



15 September 2020 (6th edition)

Coronavirus (COVID-19) - Housing and Care in Specialist Housing A Housing LIN Practice Briefing (No1)

This briefing has been updated to reflect the new rules that came into effect on Monday, 14 September 2020.

About this briefing

There are approximately 750,000 people living in specialist housing in the UK. Nearly half a million are in purpose-built accommodation for older people including sheltered or retirement housing, extra care housing, almshouses and Abbeyfields, offering independent living across all tenures. The balance are largely in social rented supported housing developed for adults in need of planned personal care and support to aid their independent living. For example, people with a learning disability or autism, or experiencing mental health issues.

This briefing sets out a number of practical things for providers of specialist housing to consider when seeking to reduce the risk of an outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19). It should also be read alongside the government's updated Guidance on Supported Living services published on 6 August 2020. (See the list of relevant guidance on page 2 of this briefing).

It is divided into four sections. The first considers a number of factors about preventing the spread of coronavirus and measures to put in place to ensure residents can continue to live independently. The second section features staffing and workforce matters while the third section considers broader issues relating to the operational management of schemes. Lastly, the fourth and final section signposts to a range of useful online resources on government, and other trade and professional bodies' websites.

Background

Residents living in specialist housing with care such as extra care housing will be concerned about the continually evolving situation, especially if they have an underlying health condition, are vulnerable and/or in need of personal care and support.

It's important that all providers continue to follow the latest rules, information and advice. You can find the most up to date information and advice on the coronavirus on the government website: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

The government has produced key guidance for adult social care and housing. They include:

- New rules on meeting with others (social gatherings):
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing>
- Guidance on Supported Living services:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supported-living-services-during-coronavirus-covid-19>
- Guidance on residential care provision:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-admission-and-care-of-people-in-care-homes>
- Guidance on home (domiciliary) care provision:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-providing-home-care>
- Guidance on renting for landlords, tenants and local authorities
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-and-renting-guidance-for-landlords-tenants-and-local-authorities>
- Technical guidance on evictions and additional protection for renters:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/913301/Technical_Guidance_on_Eviction_Notices_August_update.pdf
- Guidance on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19#work-and-employment-for-those-who-are-shielding>
- Infection prevention and control:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control>
- Guidance on how to work safely in domiciliary care (now includes specific reference to extra care housing):
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-how-to-work-safely-in-domiciliary-care>

We will update this briefing periodically on useful government, trade and professional websites which can be found in section 4 of the briefing. In the meantime, do let us know of any other steps you are taking not covered above so we can add to this list and share with Housing LIN members. Email us at info@housinglin.org.uk

Some general questions

- What practices and procedures do you have in place to shield residents and staff from coronavirus? Are they sufficient? Compare to the government [COVID-19: guidance for supported living provision](#).

- Are you aware of the local arrangements for testing residents for COVID-19? Do you have residents who have had the virus and either recovered and/or have developed respiratory issues as a result?
- Have you set up a coronavirus group with senior managers so you can take decisive action? What risk plans have you put in place should there be a Wave 2 or a localised lockdown?
- What measures have you implemented to minimise risks and address the challenges of managing your scheme? For example, do they include those below?
- Have you got a considered approach to re-opening meeting spaces or services that have been closed (such as day or group activities? Is it sufficient? Compare this to the [SCIE guidance](#) for delivering safe, face to face adult day care.

1) Independent living

- **Communications with residents:** not all residents have access to the internet, are you providing written advice on what the virtual lock down / self-isolating / social distance is? What other ways have you communicated with residents? For example, via your tenants or residents' association, personal telephone calls, setting up a Facebook group?
- **Personal hygiene:** display information and communicate about coronavirus, its symptoms and how to avoid further spread to ensure all residents maintain their personal hygiene; and ensure that they maintain their personal hygiene i.e. handwashing for at least 20 seconds, to reduce the likelihood of contracting coronavirus; provide sanitisers and encourage cleaning of surfaces that are likely to be touched frequently, and wear face masks.
- **Keeping a social distance:** where residents do come into contact with each other, while there is now a 1 metre plus rule, continue to encourage a social distance of 2 metres is maintained, e.g. in corridors. They should only be in public areas if there is an essential need – i.e. shopping, getting medical supplies. And note, if you are marking flooring to delineate 1 metre/2 metres, be mindful on how this will impact on those living with dementia or visual impairments.
- **COVID-19 symptoms:** in line with the latest government advice, any resident showing signs of a new persistent cough or fever should self-isolate at home within their flat.
- **Care needs:** map all residents' personal care or support needs to ensure they are up-to-date. This may also include identifying residents who have had COVID-19 and recovered but may have developed new health issues as a result. It could also include residents with weight management issues, in alignment to the government's renewed initiatives to prevent and manage obesity and support residents who would benefit from taking exercise (also see exercise section below).
- **Medication and health care:** discuss with residents if they have any medication requirements or health concerns that might require a prescription, a visit to their GP, a planned hospital appointment or visit to a pharmacy. In particular, assess any

resident who may need additional reserve medication for emergency respiratory situations such as asthma. Ensure that residents with breathlessness and respiratory conditions are able to access primary and community respiratory services, which are now, in some cases being offered virtually.

