

Housing Services Response to Covid-19

Julie Griffin
Acting Assistant Director for Housing

Priority areas

- Wellbeing of staff and service continuity generally – quick move to mobilise home working and obtaining urgent PPE
- Actively lobbying government on a range of issues
- Housing Options Centre (HOC) and homelessness services
- Temporary Accommodation and Bed and Breakfast
- Rough Sleeping
- Key estate Services repairs and cleaning
- Sheltered Housing and night security

Impact on Renters across all tenures:

- 2 Letters have been sent to Robert Jenrick MP and a briefing note to sent to all Members setting out support and additional funds for renters of all tenures affected by Covid-19. Including UC, Council Tax and HB support.
- Rent Service are Pro actively working with tenants falling into arrears, monitoring impacts etc.
- Government eviction ban extended to August 2020 – will need to monitor HRA business plan impacts and arrears levels

Lobbying

- Letter to Robert Jenrick Re. support for renters - response received setting out published guidance
- Letter to Ministry of Justice re Early Prison release and response received recognising our work and issues around Exempt.
- Letter to Regulator of Social Housing and response received
- Joint Letter Cabinet Member and WMCA re support for rough sleepers to Luke Hall and response plus letter of thanks received from Luke Hall
- Ongoing liaison with Dame Louise Casey

Housing Options/Homelessness

- **HOC** - building closed so moved to telephone arrangements. Continues to be an increase in the number of people coming through the Housing Options Centre via phone after an initial drop off. Case are generally relationship breakdowns but now seeing increase in DA.
- **Temporary Accommodation** – Slight increase in demand over the last 2 weeks. The numbers in Bed and Breakfast (B&B) has increased particularly for singles, as move-on is an issue.
- No increase in presentations for homelessness as a result of Illegal evictions.
- Supported families and singles in TA and B&B i.e. toys and crafts delivered to children
- **Rough sleeping** - numbers remain relatively low while have seen a geographical shift, with majority now outside of city centre, starting to see a slight visible increase as lock down measures ease – up to approx. 20

Homelessness/Housing Options Contd.

- 143 people housed during Covid-19 at a commercial hotel and one of our commissioned services.
- Small group of about 10-15 who have refused all offers. We have worked with them in a supportive way and not resorted to an enforcement led approach.
- Commercial hotel now handed back. All occupiers provided with move on.
- Housing Advice delivered through our commissioned service. has now seen 450 individuals since 31st March 2020, and there remains a steady flow of presentations.
- This service has effectively diverted a great deal of need away from the streets, and supported outreach greatly in the process, it is the intent that this be mainstreamed as we come out of lockdown.
- NRPF Group is the most problematic going forward - but we will work diligently with relevant agencies and do our utmost and working across the Council and with partners to ensure they do not return to the streets.

However, Homelessness - The immediate future

- As support measures are lifted we are expecting a new wave of new homelessness and rough sleeping as peoples lives become affected by Covid-19.
- Eviction Ban only a short term fix
- Large numbers moving onto UC after losing jobs
- Landlords will need to recoup loses

Housing Management

- **Estate Services** – higher levels of fly-tipping, supported by parks to keep areas clean and safe.
- Cleaning touch points daily etc. and undertaking health and safety checks.
- **Careline and Night Time Security** – both services continuing to operate at normal capacity including all 5 mobile night-time patrols operating last week after initial staffing problems.
- **Services for Older People** – maintaining contact to older people in sheltered – Weekly contact with the 5,000+ tackling isolation. Small number of instances of residents wanting to re-open common rooms due to misunderstanding of the easing in Lockdown restrictions.
- Responding to Anti-Social Behaviour/Domestic Abuse – our key area of focus and numbers (for new reported ASB and DA) have increased for the 3rd week in a row albeit not as high as w/c 13th April which is so far the highest total since current lockdown practices commenced. Noise and DA the main areas.

Housing Management Contd.

- **Lettings** – with the relaxation in movement in the property market we are now doing virtual lettings after an initial ban on house moves.
- The number of ‘virtual lettings is now getting to near normal levels of 30-35 per week.
- Working with Registered Providers to ensure maximum availability of accommodation.

Repairs and Maintenance

- Repairs and Maintenance Service continues to prioritise emergency and urgent repairs including 1/2hr, 1,3, and 7 day repairs including statutory gas safety inspections.
- In consultation with contractors - Looking to open up Routine repairs (30 days) new and backlog, with adjusted target completion timescales.
- We have asked our contractors to contact each tenant individually to confirm a suitable appointment times. Tenants Choice
- Typically the jobs being released will be external works in the main, such as fencing, roofing, guttering, slabbing etc.
- The feedback from contractors and customers has been positive and inline with the Government letter to social housing tenants we are working with the contractors over the next week or two on how to resume Business As Usual.

Some other key areas – Early Prison release

- After some initial fears of large numbers accessing Birmingham Exempt accommodation we established a task and finish group met and established also key contacts within Probation service and CRC.
- Information sharing arrangements are now in place with partners.
- Letter sent to Ministry of Justice highlighting issues in Birmingham with exempt accommodation provision and the need to mitigate any issues with early release.
- The numbers are very low compared with what was originally anticipated with only 10 across the west midlands region to date – all to existing addresses. Non known in Birmingham.

Questions?