

HYBRID WORKING

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

@ April 2024

What is Hybrid Working?

Hybrid Working is a type of flexible working where an employee splits their time between their contracted workplace and working remotely, including from home.

The term “on site” is used to refer to your contracted workplace, other Council premises, partner or other office space and other locations where you are required to attend for work purposes.

Why is the Council continuing to embrace Hybrid Working?

Flexibility in work location was commonplace prior to Covid when designing the best service for our customers and service users. Many employees have trialled Hybrid Working since Autumn 2021. Feedback has been generally positive, and we are now formally introducing Hybrid Working as a longer-term option where posts have been identified as suitable for this working style. The approach we are taking is based on what is best for our stakeholders, employee wellbeing and the culture the Council wishes to nurture.

I'm still unclear what the Councils agreed approach to Hybrid Working is and whether it applies to my team?

The standardised minimum number of days on site, for all employees, across the Council, whose role is seen to be suited to Hybrid Working will normally be 2 days per week (effective from 1st April 2024). This applies to all teams unless a deviation has been agreed by Strategic Leads, based on service/customer needs.

Will I be Hybrid Working?

A Hybrid Working Style is a Flexible Working option. Your Line Manager will discuss the suitability of your role for Hybrid Working. Organisation guidance, business and customer needs and expectations, team needs and your preferences, will be taken into consideration when agreeing a Hybrid Working plan.

Where an employee's preference is to work “on site” on a full-time basis, arrangements will be made to ensure a desk is available at agreed premises with the priority being the contracted place of work.

Media suggests that there is evidence that working from home improves productivity and reduces sickness levels so why are we being asked to be “on site”?

Hybrid working has never been about a view that our staff are more productive in one place than in another. It is about how we work together as an organisation, how we avoid working in silos, how we are available and visible to support the communities that we serve or enable the frontline services who support them.

There are aspects of our work that benefit from coming together to create connections within and between our teams e.g. to support new staff members, to give people opportunities to learn and develop not just in formal training sessions, but in the ways that those of us who have been here a long time have learned, by listening and working directly alongside our more experienced colleagues, seeing not just what they produce, but how they approach the work and how they engage with people. These are benefits which are difficult to replicate when the sources of that learning are only visible on a monitor screen.

In the run up to 1 April teams have had a great opportunity to think about how they will use their office time. Those two days a week are a great opportunity to focus on areas of work which are not solo activities. Projects that you are part of with other colleagues, forward planning, mentoring (formal or informal). Opportunities to take meetings away from the electronic environment and meet up with colleagues you may not work with regularly.

What does a Hybrid working week look like?

The Council's approach to Hybrid Working is based on what is best for our stakeholders, employee wellbeing and the culture the Council wishes to nurture. The standardised minimum number of days on site, for employees who are currently contracted to work “on site” and

- a) whose role is seen to be suited to Hybrid Working and
- b) who wish to use this style of flexible working (as an alternative to working solely on site) will normally be 2 days per week (effective from 1st April 2024).

Details of Hybrid Working patterns are set at team level, within these organisation wide set parameters, in line with business needs and they should be reviewed regularly ensuring best use of Council resources (desk space) across the whole working week. Managers will be encouraged to discuss individual circumstances with employees prior to implementation. This includes discussing an attendance pattern with those employees who work fewer than 5 days per week or who have an agreed flexible working pattern, such as condensed hours, with the aim of ensuring that service output is maximised and that employees have the best possible opportunity to connect and collaborate.

Can my Line Manager make me return to the office?

Throughout 2023 office-based employees returned to on-site working, on a full time or hybrid basis and rediscovered many of the benefits of collaborative, face to face working. Contractual bases remained unchanged throughout the period of Covid and there is no plan to make changes to contractual bases going forward. A manager asking you to attend on site, normally for a minimum of 2 days per week, if a Hybrid Working Style has been agreed, is simply asking you to attend your contractual base, or an agreed alternative base, as per the Council's agreed approach to Hybrid Working and in line with an employee's Statement of Employment Particulars (SEPs). Many employees for whom a Hybrid Working Style is an option, will also be able to request flexi time to support flexibility in the "on-site" working day as and when required.

What if I have commitments which prevent me from/make it difficult for me to attend the office 2 days a week? Like childcare or pet care?

