

The Future of Housing Services 2020

Delivering Health and Safety Guidance for Supported Housing during Covid-19

Centrepoint Case Study





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He has a Master's degree in health, safety and environmental law as well as undertaking training in occupational health and disability / employment law, occupational safety and health, environmental, quality and information security management.

Peter has held several director level positions including 20 years in Facilities Management and Property Management. Additional roles have including Global Director EHS, US Pharmaceutical Organisation, Executive Director of six PFI Special Purchase Companies (Education & Healthcare) and Policy and Technical Director of the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management having previously been its President. Peter was project lead on a multi-consultancy study for a leading European NGO on Occupational Safety & Health, Psychosocial and Ergonomic risk.

He has contributed to a number of publications on occupational safety and health, facilities management, health and safety law and related matters and taken part in several conferences / seminars.

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Content:

Introduction

1. Understand the organisation response to the Pandemic (*based on Government advice*)
2. Ensure greater risk awareness and employee wellbeing (*through active and directed communication*)
3. Have an agile governance system (regular leadership reviews)
4. Review current or carry out a new risk assessment and scenario planning (*when changes to Government advice or operational activities*)
5. Ensure adequate resourcing
6. Open communications

Conclusion

Health and Safety Guidance during Covid-19 in Supported Housing - Centrepont Action & Activities (Case Study)

Introduction

Centrepont – provides housing and support for young people aged 16 – 25 in London, Manchester, Yorkshire and the North East and through partnerships all over the UK.

We aim to give homeless young people a future and we want to end youth homelessness.

COVID-19 has resulted in all business and the charity sectors as well as government and public sector organisations having to deal with issues which, we have not previously experienced.

The experiences to-date has and the path ahead contain numerous challenges and unforeseen risks. The public, organisations and government are eager to return to previous work and social activities.

Whilst it will not be “business as usual,” with thoughtful and deliberate planning organisations can develop a process for safely continuing and resuming activities with a workforce that is prepared, confident and assured of its wellbeing and that will have a safe working environment that minimises disruption and ultimately improves operations; and an organisation that is in control of its plan to recover to pre-disruption performance levels despite today’s uncertainties. Centrepont took the following actions:

1. Understand the organisation response to the Pandemic (*based on Government advice*)
2. Ensure greater risk awareness and employee wellbeing (*through active and directed communication*)
3. Have an agile governance system (regular leadership reviews)
4. Review current or carry out a new risk assessment and scenario planning (*when changes to Government advice or operational activities*)
5. Ensure adequate resourcing
6. Open communications

1. Understand the organisations response to the pandemic (*Centrepont took the view*)

It is critical to understand how the pandemic had affected the organisation and to assess our organisation’s response to the pandemic by undertaking a focused risk assessment at each service and office.

Remembering that the inherent risks in the organisation have not disappeared just because of the pandemic. Therefore, when assessing risks, it was important not to just focus on those risks that have been brought about by COVID-19, but look at all the risks the organisation faces.

You need to have a clear understanding of the implications of the following:

- Inform employees of changes in the status of equipment and facilities,
- Ensure you are aware of new or updated government regulations or advice relating to COVID-19,
- Ensure you understand any new work demand patterns, possible sources of infection, and new risk exposures.
- Develop a plan that covers all critical aspects such as a cross-departmental plan for a safe work environment including social distancing, hand sanitiser and provision of personal protective equipment, guidance and training, considering on-going activities and requirements.

- Ensure you understand what budget you have available and that you have a resourcing plan that includes training so staff can manage the new COVID-19 safety measures and backup in case of a second wave of infections?

2. Ensure employee wellbeing and greater risk awareness

It is often stated that employees are an organisations most important asset, during this time it is an understatement. They will be concerned about how COVID-19 will change their work environment, their commute and social interaction this also applies to those on furlough when they return to their jobs. While social distancing recommendations will be familiar, applying them in an operational (both service and office) setting and limiting the possible spread of the virus will be a challenge for many.

Understanding how people think and instinctively react to risk is key to preventing safety incidents. Habits, behavioural patterns, past experiences, as well as emotions all have an impact on how people take decisions and react to new risks such as the current virus.

Centrepoint risk assessed and reviewed with its front line staff what personal protective equipment (PPE), sanitiser, and signage was required, all of which were provided and a central supply is being maintained and distributed when required (I should acknowledge that we have been provide with PPE and sanitiser free from a number of our supporters). Training was another aspect that was initiated based on government and our own health and safety guidance.

