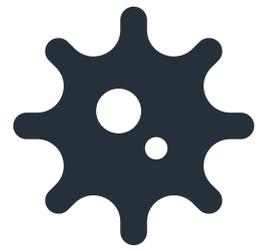


Engaging with Public Health Authorities and the Public on Coronavirus

Guide for branches
and districts





Engaging with Public Health Authorities and the Public on Coronavirus

Three main asks

- ▶ **Establish links and meet with key decision makers to discuss how schools are kept safe and raise any member concerns**
- ▶ **Communicate with reps and members in schools with outbreaks or high infections rates**
- ▶ **Feedback to reps and members**

Bargaining in a crisis is not easy, but the normal principles apply. Here is a handy guide with tips to help you establish regular meetings with key decision makers and suggestions of the type of questions you may want to ask.

This guidance is aimed at all branch secretaries. Some of you have many years of experience and some are relatively new to the role, but hopefully there will be something of use to everyone in this guidance.

In normal circumstances, we negotiate with local authority schools (HR) and MAT (HR) teams. During Covid, however, while they can act on the health and safety concerns of our members in individual schools or trusts (and should be held accountable through normal bargaining structures), they have no real influence or power to respond to local community based spikes in infection rates. For this, we should try to influence other decision makers.

Local directors of public health (DPH) are responsible for controlling local outbreaks, working with local authorities, Public Health

England (PHE) and local health protection boards. Directors of public health are key decision-makers and you should try to build a relationship with them.

Participation at normal JNC meetings will not be enough in the current climate. Joint trade unions should be requesting a regular meeting (at least weekly) with key decision-makers at local authority level, not just with schools HR.

The government's Covid-19 contain framework document sets out the delegated powers of decision making. It outlines six key principles. One particularly important one in terms of access to key information is highlighted.



Six principles support effective implementation of an integrated national and local system:

- the primary responsibility is to make the public safe
- build on public health expertise and use a systems approach
- **be open with data and insight so everyone can protect themselves and others**
- build consensus between decision-makers to secure trust, confidence and consent
- follow well-established emergency management principles
- consider equality, economic, social and health-related impacts of decisions





Directors of Public Health (DPH) work within local 'Gold' structures led by council chief executives and work with local boards to communicate and engage with communities led by council leaders.

You should seek a seat in Gold structures, with a sensible fallback position at least being meetings with individuals who do attend the Gold meetings, such as the Director of Public Health and or CEO of the local authority.

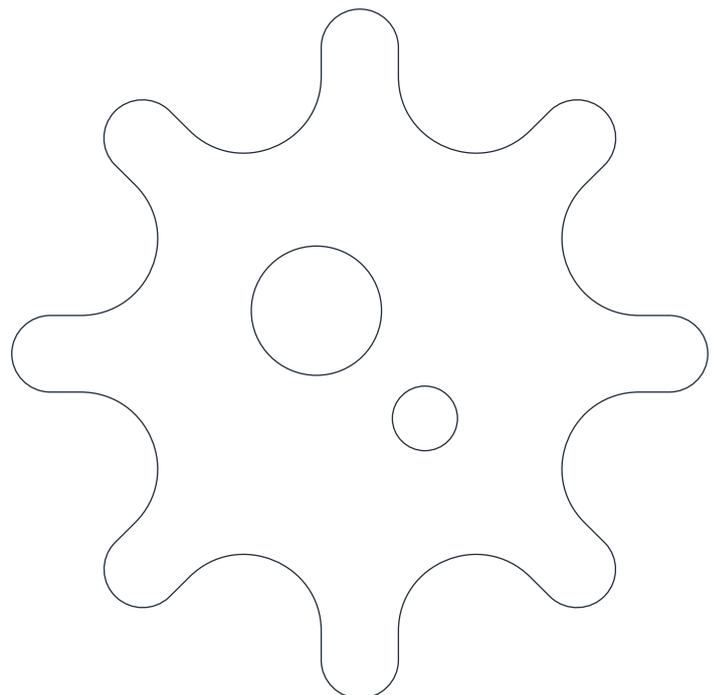
Information, consultation, bargaining is a spectrum starting at one end with information, progressing to consultation and then bargaining. We constantly seek to shift employers towards the bargaining end of that spectrum. The foundation for that is access to information which informs our bargaining strategy. Knowledge is power, and in order to strengthen our bargaining position we should be pressing LAs for a free flow of Covid-related information in line with principle 3 outlined above.

