

Dear resident,

We want to reassure you that during this national emergency, caused by the spread of Covid-19 (Coronavirus), Southwark Council, your landlord, will continue to put the safety and welfare of our residents as a top priority, especially those vulnerable residents who would not be able to manage without our help.

The most important action we must all take, in fighting coronavirus, is to stay at home in order to protect the NHS and save lives.

The council will concentrate our efforts on providing essential services, including fire safety and emergency repairs. Normal service levels will not be possible and we ask you to please not contact the council unless it is regarding an essential service or for someone who cannot manage without our help.

It's a rapidly-changing picture and we will follow national government guidelines so please listen to the daily announcements from government to find out what's going on and what you should do.

We want people to stay well and we hope to be able to limit the spread of the virus so as few people as possible get ill. For that to happen everyone has to behave responsibly and those staff who are able to work need to be able to concentrate their efforts on providing services to those who most need our support.

We know you will have many questions and there is a list of "frequently asked questions" at the bottom of this letter.

Stay at home, stay safe and stay well,

Cllr Kieron Williams, Cabinet Member for Housing Management

Michael Scorer, Strategic Director for Housing and Modernisation

Follow the Government's instructions and only leave your home for one of four reasons:

- **Shopping for basic necessities, like food and medicine, but as infrequently as possible**
- **One form of exercise a day, for example a run, walk, or cycle - alone or with members of your household**
- **Any medical need, or to provide care or to help a vulnerable person**
- **Travelling to and from work , but only where this absolutely cannot be done from home**

Covid-19 (Coronavirus) Questions and Answers

Q. Because of the virus my earnings have dropped and I now can't afford to pay my rent / mortgage / service charges. What help is available?

A. For general advice please visit www.southwark.gov.uk/coronavirus-housingadvice

If you are struggling to pay your rent or service charge due to COVID-19 impacts or another reason, please contact your rent or service charge officer and they will guide you through the support we can offer to help you. Please use the contact details provided on your rent or service charge statements.

In the case of mortgage payments, please contact your mortgage lender directly to discuss this as many lenders have now put in place measures to support customers during any personal disruption, ill health or financial difficulty arising from coronavirus. Please check their websites for further information.

Where you experience a sudden loss or interruption to income due to COVID-19 impacts or another reason you may also be able to claim benefits. For most working age people the benefit they will need to claim is Universal Credit and, if you are entitled to benefit, the payment should include an amount towards your rent. If you are already claiming Universal Credit you should let DWP know so that future benefit payments reflect your change in circumstances and loss of income. Please visit <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit> for more information.

For more advice and support with any financial hardship you face because of COVID19, or any other reason, please contact the Financial Inclusion team within the Housing Solutions service contact via telephone or email or on line through the Southwark web site email financialinclusion@southwark.gov.uk or access the web form at <http://www.southwark.gov.uk/dhponline>

Q. If I can't pay my rent or service charge will I be evicted?

A. You will not be evicted. The Council has halted all enforcement and court action for rent arrears for an indefinite period so you don't need to worry. If you are struggling to pay your rent or service charge please contact your rent or service charge officer using the details provided on your rent or service charge statements.

Q. I pay my rent in cash when I collect my pension, but I can't get out to collect it now. I'm worried about getting into rent arrears.

A. If you pay your rent with cash when you collect your pension, do not worry that you can not get out to collect your pension to pay the rent, we understand. Simply ensure that when you are able to collect your pension, that you pay the back dated rent at that time. Please contact your rent or service charge officer to keep them informed, using the details provided on your rent or service charge statements.

Q. Will the council continue to clean my estate and my block?

A. There will be a reduced estate cleaning service on your estate however we will continue to provide a daily presence to ensure the following:

- Removal of bulky waste/furniture from internal areas of blocks
- Cleaning of door handles/finger plates/lift buttons/handrails etc.
- Collection of dumped waste/fly tipping from external areas
- Rotation of chute-fed waste bins. We will also continue with unblocking of refuse chutes as required.

We will also ensure the following tasks are undertaken on a weekly basis:

- Sweeping and mopping of lifts and lobby areas
- Litter picking and removal of dog waste from external communal areas

Q. I am a resident who would like to help keep my block clean. What can I do?

A. We appreciate residents will want to do everything they can to help, including helping to clean estates. We need to put health and safety first and minimise any risk to you, your family and neighbours. You should of course keep your home clean, this will reduce the risk to you, but you should not carry out estate cleaning.

