Briefing

North Yorkshire LG Branch

1 July 2020

Reopening of Libraries

I attended a UNISON webinar today on the reopening of libraries, which are allowed to start a gradual reopening from Saturday 4 July. The webinar was aimed at UNISON reps and members who work in libraries.

UNISON's position is similar to our position throughout – the reopening of workplaces should be based on adequate risk assessments for each location and such risk assessments must pay particular attention to vulnerable groups of workers such a Black/BAME, new and expectant mothers, older workers and those who are on the government clinically and extremely clinically vulnerable groups.

Much of the government advice comes from a document prepared by 'Libraries Connected' and we would expect employers to follow this guidance as a minimum. Other government advice is also contained in the existing guidance on reopening shops and offices.

Particular attention was paid to:

Social distancing – NJC guidance is clear that returning to workplaces should be based on the current government advice on social distancing, if social distancing cannot be maintained people should be allowed to work from home, be redeployed or ultimately will be at home on normal pay. Libraries may need to review their opening, or the services they provide, if social distancing cannot be maintained.

4 July date – this is the earliest date that libraries can open and the expectation is that they should open gradually

Furnishings – in accordance with government and Libraries Connected guidance, soft furnishings will have to be removed or placed out of use

Managers – have a key role in reassuring staff and monitoring reopening, they should be visible on the 'shop floor' for staff and users

Toilets – there is some concern about toilets that are shared between staff and users. Employers will need to demonstrate how they can ensure that library users follow all the hygiene riles when using shared toilets. Some local authorities are reopening libraries with toilets being closed except for staff.

Black (BAME) workers – UNISON is concerned that the Libraries Connected guidance does not go far enough for these workers. Our position remains that Black workers should have an individual risk assessment before returning to the workplace and that they should be supported to remain at home, or be redeployed to roles where social distancing can be maintained.

Disruptive users – library staff already endure abuse and violence from some library users, and it is expected that this could worsen as a result of restrictions and changes within libraries. There needs to be a zero tolerance approach to violence and abuse and there should be signs explaining this to library users. Consideration to be given in some locations to having security staff deployed.

Shared spaces with other services and organisations – risk assessments needs to consider whether other organisations share the library space. They will need to abide by the risk assessments for their staff and users.

Helping users with IT and other equipment – only where appropriate PPE is provided (e.g. gloves, anti-bac wipes, etc). Libraries will need to review provision of such services if they cannot protect staff.

PPE – where appropriate PPE should be provided, but it is not as effective as other control measures which should be applied first such as:

- Eliminate – e.g. work from home, work from nearest library to home
- Substitute – e.g. restart with a delivery only service
- Engineering controls – e.g. erect Perspex screens
- Administrative controls – e.g. control number of users, one-way systems

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