



Essential guide to Managing Remotely

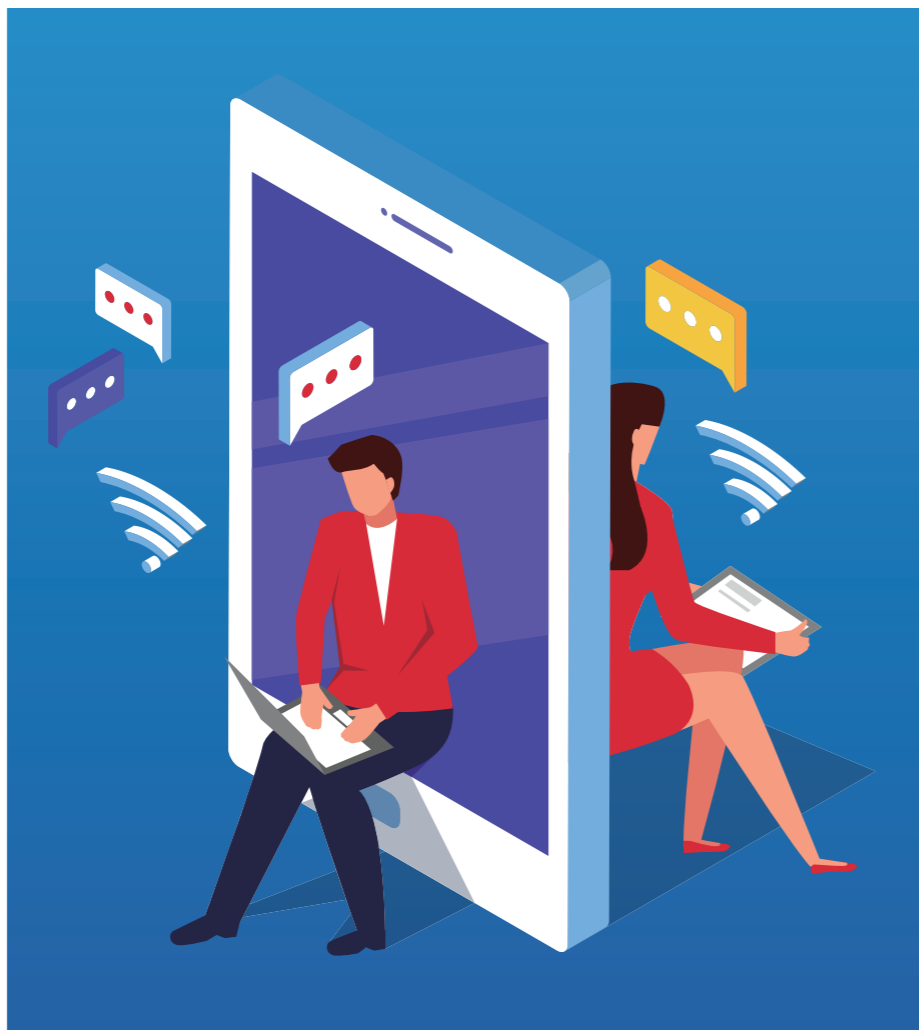
Managing remotely is very different to managing in a face to face environment and our skills and behaviours as managers need to take this difference into account. Whether you have a whole team working remotely or just a small number of the team working at home for a couple of days a week this Essential Guide is for you. It will help to support you in the communications you have with your team, building team morale, tackling difficult conversations, setting objectives and supporting development.

Communication

It is important that you communicate regularly with your remote team members to ensure that they remain motivated and engaged when working remotely. You should aim for at least one video call a week with all of your direct reports. This is an opportunity for you to check in with them and look out for signs that they may be struggling, and to take steps to help where appropriate.

Depending on their personality, style of working and role, your team members may need different levels of contact, and you may need to adjust the communication required to enable each individual to work productively. For example, some employees will need more regular feedback to carry out their role remotely, while others may feel overloaded if they receive too many messages or meeting invitations.

Your communication with remote workers needs to be even clearer than it would be if you worked together face to face as there is more room for misunderstandings and it is more difficult for them to double check their understanding with you. Video calls can help as long as you focus on the camera and on your team members face rather than just on your keyboard or another part of your screen.



Team Morale

When team members are not working in the same location, holding regular meetings will help bring the team together, maintain team spirit and encourage collaboration. It is important that you continue to celebrate success and acknowledge the achievements of team members so they know that their contribution is being recognised.

Some teams may find a daily team virtual huddle useful, others may find a weekly or fortnightly meeting may be more appropriate. Whichever works for your team keep it regular and ensure the team can continue to meet even if you are on leave.

