

Gradings under review for Brent Community Housing

Press release

The GUR lists registered providers whose compliance with the regulator's economic standards is being investigated.



The Regulator of Social Housing reports that Brent Community Housing has been placed on its gradings under review list today (23 December 2020).

The regulator is currently investigating matters which may impact on Brent Community Housing Limited's compliance with the Governance and Financial Viability Standard.

As a provider with fewer than 1,000 units, Brent Community Housing does not have a regulatory grading.

The regulator's [gradings under review list](#) is available on the website.

Further information

For press office contact details, see our [Media enquiries page](#). For general queries, please email enquiries@rsh.gov.uk or call 0300 124 5225.

Note to editors

1. The GUR lists providers where we are investigating a matter that might result in them being assessed as non-compliant in relation to the regulator's Governance and Financial Viability Standard.
2. The [regulatory standards](#) can be found on the website.
3. RSH promotes a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs. It does this by

undertaking robust economic regulation focusing on governance, financial viability and value for money that maintains lender confidence and protects the taxpayer. It also sets consumer standards and may take action if these standards are breached and there is a significant risk of serious detriment to tenants or potential tenants.

Published 23 December 2020

[COVID-19 testing for HGV drivers using the Port of Dover or Eurotunnel](#)

COVID-19 test requirements in different countries update, 18 January 2021

Several countries have introduced COVID-19 testing requirements for hauliers. The rules are different in each country. Check the rules before you travel and take the necessary action.

You can get a free COVID-19 test at a [haulier advice site](#) offering testing if you're:

- an HGV driver or crew
- a van or other light goods vehicle (LGV) driver

Kent travel update: 6 January 2021, COVID testing

More COVID-19 testing facilities open for HGV drivers and crew.

HGVs leaving England for France can only cross the Channel with evidence of an authorised negative COVID test, that has been conducted within the 72-hour period before their departure.

Drivers and crew of HGVs, and drivers of LGVs and vans can get a free COVID test at [many haulier advice sites](#).

We strongly advise drivers and crew to get a negative test before they travel to Kent or other Channel crossing points.

HGV drivers using Dover and Eurotunnel will get fast-tracked past queues if they get tested, and have a valid [Kent Access Permit](#), before arriving in

Kent.

Testing is available at Manston Airport and Ashford Sevington in Kent, but there is a chance of severe delays.

To avoid delays, get tested at an advice site before you enter Kent.

COVID testing facilities are available at Manston Airport (Postcode CT12 5FF) for HGV drivers heading to Port of Dover.

Eurotunnel traffic must continue to go via the M20, where HGV drivers without a negative test result or a valid Kent Access Permit will be directed to:

COVID testing is not available at any medical facility in the Kent area. If you visit a medical facility you will be turned away.

You must not leave your vehicle to try and be tested at another site.

Once tested, it will take 40 minutes to get a result.

If your result is negative, you will be directed to your departure point.

If your result is positive, further information will be provided on site and support will be available.

We are doing everything we can as quickly as possible to help you continue on your journey. Thank you for your patience.

Drivers should check [@KentHighways](#) and [Highways England](#) for the latest traffic updates before travelling to Kent.

Kent Access Permits

HGV drivers must have correct documentation, including [Kent Access Permits](#), before arriving in Kent to ensure they can cross the Channel.

HGVs carrying dangerous goods

Drivers of HGVs carrying certain types of dangerous goods must get tested for COVID-19 before arriving in Kent.

The terms of use at Manston Airport and Ashford Sevington prohibit the following loads:

- explosives
- polymerizing substances
- infectious substances
- radioactive substances
- goods that are [high consequence](#) from a terrorism point of view

Drivers of HGVs carrying any of these goods will be refused access to these

sites and must get tested for COVID-19 at alternative sites before arriving in Kent.

If you are not sure whether your load falls into one of these categories of dangerous goods, confirm with your company or consignor before departing from the depot.

[Testing is available at various information and advice sites across the UK.](#) Check whether the motorway service station or truck stop you plan to visit has any restrictions for certain dangerous goods before you travel.

Some companies are also providing private testing for their drivers. Check with your company if this is being offered.

[Defra updates in agri-food and environmental matters](#)

The following updates have been issued from Defra and might be of interest to the Government Chemist alert subscribers.

Updated Digital Food and Drink guide

Defra's [newly updated digital guide](#) covering the key actions food and drink businesses may need to take from 1 January 2021 is available to download, alongside a range of other digital assets.

Other assets include:

Agri-Food guidance and updates

Temporary relaxation of the enforcement of rules on drivers' hours

The Department for Transport have today published details of a [temporary relaxation](#) of the enforcement of EU drivers' hours rules.

Up to 30,000 workers to help reap 2021 harvest

The number of workers permitted to travel to the UK to pick and package fruit and vegetables [will be increased for next year's harvest](#), the government announced yesterday (22 December).

Coronavirus response updates

Protocol agreed to reopen French border to UK arrivals

An agreement to reopen the UK-French border to allow accompanied freight services and some passenger services to resume between the two countries has been reached by the UK and French governments yesterday evening (22 December 2020).

