Q&A

18 October 2021

South Gloucestershire
Council

Delivering for you

Hybrid and new ways of working

This document seeks to answer questions council staff may have relating to the introduction of hybrid ways of working and the changes this introduces. This guidance applies to all staff who work for the council (except school-based employees for whom locally managed agreements apply).

This is a dynamic document, which will be updated regularly.

Click on a question below to go directly to the response. If your query is not answered by this guide, please speak to your manager.

How the council is adopting hybrid working

What is hybrid working?

Hybrid working means that where it best supports delivery of the service, staff are able to work from other locations such as from home in addition to working from council locations. The council continues to invest in technology including laptops, remote access to council systems and cloud-based programmes and file storage to enable more staff to work more flexibly.

Why are we adopting hybrid working?

As we emerge from an extended period of enforced remote working, many teams and staff have found working from home or remotely more frequently is both achievable and productive and you have developed new skills and confidence in using remote technologies. In staff surveys, you have told us that you would like to work from home

more frequently going forward. Whilst it may not be the best approach for delivering services in all instances, introducing a higher proportion of remote working to our pre-Covid work patterns has potential to bring many other benefits for the council and staff:

- **Good for staff:** greater flexibility, improved work/life balance, less time spent commuting, reduced sickness
- **Good for service delivery:** many services have discovered new and more efficient ways of doing things over the last 18 months, which we are keen to retain
- **Good for the environment:** fewer commuting miles leading to improved local air quality and habitats
- **Good for our communities:** more local working means more local shopping and connections
- **Good for the council:** productivity gains, lower staff absence rates and, in the future, more opportunities to save money
- **Good for partnership working:** we hope to enable opportunities for us to work more closely and directly with colleagues from partner organisations

At the same time, we want to provide a range of places where staff can work collaboratively in groups in a face-to-face or more creative environment. The intention is not to prevent people from working in council buildings but to enable them, where it meets service needs, to have more choice about how often they use them and provide more appropriate settings that support their planned activities.

We are keen to progress from a one-size fits all workplace model to a more nuanced approach which recognises teams do very different things and what they need from their workplace to deliver services can be very different. We are encouraging teams to consider how their team's ways of working have adapted during the lockdowns and what new patterns are most appropriate to the outcomes they need to achieve and the wider needs of the council.

Is there a single model of hybrid working for all teams?

No. When it comes to hybrid working, one size will not fit all.

Our approach in adopting hybrid working is to ask teams to consider the type of work that you do and the aims you are trying to achieve and agree which model or models of working will best allow you to deliver those priorities most effectively.

Over time our work patterns and work styles will continue to evolve making increased use of mobile technologies and so we need to ensure we continue to facilitate these changes.

Will all teams be adopting hybrid working practices?

Because of the nature of their work, some operational teams are required to be based from a particular location, meaning remote working is not feasible. However, there may be opportunities to use technology to work in more smart ways – for example, we are investing in technology to allow better mobile working.

Will we ever go back to pre-Covid ways of working?

Many teams and staff have found working from home or remotely more frequently is both achievable and productive and you have developed new skills and confidence in using

remote technologies. Further, most staff who can work in hybrid ways have told us that you would like to continue doing so more frequently going forward.

There will inevitably be tweaks and changes to how we adopt hybrid working at a council, team and individual level as we learn from experiences and what works and what doesn't, but we have found many smarter, more efficient and less environmentally damaging ways of working to how we operated pre-Covid. For example, it would be very unlikely that there would be a business justification for large numbers of internal-facing staff to all travel to one location just for a completely in-person meeting, unless the purpose was to reconnect with colleagues.

Determining the right model for your team

What sort of working models might be open to me and my team going forward?

Different teams – and roles – will have different requirements. We've seen that it is possible to deliver some roles working entirely remotely and some tasks are more easily completed in this way. At the other end of the spectrum, some teams' work either needs to be delivered from a particular location or really benefits from colleagues working together in person to collaborate or share expertise.

We realise we are asking managers to envision a future that some might find daunting whilst others will find liberating. We want to provide good support and accurate information so managers feel confident to have discussions with their teams to agree the most appropriate approaches. Additionally, the project team is working with individual teams to identify specific requirements and accommodate their needs.

