

Covid-19 HR guidance – Safe Attendance at the Workplace

Last updated: 3 July 2020

This guidance is regularly being reviewed and will be updated accordingly.

1.Introduction

The overall Council position is that if an employee is able to effectively undertake their job role at home they will not be asked to attend the workplace. However, in line with government guidance, the Council is commencing a staged approach to move slowly out of the lockdown conditions and to start requesting that some employees i.e. those who cannot effectively undertake their job role at home, should attend their workplace.

The Council has consulted Corporate Directors and conducted a workplace survey to develop its approach. The following employees have been identified for a potential return to the workplace:

- Employees who are unable to undertake their job role at home.
- Employees who have been at home but need to return to the workplace to support service delivery as Council operations resume.
- Employees who have identified a compelling personal reason that they wish to return to the workplace i.e. to support their own wellbeing.
- Employees who are unable to work from home and have been required to self-isolate until now i.e. employees who are identified as clinically vulnerable.

Employees who are clinically extremely vulnerable – commonly referred to as shielding – should not be asked to attend the workplace at this stage. However, the government has advised that the shielding provisions will end on Saturday 1 August and individuals in this category may be asked to attend the workplace from this date, subject to all of the other requirements set out in this guidance.

2. Attending the Workplace

All employees who are able to effectively undertake their job role at home will not be asked to attend the workplace. If an employee is in a category highlighted above, they may be asked to attend the workplace so long as:

- their workplace is “Covid-19 secure”
- all required health and safety measures, including Risk Assessments and training, are in place.

For those employees who are returning to the workplace, a manager should:

- Contact the employee to advise them they are required to return to the workplace;
- Explain the health and safety measures that have been put in place, including a service Risk Assessment;
- Complete an individual Risk Assessment;
- Discuss the employee’s travel arrangement, including any adjustments – such as staggered start or end times – that may be possible if this helps the employee to avoid using public transport during rush hour;
- Focus on the employee’s well-being. Some employee’s might be anxious about safety and returning to the workplace. Managers should encourage an employee to talk to them about any concerns they have, and resolve them together. See wellbeing support below;
- Discuss any adjustments and/or ongoing support to facilitate an effective and safe return to the workplace. See Risk Assessment below;
- Arrange a return to work date;
- Arrange a reintroduction to the workplace meeting to highlight safe working practices, including regular handwashing and maintenance of social distancing, and any other changes to ‘normal’ duties.

For those employees who have attended the workplace during the lockdown period, a manager should:

- Contact the employee to advise they are required to complete an individual Risk Assessment;
- Reiterate the health and safety measures that have been put in place, including the service Risk Assessment (required for all services operating in the workplace);
- Discuss and review to ensure the controls measures in place are suitable;

- Discuss how the employee has been travelling to the workplace to confirm if any adjustments are required, especially since public transport is expected to get busier as lockdown measures are eased;
- Focus on the employee's well-being. Some employee's might be anxious about their attendance at the workplace or their travel arrangements. Managers should encourage employees to talk to them about any concerns they have, and resolve them together. See wellbeing support below;
- Reiterate the requirement for safe working practices, including regular handwashing and maintenance of social distancing.

3. Risk Assessment

Everyone who is either already in the workplace or intending to return to the workplace should complete an individual Risk Assessment to identify if they are at high risk and may benefit from additional controls if coronavirus is circulating in the community.

Service Risk Assessments are in place to ensure all employees are safe whilst attending their workplace and carrying out their duties. In addition, building Risk Assessments have been completed as part of the activity to ensure that workplaces are "Covid 19 secure." Employees should discuss service Risk Assessments and the health and safety measures that have been put in place with their line managers.

How does a manager progress an individual Risk Assessment?

Managers and employees are being asked to complete the Covid-19 Individual Risk Assessment together to determine whether any specific controls may be required. All risks facing an employee should be considered and the aim is to reduce these risks with additional control measures to ensure the risk is as low as possible.

All employees who are able to effectively undertake their job role at home should continue to do so and do not need to carry out the individual Risk Assessment at this stage. However, at some stage all employees will be asked to complete the individual Risk Assessment.

