



# **Final Covid Protocol**

## **Phase 4**

**April 2021**

## **Service Delivery Protocol**

# **Social Care and Safeguarding Services**

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## Introduction

First and foremost, I would like to recognise and thank the parents and carers who have worked with us in this past year through the most challenging of circumstances. The strength and commitment they have shown, to work through the difficulties that life can present, and to make lives better for the children and young people they love and care for has been amazing.

I would also like to recognise and thank, You, our staff, and my team. Across Social Care and & Safeguarding we have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic. That professionalism and commitment to the children, young people, and families we work with is never unnoticed or undervalued.

I expect as we move into our final phase 4 many of you will be feeling both hopeful and anxious for the wellbeing of our children and young people. As the normal routines of life open up so do the opportunities for our partners, family members, friends, and the communities, to “see” and “hear” those children. We need their support, their eyes, and their ears to truly understand the lived experience of our vulnerable children through the pandemic.

**Our priority now is to talk to those partners and key people, share information and re-establish for every child and young person we are working with a network of “trusted adults”**

March 23rd was a National Day of Reflection to pay our respects to people who have lost their lives due to Covid and family members or friends who are still grieving. Everyone’s life personally and professionally has been touched by the pandemic and we move forward understanding and remembering that.

March 26th March Yvette Stanley Director of Ofsted made the following announcement of recognition

*In late March 2020 we were emotionally and psychologically coming to terms with the prospect of three weeks of national lockdown and the likelihood of as many as 20,000 deaths due to COVID-19. A year on we have all encountered months of lockdown and very many more deaths than any of could have envisaged. Exactly a year ago today at 8pm, millions of people around the country took part in the "Clap for Carers" tribute, applauding the NHS and other care workers. I mention this because so much has happened in the last 12 months. Thousands of children have been successfully cared for in foster and residential children's homes in the most challenging circumstances. Children at risk either within or outside their family have continued to be visited by social workers doing everything possible to protect them from harm. And so many vulnerable children have benefitted from the support of the children's workforce in the community, in schools and the virtual world we have all inhabited.*

*It's not over yet, but we have shared hopes as we get closer to the promised lifting of restrictions. We may have to endure some further disappointment, but the trajectory does feel positive. I hope the Easter period (irrespective of whether this*

*is of religious significance to you) will enable you to have some time in the fresh air, the company of friends or family (albeit outdoors) and a restful day or two. We may not stand on our doorsteps clapping and banging pots and pans this year, but my thanks and admiration continues to you all.*

As we move beyond the grip of the pandemic national management and lockdown rules are changing have a look at the [Roadmap information on the Government’s website](#).

**Our mission though remains the same, to do all we can to ensure children and young people are Happy, Healthy and Safe**

### Vision, Mission and Values



### Our Covid Journey

Our demand for children services has continued in peaks through the pandemic. Whilst many understand these pressures at the “front door” we know as an “End to End” service these demands and the impact of Covid19 affected our whole system and the journey for children and young people through it.

Through the past 12 months we have experienced a long term increase in demand of “Contacts” seeking information and early help, we also saw an increase in the need for social work assessments as we undertook assessments to identify need and harm, including “Hidden Harm” but also manage professional anxiety.

We had an associated rise in the number of Children in Need and in those subject to child protection as we were prevented from safely closing cases due to additional pressure families were experiencing and the context of reduced support for example, access to school, family and early help in the community. The initial lockdown created

issues for our care planning in courts and through to permanency and we saw the associated rise in Looked After Children numbers.

During phase 3 Sept – March 21 we progressed focused work and communications to families and partners on early help, we challenged the “professional anxiety” culture and through our WCF early support we found ways to effectively and efficiently “problem solve” at the early help level and we are taking this forward in our revised service offer. We have responded to additional waves of increased demand as schools have returned and or children have failed to attend school after Christmas through our Back to School and Safeguarding Babies projects. The use of Strengthening Families First enabled us to support parents to address and manage risk and the impact of Covid preventing new care admissions where possible. We also worked closely with the courts to progress our care proceedings and addressed delays in our ability to achieve permanency for children exiting the care system.

