Statement from the Minister for Housing on housing support

I know that the Coronavirus has brought a great deal of fear and worry for everyone in our community –

As we face our Island’s biggest crisis since the Occupation, we all need to play our part to step up to the mark and support one another, and particularly those who are the most vulnerable.

First, and foremost, Islanders must listen to and follow the instructions that are being given to contain the spread of the virus. Stay at home, utilise the businesses that are supporting islanders with safe food deliveries. Check in on your family and friends using social media, phone and emails. Make sure people know they are not alone in this.

But in this uncertain time, many of you will be concerned about your current housing situation. In particular, the security of your access to your home.

My message to anyone who is concerned about their housing is to “STAY PUT IF IT IS SAFE TO DO SO”. If you are at risk of imminent harm by remaining in your current accommodation or do not have any current accommodation, we can help direct you to emergency housing.

Even if your tenancy is about to end, you should remain in place unless it is unsafe to do so.

Jersey’s courts will not be hearing eviction cases during this time. And even though many of Jersey’s landlords had already undertaken to adopt a compassionate and pragmatic approach, if any landlord does attempt to evict a tenant it will not be lawful and should not happen.
Please do not consider moving homes during this time unless it absolutely necessary for medical or personal safety grounds. Moving properties will put you and your family in unnecessary contact with other people and potentially increase the likelihood of the virus spreading.

Stay put, contact your landlords, housing associations and letting agents and explain the circumstances. At the same time, I urge you to continue, as far as possible, to meet your obligations as a tenant – keep your property in a good state of repair and do not create problems for other residents who might be self-isolating or spending long periods of time at home. If you can afford to pay your rent then please do so. Do not default. But if you are struggling financially, see what support is available from Government. You can do that by going to gov.je or by calling the coronavirus call centre on 445566.

We will be shortly issuing further guidance for all those concerned.

For those who face emergency situations and cannot stay in their home or are homeless - my officers have set up a dedicated housing email emergencyhousing@gov.je. This email is manned by the Housing Gateway Team and Safeguarding Officers.

Alongside my policy team, they are working to ensure that those that need assistance are given help and advice as quickly as possible. I would like to thank Andium Homes for supplying additional resources to ensure that we are proactively helping islanders.

My next plea is for landlords, guest house and hotel owners if you have empty accommodation that you are willing to release to emergency housing cases please contact my team using the email emergencyhousing@gov.je. We are putting together details of known accommodation, so they can be used to temporarily support keyworkers, homeless and vulnerable people.

I wish to thank all sectors of the housing market that have replied to my letters, I will be responding to them all in due course but the information you have provided has assisted in my officer’s work greatly.

Please maintain your compassion regarding the situations your tenants are currently facing, I am aware that for many of you your rental income is your only source of financial support. I urge you to contact your local banks for advice regarding mortgage breaks and also contact the coronavirus call centre on 445566 for further advice.

I can announce that, under my instruction, my officers are also working to prepare emergency legislation during the Coronavirus outbreak that will:
• introduce an immediate suspension on rent increases;
• prevent evictions of tenants due to financial hardship caused by the coronavirus outbreak; and
• prevent tenancies from being terminated, unless the parties agree.

This will be brought to the States Assembly for debate as soon as possible. In the meantime, we are working with the Courts to ensure appropriate interim arrangements are in place to deal with claims for rent arrears and breaches of lease.

My message to you is to stay put unless your health and safety are at immediate risk. We have a fully committed team working on this situation, please contact them using the email address emergencyhousing@gov.je.

The priority is to ensure that all Islanders remain safe and well.

We have launched the Children and Families Hub to provide the right help at the right time for children, young people and families.

If you need guidance, support or protection, you can call the Hub on 519000

So, if you are a parent or carer struggling please let us know.

If you know someone who is struggling please let us know.

Let’s work together to be the eyes and ears in the community to safeguard our children and families during this turbulent time.

So please stay in, stay put and stay safe.

- ends -

Notes to Editors

1. For further information, please contact the press office on 01534 440430 or pressoffice@gov.je