

## **FAQs – returning to office working**

### **What steps has the council taken to make the offices safe for staff returning to work?**

Our staff's health, safety and wellbeing is our number one priority, and the council has taken a range of precautions to ensure our buildings are Covid-secure before staff return to work in any of our council buildings. This includes:

- fitting protective screens in all reception areas and public meeting rooms;
- restricting the numbers of people allowed to work in our buildings to ensure effective social distancing;
- Installing hand sanitiser points in reception areas and providing hand sanitiser and desk wipes in offices
- Installing signage reminding people to social distance and take all necessary steps to keep themselves safe.
- Introducing additional cleaning including regular cleaning during the day of frequent touch points such as doors
- Redesigning the layout of offices to enable social distancing.

We will complete a building risk assessment for each council building before it is reopened, in consultation with staff and unions. This records all of the practical measures we have put in place to make our buildings Covid-secure. We are publishing completed building risk assessments for each of our open sites.

Heads of service will need to complete a service risk assessment in consultation with their staff before the service can return to office working. The service risk assessment needs to be reviewed and signed off by the relevant Directorate Management Team (DMT). This assessment will identify what work activity or situations might expose staff to Covid-19, along with actions required to limit and mitigate exposure as far as is possible.

### **Where will I sit when I return to office working?**

We are not planning to allow hot desking at the moment. Prior to returning to office working, your line manager will advise where your team will be located (building and floor) as this may be different to your previous location. The desks have been reconfigured to ensure social distancing. You will be asked to clean your desk at the beginning and end of every working day, using the desk wipes provided. Cleaners will also clean the office areas and desks every evening.

When you are working in one of our offices please maintain your location (i.e. a fixed desk) and do not to move between floors other than to enter and leave the building.

### **How do I keep safe if I'm working in a Council building?**

We have minimised the number of people who can work in any council building to enable social distancing and to maintain the safety of our buildings for our staff who do need to work in them. Steps you can take to help stop catching and spreading coronavirus, are to ensuring you follow the current NHS advice, which is:

- wash your hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds
- always wash your hands when you get home or into work

- use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available, hand sanitiser will be available in all council buildings
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- put used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands afterwards
- avoid close contact with people who have symptoms of coronavirus
- only travel on public transport if you need to
- do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean.

You should also maintain your location when you are in the building and only move between floors when you enter and leave the building. Meetings must continue to be held remotely, using online tools such as Teams and Skype.

### **My council building has a lift, can I use it?**

The lift capacity in all buildings will be reduced to two people at a time to enable social distancing so if you are able to take the stairs please do as it will free up lift capacity and lift waiting times for others.

However, we know that for some staff using the stairs isn't an option for a variety of reasons. If you need to use the lift and it has reached its capacity, please wait for the next lift to become available.

Staff have said they would like to be more active while at work and see using the stairs promoted more – so we've introduced signs in 5PS to help you do just that. Taking the stairs more and the lift less is one of the easiest ways to build more activity into your working day – and you are likely to save time too.

### **What happens if there is an outbreak of Covid-19 in the office?**

In light of the new test and trace service, anyone who has been within 2 metres a colleague who has tested positive for more than 15 minutes, will be notified by text message that they must self-isolate to help stop the spread of the virus.

If you have symptoms of Covid-19 or are contacted and asked to self-isolate, it's really important you follow the instructions and play your part in helping to reduce the spread of Covid-19. You should inform your manager immediately so they can record this on Oracle as '**COVID-19**'.

If you have not been in recent close contact with anyone who tests positive, then you can continue to work from home/ fulfil rota-based working in line with current arrangements.

All office buildings will have a seating plan so we will know where any staff who contract Covid-19 have been sitting. This will enable us to deep clean the affected floor.

### **Does the council recommend that staff wear face coverings when they are in council buildings?**

We are not recommending the need to wear face coverings when in work as we have put plans in place to ensure social distancing of at least 2 metres in council buildings. However, staff who want to wear face coverings will be supported to do so. If you plan to wear a face covering then put it on safely by washing your hands thoroughly using soap and water for at least 20 seconds (or use hand sanitiser if you are unable to do this) before putting your face covering on and after taking it off. It is important that you don't touch your face covering when wearing it too. When wearing a face covering, take care to tuck away any loose ends. Once removed, make sure you clean any surfaces the face covering has touched.

