INTRODUCTION

This guidance document sets out a proposed course of action for a safe return to employees' normal places of work, following the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions from Government on 11 May 2020 and subsequent updates. The primary aim of being the safeguarding of staff and their households.

The guidance in this document promotes a risk averse approach to any easing of the current remote working practices, including the management of a slow and graduated return to normal workplaces and duties. The Council will ensure that control measures are implemented as appropriate to the current perceived level of threat of potential further outbreaks of the virus. It is also recognised that at present the recommendation from Government is that people should continue to work from home if possible.

This guidance is consistent with current H&S and HR legislation and evolving Government Guidance. It should be noted that there is an increasing amount of information and data from various Institutions and Governing Bodies during this pandemic. This guidance primarily reflects information gathered from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Public Health England (PHE) and Government Guidance on Covid-19.

1.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

Management Team are initially responsible for identifying and agreeing relevant control measures necessary to slowly introduce the safe return of staff back to their normal places of work, and for ensuring that appropriate consultation takes place with Union and or staff representatives and with staff who may be potentially impacted by the control measures. Services will support the Corporate approach by carrying out local service specific risk assessments to ensure any local risks have been reduced as far as is reasonable under the current Government advice.

All employees have a duty to take responsibility for maintaining their own social distancing and respecting the safety and welfare of their colleagues, members of the public and contractors etc. This must include maintaining strict personal hygiene (particularly regular handwashing), adhering to any Council instructions, reporting COVID-19 symptoms in a timely manner to their Manager, and following the Government's rules on self-isolation and testing.

Directors and Heads of Service are responsible for ensuring all the necessary control measures are identified and implemented through to local level via their Heads of Service and Managers.

Manager, Team leaders, Supervisors are responsible for ensuring all the relevant new guidance and procedures are circulated to staff and implement local arrangements as agreed.

2. EMPLOYEE SAFETY

If an employee feels unwell with suspected COVID-19 symptoms, or believes they may have been exposed to, or have contracted COVID-19, they must not go their workplace and must report in accordance with the established sickness procedure. Any Key/Critical Worker must consider applying to the Government for COVID-19 testing which can be applied for online through the Gov.uk website.

Employees must provide the following information to their line manager:

- date of feeling unwell
- list of locations visited and names of colleagues they were in contact with prior to being symptomatic and during the early stages of the disease

Testing for Covid-19
There are two routes employees can take; organising the test themselves or HR making a booking by accessing a Government portal. The preferred option would be for staff to make their own arrangements and apply for the testing online as the facility for HR to request tests does not appear to enable staff to choose a venue or a preferred timeslot.

Applying for a test - https://www.gov.uk/apply-coronavirus-test

Information on testing and testing kits -
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-tests-and-testing-kits-for-coronavirus-covid-19-work/for-patients-the-public-and-professional-users-a-guide-to-covid-19-tests-and-testing-kits

Track and Trace App
For those who may not have access to the app, or the ability to use a smartphone, there will be an option to report symptoms and order tests in other ways. As the integrated service develops, everyone who reports symptoms, including app users, will also be asked to record recent contacts using an online service (or through a telephone interview if they prefer), so that contact tracers can reach all contacts who may be at

risk, whether or not those contacts are app users. Contacts will then be alerted either by the app or by email or telephone, advising them to self-isolate or offering public health advice. The Council will need to look at the implications of this on all Council mobiles.

Public Transport

Consider all other forms of transport before using public transport.

Travel may take longer than normal on some routes due to reduced capacity and social distancing measures. Allow sufficient time if your journey involves changes between different forms of transport. Travelling off peak may be beneficial. The Council may need to identify employees who depend on public transport to travel to work so that line managers can discuss and agree options for minimising the potential health risks to the employee (e.g. staggering start and finish times to avoid patterns of peak travel).

