Practice note: Supporting vulnerable tenants affected by Covid-19 (1 April)

Chartered Institute of Housing

Tenants over 70 or those with underlying health problems are at particular risk of serious ill health if they contract Covid-19. This includes tenants with complex needs, mental health issues and people with learning disabilities. The government's guidance on staying at home and reducing all non-essential contact will mean that the way tenants are supported will need to change, whilst at the same time, the level of support they require may increase.

The health and wellbeing of tenants is a priority and organisations need to ensure they continue to provide the support people need during this crisis.

Social housing providers will need to consider:

- How to identify those tenants who are most at risk and require more support
- How that support can be delivered and by whom (whether the landlord or a partner organisation or community group)
- How to communicate in an effective, timely and regular way with tenants

For vulnerable tenants in general needs housing:

- Compile a list of all your tenants over 70, and those who may be vulnerable (receiving tenancy sustainment or support services for example) to prioritise for immediate telephone contact.
- Consider providing a telephone line that you advertise in general communications with tenants, advising potentially vulnerable and older tenants to get in touch to discuss what support they may need.
- Once you have compiled a list and made the initial contact, you may consider narrowing down a primary list of tenants who will need more regular contact to make sure they are managing. They may need daily or weekly contact.
- Contact tenants directly through telephone calls. This may be done by staff across a number of teams, where there is additional capacity as other services are scaled back, so a common script to use will make this easier for staff and ensure you capture adequate information to inform any necessary action/ provide appropriate help, to include:
  - Updating information about members of the household; next of kin; emergency contact details etc.
  - Making sure that they are aware of the latest guidance on social distancing, when to stay at home and self-isolate. Guidance about Covid-19 is changing almost daily and ongoing reporting may increase the anxiety of tenants, so where possible, ongoing contact should be considered or links made with community and voluntary support, if the tenant wants this. (More information is available on CIH's website here.)
  - Identifying if they have experienced any symptoms, or if they are in a vulnerable group and self-isolating. If they are

Guidance for:
- England
- Wales
- Scotland
- Northern Ireland

COVID-19 FACT SHEET #4

#CV19HOUSING

experiencing any symptoms, reinforcing public health guidance to self-isolate at home Covid-19: stay at home guidance

- Understanding what help they have already from friends and/ or family and what help they might still need. This may range from financial advice if their income is or will be affected, practical help with shopping or medication deliveries or any physical or mental health issues.

- Identify how these tenants might be supported, either through your own staff or connecting to local voluntary and community groups (with their agreement). Map out what voluntary and community groups exist and what help and support these might be able to provide to your tenants. Covid-19 mutual aid UK is an umbrella group that provides links to local groups and many are being developed to help older and vulnerable people.
- Identify if they have access to the internet, and ensure they know where you are publishing latest updates, tips and help from other organisations to support their health and wellbeing. Examples include resources from MIND, supporting people's health and wellbeing. The UK Government has also published guidance for the public on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of Covid-19.
- If available and appropriate, discuss with tenants the potential installation and use of call systems where this might help to mitigate any risk and support tenants to feel safe and connected.
- Alert staff internally and local authority partners if there is a significant safeguarding risk or immediate need for additional care.

For tenants in supported housing

- Where care teams are on site, for example in extra care housing or schemes for people with severe learning disabilities, they are best placed to lead the response as they will still be providing care directly to tenants as resources allow.
- The resources of care teams may be stretched both by increased need and staff illness/ self-isolation; providers need to work closely with the local authority and other providers to pool resources in the locality.
- Draw on housing staff and other teams (which may have additional capacity as other services are scaled back) to provide help and support remotely, through additional telephone support for tenants and wider communications (e.g. newsletters, social media) (More information is available in CIH's Covid-19 factsheet #3 on supported housing. All of CIH's briefings for housing professionals can be found on our website here.)
- Identify tenants who don't have friends or family that can help with things like shopping, and identify how they might be supported, either through your own staff or connecting to local voluntary and community groups (as above), with their agreement.
- Keep tenants safe by closing/ restricting access to communal areas, putting up notices reminding residents not to use them and reinforcing government guidance. Where schemes have on-site restaurants which will be closed, these can provide meals to be delivered to individuals in their own flats.
- Where tenants or carers still require access to laundries, a rota should be agreed and additional cleaning put in place as well as guidance for tenants to follow.
- With many communal areas closed, cleaners can be re-directed to increase cleaning of 'touch points', such as door handles, banisters, etc.
- Public health guidance on cleaning in flats and shared areas in non-healthcare settings can be found here, including posters that summarise the advice and can be placed in and around communal spaces. Additional guidance has also been published by Health Protection Scotland and is available here.
- Where there are suspected or confirmed cases of coronavirus, tenants should be asked to keep to their own flats at all times.
- If a tenant is admitted to hospital, staff should liaise with them or their family to arrange a

deep clean of their home, as close as possible to the discharge date.

- If unfortunately a tenant should die from the coronavirus, a deep clean of communal areas may also be necessary. Staff resources should be put into ensuring that tenants are reassured about the action being taken to reduce wider risk on the scheme.

Where tenants are not complying with guidance:

- Ensure that you are communicating clearly and effectively to help tenants understand what is required (see below)
- Consider the reasons for their non-compliance and how you can support them to change behaviours.
- Work with family and friends/ existing support networks to reinforce guidance and required behaviours to keep them and other tenants safe.
- Where tenants continue to ignore advice, you may need to remind them of the obligations under their tenancy agreement. Police and public health officials have additional powers to address behaviour that puts people at risk (see more information in CIH's factsheet #3 on supported housing).

Communicating with tenants:

- CIH practice sheet #2 provides helpful tips on engaging with tenants, drawing on discussions with housing providers.
- Use multiple methods of communicating with tenants including telephone calls, social media and letters/ newsletters.
- Provide clear and explicit advice in newsletters and posters placed in strategic places throughout schemes, such as at entrances to corridors, lounges and laundries.
- When communicating with tenants with specific needs, use tools developed by specialist organisations. These may also provide or know of additional help and support available, including helplines for tenants and relatives/ carers.
- Public health bodies have produced several posters and other resources. For providers in England these can be found here. And for providers in Wales these can be found here.
- Easy-read guidance and posters for people with learning disabilities are available from Scottish commission for learning disability / Learning Disability Wales/ Mencap
- Information for people living with dementia is available from Alzheimer's Society and Dementia UK.
- An information video in British Sign Language is available from the deaf health charity Signhealth
- NHS Scotland has produced information available in other languages to use. More about coronavirus and impacts on housing rights for migrants is also available here.
- Ask tenants what other information and advice they might want – many will be concerned about other tenants living on the scheme or nearby and may value information on how they can help them as well.

Working with public sector, and voluntary and community partners to support tenants:

Given the impact that coronavirus is having on how we all live, it is unlikely that housing organisations on their own will be able to provide all the support tenants may need. You will need to consider how to work with public sector partners such as health and social care, as well as voluntary and community groups.

A future practice note will explore working with partners in local areas to ensure that you maximise the help and support tenants can access.