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All Private Rented Sector Tenants in Scotland

5 August 2020

Dear Tenant(s),

SUPPORTING PRIVATE RENTED TENANTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In the short space of a few months, none of us could have envisaged the significant impact that Covid-19 has had on Scotland. I know this has been an extremely worrying time for you and your families and it has brought untold challenges to our country.

Now, more than ever, we need to be sure that people feel safe in their homes. The effect of Coronavirus on people's lives, livelihoods and plans cannot be underestimated and our homes should remain our safe place, from which all our hopes and ambition can flourish. Therefore, I wanted to write to all private rented tenants in Scotland to highlight the steps taken by the Scottish Government to protect renters during this difficult time and to highlight some of the help and support that is available to you, should you need it.

Protection for Renters

The Scottish Government has been clear that although rent is still payable, no landlord should evict a tenant because they have suffered financial hardship due to Coronavirus and I expect landlords to be flexible with anyone facing such challenges, signposting them to the sources of financial support available. However, should your landlord issue you with a notice to leave, it is important to be aware of your rights.

On 1 April, the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 came into force, to help protect renters in Scotland during the pandemic. This legislation effectively halts any eviction action for up to 6 months, depending on the reason (also known as grounds) being used. It works by temporarily increasing the notice to leave period your landlord must give you if they want to end your tenancy. The notice a landlord must give you depends on the grounds for ending the tenancy.

You can find out more information on your increased rights, including the notice period your landlord must give you, on the Scottish Government website: www.mygov.scot/private-rental-rights/.

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Financial Support

I know that many people will also be anxious about how they can continue to pay their bills, especially as we move towards the removal of the emergency support that was put in place at the start of the lockdown period, such as the UK Government's Job Retention Scheme.

If you are worried about being able to pay your rent now, or in the near future, it is important to talk to your landlord or letting agent as soon as possible. They may be able to support you in accessing help and advice on benefits and budgeting.

You may be able to claim Universal Credit from the Department for Work and Pensions which includes support for housing costs, and the UK Government has introduced some temporary changes to make this easier. If you are currently in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, but you are still struggling to pay your rent or wider housing costs, you may also be eligible for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP).

Should you have any financial concerns, I strongly urge you to find out what financial support is available to you. Citizens Advice Scotland's website provides a range of useful advice: www.cas.org.uk/.

Safety during lockdown

Public health remains paramount at this time, as we seek to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Scotland is moving carefully out of lockdown and it is important that everyone knows what they can do to help. The latest guidance on moving, essential and non-essential works and on landlord inspections or home viewings can be found on the following page, this information is frequently updated so please always check the latest guidance: www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-landlord-and-letting-agent-faqs/.

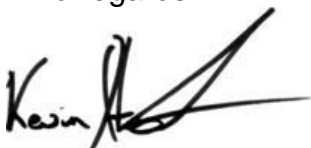
Other help

Public Health Scotland - in partnership with Citizens Advice Scotland, Shelter Scotland, the Scottish Association of Landlords and the Scottish Government - have created an online resource for all private tenants in Scotland, which will soon be available on the Scottish Government website: www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-private-tenants. A short summary of this resource can be found along with this letter, which I hope you find helpful.

The Scottish Government guidance on Coronavirus is reviewed regularly so please check for updates at www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/. Advice is also available from the Scottish Government's Coronavirus helpline (Telephone: 0800 111 4000), Scotland's Citizens Advice helpline (Telephone: 0800 028 1456) and Shelter's Housing Advice helpline (Telephone: 0808 800 4444). Please seek help and support if you need it.

I would finally like to take this opportunity to thank you for everything you have done, and are continuing to do, to help control the spread of the virus, protect the NHS and save lives.

Kind regards



KEVIN STEWART

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