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TSA Q&A Guides

# Home Working Technology During the COVID-19 Crisis©

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[admin@tsa-voice.org.uk](mailto:admin@tsa-voice.org.uk) [www.tsa-voice.org.uk](http://www.tsa-voice.org.uk)



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### BACKGROUND

During the COVID-19 crisis you will be facing challenges as you work to protect staff and service users. You will likely be reviewing business continuity plans, and considering different and flexible ways of working, including home working.

You can find a TSA Good Practice Guide for *Home Working for Call Handlers During the COVID-19 Crisis* [HERE](#).

A number of technical questions have also been raised by sector organisations and we try to cover these in the following Q&A covering health and safety in the home environment, technology support and operational considerations:

#### **Q. What is the quickest and safest way of providing alarm monitoring for home workers?**

A. Firstly, avoid methods which require installation of application software or client data on home PCs. Most if not all providers of monitoring software support remote connection methods, employing technology such as Remote Desktop Services (RDS), which allow remote viewing and control of a system from a distance. This sort of connection only requires low data rates between the home and the monitoring centre equipment. Secondly, voice connections need to be put in place between the monitoring system and the home workers, and this can be as easy as configuring the central software to dial selected phone numbers when alarm calls are set-up. Thirdly, follow some simple advice on keeping the home environment safe and secure (see TSA's guide....).

#### **Q. Will I lose the ability to voice record calls, or to check audit trails?**

A. Normal functions such as VR and audit are retained if you manage alarm calls as described above: All of the data and voice activity is still visible and logged by the central system. However, you will need to check with your software provider to understand if there are any constraints on your ability to access and playback voice recordings remotely.

**Q. There are various options for providing voice call connections for home workers, which is the best method?**

A. This will depend to some extent on the home working environment. For example, a busy household will have lots of family needs for regular contact, and so the home landline phone would not be a good option. Digital voice connections can be provided, using 'softphones' that connect via the home PC. This offers an elegant solution, often with the best quality voice connection. However, it relies on good quality broadband connectivity, and some services have found this to be a problem. The most commonly used method is perhaps a little surprising, where dedicated mobile phones are deployed with headset devices, although this carries extra costs of course. In short, start with a review of the home environments to help select the best option. If in doubt talk to your monitoring system supplier.

**Q. What happens to all of the home working if our primary system fails and we need to move to disaster recovery mode?**

A. The home workers simply need to log-on to the alternative (DR) system in this situation. They will be able to access DR system information, and calls will be routed to them. Your IT team or system supplier should be asked to provide a simple set of instructions for the home workers to use in this situation.

**Q: What operational factors do I need to consider?**

- A. During a shift, the bandwidth available for communication with the monitoring centre should not be shared with other processes or devices that can consume bandwidth including computer games and other Internet services.
- B. Check mobile signal in the individual's home is suitable, potentially using mobile signal boosters or roaming SIM.
- C. Ensure correct DSE in place – (minimum screen size)
- D. Ensure headsets are used so confidential alarm calls cannot be overheard by other members of the household.
- E. Ensure the home setup for taking alarm calls can be done in a non-communal area or high traffic area (such as the kitchen).
- F. Avoid long shifts (e.g. 12 hours) of alarm monitoring.
- G. Consider additional changes required for anyone with a disability to support them working from home.
- H. Working from home removes from staff the opportunity to interact with and socialise with colleagues and to receive informal instruction on recent news and activities; feelings of isolation can be reduced by:
  - a. Requiring home workers to interact with colleagues every day;
  - b. Arranging for training and feedback sessions to be performed in groups using virtual meetings;
  - c. Regular contact with Supervisors, whenever concerns arise and especially at the start and end of shifts. It is important that employers provide regular on-going assessment either by telephone or video conferencing.