

Gullands

Covid-19 Safe Working Policy

May 2021

Version 6

Introduction

This is a policy document outlining our procedures to help employees of Gullands Solicitors of 10-22, Mill Street, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6XT and Whitehall Place, 47 The Terrace, Gravesend, Kent DA12 2DL work as safely as possible specifically during the Covid-19 Pandemic. However, there are general Health and Safety advantages included within the policy which we would look toward keeping in place long term. These include the general preference for employees and partners to work from home if possible. This should be discussed and agreed with your department head as the ability to do so may vary from department to department.

The policy promotes a common sense approach to Health and Safety generally but specifically to the avoidance of cross contamination of Covid-19. There is no substitute for common sense and for obvious reasons this document will NOT deal with every possible situation that you may find yourself in. You must remain 2 metres apart (or 1 meter plus where this is not possible) and wash your hands regularly and after touching anything that others may have been in contact with.

This policy is written in accordance with the information contained in the HM Government Document Working safely during COVID-19 in offices and contact centres. Guidance for employers, employees and the self-employed as revised on 11 May 2020. From time to time there may be updates and you can see the document yourself at www.gov.uk/workingsafely and also give feedback by emailing at workingsafely@beis.gov.uk. The policy also pays close attention to the risk assessment dated 28th May 2020 carried out by PHSC.

The firm has a duty of care to all of its employees and we endeavour to take every step that we can in order to ensure the safety of our employees. That said Health and Safety must be a shared responsibility and you personally have a duty to undertake working practices that will minimise risk of contamination not only for yourself but for your colleagues as well.

Risk Management

The firm has a general risk assessment review which is available [here](#) but this will not feature information concerning the Covid-19 pandemic.

A specific Covid-19 Risk assessment is available [here](#). This document will be reviewed regularly.

Although we undertake to try to keep employees safe, we would very much hope for full involvement from all members of staff. You (Partners, fee earners secretaries and administration staff) are best placed to help identify what safety measures may need to be implemented to minimise risk of exposure to the virus in your own specific work areas. You are actively encouraged to raise issues and/or discuss ideas with the health and safety manager as per the office manual.

Employees who do not exercise the advised safety precautions or who place others at risk may be dealt with by the firm's disciplinary procedure.

Again, we accept that we, as employers, have a duty to reduce the risk of infection in the workplace. We cannot eradicate all risk but we would ask employees to work with us to ensure that the risk is as small as it is possible to achieve. Measures to this end will include:

- In all areas, please increase the frequency of handwashing and surface cleaning. Surface cleaning materials will be made available for each area and we would ask that you ensure that the surfaces are cleaned frequently during the day.
- We will ensure that, where possible, you are capable of working from home. You have been sent a DSE self-assessment form via ActiveAbsence, which you should acknowledge, complete and return, by email and not by hard copy.
- Social distancing guidelines should be observed in full. If you are finding that this is difficult then please speak to the firm's Health and Safety manager to assess what mitigating actions may be taken or whether we can change the way in which actions are carried out.
- Screens have been erected in reception where face-to-face communication is unavoidable.
- In offices where social distancing is impossible people will be given a rotating work pattern so as to minimise the communication and allow people to work from home.
- Back to back or side by side, working formations must be adopted instead of face to face unless there is a clear 2 metre distance between you.

There are certain groups of people which the government have identified as particularly vulnerable to Covid-19. If you consider that you are one of these people or that you are at high risk for any other reason, then please make this known to the Health and Safety manager. Be ready to discuss how your specific conditions and or situations can be taken into account to help minimise your risk.

The results of our risk assessment will be made public to help clients to be well informed and confident in our ability to continue to work, but no personal details will be shared.

Who should be in the office?

Where possible those who wish to work from home can do so. Exceptions to this rule may include;

- Those with a critical role in business or operational continuity
- Those responsible for safe facility management
- Those carrying out regulatory requirements that cannot be performed remotely
- Those who cannot work from home due to home circumstances or unavailability of safe enabling equipment / suitable space
- Those who feel that working from home is detrimentally affecting their mental health

Department heads should plan for the minimum number of people needed in the office to carry out work effectively.

The wellbeing of those who continue to work at home will be monitored regularly, helping people to remain connected to the rest of the firm and up to date with firm and regulatory changes in practice.

We will keep in touch with home workers to ensure that we are aware of their working arrangements as well as their mental and physical health and personal security.

We will provide essential equipment to allow home workers to carry out their duties safely.

