



# CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADOPTING HOMEWORKING ON A LONGER-TERM BASIS

START WITH A REVIEW

GET RISK ASSESSMENTS COMPLETED

CONSIDER WORKING HOURS

WILL JOB DUTIES STAY THE SAME?

CONSIDER WELLBEING AND SAFETY

WORK COMPLETED

DATA SECURITY

Supported using public funding by



ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND



# Considerations for adopting homeworking on a longer-term basis

As the world come to terms with living under the shadow of COVID-19 for the foreseeable future, Swindon Music Service (SMS) will be thinking about adapting ways of working into the longer-term. As we entered lockdown, we had to rush into homeworking as a temporary measure, perhaps making do with whatever equipment we had available.

However, it now seems appropriate to consider how homeworking can work in the longer-term and whether further investment and/or adaptation is required. As a positive, the crisis has also provided an opportunity for us to re-evaluate how we work and how tasks can be completed more efficiently - for example video conferencing could save hours spent travelling to a meeting.

In this guidance we set out what to consider when we contemplate making homeworking a more long-term, or indeed permanent, arrangement.



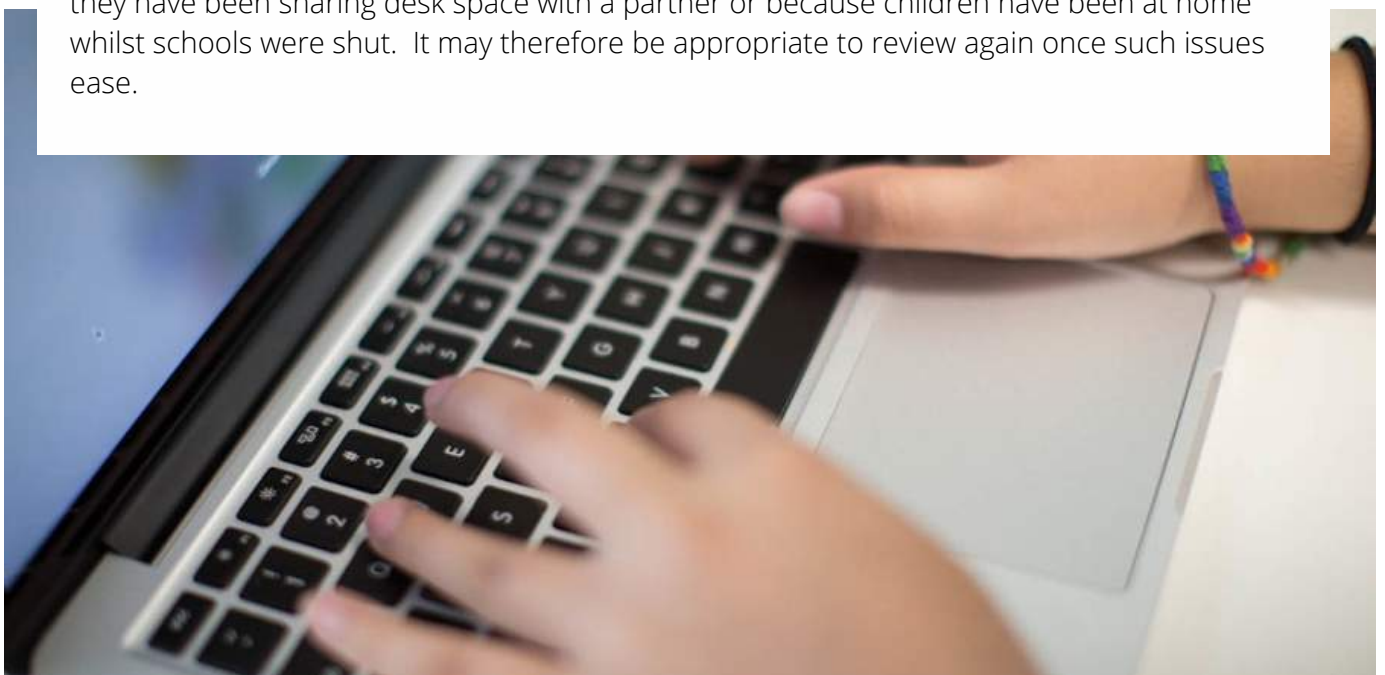
## START WITH A REVIEW

SMS will need to consider whether making the arrangements more long-term gives a greater opportunity to review with the staff what has worked well and what hasn't. It's important that all employees provide full feedback on this as well as the SMS leadership. Sometimes, the issues they've faced may not have been obvious, especially when the SMS' assessment can only be done at a distance.

This also provides a chance to discuss and agree how to improve what hasn't worked as well.

### **A Review Questionnaire is at ANNEX A**

There may have been temporary additional issues affecting homeworking, which should hopefully ease off into the medium term. For example, employees may have struggled as they have been sharing desk space with a partner or because children have been at home whilst schools were shut. It may therefore be appropriate to review again once such issues ease.



## GET RISK ASSESSMENT COMPLETED

When homeworking is only a short-term measure, there is not the requirement to complete proper risk assessments of the working environment. However, if the homeworking is going to continue beyond the short-term, these should be completed.

The risk assessments will need to consider the employee's ability to work safely, including whether they have a suitable workstation and equipment. It should consider the environment, e.g. are the temperature, lighting and noise levels satisfactory? Where the employee is using Display Screen Equipment ('DSE') - for example:

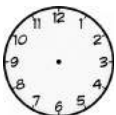
- A computer
