

# **WORKING SAFELY DURING COVID-19**

## **HOWELLS RISK ASSESSMENT**

### **Introduction**

The government is easing the national lockdown with a view towards more people returning to work. Employers have a duty to reduce workplace risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level by taking preventative measures and ensuring that everybody's health and safety is protected.

The partners have carried out a risk assessment.

One of the best ways to manage risk is to work from home where possible. Working from home will continue for some time to come which will mitigate many of the risks of returning to work.

Our situation contrasts with those whose businesses have been closed during the lockdown and there is to be a wholesale return of the workforce all at once. We have never closed. We have worked remotely where possible. We have had staff in the office throughout the lockdown. Our return to none remote working is likely to be gradual and coincide hopefully with a decline in the infection rate from Covid-19 generally which in turn mitigates the risk of staff being infected.

We have set out below the steps that we will take to mitigate the risks. This will be kept under review

### **1. Who should go to work?**

The majority of staff who have not been furloughed have been working from home during lockdown.

We will continue with as many staff working from home as possible. We will reopen reception when it is safe and right to do so. Reception staff cannot work from home. Measures will therefore be taken to ensure that social distancing is observed and staff, clients and other visitors to reception are protected.

An individual document has been prepared for the reception areas at Sheffield, Rotherham and Barnsley explaining what measures will be put in place to ensure the above. See Appendix 1.

### **2. Protecting people who are at higher risk**

We have made enquiries of staff to ascertain:

- 1) Any who are clinically extremely vulnerable? Those matching this criteria will have received a letter telling them they are in this group or will have been told by their G.P. The criteria is in the link below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

- 2) Any who are clinically vulnerable? This includes those aged 70 or over and those with some underlying health conditions, all members of this group are listed in the government guidance below

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others>

- 3) Those who live with or care for anybody in categories 1) and 2) above.

Individuals falling into these categories will be prioritised for homeworking.

If homeworking is not possible, then reasonable adjustments will be made to ensure that the member of staff can work as safely as possible on site.

Additionally, staff can access a mental health helpline through our employee assistance programme.

See link below

<https://portal.howellsllp.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/GR02064-Group-Income-Protection-EAP-Poster-04-2017.pdf>

### **3. People who need to self-isolate**

Any staff who need to self-isolate will be prioritised for homeworking.

If they cannot work at home then they will receive any statutory payments to which they are entitled.

### **4. Equality in the workplace**

In accordance with our legal obligations the partners will be mindful of the particular needs of different groups or workers or individuals and will carefully consider any issues raised where a protective characteristic might expose a member of staff to a different degree of risk and where reasonable adjustments can be made to mitigate this.

A staff questionnaire has sought to help identify any such issues.

Staff should bring any concerns that arise to the attention of HR.

## **5. Social distancing at work**

Working at home will assist significantly with social distancing at work.

Where necessary office space will be rearranged to ensure that social distancing can be observed which may include:

- 1) Using back to back or side to side working stations.
- 2) Using screens if necessary.
- 3) Providing specific instructions in relation to reception areas, kitchen areas and toilet areas. (See Appendix 2 and 3).

## **6. Coming to work and leaving work**

Working from home significantly mitigates the risk.

We already have a flexible working system allowing staff to start work between 7:30 am and 10:00 am. and finish between 4.00p.m. and 7.30 p.m. Arrival and departure times are therefore already staggered.

Washing facilities and/or hand sanitizer will be made available at all points of entry to the buildings or parts of the buildings.

Keypads should not be used unless there is no other form of entry. Internal doors with keypads should be left open where possible where this does not create a fire risk.

Care should be taken when using the keypads for logging in. Staff should use tissues when doing so and immediately dispose of the same and/or wash their hands before and after.

## **7. Moving around buildings and work sites**

Working from home significantly mitigates the risk.

Only one person will be allowed to use the lift at a time. Hand sanitizer will be located adjacent to the lifts.

We will ensure that people with disabilities are able to access the lift.

High traffic areas will be less busy because of staff working from home.

## **8. Workplaces and work stations**

Working from home significantly mitigates the risk.

Workplaces and work stations will however be kept under review as people start to return to work to ensure that social distancing is maintained.

In any cases where it is not possible to have work stations two metres apart, screens will be used.

Hot desking will be avoided unless there are no alternatives and if any stations are used for hot desking, staff will clean the work station afterwards with wipes that will be made available for use.

## **9. Meetings**

Working from home significantly mitigates the risk.

Staff have been having meetings by telephone and/or WhatsApp, Zoom etc. This can continue.

Meetings in the office should be limited to what is necessary. Communication should be by telephone or other means wherever possible.

Where meetings do take place, social distancing should be observed.

## **10. Common areas**

See Appendices 1, 2 and 3 for reception, kitchens and toilets.