3. VULNERABLE, DEPENDENT CARE GROUPS AND SOCIAL CARE PROVIDERS

The NHS has identified vulnerable individuals who are at greater risk of COVID-19 complications, as defined on their website:

https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/people-at-higher-risk-from-coronavirus/whos-at-higher-risk-from-coronavirus/

Who's at higher risk from coronavirus?

Coronavirus (COVID-19) can make anyone seriously ill. But for some people, the risk is higher.

There are 2 levels of higher risk:

- high risk (clinically extremely vulnerable)
- moderate risk (clinically vulnerable)

Who is 'clinically extremely vulnerable'?

Doctors in England have identified specific medical conditions that, based on what we know about the virus so far, place someone at greatest risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

Clinically extremely vulnerable people may include the following people. Disease severity, history or treatment levels will also affect who is in the group.

1. Solid organ transplant recipients.
2. People with specific cancers:

- people with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy
- people with lung cancer who are undergoing radical radiotherapy
- people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
- people having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
- people having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
- people who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs

3. People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe chronic obstructive pulmonary (COPD).
4. People with rare diseases that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell).
5. People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection.
6. Women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired.

People who fall in this group should have been contacted to tell them they are clinically extremely vulnerable, and that they should stay at home.

People at moderate risk (clinically vulnerable)

People at moderate risk from coronavirus include people who:

- are 70 or older
- are pregnant
- have a lung condition that's not severe (such as asthma, COPD, emphysema or bronchitis)
- have heart disease (such as heart failure)
- have diabetes
- have chronic kidney disease
- have liver disease (such as hepatitis)
- have a condition affecting the brain or nerves (such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis or cerebral palsy)
- have a condition that means they have a high risk of getting infections
- are taking medicine that can affect the immune system (such as low doses of steroids)
- are very obese (a BMI of 40 or above)

What to do if you're at moderate risk
- If you're at moderate risk from coronavirus, it's very important you follow the advice on social distancing.

- This means you should stay at home as much as possible. But you can go out to work (if you cannot work from home) and for things like getting food or exercising.

- Unlike people at high risk, you will not get a letter from the NHS advising you to stay at home at all times.

Dependent Care Groups

TMBC recognises that until such time that **schools**, **childcare providers and care home providers** return to providing services on a consistent and reliable basis, employees may need to support the provision of continuing care.

Consideration will also be given to ongoing requirements for social isolation for those who are a member of a household with one or more clinically extremely vulnerable people.

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Employees (BAME)

There is a growing body of evidence that there is an increased risk amongst the BAME community of catching and dying from Covid 19. A number of organisations, including Public Health England, are reviewing the evidence in an attempt to establish why this may be so. Hopefully this will eventually result in national guidance/guidelines on mitigation factors. In the meantime, if any employees consider themselves to be at increased risk due to their ethnicity they should raise this with their line manager and consideration will be given to identifying mitigation measures.

4. RISK ASSESSMENTS

The Corporate risk assessment process is key to determining when it is safe to return to normal places of work and whether any employee requires specific consideration.

Consideration of the following principal risk factors to include:

- Business need for attendance at a workplace by employees, delivery of a service, together with the frequency of such attendance, with the primary focus being the remote delivery of services where appropriate
- Identification and consideration of employees deemed to be extremely clinically vulnerable or clinically vulnerable (or who have household members in either group), as well as those providing care to dependents
- Self-identification of those who consider that they may be vulnerable due to other risk factors such as age, ethnicity and obesity
- Workplace layout and circulation routes, including control of access where distancing cannot be maintained
- Cross contamination risks via shared workstations, access to toilets,

- meeting rooms, photocopiers, kitchen areas and communal areas
  - Workplace occupancy levels
  - Visitors attendance at TMBC workplaces for meetings or to carry out maintenance/repairs
  - Access and egress from the workplace (e.g. lift, shared stairwells and bottlenecks)
  - Modes of travel to and from workplaces, in particular public transport.
  - Higher risk workplaces and tasks
  - Consideration of the need for, and availability of suitable of PPE
  - Availability of anti-bacteria cleaning products
  - First aid provisions including availability of first aiders and inclusion of appropriate PPE within first aid kits
  - Air handling and air movements, particularly within lifts, confined spaces and areas where there is little/no air exchange
  - Fire evacuation procedures and the need for Incident controllers on site at Gibson and Tonbridge Castle.

