

## FAQs

### Hybrid Working Arrangements - Cyngor Gwynedd

#### Introduction

Work circumstances have changed over the past years and therefore it is inevitable that the Council will need to adapt to that, taking advantage of the opportunities that flexible working offers in terms of developing and improving our services and offering benefits to our staff.

This FAQ document accompanies the Hybrid Working Scheme which provides further information to Council staff on the future working arrangements and the expectations around that.

All Council staff are responsible for ensuring that a "one Council" culture is exercised, including effective communication and working as a team. Teams will be expected to set out their work expectations/arrangements, taking hybrid working into account as a part of their operational principles.

#### 1. What is the Council's vision for future working?

Our priority is to ensure;

- A workforce that can give their best to provide quality services for the people of Gwynedd and which are always prepared to improve.
- A Council that is a good place to work, which attracts and retains quality staff, and promotes work-life balance for the benefit of all.

#### 2. Why do these changes need to be introduced?

In order to:

- Promote staff well-being and improve work-life balance, which will lead to more productive staff.
- Increase staff satisfaction levels and improve the commitment to their work.
- Strengthen the Council's ability to recruit staff when offering flexible working arrangements where possible.
- Reduce the Council's carbon footprint as staff drive fewer miles to work.
- Make better use of our offices and buildings.
- Make full use of technology in order to improve our services.
- Promote equality, e.g., by offering better opportunities for disabled people or individuals with caring responsibilities.

In order to get the best out of any hybrid working arrangement, it is important to ensure a balance between being at home and attendance at the work centre. By striking the correct balance, we will ensure effective collaboration and communication between teams, since face-to-face contact is essential to ensure the well-being of the workforce.

### 3. What is hybrid working?

Hybrid working is one example of flexible working that the Council allows. It involves dividing work time between attending the normal work centre (contractual) with working from home. These arrangements are different to situations where staff complete all of their work from the office on a permanent basis ('office' workers).

### 4. What type of working arrangements will the Council offer in the future?

- **Working from the office / work centre** - the member of staff will complete their work from the office / work centre on a full-time basis.
- **Hybrid Working** - the staff member will combine working from home and from the office. Under hybrid working arrangements, a full-time staff member will be expected to work at least **2 days per week** from the normal work centre (contractual), or a proportion that is equivalent to the working week for part-time employees. *See point 7 below for more information.*
- Excluding exceptions, officers will not be able to work from home on a full-time basis, and consequently, there will be no contractual changes as a result of these arrangements.
- Whilst this document mainly focuses on hybrid arrangements, it must also be borne in mind that the Council offers a number of other opportunities for flexible working (e.g., part-time working, compacted hours, etc.), in accordance with the Council's policy on Submitting Requests for Flexible Working.

### 5. Who will assess whether the role is suitable for hybrid working?

Service managers will be responsible for identifying which posts can be undertaken in a hybrid way and the assessment will be done before advertising / appointing, based on the service's requirements. If a post can be undertaken in a hybrid way, a discussion will be held with the post-holder to ascertain their personal wishes following their appointment.

In order to assess whether or not a post is suitable for hybrid, three factors will need to be considered:

- Do the requirements of the post allow for hybrid working? The service requirements will take precedence. Inevitably, there are some jobs where it will not be possible to fulfil them away from the office.
- Do you wish to work hybrid?
- Do you have suitable space at home for hybrid working?

### 6. Is there flexibility within the '2 days' per week definition?

Unless your work contract already notes what dates you are expected to attend the office, the staff member and line manager will need to agree to any arrangement based on business requirements.

The situation may change due to factors such as the circumstances of individuals, changes within the role and the team at a specific time and the requirements of the organisation. As a result, flexibility is afforded to work the above hours from the work centre on an average basis over the month, where required.

#### **7. I work part-time, what does '2 days' a week mean in my situation?**

Under hybrid working arrangements, the staff member is expected to work a minimum of 2 days a week from the normal work centre (contractual) or a proportion that equates to a working week for part-time employees. For part-time employees, this means the hours that equate to the nearest working day, e.g., if working 3 days a week, at least 1 day is expected in the normal work centre (contractual).

#### **8. The nature of my post means that I travel to carry out field visits most of the time, what does '2 days' mean in my situation?**

The nature of responsibilities within some roles will mean that employees will need to regularly carry out a high percentage of their work by travelling to various public and private locations across the county without much prior notice (e.g., building control, social workers).

