

Temporary Arrangements for Homeworking During Covid 19 - Guidance

People Management

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carmarthenshire.gov.uk

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Introduction

This guidance sets out Carmarthenshire County Council's approach to temporary homeworking arrangements during the Covid-19 outbreak.

The Council continues to ask employees to work from home if their job allows it. Homeworking has been in place for many weeks and guidance and advice has been provided during this time. This document seeks to consolidate this and provide clear guidance to ensure your ongoing health and safety whilst working at home as well as providing answers to your frequently asked questions.

The Management Team and Council leadership would like to thank you for your huge efforts during the past weeks and your support in making the transition to home working so seamless. Because of this we have been able to continue to provide our essential services. We know that many of you have had to balance your work at home with your personal life including caring responsibilities and we recognise that this has been a significant change in our working lives. We hope that you have been able to establish a way of working that works for you and your service and this guidance aims to support that ongoing flexibility whilst ensuring that services continue to be delivered.

These temporary arrangements will be kept under review and as we move towards the "new normal" we will continue to engage with you to seek your views on longer term homeworking policy.

In the meantime, we have developed a range of resources to support you working from home which you can find [here](#).

Scope

This guidance applies to all Carmarthenshire County Council employees excluding those locally employed by schools where Governing Bodies will determine their approach. However, schools may wish to adopt this guidance to ensure consistency and fairness.

Working Pattern

In general, your contractual working hours apply whilst you are working at home. This is to ensure that you are available to service users during standard hours. However, flexibility is extended to employees who are balancing caring responsibilities, e.g. looking after children while schools are closed. In these circumstances, many employees have worked flexibly at times to suit them, the people they are caring for and the service. If you have agreed this with your manager, this will continue whilst you require the flexibility.

The key to this is to keep your manager up to date regarding your circumstances.

Many employees will wish to continue to access the [Flexi Time Scheme](#) and this remains open for those who are in a position to do so provided the appropriate time recordings are maintained.

Homeworking can sometimes lead to a blurring of the work/home balance so please make sure that you take regular breaks and do not work excessive hours.

The following tips may assist with this:

- Take regular breaks including at least 30 minutes for lunch;
- Maintain a regular working pattern wherever possible and ensure that you have at least 11 hours break before finishing work and starting the next day;
- Continue to take your annual leave to ensure you have a break from your work ;
- Keep your online work calendar up to date so that your colleagues and manager can see when you are available and when you are not.

Please visit the wellbeing pages on the intranet which have lots of advice and support to help you [look after your wellbeing](#).

Communication & Working with your Line Manager

For many homeworking can lead to a sense of feeling cut off from colleagues particularly for those of us who are used to working in a team or office environment where social interaction tends to regularly take place be it a coffee break chat or catch up at lunch.

Regular communication is vital for us to maintain a sense of togetherness in these testing times, reflecting our Core Value as One Team. We have to make an extra effort when focused on our work to stay in touch with our colleagues, particularly when they may not readily know or understand what we're working on. It is important to maintain good working relationships with colleagues and take personal responsibility for staying in touch.

Our learning and development resources offer some practical tips for staying in touch, using technology well, whilst being mindful that we are all trying to adapt to new ways of working, getting the right balance between work and life. Regular contact between you and your line manager is important to ensure that you have the right support to do your work and feel engaged. Key areas of focus include:

- That you have the right equipment and can access IT systems;
- That you have a plan to develop your skills to use applications such as Microsoft Teams to message/video and participate in meetings;
- That you agree when to have regular 1:1 online meeting so that you are clear about your work goals and can provide feedback;

- That you have an opportunity to discuss your wellbeing and can have informal online meetings/chats with others.

Your Learning & Development

Our Organisational Development Team are supporting managers and individuals with these new ways of working including digital skills and continue to offer a range of digital based learning. You are encouraged to continue to access these [learning and development resources](#) whilst working from home. If there are specific development needs that are essential to your ability to fulfil your role whilst working from home, it's important you discuss these with your line manager as part of your 1:1 discussion. Your line manager if necessary, can then seek advice from an Organisational Development Advisor to explore how these may be accommodated.

Sickness

If you are sick and unable to work, you must telephone your line manager as soon as possible. The authority's [sickness absence policy](#) and procedure will apply in these circumstances.

If you have coronavirus symptoms, which include a fever, a new continuous cough, or a loss of or change in your sense of smell or taste, you **must** follow the Government's selfisolation guidance at www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-homeguidance.

Health & Safety

As your employer, we have a legal and moral duty to look after your health, safety and wellbeing whilst working from home. There is no increased risk working from home, however, we need to ensure that you have the most appropriate workstation set up possible.

