

Workplace and Working Space Arrangement

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1.0 Statement of purpose/objectives

This arrangement will assist the Council in meeting its legislative requirements. The provision of a safe working place & space is an essential part of protecting people from harm whilst at work.

2.0 Scope

This arrangement has been prepared to provide guidance on the requirements for workplace health and safety and applies to all Shropshire Council employees, agency workers and volunteers at work.

3.0 Definition

For the purpose of this arrangement, workplace is defined as:

“Factories, shops and offices and also, for example, schools, hospitals, hotels and places of entertainment.

The term workplace also includes the common parts of shared buildings, private roads and paths on industrial estates and business parks, and temporary worksites (except workplaces involving construction work on construction sites).” - Health and safety Executive.

4.0 Duty of care

Shropshire Council has a general duty of care to protect the health, safety and welfare of its employees and non-employees so far as is reasonably practicable.

5.0 Implementation

Management guidance in the form of Frequently Asked Questions will be provided and updated to support the implementation of the arrangement.

6.0 Compliance

This arrangement will enable Shropshire Council to conform to statutory requirements and best current practice. Further references are provided in Appendix 1.

7.0 Review of Arrangement

This arrangement will be reviewed by Health and safety Team every 3 years

Approving Body

Approval	Health, Safety and Welfare Group	24 October 2013
Reviewed	Health and Safety Team	January 2017
Reviewed	Health and Safety Team	November 2018
Reviewed	Health and Safety Team	December 2021

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Office Safety Frequently Asked Questions

1.0 Roles and responsibilities/who does what?

- 1.1 **Shropshire Council** as a local authority employer, through its elected members, has ultimate responsibility for compliance with Health and Safety legislation.
- 1.2 The **Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team** are responsible for ensuring:
- The implementation of the Office Safety Arrangement across all their service areas to ensure consistency of approach.
 - The allocation of suitable and sufficient resources.
- 1.3 **Directors / Heads of Service** will appoint appropriate people who are responsible for ensuring:
- The implementation of the office safety arrangement and that all staff are familiar with the contents of the arrangement insofar as it is relevant to their role and responsibilities.
 - Service area office health and safety standards and performance are monitored.
 - Suitable levels of competency for managers, supervisors and staff, enabling them to undertake work activities safely.
 - The allocation of sufficient resources to effectively maintain office and workplace standards.
- 1.4 **Premise/Line Managers** are responsible for:
- Identifying staff where lone working is part of the staff's working practice within an office environment.
 - Ensuring risk assessments are undertaken for office activities and that control measures are communicated to the appropriate people.
 - Ensuring that all staff receive appropriate information, instruction and training relating to their work place activities.
 - Reporting any work place issues to the service area Health and Safety Officer/Coordinator.
 - Reporting any work-related accidents, in accordance with the Council Accident Reporting System – using the Unit 4 Business World/ERP electronic reporting form.
 - Ensuring, in conjunction with line managers, that risk assessments are reviewed annually or more frequently: when there has been any significant change or incident(s), and if new legislation requires change to best working practice.
- 1.5 The **Health and Safety Team** is responsible for:
- Providing advice and guidance to enable managers to carry out their duties and responsibilities effectively.
 - Providing advice and guidance to managers on specific training available.
 - Ensuring, in conjunction with managers, that work place activities are monitored on a regular basis via self-auditing and auditing processes.

1.6 Health and Safety Representatives are responsible for ensuring:

- Health and safety standards and performance are monitored and resources effectively managed to prevent as far as is reasonably practicable accidents and ill health in the workplace.
- A suitable level of competency for managers, supervisors and employees, enabling them to undertake work activities in safety.

1.7 All Shropshire Council employees are responsible for:

- Complying with the requirements of the office safety arrangements.
- Assisting with the risk assessment process, as required.
- Co-operating with the safe systems of work as identified to enable Shropshire Council to comply with its health & safety responsibilities.
- Reporting immediately to their line manager, any adverse incidents that have arisen within their office environment.

