

COVID-19 – a message from Camden Council’s housing team

Dear resident

As the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic develops, I’m writing to let you know that your safety and wellbeing is always the council’s first priority. National guidance has been issued this week and I know that residents are very worried, but I reassure you that we are well prepared and have plans in place to support you and keep your housing services running. We have strong communities and tenant leaders, and we will work alongside you to get through this difficult time.

We know we will have to move our teams around as our staff are forced to self-isolate, but we are ready to work differently to support everyone who lives in our council homes as much as we can. You will see some changes to your services but please bear with us as we work hard to make sure that all essential work continues, and that the most vulnerable people in our communities get the help they need.

Your housing teams

Your neighbourhood housing teams will continue to work, but to protect residents and staff, the team will only be carrying out essential visits. They will be prioritising supporting vulnerable residents and people living alone with other support needs. Please look out for your neighbours, particularly if they are older, and if you are worried about them please call us on **020 7974 4444** (option 9). If you live alone and need help to go shopping and can’t ask family, friends or neighbours for help, contact us on the same number.

If you are worried about paying your rent we can help

We know that many of our residents who are working will be very worried about the impact of the situation on their income. If your financial situation has changed and you are concerned about how you will pay your rent or council tax, **we are here to help**. No tenant will be evicted from our council homes if there is clear evidence that they have been unable to pay rent as a direct result of COVID-19. Please get in touch with your neighbourhood housing officer as soon as possible so we can offer you support and advice. The council is committed to supporting tenants through this very difficult time.

If you’re concerned about not being able to pay your rent because you pay in cash or use an Allpay card, speak to your neighbourhood housing officer. You can also pay for your rent online at camden.gov.uk/your-council-rent or over the phone on **020 7974 4444**.

Temporary changes to the repairs service

We will continue to carry out all communal and external works to your homes as normal, but for the time being **we will only carry out priority repairs inside tenants' homes**. This is to keep you and our staff safe, and to avoid the spread of COVID-19. If a council officer or contractor needs to access your home, it will only be if it’s really necessary for you and the other people in your building, so please let them in.

Essential repairs include: heating and hot water, lifts, leaks, windows and door issues including locks and essential carpentry, sanitary plumbing, electrical work, health and safety works and fire safety works.

Non-urgent repairs like decorating, plastering, or non-emergency surveys will be temporarily put on hold. Our normal service will start again once the risk from coronavirus has reduced and we will keep you updated of any developments.

Our repairs call centre staff will ask everyone requesting a repair if anyone in their household is self-isolating. Repairs staff or our contractors will only attend a home where a tenant is self-isolating in an emergency, on a case by case basis, following advice from our public health team. If staff or contractors need to carry out an emergency repair in your home and someone is self-isolating or has COVID-19, they will wear full protective clothing – this is to keep everyone safe.

If you have any queries about repairs please call Contact Camden on **020 7974 4444**.

Your caretaking service

As planned, we will be taking over the external cleaning of estates from 6 April, and you will see your caretakers in their new blue uniforms. Having said that, the most important thing for us is to keep you safe and well, so we may need to use the service in a different way and move caretakers to where they are needed most.

Although you might not see your usual caretaker on your estate as we move staff around to cover as necessary, we reassure you that essential services – cleaning, health and safety, reporting emergency repairs in communal areas and supporting our most vulnerable residents – will continue to be our priority across the borough.

We need to be realistic about the caretaking resources we have as we need to maintain essential services, but we do expect our staff to need to self-isolate. Our focus will be on protecting our most vulnerable residents, and we will be providing extra cleaning in our sheltered schemes where people need it most. Your caretakers will keep estates safe and clean, but we are asking every resident and visitor to follow the Public Health England advice that everyone should wash their hands thoroughly when they get home to protect themselves and their families. Public Health England advise that you:

- **wash your hands more often** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use a hand sanitiser when you get home, when you blow your nose, sneeze or cough, eat or handle food
- **avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth** with unwashed hands
- **avoid close contact** with people who have symptoms
- **cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue**, then throw the tissue in a bin and wash your hands
- **clean and disinfect** frequently touched objects and surfaces in your home.

Please help your caretakers to keep everyone safe and well by disposing of your rubbish properly, in tied up bags and in the right place.

Helping your community

In the coming months we will need to work together and help each other out. If you are healthy and are not showing symptoms, please think about your neighbours and other people who may need help. If someone needs help with shopping or is likely to be feeling lonely, please look out for them in a safe way. We are creating a register of volunteers to help local people with anything from delivering food to making phone calls to cheering up people in isolation. To sign up as a volunteer visit help.timetospare.com/camden

Maintaining your mental health

There are a range of simple things you can do to help keep mentally healthy and physically active when you can't get out and about as normal at oneyoucamden.org

Camden Age UK have also set up a number of activities and services for people aged over 55 who are unwell, self-isolating or struggling to get out that you can take part in from home. They are offering an assisted online shopping service, livestreaming music recitals every day, an online book club and a telephone befriending service. Visit ageukcamden.org.uk or call **020 7239 0400** to find out more about what they have on offer for Camden residents.

For more information

We will continue to update our webpage at camden.gov.uk/coronavirus including information from Public Health England. We would like to keep you updated as everything is changing very quickly, so to sign up for email updates register at camden.gov.uk/coronavirus-updates

We really appreciate that this is a difficult time for everyone but your housing staff are here to support you, your family and your community in every way we can.

Yours faithfully



Cllr Meric Apak, Cabinet Member for Better Homes