**HYBRID WORKING POLICY**

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**1. Introduction**

1.1 As a Council we want to deliver the best services to the residents of Croydon. This means that our workforce needs to be dynamic and adaptive, with the right support and development in place, to effectively respond as needed. The aim of hybrid and flexible working is to create a more responsive and efficient workforce, meeting our residents’ needs. The Council is going through a process of culture change which is driving customer service improvement and connects with the importance of staff being available and present in the borough to meet the needs of our residents. Hybrid working is based from the contractual workplace i.e. the borough of Croydon with remote and homeworking on occasions, however reflecting the need for staff to be present in the borough first and foremost. The expectation is for staff to ensure as a minimum that the Council has full-service cover Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm.

* 1. This policy sets out Croydon Council’s approach to hybrid working, through which employees may split their time between attending the workplace and working remotely (including working from home), depending on business needs. We recognise at the same time however, that there are some roles where it is not possible to work in a hybrid way due to the very nature of the role and service requirement.
	2. We are a local government employer providing public services to the residents of Croydon. Hybrid working is therefore predicated on first ensuring that the Council’s business and service needs are met. Whilst working remotely can have many benefits, including supporting work/life balance, we also need to balance this with the importance of our visibility and accessibility as a front-facing public service and understanding the needs of our residents in order to provide quality services, which comes from being present in Croydon. The Council is also aware that remote working can have a negative impact on staff eg isolation and lack of social interaction, which needs careful risk assessment and management. It is therefore expected that all employees will work from their Council workplace, but to varying levels/degrees of time as determined by service and business needs.
	3. For most Council employees, contractually their base (normal place of work) will be the Council workplace. The Council’s definition of and approach to hybrid working is predicated on the basis of hybrid working primarily being undertaken from the **Council workplace** as the normal place of work in the first instance. From the Council workplace, but as determined by service/ business needs, employees may then work remotely (including from home). The Council has the contractual right to require any employee to work in the borough of Croydon, as required by business/service need and it is correspondingly a duty of employees to be present in the Council workplace. Understanding of residents needs comes from being present in the borough of Croydon.

1.5 Hybrid working is an important element of the Council’s:

* strategy for adapting to, and thriving in, the new working environment following the coronavirus pandemic
* recognition of the reducing working space within Council buildings
* commitment to supporting a positive work-life balance for our employees
* employment conditions where it meets the Council’s business needs. There are four hybrid working categories/models for roles in the Council as outlined in section 3 below.
	1. The Council will aim to advertise all job roles on the basis that they are open to hybrid and flexible working options unless there are specific business reasons not to do so. It is recognised that with a labour market approach to recruitment, the emphasis on hybrid working may vary to reflect the type of role and job market, dependent on business need. This will be explained in the recruitment process within the definition and approach outlined above in paragraph 1.4.

1.7 It must be noted that employees cannot work from abroad or at a distance where a daily commute is not feasible, reflecting the contractual requirement to be able to work in the borough of Croydon. Doing so without prior written permission from the Corporate Director may be in breach of terms and conditions of employment. Managers must discuss any exceptional requests to work from abroad temporarily with HR in the first instance (e.g. if a plane is delayed or in self-isolation instances). Such requests may be due to personal/family reasons. Where a manager supports a request to work from abroad temporarily, approval must be sought from their Corporate Director.

1.8 In view of the current evolving nature of the workspace, this policy will be reviewed 6 months after implementation.

**2. Scope**

2.1This policy applies to all Council employees, except staff working for outsourced services, teachers, lecturers and school-based staff who have their own procedures.

2.2Hybrid working principles as outlined in this policy encompasses the working arrangements for all workers, including agency and temporary workers but only employees are eligible to apply for formal flexible working arrangements.

2.3 Where employees have contractual flexible working arrangements already in place these are not changed by the contents of this policy or the supporting documents.

**3. Hybrid Working Models/Categories**

The standard model of hybrid working within the Council is that predicated on the basis of hybrid working being primarily undertaken from the Council workplace, as referred to in paragraph 1.4 above. There are however other types of categories/models of hybrid working for roles within the Council to meet the Council’s business needs accordingly:

* Fixed location based roles
* Community based roles
* Operational roles

3.1 **Fixed Location roles:**

* Where the key roles and responsibilities must be performed from a specific location. This could be because specialist equipment is needed, or because the role requires the postholder to deliver services directly to residents from a fixed location.

