

**HOUSING EXECUTIVE - Supporting People
Programme: COVID19 CONTINGENCY PLAN**

Version 5.0

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OVERVIEW

Purpose

The purpose of the plan is to outline contingency arrangements which will be taken to support Supporting People funded services to continue to deliver services during the COVID-19 pandemic and includes areas where we are undertaking 'Business as Usual' activities. The principal audience for this plan is Supporting People (SP) Providers, statutory partners and others with an interest.

This plan will be continually reviewed and updated to reflect the wider responses and support required across the system.

Service Provider Reporting Requirements

In the event of an incident linked to Covid19, service providers are required to notify the Supporting People team. Instances linked to Covid19 are described below:

- A staff member or service user testing positive for Covid-19
- A staff member or service user dying as a result of Covid-19

Providers should email the following information to their Supporting People Lead Officer on the day of the incident or as soon as practically possible. This information needs to continue to be supplied through peak holiday periods such as Christmas, Easter etc

- Scheme name
- Service User or Staff member
Age and gender of the individual
- Date the Covid19 case was confirmed, date of Death or date symptoms led to isolation
- If the staff member / service user is in hospital or self-isolating at home
- If a risk to other service users or staff has been identified – for example is there a shared tenancy
- Action(s) taken by service provider

Please note. This information may be copied to your SP Lead Officer when informing statutory bodies, if your organisation is also required to report in this way.

Service Provider Personal Protection Equipment PPE

Distribution of PPE

From November 2020, the Housing Executive commenced the supply of PPE to SP services which receive H&SC funding.

For SP services solely funded by Supporting People, the Housing Executive continue to source and deliver PPE for use in these services.

A PPE stocktake form was implemented from 01 September 2020 to enable Supporting People to manage the PPE process and make best use of PPE items. This requires some additional information to accompany each monthly PPE order and 3 month rolling PPE forecast submission.

The PPE stocktake form should be used to record the amounts of each PPE item physically still held in stock in your organisation and should be submitted along with your monthly PPE order and 3 month rolling forecast to supporting.people@NIHE.gov.uk. Please ensure the figures submitted are accurate.

If you find that you are running low on an item of PPE during the month an additional order can be placed and delivered to you.

Stocktake, ordering and three month rolling forecast forms can be found on our website under the Personal Protective Equipment Arrangements dropdown here: [Supporting People Delivery Partners](#)

Use of face masks/face coverings

In light of evolving evidence the Northern Ireland Executive decided that members of the public must wear face coverings when in enclosed settings where social distancing cannot be maintained, this became a mandatory requirement from Monday 10 August 2020. This includes not only public transport or retail environments, but also any other settings where interactions with individuals from other households take place, including domestic settings and healthcare environments. There are exemptions for those with some underlining health problems.

It is appropriate to extend recommendations about their use in settings where COVID-secure environments cannot be maintained through other means.

A COVID secure environment is described as one where 2m social distancing, optimal hand hygiene, frequent surface decontamination, ventilation and other measures are in place to prevent the spread of the virus.

In line with infection prevention and control guidance from Public Health England (PHE) in relation to COVID 19 and recent 'Principles for Visiting in Care Settings in NI' – the following recommendations for use of face coverings and face masks in all healthcare facilities/buildings should be considered –

Staff should ensure that they adhere to the required public health measures. This includes maintaining strict social distance, ensuring that good hand and respiratory hygiene is practiced by all and that there is good ventilation.

- In first instance all efforts to maintain 2m distance should be made in all areas where possible and all mitigations to improve or comply with 2m distancing should be undertaken
- All facilities and buildings should be risk assessed to ensure that they are COVID secure - enhance social distancing, optimal hand hygiene, use of screens or barriers to separate people, ensure good ventilation, promote remote and virtual working, ensure regular surface cleaning and use of environmental hygiene procedures, provide additional waste bins, guide movement around buildings supported by appropriate signage
- Hand hygiene and high standard of infection control precautions including safe respiratory etiquette should be maintained i.e. '*catch it– bin it–kill it*', sneezing and coughing into arm
- Where there are times when maintaining a COVID Secure environment including a 2m distance is not possible, then a face covering or clinical grade face mask should be donned by all staff depending on the role and the working environment of the staff member.

Members of the public and staff should always be guided by public health requirements in place for the particular setting.

PPE Guidance

To help support colleagues within the Housing Executive and supported living sector, RQIA have collated some specific guidance on the use of PPE within the Supported Living Sector.

It is hoped this guidance will provide some information to staff in assessing PPE usage, when it is deemed to be required and the correct procedures for the donning and doffing of PPE.

