Flexible Working Policy

1.   Introduction and Purpose of the policy

1.1   Barnet Council is committed to empowering its employees and managers to organise and perform work and deliver services in ways which are flexible and balance the needs and preferences of Council staff, Barnet residents and service users, partner organisations, and other stakeholders.

1.2   The purpose of this policy is to set out the approach that the Council will take to facilitate the delivery of services in ways which meet the needs of Council employees, Barnet residents, partner organisations, and other stakeholders.

2.   Scope

2.1   This policy applies to all Council employees. It does not apply to agency workers, contractors, or consultants.

2.2   This policy does not apply to employees working in schools under the direction of a Governing Body. The Council nevertheless recommends Governing Bodies in community schools within the London Borough of Barnet to adopt the principles of this policy.

3.   References

3.1   This Policy should be read in conjunction with the Council's Future of Work Guiding Principles. Other policies associated with this document include:

- The Council's Code of Conduct
- Particulars of employment and other documents setting out relevant terms and conditions.
- Policies relating to the use of Council offices and other workplaces.
- Policies relating to Data Protection and the use of Council IT equipment and networks.
- Grievance Policy and Procedure
- Health and Safety at Work Policy (including Remote Working arrangements)
- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy

4.   General Principles

4.1   The Council embraces flexible working as the default option for service delivery. Flexible working practices should be the norm and not the exception.

4.2   The key aspects of flexibility in carrying out work concern timing (**when** the work is done) and location (**where** the work is done).

4.3   The Council will not seek to place any blanket restrictions on either the timing or the location of the performance of work duties by its staff.

4.4   The Council believes that employee performance should be assessed and managed on the basis of outcomes in relation to specific objectives defined as part of relevant performance review processes, together with the broader expectations for each role. Similarly, behavioural

competences and the expectations set out in the Code of Conduct should be assessed and managed through relevant channels.

4.5   Unless otherwise specified (e.g. as part of terms and conditions for senior management), all Council employees will have a 'principal place of work' and be expected to work for a set number of weekly contractual hours. The Council expects employees and managers to consider the practical aspects of these terms (e.g. in co-ordinating availability for meetings and ensuring that any documents received by post are processed in a timely manner) while supporting flexibility in service delivery.

4.6   The nature of a variety of roles and services within the Council will mean that a significant number of employees are required to undertake work at defined times and/or locations. The Future of Work Guiding Principles include guidance and illustrations around how flexibility can be applied to the various types of work activity undertaken within the Council.

4.7   Managers are responsible for outlining any restrictions and requirements on when and where duties are performed to staff reporting to them as well as job applicants and new starters. Managers should regularly review such restrictions in line with evolving service needs- this should happen both on a team level and for individual posts. Restrictions and/or requirements will generally relate to the nature of the work and not the grading of the post or the individual characteristics of one or more employees.

4.8   Employees should be aware of the possibility of evolution in the duties within their roles and the consequences that it may have on flexibility. The Council appreciates that restrictions on flexibility and other changes of similar nature will sometimes have an impact on an employee's personal and professional life. Managers should endeavour to provide employees with as much advance notice of possible changes to working arrangements as possible, together with an opportunity to discuss the implications of such changes and raise any concerns which they may have.

4.9   The Council does not operate a formal process for requesting flexible working arrangements. Employees who wish to work more flexibly than is currently allowed by the parameters of their role should discuss the matter with their line manager in the first instance.

4.10 If a line manager does not believe that they can be accommodate a request by an employee to work more flexibly, they should provide the employee with a written summary of the reason[s] for turning down the request. Any related complaints or concerns should be addressed in line with the provisions of the Grievance Resolution Policy and Procedure.

5.   Flexible working and meetings

5.1   Any references to 'meetings' (or 'hearings', or any other similar term) in any Council policy or process will be applicable to discussions held in a defined physical location (normally on Council premises) as well as those held remotely through the use of teleconferencing or videoconferencing facilities.

5.2   In line with its Transport Strategy, the Council is committed to supporting behavioural change in work-related travel to generate savings in time and minimise environmental as well as

financial costs. The Council encourages employees to keep business travel to a minimum by adopting a remote-first approach and participating in meetings by teleconferencing or videoconferencing wherever possible and appropriate.

5.3   The Council will configure its premises and systems to facilitate 'blended' meetings, where some participants are co-located and some participate through teleconferencing or videoconferencing.

5.4   The Council trusts employees and managers to make appropriate decisions on venues for physical meetings. However, formal meetings must not be held in residential premises unless exceptional circumstances apply (e.g. where one of the participants is unable to leave home due to medical reasons and holding the meeting remotely would not be feasible/practicable) and all participants agree.

