Policy Statement - Reopening of Council Buildings

Introduction

This Policy Statement sets out what approach OCC/CDC will use to reopen its many buildings and public facing facilities. It will establish the Priorities by which buildings/facilities will be opened and describe the Principles which will guide responsible officers when considering what buildings need to be opened and when.

This Policy Statement will be reviewed at CEDR level least every 3 weeks in line with:

- government advice at the time,
- if there is a further outbreak or
- a local outbreak that is likely to impact services being delivered.

Context

As government guidelines permit the return to work and businesses are broadly allowed to reopen workplaces, we must be prepared to determine our own thresholds and policies for welcoming employees and customers/visitors back into our buildings.

Factors to consider are the availability of widespread testing, reliable and sustained accessibility to key infection control and hygiene supplies such as hand gel and PPE, the ability to support social distancing and frequent cleaning, and regulatory requirements and implementation of safe working practices.

Moving from 'response' to 'recovery' requires a considered, planned and phased approach. This approach will reflect government and public health advice which recommends that buildings re-open in a gradual and thoughtful manner with all the necessary protection and social distancing measures in place. The plan will enable the council to increase the number of staff working in front facing and location based services.

Aim

- To protect our staff and the public from the spread of infection
- To safely reopen council buildings to support the public in accessing services that cannot be accessed in other ways and to deliver our transformation programme
- To explore sharing accommodation with partners

Priorities

To ensure a coordinated approach and to be able to manage resources to open buildings, there will be a need to manage demand by prioritising as per diagram below:
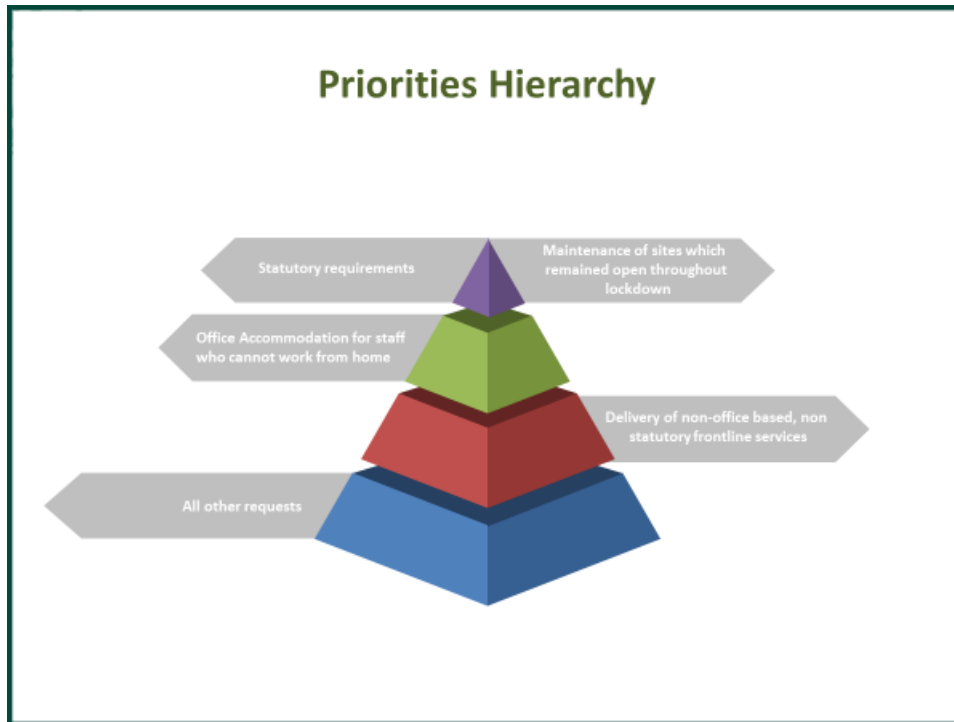
Priority 1
- Buildings that facilitate critical services or there is a need to meet legal requirements e.g registrations
- Government instruction or guidance to resume
- Currently open/partially open sites for ensuring Covid-19 compliance

Priority 2
- Offices for staff who are unable to work from home
- Essential public services or functions i.e. legal or highly sensitive meetings, transactions, customer services that can only be done via face to face contact with members of the public

Priority 3
- Buildings that are shared and partner wants them opened
- Facilities that are essential to the health and wellbeing of our residents e.g. libraries

Priority 4
- All other requests, including ad hoc urgent requests

Principles

Every effort should be made to share buildings with partner organisations to reduce the need for travel and make efficient use of buildings.