I am launching this, our Covid phase 4 protocol, April 21 and in it we are resuming face to face visits to all children subject to assessment and plans. I am extremely conscious of the need to re-establish home visits to see the child in their own homes. The social work skill in listening, observing, triangulating, and analysing to understand the “lived life experience” of the child has never been more important and to do this we need to see them in their own homes, in the company of their parents/carers and with siblings as well as on their own.

**Now is the time for the services we deliver to resume. The way in which some of those services are delivered has changed. These changes are set out below.**

**This protocol is the final Phase 4 of our service delivery during COVID-19.**

**Phase 1** - Our initial management and emergency response to community lockdown

**Phase 2** – Starting our road to recovery by opening more services and management of workload and workflow in preparation for phase 3

**Phase 3** – Setting out how we began to “Reset” our services responding to demand, hidden harm and new ways of working. During this phase we continued to “Review” the impact and learning we have gained.

**Phase 4** – Resuming in full and implementing adaptations from our learning. This protocol will set out what we will do differently as we move to working and living with Covid

## 1 Visits to Children and Young People

Face to face visits to children subject to Child Protection resumed in Protocol 3, Sept 20. Other visits used the flexibilities and risk assessment case by case.

**In this Phase 4 all visits to children and young people have resumed face to face on a minimum statutory basis.**

Additional visits can be undertaken virtually as this has enhanced or ability to keep in touch and maintain relationships with children and their parents, but they are not a replacement for seeing children and young people or to seeing them in their home environments.

The social work skill in listening, observing, triangulating, and analysing to understand the “lived life experience” of the child and family has never been more important.

**Please refer to the Phase 4 guidance on safe visiting and use of PPE at**

[Practice Standards and Procedures - Covid-19 Practice Guidance \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

## 2 Back to School

Our children and young people have now returned to schools and educational settings, I have heard many positive accounts of them returning, but I know this isn't easy for some others. **Attending school is an essential part of our support and safeguarding and it is our “Expectation”** that all children who are subject to any plan (CIN/CP or Care) attend their school or educational setting.

Some children will face multiple issues such as loss of structure and routine, bereavement, anxiety about infection, isolation and loss of peer network, low self-confidence returning to school and concerns about educational attainment.

Parents may be dealing with loss of employment, have COVID 19 related anxiety and/or lack willingness or skills to deal with challenges from their own children about not wanting to return.

**Where any child or parent is unable or unwilling to meet the expectation of school attendance, this should be identified as a risk factor in the assessment and child's plan.**

Consider the following and see below for details.

- Undertaking a piece of work using the back to school signs of safety bespoke plan
- Referring for a Peer Mentor
- Viewing a Health and Wellbeing Workshop
- Ensuring the school is providing home learning where absence is Covid/isolation related
- Regular virtual keep in touch contacts

## 2.1 Peer Mentors

Five mentors from Worcester Sixth Form College have been trained to offer peer support. Mentors have been loaned a tablet from WCF on which to conduct their mentoring sessions.

The Peer Mentors role is to support students who have been identified as having concerns and worries about returning to school. The Peer Mentor will act within an agreed range of confidentiality and will ensure they have the best interests of the mentee in mind at all times.

Remember that the Peer Mentor’s role is there alongside other support services. The Peer Mentor is not: • A teacher, a counsellor, a social worker

The mentor will meet virtually with a student on a 1:1 basis to

- Listen to the worries and concerns of the mentee about returning to school
- Encourage the mentee to find solutions to the worries and concerns they have about returning the school with their carers/parents/assigned worker/school
- Give help, advice, and guidance, where appropriate
- Support the mentee to work with the assigned Back 2 School workers
- Link the YP in with the school’s own student support/mentor programme where available

If you have a child or young person who may benefit from having a Peer Mentor contact Denise Hannibal [dhannibal@worcschildrenfirst.org.uk](mailto:dhannibal@worcschildrenfirst.org.uk)

## 2.2 Health and Well Being workshops

A programme of 12 health and well-being workshops were designed and delivered by health professionals specifically to support the B2S project. Many of the sessions were also recorded and available to watch at a time convenient to families.