5.5   When organising remote meetings which include participants from outside the Council, care should be taken to ensure that they have access to, and information about, any equipment required to participate.

6.   Health and Safety

6.1   The Council will make reasonable efforts to support employees with appropriate equipment for working flexibly or remotely (e.g. by providing them with laptops and office chairs). The Council will also provide employees with guidance on DSE assessments and sympathetically consider employee requests for non-standard equipment (e.g. adaptations connected to a disability or long-term health condition).

6.2   It should be noted, however, that the Council has no control over the layout, ergonomics, or environment of non-Council workplaces. Consequently, employees working from home or another non-Council location are responsible for ensuring that suitable arrangements are made. Additional information, support, and advice for employees will be available on the intranet, the Council's e-learning system, and/or from the Council's Safety, Health, and Wellbeing team.

6.3   Each employee is primarily responsible for ensuring that they take regular breaks and do not work excessive hours, while line managers should ensure that realistic expectations and workloads are set which can be performed within the employee's contractual hours. Employees should raise any concerns about workload and/or working time (e.g. around the timing and length of meetings) with their line managers.

6.4   Employees who organise any work meeting that is not held on Council premises should consider relevant access and health and safety requirements for participants.

6.5   Any issues relating to an employee's health, including sickness while working remotely and Occupational Health recommendations on the timing and location of work, will be managed under the provisions of the Council's Absence Management Policy and Procedure.

Appendix 1: Working Remotely from Abroad
Guidance for employees and managers

1. Introduction

As outlined in the ['Future of Work' guiding principles](#), the Council expects its employees to be **predominantly based in the UK**.

Any spells of overseas working must be agreed in advance between the employee and their line manager, taking into consideration any implications in terms of IT, insurance, and any practical issues (e.g. any need to send/receive documents by post).

This document outlines the key issues which employees and managers need to consider in respect of working remotely from abroad.

2. Things to consider when working abroad

As the Future of Work guiding principles and the Flexible Working Policy outline, a number of roles within the Council are suitable for, and/or require a degree of, remote and agile working.

Compared to working remotely from within the UK, working remotely from abroad comes with additional complexities and risks which employers need to manage - from tax issues to IT security considerations.

The Council will occasionally ask employees to undertake work remotely from outside of the UK where there is a business need to do so (e.g. a social worker needing to visit a child located abroad). Where that is the case, the employee's line manager will need to obtain Head of Service approval before discussing the matter with the employee, and consider relevant issues outlined within this guidance document. Travel expenses will be reimbursed in accordance with the provisions of the Council's Expenses Policy.

Employees may wish to work remotely from abroad for personal reasons, or to make occasional use of Council devices during a personal trip [whether during a period of leave or on one of their non-working days].

2.1. HR Considerations

Notwithstanding the Council's desire to support flexible and remote working (subject to service needs, the nature of each role, and alignment with the FoW principles that apply corporately and within each service), there are legal provisions covering employment and tax residency status which place limits on its ability to accommodate employee requests for working remotely from abroad on a long-term basis.

Employees wishing to work remotely from abroad must obtain permission from their line manager in respect of each period of remote work from abroad. Managers should obtain detailed HR advice prior to making a decision on any employee requests to work remotely from abroad for periods of 6 months or more.

Employees are responsible for ensuring that they meet any visa requirements and other associated rules for temporarily working from the relevant jurisdiction[s] and should be aware that restrictions may also apply to working from certain UK territories (such as the Channel Islands).

Employees working from abroad and their managers should be mindful of any time difference between London and the location from which the employee is working in order to balance the need for synchronous communications (especially attendance in remote meetings) and other service needs with the employee's preferences in terms of working hours in the different time zone.

As with working remotely from within the UK, the Council retains the right to ask an employee working from abroad to attend its offices or other premises if there is an urgent business need to do so. If that happens, the Council will endeavour to provide affected employees with as much notice as is possible in the circumstances but will not reimburse them for any [additional] costs incurred as a result of being asked to travel with limited notice.

2.3. IT Security Considerations

Employees are responsible for ensuring that the country to which they are travelling allows visitors to bring encrypted devices with them. Travel advice from the UK Foreign Office and the relevant national authorities of the destination country (-ies) is likely to indicate whether taking an encrypted device to a country is permitted or/and likely to cause complications. It is important to check the rules of a country before going.

Employees cannot take their Council laptop with them to any countries that do not permit the use of VPNs or encrypted devices. In addition, the UK Government recommends against taking devices to a small number of countries that are deemed high-risk in terms of their political environment and associated issues. IT will monitor relevant recommendations and advise managers and employees about any country-specific restrictions of this type.

