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Hybrid Working Policy

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HYBRID WORKING POLICY

Guidance for AFBI staff in requesting hybrid working.

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AFBI Hybrid Working Policy

Contents

1   Introduction

AFBI is committed to promoting flexibility and choice at work with the aim of meeting both the needs of the business and its employees. The benefits of working from home (WFH) are wide ranging and include better work-life balance for employees, increased productivity and environmental benefits. It is recognised that hybrid working i.e. a mix of working from home and from the workplace offers employees additional work style choices that are important for both individuals and business areas. The purpose of this policy is to outline AFBI's approach to hybrid working and to provide a framework to ensure consistent practice. It provides an overarching approach to hybrid working and supplements existing AFBI and NICS policies. It also sets out a number of underlying principles and practical considerations and signposts staff to other relevant policies. This policy will be subject to regular review.

The following is a list of other related or relevant policy guides referred to in this document:

- Alternative and Flexible Working Patterns Policy
- Equality Diversity & Inclusion Policy
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Staff Handbook
- AFBI Data Protection Policy
- AFBI Data Breach Management Plan
- NICS Mobile Device Security Policy
- AFBI Guidance on Travelling with Mobile IT Devices
- NICS Use of Electronic Communications Policy
- AFBI Clear Desk & Screen Policy
- AFBI Internet and Email Usage Policy
- AFBI Good Practice in Electronic Communications
- AFBI Encryption of External Communications Policy
- NICS Guidance to Physical Document and IT Security
- AFBI IT Security Operating Procedures and User Acceptance
- NICS Policy on Recording of video conferences
- AFBI Information Security Policy
- AFBI Visiting Worker Information Security Policy & Guidelines
- NICS Information Assurance Policy
- HR - 9.01 General Guidance for Travel and Subsistence (Policy) - Employee Services - HR and Finance (service-now.com)
- NICS Travelling Time Policy – HR - 8.13 Travelling Time

2   Policy Definition & Scope

2.1   Hybrid working is part of a number of flexible working arrangements available to AFBI employees (including probationary and agency staff) in the appropriate circumstances. This policy applies to all employees regardless of age, marriage (including equal/same sex marriage) and civil partnership, disability, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, or gender identity or gender expression.

2.2   This policy focuses on the operation of both regular hybrid working and more casual or incidental hybrid working agreement. Regular hybrid working refers to consistent pattern of working that has been officially agreed between management and their staff and has been accepted as both the employee's work pattern of **choice and also suitable for business need.** It includes a blend of WFH and working from a designated workplace. More casual or incidental hybrid working includes WFH which occurs on an irregular basis or occasional situations.

2.3   The policy does not apply where staff are adhering to a work pattern that is required for business reasons i.e. a work pattern which requires the employee to be in the workplace at all times due to the nature of the business.

2.4   Throughout the policy, a legal requirement is indicated by the word "**must**" – for example, "employers must ensure staff carry out a DSE risk assessment". The word "**should**" indicates what AFBI considers to be good employment practice. The full range of flexible working arrangements will be referred to throughout the policy as **smarter** working. The term **workplace** is used throughout to indicate employees' designated office or work location.

2.5   These procedures set out the broad parameters that apply when, subject always to business needs, an employee is able to and chooses to use the flexibilities AFBI has made available to support smarter working.

2.6   Arrangements made using this policy aim to balance the work preferences of employees with business needs. With the exception of those permanently recruited to work from home (as outlined in their employment contracts), arrangements under this policy will not create any entitlement to work from home on a contractual basis nor does it automatically apply that an individual's work pattern can be facilitated if they were to take up a new AFBI post or if the duties of the role change significantly to the extent that the arrangement can no longer be accommodated.

2.7   This policy applies to AFBI working within the UK and Ireland only and does not cover arrangements to work overseas. Due to potential security, tax, visa and other complexities surrounding remote working abroad, Branches are not able to consider requests for overseas working under this policy.

3   Definition & General Principles

3.1   Hybrid working is a term covering a variety of working arrangements agreed between managers and their staff that involves some time spent working from home and in the designated workplace. It is a type of smarter working which, depending on the agreement between employer and employee, can be also used in conjunction with other arrangements such as flexi-time, working part-time/job-share, term-time working, compressed hours, or set/core hours as outlined in the Alternative and Flexible Working Patterns Policy. However, hybrid working and other forms of flexible working do not necessarily have to be used together. For example, a manager may agree that an employee working from home works the same working pattern as workplace-based staff.

