

Dover District Council

Private Sector Housing Team

Covid – 19 and Private Sector Housing Team working practises

During the current Coronavirus (Covid -19) outbreak, the Private Sector Housing Officers will be running an adapted service.

This is subject to availability of officers (as they may need to self-isolate) and to the technology capability within our customers' households.

- **From Tuesday 24th March 2020 until further notice** only urgent home visits will be carried out. Urgent means that there is an imminent risk of severe harm due to a defect with the property and only if there is no other way of instigating remedial works without a visit in person.
- **Telephone assessments** - If a visit deemed to be urgent takes place, the officer will first telephone the customer and establish whether anyone in the household is self-isolating or feeling unwell. We will risk assess the situation and make a decision whether to visit. If we do visit, we will take the necessary hygiene and social distancing precautions.
- **Social distancing and hygiene** - For more information on this please visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>
- **Virtual inspections** - We will be trialling “virtual inspections” where possible. This relies upon the customer having a smart phone or tablet and the installation of a video messaging application such as WhatsApp or Zoom. If a video call can be placed, we will ask the customer to show us the areas of concern within their home so that we can assess whether hazards are present to the best of our abilities. If you do not have a smart phone, you could ask a friend or family if they would be willing to help you. By doing this, it means we can deal with your situation much quicker.
- **Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)** – occupants of HMOs should take extra precaution when using shared facilities. Try to only use the kitchen when other people are not in it and clean the toilet and bathroom before and after use. Only urgent visits will be carried out where there is an imminent risk to harm due to a defect within the property. Licences up for renewal or new HMO applications will be dealt with in an orderly manner, including payments. Relevant inspections will be arranged at a later date

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- **Important** - If your health changes between the time of booking the visit and the visit taking place, you should contact us immediately, where we will reassess and either carry out a virtual inspection or postpone the visit.
- **Completion visits** - where landlords have arranged for works to be completed, we will endeavour to set up a virtual inspection with the occupant to allow sign off. This may not be possible where multiple flats are involved, but we will do as much as we can under the circumstances and then may have to revisit in person when the covid-19 restrictions are lifted. We will notify the landlord and tenant whether a further visit is necessary or whether we can close the case by doing a virtual inspection only.
- **Landlords and their contractors** – whilst we will make every effort to ensure that the defects and hazards within your home are remedied, this may take longer than usual due to the circumstances of the landlord (as they may be self-isolating or unwell) and of the contractors' availability and visiting policies. Further advice for landlords can be found at <https://landlords.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/coronavirus-what-do-landlords-need-know>
- **Disabled facility grants and Loans** - will be reviewed on a case by case basis and all non-critical cases will be dealt with in order of need. Any visits to client's homes will be dependent on the client agreeing to a visit and the current practises in that our partner agencies (Peabody and KCC) have in place. External works which entail no direct contact between the client and contractor are likely to continue until further notice. Most payment to contractors should continue where a site visit is not necessary.

This information will be subject to change to keep in line with central government instructions and the resource needs of the Council.

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