- A laptop
- Mobile phone devices

For the vast majority of homeworkers, a DSE risk assessment must be completed for this equipment. Such assessments should consider the safety of the equipment, for example ensuring that any electrical equipment is in good working order etc.

The employee can be asked to complete risk assessment/s at home and then additionally send photos to help provide confirmation of their answers. Further guidance on homeworkers including about risk assessments can be found at **ANNEX B "Temporary Homeworkers"** Fact Sheet.

SMS will need to review the outcomes of the assessments and prioritise addressing any issues that affect the employee working from home. A discussion between the SMS leadership and the employee would then be needed and practical solutions considered.

The risk assessments should be kept under review and reassessed where appropriate, for example if there is any change in circumstances. **A Guide to assist a Risk Assessment** can be found at **ANNEX C**



## CONSIDER WORKING HOURS

It's important that everyone undertakes the hours worked that should be completed. This is important both from their point of view of ensuring the employee is getting work completed, but also to try to ensure they are not working too many hours.



## CONSIDER WORKING HOURS (cont...)

Equally, it can be difficult to switch off when working at home as the lines are blurred as to when the employee has 'left' for the day. It's important to ensure that employees aren't working all the time. Employees should be encouraged to finish for the day, in the way that they would have done in the office.

Employees should also be required to take appropriate breaks and where using DSE, they should be encouraged to take regular breaks away from the screen of 5-10 minutes every hour. This includes completing other tasks such as reading documents or making hand-written notes.



## CONSIDER WHAT EQUIPMENT IS BEING USED

For homeworking to be successful into the long-term, the employee must ensure they have a quiet and comfortable workspace.

The review is a chance to consider whether better equipment is needed/can be provided. For example:

- a higher-spec computer
- a mouse
- a separate keyboard
- a laptop riser
- a more suitable chair
- is their wifi speed sufficient to support home working?
- Would the employee be able to work more efficiently if they could print documents out?

If an employee had already been provided with alternative equipment in their usual place of work e.g. ergonomic desk, chair or mouse, and this equipment is still in the office, consider whether these should now be delivered to the employee at home.

An employee must take care of equipment provided by the SMS. It would be prudent in the long-term to ask them to sign an Agreement obliging them to look after the equipment and which allows deduction of wages for any damages.

