

**To: All Social Housing Tenants**

**From: Paul Price, Director of Social Housing Policy & Oversight,  
Department for Communities**

As Director of Social Housing, I know that many of you will have been impacted in some way by COVID-19 and I wanted to take the opportunity to make you aware of the measures the Department has in place to ensure that you continue to remain safe and secure in your home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The guidance in place at the moment is to stay at home as much as possible, limit contact with other people and keep your distance if you do go out. Whilst some restrictions are beginning to be lifted, this message from the Executive remains.

This letter sets out the advice and support which has been put in place at this time – more detailed information is available at <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/covid-19-guidance-social-housing-landlords-and-tenants>

## **SUPPORTING YOU**

### **Rent, payments and support**

Some households in social homes will face difficulties with paying their rent which are beyond their control and related directly to the COVID-19 emergency. Households who may be facing additional financial pressures during these unprecedented times will not be evicted due to rent difficulties arising as a result of COVID-19. As a tenant you should continue to pay your rent and abide by all other terms of your tenancy agreement. If you are unable to do so, you should speak to your landlord as soon as possible.

The Department is working with social landlords to help them to keep tenants in their homes and to ensure that the welfare system can provide help to them as fast as possible. Both the Housing Executive and all of our Housing Associations have given a commitment to treat all rent issues with sensitivity and to support tenants through this difficult period.

Additional measures have been put in place to help tenants to access relevant social security benefits during the COVID-19 outbreak. Further information on rent, payments and support is available via the following link <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/covid-19-guidance-social-housing-landlords-and-tenants>

In addition, information on relevant benefits and who to contact can be accessed on the NI Direct website:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-and-benefits>.

## **STAYING SAFE IN YOUR HOME**

### **Maintenance, repairs and property access**

It is vital that landlords and tenants work together to keep homes safe, especially now as we spend increased amounts of time at home. Never has the positive partnership between landlords and tenants been more important. I would encourage you to work with your landlord and to take a practical, common-sense approach to resolving issues and to let your landlord know early if there is a problem.

When a problem within your home does occur, it is important that you follow sensible precautions should there be a need for a contractor or others to visit your property. By following guidance and taking precautions, for example, remaining in a separate room during visits, you can limit the risk of catching the virus. Full advice on issues like these are included in the Departmental guidance <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/covid-19-guidance-social-housing-landlords-and-tenants> and also in the guidance issued by the Public Health Agency: <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus>

It is important to raise any concerns with your landlord and work with them to ensure that your home remains safe. The ability to carry out maintenance and repairs safely, while at the same time observing public health guidance will be kept under constant review. Priority will continue to be given to those repairs which affect your ability to live safely and maintain your mental and physical health in your home. However, external repairs and work on vacant properties have resumed and other works will follow as restrictions ease.

### **Gas safety checks**

The purpose of a gas safety check is to make sure gas appliances are safe for continued use. Given that so many of us are spending more time at home, these safety checks are even more important and must be carried out where possible. I encourage you to work with your landlord to ensure your safety and allow access to your home whilst observing public health guidelines to ensure that gas safety checks can take place. Further details are included in the guidance <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/covid-19-guidance-social-housing-landlords-and-tenants>

## **Anti-social behaviour**

The Department is aware of some reports of an increase in anti-social behaviour. Anyone participating in such behaviour should consider the far-reaching implications for themselves, their households, their neighbours and the wider community. With so many of us at home, it is essential that we feel safe and secure in our homes.

Every one of us can contribute to ensuring that our neighbourhoods and communities are thriving, inclusive and ultimately safe places to live. Proven incidents of anti-social behaviour may put tenancies at risk.

If you are affected or concerned about anti-social behaviour you can raise this with your landlord or access further advice and guidance via the following link:

<https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Community/Anti-Social-Behaviour/What-is-Anti-Social-Behaviour>

## **Support for victims of domestic abuse**

Staying at home can cause anxiety for those who are experiencing or feel at risk of domestic abuse. For anyone who is or feels they are at risk of abuse, it is important to remember that there is help and support available to you. The instruction to stay at home as a result of COVID-19 does not apply if you need to leave your home to escape domestic abuse. If you feel unsafe in your home or have concerns for your safety in relation to domestic violence, harassment or intimidation, you should speak to your landlord or contact the Housing Executive's Housing Solutions and Support on 03448 920 900.

## **LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF**

### **Health**

You should take sensible precautions to keep yourself safe. If you think you may have the virus follow Government advice on self-isolation - you'll need to stay at home for at least 7 days. If you live with someone who has symptoms, you'll need to stay at home for 14 days from the day the first person in the home started having symptoms. Further information on what you can do to stop COVID-19 spreading can be found at <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus>

### **Wellbeing**

We are all having to deal with a wide range of impacts brought about by the COVID-19 outbreak and the effect it has on everyone's daily lives. The links to the following guides provide advice on how to look after your mental health and wellbeing: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-taking-care-your-mental-health-and-wellbeing>

## **COVID-19 Community Helpline**

A freephone helpline to help those in vulnerable groups to access information, advice and guidance in relation to COVID-19 is open 9.00 am to 5.00pm, seven days a week. The helpline is local and managed by Advice NI.

You can contact the helpline by calling the freephone number: 0808 802 0020. You can also get in touch by email and text message email: [covid19@adviceni.net](mailto:covid19@adviceni.net) or text: ACTION to 81025

## **FURTHER ADVICE ON COVID-19**

The Executive's advice on COVID-19 is available in one place, covering a range of topics including protecting yourself and others from coronavirus, and work, financial support and money. You can find out more information here:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>

I hope that you find this update helpful and encourage you to access the full range of guidance available via <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/covid-19-guidance-social-housing-landlords-and-tenants>



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