**South Dublin County Council**

**FAQs for Employees and Line Managers**

**October 2021**

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## I am office based - What working arrangement should I have?

All office-based staff should now have returned to the office and working within the Green & Gold Team rosters across the organisation. It has been agreed among all Directors / Heads that once social distancing measures are lifted and before a remote working policy is formally in place, these working arrangements will continue and all staff should be attending the office for a minimum three days one week and 2 days the next week – as per the current yellow/green arrangement. Remote working can continue the remainder of the week, where this is approved by your senior managers.

## I am outdoor / depot based - What working arrangement should I have?

Outdoor based staff may be currently working under split shift arrangements as approved by your senior managers; however, all staff should be completing their full working hours and have a full clocking record of their hours worked. From October 22nd or later pending confirmation of the lifting of the physical distancing requirement under public health guidelines, the split shifts will all come to an end and staff will return to their pre-Covid shift of 8 am to 4.45pm Monday to Thursday and 8am to 2.30pm Friday.

## Is it safe to return to the offices?

Yes, there are a suite of Standard Operating Procedures in place to ensure the offices are a safe working environment. It is however each employees own responsibility to protect themselves by observing physical/social distancing, appropriate hand hygiene and cough and sneeze etiquette, and ensuring sufficient ventilation in their working area. The implementation of the SOP’s is the responsibility of all staff and managers working together, and this is supported by the Health and Safety and Assistant Health and Safety Officers, Sean Fox and Sami Ullah Khan as well as the Covid Engagement Forum Members Noel McCarthy, Richard McCormack, and Colm Brazil (Worker Representatives), and Galen Doran, Compliance Officer. All information on the Covid Engagement Forum and all Health and Safety matters is available [here](http://intranet/Sites/2?page=1184) or from your Worker Representative and/or line manager if you don’t have access to the intranet.

## What if my work colleague(s) is/ are not vaccinated?

The decision to get vaccinated is voluntary and each employee will therefore make their own individual decisions in this regard. It is also important to bear in mind that all staff, whether vaccinated or not, can get the virus and are potential carriers of the virus. There will be unvaccinated staff working in the organisation and the safety of all staff will be ensured by the ongoing adherence to the SOP**s** and compliance with Covid guidelines. Equally, HR and/or Line Managers cannot and should not ask who is vaccinated and who is not, and it is important that all staff are treated equally. In this context unvaccinated staff are also bound by the same rules in terms of their work patterns and attendance at work as outlined in the first and second FAQ’s above.

## I am at very high risk for COVID-19 - should I attend my work premises?

The Council’s Occupational Health Service will be consulted for employees in the very high-risk category to advise on whether the employee can attend the work premises. Where this has happened to date, attendance at work has been authorised in most cases. Implementation of the Work Safely Protocol and the Standard Operating Procedures is intended to minimize the risk of transmission in the workplace, including for those who were or are still considered to be in the high-risk categories. The work premises includes travelling in works vehicles and SOP 14 should always be observed in these circumstances.

## Am I required to wear a face covering when in work?

Wearing a cloth face covering not only helps protect you, but also prevents people who do not know they have COVID-19 (Coronavirus) from spreading it to others. Alongside wearing a face covering in the examples below, you should always ensure to do the important things necessary to prevent the spread of the virus such as physical distancing, hand hygiene, cough / sneezing etiquette and maintaining sufficient ventilation in your working environment.

Face coverings are mandatory in certain venues including libraries, and public health advice remains that face coverings should be worn in places or situations where it may be difficult to achieve or maintain physical/social distancing, including:

* When entering and exiting buildings.
* Public access areas of buildings, including receptions/foyers and public counters.
* When moving throughout buildings to toilets, photocopiers, on stairwells etc.
* Kitchen areas (prior to and after eating) or when using facilities such as boilers, toasters.
* In any circumstance where 2 metres distance can’t be maintained

When in the Council offices it is also required to wear a face mask when entering / exiting and moving around the Staff Canteen and Coffee Dock.

## What if I feel unwell while in work with Covid symptoms?

It is important to emphasize that any employee who is displaying any symptoms of COVID-19 – regardless of vaccination status - does not attend the workplace.

However, if you become unwell or start displaying symptoms when in the offices, self-isolate and make phone contact with your GP, Line Manager, and the Attendance Management Unit in Human Resources Department.

## What if a member of my family/household must self-isolate or has been sent for a COVID test?

Employees who are fully vaccinated and have no symptoms do not need to restrict their movements and should attend work. Different arrangements apply for individuals who have not been fully vaccinated. Refer to HSE website for full details.

##  What if I live with someone who is Very High Risk?

You will still be required to attend your work premises as required.Employees who live with very high-risk individuals should follow the HSE guidelines to protect themselves and to minimise risk of transmission.

Note: The work premises includes travelling in works vehicles and SOP 14 should always be observed in these circumstances.

##  What if I test positive to Covid 19?

You should follow HSE/Medical advice. You should then let your Line Manager and the Attendance Management Unit know. If you are well enough to work remotely this should be facilitated. If you are not well Special Leave with Pay may apply to you. You will need to submit your HSE Covid test results to the Attendance Management Unit and complete a self-declaration form.

