

1. Introduction

East Suffolk Council (ESC) recognises that the workforce does not need to be in set buildings to effectively provide services. Agile working can support the development of modern working practices enabling our people to maximise their performance and productivity, whilst maintaining a good work life balance. In addition, technology makes it easy to access information remotely, work from a variety of locations, whilst promoting a more joined up service. However, it is important to note that quality of service delivery must not be compromised by working in an agile way.

In many areas of the Council our people, staff and members, will be able to choose when, where and how they work in the future as long as it suits the purpose of their job role and once it is safe to do so. This will give us the fantastic opportunity to embrace the benefits from home working during COVID-19 of being able to spend more time at home, while enabling our people to be flexible in the way they work and reconnect with their colleagues and the office as needed. The Council is able to respond to what our People have told us in our comprehensive staff survey about their working preferences as we move out of the pandemic.

The key principles that underpin this guide are:

1. **We want to capitalise on our new agile working culture to provide an environment where staff and members can thrive.** Instead of regimented office-working, we want to allow our people to be as flexible as possible, while still connecting easily with colleagues and utilising office space as and when required.
2. **We want to make smarter use of hybrid workspaces which merge the physical and virtual office.** Therefore, we will invest further in digital innovation and automation to help further develop - and provide the necessary support and tools for - our flexible workforce.
3. **We will re-design our physical workplace to help drive the organisation forward with a shared sense of purpose and a culture of collaboration.** Our future office space will not support full working weeks for everyone but will feature a range of differing environments to inspire creative thinking, provide quiet working areas and unite the organisation for meetings.
4. **Our new working culture will be designed with the environment at heart. The blending of virtual and physical workspaces should help reduce ESC's carbon footprint.** This includes reductions in emissions from travel and reducing waste - particularly from plastic and paper.

5. **Naturally, we want the organisation to operate efficiently and to make the most appropriate use of our resources.** We will therefore ensure that sensible and progressive decisions are made about the future of our workplaces which match our progressive ambitions, but which will also help us achieve financial sustainability.

2. Scope

This Guide applies to all employees and members at East Suffolk Council. Although relevant to employees working at all levels within the organisation, the nature and extent of Agile Working will depend upon the job undertaken. It is important to note that there are some roles that can't be undertaken at home. Other considerations will include the impact on the ability to meet customer demand (internal and external), employee welfare and UK GDPR implications of carrying out certain roles in a home / community context. The Guide also applies to Members.

The different ways in which Agile working can be undertaken is dependent on the demands and needs of the role and service the individual's preferences and circumstances. This must always ensure that the needs of the service user are the key priority.

3. What is agile working?

Agile working underpins the principle that work is an activity we do rather than a place we go. It places an emphasis on how we make use of the technology and workspace available to complete our work. The Agile Working Guide sits alongside the Council's Flexible Working Policy [Flexible Working Guidance and Options.docx \(sharepoint.com\)](#).

By working in an agile way we will develop a more modern, dynamic workforce that delivers our services from locations other than the traditional working environment of a desk in a council building. Agile working enables employees to work flexibly from any location, whether it is from a Council building, within the community at a touch down location or by varying degrees of home working and regular working from the office.

Introducing more agile working practices will involve developing a new work culture with new approaches to management and teamwork looking at outcomes as the measure of success.

4. Benefits and disbenefits

This approach to agile working supports what our people have said in the recent survey that they are looking for in future working environments:

- Saving on commuting time and cost and reduction in our carbon footprint;

- Greater flexibility in working hours and better work life balance, with improved employee wellbeing, health and happiness – reduced stress, better sense of control, greater job satisfaction, motivation, morale and productivity;
- An opportunity for our people to manage their working day more efficiently with increased engagement as a result of autonomy and trust at work;
- Offering a range of work styles to match individual work preferences will enable people to work where they can be comfortable, able to concentrate and focus and therefore be more effective;
- Ensuring the office provides social interaction and collaborative space.

Some people also experience difficulties working from home and this should be acknowledged and addressed through the work style agreed. The main disadvantages identified through the survey are the lack of social interaction with colleagues, missing out on ad hoc conversations, access to printers and feeling less engaged with the organisation as a whole when people have been solely working from home.

Our people have said that they appreciate wearing more comfortable clothing when they work from home. It is fine that you take a more casual approach when you work in the office in the future although please take into account how you represent the Council if you meet customers as part of your role. If unsure, speak to your manager.

5. Responsibilities

Corporate responsibilities

CMT are responsible for establishing arrangements to ensure:

- Effective implementation of this guide;
- Continued service delivery;
- Consultation with their employees on these arrangements;

Management Responsibilities

- Being flexible, open and constructive whilst remaining focused on the needs of the service.
- Ensuring regular communication is maintained between themselves and team members, providing support.
- Being flexible in requiring the employee to attend the office at short notice.
- Setting and monitoring defined performance measures in line with the Council's Performance Management arrangements - see [Performance Improvement Policy - June 2021.docx \(sharepoint.com\)](#).
- Allowing employees who are working from home to have a right to privacy out of working hours and the ability to separate their working and home lives.

