

COVID-19 UPDATE FROM CITIZENS ADVICE BRENT – 1 JULY 2020

Housing update

What you need to know

This week we'll look at tactical advice for those who are currently accommodated by the 'Everyone In' initiative - the government's response to rough sleeping during the coronavirus outbreak looking at clients who're eligible and in priority need for homelessness assistance.

The Everyone In initiative is not part of the local authority's (LA) statutory homelessness provision and just because your client has been provided with accommodation it does not mean that the LA has instigated a homeless application.

If you believe that your client is eligible and in priority need you should liaise with the LA to ensure that a homeless application is now taken if this has not happened already. If your client is having difficulty making a homeless application then there are some tactics that can be used and you should seek specialist advice.

Remember, the updates to the homeless code of guidance mean that:

- those **who are clinically extremely vulnerable should be priority need** - the client's shielding letter should be sufficient to meet this criteria. Where a client has a medical condition that means they fall into the shielding category but do not have written confirmation, the LA should take medical advice to confirm their health needs and diagnosis. If it is confirmed they have an identified condition they should fall into the priority need category.
- Those who have **a history of rough sleeping and who are [over 55 or have a health condition that enables them to get a free flu jab](#)** should also have their priority need assessed in the context of the coronavirus

Careful consideration of how the pandemic poses risks to those who're clinically vulnerable should also be given when assessing priority need

If your client is eligible and in priority need the LA will have an ongoing duty to provide interim accommodation until a homeless decision has been made. This doesn't mean that your client should refuse any accommodation offered outside of the homelessness duty but being owed a

duty does have implications for the type and standard of accommodation that they should be offered.

If your client is offered accommodation you should ensure any offer meets the criteria of a suitable offer in response to a homeless application. If your client is not happy with any decision or thinks an offer of accommodation is not suitable this can be challenged, but we would advise them to accept the offer and ask the council to review if the home is suitable. That way your client will have somewhere to live whilst the review takes place.

Many local authorities are supporting rough sleepers into private rented accommodation by providing deposits and/or rent in advance. Some local authorities are asking local charities or third party organisations to do this - it's important to differentiate between offers of accommodation from the local authority where review rights may arise for those who are owed a homelessness duty, and support into private rented accommodation from a charity or third party organisation.

If your client is offered accommodation the local authority should be clear if it's an offer in response to the client's homeless application or not and be clear on the implications of turning down an offer. You can refer your client to a housing specialist if they have been offered accommodation by the LA or a third party and they do not think it's suitable for their needs.

Debt update

What you need to know

Very important consultations

We try to keep these updates to Coronavirus only news. However, these are very important and you might wish to respond as individual agencies:

- Cabinet Office: [Fairness in Government debt collection](#) (closes 21st Sept)
- Ofgem: [Self-disconnecting and self-rationing](#) (closes 24th August)

Both acknowledge the likely debt legacy of Coronavirus.

Consumer update

What you need to know

Wirecard to resume missing e-money and payment services

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) ordered the UK arm of Wirecard, a payments firm, to freeze customer funds on 26 June. [The FCA has now allowed Wirecard to carry on with its operational activities](#). The FCA said:

"This means customers will now, or very shortly, be able to use their cards as usual. If any customers are still experiencing difficulties in using their card, they should contact their card provider directly and should do so using the contact details on their website."

Customers can also contact the [FCA consumer helpline](#).

The [FCA explains what happened to Wirecard](#) and some of the payment [cards affected were outlined in the Guardian](#).

Office for Students (OfS) briefing note for disabled students

[This OfS briefing note](#) looks at the practical steps universities and colleges are taking to help disabled students during the pandemic and beyond. Prospective and current students might be concerned about how their university or college will make adjustments for them in the event that some or all learning and teaching needs to be delivered remotely. Prospective students may also be unable to visit campuses to assess the physical accessibility of accommodation and teaching facilities. The briefing explores concerns raised by disabled students themselves, and signposts to sources of advice and information.

