



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP

*Secretary of State for Housing, Communities
and Local Government*

**Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local
Government**

4th Floor, Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

Email: robert.jenrick@communities.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/mhclg

To: All Members of Parliament in England

11 January 2021

Dear Colleague,

**FURTHER SUPPORT FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE THROUGH THE NATIONAL LOCKDOWN:
ROUGH SLEEPERS AND EVICTIONS**

Last week I announced further support to protect the most vulnerable through the national lockdown. This includes further efforts and funding to protect rough sleepers and ensure they are registered with a GP, where they are not already. I also confirmed that evictions will not be enforced by bailiffs until at least 21 February, except for in the most egregious situations. I have set out below the comprehensive set of measures the Government has put in place to protect the tenants, whilst ensuring landlords have access to justice for the most serious cases.

Rough sleeping

Given the new variant of COVID-19 that is driving infection rates and the Prime Minister's announcement of a new national lockdown, it is clear we need to redouble our efforts to ensure that people who sleep rough, who we know are vulnerable to this disease, are kept as safe as possible and that we do everything we can to protect the NHS.

As a result, I am launching an additional £10 million fund, as part of the over £700 million deployed this year, to help ensure even more rough sleepers are safely accommodated and will be asking that this opportunity is actively used to make sure all rough sleepers are registered with a GP, and are factored into local area vaccination plans, in line with the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation prioritisation for Covid vaccinations. In due course, those vaccination efforts will be simpler and more successful where rough-sleepers are in safe accommodation.

This Government is committed to ending rough sleeping and we have taken huge steps working with local authorities and their partners to protect rough sleepers during the pandemic. This work has not stopped, and in November we had supported around 33,000 people with nearly 10,000 in emergency accommodation and over 23,000 already moved on into longer-term accommodation.

This work has had a huge impact; intelligence from local authorities indicates that numbers on the streets have fallen significantly. A recent study published by the Lancet showed that because of this response 266 deaths were avoided during the first wave of the pandemic among England's homeless population, as well as 21,092 infections, 1,164 hospital admissions and 338 admissions to Intensive Care Units.

These efforts have been backed by significant government support. We have given councils over £4.6 billion in unringfenced grants to help them to manage the impacts of COVID-19, which we have been clear includes their work to support rough sleepers.

We have also been in close contact with councils to develop plans for the coming months, supported by the £266 million Next Steps Accommodation Programme which aims to ensure that as few people as possible return to the streets. This includes bringing forward 3,300 new homes this year for rough sleepers, leaving a national legacy of this Government's support for these individuals.

In addition, to prepare for winter months, we launched a £10 million Cold Weather Fund for all local authorities to bring forward COVID-secure accommodation this winter and to keep vulnerable people safe from the

cold. This is accompanied by a £2 million Transformation Fund for the voluntary sector, as well as comprehensive guidance on reopening night shelters more safely, where not doing so would endanger lives.

With the introduction of national restrictions in November, we asked all local authorities to update their plans for rough sleepers to make sure they had somewhere safe to go over the winter. We provided targeted support through the Protect Programme to support local authorities with higher numbers of rough sleepers to meet the specific challenges they faced. In total, we are spending over £700 million in 2020/21 on homelessness and rough sleeping.

Despite the success of ongoing interventions, we know there are some people on the streets who have not engaged with that support, or have lost accommodation provided to them, which is why I have asked local authorities to make further efforts to accommodate all rough sleepers again, even those who have previously refused help.

The Government has asked local areas to ensure that vulnerable groups will be able to access the vaccine, when they fall into one of the JCVI priority groups, and this should include people experiencing rough sleeping. Local authorities should work with their local health partners to ensure that – when they are prioritised - individuals experiencing homelessness are able to access the vaccine by other means if mainstream provision is unsuitable. This will help ensure that the wider health needs of people who sleep rough are addressed, supporting them now and for the future.

I encourage all relevant partners and local authorities to consider how they can best use the available support to protect the most vulnerable.

Ongoing protection for renters

Since the start of the pandemic, the Government has put in place unprecedented support to protect renters. Further legislation to extend protections for renters has come into force today, continuing to prevent bailiffs from attending residential premises to enforce a writ or warrant of possession except in the most egregious circumstances. This will ensure we continue to protect public health during the new period of national lockdown restrictions, at a time when the risk of virus transmission is very high, and to avoid placing additional burdens on the NHS and local authorities.

The measure contains some exemptions for the most serious cases. These exemptions are for:

- cases where the court is satisfied that the claim is against trespassers who are persons unknown;
- cases where the court is satisfied that the order for possession was made wholly or partly on the grounds of anti-social behaviour, nuisance or false statements, domestic abuse in social tenancies or substantial rent arrears equivalent to six month's rent; or
- where the property is unoccupied and the court is satisfied that the order for possession was made wholly or partly on the grounds of death of the tenant.

Many landlords have been compassionate and shown huge forbearance for tenants over this period. However, in order to ensure that the restrictions do not disproportionately impact landlords, some of whom rely on rental income for their livelihoods, we have amended the rent arrears exemption from the earlier regulations, to apply in cases where there are six months' rent arrears or more; in recognitions of the need for landlords to be able to access justice in cases such as this.

This legislation will be in place for at least six weeks, when it will be reviewed and consideration taken to the latest public health data. The legislation applies to England only.

These continued restrictions on bailiff enforcement build on protections for renters announced last year, including 6-month notice periods until at least the end of March for all but the most serious cases. This means that renters served notice today can stay in their homes until July 2021, with time to find alternative support or accommodation.

Courts will continue to remain open throughout the new period of national lockdown restrictions. The Court rules and procedures introduced in September to respond to the pandemic remain in place and will be regularly reviewed. This includes the requirement for landlords to send the court information about the impact the pandemic has had on their tenant. The judiciary will continue to prioritise the most serious cases, such as anti-social behaviour or fraud.

In addition, the Government is piloting a new mediation service as part of the possession action process to support landlords and tenants to resolve disputes before a formal court hearing takes place. This new service will be free to use for tenants and landlords that agree to do so. We anticipate the pilot rolling out in February

for six months. It will help more tenants at an early stage of the possession process, mitigating the risk of tenants becoming homeless and helping to sustain tenancies where possible.

We've taken action to prevent people getting into financial hardship by helping businesses to pay salaries, with the Job Retention scheme extended to the end of April, and boosted the welfare safety net by billions. This helps to ensure that tenants are able to pay their rent, minimising the impact on landlords. We strongly encourage all tenants to pay their rent and if they are having difficulty in doing so, they should have an early conversation with their landlord.

To further support landlords with buy to let mortgages, the mortgage holiday has been extended with applications open to 31 March 2021. Borrowers impacted by Coronavirus that have not yet had a mortgage payment holiday will be entitled to a six-month holiday, and those that have already started a mortgage payment holiday will be able to top up to six months without this being recorded on their credit file.

Taken together, our package of protections for renters strikes the right balance between prioritising public health and supporting renters, whilst ensuring landlords can access and exercise their right to justice. This, along with the measures being announced today to step up the Government's ongoing support for rough sleepers and ensure their wider health needs are addressed, will safeguard the most vulnerable people across England through the national lockdown.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Jenrick." The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a short horizontal line.

RT HON ROBERT JENRICK MP