NHS
North Central London
Clinical Commissioning Group

Return to Office Working:
Conversation Toolkit (1)

July 2021 v6

Return to Office Working

This resource pack comes in 3 parts and staff and managers are encouraged to review all three documents prior to having the 'return to office working' discussion:

1) Conversation Toolkit

2) Conversation Guidance

3) Conversation Template

These documents are designed to support managers and staff to have meaningful conversations about return to office working.

These tools will allow everyone the opportunity to discuss their future working arrangements confidentially.

What this toolkit covers:

Purpose

This toolkit provides information, advice and support to individuals and line managers when considering the future and best use of our office space.

This toolkit:

- **Enables and supports conversations** between an individual and line manager when considering where and how best an individual can work in the future. **You should record these conversations** in the Return to Office Working Conversation template

- The toolkit supports the return to office working conversation to focus on **four areas for consideration**:

1. If you are, or live with someone who is, **clinically vulnerable** or **clinically extremely vulnerable**
2. If you have any of the COVID-19 **risk factors**
3. If you have **individual considerations** that might impact where and how you work
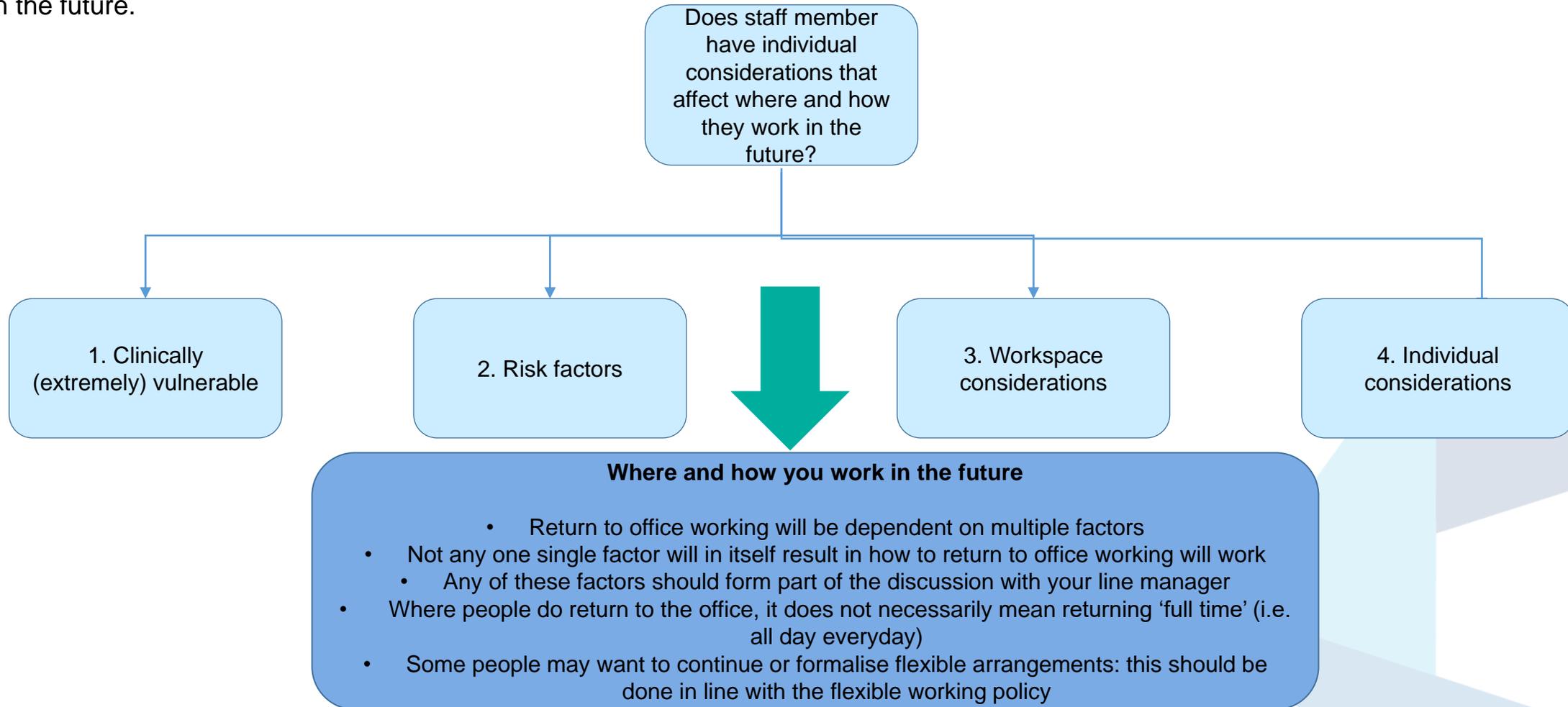4. If there are **workspace and workstation considerations/adjustments**

These factors should be considered both individually and together.

