



**Policy Reference No:**

# **Hybrid Agile Working Policy**

## **St Helens Borough Council**

Effective from: 01/06/2022



# Policy Title

## Policy Information

|                                |                       |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Policy Reference Number</b> |                       |
| <b>Document Status</b>         | Version/ Draft/ Final |
| <b>Reason for Review</b>       |                       |
| <b>Approved Date</b>           |                       |
| <b>Effective from</b>          |                       |
| <b>Policy Author</b>           |                       |
| <b>Responsible Directorate</b> |                       |
| <b>Date of Next Review</b>     |                       |

## Version Control

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Author</b> | <b>Version</b> | <b>Reason for Change</b> |
|-------------|---------------|----------------|--------------------------|
|             |               |                |                          |

## Our Vision and Values

The Council has co-designed a clear vision for workplace culture and worked together with employees to identify values and behaviours for everyone. These will be at the core of how we work together to deliver our services. Employees will be empowered to deliver new ways of thinking and new ways of working, encouraging innovation and creativity in a learning environment.

Our vision, values and behaviours are underpinned by our Bonds for Working Together at St Helens which outline what employees can expect from working at the Council and what is expected of them.

### Our Culture, vision, values, behaviours and Bonds for Working Together at St Helens



## Introduction and Purpose

The vision for Ways of Working is to improve service delivery by changing the way we work and improving the facilities where we work. This policy sets out the framework within which the programme will be delivered.

The Ways of Working programme is about both people and culture change. It is about encouraging and supporting changes in the way people work and empowering them to work more flexibly to deliver better services. As part of the programme more employees will become hybrid or agile workers. This will empower employees to be able to work where, when, and how they choose; with maximum flexibility and minimum constraints to deliver high quality responsive services by:

- Mobile working
- Using Agile Hub facilities
- Homeworking to varying degrees

At the heart of the Ways of Working programme is the philosophy

“work is something we do, not somewhere we go, it’s an activity, not a place”.

Agile working is not a new concept; it can be used to make working smarter. Many public and private sector organisations use agile working methods to deliver their services more efficiently, ensure services are responsive to customer needs, deliver cost savings and retain their employees through providing a better work life balance.

The introduction of new technologies is helping to improve working environments and can enhance the way we serve the people of St Helens. Technology also enables people to work in ways which best suit their needs without the traditional limitations of where and when tasks must be performed. The aim of Ways of Working is different to flexible working which focusses on an employee’s work pattern. The different ways in which hybrid or agile working can be undertaken is dependent on the demands and needs of the role, the service the employee works in, and the impact on service delivery.

## Scope

The Ways of Working Policy sets out an overall framework for the management and expansion of hybrid or agile working within the Council, enabling our workforce to carry out duties in a more efficient and effective way. The policy applies to all employees of St Helens Borough Council whose roles are suitable to be included in hybrid or agile working arrangements.

## Definitions and Abbreviations

In the Policy, the following words and phrases mean:

**Hybrid** - Hybrid working is defined in workplace policies and legal guidance as a structure where employees split their working time between the employer’s workplace and a remote location (usually home). It is a blend of office-based and remote work. Unlike pure remote working, hybrid workers have a designated contractual work base they attend periodically. It may be agreed formally (contractual) or informally (discretionary) and requires a change to the contractual place of work if it is a permanent arrangement.

**Agile** - Agile working is generally understood as a broader, more flexible approach focusing on “how” work is done rather than “where”. It focuses on removing barriers to efficiency and is often implemented as a policy-based arrangement focused on service suitability. Agile includes the flexibility of hybrid, but adds flexibility in working hours (time), location (remote and hot-desking) and autonomy (how tasks are completed).

**Council** - St Helens Borough Council

**Employee** - Those employed by St Helens Borough Council including agency/consultancy staff, secondees to the organisation and those employed under partnership arrangements including those employed in schools.

## Benefits of Hybrid or agile Working

The Ways of Working Programme gives us the opportunity to modernise our working practices, moving away from traditional assumptions about where, when and how work should be done to a culture of working wherever, whenever and however is most appropriate to get the work done. This doesn't just cover our working hours, locations and workstyles, it's about being responsive and adaptive to service needs, embracing innovation and utilising technology.

Our vision is underpinned by five core principles

### OUR FIVE CORE PRINCIPLES



## Benefits of Hybrid or agile Working Arrangements

Flexibility in location of work is an effective business tool - It can help to manage headcount and workflow, improve individual loyalty, performance, and productivity.

