

**The responsibility of freedom**

The Prime Minister announced that from Monday 19th July in England the final stage of the Covid recovery plan comes into force meaning all restrictions are due to be lifted. Essentially, what this means is that social distancing will come to an end, along with the mandatory requirement to wear a face covering. There will also no longer be any limits to the number of people attending a gathering, and the ‘work at home’ guidance will be lifted. It will be the responsibility of each of us to decide how we wish to approach life beyond ‘Freedom Day’.

Paul Offley, Compliance Officer at The Guild of Property Professionals, says that over the past 18 months the property industry has been remarkable at adapting to new working practices and processes, ensuring that both property professionals and the clients they serve are kept safe and well. The 19th of July will once again bring about change and the need to adapt to another way of working, on that resembles a pre-pandemic world, but perhaps not entirely.

“So many lives have been impacted by the pandemic and masses of people have experienced loss or suffering as a result of this awful virus. While we are all looking forward to a return to some normality, it is also important that we do not un-do the good work achieved but learn to live with Covid in our day to day lives,” says Offley.

He adds that while there is no indication at this stage whether the MHCLG will issue an updated ‘home moving guidance’ to reflect the lifting of restrictions, there are aspects that agents in England should consider during this next stage:

1. **The ‘work from home’ guidance**

Offley says that while the ‘work from home’ guidance will now be lifted, agents should think about how this is going to work in their business. “Many firms are experiencing benefit from different working patterns; so, whilst the guidance is lifted, it is not mandatory, and firms should decide for themselves what is right for their business and their teams. Be mindful also that the requirement to self-isolate for anyone coming into contact with a person who tests positive could have an impact on your business if you have everyone back in the office,” he advises.

1. **Self-Isolation**

Offley says that agent should remind members of their team that if they are contacted by NHS test and trace, they must continue to follow any self-isolation period. “Make it clear when arranging any appointments that these should not go ahead if any party has been advised to self-isolate or awaiting test results,” he adds.

1. **Face coverings**

Everybody will react differently to this. While some will be ready to venture out without one, others will be less inclined to do so. “It will be important to respect everyone’s decision either in the office or on appointments. It is advisable to ask the question ‘would you prefer us/your viewer to wear a face covering at the appointment,” Offley suggests.

1. **Hand washing**

We’ve all got used to carrying with us our little bottle of sanitizer and using these on entering/leaving shops and premises – agents should keep this up, as it is massively helpful in preventing the spread of the virus and will put a lot of people at ease.

According to Offley, there are many agents who received instructions from clients because they felt safe using that particular agent. “Agents put controls in place to allow business to continue in a safe way, making customers feel at ease and making them feel safe. While the restrictions may no longer be in place from 19th July, the need to feel safe will be,” he adds.

Offley provides his top 6 tips for Freedom Day that agent can use with their customers:

* We will not attend work or any appointment if we are feeling unwell or have been advised by NHS test and trace to self-isolate. The same applies to any visitor to our offices.
* We will ask you if you wish ‘face coverings’ to be worn on any appointment or meeting and we will respect your wishes.
* We will ask you if you prefer to receive only digital communication from us rather than paper copies.
* We will continue to record names and dates of contacts in case of any NHS test and trace position.
* We will continue with our hand washing/sanitizing to reduce the risk of spreading the virus.
* Our priority is always the safety of our customers and our colleagues.

-ENDS-

**Editors’ Notes**

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