

# **Managing the impact of Covid-19 on our business and customers**



**December 2020**

## **Planning for the unexpected is part of our business**

Futures Housing Group is driven by its social purpose. While much of our work is focused on the practicalities of providing homes, underpinning that is our fundamental concern for the welfare of our customers.

People depend on us, not just for putting a roof over their heads, but also a range of services to help them live independently and live well. Anything that disrupts our work could have a negative impact on our customers. So planning to keep things running smoothly through unexpected events and to minimise the effect on customers is an essential part of our work.

We have a range of systems and procedures in place in anticipation of having to deal with emergencies or other disruptions. These include contingency plans for all aspects of our work. These plans are regularly reviewed and senior managers are responsible, both individually and as a group, for ensuring that we are prepared so we can keep problems under control.

Risk management is the responsibility of everyone at Futures Housing Group and is overseen by our Executive Team and Group Board.

As a responsible organisation, we also take the well-being of our staff and those we work with very seriously and our contingency plans reflect this.

## **Managing our response to the coronavirus outbreak**

Planning for pandemics or other health-related incidents has been part of our overall business continuity planning for a number of years. As a result, we already had core plans in place for maintaining our services to customers and the effective running of our business when it became apparent that the UK was at the start of a coronavirus outbreak.

We triggered the first stage of our business continuity plans early in March 2020 as infections began to be reported across the UK. Senior managers from across the organisation, supported by a range of staff involved in providing crucial services, continue to meet regularly to review the situation, monitor developments and lead our response. We are following all relevant official government and NHS advice. All our operational plans are reviewed and updated as necessary.

We have invested heavily in recent years in technology. This means that most staff have access to equipment and systems that allow them to work flexibly from any online location. We are therefore well equipped to maintain service delivery and have continued to do so throughout most of 2020. While there was disruption to some frontline services during the first national lockdown, we have subsequently dealt with most of the backlog this caused and are now largely running services at a normal, pre-pandemic, level.

We have adapted our ways of working to continue to prioritise safety and to help keep any disruption to a minimum. These measures are flexible and have been scaled up and down as

necessary in response to changing government advice in our areas of operation as well as nationally.

## **Our business continuity strategy for coronavirus**

Our response to the impact on our business and customers from coronavirus infections focuses on the following areas:

- Minimising risk – to our customers, our workforce, our operational partners and the wider community. This means taking sensible steps, based on national guidance, to help reduce the risk of spreading the infection in the course of our work.
- Using our flexible working capacity so that people can work remotely when they cannot travel to their normal workplace or where the government advice is to work from home where possible.
- Supporting our workforce to help minimise the impact of coronavirus on them and their families.
- Working effectively with key suppliers and partners to ensure that our plans are coordinated and jointly helping to keep key services running.
- Prioritising essential systems and services if demand increases and/or significant numbers of our people cannot work due to being unwell. To date this has not been a major issue but may mean, for example:
  - Cutting back on non-urgent services to free up teams to deal with emergencies.
  - Temporarily redeploying staff who are fit to work into other roles, where possible, to support critical business functions.
  - Focusing on the needs of customers who we know are more vulnerable.
- Staying alert and adaptable to changes in the outbreak and providing clear and effective leadership at all stages.
- Considering long-term as well as short-term implications of the outbreak to ensure that we can resume normal operations quickly and effectively once the crisis period passes.

## **Our current status (December 2020)**

Most parts of the organisation are now well adapted to working through the pandemic and services to customers are largely running as normal. Increasingly, now that the first vaccines are being deployed, we will continue to consider how to resume 'business as usual' smoothly as and when restrictions are further reduced.

As of 9 December:

- Some of our offices are open but operating with substantially reduced staff numbers within a Covid-secure environment. Use of these workspaces is prioritised for those team members who cannot work effectively from home or whose work requires them to be in one of our premises. All offices are closed to external visitors (except for exceptional pre-arranged circumstances).
- In line with Government advice, all staff who can continue to work from home are strongly encouraged to do so.
- Staff carrying out essential and emergency work or working out in the community are provided with suitable PPE where required and have been given detailed and specific instructions for safe working.
- Our customer services are currently running largely 'as normal' but this may be subject to change as long as Covid-19 is still circulating in the community. We provide regular service status information and updates to customers through our website and social media. Where possible we continue to provide remote support where possible (for example trying to help customers resolve problems themselves where it is possible and safe for them to do so).

## **Looking to the future**

A team of senior managers meets monthly to pro-actively review the status of the pandemic and to advise on or agree any further changes to our working practices that may be necessary. The same group is also on standby to convene urgently if there are any sudden developments that we need to consider or act upon.

Regular discussions are also taking place to plan for how we continue working effectively once the pandemic and associated restrictions have come to an end. Like many organisations, we have adapted quickly to new and more agile ways of working during 2020 and our ambition is to build on these changes and continue to evolve as our working environment changes.