Overview of Considerations

There are a number of considerations that a member of staff and line manager will need to discuss during conversations about returning to office working.

There are a range of factors and the examples given here are not exhaustive. You should discuss **all factors** during the discussion – these factors shouldn't be seen in isolation. These factors will help inform where and how you work in the future.

Does staff member have individual considerations that affect where and how they work in the future?

1. Clinically (extremely) vulnerable

2. Risk factors

3. Workspace considerations

4. Individual considerations

Where and how you work in the future

- Return to office working will be dependent on multiple factors
- Not any one single factor will in itself result in how to return to office working will work
- Any of these factors should form part of the discussion with your line manager
- Where people do return to the office, it does not necessarily mean returning 'full time' (i.e. all day everyday)
- Some people may want to continue or formalise flexible arrangements: this should be done in line with the flexible working policy

Risk Factors

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There is evidence from the Government and Public Health England that shows people from some communities and protected backgrounds such as ethnicity, age, gender and specific health conditions are disproportionately affected by COVID-19. The key protected characteristics include:

- **Age** - The impact from age increases the older the person is

- **Ethnicity** - People from BAME groups are most likely to be diagnosed with COVID-19. Other minority ethnicities have a higher risk of death when compared with White British

- **Gender** - Clinically the impact found from research so far relates to males being at greater risk

- **Co-morbidities** - There is an increased risk of adverse outcomes in people who have diabetes, hypertensive disease, chronic kidney disease, COPD, dementia or those who are obese

Individual and Workplace Considerations

It's important to discuss all aspects of an individual's return to office working; and consider any factors that may impact their ability to return.

Individual factors and personal circumstances

- Isolation – individual working or lack of genuine interaction with individuals or teams e.g. working and living alone

- Vulnerable – at risk (or increased risk) if working for prolonged periods at home

- Personal health – working in the office supports your mental health (for example for those who have been living alone)

- Caring responsibilities

- Financial hardship when working from home

- Preferences

Work/workplace factors

- Systems access (e.g. poor broadband) – OK at home but significantly better in the workspace

- Unconducive work space – limited and/or disruptive space at home, cannot be mitigated by equipment etc.

Office Space Considerations

Consideration should be given to whether a member of staff requires work space or work station adjustments to facilitate a return to office working.

Please note the requirement to put in place work station adjustments cannot be used to exclude staff from CCG offices as this could be discriminatory. However, there may be a delay for staff (that require adjustments) to return to the office if further advice is required from Occupational Health on workstation or any other reasonable adjustments, or there is a need for equipment to be ordered and delivered to the office.

Examples of Adjustments include:

- **Workplace adjustments -** the CCG will consider workplace adjustments for anyone who experiences a barrier or difficulty at work. Line managers have a responsibility to make sure staff affected by disabilities, long-term medical conditions and mental ill health or are neurodivergent, are treated fairly and have the same opportunities as all other colleagues.

- **Physical/visual impairments -** Impairments that limit a person's capacity to perform physical actions or an impairment that results in sight loss. These may impact how a person can interact with a workspace

- **Hidden disabilities -** A hidden disability is a disability that may not be immediately obvious and would include neurodivergence. Without visible evidence of the hidden disability, it is frequently difficult for others to recognise or acknowledge the challenges faced.

Mitigating the risk for members of staff who return to office working

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Assessing safety of workspace

- Has the building/site risk assessment been completed and have you discussed with your manager?

- Are you aware of the specific requirements of working at a particular office and how this might impact you?

- Do you require access to a lift or are there any mobility issues to be considered?