## **11. Accidents, security and other incidents**

In an emergency, for example, an accident or fire, people do not have to stay two metres apart 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.

## **12. Manage contacts**

Working from home is continuing and reduces the number of people in the offices significantly, which in turn reduces the risk to others attending our premises e.g. the contractors removing confidential waste.

The main area of contact is reception. We will continue with telephone appointments wherever possible to reduce the number of people in reception and adopt the procedures for reception set out in Appendix 1.

Visitors to the premises will be required to observe social distancing and will be administered hand sanitizer upon entering.

Hand sanitizer will be made available in all receptions.

See also Appendix 5 in relation to use of the work van.

### **13. Providing and explaining available guidance.**

Signs will be placed in reception explaining social distancing and our hygiene protocols.

### **13. Keeping the workplace clean**

Working from home significantly mitigates the risk.

Staff are asked to frequently clean work areas and equipment between uses. This includes door handles, keyboards, work surfaces and printers and any other high touch items.

Hand sanitizer will be available at all points of entry and all main doors where people pass through the office.

This is in addition to daily cleaning by our cleaners.

### **14. Hygiene – hand washing, sanitation facilities in toilets**

Working from home significantly mitigates the risk.

Hand sanitizer will be provided in multiple locations. Staff are asked to use this to minimise the risk of transmission from one part of the office to another and to regularly wash their hands even when not moving around the office.

See Appendices 2 and 3 for the use of kitchens and toilets.

Signs will be placed at the entrance to kitchens and toilets as a reminder.

The hand driers are not to be used. Paper towels will be used instead.

Clothes should be washed regularly.

Staff with symptoms should not come to work and should arrange to be tested before returning to work.

If anyone becomes unwell with a new continuous cough, a high temperature or loss of sense of smell in the work place, they will be sent home and advised to follow the stay at home guidance.

## **15. Changing rooms and showers**

We have one shower. It is rarely used and is for one user at a time. Users will clean the shower after use.

## **16. Handling goods, merchandise and other materials, and on site vehicles**

See Appendix 5

## **17. Personal protective equipment (PPE) and face coverings**

The nature of our business is that such that we do not need PPE.

The government guidance is that face covering may be **marginally** beneficial as a precautionary measure. The evidence however suggests that wearing a face covering does not protect you, but it may protect others if you are infected but have not developed symptoms.

Government guidance is that face masks are not a replacement for other ways of managing risk such as social distancing.

Wearing face masks will therefore be optional. If you choose to wear one, it is important to use face coverings properly and wash your hands before putting them on and taking them off.

The partners will support staff who want to use face coverings. Those using face coverings should note:

1. They should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer before putting a face covering on, and after removing it.
2. When wearing a face covering, avoid touching your face or face covering, as you could contaminate them with germs from your hands.
3. Change your face covering if it becomes damp or if you have touched it.
4. Continue to wash your hands regularly.
5. Change and wash your face covering daily.

6. If the material is washable, wash it in line with manufacturer's instructions. If it is not washable, dispose of it carefully in your usual waste.

7. Practice 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.

## **18. Shift patterns and working groups**

Working from home significantly mitigates the risk

## **19. Work related travel**

Working from home significantly mitigates the risk. Staff should work at home if they can.

If staff have to travel they should work or cycle if they can and should not travel with people who are not members of their household if this can be avoided. See the government's guidance below.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers>

Staff have been consulted on any problems with their daily commute and we note the need to prioritising remote working for those who have a problem.

Staff rarely travel from one office to another together and are asked not to do so where possible.

## **20. Communications and training**

Throughout the lockdown, staff have received regular and very detailed updates on issues affecting them because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has included;

1. Government announcements and updates
2. Instructions on remote working
3. Advice on how to stay safe

Communication will continue in the same way moving forward.

## **21. Review**

This risk assessment will be kept under view as circumstances change. Staff are encouraged to feedback to the partners and/or HR anything that is working well, any suggestions for improvements or any concerns.

**Graham Hogarth**

**COLP**

**Version 3 8 June 2020**

## **RISK ASSESSMENT APPENDIX 1 (RECEPTION)**

### **A) SHEFFIELD**

#### **Capacity**

Client numbers will be restricted to allow for social distancing.

Remove all hot drink facilities. Water is available using the water machines and disposable cups. Clients fetch their own drink.

#### **Staffing**

No more than two receptionists will attend the counter protected by a screen and maintain 2 metres distance at all times where practicably possible

Masks and gloves are available for receptionist staff if required.

Reception will oversee the number of clients in and out.

The chip and pin machine to be wiped down after every use.

#### **Signage, markings and client information**

There will be tape on the floor to maintain social distancing. There will be a sign on reception desk and on the door explaining the social distancing rules and protocol for using the offices.

