

## **Albyn Housing Society Limited**

### **Frequently Asked Questions (Tenants)**

1. I/we have lost our income as a result of Corona Virus (CV) shutting down our workplaces, how are we supposed to pay our rent when we have no income?

Unfortunately, there are no clear answers to this, however based on current information we are attempting to provide answers to the following scenarios:

- a) People able to apply for support through their employer for 80% of their regular salary
- b) People new to Universal Credit
- c) People who are self-employed and have lost their incomes
- d) People whose positions have already been made redundant

What the government is doing in relation to (a) to (d) above:

- a) Please go directly to <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-guidance-for-employees> for more details on discussing this with your employer
- b) Please go directly to <https://www.universalcredit.co.uk/coronavirus/> to make your application. The Government have put measures in place to speed up this process but there is still an expected delay of approximately 5 weeks.
- c) Please go directly to <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-a-grant-through-the-coronavirus-covid-19-self-employment-income-support-scheme> to find out more about eligibility to claim a taxable grant worth 80% of your trading profits up to a maximum of £2,500 per month.
- d) Please make your Universal Credit application without delay as at point b) above.

What Albyn Housing Society are doing:

- We are working hard to keep abreast of the government's announcements about financial support for people during this time of great uncertainty
- We are lobbying our industry and regulatory bodies such as the Scottish Housing Regulator and Scottish Federation of Housing Associations to stress the importance of financial support for people to pay their rent and to explain the impacts on Albyn tenants such as concerns about building up unsustainable levels of debt and also to outline our concerns about Albyn Housing Society as an RSL if this support is not forthcoming. We are also explaining the impact with regard to housing stock quality and impact on future component replacement programmes (such as heating systems, windows, kitchens and bathrooms)
- Our Board met on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 with an emergency agenda to address the very real concerns that tenants and our teams have about the financial pressures this situation is and will continue to have on our tenants. We considered what flexibility there is within our budget to address immediate concerns raised by tenants, address our cashflow position and also to deal with the matters listed above with regard to longer-term impacts.

Prior to the Board meeting, it was agreed (26/03/2020) to suspend the planned rent increase across all tenures for a period of six months, to be reviewed once a clearer picture emerges of the current situation.

The Board has also agreed to create a hardship fund to support those most in need of financial assistance as a result of Covid 19.

The Board also considered longer-term issues and their impact on our cash flow and wider financial position such as the development programme and component replacements (heating systems, windows, kitchen and bathrooms). This is just a flavour of the important topics that the Board have considered, and we wanted to keep you as informed as we can under the very changeable nature of the current situation.

- We are seeking to provide advice and guidance to staff so that they in turn can respond to your queries. Please bear with us while this message filters out across our business.

2. Will I lose my home if I cannot pay my rent due to losing my income as a result of Corona Virus?

No. Albyn Housing Society has committed to taking no eviction action in relation to CV. We do however appreciate that the accumulation of arrears will be a source of stress and worry for tenants.

This is why we are lobbying hard to make the case that our region is disproportionately affected by seasonal job losses and more general economic difficulties and therefore, we are seeking to influence the government(s) to support tenants with rent relief or to provide direct financial support to RSLs at this worrying time.

3. Will I lose my home if I cannot pay my rent due to inability to pay for reasons not related to Corona Virus?

There are a number of current cases proceeding through the court system at present. On a practical level, these cases will not be heard by the courts due to current court closures and therefore we have taken the decision to halt all and any eviction action for a period during the current crisis in order to help all tenants at what is a very trying time for the whole country. We will keep this position under review.

4. What happens if I go into rent arrears?

At the moment, the government has encouraged RSLs to take no eviction action related to CV. Albyn has taken the view that there will be no evictions for the duration of the current pandemic. However, it is likely that we will require to address historic, non-CV related rent arrears cases as a priority when the current situation returns to normality, whatever that might be. Our goal under those circumstances will be to ensure that we balance fairness with sound decision-making to ensure that current tenants are not then carrying a disproportionate financial load through future rent increases to pay for arrears arising from historic, non-CV related arrears.

5. Will there be a “rent holiday” during the CV pandemic?

There have been a number of comments made on social media and to our Housing Officers that rent payments are to be suspended during this crisis period. Please note that if you are still being paid by your employer or receiving your normal entitlement to benefits, then you should continue paying your rent. If you have had your income affected by this situation and you can no longer pay your rent, then it is essential that you apply for Universal Credit and you advise your Housing Officer that this has happened.

Whilst there will not be any evictions for the foreseeable future, rent arrears will continue to accumulate and Court action may still be necessary at some point in the near future if you have withheld your rent for any reason other than a loss of income caused by the CV pandemic.

We have received no instruction or guidance from the government at this time regarding rent payments. There are routes available to people to cover their rent if they experience difficulties. Your Housing Officer will be able to advise you of these.

6. Gas Safety – will we still do our annual safety checks?

We are still servicing boilers to ensure that they are working correctly. Please be assured our contractors have clear working guidelines to prevent the spread of and exposure to CV. We have currently suspended forced entries as that requires 3 people to attend the property and social distancing cannot be maintained. Where we haven't been given access to a property (not CV related) and the service due date has been exceeded, we will aim to cap the gas supply. For customers who cannot give access, due to self-isolation or quarantine, please make this clear to the contractor or your Housing Officer and we will make alternative arrangements. Where your gas supply has been capped, we will restore the system once you have given us access and your boiler has been serviced. Where you have a prepayment meter it is important that you are in credit to allow the service to proceed. If you have no money on your meter and this is a problem for you, please speak to your Housing Officer.

Should the situation change regarding servicing then we will let you know as soon as we are made aware of any changes.