SMS will consider whether any particular instructions are needed concerning the equipment - for example how to move or store delicate equipment and any security precautions e.g. not leaving a laptop on display. The equipment will need insuring and SMS will look at its insurance policies to check if they cover the employees taking the equipment home. If they don't, it may be appropriate to ask the employee to cover their equipment on their contents insurance.

Do any security measures need to be increased, for example the security of the charities data secure when accessing it from home?



## CONSIDER HOW COMMUNICATIONS HAVE BEEN WORKING

- How has the employee been communicating with colleagues during lockdown?
- Do they have a work mobile?

If they were using a personal telephone as a temporary measure, it would be appropriate to now provide them with either a work mobile or some means of internet phone communications.

Consider whether to lay out guidance on how often the employee should make contact with colleagues and/or managers. Do daily/weekly meetings need to be scheduled? Regular communications are really important for effectiveness and engagement. Therefore, even if the charity doesn't want to schedule in meetings, regular contact should be maintained.

What software is in place for meetings? If possible, use video call as phone calls to make communications more meaningful, interactive and as close to face-to-face as possible.



## DOES PAPERWORK NEED TO BE UPDATED?

Ensure contact details for the employee are up to date.

Consider whether the new arrangements need any amendments to the 'place of work' within the contract of employment. This would certainly be needed if homeworking was a permanent change.

If homeworking is medium to long-term arrangement whilst COVID-19 will poses a significant health risk, then it may be more appropriate to set this out in a letter instead. It should be clear in the letter that the homeworking arrangement is a temporary arrangement whilst the threat of COVID-19 makes this an appropriate precaution and that it can be brought to an end at the discretion of SMS at any time. As a side note on this, whilst the arrangements may only be temporary, of course if the employee later applies for homeworking on a permanent basis it may be difficult for SMS to argue against this if it did work during the COVID-19 crisis.

Ensure the employee appreciates that they are subject to all the usual SMS rules and procedures whilst at home - e.g. acceptable behaviour policy and IT policy.



## WILL JOB DUTIES STAY THE SAME?

Can all the employees's duties be practically carried out at home? Were any removed whilst this was a short-term arrangement - perhaps by either not being completed or by temporarily transferring them to someone else? In the long-term, with investment into better homeworking equipment or arrangements, can these tasks now be resumed by the employee?

If this isn't possible and they cannot be part of the employee's job if homeworking continues, then the charity would need to discuss and agree this with the employee and be able to justify this. In particular, the charity would need to consider whether there is any loss of status and whether pay needs to be adjusted - presumably through a change in pay would mean the employee would be less inclined to agree.



## CONSIDER WELLBEING AND SAFETY

SMS has a duty of care to take all reasonable steps to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of employees in their working environment, including working from home. As stated above, it is therefore important to ensure risk assessments are properly completed and updated.

Part of the review will consider:

- whether any adjustments need to be made to the job to alleviate strains or challenges arising from home working?
- what support is in place for the employee?
- can they easily raise a query with their line-manager?
- do they know who to call if they have IT problems?

Bear in mind that working from home is certainly more isolating than working in an environment with other people. SMS will need to consider additional engagement or well-being communications with the employee.

- are there any health issues, including any mental health issues, which mean the increased safeguarding or adjustments needs to be put in place for the employee at home?



## WORK COMPLETED

How will the work 'output' be measured into the long-term and if relevant, monitored to ensure productivity is not unduly affected by home working?

Does work need to be transported between the home and the SMS - e.g items have been completed, documents that have been produced? Is there an easier way of doing this?



## DATA SECURITY

Confidentiality and data protection is as important at home as in the office. Can home workers safeguard confidentiality and ensure compliance with data protection regulations? Can the homeworker ensure a safe route for SMS information?

If documents do need to be transported between (e.g.) the employee's home and a client of the usual workplace, can this be done securely?

SMS will remind homeworkers to regularly update virus blockers to keep as protected as possible. They should also follow all the usual IT security rules.

It is important to have set rules about not having phone calls overheard; controlling access to paperwork and IT equipment; and not letting other members of the household use the office equipment.