Under those circumstances, consideration will need to be given to flexibility in the definition of 2 days from the work centre (or equivalent for part-time employees), whilst also ensuring that employees are able to take advantage of the face-to-face contact with their colleagues. On those occasions, the Council's [Travelling and Subsistence Policy](#) will remain operational (e.g. it will not be possible to claim travelling time from home to work).

#### **9. I am doing a course as part of my work contract, does my 'college' day count towards the '2 days'?**

As it is important to ensure contact and face-to-face collaboration, the 'college' day will not count towards the '2 days' and those staff members will be expected to come in more regularly than 2 days per week. Any arrangement should be discussed with your Line Manager. See point 11 for information regarding the expectations in circumstances where employees are new or on an induction period.

#### **10. Am I expected to work from the office on specific days, e.g., Wednesdays?**

Unless your work contract already notes what days you are expected to attend the office, any arrangement will need to be confirmed with your line manager, based on business requirements.

#### **11. I am new to my post / to the Council, is it possible for me to work hybrid?**

Getting to know colleagues and learning from others is much more challenging when working from home; virtual communication does not fully fill this gap every time.

Robust induction and communication arrangements will be required in order to give new staff the necessary support.

To that end, teams where their posts allow for hybrid working are expected to come together face-to-face more regularly than 2 days a week to coincide with the induction programme of the new employee (or an equivalent proportion of the working week for part-time employees). This is considered essential in order to introduce a new staff member effectively to their colleagues and to work responsibilities and duties.

## 12. What is considered as an 'exception' under this Scheme?

The Council acknowledges that there may be a need to make exceptions to the procedure on occasions. Staff can face a number of challenging circumstances from time to time and there is a need to acknowledge this and respond reasonably to those circumstances.

Individual needs will be considered as a part of initial discussions between the staff member and line manager in order to ensure that there is a clear understanding from the outset of any adjustments that need to be put in place under this pattern or work location. This initial discussion will also be an opportunity to set out the expectations placed on individual teams and under this scheme.

Any exception that diverts from the expectation for hybrid workers to spend two days per week away from the normal work centre (contractual), or an equivalent proportion of the working week for part-time employees, will be subject to exceptional circumstances only. Staff will be expected to obtain the agreement of their line manager under those circumstances.

- **Exceptional Circumstances (examples)** – There may be a need to consider amending the work pattern temporarily in circumstances where:
  - There is a clear business case for doing so, e.g., inability to recruit to a post meaning that there is a need to attract someone who lives far away from the normal work centre (contractual)
  - temporary health circumstances mean that there will be difficulties to travel into work, e.g., leg fracture or extreme back pain.
  - staff member disability, which means that full consideration must be given to any reasonable adjustments that the individual requests and put appropriate support in place in accordance with the 2010 Equality Act (any appropriate medical reports can be considered when making a decision).

As employees, each one of us has a responsibility to ensure that there is a sufficient provision in place to avoid conflict with work performance and the ability to deliver the duties of our posts. Under such circumstances, the [Annual Leave and Free Time Policy](#) + [Carer Support Policy](#) can be used.

**Field Workers** - The nature of responsibilities within some roles will mean that employees will need to carry out a high percentage of their work by travelling to various public and private locations across the county without much prior notice (e.g., building control, social workers).

Under those circumstances there will be a need to consider flexibility in the definition of 2 days per week from the normal work centre (contractual), or equivalent for part-time employees, ensuring at

the same time that employees are able to take advantage of the benefits of face-to-face contact with their colleagues.

Of course, these are only examples, and situations that are not referred to here may arise.

Subject to the nature of the additional flexibility sought, the employer may ask the staff member to make a formal request for flexible working - see [Flexible Working Policy](#).

If it is considered that it may be an exceptional circumstance, the line manager may ask for support and advice from the Human Resources Advisory Service or Occupational Health Service.

### **13. Would it be okay for me to take time off during my working day, e.g., to fetch the children from school?**

The Flexible Hours Scheme can offer staff flexibility to have a work-life balance and under this scheme, there is no specific minimum hours that must be worked during any day.

It must be borne in mind that we all have a usual work pattern that addresses the requirements of the service and the team, therefore there is a responsibility on us all to ensure that there is a sufficient provision in place so that the service requirements come first. It must be noted that exceptional circumstances under this scheme do not normally include working from home in order to provide childcare or to care for other members of the family. Under such circumstances, the [Annual Leave and Free Time Policy](#) and [Carer Support Policy](#) can be used.

Any change to the normal work pattern should be discussed with your line manager and in accordance with the policy, an agreement should be reached on any regular / permanent change to the work pattern under the [Flexible Working Policy](#).

