

COVID-19 practice examples

Encouraging people to comply with social distancing and self-isolation



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Introduction

The importance of appropriate housing and support has become more evident than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the deep inequalities between those who have good quality housing with outdoor space, poor quality accommodation or no home at all. The Welsh Government and local authorities in Wales have taken swift action to provide emergency accommodation for ~500 people who are sleeping rough or living in unsuitable settings.

However, social distancing and self-isolation remains extremely difficult for people in emergency or temporary accommodation, hostels and supported housing. Communal areas and facilities are common and people often share critical spaces such as kitchens and bathrooms. In addition, people's experiences of trauma, mental health problems and/or substance use issues make it even more difficult to stay inside and comply with social distancing, hygiene and self-isolation instructions.

Homelessness and housing support services have had to consider how to encourage people to comply with these instructions, in order to reduce the spread of the virus and protect the safety of their staff and people using services. The Welsh Government has published guidance on this issue, setting out the approach that local authorities and support providers should take. This document aims to complement this guidance by illustrating how organisations have utilised their experience and expertise to achieve compliance with lockdown measures.

We recognise that some providers have faced difficulties in getting service users to comply with some of the changes they had implemented. However, lots have had success and have contributed to the extraordinary national effort to reduce the spread of the virus.

As ever, we advocate a psychologically and trauma informed approach, recognising people's individual experiences and the importance of listening to their views. The best examples of practice were where people using services have been actively involved in its development and implementation. This increased the likelihood of practice being adhered to as it was more likely to have been accommodating of people's needs.

This report is not supposed to be prescriptive, nor applied universally. We recognise that each organisation's experience is different, dependent on their circumstances and people's specific needs. Neither are the examples in this document supposed to be exhaustive - we know there will be other examples of practice which are making a positive difference. We hope this report helps organisations as they work to protect the health of people using and delivering services during this challenging time.

Katie Dalton
Director

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Policy and Communications Officer

Thank you

Thank you to the organisations which responded to our call for evidence and shared their experiences of encouraging people to comply with social distancing, hygiene and self-isolation guidance:

- Caerphilly County Borough Council
- CAIS
- Community Furniture Aid
- Crisis Skylight South Wales
- Hafan Cymru
- Hafod
- Llamau
- Mirus
- Newport City Homes
- National Probation Service
- Plattform
- Pobl
- Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
- Tai Calon
- Tai Tarian
- The Wallich
- Trivallis
- United Welsh
- Valleys to Coast
- WCADA



Communicating information

Effective communication of government guidance is critical to ensure that people using and delivering services are able to stay safe and avoid transmission of the virus. With direct contact being limited by social distancing measures, and services being delivered in a variety of settings, organisations have had to develop a range of ways to communicate this important public health information.

Internet and social media

- Providers have directed people to official government or public health guidance online, including information that has been made available in an easy read format.
- Many have used social media such as Facebook and Twitter to share new information and updates from their respective organisation and from the Welsh and UK Governments.

Telephone and letters

- Some providers have sent letters to explain the guidance, what changes are being made to services and the reasons why these changes are occurring.
- Some have followed up with telephone calls to ensure that people understand the guidance and changes ahead.

Signage and posters

- New signage has been introduced across most projects to provide clear information about hygiene practices and social distancing. Signage has also been developed to describe what is essential and non-essential travel to deter people from leaving projects unnecessarily.
- One provider noted that their posters were designed by people using services, to help make them more relatable and clear for their peers.
- Some providers are utilising pictures and easy read notices to avoid excluding people with literacy issues or disabilities.

Person-centred approaches

- The National Probation Service has produced evidence-based [guidance](#) on encouraging co-operation and compliance with COVID-19 advice. This includes the need to provide clarity, show empathy, avoid punitive approaches and involve people in decisions.
- Some organisations have encouraged peer mentors to communicate the guidance, in the hope that this will be more effective than traditional communication routes.
- Some providers have developed individual risk assessments with people using services and discussed these with them so that they are aware of the procedures in place if they need to self-isolate.

Communicating the message and guidance through posters around the hostel, especially in hot spots for the clients. Particularly pictures in case we have individuals who cannot read. We have also asked the clients to assist in making these posters, in a way they think their peers will understand.

~ WCADA

We had sent letters outlining what we will be doing and what they can do to help, this was backed up by telephone calls. Signage has been put up around the schemes.

~ Tai Calon

We have extended our online presence to Facebook and now provide daily updates of reliable, trustworthy and useful information and advice for our community.

~ Community Furniture Aid

Llamau has worked with a graphic designer to create posters for their supported accommodation and refuges to help to encourage social distancing and to communicate what that means.

