

# **Flexible Working**

## **Health and Safety Guidance for Managers**

**Issued by Occupational Safety Team**

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## Manager's Responsibilities

### What are your responsibilities as a manager?

To ensure that you: -

- Carry out suitable and sufficient risk assessments of mobile/flexible workers activities and working environments.
- Ensure mobile/flexible workers are aware of their own safety responsibilities.
- Implement a system to ensure mobile/flexible workers personal safety whilst at work.
- Provide suitable and safe equipment for mobile/flexible workers.
- Have regular contact with your mobile /flexible workers including regular One to Ones and Supervision Sessions. Ensure health & safety is a discussion topic. Record details discussed.
- Provide suitable and appropriate training for mobile/flexible workers.
- Make mobile/flexible workers aware of how to report accidents, hazards and problems, and who to.
- Consider what first aid provisions may be required for mobile/flexible workers. This will be dependant on the nature of the risks involved with the work they are undertaking.

## Contents

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>Manager's Responsibilities</b> .....                           | <b>2</b> |
| <b>1. Introduction</b> .....                                      | <b>4</b> |
| <b>2. Personal Safety</b> .....                                   | <b>5</b> |
| <b>3. Accident and sickness reporting</b> .....                   | <b>5</b> |
| <b>4. Disability issues</b> .....                                 | <b>6</b> |
| <b>5. First aid</b> .....   | <b>6</b> |
| <b>6. Training</b> .....  | <b>6</b> |
| <b>7. Lone Working</b> .....                                      | <b>6</b> |
| <b>8. Working Time</b> .....                                      | <b>6</b> |
| <b>9. Touchdown Points and Non-territorial Workstations</b> ..... | <b>7</b> |
| <b>10. Portable Computers</b> .....                               | <b>7</b> |
| <b>11. Driving</b> .....  | <b>7</b> |
| <b>12. Working in vehicles</b> .....                              | <b>8</b> |
| <b>13. Public transport</b> .....                                 | <b>8</b> |
| <b>14. Working from home</b> .....                                | <b>8</b> |
| <b>15. Stress and wellbeing</b> .....                             | <b>9</b> |

### 1. Introduction

This guidance document is to help managers of employees who are enabled or required to work away from the work base, or at a variety of sites.

Managers have a duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees wherever they may be working.

Many health and safety issues associated with mobile/flexible workers are no different from those for employees working at a fixed office base, but the potential for injury and ill health among mobile/flexible workers can be increased by poor working conditions, the need to carry equipment, exposure to the general public, social isolation and the lack of supervision.

Health and safety issues have to be considered for all aspects of mobile/flexible working i.e. suitability of task and employee, suitability of workspace, working environment, training requirements, procedures and equipment required etc.

Managers (on behalf of the Council) are required by law to do suitable and sufficient risk assessments for mobile/flexible workers, identifying the hazards relating to the work activities, working environment and foreseeable hazards, emergencies etc. **(See the guidance on completing risk assessments on the Occupational Safety website [www.bradford.gov.uk/hands](http://www.bradford.gov.uk/hands) .)** It is not practicable to carry out full risk assessments for all mobile/flexible workers in all situations e.g. a visiting officer may have to visit members of the public at several home addresses during a single day. This is particularly so in situations where a mobile/flexible worker works at a location for a very short period of time, for example occasional work on a train, or delivering equipment.

Managers should risk assess all known and likely significant hazards arising out of the work activities and the work environments the mobile/flexible worker is likely to find themselves in. Managers should discuss with their employees about the health and safety issues they perceive to be a risk in their workplace.

Managers must record the findings of risk assessments (See [Risk Assessment Form RA1 and Guidance](#) on Occupational Safety Website) and review and revise them annually and or when a significant change occurs.

Health & Safety legislation applies to all employees, including mobile/flexible workers, e.g.

- Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations
- Manual Handling Operations Regulations
- Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations
- Display Screen Equipment Regulations

Guidance and hazard identification checklists have been produced to help managers undertake these risk assessments and can be used as part of the mobile/flexible worker health and safety risk assessment process.

These are available on the Occupational Safety website [www.bradford.gov.uk/hands](http://www.bradford.gov.uk/hands) .

This guidance is not exhaustive and the risk assessments may highlight the need for other requirements, procedures, information or training.

### 2. Personal Safety

Mobile/flexible workers should have information/training on the health and safety risks highlighted in the risk assessment and what controls are in place, action to take etc. They need to have the information and ability to do on the spot 'assessments' to ensure their own health and safety. The risk assessment will highlight which equipment is necessary for the task(s) e.g. mobile phones, laptops, a torch, personal alarms or dog deterrent devices. All equipment must be maintained and inspected regularly. Procedures should clearly state the responsibilities of both the employee and manager in the maintenance and inspection regime.

