

Key changes in the revised Blended Working Policy in Local Government

FÓRSA BRIEFING

In summer 2022, Fórsa negotiated a policy with employers called the 'Blended Working Framework' in the local government sector. Fórsa members wanted to ensure a greater flexible working model. Fórsa triggered the review clause in the Framework to:

- Establish blended working across all local authorities
- Embed a culture of blended working into the sector
- Ensure that it is available to members to the greatest extent possible
- Underpin any revised and agreed policy with a fair, transparent and equitable appeals mechanism

Fórsa pursued the review and negotiated the revised Blended Working Policy in the local government sector that was introduced at the end of May 2024. The updated policy represents a significant improvement, offering greater protections for members and incorporating a comprehensive appeals process. These changes align with the WRC Code of Practice for the Right to Request Remote Working, ensuring a fairer and more transparent approach.

What you should know

The revised policy emphasises a fair, transparent, and swifter process with more opportunities for feedback and engagement. It now includes a robust appeals process and greater protections for members, ensuring decisions are justified and reviews are conducted impartially. Know your rights!

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So what's new?

Here's an overview of the key changes

Clearer application process

OLD POLICY Vague engagement between management and employee before decision-making.

NEW POLICY Requires active engagement with the employee before making a decision. Applications must be considered based on their individual merits.

Decision timeline reduced

OLD POLICY Decisions could take up to 12 weeks.

NEW POLICY The decision timeline is significantly reduced to 4 weeks with a possible extension of up to 8 weeks if necessary.

Justifications for refused requests

OLD POLICY General reasons like business needs could be given for refusal.

NEW POLICY Requires specific, objective justifications for refusals that the employee can review and, if needed, challenge on appeal.

Right to request a review

OLD POLICY Informal reviews followed by a formal review conducted by a Senior Manager, potentially from within the same department/directorate.

NEW POLICY Formal reviews are now conducted under the organisation's Grievance Policy, and the Review Officer must be from outside the employee's section or department, ensuring greater impartiality.

Grievance process with further escalation

OLD POLICY Formal reviews are now conducted under the organisation's Grievance Policy, and the Review Officer must be from outside the employee's section or department, ensuring greater impartiality.

NEW POLICY If unresolved after the grievance procedure, employees may refer the case to the WRC. However, the WRC cannot assess the merit of the decision, only the process leading to it.

Exploring alternatives

OLD POLICY No formal mechanism for exploring alternative working arrangements.

NEW POLICY Encourages managers to meet with employees to discuss feasible alternatives, considering each individual's specific circumstances.

If you have any questions or need assistance, contact your Fórsa representative.