

Almshouse Charities Best Practice during Coronavirus April 2020

Eventide Homes

How are you supporting your vulnerable residents at this time?

Welfare calls & estate walkabouts. Help with shopping and medicines. See our emergency plan which has been amended a few times since the outbreak!

What action have you taken to prevent the spread of Covid-19?

Initially we introduced hand sanitisers in our common areas, we then cancelled communal activities and now are only carrying out urgent repairs, whereby social distancing is carefully managed. We've been issuing special edition newsletters.

Are you residents respecting the social distancing measures? If not, how are you dealing with these?

Yes although have had to remind a few, who were enjoying the sunshine a bit too close together.

How are you handling property maintenance and essential safety checks?

We are carrying out urgent repairs and gas safety tests - Following best practice from Housing Associations. See <https://www.housing.org.uk/news-and-blogs/news/gas-safety-check-advice/>

How are you maintaining contact with your residents?

By phone, notice boards & newsletters.

How are you/or your residents interacting with community groups?

Those who have smart phones have a Whatsapp group.

How are your residents managing to maintain fitness?

Most of them are walking the grounds, if they are not 'shielded' and respecting the 2m distancing. I've seen a few residents doing exercises apart on the greens here.

How are your residents getting shopping?

We are lucky that we have two supermarkets in very close proximity. A number are going early to get shopping for themselves and their vulnerable neighbours. Our post office/newsletter is also being fantastic and has arranged delivery for shopping for those that want it. I think most post offices are offering similar community support.

What are you doing to ensure you can maintain your charity and services during an extended period of lockdown?

See Vital Services on our plan. There are only two members of staff, we are working apart, either from home or onsite – if we are onsite we are there 'to help a vulnerable person' – this week it has mainly been to send prescriptions to the chemist and then to pick up the medicine and deliver it. I know the Almshouses Association's view on 'essential or keyworkers' has changed in the last week. Our view is that we are abiding by the gov measures if we are onsite 'to help a vulnerable person'.

Cutbush & Corral Charity

How are you supporting your vulnerable residents at this time?

We have updated all next of kin details, are in regular phone contact and will involve families first should the need arise. We are determining the frequency of telephone contact that is required, prioritising the most vulnerable i.e. no support network, serious health conditions, mental health issues etc. We are finding out what support is available in the community should we need to advise residents on access or access it ourselves. We have prepared a few 'emergency packs' of non-perishable food items that we can deliver if needed.

What action have you taken to prevent the spread of Covid-19?

Office, admin and support staff are working from home. Maintenance Manager is cleaning communal areas (hallways and entrances) in accordance with COVID-19: cleaning in non-healthcare settings. WE have paused the application process (no home visits), we are not accepting guest room bookings.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>

Are you residents respecting the social distancing measures? If not, how are you dealing with these?

In the main – where concerns have been expressed about neighbours ignoring advice we have encourage individuals to be polite but firm in requesting that they maintain distance. Where residents are helping their neighbours we have posted guidance "How to Help Safely". <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-how-to-help-safely--2>. Staff and contractors have been told to model social distancing and reinforce the message.

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How are you handling property maintenance and essential safety checks?

Only urgent and essential maintenance issues will be dealt with following a risk assessment. All non-essential work has been paused with the exception of gardening – which we believe is low risk and important for maintaining the aspect for residents stuck indoors.

How are you maintaining contact with your residents?

We sent a letter to all residents on 17 March informing them that communal rooms would be closed, activities would not be taking place, only essential repairs would be undertaken and that we were on hand if they need support (we have a 24 hour on call number). Regular telephone contact by support staff. We will continue to deliver a monthly Newsletter.

How are you/ or your residents interacting with community groups?

We're pretty self sufficient at the moment – however we may need to engage with "Community Hubs" being set up in order to access food supplies/ medicines if/when individual resident's support network breaks down. This is most likely the place we will go to for support for individuals (Maidstone Borough Council - <https://www.maidstone.gov.uk/home/other-services/covid-19/tier-2-primary-areas/support-for-a-vulnerable-person>)

How are your residents managing to maintain fitness?

Many continue to leave their home for walks or to go to the shops.

How are your residents getting shopping?

Friends and family in the main, some are very independent and continue to go to the shops.

What are you doing to ensure you can maintain your charity and services during an extended period of lockdown?

Myself (Chief Officer and the Maintenance Manager continue to attend the work place whilst maintaining social distancing). We think we are key workers as we work for a charity supporting vulnerable people – we have a letter from the Chair which we keep on our person to provide evidence e.g. to the Police, supermarkets etc). I keep Trustees informed of changes to the emergency plan as and when guidance changes. We have cancelled sub-committee meetings. Decisions have been made via email and will be recorded in minutes of the Board meeting which will likely take place via Zoom.