Hand sanitiser available in reception area and clients encouraged to sanitiser on entering reception.

#### **Interview Rooms**

Interview room doors to be left open when not in use to promote air circulation.

Interview Room 1 at the front and Interview Rooms 8, 9, 10, 11 and 14 at the rear can be used to see clients as social distancing can be maintained most easily in these larger rooms

Whilst it is unlikely that they will be needed, the stationery cupboard and room 12 could be used if need be.

Interview Rooms 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 at the front are reserved and their use is to be kept under review.

They may be used by staff who have to attend the office on a particular day and cannot safely use another work station so as to ensure social distancing etc.

They may also be used as a break-out, extra waiting area for any clients in reception who are anxious or have concerns about being in the open main reception areas.

Remote appointments will continue wherever possible. It is anticipated that reception will therefore be less busy than normal. A higher proportion of those attending are likely to be doing so to drop documents off than to attend appointments.

## **Review**

The arrangements will be kept under review and reception staff will report any problems or suggestions for improvement to the head of business support.

## **B) ROTHERHAM**

### **Capacity**

Client numbers will be restricted to allow for social distancing

### **Staffing**

The receptionist will attend the counter protected by a screen.

Masks and gloves are available for receptionist staff if required.

Reception will oversee the number of clients in and out.

The chip and pin machine to be wiped down after every use.

Only the receptionist should access the post room. Post should be left in the hot desk area for the receptionist to collect every day and frank.

### **Signage, markings and client information**

There will be tape on the floor to maintain social distancing. There will be a sign on reception desk and on the door explaining the social distancing rules and protocol for using the offices.

A leaflet containing the same information will also be given to clients and others upon entering the building.

## **Interview Rooms**

Interview room doors to be left open when not in use to promote air circulation.

The large Interview Room 1 behind reception and Interview Room 4 behind the hot desk area can be used to see clients as social distancing can be maintained most easily in these larger rooms

The two smaller Interview Rooms behind reception are reserved and their use is to be kept under review.

They may be used by staff who have to attend the office on a particular day and cannot safely use another work station so as to ensure social distancing etc.

They may also be used as a break-out, extra waiting area for any clients in reception who are anxious or have concerns about being in the open main reception areas.

Remote appointments will continue wherever possible. It is anticipated that reception will therefore be less busy than normal. A higher proportion of those attending are likely to be doing so to drop documents off than to attend appointments

## **Review**

The arrangements will be kept under review and reception staff will report any problems or suggestions for improvement to the head of business support.

## **C) BARNESLEY**

### **Capacity**

Client numbers will be restricted to allow for social distancing.

Reception will be protected by a screen

Remove all hot drink facilities. Water is available using the water machines and disposable cups. Clients fetch their own drink.

Reception will oversee the number of clients in and out.

### **Staffing**

Masks and gloves are available for receptionist staff if required.

The chip and pin machine to be wiped down after every use.

### **Signage, markings and client information**

There will be tape on the floor to maintain social distancing. There will be a sign on reception desk and on the door explaining the social distancing rules and protocol for using the offices.

### **Interview Rooms**

Interview room doors to be left open when not in use to promote air circulation.

Social distancing can be maintained in all interview rooms if desks are rearranged

### **Review**

The arrangements will be kept under review and reception staff will report any problems or suggestions for improvement to the head of business support.

### **Version 2**

**1 June 2020**

## **RISK ASSESSMENT APPENDIX 2 (TOILETS)**

### **A) SHEFFIELD**

All toilets should be used by one person at a time. Some toilets are for single use in any event. For those that are not, users should knock on the door before entering. Toilet and sink areas should be cleaned as much as possible after use.

Hand driers should not be used. Paper towels should be used and disposed of.

Signs will be placed on toilet doors reminding staff and clients of the protocol

### **B) ROTHERHAM**

Toilet and sink areas should be cleaned as much as possible after use.

Hand driers should not be used. Paper towels should be used and disposed of.

Signs will be placed on toilet doors reminding staff and clients of the protocol

### **C) BARNESLEY**

Toilet and sink areas should be cleaned as much as possible after use.

Hand driers should not be used. Paper towels should be used and disposed of.

Signs will be placed on toilet doors reminding staff and clients of the protocol

### **ALL OFFICES**

The cleaners will make sure toilets are well stocked with cleaning materials. If however you have any concerns or notice anything such as soap running low please bring it to the attention of Simon Sheldon, the head of Business Support.

**Version 2**

**1 June 2020**

## **RISK ASSESSMENT APPENDIX 3 (KITCHENS)**

Please do not make drinks for other staff members or clients.

Please do not bring food out of the kitchen area for other staff members.

Only one person is allowed in the kitchen area at any one time. After using the kitchen, work surfaces, kettles, hot water dispensers, microwaves, toasters etc. should be cleaned with wipes and disposed of.