Team dynamics, affective psychology and persuasive communication can all be employed to improve risk awareness. This is why Centrepoint considered that regular communication with all employees including those working from home very important. Centrepoint is very lucky to have Dr Helen Miles Consultant Psychologist and her team providing regular blogs and advice that are communicated to all staff. *(with other insights posted on social media for the benefits of others).*

It is also important to take steps that ensure employees cope well with the emotional strain of the pandemic. Managers have been advised to show sensitivity and take steps to address their concerns.

Centrepoint has taken steps to provide employees with the necessary tools to enable them to work safely and confidently and establish a work environment that is supportive and caring.

“Don’t be reluctant to adjust existing policies if necessary. And be sure to check-in often with all employees to proactively seek their thoughts and input”.

3. Have an agile governance system

Centrepoint realised the need to align the company’s standard operating procedures with the new status quo. That goes from details such as integrating new hygiene measures, infection control additional detailed guidance, to adapting to a changed business and social environment.

Centrepoint re-examined our health and safety management system to adapt to the new reality of work under COVID-19.

By setting up a Coronavirus Business Continuity Committee (CBCC) with a specific COVID-19 remit made up of senior managers from all aspects of the business including safety professionals, organisations can identify business critical processes, appropriately prioritise activities and take the necessary decisions quickly and efficiently.

The CBCC should consider situational constraints, business and operational goals and input from all risk assessments and scenario planning. It should also ensure that necessary resources (manpower, financial, etc.) are made available and establish performance measures to keep initiatives on track.

It is recognised that some employees in Centrepoint may continue to work from home, including management staff. Given their remote location, it may be challenging to oversee operational discipline or provide guidance on any operational failure directly, therefore regular checks on adherence to safety measures, how we manage the potential exposure of employees and contractors and control the volume of potential psychosocial risks and as such develop plans and provide guidance to mitigate any failures.

Finally, it is important to remember that the CBCC's responsibilities will not end as soon as business as usual occurs. It will be vital that the CBCC review progress, track the implementation of measures and adjust any plans as necessary to ensure their long-term success.

4. Review current or carry out new risk assessments and scenario planning

Assessing the current risks facing the organisation and considering various credible scenarios that could impact the operations are critical to effective on going management and leading to a return to work planning for those furloughed and opening of offices. Again, remember that the inherent risks faced by your organisation still exist. A thorough risk assessment should consider those risks as well as any additional risks resulting from COVID-19.

The most efficient way to do so is to engage front line personnel and seek their input. After all, as they work on the front line in services, they are in the best position to know and identify existing or potential new hazards.

Centrepoint also determined critical controls (IT), assessed them for integrity, and carried out inspection and test for continued functionality. If determined that additional controls are necessary, they were implemented at the earliest opportunity to maintain or enhance communication.

Centrepoint provided each service with additional IT equipment and access to Microsoft Teams for virtual meetings

Detailed monitoring by Senior Managers and specialist managers (Health & Safety, Property Management and IT) should participate in all readiness assessments. Identify failure modes and model each scenario.

By taking into account social distancing needs and redesign workflows accordingly. Then develop and implement necessary preventative and mitigate actions, and make sure contingency plans are in place. If deficiencies are identified, they should be addressed, and the assessment should be repeated. Once all operations are determined to be safe, the CBCC should be briefed.

The more thorough a risk assessment and scenario planning is, the better its chances for it to be successful. Consider departmental dependencies. Be sure to establish and monitor performance indicators and leverage all available data. Assessments and scenarios should be reviewed with the CBCC for alignment. Finally, remember to continually update scenario models and risk assessments with new information and data as it becomes available.

5. Ensure adequate resourcing

It was realised that Human Resources may be significantly strained during this time due to potential Covid-19 interaction. Centrepoint determined the minimum resources required to meet operational and critical needs in its services and fully understand the competencies required for that personnel.

It was recognised that the organisation will need to have a firm grasp of the availability of necessary resources and the need for any back-up locum arrangements, and prepare for the possibility that any resources brought in to supplement the required workforce may not have extensive previous

experience or adequate competencies and will therefore require some level of assessment and training.

6. Open communications

Each organisation will have their own specific plans for how operations maintaining momentum which is a fluid endeavour with numerous variables to consider, it is very important to build and maintain clear lines of communication, both internally and externally. The organisations Covid business continuity plan should be shared among all employees, and communication mechanisms between leadership, managers and front-line staff should be in place to track progress of the plan and respond to direct input from staff implementing it.

Centrepoint considered that the workforce input should be actively encouraged, and any concerns raised or ideas proposed examined and if appropriate, should be acted upon promptly.

Conclusion

Centrepoint has throughout focused on Government advice and acted accordingly which has put us in very good position to react during the pandemic and we feel confident should we experience a second spike at any of our locations we have suitable and sufficient planning in place.

Plan – Do – Act – Monitor – Review – Communicate.