

# **COVID19 SURGE PLAN: HOUSING EXECUTIVE**

**Version 1.0**

**26<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

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# OVERVIEW

## Purpose

The purpose of the plan is 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.

The overall objectives include:

- Working together to safeguard homeless households at a strategic, service and individual level
- Ensuring essential core services are identified and maintained
- Ensuring a coordinated response across the homeless sector
- Ensuring consistent communication is maintained across services.

As this is a rapidly developing situation, this plan will be continually reviewed and updated to reflect the wider responses and support required across the system. It is difficult to predict how homeless demand will be affected but it is anticipated that as the situation escalates, the pressures across the provision of homeless services may rise. Such an increase in demand is likely to coincide with a reduction in staffing levels both within the Housing Executive and across the provider sector. This combination of factors will require a stepping down of non-essential services. In order for homeless services to be able to respond effectively, it is necessary to have a responsive escalation plan detailing the actions to be taken, by whom, and when.

The plan mirrors the approach taken by Health & Social Care by breaking the pandemic into three surge stages, Level 1 Minor Surge (green status), Level 2 Moderate Surge (amber status), Level 3 Major Surge (red status). This plan details the actions to be taken in each surge stage. It has been designed to ensure essential homeless services are maintained in the event of a Major Surge, where up to 50% of staff may be absent due to illness or caring responsibilities.

## **Responsive action**

It is anticipated that as the situation escalates, the pressures across the provision of homelessness services will rise significantly, placing heavy and changing demands on services and staff. The plan will be continually reviewed and updated to reflect the wider responses and support required across the system.

## **New Placements**

During the amber and red phases of the pandemic, new placements may only be accepted in cases of most extreme need. All possible steps to maintain existing placements should be taken.

## **Assumptions**

This plan is based on the broader assumptions in terms of the anticipated duration of the surge; the expectation that the pandemic will happen in a series of waves, up to two waves after which the community will have developed a level of immunity or a vaccine will become available; that during that time, staff absences across homeless services will escalate to a peak of 50%; and that the capacity to maintain current services will be significantly reduced.

In light of these assumptions, the plan aims to provide the basis for a co-ordinated response to manage the people who will be affected, and to ensure clear and consistent communication and collaboration with internal and external stakeholders.

## **Interfaces with other services**

This plan details contingency arrangements and escalation measures to support **homeless services and their providers** to continue to operate during the surge phases of the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak. It should be read in conjunction with the contingency plans of the range of other departments and agencies that support our service users and staff, including but not limited to: Department for Communities; Supporting People Programme - Covid19 Contingency Plan; Supporting People funded providers; Health and Social Care Board; Health and Social Care Trusts; the Public Health Agency (PHA), 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.

The Housing Executive will maintain communication with these key partners and will work collaboratively with them to contribute effectively to a co-ordinated response across the entire homeless services sector.

## **Pre surge**

In advance of the anticipated Level 1 Minor Surge the Housing Executive developed a number of work strands including:

- Establishment of a coordination team
- Development of this Surge Plan
- Mechanisms for ongoing daily monitoring of homelessness demand and capacity
- Mechanisms to ensure effective communication across the sector and with associated statutory partners in relation to the changing situation

## **HOMELESS SERVICES**

Essential services included within this plan and that require to be maintained are as follows:

1. Homeless Accommodation Based Services
2. Statutory Homeless Assessments
3. Day Centres
4. Rough Sleepers Services
5. Young People's Services (included in generic homeless)
6. Out of Hours Services
7. Approved Premises
8. Floating Support Services
9. Sheltered Housing

Plans to mitigate each surge phase for each of the above services are contained in this plan.

## HOMELESS ACCOMMODATION BASED SERVICES

Service providers are assumed to be implementing and continually reviewing their Continuity Plans.