You should wash reusable face coverings regularly. It can go in with other laundry, using your normal detergent.

From Monday 15 June you will need to wear a face covering while using public transport in the UK.

### **Will the council be checking staff and visitors' temperatures before they enter a council building?**

The council will not be checking staff and visitors' temperatures before they enter a council building. The Government has not recommended taking employees' temperatures and employees can carry the virus without showing symptoms, so temperature checking can provide a false sense of security. In addition employees have the right to refuse to have their temperature checked.

We are asking any staff with a temperature or other symptoms of Covid-19 to stay at home and take a swab test to check whether they have Covid-19. Advice on swab testing is available [here](#).

### **Will the council be providing PPE to staff who are returning to work in council buildings?**

All staff who require PPE will be provided with the correct PPE to carry out their roles. This will take into consideration the setting, the type of activity you will be undertaking when you return to office working and the risk of infection. Your head of service will have completed a Covid-19 service risk assessment prior to you returning to work in a council office. This will have included an assessment of whether staff need to use PPE to carry out certain activities.

Staff should **only use PPE when it is needed**. There are currently limited supplies of PPE and it is essential that supplies are used appropriately. For further information please refer to important detailed guidance on when PPE is needed and what PPE to use, which can be found [here](#). For information on how to safely put on and remove PPE specific to COVID-19 see the [Guidance on infection prevention and control for COVID-19](#).

### **I have been told that my team is returning to office-based working, but I am living with someone who is shielding, what can I do?**

We are encouraging all staff who are living in the same household as someone who is shielding to discuss their health and wellbeing and any concerns they have with their line manager. Line managers will complete an individual risk assessment with any member of staff who is living with someone who is shielding before they return to work in our buildings. Managers will discuss measures that should be put in place to reduce any risk to you or members of your household.

If you living with a vulnerable person and unable to work at home and/or are classed as critical worker by the Council for our Covid-19 response work then you should continue to attend work.

Public Health England recommends the following precautions if you have a vulnerable person living with you who is displaying symptoms associated with Covid-19:

- Minimise as much as possible the time any vulnerable family members spend in shared spaces such as kitchens, bathrooms and sitting areas, and keep shared spaces well ventilated.

- Aim to keep 2 metres (3 steps) away from vulnerable people you live with and encourage them to sleep in a different bed where possible
- Wash your hands regularly for 20 seconds, each time using soap and water, or use hand sanitiser.

Coronavirus (Covid-19) can make anyone seriously ill. But for some people, the risk is higher. There are 2 levels of higher risk groups - individuals that are high risk (clinically extremely vulnerable) and those that are moderate risk (clinically vulnerable). [See more on this here.](#)

### **I have been identified as being at increased risk of Covid-19 due to a health condition / because of my ethnic background and I am scheduled to return to office working, what should I do?**

Emerging UK and international data suggest that people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are being disproportionately affected by Covid-19 and Public Health England have been asked by DHSC to investigate this at a national level. Underlying health issues and certain social circumstances are being put forward as possible explanations but it is important not to assume this. Until there is clarity about this matter we advise that BAME staff may be additionally vulnerable to Covid-19. Similarly, those in the age group 60 – 69 and male gender also seem to confer increased risk.

If you have been identified as at increased risk from coronavirus (Covid-19) due to a health condition or because of your ethnic background then it is the responsibility of your Line Manager to complete an individual risk assessment with you. On their own ethnicity, age and gender may not require restriction from any particular activity but with BAME staff in particular considering if there any underlying health conditions present as well, would reinforce the need to apply stringent social distancing and/or the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

It is not possible to avoid all risk and the aim of the risk assessment is to avoid unacceptably high risk activities and bring down risk in other areas as far as reasonably practicable. Individual risk assessments must be reviewed and signed off by your Director.