### **14. Can staff work from a different work centre to what has been noted in their contracts on the 'office' days?**

This should be discussed with your manager as there would be a need to consider the service provision requirements and collaboration with other members of the team.

At the manager's discretion, this could be considered as an option, subject to the availability of suitable space in those offices and evidence that there is a clear benefit to working from that location.

### **15. Co-location arrangements with other agencies have been established to ensure that the best possible service is being provided. Will this be possible if the team is hybrid working?**

The ability of individuals to work hybrid will be subject to the nature of the post and meeting the requirements of the service will take priority. It is essential to ensure that there will be no negative impact on services for the people of Gwynedd. Members of staff and managers will need to consider the context of the team more widely when considering requests for hybrid working.

### 16. Will it be possible for me to adapt my working arrangements if my personal circumstances change in the future?

The Council will seek to facilitate changes where possible, based on matters such as the availability of office space, service requirements, costs, etc. This should be discussed with your Line Manager, giving sufficient notice where possible.

### 17. Does the Council have the right to end a hybrid working arrangement?

The Council may withdraw the right to hybrid working provided that there is a valid reason for doing so, e.g., change in working circumstances, health circumstances, associated capability reasons, associated misconduct and failure to follow arrangements, etc. Reasonable notice will be given in such circumstances.

## Health, Safety and Well-being

### 18. What is considered a suitable location at home?

- Any home working arrangement will be subject to the space and circumstances of the home allowing the individual to undertake their post effectively. Not all have a suitable location to enable them to work from home effectively.
- It is important that the workstation meets data protection and health and safety requirements.
- It is important to have a space where you can concentrate, carry out work and not be disturbed. Staff are responsible to ensure that provision is in place for any caring responsibility to avoid conflict with work performance.
- If you have not completed a self-assessment to date, or if your work situation has changed since you completed it, you should complete an assessment here: [Workstation Self-assessment](#)
- Broadband – An adequate broadband connection will be required to enable you to undertake the job e.g. easy access to Council systems and full participation in virtual meetings. It will be the responsibility of the staff member to provide an adequate broadband connection and the Council will not reimburse you / contribute to the cost. Any satisfactory workstation assessment will be subject to an adequate connection at staff homes, and the manager is entitled to ask you to work from the office permanently unless a guaranteed sufficient broadband connection is available.

### 19. What are the health and safety considerations related to home workstations?

- Over the course of the pandemic, working from home was imposed on employers in an emergency situation with no time to plan for it, and therefore there was no strict enforcement of the Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992. As we emerge from the crisis, it is necessary to ensure that home workstations are compliant with the requirements of the standards.
- Should the [Workstation Self-assessment](#) highlight that aspects of the workstation require further attention, this will be followed-up by competent officers from the Council, with consideration given to providing equipment where necessary in order to comply with the requirements of the standards.
- Your home workstation will be considered as the place where you will carry out the workstation self-assessment. A manager can agree to you working from another location in special circumstances, which should be discussed with your line manager in advance.

## 20. I am about to move house and I am hybrid working. Do I need to complete a new workstation assessment?

When an employee moves home, they will need to show that the proposed workstation at the new home satisfies health and safety requirements and complete a workstation assessment of the new workstation.

## 21. What will happen if I do not complete a workstation assessment?

It is a legal requirement for everyone to complete a workstation assessment. To ensure that the Council shows a duty of care towards our staff, it is essential that these assessments are completed in order to allow for a hybrid working arrangement to be in place. The managers will be entitled to ask you to work from the office permanently unless there are assurances that the workstation assessment is in place and that this satisfies the requirements.

## 22. What is considered as an 'acceptable break' from the screen?

A regular break when a worker looks away from the screen, e.g., does some paperwork, makes a phone-call and extends the muscles (e.g., stands up and stretches, goes to the toilet, makes a cuppa, goes for a walk during their lunch break, etc.). This is in order to help prevent musculo-skeletal and mental problems, e.g., backache, helps prevent headaches, and improves focus and productivity.

## Offices

## 23. How will the office space look in the future?

The Council will make changes within the office to ensure that we make the best use of our buildings. It is anticipated that the office space will be a mixture of workstations such as;

- **Confidential/quiet space:** suitable space to hold on-line meetings in the office or respond to phone calls – quiet and confidential.
- **Hot-desks** – adequate equipment on hot-desks available to the entire workforce, which meets standard requirements.
- **Social / team meeting spaces:** space for teams and officers to hold team meetings or informal meetings.

