

Hybrid Working Policy – Employee FAQs

These FAQs should be read in conjunction with the Hybrid Working Policy. If you have a query that has not been covered below, please discuss with your line manager.

Hybrid Working Principles

1. What is Hybrid Working?

Hybrid working is a work arrangement where employees have the flexibility to split their time between working remotely (normally from home) and working in an office or other designated space.

2. Is Hybrid working the same as Remote Working?

No. Remote work is a work approach where employees work from a location away from their office, while hybrid work is a flexible approach that allows a mix between remote work and work in the office.

3. How does Hybrid Working affect me and my role?

If you are working in a role that is suitable for hybrid working- e.g. you have a non-customer facing role and your work is office/desk based, then you are able to work in a hybrid manner. All staff who can work in a hybrid manner will be able to work from home for two, maximum three days per week. The remaining days within the week will be required to be in the office (e.g., Observatory House). This will be pro-rated for part time workers. The needs of the service will be the key driver in implementing hybrid working and will take precedence. Line managers are responsible for managing their service areas, operational standards and expectations.

4. Who does the hybrid working policy apply to?

The policy applies to all permanent staff. Agency workers, interims and contractors are still expected to attend the office. These arrangements however should be agreed with the line manager.

Attendance and Availability for Work

5. I would like to permanently alter my working hours/pattern. Does the hybrid working policy deal with this?

The hybrid working policy does not deal with requests to permanently alter an individuals' working hours/pattern. In respect of a situation where an individual wishes to make a flexible working request, the council's flexible working policy encompasses the statutory right to flexible working and contains the statutory procedure for employees to make such requests.

6. Can I choose when and where I work?

Your line manager will have the responsibility for ensuring that the residents and service needs take priority; that staff are treated fairly and trusted to take responsibility for themselves and their work when working remotely. Managers will, in consultation with their staff, create rota patterns that best meets the needs of the service. These rotas will be subject to change and there is no entitlement to work remotely on specific days of the week. However, your line manager will work with you and your

colleagues to discuss your personal circumstances and to explore what can be accommodated within the team.

7. My manager has asked me to come into the office on a day that I would normally work from home. Do I have to come in?

Staff are expected to come into the office on a day that they would normally work from home should a need arise that requires their attendance in the office. This may include situations such as training, a team meeting, colleague collaboration, when they are unable to connect to the Slough IT systems, or if they are asked to do so by their manager, e.g. in the event of sickness of a colleague, inadequate cover, emergency or need.

8. Can I choose the times I work both in the office and from home?

One of the aims of the hybrid working policy is to allow for greater flexibility and work life balance. However, the needs of the service and residents takes priority. Staff must be available and able to work on their contracted days and times whether they are in the office or working remotely, unless absence is for an authorised form of leave or sickness. Any variation to this arrangement can only be made by prior agreement with the line manager.

When staff are working from home, they are expected to work in a similar way as they would in the office, for example, they should be available to answer the telephone, respond to emails, instant messaging etc during the hours that the service operates (usually between 9am-5pm), unless a change is agreed with their line manager.

9. Can I look after my children when I am working from home?

Working from home is not a substitute for caring for dependants. Employees are expected to have made alternative arrangements for the care of their dependants during their working day.

10. I currently work part-time. How does the hybrid working principles impact me?

The policy principles for full time staff outline that staff can work from home 2 days, maximum 3 days per week. The remaining 2 days are required to be worked from the office. This works out to be 40% of the working week. Therefore, if you work part time, you will be required to come into the office 40% of your working week. If you work 4 days per week for example, this would be 1.5 days in the office. Practically this may not work so you and your manager would need to discuss and take a pragmatic approach. For example, one week you may come into the office 1 day and the next week 2 days.

Personal Circumstances

11. I am currently on probation. Am I allowed to work in a Hybrid Manner?

All new staff in probation must work the first few weeks of their probationary period in the office. This ensures that you are probably inducted and have a good understanding of the organisation's objectives and culture.