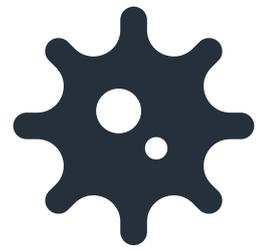
Securing this as a recognised trade union should be uncontroversial. However, some local authorities may either have got out of the habit or be resistant to this. We should press them on this point and seek agreement for regular updates/information ahead of any meetings i.e. weekly email update on areas and issues of interest followed by a meeting with appropriate council officers at least weekly at the present time.

Best practice:



Branches report that the most effective meetings have been ones where we have met with: the Director of Education/ Children's Services, the Director of Public Health and with the other education/ council unions present. Pre-meetings with the other unions have resulted in better outcomes.





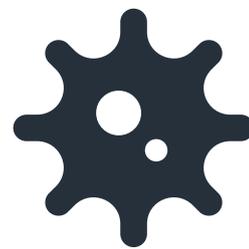
If you're not getting sufficient engagement with your local authority, here are some approaches:

Bristol - William Brown, assistant branch secretary

"Originally the local authority in Bristol did not want to meet with the trade unions to have any meaningful discussion over Covid. Below are a number of tactics which were used to successfully establish regular meetings.

- Use an ally. Councils have lots of meetings where the minutes and agenda are publicly available. Look at the previous minutes and see if you can identify a sympathetic councillor or another individual and approach them to see if they would be willing to ask questions on your behalf.
- Make a collective approach. Go to your local trades council and reach out to other secretaries and officers from different unions to put together a list of agenda items you think should be discussed and start lobbying the LA.
- Have trade union pre-meets to iron out differences of opinion behind closed doors wherever possible. This helps present a united front in any dealings with the LA.
- If you hear about a group you do not currently sit in, ask for a seat. If they say no make them justify their decision and keep applying pressure until it becomes easier to say yes.
- Use the wrong forum. Turn up at a meeting which might not be focused on education or one that's open to the public and raise some questions there. If you're told this is not the right place, then ask where is and who you should be speaking to, which can lead to a conversation about creating a new forum
- Be prepared for boredom. I've attended meetings with little direct relevance on that day's agenda and made comments so the NEU is visible. Keeping that seat at the table open could become very important when you least expect it.
- Identify the meetings held and which are focused on education and open to the public and raise some questions there.
- Go up the political ladder. Reach out to councillors (perhaps check the NEU councillors network as a starting point) and ask them to apply pressure. Then if you have a mayor or council leader, go to them next. Then go to your MPs and, where applicable, Metro Mayors. Try to work out who has the power and influence to get the relevant officers to engage with you.
- Make a nuisance of yourself. There is a need to balance this with a level of caution as you still want a good working relationship with individuals, but if the LA are not sitting down and talking with you enough then making a fuss is completely justified. They have a duty to the people they serve and you are doing your duty by trying to keep schools and their communities safe."





Examples of tactics and activities include:

- ✓ **A one-to-one meeting with a key council leader.**
- ✓ **A workshop/round table/conference with elected officials.**
- ✓ **Write a letter to the Director of Public Health.**
- ✓ **Set up a mass participation event engaging members of the public to support your position.**
- ✓ **Lobbying decision makers in face-to-face meetings to persuade them to support you.**
- ✓ **Online surveys/petitions.**



currently providing on the continuation of schools opening safely? In other words at what point will you start to move through the tiers of national restriction for education and childcare, outlined in Annex 3 of the contain framework?

Outbreak Control Plan

Each LA is required to produce a local outbreak plan developed in line with the [Association of Directors of Public Health \(ADPH\) guiding principles](#) setting out how partners should work together to implement the plans and take a preventative approach.

We should request sight of the plan and then a follow up meeting to discuss its contents. It should be published on the local authority website.

Influencing decision makers

Be clear with the message you want to get across to them to hold them to account.

Questions to ask:

- What is the latest public health advice you have provided in respect of schools and has that advice been followed in full?
- Has your advice changed since the latest data was published? If so, how, and if not, why not and when do you intend to review your advice?
- In what circumstances do you predict it would be necessary to issue new advice which might cause the local authority to rescind or reverse the advice it is

Key issues in relation to the Outbreak Control Plans and questions you may want to ask:

- Are we (and other unions) identified as needing to be informed with details of cases of Covid in educational settings?
- Is there sufficient stock of PPE in affected schools?
- Can priority testing for our members be accessed?
- What plans are there for asymptomatic testing of staff?
- Are all staff, parents and close contacts being informed of incidents?





