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To All RSLs and Local Authority Directors of
Housing

18 March 2020

Dear All,

As you will be aware the Scottish Housing Regulator wrote to all social landlords on 6 March in relation to Coronavirus <https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/about-us/news/housing-regulator-advises-social-landlords-on-coronavirus>

They have advised social landlords to maintain a record of any instances where service cannot be delivered because of Coronavirus (COVID-19), and to notify them of any significant service disruption or financial impact on your organisation as a consequence of Coronavirus COVID-19.

In preparing for the potential effects of the virus we are working closely with the Scottish Housing Regulator, SFHA and other social housing stakeholders on a number of actions.

In what are exceptional circumstances, the aim is to provide reassurance and specific guidance on the main questions from and concerns of the social housing sector. Given the fast changing and unpredictable nature of the situation, it is anticipated that further information and guidance will be issued in due course.

I know from recent discussions with some landlords that you are already forward planning for an escalation of the virus and as part of those preparations Social Landlords should also ensure that their business continuity/resilience plans are up to date and accessible to all who may need it.

You will already have clear processes in place for managing tenancy issues which, if unresolved, could lead to eviction action. It is absolutely critical that we work together to ensure that no tenant is evicted because of any financial hardship suffered as a result of Coronavirus. I am calling on you to ensure you do all that you can in this regard, and in turn we are actively considering how best we can support landlords and tenants to ensure no evictions take place. I know many of you will already be providing advice and support, including financial advice, to help tenants to sustain their tenancy at this difficult time and I would ask you to prioritise this activity as part of your Coronavirus response and we thank you for the work you are currently doing in this area.

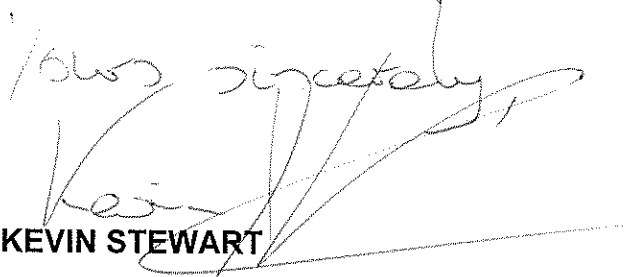
People affected by the Coronavirus who are concerned about paying their rent can claim Universal Credit from the Department for Work and Pensions which includes support for housing costs, if eligible. The UK Government has introduced some temporary changes to make this easier. We would ask you to urge your tenants to apply for Statutory Sick Pay and Universal Credit where they are eligible. We would also urge you to encourage them to speak to you as soon as they are in financial difficulty as it may mean that they are unable to pay their rent at this time. Further information can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-support-for-employees-benefit-claimants-and-businesses>

I greatly appreciate the strong partnership that exists between Government and the social housing sector in Scotland. We are engaging directly with the Regulator and representatives from the sector as the situation regarding COVID-19 develops and will continue these discussions to fully understand the impact this is having on your business and consider how Government can support you.

I would like to thank you and your staff for the work you do to support communities across the country, particularly with the extra pressures that COVID-19 may place on your organisation during this challenging period.

Finally, I would draw your attention to the statement made today by Aileen Campbell MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, that outlines a £350m package of welfare and wellbeing support and included actions we are taking in the private rented sector. The statement is attached.

Kevin Stewart

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