

## Making the Workplace Safe

For those of you working on the frontline during the coronavirus crisis, your health and safety is our utmost priority. Appropriate risk assessments and adequate PPE should be there for all. UNISON has been informed that there is currently enough PPE in Sandwell for all those that need it. If you cannot get the PPE you need you should contact us either by email at [sandwellunison@btconnect.com](mailto:sandwellunison@btconnect.com) or on 07736 923559.

For those working from home, this can bring new health and safety challenges, including mental health issues. To help please check out UNISON's national guidance at [www.unison.org.uk/coronavirus-rights-work/#heading-12](http://www.unison.org.uk/coronavirus-rights-work/#heading-12).

At some point people will be expected to return to the workplace in some fashion. UNISON's priority is that this is done in a safe manner. UNISON will demand the appropriate risk assessments are undertaken to work in a COVID-19 world. That the necessary PPE is provided, and new working practices ensure social distancing measures are adopted.

In Schools, UNISON is standing alongside other trade unions to ensure pupils and staff remain safe. Whilst it is easy for the Prime Minister to call for them to reopen – doing so safely is not that easy.

In offices, not everyone can be there at the same time. This is particularly true for those offices that are designed around hot-desking. The Council's 'workplace vision' has seen workers crammed into ever tighter spaces at smaller desks, like sardines in a can. UNISON has already been informed that the Council reckons only 25% of these desks can be used!

**Hot-desking during COVID-19 becomes Dangerous Desking.** If you do not have the wipes to clean your desk before working – you should not use it.

Then there is the safety of our cleaners. Cleaners need adequate PPE to help us all keep safe. There also needs to be more cleaners and cleaning of workplaces. When we clap for key workers on Thursday evenings – remember the cleaners – who help others still working, keep safe.

Please forward this newsletter onto your colleagues.

We do not have everyone's email address. For their health & safety, make sure they get it.

Sandwell UNISON Branch is working remotely. Please check the Branch website [www.sandwellunison.co.uk](http://www.sandwellunison.co.uk) for contact details.

### Concerns about Your Workplace?

In the first instance you should raise any concerns with your management. Secondly you should contact UNISON on 07736 923559 and let us know what the issues are.

Finally, if you are still faced with working in an unsafe environment, every worker has the right under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act (ERA) 1996 to refuse to undertake a particular task if it is unsafe to do so. **Before using this right, we advise members to contact the UNISON Branch first.**

Section 44 of ERA 1996 provides employees with the means to contest the adequacy and/or suitability of safety arrangements without fear of recriminations (e.g. getting sacked or transferred) or suffering detriment (e.g. loss of wages). Section 44. provides employees with the 'right' to withdraw from and to refuse to return to a workplace that is unsafe.

## Thank you