The Corporate Covid -19 Risk Assessment and Guidance will be communicated via senior managers. It will advise employees on the generic hazards associated with TMBC's undertakings and the precautions that employees must take to mitigate their risk of exposure, infection and transmission.

The Risk Assessment also acts as a checklist, providing the facility to record details of the actual actions taken to control the risk, the date implemented and whether further actions are required.

4.1 Service Specific Risk Assessments

Each workplace and Service is unique; every location must be subject to a local Covid-19 Risk Assessment that considers the specific hazards that may present a COVID-19 exposure risk.

Consideration will need to be given to the advice/guidance that Services will be receiving from other sources within industry e.g. Charted Institute for Environmental Health (CIEH), ACAS, Governing bodies for Leisure, Waste etc.

The Corporate COVID-19 Risk Assessment can be used as a template and amended, as appropriate by each Service. Its development must involve working with staff, to assess and record the tasks, activities, equipment and workplace layout and PPE needed, as well as appropriate consultation with Unison and/or staff representatives.

Once the workplace hazards and appropriate control measures have been determined, the Service Covid-19 Risk Assessment must record details of the actual actions undertaken to control the risk and detail any further actions required, together with who is accountable for implementing those actions i.e. all employees, Head of Service,

Managers, Team leaders.

5. SAFEGUARDING FACTORS WITHIN TMBC CONTROL

To protect employees, there is a need to consider making adaptations to workplaces and work arrangements. Where TMBC has control or influence, the following safeguarding factors are to be considered and implemented (as appropriate) at each work location:

- **Workplace Layout for an office environment**
  The office layout must be considered **prior** to employees occupying the workspace to establish how 2m social distancing can be maintained between employees.
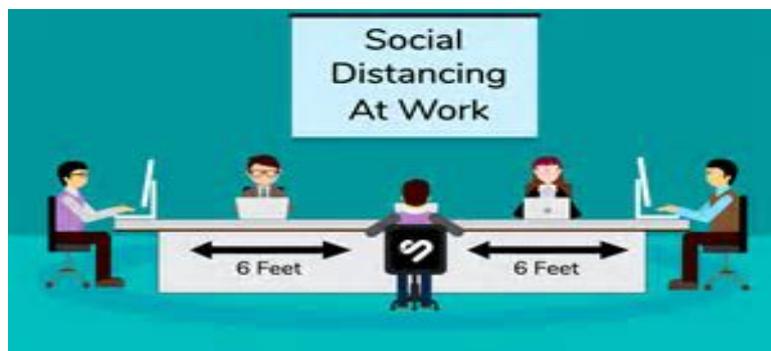
  Layout considerations are to include the circulation of employees through the workspace to determine whether specific measures are necessary. This may include the physical removal of seats and barring/taping-off communal/break-out areas to enforce restrictions and introducing one-way systems to assist social distancing.

- **Workplace occupancy**
  Calculate the workplace's maximum occupancy based on the ability to maintain social distancing and actively manage attendance so this level is not exceeded, factoring in any visitors and contractors who may be present.

- **Phased return to the workplace**
  To be considered for groups and/or teams, whereby certain individuals return to the workplace before others. This must be based upon an assessment to determine those activities that can continue to be delivered remotely and whether physical attendance can be combined and/or delivered by others.

- **Employee rotas for office and Work from Home (WFH) days**
  The use of rotas must be considered to minimize the number of individuals in a workspace, which may be introduced for the entire workspace or for

individual teams and Services, e.g. Team A / Team B attendance schedules.

