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



Updated: 1700hrs 24th March 2020

New or amended information to the previous day will appear in red

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1. Context and key updates

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.

As of 1700hrs 24th March, a total of 6650 cases have been confirmed across the UK and 335 people are confirmed to have died from the virus. The number of cases is likely to be a significant underestimate due to a scaling back in testing of suspected cases.

There are 478 cases confirmed in Wales. However, testing for the virus has now been scaled back other than in hospitals and clinical settings. It is therefore likely that number of cases will be a significant underestimate.

However, 135 patients are now confirmed to have fully recovered from the virus across the UK and left hospital. A much higher number are likely to have contracted the virus and recovered at home.

During a press conference on 23rd March, the Prime Minister announced a change in approach to combatting 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**



Childcare for critical workers

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.

Emergency powers and legislation

The UK Government have published the Coronavirus Bill, emergency legislation to respond to the outbreak.

The [Coronavirus Bill](#) will empower 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 Bill is to pass through Parliament on Monday 23rd March and receive Royal Assent before the end of the month.

[A full briefing on the impact of the Bill has been published by CHC, with analysis around the impact on housing associations](#)

The Bill has been amended to extend the notice period for the majority of Notices Seeking Possession to three months. This will come into force when the Bill becomes an act and is implemented (likely to be within this week (ending 27th March). CHC will publish a briefing on the impact of these changes once more details are available.

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.



2. Core Guidance

[Daily statement from Public Health Wales](#)

- Latest position regarding testing and response to the virus

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

- Number of cases
- Advice for the public
- Advice for healthcare professionals
- Guidance for schools
- General information on the virus

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

- general information
- specific guidance for
 - education sector
 - social, community and residential care sector
 - businesses and employers

[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)

3. Communication with tenants, staff & general public

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 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.

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

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

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

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](#).



4. [Communication with tenants without first language English or Welsh](#)

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

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

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

- Welsh
- English
- Arabic
- Mandarin
- Cantonese
- Polish
- French
- Bengali
- Gujarati
- Portuguese
- Punjabi
- Urdu

5. [Cases of COVID-19 amongst your workforce or exposure of your workforce to COVID-19](#)

[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 a 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 the withdrawn guidance, which is still visible, in addition to the new guidance.



6. Movement of staff and critical worker status

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.

We are working with Welsh Government on assurances of exemptions for essential staff members in the event of severe travel restrictions in Wales.

7. COVID-19 and care/support settings

[Guidance for social, community or residential care settings has been issued by Welsh Government.](#) (link to latest version, auto-updated)

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. We are seeking urgent clarity on expedited registration process of additional care workers.

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

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

For any specific inquiries relating to the delivery of social care and COVID-19, Welsh Government have a dedicated inbox:

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 the



withdrawn guidance in relation to returning travellers, which is still visible, in addition to the new guidance.

8. Availability of supplies to essential services

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.

9. 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 transferrable 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](#)

10. Flexibility in compliance due to inability to access homes

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.

This document will be updated as soon as we receive this and the change communicated.

11. 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)



12. 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.

13. Protecting tenants who are extremely vulnerable

[UK 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 should take

NHS Wales will be writing to people they are aware have these conditions. However, records are unlikely to be complete and so housing associations may wish to have regard to this guidance when communicating with and supporting their tenants.

14. Delivery of homeless and substance misuse services (including day centres and hostels)

We are pleased to have worked with Welsh Government and experts to deliver [guidance on the operation of homelessness and substance misuse services 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

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



15. Advice for providers of floating support/home care

[Welsh Government guidance on social care settings provides general guidance for the delivery of care and support services.](#)

[Specific information on the delivery of services relating to homelessness and substance misuse is available from Welsh Government.](#)

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

16. Further housing related FAQ

[A frequently asked question page has been published by Welsh Government for landlords.](#)

If you have any specific questions you believe should be answered by guidance, please do not hesitate to contact Will-Henson@chcymru.org.uk

CHC are implementing a new approach to answering queries from housing associations and a new Q&A section will appear in these briefing from 25th March.

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

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