

Repairs and maintenance services

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Chartered
Institute of
Housing

Following the UK Government's announcement of a 'new national lockdown', landlords can take steps to carry out repairs and maintenance and safety inspections, provided these are undertaken in line with [public health advice](#) and the relevant coronavirus (COVID-19) [legislation](#), and the wishes of the customer.

The current restrictions may mean it is still difficult to carry out routine or essential repairs and maintenance, for example if a person is still 'shielding' or 'isolating' due to showing COVID19 symptoms or testing positive. Landlords should be aware that some tenants may just generally want to exercise caution and this should be respected granted that any repair does not pose threat to endanger life or harm a person. Clinically extremely vulnerable people can permit landlords and contractors to carry out routine repairs and inspections, providing that the latest guidance on [staying alert and social distancing](#) is followed.

Rules on local restrictions vary in [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).

However, Government have stated that it expects landlords to make every effort to meet their responsibilities where possible.

A pragmatic approach to enforcement from local authorities is recommended by Government. This should mean that tenants who are living with serious hazards that a landlord has failed to remedy can still be assured of local authority support, but that landlords should also know they should not be unfairly penalised where COVID-19 restrictions may have prevented them from meeting some routine obligations.

Under the current circumstances, when offering a repairs service it is important for landlords to assess how best customers are communicated with, how triage is used in response to a

reported emergency repair where a person may have COVID19 symptoms, and how social distancing is practiced in a consistent and effective way to protect both staff and customers.

Repairs and maintenance engineers working in the properties of customers who are self-isolating or vulnerable should follow the latest advice from the UK Government or devolved administration in your area.

The latest guidance on **working safely during the pandemic** can be found [here](#).

The Scottish Government has [advised social landlords](#) to use best efforts to deliver the repairs service where possible and has highlighted [guidance](#) for tradespeople working in other people's homes. However, if you are unable to do so you should record this fact and that this is related to the COVID19. You should consider retrying as soon as is possible and appropriate, having full regard for advice on self-isolation, hygiene and distancing and make sure that you reflect the level of such instances in your performance reporting. You will want to maintain good communication with tenants affected so they are clear on what action you are taking and the timescales for this.

Failures to deliver any services due to COVID19, such as a customer that refuses entry, should be

Guidance for:

- England
- Wales
- Scotland
- Northern Ireland

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recorded and any significant instances should be reported to the [Scottish Housing Regulator](#).

Welsh government have recommended that repairs may go ahead as long as both staff and customers follow the Welsh government's [guide on staying safe and social distancing](#).

[Welsh government](#) have stated that you must establish whether a person is self-isolating if you are arranging to visit a home for repairs and maintenance duties. If a person is self-isolating, you should contact the customer either by phone, email or through a family member or friend and determine whether this is an emergency repair or not. It is recommended that no work should be carried out in any household which is self-isolating unless it is to repair a fault which poses a direct risk to people's safety, for example emergency plumbing. In these cases, [Public Health Wales](#) can provide advice to tradespeople and households. No work should be carried out by a tradesperson who has coronavirus symptoms, however mild.

We have collated the following things for you to consider when carrying out repairs and maintenance duties:

1. Routine repairs - keeping yourself and customers safe.

- Ask the customer whether they are displaying symptoms of COVID19 and then make an informed decision as to whether the repair is an emergency or can wait for now, until the customer has fully recovered.
- Make an informed decision as to which engineer is best placed to attend a property that is showing symptoms of COVID19; if an engineer is [classed as vulnerable or high-risk](#) through medical conditions, for example diabetes, they should not be attending this particular property.
- Conduct dynamic risk assessments.
- Wear personal protective equipment.
- Wash/sanitise your hands upon entering and leaving a property.

2. Emergency repairs:

- Clearly defining what constitutes an emergency during the pandemic should help save time and resources.
- Encourage the use of video and/or photographs of the reported repair, to assess and confirm the severity without the need to visit the property for a pre-visit.
- Ask the customer to confirm whether they are self-isolating due to showing symptoms of Covid-19 and get this in writing for documentation.
- If a customer is self-isolating and showing symptoms and does not want to allow you access to their home due to fear of contact, you could ask them to open their property to you and ask them to stay in another room or the garden if they have one; you may want to reinforce the message that this is a repair that poses significant health risks if not carried out. You may also wish to inform them of your own safety measures such as personal protective equipment (PPE) dust sheets and cleaning products, for extra reassurance.
- If a customer is not self-isolating but requires an emergency repair, it may be helpful to advise the customer that you will be wearing PPE and would appreciate if they were able to remain in a separate room while you access the property. Reassure the customer that this is a precautionary measure and is in line with the most recent Government guidelines; this could help ease anxiety.
- Continue to review your tenant communication systems and record what has been done and any responses from tenants.

3. Legal and regulatory responsibilities

- Organisations are expected to meet all applicable statutory requirements that provide for the health and safety of the occupants in their homes.
- In England, [The Regulator for Social Housing has issued an updated statement](#) reminding providers that they are expected to communicate in a timely manner with the regulator on material issues that relate to non-compliance or potential non-compliance within the regulatory standards.
- The Regulator has reported that despite increased infection rates and the introduction of tiered lockdowns in parts of England, providers' responses showed that the delivery of services remained stable in October. The number of providers who had completed all or most gas safety, fire compliance, asbestos, electrical, legionella and lift checks was similar to the previous two months.
- Where providers believe tenant safety is threatened or viability is under strain, they should contact the RSH immediately, and specifically they will expect providers to notify them when:
 - o either as a result of access issues, or a shortage of staff, you are unable to deliver a minimum service to your tenants. For example, if you are unable to complete emergency repairs or statutory health and safety requirements, and a material backlog of outstanding repairs and safety checks are building up;
 - o a shortage of staff means that safe levels of staffing cannot be maintained in care, supported or vulnerable people's accommodation; or
 - o danger to tenants is identified and cannot be rectified within reasonable timescales.

- We want to reiterate that it is very **important to closely monitor and clearly record** any issues that you are facing in carrying out essential services as a result of COVID19 which you can then report to the regulator.
- In the event you are completely unable to gain access to a property due to self-isolating concerns, it is advised that you document and record all of the reasonable steps that you made in an attempt to carry out the work which will comply with law. Be sure to document:
 1. All details of communication with the customer including dates, times, method of communication, and outcome.
 2. Details of any attempt to gain access and reasons for refusals.
 3. Plans in place to re-visit this property.
 4. Communicated with elected members/ governing Boards.

We will be monitoring the situation in each nation as it develops and offering advice on what we continue to learn. It is helpful for us to understand the measures that your organisation may be putting in place, so please get in touch via our email address: policy.practice@cih.org