Choose a medium that everyone can attend via, this may be a daily or weekly video meetings or monthly face to face meeting. Mixed medium meetings when some of you are in person and others are on video can make the remote team members feel isolated.

Encourage everyone to put their videos on, they can always blur out the background if they want to. Seeing your colleagues helps build stronger connections and improves understanding as you can see their body language and pick up on non verbal clues to how they are feeling.

Build in a little extra time for non-work conversations at the start or end of meetings and encourage your team members to communicate with each other by telephone or video call as well as by email. This can enable employees to support each other, and these conversations can also include a social dimension that may be more difficult in written communication.

Think about other ways to replace the social aspects of being part of a team with the use of technology - for example, if the team would usually sign birthday cards for each other, these can be replaced with virtual cards that everybody can sign.

Difficult conversations

Sometimes remote working can highlight skills or performance gaps that may not have been noticed in the office. However, it can be more difficult to provide feedback remotely rather than in person.

You need to prepare to have this discussion with the person. As it will be a remote conversation its best to both use video on the call. That way you have the benefit of being able to use the non-verbal communication indicators to help you to communicate as well as you would if you were face to face.

It helps to have a kitbag of questions to help you understand what has been happening to cause the gap. These questions are a good starter:

- What is the actual problem?
- When did it happen?
- How long has it been occurring?
- Was there a trigger?
- Who is involved?
- What has been done to rectify?
- What do you want the outcome to be?
- Has the person ever been able to do what you are asking them to do?
- Have they been trained?
- Did they have clarity of what should be done?
- Did they have the capacity (time/resource) to be able to do it?
- Are there any external factors to consider?

Obviously you may not need to ask all of these questions, but if you charge straight in without understanding it makes it difficult to resolve the situation as the root cause of the problem itself may still exist.

Now think of the person to whom you will be talking to, when is a good time for them to receive this feedback, are there times in the day when background distractions are minimal. If you let them know that there is something that you would like to talk to them about, or make this conversation part of a one to one, they will more open to receiving the feedback. You should also consider what their reaction is likely to be. Knowing that they are likely to be confrontational or emotional does not stop you having the conversation, but it does mean you are prepared. An unexpected reaction can cause you to go into a fight, flight or freeze response. This can involve you getting defensive, emotional, or just going blank. None of these is welcome and usually can be detrimental to the conversation.



By being prepared you can remain calm and professional and remain in control. If you experience a response you are not expecting you can call a short break in order for them to compose themselves or possibly to allow the information they have been given to sink in.

Even if the problem is a temporary one it needs to be addressed. There have been many cases where performance has not been addressed and then it becomes harder to do so later on when the situation deteriorates. It may have a knock on effect with others who see the situation not being addressed. This has a high impact on engagement and morale.

Although you need time to get the information together you need to make sure that you act as soon as you can.

Make sure you have all of the information, use 'I' (as in I'd like to talk to you today about the x project that you have been working on) instead of things like 'it's come to my attention' – that makes it seem as though people have been talking about them.

You may be having this conversation over a video conference (preferable to a phone call- it means you can both use body language as a guide to emotions) make sure you have plenty of time and no distractions. Make sure it is private with nobody walking around behind you.

Have the detail, dates, times, exactly what happened. Let them know what the discussion is about and why you are there, what needs to happen as a result of the discussion.

Make sure you use appropriate language for the person you are talking to, clarity is important, this is no place for ambiguity. Also what is your body saying? Are you defensive, aggressive, nervous? All of these can have an impact on the outcome of the discussion. Use positive statements, instead of “you were late for today’s training session – use “to benefit fully from the training you need to be punctual”

Ask them for their version of events – there may have been factors of which you are unaware. They may have had to make a decision that turned out to be a poor one because of the situation.

You cannot change a personality in a performance discussion – personality is formed over many years! However you can address poor performance or inappropriate behaviour. Let the person be part of the solution. You will get more buy in.

If the person realises that their performance or behaviour has fallen below expectations they will generally be more committed to the resolution.

Agree with them what they need to do next, what support they require from you and what timescales they will be able to address the shortfall in.

Don’t forget though at the one to one meeting it is important to acknowledge the change in performance. Give praise – (sincere) for exactly what is now being done to the correct standard in order to encourage more of the same. If further improvements are needed then you need to have another conversation. Using the same guidelines as before. What has improved, what is still outstanding?