Q.1 What have been the positives from you working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Q.2 What have you found difficult when working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Q.3 Which tasks in your Job Description did homeworking preclude you from undertaking?

Q.4 Has anyone else undertaken these tasks whilst you have been working from home?

Q.5 Would you wish to return to the Platform to work, or continue to work from home on a temporary basis?

Q.6 What adjustments would be needed to your job/role, if you worked from home?

Q.7 What support would you need from SMS if you worked from home?

Q.8 How easy have you found it to raise a query with your line-manager when working from home?

Q.9 Do you know who to contact if you have any IT problems?

Q.10 Are there any health issues, including mental health issues, which mean you require increased safeguarding or adjustments to be put in place at your home?

Q.11 Have you completed your Data Protection and GDPR training this year?

Q.12 Have you completed any Risk Assessment training?

Q.13 Have you completed a Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessment for homeworking?

Q.14 Have you read, understood and signed the Homeworking Risk Assessment?

Q.15 Please add any further comments you may have that would assist this review



## Who is a temporary homeworker?

A temporary homeworker is a working arrangement between SMS and an employee, where the employee works from their home rather than the Platform on a temporary basis. The arrangement can be flexible and involve flexible hours or it can be where SMS identifies that the employee works set hours, for example the same hours as office/ premises-based employees. There is no set time as to what denotes temporary. It could be as a result of implementing a disaster recovery plan, as part of an agreement to suit the temporary needs of the employee, during a temporary closure of the office for routine maintenance, or as the result of a wider issue such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic.



An employed homeworker has the same statutory rights regarding Health & Safety law as those on SMS premises and SMS has the same duty of care towards them, including to take all reasonable steps to ensure that they have a safe working environment. Temporary homeworking offers many advantages to SMS and an employee on a short term basis, by reducing costs of accommodation and travel (including travel to and from work), allowing flexible working and improving work efficiency. But it also brings its own Health & Safety hazards, from working in isolation to a lack of control over the work environment. This document primarily deals with arrangements which are for temporary homeworkers rather than permanent homeworkers.

## Work environment

Attention must be paid to working out arrangements for homeworking ensuring that care is taken not to invade personal privacy of an employee's home such that it just becomes an extension of SMS' premises. Consideration must be given to available space and lighting, the work activity to be carried out and the work equipment to be used.

Most employees would not have factored homeworking into the design and layout of their home, and so may set up a workspace where they can. Consideration must be given to security, fire, being too hot or too cold, space and ease of access, poor ventilation.

It is difficult for SMS to adequately control all of the Health & Safety hazards that may be present, as they have limited control over the workers home environment. It is recommended that employees are reminded to pay particular attention to good housekeeping and storage facilities for their work equipment and work space. It is sometimes a good idea that once a good workspace is identified and established that a photograph is taken for reference purposes for what 'good' looks like.

## Work Equipment

The number of people undertaking homeworking has increased over the years and with it the diversity of work activities being carried out. This has never been more relevant than during the recent COVID-19 pandemic where people were actively encouraged to work from home where possible.

Due to the variance in work activity, there is a very large variance in work equipment being used. However the standard and quality of this equipment cannot be less than if the work activity was being carried out within the Platform.



### Risk assessment

For temporary arrangements there would be limited requirements to conduct a formal risk assessment in each workers home, however the principles of risk assessment would still be relevant, and a checklist could be used to satisfy this requirement. If a worker is undertaking work that would be normally completed within the employer's premises, it may be that risk assessments could be adapted to suit the case that this is now being completed at home.

### Health & Safety training

The training of temporary homeworkers is very important and must not be assumed that they are trained. Any training provided must be formalised, documented, and signed for.

Training may also incorporate providing information and charity standards so that there is no misunderstanding between parties.

The training may incorporate Health & Safety rules which the employer wants the homeworker to endorse and follow, these must be straightforward and to the point and with no jargon which may cause misunderstanding.