3.2   For the purposes of this policy working from home **includes:**

- Roles where staff work at home the majority of the time apart from carrying out regular or occasional duties/meetings at the workplace(s) or with clients
- Staff who split their time between working at home a number of days a week (depending on the agreement with their manager); with the rest of the time spent in the workplace, or with customers.
- Public locations with secure Wi-Fi accessibility e.g. cafes, public transport (it should be noted however that the vast majority of this type of working will be considered casual or incidental and should not form a regular working pattern).

Hybrid working **does not include:**

- Staff who work at their workplace location at all times except for required attendance at meetings etc.

Process

3.3   Not all business areas and roles will be suitable for hybrid working. The nature of the work may dictate that not all laboratory, field or office based roles will be suitable for hybrid working.

Staff must make their request for hybrid working to their line manager in writing (by completing the employee part of the Workstyle Agreement and email it to their line manager). Managers will be responsible for considering the potential for hybrid working fairly and consistently, taking account of the NICS Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy. The most important factors to consider are:

1. The business needs of the Branch;
2. The individual employee's role in providing an effective service and;
3. The employee's work preferences.

The immediate line manager is then required to make a recommendation but to ensure consistency within Branches, the final decision will be made at least at Grade 7 or Head of Branch level.   If the request is ultimately rejected, the line manager and decision-maker are expected to detail the rationale. If approved, the arrangements may be on a continual basis or for part days/weeks on a rota or pattern basis.

The agreed working arrangements must be formally recorded as a Workstyle Agreement (Request For Hybrid Working Form - Hybrid Working Policy Intranet Page) (using the Workstyle Agreement outlined in the toolkit related to this policy), and held by line manager and employee as per AFBI arrangements. The outcome must also be shared with AFBI HR/People and Culture Branch. Workstyle Agreements must be reviewed on a regular basis (at least annually at the End of Year Review) or when a relevant change occurs e.g. change of business or personal requirements.

Any employee who feels that their request has not been considered fairly and consistently can appeal (Uniform Appeals policy). Agency workers have no right of appeal however if they have

any dispute with the agreement that cannot be resolved locally they should contact their Agency in the normal way who will consider and liaise with the business area if necessary.

The Workstyle Agreement as outlined in the Staff Toolkit must be completed for all staff working either a regular pattern of hybrid arrangement or working a more informal arrangement i.e. not a regular but an incidental work pattern.

The Workstyle Agreement outlined in the Staff Toolkit for this policy does not need to be used to record agreement between managers and staff for all other roles that have to be carried out in the workplace due to the requirements of the role or the nature of the business or where a staff member has chosen to work in their workplace at all times.

Considerations

3.4   A focus on the various elements of jobs should identify those tasks that can be performed effectively away from the workplace. The following issues should be taken into consideration to decide if the work or parts of the work can be undertaken at home:

- What is the service provided and what is the impact upon the individual's work load and the work of the team?
- What will be the effect on service delivery?
- Are the arrangements expected to have a positive impact on the work-life balance/health and well-being of the employee?
- Does the employee believe that their home working environment is suitable? Taking into account considerations that may affect an employee's ability to work from home such as: DSE Homeworking and Homeworking Health and Safety risk assessment outcomes, those living in shared households or homes or, where the employee indicates to the line manager any personal circumstances that puts them at a greater disadvantage working at home than being in the workplace due to medical, welfare reasons, or other personal circumstances.
- Does the job require long periods of uninterrupted mental concentration and where does the employee feel best able to concentrate?
- Can AFBI security requirements be met?
- Does the job require a lot of ad hoc communication between the groups of staff?
- Can the work be monitored in terms of output, or is it possible to come to an agreement with the employee about the amount of time particular outputs and deliverables will take?
- How will contact with the manager and team be maintained?
- What equipment would be required?
- Does the employee have any adjustments in their workplace location and is it possible to meet these needs in the home environment?
- What costs would be incurred?

Key Principles

3.5   Hybrid working is not prescriptive in its application and not everyone prefers a workstyle that includes it i.e. one size does not fit all; but it endorses a **common-sense approach** underpinned by the following key principles:

AFBI Organisational Approach – There are a significant number of roles across the Organisation which are not suitable for home working, such as laboratory or field roles yet others which do lend themselves to a hybrid working pattern easier. For those roles that can

avail of hybrid working, it is expected that staff should be on site for a **minimum of 40% of their working week, unless in exceptional circumstances and agreed by line management.** AFBI consider this is an Organisational approach is to ensure that AFBI works as a team. A presence in the office has many benefits such as:

- Improving employee wellbeing
- Building relationships and connecting people
- Maximising innovation and collaboration
- Improving AFBI culture
- Guarantees workplace standards
- Improving work life balance by keeping home and work separate

AFBI recognises that a hybrid approach is beneficial to the employer and employee and wants to capatalise on this flexibility. This will be a key part of the policy to be reviewed and evaluated after one year of being implemented to ensure that the approach is successful.

