

## Health and Safety Executive Board Paper

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### HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE

#### The HSE Board

#### PROPOSALS FOR HOME/FLEXIBLE WORKING PILOTS

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#### Issue

1. Proposals for substantial pilots to introduce more flexible working in HSE, and to seek to reduce accommodation overheads.

#### Timing

2. Urgent (Preparations need to get underway to allow the pilots to commence as soon as possible in order to allow the results to feed into forthcoming property lease/rent negotiations at Luton, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Wrexham and Carmarthen. Provisionally, all three pilots are expected to commence early in 2004 for a period of six months, followed by formal evaluation).

#### Recommendations

3. **Board members are asked to:**
  - note the property issues that BSD and FoD are seeking to resolve at Worcester and Bristol (details in Annex A);
  - agree that the field pilots are undertaken using an appropriate variant of traditional hot-desking and 'team space' (details in Annex B);
  - agree to plans for a limited home working pilot in Policy Group, exploring the issues of team working (Annex C, paragraph 5);
  - note RPD's intention to identify somebody in BSD personally drive this work forward (paragraph 25);
  - provide a steer on the reversibility issue (paragraph 31).

## Background

4. The Board has asked for proposals to pilot models of more flexible working, for both field and policy staff to assess empirically whether savings can be made in the cost of the estate, whilst also improving the flexibility, productivity and work-life balance of those participating in the pilots. For the purposes of the pilots, formal home working presumes that the normal work base is an individual's home, where a significant proportion of working takes place and the necessary furniture and IT kit is provided. Flexible home working is where the normal work base is an office, but a proportion of working hours are spent working at home using a remote access-enabled laptop PC.

## Argument

5. Recommendation 6 of the Corporate Support Review calls for "A highly mobile, productive, and better equipped operational field force able to spend the substantial majority of its time interacting with duty holders". To achieve this HSE has to develop more flexible and efficient ways of working.
6. Previous studies on flexible working in HSE concluded that inspection staff had the most suitable jobs for hot-desking and formal home working, and that there was some scope for home working amongst other groups of staff. The business centre approach (essentially hot-desking for certain groups of staff combined with home working) was thought to offer the most advantages and merited further study. Other London Government Departments are introducing reduced space and flexible working options, e.g. DTI, which, in future, we understand will only be allocating space for staff on the basis of 80% office occupancy.
7. More flexible working offers the potential to meet employees' individual needs. The legislative drivers for home working are on the increase. The right to request to work flexibly, including from home, is now enshrined in law through the new Employment Act. It would also enable HSE to adopt a more flexible accommodation strategy.
8. A survey undertaken on behalf of the Department of Trade and Industry, carried out by recruitment website *reed.co.uk* with the Department of Trade and Industry's Work-Life Balance<sup>1</sup> campaign, surveyed over 4,000 jobseekers, and showed that:
  - almost half of the respondents (46%) chose flexible working as the benefit they would most look for in their next job, with only 1 in 14 (7%) choosing gym membership and 1 in 10 (10%) opting for a company car;
  - a third of them would prefer the opportunity to work flexible hours rather than receive £1,000 more pay per year;

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<sup>1</sup> Survey of 4000 jobseekers carried out by Reed,co.uk on behalf of the DTI. January 2003

- 7 in 10 (68%) jobseekers would like the chance to work more flexibly when necessary;
  - 8 in 10 (77%) parents with children under 6 said that work-life balance is an important factor in deciding whether to apply for a new job;
  - 6 in 10 (60%) workers view work life balance as an important factor in assessing a potential new job
9. A general observation is that inspectors, workplace contact officers and other travelling staff appear to be out of the office to the extent that field offices are generally only 40-60% occupied.
  10. **Annex A** sets out the accommodation options being considered at Worcester and Bristol, whilst **Annexes B and C** consider, respectively, possible flexible working models for those same sites and for Policy Group. The positions at Worcester and Bristol are still fluid and the latest position will be reported at the Board discussion. All the parties involved would wish to retain some flexibility to determine jointly which property option is pursued, and the exact hot-desking model that is deployed.
  11. There are already examples of staff working more flexibly, e.g. formal home workers in Policy Group, Hull, and HID (MI), who have commented on their experiences of formal home working. A summary is provided as **Annex D**. Overall the response was very positive, whilst acknowledging that it needs commitment and managing to work effectively.
  12. To be successful, formal home working is best introduced voluntarily on the basis of consensus, driven by individual considerations and improved work life balance. This may, however, make it more difficult to reduce estate costs and initially incur extra management and support costs.

