

Covid – 19 - Amended Private Sector Housing Team Services

The Government is asking everyone to do all they can to help stop coronavirus spreading and has published advice on maintaining strict separation from others wherever possible during this unprecedented time. You can see the latest Government guidance on Coronavirus [here](#).

This means that during this time it may be harder for local authorities to carry out their usual work. Inspecting properties and taking enforcement action may be affected by issues around resources or tenants maintaining strict separation. Landlords may also find it harder to comply with their legal obligations for the same reasons.

The Council will have full regard to the following Guidance documents issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government which provides a recommended approach for local authorities, Landlords and Tenants taking into account the COVID-19 outbreak and current public health guidance:

[Guidance for landlords and tenants](#)

[Guidance for local authorities](#)

Landlords' repair obligations have not changed and it has never been more important that landlords and tenants take a pragmatic, common-sense approach to resolving issues. We recommend that access to a property is only proposed for serious and urgent health and safety issues which are those which will affect the Tenant's ability to live safely and maintain your mental and physical health in their home.

During this time the Private Sector Housing Officers will be running an adapted service. This is subject to availability of officers (as they may need to self-isolate) and to the technology capability within our customers' households.

1. **Until further notice** only urgent home visits will be carried out. Urgent means that there is an imminent risk of severe harm due to a defect with the property and only if there is no other way of instigating remedial works without a visit in person. These could include water supply problems, sanitation, security, fire safety, electrical safety, gas safety, heating & hot water faults; this list is not exhaustive.
2. **Telephone assessments** - If a visit deemed to be urgent takes place, the officer will first telephone the customer and establish whether anyone in the household is shielding, self-isolating or feeling unwell. We will risk assess the situation and make a decision whether to visit. If we do visit, we will take the necessary hygiene and social distancing precautions.

3. **Social distancing and hygiene** - For more information on this please visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>
4. **Virtual inspections** - We will be requesting clients to assist in providing as much photographic/video evidence as possible. This could involve emailing evidence such as photos or videos to the Officer or where possible using video messaging applications such as WhatsApp or Zoom. If a video call can be placed, we will ask the customer to show us the areas of concern within their home so that we can assess whether hazards are present to the best of our abilities. By doing this, it means we can deal with your situation much quicker.
5. **Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)** – If you are living in accommodation which you share with other people, or share facilities with other people, you should take extra precautions when using shared facilities. Try to only use the kitchen when other people are not in it and clean the toilet and bathroom before and after use and follow current [Public Health England guidance](#). You can find Government guidance on cleaning your home to minimise the risk of infection [here](#) and on what to do if you are in a shared home with someone who may have the virus [here](#).

HMO licences up for renewal or new HMO applications will be dealt with in an orderly manner, relevant inspections will be arranged at a later date.

6. **Important** - If your health changes between the time of booking the visit and the visit taking place, you should contact us immediately, where we will reassess and either carry out a virtual inspection or postpone the visit.
7. **Completion visits** - where landlords have arranged for works to be completed, we will endeavour to set up a virtual inspection with the occupant to allow sign off; see item 4 or may accept photographs or videos via email. This may not be possible where multiple flats are involved, but we will do as much as we can under the circumstances and then may have to revisit in person when the covid-19 restrictions are lifted. We will notify the landlord and tenant whether a further visit is necessary or whether we can close the case by doing a virtual inspection only.
8. **Landlords and their contractors** – whilst we will make every effort to ensure that the defects and hazards within your home are remedied, this may take longer than usual due to the circumstances of the landlord (as they may be self-isolating or unwell) and of the contractors' availability and visiting policies. You can find further guidance on visits to properties to make repairs [here](#)

9. **Immigration inspections** – we will try to arrange virtual inspections where possible see item 4 but this will be after the applicant has confirmed that their visa application will still be able to be submitted. There are travel restrictions in place for certain countries and if travel is restricted, the immigration inspection will be postponed until those restrictions are lifted.
10. **Disabled facility grants** will be reviewed on a case by case basis and all non-critical cases will be dealt with in order of need. Any visits to client's homes will be dependent on the client agreeing to a visit and the current practises in that our partner agencies (Peabody and KCC) have in place. External works which entail no direct contact between the client and contractor are likely to continue until further notice.
11. **Enforcement of standards in rented properties**; due regard will be given to the [Council's Private Sector Housing Enforcement policy](#), [MHCLG guidance](#) and a common sense approach will be applied based on risk.

During this unprecedented time the Council will only take the enforcement action that they determine is necessary. All decisions will be made on the merits of the individual case and based on an assessment of risk. This may mean that:

- The Council will consider requests for time extensions to complete works; these should be made in writing stating the additional time period required and the reasons why the works are being delayed. All requests must be submitted with a copy of the proposed full works programme.
- Enforcement action which is non-urgent or not legally required may be delayed until restrictions ease.
- Legal notices served under the Housing Act 2004 may, if the notice provides for this, be suspended for a period due to difficulties in completing the works.
- Work in default may be deferred.
- Other forms of enforcement action may be considered for the most serious hazards, e.g. a Prohibition Order covering part of a property may be used instead of Emergency Remedial Action.
- Steps may be taken to isolate or contain rather than remedy hazardous conditions.

This list is not exhaustive.

All decisions will be approved by the Senior Private Sector Housing Officer and/or the Housing Solutions and Private Sector Manager.

This information will be subject to change to keep in line with central government instructions and the resource needs of the council as a whole.

Issue date: 05 January 2020

Signed off by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Dosad', with a small flourish at the end.

Peter Dosad

Head of Housing