Customers and service first - The primary focus **must always be on meeting the needs of the service** and putting the service user/customer at the centre of all decision making/solutions. This is vital within AFBI given the nature of the scientific work and the need for a significant portion of AFBI employees to be in the workplace to perform their duties. Operation of the WFH policy must ensure that AFBI fulfils its duty to with regard to the health, safety and wellbeing at work of staff while ensuring that that the WFH does not create a barrier to positive working relationships or productivity with key internal or external stakeholders.

Challenges how we work – Hybrid working should be used as a tool to maximise efficiency, improve service delivery, develop relationships and improve outcomes for AFBI customers and staff. It challenges us all to think about how we work and removes the traditional barriers associated with work and encourages us to be more creative, innovative and to use our time more productively.

Built on the premise of mutual trust – Staff are trusted and empowered to deliver set outcomes on time and have choice in relation to the traditional work boundaries of work space, location and set working hours within the boundaries of the needs of the business area and the requirements of their role. The flexibility that WFH gives to staff emphasises the importance of staff wellbeing; particularly in creating an improved work/life balance by providing opportunities for staff to work in different ways. Any employee found to be abusing that trust may have their hybrid arrangements curtailed or removed altogether.

Availability - There should be a clear understanding between managers and staff over when and where the employee will work and be contactable. All employees working from home need to communicate clearly, letting their line manager, colleagues and clients know when they will be available, when they won't, and how to get in touch with them during working hours. Staff must be available to their managers as agreed and if any problems arise in this regard keep their managers informed. It is expected that every individual is available for work within their normal hours of work, whether working from home or from an AFBI site.

Equipment and Tools – It is expected that all staff who are granted a hybrid working arrangement are provided with the necessary tools and equipment and adopt the following techniques to aid communication and promote availability within work hours:

- An AFBI laptop must be used.
- All employees must use the Outlook calendar and share this with their manager and team. Note- it is imperative that confidentiality and privacy are maintained and staff should not be compelled to share confidential or personal information or appointments on Outlook.
- All employees must have Cisco Jabber installed on their laptop and avail of a pair of headphones for confidential conversations. Cisco Jabber is an aid for communication it should not be used for staff monitoring.
- All employees must let their line manager and staff know of their availability as they normally would do when working on AFBI sites.
- Most of the software which supports text, audio and video chat used across the AFBI has a function that allows employees to add their current status – staff should use this for informing others when they are not contactable.

Advice from AFBI Human Resources/People & Culture Team is available to assist managers. The [Hybrid Working Staff Toolkit - Hybrid Working Policy Intranet Page](#) can help with this.

Need for on-site attendance: This will vary depending on the business area/branch and role. Managers should always consider whether there really is a need to travel to an AFBI site or whether journeys can be replaced with telephone calls, online meeting facilities or video conferencing. It expected that everyone (managers and staff) approaches hybrid working with a degree of flexibility and staff will attend workplaces when necessary for meetings, team interaction, client events and particular tasks when requested. Maintaining a mix of home and workplace-based working is often best, allowing staff to focus on their work when at home, while still feeling part of the team and catching up on what is happening in the organisation when in the workplace. Sometimes staff and managers may need to experiment with arrangements to get the balance right.

Care arrangements: WFH and hybrid working is not a substitute for suitable care or formal caring arrangements. Dependents need to be looked after by someone other than the employee when they are working and if necessary, care arrangements should be in place to cover the time when the employee is working. Please refer to the [Staff Handbook](#) for additional information on alternative and flexible working patterns.

Link with Other Policies

3.6   The flexible working hours scheme will apply to staff working from home in the same way that it applies to workplace based staff. Any flexible working pattern should be objectively considered as part of the initial discussions and any subsequent requests to change those arrangements should be made according to the existing procedures. The hours worked should not exceed your normal/flexi working hours other than where overtime has been approved for business reasons. Even if you are busy, it is **essential** that staff find the time to take regular breaks. Good practice suggests a lunch break of a minimum of 30 minutes, two other breaks of 15 minutes (morning and afternoon) and short breaks to rest the eyes from screen use. Staff should ensure that the time period between stopping work one day and beginning the next is not less than 11 hours.

