

Thanet District Council Flexible Working Arrangements Policy

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A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of several overlapping, curved bands in various shades of blue and teal, creating a sense of movement and depth.

Policy	Flexible Working Arrangements Policy
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Service	HR
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Policy Statement

This Flexible Working Arrangements Policy demonstrates how Thanet District Council (“the council”) embraces different employee working scenarios in order to balance organisational value with employee workplace satisfaction.

It sets out expectations and requirements of employees, managers and the council, as well as the council’s underlying flexible working principles.

It is one of the HR flexible working policies alongside the:

- Flexible Working Request Policy
- Flexitime Policy.

1. Introduction

Thanet District Council (“the council”) recognises the need to develop modern ways of working to enable employees to maximise their performance and productivity and deliver the greatest value to the organisation, whilst maintaining a good work-life balance. In addition, new technologies are making it easier to access information remotely, work from a variety of locations, whilst promoting a more joined-up service. Remote working is the term used to describe how employees can work from any location, whether it is from a Council building, in the community, from home or any combination of these.

Although not all of the roles within the Council can be classed as totally flexible, there is considerable scope in many cases for some form of flexible and/or remote working arrangements. The different ways in which this can be undertaken is dependent on the demands and needs of the role, the individual’s preferences and circumstances and the service an employee is engaged in. It is possible, with careful planning and a degree of best practice evaluation, for staff to carry out their duties from a variety of different locations and/or in a variety of working patterns all of which support their individual work/life balance alongside the needs of the service.

It is recognised that a safe and healthy working environment is required in any work location, and this not only relies on effective IT infrastructure and the provision of suitable IT equipment, but also on staff engagement and a manager’s interaction with each member of their team.

2. Scope and Audience

This policy sets out the Council’s approach to the way that employees work, which allows employees to split their time between attending their normal workplace and working remotely (hybrid working) but is also subject to the needs of the service.

This policy must be considered alongside the Council’s other corporate strategies and policies, in particular those relating to human resources, ICT, health and safety and Data Protection.

Its audience is all council employees, while recognising that not all roles are suitable to some or all of the measures within this policy.

3. Key Principles

We will base our flexible working arrangements on the following principles:

- All decisions regarding flexible working arrangements will be based on what provides the best possible outcomes and services for our residents, service users, customers and partners. It won't be suitable for every employee and will depend on the role they do; the level of supervision needed; the minimal levels of physical cover required in the role; and the technology and environment available to each individual.
- Flexible working arrangements will not impact the level or quality of service to our customers, colleagues and partners.
- Leadership and engagement of our teams is critical to the planning and delivery of successful working arrangements.
- Work will take place at the most effective locations and at the most effective times.
- Working remotely reduces the impact on the environment in line with the Council's climate change strategy.
- Employees have the opportunity to lead balanced and healthy lives.
- Employees are required to structure their day/week in a way that balances their work with the needs of the Council. Employees are responsible for managing their own time and working their contracted hours. Employees must recognise that the ability to work from home is not a substitute for arranging child care or similar carer responsibilities, and it is their responsibility to ensure that adequate provisions are in place to avoid conflict with work performance when they are working from home. Any abuse of trust or misconduct may be dealt with under the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- Employees will be expected to apply the same response times to Councillor calls and emails wherever they are located. Should this standard not be met employees will be required to work from the office.
- The immediate line manager will decide when employees are required to work in the office and what arrangements are suitable and effective for service delivery, taking into account an awareness of employee wellbeing and the wider service needs that have to be met.
- Managers will endeavour to give reasonable notice when employees are expected to attend the office for a specific day/time that would not usually be required, however it is ultimately the managers decision and it is expected that employees will be available to attend such requests to meet the needs of the Council.
- There will be occasions when working in the office is critical for a variety of reasons, such times may include but are not limited to training, 1-2-1 meetings, team meetings, investigations, formal hearings/meetings, employees who are not achieving the best results due to the environment they are working in, appraisals, managers forum, staff briefings and customer appointments where it has been determined that they are best conducted in person.

- There may be circumstances when employees are asked to work from home, such as in the event of a lockdown, unforeseen event or where government guidance is given that employees should work from home if they can.
- The Council will ensure that employees have the right technology and equipment in place to carry out their role and support their working arrangements.
- The Council's Code of Conduct will apply to all staff regardless of their working location.
- The Council recognises that it has the same health and safety responsibilities for employees working at home and in other remote locations, as for any other worker.
- By implementing this policy the Council is better supporting employees who may find some aspects of fully office based work challenging for various reasons, such as travel, distractions that an office environment may present, disability or health related issues. Careful consideration has been taken on the health and safety aspects of flexible working arrangements and the council's commitment to providing suitable environments for all, including the provision of specialist equipment and reasonable adjustments where needed.
- The Council recognises that for some colleagues the option for flexible working arrangements is greatly reduced or is not available at all due to the nature of their role, as they are required to deliver a service from a specific location or at a specific time. In these cases local options can be discussed and agreed where appropriate to allow as much flexibility as possible for all colleagues.

4. Policy Purpose

This policy is designed to assist both managers and employees in implementing safe working arrangements regardless where employees are working from, by highlighting areas for consideration and providing practical advice and Information.

