



COVID-19 guide to surveying services:

Inspections and visits for non-domestic properties during COVID-19 (Scotland)



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1 Introduction and general considerations

The purpose of this guidance is to provide RICS professionals and RICS regulated firms with recommendations to enable them to deliver services to clients safely, consistently and in line with Scottish government guidelines.

It is critical that before any inspections are undertaken, RICS professionals and regulated firms consider and assess the most up to date **government guidance** on COVID-19.

- **Coronavirus (COVID-19): Scotland's route map** on lifting restrictions related to COVID-19 was introduced in June.
- The Scottish government has also issued **Scotland's Strategic Framework**, which sets out a five-level plan to vary rules for a rapid but proportionate response to COVID-19. This came into effect on 2 November. The framework indicates five different levels of protection that might be needed, based on different levels of virus transmission. It will allow for rapid but proportionate responses on both a local and national basis, using a transparent range of measures and options.
- Guidance is updated regularly – at least every three weeks – and surveyors should always adhere to the latest version in the relevant area. To assist with this, the Scottish government has issued an **online postcode checker** for COVID-19 restrictions by protection level in areas of Scotland.
- The Scottish government has also produced guidance, **COVID-19: returning to work safely**, to help ensure workplaces are as safe as possible.
- RICS has published guidance entitled **Beyond COVID-19: Reopening of commercial buildings** designed to give support and advice on the preparations and considerations for the reopening of commercial buildings.- RICS professionals can continue providing feedback to RICS using the existing insight community.

This RICS document builds on government guidelines and focuses on inspections and visits where RICS professionals need to come into contact with people and enter non-domestic properties. It applies to development sites, buildings under constructions and in-use buildings.

RICS professionals and staff in RICS regulated firms need to ensure they continue to provide the highest levels of service while maintaining current social distancing guidelines and that they comply with **public health guidance (PHG)** issued by Public Health Scotland and NHS Inform.

Consideration must be given as to whether a physical visit, viewing or inspection is absolutely necessary. RICS professionals and regulated firms should consider if the inspection or viewing can be undertaken remotely.

Where a physical inspection or visit is required, government advice has confirmed this can now take place but must be delivered in line with government and Public Health Scotland (PHS) **social distancing guidelines**.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) protects the user against health or safety risks at work. It can include items such as safety helmets, gloves, eye protection,

high-visibility clothing, safety footwear and safety harnesses. Workplaces should continue to use any PPE required as per local policies (business as usual) to mitigate against non-COVID-19 risks in their setting. The risk of COVID-19 should be managed by good hygiene measures and physical distancing.

Sector-specific guidance has been developed by the Scottish government and can be found at **COVID-19: returning to work safely**. Note that face coverings are not considered PPE but if worn it is important to use them properly and wash your hands before putting them on and taking them off. In line with the most recent Scottish government guidance, RICS professionals and regulated firms must ensure that the risk assessment for the business and premises they are visiting or inspecting addresses the risks around COVID-19.

RICS professionals and regulated firms have a duty of care to ensure individuals delivering services are in good health and able to deliver the service safely.

There are interactive tools available from the **Health and Safety Executive (HSE)** to support firms.

If it is not possible to inspect or visit the property safely to the extent required to provide the service on a restricted basis, it may be necessary to decline the inspection/site visit.

If the instruction is accepted, any restrictions to the service needs to be recorded, agreed and where appropriate highlighted on any correspondence with the client. Where possible, a disclaimer should be included in the terms and conditions relating to any errors or omissions in the service caused by any inability to inspect or visit relevant areas.

RICS professionals and regulated firms should always consider the safety and wellbeing of their employees in their decision-making process.

2 Recommendations before the property inspection or visit

RICS professionals and RICS regulated firms should:

