

Home Working Safely

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: -

- suitable and sufficient risk assessments of all home working activities and working environments are carried out
- home workers are aware of their own safety responsibilities
- suitable and safe furniture and equipment is provided for home workers
- fire precautions are considered
- first aid provision is considered
- home workers know how and to whom to report accidents, hazards and problems
- suitable and appropriate training for home workers is provided

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1. Introduction

Under health and safety law managers have a duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their staff. This includes staff working at or from home, whether full time, part time or just occasionally, temporary or permanent.

Home working can be:-

- (i) where staff work at home for all, or a significant part, of their working time
- (ii) part of Flexible Working arrangements or where mobile staff work from home

This guidance is for managers considering introducing home working or where an employee has requested home working. Health and safety issues have to be considered at each stage of the process, i.e. suitability of the job/role/task, employee, the home base, training requirements, procedures and equipment required. Advice can be obtained from Human Resources Advisers or the Occupational Safety Team.

2. Legal Duties

Managers, on behalf of the employer, are required to undertake suitable and sufficient risk assessments of home working activities and working environments, before home working starts, once it has commenced and at regular intervals.

Health & Safety legislation applies to all workers, including home workers, for example.

- Health and Safety at Work Etc Act 1974
- Management of Health& Safety at Work Regulations
- Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations
- Display Screen Equipment Regulations
- Manual Handling Operations Regulations
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations

Guidance, risk assessment forms and checklists have been produced to help managers undertake these risk assessments and can be used as part of the home working health and safety risk assessment process.

These are available on the Occupational Safety Website via BradNet
www.bradford.gov.uk/hands/

3. Manager's Responsibilities

As a manager, you should ensure that:-

- a suitable and sufficient risk assessment of the tasks and working environment is carried out and suitable measures put in place to reduce the risks, see **Assessment Checklist of Home Environment** on the Occupational Safety website.
- all furniture and equipment provided by the Council is suitable for the task, meets all relevant health and safety standards and is installed correctly. If staff are to use their own furniture and/or equipment you must be satisfied it is suitable and safe and is included in the risk assessment.
- a member of staff working at home for all, or a significant proportion of their working time, has installed a suitable smoke detector to effectively cover the means of escape from the work area, **before** home working commences. The staff member will be responsible for testing and maintenance.
- first aid provision is considered as part of the risk assessment. Depending on the nature of the work activities and the risks involved, consider if staff should have basic first aid training and a suitable First Aid Kit. A procedure should be in place to replenish supplies.
- procedures are in place for the home worker to report any problems, hazards, equipment failure.
- a procedure is in place for the home worker to report accidents/incidents and has access to the relevant forms.
- the training needs of the home worker, supervisor/manager and colleagues have been considered and completed **before** home working commences, e.g. if the home worker is to assess their DSE workstation they must have had relevant health & safety training. E-learning training modules are available on Evolve.
- arrangements are in place for all electrical equipment provided by the Council to be inspected under the portable appliance testing programme.
- for staff working **from home** there must be a system for ensuring they are safe at the end of the working day e.g. a phone call to 'sign off' when leaving site or arriving home.
- staff are aware of their health and safety responsibilities as outlined in the Council's Health & Safety at Work Policy.
- home working risk assessments must be reviewed annually **and sooner** if 'significant changes' occur. For example, if the home worker moves to another address, the suitability of these new premises must be risk assessed and home working should only continue if it is suitable.
- members of the public, customers or clients must not visit the home location in relation to work. If direct face to face contact with customers etc. or other staff, is a requirement of the work then the task is not suitable for 'at home' working.

The risk assessment may highlight the need for other procedures, information, training etc.

Staff working at/from home as part of Flexible Working arrangements

All staff **must** have permission from their manager before working at home. Permission should only be given if the manager is confident there will be no detrimental effect on the health, safety and welfare of the individual, or others affected by the decision. If the staff member has supervisory duties, is a first aider or fire warden, alternative arrangements/cover must be in place for the time they are working at home.

4. Staff Responsibilities

As a manager, you should ensure the home worker understands their health and safety responsibilities. These are:-

- To take care of their own safety and that of others who may be affected by their actions whilst at work, and to co-operate with the Council to enable it to carry out its responsibilities effectively.
- Council staff, Union Health and Safety Representatives and HSE Inspectors have the right to visit employees at home to carry out health and safety inspections.
- Where a smoke detector is required, they are responsible for installation, testing and maintenance.
- It is the home worker's responsibility to maintain their working environment to agreed standards so there are no health and safety risks to themselves, or others, and Council equipment is not put at risk.
- Staff have a duty to report any problems, hazards, equipment failure etc. by following the agreed procedure.
- They may need to consult with their manager before making any changes to the home working environment.
- Home workers are responsible for maintaining the integrity of the domestic electrical supply. If portable appliance testing should identify any faults with the domestic supply, the home worker is responsible for correcting the fault at their own expense and for providing certification that the supply is now safe. Until remedial works are carried out they will be required to work in Council premises.
- Home workers cannot look after or care for others and do a job at the same time. Care arrangements will still be needed during working hours, e.g. for children during school holidays.
- If they move to another address the suitability of these premises will need to be risk assessed and home working will only continue if the manager considers them to be suitable.
- Members of the public, clients or customers **must not** visit the home location in relation to work.

5. Avoiding Potential Problems

Isolation

There is a real danger that home workers/flexible workers could become socially isolated resulting in stress or depression or having a detrimental affect on their wellbeing. Signs to look for include falling behind with work, poor accuracy, inability to make decisions, high sickness levels and gradually slipping out of contact. (See Stress Risk Assessment Guidance for further information). No single measure on its own can guarantee to keep isolation at bay. Probably the best way of avoiding it is a combination of methods.

- Make sure home/flexible workers spend some time in the office.
- Ensure there is an 'open line' to the manager and colleagues when needed. There must be regular face to face and phone contact.
- Promote a sense of belonging to the Council and team.
- It is important to provide a regular opportunity for communication which is not solely work related e.g. participation in social gatherings or outings or telephone conversations which have an element of social chat.
- Promote a sense of integration into the normal procedures and culture of the Council/team.
- Respect boundaries – remember the home workers place of work is also their home. It is not fair to expect home workers to be available at all hours. An agreement must be made on the times when home workers can be contacted.

Working Time

Research has shown that staff working at home frequently, forget to take breaks or work well beyond their contracted hours. Managers should monitor the working hours of staff and remind them to take rest breaks, DSE task breaks, lunch breaks etc.

Laptop/Portable computers

Laptops are not designed for intensive or prolonged use and should not be provided for such use without assessing the risks (portable computers are subject to the Display Screen Equipment Regulations if they are in prolonged use). Additional equipment or accessories may be required to make them safer to use e.g. connections so that a normal mouse and keyboard can be used.

Managers should also consider manual handling issues and possible risks from violent theft.

See **Laptop Guidance** on the Occupational Safety website.

For advice and support, see the [Occupational Safety Website](#) or contact the Occupational Safety Team.