How do I ensure the needs of my team are considered?

As part of the engagement around our hybrid ways of working, team managers discussed with their teams the models of working which will best help the team deliver their priorities and ensure specific needs - such as office space for individuals who can't work from home or team storage facilities in offices - are captured and shared with the project team.

The project team is already working with many council teams, implementing measures to better support their needs from hybrid working.

Enabling effective hybrid working

The Council is adopting a comprehensive and strategic approach to modernising work practices, recognising that one size won't fit all. Our focus in this exercise is to find the best ways of doing things whilst supporting greater choice, more flexibility and a better work life balance.

A hybrid way of working, balancing time working remotely with time spent working collaboratively with others requires continuous investment in new technologies, different types of facilities and ensuring it is accessible to all. We're looking to invest in the design

of our buildings, the spaces within them and how they are presented, operated, accessed and booked. We also want to encourage colleagues to make use of facilities within our community without the need to travel to our buildings. Having the appropriate technology and connectivity is key to that approach.

How will technology and facilities be developed to support hybrid working?

A great deal of work is going into developing our hybrid working infrastructure.

A robust technology infrastructure for home-working

We continue to invest in our IT infrastructure to ensure it is sufficiently robust to support large numbers of staff working from home, with minimal downtime and disruption. Engaging with managers and staff, we will build a clearer understanding of a future roadmap of investment and support requirements.

Technology to allow you to work on the move

We are working at pace to upgrade everyone to Windows 10 and we are investing in devices and configuring more of our systems to allow staff to work in a genuinely mobile way, using key applications and updating core systems whilst on the move.

A positive experience dialling into meetings remotely

In the past, joining meetings remotely was not always a positive experience. However, the technology to enable hybrid meetings has improved significantly and we have trialled and installed new kit in key meeting rooms at the Badminton Road office and the Kingswood and Patchway hubs and over time we aim to roll this out more widely across our estate. This continued investment will ensure we have a distributed network of technology connected places where people can work from to supplement working from home - avoiding unnecessary travel.

You can find guidance to help you run a hybrid meeting here and we will be offering informal opportunities for colleagues to share good practice and hints and tips.

Establishing a collaborative hub

Having been forced to work fully remotely for some time, you have told us that our hybrid ways of working need to better support collaborative working, problem solving and sharing knowledge and experience, and provide more opportunities and facilities for bringing teams together. We are keen to invest in facilities to better enable teams and project groups to come together to work.

Can I still work from home when it best suits what I need to do?

Yes, a core principle of hybrid working is that individuals and teams consider how and where they need to work to best deliver their roles. For many individuals and teams this will involve a combination of working from home and from community facilities, with service-users and from council buildings.

Will I be able to carry on working from home full time?

This will depend on what you do, what your team does, what service area you're in and what model/s of working you, your colleagues and your manager decide works best for your team. Of course, service needs must take precedence, but we anticipate that many people will have greater choice in combining working from home and working in the office, depending on what tasks or activities they need to carry out, day by day.

Will I be able to return to the office to work full time?

Again, this will depend on your role and the approach agreed for your team. We recognise some roles need to be office based and for some individuals an office environment enables them to do their best work.

Will I be able to choose when I work as well as where?

Whilst adopting hybrid models is about offering more flexibility, we also have to recognise that to get our work done effectively we need to be able to communicate and collaborate with each other. This is one reason why the council has always had defined, core working hours. We don't want greater flexibility to lead to greater inefficiency, therefore there are no plans for us to move away from mandating core working hours for our staff. Obviously, the need to flex within that framework for things like dental appointments etc. remains at individual managers' discretion, as it always has been, but there are currently no plans to allow staff to routinely or regularly shift their working hours to say, working during evenings instead of during the day, for instance.

Working from council buildings

Will I have an allocated desk in a council building?

Going forward we anticipate we will need more collaborative space in buildings and fewer desks. Some desks might be allocated to individuals or specific teams – this will depend on feedback from teams. We will make changes in phases, working with managers to ensure that we get the balance right between collaborative working areas and desk space.

The council will continue to explore options to best support staff with disabilities, including providing specialist equipment and allocating desks.

Will there be desks and chairs in offices for staff splitting their working time between office/remote?

