

**VENTRUS HOMEWORKING POLICY
NETWORK SUPPORT TEAM
NOVEMBER 2023**

Date approved by Trustees of Ventrus Multi Academy Trust	13th December 2023
Review Period	Annually

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Also see “Roles and Responsibilities of line managers” - additional Homeworking document to be read in conjunction with this policy for those with line management responsibilities

1. SCOPE

This policy applies only to members of the Network Support Team (also known as 'Central Team') and is a contractual arrangement. It is considered that these jobs can be done just as effectively and efficiently from home and/or the job involves frequent/regular visits across all/multiple school sites. For the avoidance of doubt, the list (as at September 2023) is:

- Executive Leadership Team (ELT):
 - Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
 - Chief Financial Officer (CFO)
 - Directors of School Improvement (DOSIs)
- Finance posts previously based at Woodwater Academy
- Employee Services Team
- HR Business Partner (HRBP)
- Senior Executive Assistant
- Estates and Facilities Manager
- Catering Lead
- Training School Lead
- Primary School Business Manager
- Head of IT

For the avoidance of doubt, this policy does not apply to other employees of the Trust (including other members of the Network Support Team not named above), who will be expected to continue working from the relevant schools, unless otherwise agreed by the Trust. In the vast majority of cases, employees will work from home on an occasional basis only and with prior agreement from their line manager. Consequently, their working arrangements will remain unchanged.

The guidance covers laptop, desktop PC or paper-based work from an employee's home. The same principles apply if using a laptop in any remote/offsite location, e.g.

- whilst travelling
- at another organisation's workplace
- from home
- from other Trust locations

You will be required to work from your home address for the duration of your homeworking arrangement. If you wish to work from a different location at any time, this will need to be agreed with your line manager in advance. If your home is outside of the county of Devon, you will need to agree an approach with your line manager which may be different. You are not permitted to work outside of the country.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Trust recognises that employees who are homeworking need to feel safe and comfortable, maintaining trust, empowerment and respect. Different personalities have different needs and strong workplace relationships are essential.

Working at home, either on a laptop, desktop PC or carrying out paper-based work is a low risk activity. This type of working pattern can offer a range of potential benefits, but there are also associated hazards.

These include:

- Working in isolation (wellbeing, stress or personal safety and accidents).
- Aspects of the work environment like display screen equipment (DSE), fire safety and electrical safety.

The guidance in this policy provides practical advice on steps to take to ensure work at home is carried out in a healthy and safe way. The checklist at **Appendix 1** is for staff to consider the safety of their homeworking environment.

3. INSURANCE

The Risk Protection Arrangement is in place. The Trust is not liable for any loss, injury or damage that may be caused from any equipment that is not provided by the Trust but required by the employee to work from home.

Home insurance may be affected by having to work from home. Staff should check this with their home insurance provider.

Employees should check with their home insurer to ensure that homeworking does not invalidate their own policy.

4. ACCIDENTS, INCIDENTS AND ILL HEALTH REPORTING

Accidents and near misses should all be reported immediately to the line manager, the Estates and Facilities manager and the HRBP (*See Appendix 8*).

Sickness Absence should be reported to the line manager in the first instance, as explained in the Managing Sickness Absence Policy.

5. EXPENSES

5.1 Travel Expenses

The contracts of employment for permanent homeworkers will reflect the fact that their normal place of work is home. Within the County of Devon, reasonable and necessary car mileage expenses will be payable for work related journeys beginning and ending at the home base, with the exception of Team meetings. Those homeworking employees not living within the County of Devon should liaise with their line manager regarding travel expenses, this has been authorized for two members of staff.

It should be noted that employees whose normal place of work is home may still be expected to attend one of the Trust sites from time to time for Team meetings, (*see Section 6.1*). All other terms and conditions of employment remain unchanged by homeworking.

Microsoft Teams should be used where appropriate and business journeys should be limited to the essential delivery of individual roles. Those covered under this policy should liaise with their line manager in advance if increased business mileage is anticipated.

5.2 Homeworking Allowance

A monthly allowance of £26, paid via payroll, will be made available to permanent homeworkers, the amount will be reviewed annually each September and in line with HMRC rules. It is expected that this amount is used to ensure efficient broadband quality to enable the employee to work efficiently and effectively.

The flat rate payment applies equally to part-time and full-time staff and will not be subject to tax, National Insurance or pension deductions. Employees in receipt of the homeworking allowance should ensure that they are not claiming additional credit from HMRC for working from home via their tax code or other such arrangement. In such instances of double claiming the Trust will not be held liable for any amounts that may be due for repayment to HMRC.

There is no requirement for the employee to keep records of additional costs incurred in order to receive the homeworking allowance.