- [Guide to donning and doffing Standard PEE H&SC Poster](#)
- [Easy Visual Guide to PPE Poster](#)
- [Recommended PPE for Primary Outpatient Community and Social Care Poster](#)

The [Northern Ireland Social Care Council \(NISCC\) website](#) provides a wide range of guidance that covers many aspects of Infection Control and PPE. This site links to a number of videos providing PPE guidance, for ease of reference two of these are provided below:

- Click [here](#) to see PPE for Domiciliary Care video.
- Click [here](#) to see video on Donning and Doffing.

Testing for Covid-19

Everyone in Northern Ireland with symptoms of Covid-19 is eligible for a free test.

The symptoms of covid-19 as described by the PHA are:

- a high temperature - this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
- a new continuous cough - this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual) ; or
- a loss of or change in sense of smell or taste.

A Covid-19 symptom check can be found here: [Symptom checker](#)

Tests should be completed in the first 3 days of coronavirus symptoms appearing although testing is considered effective up until day 5.

There are two ways to get a coronavirus test; going to a testing centre or getting a test kit delivered to your home.

In Northern Ireland the following groups of people can access priority testing:

- [Essential Workers](#)

- Anyone who has symptoms of coronavirus and lives with an essential worker

Essential workers and those who live with an essential worker can arrange a test [here](#).

Testing for all symptomatic individuals in Northern Ireland can be booked here: [NHS Covid-19 Testing and Tracing](#)

Further information on testing for covid-19 can be found here: [Public Health Agency Testing for Covid-19](#)

COVID-19 Testing for Supported Accommodation

COVID-19 testing is available to all supported living clients and staff if they display symptoms.

If your supported living service has a Covid-19 outbreak or you require any further support, please contact the Public Health Agency via the PHA Duty Room on 0300 555 0119, or contact Deirdre Webb on 07920186497

Flu vaccine

This year we are facing the double threat of COVID-19 and influenza. Early studies show that for some people with both COVID-19 and flu virus there is an increased risk of complications and death. Each year the flu vaccine protects against the most common strains of flu likely to be circulating.

Front-line health and social care workers are more likely to be exposed to the flu virus. It has been estimated that up to 1 in 4 health and social care workers may become infected with flu during a mild flu season.

Getting vaccinated early helps to:

- protect you from getting flu and from passing it on to your family
- protect service users, who can be particularly at risk of the serious complications of the flu
- protect other health and social care staff
- ensure health and social care services are effective and efficient.

If you are pregnant, suffer from a medical condition or are aged 65 or over, it's more important than ever for you to get the flu vaccine.*

Contact your GP surgery to find out the arrangements for flu vaccination in your practice.

**For details of other groups who should get the vaccine see the 'Flu is more serious than you think' leaflet: www.pha.site/Flu-leaflets*

Covid Vaccine Northern Ireland

The Covid-19 vaccination programme began on 08 December 2020 when those who will be carrying out the vaccinations received the vaccine.

Each of the H&SC Trusts have identified premises where vaccinators will be administered. The first phase of the programme began week commencing 14 December and the vaccination model will also include Trust mobile and roving teams who will focus on those groups for whom travel to a vaccination centre would be challenging, such as the elderly and care home residents or a supported living centre where the clinical risk was considered to be similar to a care home. Subject to the availability of a suitable vaccine, from early January 2021, it is intended to roll out the programme through primary care led vaccination clinics.

Please see the letter from the Chief Medical Officer Dr Michael McBride: [Deployment of the Covid-19 Vaccine in NI](#)

Related Guidance Documentation

SP Homelessness providers should follow the Department of Health guidance in the Covid-19 Guidance for Homeless Providers in Northern Ireland V5 (link below) in addition to this document and the Homelessness Surge plan.

[Covid-19 Guidance for Homeless Providers in Northern Ireland V5](#)

The Housing Executive Covid19 Surge plan has been developed to outline contingency arrangements and escalation measures to support Homelessness and Supporting People funded services to continue during the containment and surge phases of the COVID-19 outbreak. This can be found via the link below. This document is currently being updated and a revised and issued in January 2021.

[Housing Executive Covid19 Surge Plan](#)

The HSCB and PHA have developed the HSCB and PHA Homeless COVID-19 Surge Plan to guide the system through the surge periods of the COVID-19 pandemic within the homeless sector.

[HSCB and PHA Homeless COVID-19 Surge Plan](#) (link unavailable – document to be shared with SP homeless providers)

The Housing Executive and PHA have developed a Homeless Services Outbreak Protocol which can be found via the link below.

[Protocol for dealing with Outbreaks of Covid-19 in Homeless Services](#)

The Department of Health has published guidance for supported living providers and is aimed at H&SC Trusts, the NIHE and independent providers of supported living services and should be considered alongside guidance for Nursing & Residential Care Home and Domiciliary Care providers.

