

No: 252/20

12th May 2020

TO: ALL BRANCHES

Dear Colleague

Coronavirus - Government announcement on easing lockdown measures

The purpose of this LTB is to update branches on the Government's announcement and statements this week, on easing the current lockdown measures in England to deal with coronavirus.

Whilst many CWU members will not be directly affected by the changes in relation to the re-opening of workplaces, we do have members who will be and we will all be impacted by the easing of lockdown measures more generally. The union has therefore been engaging with the Government independently and through the TUC over the past two months.

The Prime Minister has set out a number of steps on easing the lockdown for England including encouraging the re-opening of workplaces that have shut – notably in manufacturing and construction – where it is not possible for staff to work from home; removing the limit on exercising outside only once a day from Wednesday, while continuing social distancing requirements; and looking ahead, the possible re-opening of primary schools, starting with certain year groups in June, and the possible re-opening of the hospitality industry in July. A summary of the measures is attached to this LTB.

Alongside this, the Government has published more detailed guidance about safe-working in certain types of workplaces including offices and contact centres, other people's homes and shops and branches. Along with the TUC, the CWU has been engaging with the Government on its workplace proposals and this guidance over the past two months. Working with other unions we have been pushing the Government to put the health and safety of workers first with regard to any easing of the lockdown and to clearly set out the steps employers need to take in order to ensure workplaces are safe. We have also made a number of proposals in relation to working practices in our own industries and taken part in a Government consultation to set out the union's views.

We do not believe the Government has managed the latest announcements well, particularly by failing to publish its guidance on specific workplaces until last night and having been unclear initially about when it hoped workplaces that had been closed would open from – it has now clarified it is encouraging re-opening from Wednesday. We are also concerned that there is no UK-wide approach to social distancing, that the public messaging is not sufficiently clear and in several areas the proposals we made in relation to particular types of workplaces have not been included in the final guidance.

For members who are affected by changes as a result of the announcements on workplaces this week, it is important to be clear that employers are under legal obligations to protect workers from risks to their health and safety, to carry out risk-assessments and to consult union health and safety representatives. Importantly, employees have individual rights not to work in a workplace where they reasonably believe it would be unsafe to do so. The guidance the Government has published sets out more detailed workplace-specific standards in relation to coronavirus on issues such as maintaining 2 metre distancing and cleaning surfaces, and where any employer is re-opening their business or changing working practices in response to the Government's announcement, it is important that branches contact the relevant industrial department for advice.

Similarly, where changes are being made by employers and there are questions in relation to those in vulnerable groups who have been told to self-isolate, individuals who have childcare issues or face difficulties getting to work because of public transport, branches should contact the relevant industrial department.

Finally, alongside the TUC, the union will be continuing to push the Government on both immediate steps taken in response to the crisis – including statutory sick pay, benefits levels, the furlough scheme and support for parents – and the need to ensure working people do not suffer as a result of a long-term economic crisis. The NEC will be discussing these issues later this week and we will be saying more on the union's demands and how we will be campaigning on this as part of our ongoing work on the new deal for workers.

Any queries on the contents of this LTB should be directed to gsoffice@cwu.org or the appropriate industrial department.

Yours sincerely



Dave Ward
General Secretary