

Supporting people in COVID-19 hotels

Guidance for emergency homelessness sites

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Let's end homelessness together

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Introduction

This guide aims to support local authorities and their partner agencies to provide appropriate responses for people sleeping rough that they have accommodated in hotels and B&Bs. We hope that it will help outreach workers, navigators, support workers, volunteers and experts by experience support the development and ongoing provision of services during this current health crisis.

On-site support for guests

For many people experiencing homelessness, this is a time of great anxiety and uncertainty. They are experiencing unprecedented changes to how they access services and how services are provided. People may also be required to reside in accommodation that is not necessarily suitable or familiar to them. This, in turn, may present challenges both for those accessing and delivering services, as well as for hotel staff. It is important to consider how support teams can maintain positive relationships with the people they are supporting. For this reason, it is good practice to ensure that key workers co-locate at the hotels and B&Bs being used to accommodate people who were sleeping rough, in order to provide direct support to hotel staff who may not have the expertise to support their new guests.

On-site support from key workers can:

- Provide an opportunity to identify when people are struggling with anxiety and mental ill health, and ways to mitigate any arising potential or perceived changes in behaviour
- Provide ongoing support to hotel staff who may not have the same level of training, understanding or expertise around the complexities of homelessness
- Monitor what ongoing support is needed and update health needs, substance or alcohol needs and other assessments where possible
- Support move on opportunities and referrals, and keeping guests up to date on progress
- Negotiating with the hotel to have a working space within the hotel so any enquiries can be directed to the team while maintaining social distancing – taking some of the strain away from hotel staff, strengthening the relationship between the support provider and hotel management
- Reassure guests that they have access to support, maintaining relationships
- Develop a rota system and consider what time people may want to engage with key workers, ensuring that on-site support is provided in the most effective, efficient and timely way
- Balance the need to provide security – think about who would be best placed to provide security, and if it is needed at all. Could skilled staff from others service areas be redeployed for this purpose or could you adopt a concierge model instead of hiring formal security? Security will need at least a basic level of understanding through introductory training
- Enable enhanced engagement opportunities to support people with benefit claims, settled status applications and applying for housing

Taking a multi-agency approach:

- All localities should have a task force (or equivalent) in place so that support is provided through a robust partnership which will support the planning, implementation and delivery of services
- Ensure that you are working with local health providers to provide homelessness health outreach so that dressings and wounds are regularly checked and re-dressed

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- Liaise with local drug and alcohol treatment providers to arrange supply and disposal of sharps boxes and to ensure that people have access to scripts (both ongoing and rapid access)
- Include organisations in the task force that support people experiencing domestic abuse, survival sex work and those vulnerable to exploitation
- Involve local food providers in discussions and coordinate their work so that the distribution of food is effective and consistent
- Convene regular taskforce meetings, and ensure that updates and changes to services are shared with all partners
- Enable positive move on and achieve rapid turn-around of voids where possible
- Develop a trauma informed approach throughout the local partnership

Providing support to hotel staff

- Assign a single point of contact for the hotel with a homelessness or outreach manager, and maintain regular contact with hotel staff. In some localities daily updates are being provided by hotel staff to a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to update them about any problems that may have arisen overnight
- Provide staff with training on:
 - Understanding homelessness
 - Understanding multiple and complex needs

Maintaining Social Distancing

Understandably, there is a lot of concern and anxiety around maintaining social distancing and safeguarding staff delivering their support roles. It is imperative that you do not expect staff who fall within an at-risk category to provide frontline work in hotels. It is also important that we do all we can to encourage, support and educate where necessary about the importance and practicalities of continuing social distancing for the benefit of everyone.

Maintain social distancing and awareness by:

- Marking out social distancing grids in communal areas e.g. reception or key working spaces, as a visual representation that's easy for people to follow
- Encouraging people to use the stairs where possible, instead of lifts, to reduce the risk of contamination in close quarters. If the venue has multiple stairwells, think about allocating these to separate floors to prevent gatherings or bottlenecks within the stairwell, or allocate them as entrance and exit stairwells
- Displaying easy to understand posters within the hotel or B&B to encourage a better understanding of social distancing. Don't just rely on written material, also use pictures
- Leading by example to demonstrate social distancing when speaking to hotel staff and colleagues
- Encouraging people to maintain social distancing when they leave the accommodation, and to avoid gathering in groups
- Using motivational and solution focused approaches to overcome resistance to social distancing where needed
- Contacting your local PCSO teams to determine what support they can provide e.g. educating residents about what social distancing means, what is expected of people, and how police are enforcing the Health Protection Regulations. This may help to dispel any fears that people will be fined on the spot for going outside

Supporting people to keep occupied during self-isolation

For many of your guests, the idea of self-isolating in itself creates stress and anxiety. Many services have started to provide activity packs that help people pass the time and keep occupied. In turn, this also encourages social distancing and supports guests to feel more at ease by having something to do.

Support people by:

- Keeping in touch using their preferred format e.g. phone, text, Whatsapp, email etc
- Encouraging them to develop a regular routine and set themselves targets
- Engaging positively in their interests; sharing ideas and recommendations based on those interests
- Sharing practical examples of how to manage wellbeing, highlighting useful activities e.g. mindfulness exercises

Ease the boredom of isolation by providing:

- Reading material such as books, magazines and newspapers
- Puzzles and one player games
- Tablets and smart phones with internet access and free wifi/data e.g. to access online learning or exercise courses, keep in touch with friends and family
- Craft materials, colouring books or other mindfulness activities
- Activity packs/recreation packs that are gender specific
- Contact numbers and information packs
- Regular credit top-ups in the event that they need telephone support

Food provision

The current crisis has greatly affected access to food. For people experiencing homelessness this has been especially disruptive as many soup kitchens, day centres and faith groups have had to close or change their approach. It is important to arrange access to regular meals and food that is both healthy and nutritious, especially for those that may have a reduced immune system and existing health conditions – vulnerabilities that are often associated with homelessness. Partnership working is a key element of food provision and needs to be well planned. The local taskforce might be best placed to manage this planning.

Support effective food provision by:

- Identifying what services are able to provide food. If there are several, develop a rota to ensure that this is being shared equally between providers and avoids over-reliance on one single service, ensuring that stock levels can be managed
- Providing equipment such as kettles, small fridges and microwaves if these are not already provided in hotel and/or B&B accommodation to enable guests to prepare food in their own rooms (fridges may also be required for the storage of prescription medication such as insulin)
- Liaising with the hotel to provide at least one meal a day if possible. Often this will be breakfast, delivered to people's rooms to ensure that social distancing is maintained and preventing the unnecessary gathering of people in dining areas
- Liaising with day centres, soup runs and foodbanks in your local network to provide food parcels, either non-perishable food or pre-prepared meals
- Ensuring that you are meeting dietary requirements, e.g. specific provision for those who have diabetes, for halal or kosher food, vegans and vegetarians etc

Homeless Link's Partnership Managers

Contact your local Partnership Manager for further support or to share examples of good practice.

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Resources

Guidance for alcohol & substance use

Public Health England

www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-commissioners-and-providers-of-services-for-people-who-use-drugs-or-alcohol/

CGL 'Harm reduction strategies for alcohol dependence'

www.homeless.org.uk/covid19-homelessness

Guidance for testing of frontline staff

www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested

Covid-19 & data protection

www.homeless.org.uk/covid19-homelessness

Providing emergency COVID-19 accommodation

Riverside's Emergency Hotel Provision Service model

www.riverside.org.uk/coronavirus/partners-and-commissioners/



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

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