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Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Housing Associations: A guide



Coronavirus (COVID-19) and housing associations: a guide

Updated: 1600hrs 6th April 2020

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1. Context and key updates

This resource

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing significant disruption to the operations of Welsh housing associations due to impacts on workforce, tenants and ability to deliver services.

This resource has been created for housing associations to support with their preparations around, and response to, the outbreak of COVID-19. We hope it will also help HAs to form guidance for their own audiences including tenants.

Please note this resource is a consolidation of official guidance, and is not guidance created by CHC.

Current status

NB: Numbers of reported cases are likely to be significantly underestimated due to a scaling back in testing of suspected cases.

As of 0900hrs on 5th April 2020, a total of 47,806 cases have been confirmed across the UK. As of 1700hrs on 4th April 2020, 4,934 are confirmed to have died with the virus.¹

As of 1400hrs on 6th April 2020, there were 3,499 confirmed cases and 193 deaths in Wales.²

During a press conference on 23rd March, the Prime Minister announced a change in approach to combating the spread of COVID-19. This includes guidance that people should:

- *Stay at home*
- *Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (where this absolutely cannot be done from home)*
- *Stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people*
- *Wash your hands as soon as you get home*

Coronavirus regulations

Welsh Government has made [amendments to the Health Protection \(Coronavirus Restrictions\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2020](#). On 3rd April, First Minister Mark Drakeford confirmed that [new rules to protect workers](#) during the coronavirus outbreak will take effect at 12.01am on Tuesday 7th April.

The 2 metre social distancing rule will apply to any workplace, and will require employers to take all reasonable measures to ensure that a distance of 2 metres is maintained between any persons on the premises. In the regulations, 'premises' include any building or structure and any land.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public#number-of-cases-and-deaths>

² <https://covid19-phwstatement.nhs.wales/>



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The regulations state that the 2 metre rule does not apply to distances between two members of the same household, or a carer and the person assisted by the carer. It will, however, apply to maintenance and construction settings.

The regulation amendments also clarify the arrangements for funerals and crematoriums, with the 2 metre rule limiting the number of people that can attend.

Detailed guidance will be published when the new regulations come into force, and we will share this with members as soon as possible.

Welsh Government previously laid a [Statutory Instrument](#) which details enforcement of restrictions on movement and gatherings, and published [Q&A style guidance](#) to support individuals and organisations in complying with this.

Coronavirus Act 2020

The Coronavirus Act is emergency legislation to respond to the outbreak, and was passed by UK Government in March. It received Royal Assent on 25th March 2020 and is now in force.

The Coronavirus Act empowers Welsh Government to act in a range of areas, including:

- Increasing the availability of staff for the health and care sectors
- Relaxation of regulation in the NHS, care sector and beyond
- The power to close schools and compel them to remain open to the children of key workers
- Powers to slow the spread of the virus through restricting movement

The Act includes provisions extending the notice period for the majority of Notices Seeking Possession to three months. This is now in force across the majority of tenancy types. It should also be noted that the Judiciary has suspended all new and existing eviction proceedings in court for 90 days, from 27th March (more details below).

Childcare for critical workers

On 6th April, Welsh Government [launched a coronavirus childcare assistance scheme](#) to support Wales' critical workers. This means that parents doing jobs critical to Wales' response to coronavirus will get free childcare during the pandemic. Julie Morgan AM, Deputy Minister for Health & Social Services, has issued a [Written Statement on this new childcare offer](#).

Local authorities will be able to use funding from the Welsh Government's Childcare Offer to support registered childcare providers to care for pre-school-aged children of critical workers. Children who are considered vulnerable will also be included in the scheme. The changes will cover the next three months and provide care for children under five. Guidance about the new arrangements will be published soon.



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School places have been restricted since the end of Friday 20th March, although children of critical workers are able to remain in school. Welsh Government previously issued [guidance for parents/guardians on access to school places for critical workers](#), which includes guidance on the definition of a critical worker.

