

Lifting the lid on the work of the Coronavirus Response Team

In this edition of inCommon we are winding the clock back to the moment the **Coronavirus Response Team** was convened over a suspected case of Coronavirus and sharing insights from these unprecedented circumstances. This included closing the London office with 30 minute's notice, the Head of Facilities sleeping in the office over the weekend, and a client's flatmate sending a barrage of emails to the Managing Partner over whether he should go on a friend's stag do! These have been just some of the unusual challenges the Crisis Response Team has dealt with over the past few months.

FIRST FEW HOURS

How the first few hours of a crisis are handled is crucial. Getting the right team in place, deciding on what basis decisions will be made and acting quickly are all fundamental.

Jo Ludlam, the lead crisis management partner in London, recalls the first few hours back in February when the Crisis Response Team (CRT) was convened in a COBRA-style meeting. She says there was no precedent and no advice from the government on how to deal with a suspected case of Coronavirus.

She says they were effectively making up the crisis response playbook as they went along, but from the first moment, the team was completely united in deciding the health and wellbeing of staff should be the guiding principle.

Jo said: "The collective view from the outset to prioritise above all other considerations the wellbeing of our people drove the decision to close the office with half an hour's notice on that first Thursday. We also made the decision to be completely transparent and to provide our people with as much information as we had, even if we didn't have the full picture. We all felt it was important to share what we knew in order to empower people to make their own decisions."

The team worked into the night, preparing a Q&A for all employees and embarking on an extensive contact tracing programme. When it was clear the CRT would be locked in their meeting until the early hours, Scott Jones, Head of Facilities, left the meeting, raided the cupboards around the building and came back with piles of biscuits and chocolate to keep the team going.

"At Bakers, team work is something I think we are genuinely really good at. Diversity is the thread that runs through all our client teams too and ensures balance as well as strong, effective teams."

Alex Chadwick, London Managing Partner & Head of the CRT

Most of the team finally went home in the early hours, but Scott stayed all weekend, sleeping in the office. He recalls his biggest challenge was finding a cleaning company with full sanitisation capabilities.

After hours calling cleaning firms up and down the country and when he had almost exhausted all avenues, Scott eventually managed to find a 24-hour cleaning service from Nottingham who arrived in full hazmat suits with mist sprays. They cleaned round the clock over the weekend finishing at 7.30am on Monday, just ahead of the office opening at 8am. The rest of the team worked through the weekend to plan for every scenario and eventuality; a positive test result, a negative result, or no result at all in time for Monday morning.

The first few days were also not without their challenges for Alex Chadwick. As well as being Managing Partner and leading the CRT, he also had to respond to the worried flatmate of a client who, having been in the building earlier in the week, was seeking Alex's advice (at all hours!) as to whether he should still go on a friend's stag weekend! Much to everyone's relief, the coronavirus test was negative and the office re-opened as normal on Monday. Little did we know that only a few weeks together, the team would make the decision to close the office again before lockdown.

WELLBEING

Ensuring people are safe has been and continues to be the top priority of the CRT at all times and has driven every decision. It's why the office was closed at such short notice, it's why Scott spent hours on the phone to find a cleaning company, why Alex ensured the CRT was made up from all parts of the firm so everyone had a voice and why the wellbeing of people has been the first agenda item at every single CRT meeting since the start.

Scott said: *"To feel so genuinely cared about has given me a sense of worth and spurred me on. The safety and wellbeing of everyone in the London office has always been the first point of business. I've seen that first hand and it makes you feel more valued than ever before."*

"Being a thoughtful and inclusive firm, a caring organisation is part of who we are. It's our culture and I hope more than ever, people have personally felt that care during this crisis," added Alex.

DIVERSE TEAM

Right from the start Alex ensured that the make-up of the CRT was as diverse as possible. Not only was it diverse from a gender point of view, but it was made up of colleagues from all parts of the office, lawyers and business professionals, with a wide range of expertise, from legal to practical (LPM, IT and Facilities), and taking into account the perspectives of our people (HR), our clients (BD) and the wider market (PR/Comms). Alex made sure everyone was given a voice and

everyone was listened to. He believes the team is stronger because of it.

