

Supported housing response to coronavirus

Briefing note

April 2020

Summary

Supported housing providers are on the front line of the coronavirus crisis. They are providing vital services and putting in place exceptional measures to ensure vulnerable residents get the support they need at this challenging time. These range from moving office-based staff into crucial frontline roles to calling older and vulnerable residents and financially supporting local charities and community groups.

Supported and specialist housing associations are facing particular challenges during the crisis. These include difficulties accessing personal protective equipment (PPE) for frontline care and support workers to covering the cost of backfilling crucial roles, and supporting people with complex needs to access and sustain accommodation where they can safely self-isolate.

This briefing gives examples of the vital work supported housing providers are doing to respond to the coronavirus emergency and summarises the key challenges they are facing in doing so.

What is supported housing?

Supported housing provides vital support services for some of the most vulnerable people in society, including older and disabled people, people experiencing homelessness, people suffering from mental health or substance abuse issues, or people fleeing domestic violence. Housing-related support can be delivered in a residential setting in sheltered or extra care housing, homeless hostels, mental health step-down units or domestic violence refuges, or it can be delivered as floating support in the community.

Support services can help people settle into a new home, maintain their tenancies, make sure their property is safe and secure, learn life skills like cooking or budgeting, and deal with third parties such as landlords, jobcentre staff, or probation officers. They are often delivered by housing associations, frequently in partnership with voluntary and community sector organisations.

How are supported housing providers responding to the challenge of coronavirus?

Supported housing providers are on the frontline of the coronavirus crisis, working with vulnerable people to ensure that they have safe and secure accommodation for the duration of the outbreak and to keep vital care and support services running. Supported housing can help the government meet its commitment to house all rough sleepers for the duration of the crisis, ensure that some of the most vulnerable people in society can safely self-isolate, and facilitate faster hospital discharge, freeing up vital beds for other coronavirus patients.

Housing associations and managing agents are putting exceptional measures in place to ensure that residents are properly supported at this challenging time. From moving asset management staff into crucial frontline roles, where appropriate and safe to do so, to linking residents in with local volunteer networks, to supporting local charities and community organisations, the supported housing sector is stepping up to deal with the current crisis. The case studies below highlight some of the ways that the NHF's supported and specialist housing members are supporting their residents and communities.

Case study: Riverside managing staff shortages

Riverside are a large housing association and care and support provider, managing almost 56,000 homes across England and Scotland. In response to the current coronavirus outbreak, Riverside have created a buddying system in their retirement living schemes for Riverside volunteers to ring residents for a social interaction and a chat. Because increasing numbers of staff in their care and support division are absent through illness or self-isolating, Riverside are also redeploying staff from their asset management teams to help with essential tasks for their more vulnerable tenants, such as deliveries and health and safety walkabouts. They have an assessment process in place to ensure they deploy the right people, with the skills to work with more vulnerable residents.

Case study: Tyne Housing Association helping residents to self-isolate

Tyne Housing Association are a specialist supported housing provider, providing homes, training and support services to single, homeless and vulnerable people living in the North East. Since the coronavirus outbreak began, their team have been preparing three meals per day through one of their subsidiaries, Ouseburn Farm Café, which has now closed. They deliver these meals every day directly to residents in their emergency accommodation at Byker Bridge House, to help people stay safely in their rooms and reduce communal contact.

Case Study: Stonewater delivering support services remotely

Stonewater manages around 32,000 homes, both general needs properties and supported housing services for groups including young homeless people, disabled people, people with mental health needs, victims of domestic violence and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Since the start of the coronavirus outbreak, Stonewater have been checking in with their supported housing residents daily and working to ensure that all support plans can be delivered remotely, either online or over the phone. With the consent of residents, they are contacting their family members and support networks to make sure people are well connected. Stonewater are also offering to provide equipment and provisions to any residents who are self-isolating, such as a microwave, kettle, food and sanitary products.

Case study: Broadacres supporting older people in rural areas

Broadacres manages over 6,000 homes across North Yorkshire, and provides a range of support services, often in very rural areas with some of the highest proportions of older residents in the country. Broadacres adopted strict social

distancing in their extra care schemes three weeks ago, closing restaurants, communal areas and commercial enterprises and supporting residents to self-isolate with meal deliveries available three times a day. Volunteers from the rest of the organisation have been shopping and collecting prescriptions for residents, where rural distances can make it challenging for friends and family members to step in. The extra care team have been organising remote quizzes to reduce social isolation and loneliness.

Case study: Two Saints working with local authorities to accommodate rough sleepers

Two Saints is a specialist housing association in Hampshire, predominantly working with single homelessness people, although they also work with young people, those with mental health difficulties, former offenders and refugees. Over the last week they have coordinated with many local authorities to move 99 rough sleepers and 44 people previously occupying hostel emergency beds into self-contained accommodation, to minimise the risk of coronavirus transmission and help people to safely self-isolate.

Case study: South Yorkshire Housing Association supporting communication across generations

South Yorkshire Housing Association provides homes and support for people with varying support needs, with over 6,000 homes across South Yorkshire. Their staff team arranged for local school children to write letters of encouragement and reassurance to residents at one of their extra care schemes in Dronfield. Keyworkers and local volunteers have also been delivering home-cooked meals and specially printed magazines to SYHA residents.

How is coronavirus affecting supported housing providers?

This is an especially difficult time for supported and specialist housing associations, who are facing unprecedented challenges. Early consultation with the NHF's supported and specialist members has revealed some key challenges facing the sector as a result of the coronavirus outbreak:

- Increased costs of providing support services, cleaning and staffing, especially the cost of backfilling vital roles with more expensive agency staff.
- Access to PPE for frontline care and support staff, to ensure they are properly protected when working with people who may be carrying coronavirus or especially vulnerable to its effects.
- Homelessness, in particular the extra support that will be needed following the government's commitment to house all rough sleepers during the crisis. We're calling for the £1.6bn of recently announced funding for local authorities to maintain services for vulnerable people to include funding for supported housing, and for an additional £150 million of dedicated funding for hostel providers to ensure that vital services remain open.
- Wider issues, which have specific impacts in a supported housing context, such as fire safety and compliance with regulation.

The NHF is raising these challenges with ministers and officials and calling for the funding and support needed to help housing associations meet them.

We want to hear from members about how these challenges are affecting them, any other challenges they may be facing, and what support and solutions would help them to overcome them.

Please get in contact with Lois Lane, Policy Officer, at lois.lane@housing.org.uk to share views and experiences.