Legacy East Almshouse Partnership

How are you supporting your vulnerable residents at this time?

LEAP manages 12 charities right now with around 42 properties in 12 locations in Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk; each charity has no more than 4 properties except one which has 6. We have not taken any specific action although we would try to if asked. None of the LEAP trustees lives particularly close to any of these almshouse properties. We usually only get to see the residents once a year on an annual inspection visit.

What action have you taken to prevent the spread of Covid-19?

No specific action other than to agree we won't visit them in this lock-down period. The residents are free to call our Clerk at any time during the day of course for repairs etc. We have had one resident who is under 60 and still works. He has warned us that he will not be able to pay his wmc. We are happy to be flexible and offer him a payment holiday.

Are your residents respecting the social distancing measures?

If not, how are you dealing with these? We have to presume they are.

How are you handling property maintenance and essential safety checks?

We will arrange repairs but not annual servicing.

How are you maintaining contact with your residents?

Am thinking we might need to call them to find out how they are but we generally do not have much contact with them.

How are you/ or your residents interacting with community groups?

We are not unless a resident seeks help individually.

What are you doing to ensure you can maintain your charity and services during an extended period of lockdown?

If any of our charities has a financial problem, LEAP as the overall managing trustee has been building up reserves and would provide support.

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Worcester Municipal Charities

We have three groups of almshouses. The two blocks of retirement almshouses totalling 25 + 7 = 32 are managed by the office staff and our two part-time resident wardens who have replied to your questions as follows.

The 39 Almshouse flats for the younger homeless which are in units of varying sizes are managed for us by Worcester Citizens Advice who have confirmed they are following Government advice as regards isolation and distancing etc.

Responses have been provided by Julie Clayton, Warden at Nash's and Wyatt's Court, and Paul Saunders, Warden at Berkeley's.

How are you supporting your vulnerable residents at this time?

I am doing basic shopping as and when our residents need me to.

Responding as and when they require assistance whilst maintaining social distancing and or social isolation. To protect the resident and myself I will only enter an almshouse if there is an emergency.

What action have you taken to prevent the spread of Covid-19?

I don't go into the residents' flat. I wear protective gloves when I am cleaning the staircases. I bleach the bannisters everyday and all windowsills. I mop the corridors everyday with disinfectant and also disinfect front door handles in each block.

Wearing latex disposable gloves and face mask if needed. Disinfecting communal areas and door furniture regularly.

Are your residents respecting the social distancing measures? If not, how are you dealing with these?

Yes social distancing is being used. Residents have a walk round yard at different times of the day. The residents that can't come out due to illness they are getting up and walking round flat.

The residents seem to be practising social distancing as best they can. I do remind them when I see them.

How are you handling property maintenance and essential safety checks?

I am doing normal safety checks regarding the fire alarm system weekly.

I am checking fire extinguisher and lighting in the corridors as normal.

Also lighting at night in the door ways which I am checking daily.

The only security check I'm not able to do is the pull cords as they are in the flats and as my residents are vulnerable self-isolating I don't want to put them at risk by me going in.

With continual site walks and checks regarding safety and maintenance checks I am able to do basic repairs if need be. In the case of an emergency I will call a contractor I would ensure social distancing is maintained.

How are you maintaining contact with your residents?

Via phone and talking through window.

Doorstep visits, telephone to and from residents their family/friends and carers

How are you/or your residents interacting with community groups?

The Community Room has been taken out of use.

Given the government guidelines the residents are avoiding contact with community groups. I am keeping a check on local things via the internet. The Community Room has been taken out of use.

How are your residents managing to maintain fitness?

They have been walking round the garden and yard. Getting up from their chair or couch and having a walk round flat.

How are your residents getting shopping?

Most of residents have been able to get their own shopping or through their family. The ones who have no family I am shopping for them.

Some are managing to shop for themselves and others are relying on families to deliver essentials. They are practising social distancing as best they can. I will also do basic shopping for those in need.

What are you doing to ensure you can maintain your charity and services during an extended period of lockdown?

I can carry on doing what I am doing and making sure my residents know I am there for them and we will get through this together.

The Charity is maintaining a one person point of contact at the office.

Residents may feel alone at times which can be upsetting, however it is also essential for wardens to keep safe and keep the service running at this very difficult and challenging time.

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Edward Mayes Trust

How are you supporting your vulnerable residents at this time?

Staff are offering a telephone support service to all our residents on a daily basis with out of hours support from our call centre service backed up by a mobile warden service in the event of an emergency depending on the circumstances.

What action have you taken to prevent the spread of Covid-19?

We have closed our communal lounge and kitchen to residents which has allowed us to create a safe working environment for our staff who can work safely in isolation Monday to Friday office hours. All staff and residents have been issued with the Government guidance on preventing the spread of the virus and we have a vigorous cleaning regime of all door handles, light switches etc.