If your role is suitable for Hybrid working, e.g. non customer facing, desk based role, then after a few weeks you can discuss with your line manager how you can work in a hybrid manner.

12. Do I have to work in a Hybrid manner? I don't want to because my personal circumstances are not conducive to working from home.

There could be a number of reasons where working at home is not possible for a member of staff, e.g. shared flats/houses, insufficient space, someone else caring for children/relatives at home. In such circumstances, managers need to explore other working options with their member of staff, e.g., a permanent desk in the office, library, or other council office.

13. When I commenced employment with Slough, I took the role on the basis that I didn't need to attend the office at all or more than 1 day per week/I have a contractual arrangement which states that I don't need to come into the office. What do I do?

You should discuss your individual circumstances with your line manager who may take advice from the HR team.

14. I am concerned about walking with my IT equipment and personal belongings from Hatfield car park to Observatory House. What safety measures are in place to protect Slough employees.

There is a combination of personal choice and solutions that can be proposed to support with this. If individuals do not want to park at Hatfield and walk into the office with their IT equipment, they do have the option to park at Herschel car park which are subject to standard car parking charges.

The council is open to all suggestions to support staff, such as arranging walking groups to ensure people are walking to the car park together. Alternatively, you can discuss this in your teams with your line manager to resolve how you as a team can support each other.

15. During the pandemic, I moved to another part of the country, meaning that I have an extremely long commute. What am I going to do when the hybrid working policy is implemented?

The council understands that some people made personal decisions during the pandemic and therefore moved far away from the office. Unfortunately, we are now at a place where we need our staff attending the office more to support with the recovery of Slough. Therefore we cannot make special dispensation for those who made the decision to move further away. Individuals in this situation will need to discuss this with their line manager and see how they can accommodate the new policy into their working schedules.

16. I stated in the hybrid working survey that I either only wanted to come into the office once per week or not at all. What would happen if I refused to adhere to the hybrid working policy?

Slough is at a critical point in its recovery journey, and having staff in the office together twice per week to collaborate and meet face to face is an essential part of this journey. It will enable us to communicate more effectively, re-define our organisational culture and foster good working relationships. Asking staff to come into the office is a reasonable organisational request, and more generous than a lot of organisations. If staff refuse to abide by this policy, this will be deemed misconduct, and management may instigate formal proceedings under the disciplinary policy and procedure.

Employee Wellbeing/Absence

17. If I am feeling unwell, can I still work from home to save me taking a sick day?

If you are feeling unable to work due to sickness absence, you should inform your line manager in line with the Managing Sickness Absence Policy. As a guide, hybrid working is not to be used as a substitute for a working in the office day when an employee feels unwell. It is however recognised that there may be specific circumstances where such requests may be agreed.

An employee who has reported in as sick is not expected to work either in the office or remotely. Managers should be mindful of this and not pressure them into working, simply because employees have the equipment to work from home.

18. How can I establish boundaries between my personal and work life whilst working hybrid?

It is important that you and your line manager look after your health and wellbeing. You should establish a dedicated workspace, define your working hours and communicate your schedule to your family members or housemates if appropriate. Use tools like calendars and time management techniques to stay organised.

It is important that you take regular breaks from work in accordance with the working time regulations and your contract of employment. Working hours and break periods are confirmed in your terms and conditions of employment, but must include:

- A break of at least 20 minutes if working more than six hours a day
- A rest of at least 11 hours between working days
- An uninterrupted break of 24 hours each week

Where working in front of a screen for long periods of time, you must ensure you take regular breaks.

If you choose to work late during unsociable hours, providing you have agreement from your line manager, please be courteous and respectful to your colleagues. Colleagues are not expected to respond to emails or other forms of communication during unsociable hours, unless in the case of an emergency.

