

CAFT STRATEGY FOR RESUMING INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWS AND VISITS
FOLLOWING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Background

1. At the end of March 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic was starting to unfold a decision was made by CSB / the Leadership Group that all employees where possible should work from home to reduce the risk of spreading the virus.
2. All members of the CAFT have been working from home since this time, although not all were able to access systems remotely immediately due to a lack of devices. All members of the CAFT have now been allocated a Windows 10 device and remain working from home for the foreseeable future

Investigations update

3. A good proportion of activities undertaken by the team can be carried out as a desk based activities in gathering evidence, however, a key function of the CAFT role when case relevant is to undertake interviews (both formal interviews under the Police & Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and informal interviews of witnesses) and visits to domestic and business premises to speak to suspects & witnesses involved in investigations.
4. The cessation of these activities during the period of home working has resulted in many investigations being 'parked' until such a time that these activities can be resumed. This has created both a backlog of live cases which has also impacted upon positive outcomes as cases are unable to be progressed to a conclusion as they normally would.
5. Given that we are now 6 months into the pandemic and the team continues to work remotely and importantly given the latest Government advice that those that can work from home should now continue to do so; a crossroads has been reached where a resumption of visiting and interviewing is required in a safe way following a thorough risk assessment.
6. The guiding principle behind both considerations for visiting and interviewing face to face is that staff should fully explore the option that the information sought cannot reasonably or appropriately be obtained via either email, telephone or virtual meeting platform.

Proposed visiting guidelines

7. Staff considering a visit should ensure they have fully explored the option that the information sought cannot reasonably be obtained via email, telephone or virtual meeting platform.
8. Staff undertaking visiting duties in pairs at all times understand the importance of minimising any additional risk of catching/spreading Covid-19. The additional arrangements below are intended to help minimise this risk.

9. Staff to confirm in advance that they or no member of their household is symptomatic, unwell or self-isolating.
10. Staff will use Personal Protective Equipment during the visit. This includes a face mask (if no exemption), gloves (if deemed appropriate) and hand sanitizer.
11. Staff should not enter customer's or witnesses premises, although this may pose a data protection risk interviewing individuals on the doorstep/entrance.
12. Staff will only remove face masks for the purposes of confirming identity. This will be done before engaging any further.
13. Customers/witnesses will be asked to sign any documents with their own pen (or a sanitised pen will be provided).
14. Visits will be kept as short as possible.
15. Social Distancing - all attendees should maintain a distance of minimum 1 metre from each other.
16. CAFT may utilise officer resources from Internal Audit for visits on occasions where more numbers are required (eg synchronized visits to multiple locations)

Local and National Guidance

Please visit Harrow Council <https://www.harrow.gov.uk/coronavirus> and Central Government website for further guidance <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

Proposed formal PACE interview guidelines (face to face) – Option 1 to be considered in terms of logistics

17. Staff undertaking interviewing duties in pairs at all times understand the importance of minimising any additional risk of catching/spreading Covid-19. The additional arrangements below are intended to help minimise this risk.
18. Interviews to take place at the Civic Centre interview rooms in Reception
19. Staff to confirm in advance that they or no member of their household is symptomatic, unwell or self-isolating. All parties should only participate in the interview if they do not have symptoms, no one in their immediate family has symptoms and they, or a member of their immediate family are not in the extremely vulnerable category.
20. Staff will confirm at start of interview that all in attendance (LA staff/interviewee/legal representative/any third-parties) are currently well, do not fall into the extremely vulnerable (or shielding category) and do not have any symptoms.
21. Social Distancing - all attendees should maintain a distance of minimum 1 metre from each other.
22. All attendees to be offered the use of masks and gloves (PPE). Hand sanitiser and sanitiser/disinfectant wipes will also be made available and washroom facilities are available close to interview rooms.

23. If social distancing guidelines cannot be maintained Perspex screens will be available to provide shielding between interviewer(s) and person being interviewed.
24. Frequent breaks should be considered as a result of wearing PPE which can be uncomfortable if worn for long periods.

NB Given the geographical location of team members (2 Officers located a few hours away from the Civic Centre) this option may not be the most appropriate option at present

Proposed formal PACE Interview guidelines (virtual meeting platform MS Teams) – Option 2 to be considered in terms of logistics

25. Staff will be located in their homes to undertake this method of interviewing. The main risk using this option is the internet speed and strength of wifi signal to be able to run a meeting for a number of hours.
26. Suspect to be invited electronically to attend MS Teams PACE interview with all standard PACE interview information such as notice of rights attached to email along with link to MS Teams appt.
27. Lead Officer to include 2nd Officer in communications and in planning discussions.
28. 2nd Officer could be located in their own house or office.
29. In the PACE room (Officers home);-
PACE compliant recording device ;
30. MS Teams running on officer device;
31. Speakers connected to the device, so that all voices may be heard by the PACE recorder;
32. Record interview in PACE compliant manner on PACE recorder.
33. Record interview using MS Teams.
34. Show evidence remotely using 'share my screen'. (Folder needs to be fully prepared prior to interview)
35. Immediately download and zip the MS Teams recording and password protect (note password on file).
36. Send locked zip of MS Teams recording to suspect and/or solicitor **but do not send the password** ; the subject can obtain this only if a prosecution is authorised. (If sending is not possible, due to file size, upload to one drive)
37. Record the password on the file, on the master disk and in the disk log.

NB Given the geographical location of team members this option would be the preferred option at present. Full testing of this option to be carried out before proceeding

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Timings

38. Visits

Subject to approval, visits can commence as soon as the necessary PPE has been ordered and distributed to officers, training provided and a risk assessment complete.

39. Interviews

Subject to approval, depending on which interview option is chosen, the commencement of interviewing could take a little longer, particularly if the virtual meeting platform is the preferred choice as thorough testing of the IT in each officers location and PACE compliance would be required before going live.