

15. **HYBRID WORKING POLICY (TR)**

1. **Purpose of the report**

Members are asked to approve the Policy on Hybrid Working and note the Guidance on hybrid working document.

Key Issues

- **Flexible working is a feature of the modern workplace and a shift to home and hybrid working has been accelerated by the pandemic. The offer of flexible working when advertising for a role attracts more applications.**
- Approximately two thirds of our employees currently spend time working from home.
- The Authority does not have a policy or reference document on remote or hybrid working.
- Employees get the right support to work away from the office

2. **Recommendations(s)**

1. **To approve the Policy on hybrid working as set out in Appendix 1**
2. **To note the Guidance on hybrid working as set out in Appendix 2**

How does this contribute to our policies and legal obligations?

3. Hybrid working arrangements are informal and do not amount to a variation to employment contract. There is no automatic right to hybrid working and requests to enter into an arrangement must be made via the line manager, to be authorised by the Head of Service. The arrangement is reviewed annually and can be withdrawn.
4. To vary contractual working hours, working patterns, or location permanently, an application must be submitted under the Flexible Working Policy.
5. There is the same health and safety responsibilities for employees working from home as for any other. The policy sets out responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act, and in particular the Display Screen Equipment (DSE) requirements and work-life balance.
6. Employees have access to the personal and confidential information they need to do their job. This information must not be disclosed to other who are not authorised to see it. The Information Management Policy Framework applies at all times regardless where employees are working. To work remotely an employee must have up-to-date Data Security training and comply with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).
7. Hybrid working arrangements contribute to the Authority Plan 2023-28 aim of enabling delivery: The Authority is inspiring, pioneering and enabling in delivering the National Park vision.

Background Information

8. The Covid 19 lockdown was a series of stay-at-home orders introduced by the government in response to the Covid 19 pandemic. On 23 March 2020, the Prime Minister announced a nationwide lockdown to curb the outbreak. The lockdown was incrementally lifted but similar restrictions were introduced in late 2020 and early 2021 as infections rose.

9. The easing of lockdown measures in England prompted employers to consider their position on remote and hybrid working. At the Authority a Blended Working Group was created to assess the impact of continued remote or hybrid working on people, finance, IT provision, and use of properties. The employees were surveyed over March and April 2021. There was 86% response rate with the following headlines:
- 66% of respondents say there are aspects of work which cannot be done at home.
 - 87% of respondents would like some form of blended working in the future.
 - 94% believe a blended working arrangement could work for their role and 95% believe it will not impact on their accessibility by others.

The survey asked about the proportion of time they would like to work from home or the workplace, a 50/50 split was the highest preference closely followed by the two categories either side:

- Less than 20% at home: 3.9%
- 20 – 49% at home: 24.4%
- 50/50 split home and workplace: 33.3%
- 60 – 79% at home: 21.7%
- 80% or more at home: 12.8%

In consultation with Unison and Staff Committee, the Blended Working Group drafted 'Return to the Workplace Principles' and 4 October 2021 marked the first full week since the end of March 2020 that employees returned to the workplace.

The Management Team had recognised the contribution of homeworking to employee wellbeing and they were supportive of trialling a form of blended working in appropriate roles before committing to a permanent way of working. For these roles, a 12-month trial period commenced where employees could work up to 60% of their contracted hours at home per week with the intent that after 3 months this will move to up to 40%.

In mid-December the work-from-home guidance was reintroduced in England to curb the spread of Omicron, a variation of Covid. The 12-month trial was paused and resumed in early February 2022, closely followed by Aldern House re-opening to the public and Full Authority meetings in person.

Towards the end of the trial, the Management Team concluded that hybrid working model is here to stay. This type of working had been rapidly adopted by organisations post-Covid and the flexible working advantage offered by the Authority in recruitment pre-Covid, has been eroded. In a strong employee's recruitment market, hybrid working gives people the level of flexibility they want to get their work done where they are most productive. It can improve wellbeing by reducing the stress of travelling into the workplace. Hybrid working also has a positive impact on the environment by reducing the daily polluting commute which also wastes considerable time and money.

Hybrid working has meant there was underutilisation of Authority office space. Changes to how we allocate office space as outlined in the Accommodation Framework, enables more space to be let resulting in additional income.

Consultation on hybrid working documentation commenced in November 2022. Managers, Unison and Staff Committee were consulted on this draft Policy and Guidance over February and March with feedback being supportive and positive.

Proposals

10. The draft Policy on Hybrid Working is given in Appendix 1 for Members consideration and approval. Although a level of remote working has been in place since March 2020 the Policy makes clear the Authority's aims, scope and intent for its use. Our employees, managers, Heads of Service, and Human Resources practitioners will have a reference document to provide robust guidance on their responsibilities.
11. The draft Guidance on hybrid working is given in Appendix 2 for Members consideration and note.

Are there any corporate implications members should be concerned about?

Financial:

12. Costs arising from training, additional IT equipment or furniture will be supported from the Hybrid Working Reserve

Risk Management:

13. The policy and guidance outline controls to remove and/or the potential harm to our employees from ineffective DSE assessment, other occupational health and safety risks, and inappropriate work-life balance.

Sustainability:

14. Increased home working avoids the daily commute and associated emissions. However, this is at least to some extent offset by the increase in domestic energy use associated with each staff member heating and lighting their home while their office is also being heated and lit. While the office energy use will be optimised to some extent by more efficient use of the office space, there will be a commute distance threshold over which it becomes more efficient to work at home than come into the office.

Work is progressing to better understand the impact of home working on the Authority's emissions and net zero commitment

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:

15. The policy and guidance will be applied fairly, free from discrimination direct or indirect. A consistent and fair process will be ensured when considering applications for hybrid working, implementing hybrid working, varying or withdrawing hybrid working arrangements.
16. Hybrid working may support diverse recruitment and retention of skilled and experienced employees.
17. Hybrid working may be requested by an employee as a reasonable adjustment where there is a disability.

18. Climate Change

Hybrid working can contribute towards the net zero carbon target for the National Park (as set out in the National Park Management Plan) through reduced travel.

19. Background papers (not previously published) – these can be viewed in the "Background Papers" Folder in the Library on the National Park Website

Easing of Lockdown Survey May 2021
Return to the workplace principles June 2021

20. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Policy on hybrid working

Appendix 2 - Guidance on hybrid working

Report Author, Job Title and Publication Date

Theresa Reid, Head of People Management, 11th May 2023