Where employees have to visit areas, or individuals, which may prompt strong reactions, then managers should consider setting up a procedure for individuals or supervisors to check for relevant information from their own department's up-to-date Incident Register of high risk addresses or clients. The information may indicate that further controls are required e.g. mobile/flexible workers are required to pair up or work as a team for the visit; or to report in by phone immediately after the visit; or have a system of checking a mobile/flexible workers whereabouts.

Where the job carries any risk of aggressive encounters with clients/members of the public, mobile/flexible workers should be trained in personal safety awareness. Training topics should include:

- reading and managing body language,
- understanding how problem situations may escalate,
- diffusing aggression,
- knowing when to leave.

Employees may need to be trained in 'break-away' techniques but must also be taught to use them only when absolutely necessary.

There must be a procedure in place to ensure the safety of mobile/flexible workers at the end of the working day if they are not required to return to the office or base e.g. a phone call into base as they leave their last visit.

Depending on the nature of the work, the risk assessment may indicate mobile/flexible workers have to adhere to contact procedure agreed with their manager.

The procedure should also set out the actions to be taken when an employee fails to return or telephone into base. It also needs to be clear who is responsible for initiating the procedure. All employees must be informed of the procedure and managers should ensure the procedure is followed.

### 3. Accident and sickness reporting

Managers must ensure that:

- The Council's Accident & Sickness procedures are adhered to. (See [Investigating Accidents and Incidents, Health & Safety Guidance for Managers](#) on the Occupational Safety website.)
- Mobile/flexible workers are able to recognise early warnings of common work-related ill-health conditions, for example upper-limb pains, and know how and who to report the problem.

### 4. Disability issues

When carrying out risk assessments managers must take into account any additional needs, health related conditions and disabilities of employees and where necessary make reasonable adjustments to enable them to carry out their work safely. This may also include completing a Personal Emergency Egress Plan (PEEPs) for the individual when they are working at different premises, as this is a subject for the manager to manage the individual's needs.

### 5. First aid

Managers must assess the first aid needs of their mobile/flexible workers. The exact provisions will depend on the nature of the work activities and the risks involved and may need to include training up staff as first aiders, providing a first aid kit and/or providing a mobile phone (or other communication device) to raise the alarm. A procedure should be in place to replenish first aid kit supplies and/or providing refresher training for first aiders – (See Managers' [Guidance for First Aid Provision](#) on the Occupational Safety Website).

### 6. Training

The training needs of mobile/flexible workers go beyond those of office based staff. Where jobs involve employees visiting and working at a range of third-party premises or sites, it is difficult to assess the risks at each of these temporary workplaces. Employees training should equip them with appropriate knowledge, and if necessary equipment, to help them to identify and manage the risks to their safety and security wherever they are working. Part of this training must ensure that employees have a full knowledge of the Occupational Safety Website.

Managers must also consider if the supervisors and colleagues of mobile/flexible workers require additional information and training in relation to mobile/flexible working.

### 7. Lone Working

See [Lone Working Health & Safety Guidance for Managers](#) on the Occupational Safety Website for more information.

### 8. Working Time

Research has shown that employees working away from a work base frequently forget to take breaks or work well beyond their contracted hours. Managers should monitor the working hours of employees and remind them to take appropriate breaks, e.g. rest breaks, DSE (Display Screen Equipment) task breaks, lunch breaks.

Line managers must monitor for evidence that staff are not routinely overworking.

### 9. Touchdown Points Non-territorial Workstations (where still in use)

Services which cover a wide geographical area may set up Touchdown Points/Non-Territorial workspace at other Council premises to allow mobile/flexible workers to write reports, access Council systems or carry out routine administration.

The advantage of these temporary working areas is that they offer mobile/flexible workers an ergonomic alternative to working in their cars or travelling back to their bases.

Any shared Touchdown Point/Non-Territorial workspace must be equipped with furniture and equipment that is easily and quickly adjustable to suit a range of users undertaking a variety of tasks. DSE workstations must meet minimum standards, as outlined in **Display Screen Equipment H&S Guidance for Managers, appendix 1**. The manager in charge of the Touchdown Point/Non Territorial Work Space etc. is responsible for ensuring all workstations comply.

Instructions on workstation adjustments, location of toilets and drinking water, fire and emergency evacuation and accident reporting procedures must be prominently displayed.

Any building with a Touchdown Point or Non-territorial workstation will need a system for users to check in and check out with a receptionist or building supervisor so that their presence is logged for security purposes and in case of fire or emergency.

The mobile/flexible workers must take responsibility to ensure that they make themselves aware of the premises rules, particularly regarding safety.

The '[DSE Assessment for Flexible Workers](#)' has been produced to help managers and employees assess the health and safety of individuals working on computers at several locations. It is not practicable to complete a 'DSE Workstation Assessment Checklist' for every workstation the employee may use. If the Flexible Worker has a workstation at home a 'DSE Workstation Assessment Checklist' should be completed for this workstation.

### 10. Portable Computers

See [Laptops Health & Safety Guidance for Managers](#) on the Occupational Safety Website for more information.