2. What are the common hazards in an office environment?

Slip, trips and falls account for most of the accidents in offices, many of them when staff are carrying loads. They happen because of the condition of floors, poor lighting or untidiness. Examples are:

- Change of floor level/surface.
- Spillages of chemicals or beverages not cleaned up causing a slipping hazard.
- Trailing leads creating a tripping hazard.
- Loose matting creating a tripping hazard.
- Wet floors after cleaning causing a slipping hazard.
- Poor lighting causing a fall.
- Excessive or unwanted items around workspace causing a fall.

3. What are office safety risk assessments?

Managers must take responsibility at all times for their staff and ensure adequate safe systems of work are provided. Risk assessments will help identify potential hazards, advise how to eliminate them and confirm that the work place is safe.

4. Who should carry out office safety risk assessments?

The risk assessment should be carried out by line managers with the full co-operation from the office staff. The risk assessment should be reviewed as often as is necessary.

The outcome of the risk assessment will show that all hazards have been identified, the risks assessed and control measures put in place.

5. What is a safe system of work (SSoW)?

The SSoW will provide a method for office workers to carry out their day to day work activities safely. A competent person will undertake a thorough risk assessment and ensure that adequate control measures have been put in place and are routinely tested as necessary.

6. Is there a minimum space requirement for each person in an office?

Office staff should have enough free space to safely go to and from their workstations and to move around the office with ease. In normal situations the recommendations are 3.7m² of floor space for each person or where the ceiling is less than 3 metres, 11m³ for each person. The total space of an office is averaged across the floor area so it does not mean that everyone will have his or her recommended floor space.

For Example: In a typical room, where the ceiling is 2.4m high, a floor area of 4.6m² (for example 2.0 x 2.3m) will be needed to provide a space of 11 cubic metres. Where the ceiling is 3.0m high or higher the minimum floor area will be 3.7m² (for example 2.0 x 1.85m). (These floor areas are only for illustrative purposes and are approximate).

7. Is there a minimum width for walkways through an office?

There is no defined minimum width for walkways, but there must be sufficient clearance to allow all those who are likely to use the walkways to move freely around the office.

This includes having sufficient space to move safely to and from his or her workstation and also applies to office staff with disabilities such as wheelchair users. This guidance does not apply if the route is a designated fire escape route¹.

8. Are there any legal entitlements for employees to work in natural daylight?

There are no legal entitlements for lighting at work to be natural light, however wherever possible natural light should be used. It is usually considered that people prefer to work in natural light than artificial light. These issues should be considered when designing an office area or positioning work stations.

9. What lighting levels are recommended in offices?

The lighting should be sufficient for all office staff to carry out their work effectively and safely. Guidance recommends that where a combination of office activities and DSE work is carried out lighting levels should range between 300 and 500 lux. This is on the basis that those who require more light are able to use "Task Lighting" (e.g. desk lamps).

10. How do I assess my work station and space?

The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations sets out the minimum requirements for workstations. Shropshire Council office staff have access to the on-line Cardinus Display Screen Equipment (DSE) training and risk assessment (Temporary Home Working) package which allows them to assess their work area and raise any areas of concern.

Further reference to workstations can be obtained by accessing the Shropshire Council DSE Arrangements.

11. What are the manual handling requirements in an office?

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations makes reference to the minimum health and safety requirements for the manual handling of loads. During the working day we may lift many objects and it would be impossible to conduct a formal written risk assessment for them all. Generally, in an office environment, a formal written manual handling risk assessment would not be expected (although a particular handling task

may require it). Managers should consider the basic factors involved in manual handling risk assessment especially those who have control over the activities carried out in the office.

A risk assessment based on office factors would show us, generally that:

- Heavy loads should be broken down where possible (e.g. opening the box of paper and carrying the packs of paper individually) will reduce the weight.
- Heavy objects should be stored as close to where they are needed as possible.
- When storing items on shelves do not place heavy items up high. They will be difficult to place on or remove from the shelves and if they were to fall they could cause serious injury. Place them at waist height or closer to the floor.