- **Staggered start and finish times**
  To be considered to reduce occupancy levels at any given time. Employees to be consulted to establish their preference in start and finish times where possible.

- **Travel to place of work and business travel**
  The mode of travelling to a workplace requires careful consideration, particularly where this is only possible via public transport. Where feasible, the use of public transport must be avoided during rush hour. Hands must be thoroughly sanitised after travel on public transport and where officially recommended, face masks worn.

- **Desks/workstations**
  Must be kept as clear as possible so can be easily cleaned with anti –bacteria spray by the employee after use each day.

- **Door usage**
  Hand sanitiser dispensers will be placed by near staff entrance and exit   points to and from the buildings so they can sanitiser their hands once entering the premises and when leaving.

- **Hot desking and equipment**
  Employees who hot desk will need to ensure that a desk is available and to clean the desk and equipment before and after use.

  Where hot desking is unavoidable, there is to be no shared use of equipment, such as laptops, headsets, pens, keyboards or mice.

  All employees will be required to clean common equipment, e.g. photocopies and printers pre and post usage.

- **Kitchens, canteen area (Gibson) and breakout areas**
  Kitchen areas should only have one person at a time.

  Ensure there is adequate spacing between tables and restrict usage of the tables to one or a maximum of two individuals (depending upon the table size) to maintain distancing. Chairs may be removed or taped off to enforce distancing.

  Consider staggering lunchtimes and breaks to ensure that common areas are not subject to crowding.

Disinfecting products to be available to allow employees to clean surfaces and taps and handles to be wiped down or sprayed after use. Areas like fridge handles, hydro boiler levers for hot water and taps will need to be sprayed with anti-bac after each use by that member of staff.

- **Meetings**
  Wherever possible, continue to conduct meetings using digital platforms e.g. Skype, Microsoft Teams. Where face to face attendance at meetings is necessary, the number of invitees must reflect the room size and the ability to allow spacing between chairs. Where meeting rooms are not sufficiently sized to allow multiple occupation, they must be limited to single occupancy or taken out of use.

- **Cleaning**
  Appropriate disinfectant and cleaning products to be made available at each workplace for employee use. COSHH Safety Data Sheets to be displayed where necessary.

  Desks/workstations to be cleaned by the user at the beginning and end of each occupancy, using appropriate disinfecting products. Other areas requiring cleaning after use:

  - Door handles
  - Fridge
  - Handrails
  - Microwave
  - Taps
  - Breakout areas
  - Hydro boil hot water lever

- **Ventilation**
  Where windows can be opened consider using these to facilitate natural ventilation and lower the risk of transmission.

- **Safe Working Practice and Signage**
  Social distancing posters have already been placed up throughout the Gibson building and Tonbridge Castle. Other relevant signage to be installed throughout the workplace to communicate the local rules. This will need to be undertaken **prior** to employees occupying the workspace.

  Each workplace must remind employees of the key messages around safe practices, i.e. keeping themselves up to date with latest Government advice, regular hand washing, maintaining social distancing, reporting symptoms and the use of face coverings for public transport if required.

- **Cleaning regimes for Cleaners within the offices**

  Cleaning of the offices must meet official Government Guidelines, including any decontamination cleaning following identification of Covid-19 positive individuals who have visited the site.

- **Fire drills and assembly points**

  Any fire drill will inevitably result in many people gathering within proximity of each other, whether this is during exit from a building or when assembling at an assembly point. Staff will need to ensure that they maintain social distancing at the assembly point.

- **Fire Procedures**

  In the event of a genuine fire or need for emergency exit, the priority is to exit the buildings in a swift and safe manner to preserve life, following the Fire procedure for the relevant building. The fire boxes within Gibson are designed so that any member of staff (if a nominated fire warden is not around) can carry out a search of their allocated area by using the map and pen in the fire boxes to check the area. All staff must have read the TMBC fire policy and relevant fire procedures on Staffnet. Consideration for more Incident Controllers who manage the evacuation and fire panel will need to be explored before staff return to the workplace.

