



Housing LIN

Connecting people, ideas and resources

Report

Findings from the Housing LIN survey of home-based work in Housing Organisations

JANUARY 2021

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Introduction

As Coronavirus was talking hold in early 2020, the Housing LIN was one of a small group of organisations, consisting mainly of academics and architectural practices, that formed a new network to look at the drivers for increased working from home, especially in relation to social housing.

With Covid-19 triggering millions of people to now work from home, the [Workhome Project](#) has been monitoring the resultant social, physical, environmental and technological change that has taken place to impact on the way and where we work.

To better understand the effect on the housing sector, the Housing LIN launched a survey back in the autumn of 2020 to identify and capture the impact and examples of home-based working during the Covid-19 pandemic for their staff and residents. In collaboration with the Workhome Project, we aim to use the results of the survey to inform and influence national policy, including the recently published Social Housing White Paper, spread the practice of innovative approaches of home working across the housing social sector, and make recommendations for the social housing sector.

Responses and trends:

The survey received an impressive 190 responses from a range of tenants, employees and associates of a large number of housing organisations. The findings are clustered around the following headings.

1. Tenancy agreements - permission to work from home

The majority of respondents did not know whether their organisation included a statement about homeworking in their Tenancy Agreement. Interestingly, only 22 out of 190 respondents stated that there was mention of home-based working.

Out of the 22 that knew there was inclusion of statements about home-working in the tenancy agreement 10 people answered, for each, that the inclusion was not encouraging or neutral in terms of encouraging people to work from home. Six respondents stated that the clause in the Tenancy Agreement specifically prohibited tenants from running a business from their home. However, 15 stated it did not. For those that required permission from the organisation to run a business from their home - 87% stated that they did require permission.

2. Flexible home working

Regarding flexible home-working policies that enabled housing organisation employees to work from home successfully, a large proportion of the respondents (84) stated that their organisation had a policy in place; only 7 stated that their organisation did not have a policy in place. However, with government guidance under lockdown encouraging people to work from home, interestingly

70 stated that their organisation did not have any policy to promote home-based working or running a home-based business as means to employment for tenants – compared to 16 that stated their organisation did.

3. Supporting people to work from home

Although a minority of the respondents stated they were aware of other policy changes that enabled tenants and staff to work from home, those that were aware stated that the policies promoted or provided the following:

- Flexible / Agile working methods
- Provision of digital equipment and software, such as iPads and Microsoft Teams subscriptions
- Provision of monitors, chairs and other equipment
- Flexibility in the number of days required to come into the office – on the basis of necessity
- Updated risk-assessments to work

4. Other improvements for working from home

33 respondents stated they were aware of physical or digital improvements to property their organisation manages to enable home-based work. Of those that were aware of such improvements, the following were stated as being implemented:

- Improved internet bandwidth and extension of Wi-Fi coverage within the housing schemes
- Laptops and smartphones being issued to staff
- Use of video-calling applications such as Skype, Zoom or Microsoft Teams

The proportion of tenants that stated they'd worked from home since the onset of the pandemic was 39%. When asked to rate their internet connection in their home, 29% stated the connection was excellent, 53% stated it was adequate and 18% stated it was inadequate.

Half the tenants that responded, although out of a small number, stated that they faced spatial constraints when working from home. The cited issues included:

- Children or other family members coming to live in their home, limiting their space to work
- The impacts of working from home on partners and other co-habitants
- Lack of a suitable work desk set-up
- Lack of reliable internet connection
- General spatial constraints – due to size of home, family size

5. Wider benefits of working from home

A large number of respondents stated that there were some positives that they didn't initially expect to arise from home working. These include:

- Higher levels of productivity – due to time saved on travel and easier setup of and ability for more frequent team meetings
- Better work life balance, due to ability to freely manage time whilst working from home
- Monetary savings on fuel costs for travel and savings on lunch expenditure
- Adoption of better digital hardware and software
- Improved communication through regular and/or frequent digital contact with colleagues and residents
- Use of digital technology lowering the need for paper documents
- More access to online training and webinars

6. Other comments received about working from home

Additional comments centred around working from home that respondents wanted to raise included:

- An overall preference for home-working – some respondents stated they would not want to return to an office at all
- Flexible hours needing to be stated for all employees, even for when working at an office – to allow for a better work/life balance
- Ease of working from home for people with a disability – if their home environment has been adapted sufficiently, they'd prefer to work from home
- Challenging for people living in shared accommodation to work from home
- There is a negative impact from loss of physical social presence with colleagues, as would be the case if working from an office
- A recognised need for future adaptations to homes to enable better working from home
- A difference in the ability to work from home – desk-based staff might find it easier to adapt, whilst people working in support roles might find it harder to adapt, as they'd previously relied on face-to-face interaction

