

BSO Interim Working from Home Policy

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1.0 Introduction

In response to government advice in March 2020 a large proportion of staff in the Business Services Organisation (BSO) moved to working from home on a regular basis. The working from home survey in June 2020 indicated that in the main working from home had been a positive experience for staff and managers during this challenging time. As the BSO returns to Business as Usual it is committed to, where service needs permit, facilitating home working in accordance with Northern Ireland Assembly guidance.

The purpose of this policy is to set out the criteria and arrangements for working from home as the BSO responds to COVID-19 pandemic ensuring a consistent approach which meets the needs of our business. It will also act as a pilot for the organisation's longer term Working from Home (WFH) Policy which may look further at hot desking /mobile working. This policy replaces the Working from Home Protocol that was issued in April 2020.

To work effectively, any working from home arrangement must primarily meet the business needs of the BSO, followed by the individual needs of staff, to ultimately ensure the continued delivery of safe and high quality services.

As the BSO have responded to COVID-19 we have developed a number of Health & Well Being & Mental Health Resources alongside our PHA colleagues. To access these resources please click on the below link to the Health & Well Being sharepoint site: <https://regional.sharepoint.hscni.net/sites/shw/SitePages/Home.aspx>

2.0 Scope

It is accepted that this policy cannot be applied to all roles within the BSO. Where service needs can accommodate, this policy is applicable to permanent, temporary, full time and part time employees and may on some occasions be extended to Agency Workers. The relevant Senior Manager / Head of Department will determine that working from home arrangements will be viable.

Working from Home may arise through different circumstances:

- In accordance with government guidance in response to COVID-19 and any other public health/government recommendations
- To facilitate social distancing in the offices
- Requested by the employee as part of a flexible working arrangement;
- Agreed time away from a work base to complete work uninterrupted;

- As part of a reasonable accommodation for employees with a disability;

These circumstances are not exhaustive as there may be other situations when homeworking options may be explored. As aforementioned any future Policy may require a need to accommodate mobile workers who are required to mainly work away from their base.

3.0 Types and Definitions

Types of Mobile/Home Working:

Remote / Mobile Working	This is work undertaken away from the main office base, which is enabled through the use of mobile devices/information and communication technologies, so that a member of staff may alternate between their main office base (contractual base) and other suitably equipped locations, e.g. nominated BSO offices / establishments, shared facilities and on occasions from home.
Occasional (ad-hoc) working from home	This is defined as work undertaken at home on an occasional basis. The employee retains access to an office workstation at their normal place of work.
Regular working from home	This is where an employee spends a regular proportion of their contracted hours working from home e.g. 3 days out of 5. The employee retains access to an office workstation at their normal place of work.

Moving forward, in response to COVID19 It is anticipated that occasional and regular working from home will become options for staff.

4.0 Roles & Responsibilities

4.1 Employee Responsibilities

- Comply with all BSO policies and procedures whilst working whether this in their home or on BSO premises;
- While WFH, maintain the professional manner that would be expected in workplace at all times.

- Provide appropriate contact details and ensure that you are fully contactable during their working hours;
- Understand that there is no right to work from home, the decision is a management decision based on the needs of the business and can be withdrawn at any time with immediate effect however in most circumstances staff will be provided with 4 weeks' notice
- Deliver the agreed work objectives set out by the line manager on a timely basis;
- Inform your line manager as soon as possible in the event of an accident or incident occurring whilst working at home. This includes reporting any damaged, lost or stolen equipment, breaches of confidentiality or loss of data;
- Complete a risk assessment within 4 weeks of the implementation of this Policy or before commencing a working from home arrangement. Employees will work safely and comply with any control measures identified in the risk assessment (appendix 1). Where any new risks become evident, you must notify your line manager immediately and review the risk assessment to reduce risk; Please see link to online video tool for further support on how to complete the home working checklist [\[INSERT LINK\]](#)
- Report any sickness in line with the BSO's Attendance at Work Policy and Procedures;
- Flexi-leave, appointments or work outside of normal business hours must be approved as normal by line management. It is not expected that staff availing of regular working from home will be permitted to avail of flexi-leave. Managers are however encouraged to promote flexible working where possible. Only in exceptional circumstances, if expressly agreed with line management will staff be permitted to accrue flexi when working from home.
- Be familiar with any personal tax and insurance issues relating to working from home and to alert the HMRC and insurance provider when required to do so.
- Report any damage or significant "wear and tear" to equipment provided by the BSO to your line manager and appropriate department e.g. ITS at the earliest opportunity.
- Be available to attend workplace meetings/ training etc when you are required or requested to do so
- Ensure the safe storage of BSO equipment and confidential information in line with Information Governance procedures. It is anticipated that staff working from home should be working from electronic files and it will only be in exceptional circumstances that paper files should be taken home. Where paperwork is to be taken home it must have prior written authorisation and must be stored in line with BSO information governance procedures.
- Maintain contact with your manager and colleagues, frequently via face to face meetings or via video conferencing.