"I wanted to make sure I had diversity of view, approach and seniority on the team to get to the right decision every time. I needed challengers, debaters, risk-takers as well as considered thinkers and the risk-averse. The team has a great balance and when we make a decision I am confident it's well thought through. Everyone has a voice and everyone is listened to. It really is team work at its best."

"At Bakers, team work is something I think we are genuinely really good at. Diversity is the thread that runs through all our client teams too and ensures balance as well as strong, effective teams," said Alex.

THE WAY FORWARD

One of the key activities throughout has been the skeleton team keeping the building going so it can re-open at a moment's notice. At the start they had the logistical challenge of getting 500 packages containing keyboards, mice and screens delivered quickly to people's homes. And since then, a team of 12 has been working in the office in shifts to scan all mail, locate important files in lawyer's offices, run the reprographics centre and keep the building going. In fact, Scott started his career at the firm 21 years ago in the mailroom, working his way up to Head of Facilities and is now taking turns in the mailroom again!

The CRT team is now preparing for when the office re-opens, which is a much more complicated process than the initial office closure. It will involve new measures and protocols to ensure that social distancing can be adhered to and that all employees can be kept safe at all times.

Getting to this point, however, has been a team effort. And as Alex says, the CRT has pulled out all the stops and gone so far above and beyond in a way that has been quite remarkable.

Alex said: *"The CRT team has an extraordinary caring mindset which has been evident in spades throughout. But for their energy, determination, aptitude and care we wouldn't have succeeded in the way we have."*

"The safety and wellbeing of everyone in the London office has always been the first point of business. I've seen that first hand and it makes you feel more valued than ever before."

Scott Jones, Head of Facilities

▼ **Meet the Crisis Response Team**

Coronavirus Response Team

Alex Chadwick, London Managing Partner & Head of the CRT

Jo Benjamin, Senior Personal Assistant

Emily Franca, Communications Manager

Tina Gandesha, Head of London BD&M

Elora Glucksman, Senior Communications Manager

Katherine Hallam, Head of Talent Management

Scott Jones, Head of Facilities

Helen Langley, Senior HR Business Partner

Joanna Ludlam, Disputes Partner & Crisis Management Lead

Ian Pinder-Packard, Legal Project Manager

Ed Poulton, Disputes Partner

Hemel Vaja, Senior IT Manager

Jonathan Westwell, General Counsel

Julia Wilson, Employment Partner

Spotlight on...



Ian Pinder-Packard
Senior Legal Project Manager, Services

Most memorable CRT moment: discussing the impending exit from the office whilst sitting in a car park following a Sunday roast in a favourite hostelry, and not really appreciating how long it would be before I would be there again (the hostelry, not the car park).



Julia Wilson
Employment Partner

CRT Role: "My purpose on the CRT is to share broader employment law experience and benchmarking as we discuss key decisions, and plan for the future. If I can be super-corny my most memorable moment was a weekend just before the office went full remote, where the CRT decided to abandon the baker-team / mckenzie-team planning (we know how much work had gone in to that); and there were such passionate, caring and clever voices and views from all CRT participants. It reminded, as my CRT experience often does, of why I have always loved working here, and how much genuine care there is for the wellbeing of our colleagues."



Hemel Vaja
Senior Manager, IT Service Delivery

Most memorable CRT experience: The February office closure was a period of high intensity decision making – and calm soon came before the storm where we collectively decided to close the office in a controlled way on Sunday 15th March. That has been my most memorable day, we all came together supporting each other and to ensure business continuity. There may have been things we could have done differently – but I'm glad of the result. I'd like to thank the On-Site team for their support in helping our people make Skype calls, Zoom calls (including backgrounds) and issue essential home working kits. If anyone is missing their IT equipment and has requested it, please do let me know!



Tina Gandesha
Head of London Business Development, Marketing & Communications

Most memorable CRT experience: The Monday morning after we'd had to shut the office at short notice. We'd had a very intense 4 days, effectively creating a plan from scratch with absolutely no blueprint. Most of us had not worked together before and we were thrown into this very intense working relationship. When we all physically saw each other on the Monday morning we were all so pleased to see each other. There was a steady procession to the seventh floor (where most of us sit) and there were these lovely, natural moments where we all breathed a sigh of relief and high-fived each other. Little did we know then that it was just the start. Ten weeks on the comradery is still there, we just have to do a Zoom high-five.