

# Homeworking Guidance

## 1 Purpose

- 1.1 Healthwatch Worcestershire recognises that flexible working opportunities can benefit everyone and, even before the implementation of the Flexible Working Regulations (Part 9 of the Children and Families Act 2014), offered an extended right to all employees who had 26 weeks continuous service and had not made another application in the past 12 months.
- 1.2 The organisation has a duty to give reasonable consideration to Flexible Working requests. Homeworking is just one example of a flexible working pattern which might be considered.
- 1.3 This guidance is not contractual and does not form part of an employee's contract of employment. Healthwatch Worcestershire reserves the right to make amendments to this guidance from time to time at its sole discretion.

## 2 Definition

- 2.1 Homeworking is an arrangement in which employees perform some or most of their usual job-related duties at home rather than in a central workplace.
- 2.2 This can be on an occasional basis (no agreed pattern of homeworking), a regular basis (eg one day a week or 2 days per month) or as a designated homeworker (whose normal place of work is their home even though they may work elsewhere for some of their working hours).
- 2.3 This guidance primarily deals with designated homeworking but the principles apply equally where homeworking is less frequent.

## 3 When might homeworking be a suitable option?

- 3.1 In considering homeworking, both managers and employees need to be realistic about the nature of the role. Some types of work are more suited to homeworking than others, eg telesales and marketing, consultancy and professional services, research and development.
- 3.2 It is widely considered that wherever possible, a partial homeworking arrangement is more likely to meet organisational needs than a full homeworking arrangement and this offers significant social benefits for the employee.

## **4 Benefits and Issues**

4.1 A 2013 report by ACAS found that the benefits of homeworking included:

- freed-up office space
- reduced office overheads
- ability to recruit and retain a more diverse and talented workforce
- improved performance and productivity
- a greater sense of well-being
- less work:life conflict
- improved job satisfaction and engagement (related to autonomy)
- workers being willing to work beyond their contractual hours

4.2 However, certain issues needed to be considered and resolved, including:

- confidentiality and data security
- distractions (or different distractions)
- less managerial control, particularly in terms of supervision and workload monitoring
- impact on colleagues workload
- social isolation/less interaction with the team
- less information sharing (particularly informally)
- less flexibility/support between roles (eg covering other people's duties)
- perceptions of fairness (in particular from employees whose work does not lend itself to homeworking)

## **5 Health and Safety**

5.1 The employer remains responsible for all the normal Health and Safety legislation (including the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Display Screen Equipment Regulations and the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations). Normal duty of care is extended to homeworkers; this includes accident and near miss reporting and investigation.

5.2 Where homeworking is being considered, it is essential that a health and safety trained manager carries out a Workplace Risk Assessment ensuring that the employee's home is safe, secure and reasonably distraction-free and that risks are identified, assessed and mitigated so that the remaining risk is 'low'.

5.3 Managers will also wish to discuss the arrangements in depth with the employee to satisfy that working without close supervision is not likely to cause undue stress and that they are able to separate their work from their personal life and overcome the threats posed by working in isolation.

5.4 A work-station self-assessment must be carried out and the employee should seek advice as to how to set up and adjust their work-station to protect against physical/musculoskeletal problems.

- 5.5 Where homeworking is agreed on an ad hoc basis (rather than as a designated homeworker) the employee will be responsible for self-assessing their work station set up to ensure safe working.
- 5.6 Under no circumstances should meetings with external visitors take place at the employee's home. Employees who meet with colleagues or external visitors should make arrangements to meet at the office or in a safe public building.
- 5.7 It is strongly recommended that timesheets are completed by the homeworker to allow the manager to monitor that regular breaks are taken, that work is not being conducted at unreasonable times and that the Working Time Regulations are complied with.

