

Inclement Weather Policy



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Introduction

This policy is intended to outline the responsibilities of employees for attendance at work during inclement weather conditions.

It is recognised that during periods of inclement weather employees may face great difficulties, not only in attending their place of work, but also in returning home.

The policy has been designed to promote fairness and consistency in the treatment of all employees throughout the Council, whilst considering the needs of the public and the services the Council provides.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- All Council employees
- All contractors working on sites for the Council
- Temporary agency staff

Severe or inclement weather conditions can take many forms. A definition of inclement weather would be snow, ice, fog, floods etc. that render journeys by road, whether by public or private transport, extremely hazardous.

The Chief Officer/Strategic Director on-call, in conjunction with other available Strategic Directors and/or the Chief Executive, will make the decision to declare an "Inclement Weather day". This decision will be made based on local intelligence and advice from external agencies.

This policy is to be used as a guide to the options that are open once the decision has been made.

Risk

In assessing the feasibility of travelling to or from work during periods of inclement weather, it is not the Council's intention that employees put themselves at unnecessary risk. An effort should be made to arrive at work but not jeopardise personal safety. Staff must use their own judgement and pay regard to any warnings issued by agencies such as the police, motoring organisations or weather bulletins. It may be possible to adjust travel times or liaise with management regarding work arrangements.

Continued attendance at work will be decided by the Strategic Director/Chief Officer on call, in conjunction with the Chief Executive, or a nominated Strategic Director, in their absence.

Business Continuity Plans

It is acknowledged that many essential council services have to continue throughout periods of inclement weather, in particular where statutory duties are provided. Strategic Directors and Chief Officers will make judgements based upon the management of essential services that have to be delivered throughout periods of inclement weather.

To support these judgements and ensure that essential services are clearly identified, Directorate Heads of Service/Service Leads should have in place up-to-date Business Continuity Plans, based on the Business Continuity Toolkit of the Local Authority.

When inclement weather is declared, it is essential that Heads of Services and their teams understand contingency arrangements in the form of their Business Continuity plans, to ensure that all staff know their responsibilities within the plan. All managers/Heads of Service should monitor the situation and when declared, instigate their Business Continuity Plan. The Business continuity plan will include the specific cascade arrangements for that service area (including contact numbers for staff) and set out which services are essential services and therefore must be staffed in the case of inclement weather.

Each Business Continuity Plan must establish clear lines of communication to ensure that staff are aware of disruption to services, weather or other event. The toolkit includes a staff incident plan, which includes a communication cascade to facilitate this process.

Process for Determining That a Day is Inclement

The decision to declare a day inclement will be made either by the Chief Executive or in their absence, the Strategic Director/Chief Officer on call, in consultation with other available Strategic Directors and Chief Officers. Appendix A, describes the process to be followed.

This decision must take into account the following considerations:

- a) Local weather conditions
- b) Capacity of the service to function
- c) Advice from the Winter Service Team

The presumption would be in favour of keeping the work place open in order to provide a service to the community, unless to do so would put the health, safety and welfare of employees at risk.

Communications

When a day is declared “inclement”, the communications officer who is on call will be contacted by the relevant Chief Executive, Strategic Director or Chief Officer. A list rota for CAPA will be available in the Emergency Planning Folder on the “O drive”.

Once informed, CAPA will implement their communication plan. This will:

- Ensure Dudley Council staff and elected members are well informed during any inclement weather that may affect the normal working day.
- Ensure service areas understand the importance of communications especially during severe weather with heightened pressure and scrutiny.
- Provide a useful and relevant flow of information to the public, partners and key stakeholders about how council services may be affected by the weather.
- Ensure any communications is carefully managed in the media/public during the inclement weather to protect and enhance the council’s reputation.

CAPA will:

- Send an email with links to the Inclement Weather Policy to Corporate Board and the Leadership Forum distribution list, asking managers to cascade the decision to staff using their agreed business continuity arrangements.
- Add news items and business messages to Connect, with links to the policy.
- Add Information to the Weather Watch page on the Dudley Council website. This will assist to keep staff informed of other services affected by the weather and the wider work of the council.
- Send an agreed email to Cabinet and all Elected Members.
- Update information as required throughout the inclement weather period.