3.7 The Staff Handbook still applies to you while working at home and all HR policies apply, including the standards of conduct and [dignity at work](#) when conducting business on behalf of

AFBI. Therefore, staff should ensure that when undertaking their duties through remote and/or virtual means that their working environment is suitable for this purpose.

4   Health, Safety & Wellbeing

4.1   AFBI has a duty of care to its employees and must ensure that a Health & Safety Homeworking risk assessment and a Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Homeworking risk assessment are carried out prior to the commencement of any home working arrangements. Every employee must complete an on-line DSE Awareness course every three years to ensure that their training is up to date. Employees must complete the assessments of their home working arrangements and take steps to minimise the risks identified when working at home. To support this, AFBI has developed electronic Homeworking risk assessment and DSE homeworking risk assessment questionnaires which are available to download from the Health and Safety Intranet site as follows:

- Health & Safety- DSE home working risk assessment questionnaire
- Health & Safety- homeworking risk assessment questionnaire

Staff must use the DSE home working risk assessment and the homeworking risk assessment questionnaires. If necessary, advice is also available from AFBI Health & Safety Advisors. The questionnaires will allow staff to assess their work space in their own home environment, identify potential hazards, mitigate risks, raise and progress relevant issues with their line manager, Branch Risk Assessors and or AFBI Health & Safety Advisors.   Access to a copy of the agreed homeworking risk assessment and DSE homeworking risk assessment should be maintained by the line manager and employee in line with AFBI procedures. Branches reserve the right to carry out home visits at agreed times to progress or resolve any health and safety matters that may arise and that cannot be effectively dealt with remotely. Home working guidance and advice on setting up a computer workstation at home is also available and can be found via the following links:

- Health & Safety- home working guidance
- Health & Safety- setting up a computer workstation at home

4.2   The Health & Safety Executive have also produced guidance in relation to carrying out assessments. Homeworking and DSE homeworking assessments must be reviewed at least annually (at the End of Year Review) or more frequently if there is a change of circumstances, for example, pregnancy, a house move or change of work location within the home.

4.3   AFBI is responsible for the equipment it supplies only and will therefore be responsible for addressing any AFBI equipment related issues identified within the DSE homeworking risk assessment. It is the responsibility of the employee to address any environmental issues within their home and any risks arising from their own equipment as highlighted by the homeworking and/or DSE homeworking risk assessment. AFBI may not permit home working to commence or continue until any issues identified during the assessment process have been resolved.

4.4   Those with disabilities or who normally have special adjustments in the work place should discuss any requirements with their manager.

4.5 If an item of furniture or equipment is required based on the outcome of the DSE homeworking assessment, provision arrangements should be followed as outlined in section 8.

4.6 Once the home workplace has been assessed as safe (homeworking and DSE homeworking assessments in place, and all remedial action taken), it is the responsibility of the employee to keep it that way. Employees continue to have a responsibility to take reasonable care of their own health and safety whether they are working from home or in the workplace. Employees should take regular screen breaks. Anyone working from home must keep in regular contact with their manager. They must also tell their manager about any health and safety risks or any home working arrangements that need to change or are inadequate. The home worker and their line manager should hold a copy of the agreed risk assessments in line with AFBI process.

4.7 Periodic maintenance checks and electrical testing may be carried out. For example electrical equipment/leads will need to be returned to a designated workplace or location, on an annual or other rolling basis to facilitate PAT testing.

4.8 The area set aside for working at home should be kept tidy and clear of obstructions, for example, there should be no trailing wires or objects that may cause a person to trip. Spills should be cleaned up immediately; mats should be fixed securely and not have curling edges. It is important to prepare and practice a plan of action that will help in the event of a fire. The attached link provides useful guidance on planning an escape.

4.9 Further guidance and some tips and reminders to ensure your health and safety while working from home at finance-ni.gov.uk.

Insurance

4.10 Employees must ensure they have Class 1 (clerical use) business insurance in place for homeworking which is normally provided by insurance companies at no extra charge. Most home insurance companies expect customers to declare if they work from their home (clerical use cover suffices) and while it usually makes no difference to the policy premium, failure to declare could present problems in any future claim. Therefore it is the responsibility of the employee to consult their insurance policy documents and, if appropriate, their insurance company, mortgage providers and landlords to ensure that they meet any contractual requirements. Employees must not conduct face-to-face business meetings in their homes as this would incur public liability that they may not be insured for.

Reporting of Accidents/Near Misses

4.11 Any incidents affecting home workers must be reported to, and recorded by employers. This includes accidents and any 'near miss' occurrences. The home worker must forward details of any relevant incident to their line manager who should then follow AFBI's incident reporting process and forward/copy to AFBI's Health and Safety Officer/Advisor. Further information and access to the AFBI reporting system and forms can be found at Accidents & Incidents | AFBI Intranet (nigov.net).