This policy is about making the best use of the way we work through flexible and remote working practices and focuses on achieving the following:

- Meeting the aspirations of both Managers and employees by getting the right work life balance that best fits the needs of the Council and its employees;
- Increased productivity and effectiveness of our activities;
- Reducing the costs of running the Council by making the best use of our assets;
- Creating office environments that allow collaboration and innovation;
- Reducing the environmental footprint of our working practices.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Corporate Responsibility

- The Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service) on behalf of the Council carries overall responsibility for ensuring that the Council has the appropriate processes in place which adequately and appropriately support its employees, regardless of what working pattern or arrangement they have in place.

- HR is responsible for providing advice and guidance on this Policy.
- HR is responsible for reviewing, updating and amending this policy to reflect changes in legislation or employment practice in conjunction with the Chief Executive and Trade Unions where appropriate.

Directors will:

- Lead and maintain an overview of flexible working arrangements in their area of responsibility.
- Ensure effective implementation of this policy and ensure that it is applied fairly and reasonably across service areas.
- Ensure continued service delivery.

Managers will:

- Ensure they and any member of their team interested in flexible working arrangements are familiar with this policy and the Lone Worker policy.
- Ensure flexibility, openness and constructiveness in discussions and agreements with team members about flexible working arrangements, whilst focussing on the needs of their service. Any issues around disability and reasonable adjustments must form part of these discussions.
- Determine whether a role is suitable for flexible working arrangements.
- Assess whether the post holder and their home environment are suitable for remote working (including Health & Safety considerations).
- Make arrangements for regular and effective communication between themselves and team members by way of Council updates, individual one-to-ones and team meetings to ensure effective management at all times.
- Provide support and discuss any issues that arise with the arrangement with the employee as soon as possible;
- Ensure flexible working arrangements are managed consistently with other team members and give the same opportunities for training and development;
- Determine the requirement for flexible/remote workers to attend the office;
- Ensure that team members complete any compulsory training including e-learning modules and display screen equipment
- Ensure suitable and sufficient risk assessments are in place covering other risks associated with flexible working arrangements, such as stress and mental health, and lone working;
- Support new starters, specifically ensuring they have all the equipment they need to work effectively from day one and helping them select the most appropriate working styles taking into account their role and personal circumstances;
- Only visit the home of remote workers where this has been agreed by both parties and an appointment has been booked in advance as it would be for any other meeting in the office; If a visit is required due to welfare concerns and this is therefore not possible, this should be discussed with HR to make appropriate arrangements.
- Regularly review the flexible working arrangements.

Employees will:

- Jointly agree their flexible working arrangements with their manager;
- Ensure their remote/home environment is appropriate and conducive to remote/home working, this includes making childcare/caring arrangements during working hours;
- Alert their manager if their remote/home environment changes temporarily or permanently which renders it inappropriate for remote/home working;
- Maintain regular contact with their line manager and colleagues as agreed;
- Comply with all relevant risk assessments as necessary;
- Undertake regular risk assessments of their home workstations and complete all required training courses, including the compulsory e-learning modules;
- Attend the office as required by their line manager;
- Allow the Council access to their home, with reasonable notice;
- Ensure they have adequate internet and telephone connections and are contactable during working hours;
- Ensure that they have informed their home insurers that they are conducting their work from home, as required;
- Take reasonable care of any Council equipment;
- Follow the same Council policies and procedures as office-based employees;
- Familiarise themselves with the Council's Lone Worker Policy.

6. What are Flexible Working Arrangements?

Flexible working arrangements give more choice over deciding how, when and where employees work best in a way that balances the needs of the Council and their team. It opens up opportunities to many roles of working remotely, at home and/or working in an office environment. Flexible working arrangements will therefore be decided by individual departments/managers in order to provide the best possible outcomes in relation to the Council's objectives.

7. The Benefits of Flexible Working Arrangements

Our working arrangements provide benefits for our residents, employees, services users and the Council in a number of ways:

- It enables employees to manage their working day in the most efficient way and focus more effectively on a piece of work, particularly where concentration is important, resulting in increased productivity.
- Travel time and costs can be greatly reduced.
- It lowers our environmental impact through reduced emissions from reduced travel to the workplace.
- It provides for a better work life balance for employees whilst also supporting their wellbeing.
- It can reduce stress levels and provide greater job satisfaction, motivation and engagement resulting in less absenteeism and the related costs.

- It may result in improved recruitment and retention of skilled and experienced employees by offering a wider range of work styles to match individual preferences.

8. Types of Flexible Working Arrangements

Office/depot based employees who:

- Spend most of their time working at a fixed desk in an office/depot;
- Have specific, individual equipment/furniture needs to be able to perform their role and work effectively;
- Spend little time away from their desk except for meetings with colleagues in the office;
- Do not have an option/or preference to work from home.

Hybrid employees who;

- Split their time between office and home working;
- May also spend time attending meetings or working at other partner or client sites.

Mainly home based employees who;

- Spend the vast majority of their time working from home;
- Come into the office only for specific meetings or for other reasons as required.

9. Further information and Contacts

For any issue relating to display screen equipment, risk assessments, stress and mental health or any other health and safety at work concern, please contact the Corporate Health & Safety team at healthsafety@thanet.gov.uk

For any issue relating to working hours, sickness absence, travel/mileage and flexible working arrangements, please contact HR at hr@thanet.gov.uk

10. Equality Statement

The Council is committed to promoting equality, valuing diversity and inclusion and combating unfair treatment. The Council will endeavour to ensure equal access to its policies and procedures and will combat discrimination or less favourable treatment on the grounds of any irrelevant consideration, in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.