Standard setting

If you are objective setting as part of a standards setting meeting, you will have agreed what needs to be done with the person, this will be in writing with agreed follow up times. Remember, the objectives you set have to be attainable within the period given or you are setting them up for failure. Check in with them at appropriate times to ensure they are ok, or if they need additional support. Remember praise and encouragement are vital as the person may have taken a knock to their confidence.

Please speak to a member of the HR Team if you are looking to commence standard setting with your team member.

Setting objectives

Objectives are not just for the annual appraisal, in fact they should be part of your regular one to ones. You can review them, alter them, and reset them all through the year. As things change your goals can too. In order to measure them though they should be SMART.

Setting your team SMART objectives is probably the easiest way to increase productivity in the workplace. How often have you had an image in your mind, asked somebody to do it for you but when you check it is not what you wanted? The image in your brain could not be seen by the team member so they created their own image and worked off that!

Setting a SMART goal is the way you transfer the same image that you have into their brain and increases the chance of doing the job right first time.

- Specific** State exactly what you need to achieve.
- Measurable** Could another person measure whether or not you had achieved it?
- Achievable** Is it realistic? Can it be done? Setting an impossible target will just demotivate the person trying to do it and it will not get done, although a goal should be stretching there should always be the ability to achieve it.
- Relevant** Will it contribute to the corporate plan? What value will it add to the council?
- Time-bound** When should it be completed by? What is the deadline? Remember it needs to be a realistic deadline.

Personal Development Plans (PDPs)

In order to maintain and improve we all need to continually develop ourselves – even just to stand still as the world moves ahead.

The easiest way to start is with a PDP, we have a **Corporate Template available on Achieve that you can access here.**

Behavioural - How you do your job – soft skills

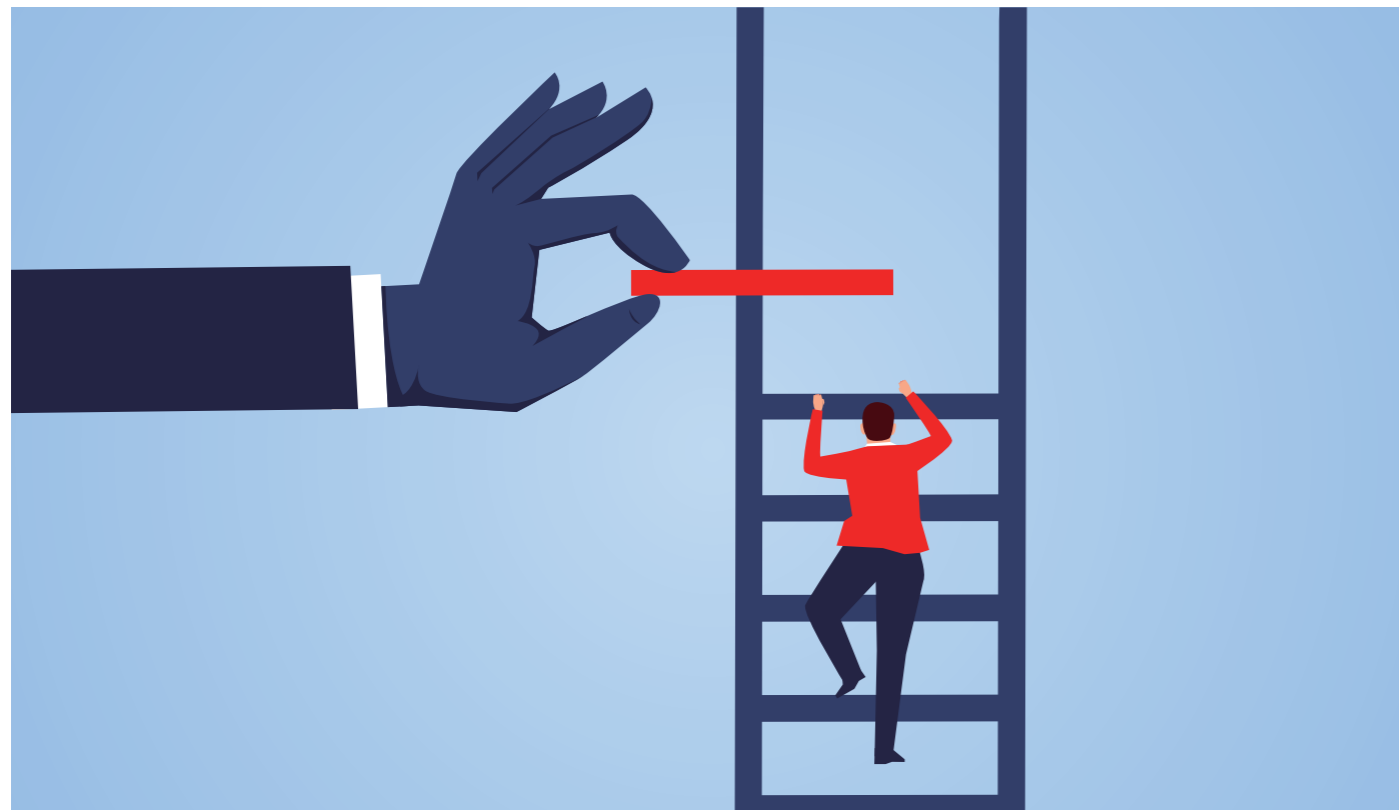
Technical - What you are doing – technical skills