### **I am worried about how I can get to work safely, what advice can you give me?**

There are a range of travel options for staff who are returning to office working. Wherever possible we are asking staff to avoid using public transport and consider sustainable means of transport such as walking, running or cycling. However we know that some staff live too far away from work for this to be possible. If you need to use public transport then:

- Keep a 2 metre distance from people outside their household. Where this is not possible they should keep the time spent near others as short as possible
- Wait for the next service if they cannot safely keep their distance on board a tube, bus or train
- Before a journey, check with transport operator for the latest travel advice
- Travel at off-peak times (including staggering start/finish times particularly avoiding 05:45-08:15 and 16:00-17:30)
- Check the [TFL website](#) to find out the busiest stations and times to travel and avoid these if possible.
- Avoid changes during the journey where possible, this could include walking the first or last mile of a journey, or alighting at an earlier station
- Wear a face covering, and wash your hands before putting it on and after taking it off.

- Use a contactless payment method where possible
- After finishing a journey, wash hands for at least 20 seconds or sanitise hands as soon as possible. There will be hand sanitiser points in all Camden buildings.

### What steps have Transport for London (TfL) taken to make travel safer?

TfL have taken a number of steps to make travel safer and Covid-secure.

These are:

- Making the wearing of face coverings mandatory for the full duration of journeys on the public transport network from Monday 15 June. Face coverings can be a simple cloth that covers the nose and mouth.
- TfL is helping customers adjust to the new requirement by piloting the temporary distribution of face masks at targeted Tube and bus stations, including King's Cross and St Pancras.
- Providing their front-line staff with face coverings
- Asking all taxi and private hire companies to wear face coverings and ensure protective measures, including regular cleaning, are in place.
- Installing hand sanitiser points at all tube and TfL rail stations, bus stations and at London Overground and DLR stations where it's safe to do so
- Only accept contactless or Oyster to pay for travel at most stations
- Additional signage, with alterations to entrances and exits to help direct people in and out of stations safely.
- Middle door opening only on buses
- An enhanced cleaning regime that includes cleaning the Tube daily with hospital-grade antiviral disinfectant, cleaning key interchanges more frequently and wiping down all regular 'touch point' areas on buses, with a strong disinfectant every day.

### How should I travel to my appointments when I return to my office?

We are recommending that you should hold as many appointments as possible over the phone or using online tools such as Skype or Teams as this will enable safe distancing. If it is essential to have a face to face meeting you can ask people to come to one of our council buildings as there will be meeting rooms with protective screens available for appointments.

However, we do appreciate that staff will need to travel to some appointments. In these situations we are asking staff to try and avoid using public transport during the day and consider walking or cycling to appointments instead.

We have a number of schemes available to support those of you who would like to get access to a bike:

- Our [cycle to work scheme](#) allows you to benefit from the long-term loan of a bike, along with associated equipment, completely tax free.
- Our [pool bike scheme](#) enables you to borrow a bike during working hours.
- TfL Santander bikes are also available to hire. The website gives details of coverage and how to set up an account. Bikes can also be hired on a casual basis by using a debit/credit card at the terminal at each hire station. There are more details [here](#).
- Jump and Lime operate dockless bike schemes in Camden and can be hired via your mobile phone via an app.

The council are also taking steps to make walking easier, this includes widening pavements and making some roads traffic free. Below are some useful links to help you.

- [walkit.com](https://www.walkit.com) helps you to plan your route and work out how many calories you're burning
- TfL's new [legible London scheme](#) helps you find your way with clear and intuitive mapping.

### **If I cycle to work are showering and storage facilities available?**

The council has showering and storage facilities available for staff who plan to cycle to work. There are cycle parking facilities outside many Camden premises and the council has an ongoing programme to provide secure, covered areas for staff to secure their bikes. As offices will have a maximum occupancy of 30-40% due to social distancing restrictions we will be able to allow some staff to bring their bikes into the office space if they cannot access a bike rack / bay.

### **I want to drive to work, will this be possible?**

We are encouraging staff to walk or cycle where possible, but some staff delivering critical services have been using their cars as they have an essential need to park in the borough and we are currently providing some staff with parking permits. If you need to request a permit, please complete [this form](#). The Parking Team will review your request within 2 working days. If your request is approved you will receive an email outlining your parking options

### **I do not have a face mask and need to use public transport what can I do?**

Face coverings can be a simple cloth that covers the nose and mouth. They can be made using items found in the home or are now available in many shops open across London. Here are some suggestions for how to make a face covering. [Find out how to make a face covering](#).

