**

7.10.1 Individuals should ensure that they are not 'overworking'. Downtime from work is essential and individuals should make every effort to look after their own health and well-being.

7.10.2 Individuals should take adequate breaks throughout the working day and meetings should be scheduled to allow for adequate breaks in-between.

7.10.3 Individuals are encouraged to raise and discuss any concerns regarding their health and well-being with their line manager at the earliest opportunity.

## **7.11 Health and Safety**

7.11.1 The council is committed to providing and maintaining a safe and healthy working environment for all, ensuring the health, safety, and welfare of all employees.

7.11.2 A greater responsibility, in respect of health and safety, is inherently placed on individuals when working remotely given that options for supervision, control etc. are generally significantly reduced.



- 7.11.3 Individuals should familiarise themselves with the Homeworking Code of Practice [\[include link\]](#) which details the health and safety roles and responsibilities of both managers and employees and the procedure to be followed when an individual is working remotely.
- 7.11.4 Individuals must complete the Homeworking Self-assessment checklist and the Display Screen Equipment (DSE) and Workstation Assessment Checklist.
- 7.11.5 The Council will make every effort to meet the needs of those individuals, where possible, who require specialised equipment as a reasonable adjustment or if related to a disability.
- 7.11.6 In-person work meetings or other work-related activities with colleagues, customers, etc. should not be carried out at an individual's remote working location.
- 7.11.7 Any accident that occurs while working remotely, in connection with work-activities, must be reported to the line manager in accordance with BCC accident reporting procedures.
- 7.11.8 As set out at 4.8, should it be the case that an individual does not have a suitable workstation and/or they cannot work safely and securely in their remote setting, the Workstyles policy will not apply, and they will be required to attend the workplace.