Attract and Retain a talented and diverse workforce to develop a more inclusive culture and draw the best people from diverse talent pools.

Flexible and Responsive Services - support better contact and improved service delivery for the benefit of St Helens residents and customers.

Supports individuals - It can help to balance work and other commitments, increase job satisfaction, enable individuals to remain economically active and allow individuals to continue to work towards career goals.

Different arrangements work for different functions - There is no one-size-fits-all solution; some tried and tested solutions are available, and they will be tailored to different service needs and individual circumstances.

Effective Hybrid and Agile Working involves give and take - Responsibility for making it work rests equally with staff and managers, who together need to assess the opportunities and challenges, openly and honestly.

Presence does not equal performance - Staff performance should be judged by measurable results and outcomes, not by time spent in the office. Staff working on a hybrid or agile basis will not suffer any detriment to their careers; business needs and required competencies are the basis for establishing criteria for job vacancies, staff development, and recognition.

Reduce greenhouse gas emissions - Working in a hybrid or agile way reduces the need to commute to a fixed office base which in turn helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions. St Helens Borough Council has a target to reduce Green House Gas emissions from Direct Emissions and Energy Indirect Emissions activities by 3% a year. Adopting more flexible ways of working is a viable solution which can help the council significantly reduce its carbon footprint.

Reduce fuel usage - Environmental benefits will accrue from employees not having to travel to and from Council buildings to carry out their work. Most staff still travel to work in petrol/diesel vehicles which damage the environment. As hybrid or agile workers drive less, they reduce their consumption of these fuels contributing to a greener environment.

Less office waste – Hybrid and agile working allows employees to cut down on office waste such as printer paper and the use of plastic. During a workday, employees might use a vast amount of physical resources when working in an office. Hybrid and agile workers typically create less waste during their workday preferring to use email, Microsoft Teams, and other digital tools for messaging, taking notes and sending files.

## Working Environment

For the purpose of this policy Council employees fall into one of three categories:

**Location based** - these are employees who are required to spend most of their working time at a specific location or locations, for example, providing face to face customer services, using specialist equipment or where statutory working practices dictate attendance. This category also includes employees who do not have a desk-based role, such as cleansing, catering, and social care staff.

**Hybrid or Agile** – these are employees who can regularly work away from Council workspaces, for many staff this would be predominately at home, but may include other venues in the community. This category will also include those staff that spend a significant proportion of their working time on the move and have the ability to work from any location at any given time and utilise whatever workspace is available to them be that in an office, on site, in the community or at home. Lots of Council employees could fall into this category and the degree of flexibility would need to be determined by the Head of Service in consultation with the employee.

**Designated Home Worker** – these are employees who are defined as permanently working from home. As part of the contract of employment they may be required to attend a specific Council location for a set number of days per year. Any travel costs to the specified location on the set days will be borne by the employee. If required to attend alternative locations in excess of their contractual requirement, any travel costs will be borne by the Council in accordance with the travel expenses policy.

## Establishing Ways of Working Arrangements

All employees that were previously office desk based will become hybrid / agile workers by default. The exceptions to an employee becoming hybrid or agile are:

- the specific role requires a fixed base or is exclusively delivered on location
- the service has a statutory duty for face-to-face resident contact
- the employee's home circumstances are such that they are unable to work from home
- the role is a designated 'home based' role

Consideration of employees' home circumstances must be discussed and taken into account.

This may include personal circumstances linked to protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 such as disability, or other circumstances such as caring responsibilities or domestic abuse.

Any employee who has a disability or long-term condition should be supported by the completion of a Reasonable Adjustment assessment for each of the different venues from which they will operate.

For administration purposes all employees will have a designated work base except for designated home workers. St Helens Borough Council will ensure that there are appropriate Agile Hub facilities available to support an effective hybrid or agile working environment.

## Consultation

This policy has been developed in consultation with Trade Unions and staff. The implementation of any necessary changes to the employee's contract of employment, will be confirmed, in writing, prior to the implementation of the change.

## **Fairness and Consistency**

It is essential that managers and employees enter into the spirit of Ways of Working within the constraints of normal service provision. As each service is different, a one size fits all approach cannot be applied. The final decision in terms of Ways of Working arrangements will be based on the impact it has on the service, so although employees have access to hybrid or agile working, not all of the aspects implemented will be the same across the Council as a whole.

