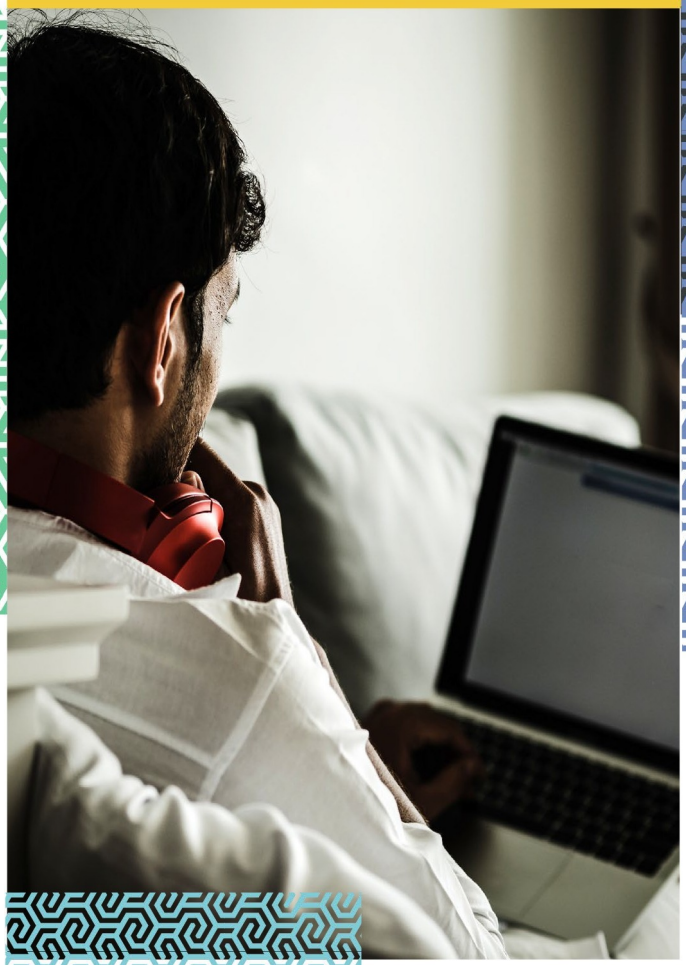
Risk Control

Homeworking



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Risk Control
Homeworking

Introduction

The traditional office working pattern of being physically present in an office from “9 to 5” is now not always the most productive way for the modern business to operate efficiently. Keeping pace with the high demands of business management in the 21st Century, working across international boundaries and maximising employee working hours has transformed the way we work. Employers are creating work environments that support an agile, dynamic and resilient organisation by introducing different ways of working flexibly. This reduces travel time and achieves a work life balance bringing benefits to the employee and employer alike.

Latest statistics from the Trades Union Congress (TUC) show that one in seven workers now work from home or fulfil the majority of their working role away from the office[1].

Homeworking

Homeworking - as part of your operating strategy can bring many benefits to your business, attracting fresh investment and new talent. Office space costs are reduced, less time and energy is wasted on travel to and from the office and potentially your staff will have less sickness absence.

The dark side to the operation is that if managed incorrectly – homeworkers can feel isolated from the rest of the business and detached from a corporate working environment. This can lead to rogue / maverick behaviour and actions being taken where employees view themselves as independent to the rest of the business.

In the absence of a suitable framework and guidance; the homeworker may work beyond their contracted hours through fear that their manager may not trust/believe they are ‘working enough’ and fail to switch off. Homeworking is not suited to everyone and some may struggle to concentrate as they would in the office and could be less productive. The employees’ home environment may also not be suitable. A strong working relationship between employee and employer will help any homeworking policy implementation and mitigate against the risks that arise from the activity.

[1] https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2017/06/Homeworking-GuideJune2017.pdf

Homeworking Policy

A homeworking policy should set out the view/appetite of the business in respect of homeworking and should clearly define what is meant by a home worker. There are permanent, regular and ad hoc home working arrangements and the business should provide enough information in the policy to enable an employee to determine which category applies to them. Other areas which should also be addressed as part of the policy include but are not limited to:

— Definition of homeworker types

Clearly define how the policy is to be applied to the varying degrees of ‘homeworker’.

— Eligibility criteria

How approval is sought and granted and what criteria needs to be met by the employee to qualify as a homeworker.

— Roles and responsibilities

The expectations of the employee as a homeworker and how this differs from an office based employee.

— Health and Safety

The H&S requirements that need to be met by the employee including display screen equipment requirements and notification to the employee of the employers right to inspect the homeworking site.

— Data Security

Requirements on managing sensitive information outside the office, disposal of documents and compliance with data security policies at home.

— Equipment and supplies

Provision of work equipment and supplies necessary to undertake the role.

— Linkage with other policies

Flexible working policy, equal opportunities policy etc.

Managing the risk …

Under UK Health and Safety legislation, it is an employer’s duty to consider the potential cause of harm to their home workers or other people as a result of the work being undertaken within the home. A risk assessment should be completed as should a work station assessment to identify the required controls needed to manage the risks.

The business could consider the production of homeworking guidelines and a checklist to support the process.

When considering whether an employee is eligible for homeworking, managers should document whether:

— The job role is suitable for homeworking

— The employee is suited to homeworking e.g. are they self-motivated, performing well in their role and able to work without direct supervision

— The home environment is suitable for homeworking.

This could form part of the overall risk assessment. There is guidance available from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on conducting a risk assessment which is free to download at www.hse.gov.uk/risk

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) has produced guidelines recommending four key ingredients for managing productive home working:

1 Building trust between staff working from home and their manager

2 Agreeing how work performance will be supervised and measured

3 Communicating effectively

4 Training.

They have produced a guide for employers and employees which can be downloaded from their website[2].

How can you support your homeworkers?

Ensuring there is sufficient contact with colleagues by drawing out contact and touchpoints back at base and/or the use of office buddies to keep up dialogue.

Agreeing how you will keep in touch – weekly calls, visits to the office and how often these should be.

Ensuring managers are sufficiently trained to recognise the trigger signs that the work environment is not right, the employee is overworking or withdrawn from the team.

Summary

If managed effectively – homeworking can be a productive and worthwhile option for many employees and employers to get the best out of their business.

It requires a framework, policy and guidance to operate and reduces the risk of ambiguity over roles and responsibilities for both parties.

References

1 https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2017/04/Homeworking-Guide.pdf

2 https://workplaceinsight.net/home-workers-take-less-sick-days-than-office-based-colleagues/

3 http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=4860

[2] http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=4860

Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

Get in touch

For more information, please contact your broker, RMP risk control consultant or account director.

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