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| <b>GREEN STATUS</b><br><b>10-20% staff absence</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Normal Services maintained (longer shifts, bank staff, over-time)</li><li>• Implement Contingency Plan –should consider measures such as redeploying floating support staff to accommodation based services</li><li>• Ensure current assessment of each client is up to date and fed to the Housing Executive</li><li>• Postpone routine activities such as non-essential training</li><li>• Suspend communal activities within schemes</li><li>• Ensure routine intense cleaning and hygiene measures</li><li>• Electronic meetings to reduce face to face meetings</li><li>• Consider PPE requirements to permit interaction with suspected and confirmed cases.</li><li>• Identify alternative staff resources– for example volunteers, students, retired</li><li>• Ensure census of occupants and staffing levels sent daily to NIHE</li></ul> |
| <b>AMBER STATUS</b><br><b>30-40% STAFF ABSENCE</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review level of need daily</li><li>• Redeployment of staff</li><li>• Pooling of staff across organisations</li><li>• Amalgamation of staff teams</li><li>• Stand down non-essential support</li><li>• Target resources at those in highest need</li><li>• Establish minimum level of contact</li><li>• Reduce formal one-to-one supervision</li><li>• Establish safe operating level in light of</li></ul>   |

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|   | <p>reduced capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider closure of non-essential services</li> <li>• NIHE sole referrer to reduced number of units</li> <li>• Consider utilising alternative staff resources– for example volunteers, students, retired</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>RED STATUS</b><br/><b>50% Staff absence</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase reporting arrangements</li> <li>• Redeploy staff to priority areas</li> <li>• Cease all non-essential services</li> <li>• Review level of need – twice daily</li> <li>• Review minimum level of contact</li> <li>• Reduce or suspend support to individual cases</li> <li>• Utilise alternative staff resources– for example volunteers, students, retired</li> <li>• Close or suspend facilities where unsafe to continue operating</li> </ul> |



## STATUTORY HOMELESS ASSESSMENTS (IN HOURS SERVICES)

Under the Housing (NI) Order 1988 the Housing Executive has a statutory duty to investigate homelessness if it is believed that a person may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 28 days. Capacity to undertake homeless assessments should be maintained during the course of the pandemic.

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| <p><b>GREEN<br/>STATUS</b></p> <p><b>10-20%<br/>STAFF<br/>ABSENCE</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain normal service</li> <li>• Ensure daily reporting of staffing levels and homeless demand to Covid-19 Emergency Planning Group</li> <li>• Establish 'pool' of staff working in other areas of the business with experience of conducting homeless assessments</li> <li>• Source additional temporary accommodation provision</li> <li>• Prepare arrangements/protocols for staff to conduct homeless assessments by telephone</li> <li>• Prepare triage arrangements</li> <li>• Prepare communication notifying customers of potential changes to services</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>AMBER<br/>STATUS</b></p> <p><b>30-40%<br/>STAFF<br/>ABSENCE</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain daily reporting of staffing levels to Covid-19 Emergency Planning Group.</li> <li>• Assess overall staffing situation and consider the need for staff to operate across areas to maintain cover or draft in staff from other business areas with experience of conducting homeless assessments.</li> <li>• Relaxation of the management control framework.</li> <li>• Suspend regular housing applications to focus on homeless assessments and introduce triage to assess need.</li> <li>• Implement emergency arrangements based on OOH service.</li> <li>• Communication to customers about service</li> </ul> |

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|   | changes.  |
| <b>RED STATUS</b><br><b>50% STAFF</b><br><b>ABSENCE</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maintain daily reporting of staffing levels to Covid-19 Emergency Planning Group.</li><li>• Continue to assess staffing situation, redeploying staff if necessary.</li><li>• Consider assessing urgent homeless cases only <b>(legal advice required)</b></li><li>• Continued relaxation of management control framework.</li><li>• Communication to customers about service changes.</li></ul> |

## STATUTORY HOMELESS ASSESSMENTS (OUT OF HOURS SERVICES)

Under the Housing (NI) Order 1988 the Housing Executive has a statutory duty to investigate homelessness if it is believed that a person may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 28 days. Capacity to undertake homeless assessments should be maintained during the course of the pandemic.