## **Managing in a Hybrid or agile Environment**

Successful hybrid or agile working arrangements are built upon an organisational culture of trust and empowerment. The Ways of Working Policy sits within the context of the co-production of a new vision for the organisational culture of the Council, the development of a behavioural framework aligned to organisational values and an employee deal that sets out joint expectations.

The development of an Employee Deal will underpin the organisational vision, values, and behaviours. It will outline what the council will offer along with the expectations of employees. These joint expectations are essential to support hybrid or agile working arrangements and will be underpinned by practical mechanisms such as sharing of schedules with colleagues and managers, and regular updates about work-in progress appropriate to the service and the specific role undertake.

One of the most important considerations in making hybrid or agile working arrangements a success is managing by outcome rather than presence. This involves different ways of keeping in contact with staff, of assessing workloads and monitoring and measuring performance. Training and support in relation to management in a hybrid or agile environment will be offered to managers and staff.

## **Employee Wellbeing**

Full-time employees spend almost half of their waking hours working, travelling to and from work or thinking about work, therefore it is essential to take care of employees' health and wellbeing and encourage all staff to prioritise their own wellbeing as part of a healthy work life balance.

Within Ways of Working employees are empowered to work more flexibly at times and places that work for them, whilst maintaining a healthy work-life balance. It is the responsibility of managers to communicate regularly with their teams enabling them to feel connected to the organisation and valued for their contributions to delivering the service outcomes.

As part of the development of Ways of Working St Helens Borough Council will seek to ensure that employees are engaged in the development of arrangements that meet the

needs of services and individuals. More information about employee wellbeing, support and resources is available on the Council Intranet

<http://applications.sth.net/intranet/employee/staffwellbeingzone.aspx>

## **Working Time**

Trust and accountability between employees and the Council is a key component of the Ways of Working programme and it will give employees much more flexibility than ever before. Employees will no longer be required to work within the constraints of a traditional flexi-time scheme where the working hours in which they are required to be present are determined by rigid parameters of a scheme. In consultation with their managers, employees will have more flexibility to determine when they work and where they work from and will not be required to record their time via the Council's Time Management System. However, staff will still be able to accrue time and take time back with the prior agreement of their manager(s).

Both employees and managers have a responsibility to ensure that the requirements of the Working Time Regulations in relation to excessive hours are complied with, particularly in connection with hybrid or agile working arrangements where employees may find themselves working beyond their required hours.

Sickness absence reporting procedures and processes to record leave and other absence must be retained.

## **Flexible Working**

An employee can submit a request for flexible working when they wish to vary their contractual working pattern. For example, this can include, but is not limited to, part time working, a reduction in hours or days and term time only working. Whilst the legal right to request flexible working is only available to employees with more than one year's service, the Council will consider applications from any employee regardless of length of service. The legal right is to 'request' flexible working and managers are obliged to consider any application whilst also considering Service need. Any request that is agreed will generally mean a permanent change to the employee's terms and conditions of employment unless otherwise agreed between both parties.

All requests for flexible working will be dealt with in accordance with the ACAS Code of Practice. More guidance is available on the intranet, accessible [via this link](#).

## **Travel Expenses and other expenses**

Claiming travel expenses will not change under the Ways of Working Programme, therefore employees will not submit mileage claims when they are required to visit their designated work base. Claims will only be paid when they exceed the mileage they would have travelled on the journey to and from the designated work address. Hybrid or agile workers must ensure they have the appropriate level of vehicle insurance when undertaking travel for work purposes. Claims will be made via Payroll Self Service Portal and will be submitted monthly.

The Council will not reimburse employees for the costs of working from home, however tax relief for household bills may be available to employees who should contact the HRMC

directly for more information. Employees usually need to demonstrate that they have incurred expense “wholly exclusively and necessarily” as a result of their employment.

Employees will be required to complete a self-assessment form, and any claim must be evidenced by being able to demonstrate the difference in costs incurred by working from home, compared to those that were incurred before home working was undertaken. The tax office can ask for up to twelve months' worth of evidence. This is entirely a private matter to be settled between the individual employee and the tax authorities. For more information please contact the HRMC directly or refer to their website <https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home>

## **Agile Hubs and Equipment**

As part of the Ways of Working programme our offices will be designed and created to support hybrid and agile working and ensure maximum flexibility. The Agile hub will be a functional space primarily to support collaboration. There will be an emphasis on shared mixed-use spaces where people can work effectively together.