We are currently working with managers to understand how staff will be working as we go forward and capturing facilities requirements for each team. One size won't fit all; some staff will need to be predominantly based from a council building going forward and will require dedicated desks, others will spend a larger proportion of their time working remotely and so may not have a dedicated desk of their own, but will be able to make use of hotdesks, collaborative areas and other dedicated working spaces in buildings when they need to. But we will make any changes in phases, working with managers to ensure that we get the balance right to support staff in their work. And if you need specialist

equipment or set-up, we will pick this up through conversations with managers and ensure this is available too.

Will hybrid working technology be available at all offices?

Our hybrid model is based on the principle of staff being able to work from any of our council buildings and to enable this, we will continue to invest in technology across all our buildings. We are currently engaging with managers to understand each team's needs from facilities and buildings. This information will help us prioritise investment.

Will changes to support hybrid working be brought in ahead of staff being asked to work in this way?

Many changes to better support hybrid working have already been implemented, for example everyone has access to Skype and Teams and those staff who are currently not using the Windows 10 operating system will be upgraded very shortly. Additionally, better audio-visual equipment has been installed in some meeting rooms in the Badminton Road building and Patchway and Kingswood hubs.

We believe some of our building spaces could be better configured to support collaborative working. However, we want to fully understand the need and explore the potential benefits before we commit to potentially costly and disruptive changes. We hope that the switch to hybrid working, the reconfiguration of working space and the increasing use of hybrid meetings will release some of the pressure on meeting room availability.

Will teams be based in the same buildings and areas as before Covid?

Not necessarily. With increased remote and home working, fewer staff will be working from Council buildings going forward and we anticipate occupancy in Badminton Road will fall by more than a third from pre-Covid levels. New plans for buildings are based on predicted usage and bringing teams whose work is aligned closer together.

Will we be introducing booking systems for desks, parking etc?

We don't know yet, but as part of our investment in hybrid working, we will certainly be looking at how technology might help us introduce more efficient processes.

What will happen with access to car parks?

In implementing hybrid working we anticipate many more staff will be spending more time working away from council buildings than was the case pre-Covid, reducing unnecessary travel and easing some of the pressure on parking space. We haven't yet agreed the approach for allocating parking spaces at our various buildings, but we do recognise it is a concern for some. We plan to ask staff for ideas about how our policies should work to align with our council priorities.

Am I able to claim back home-working expenses?

No. However, you may be able to claim [personal tax relief](#) for increases to bills because you are working at home on a regular basis.

If working from home is leading to a wellbeing issue, then we will accommodate individuals to work in the office.

Could my base location be changed to my home?

No. We are following the approach adopted by other local authorities and don't plan to change anyone's base location to 'home' even where individuals spend most of their time working remotely. Staff will still be required to attend buildings for service reasons, team meetings etc.

If I don't have a fixed office base, can I work from other council locations?

Potentially, yes. As we invest in our buildings, we hope to create a technology connected network of places, allowing staff the flexibility to work from any of our council buildings.

What catering facilities will we provide going forward?

The council faces significant financial challenges and with the number of staff currently working from council buildings it is not viable for Integra to provide catering facilities to all buildings. There is currently a lunchtime service at the Badminton Road office and kitchen facilities are available for staff to use.

Working from home and remotely

Can technology help us do more of our work remotely?

Yes. We have shown that our IT infrastructure is sufficiently robust to enable large numbers of staff to work remotely, including from home over a prolonged period. We are investing in devices, software and IT security to enable staff to be able to do more of their work across the community, and away from our buildings or from their home, for example updating systems in between visits and avoiding the necessity to return to a specific office to do this.

How do I keep in contact with colleagues if I'm working from home more often?

Maintaining cohesion and team morale can be more challenging with enforced remote working. However, teams have found new and innovative ways to keep in contact. Following are ideas and guidance:

- Maintain regular meetings such as one to ones and PDPRs – if you are hosting them online, consider turning on cameras
- Organising 'keep in touch' sessions via Teams, giving everyone the opportunity, if they want to, just to say hi

- Even for formal Teams meetings, leave a few minutes at the beginning to settle everyone
- Making use of new technology which enables hybrid meetings
- Arranging 'working meetings', with colleagues working on the same project dialling in to a Teams 'meeting' whilst they work and discussing issues as they arise

Hosting a meeting electronically can be very different to a physical meeting, with new and additional considerations to ensure everyone has a role and feels comfortable. We are investing in technology to improve the audio-visual aspect of hybrid meetings and will be sharing best practices to help you make the most of hybrid meetings.

