

Private Sector Housing Team Service Update

We understand this may be a worrying time for all our customers and we will, where possible, do everything we can to continue to support our landlords, agents and tenants during this difficult time. This will include prioritising essential services for those who most need them.

The current situation is constantly evolving which means we may have to make further changes in accordance with government guidance. The Private Sector Team have so far identified key services which we will try to continue with for as long as possible. Other services will need to be adapted or temporarily suspended in line with recent government advice to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all our staff and customers. These are explained in further detail below.

Priority Services

The Private Sector Team will aim to continue to offer the following priority services to our customers

Illegal evictions and harassment:

- The Private Sector Team will continue to deal with reports and queries in relation to harassment and illegal evictions. For up to date information on this, landlords can visit: <https://www.rla.org.uk/campaigns/coronavirus/index.shtml>

Issuing Advice/Sign post landlords for help with their properties and tenants in relation to COVID-19 issues.

- It is important now more than ever that landlords keep up to date with all relevant developments in relation to COVID-19 and how this might affect their business. We will aim to provide useful resources and updates to enable landlords to do this.

Identifying properties to assist homeless clients

- Homelessness faces increasing strain and pressure as there is a push from the Government to ensure that people facing homelessness have access to suitable accommodation during this time, not only to provide protection to themselves but also to the community around them.

The Private Rented Sector could provide a valuable resource in tackling this issue and as such we would welcome an informal discussion with landlords on our Accreditation database regarding properties they may have available and ready to let at this time. For an informal discussion with a member of the Private Sector Housing Team, please use any of the below numbers.

General Services

The Private Sector Team will, where possible, continue to offer these services, but with alterations for health and safety purposes. These may cause some delays.

- Tenant Reference Checks

We will continue to carry out reference checks on tenants, however serious consideration will need to be given as to whether it is safe for tenants to move at this time. Further updates will be issued if this service is also suspended.

Temporarily suspended services

In the interest of health and safety the Private Sector Team have made the decision to temporarily suspend the following services:

Property Inspections

- As a result of the government announcement on the 23rd of March 2020, all inspections will be suspended until further notice. The Private Sector Team will explore other options in relation to passing properties for accreditation without an inspection, however this will be for emergency housing cases only.

Landlord Forums and Training Events

- Again, with a view to adhering to government guidelines regarding social distancing, the team have suspended all forums and training until further notice. Online training may be available through organisations such as the NRLA. You can contact the Private Sector Team if you have any queries regarding this.

Landlord Steering Group Meetings

- Our landlord steering group meetings will also be suspended until further notice. The Private Sector Team is currently exploring whether these types of meetings could be held virtually or using conference call technology.

Advertising properties on Northumberland Homefinder Bidders

- In line with government guidelines in relation to house moves, the Private Sector Team have temporarily suspended advertising any properties, or sending over any Homefinder bidders.

The Private Sector Team are currently working from home in order to minimise social contact, but will be contactable on the numbers and email address below, should you have any questions about our services and how these will operate over the coming weeks and months.

Vicky Ledger: 01670 623053 or 07795 854900

Jo Saynor: 01670 624526 or 07825242741

Gary McGuire: 01670 623071 or 07767 003116

Kirsty Douglas: 01670 623073 or 07966 330972 (*non working days are Tuesday and Wednesday*)

Abby Henderson-Rowan: 01670 623060 or 07966323987

Lynne Dempsey: 07833 083978

Email: privatesectorhousing@northumberland.gov.uk

Useful Information for Landlords

The situation in relation to COVID-19 is changing on a daily, if not hourly basis. Emergency legislation now exists that directly affects landlords in relation to things such as evictions.

The new restrictions on leaving your home may also have an impact on you, your tenants and your business. It is vital at this time that you refer to official, reliable resources to keep up to date with all relevant developments. It is also important for keeping you and your tenants safe.

The following organisations and websites can be referred to for up to date information:

<https://www.rla.org.uk/campaigns/coronavirus/index.shtml>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

<https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/23/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know/>

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-government> (please click the link and scroll down to housing)