Personal or confidential information must not be stored on the C drive or desktop. When travelling with laptops or other Council devices, employees must always keep the devices with them. When travelling by plane, Council laptops must never be transported in the hold.

If airport security or border control officials ask you to log into your laptop, you may do so, but only accessing the laptop itself- do not log in to the VPN. In the unlikely event that your laptop password is demanded by security, you may give it to them. You must then change your password as soon as practically possible.

Employees working from abroad should be mindful of the fact that a significant amount of network maintenance and IT updates are undertaken outside of the Council's regular 'office hours'; this may impact the speed and/or reliability of their access to Council systems if they work outside of these hours due to time differences.

2.4 Information Management and Data Protection Considerations

Employees working remotely from abroad will need to appreciate that they will continue to be bound by UK data protection laws, although different countries have different data protection laws which in some cases will create additional obligations.

It is important to note that this guidance does not cover contractors or independent consultants. Managers should obtain detailed advice from the Records and Information Management team prior to engaging any contractors/consultants who will be working [whether partly or wholly] from abroad.

3. IT Process

Once a line manager has approved an employee request to work remotely from abroad, they must complete the 'Report Overseas Worker' form on Service Now. This will ensure IT are aware of staff working abroad, in what country(-ies) and for what period of time.

In the event that there are any changes to the employee's travel plans (e.g. due to issues with flight connections via additional countries), managers will need to complete a further 'Report Overseas Worker' form to report the changes to IT.

On receipt of a Service Now form, IT will alert the line manager to any country-specific restrictions or concerns. Depending on UK Government guidance, this may result in the manager being advised to liaise with the employee in order to take additional steps to mitigate any risks, or even to revoke their approval to a request.

4. Practical guidance for working from abroad

4.1.   Ensure you have permission from management.
As mentioned above, it is important that any spells of overseas working be agreed in advance with the employee's line manager.

4.2.   Keeping information safe.
- When working from abroad, you should limit the amount of paper that you print, only print where there is an essential need to do so, and exercise care when disposing of any printed documentation. As with any type of remote working, it is always advisable to keep data within the council network.
- Any documentation you do hold must remain in the property you are residing in. Do not travel with council records. Paper records much be locked up securely when not in use.
- Do not keep any personal or confidential information on the C drive or desktop.
- When travelling by aeroplane, you must always keep your laptop with you. It must never be transported in the hold. Please ensure you carry your laptop in a briefcase/laptop bag so that you can easily take it onboard with you in case you are required to 'gate check' your cabin luggage during the boarding process. Wherever possible, you also should avoid having chargers and peripherals (e.g. mice) for your laptop transported in the hold; replacements may not be straightforward to find in case of loss or delay.
- Always keep the laptop with you when abroad or lock it away in the hotel/house safe overnight or when otherwise unattended.
- Do not leave equipment in a vehicle- even when taking comfort breaks you should take it with you. (Please note - any IT equipment (laptops, mobile phones, etc) left unattended in public will not be covered for loss or damage under the Council's insurance.)
- Inform your manager immediately if the equipment is stolen, lost, or damaged whilst away. Do not wait for your return to the UK.
- Follow the usual rules about taking calls in private, guarding your screen during use etc
- All Records and Information Management policies continue to apply regardless of your place of work.
- In the event of a data security incident, you must immediately contact DPI@barnet.gov.uk.

4.3.   Health and Safety when working abroad
DSE assessments should be undertaken for temporary workspaces. Please refer to the relevant guidance on the intranet.

4.4. IT Systems and Security

- Please ensure that your laptop is connected via VPN at least **weekly** for a continuous period of 4 hours to ensure security updates are applied and to avoid issues with your machine.
- Contact IT in the event of a failure of the device or any connectivity issues with the VPN.
- Please note the IT Service Desk is open between 8am and 6pm, Monday to Friday (London time)

Important contact details

5. **IT Service Desk Hours**
   All IT faults and IT security issues should be reported to the IT service desk using the self-service portal. Please note the Service Desk is open between 8am and 6pm, Monday to Friday UK time
   Email: IT.servicedesk@barnet.gov.uk
6. **Reporting lost / stolen equipment**
    You must immediately report any lost/stolen council equipment to:
   a. your line manager
   b. the Records and Information Management team on data.protection@barnet.gov.uk
   c. Insurance on insurance@barnet.gov.uk
   d. the IT service desk via Self-service portal or on 020 8359 3333 during office hours.