### 11. Driving

Managers have to manage risks from work-related driving in the same way that they do with any other work-related hazards. One in three of the UK's road traffic accidents involve vehicles driven for work purposes, and it is clearly an issue relevant to mobile/flexible workers.

The first step is to try and avoid unnecessary journeys or take an alternative form of transport where convenient. Where the journey is necessary, managers may need to consider:

- the driver – competency, training, fitness and health
- the journey – routes, scheduling, time, distance and weather conditions
- the vehicle – suitability, condition, safety equipment, ergonomics

If an employee uses their own vehicle they must be insured for business use. – For further guidance please refer to the [Driving at Work page](#) on the Occupational Safety Website.

### 12. Working in vehicles

If employees are routinely travelling between sites by vehicle, they may be tempted or expected to use the vehicle for routine administrative work. Managers must assess all the risks (e.g. are staff likely to work on laptops in their cars), and employees must be given information on the risks and how to work safely (e.g. such work should be done for very short periods of time). Using Laptops while sat in a vehicle may increase the risk of theft and or aggression.

The law makes it an offence both for drivers to use hand-held mobile devices while their vehicle is in motion and for employers to cause or permit a person to do so.

The Highway Code contains the following requirement. This forms part of the Road Traffic Act so that it is a legal requirement and a criminal offence to disobey it:

*“You **MUST** exercise proper control of your vehicle at all times. Never use a hand held mobile phone or microphone when driving. Using hands free equipment is also likely to distract your attention from the road. It is far safer not to use any telephone while you are driving – find a safe place to stop first.”* (Road Traffic Act 1998 Sections 2 and 3)

Managers must remind mobile/flexible workers of their responsibility to ignore calls received whilst they are driving and return them only when they are parked safely.

[Mobile Phone Use at Work, Health & Safety Guidance for Managers](#) document is available on the Occupational Safety Website.

### 13. Public transport

Mobile/flexible workers using public transport for all or part of their travel should be instructed in the following precautions:

- avoid unlicensed minicabs and use reputable car-hire companies
- never leave valuables unattended
- keep bags and cases locked, where possible, to prevent interference with or theft of the contents
- be aware of the need to take breaks and stretch regularly when working on trains or aeroplanes
- Avoid carrying out work while using public transport, but where doing so, ensure other passengers are not able to read or hear sensitive and confidential information.

### 14. Working from home

If mobile/flexible workers work at home on a regular basis the manager should consider the home base as part of the risk assessment. See '[Home Working Safely](#)' [Guidance and Assessment Checklist of Home Environment](#)', Occupational Safety Website.

Managers should remind mobile/flexible workers working 'from home,' that members of the public, customers or clients must not visit the home location in relation to work.



### 15. Stress and wellbeing

Where employees are routinely making home visits, or dealing face to face with members of the public who may be either hostile or distressed, their stress levels are likely to be raised and affect their wellbeing. Traditionally, the need to return to an office base to write up case notes may have provided the opportunity for informal conversations and briefings with colleagues or the chance to “let off steam”, but new working patterns combined with home working may take away these opportunities. Managers must consider this as part of their risk assessment. See the Stress Risk Assessment Guidance on the Employee Health & Wellbeing Website via **Bradnet**.

#### **Avoiding isolation**

Where employees spend the majority of their working time away from the traditional office work base and other colleagues; there is a danger their wellbeing will be adversely affected if they become demotivated and stressed by lack of human contact. Even where employees are meeting people throughout the day at sites visits etc. lack of regular contact with colleagues can still mean they risk isolation from their teams and the wider organisation.

Managers should look at the formal and informal debriefing mechanisms that were in place before mobile/flexible working and try and substitute them or adapt current safe systems of work to reflect the mobility aspect e.g. employees could be asked to attend regular group meetings to discuss visits or cases and/or to establish pairs with colleagues who they are able to telephone after difficult visits.

Managers must try to make sure that mobile/flexible workers are in regular contact with all colleagues, both office based and those mobile/flexible working. Regular face-to-face team meetings and social events and/or conference calls should be supplemented by increased contact between managers and their employees via email, telephone, One to Ones, team briefings, team meetings and supervision.

Even where they are working remotely, mobile workers should be encouraged to arrange to coordinate work breaks with colleagues, meeting in coffee shops for instance. It is important to emphasise to office-based employees that those working away from the base are not out of contact and can be telephoned as normal with any queries or other work-related issues.

Where employees make infrequent visits to Council offices, managers should ensure local communications, such as notices on boards or verbal announcements are translated into email or relayed at team meetings.

Where employees need additional support with their mental health and wellbeing, ensure they are fully supported and are also signposted to the appropriate support services (Employee Health and Wellbeing Service) and relevant guidance information.

**For further advice, see the Occupational Safety Website**  
[www.bradford.gov.uk/hands](http://www.bradford.gov.uk/hands) or contact the Occupational Safety Team.