Wellbeing

4.12 Managers have a duty to take reasonably practicable steps to protect all employees from the effects of work-related stress regardless of their working arrangements. Managers should ensure they are looking out for their employees by:

• Maintaining regular contact.

• Ensuring employees are clear about what work they need to deliver and by when.

• Looking out for signs of stress, considering whether the stress could be linked to work pressure and acting accordingly.

• Taking reasonably practicable steps to ensure that the home working environment is suitable.

• Taking account of considerations that may affect an employee's ability to work from home such as those living in shared households or homes with no or limited internet access, or where the employee shares with the line manager any personal circumstances that puts them at a greater disadvantage by working at home than working in the workplace due to medical, welfare reasons, or other personal circumstances.

4.13   Employees should ensure they are taking steps to look after their wellbeing while working from home. This includes:

• Maintaining regular contact with their manager and colleagues.

• Taking regular breaks.

• Avoiding being 'always on' by ensuring that they identify non-working time. Most of the software which supports text, audio and video chat used across the AFBI has a function that allows employees to add their current status – staff should use this for informing others when they are not contactable.

• Contacting the Employee Assistance Programme provider, Inspire or Welfare Officers if they need support, for example, in relation to heightened feelings of anxiety. Links can be found on the Health & Wellbeing AFBI Intranet site @ Health & Wellbeing | AFBI Intranet (nigov.net)

• Being aware of personal and workplace stressors and the activities and resources that can help to address this.

• Being aware of the contact details for IT support

4.14   Employees can stay mentally and physically active by:

• Looking for ideas of home-based exercises on the NHS website

• Spending time doing things they enjoy – this might include exercise and sporting activities, reading, cooking, arts and crafts, other hobbies or listening to/watching favourite radio or TV programmes.

• Trying to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, drink enough water, exercise regularly, and avoid smoking, alcohol and drugs.

• Keeping windows open to let in fresh air, get some natural sunlight if they can, or get outside.

4.15   Further guidance and information for staff and managers can be sourced at Health & Wellbeing.

4.16   Managers and employees must follow these points to maximise the effectiveness of hybrid working:

• Agree objectives, working arrangements and how the team will operate and communicate to maintain service delivery. Plan ahead and promote flexibility to manage work-life commitments, using shared diaries and collaboration tools to show availability and work flexibly.

• Stay connected by using digital communication and collaboration tools such as instant messaging (e.g. Jabber) and video meeting/conferencing (e.g. WebEx) to work together and communicate on projects, and consider phone calls, tele and video conferencing to discuss ideas and catch-up instead of constant email and instant messaging traffic.

• Adopt an approach that builds positive relationships.

• Share information and track progress of priority tasks, giving feedback on work and discussing new ideas to avoid isolation and maintain a sense of community.

• Set clear boundaries between home and work and creating a safe and comfortable place to work.

• Have regular health and wellbeing conversations and be flexible in responding to business and employee needs.

• Maintain contact with colleagues and stakeholders to manage relationships and expectations regarding service delivery.

4.17   Further detail and advice is available at [Health & Wellbeing](#) under 'Advice for Line Managers'.

4.18   Managers across AFBI should be thinking about virtual leadership and development and the actions they need to take to support their team's wellbeing and delivery. A wealth of information on learning and development on a variety of topics, such as leadership, remote working, well-being, performance management and essential learning for line managers can be found on [LInKSLearningBundles.](#)

5   Information Management, Assurance and Data Protection

5.1   When working from home the same obligations and compliance in good records management and protecting personal information apply. Where a hybrid working request is facilitated, the line manager must remind staff of these obligations. It is the responsibility of both staff and their managers to ensure that they are aware of AFBI's Information Management, Security and Data Protection Policies and Procedures.

5.2   Where working from home impacts on how personal data is going to be processed, a Data Protection Impact Assessment screening, or full DPIA, must be considered. The DPIA must be carried out by the relevant person within the business area and approved by the Information Asset

Owner (IAO) for the business area. This evidential document must be stored in the relevant annual container under AF07/001/003 on AFBI's records management system (currently Content Manager). Advice and assistance is also available from AFBI's Information Governance Unit (info.gov@afbini.gov.uk) or AFBI's Data Protection Officer if required. Further information on the can be found on the AFBI Intranet @ Data Protection (Privacy) Impact Assessments (DPIA) | AFBI Intranet (nigov.net)

5.3   Any personal data incidents, security breaches or loss of information or equipment must be reported to your line manager immediately in line with AFBI's Data Breach Management Plan.