If you cannot buy or make your own face covering then the council has a very limited stock of face masks for critical staff returning to office working.

### **I work in sites across the borough, what can I do to protect myself?**

If you work in a frontline service or where presence in an office is necessary, your manager will complete a service risk assessment, in consultation with your team. This will look at ways of minimising the risks to you and other members of your team when you are working. This will include discussing flexible working arrangements with your team, for example, a weekly rota to reduce the risk of all the team becoming ill or needing to self-isolate at the same time.

If you are on a rota to be in one of our offices you will not be able to work from home unless you have agreed alternative working arrangements with your manager in advance, or it is an emergency situation. If you are unwell and unable to work then this will be recorded as sickness absence as normal. [See more information on 'typical' sickness absence reporting here](#).

You should inform your manager as soon as possible if you are sick or an emergency situation arises which means you are unable to attend work, so that they can make alternative arrangements to ensure service delivery.

## Will we be able to use the meeting rooms when I return to work?

We are recommending that all meetings should continue to be held via Skype or Teams as this will enable safe distancing and means that staff who are working from home can continue to attend.

All meeting rooms will have a reduced capacity. This capacity must not be exceeded in any circumstances to ensure that social distancing of 2 metres can be maintained.

If you are meeting with a member of the public and you cannot meet them virtually then you will need to use a meeting room which has a protective screen installed.

## I am in a team that is returning to office-based working but I do not have childcare, what can I do?

For staff in our essential services needing to come to work we ask that you try and arrange suitable alternative childcare arrangements to allow you to attend work. However, we would remind staff of the government advice that childcare is not undertaken by over 70's. Talk to your manager about any flexible working arrangements that may help support your attendance at work.

For a temporary period only, we're enhancing our approach to dependency leave to support you with some of the caring-related challenges and to give you time to put alternative childcare arrangements in place.

During this period:

- We have increased our dependency leave allowance from five days to 10 days – to help cover any exceptional circumstances where the care requirements of your dependent(s) mean that it's not possible for you to work at all, or for some periods of time. Please note, the extra 5 days of dependency leave will usually only be granted where no other arrangement can be made for example, those who can't work from home or are key workers whose nursery/school cannot meet full care requirements.
- You can use dependency leave more flexibly – including taking part days if you're sharing caring responsibilities with a partner for example

There is no need to use up your other leave entitlements such as, annual leave before receiving paid dependency leave. If you are unable to make alternative care arrangements, please speak to your line manager to discuss flexible working options, or to agree further time off. Your line manager may, at their discretion, agree to grant annual leave or special leave at short notice.

See [Supporting you to manage caring responsibilities during COVID-19](#) for more information.

If your child is school aged then the Government advice is that the children of key workers are able to attend school, regardless of which school year they are in, in order that essential services can be maintained.

If you think you are a key worker, please confirm with your director that your specific role is necessary for the continuation of an essential public service.

Please liaise with your child's school about arrangements. If your school is closed then please [contact your local authority](#), who will seek to redirect you to a local school in your area that your child, or children, can attend.

## Home workers

### How can I find out when my team will be going back to office working?

Your health and wellbeing is our number one priority, and we will take all precautions necessary to keep you safe at work.

A crucial part of this has involved the large majority of us working remotely. This continues to enable us to keep social distancing measures in place – which means that we can keep our office buildings as safe as possible for the small percentage of staff who need to work from them. Working remotely is also crucial in reducing overall risk levels across our communities, by helping to reduce avoidable travel and contact.

Our buildings will have reduced capacity to enable social distancing so we have been doing lots of work to assess the needs and requirements of each of our services, alongside looking at people's individual needs and circumstances –to prioritise who may need to come back to work in our buildings. CMT, in discussion with Directorate Management Teams (DMTs) are continuing to make collective decisions on this – and if you are in one of the services who will be asked to return to work, in a phased way over an extended period of time, you will be contacted by your Head of Service. Before you return to the office your Head of Service will complete a service risk assessment in consultation with you and your colleagues to ensure. This assessment will identify what work activity or situations might expose staff to Covid-19, along with actions required to limit and mitigate exposure as far as is possible.