Getting to work

- Stagger start and finish times to reduce the number of people in the office

- Discuss with members of staff personal safety measures for their journey to and from work

- Avoid public transport at peak times

- Walk or cycle to work where possible

- Offer flexibility so that members of staff can work from home for part of the week

In the Office

- Observe all rules and guidance on social distancing in the workspace in accordance with the 'Return to the Workplace – Working safely during the Covid-19 Pandemic' guide

- The Business Services Team will ensure Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) are up to date in the context of social distancing and will brief staff via staff briefings, staff bulletins and the 'Return to the Workplace – Working safely during the Covid-19 Pandemic' guide

- Maintain hygiene standards at all time

- Ensure that a Display Screen Equipment (DSE) risk assessment is undertaken via Occupational Health, if required

- Seek Occupational Health advice if reasonable adjustments are required to support the member of staff back to office working

- Review the return to office working on a regular basis

Summary

This toolkit has taken you through the areas that will need to be considered by staff and line managers when having discussions about how and where you work in the future. Both staff and line managers will need to keep a record of this conversation and what was agreed, and keep this under regular review.

Please see below a list of useful documents to complement this toolkit:

- Return to Office Working: Conversation Guidance (2)

- Return to Office Working: Conversation Template (3)

- 'Returning to the Workplace – Working safely during the Covid-19 Pandemic' Guidance

- NCL CCG Workplace Risk Assessment – Covid-19

- NCL CCG User Guide for NCL Office Sites

- Agile Working Policy
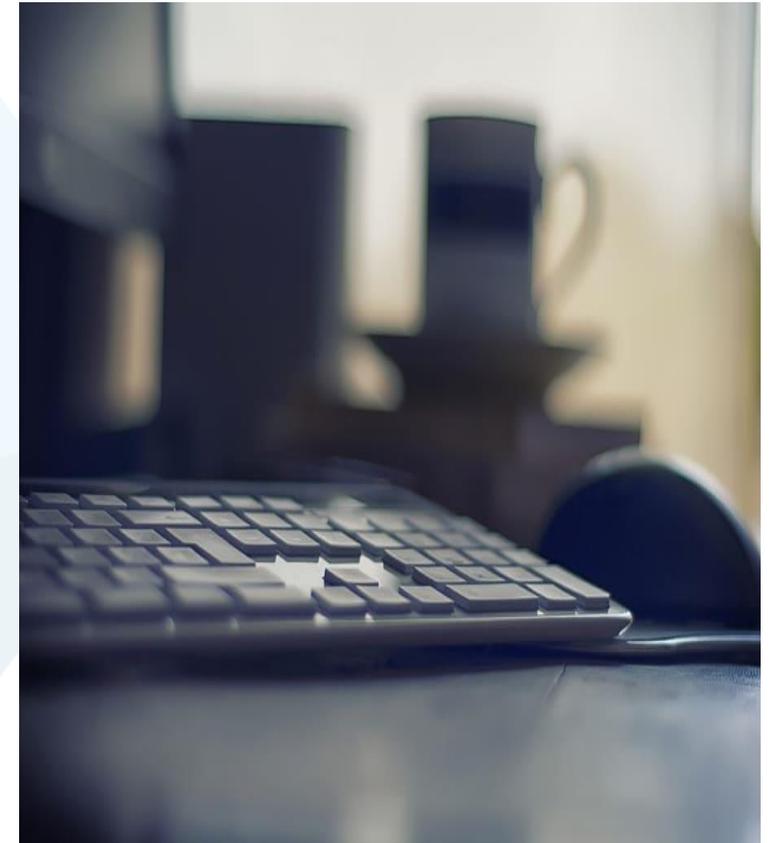
Further Information

If you require any further information or have any questions about any of the Return to Office Working resources or requirements, please use the following contact details:

❑ Conversation Template (3) and Conversation Guidance (2) – your designated HR Business Partner

Directorate	HR Business Partnering Team	Contact Details
Borough	Elaine Campbell	✉ Elaine.campbell16@nhs.net
Corporate Services	Raksha Merai	✉ r.merai@nhs.net
Finance	Sharon Wynter-Smith	✉ Sharon.wynter-smith@nhs.net
Quality	Sharon Wynter–Smith	
Strategy	Suzanne Lopez-Barillas	suzanne.lopez-barillas@nhs.net
Strategic Commissioning	Suzanne Lopez-Barillas	

• NCL CCG Workplace Risk Assessment and NCL CCG User Guide for NCL Office Sites – the Business Services Team at nclccg.businessservices@nhs.net

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