Workplace and Public Buildings Recovery Standard
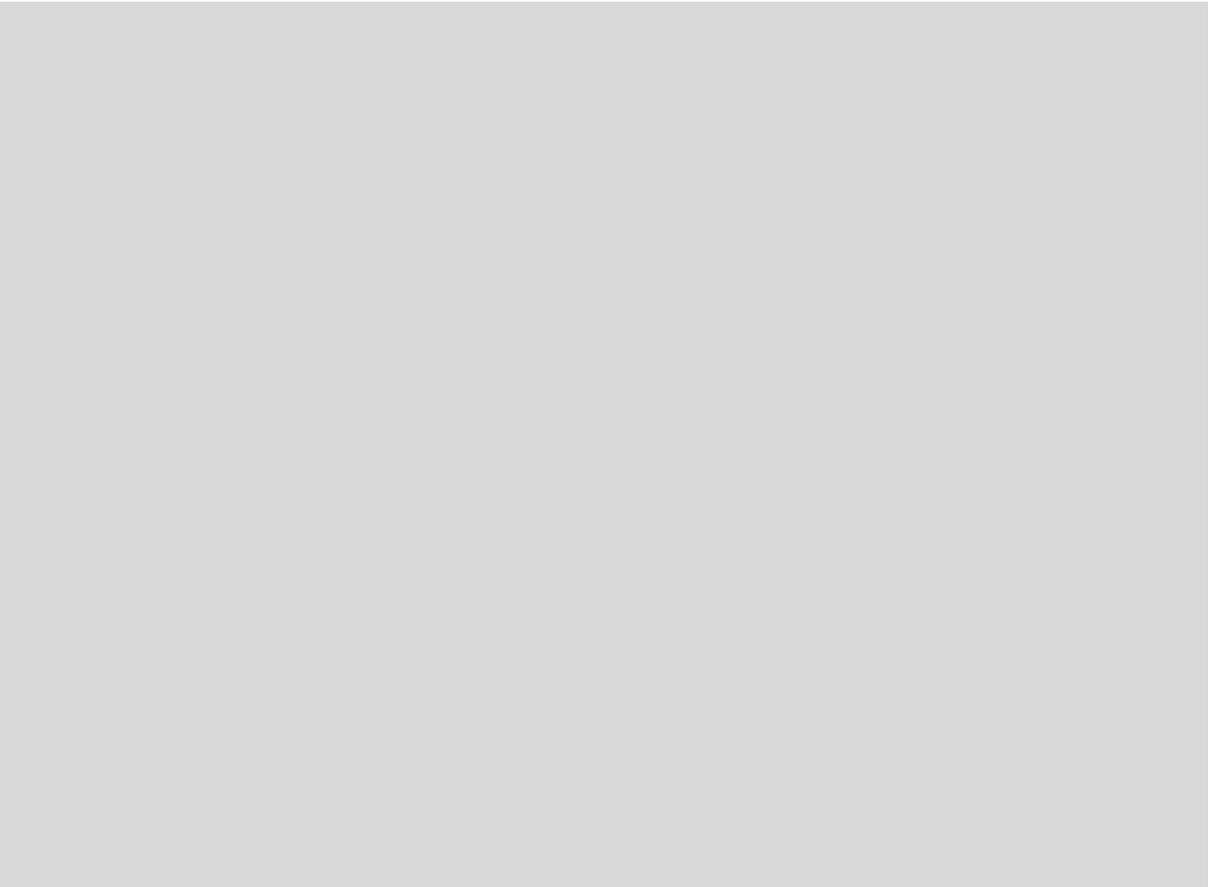
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As part of our system review, this document is valid until Apr 2021		

Contents

1   Introduction

The purpose of this standard is to set out the requirements for working safely in the workplace environment, based on current Government guidance for those employees who cannot work from home, during the prescribed period, regarding the Covid-19 pandemic.

In summary, it is possible to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace through risk assessments and the following infection and control measures:

o   maintaining social distancing

o   minimizing contact with any individuals who are unwell

o   cleaning hands more often than usual

o   ensuring good respiratory hygiene

o   cleaning frequently touched surfaces

o   wearing additional personal protective equipment to that already required by your role but only if specifically indicated complying with any necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements

This standard is effective from June 2020, until any enforced changes or new guidance is received, and it will be subject to regular review based on Government guidance.

2   Scope

The scope of the standard covers all persons, offices and operations therein within the Council.

Exceptions that mean the requirements of this standard cannot be fulfilled or enhanced will be documented through a Minimum Standard.

