**Hartlepool Learning and Skills Services**

**COVID-19 Guidance Information**

**Updated 26th February 2021**

The main priority of Hartlepool Borough Council’s Learning & Skills Service is to ensure the health, safety and well-being of all staff, learners, volunteers and visitors accessing its provision.

In line with Government guidance, Hartlepool Borough Council’s Learning & Skills Service has adopted the Department for Education coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance so that we can effectively implement measures that will enable the safe return of staff, learners, volunteers and visitors into our education, employment and training provision.

This guidance confirms the Government’s plan that learners, whether young people or adults, will be able to return to educational settings including adult and community learning providers.

The Service is working towards the return of learners within classroom based settings from March 2021, however, the Service will continue to deliver high quality online and remote learning including Adult Skills and Community Learning.

This guidance document will provide you with the information to assure you that the Service is undertaking all necessary steps to welcome back all staff, learners, volunteers and visitors within a safe environment.

**Risk Assessment**

As an employer, we have a duty to protect people from harm with health and safety legislation requiring employers to assess risks and put in place proportionate control measures. This includes taking reasonable steps to protect staff, learners, volunteers and visitors from COVID-19 within Hartlepool Learning & Skills Service.

The Service will continue to implement control measures to limit the transmission of COVID-19. As part of our planning for full return, the Service has updated risk assessments to enable a return of all learners building on the learning to date, practices already developed and best practice from Hartlepool Borough Council.

These arrangements will be closely monitored, and revised when applicable, to ensure that the controls are effective, working as planned, and updated appropriately considering any issues identified and changes in advice from Public Health.

**System of Controls**

Prior to visiting the Service, we suggest that you please read the information within this document and review our website address at [www.hartlepool.gov.uk/learningandskills](http://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/learningandskills) to check if there are any updates or revisions to our COVID-19 processes, procedures and/or practices.

The key control measures which are being implemented across the Service are shown below, grouped into Prevention and Response to any Infection.

**Prevention:**

1. Minimise contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring that those with COVID-19 symptoms, or who have someone in their household who does, do not attend buildings or any face to face activity within the Service.
2. Ensure face coverings are used in recommended circumstances.
3. Clean hands thoroughly, more often than usual, with signage in place across all buildings highlighting hand hygiene guidance from the Government.
4. Ensure good respiratory hygiene with the ‘catch it, bin it, kill it’ approach being promoted through posters and across Social Media.
5. Enhanced cleaning within all buildings, including frequently touched surfaces using wipes, and all classrooms used by the Service.
6. Minimise contact between individuals and maintain social distance with floor markers and a one way system implemented within the Service.
7. Keep occupied spaces well ventilated.
8. Where necessary, appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) will be worn by Staff Members.
9. Promote and engage in asymptomatic testing.

**Response to any Infection:**

1. Engage with the NHS Test and Trace process and the Service will be keeping a temporary record of our staff, learners, volunteers and visitors for 21 days in compliance with Government Guidance.
2. Manage any confirmed cases of COVID-19 amongst learners and within the community in partnership with Public Health.
3. Contain any outbreak by following local advice from Hartlepool Borough Council’s Public Health Team.

**1. Minimise contact with Individuals**

The Service will ensure that learners, staff, volunteers and visitors do not come into our buildings if:

* They have one or more COVID-19 symptoms;
* A member of their household (including support bubble or childcare bubble) has one or more COVID-19 symptoms;
* They have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test & Trace or Public Health;
* They have had a positive test for COVID-19, or;
* They are required to isolate due to visiting countries outside the Government’s Common Travel Area.

On entering any Learning & Skills Service buildings, the COVID-19 Induction Presentation will be shown on the screens in Reception or presented to individuals on arrival. This information is also available on the Learning & Skills Website. There are posters, floor markings and hand sanitiser stations throughout our buildings and provision to ensure the safety of learners, staff and visitors.

If anyone within our buildings become unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, or has a loss of, or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell, they will be sent home immediately (avoiding public transport) and advised to follow Government Guidance including 111 and <https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>.

