COVID-19
Office reawakening

Employee return procedures
Contents

1  Introduction 1
1.1  Readiness for Occupation 1
1.2  Reconfiguration 2
1.3  Returning to work: 3
1.4  Occupational health, safety and wellbeing 4
1.5  Communication 5
2  Office re-awakening: further services 5
3  SHEQ Helpdesk 5
1 **Introduction**

Over the coming weeks and months, organisations will begin the process of reawakening their offices and physical workplaces, and start the process of migrating their workforce from those working at home, and those currently on furlough, back into their premises. The mix of returning workers will vary, and inevitably a sizeable proportion of the workforce will – and should - continue to work remotely for the coming months.

However, as workplaces begin to emerge from the impact of Covid, and start to bring people back into the physical workplace, careful planning and management will be key. In England, the Government has produced a variety of detailed guidance notes by different industries. These may also be useful in other countries and can be found here:


We are in unprecedented times, and the guidance we have developed here does not constitute legal advice, but outlines some of the key actions you may wish to consider as you start reawakening your offices.

1.1 **Readiness for Occupation**

This will include:

- Seeking assurance from landlords or managing agents that shared or managed office spaces are open, safe, cleaned, and ready for use. This will include shared toilets, staircase doors and handrails, lift and lift controls, escalators, door access pads and turnstiles.
- Ensuring all statutory maintenance has been carried out in advance of opening, including but not restricted to:
  - Water Hygiene Compliance (Legionella Testing and Regular Flushing)
  - Emergency Lighting Tests
  - Fire Equipment Tests

and results of the above are satisfactory.

- Deep cleaning the office space, paying particular attention to all touch points and hard surfaces.
- Ordering in and providing cleaning materials, soap, hand-sanitisers and paper towels.
- Reviewing operations and agreements with FM Contractors, this may require changes to specification, materials, equipment, rotas and costs.
- Pre-occupation work to include readying IT, switchboard and kitchen equipment, office security and access systems are operating, clearing post, engaging with suppliers to arrange deliveries of necessary supplies, paper, milk etc.
- Notifying insurers that offices are now reopening.
- Completing and updating office health and safety risk assessments, fire risk assessments, emergency plans and facilities/premises checklists/inspections.
1.2 Reconfiguration

Following relevant government guidance, ask employees to:

- Maintain social distancing in the office when working and moving around (2 metres).
- Using sanitising wipes, clean all surfaces they touch to including but not restricted to working surfaces, telephones, printers, keyboards and display screens.
- Not share cutlery, crockery or towels.

Where possible workstations should be assigned to an individual and not shared. If they need to be shared they should be shared by the smallest possible number of people.

Consider using ‘fixed teams or partnering’ (so each person works with only a few others) and removing access to hot desk / shared / collaborative work areas. If not, these areas will need regular cleaning, and cleaning before and after each person uses the hot desk.

Employers will also need to consider:

- Marking up desks and hot-desk areas which meet the distancing requirements so that colleagues can easily identify where they can sit. This could include for example a row of 3 desks reduced to 2.
- Reallocating meeting room space and breakout areas in to workstations
- Using screens or barriers to separate people from each other, where the 2 metre social distancing rules cannot be applied.
- Using back-to-back or side-to-side working (rather than face-to-face) whenever possible
- Avoiding transmission during meetings, for example, avoiding sharing pens and other objects.
1.3 Returning to work:

- Local government guidance must be followed at all times regarding when businesses should and shouldn’t re-open. In all cases existing rules must still be followed with regards to self-isolation – for example where the individual displays symptoms, where there are symptoms within the family, or where people have recently travelled.

- A risk-based approach must be implemented for those people defined as ‘susceptible’ or are living with such people – for example elderly, or those with certain health conditions. For example in the UK, such people have been written to by the UK government requiring them to isolate for 12 weeks. Check if any similar schemes existing in your country. If any of these people are employed by you, they must continue to work from home.

- Once the decision to re-open has been taken, a gradual phased return to work should be implemented – initially only those people whose presence in the office or workplace is considered essential. Consider implementing a rota system, or staggered work pattern, such as 3 days in the office, 2 days at home etc.

- Any people who are able to effectively continue working from home should still be actively encouraged to do so. Skype for Business or other virtual platforms should continue to be encouraged.

- Access to higher story offices via lifts may result in a limiting factor on occupancy. To maintain social distancing rules, the lift carriages effectively mean perhaps just 1 person at a time in the lift, for any building user. This will cause congestion and present a very slow method of accessing offices on the upper floors of larger building – thereby effectively greatly reducing the number of people who can work from the office.