Those in greater risk

Ideally those who fall under the category of higher risk as per the government's current guidelines <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19> should not come into the office. However, if there is a specific need to attend then please discuss this with the health and safety manager to ensure that risks are minimised.

People who need to self-isolate

These people should not come into the office.

Those who can continue to work from home will be supplied with the means to do so.

Those who are on sick leave will be paid in line with their contract with the exception that confirmed Covid -19 sufferers will, under current Government provisions, receive SSP as from day 1 and not have the usual qualifying period.

Those who have symptoms or live with someone who has symptoms should follow the current government advice found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>

Equality in the workplace

We will continue to recognise the individual rights of our employees by:

- Understanding and taking into account the particular circumstances of those with protected characteristics
- Involving and communicating appropriately with staff whose protected characteristics might either expose them to a different degree of risk, or might make any steps that we may implement inappropriate or challenging to them.
- Considering whether we may need to put in place any particular measures or adjustments to take account of our duties under the equalities legislation
- Making reasonable adjustments to avoid disabled workers being put at a disadvantage and assessing the health and safety of new or expectant mothers.
- Ensuring that any steps taken do not have an unjustifiable impact on some people more than others.

Social Distancing

We must maintain social distancing in the workplace wherever possible. Staff are encouraged to identify areas where this is becoming problematic so that that the partners and management can consider alternate working practices. In addition, we should;

- Increase the frequency of hand washing and surface cleaning
- Use screens and/or barriers where appropriate
- Adopt back to back or side to side working positions instead of face to face.
- Reduce the need for person to person contact where possible
- Consider operating a rotational work routine to limit time in the office
- Remember that social distancing continues during lunch breaks and before and after work hours. It also applies to non-staff members who are on the premises in the waiting area and meeting rooms for example

On Arrival

- On the first entry of the day use No 16 where your temperature will be taken automatically by a thermal camera.
- Avoid grouping in areas such as reception during arrival and departure times, remembering to cater for those with special requirements to avoid crowding in communal areas at any time.

Workstations

Where possible, staff can work from home. However, in situations where this is not possible then we must:

- Not allow people to enter the offices of others unless the 2 metre social distancing rules cannot be maintained, but to stand at the door. Papers that need to be signed should be left at a convenient place at the entrance to the office to be collected. After signing has taken place, both parties are encouraged to wash their hands.
- Manage occupancy levels to enable social distancing
- Avoid the use of Hot Desks.

Meetings

Face-to-face meetings with clients or contacts, in or out of the office must be arranged in accordance with the latest government advice. Meetings in the office must be booked in advance and should not run concurrently with other meetings that may be in the same room

allowing for cleaning and preparation between meetings. This will be carried out by the receptionist. We have a centralised booking system and this should be used on all occasions using only meeting rooms 1, 2, 3 and 4. In these circumstances we should:

- Send the attendees the meeting information sheet
- Ensure that only essential parties attend
- Not provide refreshments of any kind
- Avoid sharing items such as pens or papers where possible.
- Ensure that hand sanitisers are available
- Avoid impromptu meetings where possible
- A 2-metre marker will be put in place in front of the reception desk.
- The interior door will be locked and a receptionist will buzz people in using an intercom system assuming that the temperature levels are acceptable. Once the visitor has gone through then the receptionist should wipe down the door handles and other touchpoints with the wipes provided.

In any meetings held away from the office, social distancing and the above points should be observed where possible.

Common Areas

We need to ensure that social distancing remains in all communal areas of the firm such as photocopying areas, tea rooms, stairways and corridors. Kitchen/WC areas are designated as single occupants only and this is noted on the doors. We also encourage:

- Staggering lunch times to reduce pressure on communal areas.
- Staff to bring their own lunch.
- Staff not to store their shopping in the fridges where other people may have to move them. You may still store your lunch and drinks in there.
- Staff to use the cleaning products provided before they leave any common area to wipe down any touch points, such as light switches, taps, sides and fridge doors.
- Staff to maintain the 2 metre rule if they go out of the office.

Accidents and emergencies;

In these situations, you do not have to adhere to the 2 metre rule if it would be unsafe to do so. First aiders can see to people who may need assistance and should then observe the appropriate hygiene rules once the situation has been dealt with. Facemasks are available for first aiders in the event that they need to provide first aid treatment and we will ensure that resuscitation protection, aprons and gloves are available in all first aid boxes.