They must then self-isolate for ten days and should arrange to have a test to see if they have COVID-19. Other members of their household should self-isolate for ten days from when the symptomatic person first had symptoms.

If anyone becomes ill with COVID-19 symptoms and is awaiting collection, if possible, they will be moved to a room where they can be isolated behind a closed door, and with appropriate supervision if required. Ideally, a window should be opened for ventilation. If it is not possible to isolate, they will be moved to an area which is at least 2 metres away from other people. If they need to go to the bathroom while waiting to be collected, they will use a separate bathroom which will be cleaned and disinfected before being used by anyone else.

PPE will be worn by staff caring for the individual while they await collection if a distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained such as a person with complex needs.

As is usual practice, in an emergency, 999 will be called if someone is seriously ill, injured or their life is at risk. Please note that anyone with COVID-19 symptoms should not visit the GP or pharmacy.

Any members of staff who have helped someone with symptoms and any learners that have been in close contact with them do not need to go home to self-isolate unless they develop symptoms themselves, in which case they should arrange a test, or they have been requested to isolate by NHS Test and Trace or Public Health.

Everyone must wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser after any contact with someone who is unwell. The area around the person with symptoms will be cleaned after they have left to reduce the risk of passing the infection on to other people.

Public Health England are clear that routinely taking the temperature of individuals is not recommended as this is an unreliable method for identifying COVID-19.

**2. Ensure face coverings are used in recommended circumstances.**

The Service strongly recommends that face coverings are worn by learners, staff, volunteers and visitors when moving around the premises, in corridors and communal areas and in classrooms where social distancing cannot easily be maintained, except where exemptions apply.

The recommendation to wear face coverings in classrooms is being introduced for a limited time and this document will be updated when further guidance is issued by the Department for Education.

The exemption from wearing face coverings applies to those who:

* Cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical impairment or disability, illness or mental health difficulties; or
* Speak to or provide help to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate.

It is not recommended that face visors or shields are worn as an alternative to face coverings. This is due to guidance from the Government which identifies that face visors or shields are unlikely to be effective in preventing airborne transmission.

The Service has a contingency supply of face coverings which are available to learners, staff, volunteers and visitors. This will ensure that no learner is denied access to our provision on the grounds that they are not wearing a face covering.

There is a process for the removal of face coverings which has been adopted based on guidance from the Government. This will be communicated regularly to learners, staff, volunteers and visitors and instructs individuals to:

* Not touch the front of their face covering during use or when removing it;
* Dispose of temporary face coverings in a ‘black bag’ waste bin (not recycling bin);
* Place reusable face coverings in a plastic bag they can take home with them;
* Wash their hands again.

If a face covering becomes damp, it should not be worn, and the face covering should be replaced carefully with additional coverings available from the Service.

**3. Clean hands more often than usual within the Building**

COVID-19 is an easy virus to kill when it is on skin and this can be done with soap and running water or hand sanitiser. The Service has hand sanitiser stations throughout the building so learners, staff, volunteers and visitors can clean their hands regularly, including at arrival, upon return from breaks, when changing rooms, before/after eating and before exiting the building.

Regular and thorough hand cleaning is going to be needed for the foreseeable future and will be promoted by the Service.

**4. Promoting ‘Catch it, Bin it and Kill it’**

The ‘catch it, bin it, kill it’ approach continues to be very important, and the Service will ensure that tissues and bins are available so learners, staff and visitors can follow this routine. Those with complex needs can be helped and this approach is now part of how the building will operate.

Public Health England does not recommend the use of face coverings in education settings including Hartlepool Learning & Skills Service.

**5. Enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces such as computers and workstations within Classrooms**

The Service has implemented a schedule that ensures cleaning is enhanced and includes:

* Regular cleaning of rooms and areas that are used by learners, staff and visitors within the building.
* Frequently touched surfaces will be cleaned more often than normal with wipes being available within all rooms for use by learners and staff members.
* Toilets will be cleaned regularly and learners encouraged to clean their hands thoroughly after using the toilet with a poster campaign across all buildings.