Are you residents respecting the social distancing measures? If not, how are you dealing with these?

We issued all residents with the Government guidance on social distancing and this appears to have been understood, we have had no issues so far.

How are you handling property maintenance and essential safety checks?

We are offering an emergency repairs service only which covers any repair which puts the residents welfare or property at risk e.g. no electricity, no water, no working toilet, no heating, no hot water. Our gas servicing is due in September 2020 so we have some breathing space.

How are you maintaining contact with your residents?

We are speaking with all residents each day using our warden call system and issuing letters if we need to get information out e.g. Government guidelines etc.

How are you/or your residents interacting with community groups?

Those residents who are competent with the internet are able to use social media groups to keep in touch and find out information, its more isolating for those who do use the internet.

How are your residents managing to maintain fitness?

Residents are able to exercise in our private grounds and garden as long as they maintain the social distancing guidelines.

How are your residents getting shopping?

All our residents are being supported by family and friends for shopping and essential supplies, we also have a small army of local volunteers who have set up a support group on Facebook, residents who need additional help with shopping and telephone support have been matched with a volunteer, we are lucky to be close to Manchester City Centre and there is no shortage of young professionals willing to help us.

The new local authority hubs recently created in each area should be able to support the most vulnerable residents who need shielding the most and should be contacted if residents do not have adequate support.

What are you doing to ensure you can maintain your charity and services during an extended period of lockdown?

Staff are able to carry on providing services safely either from the staff office or from home using a laptop and mobile phone, Trustees are contacted via email with regular updates and we aim to use conference call and possibly video conferencing if and when we need a trustee meeting to make any essential decisions, we had a continuity plan already in place which we were able to adapt quickly when the crisis kicked off. We have kept in close contact with our subcontractors to ensure they are able to continue providing services and have capacity to do so throughout the period of the crisis.

United St Saviour's Charity

How are you supporting your vulnerable residents at this time?

At UStSC we have closed our offices but are maintaining daily telephone contact with every resident. During these calls (or sometimes texts) we are ascertaining the health and level of support required by each individual in the household. We then respond accordingly by providing befriending, contacting relatives or delivering groceries or prescriptions for people that can't get out or be helped by anyone else. This week we launched a weekly newsletter (attached) which aims to make residents feel more connected whilst staying indoors.

What action have you taken to prevent the spread of Covid-19?

Our approach to reducing the spread of the virus is to ask residents to stay home and to restrict people going into the almshouses. Shopping deliveries are collected from the car park. We ask residents not to use the lounge or meet in the gardens although this is impossible for us police remotely. We have given advice on social distancing and in our next literature we will ask residents to reduce their shopping trips to once a week if they can. Unfortunately we are not having any cleaning done at this time so we are relying on people to leave the laundry and other areas as clean as possible.

Are you residents respecting the social distancing measures? If not, how are you dealing with these?

We are concerned that there are a minority of residents who are not respecting social distancing measures possibly because they don't understand the seriousness of it. We have had one persistent offender who we are very concerned about. We spoke to the Police about this individual who gave us a crime ref number and said that if it continued they would issue an on the spot fine of £30. If it transpires that she has some level of dementia we will need to revisit this problem.

How are you handling property maintenance and essential safety checks?

We will only complete emergency repairs for the time-being. We had to call British Gas for a boiler breakdown and this was completed efficiently with the resident staying in another room during the repair. I intend to take some advice on fire safety testing which we usually do weekly to ensure that we continue to comply with all our health and safety responsibilities.

How are you maintaining contact with your residents?

Mon-Fri by phone and occasional weekend calls to the most isolated / vulnerable. Some residents are happier to communicate by text or email.

How are you/or your residents interacting with community groups?

We have circulated the contact numbers for local support groups including Age Uk. Where appropriate we will signpost people to local organisations for befriending or other services.

How are your residents managing to maintain fitness?

It's hard to know. Yesterday we sent everyone an exercise sheet and we know that a good number of people go for daily walks. Some residents do gardening as part of their daily exercise but this is problematic in the communal gardens as it tends to result in people 'meeting up' and therefore not respecting social distancing effectively.

How are your residents getting shopping?

This varies. Some go out and shop for themselves; some have online deliveries arranged by themselves or by relatives; some have asked us to buy them some shopping which we are able to do on a small scale. Some residents have shopping dropped off by relatives. The last is of most concern and we are very clear that shopping should be dropped at the gate or car park of the almshouse. We are doing all we can to prohibit visitors.

What are you doing to ensure you can maintain your charity and services during an extended period of lockdown?

We are holding frequent online meetings between the executive and other members of staff. The CEO reports key issues, including financial implications, to trustees as they arise. We have discussed some contingency measures in the event that any of our key staff become ill and unable to work. This is likely to involve working with local partners to maintain almshouse services.