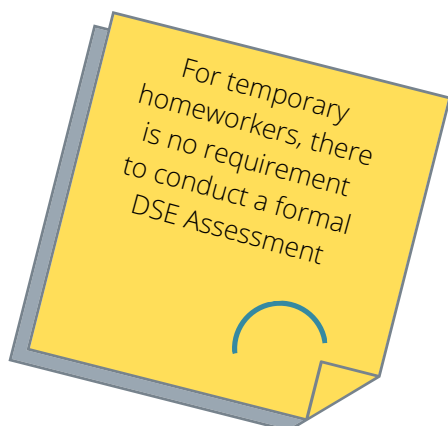
For example

- No person other than the homeworker must use the equipment.
- Take extra care if children/vulnerable people are in the home (i.e. switch off and unplug equipment).
- Report any defects or safety concerns and do not use the equipment until it is safe to do so.
- Report all accidents and near misses.
- Do not lift any more than you're capable of.
- Do not store materials where they could fall on to someone or be pulled over by children.

Temporary homeworkers must be provided with copies of HSE leaflets e.g. 'Health and Safety Law – what you should know' and any others which are applicable.



## Display Screen equipment (DSE)



For temporary homeworkers, there is no requirement to conduct a formal DSE Assessment, although it would still be advisable to ensure that staff are reminded about the principles of a good workstation set up. If the arrangement becomes longer term, employers may wish to review this and ensure that their home workers are able to achieve a good working position and are following guidance.

## Management of homeworkers

Due to the nature of homeworkers they are generally working alone, this can cause a feeling of isolation and sometimes cause unnecessary stress. It is important that good robust lines of communication are established. Even though the arrangements may be temporary, the homeworker must have means of communicating with the company – phone/mobile phone, where necessary emails and texts etc. It is important that a point of contact is established either in one person or maybe two. If there are too many this can cause confusion and crossed purposes.

If homeworkers have to visit the Platform on either regular or ad hoc occasions it is important that this is organised.



### First Aid

First aid is often overlooked for homeworkers and they are left to use what domestic provision they already have and very often consider because they are working from home that any injury/incident or near miss is their own fault. This culture must not be allowed to establish, and homeworkers must report all injury/incident or near misses that occur as a result of, or in connection with, the work activity they are completing at home to the company. Formal accident investigations must be carried out and recorded. Consideration should be given to whether the worker has access to any first aid supplies in their home.



### Monitoring of homeworking

The good management and monitoring of homeworkers is very important to ensure that homeworkers feel valued. It is difficult sometimes to maintain the fine balance of good trust of the homeworker and the 'light touch' control of those same homeworkers.

A weekly contact monitoring list is good to establish so that early warnings of problems which may be occurring either with the homeworker or the work equipment. With modern technology 'face to face' meetings can be held even though these may be brief they are useful for giving opportunities both ways for good communication and feedback.

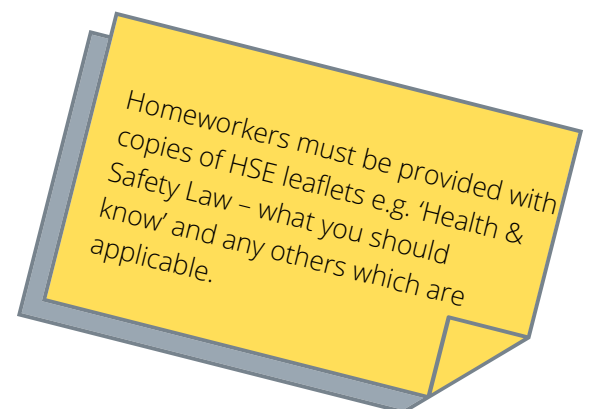
Identify the hazard:	As well as the normal hazards associated with the work activity there may be additional hazards with working from home, these must be discussed with the worker and managed – an example may be isolation/lone working. One which is forgotten is the fire risk may be higher due to using domestic property. Electrical circuits at the homeworker's property may not be to the required standard etc.
Identify who is at risk:	As well as the homeworker being at risk, there may be children and/or vulnerable people at the premises, who may be at risk.
Control measures:	These must be identified and communicated to the homeworker, they may include training, good working practice, legislative requirements and also extra controls to accommodate home working environment, this may include extra monitoring and photographs etc.
Communicate the risk assessment	The homeworker must be trained in all aspects of the risk assessment; they must understand the risk assessment and be able to apply all the controls required within the assessment.
Review the risk assessment	The risk assessment must regularly be reviewed, circumstances for the homework may vary more frequently than an in-house SMS risk assessment for example the homeworker may move home, they may become pregnant or another member of the household may become pregnant.