[Access to Health & Wellbeing resources](#)

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|--|---|
|    |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importance of Routine</li> <li>• Beating Worries and Anxiety</li> <li>• Relaxation Techniques</li> <li>• Coping with Change</li> <li>• Emotional Regulation</li> <li>• Paediatric yoga to support self-regulation</li> <li>• Mindfulness</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• • Kooth session</li> <li>• Managing change for children and young people with ASD</li> <li>• Building Relationships</li> <li>• The Importance of Exercise Sensory Needs</li> </ul> |

## 2.3 Signs of Safety tool

As part of the B2S project a specific tool was designed. This tool can be used as a work session/s with a parent and child supporting a return to school. As professionals experienced in working with SoS this will be familiar to you. However, if you would like assistance in using the tool contact Paula Cook: [pcook1@worcschildrenfirst.org.uk](mailto:pcook1@worcschildrenfirst.org.uk)

**Please refer to the Signs of Safety tool published at**

[Practice Standards and Procedures - Covid-19 Practice Guidance \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

## 2.4 Lateral flow tests for staff going into schools

We ask staff to support our schools in being as safe as possible and minimising the chance of spread of Covid. This means we ask staff to take a LFT before undertaking any planned visits to a child in school and during the visits to keep a safe distance and wear your PPE in accordance with the infection control measures in schools.

However, this is not a “mandatory requirement” and social care staff should not be refused entry to a school. If you are undertaking a S47/emergency visits and any school refuses entry, please call your GM for support and intervention. If on any nonemergency visit you are refused entry, please report this to Denise Hannibal.

## 3 WCF Early Help & Family Support

Our new WCF Early Help Family Support (previously known as EIFS and TFS) goes live April 21 in line with the implementation of this protocol.

As families have experienced the pressure of Covid they have been coping with many new pressures associated with lockdown, bereavement, anxiety, relationship problems between adults and between parents and children, isolation and emotional health and wellbeing challenges.

**Access to Early Help has never been more important. Early Help can prevent risk and needs escalating and it can enable us to identify “Hidden Harm”**

The Covid-19 pandemic has given the service the opportunity to be creative and to consider and implement different ways of working. This in turn has shown areas of success in an adapted process and intervention with families. These were taken into account during the development of this new service.

### April 2021

- The service will be called ‘WCF Early Help Family Support’
- This Service will work with children aged 0 -18 across the whole of Worcestershire who present with emerging, through to complex and escalating needs, 52 weeks of the year.
- There will be a mix of virtual and direct delivery, with a focus on resolution at first point of contact where this is possible

- An early help assessment and intervention delivered for more complex needs.

If you are looking to step down or close a case, then explicit consideration for an Early Help Intervention should be given and recorded.

Sometimes families or young people need a piece of intervention that supports their achieved progress in the longer term. Sometimes they just need to know where to go if things start to become difficult at any time in the future.

The service works on a district basis and request for service are made via this link

- <https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/requestfamilysupport>

However not all families need WCF Early Help Family Support. **Early Help is provided through schools and through the 0-19 Starting Well Services amongst many other local voluntary support services in the community. Please make sure your families are aware of the early help offer available to them.**

*The Starting Well Partnership has delivered public health nursing services for children, young people, and families across Worcestershire since April 2020.*

*The Partnership, which is led by Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust and includes Barnardo's, Action for Children, and Redditch Borough Council, brings together a range of professionals that will support 'parents to be' and their children during the early years and will ensure young people's health needs are met as they move through school towards adulthood. We work alongside lots of local organisations and community groups including schools to identify and address health and wellbeing needs by empowering families and young people to access support networks and groups in their local community.*

*The Starting Well Partnership works within six district teams across Worcestershire. These teams are made up of Health Visitors, Parenting Support Workers, Community Nursery Nurses, School Health Nurses, Health Care Assistants, Volunteer Coordinators, Community Health Connectors, Business Support Officers and Administrator*

You can find full detail on the 0-19 offer in the link below.