We expect that most staff will continue to work remotely until at least **September 2020**, and we will keep you updated on any changes to this date.

### I am finding it hard to set up my workstation properly, what advice can you give?

As most of us will need to continue working from home for the next few months it is very important to set up your work station properly so that you can work safely and comfortably from home.

When everyone starts at Camden they are issued with a 'Mobility' pack containing a laptop, a laptop riser, keyboard, mouse, number pad (if required/ requested), rucksack bag and telephone headset. Using your agile equipment and setting up a desk at home can take some adjustment.

Here are some tips on how to set up your workstation at home

- **Use a sturdy supportive chair** – If you don't have a supportive chair, add a pillow on the seat, this may also be used if you need to raise yourself to the correct height or a rolled up towel or another cushion for lumbar back support.
- **Support your feet** – If your feet don't firmly touch the ground while sitting, place them on a stack of books, a sturdy box, step stool etc.
- **Raise your monitor** so the top of the monitor is at or slightly below eye level using your riser, a biscuit tin etc. but make sure it can withstand any heat the laptop produces.
- **Use your separate keyboard and mouse** – If possible, the monitor should be separated from the keyboard/mouse to allow shoulders to be relaxed with the elbows bend at 90 degrees.
- **Take short frequent rest breaks** to break up long spells of work at your computer (at least 5 minutes every hour), for example, get up and move or do stretching exercises



- **Avoid awkward sitting positions** and static postures by regularly changing position.
- **Avoid eye fatigue** by changing your focus or blinking from time to time.

## Guides

- Hub4 have put together a [homeworkers e-Book](#). Within this eBook you will find resources to optimize your home workstation, making it ergonomically friendly, with common household furniture if you do not have the ideal equipment to hand.
- [Home working and staying healthy](#). This guide was put together by the Chartered Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors and gives a visual representation of how you can work from home comfortably and also stay mentally fit.

## I have a special chair that I use when I am at work, can this chair be sent to my home?

We are currently prioritising staff who have formally been provided with specialist office equipment (such as a special chair for example) – and we will be communicating with you soon to arrange for you to have access to this equipment at home if you need it.

Alongside this, we are developing a process to enable us to get certain items of office equipment (such as chairs) to those staff who need them. We will be sharing more information on this soon, so please watch this space.

## I need additional equipment if I am going to continue working at home, how can I get this?

We are developing a process to enable us to get certain items of office equipment (such as chairs) to those staff who need them. We will be sharing more information on this soon, so please watch this space.

If you need additional agile kit or something is broken then currently it is quicker and more efficient for you to purchase these items yourself from an online retailer and claim back the cost using the [expenses claim form](#).

The following list sets out the standard items of agile kit, along with the maximum amount we will reimburse staff for each item.

- Mouse - £7
- Headset/phone handset – £30
- Laptop riser - £35
- Keyboard - £13

## My laptop is broken, what can I do?

If your laptop is damaged while working remotely, please call the IT service desk in the first instance. If you are unable to do this through your laptop, you can use a mobile phone and call 020 7974 4321.

The service desk will find out more about the issue and attempt to fix it remotely.

If this is not possible and a replacement laptop is required we will arrange for a courier to deliver a laptop to your home address, and collect the damaged laptop from you. This will be done in contact-free way

## I am missing the social aspects of work, what can I do?

This is a key issue for many of us, who are missing work colleagues and the social interactions that we have during our working day. We are continuing to develop our [looking](#)

[after each during Covid-19 pages](#) – which feature a wide range of resources, tips and tools to help you look after yourselves and each during these challenging times. Some of the ideas include arrange virtual coffee mornings and team lunches with colleagues using Teams (no work talk allowed), virtual pub quizzes.....

**My team is not scheduled to return to office working for quite some time but I cannot continue working at home, what can I do?**

We recognise that some staff will have individual circumstances which have made working at home very difficult. If you feel that you cannot continue working from home then contact your Head of Service or HR to discuss your circumstances. They will complete an individual risk assessment with you and, subject to building capacity, it may be possible for you to return to office working. However, you may need to work in a different building to normal.