## Consultation

13. FOD, Policy Group, BSD and the Trade Unions were consulted on both the proposals and this paper. HID and RI staff would also be expected to participate in the Worcester and Bristol pilots.
14. The TU side is likely to reject all of the proposals if the formal home-worker policy is not formally agreed with it ahead of the pilots commencing. The present position is that a 'Homeworking Pack' already exists from Personnel Division, covering the vast majority of the issues that need to be addressed, but leaving some to personal discussion between the person, their Line Management and Personnel Division. The TU side has provided a number of comments on the information in the existing pack, and Personnel Division are arranging to provide responses on those comments. As a result of the CSR initiative to extend the circumstances under which homeworking will now be considered (for the pilots), the TU side has reiterated its concerns with the information/policy, and has stressed that its main concerns are on

tax, insurance and liability issues, together with contact arrangements and security considerations, but the key issue is the reversibility and voluntary nature of the pilots. Personnel Division's initial advice on those issues are reproduced below, but a full response to all of the TU side concerns is still being prepared by Personnel Division.

15. The piloting and assessment of DSE self-assessment is ongoing. How and if this can be applied to formal home workers will be a subject for discussion as the guidance is finalised, and may form part of the pilot.
16. The issues surrounding taxation are complex, and may well vary from individual to individual. For this reason issues like this are best discussed, in detail, with prospective formal home workers on an individual basis. The draft guidance does include some general principles, but these will need to be applied to specific situations.
17. The position of London Weighting and formal home working needs further review. It is currently envisaged that this will take place after the agreement of the new guidance to ensure that all staff who are home workers are treated fairly and equitably.
18. T&S for formal home working staff is covered in the draft guidance, and is based on advice taken from Inland Revenue. We know from contacts in OGD's that the rules on travel to parent offices are applied in the same way.
19. Insurance/Liability issues, like tax, can vary from individual to individual. The draft guidance provides a general overview, but specific circumstances may require further discussion.
20. From the project point of view we have explained to the TU side that we would wish for the pilots to inform the policy, rather than the reverse, and that the majority of the TU side concerns are either already in hand, or will form part of the initial work package of the new Project Manager.
21. The level of interest from Policy Group staff for the proposed formal home working pilot is significant at just under 10% of the Directorate. This is despite detailed information not being made available, including detail on those issues raised by the TU side.

## **Presentation**

22. Introducing the flexible working pilots will need very careful communication and handling within the context of the Change Programme. **The wider issue of communicating and engaging with staff on this work will be raised orally at the Board meeting.**
23. Guidance for pilot participants and managers will need to be drafted and agreed before the pilots commence. Being unprepared for questions will produce uncertainty.

24. Details of the pilots should be provided to all staff as early as possible to avoid information and rumours circulating on the grapevine.

### **Costs and Benefits**

25. **The RPD Director intends to identify somebody in RPD BSD to personally drive this work forward, and to liaise with field/policy managers, ensure the right support is provided promptly from the centre, and report on the costs and benefits.** There will be a need for local resources in Worcester and Bristol to prepare for, operate, monitor and evaluate the pilots, possibly utilising a Band 2 or 3 at both offices and use of temporary/contract staff. This would be essential to the effective running of the pilots and management of the sensitive issues.
26. The BSD person responsible for this work will ensure that those representing, in particular, Operations Group, Policy Group and RPD, are all fully involved in the developing programme. One of the early key tasks would be to prepare an evaluation plan, in consultation with local management and the trade unions, which details the criteria to be used to assess the effects of the pilots. The person would also need to work up the details to address the action required in paragraphs 13 to 20, including those issues raised by the TU side. The precise shape of the arrangements still needs to be determined.
27. The Policy Group pilot would incur average set-up costs of maybe as much as £12K for each participant, although there may be some scope for economies of scale within, at least, the REFIT contract. This would have to be met within existing BSD budgets. A breakdown of costs is attached as **Annex E**.
28. For the field pilots there will be extra IT costs where more portable computers are required. These elements would be incurred at some point in the future in any event and would be met from BSD existing budgets. There may also be limited furniture costs. It is important to note that neither field office is currently open plan.
29. The main benefits of the pilots will be to determine the extent to which it is possible to change office practices and the accommodation model. If the pilots are successful, it should enable us to keep rents, rates and utilities lower than they would otherwise be, increase productivity and offer more flexibility for some staff. The scale of the accommodation related savings will depend on the optimal desks-to-staff ratio and the prevailing cost of space in any location, eg. there are potential annual accommodation savings for Bristol and Worcester of between £115k-£135k and £52k-£58k respectively, depending on the reduction in office space.
30. One of the further purposes of the pilot is to assess whether there are other quantifiable gains to HSE, e.g. in productivity, and qualitative gains for those staff participating, e.g. achieving better work-life balance. These aspects will be captured by the evaluation plan.