3   Managing risk

Staff should continue to work from home, if at all possible.

Before any services can resume the following will take place:

1. Managers will provide their Head of Service with a rationale for resuming the service(s) / return of colleagues to site and any additional precautions – with input from the Health & Safety Team as required.
2. A re-induction will be provided for returning colleagues – either online in advance or onsite before the start of work – to explain the control measures that have been implemented to ensure safe working.
3. All services planned to restart must be signed off in advance by the appropriate Senior Manager
4. Managers will share the rationale and risk assessments with the TUs in advance of any re-induction process or return of colleagues to the workplace to allow the TUs the opportunity to raise any issues or concerns.
5. All affected colleagues will be briefed and given the opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns about the proposed working arrangements.

NTC has a duty to reduce workplace risk to the lowest reasonably practical level, by taking preventative measures. NTC must work with any other employers or contractors sharing the workplace so that everybody's health and safety is protected. In the context of COVID-19 this means working through these steps in order:

- In every workplace, increasing the frequency of handwashing and surface cleaning.
- NTC should make every reasonable effort to enable working from home as a first option. Where working from home is not possible, workplaces should make every reasonable effort to comply with the current social distancing guidelines set out by the government.
- Where the social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full, in relation to a particular activity, NTC should consider whether that activity needs to continue for the business to operate, and if so, take all the mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission between their staff.

Further mitigating actions include:
- Increasing the frequency of hand washing and surface cleaning.
- Keeping the activity time involved as short as possible.
- Using screens or barriers to separate people from each other.
- Using back-to-back or side-to-side working (rather than face-to-face) whenever possible.
- Reducing the number of people each person has contact with by using 'fixed teams or partnering' (so each person works with only a few others).

Finally, if people must work face-to-face for a sustained period with more than a small group of fixed partners, then you will need to assess whether the activity can safely go ahead. No one is obliged to work in an unsafe work environment.

If you have not already done so, you should carry out an assessment of the risks posed by COVID-19 in your workplace as soon as possible. If you are currently working, you are likely to have gone through a lot of this thinking already. We recommend that you use this document to identify any further improvements you should make.

4   Who should go to work?

Employees should work from home if at all possible. The government has issued specific guidance in relation to those who are more vulnerable and the following steps should be taken:

- Clinically extremely vulnerable individuals are strongly advised to stay at home and therefore should continue to work at home in either their existing role or through provision of alternative work, unless otherwise advised by their GP.

- Clinically vulnerable individuals should work from home in their existing role or in an alternative role wherever possible. If it is not possible to identify suitable work to undertake at home the safest role in the workplace should be identified for them (not necessarily their own role). They should only return to the workplace when a specific risk assessment has been carried out taking into consideration their condition and specific control measures to reduce the risk of exposure as far as possible.

- There may also be colleagues who live with a clinically extremely vulnerable individual and the same process should be followed as for clinically vulnerable colleagues.

- It is important to understand and take into account any particular circumstances or factors not already considered by individuals. Managers must assess risk and continue to manage accordingly.

HR guidance is available for managers and employees to enable the appropriate support or measures to be identified in these circumstances.

Consider who is needed to be on site, for example:

- Workers in roles critical for business and operational continuity, safe facility management, or regulatory requirements and which cannot be performed remotely.
- Workers in critical roles which might be performed remotely, but who are unable to work remotely due to home circumstances or the unavailability of safe enabling equipment.
- Planning for the minimum number of people needed on site to operate safely and effectively.
- Monitoring the wellbeing of people who are working from home and helping them stay connected to the rest of the workforce, especially if the majority of their colleagues are on-site.
- Keeping in touch with off-site workers on their working arrangements including their welfare, mental and physical health and personal security.
- Providing equipment for people to work at home safely and effectively,
- A risk assessment will be produced, detailing the measures taken to ensure the health and safety of all staff working in the office environment(s).

5   Social distancing

Current guidance stipulates you must maintain social distancing in the workplace wherever possible.

Where the social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full in relation to a particular activity, NTC should consider whether that activity needs to continue for the business to operate, and, if so, take all the mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission between their staff.

Mitigating actions include:

- Further increasing the frequency of hand washing and surface cleaning.
- Keeping the activity time involved as short as possible.
- Using screens or barriers to separate people from each other.
- Using back-to-back or side-to-side working (rather than face-to-face) whenever possible.
- Reducing the number of people each person has contact with by using 'fixed teams or partnering' (so each person works with only a few others).

