

REPORT OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE – 17 APRIL 2007

HOMEWORKING POLICY

Recommendation

- (a) *To adopt the Homeworking Policy.*
- (b) *That the Chief Executive be authorised to amend the Management and Staff Guidance which provides the operational framework to the Policy.*

Contact Officer: Amanda Nicholls, extension 2023.

Reasons why a decision is required

1. The pilot Homeworking scheme was presented in January 2006 for a period of 12 months. For the duration of the pilot, contracts of employment and conditions of service have not been permanently amended for those employees working at home. A decision must now be made as to whether this scheme has proved successful and should be implemented across the Council
2. The policy on homeworking is supported by the Management and Staff guidance. It is proposed that the Management and Staff Guidance should provide an operational framework for the implementation of the Homeworking Policy and as such, should be amended as appropriate by delegation to the Chief Executive.

Information to be considered in taking the decision

3. Following the completion of the pilot scheme, meetings have been held with the Revenues and Benefits Section, who have been carrying out the pilot, as well as ICT and Customer Services to understand the implications of homeworking.
4. The employees currently undertaking the scheme have found it beneficial and wish to continue working on this basis. Whilst a homeworker will be expected to achieve at least the same level of performance as they would have achieved should they remain office based, an analysis has taken place regarding the amount of work generated by office workers compared to homeworkers within the Benefits Section, and homeworkers on average are producing 20% more claims.

The Scheme

5. The introduction of home working can only be done in agreement with both parties, where it is considered feasible for the role and where the employee is considered suitable.
6. Following a trial period of homeworking, a decision will be made whether or not to make the agreement permanent. The Council will reserve the right to require homeworkers to return to office based employment where there are performance issues, or it is having an adverse effect on the work within the team. The individual will not automatically be allowed to reverse the agreement should their personal circumstances change.

7. Homeworking is not covered by any specific legal provision. However, parents with children under 6 or disabled children under 18 or employees with elderly dependents, have the right to request flexible working and this places a duty on employers to consider their request. Home based employees have exactly the same employment rights as office based employees, however, homeworking is not an alternative to paid dependent care.
8. Health and Safety legislation also applies to homeworkers and the Health and Safety Advisor and the line manager will carry out a risk assessment on each home based location prior to the homeworking being agreed.
9. Communication and Team building are especially important to any team comprising of some employees working away from the office. The Management and Staff Guidance contains specific reference to this with recommendations to line managers for the management of such teams.
10. Security arrangements for employees working at home must mirror those that are in place for office based employees including the security and confidentiality of Council equipment and information, the provision of secure lockable containers, the protection of home computers and their links and the disposal of confidential waste. Employees are responsible for ensuring the necessary confidentiality at their home and that all information stored and accessed is secure and cannot be accessed by unauthorised parties, including family members.
11. The Council's insurance covers laptops and notebook PC's whilst off it's premises but extended cover must be arranged to cover desktop PC's. The Council's Employers Liability and Personal Accident Insurance will cover homeworking as long as a health and safety risk assessment has been completed. The Council's insurance will also cover any equipment provided for accidental damage and theft if deemed cost effective. HR will inform the Insurance Officer of any homeworkers.

Costs

12. A baseline cost consists of the equipment that may be required remotely or at home and the costs of networking necessary information between the office and the home. The following are some of the main elements of expense that could be involved:
 - (i) Telecommunication systems/call handling eg separate telephone lines/mobile phones.
 - (ii) Computers/printers/faxes/scanners (potentially removed from office)
 - (iii) Increased insurance costs.
 - (iv) Other office equipment and furniture (potentially removed from office).
 - (v) Broadband to a specified maximum cost.
13. Homeworkers will have other requirements, which will have a cost factor such as:
 - (i) Storage facilities for confidential information and equipment.
 - (ii) Training and guidance (for the manager and for the employee).

- (iii) Requirements of health and safety including first aid and fire safety.
- 14. The ICT section will assess and advise on the most viable and cost effective means of computer and telecommunications systems for each homeworking arrangement and ensure compliance with software licences etc.
- 15. Clear, costed business cases must be submitted to support requests for homeworking and should be agreed by the Head of Service.

Background Papers

None

Resource Implications

Minimal, but each case must be assessed on an individual basis.

Consultation Statement

Consultation has taken place with Unison and GMB, and not adverse comments have been received.

Impact on Corporate Objectives

None.

Attachments

Appendix 1 – Homeworking Policy

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Human Resources Manager