Staff do not have to use the kitchen if they do not want to. Staff are encouraged to try and keep their use of the kitchen to a minimum

Staff wishing to use the kitchen should use their own cups, plates and cutlery etc. whenever possible and are responsible for cleaning them. No plates, cups or cutlery etc. should be left in the sink.

The dishwasher may be used but care should be taken when removing items from the same as you may be touching other people's plates etc. Therefore use hand sanitiser when removing items and try wherever possible only to handle your own,

The microwave can be used to heat up but not defrost pre-cooked meals. Food cannot be prepared in the kitchen e.g. making sandwiches/ salads. All food should be pre-prepared and the kitchen used only to store food in the fridge or cupboards or be heated up in the micro-wave.

Hand sanitiser should be used after entering the kitchen and immediately after leaving.

Staff are encouraged to bring packed lunches to keep the use of the kitchen to a minimum.

**Version 2**

**1 June 2020**

**RISK ASSESSMENT  
APPENDIX 4  
(ENTERING, WORKING AND MOVING AROUND THE BUILDING)**

**A) SHEFFIELD**

**Bridge Street**

The number of staff present in the office for the forthcoming future is likely to be low. We do not therefore propose introducing a one way system. This will however be kept under review

For security reasons the door from reception to the staff area may have to be locked and the keypad may have to be used.

In such cases, hand sanitizer available in reception and at various points of entry to the different parts of the building should be used after touching the keypad.

Care should be taken when using the keypads for logging in. Staff should use tissues when doing so and immediately dispose of the same and/or wash their hands before and after. Staff have the option of using their computer to log in and out.

**Richfield House**

The number of staff present in the office for the forthcoming future is likely to be low. We do not therefore propose introducing a one way system. This will however be kept under review

Care should be taken when using the keypads for logging in. Staff should use tissues when doing so and immediately dispose of the same and/or wash their hands before and after. Staff have the option of using their computer to log in and out.

**B) ROTHERHAM**

The number of staff present in the office for the forthcoming future is likely to be low. We do not therefore propose introducing a one way system. This will however be kept under review

For security reasons the door from reception to the staff areas may have to be locked and the keypads may have to be used.

In such cases, hand sanitizer available in reception and at various points of entry to the different parts of the building should be used after touching the keypad.

Care should be taken when using the keypads for logging in. Staff should use tissues when doing so and immediately dispose of the same and/or wash their hands before and after. Staff have the option of using their computer to log in and out.

NB The conveyancers on the first floor and care team on the top floor need to open a door to get to their printer/copier on the other side of the floor. They are both fire doors so we will need hand sanitiser close to those doors as they cannot be propped open.

### **C)BARNESLEY**

The number of staff present in the office for the forthcoming future is likely to be low. We do not therefore propose introducing a one way system. This will however be kept under review

For security reasons the door from reception to the staff area may have to be locked and the keypad may have to be used.

In such cases, hand sanitizer available in reception and at various points of entry to the different parts of the building should be used after touching the keypad.

Care should be taken when using the keypads for logging in. Staff should use tissues when doing so and immediately dispose of the same and/or wash their hands before and after. Staff have the option of using their computer to log in and out.

### **Working in the Office (applies to all buildings)**

Staff who are currently working from home should continue to work from home provided their job can be done at normal capacity. Only come into the office if it is necessary.

Please keep your movements around the office to a minimum. Consult colleagues by phone if you can rather than walking across the office to speak to them

Open windows to promote air circulation, making sure the last person on your floor closes the windows.

Wherever possible work back to back or side to side as opposed to face to face.

Adhere to 2 metres social distancing when approaching another staff members desk.

Avoid face to face meetings where possible.

**Version 2**

**26 May 2020**

**RETURN TO WORK RISK ASSESSMENT  
APPENDIX 5  
OFFICE VAN/POST HANDLER**

**OFFICE VAN**

The Post Handler should be the only person allowed in the office van at all times.

No passengers allowed.

If the Post Handler is on holiday, all surfaces in the office van should be wiped down and cleaned before someone else enters and drives the van.

Anti-Bac cleaning wipes will be in the office van glove box at all times.

Masks and Gloves will be available if required.

Gloves to be worn when attending a petrol station for fuel.

Hand Sanitiser to be kept in the office van and used regularly as washing facilities are not available.

**POST HANDLER**

Gloves will be available if required to open the incoming post.

Hands are to be washed immediately when all incoming post is opened.

The Post Handler will be moving post and stationery items around the offices and will adhere to 2 metre social distancing where possible and regularly wash hands.

Gloves will be available if required to collect outgoing post.

Hands to be washed immediately when all outgoing post has been franked and bagged.

The franking machine to be wiped down after every use.

**Version 2**  
1 June 2020