4.2 Line Manager Responsibilities

- Consider home working as a key enabler to more flexible, responsive working pattern and reducing the need for office space, facilitating social distancing; complying with government guidance to avail of working from home where possible
- Treat each application to work from home on its own merits and give it reasonable consideration;
- Consider the needs of the individual applying to work from home. Applications from people with disabilities may be considered as being a 'reasonable adjustment' under the Disability Discrimination Act and recommendation from Occupational Health;
- Assess the sensitivity and confidentiality of the work to be undertaken from home and ensure that the employee has completed their mandatory Information & Governance training;
- Ensure that a risk assessment has been carried out by the employee prior to agreement of a home working arrangement (or within 4 weeks of the implementation of this Policy if already in place as a result of COVID-19) and discuss any potential risks with the employee. Where appropriate seek advice from the Health and Safety Adviser [\[INSERT LINK TO MANUAL HANDLING TRAINING and CHECKLIST VIDEO\]](#);
- Ensure that incidents or accidents are logged appropriately and at the earliest opportunity via the Intranet reporting system; [\[INSERT LINK\]](#)
- Liaise with the ITS Department before agreeing any working from home arrangements to discuss/agree potential IT equipment/access arrangements, where necessary (See section 7 ICT Requirements).
- Liaise with the Human Resources Department (Terms & Conditions team) where advice or guidance is required;
- Ensure employees are aware of expectations and the required standard of work: In some instances, it may not be appropriate for staff to work from home where there are issues regarding conduct, attendance, disciplinary or performance. In these instances managers should seek advice from Human Resources
- Maintain contact and normal supervision arrangements with employee & provide opportunities for face to face meetings or via video conferencing as appropriate with manager and colleagues
- Ensure employees adhere to their responsibilities regarding health and safety, information governance and confidentiality;
- Ensure that the Policy is not used to replace carer's leave or sickness absence in cases where an employee is unfit for work. However there may be instances where working from home is appropriate for short-term duration to support

employees following an injury or due to personal circumstances which are discussed and agreed in advance.

4.3 Human Resources & Corporate Services

- Ensure that this policy is applied in a fair manner through advice on its application;
- Where appropriate seek advice from the BSO Health & Safety Advisor regarding Home Working Health & Safety Provisions / Risk Assessments
- Review operation of the policy after initial 12 months operation

4.4 Trade Unions

- Trade Union representatives have an important role to play generally in providing advice, support and working in partnership with managers and the Human Resources team in looking to ensure that the Working from Home Policy is implemented to deliver benefits to the BSO, it's employees and BSO clients.

5.0 Application Process

This procedure outlines the steps that should be taken by both employees and managers in consideration of working from home arrangements.

For all employees who were permitted to and continue to work from home as a result of COVID-19 the appropriate Head of Service / Senior Manager must complete the pro-forma contained in **Appendix B** and return this pro-forma to **BSO.HumanResources@hscni.net**.

For all future new working arrangements employees and managers must follow the below process:

5.1 Step 1: Formal Application

Employees who wish to be considered for working from home should complete the Work Life Balance request form on HRPTS (ESS).

5.2 Step 2: Consideration of Criteria to assess suitability

A meeting should be held as soon as practicable between the employee and the manager to discuss the suitability of working from home arrangements. Where managers are extending current working from home arrangements which have been in place during COVID it is expected that they will hold regular meetings with their teams

to communicate extended arrangements and where appropriate meet with individuals to discuss any concerns.

