

No. 121/20

13th March 2020

Dear Colleague,

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) IMPACT UPON THE CWU

The purpose of this LTB is to inform branches of the actions we are taking in response to the above as it affects the CWU.

Branches will be aware that the Health and Safety department have issued a number of LTB's that are directed at the industrial health and safety aspects of this matter as it impacts upon our members working conditions. In relation to those issues Branches and Representatives should continue to deal with those matters through the relevant industrial departments in conjunction with the H&S Department at CWU HQs.

We have embarked upon instigating a series of measures that would allow, as far as possible the CWU to continue to function as the impacts of this viral infection worsen in line with Government and Public Health England (PHE) predictions.

The latest announcement by Government (Thursday 11th March 2020) is that the situation currently being experienced in Italy is likely to occur here in approximately 4 weeks' time. Obviously whilst the spread of the virus is beyond our control we are working on a series of measures that would allow, as far as is reasonably practicable, for the CWU to continue operating in order to serve and support our members should the need arise whereby through Government directive or a diagnosis of infection, we have to close or are unable to operate out of, 150 The Broadway.

Amongst the issues being scoped we are:

- Asking all departments at CWU HQs to immediately identify their essential work issues.
- Identify key staff to carry out this work.
- Equip a larger number of staff to be able work remotely e.g. from home.
- Sourcing of alternative "emergency" premises.
- Open up more video conferencing facilities to allow access by Branches, Regions, Reps.
- Identify what meetings, events, etc. may need to be cancelled in order to protect Reps and staff.

This plan will be under continuous review and development as the public landscape changes. You will have seen that the latest Government advice on this matter was sparse i.e. self-isolate for 7 days even with mild symptoms and continue to wash hands thoroughly. However they did give a clear indication that as the virus escalates, as they expect, much stronger measures will be introduced.

We are already seeing a number of businesses and institutions advising against unnecessary travel and in Scotland we have seen a ban on events of more than 500 people. Our intention here is not to be alarmist but medical experts state that "the trajectory is that we are 4 weeks behind Italy". In response to this the Government has stated that they are "considering banning major events over the coming weeks".

The introduction of such measures, as seems inevitable in the coming weeks, would seriously impact on our normal way of operating i.e. via meetings, briefings, schools and conferences. As a result we are currently scoping what options are open to us in this regard, but we are of the view that these are measures we will have to make decisions on within the next few days.

We clearly have a responsibility here to ensure that we do not place members, activists and staff and by association, their families and friends in danger. Again, we are dealing here with what Government describes as the “worst public health crisis for a generation” and that “many families are going to lose loved ones before their time”.

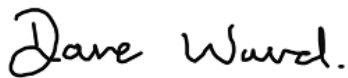
There is no question about the gravity of the situation we face, over the next few days we believe we will need to go further than the extremely minimalist approach being taken by Government in order to protect our members, activists and staff. This means that as well as putting in place what measures we can to continue try and operate as a CWU, we will need to consider our responsibilities and what other actions we believe we should take as we face the significant public health risk posed by the virus.

Once we have considered all aspects of our operation in the context of an environment that is increasingly concerning and changing daily, we will communicate again with Branches to update you as necessary.

The contents of this LTB deal with the way the CWU will operate in dealing with this issue. Industrial or Health and Safety issues that are impacted by Coronavirus should be raised with those departments.

Any questions or comments on the content of this LTB i.e. on CWU issues, should be addressed to Tony Kearns, Senior Deputy General Secretary via sdgs@cwu.org.

Yours sincerely,



Dave Ward
General Secretary



Tony Kearns
Senior Deputy General Secretary