- **Eating:** to restrict unnecessary social contact, ensure food is consumed in a socially distanced manner or in residents' apartments only.
- **Leaving the scheme:** residents must follow government advice and stay alert. Residents must adhere to the new rules on socially distancing indoors and outdoors that came into effect on Monday, 14 September (see more under Visitors below). Also, with some exceptions, they must wear face masks when entering shops, etc. Guidance about exceptions, including some people living with dementia, can be found at the government website on [guidance and support for COVID-19](#)
- **Exercise:** residents should follow government advice and exercise safely outside and also be mindful of local lockdown arrangements. The government have now published their obesity strategy too entitled, [Tackling Obesity: Empowering adults and children to live healthier lives](#). The Centre for Ageing Better and partners have also produced a useful booklet on exercising called, [Active at Home: A guide to staying active at home during the coronavirus outbreak](#).
- **Visitors:** the latest government rules that came into effect on Monday, 14 September, specify that social gatherings of more than six people indoors and outdoors are banned in England. There is a £100 fine for anyone breaking the new conditions, doubling to a maximum of £3,200. While some schemes have opened up outdoor space and some communal areas where social distancing and personal hygiene measures can be observed for limited number of visitors e.g. family and friends, record all non-essential visitors. Essential visitors can visit your schemes, including delivery drivers and those who volunteer, other than essential care or NHS staff providing planned or responsive. care. Face masks should be work by all visitors in communal areas and it is also good practice to keep detailed information about visitors in case of the need to follow up track and trace if there is a case notified?
- **Communal areas:** review your policies and practices and conduct a health and safety check. In line with latest government rules, no more than 6 people can meet socially indoors or outdoors. Ensure that residents comply with this and also keep their distance from each other in communal parts or internal areas of the scheme where residents can come in close contact with other residents. Review opening up any bar, cafe or restaurant, lounges, guest rooms, hairdresser, etc. Essential use of laundry and shops only.
- **Group activities:** Following latest government rules, all group activities to be reviewed and modified, where possible, to take place in a socially distanced way. Encourage residents to engage in activities in their home such as: reading, magazines, jigsaws, music, knitting, their favourite TV/radio programmes available. Also see the Housing LIN's practice briefing (No6): [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - Supporting Residents in Retirement Housing and Extra Care Housing who experience Loneliness - An A-Z of examples](#)

- **Feeling isolated:** with restrictions in place preventing going out of apartments, consider alternative ways in which to encourage social contact e.g. socially distanced walks and activities and contact with friends and family via telephone, Skype and over the internet. Again, see the Housing LIN's practice briefing (No6): [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - Supporting Residents in Retirement Housing and Extra Care Housing who experience Loneliness - An A-Z of examples](#)
- **Pets policy:** if you have one, what arrangements are in place to walk dogs or care for pets?
- **Counselling:** advise on how to access bereavement support upon the loss of a family member, friend, relative or fellow resident. Also see the Housing LIN practice briefing (no4): [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - Top tips in Bereavement Care in Specialist Housing](#)
- **Support for people with dementia:** if residents live with or care for someone living with dementia they may be more worried about coronavirus or the impact of staying in their home. Share with them the **National Dementia Helpline** number of **0300 222 11 22**. Also see the [Housing LIN practice briefing \(No3\) on COVID-19, housing and dementia](#).
- **Safeguarding:** continue to maintain safeguarding policy and be mindful of any additional risk from isolation.
- **Domestic Violence:** people experiencing domestic violence may now be trapped by their abuser – think about how you can support this group.

2) Workforce matters

- **Personal hygiene:** display information and communicate about coronavirus, it's symptoms and how to avoid further spread to ensure that staff maintain their personal hygiene i.e. handwashing for at least 20 seconds, to reduce the likelihood of contracting coronavirus, provide sanitisers and face masks. And follow latest guidance on PPE as referenced on p2 (and also see below)
- **Staff illness:** if staff show signs of a persistent cough or fever they must self-isolate but may be able to work from home. The government has announced new statutory sick pay measures. Can you track who they have been in contact with and give advice to isolate?
- **Access to staff testing:** There are local organisations who can test staff for COVID-19. Please refer to your local public health or local council for advice.
- **Travel:** prevent all non-essential travel between schemes and/or offices.
- **Sleep in arrangements/waking cover:** Manage staff concerns by reinforcing protective and infection control measures and resources.
- **On-site staff:** scheme manager, housing officer on-site staff will be required to undertake a number of roles flexibly. This will include working with care providers and local authorities to identify people who are vulnerable and to inform planning if there

is an outbreak. On site staff should also be supported to undertake additional protective and infection control measures. Flexible hours should be considered.