The line manager should take into account the following factors when discussing and considering home working applications:

The business need	The work task to be completed at home or in other BSO facilities will fulfil business needs.
The impact on team workload	The absence of the individual from the workplace will not create additional workload for other employees or affect operational effectiveness.
The suitability of the job/work task	Working at or from home or other BSO facilities will only be possible where the work can facilitate this.
The suitability of the home work area	The member of staff's home, when this is being used as a work base, should be a safe and secure working environment. It is the responsibility of the employee to provide assurance of this through their completion of the H&S risk assessment.
The capability of the employee	The ability to deliver work effectively without supervision. Employees who are subject to either informal or formal conduct, attendance or capability proceedings will not normally be eligible for working from home arrangements, particularly if they require close supervision and coaching by their manager to make the necessary improvements.. During the COVID-19 pandemic these requirements may be waved ensuring compliance with government guidance.
Caring responsibilities	The potential impact of the home environment and caring responsibilities should be considered. The BSO understands that employees may want to work from home because of caring responsibilities. Employees are expected to discuss any caring responsibilities with their line manager and demonstrate how they can deliver the agreed work objectives. Employees must be able to demonstrate that they can carry out the full duties of their post.
ICT requirements	Due consideration to ICT requirements should be given prior to agreement to working from home. ICT equipment are subject to a costed business case by the line manager, with advice from the Information Technology Services (ITS). It should be noted that all costs to be incurred will require approval from the budget holder responsible for the employee's cost centre.

5.3 Step 3: Risk Assessment

The employee must undertake a risk assessment ([appendix A](#)). Once completed, this form should be considered by the line manager.

The Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978 requires all employers to ensure as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of employees whilst at work. This duty also applies to employees working from home. This also places an obligation on employees working from home to ensure they take reasonable care not to put themselves or others at risk.

In addition, employees must undertake, where applicable, a Display Screen Self-Assessment, as this is a requirement of the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment (DSE) regulation 1992 relating to regular users. This assessment is on the BSO Intranet site 'Display Screen Self-Assessment' [\[INSERT LINK\]](#). Employees are encouraged to undertake the E-Learning module prior to completion of self-assessment. Once completed, assessment from e-learning module should be provided to your line manager to address any issues of concern. For those employees continuing to work from home during COVID-19 managers should ensure employees undertake, where applicable, a Display Screen Self- Assessment.

Should any queries arise, further advice may be sought from the BSOs Health and Safety Advisor. A new working from home arrangement cannot commence prior to these risk assessments being carried out and any necessary control measures having been implemented.

5.4 Step 4: Outcome

If an employee has made an application for home working, the manager will inform the employee of their decision in writing within **14 days** of the date of the meeting. If the request is accepted, the manager will agree the following:

- Clear work objectives and arrangements with the employee;
- If required, discuss any potential issues arising from working from home (e.g. caring responsibilities. Health and safety etc.)

If a line manager declines a request for home working they should provide the reasons to the employee in writing within the above timescale. In these circumstances, the employee can request for the decision to be reviewed by the Senior Manager / Head of Department. The final decision will be conveyed in writing to the employee.

All documentation relating to an application for Home Working, including the Risk Assessment Checklist must be retained by the manager.

5.5 Step 5: Withdrawal of Homeworking arrangement

Agreed homeworking arrangements can be withdrawn if it is demonstrated that:

- The business needs are not being met
- The performance of the employee suffers as a result of homeworking;
- The effectiveness of the team in which the employee work is compromised.
- Government advice on working from home has changed

In most circumstances, if regular homeworking arrangements are to be withdrawn, the employee will be given in writing, a minimum of 4 weeks' notice of this change.

However, if homeworking arrangements are reviewed due to the employee's performance, attendance or conduct, the manager reserves the right to immediately withdraw the homeworking arrangement and these may be dealt with under the appropriate BSO Policy should this be necessary.

6.0 Terms & Conditions – Base and Business Mileage

Whilst working from home, an employee's base remains as defined in their contract of employment. Employees are only permitted to work from their own homes.

Employees entitled to claim Business mileage should ensure that home to base return miles are deducted as per normal claiming processes irrespective of whether an employee attends their base or not as part of any journey on that particular day.

Managers should ensure that everyone working from home is aware of the expectations upon them including when employees will be available to work (staff unless requested to do so should not work above their normal daily contracted hours).

Employees may be able to claim tax relief for some of the bills they have to pay because they have to work at home on a regular basis. Employee's cannot claim tax relief if they choose to work from home. From April 2020 the rate is up to £6 a week (£26 per month) to cover **additional** costs. For previous tax years the rate is £4 a week (£18 a month). Employees can only claim for things to do with their work, for example, business telephone calls for the extra cost of gas and electricity for their work area. Employees cannot claim for things that you use for both private and business use, for example, rent or broadband access.

Employees should seek guidance from HMRC as necessary - claims are made through a [P87 form](#).

7.0 Security & Confidentiality

Employees are responsible for ensuring the security and confidentiality of BSO property and all BSO data, information, files, documents etc. within their possession. The BSO's Information Governance, Security Policy and Information Security Policies will apply.