Your line manager should have discussed with you the arrangements for working at home and encouraged you to implement a suitable work set up. You should ensure that you set up your work area to be as safe as possible following the [DSE guidance](#) and you should complete the DSE self-assessment to assist with this. Some helpful tips to assist you whilst homeworking include:

- Break up long spells of DSE work with rest breaks (at least five minutes every hour) or changes in activity;
- Avoid awkward, static postures by regularly changing position;
- Get up and move around or do stretching exercises;

- Avoid eye fatigue by changing focus or blinking from time to time.

If you have any concerns or are experiencing any difficulties, highlight them in the selfassessment and discuss these with your line manager to identify suitable solutions. Additionally, the authority's liability insurance will cover working from home and equipment etc., however, it is recommended you notify your own household insurance provider that you are now homeworking.

Employees should follow the usual reporting procedures for any [work-related accidents](#) that occur whilst undertaking work at home.

Equipment & Materials

If you are continuing to work from home, have followed the guidance on the intranet and completed the DSE self-assessment and feel that you may require additional equipment or resources to do so, you should highlight these on the self-assessment and discuss them with your line manager to identify suitable solutions.

Where it is agreed that additional equipment or resources are appropriate and required, this will be arranged via your line manager. You must take care of any equipment and resources provided by the authority and notify your line manager of any faults or issues that may arise. You are required to use only IT equipment provided by the authority for undertaking your duties. Where you are using any of your own equipment and materials, please notify your line manager.

Telephone & Internet Accounts

You will pay the costs for all telephone and internet connections in your home.

However, we will reimburse you for any additional telephone and internet premiums due to an increase in data or telephone usage needed for work, upon submission of the appropriate documentary evidence to illustrate the differential in costs incurred.

We will pay all charges on any mobile phone provided by us, with the proviso that it must be used only for work-related purposes.

Stationery & Postage

You should obtain receipts for any stationery purchased and any items posted in the course of your work and reclaim such costs once a month using our expenses claim procedure.

Tax

Employees may be able to claim tax relief for any household expenses incurred as a result of working from home, provided the expenses are solely work related. If you wish to benefit from this tax relief, see the Government's guide on claiming tax relief for your job expenses at www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home.

Security

Employees who work from home are responsible for keeping all documents and information associated with the authority secure at all times and in line with the authority's [information governance procedures](#). Specifically, homeworkers are under a duty to:

- keep filing cabinets and drawers locked when they are not being used;
- keep all documentation under lock and key at all times except when in use; and
- use a unique password for your work computer and any other digital devices you use for work.

Further, the computer and other equipment provided by us must be used for work-related purposes only and must not be used by any other member of the family or third party at any time or for any purpose.

Insurance

Employees should check with their home and contents insurance providers that they have adequate cover for the fact that they work from home/that any of their own equipment is covered for work use.

Mortgage or Rental Agreements

You are responsible for checking applicable mortgage or rental agreements to ensure you are permitted to work from home, and for obtaining any permissions necessary to work from home.

Travelling Time and Expenses

The expectation is where staff can work from home, they should continue to do so during the covid period. Whilst it is the expectation that staff should continue to avoid attending or convening meetings in person this will not always be possible. The official work base for temporary home working employees during the covid period has not changed. Therefore, for the purposes of travelling expenses an employee travelling to a

workplace meeting, irrespective of the time the meeting starts, will not be able to claim mileage unless it exceeds their normal travel to and from work mileage. Please refer to the Authority's [Travel Policy and Financial Procedure Rules](#).

Furthermore, the normal commute travel time to and from work to attend the meeting, irrespective of the time the meeting starts, must be excluded from the working time recorded on flexi on the day in question. However, if this exceeds the normal commute time the employee would record travelling time over and above this as working time using the same principle as claiming travelling expenses.

Ensuring Equality of Opportunity

All employees are required to adopt a positive, open and fair approach and ensure the authority's Equality and Diversity Policy is adhered to and applied consistently to all irrespective of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, disability, religion and belief or non-belief, age, sex, gender reassignment, gender identity and gender expression, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity, marital or civil partnership status.

If you have any equality and diversity concerns in relation to the application of this policy and procedure, please contact a member of the HR Team who will, if necessary, ensure the policy/procedure is reviewed accordingly.

In addition, the Welsh Language Standards requires us to 'ensure that the Welsh language is treated no less favorably than the English language' and this principle should be adopted in the application of this policy and procedure. Advice and guidance on Working Bilingually can be viewed on the intranet.

If you require this publication in an alternative format please contact People Management on Ext 6184 or email PMBusinessSupportUnit@carmarthenshire.gov.uk