## 24. Will there be space for me to work when I attend the office / my work centre?

It is inevitable that the Council will consider reducing the amount of office space that is required as more employees opt for hybrid working. Similarly, there will be a need to ensure that sufficient office space is available to all and that this is available on any day (e.g., times when whole teams attend at the same time).

A number of our workstations will move to provide hot-desks and there will be a need to arrange to book them in advance in order to ensure purposeful space on the days that you attend the work centre. It is important to note that the new working arrangements do not anticipate an arrangement that moves teams around buildings from one day to the next or separates colleagues or gives customers uncertainty about the location of staff. The importance of maintaining team contact and

easy access to necessary resources or equipment is noted. As a result, specific locations will be earmarked for departments/services.

### **25. What equipment will the Council provide for me for hybrid working?**

- The Council will provide the IT equipment that is necessary for undertaking the post, e.g., laptop, screen, keyboard, mouse, headphones.
- Consideration will be given to providing additional equipment based on workstation assessments to comply with the requirements of the Visual Screen Equipment Regulations 1992.
- A desk and chair for the home will not be provided, but the staff member must have both and adequate space to meet the requirements in the regulations in order to be able to work from home safely.
- If you need any specialist equipment or you have specific needs then you should discuss that with your line manager in order to consider any reasonable adjustments.
- Staff members will be required to complete an equipment register in the future so that there is a record of the equipment provided.

### **26. What will be the temporary desk (hot-desk) layout in the future?**

Every temporary desk (hot-desk) will include:

- Desk
- Chair that may be adapted to an individual's needs
- Height-adjustable screen
- Laptop raiser
- Docking station
- Footrest
- In the future, there will be no desk phone provision on the temporary desks as softphones will be loaded on staff laptops.

### **27. Will I need to bring headphones into the work centre / office?**

Information protection policies and procedures will remain as relevant when you work from home and in the work centre/office, so it is good practice to use headphones when you need to hold sensitive/confidential conversations and in order to safeguard information when holding virtual meetings (e.g., Microsoft Teams).

### **28. I have a musculo-skeletal condition which means that I need a specialist chair, will there one be available for me if I work from the office / work centre?**

Individual circumstances will be considered when designing office space (e.g., hot-desks) in order to seek to ensure that the appropriate equipment is always available for you when you work from the normal work centre. Individual workstation assessments will need to be considered in this respect.

### **29. What will be the procedure for returning property if I leave the Council?**

Any Council property will need to be returned at the end of employment in accordance with the work contract. This will include the Council-owned equipment at the employee's home.



## Work Policies/Conditions

### 30. What will be my contractual work centre if I wish to work hybrid?

- There will be no change to the contractual work centre of staff, and an office will continue to be identified for all employees.

### 31. How will travelling costs be calculated if I wish to work hybrid?

- There is no change to the current travelling costs claiming policy, and in line with this policy staff will continue to claim travelling costs based on their contractual work location, which is the office.
- The Council will not re-pay travelling costs to the workplace already noted in the employment agreement of staff.
- In order to calculate the mileage travelled on official business, the total mileage travelled to the contractual working location should be deducted from the total mileage. See the [Travel and Subsistence Policy](#) for more information.

### 32. Will the Council continue to offer the flexible hours scheme in the future?

- This [Flexible Hours Scheme](#) will continue to be reviewed to ensure that it meets services' requirements.

### 33. Do the Council's policies still apply when I work from home? E.g., smoking, alcohol/drugs?

Staff have a contractual responsibility to continue to work in line with the policies and procedures in place within the Council and normal workplace rules, such as [Code of Conduct and Practice](#) and the Council's procedures will apply to every employee, regardless of where they are working.

### 34. Will the Council contribute towards domestic costs, e.g., electricity, heating, broadband?

As the hybrid working arrangement would be voluntary and as all types of benefits are possible for individuals from choosing to move to a hybrid working arrangement, the Council will not reimburse staff for domestic costs.

### 35. What mortgage, lease and insurance considerations do I need to be aware of if I work from home / hybrid working?

- Staff will be responsible for ensuring that they have informed their home insurer / mortgage lender of their intention to work hybrid. They should check that nothing is preventing them from working from home in their contracts with their providers.
- Employees should ensure that all Council property is used appropriately and responsibly and that all reasonable steps are taken to prevent damage and theft. The line manager must be informed immediately of any Council property that has been damaged or stolen.
- Employees who work from home are covered under the Council's Employer Liability Insurance and Public Liability Insurance in the same way as if they would work in an office, provided that the guidance in this document has been followed.