Health and Safety Guidance
Homeworking

Managers and employees should follow these 5 steps when considering working from home to ensure adequate arrangements for health and safety are in place.

Risk assessments must be undertaken before homeworking commences.

1	Managers should explore whether working from home is appropriate and practical. Further information can be found in the **Agile Working Policy**.
2	All employees who work from home should follow this guidance and managers are required to carry out risk assessments in relation to their work activities. If the employee works from home more regularly (e.g. they routinely work at home at least one day per week) or they are a contracted home worker then they should complete the **Risk Assessment Checklist for Homeworking** and review with their manager to assess whether homeworking can be done safely and what equipment or furniture they may need. (If agreed the employee will be allocated with the appropriate ICT equipment)
3	Employees complete the **E-learning training** and **Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Self-assessment** and review with their manager to decide if working with DSE can be done safely. If following completion of the DSE self-assessment problems persist or the employee has a known medical condition that affects the use of DSE then the manager should contact the Health and Safety Team to arrange a further specialist assessment to be carried out. Email: healthandsafetyhelp@oxfordshire.gov.uk
4	Adopt safe practice when working from home – manager and employee responsibilities.

5 Arrangements for working from home should be monitored and reviewed at least annually or where there is a change in the home environment.

1 # Is working from home feasible and practical?

When considering homeworking employees need to recognise that this arrangement may not be appropriate in all cases. Managers should discuss and agree with employees any homeworking arrangements and consider the following:

- Is it practical in terms of accommodation and personal circumstances?
- Will homeworking meet the needs of the job and deliver high quality customer service and the goals of the service?
- Will homeworking make the best use of the resources available including ICT, accommodation and people's time? Cost all the options before agreeing to new working arrangements.
- Is a workstation required and what equipment and furniture is needed?

Further information can be found in the Agile Working Policy or visit the agile working InSite pages: https://intranet.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/agile-working

2 # Working from home safely

Risk Assessment

Under health and safety legislation the Council has to take reasonable steps to protect the health, safety and welfare of its employees including a duty to carry out risk assessment in relation to work activities which will also include working from home.

This does not mean that it will be necessary for managers to visit the homes of every employee who carry out some percentage of their work at home. For employees who occasionally work from home it will usually be sufficient to bring to their attention possible hazards. This can be done by issuing this document and ensuring if applicable they complete their own Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessment on their home work station.

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If you feel an employee is working from home more regularly (e.g. they routinely work at home at least one day per week) or contracted home worker then they should complete the attached **Risk assessment Checklist for Homeworking.**

A lot of work carried out at home is going to be low-risk, office-type work but here is a list of the things employees need to do to ensure a healthy and safe home workplace.

Workspace

Keep the home working area free of tripping hazards/obstacles (including stairs and hallways). Make sure there is adequate space for the proposed work activities, with sufficient room to move around safely. Make sure there is suitable and sufficient lighting to avoid eye strain. A comfortable heating temperature should be maintained whilst working.

Furniture and equipment

As a home worker the Council will provide employees with a laptop, mobile phone and associated equipment e.g. mouse, keyboard, screen stand etc. Printers are not provided for use at home. Further information can be found in the ICT Service Catalogue:

https://intranet.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/catalogue-agile-working

Generally employees working from home for prolonged periods are expected to provide their own furniture and adjustable chair which must be suitable for the work tasks. A desk / table / work surface area approx. 1.2m wide and 0.8m deep is suitable for general office type activities. If employees are not able to provide their own furniture then this should be discussed with their manager to identify any possible alternative arrangements. There should also be secure storage facilities for equipment and information.

Electrical safety

The Council is only responsible for equipment it supplies e.g. laptop, mobile phone, including its maintenance. Employees will be responsible for their own home working environment including domestic electrical systems.

The Council is only responsible for equipment it supplies

You are responsible for your own home working environment

All portable electrical equipment supplied by the Council must be tested in accordance with the Council's Policy for portable electrical equipment testing.

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The Council will not test equipment at employee's homes and therefore employees will need to bring any equipment to be tested into a council office. For further information on portable appliance testing email Corporate FM at fmpropertyservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Electrical socket outlets must not be overloaded, and where it is necessary to use extension leads, these should be the fused and switched type to prevent overloading.

Regularly check electrical equipment to make sure that the plug tops, leads and outer castings are free from defects. Cables should be kept tidy and not present a trip hazard.