- act in a transparent and professional manner with all parties involved
- ascertain which level the property being inspected is placed in, and ensure that there are no breaches of the requirements
- ascertain whether or not there are any client/occupier/building manager expectations and/or requirements prior to visit, e.g. what areas to inspect, what areas are restricted, what PPE is required. See examples of questions below
- be clear with the client/occupier/building manager about their service and any restrictions to the service as a result of COVID-19
- emphasise social distancing guidelines from the government or Public Health Scotland and ask the client/occupier/building manager to comply with them
- ensure that the obligations in relation to client/occupier/building manager confidentiality and GDPR-compliant safe storage of client/consumer information continue to apply, even though some or all staff may be working remotely
- avoid physical contact with clients/occupier/building managers and instead contact them by email, video conferencing platforms, or telephone
- when liaising with other property professionals, avoid physical contact and adhere to current social distancing measures at all times
- minimise physical contact when accessing the property; when organising an inspection or visit of the subject property, check with clients/occupiers/building managers whether anyone falls within **a high risk group**, has or has had COVID-19 symptoms and has not yet completed the required period of household self-isolation, or is awaiting test results. Note that this is likely to be sensitive health-related data and must be collected and stored in accordance with data protection legislation. The Information Commissioners Office has published **guidance for handling data during COVID-19**
- secure as much information as possible from the client/occupier/building manager prior to the visit and as part of the pre-inspection research, including property use, occupancy, location, potential risk to occupiers and any other relevant information required for the subject property and instruction. This includes carrying out a pre-inspection or visit risk assessment with the occupier/client/building manager
- take all reasonable steps to ensure the client and property occupier is provided with as much information as possible about the visit and service in advance and ensure the service arrangements are agreed by all parties prior to the physical inspection
- sanitise equipment in line with current Public Health Guidance, periodically and as often as practical
- ask clients/occupiers/building managers to prepare for the inspection and share the following recommendations. Please note this is not an exhaustive list:
 - when occupiers are present in the premises, they should maintain social distancing in line with government guidelines

- ask the client/occupier/building manager to ensure all areas relevant to the service delivered are open or easily accessible (e.g. plant rooms, fire escapes, cellars, lofts, doors, window) to reduce contact with surfaces as much as possible
- advise client/occupier/building manager the property will be left as presented/found at arrival
- advise site host to ensure coordination of COVID-19 secure certificates for each area/premise.

It would also help to ask the client/occupier/building manager, when appropriate, to advise the RICS professional or RICS regulated firm on the questions below:

- Is the subject property open to access?
- What physical distancing measures will be required for the subject property?
- What personal protective equipment (PPE) is mandatory for the subject property?
- Are toilet facilities present and are they available for use?
- Are there any inaccessible areas or areas of heightened sensitivity?
- To minimise physical contact, can you share documents electronically?
- Is the property occupied?
- Are you aware of any issues in the property? If yes, please specify where.

3 Recommendations during the property inspection or visit

RICS professionals and RICS regulated firms members of staff should:

- consider health and safety aspects and any relevant current government advice in relation to travelling to the property, accessing the property, carrying out an inspection and delivering the service
- if the client/occupier/building manager is present, request that they avoid physical contact and ensure compliance to existing social distancing measures
- adhere to Public Health Scotland (PHS) guidelines on cleaning hands thoroughly prior to and upon leaving the property
- comply with current PHS guidelines on any suitable PPE/face covering to be used prior to entering the property
- only take the equipment and tools actually required for the inspection to the property, according to the service delivered
- aim for as minimal an amount of contact with surfaces when inspecting elements of the property as possible
- ensure you keep a record of the inspection using appropriate recording equipment, including any limitations of the inspection as a result of the restrictions
- ensure you take an adequate number of photographs/videos to assist with recording the extent of the inspection especially for restricted/inaccessible areas.

4 Recommendations after the property inspection or visit

RICS professionals and RICS regulated firms should:

- wash or sanitise their hands thoroughly and sanitise their equipment
- appropriately dispose of any PPE used during inspection in line with government and PHS guidelines
- communicate the outcome/findings of the inspection or visit appropriately with the client, as per the instruction and agreed terms of engagement
- deliver the service in line with current RICS standards and guidance
- ensure that any restrictions of information/advice are made clear and stated in report(s)
- note any limitations to service delivered as a result of current social distancing measures and health and safety risks, and where possible, include a disclaimer relating to any errors or omissions arising from any limitations to the service delivered
- highlight any risks and hazards found during the inspection with the client, depending on the type of service.

5 Professional accountability and responsibility

RICS professionals and RICS regulated firms are expected to behave ethically and professionally, while taking adequate steps to consider health and safety at all times for all parties involved.

The government has set out enforcement measures to ensure compliance to social distancing guidelines. Professionals must adhere to government guidelines at all times.

Please note, in line with current government guidelines, people with symptoms going to work who cannot work from home **can apply to get a test**.

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