## **6 Data Security and Management**

- 6.1 Healthwatch Worcestershire should ensure compliance with its Data Security and Management policy, in particular, where homeworkers are dealing with information on identifiable living people. Managers will need to ensure that homeworkers are fully trained on Data Security and checks are made on a regular basis.
- 6.2 Where there is a risk that other household occupants might gain access to work related computer files, these should be password protected and great care should be taken not to inadvertently disclose passwords.
- 6.3 Employees should be instructed to store information files in a lockable cabinet and to destroy data that is no longer required using a cross-cut shredder.
- 6.4 Additionally, consideration will need to be given to whether employees will be involved in phone calls (including with and related to members of the public) and ensuring that confidential information cannot be overheard by other household occupants or visitors

## **7 Technology and equipment**

- 7.1 It is strongly recommended that the employee is given 'at home' support in setting up their technology, eg dial up laptop, ergonomic keyboard, Blackberry, printer, and given clear guidance on how to deal with technology faults and breakdowns.
- 7.2 Where electrical equipment is provided by Healthwatch Worcestershire, it should be PAT tested and regularly maintained.
- 7.3 Where the organisation owns the technology and equipment, they should check with their insurers that insurance will remain valid and if additional premiums are payable.

## **8 Managing homeworkers**

- 8.1 The attitude of managers is key to successful homeworking and often requires them to adopt new ways of motivating and monitoring their staff, in particular, with regard to trust, performance management, communication and training. Managers will need to measure effectiveness in terms of output rather than hours worked.
- 8.2 Managers will need to agree in advance with the employee the way the job will be managed, eg 2-way flexibility, supervision, core hours, expenses, technology and security.
- 8.3 Managers will need to arrange regular 1-to-1 meetings; it is strongly recommended that wherever practicable these are held in the central office to ensure that homeworkers interact with their office-based colleagues on a frequent basis.
- 8.4 Managers should ensure that homeworkers are involved in team meetings and social activities. It is strongly recommended that initial induction is carried out in the central office.
- 8.5 Certain individuals may not be considered suitable to be homeworkers, including those who lack time management, self-discipline and motivation or have poor communication and technology skills.
- 8.6 Only under exceptional circumstances should employees with less than 12 months satisfactory service be approved as a designated homeworker.

## **9 Responsibilities of the homeworker**

- 9.1 Employees who work from home are advised to:
  - i) check whether there are any restrictions on homeworking within the terms of their lease, mortgage or tenancy agreement;
  - ii) keep their insurance company informed about the new use of their home;
  - iii) check if planning permission will be required and apply if necessary (this is unlikely for a home office);
  - iv) check if business rates rather than council tax are payable on the part of the property used for work (this is unlikely for a home office);
  - v) ensure their own health and safety and the safety of others living in their home or visiting;
  - vi) ensure they keep sensitive information safe and secure, eg by locking files away and destroying data securely when they have finished with it.
- 9.2 The employee may be able to offset against tax reasonable business expenses (up to £4 per week) for working from home (including heating, lighting, additionally home contents insurance, business telephone calls, etc.) This does not include any alterations to buildings or purchase of furniture.

The employee is advised to discuss in advance with the Tax Office as such a claim may give rise to Capital Gains Tax.

- 9.3 Employees should NOT claim expenses for attending the office as required and for tax purposes such journeys will be treated as travel to normal place of work. Where the employee is required to travel to other places of work eg community meetings) they should claim mileage for whichever is the shortest of the journeys - home to meeting or central workplace to meeting.
- 9.4 In the event that the homeworker moves to a different home address, temporarily or permanently, they must inform their line manager and the suitability of the new work location must be assessed.

## **10 Contractual issues**

- 10.1 It is highly recommended that a trial period of 3 months is agreed to test out the arrangements. Managers are responsible for ensuring that the arrangements are regularly reviewed during the trial period to confirm suitability or consider how they can be adjusted to support the service. Where the manager is not satisfied that the arrangements are working, and no suitable adjustments can be made, the employee will revert to their original contractual arrangements at the end of the trial.
- 10.2 Following a successful trial period, employees will be given a revised Written Statement of Employment Particulars to contractually change the working arrangements.
- 10.3 In the event that the homeworking arrangement ceases to meet the organisation's needs, Healthwatch Worcestershire reserves the right to review homeworking, as with any other flexible working, at any time and to make changes subject to reasonable consultation.