19. How can I maintain good communication with my colleagues in a hybrid work environment?

Use a combination of communication tools such as MS Teams chat, video meetings and phone calls. Schedule regular check-ins with team members and your line manager, and always attend training and team meetings in person. If you are feeling isolated at any time, you should discuss this with your line manager.

20. What role does my manager play in supporting me in a hybrid work arrangement?

Your manager should provide clear guidelines, maintain regular communication, and offer support when needed. They should also assess your performance based on results and objectives rather than hours worked.

IT and Equipment

21. What equipment will I be given and how should I keep this secure?

If your role has been identified as one that can be effective through hybrid working, we will provide

you with the necessary equipment to fulfil your duties.

Where possible equipment will be provided that is portable and can therefore be used from any location, including council premises.

The specific equipment provided will depend on the nature and requirements of your position but may include:

- a laptop
- telephone headsets that can be used for making calls via your laptop (rather than a desk based telephone and landline extension)
- a mobile phone if appropriate to the position

You must ensure that all council data and equipment (including laptops, handheld email devices, mobile phones etc.) is stored securely, and that it is not at risk of loss or theft. This includes where staff are working remotely. Further guidelines for employees on data security can be found on Insite. The Council will not pay for additional equipment for remote working, other than that which is provided as standard issue, unless where reasonable adjustments are required to be made.

22. I require specialist equipment to do my role. How will I be supported by the organisation to be able to work from home?

Some staff will have special requirements and specialist equipment due to various reasons such as job related or having a disability. The council does not want to prevent these individuals from being able to have the same opportunities as other staff and not being able to work from home.

In discussion with the individual, and seeking advice from the health and safety team, managers should take individual circumstances into account and ensure that staff are treated fairly and according to their particular needs.

23. Will I be given a fixed desk to work from when I come into the office?

The council is not able to allocate fixed desks to individuals with the preference being to operate a hot desking model. Work is underway to identify the future use of Observatory House and ascertain the number of working spaces available to staff. Once this has been resolved, it is likely that a new hot desking policy will be introduced which will include a desk booking system etc.

24. Will the Council cover the cost of my broadband and utilities whilst I am working from home?

There is no provision to cover the cost of utilities whilst staff are working from home. One of the main benefits of offering hybrid working is the reduction in travel costs which should offset the cost of utilities.

25. Will Slough be looking at the availability of equipment such as chairs, IT cables, PCs etc, as well as making other facilities available such as touch down areas, fridges and so on in Observatory House?

All office based staff have been issued with laptops to be used. PCs will not be issued. If a member of staff does not have a laptop, their line manager is required to submit a request. If a desk is missing cables, these can be requested from IT.

In the building, all desks have chairs. This is also the case at touch down areas. Some fridges have been switched off due to low occupancy, however this will be reviewed if numbers in the office increase.

26. Do I have to do anything to set up my workstation at home correctly?

Most of the regulations under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 apply to individuals who are working from home as well as to employees working at council accommodation. If you use a computer, laptop or tablet whilst working in the office, or at home, or in other remote location, you are be required to undertake a self-assessment to ensure that the work can be undertaken safely without endangering your health and wellbeing. At the council we use an online e-learning training and assessment program, located within the H&S Modules of Learning Pool, called 'Display Screen Equipment Training and Self-Assessment'. This course is mandatory for all visual display screen users and should be repeated if there is a change in circumstances i.e. location, health etc.

You are responsible for completing this training and self-assessment, and highlighting any concerns to your manager. You are also responsible for implementing any actions identified in order to reduce or mitigate the risks in your home and make your work environment safe. If you are unable to put suitable safeguards in place, you may not be able to work from that location and will need to work at council sites.

Whilst accidents at work are rare, they can happen. It is important that any accidents that happen whilst working remotely are reported to your line manager. An 'Accident, Incident and Near Miss Form' must be completed and forwarded to your manager. The forms can found on SBC Insite.