

# Coronavirus (COVID-19)

STAY ALERT  
CONTROL  
THE VIRUS  
SAVE LIVES

Community Helpline 0114 273 4567 Open 8.45am-4.45pm

## Guidance for Landlords of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)

The purpose of this information leaflet is to ensure that all landlords of multi-occupied properties in the city are aware of current national guidance on the management of rented properties and related issues, including cleaning and repairing obligations, changes to termination of tenancies and non-payment of rent.

### Reducing The Risk Of Spreading Infection Within The House And Beyond

With the first tentative steps towards easing the current restrictions on work and other activity outside the home, the possibility of a further peak in the spread of Covid-19 infection remains. If one person develops covid like symptoms everyone else in the household will have to self-isolate and stay home for 14 days. Therefore the message remains

#### Stay alert and help control the virus by –

- staying at home as much as possible
- working from home if you can
- limiting contact with other people (other than your immediate household)
- keeping your distance if you go out (2metres apart where possible and use of protective equipment where appropriate especially in work environments)
- washing your hands regularly

Individuals who live with others in a HMO and are unwell should minimise their use of shared spaces and communal facilities as much as possible. A copy of the advice leaflet provided for tenants living in multiple occupancy accommodation is enclosed with this information pack. For help obtaining practical assistance for those who are vulnerable, self-isolating or shielding contact **Sheffield City Council's Community Support Service on 0114 273 4567 (8.45am to 4.45pm)** or visit <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/your-city-council/coronavirus-support-for-people>

Landlords should be aware that no one can be removed from their home because of the virus.

Landlords are not obliged to provide alternative accommodation for tenants if others in the property contract the virus.

## Termination of Tenancies and Non-Payment of Rent

Because many people have experienced a drop or loss of income, where a tenant is struggling to pay their rent landlords are encouraged to take a pragmatic approach and come to agreement with their tenants regarding late or deferred rent payments.

To reduce the risk of people losing their home over the next few months, the government has brought in emergency legislation\*\* to prevent private tenants from being evicted if they are unable to pay their rent and to delay possession proceedings.

1. The notice period for termination of a tenancy by service of a section 21 notice has been extended to 3 months. Under emergency legislation this change will remain in effect until 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020.
2. Court action on housing possession proceedings has been suspended for a 90 day period from 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020. During this period claim seeking possession following termination of a tenancy will not be heard.

Landlords will be aware that **eviction by any means other than through a court order is illegal**. This Council continues to investigate complaints and will not hesitate to prosecute landlords who attempt to evict or harass tenants illegally.

\*\*A copy of up to date Government Guidance for Landlord and Tenants on the changes introduced under The Coronavirus Act 2020 can be found under 'housing and accommodation' at <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

### Business Support

The government has issued a range of assistance to businesses. Some of this assistance is directed through the Council. For more information on support for Sheffield businesses go to:

<https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/your-city-council/coronavirus-support-for-businessweb>  
and [www.businesssupport.gov.uk](http://www.businesssupport.gov.uk)

If you are concerned about making your mortgage payments during this time you should look at your lender's website. This should be updated with the latest information, including FAQs, which can answer many queries.

UK Finance advises that payment holidays will be available to all customers who are up to date on their mortgage payments. A payment holiday will also be available to all buy-to-let landlords whose tenants have lost income because of the impact of Covid-19.

Landlords are expected to pass on this relief to their tenants where they are having difficulty making rent payments at this time. If you need a mortgage payment holiday you will need to self-certify that your income has been either directly or indirectly impacted by Covid-19.

Customers will still owe the money where a payment holiday has been granted and interest will still accrue, so if you are able to make part of your normal mortgage payment to reduce the money you owe or your interest charges then you should consider doing so.

## Repairs & Maintenance

### When to Inspect?

**The Landlord's obligation to repair and maintain rented accommodation and licence licensable HMOs has not changed** and landlords should make every reasonable effort to keep their properties in good repair and free from hazards through-out this difficult period. Landlords are still responsible for submitting HMO Licence Renewal application forms on time, preferably scanned and emailed to [phs@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:phs@sheffield.gov.uk).

HMO Licence Renewal forms can be downloaded from <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/content/sheffield/home/housing/renew-change-hmo-licence.html>.

The Government advises that inspectors or maintenance workers can still visit rented accommodation for essential or urgent work (including preliminary inspection where this is necessary). Urgent health and safety issues must still be dealt with for example leaking roof or a broken boiler. The guidance lists some further examples. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-and-renting-guidance-for-landlords-tenants-and-local-authorities>

For routine checks and maintenance, take a risk-based approach. Also take steps before any visit to ask if any residents are showing symptoms, self-isolating or shielding / vulnerable. It might be possible to avoid the need for visits by asking a responsible person within the HMO to do some checks, for example pushing the test button on smoke alarms, or sending photos of any repair issues by email or phone. The responsible person should be asked to record any findings and to pass them on to you. Please remember this is not a long-term solution and once the Government has confirmed the current restrictions have been lifted you should resume your normal inspections

Where a suitable contractor has been found to undertake works, relevant checks should be done to see if anyone in the property is showing symptoms, self-isolating or shielding / vulnerable. Check again within 24 hours of the proposed visit. If safe to do so, a contractor can attend making sure they are wearing appropriate protective equipment whilst observing social distancing, using handwashing or sanitizing and so on. Where practicable, arrange for residents to stay in their room and away from the work area, for the duration of the visit. More detailed advice on safe working practice can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/homes>

### Safety Checks

Advice from the Health and Safety Executive is that they still expect to see annual gas safety checks carried out. Similarly, other essential safety tasks such as the annual inspection and test of the fire detection and emergency lighting systems and the five-yearly

electrical safety inspection should also be completed and certified by the relevant competent person.

Despite reasonable efforts, it might not be possible to complete all these checks. For example, your tenants may be self-isolating or might otherwise refuse access to the property. Your usual contractor may be unavailable to work or not have access to the materials to complete the job, and alternative contractors may be fully booked for some time ahead.

If this happens, you should keep a written record of the problems found, the efforts you have made to overcome them and any alternative steps taken to ensure that any health and safety risks are minimised pending completion of work. This might include a record of discussions you have had with tenants and the contractors you have contacted. The key thing is to take all **reasonable** steps to comply with your duties.

Further up to date advice on carrying out gas safety checks with examples of different scenarios can be found on the Gas Safe Register's website at <https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/help-and-advice/covid-19-advice-and-guidance/landlords/>

## Cleaning

**The landlord's obligation to ensure the cleanliness of new lettings and common parts is unchanged.** In many cases landlords have cleaners periodically within their houses. In some cases these arrangements have stopped due to the pandemic, perhaps because of unavailability of staff or following a risk assessment.

We recommend that cleaning products are left at the property with suitable instructions, in shared accommodation and for cleaning of communal areas. Usually household products will suffice. Make sure the manufacturer's instructions are available. In some cases, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) may apply.

Where cleaners are employed to go into the HMO a full risk assessment and work practice guidelines with provision of appropriate protective personal equipment should be carried out. The occupiers' cooperation with these arrangements will be needed, in order to protect individuals and minimise the risk of transmission of the virus.

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If you require any further advice or guidance on the contents of this leaflet or current HMO licensing arrangements please visit the housing pages of the Council website <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/housing>

or contact the **Private Housing Standards Team:**

**Email:** [phs@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:phs@sheffield.gov.uk)

**Telephone:** 0114 273 4680