**6. Minimise Contact and Maintain Social Distance**

Minimising contacts and mixing between people reduces transmission of COVID-19. This is important in all contexts and the Service will do everything possible to minimise contacts and mixing while delivering a full programme of learning.

This will be achieved through a number of mechanisms such as keeping groups separate and maintaining social distance between individuals using a one way system and markings/posters throughout all buildings. Learners may also be asked to wait outside buildings until invited in to avoid congestion.

You will see posters and floor markings throughout the building and the Service has introduced a one way system supported by signage to ensure the safety of learners, staff and visitors. The use of the lift will be restricted and, if required, would be limited to individuals unless support is required. The building will be cleaned every day and staff will ensure classrooms are cleaned after each session.

Groups

Consistent groups reduce the risk of transmission by limiting the number of learners in contact with each other to only those within the group. The Service will aim to maintain distinct groups to make it quicker and easier in the event of a positive case to identify those who may need to self-isolate, and to keep that number as small as possible.

Where class-sized groups are not possible in order to deliver the full programme of study, or in order to manage the practical logistics within and around the site, other measures from the system of controls will become even more important. This includes, as a minimum, keeping daily groups separated. Although passing briefly in the corridor or external areas is low risk, we will aim to avoid creating very busy corridors or entrances and exits.

By limiting contact, this means that if one person in a group tests positive for COVID-19, we can be confident that they have only had close contact with some or all of that group, rather than the whole Service.

Once groups are established, they will be kept apart and logistics such as start and finish times, and lunch and break times, will be reviewed to ensure this can be feasible across the Service.

The approaches of separating groups and maintaining distance will provide benefits even if implemented partially. The Service may consider keeping learners in their class groups for the majority of the time, but also allow mixing into wider groups for specialist teaching, pastoral support and transport. Endeavouring to keep these groups at least partially separate and minimising contact between learner’s offers public health benefits as it reduces the network of possible direct transmission.

However, it is recognised that some staff will need to move between ‘cohorts’.

This will be monitored to ensure a balanced approach of keeping distinct groups separate while offering a broad curriculum through the Service.

**Measures within Rooms**

Maintaining a distance between people whilst inside and reducing the amount of time they are in face to face to contact lowers the risk of transmission. Staff will maintain distance from their learners, stay at the front of the room, and away from their colleagues, where possible.

Ideally, staff and learners should maintain 2 metre distance from each other. In particular, they should avoid close face to face contact and minimise time spent within 1 metre of anyone.

If this is not possible, then additional social distancing mitigations will be required such as smaller class groups and face coverings.

Where face to face interviews occur, such as careers interviews or assessing learners within a workplace, staff will apply the same rule of maintaining distance and hand sanitising, etc.

The Service has made adaptations to support distancing including signage, floor markers, moving unnecessary furniture to make more space, changing desk layouts, and seating learners side by side and facing forwards, rather than face to face or side on.

At the start of classes, there will also be a short Health & Safety Induction to cover key points including safety requirements and measures within the building by the relevant Tutor/Assessor. Learners will be asked to refrain from moving any furniture in the classrooms and hand sanitiser points will be located throughout the building.

There will be regular sanitising of contact points throughout the day and class times will be staggered to minimise the number of people in buildings.

**Other Measures**

The Service will aim to keep groups apart through timetabling. While passing briefly in the corridor is low risk, the Service aims to avoid creating busy corridors, entrances and exits through staggered start and end times.

Our priority is to keep you safe on our premises therefore once enrolled on one of our programmes you will provided with our Code of Conduct to ensure that you adhere to our requirements and expectations.

**Measures for Arriving and Leaving:**

**The Service aims to** limit use of public transport where possible by encouraging walking, cycling and other forms of active exercise. The Service will also deliver a larger amount of courses within the local community using facilities such as Community Hubs.

Learners and staff will be reminded that it is the law that they must wear a face covering when travelling in England on a public bus, coach, train, tram, or other forms of public transport.

The procedures for removing face coverings when learners and staff who use them arrive will be communicated at Reception. This will enable individuals to wash their hands immediately using hand sanitiser on arrival and dispose of temporary face coverings in a bin or place reusable face coverings in a plastic bag.

