



The latest views from Alistair McIntosh, Chief Executive, Housing Quality Network

Tuesday 24 March 2020

Compliance and coronavirus

By Alistair McIntosh, Chief Executive, HQN

We're in uncharted waters. Landlords by and large know what they have to do to stick to the rules on safety for gas, fire, water, electrics, asbestos, and lifts.

But how do you set about this when operatives and tenants are self-isolating? That's the question everyone is asking. So far, we've seen some useful official guidance. It's well worth reading so we've put links in at the end of this article. Wherever you happen to be, do look at the Scottish guidance as it makes some points that apply to us all.

You'll be taking advice from your safety experts and lawyers but here are ten points to bear in mind:

1. You must hold an accurate and up-to-date picture of compliance at all times across all your homes and premises. This is the basic minimum requirement. Keep an audit trail of reasons for non-compliance.
2. Where you're unable to comply with the various requirements on your homes, you must advise your regulator promptly. Carefully distinguish between breaches that can reasonably be attributed to the virus and those that cannot.
3. Put measures in place to ensure tenants can say when they're isolating and that operatives are aware of this. Give operatives a checklist of questions to ask before they go into a home. If operatives do have to go into homes where the virus may be present to do critical safety work, ensure they wear suitable protective equipment (such as fit for purpose masks and disposable gloves, and use sanitiser.)
4. Make sure that the board or councillors are fully aware of your approach and sign up to it – regulators will be interested in how well your governance copes with a genuine crisis. Of course there will be various inquiries afterwards about how well the housing sector has dealt with coronavirus. Get ready for this now – you know it's coming.
5. Pool knowledge across your organisation about high risk properties and residents. Put in place an action plan for containing and responding to such risks.



6. Make sure it's easy for residents and operatives to report their concerns about safety to you.
7. Ask operatives who do get into homes to keep a sharp look out for domestic abuse or safeguarding issues. These will go up as people are confined to their homes.
8. Get regular updates from the call centre about patterns of enquiries and emerging concerns. The call centre is your ear to the ground at this time.
9. Run stress tests about how you would respond to something like a major fire in one of your blocks. Liaise with the emergency services and other landlords about how you would respond.
10. This will end at some point so start working on your recovery plan to achieve full compliance.

Useful links

- [MHCLG: Guidance for Landlords and Tenants](#)
- [Scottish Government Covid-19 advice for social landlords](#)
- [Regulator for Social Housing – England](#)
- [Gas Safe Register – COVID-19: Advice for landlords.](#)