Social distancing applies to all parts of a business, not just the place where people spend most of their time, but also entrances and exits, break rooms, canteens and similar settings. These are often the most challenging areas to maintain social distancing.

6   Equality in the workplace

To treat everyone in the workplace equally:

- Understanding and taking into account the particular circumstances of those with different protected characteristics.

- Involving and communicating appropriately with workers whose protected characteristics might either expose them to a different degree of risk or might make any steps you are thinking about inappropriate or challenging for them.

- Considering whether you need to put in place any particular measures or adjustments to take account of your duties under the equality's legislation.

- Making reasonable adjustments to avoid disabled workers being put at a disadvantage and assessing the health and safety risks for new or expectant mothers.

- Making sure that the steps you take do not have an unjustifiable negative impact on some groups compared to others, for example, those with caring responsibilities or those with religious commitments.

7   Arriving to and leaving from work - considerations

- Staggering arrival and departure times at work to reduce crowding into and out of the workplace, taking account of the impact on those with protected characteristics.

- Providing additional parking or facilities such as bike-racks to help people walk, run, or cycle to work where possible.

- Reducing congestion, by having more entry points to the workplace.

- Providing more storage for workers for clothes and bags.

- Using markings and introducing one-way flow at entry and exit points.

- Providing handwashing facilities, or hand sanitiser where not possible, at entry/exit points and not using touch-based security devices such as keypads.

- Defining process alternatives for entry/exit points where appropriate, for example, visitors are to be strictly chaperoned, monitored and only by exceptional appointment only.

8   Moving between buildings & work areas

- Reducing movement by discouraging non-essential trips within buildings and sites, for example, restricting access to some areas, encouraging use of radios or telephones, where permitted, and cleaning them between use.
- Restricting access between different areas of a building or site.
- Reducing job and location rotation.
- Introducing more one-way flow through buildings.
- Reducing maximum occupancy for lifts, providing hand sanitiser for the operation of lifts and encouraging use of stairs wherever possible.
- Making sure that people with disabilities are able to access lifts.
- Regulating use of high traffic areas including corridors, lifts turnstiles and walkways to maintain social distancing

9   Workplaces & workstations

- Review layouts and processes to allow people to work further apart from each other.
- Using floor tape or appropriate signage to mark areas to help workers keep to the prescribed social distance.
- Only where it is not possible to move workstations further apart, arranging people to work side by side or facing a way from each other rather than face-to-face.
- Only where it is not possible to move workstations further apart, using screens to separate people from each other.
- Managing occupancy levels to enable social distancing.
- Avoiding use of hot desks and spaces and, where not possible, cleaning workstations between different occupants including shared equipment using appropriate products provided (e.g. wipes). This will be an employee responsibility when arriving and leaving the desk.
- All staff are reminded to operate a clear desk policy.

10   Meetings, including induction

- Using remote working tools to avoid in-person meetings.
- Only absolutely necessary participants should attend meetings and should maintain the correct social distance/separation throughout.
- Avoiding transmission during meetings, for example, avoiding sharing pens and other objects.
- Providing hand sanitiser in meeting rooms.
- Holding meetings outdoors or in well-ventilated rooms whenever possible.

- For areas where regular meetings take place, using floor signage to help people maintain social distancing.

11 Common areas

- Working collaboratively with landlords and other tenants in multi-tenant sites/buildings to ensure consistency across common areas, for example, receptions and staircases.
- Staggering break times to reduce pressure on break rooms or canteens.
- Using safe outside areas for breaks.
- Creating additional space by using other parts of the workplace or building that have been freed up by remote working.
- Installing screens to protect staff in receptions or similar areas.
- Encouraging workers to bring their own food.
- Reconfiguring seating and tables to maintain spacing and reduce face-to-face interactions.
- Encouraging staff to remain on-site and, when not possible, maintaining social distancing while off-site.
- Regulating use of locker rooms, changing areas and other facility areas to reduce concurrent usage.

12 Accidents, Security and associated issues

- In an emergency, for example, an accident or fire, people do not have to stay socially distanced if it would be unsafe.
- People involved in the provision of assistance to others should pay particular attention to sanitation measures immediately afterwards including washing hands.

13 Customers, visitors and contractors

To minimise the number of unnecessary visits to offices.
- Encouraging visits via remote connection/working where this is an option.
- Where site visits are required, site guidance on social distancing and hygiene should be explained to visitors on or before arrival.
- Limiting the number of visitors at any one time.
- Limiting visitor times to a specific time window and restricting access to required visitors only.