- It is the responsibility of all employees to ensure the safety and security of any documentation containing personal data in transit, and whilst at home, and that access by unauthorised individuals is not possible at any time. Transporting records from BSO premises requires vigilance and the principles of confidentiality must be maintained at all times. It is anticipated that staff working from home should be working from electronic files and it will only be in exceptional circumstances should paper files should be taken home.

Where there is a breach of confidentiality or loss of data or information asset, this must be reported and managed via the incident reporting process and in accordance with the **INSERT POLICIES** Policy.

8.0 BSO Equipment and ITS Support

Subject to business case approval the BSO will provide necessary computer and electrical equipment (e.g. laptops and mobile phones) to home workers. This cost will be funded by the employees Directorate. A request for equipment should be logged as appropriate via – **INSERT PORTAL / REQUEST INFO**. Equipment provided will remain the property of the BSO and must not be used by other members of the household. These items must be returned should the home worker cease employment with the BSO or if an employee is placed on precautionary suspension from work during an investigation process.

Where equipment is provided, the BSO will be responsible for the service and maintenance of the supplied equipment. Any concerns regarding BSO equipment must be immediately raised with the Line Manager.

An application for home working may be refused if there is not sufficient funding to accommodate all equipment necessary to effectively perform their duties at home.

Employees will be held responsible for the loss or damage to equipment where requirements of the Information Security Policies have not been observed. The matter may also be investigated in accordance with the BSO's Disciplinary Procedure.

ITS will provide telephone support to home workers. Any ICT equipment that requires physical repair or complex troubleshooting should be delivered to the ITS Department.

There may be a requirement for the employee to work from the office when equipment is being repaired. ITS employees will not be required to visit the employee's home. The employee will be responsible for connecting up the equipment themselves e.g. connecting screens, keyboard, mouse and power to docking stations / pc base units.

Connecting to home broadband (Wi-Fi) is the responsibility of the employee and therefore the employee should contact their home broadband provider for support. Employees will be responsible for any additional or improved Broadband costs. Home devices such as printers should not in any circumstance be connected to BSO equipment without ITS approval.

ITS cannot provide replacement devices without notice and managers should consider contingency measures in these circumstances. (e.g. returning to the office). The BSO will not be responsible for the purchasing of any equipment such as chairs or desks. It is the responsibility of the employee to ensure they are set up appropriately to work from home.

9.0 Insurance

The BSO will be responsible for any necessary insurance of equipment supplied by them and the employee liability insurance for use of the equipment.

It is the responsibility of the employee to have adequate home buildings and contents insurance.

The BSO will not accept liability for damage caused to the home or its contents.

The employee must inform their insurers, mortgage lender etc, if they are working from home on a regular basis.

10.0 Recovery of BSO Property

On the cessation of home working, for whatever reason, all BSO property and data must be returned to the line manager of the appropriate department. Should an employee fail to return any BSO property then withholding of any final salary payments will be applied and or further action deemed as appropriate by the BSO

11.0 Monitoring and Review

During COVID19 working from home arrangements will be kept under constant review and may be subject to change based on alteration of government advice, a change in service requirements or changes to an employee's personal circumstances.

The line manager must retain a record of the risk assessment for a period of 5 years. The employee must inform their line manager if there is any significant change to their working at home activity or the location of equipment used. If such a change does occur e.g. the employee moving home, then a new risk assessment must be carried out.

12.0 Policy Review

The Policy will be in place for 12 months following approval. An earlier review can take place should exceptional circumstances arise resulting from this policy; in whole or in part, being insufficient for the purpose and/or if there are legislative changes.

It is intended that a longer term Working from Home Policy will be considered in 12 months' time which will further consider remote working / home working and organisational change initiatives which may reduce the need for office accommodation and/or support improved space utilisation enabled through technology improvements.

Appendix A

HOME WORKING CHECKLIST

This checklist must be completed by the employee as part of an application to work at home. The employee must share a copy of this checklist with their line manager who will discuss the information with the employee, including any problems identified, and decide what action to take. The line manager must be satisfied that the employee can work safely at home before permission is given. A visit to the employee's home may be necessary by the line manager before home working begins, or as part of the monitoring process at any point after home working commences.

Any action required/ agreed is the responsibility of the Line Manager to check that these are completed within a reasonable amount of time. If working at home is approved, this checklist should be reviewed annually or earlier if there is an incident or if the home environment changes. Health and Safety issues should be discussed regularly at supervision meetings. A DSE Workstation Self-Assessment must be completed for the home computer workstation within the first week of home work starting or within 4 weeks for any existing homeworking arrangements in place as a result of COVID-19.