5.3 Tax matters

It is the employees' responsibility to seek specific advice on tax matters and implications with regard to homeworking e.g. capital gains.

6. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 Business Rates

Where an area of the home is dedicated exclusively to work, there could be a liability for business rates, but this is unlikely where business use is subsidiary to domestic use (e.g. a desk in a room that is also used for domestic purposes). For further information visit www.voa.gov.uk.

6.2 Planning

Planning permission may need to be considered by employees in relation to working from home. There may be a planning condition imposed on the original planning permission for the property, which could prevent home working that the employee needs to check. Otherwise, planning permission would only need to be sought if the change of use to working from home would change the overall character of the property e.g. a marked rise in traffic or people calling, or disturbance to neighbours at unreasonable hours. All of these situations are highly unlikely if the guidance in this policy is adhered to.

6.3 Possible legal restrictions

Employees need to check that there is no legal obstacle to them working from home, e.g. a restrictive covenant attached to the lease or deeds of the property forbidding non-domestic activity. If the property is rented, the landlord's agreement to the arrangements for home working may be necessary.

7. COMMUNICATIONS

7.1 Team Meetings

It is expected that Team meetings will take place approximately every 6 weeks. All employees listed in Section 1 are expected to attend, unless otherwise agreed with their line manager. Travel expenses will not be paid for travelling to and from these meetings, which usually take place at Woodwater Academy (Exeter) or St Andrew's School (Cullompton).

An employee must never have meetings in their home with pupils or parents, nor give them their home address or telephone number.

7.2 Dress Code and Online Meetings

There is an expectation that for online meetings, cameras will be "on". Smart casual/smart dress is expected when more formal meetings are taking place.

It is essential that the employee ensures meeting participants know when someone is in the room with them/able to hear the conversation. The employee must take steps such as closing doors and using headphones to maintain confidentiality.

8. DATA SECURITY

The employee is responsible for ensuring the security of information in their home and outside of the workplace. To comply with data protection legislation, employees must only store or process Trust data on equipment which has been provided by or authorised by the Trust.

To comply with data protection legislation, the Trust retains the right to conduct a data protection impact assessment (DPIA) to assess the risks involved with data processing in the home. Where this is necessary, the Trust will contact you to arrange the DPIA.

A useful homeworking security guide has been prepared by the Trust DPO and can be found at **Appendix 7**. All confidential documents should be locked away, suitable lockable storage will be provided by the Trust on request when needed. Employees should also comply with the Trust's other policies on Data Protection and Privacy.

Any documentation used during the course of homeworking, which may hold confidential or Trust sensitive information, should be stored and treated as if they were confidential. **Employees should not dispose of any confidential paperwork at home. All confidential paperwork should be collected and** disposed of in the Trust confidential waste bins when the employee visits Trust premises.

9. DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT (DSE)

Permanent homeworkers should be aware that setting up their workstation correctly at home is equally as important as when they are in the office, and the same principles apply. A workstation includes the desk or table, chair, and PC or laptop.

If a homeworking employee is experiencing pain or discomfort or have an underlying health condition which is affecting their work, after completing the checklist at **Appendix 1**, they should contact their line manager who will be able to organise a full DSE assessment via Occupational Health. The HRBP can help arrange this and support the line manager through the process.

Whilst it may seem easier to simply open the laptop and start working without making any adjustments, this can lead to poor posture, which can cause pain and discomfort over time. It is well worth taking a couple of minutes to set up a workstation correctly every time the employee starts work.

See Appendix 5 - Tips for working on a PC or laptop at home

10. WELLBEING

10.1 Hours of Work

The hours of work should not exceed those in the contract of employment and in any case those applied through the Working Time Directive.

10.2 Support resources

A range of support Wellbeing resources are available at **Appendix 6**. Additional support may be available by speaking to the employee's line manager.

10.3 Home Working and Lone Working Risk Assessments

See Appendices 2 and 3

Concerns relating to wellbeing at work should be discussed with the line manager.

11. SAFE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

11.1 Fire and electrical safety

Employees should make sure they have smoke alarms fitted and check these regularly.

<http://www.dsfire.gov.uk/YourSafety/SafetyInTheHome/SmokeAlarms/index.cfm?siteCategoryId=1>

Employees should not overload sockets adaptors. This online tool can assist in deciding if a socket is overloaded.

<https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/guidance/safety-around-the-home/overloading-sockets/>

Employees should carry out regular visual checks on plugs, cables and electrical equipment and should not use items which have damaged casing, cables, plugs, scorch marks or other signs of damage.

[Further information](#) is available from the Health and Safety Executive.

Employees should ensure Trust owned electrical equipment has been PAT tested (it should have a sticker confirming this).