- Determining if schedules for essential services and contractor visits can be revised to reduce interaction and overlap between people, for example, carrying out services at night.
- Maintaining a record of all visitors.
- Revising visitor arrangements to ensure social distancing and hygiene, for example, where someone physically signs in with the same pen in receptions.
- Providing clear guidance on social distancing and hygiene to people on arrival, for example, signage or visual aids and before arrival, for example, by phone, on the website or by email.
- Establishing host responsibilities relating to COVID-19 and providing any necessary training for people who act as hosts for visitors.
- Reviewing entry and exit routes for visitors and contractors to minimise contact with other people.
- Coordinating and working collaboratively with landlords and other tenants in multi-tenant sites, for example shared working spaces.

14 Hygiene, handwashing & sanitation

To help everyone keep good hygiene through the working day.

- Using signs and posters to build awareness of good handwashing technique, the need to increase handwashing frequency, avoid touching your face and to cough or sneeze into a tissue which is binned safely, or into your arm if a tissue is not available.
- Providing regular reminders and signage to maintain personal hygiene standards.
- Providing hand sanitiser in multiple locations in addition to washrooms.
- Setting clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets to ensure they are kept clean and social distancing is achieved as much as possible.
- More frequent cleaning for busy areas.
- Providing more waste facilities and more frequent rubbish collection.
- Where possible, providing paper towels as an alternative if hand dryers are not available in handwashing facilities.
- Where shower and changing facilities are required, setting clear use and cleaning guidance for showers, lockers and changing rooms to ensure they are kept clean and clear of personal items and that social distancing is achieved as much as possible.
- Introducing more frequent cleaning of all facilities regularly during the day and at the end of the day.

15 Cleaning, before re-opening and during occupation

To make sure that any site or location that has been closed or partially operated is clean and ready to restart, including:

- Frequent cleaning of work areas and equipment between uses, using your usual cleaning products.
- Frequent cleaning of objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, such as door handles and keyboards and making sure there are adequate disposal arrangements.
- Clearing workspaces and removing waste and belongings from the work area at the end of a shift.
- Limiting or restricting use of high-touch items and equipment, for example, printers or whiteboards.
- If you are cleaning after a known or suspected case of COVID-19 then you should refer to the specific guidance.
- An assessment for all sites, or parts of sites, that have been closed, before restarting work.
- Carrying out cleaning procedures and providing hand sanitiser before restarting work.
- Checking whether you need to service or adjust ventilation systems, for example, so that they do not automatically reduce ventilation levels due to lower than normal occupancy levels.
- Most air conditioning system do not need adjustment, however where systems serve multiple buildings or you are unsure, advice can be sought from your heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) engineers or advisers.
- Opening windows and doors frequently to encourage ventilation, where possible.

16 Handling goods & materials

- Cleaning procedures for goods and merchandise entering the site.
- Cleaning procedures for vehicles.
- Introducing greater handwashing and handwashing facilities for workers handling goods and merchandise and providing hand sanitiser where this is not practical.
- Regular cleaning of vehicles that workers may take home.
- Restricting non-business deliveries, for example personal deliveries to staff

17 PPE

PPE protects the user against H&S risks at work. It can include items such as safety helmets, gloves, eye protection, high-visibility clothing, safety footwear and safety harnesses. It also includes respiratory protective equipment, such as face masks.

Where you are already using PPE in your work activity to protect against non-COVID-19 risks, you should continue to do so.

At the start of this document we described the steps you need to take to manage COVID-19 risk in the workplace. This includes working from home and staying socially distancedy from each other in the workplace if at all possible. When managing the risk of COVID-19, additional PPE beyond what you usually wear is not beneficial. This is because COVID-19 is a different type of risk to the risks you normally face in a workplace, and needs to be managed through social distancing, hygiene and fixed teams or partnering, not through the use of PPE.

The exception is clinical settings, like a hospital, or a small handful of other roles for which Public Health England advises use of PPE.

Workplaces should not encourage the precautionary use of extra PPE to protect against COVID-19 outside clinical settings or when responding to a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19.

Unless you are in a situation where the risk of COVID-19 transmission is very high, your risk assessment should reflect the fact that the role of PPE in providing additional protection is extremely limited. However, if your risk assessment does show that PPE is required, then you must provide this PPE free of charge to workers who need it. Any PPE provided must fit properly.