**Other Considerations**

The Service will ensure that care is taken if a learner routinely attends more than one setting on a part-time basis, or moves between the Service and their workplace as part of an apprenticeship.

Casual staff and other temporary workers can move between providers, but the Service will consider how to minimise the number of visitors to our buildings, where possible. These individuals will be expected to comply with arrangements for managing and minimising risk as stated within this Guidance.

**7. Keep occupied spaces well ventilated**

**It is proven that good ventilation reduces the concentration of the virus in the air, which reduces the risks from airborne transmission.**

**The Service will aim to ensure all buildings are well ventilated whilst maintaining a comfortable teaching and learning environment is maintained. This will be achieved by a variety of measures including:**

* **Mechanical ventilation systems – these will increase the ventilation rate wherever possible.**
* **Natural ventilation – opening windows and internal doors creates a throughput of air within buildings.**

**The Service will try to balance the need for increased ventilation while maintaining a comfortable temperature for** learners, staff, volunteers and visitors.

**8. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

PPE is available to support Staff Members such as aprons and should be used within the Service when required such as the following situations:

* Where an individual becomes ill with COVID-19 symptoms while on site, and only then if a distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained.
* Where a learner already has routine intimate care needs that involve the use of PPE, in which case the same PPE should continue to be used.
* If the use of PPE is specified in the COVID guidance for the sector or to provide general First Aid.

It should be noted that face coverings are not classified as PPE.

**9. Promote and engage in asymptomatic testing**

Regular rapid testing is being used to support learners and staff to return by helping to identify people who are infectious but do not have any COVID-19 symptoms. Testing remains voluntary but is strongly encouraged by the Service.

Mass Asymptomatic Testing Site:

The Service will promote the regular use of the Mass Asymptomatic Testing Site at Mill House Leisure Centre. Any learner, staff, volunteer or visitor can book a test by phoning 01429 523330 or using the following link:

<https://online.hartlepool.gov.uk/service/COVID_19_Community_testing>

Testing is voluntary but regular weekly testing is encouraged. You will be asked to self-swab at the Mass Asymptomatic Testing Site and will be informed of your result after 30 minutes. Individuals with a positive test result will need to self-isolate in line with the stay-at-home guidance. Those with a negative test result can continue to attend premises unless they have been advised otherwise by NHS Test and Trace or Public Health.

Home Testing:

Learners and staff will have access to Lateral Flow Device test kits from the end of March to self-swab and test themselves at home. Staff and learners must report their result to NHS Test and Trace as soon as the test is completed either online or by telephone as per the instructions in the home test kit. Staff and students should also share their result, either positive or negative, with the Service.

It should be noted that the asymptomatic testing programme does not replace the current testing policy for those with symptoms. Anyone with symptoms, even if they recently had a negative Lateral Flow Device test result, should still self-isolate immediately according to Government guidelines. Those with symptoms are also expected to order a test online or visit a test site to take a lab based test to check if they have the virus.

**10. Engage with the NHS Test and Trace process**

The Service will promote and comply with the NHS Test and Trace process and will stay in regular contact with the Council’s Public Health Team. Learners and staff should understand that they will need to be ready and willing to following advice from Government including:

* Booking a test if they are displaying symptoms - staff and learners must not come into buildings if they have symptoms, and will be sent home to self-isolate if they develop symptoms within any buildings used by the Service.
* Providing details of anyone you have been in close contact with if they test positive for COVID-19.
* Self-isolating if you have been in close contact with someone who develops COVID-19 symptoms or someone who tests positive for COVID-19.

Anyone who displays symptoms of COVID-19 can and should get a test which can be booked online through the [NHS Website](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/), or ordered by telephone via NHS 119 for those without access to the internet. The Government has ensured that it is easy to get a test through a wide range of routes that are locally accessible.

All providers including Hartlepool Learning & Skills Service have a small number of lab based home testing kits that can be given directly to learners or staff who have developed symptoms on-site.