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| <p><b>GREEN STATUS</b></p> <p><b>10-20% STAFF ABSENCE</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain normal service using overtime as necessary</li> <li>• Ensure daily reporting of staffing levels and homeless demand Covid-19 Emergency Planning Group</li> <li>• Establish 'pool' of staff working in other areas of the business with experience of conducting homeless assessments</li> <li>• Source additional temporary accommodation provision</li> <li>• Prepare arrangements/protocols for staff to conduct homeless assessments by telephone</li> <li>• Prepare triage arrangements</li> <li>• Prepare communication notifying customers of potential changes to services</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>AMBER STATUS</b></p> <p><b>30-40% STAFF ABSENCE</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain daily reporting of staffing levels to Covid-19 Emergency Planning Group.</li> <li>• Assess overall staffing situation and consider the need for staff to operate across areas to maintain cover or draft in staff from other business areas with experience of conducting homeless assessments.</li> <li>• Relaxation of the management control framework.</li> <li>• Suspend regular housing applications to focus on homeless assessments and introduce triage to assess need.</li> <li>• Implement emergency arrangements based on OOH service.</li> </ul>                                |

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication to customers about service changes.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>RED STATUS</b></p> <p><b>50% STAFF ABSENCE</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain daily reporting of staffing levels to Covid-19 Emergency Planning Group.</li> <li>• Continue to assess staffing situation, redeploying staff if necessary.</li> <li>• Consider assessing urgent homeless cases only <b>(legal advice required)</b></li> <li>• Continued relaxation of management control framework.</li> <li>• Communication to customers about service changes.</li> </ul> |

## DAY CENTRES

Service providers are assumed to be implementing and continually reviewing their Continuity Plans. **NB Day centres already moved from an in-reach to outreach model were possible and staff resources deployed accordingly.**

### GREEN STATUS 10-20% staff absence

- Normal Services maintained (longer shifts, bank staff, over-time)
- Implement Contingency Plan – should consider measures such as redeploying floating support staff to accommodation based services
- Ensure routine intense cleaning and hygiene measures paying particular attention to PHA guidance re shared bathroom/shower facilities & laundry provision and
- Ensure current assessment of each client is up to date and fed to the Housing Executive – identify clients with no available accommodation
- Suspend communal/group activities
- Postpone routine activities such as non-essential training
- Request Service users with accommodation within the groups advised to self-isolate are supported to do so
- Ensure all other clients are aware of guidance re social distancing
- Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media
- Electronic meetings to reduce face to face meetings
- Identify suitable area to isolate should someone take ill while in the day centre
- Identify alternative staff resources– for

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|   | <p>example volunteers, students, retired</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure census of occupants and staffing levels sent daily to NIHE</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>AMBER STATUS</b><br/><b>30-40% STAFF</b><br/><b>ABSENCE</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review level of need daily</li> <li>• Redeployment of staff</li> <li>• Pooling of staff across organisations</li> <li>• Amalgamation of staff teams</li> <li>• Stand down non-essential support and advise those with accommodation to remain there and not access daycentre facilities</li> <li>• Target resources at those in highest need</li> <li>• Establish minimum level of contact</li> <li>• Reduce formal one-to-one supervision</li> <li>• Establish safe operating level in light of reduced capacity</li> <li>• Consider closure of non-essential services</li> <li>• Consider utilising alternative staff resources– for example volunteers, students, retired</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>RED STATUS</b><br/><b>50% Staff</b><br/><b>absence</b></p>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase reporting arrangements</li> <li>• Redeploy staff to priority areas</li> <li>• Cease all non-essential services</li> <li>• Review level of need – twice daily</li> <li>• Review minimum level of contact</li> <li>• Reduce or suspend support to individual cases</li> <li>• Identify alternative staff resources– for example volunteers, students, retired</li> <li>• Utilise alternative staff resources– for example volunteers, students, retired</li> <li>• Close or suspend facilities where unsafe to continue operating</li> </ul>   |

## OUTREACH SERVICES

Service providers are assumed to be implementing and continually reviewing their Continuity Plans.