The [press notice](#) can be found on GOV.UK, along with [guidance for operators, drivers and crew of HGVs](#) on crossing an international border safely.

Working safely during coronavirus guidance updates

See the latest [updates](#) to the gov.uk guidance on how to make your workplace COVID-secure.

Advice for clinically extremely vulnerable in new Tier 4 areas

This group is advised to stay at home at all times, unless for exercise or medical appointments, and not to attend work, even if they are unable to work from home. Read the [press release](#) and the [updated guidance](#).

Links and reminders

Preparing for January 2021

With less than a month to go until the end of the Transition Period Defra are urging all businesses to ensure they are as prepared as possible. Businesses and traders should be aware of the steps they may have to take in order to adhere to new regulations, and to continue to operate without disruption.

Broad guidance for businesses and individuals can be found at gov.uk/transition. Specific guidance is available for:

Please also watch out for guidance and shareable, sector-themed assets on [Defra's social media channels](#).

Moving Goods from GB to NI Trader Showcase site

Defra has created a one-stop shop of key information, documents and assets for traders who move live animals, animal products, plants and plant products from GB to NI. [Find it here](#). Please make sure your internet browser is up to date in order to access this link.

The type of information available includes process maps, understanding high risk and low risk consignment documents, information on schemes to support traders, and FAQs

Links to Defra's Exporter Journey GB to EU Webinars

Links to Defra's recorded webinars on the GB to EU Exporter Journey are now available on YouTube. Please share with anyone who may find this information useful. The topics are:

[Response to article published by the New York Times on UK government procurement](#)

At the height of the crisis in April, health services around the world faced an unprecedented urgent situation where demand for personal protective equipment (PPE) and other medical equipment, including testing supplies and ventilators, far exceeded supply, and global production and supply chains were under severe pressure. The government pledged to do whatever it took to protect the people who protect us, deploying hundreds of officials to work night and day, at great speed, to source as much PPE as quickly as possible to protect the NHS and care sector and save lives. We also mobilised huge resources to increase testing capacity and deliver other important medical equipment.

On 17 December, the New York Times published an [article](#), "Waste, Negligence and Cronyism: Inside Britain's Pandemic Spending." The article makes a number of incorrect claims, uses poor methodology and excludes important context about the challenges faced by the UK Government and other public authorities during the unprecedented global pandemic.

Claim: "The government handed out thousands of contracts to fight the virus, some of them in a secretive "V.I.P. lane."

Response: At the peak of the pandemic, UK Government officials were inundated with approaches from companies and other commercial actors with offers to procure or provide PPE and other relevant equipment. To help establish a mechanism for handling the approaches, as well as increase the speed at which they could be dealt with, an inbox was created for referrals. This inbox was available across government and to parliamentarians from all parties. In total, the UK government received over 15,000 offers of support from businesses to help with PPE, and MPs were inundated with offers of help from their constituents. MPs rightly were keen to pass on offers.

The government remains hugely grateful for the outpouring of offers of help and the high priority mailbox allowed procurement officials to assess more quickly offers from more credible sources, such as large companies with established contacts and those more capable of supplying at speed.

The government also ensured that offers of support raised by Opposition MPs were dealt with expeditiously. As the National Audit Office report notes, all PPE offers, no matter from where they came, went through the same eight step official assurance process, including quality checks, price controls and other due diligence. This eight step process has been published in the NAO's report.

Claim: The New York Times “analyzed a large segment of it (government spending), the roughly 1200 central government contracts that have been made public, together worth nearly \$22 billion. Of that, about \$11 billion went to companies either run by friends and associates of politicians in the Conservative Party, or with no prior experience or a history of controversy”.

Response: The New York Time's definition of 'politically connected' is misleading. As the article sets out, they defined this as 'companies with political connections were defined as those with current or former government officials and advisers on staff, as party donors or who have received a British honours system award, such as a knighthood or peerage'.

This definition fundamentally misunderstands the British state. government officials – or civil servants – are politically neutral and therefore it is simply wrong to infer that they have political connections. The New York Times also considers those who received a state honour as having a political connection. Again it is either a misrepresentation or a misunderstanding of the honours system to assert that someone receiving an honour automatically has a 'political connection'. In fact, the honours system operates independently of government, with the vast majority of honours recommended by independent honours committees.

Finally, this implies that any company with a 'connection' to the government got a contract as a result of that connection. The National Audit Office examined a series of contracts and “found that the ministers had properly declared their interests, and ... found no evidence of their involvement in procurement decisions or contract management”. This was not reflected by the New York Times.

Claim: “Smaller firms without political clout got nowhere”.

Response: This is again factually untrue. 'Political clout' played no part in the official procurement process. For example, all PPE procurement went through the same eight checks, including quality checks, price controls and other due diligence, and was assessed against the same standards.

It is untrue to suggest that smaller firms, SMEs, did not receive contracts.