Fire safety

The Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service '365alive' website provides practical advice on home safety including an online tool for completing a home fire risk check. Employees can also get advice on smoke alarms, making an escape plan and what to do in an emergency.

     Visit http://www.365alive.co.uk

Reporting accidents and incidents

Employees are required to report accidents and incidents using the online reporting tool available on the intranet: report accidents and incidents

First aid

Employees should have access to first aid. As most work carried out at home is going to be low-risk, office-type work basic first aid first aid that you would typically find at home is generally all that is required.

Expectant mothers

Expectant mothers should inform their manager as soon as possible who will then carry out a risk assessment to ensure the health and safety of the mother and their baby while at work. For further information visit: H&S Guidance for New and Expectant Mothers

Stress and isolation

Whilst working from home can help improve an employee's wellbeing through helping achieve a better work-life balance and reducing the stress of commuting it can also involve stresses that need to be considered and managed.

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Where employees who are based from home but are routinely making visits in the community, and dealing face to face with service users and members of the public who may be either hostile or distressed, their own stress levels may be raised. Traditionally, the need to return to an office base to write up reports may have provided the opportunity for informal conversations and briefings with colleagues and peer discussions, but an employee returning to their home may take away this opportunity.

The stresses of lone working and the loss of social interaction with colleagues need to be reflected in the communication plans and management arrangements for home working.

Managers must try to make sure that home workers are in regular contact with colleagues, both office based and those who are home or mobile working. Regular face-to-face meetings and/or conference calls should be supplemented by increased contact between managers and their employee via email, telephone.

Arrangements should be put in place by managers to enable the employee to:
- Be kept up to date with Council news and developments.
- Participate at team meetings and ensure adequate supervision and one to one's.
- Report work concerns, sickness absence, health problems, equipment failure etc.

Managers may want to set up a system for those employees who predominantly work from home whereby team members keep one another informed of day to day happenings. This also helps to reduce the level of isolation and unreleased stress which some homeworkers may otherwise experience.

If employees are showing early signs of stress as a result of working at home, then this should be discussed with the manager as soon as possible.

For further information: Stress at Work Policy and Guidance

In addition guidance on lone working safely can be found on the H&S InSite pages or visit:
 Health and Safety A-Z

Working time
Research has shown that employees working at home frequently forget to take breaks and work excessive hours. Managers should monitor the working hours of employees and remind them to take rest breaks, DSE breaks, lunch breaks etc.

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Security and confidentiality

Under no circumstances are service users and members of the public to visit employee home locations or to be made aware that employees are working at home.

Employee home addresses and personal home and mobile telephone numbers must not be given to service users or members of the public. Where employees have been provided with a mobile phone specifically for use in carrying out work, this number can be given to the public, or if appropriate, calls can be forwarded automatically from the office telephone system.

All confidential electronic and hard copy information must be kept secure at all times and stored in a safe place to prevent authorised access including other persons who live or visit the home.

Employees should follow the Council's ICT Acceptable Use Policy and Data Protection Policy.

Safety representatives

Safety representatives appointed by a recognised Trade Union can represent homeworkers in consultations with employers about health and safety matters.

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Risk Assessment Checklist for Homeworking

Notes for completion are at the back of this form

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	Assessment of current control measures	Yes	No	Comments / Action required	Action completed by	Done
Workspace	Employee RSI, Musculo-skeletal injury Slip, trip, fall illness	Is there a designated work area and suitable furniture?					
		Is there adequate space in the work area for you to carry out your work safely?					
		Is there sufficient secure storage space?					
		Is the room suitably heated and ventilated?					
Workstation and use of laptop	Employee RSI, Musculo-skeletal injury Eye strain	Do you use DSE for continuous or near continuous spells of an hour or more at a time on most of your work days?			If yes you must complete the DSE Risk Assessment		
		Have you completed the **DSE E-learning training**?					
		Have your completed the **Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Self Assessment**?					
		If DSE is to be used, will the workstation meet minimum standards? E.g. adjustable chair etc.					
Fire	Employee and other occupiers Burns, Smoke	Are there sufficient smoke detector/alarms in the home?					
Electrical Equipment	Employee and other occupiers Electric shock Burns Tripping	To your knowledge is the home hard wire electrical system safe?					
		Are there a sufficient number of electrical sockets for the equipment provided?					
		Has all portable electrical equipment provided by the Council been tested?					
		Are cables tidy and in good condition?					
First Aid	Employee	Is basic first aid provision available?					
Manual Handling	Employee Back, limb injury	Will the work in the home involve any significant manual handling activities? Do you need a bag/wheeled trolley to transport laptops, files etc. between locations?					