Clients, Visitors and Contractors

The following will apply:

- We are to encourage video conferencing or telephone calls instead of visits
- We will notify them of Health and Safety procedures that will be adopted at the time of booking by sending them an information sheet. This will explain hygiene requirements and social distancing which must be practiced by all parties.
- All parties to a meeting will wear a mask unless all parties agree in advance that this is not required. If a member of staff is unwilling to wear a mask where a client has not indicated that this is ok with them, they are not permitted to meet that client face to face.
- Meeting rooms will have limited occupancy as follows;
 - Interview rooms 1 and 2 have a maximum of 4 occupants including 1 observer (not permitted to sit at the table)
 - Interview room 3 has a maximum of 5 occupants including 1 observer (not permitted to sit at the table)
 - Interview room 4 has a maximum of 7 occupants including 1 observer (not permitted to sit at the table)
- We will no longer use a visitor book or plastic name tags for visitors.
- Visitor numbers should be managed and limited using the online facilities.
- We will maintain a central record of all visitors via the meeting room diaries or outlook.
- Avoid sharing implements such as keypads and pens.

Providing and Explaining available guidance

It is important that we make staff and clients alike feel safe within our offices. To help with this we will:

- Provide guidance on social distancing and available hygiene to all visitors before arrival.
- Train all staff that act as hosts of their responsibilities in relation to the transmission of COVID-19.
- Ensure that our risk assessment is published on our website and in our reception area.

Reporting

- If you are concerned that you are displaying symptoms, please email your head of department explaining the situation briefly and then go home directly. Remember to practice social distancing and cover your face.
- If you feel that the H&S arrangements are inadequate, please contact the Health and Safety Manager or the Health and Safety Partner.

Cleaning

Keeping the workplace clean

We encourage:

- Frequent cleaning of desks and work areas plus equipment between uses using normal household cleaning products supplied
- Frequent cleaning of areas that are regularly touched such as door handles by the occupants of the room
- Operating a clear desk policy to enable easier cleaning
- Having specific times to print, instead of all through the day, to minimise the cleaning requirements. Cleaning after your own use.
- Should we have a known or suspected case of COVID-19 we should look at specific guidance to take further action

General Hygiene – Handwashing, Sanitation, Facilities and Toilets.

We will:

- Put up posters to encourage regular and proper handwashing.
- Set clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets to encourage social distancing
- Encourage office occupants to empty their own bins when appropriate and take them to the main bins at the bottom of Mill Street.
- Ensure paper towels are used rather than hand-towels made from Material.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and face coverings

General use

As long as we observe the social distancing methods outlined in the government's guidelines and wash our hands regularly there is little or no additional protection that PPE save for face coverings can provide whilst in the office. We do not after all work in a clinical environment.

However, use of face coverings is a legal requirement to protect employees during their commute to the office if they need to use public transport where social distancing will become increasingly difficult as more people return to work. Where these are worn, they should be kept with the user and not disposed of in the office.

PPE used in client meetings should be disposed of in allocated black sacks. These sacks should be filled $\frac{3}{4}$ full and then tied. The bags should be labelled with the date and stored for 72 hours before going to the controlled waste bins in Mill Street. This will be controlled by the receptionist

Face Masks outside of meeting environments

Facemasks or a face covering of some kind must be worn in communal areas. Face coverings do not have to be professionally made or clinically proven. They can be as simple as a neck or headscarf or something similar. However people should also remember:

- To wash their hands thoroughly before and after use
- To avoid contamination by touching it whilst in use
- To change it if it becomes damp
- To continue hand washing practices
- If the face covering is reusable ensure it is washed after every use or in line with the manufacturer's instructions
- To continue to practice social distancing

Face Masks inside meeting environments

- Members of the firm should wear a facemask (available from reception) unless specifically agreed otherwise with the client.
- Clients will be asked to wear a facemask in the list of what to expect, sent at the time of booking the meeting.

Incoming Goods

Unlike our previous service, delivery drivers will not be permitted to enter our buildings at any depth and so distribution of parcels of stationery and the like will not be permitted either by us or indeed their own employers. Parcels will therefore need to be delivered by prior agreement to the reception area.

You should continue to exercise the 2 metre social distancing rule during delivery and ensure that you wash your hands thoroughly after you have collected or delivered the parcel or package.

It is impossible to avoid the delivery of post and continue to do our jobs.

If you decide to wear disposable gloves these should be used once only and you should still remember to wash your hands.