- Is monitoring taking place at ward level?
- Is temporary closure being considered and do we have a seat at the table for that decision?
- Is the risk assessment reviewed with union involvement when there is an outbreak?
- Is the union involvement at any incident management team meeting?
- Is additional support advice available to schools from LA public health?

Reports from reps and members will provide some of this information, but not in every case and not necessarily in this detail. There is also a value in establishing with the LA that this is the sort of thing they

should provide for us as a union. Some local authorities are reluctant to provide details citing the wish to avoid adverse publicity, however, we are seeking to obtain this information to be able to engage and support our members.

Covid-19 prevalence in the community

There are a number of ways of calculating this and, as an education union, we need a range of measures. In the first instance we need to know what the picture in local schools is, including how many cases and where they are.

Some branches have found this format useful when requesting weekly updates from LAs on Covid cases in schools:

Date of first positive test result	School	Single case/ cluster/ outbreak	Actions taken on advice from PHE	Isolation period end date
04/09/2020	A	Single case (pupil)	1 class isolating for 14 days (pupil/staff)	18/09/2020
02/09/2020	B	Single case (staff)	1 class isolating for 14 days (pupil/staff)	17/09/2020 (amended)
07/09/2020	C	Outbreak (pupil)	1 Year group and close contacts isolating for 14 days (pupil/staff)	21/09/2020
Etc.				

Part of the point of receiving weekly data is that we want to be able to respond urgently to changes in patterns of transmission and be able to press LAs to take preventative action in relation to schools - not play catch up once things have spiralled further.



Leeds

After initial reluctance to supply the NEU with school out-break and infection data, the local authority now give weekly data on the amount of positive Covid-19 cases broken down by number of school affected, settings, and staff or pupils.

The branch uses this information to contact school reps and members to check if any assistance or escalation is needed. Particularly focusing on those members who are vulnerable and requesting individual risk assessments if they are not working from home.



The Government's covid watchlist

All branches can access weekly data from the NEU map in relation to schools in areas of higher risk, including those on the watchlist. You can use this data in meetings with key decision makers.

You may also wish to contact NEU reps in higher risk areas to ensure that all appropriate measures are in place, including completion of an appropriate NEU checklist.

You may also wish to contact members in schools without a current rep. This will be an organising opportunity to establish what the current safety arrangements are, and to elect a rep in these workplaces.

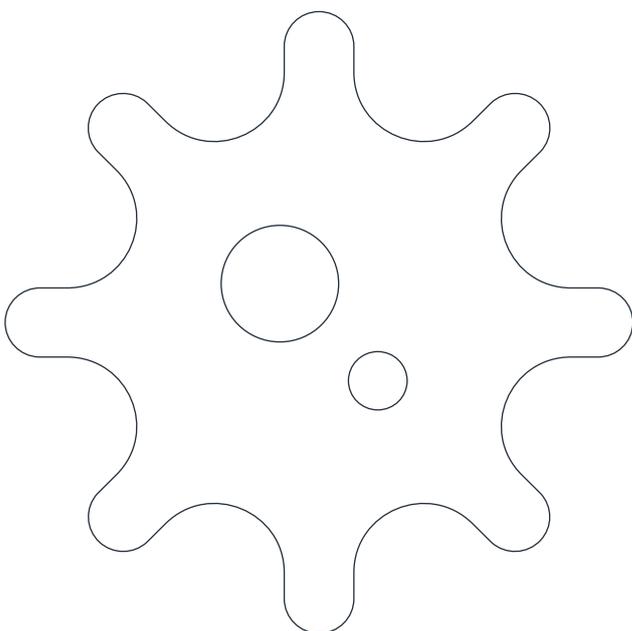
Below are questions/actions you may want to use in relation to the covid watchlist:

Not on the watchlist

- normal safety as outlined by the NEU checklist and DFE guidelines measures required.