Within Agile Hub facilities there will be some allocated team spaces or ‘villages’, however, there will not be allocated fixed workstations for specific employees.

Agile Hub facilities will be designed to meet the needs of staff with disabilities in terms of access to specialist IT and ergonomic equipment. If an employee requires special equipment or an adapted workstation, whether that be specific software or a specially adapted chair etc. the Council will provide this and make reasonable adjustments to support staff to work effectively.

In order for staff to work from home the Council will provide the appropriate IT equipment (see Section 13). The Council may also provide appropriate furniture such as a desk, chair etc., to meet workstation requirements following an appropriate DSE (Display Screen Equipment) Assessment.

## **Insurance**

Hybrid and agile working is covered by the Council's Employer's Liability Policy, it is not limited to covering a particular place or building and there are no exclusions or limitations in cover for staff working at home or on the go in the UK. However, it is important to ensure that reasonable care and precautions have been taken to minimise accident, injury, loss or damage. If staff intend to work from a second residence outside of the UK they need to obtain prior confirmation of cover from the Insurance Section, via their manager.

In terms of personal motor insurance, must ensure they have the appropriate level of insurance that includes business use on behalf of the Council if they use their personal vehicle.

Employees that are undertaking any type of work from home are advised to notify their own household insurer as it could affect the terms of their own insurance. Failure to inform domestic insurers may result in home insurance cover being rendered invalid. Each insurance provider has its own attitude to working from home and the Council will not provide any allowance to cover personal household insurance.

It is recommended that employees contact their mortgage provider or landlord, as some mortgage and rental agreements do not permit any form of working from home to take place on the premises.

## Health and Safety

As an employer, the Council remains committed to ensuring that all employees are working in a safe and healthy work environment. Health and Safety at Work legislation applies whether employees are working in the office, remotely or at home. All employees have a key role in establishing and maintaining their own health and safety, including personal security.

It is requested that managers undertake a Risk Assessment of proposed hybrid or agile working arrangements and that this is carried out in consultation with the Health and Safety Section and the employee.

Managers should remind employees of their continued health and safety responsibilities and of the requirements of the Working Time Regulations. Managers should be proactive when ensuring that employees work sensible hours and take regular breaks. Further advice on how to apply the Working Time Regulations can be obtained from Human Resources.

The Council continually strives to reduce the number of accidents and near misses affecting its employees and has established a detailed process for investigating accidents with a view to minimising future risks. All accidents involving staff/visitors or service users should be reported using the St Helens Borough Council online Accident Reporting System. The injured person or, someone acting on their behalf, should complete all relevant parts of the electronic form, which will then be passed to the manager/supervisor for completion.

As an employer, the Council takes its health and safety responsibilities seriously and is committed to protecting its employees from the health risks associated with working with display screen equipment (DSE) and complying with the Regulations. All employees classed as DSE users (anyone using DSE daily, for an hour or more at a time) are requested to complete the DSE online course and then to complete the corresponding workstation assessment. This will help identify any remedial action that needs to be taken.

The Council has a diverse range of lone working roles ranging from trading standards officers to park wardens to social workers. Any risks associated with an employee's lone working should be considered by the manager as part of an employee's risk assessment and in line with the St Helens Borough Council's Lone Working Policy.

All employees have a duty to take reasonable care of their own health and safety and the health and safety of anyone else who might be affected by what they do. For hybrid or agile workers this is likely to include their own and anyone else who may have access to their workspace. It is the hybrid or agile worker's responsibility to report, to their line manager, any employment related hazards or concerns affecting their own or others' health and safety.

It is recommended that all managers include health and safety as a standard agenda item for team and other relevant meetings. This will keep health and safety matters prominent and ensure that any concerns or potential issues are raised and addressed on a timely basis.

Managers are asked to be vigilant regarding signs of isolation, anxiety and stress that may occur due to home working. This should be discussed at regular 1 to 1 meetings and team meetings to help maintain contact. All employees should keep in touch with colleagues and inform their manager if they are feeling anxious or stressed.

The Council's suite of health and safety policies, procedures and forms are available on the Health & Safety page of the Council's Intranet. The Health & Safety Team can also be contacted for advice and queries.

## **Information Technology**

Effective and innovative use of technology is a key enabler of Ways of Working arrangements and by making use of IT appropriately many barriers to where and when employees can work are able to be removed.

