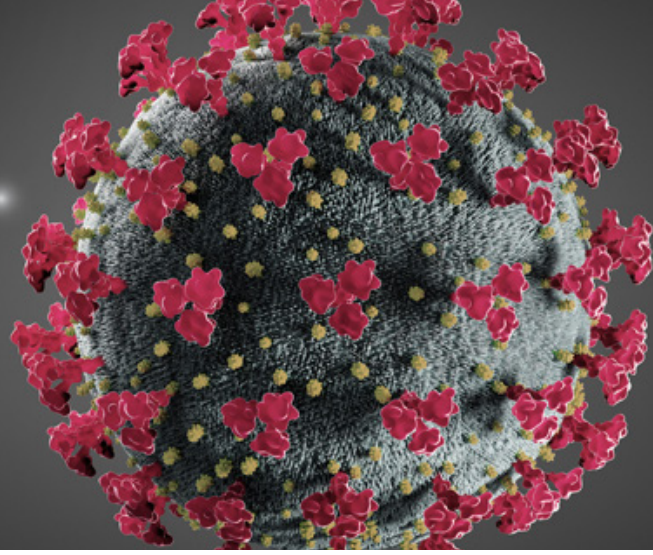


Coronavirus – how are you preparing?

The Coronavirus outbreak has landlords across the country digging out their business continuity plans. Communications is key to this. How effectively is your organisation getting the key messages out to all the key players?



Bobbie Hough, HQN's lead for our specialist Housing Management network, housing communications expert and Director of Hough Bellis Communications sets out his top tips on what your organisation should be doing.

Tip 1

Talk to employees – tell staff how you're planning to handle the situation if Coronavirus hits your organisation. Check they know their rights and obligations (remind them of the sick pay policy, for example, and tell them what to do if they have the symptoms of Coronavirus or if tenants fall ill). Check managers know the situation and their role in it; and let them know if you change any policies or procedures. The golden rule is keep employees informed, even if it's just to let them know there is no news. People will naturally be anxious and will want to see good leadership.

Tip 2

Communicate with residents – keep your social media and webpages up to date with your latest news, and supply your customer service department with frequently updated Q&As. Your aim is to keep residents informed of any changes to the service you offer them, and to signpost them to other authorities (there's no need to set up a rival health information service). Make sure your financial inclusion teams have the latest information on benefits and Universal Credit, and let residents know if you change any policies as a result of the virus. Consider the potential effects such as reduced income (eg residents on zero hours contracts may not get sick pay), cleaning of communal areas, and prioritisation of repairs work. Anticipate the questions, agree your position, and get the answers out there.

Tip 3

Talk to your contractors and suppliers – find out about their plans and pinch points. Consider how this will impact on your business and build them into

your own business continuity plans. What further assurances do you need? Share your plans and approach with them.

Tip 4

Local links – make sure you know how the response is being managed in your area. Refresh links with your counterparts in the NHS, local authority, police force and other housing associations. Follow the official messages – don't speculate or make up your own advice. Make sure your organisation is included in any updates such as email briefings, so you know the latest guidance.

Tip 5

Prepare for continuity – dust off your business continuity plan and go through it with key staff. Discuss how you'll transition to remote working if you don't already do this. Check staff have remote access to key files, email and contacts, and to the passwords and logins for websites, intranet and social media. Test your out of hours staff contact system; if you don't have one, consider setting up WhatsApp groups.

Tip 6

Sustain it – it's been reported that the incident could last months rather than weeks, so you'll need to be able to sustain your response. Check how you'll cope with reduced staff if you have a lot of people off sick or in self isolation. Look ahead at what you've got coming up: agree prioritisation of work and manage the expectations of residents and other customers.

Most importantly, keep the communication flowing.

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