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| <b>GREEN STATUS</b><br><b>10-20% staff</b><br><b>absence</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normal Services maintained (longer shifts, bank staff, over-time)</li> <li>• Implement Contingency Plan – should consider measures such as screening of clients and use of PPE for outreach workers</li> <li>• Attempt to capture basic assessment of each client – particularly re availability of accommodation to self-isolate</li> <li>• Postpone routine activities such as non-essential training</li> <li>• Ensure staff follow appropriate PHA guidance re hygiene measures &amp; PPE requirements</li> <li>• Electronic meetings to reduce face to face meetings</li> <li>• Identify alternative staff resources– for example volunteers, students, retired.</li> <li>• Ensure staffing levels sent daily to NIHE</li> </ul> |
| <b>AMBER STATUS</b><br><b>30-40% STAFF</b><br><b>ABSENCE</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review level of need daily</li> <li>• Redeployment of staff</li> <li>• Pooling of staff across organisations</li> <li>• Amalgamation of staff teams</li> <li>• Stand down non-essential support</li> <li>• Target resources at those in highest need</li> <li>• Reduce formal one-to-one supervision</li> <li>• Establish safe operating level in light of reduced capacity</li> <li>• Consider utilising alternative staff resources– for example volunteers, students, retired</li> <li>• Consider closure of non-essential services</li> </ul>   |
| <b>RED STATUS</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase reporting arrangements</li> </ul>  |

**50% Staff  
absence**

- Redeploy staff to priority areas
- Cease all non-essential services
- Review level of need – twice daily
- Review minimum level of contact
- Reduce or suspend support to individual cases
- Utilise alternative staff resources– for example volunteers, students, retired
- Close or suspend facilities where unsafe to continue operating



## OUT OF HOURS SERVICES (NIGHTSHELTERS)

Service providers are assumed to be implementing and continually reviewing their Continuity Plans. **NB Night shelters have already shifted operations to operate temporarily as a hostel with clients remaining in situ.**

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| <b>GREEN STATUS</b><br><b>10-20% staff absence</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normal Services maintained (longer shifts, bank staff, over-time)</li> <li>• Implement Contingency Plan –should consider measures such as redesignating crash facilities to longer term accommodation to reduce risk of spreading virus across sites</li> <li>• Ensure current assessment of each client is up to date and fed to the Housing Executive</li> <li>• Postpone routine activities such as non-essential training</li> <li>• Ensure routine intense cleaning and hygiene measures</li> <li>• Electronic meetings to reduce face to face meetings</li> <li>• Provision of PPE to permit interaction with suspected and confirmed cases.</li> <li>• Ensure census of occupants and staffing levels sent daily to NIHE</li> </ul> |
| <b>AMBER STATUS</b><br><b>30-40% STAFF ABSENCE</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review level of need daily</li> <li>• Redeployment of staff</li> <li>• Pooling of staff across organisations</li> <li>• Amalgamation of staff teams</li> <li>• Stand down non-essential support</li> <li>• Target resources at those in highest need</li> <li>• Establish minimum level of contact</li> <li>• Reduce formal one-to-one supervision</li> <li>• Establish safe operating level in light of</li> </ul>  |

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|  | <p>reduced capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider closure of non-essential services</li> <li>• NIHE sole referrer to reduced number of units</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>RED STATUS</b><br/><b>50% Staff</b><br/><b>absence</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase reporting arrangements</li> <li>• Redeploy staff to priority areas</li> <li>• Cease all non-essential services</li> <li>• Review level of need – twice daily</li> <li>• Review minimum level of contact</li> <li>• Reduce or suspend support to individual cases</li> <li>• Identify alternative staff resources– for example volunteers, students, retired</li> <li>• Close or suspend facilities where unsafe to continue operating</li> </ul> |

## FLOATING SUPPORT SERVICES

Service providers are assumed to be implementing and continually reviewing their Continuity Plans