Employee Responsibilities

5.4   Responsibilities of employees working from home include:

- **Communicate securely -** Use AFBI approved communication devices i.e. laptop, PC, tablet, softphone or work mobile phone and AFBI approved software.

Decision making - Any discussion via online chat and instant messaging apps on unofficial channels e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook messenger etc. leading to decision making, must be redirected to the official channels i.e. organisational email and stored in AFBI's official records management system (Content Manager).

- **Printing** - Printing at home is not permitted. On such occasions where there is a requirement for staff to print, they must arrange to go to a suitable workplace and use a Multi-Functional Device (MFD).

- **Security** - Ensure IT equipment is turned off and securely stored when not in use. Ensure devices are locked (i.e. screens made unreadable) when leaving them for any length of time. Documents and equipment must be kept in the car boot during transit between home and the workplace. Staff must complete a Mobile Device Registration and Risk Assessment Form on receipt of their device(s) and Branches must document any hard copy records being removed from the workplace. See NICS mobile device security policy NICS Guide to Physical Document and IT Security AFBI Information Security Policy and Guidance on travelling with mobile IT devices for more information.

- **Digital assistants** – Devices such as Alexa, Siri, Google Assistant etc. must be switched off or removed from your home work area to avoid inadvertent disclosure of information.

- **Saving records** – All relevant records must be saved into AFBI's Records Management System (or equivalent approved secure storage). Ensure records that cannot be saved immediately to the Records Management System (e.g. due to limited connectivity) are checked into the Records Management System as soon as possible once connection to the network is re-established.

- **Confidentiality** – Be aware when holding conversations or using a video connection. You may be sharing your home working space with other family members or friends. Try to hold conversations where others are less likely to overhear you and position your screen where it is less likely to be overseen. Ensure you are not disclosing any personal data in the background. Headsets should be worn to further reduce the risk of overheard conversations. Refer to AFBI's guidance on using electronic communications.

- **Home security -** If working in a room next to or near an accessible window consider closing blinds and or curtains to prevent/deter sight of official material from outside of your property. Make sure that papers and devices are not visible from outside the property when you leave the room or have completed work for the day. Ensure to continue to abide by [AFBI's Clear Desk and Screen Policy](#) at home. Further advice on [home security](#) is available on the PSNI website.

- **Data incidents / breaches** - Report any personal data incidents, breaches or loss of information or equipment to your line manager immediately and follow the steps in AFBI's [Data Breach Management Plan](#).

- **Paper documents** - Any personal or sensitive documents taken from or printed off in the workplace and reviewed away from the workplace location, must be managed and disposed of appropriately i.e. securely stored and strip-shredded. Staff should be aware that their branch may have additional security restrictions on what documents may be taken out of the workplace, or printed to use at home; and should check with their line manager. Branches must document the records agreed and being held outside of the workplace.

6   Security

6.1   Employees who work from home are required to comply with all IT security and confidentiality requirements of AFBI. This includes acceptance and adherence to the [Use of Electronic Communications Policy](#).

6.2   Employees have a direct responsibility for all official equipment and information material held at their home or other AFBI workplace locations and must take all possible measures to ensure that it is not accessible to non-authorised people (e.g. other members of the household). Employees and managers should discuss any concerns and agree how this will be achieved and managed.

6.3   Employees should ensure they have Class 1 (clerical use) business insurance in place for homeworking as per paragraph 4.10.

7   IT Equipment and Service

IT Equipment Provision

7.1   For AFBI staff on an IT Assist supported network, IT Assist will provide them with the necessary IT equipment to connect securely to the corporate network via Secure Remote Access (SRA). This is ordered through the [AFBI IT Helpdesk System.](#) This will normally be a laptop or tablet and includes a screen, dock (or a docking screen), keyboard, mouse and headset. This remains the property of DoF and must be returned when the staff member leaves service. Should the staff member transfer within AFBI, they would retain this equipment unless a laptop was no longer required for their duties. The supplied dock and screen should be used primarily onsite. The initial laptop and additional equipment is paid for by a central budget.

In addition to a laptop/tablet device, staff who work from home on a regular basis should also be provided with; a monitor with docking capability, or separate monitor and docking station,

keyboard and mouse. This is ordered through the [AFBI IT Helpdesk System](#) and this is funded corporately.

