

Factsheet

Social renting: Moving home during the COVID-19 outbreak

HOMES FIRST

Lewes and Eastbourne
Councils
working together for you

This leaflet summarises the latest government advice on moving home during the COVID-19 outbreak for those who rent in the social housing sector.

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Social landlords

The allocation of social housing by local housing authorities is governed by [Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996](#) and authorities must have regard to statutory guidance. Registered providers of social housing should refer to the [relevant regulatory standards](#) set out by the Regulator of Social Housing.

Landlords need to consider how to carry out their activities in line with the government's advice on [social distancing in the workplace](#). Practices should also be altered in line with this wider guidance, including:

- Property inspections for vacating tenants;
- Collecting returned keys;
- Conducting viewings;
- Conducting tenancy sign-ups;
- Preparing homes to be re-let.

Some applicants and tenants may be anxious about moving at this time. It is important that social landlords ensure applicants and tenants are not put under undue pressure to move, if they are not ready or able to do so.

It is important that social landlords discuss with applicants and tenants their state of health, level of vulnerability and their arrangements for moving (including any assistance required) before proceeding with the move.

Landlords should avoid moving tenants who are showing symptoms of coronavirus or self-isolating. There may be exceptions to this (e.g. safety reasons) and in these scenarios landlords should speak to the local Public Health team about appropriate infection control measures before taking any action.

Landlords should avoid moving residents who are shielding because they have been notified they are in the clinically extremely vulnerable group. If a home move is required, the landlord should speak to the local Public Health team for advice on appropriate measures to protect the resident.

Government advice on home moving

The government has amended the coronavirus (COVID-19) regulations. As a result of this, people who wish to move home can now do so. This guidance provides important public health information to ensure that moving home and key activities around this, such as viewing property, can happen safely.

One of the simplest steps you can take when moving home is to wash your hands frequently, and wherever possible stay at least 2 metres apart from people who are not members of your household.

Those involved in the process of finding and moving into a new home will have to adapt to ensure that the risk of spread of COVID-19 is reduced as far as possible. This will include doing more of the process online, such as virtual initial viewings; vacating your current property whilst other people are shown around; and ensuring your property is thoroughly cleaned before someone else moves in.

The government are encouraging all parties involved to be as flexible as possible over this period and to be prepared to delay moves, for example if someone becomes ill with coronavirus during the moving process or has to self-isolate.

Vulnerable people or those shielding

People who are shielding or otherwise vulnerable may have pressing needs to move home. However, this should be balanced with the increased risks presented by coronavirus.

Those who are shielding or otherwise clinically vulnerable should ensure they are aware of the medical advice, including on staying at home and avoiding unnecessary contacts over this period, if at all possible.

Clinically vulnerable and shielded individuals (i.e. those who have received a letter advising they are in the clinically extremely vulnerable group) will need to carefully consider their personal situation and the circumstances of their own move, and may wish to seek medical advice before deciding whether to commit to or go ahead with a move. Some moves are likely to be lower risk - for instance if the home is empty, all travel can take place in their own transport and they can avoid contact with others.

Everyone in these categories who intends to move should make clear their status to all of the professionals involved in the process. They may be able to implement additional precautionary measures to further protect you.

Self-isolating or having tested positive for coronavirus

Moving home is not appropriate whilst you pose a direct risk of transmitting coronavirus. People who have coronavirus or are self-isolating with their family members should not leave their home to either move home, or undertake property viewings.

If you are contractually committed to move home, you should delay your move until all members of your household have come to the end of their self-isolation period.

Should a move be essential for people in this category, for instance due to an urgent health and safety risk, please contact Public Health England/local public health teams for advice.

Public Health England South East can be contacted on Tel: 0344 225 3861.

If a move is scheduled whilst measures to fight coronavirus apply

People are free to move home. However, the process of finding and moving into a new home is likely to be different, as those involved in the process will need to adapt practices and procedures to ensure that the risk of spread of coronavirus is reduced as far as possible.

Initial viewings should be done virtually wherever this is possible.

All physical viewings should be limited to members of the same household and open house viewings should not take place.

When physically viewing properties, where possible, you should avoid touching surfaces, wash your hands regularly, and bring your own hand sanitiser. The number of people on a viewing should be minimised to those from your household that absolutely have to be there. If you need to be accompanied by small children, you should try to keep them from touching surfaces and ensure they wash their hands regularly.

