

BRIEFINGNOTE

Covid-19 – Guidance/Best Practice Document (HMO Sector)

We hope you have been making plans and adjustments on how you will be operating and managing your student rented accommodation. As we begin the processes and preparation for the start of the academic year we want to share some best practice approaches during this transitional period. We appreciate guidelines provided by the government are changing and evolving on a regular basis. We will continue to keep you updated with relevant adjustments released from government as and when they occur.

We are aware there is some anxiety amongst new and returning students about the prospect of leaving the relatively safe environment of their family homes and coming to a new city. Early communication with your new tenants and providing an assurance on how you have adjusted your procedures in the light of Covid-19 will be key to minimising risk and providing a positive message that their safety is your key concern.

Landlords and agents should give due consideration to the following:

- Depending on the size of your portfolio this will take some significant planning and preparation taking into consideration social distancing and keeping your tenants and staff safe.
- Ask your tenants to inform you if they are categorised as vulnerable to allow you to plan how you will deal with their tenancy.
- One of the most important aspect both tenants and parents will be focusing on will be how the property is handed over with particular emphasis on the assurance that the dwelling has been cleaned thoroughly and the previous occupants belongings removed.
- Tenants should be encouraged not to move to the property too early. There may be some minimal delays in the commencement of some learning activities and many of the traditional social events will not be taking place. Where a landlord is in a position to do so, in order for this request to be attractive, it may assist in offering incentives such as increasing any period of reduced rent.
- Pre-arrival information will be important laying out in a clear and transparent way how you want tenants to arrive. We would recommend pre-booked time slots

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wherever possible to avoid large groups of people congregating in one area. Try and avoid multiple students with their parents moving in and around the accommodation at once (LSH has advised students to only bring one other person with them).

- Local residents may be anxious about hundreds of students moving back in to their community. How the move in process is managed could determine community relations for the rest of the year. Impress upon your tenants the importance of recognising their new neighbours concerns particularly if they are elderly or in one of the vulnerable categories.
- Arrangement for key collection should be co-ordinated effectively and where a household is forming then one representative from the household should, where practical, collect the keys for that dwelling.
- If your tenants are returning from another country, currently, they will be required to enter quarantine. This may involve them having to travel to your property immediately from the airport and therefore it may be outside of normal working hours when they arrive. Attempt to discover which of your tenants may be required to enter quarantine and assure them you have capacity to deal with their circumstances. Depending on the arrangements in their property they may require additional support for the first 14 days of their tenancy. Provide them with information on local shops and grocery ordering services.
- Tenants information pack – this should now be updated to incorporate how things have changed during the pandemic and what support is available to your tenants. This is an opportunity to provide an overview of the steps and precautions you will be putting in place for repairs and any other issues, which may arise in the property giving your tenants the confidence that appropriate precautions will be followed.
- The tenants in each property will form a '**household**'. This definition is key to students being able to follow government guidelines correctly. Please emphasise this in all of your communications with tenants.
- If you haven't captured information in your tenancy regarding social gatherings and parties now would be a good time to point out the current restrictions and consideration for the community they are moving into. The government guidelines allow people to move once into a new household. Your tenants moving into their

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new house/flat/cluster flat now become one 'household' and are required to follow the current government guidelines with regards to the number of people from one household meeting.

- Advise on the nature of any access that may be required to the property during the tenancy (maintenance, safety inspections etc). Explain that some responses may take longer than usual but re-assure that you will always have their safety as your key concern.
- Many students work or receive financial support from family to subsidise their rent payments. Work suitable for students is likely to be in shorter supply this year and many families have been negatively impacted financially by the Pandemic. Encourage your tenants to discuss any issues paying rent in accordance with the payment schedule. Consider flexible terms for rent payments that may be more in accordance with your tenants ability to pay. Try to avoid precipitate and excessive action in relation to debt recovery depending on personal circumstances.

Thank you for your continued effort, response and support in the current circumstances.