- **Contractors:** for example, ensure contractors are following government advice and only permit access where providing an essential service. For example, emergency maintenance or repair. Make safe and stop all planned works.
- **Protective clothing and equipment:** do you have sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE) for general use as now set out in government guidelines in addition to caring for an infected resident?
- **Cleaning:** do you have an infection control policy? Add deep cleaning after confirmed case.
- **Cleaning rotas:** amend so cleaners pay attention to door handles, door plates, lift plates and buttons, metal surfaces and other areas which are likely to be touched frequently. Schemes to be deep cleaned following any confirmed cases of COVID-19.
- **Social alarm/telecare:** make sure you have the right contact number for the resident and any family member. What other functionality does your system have to enable remote care? The findings from a recent [Appello/Housing LIN survey](#) found that 90% of those surveyed planned to utilise technology further to support residents who may have to self-isolate or shield as a result of the pandemic.
- **Remote support to staff:** Staff may be working tirelessly to support residents. Consider whether remote coaching, mentoring and telephone support is needed to help them manage any stresses that arise.

3) Other operational issues

- **Lettings panel:** what arrangements do you have in place to jointly assess a prospective resident with social services? Can you carry this out as a team virtually?
- **Commissioned care:** have you spoken with your social services commissioner about the levels of care you are able to deliver on site? How flexible is the council's contract to respond to additional crisis/emergency in interventions on account of COVID-19? Does the resident's care needs been reassessed during COVID-19?
- **Difficulty paying rent or mortgage:** are you aware of government guidelines on what happens if tenants have difficulty paying their rent or mortgage? Also see the Housing LIN practice briefing (No5): [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - Changes to Welfare Benefits](#)
- **End of Life Care:** do you know your local community end of life care services, hospice or Macmillan nurses? Do you know which residents have advanced care planning arrangements, have stated their preference in the event of emergency resuscitation (via a DNACPR or ReSPECT process) and have this documented? Also see the [Housing LIN Practice Briefing \(No2\) on Housing and End of Life Care practice briefing](#).

- **Health and medical support:** Can you help minimise any non-essential or routine requests to local GP surgeries? Can you work with GP practices to co-ordinate any visits to different residents? Can you support residents who may need to take part in video consultations with health, medical and social care professionals?
- **Hospital discharge:** do you have protocols in place for the transfer of care back home? Are you able to offer 'step down' provision?
- **Viewing properties:** Ensure that any viewing meets social distancing requirements. If there has been a recent outbreak at the scheme, viewing will need to be put on hold. What procedures do you have in place for viewing vacant properties? Can you conduct a virtual tour of the scheme?
- **New resident moves:** what procedures do you have in place to help new residents move in (e.g. managed access for removal men) and to help them settle in and become acquainted with their neighbours (see independent living – feeling isolated above)? If they are new to the area, ensure that they are registered with a local GP.
- **Staffing ratios:** Given the likelihood that staff will also get ill and need time off to recover, what safer staffing ratios have been developed to ensure that there is enough cover? What business continuity plans are being utilised to use agency staff?
- **Sharing limited resources:** how can you best work with local authorities to establish plans for mutual aid, including sharing of the workforce between supported living and home care providers, and with local primary and community health services providers; and with deployment of volunteers where that is safe to do so? Are you linked into local Resilience Forums?

4) Useful websites

For latest public and professional information and advice on coronavirus and the sector's response visit:

Government policy, guidelines and advice

- Department of Health and Care Services <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus/>
- Public Health England <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england/>
- NHS England <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Trade and professional bodies

- ADASS <https://www.adass.org.uk/covid-19-responses-and-guidance>
- ARCO <https://www.arco.uk/guidance-and-information-for-covid-19/>
- Chartered Institute of Housing <https://cihnews.org/p/YRX-FXV/our-approach-to-covid-19/>

- Erosh <https://erosh.co.uk/erosh-covid-19-centre/>
- Local Government Association <https://local.gov.uk/coronavirus-information-councils/>
- National Housing Federation <https://www.housing.org.uk/news-and-blogs/news/responding-to-coronavirus--resources-for-housing-associations/>
- Shakespeare Martineau <https://www.shma.co.uk/coronavirus-resource-hub/>

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Note

Updated to reflect government guidance issued up to 10 August 2020. We will continue to review content in line with government advice.

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The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 25,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England, Wales and Scotland to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population.

For more information on Coronavirus, visit the Housing LIN's online Info Hub on our Health Intel webpages at: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Coronavirus-Info-Hub/>

If you would like to talk through how the Housing LIN can support your organisation at this time, please do not hesitate to contact us (see contact details below). And for more about our consultancy services, visit: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/consultancy/>

If you would like to write a briefing for the Housing LIN on how your organisation is tackling coronavirus, please email us at: info@housinglin.org.uk

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