31. There has been some debate about the degree to which these pilots are reversible if evaluation shows that they are unworkable, and the causes cannot be corrected. For the field pilots, given a reasonable degree of co-operation from HSE's landlords, it may be possible to keep open the option of returning in Bristol's case, to one desk per person, though probably to a less generous space standard than 17m<sup>2</sup> per person. In Worcester's case, if the pilot failed, we would need to review the option to close the office. The issue of "reversibility" is important to the TU side, but involves additional costs and complexity and may seem unnecessary given that other comparable organisations operate similar flexible working models quite successfully. The Policy Group pilot has significant set up costs, and we would need to address with staff and local management what happens if staff want to continue formal home working beyond the pilot. The Board's steer on this aspect would be welcome.

### **Action**

32. The Board is requested to agree and/or note the issues in paragraph 3.

25 September 2003

## Annex A

### Accommodation Options for Worcester and Bristol

#### Worcester

1. The lease ends in Worcester on 28 September 2003. Neither the landlord nor HSE have so far indicated what their intentions are following this date. It is likely that the landlord will seek to renew the lease on the 'whole' from this date. HSE has protection under the Landlord and Tenant Act and the landlord may only 'evict' HSE for limited reasons and only after 6 months notice.
2. Worcester occupies approximately 630m<sup>2</sup> at present. It is estimated that 250m<sup>2</sup> may be sufficient space for a flexible working pilot working on 14-17m<sup>2</sup> per workstation and average occupancy of between 40-60%. The precise layout, etc., would need to be discussed locally with staff, management and 'space planners', and be flexible enough to accommodate any changes/increases in staffing patterns, together with anything learnt from the pilot.
3. **The Options being considered for Worcester are:-**
  - a) Negotiate for a limited extension of the current lease (and existing space) by 12 months and use this extension to run and evaluate the pilot. Artificially create an area that staff are not allowed to use (i.e. rope off) during the pilot. This would ensure that, should the pilot fail, the situation would be recoverable by reclaiming the original space, but there would be costs involved, which, if the office subsequently shut after the 12 month extension would need to be written down, ie. a hit on HSE's admin costs.
  - b) Negotiate a new lease on about 50% of the existing premises only. The occupied space in the office would need to be refurbished and it may be prudent to negotiate a lease breaks/end over the minimum period possible in the light of the pilot. This may result in higher rents than if the lease was taken over a longer period. Again, if the pilot failed it is likely that the office would close, and the refurbishment costs would be written off.
  - c) Find alternative, less expensive premises (if possible), with lower refurbishment costs. Because of the pilot, it would be prudent to negotiate a lease break over the minimum period possible.
4. **Option 3b is the most likely outcome at the time of writing.** HSE's agent is holding preliminary discussions with various landlordss' agents to sound out the prospects of meeting our needs at the affordable cost.