18 Face Coverings

There are some circumstances when wearing a face covering may be marginally beneficial as a precautionary measure. The evidence suggests that wearing a face covering does not protect you, but it may protect others if you are infected but have not developed symptoms.

A face covering can be very simple and may be worn in enclosed spaces where social distancing isn't possible. It just needs to cover your mouth and nose. It is not the same as a face mask, such as the surgical masks or respirators used by health and care workers. Similarly, face coverings are not the same as the PPE used to manage risks like dust and spray in an industrial context. Supplies of PPE, including face masks, must continue to be reserved for those who need them to protect against risks in their workplace, such as health and care workers, and those in industrial settings like those exposed to dust hazards.

It is important to know that the evidence of the benefit of using a face covering to protect others is weak and the effect is likely to be small, therefore face coverings are not a replacement for the other ways of managing risk, including minimising time spent in contact, using fixed teams and partnering for close-up work, and increasing hand and surface washing. These other measures remain the best ways of managing risk in the workplace and government would therefore not expect to see employers relying on face coverings as risk management for the purpose of their health and safety assessments.

Wearing a face covering is optional and is not required by law, including in the workplace. If you choose to wear one, itis important to use face coverings properly and wash your hands before putting them on and taking them off.

Employers should support their workers in using face coverings safely if they choose to wear one. This means telling workers:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on, and after removing it.
- When wearing a face covering, avoid touching your face or face covering, as you could contaminate them with germs from your hands.
- Change your face covering if it becomes damp or if you've touched it.
- Continue to wash your hands regularly.
- Change and wash your face covering daily.
- If the material is washable, wash in line with manufacturer's instructions. If it's not washable, dispose of it carefully in your usual waste.
- Practise social distancing wherever possible.

You can make face-coverings at home and can find guidance on how to do this and use them safely on GOV.UK.

19 Workforce Management

19.1 Shift patterns

- As far as possible, where staff are split into teams or shift groups, fixing these teams or shift groups so that where contact is unavoidable, this happens between the same people.
- Identifying areas where people directly pass things to each other, for example office supplies, and finding ways to remove direct contact, such as using drop-off points or transfer zones.

19.2 Work related travel

- Minimising non-essential travel – consider remote options first.
- Minimising the number of people travelling together in any one vehicle, using fixed travel partners, increasing ventilation when possible and avoiding sitting face-to-face.
- Cleaning shared vehicles between shifts or on handover.
- Putting in place procedures to minimise person-to-person contact during deliveries to other sites.
- Maintaining consistent pairing where two-person deliveries are required.
- Minimising contact during payments and exchange of documentation, for example, by using electronic payment methods and electronically signed and exchanged documents.

20 Communications & training

Providing clear, consistent and regular communication to improve understanding and consistency of ways of working.

Engaging with workers and worker representatives through existing communication routes to explain and agree any changes in working arrangements.

- Developing communication and training materials for workers prior to returning to site, especially around new procedures for arrival at work.
- Ongoing engagement with workers (including through trades unions or employee representative groups) to monitor and understand any unforeseen impacts of changes to working environments.
  Awareness and focus on the importance of mental health at times of uncertainty. The government has published guidance on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of coronavirus (COVID-19).
- Using simple, clear messaging to explain guidelines using images and clear language, with consideration of groups for which English may not be their first language.
- Using visual communications, for example, whiteboards or signage, to explain changes to schedules, breakdowns or materials shortages to reduce the need for face-to-face communications.
- Communicating approaches and operational procedures to suppliers, customers or trade bodies to help their adoption and to share experience.

21 Inbound & outbound goods

- Revising pick-up and drop-off collection points, procedures, signage and markings.
- Minimising unnecessary contact at gatehouse security, yard and warehouse. For example, non-contact deliveries where the nature of the product allows for use of electronic pre-booking.
- Considering methods to reduce frequency of deliveries, for example by ordering larger quantities less often.
- Where possible and safe, having single workers load or unload vehicles.
- Where possible, using the same pairs of people for loads where more than one is needed.
- Enabling drivers to access welfare facilities when required, consistent with other guidance.

- Encouraging drivers to stay in their vehicles where this does not compromise their safety and existing safe working practice, such as preventing drive-aways.

22 Behaviours

The advice given to staff and received from government will be changing, sometimes rapidly, dependant on the scientific advice they in turn receive. During these difficult times it is incumbent on all staff to act and react in a professional manner and to support, in any way they can, their employer. We would ask all staff to consider their own behaviours, to aid in the delivery of services to the public, in a manner which reflects their and our commitment and professionalism.