[Covid-19: Guidance for Supported Living Providers](#)

A large proportion of Supporting People funded services provide domiciliary care funded by Health & Social Care Trusts as well as housing support funded by the Supporting People Programme. These include services provided to older people, younger people and people with a disability and mental health issues. The Department of Health have provided detailed guidance for service providers which should be followed.

[Covid-19: Guidance for Nursing Homes and Residential Care homes in Northern Ireland](#)

The Department of Health has published updated guidance for domiciliary care providers in Northern Ireland. The guidance (linked below) provides clear direction on the supply of PPE and what is recommended for infection control and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

[COVID-19: Guidance for Domiciliary Care Providers in Northern Ireland](#)

These plans provide detailed guidance for service providers who provide care in a supported living setting. Supporting People funded services are strongly advised to follow this guidance and continue to follow guidance issued by Department of Health, relevant Health and Social Care Trusts and the Public Health Agency.

The regional visiting guidance (below) continues to apply during the Christmas period, for visiting in Care settings. However, the Department of Health advise that these services should recognise the importance many people attach to seeing family and friends over the Christmas period, and therefore facilitate visiting in line with the guidance over the Christmas period (below).

[COVID-19: Regional Principles for Visiting in Care Settings in Northern Ireland](#)

[COVID-19: Care homes – Christmas family visiting \(23 – 27 December 2020\)](#)

This guidance has been made available from the Department of Health for Health and Social Care providers and may be helpful to SP Providers.

[Covid19: Pre employment Vetting Guidance Health and Social Care Providers](#)

The Department of Health and the Public Health Agency are keeping abreast of the changing situation around Covid-19. The link below provides details on advice and updates on Covid-19:

[Covid-19: Department of Health](#)

This plan should be read in conjunction with the contingency plans of the range of other departments and agencies that support service users and staff, including but not limited to: Department for Communities (DfC); Housing Executive Homeless Services; Health and Social Care Board; Health and Social Care Trusts; the Regional Out of Hours Emergency Social Work Service (RESWS); the Department of Health (DoH); partner organisations including the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Probation Board of Northern Ireland (PBNI) and others.

CONTINGENCY MEASURES

Provider Business Continuity Plans

It is fully appreciated that this is a difficult and challenging time for service providers and staff who continue to deliver support to service users. Supporting People are committed to working with providers to support continued delivery of service to vulnerable clients.

Supporting People Emergency Covid-19 Funding

The following support measures were agreed in response to cost pressures faced by Supporting People (SP) Providers as a result of COVID-19 in 2020/21;

- Additional funding has been secured to support vulnerable individuals, who are particularly at risk during the Covid-19 emergency, to continue to live independently, and;
- DfC confirmed Ministerial and DoF approval for the NIHE proposal to temporarily unfreeze the accumulated SP Reserves across Supporting People provider organisations, specifically to deal with Covid-19 related pressures, in particular additional staffing costs and other eligible expenditure

Eligibility for the use of SP Reserves

Providers with accumulated SP reserves may draw down on their reserves for SP eligible expenditure that is directly related to Covid-19 as outlined within the Northern Ireland Supporting People Guidance (DSD 2012). Any additional SP eligible expenditure must be drawn down from reserves before requesting further funding from the SP Covid-19 fund.

Principle-based approach to funding

SP is using a principle-based approach to the Covid-19 funding. The principle is that funding is eligible where it addresses financial pressures that have arisen due to Covid-19 and are required to ensure the continuity of services for the service users. The onus is on the provider to demonstrate this.

A summary of eligible costs was shared with service providers 17 August 2020.

The following categories have been confirmed as eligible expenditure under this funding:

- Staff costs
- SP eligible Associated Support/Overhead costs
- Cleaning and Infection Prevention
- Loss of Housing Benefit
- Loss of SP income
- Social Distancing Measures
- Short-term Scheme Reconfiguration
- Loss of income from fundraising activities
- Loss of income from social enterprises

Confirmation of Actual Covid-19 Costs

Supporting People required the submission of actual financial pressures due to Covid-19 from SP Providers. This was sought for the period April to July 2020 and will next be sought for the period Aug – Oct 2020.

Providers are reminded to complete and return the excel templates entitled Actuals. Supporting evidence is required that provides the detail on what is being claimed.

Eligibility and Vouching Criteria document was shared with providers, on 17 August 2020 which gave guidance on what may be claimed.

Additional Staffing

Funding has been ring fenced for Supporting People Service providers to recruit new staff members on a temporary basis, to expand the number of dedicated staff per Supporting People funded service.

Each singly funded Supporting People service (i.e. those not in receipt of H&SC funding) can access funding to meet staff costs in respect of a temporary member of staff between now and 31 March 2021. Providers with restricted Supporting People reserves should use these in the first instance.