### Health & Safety training

The training of homeworkers is very important, and it must not be assumed that they are trained. This must be formalised, documented, and signed for. Training may also incorporate providing information and company standards so that there is no misunderstanding between parties.

The training may incorporate Health & Safety rules which the employer wants the homeworker to endorse and follow, these must be straightforward and to the point and with no jargon which may cause misunderstanding. For example

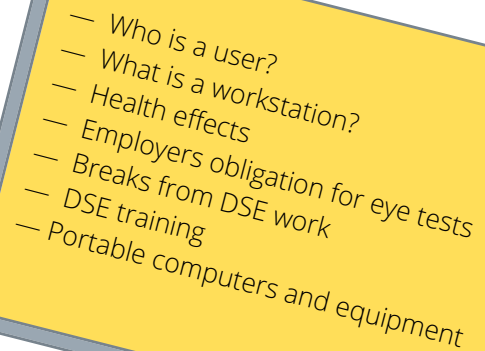
- No person other than the homeworker must use the equipment.
- Take extra care if children/vulnerable people are in the home (i.e. switch off and unplug equipment).
- Report any defects or safety concerns and do not use the equipment until it is safe to do so.
- Report all accidents and near misses.
- Do not lift any more than you're capable of.
- Do not store materials where they could fall on to someone or be pulled over by children.



## Display Screen equipment (DSE)

Employees working at home on a long term or permanent basis must carry out a workstation assessment, this is so that the risk can be identified and controlled.

Considerations must cover and be documented:

- 
- Who is a user?
  - What is a workstation?
  - Health effects
  - Employers obligation for eye tests
  - Breaks from DSE work
  - DSE training
  - Portable computers and equipment

## Management of homeworkers

Due to the nature of homeworkers they generally work alone, and this can cause a feeling of isolation and sometimes cause unnecessary stress. It is important that good robust lines of communication are established. The homeworker must have means of communicating with the company – phone/mobile phone, where necessary emails and texts etc. It is important that a point of contact is established either in one person or maybe two. If there are too many this can cause confusion and crossed purposes. In larger organisations it may be that there is an appointed homeworker manager/supervisor with established duties purely for homeworkers.

If homeworkers have to visit the company on either regular or ad hoc occasions it is important that this is organised. This would be especially true where a company has large amounts of homeworkers and if they visited all at once this would overwhelm the company and cause safety risks in itself.



### First Aid

Very often first aid is overlooked for homeworkers and they are left to use what domestic provision they already have and very often consider because they are working from home that any injury/ incident or near miss is their own fault. This culture must not be allowed to establish, and homeworkers must report all injury/ incident or near misses to the company associated with their work activity. Formal accident investigations must be carried out and recorded. There must be company provided first aid kit containing all the necessary equipment to carry out first aid, monitored and restocked where necessary.



### Monitoring of homeworking

The good management and monitoring of homeworkers is very important to ensure that homeworkers feel valued. It is difficult sometimes to maintain the fine balance of good trust of the homeworker and the 'light touch' control of those same homeworkers.

A weekly contact monitoring list is good to establish so that early warnings of problems which may be occurring either with the homeworker or the work equipment. With modern technology 'face to face' meetings can be held even though these may be brief they are useful for giving opportunities both ways for good communication and feedback.