2. **Core & regularly updated guidance**

[Daily statement from Public Health Wales](#)

- Latest position regarding testing and response to the virus

[Key information and resources from Public Health Wales on COVID-19](#)

- [Social distancing advice](#)
- [Advice for healthcare professionals](#)
- [Resources](#) including social media videos and public information posters

[Welsh Government resources](#) (updated regularly)

- general information (including health advice)
- specific guidance for
 - [education sector](#)
 - [social, community and residential care sector](#)
 - [businesses and employers](#) (including support for third sector)
 - [Housing](#) (including supported housing)
 - [Health guidance for social landlords: What social landlords need to do if there is a case of coronavirus at a property](#)
 - [Social landlords housing regulation guidance: how social landlords will be regulated during the coronavirus outbreak](#)

[UK Government COVID-19 resources](#) (updated regularly) (many UK Government resources are available in a range of languages)

- general information (if not available through Welsh Government resources)
- additional guidance (if not available through Welsh Government resources)

[Care Inspectorate Wales have a dedicated COVID-19 section](#) on their website, where they regularly share updates, guidance and [FAQs](#).

3. **Communication**

The contents of this document should provide content for communications and will be updated regularly.



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We will also be sharing up to date UK Government and Public Health Wales guidance from our CHC Twitter handle (@CHCymru) daily.

With tenants

When developing questions for tenants prior to contact with staff, housing associations may wish to have regard to a combination of the [new guidance on self-isolation](#) and, additionally for travel questions, the [withdrawn guidance on returning travellers](#).

UK Government have issued the following guidance documents in a **range of languages**:

- [Guidance on social distancing and vulnerable people](#)
- [Guidance on self-isolation](#)
- [Guidance for shielding extremely vulnerable people](#)

At the time of the latest update of this guidance, the languages available are:

4. Welsh
5. English
6. Arabic
7. Mandarin
8. Cantonese
9. Polish
10. French
11. Bengali
12. Gujarati
13. Portuguese
14. Punjabi
15. Urdu

With sector colleagues

Community Housing Cymru has formed a specific [Yammer group](#) for the sharing of information on approaches to the COVID-19 outbreak. This group is accessible by staff nominated by each member housing association. If you would like access to this group, please ask permission from your chief executive, and then contact Bryony Haynes on bryony-haynes@chcymru.org.uk. An additional shared resource exists with access for nominated staff from each housing association to detail their response to the outbreak.

For communications colleagues, the [PR Strategic Delivery Group](#) is being utilised to share practice. If you would like to join this group please contact Rebecca Goodhand on rebecca-goodhand@chcymru.org.uk.

With the public



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Here is an [example of public communication from a housing association](#) aimed at consolidating existing guidance for the public as well as tenants.

4. Staff & employment

Cases of COVID-19/exposure of your workforce to Coronavirus

[Welsh Government guidance](#) for businesses and employers lays out what to do if a member of staff is believed to have contracted the virus or staff have been in contact with a case. This includes:

- Somebody becomes unwell and believe they have been exposed to COVID-19
- Somebody with suspected COVID-19 has recently been in your workplace
- Somebody with confirmed COVID-19 has recently been in your workplace
- When individuals in the workplace have had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19
- Cleaning offices and public spaces where there are suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19

If the setting is social, community or residential care, [separate guidance is available](#).

We are aware that the guidance for a staff member having suspected COVID-19 currently advises limited action until a case is confirmed through testing. Due to the restriction of testing to mainly hospital settings, it may be that multiple unconfirmed COVID-19 cases may occur in your workforce before any are confirmed. We are seeking urgent clarity from Welsh Government on this guidance and seeking further advice.

We note that [guidance for individuals returning from affected countries](#) has been withdrawn by Welsh and UK Governments. This is in favour of the new [universal guidance on self-isolation if symptoms are present](#). However, housing associations may wish to continue to have regard to the withdrawn guidance, which is still visible, in addition to the new guidance.