We recognise that people may have settled into a routine based on less frequent attendance in the office; however suitable arrangements for childcare or pet care should have always been in place during working hours. It is recognised that personal arrangements may have to be put in place in order to accommodate a regular 2 days or more on site, for example after school clubs or dog walker, where travelling home at lunchtime is not possible.

A level of flexibility will remain at team level and a conversation with your manager should include discussion and agreement around which days or part days you will attend the office, to meet customer, business and team needs.

The majority of office workers have access to Flexi Time and will retain the flexibility to request earlier/later start/lunch/finish times where appropriate to accommodate school start and finish times and/or breaks for pet care for example. Temporary arrangements may be agreed to accommodate out of work commitments in the short term until alternative personal arrangements can be made, in situations where flexi time is not an option.

Will Hybrid working patterns be fixed or flexible?

Hybrid working patterns will be agreed for each individual team. These patterns will need to be flexible to adapt to 'business need' and team variances within the Council set parameters (normally a minimum of 2 days per week on site) and you should adopt an agile approach to Hybrid Working. The word "normally" is included to allow some flexibility e.g.

- a) if work commitments, such as induction/supervision of a new start, require increased attendance on site for an extended period of time
- b) if work tasks, such as report writing, require occasional extended periods of uninterrupted time which it's felt could be better achieved from working at home.

Presumably as a team we will agree set days to come in each week? If so, what happens if one of the days falls on my non-working day? I would not expect to have to come in on a different day on my own?

Hybrid working patterns will be agreed for each individual team. This will consider the best way to ensure everyone has the opportunity to collaborate with others but will also have to recognise established contractual working patterns and desk capacity. Where a team comprises of one or more part time employees or where desk capacity is an issue, on site days might be split across the week to allow everyone the opportunity to benefit from collaboration with members of their team. Teams should also remember that onsite does not necessarily mean your contracted place of work; employees may find it beneficial to sit beside colleagues not in their immediate team e.g. internal customers, project team colleagues.

Can I choose where and when I attend “on site”?

The purpose of implementing the minimum 2 days a week “on site” parameters is to assist you, your colleagues or customers to connect and have positive collaborative experiences, therefore you should attend a location where you can do this. It may be your contractual base or an alternative location where your colleagues/customers are also going to be e.g. visiting a locality office to work collaboratively with colleagues across teams, working from a construction site where this allows interaction with partner organisations. This could even mean meeting a member of your team/your line manager for a “walk and talk” one to one in the park.

The important point here is that being “on site” should provide opportunities for connecting with colleagues in your team and across the Council or partners or customers.

What works for teams will vary. It may be that in your team people will be “on site” for agreed full or half days whilst for other teams, the 2 days a week will comprise of several variable partial days, for example making customer site visits.

If you have a genuine exceptional need to work in a quiet space, that home or an alternative site provides, on a day that you would otherwise have been working on-site with colleagues/customers, then you should discuss this with your manager. This may be offset by additional time on-site, with colleagues, in other weeks.

Might I have to be “on site” more than 2 days a week?

As explained above, individual and team working patterns will be flexible to adapt to 'business need' and team variances within the Council set parameters. Where a team is expected to attend a specific location on an agreed day or days for collaborative work with their team/customers, they may also find individual work commitments require them on site on additional days or part days.

A member of my team has said they can't attend the office on their scheduled "on site" day because they are unwell. Is that ok and should they come in extra days next week?

Each situation will require to be responded to on a case-by-case basis using managers discretion.

Firstly, if someone is saying they can't come in due to health issues, you should check that the person is fit to be working at all. Hybrid working should not encourage presenteeism and if the employee is saying they are unwell then it should be established whether they are well enough to be carrying out their duties before agreeing that they can work from home.

As attendance on site is to support collaborative working and meet the needs of our customers both internal and external, these factors should be considered when agreeing whether an employee requires to attend on site for an increased number of days following a period of increased working from home. For example, if an employee's failure to attend on site one week meant that face to face team meetings, one to one meetings or customer contact did not take place then potentially that employee may be required to attend on site an increased number of days the following week to enable these events to take place.

What if I have an employee who just doesn't want to work "on site"?