7.2   It is acknowledged that there may be some variations in the IT equipment required by staff depending on the IT requirements of their current role. The equipment to be provided should be detailed by the branch in a Service Request to the [AFBI IT Helpdesk System](#).

 7.3   Additional equipment requirements should be discussed with the Head of Branch and AFBI IT.

7.4   All IT equipment no longer required by the relevant business areas for home working must be returned to the branch or in the case of laptops, these must be returned to IT Assist.

IT Equipment Charges
7.5   An initial laptop and additional equipment as detailed in section 7.1 is paid for by a central budget. Further IT equipment will be charged to the branch. Additional equipment for home use, such as extra monitors and keyboards, can be ordered through [AFBI IT Helpdesk System](#) and will be charged to the relevant branch.

Secure Remote Access (SRA) to the Network
7.6   It is expected that all staff who wish to avail of a regular home working pattern will arrange and cover the cost of their own broadband for SRA connection to the network. Options to improve connectivity in poor coverage areas are available from IT Assist and advice should be sought from the IT Assist Service desk as necessary.

Deploying IT Equipment to Staff Homes
7.7   Staff must be willing to pick up their IT equipment from IT Assist at a time and location agreed with IT Assist. At present, it is necessary for every staff member to login to their laptop at least once in a network workplace location before bringing it home.

IT Maintenance and Support
7.8   Faults should be reported to the IT Assist Service Desk as normal on ext.155 or on the external number 0300 123 4155. IT Assist cannot make home visits to carry out maintenance so staff must be willing to return any faulty equipment to IT Assist.

PAT Electrical Testing of IT equipment
7.9   PAT electrical testing of all IT Assist provided equipment must take place on an annual basis. Staff must bring equipment to a workplace location for PAT testing as directed by their line manager.

IT Security
7.10   The IT Security and Electronic Communications policies that apply while working in the office also apply when working from home. Links to these policies are listed below. In addition to these policies staff must also follow the Mobile Device Security Policy which applies to mobile devices such as laptops and outlines employee personal responsibilities.

- [NICS Mobile Device Security Policy](#)
- [AFBI IT Security Operating Procedures and User Acceptance](#)
- [AFBI Information Security Policy](#)
- [AFBI Visiting Worker Information Security Policy & Guidelines](#)

- [AFBI Clear Desk & Screen Policy](#)
- [AFBI Internet and Email Usage Policy](#)
- [NICS Use of Electronic Communications](#)

8   Furniture and Other Equipment

Furniture Provision

8.1 If it has been identified as part of the DSE Assessment process that staff require a chair and/or a desk for a regular homeworking arrangement, the branch may request these from their relevant Premises Team. Items will be delivered to a workplace location for collection. All furniture items supplied will normally remain the property of AFBI.

8.2 Those with disabilities or who normally have special adjustments in the workplace should discuss requirements and needs with their manager. The manager should seek advice on specialised or adjusted items of furniture with a Health and Safety Advisor in the first instance. The branch can then request suitable items via their Premises Team. It should be noted that it may not always be feasible or practical to replicate complex adjustments within an employee's home environment and the health and safety of the employee is paramount. Employees whose required adjustments are unable to be made at home should continue to work at their adjusted workplace location to ensure no detriment to their health.

Other Equipment and Stationery

8.3   Other equipment such as laptop risers, footrests etc. may be identified as part of the DSE Homeworking Risk Assessment. These items should be ordered by the branch as per AFBI procedures. Stationery items required for home working should also be ordered by the branches as per Branch procedures.   Managers should make arrangements for staff to collect items from a suitable workplace location.

9   Official Travel

9.1   Staff should always consider whether they really need to travel or whether journeys can be replaced with telephone calls, online meeting facilities or video conferencing: the overriding principle in the NICS Travel and Subsistence Policy is that reimbursement is not appropriate when no additional expense is incurred. Any essential mileage expenses can be claimed in accordance with the [Travel and Subsistence Policy](#). Working from home will not change your permanent workplace or how you claim business mileage in accordance with the [NICS Travelling Time Policy](#).

9.2 Under this policy the following rules on mileage and travel will apply:

Attendance at your permanent workplace: if you travel to attend your permanent workplace at any time, whether on a day when you would normally work from home or not, you are not entitled to claim mileage or travel expenses for that journey except in the following circumstances:

> 1. Additional attendance outside normal working hours is required;

> 2. You are travelling under the emergency arrangements operated by AFBI at times when public transport is severely disrupted on an exceptional basis.

Travel to attend your permanent workplace will not be classed as working or travel time for the purposes of this policy.

