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Scottish Landlords and Letting Agents

18 March 2020

Dear Landlords and Agents

We are contacting you to make sure that you are aware of the latest information and guidance in relation to COVID-19 and to ask for your support to ensure that tenants who find themselves in financial difficulty due to COVID-19 are made aware of the support available to them.

Given the unprecedented circumstances, we would ask for your support to ensure no tenant is evicted because they have suffered financial hardship due to Coronavirus.

I hope that you will recognise at this challenging time that landlords must be flexible with tenants facing financial hardship and signpost them to the sources of financial support available.

To further protect tenants in the private rented sector from eviction we announced today we intend to take action to make a temporary legislative change to the necessary legislation to amend the mandatory grounds for eviction under the Private Residential Tenancy from 3 months to 6 months. The full details of this were announced in a statement made to Parliament today (attached).

I know that we must get the balance right between protecting tenants and ensuring landlords can continue to provide housing. I also know that the banks have agreed a three month mortgage holiday and commend this - and we urge private landlords who need this facility to apply for it. However we do not believe this is enough at this time. Therefore Ministers have written to UK Finance and the UK Government urging them to move to providing six month mortgage holidays for all mortgages including Buy to Let. We recognise that such a move could help tenants and landlords across the UK.

Support for tenants

We would ask you to urge your tenants to apply for Statutory Sick Pay and Universal Credit where they are eligible. We would also urge you to encourage them to speak to you as soon as they are in financial difficulty as it may mean that they are unable to pay their rent at this time.

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Tenants affected by Coronavirus who are concerned about paying their rent can claim Universal Credit from the Department for Work and Pensions which includes support for housing costs, if eligible. The UK Government has introduced some temporary changes to make this easier. The following website provides further information on applying for Universal Credit: <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit>

If a tenant is getting Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, but still can't afford their housing costs, they may be eligible for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP). Further information on DHPs and how to apply is available at: <https://www.mygov.scot/discretionary-housing-payment/>

Tenants may be able to get support through the Scottish Welfare Fund. Further information on how to apply is available on: <https://www.mygov.scot/scottish-welfare-fund/crisis-grants/>

Latest information on COVID-19

The following link takes you to the Coronavirus page produced by Scottish Government which has the latest information on the virus in Scotland, and further links to up to date news and information on the subject.

<https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>

I would emphasise that as the position is changing on a daily basis it is important that you are aware of, and have regard to, the latest advice from Government, the NHS and the Chief Medical Officer.

Finally, I would like to say that I am sure that landlords recognise we are in unparalleled times and there will be an expectation that all landlords help their tenants right now as part of an overall society response. We cannot have people being made or at risk of being made homeless at this difficult time and we urge you to make that message clear to all landlords in the PRS.

Kevin Stewart MSP
Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning

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