Areas of concern/enhanced support

- Send local spike letter 1 if you are not already in discussions with LA
- Start discussing with key decision makers what actions may need to be taken to keep schools open safely if the infection rates continue to rise
- Monitor the weekly infection rate through local data supplied through regional office





- If the cases per 100k locally has increased significantly, or failed to reduce from last week's figures, ask what urgent action is being taken to address this.
- Can enhanced testing and tracing be carried out in these areas, through dedicated local provision.
- Request that Black and pregnant staff and those members with underlying health risks, or those residing with others at high risk, are given the option to work from home until figures fall to a safe level

Areas of intervention

- What measures of intervention are taking place in the wider community to bring the infection rate down and enable schools to stay open safely?
- Are recommendations being made to Government for non-essential shops, restaurants and pubs to close if the infection rate continues to rise?
- If the infections rate continue to rise, what are the factors that would influence a decision to move through tiers 2,3 and 4?
- What arrangements for blended learning need to be considered for tier 2 and how do we ensure that this does not have an adverse impact on members' workload and health?
- What plans are in place in relation to homeworking and delivering lessons if tier 3 or tier 4 is used. Local structures should be aware of these plans and trade unions should be consulted.



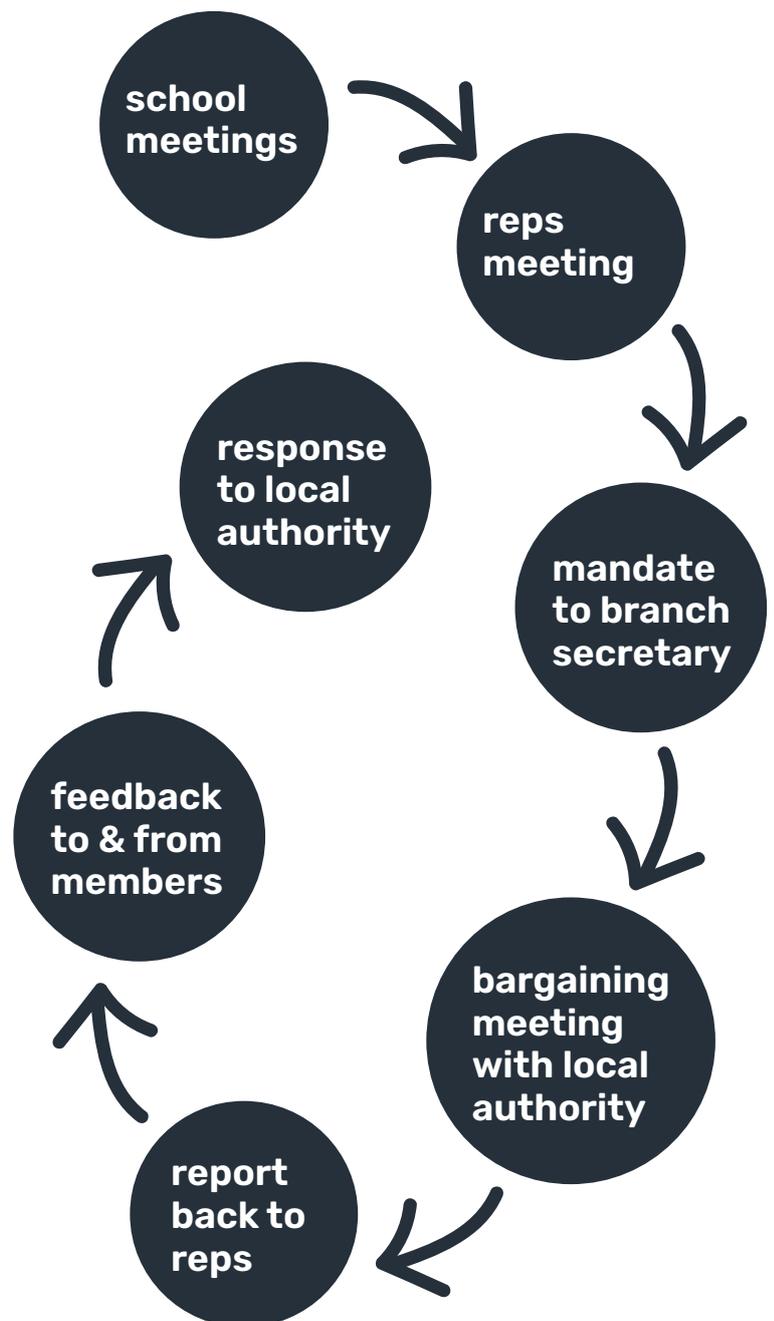
Increasing leverage

Communicating with members and involving them in the process

Whilst this toolkit is focused on bargaining with local authorities over Covid-19 health and safety concerns, the guidance below is applicable to any bargaining scenario and is taken from the NEU bargaining strategy. As part of any bargaining with the local authority it is essential to involve members and to find out how they feel and what concerns need addressing?