External - Adding value – horizon scanning or looking at external factors

We do this monthly and can tie it in with our one to ones and competencies. Then if the perfect 'next' job comes along you are in a great position and can demonstrate your development. If you wish to book a PDP session please contact gillian.crayden@ashford.gov.uk

The team version is to look at the corporate objectives and cascade these to your team. What development do they need to succeed and achieve these objectives? Is someone likely to fit into your succession plan? If so what development do they need to do? You can add this to their learning plan on Achieve if there are elearning or physical/virtual courses they can attend.

Part of their development is also to make sure that they complete their mandatory elearning, you can monitor this in your reports on Achieve.



Elearning

As a manager you have a responsibility to ensure you and your team complete their mandatory learning. You can view this on Achieve by going to the 'reports' tab and selecting 'certification completion' (my team). You can filter by person, by topic or by status of the learning. Remember to select 'active' for the user so only your current team are displayed, not those that have left the Council. You can also view this information in your 'Teams' tab by selecting the records for the person directly.



Guidance On How To Review Remote Working Arrangements

The success of the council's remote working policy will be determined by how many arrangements are approved and stay in place. It is therefore important to conduct regular reviews of the arrangements. Figures relating to the withdrawal of remote working arrangements will be reported to MT alongside the other HR metrics on a 6 monthly basis and themes will inform future reviews of the policy.

Review of remote working arrangements

As well as being good practice to review working arrangements, we also wish to avoid remote working arrangements agreed via the Remote Working policy becoming contractual over time due to custom and practice so it is essential that arrangements are reviewed regularly.

Managers are required to review the remote working arrangements on a regular basis to ensure they continue to remain viable for both employee and organisation. Reviews should ideally take place every 6 months and a note be made of the discussion. However, if during the intervening period an important issue arises in relation to the effectiveness of the arrangement it should be dealt with at that time, and not left for the review.

Should the arrangement need to be reversed one calendar month's written notice of the termination will normally be required on both sides, please take advice from HR before taking action.

The basic principles of performance management will apply when managing employees who are working remotely and the following areas should form part of the review discussion:

1.1	Has the employee clearly recorded their hours worked on the My Portal system?	
1.2	Has the employee managed their time effectively and not worked overtime or excessive hours to build up flexi time without the prior approval of their manager?	
1.3	Has the employee remained in contact with their line manager or as directed, either through e-mail or by telephone at regular intervals?	
1.4	Has the employee indicated their availability when working remotely using the status options on any online communications software i.e. Skype, Teams and Outlook?	
1.5	Have the agreed work outputs been delivered?	
1.6	Has there been at least one face to face team meeting taking place every 8 weeks and this attended by the employee who works remotely?	
1.7	Has the employee participated satisfactorily in 1:1 meetings each month either face to face or online?	
1.8	Has the employee booked annual leave in accordance with normal council procedures?	
1.9	Has the employee followed reporting procedure when unwell in accordance with normal reporting procedures?	
1.10	Has the employee reported any accidents, injuries, diseases or dangerous occurrences arising from and/or relating to the performance of their work that occurred whilst working remotely?	
1.11	Have there been any concerns over customer service standards because of the employee working remotely?	
1.12	Is there evidence of good team working, knowledge sharing and effective working relations within the team?	
1.13	Has there been reasonable flexibility when the employee has been asked to come to the office on a day they would otherwise been working remotely?	
1.14	Are you confident that we have maintained good data protection and information security standards?	
1.15	Are there any concerns about the employee's wellbeing as a result of working remotely?	
1.16	Are there any new personal circumstances relating to childcare or elder care that need to be considered?	
Conclusions:		
Can the remote working arrangement continue, or does it need to be revised or withdrawn? Please consult with HR over likely decisions to revise or withdraw arrangements.		