How do I show that I'm working when I'm working remotely?

Managers should be managing individuals based on the outputs they deliver. You should ensure you have agreed clear and measurable objectives with your manager. Also, please make use of Outlook calendars to advise managers and colleagues when you are working and when you are in meetings. If you are organising a meeting, please ensure you check calendars to check availability.

If I need to travel to an office during the working day should this be recorded as working or commuting time?

This should be recorded as commuting and not working time.

What mileage expenses can be claimed?

Our policy regarding claiming mileage expenses remains the same i.e. a commuting journey to your normal base (which remains your contractual place of work) is not reimbursed. Journeys in excess of usual commuting mileage will be reimbursed on the basis of actual mileage travelled less normal commuting mileage. See here:

http://intranet/content/CEandCR/Sections/MyHR/Travel&Expenses/CalculatingMileage.htm

Managing in a hybrid way

How do I accommodate the different perspectives, individual needs and preferences when choosing the best hybrid model for my team?

Different individuals will inevitably have different *preferences* when it comes to how and where they want to work. Your role as a manager is to identify the working model/s which will **best enable your team to deliver the priorities of your service and service users**. Your team may have specific requirements – ensure you let the project team know, so these can be considered and, where appropriate, accommodated.

You should look to accommodate the individual <u>needs</u> and reasonable adjustments of your team where these differ from the chosen working model – see the supporting individual needs section below for examples of how we can support individual needs.

How do I ensure work gets done if my team is working remotely?

Managing remotely places greater emphasis on managing by outcomes. You should ensure you have set clear, measurable objectives for your team so you can track how individual staff are performing and progressing. Training is available – see the link below.

How do I manage wellbeing in my team?

Managing wellbeing can be harder when you can't see people face to face. You should ensure you continue arranging one to ones, team meetings and PDPRs, providing opportunities to talk to your team – some teams have found it helpful to set a fixed agenda item in team meetings for wellbeing purposes. You shouldn't ignore opportunities for social interaction too.

Resources are available [on the intranet](#) to help manage wellbeing.

How do I maintain cohesion and camaraderie in my team?

This can be challenging with increased remote working, but again, most important is to arrange regular opportunities for you and your colleagues to get together for social activities and for team workshops/awaydays, both virtually and face to face.

What support is available to help me manage remotely?

Managing remotely presents new challenges. Our Learning and Development team offer a range of training courses to help managers meet these challenges. Details and booking via the [Learning and Development website](#).

Supporting individual needs

In planning how hybrid working will be adopted in their teams, managers should seek to meet the needs of those with legitimate specific requirements. This includes:

- those learning a new job,
- people who need to be based in an office either for wellbeing reasons or where they don't have an appropriate home-working setup, and
- those with disabilities needing specialist equipment or other support.

How do we support new starters?

The level of induction and onboarding required will vary from role to role (and from individual to individual), but managers should ensure appropriate time is allocated for new starters to shadow and learn from colleagues. This may include time in a face-to-face environment or in the community where this helps bring individuals up to speed quickly.

We are capturing requirements via managers to ensure we have sufficient working space to accommodate the current and future needs of new starters and mentors.

If your team is returning to a building, remember that new starters may not have worked from that location before and will need support.

What are the options for me if I don't have an appropriate home-working setup?

Where this can be resolved through providing additional technology and other home working equipment like keyboards, mice, chairs etc., these can be provided (please speak to our property services or ITD teams), but equally staff should be enabled to work from a council workplace if their physical home working environment is hampering their work.

I have a disability. Will I be able to get a specialist workstation to support working in the office?

The council will continue to explore and implement options to best support staff with disabilities, including providing specialist equipment and allocating desks.

What flexibility is there to allow for changes in individual circumstances?

Whilst service delivery must always take precedence, a key benefit of adopting hybrid working is that it allows greater flexibility. On an ongoing basis, managers will seek to accommodate existing and new reasonable adjustments to support new starters and wellbeing needs.