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	Assessment of current control measures	Yes	No	Comments / Action required	Action completed by	Done
Security	Organisation and third party	Is there a need to provide any additional equipment?					
		Do you ensure the safety and security of information kept at the home location?					
Working alone	Employee	Have you discussed the need for a call in procedure with your manager? Do you carry a mobile phone? Do you require a personal attack alarm?					
Other Issues	Employee	Are there any other safety issues that will prevent the employee working in their home?			E.g. medical or health issues?		
	Employee and other occupiers	Are there any other hazards (to employees, visiting colleagues, family members or occupants) that have not been identified above?					

Home address being assessed:				
Risk Assessment Completed by (Name of Home worker):		**Job Title:**		**Date:**
Authorised by Line Manager (Name):		**Job Title:**		**Date:**
Reviewed by:		**Job Title:**		**Date:**

Notes for Completion

This assessment checklist is to be completed by the employee as part of an application to work at home. This checklist is to ensure that those working at home have an appropriate health and safety assessment of their home 'work environment'.

The **employee must complete the form**, giving relevant information and return the completed checklist to their manager.

The manager should read through and discuss the information with the employee, including any problems identified, and decide what action to take.

The 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 before home working begins, or as part of the monitoring process at any point after home working commences.

If any action is required it is the responsibility of the manager to check that this is completed within a reasonable timescale.

If working at home is approved, this assessment should be reviewed annually or earlier if the home environment or work activities change. Health and safety issues should be discussed regularly at supervision meetings.

The employee MUST complete the Correct Use of Display Screen Equipment (DSE) e-learning training and DSE Self-assessment.
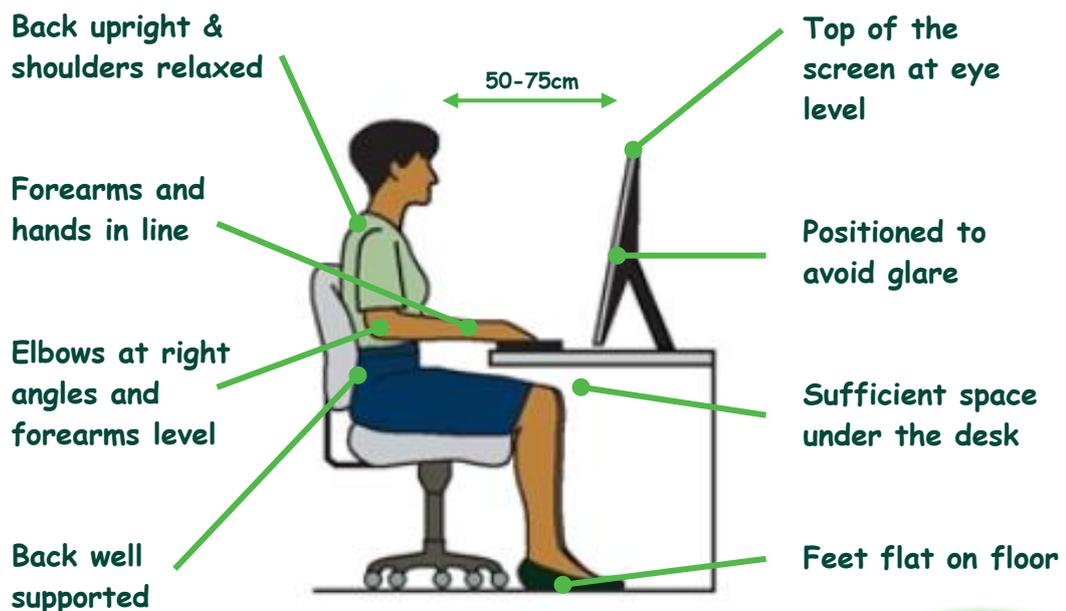
3   Using display screen equipment safely

Home workers will be issued with a portable laptop and is subject to the DSE Regulations if it is in regular and prolonged use. Homeworkers must follow the Council's Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Policy and carryout a self-assessment to decide if working with DSE can be done safely at their home environment.

