

Flexible Working Policy

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1 Scope of Policy

- 1.1 [This policy and procedure has been agreed following consultation with the Staff Representative Council, and applies to all staff regardless of status or length of service, except where probationary staff are affected differently as set out in this policy.]
- 1.2 Whilst this policy seeks to provide a consistent and fair framework for flexible working, nothing in this policy fetters or restricts the exercise of any discretion. Line managers have day to day discretion to operate the policy fairly, consistently and in the light of any particular circumstances. Any proposal to depart significantly from the policy should however be discussed and agreed by the Ombudsman or the Chief Operating Officer & Director of Investigations, or in their absence the Director of Policy, Legal & Governance.
- 1.3 This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and the PSOW may amend it at any time. Substantial changes to this policy will be made only following consultation with the Staff Representative Council.

2 Definitions:

- 2.1 **'Line Manager'**: Where reference is made to 'Line Manager' in this policy, staff are expected to substitute the following, in order, where their own 'line manager' is not available;
- A) Acting line manager,
 - B) Other line manager,
 - C) Line manager of their line manager.

3 Abbreviations:

- 3.1 'CSM' in this policy means Corporate Services Manager, and 'COO/DoI' in this policy means Chief Operating Officer/Director of Investigations or in his absence Director of Policy, Legal & Governance.

4 Introduction

- 4.1 PSOW supports the principles of flexible working, and acknowledges the importance for staff of achieving a balance between work and personal commitments. Whilst each request will be considered on its merits, PSOW will endeavour to grant requests where possible.
- 4.2 Support for flexible working is in addition to the flexibility provided by flexitime and annual leave arrangements. These are addressed in the Attendance & Absence policy.
- 4.3 From surveys of staff interest in various forms of flexible working, it is recognised that the following are the most likely to be requested:
- Ad hoc working from home
 - Regular working from home

- Compressed hours
- Term-time working
- Temporary reduction in hours

- 4.4 Eligible employees have the legal right to submit a formal request for flexible working and PSOW will deal reasonably with such requests.
- 4.5 PSOW will place restrictions on the operation of flexible working where it deems it necessary for the proper conduct of its business and in accordance with the permitted statutory grounds for refusal. PSOW reserves the right not to agree to a request where one or more of these criteria indicate that, in the current circumstances, the job can only be carried out effectively under current arrangements.
- 4.6 The statutory procedure requires that requests for flexible working (including any appeal process) are dealt with within **three months** of the written application, although this timescale may be extended by agreement. Where possible the PSOW will ensure that decisions are made well within this timescale.
- 4.7 Any employee can make an informal request to work flexibly without following the statutory procedure.

5 Eligibility

- 5.1 In order to be eligible to request flexible working a member of staff must:
- be an employee (not an agency worker or office holder)
 - have at least **26 weeks' continuous employment** with PSOW at the date the application is made
 - not have made a request under the statutory scheme for at least **12 months**.

6 Scope of a request

- 6.1 An eligible employee has a legal right to request:
- a change to hours of work
 - a change to the times of work
 - a change to the place of work.
- 6.2 PSOW will also consider requests for other forms of flexible working under this policy.
- 6.3 Any change to terms and conditions made as a result of a flexible working request will be permanent, unless PSOW agrees to a temporary variation.

7 Content of the request

- 7.1 Flexible working can incorporate a number of changes to working arrangements such as:
- a reduction or variation in working hours

- reducing the number of days worked each week
- working from a different location i.e. from home

7.2 A member of staff may therefore request a variation of the employment contract in respect of, for example:

- the hours required to be worked
- the times when required to be worked
- part-time working
- job-sharing
- working term-time only
- working shifts
- the location to work (home or PSOW offices).

7.3 Members of staff have the right to have the request dealt with reasonably, but this does not give any right to a contract variation.

8 Procedure

8.1 A member of staff making a flexible working request must follow this procedure. However, before making an application the member of staff should think about:

- what working pattern will best achieve his/her aims
- the financial implications a change might have on him/her
- what effects, if any, the change will have on the PSOW's business and how these might be accommodated.

8.2 The application must be submitted to the line manager and must:

- be made in writing and dated
- state that it is an application under the statutory right to apply for flexible working arrangements
- state whether a previous application has been made to PSOW and, if so, when
- specify the change applied for and the date on which it is proposed that the change should become effective
- explain what effect, if any, making the change applied for would have on PSOW and how any adverse effect might be dealt with.

8.3 The line manager may agree to the formal request without discussing it with the member of staff (for example, if the details of the request have already been discussed informally).

8.4 In most cases the line manager will arrange to meet with the member of staff promptly after receiving the application.