3.2 **Community roles:**

* Where the roles and responsibilities are being delivered or take place in local communities away from any office base or homeworking.
* These roles may involve client meetings, visits, inspections, project work and reports in the local community where the service users are, not where the ‘office’ is. However, there may be a need for an admin base from time to time.

3.3 **Operational roles:**

* Where key roles and responsibilities are front facing or ‘operational’ in nature and can only take place outside of an office.
* There is rarely any need to perform computer-based tasks. There may however be some exceptions to this in certain roles.

**4.** **Split between attending work and working remotely**

4.1 **Expected level of attendance at the workplace**

Where there is a business need, whilst recognising the reducing working space in Council offices, it is expected that employees will be present in the Council workplace on a rota basis.

Whilst it is expected that a full-time employee will usually attend the Council workplace for a minimum of 2 days per week (pro rata for part time staff), the number of days per week each employee spends attending the workplace compared with working remotely will vary, depending on:

* the business need of the Council
* their individual circumstances
* the nature of their role and hybrid working model /category
* what is happening within their role and team at any particular time; and
	+ the needs of the service, including the space available at specific work locations.

As outlined above, contractually for most Council employees their base of work is the Council workplace. Whilst working remotely has its benefits, working in collaboration amongst colleagues with a physical presence in the office is beneficial for:

* building individual and team development
* Having detailed / focussed long meetings, discussions or debates
* building and maintaining positive working relationships
* face to face collaborative working
* Creativity or idea generation
* Supporting the local economy

Further, staff should be aware of the mental health benefits and wellbeing aspects of maintaining some physical face to face contact with colleagues.

4.2 **Taking individual circumstances into account**

The Council recognises the benefits of being flexible and that a hybrid working pattern could be difficult for some employees to follow. For example, employees could have challenges with their working environment at home (e.g. due to space restrictions; childcare or caring arrangements) that mean that remote working is difficult for individuals and as a result they would like to attend the workplace more often. The Council encourages employees to speak to their line manager in such instances.

4.3 **Disability and reasonable adjustments**

The Council recognises that as a responsible employer, we have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees. In the context of hybrid working, potential adjustments could include allowing the employee to:

* work from home all or most of the time, even if colleagues are generally expected to split their time between attending the workplace and remote working; or
* split their time between attending the workplace and remote working, even if hybrid working is not generally available for their working style.

Employees should always discuss with their line manager and agree with their Head of Service or Director in advance how the specific adjustment in a hybrid working context can assist with the individual’s needs.

An employee’s workforce adjustment profile, which details their workplace adjustments, will still apply even if the employee changes roles and/or managers within the Council.

4.4 **The need for the workforce to be flexible**

Given the degree of flexibility that our hybrid working arrangements provide, the Council expects the workforce to be flexible.

Employees will be required to attend their Council workplace on particular days at the request of their line manager/head of service, for example for in-person training and for meetings that line management/heads of service have determined are best conducted in person (see 4.1 above, managers will require staff to attend the Council workplace on a rota basis).

Similarly, there may be circumstances in which the Council may ask employees to work remotely, or to work from such other place (s) as may be reasonably required, when employees would otherwise expect to attend the workplace/office, for instance:

* for operational needs, for example if the Council/service have too many employees attending the [workplace/office] on specific days; or
* for emergencies, for example in the event of a pandemic and on government guidance that employees should work from home if they can.

In such cases, employees will be given as much notice as possible.

**5. Arrangements while attending the workplace**

5.1 **Working hours**

For days on which employees are attending the workplace, their normal hours of work will be agreed with the service. The expectation is however that residents will be able to reach staff between the hours of 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday.

5.2 **Workspaces**

All Council employees are/will be provided with lockable drawers/a lockable cupboard. At the end of each day on which employees are attending work, they should ensure that their laptop is either taken away, or secured in a locker.

The Council operates a hot-desking system in Bernard Weatherill House whereby a bank of workstations at the workplace is provided. Services will manage their team hot desk arrangements locally. In other Council premises workspaces will be managed locally as determined by the service need.

