

Flexible Working and Family Friendly Policy

September 2009

Introduction

Surrey Youth Focus is a small organisation – currently with five paid staff (4p/t, 1f/t) It is not, and is unlikely to be, highly competitive with the private and public sector on pay, but one of the strengths of the voluntary sector is its ability to innovate, to be responsive, and to be lean and flexible.

Surrey Youth Focus does not wish to invest in HR staff or to develop practices that detract from the “leanness” referred to above, but rather to rely on common sense within the Principles and Practices of this policy, and compliance with law

One of the features that Surrey Youth Focus can offer to its staff and volunteers is to be flexible about its expectations about working, and to be supportive when they encounter personal challenges.

This policy is not intended to be a comprehensive personnel manual, but rather to set out some principles and practices. Much of the guidance in this policy is derived from Business Link whose useful website can be found at: <http://www.businesslink.gov.uk>

Benefits of Flexible working

Introducing employment policies encourages a healthier work-life balance for staff and so can bring real benefits to the organisation as a whole. Research has shown that if employees are less stressed:

- the quality of work is likely to improve
- productivity is likely to rise
- there are fewer mistakes
- sickness absence is reduced
- morale should be higher
- staff are retained, lessening recruitment cost

Principles

The key principles are:

1. **Trust:** It is crucial that in a small organisation staff and volunteers will “do the work, “ “ meet their objectives” , “get things done”, adjusting how and when they may choose to do so in prior agreement with the Chief Executive(CX).
2. **Mutual obligation:** Staff and Surrey Youth Focus as an organisation have obligations to each other that reach beyond the basic employment contract. These can be summarised as being treated respectfully and in compliance with statutory and contract obligations, and delivering back the work/ contribution to the best of one’s ability.
3. **Statutory compliance:** Surrey Youth Focus will comply with all statutory requirements relating to time off, and flexible working

4. **Family Friendly culture:** Surrey Youth Focus recognises that staff and volunteers have family commitments (childcare, adult care etc) and that sometimes these home life issues can intrude upon work, and need to be addressed flexibly by managers in a supportive way.
5. **Communication:** “Stuff happens” – particularly in a busy county like Surrey-traffic is congested, meetings over-run, delays occur, children are ill, staff are ill, accidents happen, bereavements occur, snow blocks roads etc A key principle is therefore always to phone in to the office to let colleagues know what is happening. All staff have exchanged their mobile numbers and addresses, and home email addresses to this end.

Key practices

Staff are already on a variety of different hourly contracts, which makes supervision and interaction tricky to co-ordinate. This will be yet more complex as new volunteers and staff join the team in due course. Certain minimal requirements therefore need to be in place as follows:

Recording Hours / days worked:

- A “normal “ pattern of hours (starting/ finishing) and working days should be established by agreement
- It is an absolute requirement that staff and volunteers record their actual daily attendance (In/Out/leave/ Sick leave), and meetings using the electronic office calendar,
- Similarly their actual pattern of working hours over a weekly/ monthly basis should be recorded on the attached spreadsheet (in its electronic form). If there are any issues resulting, these should be raised in the normal 1:1 meetings held by the CX.

Annual Leave

Annual leave should be agreed beforehand, and signed off (on the leave Form) by the CX, and on the electronic calendar.

School holidays

It is recognised that school holidays, half terms, INSET days etc all present challenges to working parents with children. Surrey Youth Focus will do its best to be flexible about this, enabling staff to vary “normal” attendance to reflect these circumstances.

The recording system above, and the principles of Trust and Mutual Obligation are intended to convey that if hours / days worked are “short” in one week, they will be made up later, subject to the demands of the workload, and to prior agreement.

Team Identity/ Team meetings

A “sense of Team” is important for information exchange, the covering of absences, retaining a sense of energy, purpose and delivery, and to ensure a presence in the office to deal with phone calls and occasional visitors. It can be difficult to develop this when staff are working part time, to different hours, homeworking etc. Consequently monthly team meetings are held on a pre- scheduled basis, and attendance at these is **a requirement upon all staff and volunteers.**

Working from home

There will be times when it is sensible for staff to work from home, and this can be done by prior agreement. Typically this will be when a discrete piece of work has to be done, when “peace and quiet “ is needed, or when remote access to emails, or the website makes it sensible to do so. Staff are only eligible for this once they have passed through their probationary period.

Emergency Events

Surrey is vulnerable to emergency events, particularly relating to traffic chaos, petrol shortage etc Forces of nature also occur – for example there was “snow chaos” in February 2009, whilst all manner of other events may occur – flood, storms etc.

Surrey Youth Focus recognises it has a duty of care to its staff, and staff should apply common sense to situations, depending on the context and reality of the situation.

Staff should not put themselves at risk in these emergency situations It may make sense to come into the office depending on circumstances and commitments – for example some staff live nearby, others further away. The principles of Trust, Mutual Obligation and Communication all apply in this scenario.

All staff have the capacity to access emails from home, and if an untoward event (bad weather) is known of in advance, staff are expected to make arrangements accordingly.

Pandemic flu

The prospect of a further more serious outbreak in Winter 2009 is currently a particular concern.

Pandemic flu could affect staff directly, who should follow NHS advice and “stay away” from the office, though the possibility of doing some work at home may still be feasible for some.

A serious flu (or similar) outbreak may present a real challenge for staff with caring responsibilities for example for those with a sick child, and/or in the event of school closure and children being at home. Much depends on the duration of such events, and so it is not possible to be prescriptive.

However in this scenario just about all the Principles adduced above will apply. It is recognised that parents will have to look after dependents in such circumstances, but ways and means should also be found to keep up with the work, and the contractual hours even if this means an extended period of homeworking.

Conclusion

Surrey Youth Focus wants all its staff and volunteers to enjoy the experience of working for it, and this is more likely to be so if the work/ life balance is right for particular individuals. People’s circumstances will vary considerably, and allowance will be made for this, treating each case on its merits, but consistent with the Principles and Practices set out above.

Approved by Trustees on 23 September 2009.