9 The Meeting

9.1 The time and place of the meeting will be convenient to both the member of staff and the line manager.

9.2 A work colleague may accompany the member of staff at the meeting. That employee will be permitted to confer with the member of staff during the meeting

and to address the meeting (but not to answer questions on behalf of the member of staff).

- 9.3 If the chosen companion will not be available at the time proposed for the meeting and the member of staff proposes an alternative, mutually convenient time, the manager will postpone the meeting to the time proposed by the member of staff. Alternatively, the member of staff should consider choosing another companion.
- 9.4 At the meeting the requested variation to working arrangements will be discussed fully. The impact of the change, and the ideas of the member of staff for how any adverse impact could be minimised, will be considered. The meeting also provides the opportunity to discuss any alternative variations which would be acceptable. The line manager may suggest implementing an agreed trial period for the new arrangements.

10 The Agreement

- 10.1 If PSOW agrees to the application written confirmation, specifying the contractual variation agreed to and state the date on which the variation is to take effect, will be sent.
- 10.2 If PSOW has agreed to the changes requested by the member of staff a permanent variation of the employment contract will result, unless otherwise agreed by the line manager. However a trial period may be agreed to ascertain whether the arrangements works for both parties. Once a permanent change has been made, the member of staff cannot choose to revert to the previous terms and conditions of employment.
- 10.3 Both PSOW and members of staff are expected to respect the spirit of flexible working, agreeing requests where reasonably possible and reflecting the need for the member of staff to attend team meetings, training, meetings etc and other requirements arising from their job (such as Standards Committee meetings, Adjudication Panel hearings etc.).
- 10.4 A member of staff may make further applications for variations (whether the first application was successful or not) provided they are made **at least 12 months after** the previous application.

11 If the request is refused

- 11.1 If the request is refused, the written notice will identify on which of the permitted grounds (listed below) the application was refused. The letter will also provide an explanation as to why those grounds apply, and set out the appeal procedure.
- 11.2 The application may be refused on one or more of several grounds, these being that the proposed changes will result in:
- a burden of additional cost
 - a detrimental effect on ability to meet customer demand
 - an inability to re-organise work among existing staff
 - an inability to recruit additional staff
 - a detrimental effect on quality
 - a detrimental effect on performance
 - an insufficiency of work during the periods proposed to be worked

- a planned structural change
 - any other ground allowed by regulations.
- 11.3 In deciding whether the above grounds are met, a wide range of criteria will be taken into account, including (by way of example only) the following:
- PSOW's business needs
 - the suitability of the job for the flexible arrangements proposed, e.g. the nature of the work, the hours needed and the need for continuity and consistency
 - the current balance of full-time and part-time employees and other flexible working arrangements within the department or team
 - the feasibility of covering the remaining hours

12 Withdrawal of application

- 12.1 PSOW can treat an application as withdrawn under the statutory provisions where the member of staff has:
- notified the line manager, orally or in writing, that the application is withdrawn
 - without reasonable cause, failed more than once to attend a meeting or appeal meeting
 - without reasonable cause, refused to provide the line manager with information required in order to assess whether the contract variation should be agreed to.
- 12.2 The line manager will confirm the withdrawal of the application in writing unless the member of staff has already provided written notice of the withdrawal. The member of staff will not be entitled to make another formal application until **12 months after** the original request.

13 Appeal

- 13.1 It is PSOW's policy to allow an appeal against a decision to refuse an application for flexible working. If the member of staff wishes to appeal, he/she should do so within seven days after the date he/she was notified of the decision. The notice of appeal must be addressed to the COO/DoI in writing, setting out the grounds for appeal.
- 13.2 The COO/DoI will hold a meeting with the member of staff to discuss and consider the appeal. The time and place of an appeal meeting will be convenient to both the member of staff and the COO/DoI. The member of staff has the same right to be accompanied by a work colleague as at the initial meeting.
- 13.3 After the appeal meeting the COO/DoI will write to the member of staff with a decision. If the appeal is upheld the letter will specify the contract variation agreed to, and state the date on which it is to take effect. If the appeal is dismissed, the letter will state the grounds for the decision and contains an explanation as to why those grounds apply.

14 Informal request for flexible working

- 14.1 If a member of staff does not meet the eligibility criteria under this policy, but he/she wants to make either a permanent or temporary change to his/her working arrangements, he/she may make an informal request under the procedure to the line manager, who will consider the request according to PSOW's business and operational requirements.
- 14.2 The request should be in writing, giving details of the variation and how any detrimental impact on the workplace might be managed. The request should also state whether the change requested is temporary or permanent.

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