Conclusion and recommendations

This survey identifies a number of factors that may contribute to the fact that only a third of tenant respondents were able to work from home during Covid, despite a national figure of nearly 50% in April 2020. It identifies a notable disparity in housing organisations' attitudes to home-based work for employees compared to tenants. On the positive side, a substantial majority had policies in place that enabled their employees to work from home successfully. On the other hand, despite government guidance encouraging people to work from home under lockdown, only a fifth of organisations had policies in place to promote home-based working or running a home-based business as means to employment for tenants.

The results from this survey draw us to make the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1:

Housing organisations should develop policies that support and facilitate their tenants in home-based work, including 'to start and run' a home-based business.

Most respondents did not know if their organisation's tenancy agreement mentioned home-based work. Of those that did, six prohibited tenants from running a home-based business outright, while nearly 90% discouraged the working practice by requiring written permission, which could be withdrawn, before a tenant could start a home-based business.

Recommendation 2:

So long as a clause requiring tenants not to cause a nuisance to their neighbours is already in place, housing organisations should review their tenancy agreements and remove clauses that prohibit or discourage home-based work/ running a home-based business. This should include the removal of any requirement for written permission. Housing organisations should communicate this change of policy directly to all tenants.

Just under a fifth of organisations had improved the speed and coverage of Wi-Fi in their housing schemes to enable home-based work. Less than a third of tenants that had worked from home since the onset of the pandemic had access to an excellent internet connection - almost a fifth stated theirs was inadequate.

Recommendation 3:

Tenants need access to a reliable, fast and stable Internet connection. Further improving internet bandwidth and extending Wi-Fi coverage within organisations' housing schemes may increase tenants' access to home-based employment, including running home-based businesses.

Not having enough space is identified as a constraint for tenants working from home, resulting in a lack of suitable work set-up, and impacting negatively on other members of the household.

Recommendation 4:

Local authorities should consider their allocations policies with regard to homeworking tenants, who would benefit from the allocation of an additional room for use as a dedicated workspace. It is probable that such a policy would have a beneficial impact on the proportion of tenants in employment, particularly with regard to those unable to enter employment outside the home because of disability or illness.

Many participants experienced substantial wider benefits of working from home, in terms of better work/life balance, higher levels of productivity, financial savings, improved communication with colleagues and residents and more access to online training. An overall preference for working from home was expressed, in particular regarding flexible working hours and the ease of working from home for those with a disability. It was noted, however, that working from home was challenging for those in shared accommodation, and that future home adaptations will be needed to create appropriate spaces for people to work in.

The recommendations in this report offer strategies for housing organisations to increase the incidence of home-based work and the running of home-based businesses among their tenants.

Recommendation 5:

When planning the future design of new social housing, housing organisations should take into account spatial, technological and accessibility requirements to accommodate people in a range of different occupations and situations to work from home, and/or design in scope for future adaptations.

About the Workhome Project

WORKHOME PROJECT

The Workhome Project team has an unrivalled interest in, and depth of understanding of, the architecture of home-based work. This multi-disciplinary team came together in April 2020 to encourage and facilitate disruptive thinking in response to the huge shift in working patterns. The team have since influenced debate and promoted innovation and excellence in the field of design for home-based work (www.workhomeproject.org).

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to JJW ARKITEKTER in Denmark for their permission to use the cover image.

About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 25,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England, Wales and Scotland to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population. Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'ideas lab' on specialist/supported housing, our online and regional networked activities, and consultancy services:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing that enables older and disabled people to live independently in a home of their choice
- provide insight and intelligence on latest funding, research, policy and practice to support sector learning and improvement
- showcase what's best in specialist/supported housing and feature innovative projects and services that demonstrate how lives of people have been transformed, and
- support commissioners and providers to review their existing provision and develop, test out and deliver solutions so that they are best placed to respond to their customers' changing needs and aspirations.

To access a selection of related resources on designing for 'work ready' housing, visit our dedicated pages at: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Design-building/work-ready-housing/> And with HAPPI in mind, on these pages you will also find a guest blog written by the Housing LIN's Jeremy Porteus [HAPPI Working from Home? Designing 'work ready' housing](#).

Published by

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