## **Bristol**

5. Work is already in progress to identify alternative suitable accommodation in the Bristol area, both in the centre and around the periphery. HSE's agent reports that the market is 'tight', although there are several affordable options in the locality, including a promising possibility which may offer the opportunity for refurbishment in time to start a pilot in April 2004.
6. The total useable space in Bristol is 1463m<sup>2</sup>. There are two leases in Bristol, one for the 4<sup>th</sup> floor and one for the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> floors. It is estimated that 50-66% of that space may be sufficient for a flexible working pilot working on 14-17m<sup>2</sup> per workstation and average occupancy of between 40-60%. The precise layout, etc., would need to be discussed locally with staff, management and 'space planners', and be flexible enough to accommodate any changes/increases in staffing patterns, together with anything learnt from the pilot.
7. **The Options being considered for Bristol are:-**
  - a) Exercise the break for the 4<sup>th</sup> floor only, which releases approximately 25% of the space. The 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> floors consist of 2 main floors with 'spurs' separated by the landings. If the 'spurs' were to be mothballed, the 2 main floors would equate almost exactly to the space needed for the pilot. Should the pilot not succeed the spurs could be reclaimed for use. An alternative would be to use the spurs during the pilot but accept that, if the pilot proves unworkable, everyone would need to squeeze up a little.
  - b) Relocate elsewhere, probably around the periphery of Bristol to an open plan building where it was possible to take slightly more space if the pilot failed.
  - c) Move floors within the existing building to floors which HSE would still need to convert to open plan.
8. **We are not yet in a position to recommend a specific option.** However, the advice of HSE's agent is that we should seek to get out of the current Bristol building, which he regards as poor value and likely to get worse. Progress at Bristol therefore depends on whether the potential of moving to one of the peripheral new opportunities can be realised quickly and is itself workable for our field business. BSD is taking this forward with the regional management team at the time of writing.

## **Annex B**

### **Flexible Working Options for Worcester and Bristol**

#### **Introduction**

1. Generally there is support from staff and managers for exploring the options of more flexible working involving hot-desking combined with working at home, but the local consensus is that agreement can only be reached on condition that:
  - participation is voluntary;
  - staff are involved constructively in the office design process;
  - contingency plans are put in place in the event of the pilots' failure;
  - participants are provided with the necessary IT and other equipment;
  - adequate provision is made for telephony (call management), administrative support, and accessing 'work in progress' (filing etc.);
  - the personal terms are clarified up-front, e.g. the impact on T&S and other allowances;
  - adequate provision is made for fixed space, e.g. FOCUS filing, kitchens etc.;
  - the health and safety implications of the pilots, particularly the management of DSE in both office and home, are fully resolved.

#### **Options**

##### **Option A – Home working**

2. This would be a radical step in which one or both of these pilots explores all travelling staff becoming formal home workers. All the interests (i.e. local and HQ management, staff and unions) have significant reservations about this option. These range from whether the option would be deliverable from a mechanical perspective (i.e. could the systems be adapted to operate at reasonable cost), through concerns about providing the necessary guidance and support to achieve the standard of work HSE requires, to psycho-social concerns about the effect of this home working option on individuals. In view of the consensus that this approach would not be workable, this option has been discounted.

##### **Option B – Hot-desking**

3. This is a more informal arrangement than formal home working where the member of staff uses RAS enabled laptop at home to complete

documents or to access cc:Mail accounts, without all the set up costs associated with formal home working. Under this scenario, the visiting officer carries out visits from home and returns home on their completion. He/she arranges to attend the office maybe once or twice a week to collect appropriate paperwork, guidance, etc or attend a team meeting, but does so on a hot-desk basis. This assumes that visiting staff are (or will be) carrying out contacts, travelling or are at other HSE offices or at home, for at least half of the time.

4. This model offers greater flexibility, combining more readily the dual notion of home working and hot-desking. It diminishes the level of concerns for “formal” home working and is also likely to be far more cost effective, as IT and other support could be provided when staff are in the office, rather than at home.
5. The model recognises that while our current ICT systems support a reasonable degree of flexible working (e.g. with a portable computer and RAS connection, they support remote drafting, e-mail, intranet access etc), they do not currently allow data entry into HSE’s operational systems (e.g. FOCUS) to be performed adequately over domestic (PSTN) telephone lines. However, this drawback will be overcome with the implementation of COIN. Perhaps most importantly, this option would provide flexibility both in terms the way management and support systems are adapted, and individuals adapt their working pattern and circumstances. This approach is consistent with the advice from LogicaCMG and other organisations that a flexible, evolutionary approach is more likely to be successful.
6. In practical terms, the estates planning assumption would be that one desk is provided for every two travelling staff. Further work is required to test this assumption, e.g. taking account of specialist posts, staff based in sectors and staff assessing safety cases in HID/RI. As part of the pilots, such staff and their managers would be expected to keep diaries so that it is possible to assess whether the assumption that a workstation per person is required is correct. There would also need to be active management of hot-desking arrangements to ensure that all staff did not ‘appear’ at the office on the same day all expecting ‘a desk’.