[https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20612/send\\_health\\_and\\_wellbeing/1845/health\\_services\\_for\\_children\\_and\\_young\\_people\\_with\\_send](https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20612/send_health_and_wellbeing/1845/health_services_for_children_and_young_people_with_send) <https://www.startingwellworcs.nhs.uk/home>

## 4 Virtual meetings and use of Technology

WCC/WCF have invested in technology to enable us to work with greater flexible mobility. "Teams" is our new system for holding virtual meetings. In practice we have found the use of virtual meetings extremely effective, raising attendance of partners at meeting and reducing travel time for all of us.

Going forward our meeting rooms will all also have a video conferencing facility. Like Teams but better for viewing and interaction from people logging in from different places. Equipment ordered so watch this space!

**Within our building management we have considered the needs of Parents, Young People, and professionals to have face to face meetings.**

### 4.1 Professionals

In FFD there is a dedicated room for multi-agency MASH/Strategy meetings to take place - the demand/timeliness and cross partner relationships required to manage these effectively means a dedicated face to face space is required.

Save exceptional case circumstances all other **professional only** meetings will be conducted by virtual methods via Team or video conferencing.

Exceptional cases circumstances include very complex cases subject to professional dispute / complaint and first-time planning meetings for high risk and or complex cases.

### 4.2 Parents and Young People

We have learned that for many parents not having a wide range of professionals in the room has been a positive experience but if they are logged on from home it can be harder for them to ask question of the meeting. We have also learned that parents joining meetings online from home can create a difficult situation for social workers and meeting chairs to manage. Parents can be easily distracted, log off at will if they don't like what they are hearing and reading facial expression and body language is more difficult.

**Therefore, for all Core Groups / Team Around the Child / Conferences and Looked After Child meetings the parent and young person must be invited and required to attend the office meeting space alongside the chair and social worker.**

If the parents wish to bring a support person and or the SW believes have an additional partner agency representative presence will aid the discussion, they should also be invited to physically attend. All other professionals should be asked to attend by virtual means.

This arrangement reduces the number of people in a meeting room at any one time as part of Covid management, allows large group meetings to be held in smaller rooms

recognising our reduce space in Covid safe environments and allows the benefits and challenges experienced by having parents present to be addressed.

## 5 Guidance for International Travel for Holidays for Looked After Children

**‘Under current UK COVID-19 restrictions, it is illegal to travel abroad for holidays.**

Therefore, although we don't want children to miss out on positive activities where it is safe and legal to do so; Worcestershire Children First as corporate parents will need to continue to review whether it is safe and legal for children to travel for international holidays abroad in line with government advice and guidance as it is reviewed.

[Travel advice: coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/travel-advice/coronavirus) .

This position will be subject to change as and when further guidance is available, but at the present time, we cannot currently approve travel for children outside of the UK against government guidelines.

Consideration will also be required to consider international travel and any quarantine arrangements which may be required when returning to the UK after an international holiday. Again, this will need to be considered about whether this is a safe and appropriate arrangement for looked after children by considering the guidance here: [Entering the UK: Quarantining when you arrive in the UK - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/entering-the-uk/quarantining-when-you-arrive-in-the-uk).

### 5.1 WCF Foster carers

Permission must be sought before arranging for a looked after child to travel internationally and it is strongly recommended that this is in place before you make a booking.

At this stage, fostering holiday allowance payments can be only be authorised **for UK based holidays at this time until we have further guidance.**

Foster carer payments for international holidays which foster carers may have made arranged plans/bookings for travel overseas will not be authorised.

We will keep this under review as we get further guidance as the Covid-recovery situation varies in different regions and travel advice is also dependent on some of the variants of Covid which are circulating e.g. the Brazilian and south African variants.

The fostering service will not be contributing to any quarantine hotel payments which may be incurred because of international travel.