The NEU bargaining strategy is clear that there should be a flow of communication to and from the employer and members. To ensure that bargaining is meaningful to members it is essential that they are involved in the bargaining process and you are not merely reacting to the local authority agenda. Members must be consulted, informed and involved at all stages of the bargaining process – see the ‘bargaining cycle’. Workplace reps are key to the bargaining cycle and should be encouraged and supported to take an active role so that this process becomes routine. In workplaces where there are no NEU rep, members’ nominations should be sought and elections held. The meetings referred to below as part of the bargaining cycle should only be held in person where it is safe to do so and social distancing can be observed, it may well be more appropriate to hold such meetings online.

Bargaining cycle:





Checklist

The checklist below is intended to help aid and assist you in ensuring that you have communicated to and involved members fully in the bargaining process.

Prior to meeting with the LA

Contact workplace reps before all negotiations with the LA, giving them the opportunity to provide their views on matters for discussion and bring other issues to your attention.

Ask workplace reps to communicate with members in their school so that any member concerns can be raised at the meeting with the LA.

Arrange regular communication with workplace reps, prior to and following the meeting with the local authority, to collectively discuss member concerns and relevant issues.

Following the LA meeting

Contact workplace reps after all negotiating meetings, in order to communicate information and outcomes.

Ask workplace reps to communicate the outcomes to members in their school and seek feedback that can be taken forward to the next LA meeting.

Ongoing rep development and engagement

Mentor and encourage reps to become involved in bargaining at their workplaces to ensure appropriate safety measures are in place and that SLT are held to account.

Build networking among reps, by promoting email discussion, WhatsApp groups and video calls as appropriate.

Encourage workplace discussion with members over concerns such as high local infection rates, subsequent restrictions, measures in the workplace to control the virus, and outbreaks within schools to help establish bargaining priorities.

Industrial action

As part of the bargaining process, if agreement cannot be reached with the local authority over member demands then it could be necessary to consider moving to industrial action. An example could be a school where vulnerable staff are not given the option to work from home and are supported by our other members in the school.

Many of you will be familiar with the process for progressing industrial action (if not be seek advice from regional office). This process has recently been streamlined to enable the quickest possible turn around.

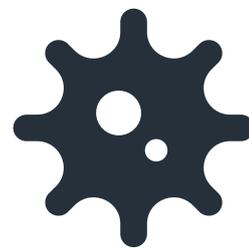
The escalation process is available within the officers recourses section of the OneDrive.

Get publicity

Many of you will already have frequent contact with media in your area. The regional office can support you with this as well.

Engage with your local press/media outlets. Use the relevant data to highlight the risks and the likely consequences regarding community transmission if the local





authority doesn't implement a responsible contingency plan.

Your media strategy should seek to achieve maximum public attention and support for the union's position. You will need to consider:

- Who you will contact?
- What message you want to get across?
- What sort of events will attract a lot of publicity?
- When to release the story?
- How to follow it up?
- Who will respond to subsequent media interest?

Press releases allow you the opportunity to put across the story in your own words and to set the narrative. You could attach a copy of a letter you have written, for example, to the Director of Public Health for background information.

Send your press release to the news editors or to your named contacts in all the relevant organisations. Liaise with your regional office, who will be able to support you.

Remember that the media want stories about things that are occurring now. Consider how to make your story more high profile and relate this to your locality with facts and figures. Be careful when using individual members in any media campaign as there is always a risk that the employer may try to take disciplinary action. To avoid this, a spokesperson from the branch should be used.

Wider community involvement

Where there is concern over the infection rates or outbreaks in a community you could try to mobilise members of the community:

- ✓ Try and get as many prominent figures in your local area involved.
- ✓ Use social media to publicise and use targeted display advertising to attract parental support.
- ✓ Encourage the use of the NEU Covid-19 map where members of the community can email their local MPs with the NEU five demands.
- ✓ Identify and contact supportive parents, including parent governors, to seek to ensure that the union's voice is heard at school gates and meetings and set up, virtually at present, a community meeting, where parents can share their concerns and experiences to build pressure.

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