This funding is aimed at allowing some flexibility for staff, for services to facilitate staff rest and for services to cover staff leave. It is also a contingency measure which aims to increase the pool of staff available to support other services, including those delivered by other SP service providers, should other local SP schemes be faced with a Covid related staffing crisis.

The level of funding is set equivalent to a Band 3 Health Worker (£19,737 + on-costs) = £21,300 per annum. Providers should claim reimbursement as part of the Covid claims process through Supporting People.

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) - Additional Salary Costs

SP Providers can claim for additional salary costs from the Covid fund, where staff are at a financial detriment by losing full pay due to Covid-related absences. This expenditure represents additional costs over and above existing SP funding provided and set out in funding agreements.

This position recognises that employment terms and conditions are a matter between employer and employee and this funding should only be requested if any future expenditure does not contravene those terms and conditions. Providers may want to ensure decisions to provide additional pay to staff in such circumstances are not to likely cause direct or indirect discrimination to other staff, or contravene existing absence policies and procedures.

Providers can claim for additional SSP costs sustained when NIHE next requests detail of expenditure incurred from November 2020 onwards, through the existing claim process. The claim process consists of a template to be completed which indicates eligible costs. The template and any updated guidelines will be sent to Providers when each call for claims is made by Supporting People.

2020/21 Financial Pressures for Jointly Funded Services

Dept. of Health has agreed to transfer funds to cover the Health element of additional Covid-19 related staff costs and overheads to allow Supporting People to administer the funding. Please continue to submit claims for these costs.

Vouching of Covid-19 Expenditure

Providers must ensure that they provide back up evidence for all Covid-19 claims. This to ensure expenditure relating to Covid-19 was appropriate, can be evidenced and was additional to expenditure currently funded by SP or any other fund. Providers should ensure that full details of expenditure are retained. Any funding found to be ineligible or unspent will be recouped.

Any funding received from an emergency fund, and its related expenditure, must also be shown separately on the audited financial statements.

Contract Management Contingency Measures

Service Providers should continue to review and update Business Continuity Plans to ensure measures are in place to ensure essential support is provided to vulnerable clients.

The following contingency measures will continue within Supporting People to reduce administrative and contract requirements for service providers, and enable providers to focus on sustaining the delivery of critical services, and support, this section now also includes areas where we can make steps towards 'Business as Usual'. Where service providers are unable to undertake contract management reporting activities these should be discussed with your Lead Officer.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE CONTINGENCY MEASURES

- Contract Management Meetings resumed in July 2020, and lead officers will continue to carry these out remotely.
- Quality Monitoring via the QMT - We undertook a pilot with some sheltered services using a light touch approach and undertook a small number of online QMTs. We hope to continue these in 2021.
- Providers are asked to continue to submit Performance Indicator Workbooks aligned to the [Supporting People PI Workbook Reporting Schedule 2020/21](#).
- A new system for providers to submit Outcomes data was introduced in October 2020. All Providers should be returning outcomes information via this new system.
- Service providers are asked to ensure that they continue to update client schedules, documenting client changes in services to ensure correct payments continue to be made for subsidy schemes. Client schedules for subsidy schemes should continue to be updated via SPOCC.net.
- Client schedules for service users in floating support schemes should continue to be kept up to date via SPOCC.net.
- We reviewed the financial information request process in response to feedback from providers and made the process simpler for providers to complete.
- Flexibility for service providers continues, in terms of the use of Supporting People funding within services, to allow for adaptations in service delivery, for

example, this flexibility can allow service providers to temporarily reduce non-critical services or redeploy floating support staff to accommodation based services, to enable critical services to be sustained in response to staffing pressures. Service providers are requested to keep their lead officer informed of any such changes. Redeployment must be within Supporting People funded services.

- Floating Support and sheltered accommodation providers should follow the [Guidance for Domiciliary Care Providers in Northern Ireland](#). Providers should follow a risk based approach to support in line with regulations/guidance.
- Providers should follow the PHA guidance as far as possible in relation to self-isolation, social distancing and vulnerable staff. [Advice on COVID-19 \(coronavirus\)](#). Rotational working should be considered where appropriate to ensure that staff members do not get sick.

Communication

Communication with Supporting People should be maintained through Supporting People Lead Officers. Lead officers will be in contact with service providers on a regular basis in order to obtain an overview of impact on services during this time and support required.

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Please also be aware of the Supporting People email inbox for general enquiries:
Supporting.People@nihe.gov.uk.

Supporting People will endeavour to maintain regular contact with services through email and telephone.

Homeless Tracker App

Work continues to develop the Homeless Tracker App which combines Homeless provider data linked to Covid-19 required by both Supporting People and Housing Services. Homeless Providers are required to complete the Housing Services provider census weekly and to report to Supporting People Lead Officers weekly until such times as the Tracker App is available for use.

This document will be continually reviewed; any revisions will be circulated.