Attendance at other AFBI site:

When choosing to attend another AFBI site, you should choose the closest one to where you are carrying out work that day. If you need the services available at an AFBI site but the nearest is further away than your permanent workplace, then you must attend your permanent workplace if it has similar services there.   Where you attend another AFBI site which is closer to your home location than your permanent workplace, you may not claim mileage or travel expenses for that journey. Travel to another AFBI site closest to your home location will not be classed as working or travel time. If you choose to attend another AFBI site other than the one closest to your home you can only claim mileage or travel expenses for that journey if you have other official business in that area that day.

If you are expressly required by your line management to attend another AFBI site for example to attend meetings, training courses, interviews or site visits this would be considered to be official business. If the other AFBI site you are required to attend is not the one closest to your home and is further away than your permanent workplace expenses can be claimed in accordance with the NICS Travel and Subsistence Policy.

10   Communication

10.1   Working from home changes how we communicate with our teams, managers and staff. Effective communication is as fundamental to positive human interaction and good mental health as it is to successful organisations. It is a process of creating and sharing ideas, information, views, facts and feelings among staff and teams to reach a common understanding and add value to service delivery. Communication and organisational culture impact each other; culture influences the way people communicate, and the way individuals and teams communicate can help foster a positive organisational culture.

Guidance for Managers and Employees

10.2   Guidance for managers and employees should include the following good practice:

- Agree objectives, working arrangements and how the team will operate and communicate to maintain service delivery.

- Plan ahead and promote flexibility to manage work-life commitments, encouraging the use of shared diaries and collaboration tools to show availability and flexible working.
- Stay connected by using digital communication and collaboration tools (e.g. instant messaging, team collaboration and video conferencing) to work together and communicate on projects, and consider phone calls, tele and video conferencing to discuss ideas and catch-up instead of constant email and instant messaging traffic.
- Adopt an approach that builds relationships with people.
- Share information and track the progress of priority tasks, giving feedback on work and discussing new ideas to avoid isolation and maintain a sense of community.
- Set clear boundaries between home and work and create a safe and comfortable place to work.

- Put procedures in place so you can keep in direct contact with home workers. This will help you recognise signs of stress as early as possible.
- Have an emergency point of contact (e.g. welfare support services) and share this so people know how to get help if they need it.
- Have an emergency point of contact in the work environment and ensure contact details are shared with relevant team members. Talk regularly about how to improve communications
- Agree and note the team working together arrangements so everyone is clear about how it will work.

10.3   Additional communication tips can be found in the Hybrid Working Toolkit for Managers & Staff.

Use of Personal Mobile or Landline for Business Calls

10.4   In the first instance staff should consider using softphone facilities such as Cisco Jabber. This will enable you to make most work calls at no cost to yourself or AFBI. You can use either your own headphones with microphone or be provided with a USB headset. Cisco Jabber softphone functionality will need to be enabled on your laptop or desktop if not already, and IT Assist will be able to provide Jabber guidance as necessary. Secondly, if you have a work mobile phone, use it. Only use your personal mobile/home landline for work calls if, for whatever reason you are unable to use softphone facilities or your work issued mobile phone.

11 Performance Management and Attendance

Mutual Trust

11.1   Managers and team members each have responsibilities where home working arrangements are in place. As would be the case within the usual workplace environment, employees should be trusted and empowered to deliver agreed outcomes on time and to the standard required.

11.2   Working from home does not alter the normal Performance Management, Hours of Attendance or Sickness Absence policies detailed in the Staff Handbook. Any member of staff that is found to be breaching NICS policy and/or abusing the trust placed on them may have their hybrid working arrangements curtailed, suspended or cessated.

Performance Management

11.3   Staff who are on Performance Improvement Plans may be required by their management to curtail or suspend hybrid working arrangements to facilitate support to improve their performance e.g. a period of closer supervision or mentoring.

Induction

11.4   Induction is a crucial element to the on-boarding experience for a new start to both an employee and the employer. It is vital that a new start is given a comprehensive induction to AFBI. Where reasonably practicable, this might include a period of time in the office at the beginning of the assignment to meet people, build relationships and to understand their role within the wider organisation. This will require line management and team members to be flexible in attending an AFBI site where and when necessary.

11.5   Current staff who are newly promoted or take over other roles will also normally be required to attend their designated workplace until training/handover period is complete.

Sickness Absence

11.5   Normal rules around reporting of sickness absence apply for any home working arrangements. It is particularly important that staff who become ill whilst working from home notifies their line manager as soon as possible.

11.6   Managers and staff should refer to the Performance Management, Hours of Attendance or Sickness Absence policies detailed in the Staff Handbook.