White Paper

2021: a year for building management to review already

January 2021

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2021 has started in much the same way as 2020 went for most in corporate real estate and building/estates management, with time and investment in COVID-19 Secure as well as statutory compliance and health, safety and environmental management.

With so many changes happening so quickly, what does the big picture look like for you as we go into a new year?

As the vaccination programme and results of lockdown see us turn a corner to recovery, issues over the workplace - both people and property related - have yet to fully materialise. So, what further opportunities/challenges these are likely to bring in the "new normal" remains a relative unknown too.

But there are a number of actions we can be taking now to allow any changes, either positive or negative, to be effectively managed and to demonstrate the value of facilities and workplace management to the organisation proactively, as well as reactively.

We have collated five activities for you to consider, or you could use it as a check list.

1. **Review your COVID-19 Secure risk assessment**

2. **Review your property strategy**

3. **Review your actual levels of statutory compliance**

4. **Review your supplier arrangements**

5. **Review your organisational objectives**

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1. Review your COVID-19 Secure risk assessment

The working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19) sector guidance was again updated on the 7th January 2021. As well as the fourteen named sectors, information on schools and further education is included too.

The national lockdown has significantly affected some sectors more than others. With our own COVID-19 risk assessment we are currently on version 19!

However even if the updates don't materially alter the current COVID-19 Secure arrangements for your buildings, reviewing and recognising the fact the updates have occurred, would be a sensible approach regardless.

If building occupancy/usage is affected, review your wider procedures around fire, Legionella, first aid, etc. too, as they may need further modification or additional processes put in place.

2. Review your property strategy

Space and occupancy have been two of the dominating themes for organisations over the last nine months and talk of "everyone working from home in the future".

While this scenario is unlikely to come to fruition for most, it is true that more people have found more remote or agile work a feasible alternative to daily office life, and a preferred option for some over the longer term. Factors such as work life balance, retention and attraction strategies and cost could also come into play for both employer and employee.

The counter argument is the loss of physical interaction, creativity, networking and serendipity that naturally occurs when and where people are together, which have not yet been solved by technology. And this is without considering the wellbeing, mental health and isolation issues that can and do arise, as well as of course as the potential issue of productivity (although for some this has increased).

Building usage will also need to be reviewed:

- Will we see greater decentralisation of offices with more, but smaller, space being sought regionally?

- What will this space need to deliver, more agile "touchdown" styles of working and/or areas of greater contact for networking, meetings and collaboration?

- Does your current space allow for these changes of if not what are the options available to you business and how do they fit with the corporate objectives?

Assessing the alternatives now will provide better information back to the Board for such decisions and hopefully an easier transition in the future. Greater choice and autonomy over where employees work is an inevitable outcome of COVID-19. It will be for the workplace and facilities management team to lead on delivering it.

3. Review your actual levels of statutory compliance

For numbers of organisations (COVID-19 Secure notwithstanding), it has been largely business as usual from a statutory compliance perspective. For others, systems have been mothballed or allowed to erode. Even in the 'old days' elements of compliance could get missed or forgotten.

So, do you know where you stand currently with all the elements of your statutory compliance and is it where you want to be?

Aspects such as air quality and ventilation have benefitted from the increased visibility the pandemic has caused. Whereas areas such as kitchens, Legionella, asbestos, fire, work equipment and IT infrastructure, have seen change or become less visible against other priorities. Such changes therefore need to be recognised, and systems of work amended accordingly, or reminders set for action as and when the equipment etc. is returned to service.

Post the initial lockdown, the variable nature of subsequent changes and restrictions across the country has also not helped with the consistency of delivered service especially for multi-sited organisations. An understanding of the overall position of each premises and confirming its compliance status, would also be a sensible activity.

Either internally resourced or through an external review – such as the Building Services Statutory Compliance Review we offer – a small investment of time and money now, can give you a clear picture of where you actually stand and so identify where you need to target your activities to best effect.

4. Review your supplier arrangements

The disruption to the supply chain over 2020 has and is having ongoing consequences. For every organisation that has maintained its services, others have seen skills and staff numbers reduced (due to furlough or job losses) and for some it has sadly caused the demise of the business itself. Some sectors have seen change in the opportunities to merge, acquire or be acquired.

With Brexit added to this mix, there are a number of potential uncertainties with suppliers that should be checked, if not already, if looking to maintain continuity.

Pinch points are occurring in areas such as cleaning and catering though, where supply has either struggled to meet demand, or demand has fallen off or been reduced through the restrictions in place.

It is hoped most organisations have already reviewed their critical service providers and their position against current circumstances. Reviewing the position of the tier 2 and 3 suppliers would be equally as wise, to establish their position to deliver what you need from them.

Most importantly for all your suppliers:

- Are they now still the right fit for you and your organisation?
- What level of contact have you had with them over the last year?
- How adaptable have they been in supporting you with the information and service they've delivered?

At Assurity Consulting we have and are receiving requests from customers on our post Brexit position and have been able, through our long-term planning, to provide all the reassurances they need. Our business also remains on a very firm footing to meet and to our best ability, to continue to exceed customer demands long into the future.

5. Review your organisational objectives

What is your organisation looking to achieve over the coming year and where will the priorities be?

FM as an industry, probably more than ever before will be pivotal in delivering the "new normal", so understanding your organisation's objectives and actively feeding into them benefits them and you.

Some wider considerations your organisation may not be thinking about could be:

- COVID-19 has seen an exponential increase in the awareness of public health and safety, and so there will be an increased focus/interest from employees too on what their organisation is doing. Making sure you can respond to such requests effectively is going to make your life much easier.

- The already growing health and wellbeing agenda will also have significance in 2021. Both physical and mental health initiatives could and will play as much a part as logistics and location, in how successful your transition to the new ways of working (whatever they are for you) will be.

- The 1st to 12th of November 2021 will see the UK host the 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow. Environmental concerns will undoubtedly be highlighted before during and after the conference whatever the outcomes.

- With the juxtaposition COVID-19 brought for the environment (travel and air quality, energy usage/management (home v office), waste, packaging (especially cardboard), what are the opportunities to engage with your organisation and the staff to creatively deliver solutions?

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