

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

**Version 6.0
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Purpose.....	3
Service Provider Reporting Requirements (<i>update</i>).....	3
Service Provider Personal Protection Equipment.....	4
Use of face masks/face coverings (<i>update</i>).....	4
PPE Guidance.....	4
Testing for Covid-19 (<i>update</i>).....	5
Asymptomatic Testing for Supported Accommodation (<i>new</i>)	6
Covid-19 Testing for Supported Accommodation.....	6
Covid-19 Vaccine Northern Ireland	7
Homeless Service User Vaccination Programme (<i>new</i>)	7
Related Guidance Documentation.....	7-9
PHA COVID-19 Bulletin (<i>new</i>).....	9
CONTINGENCY MEASURES	10-14
Provider Business Continuity Plans.....	10
Supporting People Emergency Covid-19 Funding (<i>update</i>).....	10
Eligibility for the use of SP Reserves.....	10
Principle-based approach to funding.....	10
Confirmation of Actual Covid-19 Costs	11
Additional Staffing	11
Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) - Additional Salary Costs	11
Financial Pressures for Jointly Funded Services (<i>update</i>).....	12
Vouching of Covid-19 Expenditure	12
Contract Management Contingency Measures (<i>update</i>).....	13-14
Homeless Tracker App (<i>update</i>).....	14
Communication (<i>update</i>).....	14-15

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 holiday periods.

- Scheme name
- Locality of service
- If the scheme is jointly-funded with health
- Service user or Staff member
- Date the Covid19 case was confirmed or date of death
- 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 if there is a shared tenancy.
- Other agencies involved, eg PHA, RQIA, Trust
- Action(s) taken by service provider

Please note. Due to updated requirements the age and gender of individuals does not need to be reported.

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

The Housing Executive continues to source and supply PPE to SP services which receive H&SC funding and those that are solely funded by Supporting People.

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

Wearing face coverings when in enclosed settings where social distancing cannot be maintained, is a mandatory requirement (*introduced by NI Executive August 2020*).

Note. There are exemptions for those with underlining health problems.

Further information on the use of face coverings and the exemptions that apply is available at: www.nidirect.gov.uk/face-coverings

Face Covering Regulations (NI) can be found here: [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2020](#)

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.

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 PPE 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](#)

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

Tests must be done in the first 8 days of having symptoms.

On days 1 to 7, tests can be carried out at a site or at home. If ordering a home test kit on day 7, this must be done by 3pm. On day 8, you need to go to a test site - it's too late to order a home test kit.

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](#)

Asymptomatic Testing for Supported Accommodation

The Department of Health has further extended COVID-19 testing to provide routine asymptomatic COVID-19 testing for staff working in the supported living sector. This will play a key role in helping to minimise the risk of COVID-19 through the identification of positive cases and early prevention of transmission of infection.

The COVID-19 testing programme is available across all four supported living thematic groups (*older people; disability and mental health; young people and homelessness*), and includes jointly and non-jointly commissioned schemes.

Webinar sessions were facilitated by Department of Health and Social Care, London (DHSC), with service providers, to explain how to organise and manage the COVID-19 testing process.

Supported living providers can provide asymptomatic staff testing by booking and accessing the testing kits through the online portal available on the DHSC website.

Information on routine COVID-19 testing has and will be disseminated to all supported living providers by PHA, and will also be published on the PHA website. The Department of Health will also update its COVID-19 guidance for supported living providers to reflect the availability of routine COVID-19 testing for asymptomatic staff.

PHA page on routine testing: [Regular Coronavirus testing for staff in supported living settings](#)

COVID-19 Testing for Supported Accommodation

It is important to note that where there is a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cluster or outbreak in a supported living setting (that is more than one person with symptoms among either service users or staff), the long established testing arrangements will continue to apply. In such situations, the PHA will conduct a risk assessment; if testing is required, all staff and service users will be tested for COVID-19 where appropriate through the Health and Social Care laboratory network, which is Pillar 1 of the testing programme.

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.

Covid Vaccine Northern Ireland

The first phase of the vaccine programme began in December 2020 and has been rolling out since January 2021 through primary care led vaccination clinics. The vaccination model also includes Trust mobile and roving teams who 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.

More information can be found here: [Northern Ireland COVID-19 Vaccination Programme](#)

Homeless Service User Vaccination Programme

A vaccination programme for Homeless people in Northern Ireland was rolled out to all Homeless service users on 15 March 2021.