Learners and staff need to inform the Service immediately of the results of their test:

* If someone tests negative, if they feel well and no longer have symptoms similar to COVID-19, they can stop self-isolating. They could still have another virus, such as a cold or flu – in which case it is still best to avoid contact with other people until they are better.

* If someone tests positive, they should follow the guidance for households with possible or confirmed COVID-19 infection and must continue to self-isolate for at least ten days from the onset of their symptoms and then return onsite only if they do not have symptoms other than cough or loss of sense of smell/taste. This is because a cough or anosmia can last for several weeks once the infection has gone. The ten day period starts from the day when they first became ill. If they still have a high temperature, they should keep self-isolating until their temperature returns to normal.

**11. Manage confirmed cases of COVID-19**

The Service will take swift action when we become aware that someone who has attended our building has tested positive for COVID-19. We will contact Public Health who will also contact the Service directly if they become aware that someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 through NHS Test and Trace has accessed the Service’s buildings or its provision.

The Public Health Team will carry out a rapid risk assessment to confirm who has been in close contact with the person during the period that they were infectious, and ensure they are asked to self-isolate. Public Health will guide the Service on the actions needed to be taken such as sending home those who have been in close contact with the person who has tested positive, advising them to self-isolate for ten days since they were last in close contact with that person. Close contact means:

* Direct close contacts – face to face contact with an infected individual for any length of time, within 1 metre, including being coughed on or a face to face conversation.
* Proximity contacts - extended close contact within 1 to 2 metres for more than 15 minutes with an infected individual or within 1 metre for one minute or longer without face to face contact.
* Travelling in a vehicle, like a car, with an infected person.

The Public Health Team will provide definitive advice on who must be sent home and to support this the Service will keep a record of all those attending for 21 days which will support with NHS Test and Trace.

If someone in a group that has been asked to self-isolate develops symptoms themselves within their 10-day isolation period they should follow Government Guidance. They should get a test, and:

* If the test delivers a negative result, they must remain in isolation for the remainder of the 10-day isolation period - this is because they could still develop the COVID-19 within the remaining days.
* If the test result is positive, they should inform the Service immediately so that we can respond in accordance with Government guidance, and must isolate for at least 10 days from the onset of their symptoms, their household should self-isolate for 10 days from when the symptomatic person first had symptoms.

**12. Contain any Outbreak**

If the Service has two or more confirmed cases within 14 days, or an overall rise in sickness absence where COVID-19 is suspected, there may be an outbreak, and will work with the Council’s Public Health Team. In some cases, the Public Health Team may recommend that a larger number of other learners self-isolate at home as a precautionary measure. The Service will continue to have remote learning platforms in place such as Google Education.

### Learners who are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable

Clinically extremely vulnerable learners are advised to not attend the Service, until 31st March 2021 at the earliest, because the risk of exposure to the virus may remain high. The Service will make arrangements so learners can continue their education at home using remote learning platforms including Google Education.

Learners who live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable, but who are not clinically extremely vulnerable themselves can still attend the Service if eligible for face to face delivery.

## **Transport**

Social distancing has significantly reduced transport capacity. We know that learners normally make extensive use of the wider public transport system, particularly buses. The Government has advised that they expect that public transport capacity will continue to be constrained especially during peak times.

To facilitate the return of all learners to the Service it will be necessary to take steps to both reduce the demand for public transport and we are encouraging learners, staff and visitors to walk or cycle, if at all possible. Further advise including information on cycle ways can be found through Lets Go Tees Valley on <https://www.letsgoteesvalley.co.uk/ways-to-travel/cycle/>. The Service will also be delivering a large range of courses from local venues which can easily be accessed by walking within communities such as Community Hubs.

**Staff Members**

The Government expects that most staff will be able to attend work. The Service recognises this and will follow guidance from the Council’s Corporate Management and Health, Safety & Wellbeing Teams to facilitate the safe return of staff members whilst complying with guidance on social distancing and providing a high quality service for learners, employers and the local community in Hartlepool and the wider Tees Valley.