## 6 Supervised Family Time

As of September 2020, the Supervised Family Time service comes under the responsibility of Group Manager, Selina Rawicz.

This protocol is in response to the Covid-19 National Health Emergency to address the nature of, and changes to, Family Time for Looked After Children in the present circumstances. This supersedes all other protocols to date and responds to the changes in government measures and guidance.

Worcestershire Children First has carefully reviewed these new measures in conjunction with its legal responsibilities regarding family contact which are summarised as follows;

- **Schedule 2 paragraph 15 and section 34 CA 1989** - Where a child is being looked after by a local authority, the authority shall, unless it is not reasonably practical or consistent with his welfare, endeavour to promote contact between the child and his family.
- **Reasonable contact for children 'in care'** includes direct contact between the child and those identified family members. The local authority can decide the frequency and venue of contact, and whether it is supervised or not.
- **Children Act 1989 Section 34 [2] or section 34 [4]** – parents can seek a contact order through the courts and the courts have powers to place conditions on any contact orders granted.
- **CA 1989 section 34 [4]** - The local authority may not refuse contact to a child 'in care' completely, unless permitted by the courts.
- **CA 1989 section 34 [6]** - A local authority may refuse contact to a child 'in care' for a maximum of seven days, without a section 34 [4] order if it is necessary to do so to safeguard or promote a child's welfare.
- **Contact Order on court's own initiative - CA 1989 section 34 [5]** - The court may make an order under section 34 of its own initiative in proceedings concerning a child in care.

In considering its duty to its Looked After Children alongside the relaxation of some measures by the government in response to the Covid-19 emergency, Worcestershire Children First have continued to adapt its response to family time. The latest government guidance focuses on reducing the spread of Covid 19 whilst trying to increase 'normality' and re integration. The full details can be found here;

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home?priority-taxon=774cee22d896-44c1-a611-e3109cce8eae>

In addition, the government have detailed a four-step roadmap. Full details can be found here: [COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021 \(Summary\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

The protocol will summarise government guidelines at each stage and highlight how we plan to reintegrate face to face family time in line with the published roadmap.

### Step 1 – from 29<sup>th</sup> March 2021

To summarise the Step 1 government guidelines that impact on family time;

- you can meet in any outdoor space in a group of up to 6 people or two households (unless there is a legal obligation to be in larger groups i.e. face to face family time where a supervisor plus two households is required)
- It remains that you should socially distance whether outside or inside. Although the airborne risk of COVID-19 transmission is much lower outdoors than inside, the risk of infection via larger droplets remains high if people engage in prolonged, face-to-face close contact with others.

- continue to follow strict social distancing guidelines when you are with anyone not in your household or agreed support bubble
- wash or clean hands regularly and keep surfaces clean
- Face coverings should be worn indoors and outdoors if social distancing is not possible.
- Face coverings do not replace social distancing and where possible social distancing should continue to be observed where possible at 2metres.

### **Step 2 – from 12<sup>th</sup> April at the earliest**

To summarise the government guidelines in Step 2 that impact on family time;

- you can continue to meet in any outdoor space in a group of up to 6 people or two households (unless there is a legal obligation to be in larger groups i.e. face to face family time where a supervisor plus two households is required)
- It remains that you should socially distance whether outside or inside. Although the airborne risk of COVID-19 transmission is much lower outdoors than inside, the risk of infection via larger droplets remains high if people engage in prolonged, face-to-face close contact with others.
- continue to follow strict social distancing guidelines when you are with anyone not in your household or agreed support bubble
- wash or clean hands regularly and keep surfaces clean
- Face coverings should be worn indoors and outdoors if social distancing is not possible.
- Face coverings do not replace social distancing and where possible social distancing should continue to be observed where possible at 2metres.

### **Step 3 – from 17<sup>th</sup> May at the earliest**

To summarise the government guidelines in Step 3 that impact on family time;

- Outdoor gatherings of up to 30 people are allowed (social distancing required). Although this is allowed government advice that to ensure safety by minimising size of gatherings where possible.
- Indoors, people will be able to meet socially in a group of 6, or with 1 other household (unless there is a legal obligation to be in larger groups i.e. face to face family time where a supervisor plus two households is required).
- Government will update its advice on social distancing by 17<sup>th</sup> May, Current advice is, people should continue to keep their distance from anyone not in their household or support bubble and keep up habits such as regular hand washing and letting in fresh air.