Claim: “The government had license to act fast because it was a pandemic, but we didn't give them permission to act fast and loose with public money”.

Response: This is not true. The eight step official process assessed and scrutinsed PPE offers. While prices were higher, due to a surge in global demand and constraints of supply, the government put in place stringent checks to ensure that we were paying in line with market rates. Officials

with procurement expertise ran this process. Governments across the world and devolved administrations and local authorities in different parts of the UK faced similar challenges. Indeed, OECD analysis shows that direct awards were used by countries across the world in order to increase PPE supply, such as some EU countries, Japan and New Zealand.

Claim: "The procurement system was 'cobbled together'".

Response: This is untrue. Our system was established and run by experienced procurement experts. The system enabled us to act quickly to ensure that we saved lives.

Claim: "The government cast aside the usual transparency rules and awarded contracts worth billions of dollars without competitive bidding".

Response: This is untrue. Pre-existing regulations (the Public Contracts Regulations 2015) allow public authorities to award contracts without competitive tender in circumstances of extreme urgency. An unprecedented global pandemic, with global demand pressures on PPE, was clearly an emergency. It was right that the government acted quickly – and within the existing regulations – to increase PPE available to the NHS front line. Direct awards were made by public administrations across the UK and various local authorities. Similar approaches were adopted by many other countries, including Japan, Finland and New Zealand. It is absurd to imply that the government ought to have run a full public procurement competition for PPE contracts at the height of the pandemic. The minimum number of days a competitive award could take place in under the current rules is 25 days. This would have hugely slowed down the buying of vital PPE supplies.

Claim: "To date, just over half of all of the contracts awarded in the first seven months remain concealed from the public." "The British central government published data on pandemic-related contracts worth \$22 billion awarded from January through November. Many more contracts remain secret".

Response: It is misleading to suggest that the contracts which are yet to be published through routine transparency are 'secret'. The Government has already stated that we will publish all contract award notices as part our commitment to transparency. We regret that some contracts have not been uploaded in a timely fashion as a result of prioritising staff's time on securing life saving PPE and other equipment for the NHS. All contracts will be published as soon as possible. All contract awards for PPE have now been published.

Claim: "Around \$6 billion went to companies that had no prior experience in supplying medical personal protective equipment. Fashion designers, pest controllers and jewelers won lucrative contracts".

Response: Finding new suppliers, who may not necessarily have direct prior experience of supplying PPE, was a deliberate policy – alongside exhausting existing supply routes. Clothing companies, for example, were an obvious route to new PPE supplies. As the article later acknowledges, many companies, such as the fashion brand Burberry, did create new production lines and

successfully produce critical supplies. It is unclear if the New York Times thinks it was wrong for the government to contract with these companies which successfully produced PPE for the NHS frontline.

More importantly, analysis showed that the vast majority of the PPE procured by the government during the coronavirus crisis met the required clinical safety standards, which is especially impressive given the supply chain issues, the urgency of the situation, the speed at which staff had to work and the need to explore novel routes. We found that only 0.5% of products tested to date cannot be used. The point has been made above on why many companies repurposed their activities in order to supply PPE during increased global demand.

Claim: "There is ample evidence of cronyism, waste and poor due diligence".

Response: The National Audit Office report last month recognised that the government 'needed to procure with extreme urgency' and 'secured unprecedented volumes of essential supplies necessary to protect front-line workers'. As set out above, the government does recognise that at a time of unprecedented global demand, prices were inflated for typical levels, but does not accept that process was not followed. It is untrue to say there is ample evidence of waste. We found that only 0.5% of products tested to date cannot be used. We have outlined above the stringent due diligence which took place.

Claim: "The crisis gave way to a system that was neither fair nor equitable".

Response: This is not the case. All offers of PPE, no matter where they came from, were assessed against the same criteria and went through the same eight step checks. This meant that potential suppliers were assessed against the same standards, such as whether their product met our high PPE standards and whether they could supply PPE at an adequate scale.

Claim: "Junior staffers reviewed thousands of proposals and passed on a chosen few to their bosses, who often had only a day to sign off on contracts."

Response: This reflects the speed at which the PPE market was moving at the time, and is why it was not possible to run even accelerated public tendering processes, which take a minimum of 25 days. It was right that we put in place the processes needed quickly to take up offers of support. Contracts were only agreed once due diligence and price checks took place, through the process detailed above. We needed to act quickly to ensure that we ordered life saving PPE for the NHS front line.

Claim: "Still, conflict of interest questions remain" (around Lord Deighton).

Response: Lord Deighton had no role in approving PPE contracts and no role in the COVID19 response beyond PPE. We have robust rules and processes in place in order to ensure that conflicts of interest do not occur. All conflicts of interest for Lords are declared on the House of Lords Register. Following Lord Deighton's offer to support the government in any way he could, he was

appointed an advisor on PPE to the SOS on 19 April. Lord Deighton's role initially was to help set up U.K. manufacturing of PPE. Over the next few weeks this developed into a broader advisory role across the PPE programme.

Changes to the Windrush Compensation Scheme

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