MANAGING THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS:
EMERGENCY REMOTE WORKING

BRIEFING PAPER 3.0

Black Country
Chamber of
Commerce

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Managing the coronavirus in the workplace

As the coronavirus spread continues, the Black Country Chamber of Commerce has produced the third in this series of briefing papers, Managing the Impact of Coronavirus, providing practical advice and support for business to mitigate potential impacts.

In this paper we focus on Emergency Remote Working, as one of the steps that is expected to be recommended to lessen the spread of the virus is for UK workers to stay at home wherever possible.

The spread of the COVID-19 will test many businesses preparedness for workplace changes. Travelling for meetings, or even just commuting to the office may greatly decrease.

If your office has closed, it doesn't mean that your business must close also. The biggest challenge many businesses will face to effective remote working is keeping in touch with people – both your employees and colleagues, as well as your customers and clients.

This guide sets out five simple steps you can take to manage emergency remote working.

1. Accept that your workforce may be forced to stay at home

Trying to bury your head in the sand and hoping that the coronavirus will go away and not affect you is not an option.

Public Health England are warning that widespread transmission of the virus is now highly likely but simply handing your employees a laptop and instructing them to stay at home is not going to work either.

a) Decide on how your business could remain operational should the office close tomorrow.

b) Gather a cross-departmental/functional team including line managers, IT, HR, operations, communications and other key stakeholders to scenario plan.

c) Decide who would need to do what, should the situation require a rapid response.

2. Evaluate the roles and tasks that could be affected

Knowing your organisational structure inside out will help. Look at what tasks are being completed, who does what and why and then group them into:

a) Jobs and tasks which could be completed without needing to be in the office.

b) Jobs and tasks which cannot be completed away from the office premises.

For employees and tasks that fall into group 'b', challenge your assumptions on why that role cannot be completed away from the office. Is there a technological fix?

3. Check your IT hardware and software and close the gaps

Remote working is only effective if the technology works effectively.

Employees will require access to devices that can connect to the internet (as well as a reliable internet connection). While laptops and mobile phones are an obvious choice, employees may need desktop computers at home (you need to consider any data-security and VPN issues for employees who access the internet away from the office).

Use software programmes to facilitate conference calls, team meetings, meetings with customers.

You can also roll out internal collaboration tools to facilitate shared working.

4. Agree a company communication plan

Even without a crisis effective communication can be a challenge. Working remotely adds another level of complication on this.

   a) Decide how you can keep everyone in contact and choose your preferred communication channel (daily email updates, WhatsApp group or other instant messenger options).

   b) Decide how you communicate with your customers and clients, and how and when teams will coordinate and hold meetings. Agree a communication plan for a range of scenarios and agree who is your lead on communications.

5. Review how remote working has worked for your business

Remote working can provide a business with valuable insights into performance, productivity, technological gaps and can help drive innovation.

After your period of remote working is over, take stock, ask yourself "Why don't we work like this all the time?" and "What can we learn from this crisis to improve the business?"

How can I help prevent Coronavirus in my business?

As the Coronavirus continues to spread, businesses can take proactive steps to help curb the spread of the disease.

Effective hygiene:

- Everyone should be washing their hands regularly and thoroughly with hot soap and water (make sure these are available throughout your business).
- Encourage coughing and sneezing into tissues and then throwing them away in a bin.
- You may wish to provide hand sanitiser in key locations.
- Encourage employees who are unwell not to attempt to come into work.

Communicate with your workforce:

- Update your workforce on actions taken and updates to policies.
- Ensure you have up to date emergency contact information for your staff.
- Ensure that managers understand what the symptoms of COVID-19 are and what needs to happen if someone falls ill at work.

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