12. What is electrical safety in an office?

The Electricity at Work Regulations 1989 states that: "As may be necessary to prevent danger, all electrical systems shall be maintained so as to prevent, so far as reasonably practicable, such danger".

Defective plugs, sockets and leads cause more electrical accidents than the appliances themselves. Trailing cables can create some quite serious risks of slips, trips and falls. Overloading of sockets or adapters can lead to fire hazards so by carrying out your own visual inspections of plugs and leads and getting them repaired as necessary will prevent potential fire risks.

13. Are portable heaters safe for use in an office?

Fixed heating systems should normally be used, but portable heaters may be necessary in exceptionally cold weather or if the fixed heating installation breaks down. Portable oil filled heaters may be provided as long as they are sensibly located away from combustible materials, cables do not cause a trip hazard and there is no risk of office staff being burned by coming into contact with a hot surface. Portable electric heaters should be subject to portable appliance testing to ensure they remain safe for use. Checks should be made before portable heaters are used to ensure they have been tested, safe and any defective equipment removed from the area immediately.

14. What is the definition of a portable appliance and how often should they be tested?

Portable appliances are usually those that can be transported easily and that have a cable and a plug such as desktop/laptop computers, printers, fax machines, photocopiers, desk lamps, heaters and fans.

Visual checks should be carried out at regular intervals for all portable appliance equipment in the office.

To avoid the likelihood of damage arising from the use of portable appliances only equipment supplied by Shropshire Council may be used.

NB: "Items of electrical equipment must not be brought from home".

15. Are there any restrictions on the use of multi-socket extension leads?

Extension leads should only be used as a temporary measure, pending a more permanent solution. Where such office equipment is being used frequently, a proper socket outlet should be added to the system.

Extension leads issued and tested by the approved contractors or the nominated and approved person can only be used in the office environment.

16. Are there any health and safety requirements for pregnant workers?

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations require the manager to carry out a risk assessment to establish what measures are necessary to minimise risk to pregnant workers or nursing mothers. This must be carried out and then reviewed at a regular frequency during the pregnancy as there will be physical changes to the pregnant worker during the 1st, 2nd and 3rd trimesters, Further information and advice can be obtained from the Occupational Health Department at Shropshire Council and see also the arrangement on New & Expectant Mothers at Work.

17. How are chemicals risks assessed in my office environment?

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations requires a COSHH risk assessments to be carried out and recorded where hazardous substances are produced or used in areas, processes or equipment. For products used in offices this means that the result would normally be a decision to follow manufacturer's instructions. All substances carrying a specific health warning will be provided with a MSDS (material safety data sheet) which is a document provided by the manufacturer or supplier, which provides safety and technical information on that product, this will then be used when carrying out a COSHH assessment. See COSHH arrangement.

18. What are the requirements for ventilation?

For most offices opening windows will provide adequate ventilation. Shropshire Council will provide ventilated workplaces for all employees. All enclosed workplaces must be ventilated by a sufficient quantity of fresh or purified air. The supply of fresh air should not fall below 5 litres per second, per occupant. If general ventilation is used to control the exposure to substances hazardous to health the air supply rate may need to be higher.

Coronavirus: Premise Managers are advised to check with PSG that their buildings ventilation systems comply with the HSE guidance [HSE Advice re air conditioning and ventilation during the coronavirus outbreak](#) .

19. What are the requirements for good housekeeping?

A tidy well laid out office is a basic requirement for ensuring health and safety. The standard of housekeeping has a direct bearing on the cause of accidents in two main ways:

- Unsafe acts carried out or failure to act correctly
- Unsafe conditions which influence how people act.

Minimising the risk of accidents means keeping the workplace tidy by putting items away after use, especially at the end of the day or work period. When a regime of tidiness is not applied, a casual attitude soon develops, affecting many of the office staff.

Good housekeeping requires a combination of self-discipline, cleanliness, organised storage, effective supervision, proper management and training to develop the right attitude. Good housekeeping may be regarded as a matter of common sense, but regular planned, systematic checks of the workplace are therefore essential if cleaning and good housekeeping are to be fully effective.

