

**Coronavirus information exchange for GWSF members**

Update 11, 22/4/20

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.

*Note: This Update does not cover issues relating to members applying to the Scottish Government’s Supporting Communities Funds or other similar funds, as this issue will continue to be the subject of specific communications from Colleen Rowan at GWSF.*

**1 Submission of annual accounts**

In the next round of emergency legislation, the Scottish Government is seeking to include a provision extending by three months the deadline date for submission of housing associations’ audited accounts. Many associations may feel they won’t need to make use of this provision, though it is likely to be useful for the very small number of associations with an end of June submission date (because their financial year ends in December).

Some members have raised the issue of whether they will be in a position to hold their AGM by the end of September. The position on this is uncertain at the moment, but SHR says there is no statutory or regulatory requirement to present audited accounts to the AGM, so a lack of accounts need not be the reason for delaying an AGM.

**2 Cyber attacks**

Following the recent warning from SHR about the heightened risk of cyber attacks, we have heard from one member association which suffered a serious attack over last weekend, affecting all its systems and data. We hope to learn more from the association shortly and will pass on anything we can to members.

**3 Furlough scheme**

We know some members have been grappling with issues around topping up from the standard 80% level. One association advised us that in relation to its in-house maintenance team, those being furloughed on full pay would be asked to ‘pay back’ time after the end of the crisis – for example to work an additional five days if they were furloughed for five weeks. Alternatively they could be paid at 80% and have no requirement to pay back time.

**4 SHR monthly return**

This is expected to go out from SHR later this week, with some notes on completion. Included within the notes will be confirmation that the arrears figure can either be end of month or end of the last debit period (which should suit HAs with a four-weekly debit period). SHR will also confirm that ‘staff absent’ does not need to be broken down into any sub-categories: there had been worries expressed by some small HAs that staff off ill could be personally identified.

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

Earlier this week, most of the associations contracting with MPS were advised that MPS would be terminating the entire contract within 13 weeks. This follows most associations rejecting MPS’s demand that monthly contract sums be paid in full despite the pared down (emergency repairs only) service.

SHR is aware of developments. This is obviously a very serious situation for the affected associations, not least as 13 weeks seems unlikely to be enough time in which to tender for and award a new contract.

**6 Close cleaning**

A few associations in Glasgow have been on the receiving end of social media campaigning by Living Rent on what LR believes is the essential need to clean closes several times a day.

GWSF has had feedback that in some cases tenants have objected to operatives working in closes, so associations can be in a difficult position on this. If tenants and owners follow advice on hand-washing etc. it is perhaps not clear why common areas are felt to be such a huge health risk.

**7 Gas safety**

Nothing new to report here: Housing Minister Kevin Stewart has still had no reply from UK Ministers to his letter (sent in early April) asking for an extension to the 12-month period for safety certificates.

In the meantime one member has helpfully shared a view from its insurer that as long as the ‘best endeavours’ measures set out in statute are followed, the association should not find itself liable in the event of an incident in a property where the gas check has been delayed.

**8 Fire safety – installation of heat/smoke/CO detectors**

GWSF has asked the Scottish Government if it has plans to extend the two-year period for installing fire safety measures. The deadline date is currently the end of February 2021. At this stage we believe it would be appropriate to extend the deadline by six months.

**9 Evictions**

GWSF is urging the Scottish Government to use the next round of emergency legislation to include a provision extending the current six-month expiry period for decrees. Without such an extension, all existing decrees will fall after six months and actions would have to start again from scratch.

**10 Universal Credit**

To help inform discussions between Scottish and UK Ministers, SFHA and GWSF have briefed Scottish Social Security Minister Shirley-Anne Somerville on the main asks for improving access to Universal Credit during the Covid crisis. The briefing note is attached with this Update. GWSF readily acknowledges SFHA’s legwork on this.

In the meantime DWP is in the process of confirming that the suspension of third party deductions will apply to Universal Credit as well as to legacy benefits.

**11 Lending issues**

GWSF is writing to the Royal Bank of Scotland urging it to relax its covenants on interest cover. The covenants would have the effect of penalising associations which carry out a greater than normal amount of improvement works, by way of catch up, in 2021/22 and potentially 2022/23 too.

This is one of a series of issues raised more broadly with UK lenders, with both SFHA and SHR involved in this.