Vaccines are provided through Hostel Accommodation facilities. Trusts have and will be in contact with homeless service providers to identify how many service users or new staff wish to have the Vaccine.

This is a two vaccine dose and the vaccine offers protection from severe Covid19 disease but those who have been vaccinated may still be able to transmit the virus. Even after vaccination it is still necessary to use a mask, maintain social distance and wash hands regularly.

Related Guidance Documentation

SP Homelessness providers should follow the Department of Health guidance in the Covid-19 Guidance for Homeless Providers in Northern Ireland V6 (link below).

[Covid-19 Guidance for Homeless Providers in Northern Ireland V6](#)

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.

[Housing Executive Covid19 Surge Plan](#)

A Homeless Services Outbreak Protocol (V2) which can be found via the link below has been developed by the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Department of Health (DoH) with input from the Housing Executive and other statutory partners and agencies.

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

The Department of Health published guidance for supported living providers and is aimed at H&SC Trusts, the Housing Executive 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](#)

The guidance below sets out key messages to support planning to prevent the widespread transmission of covid-19. It is aimed at providers of jointly commissioned funded supported accommodation projects for young people aged 16 to 21 in Northern Ireland.

[COVID19: Guidance for 16-21+ Jointly Commissioned Supported Accommodation Settings](#)

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 guidance for service providers which should be followed.

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

The principles below provide 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.

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

This guidance below 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](#)

Please be reminded of 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.

PHA COVID-19 Bulletin

The PHA COVID-19 Bulletin presents high level data on key areas being used to monitor COVID-19 activity and highlights current issues and public health messages, along with the analysis of the demographic of people affected by the virus.

To bulletins can be viewed here: [Coronavirus Bulletin](#)

CONTINGENCY MEASURES

Provider Business Continuity Plans

It is appreciated that challenges for service providers and staff who deliver support to service users may continue. Supporting People are committed to working with providers to support continued delivery of services to vulnerable clients.

Supporting People Emergency Covid-19 Funding

Support measures agreed in response to cost pressures faced by Supporting People (SP) Providers as a result of COVID-19 are as follows;

- Additional funding has been secured for 2021/22 for the Supporting People element of financial pressures faced by Supporting People service providers in dealing with Covid19.
- DfC confirmed approval for the NIHE proposal to extend the temporarily unfreezing of SP Reserves across Supporting People provider organisations into 2021/22, 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.

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 require the submission of actual financial pressures due to Covid-19 from SP Providers.

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.

Additional Staffing

Each singly funded Supporting People service (i.e. those not in receipt of H&SC funding) can continue to access funding to meet staff costs in respect of a temporary member of staff. 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 + oncosts) = £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 likely cause direct or indirect discrimination to other staff, or contravene existing absence policies and procedures.

Providers can claim for additional SSP costs sustained 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.

Financial Pressures for Jointly Funded Services

The Dept. of Health transferred funds to cover the Health element of additional Covid-19 related staff costs and overheads to allow Supporting People to administer funding for 2020/21.

Confirmation has not yet been received from Health for Covid-19 costs in 2021/22. Providers should therefore not make any claims for the Health element of Covid-19 costs and overheads for the 2021/22 FY.

Further information will be shared with providers when received.

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 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 services, and support, this section includes 'Business as Usual' areas. 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 continue to be carried out remotely by SP lead officers.
- Quality Monitoring via the QMT – a programme of QMT's will be carried out remotely from April 2021 onwards. Lead officers will be in contact with the relevant services.
- Providers should submit Performance Indicator Workbooks aligned to the PI reporting schedule. [2021/2022 Performance Measurement reporting timetable](#)
- Providers should return outcomes information via the outcomes system which was introduced in October 2020. [2021/22 Outcomes Monitoring reporting timetable](#)
- Providers should continue to update client schedules, for subsidy and floating support schemes via SPOCC.net.
- Agility, in terms of the use of Supporting People funding within services continues. For example, to allow redeployment of staff across Supporting People services 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.
- 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.

Homeless Tracker App

Homeless Tracker App has been developed and work around adapting some operational aspects of the app are being progressed. Homeless Providers are required to report to Supporting People Lead Officers until such times as the Tracker App is available for use.

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.

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