Some staff with specific needs may have allocated desks for reasonable adjustments to be put in place. However, if they are not present for the day, the desk must be made available to use by other people unless specialised equipment is present to prevent this.

At the end of each day when employees are attending work, they should ensure that the hot desk is left clean and tidy. The laptop [and other equipment] and any personal items should not be left on hot desks overnight.

5.3 **Safe-working measures**

Employee safety is the Council’s priority. The Council is following the latest government guidance on [reducing the spread of respiratory infections, including COVID-19, in the workplace](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19). This includes having a [corporate risk-assessment](https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/COVID19%20%20Working%20in%20BWH%20risk%20assessment%20-%20August%202021.docx).

The Council encourages the workforce to let their managers know if they have any concerns, have identified any potential risks, or have any suggestions for further adaptations we can make. Employees can do this by raising concerns or making suggestions to their line manager or the Health and Safety Team: <https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/working-croydon/health-and-safety/report-health-and-safety-concern>

All employees have a role to play in ensuring staff can work in a safe environment and employees must follow our safe-working instructions. A failure to do so may be a disciplinary offence and dealt with in accordance with the Council’s disciplinary procedure.

**6. Arrangements while working remotely**

6.1 **Working hours**

The Council’s normal working week is Monday to Saturday, 6.00am to 8.00 pm. While working remotely, employees must be available and working during their normal hours of work as agreed with their service. The expectation is that residents will be able to reach staff between the hours of 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. Key contact time with customers will be determined on a service level according to business needs.

The Council encourages employees to be mindful that they are not overworking - "downtime" from work is essential. Employees can be flexible within their working hours (which may include working earlier or later in the day) as agreed with their service and management, but need to ensure that their office diary is open and signals their availability and working time. To help maintain individual wellbeing, employees are actively encouraged to make sure that they take adequate rest breaks in line with [working time regulations](https://www.acas.org.uk/working-hours) :

* Take a break for lunch each day.
* Even if employees are busy, it is essential that they find the time to take a break of at least 20 minutes during each working day that lasts more than six hours.
* Ensure the time period between stopping work one day and beginning the next is not less than 11 hours.

6.2 **Health and wellbeing support**

All line managers should undertake training in managing remote workers and take responsibility for promoting the importance of good practice in scheduling and managing meetings, encouraging breaks and supporting staff wellbeing.

E-learning is available on Croydon Learning and it is recommended that managers undertake these:

* Preventing workplace stress and supporting staff wellbeing
* Remote working for managers
* 5 tips for successfully managing home and remote workers

Line managers are required to:

* Keep in regular contact with employees – this includes regular team and one-to-one meetings or calls.
* Talk openly about workloads and demands to ensure that employees are not suffering in silence
* Promote a clear distinction between work and home life, such as being mindful of the timings of scheduled meetings.
* Encourage employees to take regular breaks and to use their annual leave and ensure that employees do not feel undue pressure to work if they are ill.
* Make sure that employees are aware of the signs of stress and burnout, as well as the support that is available to them. Talking about stress, mental health and/or burnout openly can help reassure employees that they do not need to work to the detriment of their health.
* Managers will discuss with employees if the employee’s individual circumstances require them to work in the Council workplace due to their home working conditions not being suitable for work for wellbeing reasons, see section 4.2 above.

All employees should be made aware of the health and wellbeing support that is available on the intranet <https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/working-croydon/health-and-wellbeing/mental-health-and-wellbeing/mental-health-and-wellbeing-support> including resources such as:

* [Mental Health support provided by the Council](https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/working-croydon/health-and-wellbeing-staff/mental-health-and-wellbeing/mental-health-what)
* [Mental Health and Wellbeing at Work e-learning](https://croydon.learningpool.com/totara/catalog/index.php?catalog_fts=Mental%20health&cfp_multiselect_corporatetraini_390b9%5b%5d=Equality%20%26%20Diversity&cfp_multiselect_corporatetraini_390b9%5b%5d=Health%20%26%20Well-being&orderbykey=score&itemstyle=narrow)
* [Advice and tips for looking after your own mental health](https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/working-croydon/health-and-wellbeing-staff/mental-health-and-wellbeing/mental-health-what-can-i-do)
* [External mental health support](https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/working-croydon/health-and-wellbeing-staff/mental-health-and-wellbeing/where-else-can-i-get-mental)

6.3 **Sickness**

When working remotely, employees are not encouraged to work if they are unwell. If employees are sick and unable to work, the [sickness absence management policy](https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/working-croydon/hr/sickness) applies.