11.2 Emergencies (including first aid)

Employees should:

- make sure they have access to basic first aid provisions

- have an emergency plan including what to do if there is a fire
- report work related accidents and incidents to their line manager, the Estates and Facilities Manager and the HRBP. **See Appendix 8.**

11.3 General working environment

Employees should:

- Give themselves enough space to work comfortably and move around.
- Ensure their work area is free from trip hazards like trailing cables, bags other items etc.
- Make sure there is adequate lighting, temperature, and ventilation.

Employees are reminded to use the homeworking checklist at **Appendix 1** to assess their home working environment on an annual basis.

12. DEPENDANT CARE

The Trust recognises that it may not always be possible for employees to arrange dependant care due to unforeseen circumstances. It is a condition of the Homeworking Agreement that arrangements for regular dependant care are made in order to allow the employee to efficiently work from home without disruption. Any changes to dependant care arrangements that will impact on an employee working from home should be reported to the line manager immediately to enable appropriate support to be provided and alternative arrangements considered where necessary.

13. REVIEW OF A HOMEWORKING AGREEMENT

Any homeworking arrangement should be reviewed periodically (at least once a year). This will allow both parties to assess whether the arrangement is still appropriate.

14. TERMINATION OF A HOMEWORKING AGREEMENT

A Homeworking Agreement can be terminated, by either party, by giving three months' notice. This may be varied in exceptional circumstances. Where the agreement relates to permanent homeworking, advice should be sought from ELT in conjunction with the HRBP as the termination of the Homeworking Agreement may have wider consequences to the contract of employment.

Upon termination of any Homeworking Agreement, an employee will return all equipment provided by the Trust. Where necessary, the Trust may need to arrange a home visit to reclaim equipment and will contact the employee to make the appropriate arrangements.

15. USEFUL INFORMATION

- Health and Safety Executive [information on homeworking](#)
- Chartered Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors infographics on [homeworking and staying healthy - Free Home Work Infographic | Human Focus |](#)
- [IOSH remote working guidance](#)

Appendix 1 - Homeworking checklist

Use this checklist to identify any possible hazards in your homeworking area. Once completed, this checklist can be used in discussion with your line manager to confirm working arrangements and help you complete a risk assessment.

Employee (full name):	
Job Title:	
Line Manager:	
Home workplace location (room)	
Date:	

	✓ or X	Comments
A: Working environment		
1. Is there adequate space in the area you are working in to work safely?		
2. Is your working area free from tripping hazards (e.g. trailing cables)?		
3. Are objects like equipment, bags, paper, files and books stored safely?		
4. Is there an adequate working temperature (Minimum 16 °C)?		
5. Is there adequate lighting?		
B: Display screen equipment		
1. Have you used the visual checklist Free Home Work Infographic Human Focus 		
2. Have you completed the HSE assessment in the last twelve months?		
3. Have any concerns from the above been followed up with your line manager?		
C: Emergency actions		
1. Do you have access to basic first aid provisions?		
2. Do you know what to do in an emergency, and have you worked out a fire drill so you and anyone else in the house knows what to do and where to go in case of a fire?		
3. Are smoke detector/s fitted?		
4. Are you familiar with procedures for accident and incident reporting?		

	✓ or X	Comments
D: Electrical safety		
1. Are Trust owned portable electrical appliances PAT tested with a sticker applied?		
2. Do you carry out frequent visual checks on plugs, wiring and casings of electrical equipment?		
Employee signature:		Date:
Print name:		
Line manager signature:		Date:
Print name:		

Appendix 2 - Lone Working Risk Assessment



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Appendix 3 - Homeworking Risk Assessment



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Homeworking upda

Appendix 4 - HSE DSE Assessment

Display screen equipment (DSE) workstation checklist ([hse.gov.uk](https://www.hse.gov.uk))



DSE%20Workstatio
n%20Checklist.docx

Appendix 5 - General guidance - Workstation, working from home

- 1. Raise your screen**
Make sure your screen is raised so that the top of the screen is at eye level. This can be done using an adjustable laptop stand, a box or some books if necessary.
- 2. Use a separate keyboard and mouse**
This allows the laptop screen to be positioned correctly.
- 3. Report pain or discomfort**
If you feel discomfort, report it to your line manager as soon as you notice it. In some circumstances, an opinion from, or referral to, the Occupational Health Service may be appropriate. The HRBP can support with the referral process.
- 4. Adjust your chair height**
Your arms should be at right angles, with forearms horizontal and lightly supported by the work surface. You may need a footrest if your feet are not firmly on the floor.
- 5. Make sure the lower back is well supported**
Support for your lower back will help encourage good posture. You can use a folded towel to give you more support or consider a back-support cushion if needed.
- 6. Take regular, short breaks**
Move around for five or ten minutes every hour, aiming for frequent, short breaks. Consider taking micro breaks to stretch, move around, change activity by taking a phone call, do some reading or get a drink to avoid prolonged static postures.