~ Llamau



Practical changes and protocols

Maintaining social distancing and hygiene practices can be extremely difficult within shared accommodation settings, particularly where several people share bathrooms and kitchens. Housing and support providers have had to adapt physical spaces and protocols within their services, as well as asking people to change their routines in order to comply with government guidance.

Changes to the physical space

- Providers are enforcing social distancing rules for service users by restricting the number of people allowed to congregate together.
- Some schemes have closed communal dining rooms and are delivering meals to people's rooms.
- Others have removed tables and chairs in communal spaces to maintain social distancing and deter gatherings.
- Hazard tape has been used to deter people from accessing communal spaces, and to designate distances required to maintain social distancing.
- Some have designated one-way entrances and exit ways in order to minimise two-way flows of people in corridors.
- Where possible, some projects have kept doors open to minimise risk of contamination from handles.

Cleaning and hygiene protocols

- All services have been communicating personal hygiene protocols, including regular and lengthy hand washing, catching coughs and sneezes with tissues and cleaning surfaces regularly.
- Some organisations have increased the use of disposable cutlery to reduce contamination risk.
- Many have introduced cleaning rotas, particularly in projects with shared bathroom/kitchen spaces.
- In some shared accommodation, timetables have been created for each person to access the bathroom/kitchen, in order to minimise close physical contact with one another.
- Some providers have changed the way external cleaning services operate. Many have been asking cleaners to come in earlier to minimise contact with service users, and asking service users to ensure they maintain distance from cleaning staff.
- Some providers are supplying cleaning kits for service users and encouraging them to be proactive in cleaning their living spaces, in addition to the external cleaning services.

If there were multiple clients across projects that needed to self-isolate, we could coordinate one property as a 'safe zone' moving all those needing to self-isolate into that property and moving other clients into the other two properties.

~ The Wallich

We have introduced cleaning guidelines and rotas for tenants and colleagues. This includes where necessary introducing timetables for each individual to access the bathroom/kitchen etc.

~ Hafod

Use available funds to buy mini cleaning kit for all residents and encourage them to clean thoroughly after each use - on top of arranged staff cleaning.

~ The Wallich

We took the decision to close our lounges and held talks at each site to explain why. The vast majority were accepting of this and appreciative we were taking steps to keep them safe.

~ Tai Tarian

No more than 4 residents are permitted in the courtyard at any one time to ensure everyone can maintain a safe distance.

~ Pobl



Essential items and support

In 'normal times' people can cook in shared kitchens and go to a shop or pharmacy whenever they want - but during the COVID-19 pandemic people have been asked to self-isolate and stay away from others. Housing and support providers are ensuring that people have essential items and vital support, therefore encouraging people to stay at home and in their rooms.

Food supplies and cooking equipment

- Lots of providers have been working with voluntary services and local businesses to provide food supplies to accommodation schemes. Staff are delivering food to people self-isolating and others are helping people to shop online in order to avoid busy supermarkets.
- One organisation has developed a list of local community services to share with residents so they can link up and help to secure provisions of essential items.
- Lots of organisations have purchased toasters, kettles and microwaves so that people who need to self-isolate can prepare food and drinks in their own rooms.

Tobacco and alcohol

- Vapes have been bought for some people, in order to deter them from going out to purchase tobacco regularly.
- Schemes which support people with alcohol dependency have been purchasing alcohol to prevent people from leaving when they are supposed to be self-isolating.

Financial Support

- Some providers are ensuring that lack of finances is not a barrier to securing essential supplies during this period, especially if they are self-isolating. This includes housing associations being flexible regarding their tenants' rent payments and organisations deferring the payment for supplies for individuals until after the pandemic is over

Health and pharmacy support

- Many providers are collecting prescriptions for people.
- Lots of providers are working with specialist services to support people with their mental health and addiction issues and improve their likelihood of keeping safe.
- Some are working with substance misuse services to move people onto monthly doses of buprenorphine instead of daily doses of methadone, to reduce the need for them to leave their accommodation.

Emergency provisions are being delivered to those who have no network.

~ Tai Calon

We have put together a comprehensive list of services in the areas in which we work, so we can link our residents up to suitable community services to help with shopping etc.

~ Newport City Homes

TVs, microwaves, kettles and toasters have also been supplied to help with social distancing. We deliver food parcels to hostels to minimise shopping trips for foods. Pharmacies are still collecting prescriptions from our sites.

~ RCT CBC

We have purchased kettles and microwaves for all rooms.

~ United Welsh

Ensuring tenants are informed about all the support available locally for food deliveries. We are also working with the local authority on their safe and well scheme to help identify those who may need additional support.

~ Tai Tarian

We've been working with Kaleidoscope to trial Buvidal as a replacement for Methadone, which reduces the number of times people need to leave home.

~ The Wallich



Keeping active and engaged

Boredom and frustration have become common features of lockdown and this has been particularly challenging for people in emergency and supported accommodation. However, services have developed a variety of ways to keep people active and engaged.