If people are being shown around your current home, you should open all internal doors and ensure surfaces, such as door handles, are [cleaned](#) after each viewing with standard household cleaning products.

If your home is being viewed, it is recommended that you vacate your property whilst viewings are taking place in order to minimise your contact with those not in your household.

Anyone involved in any aspect of the home moving process should practice social distancing in line with public health advice.

When moving between properties, you and those in your household should try to do as much of the packing yourself as you can. Where this is not possible, you should speak to removal firms in advance. There is further advice about this below.

If you are particularly worried about the risk of infection, then speak to the professionals involved or removers as they may be able to put in place extra measures.

Everyone involved in the moving process must follow [social distancing](#) to minimise the spread of the virus.

Preparing to move home

You can start to look for properties you want to move into. If any member of the household being viewed is showing symptoms or is self-isolating then you should not physically visit the property.

To help prevent the spread of infection, we encourage people to do the majority of their property searching online; for example only physically viewing those properties which you believe you are most likely to want to move into.

Viewings

People should use virtual viewings before visiting properties in person where possible, in order to minimise public health risks. If any member of either the household being viewed, or the household undertaking a viewing is showing symptoms of coronavirus or is self-isolating, then a physical viewing should be delayed. All viewings should take place by appointment and only involve members of a single household.

We encourage people to do their property searching online wherever possible.

Virtual viewings will help reduce the number of properties people need to visit before finding their future home.

If agents are expected to accompany clients on a viewing, they must follow social distancing rules wherever possible. Where viewings are unaccompanied, agents should make sure viewers and homeowners understand how they should conduct themselves.

Agreeing to move

Once you have agreed to move home by signing a tenancy agreement, you have entered into a legal agreement to move. We encourage all parties to be as flexible as

possible over this period and to be prepared to delay moves if needed, for example if someone becomes ill with coronavirus during the moving process or has to self-isolate. You should not expect to move into any home where people are ill or self-isolating.

If you require independent legal advice regarding any agreement you have entered in to, you can get advice of this kind from Brighton Housing Trust (BHT). To contact them, call:

BHT Brighton Advice: 01273 234737; or

BHT Eastbourne Advice: 01323 642615.

Moving your belongings

Removal firms are able to operate, although they may need to adjust usual procedures in order to ensure moves happen as safely as possible.

We encourage you to contact removal firms as early as possible in advance of your move.

You and your household should also try and do as much of the packing yourself as possible. However, where this is not possible, you should speak to your removal firms in advance.

Where possible, you should [clean](#) your belongings, with standard domestic cleaning products before they are handled by others, including removal firms.

Whilst the removers are in your home, you should ensure any internal doors are open and seek to minimise your contact with the crew, maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres where possible.

All parties should wash their hands and avoid touching surfaces where possible to reduce the risk of transmitting the coronavirus.

You should not provide refreshments but you should ensure they have access to hand washing facilities, using separate towels or paper towels if possible, which should be washed or disposed of safely afterwards.

Removals firms

Removal firms are able to operate and should follow the latest government guidance on [safer working](#). Where moves are carried out, [social distancing](#) should be followed.

Companies should ensure employees understand how to operate safely and communicate this to customers.

Removers should contact the household in advance to check that no member of the household is showing symptoms of coronavirus or self-isolating. If they are, the home move should be delayed.

No work should be carried out by a person who has coronavirus symptoms, however mild.

Removers should wash their hands on entering the property using separate towels of paper towels which need to be washed or disposed of safely after use.

Removers should seek to minimise contact with homeowners and remain 2 metres apart from householders at all times.

Removers should implement a buddy system and ensure that the same people work together when moving bulky items and furniture.

Removers should bring their own refreshments but you should ensure they have access to hand washing facilities, using separate towels or paper towels if possible, which should be washed or disposed of safely afterwards.

Right to Buy

The Right to Buy is governed by [Part 5 of the Housing Act 1985](#) which sets out the right of eligible social tenants to purchase the home they currently rent and occupy; and the timescales for doing this.

Tenants have the right to purchase their home within the provisions of the legislation. The government recognises that the measures put in place to combat coronavirus are likely to make it difficult for councils to process Right to Buy applications within the statutory timescales.

Landlords will consider how best they can manage the application process to ensure tenants are able to take up their Right to Buy within a reasonable timescale, while acting in accordance with government guidelines on [social distancing](#).

This could include options around:

- Valuations of properties;
- Fraud prevention measures;
- The issuing of documentation;
- Using the discretion provided to them within the legislation.