### **Option C – ‘Team-Space’**

7. This problem may be alleviated by the concept of creating “team space” as an alternative to an ‘occupy the first free desk’ model. The model would operate on a similar basis to hot-desking. The key difference would be designating specific working areas for particular teams, rather than centralising hot-desking facilities within an office. This means teams would manage their own space and working arrangements. The assumption is that less central support would be required, in particular the need for centralised ‘booking services’ for obtaining a workstation, and teams would work more efficiently. The quantifiable balance between these assumed gains and higher space costs with less flexibility need to be established, and we need to look further at what has worked

for other comparable organisations and ensure we have a simple, repeatable model based on actual best practice.

### **Effects on Administrative Staff**

8. It is also intended to explore how more flexible ways of working can be applied to administrative staff. There are many part-time administrative staff and the pilots may provide some opportunity to trial hot-desking arrangements with them. It is also vital that these staff are involved in any new systems and support arrangements. Travelling officers coming to the office less frequently would need different support arrangements, which would need developing before and during the pilots. It would be preferable to avoid administrative staff becoming 'hot-desk booking clerks'.

### **Recommendation**

9. Introducing new patterns of working will require management effort, particularly before and at the start of the process. Talking to staff about the options that could work and thinking through the impact on the service, customers, colleagues and other stakeholders will take up some time. An approach should be developed which encourages managers and staff to develop and operate flexible working patterns that are appropriate for their particular circumstances within guidelines developed by central and regional management, and based on existing best practice elsewhere. This should reduce the impact on managers and engender ownership and the commitment of staff to make the pilots work. **We are therefore recommending that the pilots are undertaken using an appropriate variant of options C and B, and depending on specific local circumstances and arrangements.**

## Annex C

### Home Working Pilot in Policy Group

#### Introduction

1. A note was sent to all Policy Group staff on 30 July, asking them to register an "in principle" interest for a proposed home working pilot in Policy Group. It was made clear that no commitment would be entered into on either side at this stage, pending further work on the detailed arrangements.
2. 41 staff have responded positively, spanning a range of job bands, divisions and sections.

#### Options

##### Option A

3. A mix of volunteer staff would be selected for home working, from different divisions/teams within Policy Group. Selection would be on the basis of their particular circumstances, the suitability of the work they are engaged on, and exploring the effects of home working across a diverse range of policy projects. However, this option is not likely to provide the project with significantly additional information from that that has already been gleaned from existing home workers (see Annex D).

##### Option B

4. A more targeted approach is adopted, selecting voluntary staff from within the same team. Selection would still need to take account of their particular circumstances and the work they are engaged on, but would specifically explore the effects of home working within a team context as well as the policy project(s). Other factors could be built in, such as:
  - small team v larger teams;
  - teams who have regular contact with external stakeholders;
  - staff at different stages of life and work, e.g., young workers, staff nearing retirement, people with and without children.
5. **We are recommending that we should pilot Option B. This option provides more scope for examining the team aspects of policy work, whilst also exploring the issues of part of a team working fulltime 'in the office' whilst the rest work from home. It would be likely to involve between 6-8 staff.**

6. Guidance would need to be produced for the operation of the pilot, covering as a minimum:
  - the practicalities of home working;
  - health and safety;
  - costs/allowances (e.g. would London Weighting continue to be paid/season tickets?): We are likely to lose all volunteers if staff could potentially lose out financially.
7. A suggested 'preparing for home' checklist is attached, which would help staff and managers through the key issues for consideration. This is only a first draft at this stage, but indicates the sort of things that we believe staff will need to address.
8. As with the field pilots, there will be a need for local resources to prepare for, operate, monitor and evaluate the pilot.

