

# Coronavirus: Providing suitable temporary accommodation

## Councils must have new powers to make use of vacant holiday homes

### Context

During this global public health emergency, it is vital that we provide everyone who is homeless with safe and suitable temporary accommodation. The social distancing, self-isolation, and material support inherent to any socially effective and therefore public health response must apply to everyone in our communities. Everyone should have access to safe accommodation, support, health services and basic necessities including food and utilities. This will protect people who are homeless, and the wider community.

Shelter Scotland has campaigned for many years to improve standards in temporary accommodation. This health emergency has brought to light the significant proportion of unsuitable accommodation still being provided across Scotland. Many hostels and B&Bs, with shared sleeping areas, kitchens and bathroom facilities are totally unsuitable for people, especially during this health emergency as people cannot self-isolate or social distance themselves.

Emergency night shelters and hostels are now being shut. While councils are looking for alternative accommodation such as hotels, we are also aware of cases in which private hostels are closing and telling residents to leave, even when they have nowhere to go. The lack of hostels and B&Bs is also leaving prison leavers in difficulty, struggling to access temporary accommodation. While we appreciate efforts are being made by councils to find other accommodation, we are particularly concerned that hotel accommodation, which is being used by some councils will create significant problems for people in this lockdown situation if they do not have cooking facilities.

### What we are calling for and why

To help prevent the spread of the virus we must support those who are currently rough sleeping to find accommodation, prevent anyone from having to sleep rough, and stop placing people into unsuitable temporary accommodation. Where possible, people currently in unsuitable temporary accommodation, who are at risk of being infected by the coronavirus, should be safely rehoused.

While some local authorities are already actively addressing this issue, we believe there needs to be a national strategy put in place to ensure suitable temporary accommodation is available for all who need it during the emergency.

We are therefore calling for powers to be granted to local authorities so they use can the following accommodation as temporary accommodation during this pandemic:

- holiday homes (including Airbnb and other short-term private lets)
- second homes not currently occupied
- unoccupied furnished empty properties with adequate toilet, personal washing and food preparation facilities for the exclusive use of a household

This would ensure that more suitable accommodation could be provided for people without a home, so they can adhere to the public health restrictions which are in place to stop the spread of this virus.

### Solution

**Emergency powers should be included in legislation to allow for compulsory letting orders on public health grounds to allow these types of holiday or empty properties to be used during this crisis.**

**Local government should work with services and accommodation providers to ensure that no one is sleeping rough or being left without suitable accommodation as a result of hostel and B&B closures, and that everyone is supported into appropriate accommodation where they can safely adhere to government guidance.**

The first step could be a voluntary scheme, where private sector owners would be asked to make their properties available for use as temporary accommodation during this crisis. However, should they refuse emergency powers must be in place to ensure compliance.

Local authorities would be responsible for ensuring that the property is maintained during the time it is used as temporary accommodation, and they would also be responsible for ensuring the property is returned to the owner in the same condition as it was when the emergency letting began.

In order to ensure that owners for whom the property is a business do not lose out on any compensation for lost income they would receive if the property was empty, it should be agreed that they are still allowed to claim government compensation for lost income on the basis of normal expected rental income, but this should be minus the money received through the emergency letting scheme.

The compulsory scheme would give the local authority the power to issue Emergency Interim Compulsory Letting Orders that would make it a requirement for owners to make the property available to local authorities to provide emergency temporary accommodation for specified groups of people.

These would include:

- Anyone newly identified as requiring temporary accommodation.
- Anyone currently in unsuitable temporary accommodation, who has been identified as needing to self-isolate.
- Any families currently in unsuitable temporary accommodation where at least one family member is required to self-isolate, or anyone else living in the accommodation is currently required to self-isolate.
- Anyone currently in temporary accommodation, where the accommodation is deemed unsuitable for residents to observe social distancing measures.

Measures would be put in place to ensure that the properties would be deep cleaned and would be safe to occupy.

Owners who refuse to comply with requests to make their properties available should either have their government compensation reduced by the amount that would otherwise have been paid, where it was used as temporary accommodation, or by the full amount if they continue to fail to allow a property to be used when requested.