### **Step 4 – from 21<sup>st</sup> June at the earliest**

To summarise the government guidelines in Step 4 that impact on family time;

- No legal limit on how many people can meet, outdoors or indoors (government guidance will be published around how best to reduce the risk of transmission and protect ourselves and others)  
Ahead of Step 4, the Government will complete a review of social distancing measures and other long-term measures that have been put in place to limit transmission. The results of the review will help inform decisions on the timing and circumstances under which rules on social distancing, face masks and other measures may be lifted

Learning from Children, Young People, Parents and Carers has informed the way in which future Supervised family time will be delivered once full national lockdown is lifted

**Please take care to refer the full protocol as published in Practice Standards so consistent communication can go to children, young people parents, family, and carers.**

[Practice Standards and Procedures - Covid-19 Practice Guidance \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

## 7 Staffing Section – Working with Covid

During the last 12 months we have been responding to the government and local guidelines and balancing this with the continued delivery of our services to vulnerable children. **As our workforce you have been flexible, innovative, patient, professional and above all committed to the delivery of services. Thank You**

**The latest government guidance is available in the link below. Our protocol is based on guidance and the roles and functions of WCF as a critical service to vulnerable children and young people.**

[\(COVID-19\) Coronavirus restrictions: what you can and cannot do - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

### ***Going to work***

*You should continue to work from home where you can.*

*If you cannot work from home, you should continue to travel to your workplace. This includes, but is not limited to, people who work in:*

- *critical national infrastructure*
- *construction*
- *manufacturing*
- *childcare or education*
- *essential public services*
- *essential retail, such as supermarkets and pharmacies*

*You do not need to be classed as a critical worker to go to work if you cannot work from home.*

*Employers and employees should discuss their working arrangements, and employers should take every possible step to facilitate their employees working from home, including providing suitable IT and equipment to enable remote working. Where people cannot work from home, employers should take steps to make their workplaces COVID-19 secure and help employees avoid busy times and routes on public transport. Extra consideration should be given to those people at higher risk.*

For Children’s Social Care you remain critical workers. The Government category for “Shielded Staff” is now removed and the following applies to all Children’s Social Care & Safeguarding staff.

## 7.1 Emotional Wellbeing of the workforce

Working in safeguarding our roles and functions are highly pressured emotionally and practically. It's the job we chose to do for the benefits we experience when we have made a difference to a child's life and to a parent or a colleague's ability to do their job well.

As we implement phase 4, we are over 12 months into working under Covid19 conditions. We have strongly encouraged all staff to take annual leave and as a team of managers we have talked and supported our staff to access EHWP advice and guidance and I ask you all to continue to keep these issues foremost in your work and conversations.

The new PDR was launched 1.4.21 and has a EHWP section for completion to inform us about the needs of our workforce.

We pulled together a range of useful links and documents to supporting staff with EHWP issues (annexed to the Phase 2 Protocol) WCC has pulled together a range of external resources (available via the Coronavirus section in OurSpace). **Both of these documents can also be found in Covid Practice Standards.** [Practice Standards and Procedures - Covid-19 Practice Guidance \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

In addition please bear in mind, we now have a team of [Internal Mental Health First Aiders](#) to give colleagues support when they need it.

## 7.2 Covid Vaccines and Tests

All front-line staff have been offered the vaccine. Other staff will receive the vaccine in line with the national roll out.

The vaccine helps reduce the risk of serious ill health of an individual contract Covid, so I am encouraging all staff to take up the vaccine to protect yourself, to protect our workforce and to protect our society.

