

National Joint Council for local government services

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**To: Chief Executives in England, Wales and N Ireland
(copies for HR and Finance Directors)
Members of the National Joint Council**

27 March 2020

Dear Chief Executive,

COVID-19: general update

Please continue to visit the LGA's [Coronavirus: information for councils](#) webpage for all up to date advice.

All information contained in this circular is correct at time of publication but all links to external websites should be checked regularly as official advice is likely to be updated as the situation continues to develop.

We are very pleased to hear of countless examples of local employers and trade union representatives continuing to work together in the best interests of employees and maintenance of service delivery and are sure that this will remain the case for the duration of the national emergency.

Social distancing

The nature of some roles in local government is presenting a challenge for employers and employees in being able to observe the instruction to maintain social distancing. Examples of such roles include, but are not limited to, refuse collection crews and highway maintenance crews who share confined spaces in lorry cabs and cemetery & crematoria employees. The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) has produced [guidance](#) with practical suggestions of how the issue of social distancing can be addressed.

Travel during 'Stay at home, save lives' instruction

Critical worker definitions relate to who can seek childcare assistance in order to enable them to work. We are also aware of confusion between 'critical workers' and those who may travel to work. In terms of what is sometimes described as 'essential work', [the guidance is clear that travelling to and from work](#) is permissible only where the work an individual does

absolutely cannot be done from home. There may well be an overlap between the two categories but they are distinct.

We are aware of concerns around differences in interpretation of concepts like 'critical worker' and 'essential work' and difficulties that are arising in some areas when employees have been challenged and asked to produce documentation to justify their travel. If asked by police the purpose for their journey those working in, for example, social care, should simply state they are travelling to carry out work that cannot be done at home, and explain their critical worker status. If employers feel that their staff would feel reassured by it, we suggest they provide a hard or electronic copy of a letter from their employer explaining their critical worker status and why travel to and from a place of work is essential.

A related issue has also arisen in a very few, but nonetheless troubling, incidences of employees receiving verbal abuse from members of the public whilst going about their work outdoors. Such behaviour is completely unacceptable and the LGA is continuing to have discussions with government about clearer messaging so that the public can understand why some employees are continuing to travel and work outdoors.

The NJC, through the auspices of the LGA's and TUC's discussions with Government, is also pushing for clarity on other issues including: implications arising from schools being open over the Easter period when they would otherwise be closed; the availability of PPE for frontline staff; compliance by contractors and external providers with official and NJC advice; and practical considerations relating to pausing organisational restructures and disciplinary processes.

We again thank you and your employees for your continued hard work during these difficult times and we will continue to provide advice and guidance as it becomes necessary.

Yours sincerely,

*Naomi
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Joint Secretaries