

Ashford Borough Council - Covid-19 Secure Statement July 2020

Ashford Borough Council confirms that we have followed the Covid-19 secure government guidance for returning to work safely during the Covid-19 pandemic. We have signed and are displaying the Covid-19 secure statement to confirm this.

The following sets out the controls that have been implemented to minimise the spread of Covid-19 from person to person. This is to protect our staff and others that may be affected by our work activities.

Management of risk

We have produced an office risk assessment which was approved by senior management and staff representatives namely Unison, then shared with staff on our intranet.

We have also provided support and guidance to managers to help them prepare specific risk assessments and put in place practical control measures. Managers have been encouraged to talk to staff about the changes to the workplace and work safely during the outbreak.

Transmission of Covid-19 from persons with the virus

People may be at risk of contracting the virus from infected individuals they encounter. Following government guidelines, staff who are exhibiting symptoms of Covid-19 themselves or are living with anyone who is either symptomatic or has the virus is instructed to self-isolate and not to attend work until the end of the prescribed isolation period.

Workplace access

The government guidance requires people to work from home if possible and we responded to this by closing our Civic Centre during March 2020 to all but a limited number of key staff who were unable to work from home. Most of our staff can work from home and we have put in place measures to help them work safely and comfortably.

Our vulnerable employees have been supported to shield from home and are in regular contact with their manager. From 1 June 2020, apart from those clinically extremely vulnerable continuing to shield, all employees can return to normal duties which are being reintroduced as part of a phased process.

Social distancing measures

A key control measure to avoid the transmission of Covid-19 is maintaining social distancing in the workplace. This means staff must maintain prescribed distances apart wherever possible.

Layout changes to the Civic Centre have been made to the office space currently occupied.

Signage is displayed to remind everyone about social distancing.

Changes have been made in the kitchen areas and break times are staggered to maintain low numbers of staff using these areas at one time.

No external meetings are permitted to take place and only essential contractors are visiting the Civic Centre for urgent works.

Measures are in place for the safe collection and receipt of deliveries.

Cleaning

People may be at risk of contracting the virus from infected hard surfaces they may touch and we have posters displayed to remind staff to cough/sneeze into an arm and avoid touching their faces.

We have increased the frequency of cleaning and the introduction of improved hygiene measures are in place.

Facilities for sanitising hands on entry and exit to the workplace are provided.

There is greater cleaning of surfaces that are touched regularly with disinfectant.

Guidance is provided to staff on effective handwashing procedures.

Staff are not permitted to hot desk.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Generally, PPE is a control measure of last resort and the guidance is clear that the risks from Covid-19 are best managed using the control measures referred to above. There are some work activities which require staff to wear PPE. As such this has been provided to staff with information and instruction.

Field based staff have been provided with hand sanitizer gel and disinfecting wipes to clean hands regularly.

A robust risk-based ordering process has been set up to allow for PPE stocks to be replenished and for used PPE to be disposed of safely.

Service delivery

We have maintained remote service delivery for many of our functions by email or telephone including Customer Services, Housing, Environmental Health and Licensing, Planning and Corporate Property & Projects. Information on service delivery changes are available at <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/>

Customer Services reception in the Civic Centre

Because there is significant public interaction in this area, we are taking planned approach to re-open customer reception. To permit social distancing:

- The number of customers in reception will be limited to those with appointments.
- A call and check system will allow for staff to telephone customers in advance of appointments to confirm they have no symptoms before visiting.
- A one-way systems, barriers and floor markings have been introduced.
- Perspex screens have been installed at booths.
- A digital self-scan system will be introduced to minimise handling of paperwork.
- No cash payments will be permitted to minimise handling of money.
- Staff have been instructed to remind customers not to get too close.

This statement is subject to regular review and amendment in accordance with government guidance.