Where an employee is perceived to be unable/unwilling to attend on site on a regular basis then a meeting should be arranged to discuss the reasons and to agree any support required to enable them to attend in future. The HR services team are on hand to provide support and guidance on individual cases as required. HR@pkc.gov.uk

Is the requirement to record "where" you're working when you clock in on MyView related to hybrid working?

No. Since the beginning of January we have been asking people to indicate where they are when they are clocking in and out. This is an exercise to gather information to support the space planning exercise that's going on. There has been some feedback with regards to the options available when clocking in and out ie. "work" or "home" with some people concerned that "home" might insinuate that one is not "at

work". Please be assured that this exercise is being undertaken to capture **where** people are working. There is no suggestion that being at home means you are not working – it's about **where** you are, not what you are doing.

Will Hybrid Working affect any existing flexible working arrangements?

No, these should be factored into any agreed working patterns so that compressed working, part time working, and the like are accommodated.

I have not been hybrid working to date however I'm considering making a flexible working request to work in a hybrid manner - is this necessary?

You can discuss this with your manager informally in the first instance to ascertain whether the responsibilities of your role are suitable for a hybrid work style and, if they are, to agree how the organisational guidance can best be applied.

Can I still submit a flexible working request to change my Hybrid Working – for instance a request to work permanently from home or to attend less than two days a week on site?

Yes, however this may not be the quickest approach or even necessary. You are encouraged to discuss any possible change with your manager informally in the first instance as this will help in any future consideration of your request.

If you have particular circumstances which may require a permanent change to your contract, for example increased homeworking arrangements, as part of a reasonable adjustment under equality legislation and you have not already done so, then you should discuss this with your manager to agree a mutually suitable arrangement without necessarily requiring to submit a flexible working request. You can find information on this on Eric.

Hybrid Working Patterns will be reviewed regularly. If you experience a short term issue, for example putting alternative childcare/animal care/carer support in place for the days you are asked to be on site, a temporary arrangement could be agreed with your manager, until this support is in place.

Normally, a formal flexible working request will not be required to agree a hybrid working pattern.

For those who wish to work “on site” more than the minimum two days per week, how is this being captured and taken into consideration by the Working Smarter Project Team when looking at available desk space?

As part of the current space planning exercise feeding into the Working Smarter Project Team, managers are being asked how many desks they require, to

accommodate their teams “on site” needs. There are of course many factors to consider, including the preference for some team members to be on site all or most of the time, and this, along with the options for on-site working at other PKC locations will be taken into account. These discussions should be taking place at team or individual level – if an employee feels they are likely to wish to attend on site full time, then they should make this known to their line manager so that this information can form part of the planning process.

Will my employment contract change if I use Hybrid Working?

There will be no change to your contract unless there is an exception where it is appropriate for a formal homeworking agreement to be put in place e.g. as part of a reasonable adjustment under equality legislation.

I have been working mainly from home but have been asked to attend the office on a regular basis – can I claim mileage/time for the days I travel to my base?

As no contractual changes have been made, your base remains as stated in your Statement of Employee Particulars and you are actually using a hybrid work style. Travel to your contractual or agreed alternative PKC base does not fit the criteria for claiming mileage under the Council’s [Travel and Subsistence guidance](#). NB: An employee’s decision to move house, during COVID-19, whilst working from home to a location further from their contractual base does not give them a reason to claim mileage for the increased journey. Similarly, travel to and from your contractual or agreed alternative PKC base should be done in your own time.

What about if there is extreme weather and I can’t get into the office on a planned “on site” day?

There may be times when severe weather conditions make travel to or from work difficult or dangerous. Attending for work is regarded as essential although the Council recognises that employees should not take unreasonable risks. The Council’s [Severe Weather Arrangements](#) will apply.

What about the impact on the environment and the Council’s commitment to tackling Climate Change if we have to be “on site” two days a week?

For all travel, staff should consider a sustainable travel hierarchy starting with active travel e.g. walking or cycling, public transport and car pooling. Use of single person car journeys should only be a last option. That is how we will deliver on our commitment, not by never leaving our homes. Planning on site days alongside people travelling along the same route as you would enable car sharing

opportunities. The [Perth and Kinross Liftshare](#) site is designed to help you find suitable carpool options.