Name of Home Worker:	
Address of Home base:	
Employee's Job Title	
Department	
Date Assessment Undertaken:	
Contact No	
Date Review	

Working environment of area where home working takes place.	Yes	No	Comments/Action (state Not Applicable where relevant)
Is there sufficient means of light to carry out work activities?			
Is the temperature of the area sufficient to maintain a comfortable work base?			

Is there adequate space in the area you are working in to work safely?			
Is the work area segregated from other hazards in the premises (e.g. cooking areas)?			
Is the work area free from all slip, trip or fall hazards?			
Will the work area be affected by noise at a level which is likely to affect concentration?			
Working environment of area where home-working takes place.	Yes	No	Comments/Action
Is there sufficient segregation from disruptions e.g. children, pets, other family members?			
Is flooring and walkways at your work area in good condition and free / clear of tripping hazards e.g. trailing cables and leads?			
Is there sufficient safe & secure storage space allocated for any equipment and documents used?			
Is there a telephone or other suitable devices readily available to allow effective communication in emergency situations?			
Display Screen Equipment (DSE)	Yes	No	Comments/Action
Has the employee received training/information on how to set up their workstation to avoid poor posture?			
Do you use a screen for more than an hour a day on a regular basis?			
Are the employee's eyes level with the top of the screen?			
Is the screen clear, readable and flicker-free?			

Is the keyboard tiltable and is there space in front of it to rest hands when not typing?			
Have you completed the e-learning module associated with use of DSE?			
Have you carried out a Self-Assessment of your Workstation?			
Does the chair used provide sufficient spinal support?			
Is the work surface of a sufficient size to accommodate all the equipment to be used?			
Are there any particular disabilities or health conditions that require consideration if using DSE at home? (If yes, please specify these issues.)			
Accidents/First Aid	Yes	No	Comments/Action
Do you know the BSO procedure for reporting any accidents or work related illness?			
Do you have a first aid kit available when working at home?			
Electrical / Fire Safety	Yes	No	Comments/Action
Is the fixed electrical system in good condition e.g. no signs of scorching or arcing on socket outlets?			
Is the electrical equipment used for home working in good condition and free from any visual faults?			
Are regular visual checks on your equipment in place and do you know who to report any defects to?			
Are there sufficient numbers of sockets to prevent overloading?			

If extension leads are used are these the fused and switched type? (Cables & extension leads should be positioned to prevent them being subject to excessive wear or damage and to avoid creating a trip hazard).			
Are you using any block adapters? If yes these should be replaced with extension leads.			
Are heaters kept away from furniture?			
Are all items (especially those that are combustible) stored appropriately to prevent them from falling onto a heater?			
Do you turn off or unplug electrical appliances when not in use?			
Have you a planned escape route to ensure a safe exit from your home?			
Is there a home smoke alarm fitted and tested regularly?			
Stress & Lone Working	Yes	No	Action/Comments
Are there arrangements for keeping in contact with your manager at your work base?			
Are there arrangements in place to conduct regular supervision/ personal development reviews with you, as the home worker?			
Do you have any concerns regarding training, information & instruction to enable you to undertake your work safely?			
Do you ensure you adhere to appropriate and agreed breaks			

throughout the working day from your work as per HR/work related arrangements?			
Are support / advice readily available to you as the home worker to deal with either ICT problems or other specific work queries?			
Do you carry out any Manual Handling activities that have the potential to put you at risk? - Are risk assessments in place for load handling where applicable?			

If you answered **NO** to any of the above questions you must discuss with your manager and document the outcome on the comments/Action section.

NOTE - When assessing risks to the homeworker, legislation requires you to pay attention to homeworkers who are new or expectant mothers. (A new or expectant mother means a worker who is pregnant, who has given birth within the previous six months, or who is breast feeding.)

Any other comments you have regarding your working environment, please list here:			
Employees Signature		Line Managers Signature	
Job Title		Job Title	
Date		Date	

Appendix B

Employee Working from Home Pro-forma

NAME	STAFF NUMBER	DATE WORKING FROM HOME COMMENCED	DATE OF MEETING HELD TO DISCUSS ARRANGEMENTS	ANY ADJUSTMENTS IN PLACE	OCCASIONAL OR REGULAR HOME WORKING [SELECT]	END DATE (IF KNOWN)

SIGNATURE (SENIOR MANAGER / HEAD OF SERVICE): _____

DATE: _____