Employees should notify their line manager as soon as reasonably practicable of their illness, preferably before starting work.

In cases where the employee’s dependent (child/spouse/partner/relative) is taken ill, individuals should consult their line manager as soon as possible to explain the situation which in most cases can be managed by flexible working. However any additional leave requirements outside this should be requested in accordance with procedures within the Additional/Other Leaver policy.

6.4 **Technology and equipment**

To assist employees to work remotely, everyone will be encouraged to complete a [DSE (Display Screen Equipment) self-assessment form](https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/working-croydon/health-and-safety/workstation-and-display-screen-equipment-dse-assessments)

This assessment will determine if any specific or particular equipment will need to be supplied to individuals to enable them to work safely from a home/remote location.

Employees must take care of any equipment that is provided and notify their line manager of any faults with the equipment. If employees need any further equipment, they should notify their line manager.

6.5 **Financial assistance**

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](https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home). As at the date of this policy, the HMRC time easement for claiming tax relief for working from home expenses will end in April 2023.

Please note that the Council does not pay travel costs for transport between home and Council premises.

6.6 **Health and safety**

Employees must liaise with line management to ensure that their remote working set-up is appropriate and that they are working in a safe manner. This will include all employees completing a [DSE (Display Screen Equipment) Form](https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/working-croydon/health-and-safety/workstation-and-display-screen-equipment-dse-assessments)

However, employees must also take responsibility for their own health and safety and that of anyone else who is affected by their work (for example others in their household when they are working from home).

Employees must notify their line manager if:

* they feel any discomfort due to working remotely (such as back pain); or
* they believe that there are any work-related health and safety hazards;
* any work-related accidents occur in their home.

Employees should report any accident or incident on by completing the online accident/incident form :<https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/working-croydon/health-and-safety/report-accident-or-incident>

Line management will escalate the matter to the [Health and Safety Team](https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/working-croydon/health-and-safety/report-health-and-safety-concern) to look into what action can be taken.

6.7 **Data protection**

Employees who are working remotely are responsible for keeping information associated with the Council secure at all times. Specifically, remote workers are under a duty to:

* practise good computer security, including using a unique password for their work laptop [and any other devices they use for work];
* keep all hard copies of work-related documentation secure, including keeping documents locked away at all times except when in use; and
* ensure that work-related information is safeguarded when working in public spaces, for example by:
	+ positioning their laptop so that others cannot see the screen;
	+ not leaving their laptop unattended; and
	+ not having confidential/business-sensitive conversations in public spaces.

In addition, the laptop [and other equipment] provided by the Council must be used for work-related purposes only and must not be used by any other member of your household or third party at any time or for any purpose.

6.8 **Document management principles**

The following principles underpin the Croydon approach to document management which is a critical aspect of working in a hybrid or flexible way:

* **Digital first –** all employees to consider digital rather than paper solutions first
* **Store once –** wherever possible store documents once only
* **Shared –** wherever possible store documents in a shared location (e.g. SharePoint)
* **Know your retention rules –** retention rules vary across services, be aware of yours and undertake regular housekeeping
* **Know your filing structure –** know the filing structure of your service, ensure that you store things in the right place
* **Compliance with confidentiality and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)**

# 7. **Links to other policies**:

* [Health and Safety Policies](https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/working-croydon/hr/health-and-safety/health-and-safety-policies)
* [ICT](https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/working-croydon/information-management/guidance-and-policy-documents)
* [Information Management team: dealing with data breaches, data protection, FOI and SAR enquiries](https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/working-croydon/information-management/guidance-and-policy-documents)
* Managers [guidance for supporting disabled employees](https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Managers%20guidance%20to%20support%20disabled%20employees%20-%20updated%20March%202019.docx)

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