

Business Continuity Plan - Coronavirus Position Statement

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1 Background

1. This position statement has been produced in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The Group's business continuity arrangements ensured the continued operation of priority services from March and the Group is now entering a recovery phase with full services re-established in line with the relaxation of Government restrictions.
2. This document describes the actions the Group is taking to respond to and recover from COVID-19 and will be updated as necessary, recognising that the current environment is a fast changing one. We monitor and take account of advice from central Government, the NHS and Public Health England on how best we can protect our workforce and residents.

2 Aim

3. Our ultimate priorities are to provide services to the most vulnerable of our residents and other service users whilst maintaining business critical functions and protecting the health and well-being of our workforce.

3 Status Update as at 19 June 2020

4. On 23 March 2020, the Government announced a lockdown with travel to and from work **only if absolutely necessary** because of the coronavirus. Our offices closed on 24 March 2020. On 16 April 2020 the Government extended the lockdown by three weeks, and whilst there have been other relaxations of the lockdown since, the message from Government remains to work from home if you can.

3.1. Support for Residents

5. The impact of COVID-19 on our residents and the communities we work on has been significant and we are working with our partner local authorities and other agencies in all our major areas of operation to support residents, redeploying staff resources as necessary.
6. We have partnered with a number of public, private and voluntary agencies, other registered providers and local foodbanks to get food to the most vulnerable members of society. Food parcels have been in high demand throughout all of our neighbourhoods and we have supported families with both immediate provision and longer term solutions through volunteer networks and local authorities. We have also assisted a number of local organisations with funding and by redeploying staff as delivery drivers, helping enable food parcels to be created and delivered.
7. All our independent living tenants are getting twice weekly calls. Calls are being made to identify any tenants who are self isolating and in need of food and medication, suffering with COVID-19 symptoms and/or experiencing difficulties with mental

health. Next of kin are being contacted where welfare or social distancing concerns are identified. The Independent Living Tenancy Inclusion Officer is providing a list of local agencies offering support to vulnerable people as a resource for staff supporting tenants.

8. We have researched and completed a directory of community help groups, including public, private and voluntary sources. This directory includes support for food provision, medical supplies, money advice, loneliness support, mental health support, home care, utilities and voluntary community groups.
9. Our research of local community groups identified a number of support networks for residents to which we have been referring individuals. Altogether, we have identified over 6,000 residents over the age of 69 in our general needs accommodation and, through employees and neighbours, other residents under 70 who might be vulnerable as a result of physical or mental health needs. All these tenants have now received a welfare phone call from Jigsaw Homes to assist them with any support they need. Those showing signs of real loneliness are referred to external agencies for regular calls and befriending services.
10. We have also been keeping in touch with younger residents via text message. 16,000 tenants under the age of 70 for whom we have a mobile number have been contacted asking if they need any help with money advice, emotional support or access to food or other essentials. Another 8,000 tenants will have been contacted by the end of June 2020.

3.2. Business Critical Functions

11. We have successfully maintained the following business critical tasks since the beginning of lockdown:
 - Maintaining staffing and services to our supported housing schemes
 - Lettings to vulnerable groups
 - Services to older residents in our independent living schemes, or living alone in the community
 - Money advice to tenants struggling to pay rent and other bills
 - IT
 - Payroll
 - People team to ensure employees are deployed to the necessary areas
 - Payment of suppliers
 - Emergency repairs
 - BACS payments
 - FM (for access for IT team, etc. if offices closed)
 - Contractual obligations

- Delivery of our development programme
- Rent collection - without which we cannot pay for any of the above

3.3. Gas Servicing

12. Following Gas Safe advice from the beginning of the pandemic, we have continued to follow our procedures and try to access properties in advance of a gas certificate expiring. Throughout, we have been conscious of the need to balance this against the health and wellbeing of our customers and gas technicians. A proportion of tenants we contact are still reluctant to allow entry at present; however no access has improved from 80% in April to 50% in May and is now between 20% and 30%. We resumed our gas service programme in full during May and are regularly attempting to gain access to properties where certificates have now expired. The number of gas services that are overdue is now starting to decline. Furthermore, we have also increased our resource capacity by employing sub-contractors, in addition to our directly employed workforce, to return our programme to its normal position as soon as possible. Where COVID-19 has been identified as the reason for refused access, we do not believe it is reasonable or fruitful to pursue legal action at this time. Following Gas Safe advice in these instances we are documenting all steps taken that have led to failed access, this is either due to a direct refusal from the tenant over the phone or following two No Access cards being delivered to the property.