##  What if I am a close contact?

Staff who are fully vaccinated or had a positive COVID-19 test in the last 9 months and have no symptoms are not required to restrict your movements if you are a close contact and should continue to attend work under the current arrangements. Staff who are not fully vaccinated will need to restrict their movements and get tested. Please see the HSE information at [this link](https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/contact-tracing/close-contact/).

Special leave with pay does not apply to employees who are required to restrict their movements when they are not ill. Where an employee is required to restrict their movements, they should be facilitated where possible by working from home.

##  What happens if a colleague is diagnosed with COVID-19?

In line with the [HSE Contact Tracing Process](https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/testing/contact-tracing.html), contact tracers will directly contact all relevant persons who have been in contact with a confirmed case, or the person will be notified through the COVID Tracker App. The instructions of the HSE should be followed and employee confidentiality is always essential. If a colleague does test positive for Covid 19 that does not necessarily make you a close contact, please wait to be contacted by the HSE.

##  What if an employee has had a negative test for COVID-19?

For Staff who were tested because they had symptoms of coronavirus and receive a negative test result but still are not well enough to attend the office and so still have the COVID-19 symptoms, they should continue to [self-isolate](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww2.hse.ie%2Fconditions%2Fcoronavirus%2Fmanaging-coronavirus-at-home%2Fself-isolation.html&data=02%7C01%7Cehunt%40lgma.ie%7Cd5ac679de6db48e55cbf08d85e650a08%7Cef22ca07ab074cf98562d5c5bb0416f4%7C0%7C0%7C637363135347470098&sdata=ZiMl1xwGy0Y5gogJ%2FYE4thjFI1A%2FAPJGn9lAyElO0SI%3D&reserved=0) until they have not had any symptoms for 48 hours. They can return to normal activities once 48 hours without symptoms. The absence from work will be treated as certified/uncertified sick leave.

## Why I have been asked to attend the office more than 3 days per week?

Many office-based staff are required by their line manager to attend the office more than the roster patterns for business reasons. The offices are a safe environment in full compliance with Covid guidelines. However, staff as always should protect themselves and others by maintaining a safe distance, observing hand hygiene and cough and sneeze etiquette, wearing their face mask while moving around the building, and ensuring sufficient ventilation in their working environment. See also Question 16.

## What are suitable locations for me to work remotely from?

Currently the option available for remote working is only working in a suitable working environment in your home. In the future additional locations may emerge such as remote working hubs, but these will be solely a matter for the Council to determine. Remote working requires that the employee must remain available, whilst working remotely, to attend the workplace at short notice. Working remotely while outside of Ireland is not permitted.

## How will remote working operate for the period between the ending of the Covid restrictions and before an organisational policy is in place?

A formal policy relating to the operation of remote working in the local government sector is being developed nationally. It is anticipated that this template policy will be adopted and an application process for all staff who wish to apply for remote working will commence in early 2022.

In the meantime, Managers will continue to assess the suitability for remote working based on their learning to date, the operational needs of the organisation and the suitability of the role. Questions that managers need to consider include ‘are there responsibilities that can be conducted while working remotely without affecting service quality or organisational operations?’, ‘Would there be disruption to the flow of work and communication (e.g., availability by phone and email, websites, shared servers all of which need to be accessed remotely via adequate broadband)’.

Managers will also of course have to satisfy themselves that there is satisfactory compliance with the time and attendance policy and procedures and that all work is delivered within the required timeframe and to the required standards. The employee must provide the necessary assurance that their working environment satisfactorily meets the health and safety requirements.

Any disagreements between an employee and their line manager regarding the application of remote working should in the interim be addressed through the Council’s Grievance Policy and Procedure.

## I am currently availing of the Work-sharing Scheme and so I only work 3 days per week – what should my office presence be?

The requirements set out above are the basic minimum that will be set for all staff and will still need to be met even where staff are availing of reduced working hours under any family friendly scheme. For example, in these circumstances of working a three-day week, your attendance will be required fully in the office for week one and for a minimum of two of the days in the second week. In this example, you may be able to avail of one day remote working, where this is agreed with your manager and your work and home working environment enables this.

## Can I claim any expenses for working remotely?

There is no public sector provision for the payment of expenses relating to working remotely. However, it is open to employees to make claims directly from Revenue in respect of actual costs incurred in working from home at the end of the relevant tax year, in accordance with the relevant tax laws. Any claim in this regard is solely a matter for the individual concerned.

## Can I claim travel expenses from my home when I must go on site visits but working remotely?

Revenue rules regarding travel expenses continue to apply. An employee’s base, for the purposes of travel and subsistence, continues to remain their office location. No payment of travel expenses will be made for travel from home to normal office location.

## When can I avail of Flexi-time again?

Flexi-time arrangements were re-introduced with effect from 24 August 2020 but applies only in circumstances where employees are attending the employer’s work premises and are working their normal, pre-COVID work attendance patterns, i.e., attending the offices 5 days per week on a full-time basis. Where this is the case and the staff member was availing of Flexi prior to Covid, a request to restore flexi time should be made by the relevant Director of Services/Head of Function to the Attendance Management Unit. Otherwise, flexi-time, including any flexi-time accruals and deficits, continues to remain suspended for those employees who are working remotely.