- An assessment must be made of the availability of first aiders and fire marshals – this is a legal duty, and employers must ensure there are adequate numbers of each available at all times when the office is occupied.
Employee return procedures

- Business visitors to the office should not be permitted at this time, except where permitted by local government authorities. Meetings, presentations, demonstrations etc. should be completed via Skype etc.

- Where internal meetings are taking place, social distancing rules must be applied.

- Public transport travel should be discouraged, and people encouraged to walk, cycle, or use their own vehicle to travel to the office. Consider availability and accessibility of nearby car parks.

- Where personal travel by car is effectively not an option, city centre locations for example, then people in these locations should be further encouraged to work from home, and if accessing the office/workplace is absolutely necessary, travel at off-peak times.

- If there is a requirement for people to use public transport, they should follow the latest government advice in relation to any requirements to wear face coverings.

1.4 Occupational health, safety and wellbeing

People may be anxious, and will need reassurance that the workplace is safe therefore we recommend the following:

- The office risk assessment and work activity risk assessments (e.g. administering first aid) must be updated to reflect any revised controls that must be implemented. All those affected must be informed of the new control measures.

- Provide posters and regular reminders of World Health Organisation or local country guidance – washing hands for 20 seconds, social distancing etc.

- Post clear instructions at the entrance to offices instructing people to wash their hands as soon as they have arrived at the office.

- Suitable hand sanitiser should also be provided in locations around the office, and its use actively encouraged if soap and water hand washing facilities are limited or likely to be crowded. Effective alcohol-free hand sanitiser should also be provided for those who may not use alcohol-based products.

- Disposable gloves should be provided if identified as a requirement from the risk assessment, and suitable disposal facilities provided.

- Disinfectant wipes should be provided at desks, meeting rooms (where these remain accessible), break out and food prep areas.

- Increased cleaning, particularly of touch points and hard surfaces should be implemented.

- If safe and appropriate to do so, doors that are not fire doors should be left open to aid ventilation and reduce contact with door handles.

- Social distancing must be maintained – therefore:
  - staggering break and lunch times,
  - encouraging colleagues not to eat at communal dinner tables;
  - staggering arrival and departure times at the office – draw up a rota;
  - advise to generally avoid food prep areas if possible – encourage people to bring/buy prepared food/drinks rather than refill cups at the water dispenser / z tap

- Ask first aiders to carry out an assessment before considering treatment, and to follow the latest industry advice (e.g. from St John’s Ambulance or other reputable 1st aid organisation) if they choose to treat, and/or supervise people administering first aid.
1.5 Communication

- Communicate to employees ahead of their return what the temporary working arrangements will be and what is expected of them.
- Display reminders within the office (posters, signage) of the World Health Organisation, or local country hygiene guidance.
- Email reminders of any relevant support services you have such as – Employee Assistance Programs, wellbeing support, mental health first aiders etc.
- Display reminders of what to do if they feel ill – symptoms, self-isolation etc. in line with government guidelines and your internal policies.
- If your staff are required to go to other locations or workplaces as part of their job, ensure that you communicate and co-ordinate with other relevant parties to ensure that suitable health, safety and welfare measures are in place to protect your employees while on 3rd party sites.

2. Office re-awakening: further services

Should you require further support, Turner & Townsend can offer a range of services to clients in respect of safe re-awakening of offices and workplaces, including:

- Assurance that HSW risks are being identified and managed effectively at each stage.
- Detailed risk assessment for phased return of different groups – or where social distancing for certain tasks is not possible for health & safety reasons.
- Site inspections to confirm ongoing arrangements.
- Understanding of responsibilities where there are landlord controlled shared areas and services.
- Renewed site inductions/toolbox talks in light of changes.
- Delivery of virtual H&S training / development sessions for staff and particularly those with line management responsibility. These can be delivered face to face (assuming social distancing can be achieved) or via virtual classrooms.

3. SHEQ Helpdesk

We also offer a free helpdesk email service to answer any of our clients’ safety, health, environmental and quality concerns in relation to safe re-awakening and operation of offices and other workplaces during COVID 19 restrictions.

Our SHEQ Helpdesk is operated by a team of highly experienced SHEQ specialists. They will guide you through your options and support you to navigate through COVID-19 and its SHEQ impacts. We offer our clients up to one hour of free advice on any SHEQ problem relating to COVID-19 issues. For further information or queries please contact our SHEQ Helpdesk at:

e: sheqhelpdesk@turntown.com

(NB This is currently only operating as an English language service)
Employee return procedures

**About Turner & Townsend**

Turner & Townsend is an independent professional services company specialising in programme management, project management, cost management and advisory services across the real estate, infrastructure and natural resources sectors.

With 110 offices in 45 countries, we draw on our extensive global and industry experience to manage risk while maximising value and performance during the construction and operation of our clients’ assets.