

COVID-19 and Data Centres

Notes and actions from call 7th May



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1 Update from DCMS

There had been plenty of conversations happening across government concerning preparations and guidance for returning to work. Press leaks were not formally acknowledged but nevertheless provided a sense of the direction of travel. A statement would be made over the weekend. In the meantime DCMS was trying to ensure that the needs of the data centre sector were reflected in that guidance. Operators were generally doing more than the guidance was likely to require, and unlike other sectors, activity had not shut down, so the implications were unlikely to be troubling.

Quarantine was the next key question and operator views were sought. Government wanted to understand more about scenarios where labour and / or parts were imported and the challenges that quarantine might impose on the sector. This would enable the DCMS team to advocate within government for exemptions.

ACTION: observations on quarantine to be collated

2 Climate Change Agreement

Although not COVID-19 related, members were reminded that the CCA was being extended for two years and reopened. The announcement was made on 11 March in the Budget. BEIS was responsible for implementation but had issued proposals that were deficient in a number of material respects: the window for applications that would effectively close in August for operators, the addition of pointless complexity and a uniform target improvement of 6.7% over the last two periods. The proposals were inadequate and threatened the sector's competitiveness. A robust response would be submitted.

3 Recovery

A draft document setting out the preparations that operators were making for the recovery phase had been circulated. Members identified additional steps they were taking. These included:

- Increase to record levels of remote hands services. In some cases changes had been made to SLAs in favour of "best endeavours", although work generally remained in line with SLAs

- Monitoring and reporting tools were being used to enhance visibility to customers but if not already in place operators were reluctant to implement any major changes.
- NOCs Network Operations Centres: remote monitoring increasingly enabled, and mutual monitoring of other sites should one site be compromised.
- Maintenance routines being reviewed. Where there was justification, some maintenance intervals would be extended. Non critical maintenance was generally still being delayed and much maintenance.

PPE

- Cloth masks were being implemented. Customers were strongly recommended to wear cloth masks but in most cases not mandated.
- Operators were concerned about liability if issuing PPE
- PPE guidance – how to wear and deploy – examples requested
- PPE stocks being assembled so more could be issued if a future need arose
- Operators not mandating PPE but are issuing. Those that have researched recommended the type 1 which was not the one required for clinical environments but met the EN 24683 standard. The non medical grade mask was deliberately selected.
- Visors: these were not generally issued but were being used in construction sites as there were tasks where social distancing could not be maintained,
- No guarantees to be issued.
- Clear instructions to avoid misuse of gloves and masks and prevent complacency. Training implemented.

Lessons learned

- Greater control of communal areas – reinforcing restrictions, reminders issued and furniture moved to prevent people gathering or sitting together to eat lunch.
- Clear instructions about waste disposal – especially that of used PPE which in some cases had been found on tables.
- Flip lid bins deployed to ensure that no discarded items were left open to air.
- Clear signage and messaging for customers. In the absence of sanitiser hand washing was still the best approach.
- Ramping up cleaning and controlling numbers continue to be the most effective means of infection control, because instructions were not always followed in practice.
- All meeting rooms closed, markings on floors, limited numbers in areas depending on size, one in one out rules

Site access and home working

- Changes to visitor access process, all by appointment, all pre-screened
- Thermal imaging cameras and temperature screening are being tested on some sites
- Thermal and other screening activity located outside entrances, not inside
- Non operational staff to continue to work from home for the foreseeable future. Requests from those wishing to return for mental health reasons would be handled ad hoc, but expectations had to be managed as they would not return to a normal office environment.
- Staff welfare under closer scrutiny

Supply chains

- Operators anticipated bottlenecks in terms of staff availability and supplies including critical spares.
- Operators were anxious about viability of smaller subcontractors in the event of prolonged slowdown.
- Some activity rescheduled due to supply shortages or interruptions.

ACTION: schedule a call with the operator supplier forum and mobilise suppliers to engage.

Challenges

- Construction site staff and office staff most at risk from public transport. Operators would welcome guidelines from public transport providers.
- Bathroom facilities particularly problematic as needed by all and social distancing and hygiene had to be maintained
- Central London offices presented specific challenges, particularly for offices in blocks: protocols were needed for lifts and stairwells.
- **ACTION: incorporate additional recovery actions into recovery overview document.**

4 Next call: Friday 15th May

The next call was scheduled for Friday 15th May, 9.30.

5 ACTIONS

ACTION: Observations on quarantine to be collated

ACTION: Supplier operator call to be scheduled: Now in place, 4.30 pm on 20th May

ACTION: Incorporate additional actions identified into overview of recovery actions

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