Being vaccinated does not stop you contracting the virus or passing it on (as far as we know) and around 1 in 3 people with Covid-19 do not have symptoms. Therefore, testing is important as a tool in the management of this virus going forward

Rapid home tests (Lateral Flow or LFD tests) are a convenient alternative to workplace testing or visiting a community test site and are designed to deliver speedy results in under 30 minutes.

Early detection of cases means those who test positive can self-isolate immediately and, in doing so, break the chain of transmission.

Rapid flow testing and home testing kits can be accessed:

- at a local test site - [www.worcestershire.gov.uk/communitytesting](http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/communitytesting)
- by ordering online- <https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests>

### 7.3 Positive Test Results – Action Required.

- If you get a positive LFD Test, either at home or at a test centre, you will need to isolate immediately and book a PCR test.
- The PCR test must be taken within 2 days of the LFD positive test
- If the PCR is negative, there will no longer be a need to isolate
- Inform your manager without delay

### 7.4 Reporting a Covid Positive Employee - Managers Responsibilities

It is important that we all take steps to reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the community to save lives and protect the NHS.

To ensure the correct people are informed if an employee tests positive for Covid-19, a process map has been developed. It clarifies the actions to be taken by the employee and manager. The process map can also be found on OurSpace at: [https://worcestershirecc.sharepoint.com/WCCstaffhandbook/Coronavirus/Process% 20or%20reporting%20a%20COVID-19%20positive%20employee.pdf](https://worcestershirecc.sharepoint.com/WCCstaffhandbook/Coronavirus/Process%20or%20reporting%20a%20COVID-19%20positive%20employee.pdf)

#### Recording Covid 19 Absence

Line managers must record absence in Mercury HR as 'Paid Leave' and select one of the two codes under 'Absence Reason' - Coronavirus: -

Diagnosed COVID-19 - if YOU are symptomatic and have either received a medical diagnosis or self-diagnosis through completing the NHS 111 on-line questions

Self-isolation/quarantine - if YOU are officially self-isolating in accordance with the government's definition (including those living in a household with someone who is symptomatic), but have not been diagnosed (medically or self-diagnosed) or staff quarantined/stuck in another country

Don't forget to update your line manager as your COVID-19 symptoms cease or you are no longer self-isolating so that your manager can enter an end date to your period of Paid Leave. It is important this is done promptly. We use this data to support our employee's wellbeing and is essential for workforce planning, ensuring we can continue to deliver critical services during this time.

**Return to Work Interviews** should still be conducted and recorded in the system as normal. This is a critical piece of good management practice and even more so in the current climate.

Public Health England pathway – Covid to return to work [return to work](#)

## 7.5 Working from a WCF office location

During the past 12 months of working in “lockdown” we have learnt a lot about what works and what staff want and need.

- Staff told us that spending time working from home gave them:
  - Better flexibility in child/care commitments
  - Reduced travel time, costs, and car wear/tear maintenance
  - Increased productivity resulting from less travel and focused home working time out
- Staff told us they needed office time to:
  - Have face to face formal time with their managers and peers
  - Have informal peer and managerial support in their work
  - Have access to printing / IT support / Stationary / PPE

As we move forward to living and working with Covid we need to build in changes to the way we work that will enable us to work in a Covid safe way and to continue to experience the benefits gained from working from home, the office and in the field.

Alongside WCC we are looking to pilot this next phase of “Smarter Ways of Working” from the Office/Home/Field. Future staff survey will inform the final arrangements in 2022

### Arrangements for attending an office:

WCC have devised a set of categories for staff determined by role to support a plan of return to use of offices (see below).

