

# Coronavirus (COVID-19): Information and guidance for landlords

Westminster City Council appreciates that the pandemic presents a challenging situation for landlords in terms of inspections and repairs, the ability to comply with certain obligations as well as the associated financial difficulties faced by landlords and tenants. We are following the government advice that local authorities should take a pragmatic, risk-based approach to enforcement.

The Government has updated its [guidance](#) to landlords and tenants with information concerning

- Rent, mortgage payments and possession proceedings
- Court action on housing possession cases during the coronavirus outbreak
- Property access and health and safety obligations

## Do landlords still have to carry out repairs?

Landlords obligations have not changed as tenants have the right to a decent, warm and safe place to live. The government has recently updated its guidance to indicate that routine inspections, repairs and maintenance can now resume.

Landlords or their agents should be accessible to tenants by telephone or email and Environmental Health Officers will now investigate all matters that are brought to their attention, that could pose a risk to tenant's health and safety.

Landlords, their representatives and tradespeople are expected to follow [advice on social distancing](#).

The government has also produced [guidance on working safety in people's homes](#).

## How can I make sure the contractors I use are following official government guidance?

Each company offering services will have to carry out its' own risk assessment in terms of protecting the health and safety of their employees and any members of the public.

You should ask to see the risk assessment when you choose a contractor. It is important the risk assessment is up to date with information about how the contractor will protect their employees and residents and help reduce the spread of coronavirus.

## Legal obligations to provide gas and electrical safety inspections

Landlords should make every effort to abide by existing gas safety regulations and electrical safety regulations which came into force on 1 July 2020. There are provisions in both regulations to account for situations in which a landlord cannot do this and they must demonstrate they have taken all reasonable steps to comply with the law.

The Health and Safety Executive have produced [guidance](#) for landlords and agents on gas safety requirements which will be updated regularly.

## Do I still need to apply for an HMO licence?

It is important to still apply for new licences and renewals of existing licences as it remains a criminal offence not to and could lead to an unlimited fine upon conviction or the issuing of a civil penalty notice of up to £30,000. In addition, tenants can apply for a rent repayment order (RRO).

Applications continue to be processed as normal and we are starting to resume routine licensing inspections at HMO's. In certain situations, it may be necessary to inspect the property later, for example if a number of people are self-isolating.

## Maintaining communal areas

Inspectors or maintenance workers can now visit blocks of flats and multi-occupied properties for all routing work such as inspecting and testing fire alarm and emergency lighting systems.

If landlords are responsible for cleaning the shared areas of HMO's such as kitchens and bathrooms, then these should continue to be cleaned whilst following the governments [advice on social distancing](#). Whilst the provision of shared kitchen and dining facilities may be unavoidable in many situations, both landlords and tenants should take all practical steps to facilitate social distancing when using such facilities.

In some cases, tenants may not feel comfortable with cleaners coming into the property. In such cases you should speak to all the residents to see if you can agree on alternative arrangements, at the same time ensuring that cleaning does take place in accordance with government and NHS guidance.

Increased occupation and levels of household waste should also be anticipated. Steps should be taken to ensure that all common parts and means of escape are kept free from obstruction. It is a legal requirement to ensure that there is adequate provision of waste disposal facilities in multiple occupancy properties.

## **Protection from eviction and rent payments**

The government introduced emergency legislation to suspend new evictions from social or private rented accommodation during this national emergency. Landlords are unable to take possession proceedings up to 23 August 2020.

The government is encouraging landlords and tenants to work together to resolve disputes without the need for court action, including agreeing repayment plans where a tenant is unable to fully meet their rent.

It is important to remember that landlords must continue to meet their statutory repair obligations where rent arrears exist.

## **Can I conduct property inspections and viewings?**

Landlords and letting agents should not conduct viewings in properties where tenants are symptomatic or self-isolating.

From the 1 August 2020, the government has updated its guidance on those shielding due to being clinically vulnerable. Routine viewings and inspections can therefore resume from this date providing it is safe to do so and that social distancing and hygiene measures can be maintained. It will be necessary to maintain good communication and plan ahead to ensure that guidance [working safety in people's homes](#) is adhered to.

Information for landlords

[www.westminster.gov.uk/landlords](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/landlords)

HMO licensing

<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/houses-multiple-occupation>

[Contact us online](#)