DBS checks during recruitment

In response to coronavirus (COVID-19), the Home Office and the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) have put temporary arrangements in place to provide DBS checks and fast-track emergency checks of the Adults' and Children's Barred Lists free-of-charge.

Information on these temporary arrangements can be found [here](#).

Movement of staff and critical worker status

A [Statutory Instrument](#) has been laid by Welsh Government, imposing restrictions on day to day life in order to combat the spread of the virus.



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[Guidance has been published to assist the public in complying with the new regulations.](#)

This SI compels:

- The closure of certain businesses and premises
- Restriction of movement (not being able to leave home)
- Restriction of gatherings (not being able to gather with people outside your household)

There are a number of notable exemptions from the restriction of movement that will benefit housing associations:

- “to travel for the purposes of work or to provide voluntary or charitable services, where it is not reasonably practicable for that person to work, or to provide those services, from the place where they are living”
- “to move house where necessary”
- “Where necessary... to facilitate a house move”

School places will be restricted from the end of Friday 20th March, following action from Welsh Government. However, children of critical workers should be able to remain in school.

[Welsh Government have issued guidance for parents/guardians on access to school places for critical workers](#), which includes guidance on the definition of a critical worker.

5. Care & support services

Welsh Government guidance

CHC are members of a working group dedicated to updating guidance for social care settings and we expect updated guidance imminently.

This guidance document will assist social, community and residential care employers in providing advice to their staff on:

- the novel coronavirus, COVID-19
- how to help prevent spread of all respiratory infections including COVID-19
- what to do if someone with suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 has been in an health/social care setting
- what advice to give to individuals who have travelled to specific areas, as outlined by the UK Government
- risk assessments for undertaking domiciliary visits or providing care in residential settings
- actions to take if staff come into contact with someone who is self-isolating or is a possible or confirmed case of COVID-19.

We are aware of the potential impact on the care & support workforce due to sickness/self-isolation, and are seeking urgent clarity on the expedited registration process of additional care workers.



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[Specific guidance on undertaking home care visits is available from UK Government.](#)

Welsh Government inbox

There is a dedicated inbox for any specific inquiries relating to the delivery of social care and COVID-19: SocialCareCoordination@gov.wales / CydgysylltuGofalCymdeithasol@llyw.cymru

If appropriate, please copy rhea-stevens@chymru.org.uk into any queries to assist with our tracking.

We note that [guidance for individuals returning from affected countries](#) has been withdrawn by Welsh and UK Governments. This is in favour of the new [universal guidance on self-isolation if symptoms are present](#). However, housing associations may wish to continue to have regard to the withdrawn guidance in relation to returning travellers, which is still visible, in addition to the new guidance.

Other care regulators

The Association of Directors of Social Services in Wales (ADSS Cymru) produces a weekly update for care providers ([2nd April 2020](#)).

[Guidance note: support for commissioned providers](#). This note was co-produced by ADSS Cymru, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW), Social Care Wales (SCW), the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and the Welsh Government, and is for local authority commissioners. It is designed to summarise pressures on social care providers in Wales arising from COVID-19 and to put forward ways in which commissioners can alleviate these pressures.

On 27th March, CIW issued a bulletin on [changes to the registration requirements for urgent new provision and pre-employment requirements for care staff](#).

Supported Accommodation

Welsh Government have issued [guidance for providers in supported accommodation settings](#), outlining how they should manage their settings during the coronavirus outbreak.

This guidance is for local authorities and providers involved in delivering supported living accommodation and sets out the need to put practical measures in place to:

- Ensure that those living and working in supported accommodation settings:
- have the support, resources and policies needed to protect themselves.
- have access to the facilities that enable them to adhere to public health guidance on hygiene and isolation.



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- Mitigate the risk of infection within supported accommodation settings.

PPE & other supplies

On 2nd April, UK Government issued [revised guidance concerning the use of PPE](#) by health and social care workers, in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic. It supersedes previous PPE guidance.

