

## Housing Regulation – Business Continuity

### COVID-19/Coronavirus

You will be aware of the guidance and advice already issued via CHC, Cymorth Cymru, WLGA and CIH. The Welsh Government is working with stakeholders to develop sector-specific guidance which will be published here:

<https://gov.wales/coronavirus>

Current Public Health Wales advice can be found here:

<https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-Policies-Guidance-Resources/SitePages/Coronavirus-COVID-19.aspx>

Community Housing Cymru advice is here:

<https://chcymru.org.uk/en/coronavirus-resources-for-housing-associations>

### Ongoing Regulation

The challenges presented by the pandemic are constantly changing. RSL business continuity plans (BCPs) will be tested over the coming weeks and months as you respond to those challenges, keeping vital services running to safeguard tenants and other service users.

Therefore, our regulatory focus will be on the impact of Coronavirus on RSL operations. Primarily, this will be limited to the **safety** of tenants and service users and ongoing **financial resilience and viability**. Publication of judgement reports, other than those due before the end of March, is temporarily suspended. The temporary suspension also applied to routine regulatory oversight of assurance plans. Case management and oversight will, however, continue for RSLs where we have regulatory concerns. Effective co-regulation and self-reporting are key elements of the temporary approach but we will also be working proactively with any RSL where we identify potential issues or risks which are significant and material.

Regulation team members are all working remotely at the moment, but are available for virtual meetings through all of the usual mechanisms: 'phone, email, Skype etc.

### Business Continuity Plans (BCP)

We are not currently asking for to see individual BCPs, but we may require assurance that plans are in place and operational. We do though expect RSLs to make reasoned, rational decisions based on good governance principles when considering the need to make any changes to how services are provided. We also expect that those decisions to be properly communicated to tenants and other stakeholders as appropriate.

***RSLs must notify regulation of any significant changes to service provision or if they are encountering any difficulties with delivering services because of the pandemic - and we may seek further details.***

## Health and Safety Compliance

The health and safety of residents and service users is the absolute priority. We understand the challenges facing RSLs in these unprecedented circumstances (including difficulties with access to properties, and the associated risks which can, in turn, present risks to other occupiers, particularly in blocks of flats; or the availability of workforce or equipment). We will take a proportionate approach to compliance in these circumstances, taking account of the risks and the actions taken or planned to deal with issues.

***RSLs must notify regulation of any significant and material compliance risks because of coronavirus and we may seek further details.***

## Financial Viability

The situation is likely to have an impact on the financial plans of all RSLs. Causes of this could include loss of income, particularly from increased voids and arrears, delays in properties coming into management, and increasing rent arrears where people are unable to work. It is pleasing to note the statement from Community Housing Cymru that there will be no evictions due to financial hardship because of the pandemic. Local authority landlords are also putting in place policies to ensure that evictions will not be commenced during this difficult time.

The potential for increased costs, particularly if additional staff are required to deliver services or alternative sources of supplies prove necessary, needs to be assessed and stress tested. The position is likely to be more acute for RSLs with a high degree of diverse provision such as nursing and care homes or supported housing.

RSLs must ensure they are able to maintain business-critical systems, including payroll and the ability to maintain supply chains even when staff are working remotely.

***RSLs encountering difficulties with any aspect of their financial plan, but in particular liquidity, covenant compliance or significant increases in rent arrears as a result of the impact of Coronavirus, must notify regulation immediately to discuss the issue and provide details of mitigations.***

## Submission Dates – 2020/21 Information Submission Timetable

On 16 March, we issued the 2020/21 information submission timetable. In view of the temporary arrangements we have put in place, we are able to offer the option for you not to meet the deadlines set out **apart from** the statutory notifications (disposals etc.) requirements and the Development Data return which is still required by 9 April.

However, if you do wish to continue to provide the information to the timetable, please feel free to do so.

**From Monday, please do not contact your regulation manager directly if there is an issue you need to discuss or notify. Please email, in the first instance, the regulation mailbox: [HousingRegulation@gov.wales](mailto:HousingRegulation@gov.wales).**

This will allow us to manage the workflow effectively and allow us to respond as quickly as possible.

If you have a very urgent or critical matter, please contact Ian or Huw and we will advise how to proceed.

We will keep you updated with any further changes as the situation evolves but meanwhile, best wishes to you, your teams and your service users at this particularly difficult time.

Please contact Ian or Huw with if you have any questions.

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