

## Housing Conditions in an Isolated Climate

Most of us are fortunate enough not to have lived through a pandemic like COVID-19 before. We are not used to empty shelves or streets. Nor spending all our time at home. The instruction to stay at home brings into sharp focus those living in social housing, in homes which are in sub-standard condition, and/or requiring repairs and maintenance which vulnerable households have been waiting, sometimes for years, for their social housing or local authority landlord to provide.

Inevitably, there will be further delay and a slow down as the national effort is diverted to closing or re-directing operational resources. Whilst accepting that sensible procedures must be in place to protect public health and safety, we should continue to think about what can still be done by social housing providers, local authorities or private landlords to address urgent or ongoing disrepair which is blighting a home.

As practitioners, whether acting for landlords or tenants, we must consider how we can best progress issues to achieve the aims of the housing conditions protocol, notably “the speedy and appropriate carrying out of any remedial works which are the landlord’s responsibility”.

So, whether acting for landlords or tenants, parties ought to be in conversation now, reconciling issues about what repairs can and cannot be done in the current climate. And tenants should still be encouraged to report repair issues directly to their landlord.

The current guidance (as of 26 March, but subject to change at any moment) is that:

Work carried out in homes, for example by tradespeople carrying out repairs and maintenance, can continue, provided that the tradesperson is well and has no symptoms and keeps at least two metres from any household occupants.

No work should be carried out in any household which is isolating or where an individual is being shielded, unless it is to remedy a direct risk to

the safety of the household, such as emergency plumbing or repairs, and where the tradesperson is willing to do so.

No work should be carried out by a tradesperson who has coronavirus symptoms, however mild. This means that emergency repairs will be prioritised, and routine or non-urgent repairs may not be dealt with for the next few months.

For now, it is worth reiterating that:

1. Works should not be cancelled indefinitely – plans can be put in place now for getting the necessary repairs done once restrictions are lifted.
2. Emergency repairs, for example to deal with loss of heating or hot water, leaks, flooding, damage to electrics or a security threat, should still be carried out if safe to do so.
3. Repairs to the exterior of a property may still be done, if tradespeople are available and well enough to do so, with no symptoms.
4. Other repairs may also be carried out in properties where no one is self-isolating or shielding, if it is possible to keep a two-metre distance from residents, and if tradespersons are available and well enough to do so, with no symptoms.
5. Tenants should continue to report problems in their homes to their landlord, even if it takes a while for these to be fixed.

If you or someone you know is suffering from poor housing conditions; or if your landlord has not kept your home in a good state of repair over a long period of time, you may have a legal claim against them. Please contact our team who may be able to help.



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