Q. Will the rubbish and recycling still be collected?

A. Yes. We will prioritise rubbish and recycling collections above other waste services – please make sure you use bins or waste chutes provided, and do not dump any kind of waste in any other places. We will continue to collect bags of waste as normal if you do not have access to a bin. There may be short delays for some collections, and we may need to empty bins on a different day. Make sure you do not contaminate recycling bins, separate all recyclable materials, and make sure recyclables are clean. Always wash your hands thoroughly after disposing of waste.

Q. What do I need to do with my rubbish if someone in my home may be have COVID19

A. If you think a member of your household may have coronavirus please store personal waste such as tissues and disposable cleaning cloths within disposable rubbish bags. Place these bags into another bag, tied securely and keep it separate from other waste. These bags should be put aside for a minimum of 72 hours (3 days) before you put them in your general waste bin.

Q. Which repairs will the council do at the moment?

A. New repairs will only be logged for urgent or emergency repairs and we will aim to complete such repairs within 24 hours.

Our Fire Safety Team is continuing with Fire Risk Assessments with the advised additional precautions in place.

Our lift inspectors will undertake their tasks on site as normal, prioritising our most vulnerable residents to get the assistance they need, including prioritising Sheltered Housing Units.

The Handypersons Service will not carry out work inside residents' homes for the time being but will continue to work on external jobs.

Our Emergency Housing Officers will continue to attend major emergencies out-of-hours.

Our heating contractors are currently carrying out their work as normal, whilst taking the advised precautions.

Emergency works to housing adaptation orders will not be affected currently and resources will be moved to facilitate as many repairs as possible for this vulnerable group. New adaptations will only be completed in exceptional cases in discussion with occupational therapy.

Q. Are major works going to continue?

We will be sending letters to all residents currently impacted by major works schemes across the borough. We will be advising residents that:

- Major works due to start on estates in the near future will be postponed.
- Planned meetings with residents and site meetings are being postponed.
- No further internal works will be started, including works to windows and doors
- External and urgent works will continue as long as works can be carried out safely and without impacting negatively on residents who are at home.

This is in line with the Government's current advice, and is correct at the time of going to print.

Q. What help is available for vulnerable residents and who is counted as being vulnerable?

A. Vulnerability can be due to range of personal circumstances including health condition, disability and age. The council's area housing teams have been contacting residents who we know are more vulnerable remotely to check how they are. We are also working with colleagues in social care to prioritise contacting those who we know are most likely to need support.

There are lots of community groups offering support to vulnerable residents and you can find out more about how to volunteer and also where to get support if you need it from the council's community hub. Go to www.southwark.gov.uk/covidsupport or call 020 7525 5000.

If you do want to volunteer, please follow this advice:

- if you feel at all unwell, do not volunteer
- wash your hands regularly, especially before and after you deliver any items
- try to support people who live close to you so you don't travel longer distances

- if you make a delivery, stay 2 meters away from the person who is in isolation at all times. Place the items outside their door and then step away
- be careful about how you share personal information about yourself and other people
- be careful about taking money

Q. How can Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs) best support their residents?

A. The council values and appreciates the willingness of TRA members to help their neighbours. TRA committees wanting to coordinate support activity must ensure they don't bring people together in meetings face-to-face. Please be mindful of the government's advice on social distancing and hold such meetings virtually via chat groups or video calling if this is available.

Q. Can we continue to utilise our TRA hall facilities?

A. Given that many of those using TRA halls can be vulnerable or older the council is advising all TRAs to close down their TRA halls and cancel existing bookings in order to follow government's latest advice on social distancing and minimising non-essential contact.

Q. Our family is overcrowded is there any help we can get to help us self isolate if we have to?

A. The guidance from the government is to avoid shared spaces as much as possible if required to self isolate. However we understand this maybe difficult for many households if they are overcrowded. If you need advice on how to manage this please contact our advice line on 020 7525 5950, for on line advice please visit www.southwark.gov.uk/coronavirus-housingadvice

Q. Why are our play and games areas being locked shut?

A. In line with Government instructions to prevent social gatherings, the council is closing all communal games areas on estates until further notice to help prevent the spread of infection.