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| <b>GREEN STATUS</b><br><b>10-20% staff absence</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Normal Services maintained (longer shifts, bank staff, over-time)</li><li>• Implement Contingency Plan – should consider measures such as screening of clients and use of PPE for workers</li><li>• Postpone routine activities such as non-essential training</li><li>• Ensure staff follow appropriate PHA guidance re hygiene measures and social distancing</li><li>• Electronic meetings to reduce face to face meetings</li><li>• Provision of PPE to permit interaction with suspected and confirmed cases</li><li>• Identify alternative staff resources– for example volunteers, students, retired.</li><li>• Ensure staffing levels sent daily to NIHE</li></ul> |
| <b>AMBER STATUS</b><br><b>30-40% STAFF ABSENCE</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review level of need daily</li><li>• Consider redeployment of staff between floating support and accommodation based services depending on capacity – prioritising accommodation based services where required</li><li>• Pooling of staff across organisations</li><li>• Amalgamation of staff teams</li><li>• Stand down non-essential support</li><li>• Target resources at those in highest need and consider suspending services to service users with lower support needs</li><li>• Reduce formal one-to-one supervision</li><li>• Establish safe operating level in light of</li></ul>   |

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|   | <p>reduced capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider utilising alternative staff resources— for example volunteers, students, retired</li> <li>• Consider closure of non-essential services</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>RED STATUS</b><br/><b>50% Staff absence</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase reporting arrangements</li> <li>• Redeploy staff to priority areas</li> <li>• Cease all non-essential services</li> <li>• Review level of need – twice daily</li> <li>• Review minimum level of contact</li> <li>• Reduce or suspend support to individual cases</li> <li>• Utilise alternative staff resources— for example volunteers, students, retired</li> <li>• Close or suspend services where unsafe to continue operating</li> </ul> |

## SHELTERED ACCOMMODATION SERVICES

Service providers are assumed to be implementing and continually reviewing their Continuity Plans.

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| <b>GREEN STATUS</b><br><b>10-20% staff absence</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normal Services maintained (longer shifts, bank staff, over-time)</li> <li>• Implement Contingency Plan –should consider measures such as redeploying staff</li> <li>• Ensure current assessment of each client is up to date</li> <li>• Postpone routine activities such as non-essential training</li> <li>• Suspend communal activities within schemes</li> <li>• Restrict access to common rooms and facilities such as hair dressing rooms and common room kitchens.</li> <li>• Ensure routine intense cleaning and hygiene measures</li> <li>• Electronic meetings to reduce face to face meetings</li> <li>• Consider PPE requirements to permit interaction with suspected and confirmed cases.</li> <li>• Identify alternative staff resources– for example families, volunteers, students, retired</li> </ul> |
| <b>AMBER STATUS</b><br><b>30-40% STAFF ABSENCE</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review level of need daily</li> <li>• Redeployment of staff</li> <li>• Pooling of staff across organisations</li> <li>• Amalgamation of staff teams</li> <li>• Stand down non-essential support</li> <li>• Target resources at those in highest need</li> <li>• Establish minimum level of contact</li> <li>• Reduce formal one-to-one supervision</li> <li>• Establish safe operating level in light of</li> </ul>   |

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|   | <p>reduced capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider utilising alternative staff resources– for example volunteers, students, retired</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>RED STATUS</b><br/><b>50% Staff absence</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase reporting arrangements</li> <li>• Redeploy staff to priority areas</li> <li>• Cease all non-essential services</li> <li>• Review level of need – twice daily</li> <li>• Review minimum level of contact</li> <li>• Reduce or suspend support to individual cases</li> <li>• Utilise alternative staff resources– for example volunteers, students, retired</li> </ul> |

## **COMMUNICATIONS:**

**Note on the importance of clear and ongoing communication with partner organisations, including for example homeless providers, Departments for Communities and Health, Public Health Agency, PSNI and Probation:**

The Housing Executive is committed to maintaining regular and clear communication with partners with a view to ensuring responsive action to emerging issues, problem solving, provision of appropriate support and accommodation. This will include promoting ongoing learning and improvement across the system, within the constraints of this period. A coordinator is being appointed to liaise across the Homeless Sector.

## **POST PANDEMIC RECOVERY**

The Housing Executive recognises that a number of actions will need to be planned for when the pandemic has subsided, but system-wide issues remain to be addressed. These may include, but are not limited to:

1. Increased service pressures resulting from the need for ongoing management of homeless people presenting as a result of flu illness.
2. Grief and bereavement support, counselling, and advice for service users who have lost loved ones.
3. Support and debriefing for staff who have been involved in difficult ethical decisions.
4. Addressing the backlog of work that has been suspended while staff have been diverted to other duties.