Before carrying out the assessment employees should complete the e-learning training which is available on the learning portal, search:

'Display Screen Equipment and Workstation (eLearning course) HSELXOEC0015'

How to set up your workstation correctly:

Back upright & shoulders relaxed

Forearms and hands in line

Elbows at right angles and forearms level

Back well supported

50-75cm

Top of the screen at eye level

Positioned to avoid glare

Sufficient space under the desk

Feet flat on floor

Use the correct chair

Dining room chairs and sofas are **not** suitable for using laptops over a long period

Laptops

Laptops are not designed for intensive or prolonged use and should not be provided for such without assessing the risks (laptops are subject to the DSE Regulations if they are in prolonged use). Additional equipment or accessories may be required to make them safe to use e.g. separate mouse, keyboard, screen riser etc.

Employees should also consider manual handling issues and possible risk of theft.

Equipment and accessories

If having completed the DSE self-assessment the employee requires accessories such as a bag/wheeled pilot case, footstool, separate keyboard or laptop screen riser then this should be discussed with the manager before purchasing. All new accessories must be purchased in line with the council's buying goods procedures and costs charged against a cost centre provided by the manager. For more information visit: ICT Catalogue Agile Working

Disabilities and Medical Conditions

If following completion of the DSE self-assessment problems persist or the employee has a known medical condition that affects the use of DSE then the manager should contact the Health and Safety Team to obtain further advice. This may result in a further specialist assessment being carried out or a referral to Occupational Health.
Email: healthandsafetyhelp@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Eye Care Vouchers

Employees identified as 'DSE users' can have the cost of a sight test (and in some cases the cost of a special pair of basic glasses for DSE work) met by the council. This is managed by issuing an eye care voucher to the employee.

Please note - to qualify for an eye care voucher employees have to complete and submit the request form before visiting the optician the form can be found here:

Eye Voucher Request Form.

Vouchers will not normally be issued retrospectively.

For further information on eye care vouchers email: eyecarevoucher@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Take a break

Long spells of DSE use can lead to fatigue, eye strain and backache

4	Adopt safe practice when working from home – manager and employee responsibilities

Responsibilities of **managers**:

- To ensure employees are aware of their health and safety responsibilities as outlined in the Council's Health & Safety at Work Policies.

- To notify employees of relevant arrangements, and to provide the employee with a copy of this health and safety guidance.

- To ensure a suitable and sufficient risk assessment of the tasks and working environment is carried out and suitable measures put in place to reduce the risks.

- To ensure that home working risk assessments are be reviewed annually or sooner if 'significant changes' occur.

- To ensure the training needs of the home worker has been considered and completed before home working commences, e.g. if the home worker is to assess their DSE workstation they must have completed the DSE e-learning training.

- Ensure members of the public, customers or clients must not visit the home location in relation to Council business. If direct face to face contact with customers etc. or other employees, is a requirement of the work then the task is not suitable for 'at home' working.

Responsibilities of **employees** working at home:

- Allow appropriate Council employees e.g. managers, trained risk assessors, health and safety advisers, occupational health advisers and trade union safety representatives, Health and Safety Executive Inspectors and maintenance personnel reasonable and pre-arranged access to them and their place of work with regard to health and safety issues.

- Ensure that the working environment, workstation and work systems are maintained as agreed following appropriate risk assessments, so there is minimum health and safety risk to themselves or others and that Council equipment is not damaged or otherwise put at risk.

- Ensure that only equipment provided by the Council is used for Council business.

- Ensure that all portable work equipment has been PAT tested by the Council and the domestic electrical system is safe (Note: Domestic premises electrical supply should be inspected by a competent person every 10 years). Any testing of the domestic electrical

system including any repair work is the responsibility of the employee at their own expense.

- Ensure all accidents, incidents or hazards or other issues relating to health and safety are reported using agreed procedures.

- Employees spending all, or a significant proportion of their work time at home, will install a suitable smoke detector to effectively protect the means of escape from the work area before working from home commences. Smoke detectors will be maintained and tested.

- Ensure that under no circumstances employee personal information including home addresses and personal phone numbers are given to service users and members of the public.

- Ensure that under no circumstances employees meet service users or members of the public at their home in connection with Council business.

5	Monitor and Review

Managers should review employee arrangements for working from home at least annually or where there are changes in the home environment, including change of home address.

If you have any further questions please contact the Health and Safety Team on: 03300 240849 or email healthandsafetyhelp@oxfordshire.gov.uk