3.4. Electrical Safety

13. To ensure all our properties are electrically safe we have a five year programme of electrical safety checks. Throughout lockdown we have continued to complete these important checks but, as with gas servicing, we have experienced difficulties with access. We continue to work with tenants who are self isolating and wherever possible arrange a mutually convenient appointment.

3.5. Grounds Maintenance

14. We reintroduced our grounds maintenance service in May. We have made some temporary changes to the way we carry out grounds maintenance. In the short term this means that we will focus on grass cutting and when it is possible our staff will spend more time on site to ensure the grounds are brought back up to the usual high standard.

3.6. Caretaking Service

15. Our caretaking and cleaning service remain fully operational and continue to complete regular fire safety checks and frequent cleaning of high usage areas in independent living and general needs schemes.

3.7. Repairs

16. We made contingency arrangements for a scenario in which, as a result of mass self isolation by tenants, widespread infection, employee absence due to sickness or self isolation or lockdown, we would be unable to deliver our normal day to day repairs service.
17. We moved to an 'emergencies plus' repairs service with effect from 24 March 2020.
18. From 18 May 2020, and as an extension to the 'emergency plus' service, we also started undertaking all urgent repairs.
19. From 22 June 2020, we will recommence taking routine repair requests from tenants, making appointments from the end of June to allow time to mobilise.
20. Where repairs are required in properties with people who have symptoms and are self-isolating, we are providing additional safety precautions for our employees who attend. Where it is safe to do so, we are also undertaking external repairs that do not require our technicians to enter the property.
21. Our call centre staff are equipped to work from home and receive calls from residents making inbound calls.

3.8. Letting Properties

22. We continued to let newly built properties handed over by developers from the beginning of the pandemic and worked with local authority homelessness services to let properties to those in greatest need. In May we recommenced letting all properties in the general needs category with a new digital letting process that maintains social distancing between employees and incoming tenants. Our void refurbishment programme has resumed in full and during June we will start to administer mutual exchanges between properties.

3.9. Rent Collection

23. Tenants who get into rent arrears for reasons connected with COVID-19 are being treated sensitively and assisted. We continue to offer free and confidential advice through our money advice teams. To increase our ability to assist tenant in claiming the benefits and financial assistance they are entitled to, we have reallocated staff to money advice work and are making outbound calls to those not in receipt of housing benefit to see if their circumstances have changed due to the pandemic, offering support where necessary. This includes setting up new payment methods for cash payers who are self-isolating, accepting lower payments when a tenant is unsure of their future income, issuing foodbank vouchers, signposting to debt advice, completing grant applications and making further referrals for food provision to local private and volunteer agencies.

3.10. Impact on Workforce

24. We initially planned for a scenario in which up to 80% of the workforce might be infected by COVID-19, with absenteeism of up to 50%. Our projections proved to be overly cautious and the number of employees reporting symptoms has reduced in line with government figures. We have enabled 705 normally office-based employees to work from home and have been able to deliver all essential services during the pandemic due to the adaptability of our workforce.
25. Many employees who initially reported underlying conditions for themselves or others in their household are working from home or have recently returned to work following further risk assessments, reducing the proportion of employees not working from 15% to 5%.
26. 60 employees have not yet returned to work, either shielding for themselves or others in their household (40) or because they are unable to complete their duties and observe social distancing measures (20).
27. We have updated and published to employees our homeworking policy to take account of the coronavirus. We are using Microsoft Teams to support remote team working.
28. We have begun preparations to make our offices COVID secure and enable some office-based employees to return to office working on a socially distanced basis where they are having difficulty working from home or cannot complete all the required tasks at home. The presumption remains that employees should work from home where they can. Offices will not be open to the public (but see Miles Platting below).

3.11. Miles Platting

29. Our Manchester office is provided as part of our contractual requirements with Manchester City Council. We are currently working to make Baker House COVID secure in anticipation of staff returning to the office and the office reopening to the public. We have not set a date for reopening to the public. Measures we have put in place include screens on the reception counter and in the interview rooms, removal of seating areas in reception, hand sanitiser stations at entrances to the building and within the staff areas, PPE for staff members, and directional signage and floor signage to direct peoples routes and to keep people two metres apart. We are also working on a rota to have a reduced number of staff working from the office each day on work stations that are more than two metres apart.