Take more frequent breaks if your DSE setup is not optimal or if you are experiencing discomfort.

Try to avoid using phones or tablets for a long time, sitting on unsupportive seating such as a sofa, and static postures.

Appendix 6 - Wellbeing Resources

Online guidance

Public Health England has published online guidance setting out principles to follow, in order to help people manage their mental health.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wellbeing-in-mental-health-applying-all-our-health/wellbeing-in-mental-health-applying-all-our-health>

Keeping in contact (line managers and employees)

Line managers will keep in touch with employees on a regular basis. If you are having problems coping, please contact your line manager in the first instance.

Counselling helplines

The Trust uses the following counselling helplines, available free of charge:

Education Support - <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/>

Talkworks - <https://www.talkworks.dpt.nhs.uk/>

There are also a number of NHS / charity helplines, which can be found here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/nhs-voluntary-charity-services/charity-and-voluntary-services/get-help-from-mental-health-helplines/>

Look after your physical wellbeing

It is widely known that physical health has a big impact on emotional and mental wellbeing. The Trust encourages employees (whether or not you are working from home or in a school) to build some exercise into your day. There are resources here: [Every Mind Matters - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters)

Caring for sleep

The NHS provides advice and tips [here](#). Productivity during working hours will almost inevitably improve with better quality of sleep.

Health & Safety in the home workplace

As well as the IT and logistical challenges that come with working from home, the Trust has a duty of care to take all steps that are reasonably necessary to ensure the health, safety and welfare of employees, and provide and maintain a safe system of work. This is particularly pertinent where the length of time working from home may well be extensive. As a result, we recommend that you adopt the correct posture for desk use, and that you take regular breaks.

For those employees who are using a computer whilst working at home, whilst a temporary desk set-up might be suitable for short-term use, it might have more adverse effects if used for a longer period of time (for example, working at a low coffee table, or sitting on a stool instead of a chair with proper back support).

If you have any questions regarding your homeworking arrangement, please contact your line manager in the first instance.

and finally ...

Employee responsibilities

Employees also have a responsibility to take reasonable care of their own health and safety.

Anyone working from home should keep in regular contact with their manager. They should also tell their line manager about:

- any health and safety risks
- any homeworking arrangements that need to change

Speak to your line manager if you need help with:

- how to follow a routine whilst working from home
- IT and technology
- ways to keep up the formal and social flow of work

Looking after your mental health

[https://mentalhealth-](https://mentalhealth-uk.org/?gclid=EAlaIQobChMI7bnG6q6m8gIVBoBQBh1kKQs0EAAYASAAEgIAkvD_BwE&gclidsrc=aw.ds)

[uk.org/?gclid=EAlaIQobChMI7bnG6q6m8gIVBoBQBh1kKQs0EAAYASAAEgIAkvD_BwE&gclidsrc=aw.ds](https://mentalhealth-uk.org/?gclid=EAlaIQobChMI7bnG6q6m8gIVBoBQBh1kKQs0EAAYASAAEgIAkvD_BwE&gclidsrc=aw.ds)

Communication and Morale

1. **Over communicate** - important in our Trust multigenerational teams but even more important when you are working remotely. "If you question whether your colleague will want to know something, share it." Be proactive, ask, if there is something you want to know.
2. **Tell your team how they can reach you** - even if you do not manage people, be clear with colleagues about your working arrangements.
3. **Keep up more casual communication habits** - if you normally catch up with colleagues in person before a meeting, do the same before dialling into a group conference call when everyone is remote. If you normally chat with a colleague first thing in the morning, do the same remotely. Try to follow similar rituals and habits.
4. **Stay aligned with Trust culture** - Even though working remotely does change interactions since you're no longer together in person, you can still make sure that the little things you did in the office continue. This might include sending funny, work-appropriate emails; chatting about sports or your family or anything else you would normally do whilst making a coffee. These little things help reduce feelings of isolation and anxiety.
5. **Take time for "coffee" chat** - since you won't be bumping into your colleagues in the corridors, offices or car parks, you won't have the same opportunity for chitchat and human connection, but it is important to retain this. Make time to contact colleagues, check in personally, share stories, ask how people are doing. If you are a manager, encourage regular team meetings online.
6. **Dress and groom professionally** - Your morning prep routine plays a large role in determining your mindset for the day. You'll find you're more productive when you dress for the day.

Remember, if you have any questions, please contact your line manager in the first instance.

Appendix 7 - Data Security Guidance



Homeworking
Security Guide AL.pc

Appendix 8 - Accident Reporting Procedure



Ventrus Accident
Incident Reporting (