- Meeting their duties in relation to health and safety by undertaking appropriate risk assessments and acting on any areas of concern for their employees.
- Jointly agreeing with the employee their Agile working style and how this will be achieved.

Employee Responsibilities

- Complying with this Guide in a reasonable, constructive and appropriate manner.
- Jointly agreeing an agile working style with their manager and maintaining regular contact with their manager.
- Being flexible, open and constructive in discussing and agreeing agile working arrangements, whilst remaining focused on the needs of service.
- Complying with Health and Safety policy and procedures by participating in and undertaking risk assessments; carrying out any necessary actions to minimise risk; maintaining a safe working environment and taking reasonable care of their own safety.
- Complying with confidentiality, data protection and internet security policies.
- Ensure that all reasonable care is taken of all Council supplied ICT equipment
- Reporting immediately once known, any loss, theft or damage to Council IT equipment or the loss of confidential information.
- Consulting with any necessary parties, such as insurance companies, regarding home working.

Staff must accept it is a reasonable request for a manager to require them to work in the office for performance, operational and or team needs, determined by the manager.

6. Managing Teams

Skills needed to manage teams in an agile environment

Good people management skills underpin our ways of working. Employees should be valued and trusted for their performance rather than their presence at a set location. Employees' contribution may be less obvious to a line manager who is not present to see the impact. Managers should therefore focus on what the employee achieves (the outcome) and how they achieve it.

For our ways of working to be effective employees need to understand:

- What they are expected to do – managers should set clear objectives and be clear what outcomes are expected and give clear deadlines
- The method of agreeing/monitoring workload
- How success will be measured
- What communication is required from them
- How the line manager will communicate with them
- What decisions they can take without reference to their manager

For an employee to work in this way they need to demonstrate adaptability being willing to adopt new working practices and technology. This way of working also requires a high level of trust between managers and employees.

A programme of learning and development is available to help develop and refresh manager's skills and behaviours to support the management of agile teams.

Underpinning requirements of agile working

- Clear and realistic objectives should be agreed between the employee and their manager to enable their performance to be managed by outcomes rather than presence. This should be reviewed on a regular basis through the 'My Conversation' process. Employees will be expected to deliver the outcomes agreed with their manager.
- Staff should normally only come into the office for a purpose (project / meeting / administrative function/onboarding new starters). Exceptions apply for those who need to be designated office workers or for well-being reasons.
- Large scale team meetings should continue to be held remotely.
- Staff can come into the office for part days and book desks for part days.
- Staff should come into the office for identified training needs which is integral to their role or considered a corporate need.

Communication

Through our Survey we understand that our people haven't always felt fully connected to the organisation – the need to be kept informed is very important.

Managers should agree how they will keep their team informed of key information and team news especially if employees are not typically physically present in the same place. For example, periodic team meetings may be scheduled to bring team members together. Teams need to decide:

- How they communicate and share information
- How they will make it clear when and where they are working – e.g. via keeping outlook calendars up to date.
- How employees that are working remotely can be contacted – e.g. by using MS Teams or a work mobile.

Team cohesion

When working in different locations and at different times, social relationships need to be maintained and appropriate online and offline mechanisms need to be developed, such as buddy schemes for new recruits, regular team meetings, staff briefings etc.

Agile workers require more autonomy, and to be trusted to make their own choices about how to organise their working lives. It involves a new kind of dialogue with staff, based on clarity of expectations and good communications and much more trust.

It is the responsibility of teams to look out for each other, and in particular for managers of dispersed teams to spot problems and resolve them before they become major issues. These may be teased out through regular conversations, or clues may be spotted in terms of performance. If necessary, the manager and team member can agree an alternative work style. It is about finding the right work style for the individual, and about providing the appropriate support to overcome the particular problem.

7. Home working

Through our Survey we know that 92% of respondents wish to: continue working at home for the majority of the time, just going into the office for specific events or; agree a flexible approach working in the office as and when required each week or; to agree set days for working from home and in the office each week. The remaining 8% want to work in the office for the whole of their working week. The Councils approach to Agile working should enable preferences to be met in most cases.

The most appropriate approach to working will be agreed with the manager and will likely include some working from home.

Although agile workers will not necessarily work standard office hours (unless the role dictates this), it is important to agree a work programme so that other team members are aware of the individual's working pattern, where they are located and know when and how to contact them. This allows employees who are using their homes as part of their agile working arrangements, to have a right to privacy out of hours and be able to separate their working and home lives.

8. Fully Home Working

In exceptional circumstances it may be appropriate for someone to work completely at home, i.e., where the normal place of work is at home with no desk or office space provision at any council site. Also, it may be possible in some circumstances for an employee to live in another part of the country or even the world. However, the conditions will be more complex for this and there needs to be significant consideration given to a request by the individual, the line manager and Head of Service.