20. What are the requirements for first aid provision in the office?

Information can be accessed from the First Aid arrangement.

21. What are the fire arrangements in an office environment?

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations specifies that a sufficient number of competent persons must be appointed to implement procedures for fire evacuation.

General Fire Precautions will be applied in the office and this term is used to describe the equipment, systems and procedures required to ensure the ability of all people to safely evacuate in the event of fire occurring. For further information regarding fire safety provision refer to the Shropshire Council Fire Safety Arrangements and section 15 of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

22. What are the arrangements for photocopiers?

Most service areas have maintenance agreements with the company from where photocopiers were purchased or leased. Such companies will provide guidance on what should and should not be done with the machine. Usually, users will be expected to refill toner or replace toner cartridges, re-load paper and clear jams.

A well sited and well-maintained modern copier is generally a low-risk piece of equipment. Good management practices along with training and effective control of contractors who service the photocopiers will ensure a low-risk activity. For further information reference can be made to the Shropshire Council Photocopiers and Laser Printers Arrangement.

23. Workplace Temperatures

For workplaces where the activity is mainly sedentary, for example offices, legally the temperature should be at least 16 °C. If work involves physical effort, it should be at least 13 °C (unless other laws require lower temperatures).

There is no statutory maximum working temperature in the workplace.

- a) The recommended temperature for offices where there is display screen equipment is 19 - 23 °C. Where a reasonably comfortable temperature cannot be achieved local heating or cooling should be provided.
- b) There is no statutory maximum temperature, but managers should apply common sense. Where the temperature is considered high there are a number of measures that can be taken to improve comfort including, the provision of extra drinking water, blinds to cover windows, desk fans, insulation to cover pipes. It might be necessary to also allow more breaks, especially for those who might find it uncomfortable e.g. pregnant women.
- c) If concerns are raised relating to temperature levels, then a thermometer should be used to monitor the temperature.

24. Hot Weather Working

The provision of additional cooling devices such as fans or portable air conditioning units (subject to consideration of the risks of electrical overload and consequent fire or loss of power).

- Relaxation of dress codes (within accepted workplace norms)
- Change of work patterns to allow more frequent breaks
- Switching off any unnecessary power sources
- Installation of permanent mechanical ventilation equipment
- Moving persons from the room or workplace e.g. move to other vacant accommodation on North side of premises, work from home, etc.
- Consideration for additional cooling installation in areas which are regularly and consistently beyond reasonably comfortable temperatures.

25. Exposure to Direct Sunlight

Managers of staff working outside in direct sunlight should already have in place risk assessments and appropriate controls for those staff.

Periods of unusually high temperatures merit a check by managers that precautions specified by the assessments are in place.

Any events held outside should be risk assessed and appropriate measures taken to ensure adequate levels of sun protection and re-hydration, especially for more vulnerable, such as children or older people.

It should be remembered that by changing the time and/or physical location of events by just a small margin, much better use can be made of natural shade and the cooler parts of the day.

26. Where can I get further information and references?

Further information is available in appendix 1 and 2 below.

Appendix 1

References

HSG268: The health and safety toolbox. How to control risks at work ISBN 978 0 7176 6587 7

L24: Workplace Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations 1992: Approved Code of Practice

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992

Ergonomics and human factors at work (free download) available <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/officdex.htm>

Working with VDU's (free download) available <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/officdex.htm>

Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992

Maintaining portable electrical equipment in offices and other low risk environments Leaflet INDG236 (free download) available <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pUbns/indg236.pdf>

COSHH (control of substances hazardous to health) 2002 ISBN 0 7176 2982 1

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

Appendix 2

Where can I get further information - available from the intranet

Risk Assessment Arrangement

Photocopiers and Laser Printers Arrangement

Display Screen Equipment Arrangement

Electricity at Work Arrangement

First Aid Arrangement

Temperature Control in Buildings Used as Workplaces and Hot Weather Working Arrangement

Notes:

- 1) Minimum width for an escape route should ideally be **1050mm but in any case not less than 750mm** and where wheelchair users are likely to use it not less than 900mm.