3.12. Supported Housing Schemes

30. Many of our supported housing schemes have on-site staff providing a 24 hour service. We are continuing to run these services, albeit on some occasions with reduced staffing levels. We will utilise teams from across all services to maintain as many supported housing services as possible, both 24 hour and visiting support.
31. Business continuity plans for our staffed schemes and maintenance services are being reviewed and brought into effect as needed.

32. We are starting to mobilise some of our outreach services such as Housing First to support complex clients, following government guidance on social distancing.

3.13. Independent Living and Supported Housing Schemes

33. We carried out a business-wide review of all our independent living and supported schemes to increase cleaning regimes in line with government guidance. We have provided advice to residents on how to protect themselves through proper hygiene. We have liaised with the care teams who work in our buildings and commissioned by local authorities to ensure continued care provision to our residents.
34. We have closed communal lounges, taped off communal areas that cannot be secured and closed lavatories that are normally accessible to all residents and visitors.
35. We have also asked residents to observe social distancing guidelines and not to invite external visitors into their schemes, although this is not something we can enforce as we have no legal powers to do so and our schemes are not staffed 24/7.

3.14. Communications

36. Communications with tenants are being channelled through all media, including writing out to all our tenants. Updates are provided on our website, with regular emails sent to notify residents of important information.
37. 21 sets of FAQs for employees have been distributed via email with fresh FAQs published in response to the changing situation and any further issues raised by staff. A special edition of *Newspiece* - our in house staff newsletter - brought all this information together.
38. We are using our Facebook page, Team - Jigsaw, to communicate with employees and mass texting employees and using personal email and text contacts for employees unable to access company emails.
39. Tailored messages are also being issued to managers.
40. We recently carried out a staff survey to obtain the eNPS (employee Net Promoter Score) for the Group. This asked employees how they felt about the level of communication received from team members, managers and the company as a whole on a scale of 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good). It also asked employees how they were adapting to changes in working practices:
- Over 600 employees responded (48% of workforce)
 - eNPS was 58 (rising from 34 last quarter and a negative score at time of merger)
 - Communication was rated highly (80%, 85% and 81% across the categories rated as 'very good/good' respectively) with little variation by directorate
 - Overall, the consensus was that new working practices were working well (76%). Encouragingly there were also many positive comments reflecting on how the company had handled the pandemic, looking out for the welfare of employees and an appreciation of the financial stability of the company during these uncertain times.

3.15. Warning Flags

41. We have set up warning flags on our IT systems to highlight where tenants or their household members are shielding or self isolating because underlying conditions, and for confirmed cases resulting in the death of a tenant. We have put in place protocols to ensure that this information is shared with employees and contractors as necessary.

3.16. Offices

42. We have agreed with local authority commissioners to move some services to a telephone only service and so minimise face-to-face contact.

3.17. Training to Staff

43. All staff were enrolled in an online infection training module in March and homeworkers asked to complete a homeworking data protection survey in April. Coping with COVID -19 Anxiety and temporary homeworker e- learning online modules were issued in May.

3.18. PPE

44. The Group has adequate supplies of PPE and has issued clear guidance to employees on the need to maintain good handwashing hygiene, social distancing, when face masks are appropriate to be worn, etc. This message is reinforced through a number of channels, including the FAQs to employees.

3.19. Assurance

45. All board members are being updated weekly on the position.
46. Our Group Board is meeting monthly in order to oversee the Group's response to COVID-19 and support the Executive as necessary to respond to the changing situation. The Group's financial position is being monitored monthly by the Group Board and reviewed by the Executive in line with the Group's stress test recovery plan.

3.20. Business Continuity

47. The Group's operational response to COVID-19 is being managed by the Business Continuity Group, which comprises directors from a range of disciplines and includes the Group Chief Executive and all members of EMT. This group was meeting daily during the initial stages of the pandemic but moved to twice weekly in May and now meets weekly by video conference.

3.21. Stakeholders

48. We will share this position statement with stakeholders via our website and provide updates as necessary.



Creating homes. Building lives.

Jigsaw Homes Group Ltd.

Cavendish 249
Cavendish Street
Ashton-under-Lyne
OL6 7AT

<https://www.jigsawhomes.org.uk>
0300 111 1133
info@jigsawhomes.org.uk

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