Keeping physically active

- Some have been providing outdoor support sessions whilst practising social distancing in an open space. One provider has brought a football to encourage engagement (at a safe distance!)
- One provider is developing online 'how to do' films including topics such as room based exercises.
- Some providers are asking people in supported housing to take part in cleaning projects, to encourage them to get more active and to give them a sense of purpose.

Keeping mentally active

- Providers have been sharing mindfulness techniques with people using services.
- Some have enabled young people to continue their learning and education by ensuring they have the right digital tools and support.
- Several providers have developed activity packs including books, crosswords, puzzles and worksheets to help people to keep their minds active.
- Some providers are organising quiz nights.

Getting creative

- Organisations have sent colouring books and art materials to keep people busy.
- Some have developed art competitions for people using services and their children.
- Others have shared people's art on social media or put it in their windows to spread positivity online and in their communities.
- They've also been working with people to develop their cooking skills and some have held 'cook offs'.

We're sharing stories about the activities that people we support are doing at home to give other people ideas of activities they can do - we've had such a great response from friends and family of the people we support too, who are enjoying seeing pictures and hearing about what they've been getting up to.

~ Mirus

We've issued Boredom Buster packs to keep people occupied these have included arts/crafts materials and instructions, books, maths worksheets, colouring equipment - the feedback has been immense.

~ Crisis Skylight South Wales

We are planning to use Discord to keep doing our social evenings and have also planned in some extra use for this such as a live cook along, quiz night, etc. We have brought a football into the project which we just kick back and fore to each other (at a safe distance) in the garden, where the tenants have the freedom to discuss any concerns or ask any questions that they may have.

~ Platform

Young people we support in Swansea have been learning to cook nutritious and tasty meals in a 'Healthy Me' cooking session. Our Learning 4 Life team continues to support young people. We're using digital tools to keep in touch and help young people continue their learning, achieve accreditation and develop skills for future employment and learning.

~ Llamau

We have made up activity packs which include puzzles, word searches, crosswords, sudoku and mindfulness pictures for colouring.

~ RCT CBC



Staying connected

The new social distancing measurements mean that providers have had to find alternative ways for people using services to maintain regular contact with one another and their families/friends.

Purchasing equipment

- Some providers have purchased internet hubs for people in supported housing so they can stay in touch with friends and family without leaving the house.
- Many organisations have sought donations or purchased mobile phones with sim cards and data preloaded so people can maintain regular contact with friends, family and support workers.
- Others are re-purposing old phones or equipment and giving it to people using services.

Supporting digital engagement

- Some providers are developing dedicated WhatsApp groups and Zoom channels for people using their services to connect with each other and access peer support.
- People have also been encouraged to use social media to stay in contact with each other and access resources online.
- Some are looking to train some people to become 'digital champions' and support other people in their accommodation scheme to develop digital skills.

Regular check-ins

- Providers are offering daily or weekly wellbeing phone calls to people, depending on the level of support they want or need.
- Some providers have developed a befriending call service for older people and those who are particularly vulnerable to social isolation.
- Some providers are liaising with external agencies to provide additional support to people via telephone.

We're in the early stages of working with Digital Communities Wales to remotely train up some people we support to be 'Digital Champions' who can teach others (in their household, or remotely) how to use technology to stay in contact with people they love. We are also hoping to give out some of our old work smartphones that are no longer in use to people we support that don't have technology of their own.

~ Mirus

We have had some very good results from telephone contact during this period. Especially with a couple of tenants who are sometimes difficult to engage normally.

~ Hafan Cymru

We have set up a welfare check and befriending calls service for people 70+. Our tenancy support team is focussing on ensuring that people have access to accurate financial information to improve their situation.

~ Newport City Homes

Staff are phoning residents when they start their shift to have a chat and explain that they're here to listen. They phone again through the day just to check on how they are and how they are feeling. We are hoping to create a social hangout for our clients which they might also be able to use to communicate with each other.

~ Platfform

Purchased phones for members so we can maintain contact. We are looking at basic smart phones to have WhatsApp / Zoom 121 meetings or learning activities.

~ Crisis Skylight South Wales

We are able to offer support remotely, using telephone and technology to contact and continue to reach those in need and in isolation.

~ CAIS

About Cymorth Cymru

Cymorth Cymru is the representative body for providers of homelessness, housing and support services in Wales. We act as the voice of the sector, influencing the development and implementation of policy, legislation and practice on behalf of our members and the people they support.

We are committed to working with people who use services, our members and partners to effect change. We believe that together, we can have a greater impact on people's lives. We want to be part of a social movement that ends homelessness and creates a Wales where everyone can live safely and independently in their own homes and thrive in their communities.



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