There is talk of Perth introducing a Low Emission Zone (LEZ) – where are we supposed to park if that happens?

There was consideration given to the introduction of a LEZ in Perth at the time that this was being agreed in other Scottish cities. The decision was taken, as part of air quality management planning, that it wasn't necessary as particulate emissions levels in Perth are now below that which would justify a LEZ. The New Kingsway and Destiny Bridge (delivered through the Cross Tay Link Road project), when open, will divert much of the through traffic which currently causes issues on Atholl Street, so that and associated improvements to active travel routes, is our main priority for reducing emissions in the city centre just now.

The cost of living crisis is affecting us all, what about the extra costs of travelling to work and parking if I have to be out and about 2 days a week?

People have always had to take into account the costs of commuting when choosing where they work in relation to where they live. Indeed, for the majority of Council staff, this has changed very little over the past 4 years, with frontline staff continuing to work from their contracted bases, in care settings, schools and in other roles not suited to Hybrid Working or where a regular attendance on site has been required. They have continued to attend on site, with the same associated costs, whilst those in roles suited to hybrid working have benefited from this flexible option.

While the pandemic initially forced office-based staff to temporarily work from home, at no time did employment contracts change, and Council premises remain – for the most part – the base of work for this staff group. It did however highlight the potential benefits of hybrid working for some roles and this is what has been trialled over the past 2 years. It's important to remember that hybrid is exactly that, a blend of on site and home working, of which regular attendance at a workplace outside your home has always been a part, and this has been reflected in the information we have shared since offices began to re-open.

On the basis that employees have already been working in a hybrid manner over the last 2 years, in line with the guidance given, a request to attend on site for a minimum of two days per week should not be a significant increase, for most people, from what they have already been doing.

When I am working in an office will I be desk sharing with other staff?

In the majority of cases hot desks are now the norm in our offices and these can be booked in advance using individual teams booking processes where available. To facilitate this everyone should stick to a clear desk policy remembering that the desk

may be used by a member of your team on days you are working from home/non-working days.

As part of the ongoing Working Smarter project we will be discussing desk/space allocation and related requirements in the coming weeks. Updates on activity in this area will be provided on a regular basis from the Working Smarter Project Team.

Maintaining good levels of ventilation can leave some parts of buildings cold. How is this being addressed?

You are encouraged to declutter office space to remove obstacles which may add to restricted air flow through the building. This includes, unused office materials, storage cabinets and other office furniture.

In most instances, desks allocated to a team will be hot desks and therefore when choosing/booking a desk, consideration should be given to the location of direct air sources, including air vents, louvres and openable windows, according to personal preference. Offices are now provided with CO2 monitoring so that staff can be aware of excess levels of CO2 and windows can be opened accordingly.

Are the monitors installed in buildings measuring whether COVID-19 is present?

The CO2 monitors in Council buildings are designed to monitor the levels of CO2 concentration in rooms. Please be reassured that the indicators do not show the level of Covid-19 in the room. As the name of the monitor suggests they indicate the level of Carbon Dioxide in the room, and suggest when it would be beneficial to open a door or window and let some fresh air in. All of the installed units should have an information sheet posted near to them which tells you what the monitor LED colour means, and what to do about it. It is important that these units are not tampered with or removed, and please remember their results are indicative only. Please also note that the units do not react instantaneously to changes, so there will be a time delay between opening a door or window and the monitor display updating.

When working in the office it can be very noisy – with people on prolonged Teams calls it means there is always background noise. What can I do to get some quiet time when I need to concentrate on a piece of work?

Our open plan offices were designed to be busy and feedback from many people has been that the more people that are in the office, the less you are aware of individual conversations/background noise. Where background noise is proving to be a barrier, we would advise discussing with your manager:

- the option of using other available, quieter, spaces within the building;

- the possibility of working from home or alternative locations on days where prolonged periods of concentration are required.

We may also need to adapt our own practice e.g. wearing headphones for all Teams Calls within open plan spaces to consider the needs of others.

Through the Working Smarter project, the Council will look at the reconfiguration of office facilities to provide a range of different settings that will support Teams and hybrid meetings whilst reducing noise for other users.

What are the arrangements for visitors to Council premises?

Team members will attend any face-to-face meetings, as requested, where remote attendance is not appropriate.