- **Toilet facilities**

  The control of use and maximum occupancy of toilet facilities must be considered, which may result in single occupancy of the entire toilet area and management of access to toilets to guarantee social distancing. Toilet lids to be place down prior to flushing to reduce the volume of water droplets circulated.

- **Lifts**

  Only one person at a time to use the lift at Gibson East (New) building.

- **First aid and Fire warden/Incident controller cover**

  Cover will need to be maintained. Therefore, there may need to be a rota system to ensure there is cover during each day of occupancy. First aid facilities must allow for the risk of face-to-face contact in the event of first aid being required, e.g. facemasks to be included in first aid kits.

- **Staff Car Parking**

  Where possible staff should leave a free car park space in between parking their cars.

- **Communication**

  Guidance and Procedures reflecting new working practices and relevant risk assessments to be circulated to all staff and any other relevant parties e.g. Tenants in our office premises – CAB, Police etc

6. WORKING OUTSIDE/OFF SITE FROM OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

There are employees within the Council that predominately work outside and many that also have to go off site from Council Premises to undertake their work activities.

It is key that Services with staff carrying out work outside and off site carry out a specific risk assessment that highlights the particular risks they face. Managers should ensure in consultation with those staff that everything reasonably practicable to minimise the risk to them is carried out, but everyone needs to also recognise that you cannot completely eliminate the risk of COVID-19 at this present time.

All other risks identified from previous service specific risk assessments should also be circulated to staff to ensure that all risks, not just the spread of Covid-19 have been identified and controlled to a reasonably practicable level.

In the context of COVID-19 TMBC will work through these steps in order:

1. In every workplace whether that is the main offices or for example the Rangers office increasing the frequency of handwashing and surface cleaning needs to be applied.
2. make every reasonable effort to comply with the social distancing guidelines set out by the government (keeping people 2m apart wherever possible).
3. Where the social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full, in relation to a particular activity, the specific risk assessment 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 actions could include:

   – increasing the frequency of hand washing and surface cleaning, providing hand sanitiser
   – monitoring activity time and decreasing if necessary
   – 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)

4. 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.

In the assessment there should have particular regard to whether the people doing the work are especially vulnerable to COVID-19.

Consideration should be given to any advice that has been produced specifically for your sector, for example by trade associations, trades unions or institutions or other governing bodies.

7. PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE) AND HYGIENE SAFETY

Cleaning and disinfectant products must be provided, to allow employees to clean work areas, work equipment and other office fixtures and fittings before and after use, and to facilitate hand washing and cleansing. These products may include:

- Spray disinfectant
- Disinfectant wipes
- Hand sanitisers
- Hand soap
- Paper towels
- Face masks
- Disposable Gloves (PPE)

An assessment of the products required must be carried out for each workplace within the Council considering the number of individuals likely to be present and the work equipment and furnishings and fittings in place. The Corporate risk assessment and Service specific risk assessments will identify any additional PPE and hygiene products if required.

All required areas within the Council will have access to hand sanitiser that is above 60% alcohol to help kill off bacteria. For those staff who may get skin conditions and cannot use this type of sanitiser, then they will need to ensure more frequent hand washing with soap is used. There we be availability of some non-alcohol based hand sanitiser which is less effective at killing off bacteria but can be issued to staff upon request.

7.1 First Aid Kits

First aid kits must contain at least two face masks, one for the individual providing first aid and one for the recipient and should be stored within each workplace First Aid kit. First Aiders may not always be present in the buildings and around other Council premises due to the gradual number of staff initially returning.

Sally Rollings

Corporate Health and Safety Officer

16 June 2020 Version 3

Document version control:

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20 May 2020 V2

    -Additional wording added 'Social care providers'

    - Staff having access to different types of hand sanitiser

16 June 2020 V3

- **Additional Information added on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Employees (BAME)**