Guidance for small weddings (England)

From 4 July small marriage and civil partnership ceremonies can take place in England. The [government strongly advises](#) that:

- they go ahead only where they can be done in a COVID-19 secure environment
- ceremonies are kept as short as reasonably possible, keeping just to the parts required for the marriage or civil partnership to be legally binding
- no more than 30 people should attend, where this can be safely accommodated with social distancing in a COVID-19 secure venue.
- there should not be any large receptions or parties afterwards
- small celebrations should only take place if social distancing guidelines are followed, so in groups of up to two households indoors, or up to 6 people from different households outdoors and within support bubbles.

Resources to help you give advice on Covid-19

The consumer service

[An adviser](#) can help clients, or you on behalf of a client, understand their options and make reports to Trading Standards.

Scams

Clients can [check if something might be a scam](#). Clients can also [report a scam](#) and [get help with online scams](#) from our Scams Action Service.

Employment update

What you need to know

Labour abuse and exploitation

The [Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority](#) (GLAA) as part of a coordinated response to the relaxation of lockdown and return to work will [help deliver \(through](#)

[investigation and enforcement](#)) the next phase of [Operation Aidant](#) – a long running nationwide law enforcement response to Modern Slavery, labour exploitation and human trafficking.

This activity runs between 22 June and 10 July and will examine the impacts of COVID-19 and the resulting change to the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking picture - in essence it is aimed at identifying vulnerable, trafficked or exploited workers that have disappeared off enforcement radars during the lockdown of the economy. The GLAA has concerns that the extent of exploitation has increased significantly as a result of Covid-19.

Advisers or clients may contact the GLAA direct on 0800 432 0804 or www.gla.gov.uk to provide intelligence or report relevant labour abuse concerns.

Advisers may note that for dealing with clients for whom English is a 2nd language, the GLAA has produced a [guide to basic UK employment in 19 languages](#). This excellent [TUC guide](#) to basic employment rights is available in 21 languages - albeit it is a little dated in parts and the drafting reflects guidance to Union members.

Updated BEIS Guidance to Covid-19 safety on businesses resumption

England only - Pubs, restaurants and other parts of the economy have been given permission to resume trading from this weekend. This [Government announcement lists](#) those businesses in England that may reopen and that which remain closed, BEIS has updated the content of the [sector guidance](#) for **England** - the newest and most relevant updates are these:

- [Close contact services](#) e.g. hairdressers
- [Restaurants, pubs, bars and takeaway services](#)
- [Heritage locations](#) - castles, parks etc.
- [Hotels and other guest accommodation](#)
- [The visitor economy](#)

There is also an interactive tool on the Gov.uk website on [how to open your business safely](#) which will be of use to advisers and clients alike in terms of understanding what measures (in addition to existing [Health and Safety duties](#)) workers should expect when returning to work.

Family update

What you need to know

Domestic Abuse

The government has updated their guidance on [Domestic abuse: get help during the coronavirus](#)

[\(COVID-19\) outbreak](#). This includes further information on how to get help during the crisis, together with information on organisations who can provide further support.

The Prime Minister has also hosted the government's first [Hidden Harms virtual summit](#). This was attended by representatives from various sectors to share emerging best practice and make recommendations for further action to protect all those at risk from abuse and exploitation.

Education (England)

The Secretary of State for Education has issued a [third notice](#) to disapply offences for non-attendance in schools during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak until 31 July 2020. It has however been [reported](#) that fines for parents who do not send their children back to school in September will be reintroduced.

The government has also updated their guidance on [technology support for children and schools during coronavirus](#). Laptops, tablets and internet access can be provided where there is no access to them through another source, such as the school. The children this applies to are:

- care leavers
- children and young people with a social worker (only secondary school pupils will be entitled to internet access)
- disadvantaged year 10 pupils

The update clarifies that local authorities and academy trusts will be responsible for distribution and will retain ownership of the devices which will be loaned out. The devices are intended to assist children and families in accessing social care and remote education.

Children and safety online

Almost all of us are likely to be spending more time online, including children. These government resources provide [guidance for parents and carers to keep children safe online](#).