Should this be approved the employment terms and conditions will change and an addendum to the employment contract will be issued.

9. Health and Safety

Employees have a responsibility for their own and others' health and safety while they are carrying out work activities regardless of the work location in accordance with the Council's Health and Safety Policy. The same duties under the Health & Safety at Work Act continue to apply. Work must be able to be done safely and equipment and information must be safely and securely stored according to council's guidelines.

When working from home the employee has a responsibility to ensure they have an appropriate workspace with adequate security, storage and screening from activities and noise in the rest of the home. There must also be adequate ventilation and lighting. Employees must not carry out work meetings in their home with customers, elected members or officers from other agencies.

If homeworkers need to attend site meetings direct from home, they must follow the Council's Lone Working Policy

The Council has a generic risk assessment template that covers working from home that Line Managers can adopt or amend as appropriate. Line managers should ensure that any of their team who routinely work from home can implement the controls in the Team's risk assessment.

Line managers should seek advice from the Corporate Health and Safety Team for any risks for which they cannot determine an appropriate control.

Employees must confirm that they will notify the Council if any changes occur following the assessment. All reasonable steps to ensure that working conditions continue to comply with Health and Safety requirements must be undertaken.

All accidents and injuries which occur in the course of the employee's homeworking should be reported in the usual way.

Where employees use other Council locations to work they should familiarise themselves with the local arrangements for managing health and safety. They should ensure they are aware of fire safety arrangements to ensure they are fully conversant with the actions to be taken in the event of discovering a fire or on hearing the fire alarm signal and ensure they adhere to the local signing in and out arrangements.

Due consideration to lone working arrangements should be explored fully between the line manager and employee to ensure safe working arrangements are in place.

10. ICT Security and Data Protection

The Council provides employees with access to the personal and confidential information they need to do their job. This information must not be disclosed to others who are not authorised to see it and the security of council information and equipment is of utmost importance.

When working in a mobile way or from home all members of staff who hold or collect personal data are responsible for their own compliance with data protection law and must ensure that personal and / or sensitive information is kept and processed in accordance with UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Council's Data Protection Policy

Working from home may result in information being held outside the office environment for a longer period of time and the security of documents is of high importance. The key thing

to remember if you are working at home, or anywhere else away from your usual office space, is that the same data protection and security principles apply as they would if you were in the office.

Managers should ensure that they are aware of issues concerning protection of sensitive and confidential data, and protection of data from accidental loss. Any issues concerning data should be reported to the Data Protection team as soon as it is discovered and if the issue involves ICT equipment in any way it should be reported to the ICT Service Desk immediately so that systems can be made secure.

Please refer to the  [ICT Security Policy](#), the  [ICT Acceptable Use Policy](#) and the  [Data Protection Policy](#) for more information.

11. Allocation of Equipment and Other Financial Support

The manager, in consultation with the employee will determine their workstyle/activity. ICT will be responsible for determining and providing the equipment and technical requirements for the employee undertaking an Agile working arrangement.

Personally adapted equipment will be provided to an individual should a Workstation Assessment deem this necessary; however, this equipment will be provided at the place where they predominantly work and not across multiple sites. Therefore, the individual will be responsible for ensuring that this equipment is available for their use wherever they work.

Corporate mobile devices (e.g., laptops) provide remote access functionality and guidance on using this feature is available from ICT team. If additional or new equipment is required to support mobile working, then an ICT system request should be made by the employee and authorised by the appropriate manager.

The employee should use the Council's equipment whilst Agile Working and will not be eligible to claim expenses for use of personal equipment such as home phone lines or printers.

Any abuse of a mobile working arrangement may lead to the retrieval of ICT equipment and possibly to disciplinary action depending on the circumstances. Employees must be able to work from home free from distractions and any form of mobile working or homeworking should not be used in place of caring responsibilities.

Any additional costs incurred by working from home e.g. energy or heating costs, broadband supply, will be met by the employee, in the same way that any savings made by working from home, such as saving on travel expenses, will be gained by the employee.

The Council is aware of working from home tax relief, which employees can claim from HMRC. The Council are **not** responsible for claiming this tax relief on behalf of employees.

(<https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home>). This allowance helps offset costs for utility charges.

12. Insurance, Mortgages and Tenancy Agreements

Most home contents insurance policies cover “clerical or administrative duties” and for occasional home working this would suffice. However, it is worth checking with your insurance company as to the extent of their definition and where there is any change in premium. This is likely to be minimal and information suggests may even be cheaper due to the increased presence in the home. All corporate ICT equipment is covered by the Council’s own insurance and warranties for loss or damage.

Formal notification to mortgage lenders or landlords to obtain their agreement to the partial use of home premises for work may also be required and it’s advised to check.

13. Review

This agile working guide and approach will be reviewed as the Council continues the journey of recovery. At this stage, there is no intention to review terms and conditions of employment and for administrative purposes and for the claiming of travel expenses everyone’s contractual base will remain unchanged.