Worker Types / Categories



|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>A</b><br><b>AGILE WORKER</b><br>             | Work from any location. Degree of flexibility on working hours. Requires office use for collaborative engagements.<br><b>Programme Managers / Commercial Managers / HR Business Partners</b> |
| <b>B</b><br><b>HYBRID WORKER</b><br>            | Can work flexibly but would need dedicated office time in a fixed neighborhood, or access to particular areas/equipment<br><b>Elected Members / Designers / BEMS / Social worker?</b>        |
| <b>C</b><br><b>OFFICE WORKER (fixed)</b><br>    | Must work from the office and within a fixed location or neighborhood. Not possible to work from home.<br><b>Receptionist / IT Drop-in Centre</b>  |
| <b>D</b><br><b>OFFICE WORKER (Flexible)</b><br> | Can't work from home but can smart desk across any area or building. No particular setup required.<br><b>Member Support? / FM Managers? / Caretakers</b>                                     |
| <b>E</b><br><b>MOBILE WORKER</b><br>            | "field worker" with no fixed desk or office requirement. May have an operating base, but largely mobile<br><b>Drivers / Passenger Escorts</b>  |
| <b>F</b><br><b>HOME WORKER</b><br>              | Workers contracted to work from home exclusively. No requirement to come into the office<br><b>Agreed by exception e.g for physical disabilities / hard to recruit specialisms</b>           |

WCF will undertake to designate roles within these categories as we plan for our full staff return. In the meantime, social care and social worker roles are hybrid roles meaning you need to work from home, office and in the field. Set out below is our pilot model for smarter ways of working starting with Children's Social Care.

It is not possible to outline in this document the detail of each role/team and access plan. Your AD/GM will confirm the details for your team/service area. However, the following are principles for which those plans have been agreed:

- We have retained our commitment to ensuring staff have formal and informal opportunities to meet with managers and peers for Team Meeting, Supervision, and space allocation for informal working times.
- On average staff will be able to use office space between 4-8 days a month. This is determined by role and responsibility. This will include time spent at team meeting, supervision sessions and informal desk session
- Book your office desk time through the App each time.
- Please do not attend the office without a booking a desk or having a confirmed meeting invite to a team meeting or supervision session. This will have a significant negative impact on others sharing the building and our ability to keep staffing numbers to the maximum for safe working environments
- Only book to your maximum allocated office days. Additional days by exception must be agreed with your Group Manager.
- For Conferences/Core Groups and Looked After Child Reviews and other professional meetings see below

**Each service area has been designated a work area and will have a specific number of designated safe space desks bookable via the app.**

**Pavilion E1 - SEND and Vulnerable Learners**

**Pavilion F1 – Resources**

**Pavilion E2 – FFD & Partnerships and Early Help/Education Safeguarding**

**Pavilion F2 – Office Locations and Meeting Rooms**

**Pavilion G2 – Safeguarding / Through Care / SC Admin & BSO**

### **Covid safe office space**

Ventilation of workspaces has been identified as a key control to prevent transmission and infection. Where we have mechanical ventilation (County Hall) we can increase the Phase 4 Covid Protocol 1.4.21

fan speed and adjust the proportion of fresh air to recirculated air and this will be undertaken. However, it does not replace the need for as much ventilation as possible. In all offices spaces we need to keep windows and doors open when the building is occupied

Additional measures, e.g. mandatory face coverings, reducing occupancy, desk rearrangement etc. are in place to reflect the individual building risk assessment. Please follow guidelines at all times.

**In general, be sensible – keep your distance / keeps rooms well ventilated and wear your mask when your moving around.**

Follow the guidelines and requirement set out against your role and team/service. The Group Manager is responsible for ensuring their staff and team have the information regarding office usage. It is essential that everyone adheres to the agreed plan if we are to make it work from all. If you have concerns or question you can direct them to your Assistant Director.

## **7.6 Working from home – Tax Relief**

You may be able to claim tax relief for additional household costs if you have to work at home on a regular basis, either for all or part of the week. This includes if you have to work from home because of coronavirus (COVID-19).

**You cannot claim tax relief if you choose to work from home.** So we are clear that as an employee of WCF you will be expected to work from home at least 3 days a week. That includes working in the field but from your home base. This means you meet the claim criteria. **HMRC link** <https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home>

### **What tax relief can I claim working from home?**

The amount you can claim for is worth up to £125 a year, depending on what tax rate you pay.

**Thank you again for all the hard work and commitment you have given the children and young people we work with, your peers and our partners. Together we have made a difference.**

**Tina Russell**

Director of Children's Services (Interim)

