

## **STARTING A NEW JOB IN LOCKDOWN**

**Judith Markham**

### **Assistant Management Accountant**

I started work with the ADS Finance Team at the beginning of March. The first two weeks were exactly the start I would hope for. I was going through my induction, meeting pleasant, friendly people, being shown around Spring Bank and learning the main tasks. I was really pleased to be on board, looking forward to settling in, meeting more staff and learning more about ADS. Unfortunately, going into the third week the government announced working from home and on Thursday lunchtime, armed with a new laptop, timetables, walkthrough notes and a procedure file I set off to work from my new office, a.k.a. my kitchen table.

Now as I work, looking out onto my garden is one of the best office views I've ever had, it's very nice being able to pop the tv on while I have my lunch or empty the dishwasher while I make a cup of tea. I've mastered most of my tasks and remain very happy in my new job. However, something is missing, something's not quite as it should be. Sometimes it's silent here in the mornings but by the afternoon it's the complete opposite; my teenage children get up looking for food and grunt at me, my neighbours debate loudly, mainly about their garden, a girl bounces on her trampoline, giggling away, the bungalow at the back is being extended and there's lots of clanging, banging and drilling. These are not the usual background noises I work with.

It has made me reflect on how much Finance Teams talk to each other in practice – you might think we just like a good old chat about last night, the weekend or our families, which we do of course but most of the time we are actually exchanging important information. We constantly talk about our work and what is happening on a day to day basis in the organisation as there are always so many financial transactions and changes taking place. Our work is very integrated - a key financial control is to have more than one person involved in each process and for processes to be performed in set stages, so we need to keep updating each other as to where we are. We discuss broader strategic or external issues that might affect our work or impact the overall financial position of the organisation. People call in or ring us to discuss a whole range of issues. It's a background hum that creates a reassuring and somehow comforting atmosphere.

It makes us lift our heads from our spreadsheets and constant stream of documents that we handle. Working from home initially, on a couple of days, I had headache by five o'clock or felt much more tired than usual, which I realised was because there were no naturally occurring breaks in my work and I was concentrating so intensely throughout the day and focussing almost entirely on my laptop. I've had to rectify this with more tea breaks!

From the short time I spent at Spring Bank I knew the ADS Finance Team would be the same. I miss that personal interaction and hub of activity even though I know the rest of the Finance Team are only a phone call or email away. Cheryl, my line manager, has taken great care to keep checking I am ok and that I know what I need to do. Indeed, the whole team is using other ways to keep in touch and still update each other regularly but it feels less spontaneous than in the office.

The work we do in Finance can lend itself well to being performed at home, a spreadsheet can be opened anywhere, and we can just as easily access our emails, financial ledgers and other systems remotely, as in the office. Financial Management and transaction are fundamentally the same in all organisations but what makes it interesting and rewarding is the context within which it's performed and all the little nuances of how "we do things here". My predecessor left very comprehensive notes on how to do things here so along with guidance from Cheryl that part has been relatively straight forward to learn at home but still some procedures are just too complex to learn at a distance and won't be handed over to me until we get back in the office.

The context is trickier, and this is where the main impact of working from home is for me. I did research for my interview and there's lots of reading material available of course but verbal communication and day to day interaction fills in the gaps. It's amazing what knowledge can be gained from daily office discussions and witnessing other peoples' conversations. It gives a more rounded feeling for the operational activities. I know the basic structure of ADS but not what everyone really does. I know over 80 names from the payroll coding but only a quarter of the faces or voices that go with them.

I'm not complaining – this will all come in time when things are more normal again. I'm not the only one in this position and at least I am in this position, which I am grateful for. It's been an unusual start, but I do enjoy working here and like everyone I've come into contact with so far. I'm confident that will continue, and things can therefore only get better.