

## Business Update

Following the Prime Minister's announcement on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> May 2020 of the Government's Covid-19 recovery plans, further details have been announced and the picture is starting to become clearer for businesses in England. What is apparent is that the steps back to 'normal' will be incremental and that a positive attitude to change and flexibility will be essential. We have outlined below the key elements of the plan to aid you in your planning for the short and medium term.

### The initial steps outlined in the Covid-19 Recovery Plan

Step 1 which applies from Wednesday 13 May 2020 outlined a number of guidelines relating to business and work.

- ◆ For the time being, employees should continue to work from home rather than their normal physical workplace, wherever possible.
- ◆ Any worker who is unable to work from home, is fit to work and whose workplace is operating should return to work as soon as possible.
- ◆ Employers, using the Covid-19 Secure guidelines, should ensure that their workplaces are safe, and the risk of infection is low.
- ◆ Workers returning to their workplace should, wherever possible, avoid using public transport and employers are being asked to encourage and facilitate this as far as possible.
- ◆ Employees should be encouraged to wear face coverings in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not always possible. This does not have to be a medical face mask as used in the NHS but a face covering which may reduce the transmission of the virus.
- ◆ Any employee displaying symptoms of the virus or who is sharing a house with someone who has symptoms, should stay at home and self-isolate.
- ◆ Any employee who has been designated by their doctor as 'clinically *extremely* vulnerable' should continue to be shielded and remain at home.
- ◆ Any employee who is designated by the Government as clinically vulnerable such as those aged over 70, those with specific chronic pre-existing conditions and pregnant women, do not need to be shielded; however, they have been advised to minimise contact with those outside their household. A specific risk assessment should be completed for any employee in this group before they attend the workplace.

Although the Government outlined step 2 and 3, the content and timing of these remains flexible, dependent on the effect step 1 actions have on the Government's five tests for easing measures and as such, are best considered in a few weeks when progress may be assessed.

# STREETS HUMAN RESOURCES

## The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)

The Chancellor announced on 12 May 2020 that support through the CJRS will continue beyond the original date of 30 June. The nature and structure of the support will be changed in order to provide flexibility to businesses whilst protecting jobs. The key elements of the announcement are:

- ◆ The scheme, as it is currently, will be extended until 31 July 2020 with furloughed workers continuing to receive 80% of their monthly earnings up to a maximum of £2,500 funded entirely by the Government.
- ◆ Support will be available under the scheme from 1 August until 31 October 2020 but changes will be made to the scheme to allow furloughed workers to return to work on a part-time basis. However, employers will have to pay a percentage towards the salaries of their furloughed staff to ensure they continue to receive 80% of their salary, up to £2,500 a month.

The details of how CJRS will work in practice from 1 August are not available at this stage and will not be until the end of May. The announced changes at the very least for now give another month's respite for furloughed workers and businesses who are unsure of how the recovery plans will impact them. The lack of detail on how it will operate for the final three months will make planning more difficult. We will need to wait for the clarification on such things as: will the scheme allow staff to remain fully furloughed until the end of October should you need; the exact basis of how and who pays for part-time returning furlough staff; etc.

## The 'Covid-19 Secure' guidelines

The Government has published eight 'Covid-19 Secure' guidance documents covering safe working practices for employers and employees across a range of different workplaces and settings – <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>. These provide detailed guidance on how employees can work safely during the pandemic maintaining social distancing.

Each organisation will need to apply the guidance and take specific actions dependent on the nature of their business, including the size and type of business, how it is organised, operated and regulated. It should be noted that the advice does not supersede existing legal requirements such as relevant health and safety legislation and should be applied to employees, workers, consultants, contractors and agency workers.

The starting point irrespective of the workplace is:

- ◆ A risk assessment which for organisations of more than 5 employees must be documented. There is no specific format for the risk assessment but the Health and Safety Executive provides a range of templates and tools to help with this – <https://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/assessment.htm>

# STREETS HUMAN RESOURCES

- ◆ The various Covid-19 Secure guidelines provides examples of the types of risk that your workplace may present and suggested measures that you may take. The Government has been keen to indicate that these are suggestions and are not legal obligations but you will need to be able to evidence that you have taken reasonable measures to reduce risks.
- ◆ The risk assessment must be shared with employees and there is a poster that has been produced for employers to display to demonstrate that they have undertaken the assessment. Organisations with over 50 employees will be expected to publish their risk assessment on their website.
- ◆ As well as a general risk assessment, individual risk assessments should be done for any employee who is at a higher risk.

## Other considerations

Before re-opening or asking those on furlough to commence working whether at home or in the workplace, there are several considerations and actions. Many employees have been on furlough for weeks – research shows those who have been away from the workplace for 4 weeks or more, usually due to long-term sickness, struggle on their return. This can be due to having formed new routines and structures in their lives, lacking confidence in working with people that they have not seen for a long time or purely have forgotten their IT passwords! All organisations should consider:

- ◆ Communicating to **all** employees the organisation's plans as a result of the Government's change of advice. These may be tentative plans but communicating them will give employees reassurance and guidance so they can prepare themselves.
- ◆ Review and follow the guidance in the relevant Covid-19 Secure guidelines communicating when this has been done and what measures have been taken for both employees working from home as well as the normal workplace.
- ◆ Speaking to each employee, ideally at least a week, before you wish them to return from furlough to explain the arrangements for their return and address any concerns they have. This should then be confirmed in writing.
- ◆ Arrange any training or re-training that you think may be necessary and send out guidance on new working practices.
- ◆ Ensure that technology will work when people return including passwords.

**The information contained in this Factsheet is believed to be correct as at 13/05/20 but there may be errors or omissions for which the Streets organisation cannot be held responsible. Should you seek any further guidance please email your usual Streets contact or email [info@streetsweb.co.uk](mailto:info@streetsweb.co.uk) or visit [www.streetsweb.co.uk](http://www.streetsweb.co.uk).**