

**Coronavirus information exchange for GWSF members**

Update 10, 14/4/20

Please feel free to get in touch on any of the issues raised below, and where appropriate we’ll share views and information with members, non-attributably.

**Furloughing**

*What posts?*

A number of members have asked what sort of posts are being furloughed.

From one association:

‘I think we will be looking to furlough four staff.  Mainly the estate caretaking team as we can’t see how they could work and keep to guidelines [e.g. keeping 2m apart].’

And this detail from another association:

‘For the Housing staff we looked at the following criteria:

1. Funded placements cannot be furloughed – we have four of those.  Two who are continuing to work and two due to their job role/level of experience cannot work.  Although not being furloughed they are at home on full pay (externally funded)
2. Who, due their job role, are unable to carry out their duties at home?  This has meant that our receptionist, handyperson and clerk of works have been furloughed
3. Who, due to their level of experience, cannot carry out their job role without supervision and guidance? We recently recruited a new staff member who falls into this category
4. Whose work has significantly reduced and will be negligible by 10 April due to the reduction in our services?  Under this category we have furloughed our property services manager and two housing assistants.

I know that some organisations have asked staff whose workload has diminished to assist with their community response. We made the decision not to do this as we already have an advice team of three people who are assisting with telephone claims and a Communities team of three, an army of volunteers and we are coordinating a community wide response which is working with multiple organisations across our area (including organisations that support children, young adults and pensioners).  This seems to be working well at the moment.

We will of course keep the situation under review and bring staff back to work if the workload increases.’

*Top up the 80% or not?*

Our sense is that most associations which have furloughed some staff have chosen to top up from the standard 80% level, in line with EVH recommendations. One association said it was struggling with the notion of topping up, as it could serve as a disincentive for other staff to work from home, and that 80% was better than the alternative of redundancy.

**Managing arrears**

A comment/question from one member association:

‘How other HAs are tackling arrears cases in the current situation?

I am aware of the legal position around court action and evictions and I know we have to tread very carefully here.  We have no intention of raising court action or even threatening court action as I’m sure all we would gain from this is bad publicity.  However, I also realise some peoples’ arrears will have been going on long before the Covid 19 issues and while the current situation could be adding to individual tenants’ ability to pay, this may not be the situation in all cases.

To address the situation, our staff have tried as far as possible to contact people by phone and have moved away from any form of standard letter to more bespoke letters that address current circumstances, i.e. appreciation that they may be experiencing financial hardship, offering support both directly and indirectly via our website, our WRO and other agencies, etc. while stressing the need for them to keep in contact and let us know their circumstances, so we can help them.

However, we still have some tenants who simply don’t respond or contact us to let us know their situation, no matter how hard we try to assist them.  Just wondering what others are doing in terms of stressing to these tenants that the onus is ultimately on them to keep us informed of their circumstances so we can note this and offer assistance and whether the mention of avoiding court action in future is completely taboo?  Is there an ok way to say yes we’re here to help and appreciate your circumstances, but if you don’t engage with us there could be other consequences further down the road?’

**Maintenance contracts – HAs contracting with Mears Property Services**

Feedback to GWSF suggests that a number of the associations asked by Mears to continue paying full contract amounts have decided not to agree to this. Some are still considering the matter.