Individuals who were considered to be clinically extremely vulnerable and who received a letter from the NHS or their GP telling them this, are advised not to attend the workplace, until 31st March 2021 at the earliest. Those living with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable, but who are not clinically extremely vulnerable themselves can attend work where home-working is not possible.

It should be noted that clinically vulnerable staff can attend work and all staff should follow the system of controls within this guidance to mitigate the risks.

If staff are concerned, their Line Manager and Council’s Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team are available to discuss their concerns and explain the measures the Service has put in place to reduce risks.

When staff are able to return to work, they will work on a rota basis and the Service will endeavour to have consistent teams, where possible. Hand sanitiser and wipes will be provided to each staff members with sanitiser points throughout the building.

Protective screens are located at Reception and PPE is available where required such as when providing First Aid. The Service will continue to be flexible and allow staff members, where practicable, to work at home following advice by the Council.

## **Safeguarding and Mental Health**

The Service will continue to be aware of new and additional safeguarding concerns and the Safeguarding Policy has been updated to consider any issues which may arise as a result of COVID-19 such as the rise in online learning. The Service will continue to act immediately on any safeguarding concerns.

Learners can also raise concerns through the Tootoot Digital Safeguarding & Pastoral Support Platform. This will be reviewed and support provided by the dedicated Safeguarding Team.

Many learners and staff members will be feeling uncertain and anxious at this time. The Service is therefore available to support positive mental health and wellbeing, which is necessary for individuals to engage in learning. Any learners or staff that may need additional support can speak to a member of the Pastoral Support Team or discuss confidentially through Tootoot.

There are a range of resources available to promote and support with mental wellbeing such as:

* Every Mind Matters platform which has specific advice for adults and young people on maintaining good mental wellbeing during (COVID-19.
* Education and Training Foundation’s mental health and emotional wellbeing advice for Staff Members.

## **Service Delivery and Online Learning**

The Hartlepool Learning & Skills Service has planned the delivery of a full programme of courses and the return of classroom learning, where possible from March 2021.

The Service offers blended learning through a mix of face to face and remote delivery using Google Education. All learners will be assessed within courses to understand any gaps in knowledge and skills with additional support available upon request to the Service.

Remote learning will be an essential component of delivery for the Service alongside classroom teaching. The Service has significantly enhanced the availability of this provision and has planned to ensure anyone who needs to stay at home for a significant period of time is given the support they need to make good progress through platforms. Where classes or groups need to self-isolate, the sessions will be delivered using a range of platforms including:

* Google Education: This is the dedicated Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) available for all learners within the Service.
* QualsDirect: This is the comprehensive e-portfolio system used for provision such as NVQ’s and Apprenticeships.
* EQUALS: This is used for the delivery of online distance learning courses which are available for both Community Learning and Adult Skills.
* Ebs Prospect: This is the online application and enrolment platform which allows learners to enrol on courses remotely within the Service.
* Skype/Microsoft Teams: These platforms allow the delivery of video sessions to individual and groups of learners in partnership with Google Education.

The Service continues to improve the quality of our existing offer and have significantly expanded online learning with over eighty courses available as shown within the 2020/21 Online Course Guide which can be accessed through [www.hartlepool.gov.uk/learningandskills](http://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/learningandskills).

**Ofsted Inspections**

It has been confirmed by Government that routine inspections of providers such as the Hartlepool Learning & Skills Service remain suspended by Ofsted.

In the meantime, in order to ensure that leaders are focusing on what will best meet the needs of learners, Ofsted are carrying out the following remote inspection activities:

* Progress monitoring visits (PMVs) to providers judged to require improvement for overall effectiveness that have not yet received a monitoring visit since their last full inspection.
* PMVs to providers judged inadequate for overall effectiveness that have not yet received a monitoring visit since their last full inspection or that are due their second re-inspection monitoring visit.
* PMVs to new providers that are due a full inspection and have received a new provider monitoring visit 2 years ago or more.

Ofsted have confirmed that inspectors may visit a sample of other further education and skills providers on a case by case basis.

**Further Support**

Anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19 can get a free test to check if they have the virus. If you need medical advice about your symptoms contact:

* NHS 111
* <https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>.