The individual Risk Assessment is based on the Association of Local Authority Medical Advisors (ALAMA) tool which is completed via an online form. The ALAMA tool summarises vulnerability based on a combination of risk factors including age, sex, ethnicity, BMI and various health problems.

For full details of the Individual Risk Assessment process please review:

[Risk Assessment User Guide](#)

[Risk Assessment Online form](#)

What happens if an employee or their manager feels the adaptations are not adequate in order for the employee to work safely?

In this instance the manager should seek advice from the Corporate Health and Safety Team to discuss the outcomes of the Risk Assessment and the measures that have been put in place. The employee may be referred to the Council's Occupational Health Provider to seek further advice and recommendations on the measures and adaptations that have been put in place.

How does a manager progress a Covid-19 Occupational Health Questionnaire Assessment?

A Covid-19 Occupational Health Questionnaire Assessment may be required if:

- A risk assessment outcome indicates an employee should be assessed by Occupational Health to ensure they are safe to attend their workplace;
- An employee or their manager is not satisfied with the control measures that have been put in place for the employee's safe attendance at work;
- Corporate Health and Safety advise that an assessment is required.

The manager should advise the employee to complete an online Covid-19 Occupational Health Questionnaire Assessment. The questionnaire will then be clinically assessed by an Occupational Health Assistant. In many instances the Occupational Health Assistant will be able to assess if the employee is safe to attend the workplace from the information provided in the questionnaire. However, in some cases there may be a need to discuss an employee's response directly via a follow-up telephone consultation, should this be required, Occupational Health will contact the employee and arrange for a telephone consultation.

The outcome of the assessment will be provided to the manager for them to discuss any issues with the employee.

The link to the online Covid-19 Occupational Health questionnaire assessment will be published in this guidance by 10th July 2020. Please contact Human Resources should further advice be required regarding this process.

What happens if an employee refuses to return to the workplace?

If the steps above have been completed and Occupational Health advice confirms it is appropriate for the council to ask the employee to work onsite, and yet the employee maintains they will not attend the workplace, the manager and the employee should work together to try and find a solution. Options include:

- redeploying the individual into another role than can be undertaken at home;
- redeploying the individual into another role that is undertaken in the workplace but enables greater social distancing than the employee's substantive post;
- any other reasonable adjustment.

The HR team is available to support these conversations with employees. Managers who require assistance should contact:

newham.hrsupport@newham.gov.uk.

If it is not possible to find a way of enabling the employee to work, then the manager should contact HR to discuss next steps. Each employee's circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking equality considerations into account where relevant. Additional options that may be available to a manager, following consultation with HR, include:

- allowing the employee to take unused annual leave
- seeking the employee's agreement to be placed on unpaid leave
- withholding pay from the employee if they do not agree to unpaid leave

These steps cannot be taken without seeking advice from the HR team, who in turn will consult with colleagues in Legal Services as required.

4. Further Advice and Contacts

The following contacts are available for advice and support:

- Human Resources Human Resources Support at:
Newham.HRSupport@newham.gov.uk or telephone 0203 373 6426.
- Wellbeing Support:

The Council's **Employee Assistance Programme** offers a variety of support, including 24/7 freephone access to Counsellors and advisors who can provide confidential practical and emotional support on a variety of issues. Call 0800 328 1437 (via minicom: 01482661 814). For further information and additional sources of specialist information employees may access the website: www.employeeassistance.org.uk (online access code: Newham).

Mental Health First Aiders – to help and support employees who are concerned around their mental health. Employees can speak to a mental health first aider about anything from how they are feeling emotionally, to money issues, family concerns or relationship issues. If they are feeling emotionally overwhelmed, stressed or depressed, employees can call on a mental health first aider for support. Please access further information on mental health first aiders [Mental Health First Aider information](#)

To contact to request a chat with a Mental Health First Aider at wellbeing@newham.gov.uk.

- Corporate Health and Safety: healthandsafetysupport@onesource.co.uk.