

Date: July 2020
Our Ref: COVID update
Contact: Fiona Williamson
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To all tenants and leaseholders

Dear Resident(s)

Re: Housing Services and the Coronavirus Pandemic – Service Update

I hope that you are all staying safe and well during this difficult time and I wanted to write to provide some information of how the housing service are dealing with some changes to the service, in the current Coronavirus pandemic.

You may be aware that the Government has a plan and is keen to start reopening businesses and services this month and we are keen to play our part. We are currently considering how we can re-open our services while maintaining the health and well-being of our tenants, staff and contractors.

At present most of our staff are working from home but carrying out essential visits and inspections, as required, while maintaining social distancing and safe systems of working.

This letter contains an update on Housing Services and some useful links and contacts, so that you can access the service or support that you may require during this pandemic.

Income

We know that this is a worrying time and we understand that many of you will be affected financially by the lockdown measures the Government has put in place. We're committed to ensuring that no one is evicted from their home as a direct result of coronavirus (COVID-19) and we are here to work with you and support you through this difficult time.



All we ask is that you keep in contact with us by phone or email and let us know of any changes in your circumstances.

We've put together some information to answer some of the most frequently asked questions that tenants have been asking about paying their rent during the current restrictions and these can be found at www.dacorum.gov.uk/covid-19-rent-advice

If you would like to speak to us about your rent account or need further advice and support, including information on claiming benefits, then you can email housing.income@dacorum.gov.uk or call 01442 228000 and either ask for your Housing Officer by name or just say "Housing Income".

Repairs and Maintenance

Initially our contractors have been restricting repairs to deal with essential work only, which includes our legal duties for gas servicing and other cyclical maintenance required for health and safety. We would like to thank you for your understanding and co-operation with this approach and your consideration for the safety of operatives who have been working.

As restrictions have been lifted and the test, track and trace programme established, we are working with our contractors to agree an ongoing phased return to planned works which had been started on site, to ensure social distancing and safe systems of work are met. Any new planned works programmes are currently being reviewed to establish what realistically can be undertaken this financial year to ensure your continued safety. If you are to be effected by one of these proposed planned work programmes you will be contacted in due course with more detail.

There is a backlog of general repairs requests, which are being prioritised to allow some routine repairs to begin over the forthcoming months, however there maybe a reduction on non-essential intrusive repairs within your home to help ensure your safety. It is essential we adhere to social distancing and current government advice. Over the coming months you will see our maintenance contractors start to become more active around the borough while carrying out works safely both for themselves and our residents.

Our estate wardens have been undertaking additional patrols on our estates and have been prioritising health and safety checks, monitoring clear landings and clearing away higher than usual incidences of fly-tipping.

We are working closely with social services to support our tenants who are awaiting adaptations to their homes and these are being progressed on a priority basis, with due consideration for the safety of residents.

Cleaning service – estate management

Initially our cleaning contractors and staff have been undertaking essential cleaning and disinfection operations, with a stronger and more robust emphasis on touch point areas. This has been undertaken to assist and help with your continued safety. Again we would

like to thank you for your understanding and co-operation with this approach and your consideration for the safety of operatives and staff who have been working.

We are currently developing a programme and system of work to allow the cleaning service to resume to a somewhat normal service, whilst adhering to social distancing and current government guidelines.

Supported Housing

Our Supported Housing Officers will continue to contact tenants living in our sheltered homes and offer advice and support to those who need it. We have increased phone calls to those who have requested more regular contact and will communicate directly with you when we are confident that we can safely start home visits or open communal lounges.

Anti-Social Behaviour

If you are experiencing anti-social behaviour during this time, please be assured that our dedicated team is here to support you with this. If you would like to report an incident or on-going nuisance behaviour then please search for 'anti-social behaviour' on our website for advice and where you will also find our on-line reporting tool.

Allocations and Mutual Exchanges

Due to the limited number of properties becoming available and initial restrictions on house moves and requirements for safe working practices, we had to suspend our bidding, transfer and mutual exchange processes. In line with government recommendation and guidance, available properties are now being advertised weekly.

We have also began facilitating a number of mutual exchanges where there is a genuine need to resolve a housing need, such as overcrowding or a defined medical, social or welfare need. For more information on this, please visit

<http://www.dacorum.gov.uk/home/housing/current-tenant/moving/mutual-exchange>

We have been working with local registered providers and are aware that there will be a number of new build properties coming on line later this summer across their stock and the council's. If you are looking to transfer, please check the website and ensure your rent and council tax payments are all up to date. If you wish to see what properties are becoming available please visit www.movingwithdacorum.gov.uk, please note you will not be able to bid unless your application is up to date and active.

New Build

We have a number of construction sites where we are building new Council homes. These are open and construction activities are progressing well. Our Contractors are following the latest guidance on working safely during coronavirus to ensure they are protecting their workforce and minimising the risk of spread of infection. To see our latest projects please visit www.dacorum.gov.uk/home/housing/new-council-homes

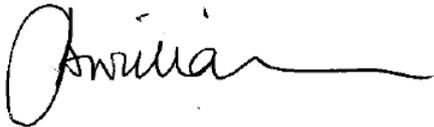
The wearing of personnel protective equipment

Our priority going forward is to continue to maintain a safe system of working for our tenants, as well as staff and contractors, so there will be some changes to how we provide services and some staff may wish to wear masks or face coverings, which is for everyone's safety. Please be aware it is not mandatory to wear a face masks whilst working in properties. It is contractor, operative or staff individual choice, however social distancing must be maintained at all times and you may prefer to be in another room or outside, weather permitting.

Your patience in helping us deal with these different ways of working and co-operation in maintaining social distance is much appreciated.

I do hope you have found this information useful. If you have any questions or concerns please contact us using the contact information contained in this letter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fiona Williamson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Fiona Williamson
Assistant Director Housing

Data Protection Statement
Dacorum Borough Council may share your information: within the council, with law enforcement agencies, councils and community organisations. This is done to detect/prevent crime, to enable delivery of your services and/or meet our legal obligations. Full details of how we process, use and store your information can be found at www.dacorum.gov.uk/opendata