

Members' Briefing **REVENUE & CUSTOMS GROUP**

To: **All Members**

cc: **Branch Secretaries, Group Executive Committee, Equality Chairs, VOAC** (for info)

Can this Briefing be circulated via HMRC IT systems: **NO**

Website: **YES**

Action to be taken: **For the attention of all members**

Date: **3 April 2020**

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COVID-19

PCS demands firm action following deaths in HMRC

- *PCS call for urgent response following Covid-related deaths*
 - *Demands put to HMRC and Cabinet Office*
 - *Members' health and safety paramount*

PCS have demanded that HMRC take firm action, following several new Covid-19 cases; and two deaths in Salford and Peterlee.

PCS demand HMRC response following deaths

PCS have been pressing HMRC throughout the crisis, for an agreed procedure regarding Covid-19 cases in the office, and how the department should respond when they occur.

Despite our best efforts, the department has not taken work on an agreed procedure forward with the union; and following the death of a PCS member in Trinity Bridge House in Salford, who had previously been sent home exhibiting the symptoms of Covid-19, [we have again written to HMRC](#) to demand that the development of this agreed guidance is urgently addressed.

Only two hours following our sending that letter however, the need for such guidance assumed critical proportions, when it transpired that a former team-mate of the member who has sadly died, has now tested positive for Covid-19.

Of further concern is the news that in recent weeks, there has been a restructuring in the office, whereby that team had been dispersed across the office, raising the increased prospect of members being open to infection in the wider workplace.

Immediate action required

[PCS immediately wrote to the Director of People Policy](#) and demanded that the department now takes immediate action. We have demanded HMRC takes the following steps:

- To close Trinity Bridge House, pending a deep-clean of all levels of the building
- To send all staff in Trinity Bridge House home, under instructions to self-isolate, in order to allow any possible further cases to become apparent
- To agree that no staff will return to the building until a full risk assessment has been undertaken, in conjunction with PCS safety representatives

- To remind all staff in Trinity Bridge House of all available counselling/support networks, including via their trade union
- To enter urgent discussions with PCS regarding an agreed procedure for dealing with all future cases or likely cases.

Given the urgency of the matter, our General Secretary, Mark Serwotka, has directly raised those demands in a meeting with the Cabinet Office, and those demands to the Cabinet Office have been followed-up in writing.

The urgency then widened, when news came through to PCS that a second member had died of Covid-19, this time in Peterlee.

Meetings with management

We had a scheduled meeting with the department on 3 April, and PCS asked for that meeting to concentrate on the need for a departmental response to the situation in Salford; and the need for urgent procedures to be agreed.

However, ARC (the senior civil servants' union) objected to the situation in Salford even being discussed. In a later discussion, ARC confirmed that they opposed the steps PCS have demanded; saying that their view was "the sad fact that a person died, doesn't change the fact that the procedures are being followed".

With PCS not able to discuss the Salford case at the scheduled policy meeting, a further meeting was organised for later in the day. At the meeting, the department reiterated that they considered they were fully compliant with government guidance.

In response, PCS asked the department: 'with four confirmed cases in the building, including one death and one hospitalisation, what will it take for HMRC to take action beyond the government guidance?' We've had no answer to that question.

Members' health and safety paramount

PCS recognise that the department has taken major steps to alleviate the impact of the virus, with tens of thousands of staff now working from home.

However this cannot and will not distract PCS from the urgent need to protect and safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of the thousands of less senior, mostly low-paid members who are currently required by the department to go into the office; in the process exposing them to a greater risk of contracting the virus.

We have already reminded management that under Health and Safety and Employment Law, members have:

- A general duty to take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves and of other people who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work; and
- Legal protections, confirming they have the right not to be subjected to any detriment by any act, or any deliberate failure to act, by his employer; and where they reasonably believe they are in serious and imminent danger, took appropriate steps to protect themselves (or others) from that danger.

PCS are preparing to meet HMRC management again on Monday (6 April), where we will demand that HMRC now takes the more robust action necessary to protect those members required by the department to come into the office.

Get involved!

Remember, HMRC applies restrictions on the content of union circulars distributed using the department's email system, so make sure that you stay in touch with your union.

If you haven't already done so, let PCS have your personal/non-work email address and your mobile phone number. We'll only use it to keep you informed about PCS matters. You can update your details

securely online by registering for [PCS Digital](#) or by contacting membership@pcs.org.uk. Alternatively, ask your local PCS rep to enter your details securely on the PCS Organising App.

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