Key changes include:

- new tables explaining the type of PPE (personal protective equipment) that should be worn in various settings to meet safety levels - including where patients do not have suspected or confirmed Covid-19
- advice on risk assessments on PPE use
- secondary, primary and community care workers should wear a surgical mask when dealing with vulnerable patients

This guidance is issued jointly by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Public Health Wales (PHW), Public Health Agency (PHA) Northern Ireland, Health Protection Scotland (HPS), Public Health England and NHS England as official guidance.

Welsh Government Health Minister, Vaughan Gething AM, has published a [written statement](#) on these revised UK-wide PPE guidelines.

We have received written assurances on the provision of PPE for care workers from central Welsh Government health and social care reserves. This will be delivered through local authorities in the coming days. [Welsh Government have issued a statement to reiterate this.](#)

We are working with Welsh Government to gain assurances on the availability of supplies (food, toiletries, medicines etc.) to essential services and vulnerable people.

We have received assurances from Welsh Government that attempts are being made to secure supplies, including hand sanitiser, for essential housing services.

6. Funding & financial support for housing associations

Loan & grant package

[Welsh Government have released information on a £500m loan and grant package for businesses and charities across Wales.](#)

This is additional to the UK Government schemes supporting the self-employed and furloughing scheme for employers.



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Flexibility in grant & funding processes

We are working with Welsh Government to confirm the situation with regards to ongoing and future grant and funding processes.

We have raised specific issues including:

- The need to suspend wet signatures on applications
- Relaxation of monitoring for certain grants (including Housing Support Grant)

7. Welfare & Universal Credit

Recovery of benefit overpayments

On 3rd April, the Department for Work and Pensions announced it had [temporarily paused the recovery of benefit overpayments for three months](#), in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Deductions for the recovery of Universal Credit and legacy benefit overpayments, Social Fund loans and Tax Credit debts will be paused. The recovery of Advances by deduction from Universal Credit payments will continue.

The majority of deductions will be suspended automatically. However, tenants should contact their bank to cancel repayment arrangements if they currently make repayments through a Bank Standing Order, Bank Giro Credit or through online banking.

Landlord Portal

On 25th March, the DWP issued a note to landlords using the Landlord Portal Service:

In order to help Landlords implement their own business continuity arrangements in response to the current UK Government advice on Coronavirus (COVID19); we have removed the current IP address restrictions relating to the Landlord Portal. Please note the following:

- *As landlords, you are responsible for controlling access to your own Portal. You should regularly review who currently has access to the Portal and their user roles/permissions*
- *Review of user roles by any Portal User who has the Manage Users role assigned to them (usually the Primary or Deputy Primary User) and is accessible via the Users tab at the top of the portal home screen*
- *Removal of the IP address restrictions does not guarantee you will be able to access the portal. If you experience any issues you should speak to your own IT departments in the first instance*



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- *If you have any questions please contact:*
TP-LP.ACCOUNTMANAGERTEAM@DWP.GOV.UK

Housing Queries Routeway

The DWP have issued an online resource as a first port of call for queries around Universal Credit, entitled [Universal Credit: Housing Queries Routeway](#).

8. Tenancies & evictions

Evictions (including community safety & domestic violence)

In an [announcement on the evening of 26th March](#), the Judiciary took the decision to suspend all court action relating to evictions from the 27th March. This suspension will last for 90 days, initially, with the potential for extension. This action is in addition to the changes laid out in the Coronavirus Act 2020. A full briefing on the Act is available from CHC.

CHC are working closely with the WLGA to ensure that alternative services and provisions are available to tackle domestic violence during the period where eviction of perpetrators will not be possible.

9. Homelessness

Delivery of homeless & substance misuse services

CHC worked with Welsh Government and experts to deliver [guidance on the operation of homelessness and substance misuse services](#) (including day centres and hostels) during the COVID-19 outbreak.