All managers/Heads of Service should monitor the situation and when declared, instigate their Business Continuity Plan.

For outlying work places, managers should check with their own Chief Officer before taking any action.

Dudley Council Plus will also provide essential information throughout normal working hours and will receive regular updates from individual services and the Winter Service Team (WST), relating to the status of Council services and the Highway Network.

Late Arrival and Early Finishing Times

Where unexpected severe weather occurs prior to the start of the working day, the decision to deem the weather as being inclement will be taken as soon as possible or in exceptional circumstance at the next available Corporate Board meeting. Employees will therefore need to log their arrival time at work, and should the day subsequently be declared inclement, employees will need to amend timesheets (clock-ins etc) to book in at their normal start time, providing they have made every effort to arrive as soon as possible.

The service specific business continuity plan will make it clear whether or not staff work for an essential service and should make every reasonable effort to get to work in inclement weather conditions.

Where a day is declared inclement prior to normal finishing time, employees, by agreement of their head of Service/Chief Officer and according to the needs of the service, may be able to leave early. This decision must consider if remaining at a location would put the health, safety and welfare of employees at risk. If it is agreed staff should leave early time will be entitled to book out at their normal finish time/standard working day e.g. 7.24 hours.

Travelling distances should be taken into account when deciding whether employees should leave work due to the impact on traffic congestion, as it may be appropriate to encourage staff to stay later.

Dudley Council Plus, the Repairs Management Centre and Telecare will continue to operate.

Non-Attendance and Notification

Employees who fail to arrive at work must, in consultation with their manager, book the day either as annual leave or, if appropriate, flexi leave.

The employee using the established practice for reporting absence must notify their manager of non-attendance. Staff must be advised that time taken off under the above circumstances, with the agreement of their manager, shall be taken as either annual leave or flexi leave.

Only in exceptional circumstances should an employee be offered unpaid leave and the HR Team supporting individual Directorates will advise as to the effect this would have on pension/service.

Closure of Buildings

In very exceptional circumstances, the Chief Executive (or other nominated Strategic Director in the Chief Executive's absence) in consultation with Strategic Directors may choose to close buildings. In the event of building closure, and in line with contingency plans, curators/building managers or nominated building officers will systematically close the buildings. In the event of a building closure, with no alternative place of work, employees who are sent home will be entitled to book out at their normal finish time/standard working day.

School Closures

The decision to close a school due to inclement weather rests with individual schools. They should refer to their own Business Continuity Plans for this process. If schools require assistance with the development of plans they can contact the Contingency and Disaster Management Team of the local authority.

Elected Members

If a decision is made to declare "Inclement Weather", CAPA will email all elected members notifying them of the decision. To protect the health and safety of elected members council officers and others, all meetings should be postponed, to the first available date. Only in exceptional circumstances should meetings continue following discussion between Elected Members, the Chief Executive and/or available Strategic Directors and Chief Officers.

Work at Other Bases

Where an employee is prevented from attending their own base of work, it may be possible, with the permission of their manager, or by prior arrangement, to attend a base nearer home. This would be permitted on the basis that the employee can perform duties relevant to their normal workload.

Should weather conditions improve throughout the day the employee would be expected to attend their own base of work following consultation with their manager.

Working from Home

Where an employee is unable to attend work at all, they may, with the permission of their manager, or by prior arrangement, work from home if appropriate.

This would be reviewed in the light of improving weather conditions.

Agile Working

If inclement weather is declared, employees who are covered by agile working arrangements should seek guidance from their manager when considering the application of agile working. The application should take into account the needs of the service and welfare of employees in deciding if an employee is required to be office based.

Subsequent Days

Unless further extreme weather occurs, subsequent days are not to be regarded as inclement. Employees should adjust their travel arrangements to achieve as normal working patterns as are practicable.

Inclement Weather Flow Chart