## **IT Equipment**

All employees requiring IT access will be provided with the following equipment for hybrid or agile use:

- Laptop or Tablet, Monitor, Keyboard, Mouse, Docking-cube (In some cases a specialist device may have been provided). Laptop or Tablet refers to the Council's current device offer for example Microsoft Surface.
- A Council smartphone may be issued to some employees who require them, for example an Apple iPhone.

## **Connectivity (Reference Mobile Device and Remote Working Policy)**

Connection to the Council's network is provided over broadband using the AnywhereConnect software which is supplied on all Laptop and Tablet devices (and on specialised laptops).

Connection is via an employee's home broadband (or other external broadband that an employee may have access to, for example in coffee shops, on trains, or other providers outside of the home) which must be connected to through the allocated device.

Council issued smartphones are equipped with the ability to provide a Wi-Fi hotspot, but this must only be used in exceptional cases or whilst out of the home or Council workspace as these connections are chargeable to the Council through a central billing system.

## **Printing**

Printing should only be done in exceptional circumstances, in line with the Council's ambition to become paperless to support our environmental objectives.

It is recognised that occasionally, or in line with statutory regulations, there may be a need for printing. All employees will either be able to print at remote locations dependent upon the printer capabilities directly from the Council network or using the printer facilities within the Agile Hub.

Employees who have a Council issued smartphone can also print using the phone's in-built printing software if their printer is able to accommodate it, for example Apple iPhone Air Print.

The rules around data protection are as relevant outside of the office environment as within it. If an employee has Council paperwork outside of the office, it must be stored securely

and disposed of via the correct means when it is no longer required. Council documents cannot be disposed of via general waste or recycling. When paperwork needs to be disposed of employees must arrange for this to be dropped at a Council building to be disposed of via the confidential waste (see Section 14 – Information Governance).

## **Scanning**

Microsoft Office Technology e.g. Microsoft Office Lens is available from Software Centre to process the scanning of small-scale documents. A central-print, copy and scan facility is available in the Councils Agile Hub which will allow employees to use the larger MultiFunction Devices (MFD's) where required.

## **Systems**

All systems that employees require access to will remain available to employees when working in a hybrid or agile way.

## **Applications and Platforms**

The Council is adopting a Microsoft centric approach to delivering its core applications and where possible will integrate these into the Microsoft platform.

## **Telephony**

All staff working outside of the office will have a Softphone which sits on the main IT device and is also available over Council provided Smartphone. The softphone provides the ability to use telephony at any location and gives you access to the Council phone book online. All staff working under hybrid agile arrangements need to be contactable by telephone on their Council issued number

A headset is provided for use with the Softphone, which can be collected by request from IT (this should be arranged using the IT Service Desk portal or by ringing 01744 676525).

Calls can also be diverted to Council issued mobile phones should that be a requirement for individual officers.

## **Engaging with IT**

All officers and elected members are asked to contact IT using the IT Service Desk portal or by ringing 01744 676525. In the case of replacement or new issue it will be available from the Service Desk. For IT software developments a Work Request system is available through this link which will allow you to request work from IT's Development section.

## **Information Governance**

The Council provides employees with the facilities and opportunities to work remotely, as detailed in the previous sections of this document and recognises that there are risks associated with accessing and handling information in order to conduct official Council business.

The Council has an Information Management Framework (link: <http://applications.sth.net/intranet/Council/InformationManagementFramework.aspx>) which sets out the overarching policies, governance and best practice surrounding the Council's management of information and information systems, including hybrid - agile working.

The policies and guidance as set out in the Information Management Framework should be read in addition to this policy, in particular the Mobile Devices and Remote Working Policy, which aims to mitigate the following risks:

- Increased risk of equipment damage, loss, or theft.
- Accidental or deliberate overlooking by unauthorised individuals.
- Unauthorised access to sensitive information.
- Introduction of malicious software and viruses.
- Potential sanctions against the Council or individuals imposed by the Information Commissioner's Office as a result of information loss or misuse.
- Potential legal action against the Council or individuals as a result of information loss or misuse.
- Council reputational damage as a result of information loss or misuse.

## **Review of Working Arrangements**

Working arrangements are open to review at any point. There may be a number of reasons for a review, including;

- a. where the needs of the Council, Service or Customer have changed,
- b. where there is a Health and Safety concern, or
- c. where the employee's personal circumstances have changed.

In all cases, managers and employees will work towards achieving a mutual resolution to enable the hybrid or agile arrangements to continue. If this is not possible, managers will discuss with the employee how the arrangements will change.