General meetings may continue virtually, where practicable, especially with external agencies, other council services etc to reduce travel (cost and environmental impacts) and to reduce lost efficiency due to traveling time for all attendees.

Site visits will take place where appropriate and in response to operational need.

While in any Council premises, you are responsible for ensuring that the visitor adheres to any health and safety instructions in place.

How often are desks and equipment cleaned?

Clear desks will continue to be cleaned once a day.

Services are advised to provide supplies of antibacterial wipes and hand sanitiser at each bank of desks.

As keyboards and monitors are not cleaned by our contract cleaners, you should wipe these before and after use as a courtesy to the next user.

What storage facilities are available in the office for files/paperwork?

It is advised that you make time to consider any paperwork/files which have been sitting in cupboards for lengthy periods and to securely/confidentially dispose of any documents which are no longer required/should not be held. Pedestals and lockers continue to be available on all floors however the reconfiguration of office spaces will look to reduce the amount of paper storage space in favour of hybrid meeting or quiet space. Teams should look to rationalise what is stored and embrace a zero tolerance of unnecessary local file storage.

Will I still have my IT kit at home for Hybrid Working or do I need to transport elements back and forward between home and office?

A standard workstation set up, comprising a single monitor, docking solution, keyboard and mouse will be available to use at each workspace in 2 High Street and Pullar House.

For staff with a hybrid working pattern, this means you only have to transport your allocated laptop and IT equipment you have been issued as a reasonable adjustment, such as a specialist keyboard or mouse, between work locations.

If you are working in a main office more often, you should discuss with your Line Manager whether you have any continuing requirement to retain ICT equipment for working from home. Any equipment no longer required should be returned to Carpenter House to ensure valuable Council resources can be reallocated / reused.

An online MyPKC form is being launched in 2024, to capture accurate data about the Council equipment you use for working from home: all Hybrid staff will be expected to provide up to date information, at least annually.

What should I do if I have IT issues when working from home?

You are responsible for regularly checking the condition of equipment and cables of Council equipment used at home and for reporting any concerns at the earliest possible point to your Line Manager.

If you have a problem with the IT equipment you are using at home, please contact the IT HelpLine on 01738 476677 / select option 1.

If issues with your home broadband mean working from home is not possible, you should attend the nearest Council premises, or your contractual base, to work until you have resolved your connectivity issues.

What if there is no chair/keyboard/other at my allocated desk?

Standard IT equipment will be available for you to use at all 2 High Street and Pullar House workspaces. Within main offices, there is potential for these workspaces to be used by different colleagues throughout the working week: **it is important you do not disconnect, move or remove any IT equipment or cables, other than your laptop, to make sure a standard set up remains available for other users.**

If IT equipment is removed unexpectedly from your team's area, this should be reported to an appropriate manager within your Strategic Area and to the IT Technical Helpline: replacement equipment can be ordered via PECOS, showing IT as the supplier.

Line Managers will allocate workstations already set up with dual monitors within your team, based on business need. Where dual monitors are no longer required, Managers will advise IT, to enable their reuse and ensure valuable resources are not

being under-used. Running dual monitors when not required incurs additional unnecessary cost.

IT equipment in main offices represents a significant investment for the Council, which needs to be controlled and protected. You have a part to play in making sure equipment remains tracked and is used regularly, appropriately and safely. You can find more information about what the Council's ICT asset management standards and principles mean for all of us in these [guides](#).

If I require additional or specialist equipment at my desk, how will I obtain this and can I get it for all bases?

Staff working a hybrid pattern are required to undertake annual DSE assessments for both their office and home working environments. Where the outcome of a DSE exercise indicates the standard workstation set-up does not meet your health or business needs, it may be possible to address this through additional support, for example to take advantage of MS365 accessibility tools, or to set up your laptop on a riser as a second screen.

Services / Strategic Areas are asked to buy equipment only when absolutely essential to "life and limb" service delivery. A justification form (available via cbs@pkc.gov.uk), authorized by an appropriate manager / budget holder is required before any additional or non-standard equipment can be ordered via IT.

Equipment issued as a reasonable adjustment will not normally be duplicated. Where this equipment proves difficult to move between office and other bases/home, a discussion should take place around whether Hybrid Working remains a suitable option.