This guidance covers services such as:

- Day services for both substance misuse services and people who are homeless
- Community treatment services for substance misuse
- People with co-occurring conditions
- Community services for people who are homeless
- Hostels and temporary accommodation, including night shelters and houses of multiple occupation for these client groups
- Housing First projects
- Substance misuse outreach services, including mobile services
- Homelessness outreach services, including mobile units and soup runs
- Residential rehabilitation services
- Community drug and alcohol services



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It provides information on:

- the novel coronavirus, COVID-19
- how to help prevent spread of all respiratory infections including COVID-19
- what to do if someone with suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 attends or has been in a substance misuse or homelessness service setting
- what advice to give to individuals both service users and staff

If you have any queries relating to this guidance please contact will-henson@chcymru.org.uk.

Local authority support for rough sleepers

[Welsh Government have released guidance on co-ordinated support for rough sleepers during this crisis.](#)

Care & support for people who are homeless

We are working with Welsh Government, Cymorth Cymru and healthcare professionals on the development of guidance for providers of care and support services to people who are homeless. We expect this guidance shortly.

10. Tenants

Delivery of services to tenants affected by COVID-19 (including those self-isolating)

We are working with Welsh Government and the HSE to obtain developed guidance on the delivery of services to tenants' homes.

Currently, the [guidance for social, community or residential care](#) may provide interim advice. [UK Government advice on home care visits](#) provides some transferable guidance.

Welsh Government have developed [FAQs for social landlords](#).

An example of guidance produced by a housing association for staff visiting homes is available in our [Yammer group](#).

Protecting tenants who are extremely vulnerable

All those identified as being at a very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (due to a serious underlying health issue) will receive a letter from the Chief Medical Officer for Wales by 3rd April. This is known as a 'shielding letter'. Welsh Government have issued [guidance to support the distribution of shielding letters](#).



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[Welsh Government have released guidance on protection measures for people who are extremely vulnerable to Covid-19](#). The guidance:

- Lists what underlying conditions make people particularly vulnerable
- Details the actions they, and others, should take

We note that records for shielding letters are unlikely to be complete, and so housing associations may wish to have regard to guidance on protection measures when communicating with and supporting their tenants.

Managing isolation in schemes with communal spaces

[Welsh Government guidance for social, community or residential care settings](#) lays out guidance for the isolation of residents in these settings. In lieu of guidance for other settings, this guidance could be considered.

Latest UK Government guidance on [social distancing](#) and [self-isolation](#) should also be considered.

11. [Safety and compliance](#)

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) share [regular updates on their website](#), for example:

- [How HSE are regulating occupational health & safety during the outbreak](#)
- [A rapid review of the evidence supporting the use of PPE](#)

Flexibility in compliance due to access restrictions

We are working in partnership with the other UK housing federations to influence statutory regulators (Gas Safe, HSE etc.) on a flexible approach to statutory compliance in the situation that significant numbers of homes cannot be accessed for testing/inspection due to the outbreak. This area of work is a priority for CHC.

Gas safety

On 30th March, Welsh Government released its guidance for local authorities on [the enforcement of standards in rented properties in Wales](#), which advises LAs on how to effectively enforce standards in the private rented sector (including housing associations/ registered social landlords). The guidance reiterates that landlords are required to have annual gas safety checks. It also states that if a landlord can show they have taken all reasonable steps to comply with their duty, they are not in breach of the duty. Showing reasonable steps includes keeping copies of all communications had with tenants and gas safety inspectors.



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CHC have commissioned Devonshires Solicitors to help us understand the legal, regulatory and practical issues around gas safety compliance. Devonshires have produced a briefing note, which you can find [here](#).

Current guidance from Gas Safe on compliance with gas testing can be found [here](#).

Fire safety

The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) provides [guidance on a number of topics](#). On 25th March they issued [guidance on the use of waking watches where a stay-put strategy has been suspended](#).

12. Further housing related FAQs

[An FAQs page has been published by Welsh Government for landlords.](#)

13. Contact

If you have any queries regarding this document, please do not hesitate to contact:

- Sarah Scotcher
- Policy & External Affairs Project Officer
- Sarah-Scotcher@chcymru.org.uk
- 07469 147485