## Preparing for Formal Home Working Checklist

IT	Considered ✓
What IT provision will be made?	
Will a laptop or PC be provided?	
What software packages will be necessary?	
How will these be loaded?	
How will IT support be provided?	
What access to email, databases will be provided?	
How will this be achieved?	
What happens if something goes wrong with IT while using it for work?	
<b>HEALTH, SAFETY AND SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS</b>	
Adequate space, light, ventilation.	
Safe and adequate power supply.	
Well-designed and maintained equipment.	
Provision of appropriate furniture and office equipment.	
Computer workstation requirements, inc. DSE assessment	
Fire safety/emergency response.	
Risks specific to the activity/location.	
Confidentiality.	
<b>TELEPHONY</b>	
Can the employee's telephone be patched through to their home number?	
What guidelines will you agree about taking and making calls?	
How will work calls be reimbursed?	
<b>PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT</b>	
Have objectives and goals been set?	
How will these be measured?	
Which aspects of the job cannot be measured?	
How will you manage these aspects?	
<b>COMMUNICATION AND REVIEW</b>	
What contact will you expect the employee to have with the office?	
What supervision or 1-1 arrangements will you set up?	
What parameters for home working will you agree with them (times they can be contacted etc.)?	
When and how will you review the effectiveness of home working?	
<b>TEAM ISSUES</b>	
What ground rules will you need to establish with the team?	
How will office cover be maintained?	
How the team knows of each person's whereabouts?	
How to contact the person working from home?	
What to say to customers/stakeholders about their whereabouts.	
Contents of team meetings – how this is shared.	
Creative methods of sharing information or ideas that would normally be shared informally.	

## Annex D

### Experience/views of a sample of existing HSE Formal Home Workers

1. The views of a sample of existing HSE Home Workers were sought on what they saw as the key benefits and disbenefits of home working. This was from both a personal and professional point of view. Comments also received covered a range of issues, and are listed in no particular priority in paragraph 4 below.

#### 2. The main benefits identified are:

Personal	HSE
- reduction in stress (particularly travel)	- increased productivity
- better work/life balance	- estate savings
- quieter home atmosphere	- reduced stress
- considerative and policy work lends itself to home working	- greater commitment
- increased job satisfaction	- improved staff retention

#### 3. The main disadvantages identified are:

- isolation
- guilt (if a phone call is 'missed' or when 'away' from desk, as messages are rarely left)
- encroachment on living space and ability to 'turn off'
- access to home from, e.g. service engineers
- temptation to work longer hours
- slow/no upgrading of equipment and software
- promotion opportunities (being overlooked)

#### 4. Other comments:

- management need to trust staff
- manager and staff need to agree contact arrangements before home working begins
- need to hold regular reviews
- need for regular formal and informal contact with work colleagues/team members
- more use should be made of the telephone – less reliance on email for contact
- need for clarity on service levels for home workers
- home workers to be given advance warning of equipment/software upgrades and made aware of possible requirement, e.g. additional electrical sockets
- think small/flexible – standard office furniture may not be suitable where space is restricted
- DSE assessments should be carried out within 'days' of installation (often delays); look for other options, e.g. self assessment
- need to agree core-working hours before home working begins.

## Annex E

### COSTS FOR POLICY GROUP FORMAL HOME WORKING PILOT

(Costs are based on REFIT's proposal for 3 x home workers in Hull, December 2001)

	Per user	
	Once only	Per annum
<b>REFIT set-up charge</b>	£10,000	
Including installation and end user training		
<b>REFIT service charge</b>		£500
Portable PC with standard HSE software build		
Flat screen monitor		
Docking station		
Ergonomic keyboard		
Ergonomic mouse		
Multi-function scanner, fax and printer		
Technology refresh twice during remaining life of REFIT contract		
<b>RAS running cost</b>		£228
Secure ID user authentication service		
Estimated remote access 0800 costs		
<b>Fixed telephony costs</b>	£198	£354
Installation of 2 x DEL lines per BT home worker		
BT exchange line quarterly rental x 2		
BT call minder messaging service per qtr.		
BT call answer is a free service		
<b>Mobile phone</b>		
Vodafone handset with text messaging message service		£72*
Estimated call charges		£54**
<b>Totals</b>	<b>£10,198</b>	<b>£1,208</b>

\*£6 per month, minimum contract 24 months

\*\* based on 100 standard minutes per month (4.5p per minute)

The above costings are based on HSE's requirement for 3 registered home workers. There may be economies of scale in the set-up charge for larger numbers, but this area is untested.