

Extra covid protections for rough sleepers and renters

- Extra support to house rough sleepers across all councils in England
- Ban on bailiff enforced evictions extended
- Confirmation of court support for landlords and renters and launch of mediation pilot

Extra support to help protect rough sleepers and renters from the effects of COVID-19 has been announced by the Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick today (8 January 2021).

Backed by an additional £10 million in funding, all councils in England are being asked to redouble their efforts to help accommodate all those currently sleeping rough and ensure they are swiftly registered with a GP, where they are not already.

This will ensure they can be protected from the virus and contacted to receive vaccinations in line with the priority groups outlined by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

Councils will also be asked to reach out again to those who have previously refused help, given rising infection rates and the colder winter months.

Renters will continue to be supported during the new national restrictions, with an extension to the ban on bailiff evictions for all but the most egregious cases for at least 6 weeks – until at least 21 February – with measures kept under review.

Communities Secretary, Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

At the start of this pandemic we made sure that the most vulnerable in society were protected. This winter, we are continuing in this vein and redoubling our efforts to help those most in need.

Our ongoing Everyone In initiative is widely regarded as one of the most successful of its kind in the world, ensuring 33,000 people are safe in accommodation. We are now going further and focusing on GP registration of rough sleepers.

We are also extending the ban on bailiff evictions – helping to protect the most vulnerable renters.

Court rules and procedures introduced in September to support both tenants and landlords will remain in place and regularly reviewed. The courts will continue to prioritise cases, such as those involving anti-social behaviour, illegal occupation and perpetrators of domestic abuse in the social sector.

Landlords continue to be required to give 6-month notice periods to tenants until at least 31 March except in the most serious circumstances.

Councils will work closely with local health partners to ensure those sleeping rough are able to access the COVID-19 vaccine in line with the priority groups outlined by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

This will be done through a GP, or by other means if mainstream provision is unsuitable, ensuring that the wider health needs of rough sleepers are addressed and assessed for clinical vulnerability to COVID, supporting them now and for the future.

Jon Sparkes, Chief Executive of Crisis, said:

These renewed efforts to protect people who are homeless in the pandemic will save lives.

It was truly a landmark moment when, back in March, everyone on the streets was offered somewhere safe to stay. It's as important, if not more so, that today we see government leadership to protect all those sleeping rough. The highly infectious new strain of coronavirus alongside the cold weather makes this the most dangerous moment of the pandemic for those without a home.

What is very welcome here is the two-pronged approach – a continued commitment to getting everyone into safe accommodation but also now making sure people are registered with a GP so they can quickly access the vaccines. We know through our services that people facing homelessness often are not registered with a doctor's surgery. Addressing this issue will be a lifesaving intervention and a step towards ensuring people who are homeless are protected in the longer-term.

Steve Douglas CBE, Chief Executive of St Mungo's, said:

We and other homelessness charities called on government to provide an urgent and decisive response to support those sleeping rough who now face the double threat of severely cold weather and a continued health emergency.

We welcome this response and will work with our local authority and health partners to provide both the immediate accommodation and the health care advice that is needed to protect lives.

A new mediation pilot will further support landlords and renters who face court procedures and potential eviction from next month (February). It will offer mediation as part of the possession process to try and help landlords and tenants to reach a mutual agreement and keep people in their homes.

Helping to resolve disputes through mediation will enable courts to prioritise urgent cases, supporting landlords and tenants to resolve issues quickly without the need for a formal hearing. The mediation pilot will work within the existing court arrangements in England and Wales.

The protections for renters are on top of the comprehensive package of support the government has put in place to help households, including support for businesses to pay staff salaries and strengthening the welfare safety-net by billions of pounds.

This has helped to protect renters from the economic fallout of the pandemic by supporting them meet their outgoings, including paying their rent.

The government has also provided unprecedented support for rough sleepers during the pandemic. This £10 million investment builds on more than £700 million government spending on homelessness and rough sleeping this year alone.

Through Everyone In, by November we had supported around 33,000 people with nearly 10,000 in emergency accommodation and over 23,000 already moved on into longer-term accommodation.

Renters' additional information

The package of support is reducing the number of evictions as applications to the courts for possession by private and social landlords were down 86% between July and September 2020, compared to the same quarter in 2019. No repossessions were recorded between April and end September 2020 compared to 14,847 in the same period last year.

The government has changed the law in England to ensure bailiffs do not enforce evictions for 6 weeks until 22 February, with no evictions expected to 8 March at the earliest. This will be kept under review.

The only exceptions to this are for the most egregious cases – anti-social behaviour, illegal occupation, death of a tenant where the property is unoccupied, fraud, perpetrators of domestic abuse in social housing and extreme rent arrears equivalent to 6 months' rent.

[Guidance](#) to support landlords and tenants in the social and private rented sectors understand the possession action process and new rules within the court system in England and Wales is available.

For those renters who require additional support, there is an existing £180 million of government funding for Discretionary Housing Payments for councils to distribute to support renters with housing costs.

Rough sleepers' additional information

A recent study published by the Lancet showed that because of this response 266 deaths were avoided during the first wave of the pandemic among England's homeless population, as well as 21,092 infections, 1,164 hospital admissions

and 338 admissions to Intensive Care Units.

The government has allocated £91.5 million to 274 councils in September to fund immediate support and interim accommodation for vulnerable people, as well as the £10 million Cold Weather Fund for councils to help to keep rough sleepers safe this winter.

This is alongside over £150 million to bring forward 3,300 long-term homes this year alone, alongside £112 million funding of the Rough Sleeping Initiative this year.

Councils have also received £4.6 billion in unringfenced grants to help them to manage the impacts of COVID-19, which we have been clear includes their work to support rough sleepers.