Where this is not possible buildings will be reopened:

- In line with best practice guidance from Government, HSE and Public Health.
- When health and safety and social distances measures are securely in place
- Where the business case demonstrates face to face work with the public is necessary to deliver services and as per prioritisation set above
- Where the business case demonstrates this supports the delivery of transformation of services
- In a coordinated way across all our operational properties.
- When approval has been authorised by CEDR and then all relevant risk assessments have been signed off both by property and the respective service directors.
- When a clear communication plan is in place and staff/public fully understand the conditions of usage.
- Staff may be asked to work from a different building than they would normally use

Focus on People – Criteria for Future Working Arrangements

Government guidance is to work from home if you can and we will continue to encourage this.

However, going forward we will continue to embrace new ways of working, including supporting agile working.

Below are some of the initial criteria that will be used to asses staff's need for office accommodation, but this will be reviewed every 3 weeks and in line with government guidance:

- Key worker roles or those staff who support front-line customer facing roles that are not effective or as effective when done remotely.
- Those staff undertaking work that can be distressing and where the employee would benefit from the physical separation of the home and work environments.
- Those staff undertaking work that involves highly sensitive information and data and where the home environment may not provide a safe and confidential space.
- Where an employee can successfully carry out their work from home but has indicated that their health and wellbeing is beginning to suffer as a result of isolation or an exacerbation of an existing mental health condition. Occupational Health assessment will be recommended in this situation prior to a decision.

- Domestic circumstances mean that working from home has a major impact on the employee's productivity and/or health and wellbeing.
- An office location can be identified for the employee that could alleviate where possible, the need to use public transport.
- Consideration should be given to staff returning to work from an office location on a limited number of days per week rather than full time where the role can be successfully carried out from home.

All the points above will be considered as part of the process of effectively risk assessing each individual case and the actual need for office accommodation.

Building on our long-term Property Strategy

We will conduct a holistic review of our requirements for use of our buildings and assess and optimise our medium- to long-term positions and options considering anticipated changes to workplace strategy and transformation programme in a post-Covid-19 world. We need to build in greater resilience by introducing a spectrum of physical and virtual solutions based on business needs, learning from our experiences as a result of lockdown.

It is recognised that in the longer term our use of buildings may need to change to deliver new ways of working especially reflecting a post Covid-19 workplace.

A balance will be sought between the practical requirements of 'standing up operations' including dealing with backlogs and current service delivery arrangements, with our longer-term transformational ambitions.

These include enhancing access through digital delivery, supporting our workforce with increased options for flexibility and decoupling service delivery from buildings and focusing on how, when and where customers want to access our service.

Our arrangements need to be in line with our Property Strategy, to make the best use of our assets, particularly in the longer term.

Key points to note:

- Service directorate Directors/Asst Directors (ELT level) will be responsible for both getting CEDR approval for the standing up of services and implementation
- FM Cell will be the forum for coordinating all activities around processing and implementation of any requests
- An OCC wide communication of all the above will go shortly after final CEDR endorsement so that the message is clear across both OCC/CDC. Communications plans have been developed.
- **Those buildings which did not close during lockdown are now being prioritised for risk assessments and implementation of appropriate measures.**
- **All buildings MUST have all Covid-19 Secure Risk Assessments in place before re opening.**

Process for Opening

Diagram below outlines the different stages of the whole process:

Process for re-opening of sites

CEDR approval for standing up of service	Accommodation Request Form	Planning	Actions	Final Approval / Go Live

* Service Director (ELT) takes request for standing up of service to CEDR (via Corp Director) for approval.

Once CEDR approval is gained, the Service must complete an accommodation request form for PIFM to review and execute.

FM Cell will be the forum to coordinate prioritization and implementation of all approved requests

FM Manager appointed for each case to support with mobilisation.

1. Service activities COVID risk assessments undertaken

2. Service specific requirements adjusted

2 Risk Assessments to be signed off prior to Go Live –
1. PIFM
2. Service Specific

Note – both risk assessments would have also included the assessment of all staff involved

* All service directorate requests will be discussed in advanced with the PIFM Team via the FM Cell to ensure coordination of activities and management of expectations.