

23 March 2020

Covid-19 and data centres:

Bulletin TWO

(follow up to our [19 March position statement](#))

Last week we published our first [position statement on Covid-19](#). This set out the actions that operators are taking to limit routes for infection whilst providing continuity of service, and identified some of the challenges we are facing. This note provides an update to that statement.

Most importantly, operators will have reviewed the list of key workers published by Cabinet Office and the Department for Education on Thursday and will be relieved to see that Data Infrastructure was included explicitly in the list. We had been lobbying hard for this and were really pleased and relieved to see this inclusion, so we owe thanks to DCMS for swift and decisive action.

However, the real work has only just begun: while the key worker list is an important indicator we need to do a lot more to ensure access for key facilities staff in the event of tighter restrictions on movement or a full lockdown. DCMS has again been hard at work and has already established a dedicated data centre team who we met (by videoconference!) last week. We will be working very closely with them over the next days, weeks and probably, months.

Our DCMS counterparts fully understand the importance of digital technology and are already advocating actively on our behalf within government. They have a lot of questions for operators. We have already provided explanatory material on data centres and background on the UK sector. We at techUK will continue to act as a two way point of contact with the data centre sector. We will ensure all bulletins like this are in the public domain so feel free to share. Meanwhile, here are the first few questions we need to address.

Q1: What are the essential roles in data centres?

Our immediate action is to help DCMS design the process that will enable core staff to get on site as needed to ensure continuous running. DCMS need to understand the core roles, understand why they matter, get a feel for approximate numbers and where our activities are concentrated. So far we have identified 9 categories of staff. There are some obvious overlaps and we are going to refine these categories and provide justifications for each category of worker.

1. Operational staff
2. Security staff
3. Cleaning staff
4. Construction staff
5. Colocation customers
6. Subcontractors
7. Outsourced maintenance
8. Suppliers – including fuel
9. Back office staff

Q2: What have we learned from elsewhere?

Government is thinking carefully about how to implement restrictions on movement in practice. Operators with facilities in other countries subject to lockdown may have valuable insights into what has and what has not worked, and whether the more pragmatic approaches of some countries have been as effective as other, more draconian restrictions elsewhere.

Q3: Can we set out a risk timeline?

We need to try and provide a timeline of risks graduating from immediate to longer term, and also identify which of these are sector specific and which are not. Immediate risks include staff access for critical functions. Short to medium term risks may involve supply chain, replacement parts etc. Then there are second tier risks like availability of gasoil and of course breaching air quality permit limits if operators need to run on standby for long periods.

These questions will be discussed on our next calls, please get in touch for an invitation if you do not have one. Our third bulletin will revisit actions that operators are taking and share new information from the sector. Look out for that in the next day or so.

Our first position statement can be found here: <https://www.techuk.org/insights/news/item/17086-covid-19-data-centre-sector>

Contacts



Emma Fryer
Associate Director, techUK
Tel: 01609 772 137
Mob: 07595 410 653
emma.fryer@techuk.org



Lucas Banach
Programme Assistant
Tel: 020 7331 2006
Lucas.banach@techuk.org

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Further information

Operator statements

Digital Realty: <https://www.digitalrealty.com/coronavirus-statement>

Equinix: <https://www.equinix.com/lp/equinix-coronavirus-statement-to-customers-and-partners/>

4D Data Centres: <https://www.4d-dc.com/insight/4d-data-centres-covid-19-latest-response-plan-statement>

Useful URLs

WHO Guidelines: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

Latest Advice: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>

PHE: Decontaminating non healthcare environments: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>

For further information on techUK's data centres programme see our programme overview:

<https://www.techuk.org/insights/news/item/272-data-centre-programme-overview>

Or visit our website <https://www.techuk.org/focus/programmes/data-centres>