

Innovative practice for lettings and transfers in the social housing sector during Covid-19

In March-April 2020 the [Pan-London Housing Reciprocal](#) at Safer London team gathered information from councils and housing associations in London on how they continue to support people at risk of abuse or violence during the pandemic. The document below is a summary of feedback received.

New lettings prioritising domestic abuse

Although activity has significantly reduced, many landlords are able to continue new lettings, prioritising people at risk of domestic abuse and other safeguarding need. Practice examples are detailed below to explain how they make it happen while respecting social distancing guidelines and keeping staff safe.

We encourage all landlords to include cross-borough reciprocal requests in their emergency response to ensure that tenants at risk of violence in their borough are not trapped in an unsafe home during the lockdown.

Virtual Viewings

A number of landlords have started doing virtual viewings, with one landlord reporting 14 successful viewings already done this way in a week. This can be done as a video recording, with a member of staff (for instance the void surveyor) completing a video of the property once ready to let. It can also be done as a live tour using a video media such as Whatsapp. Other landlords provide a property portfolio with detailed pictures and measurements of the property that can be emailed to applicants.

Some landlords ask applicants to sign disclaimer or confirm in writing that they were accepting the property without seeing it in real life. If using virtual viewings, it is recommended to inform applicants (and Local Authorities if you are taking nominations) as soon as possible what your process is.

Online Sign-Ups

Many landlords are now doing paperwork and tenancy sign-ups remotely. This can be done by discussing the terms of the tenancy over the phone, and using online tools such as DocuSign to enable tenants to sign their tenancy agreement electronically.

Key Safes

Landlords informed us that they are using key safes for new tenants to collect keys by themselves, or for referring agencies to collect them. Some landlords also agreed to send keys by post, for instance for tenants leaving a property. If posting keys to a new tenant, it needs to be agreed beforehand to ensure there is no risk of perpetrators intercepting them.

Protocol for face-to-face interaction

Housing providers who are still doing face-to-face meetings or viewings should have a specific protocol or process to ensure social distancing guidelines are respected. For instance having only one applicant viewing at a time, with the viewing officer waiting outside the property while the applicant views inside. For face-to-face meetings, large meeting spaces need to be provided to respect social distancing of 2 meters. Where

available PPE should be provided to staff still meeting clients. It is advised to use remote alternatives to face-to-face contact for staff or clients who need to self-isolate due to being vulnerable, having symptoms or living with someone who has symptoms.

Removals and set up

Tenants might experience difficulties organising removals and setting up things like flooring in their new property. Some landlords have put additional support in place to assist new tenants with floorings, white goods or removals if they cannot access this directly from stores. Using your own contractors and offering this service can make a difference to someone at risk of violence being able to accept a property and move away from risk.

Welfare checks and spotting signs of domestic abuse

It is vital for Housing Teams to keep in regular contact with tenants. Housing providers have a unique access into people's homes and are ideally placed to spot the signs of domestic abuse and help people whilst out delivering food parcels, carrying out routine welfare checks and carrying out essential repairs during lockdown. DAHA has produced a [practical guide for housing staff](#) with advice and scripts on how to safely check up on tenants during the lockdown.

Raising awareness

It is extremely important for landlords to relay the [Government campaign](#) raising awareness about domestic abuse and giving information on how to access support. This can be done by including these key numbers on your website, social media or notice boards:

- National Domestic Abuse Helpline (24/7 free advice) 0808 2000 247
- [Women's Aid chat](#) and [Refuge instant messaging](#)
- Galop LGBT+ DA Helpline 0800 999 5428
- Silent help from the police: if you need help but unable to speak because of domestic abuse ring 999 when they answer press 55

This was produced by:



Safer London coordinates the [Pan-London Housing Reciprocal](#), a collaboration of over 80 social landlords supporting tenants at risk of abuse or violence in London to move to a safe place and keep their social tenancy.