

Industry guidance: Re-opening the Home Moving Market Safely

COVID-19 is having an impact on industry professionals whose work involves direct contact with clients, occupiers, tenants and home movers whether in an office or through visits to a private residential property. This is causing significant uncertainty for many, especially as Government guidance continues to evolve.

The purpose of this pan-industry guidance is to provide professionals with information to enable them to complete moves while maintaining safety as social distancing measures are eased in line with Government guidelines.

This document has been developed collaboratively by the residential sector and professional organisations' representatives. It is relevant to property agents, lenders, mortgage advisers, property lawyers/conveyancers, surveyors, energy assessors, property managers, home removal and associated professionals such as contractors involved in the property development, management and the home moving processes.

The guidance will focus on physical contact points in the home moving process whereby professionals delivering services will need to come into contact with people and/or enter private residential properties.

It will be followed by consumer guidance on safe home moving to ensure clarity, transparency and a smooth process for all parties.

As the situation and guidance in this area is constantly evolving, we intend for this information to be updated regularly.

Sector specific guidance is being finalised and links will be added.

This guidance is endorsed by:



This guidance has been seen by:

Association of Consumer Support Organisations, House Builder's Federation, HM Land Registry, UK Finance, and companies involved in the day-to-day moving process.

1. General industry recommendations for individual behaviour to reduce risks associated with COVID-19:

- Limit as much as possible any contacts with people outside your household – this is the most important condition for staying healthy.
- Transmission is affected by both duration and proximity of contact; individuals should not be too close to other people for more than a short amount of time. When in physical contact, stay side-to-side rather than facing people.
- When travelling, professionals should continue to avoid public transport wherever possible.
- Wherever possible, go directly from home to work and then back home and avoid peak travel times.
- Wash your hands as often as possible with soap or use hand sanitiser or wet wipes when you are outside.
- Eat at home and/or bring your own food at work.
- If you are coming back from an area with high risk of contamination, follow the advice on the [NHS website](#).
- Don't shake hands. Use the knuckles of your fingers to touch the light switches, elevator buttons, etc.
- When at petrol stations, use a paper towel or use a disposable glove to use the pump.
- Open doors with your elbow or otherwise, not your palm.
- Wash your hands for 20 seconds and/or use hand sanitiser before and after going into a property.
- When you return home or to your place of work, wash your hands with soap for 20 seconds and/or use hand sanitiser.
- Always bring a hand sanitiser with you. Have hand sanitiser on hand near the front door of your home and in your car for use after visiting a petrol station or touching items when you cannot immediately wash your hands.
- Cough or sneeze in disposable towels and throw them away.
- If you are using disposable gloves, when you take them off, immediately wash your hands thoroughly.
- Aim to wear a face-covering in enclosed public areas.
- Avoid touching your face at all times.
- Where possible, avoid touching surfaces when in someone else's home.
- Follow a common sense approach when interacting with, or entering, people's homes.

2. Physical contact during home moving

As the stay-at-home measures lift, professionals need to ensure they continue to provide the highest levels of service while adhering to current social distancing guidelines, ensuring the health and safety of consumers and professionals carrying out services in people's homes and complying with the public health guidance (PHG) issued by the relevant public health body for the location of the services undertaken.

UK Government, in consultation with industry, has produced [new guidance](#) to help ensure workplaces are as safe as possible, including specific detail for professionals who have to [work in other people's homes](#).

In line with current Government guidelines, we recommend the following steps:

1. Client engagement

- Professionals act in a transparent and professional manner with all parties involved, and are clear with the client/consumer about their service and any restrictions to the service as a result of COVID-19.
- Make sure the obligations in relation to client/consumer confidentiality and safe storage of client/consumer information continue to apply even though some or all staff are working remotely. Ensure this is in line with GDPR legislation.
- Avoid physical contact with clients. Contact clients/consumers by use of digital technology, for example e-mail, video conferencing platforms or, telephone, etc.

2. Identity requirements, witnessing and signatures

- ID checks should be conducted using electronic verification methods where possible to avoid the need for physical presence, in accordance with the [LSAG COVID-19 Guidance](#).
- Witnessing should be undertaken in person but maintaining social distancing measures. Each signatory should observe [PHG](#), use their own pen which they should not share and wear gloves to minimise the risk of transmission of the virus.
- Electronic signatures should be used where possible in the present circumstances rather than wet ink signatures. Make sure they are electronically dated correctly, for example, with the date of the contract.
- With the very important exception of documents that need to be supplied to HMLR for registration, electronic signatures can be used in most cases. See sector specific guidance for conveyancers - to follow.

3. Documentation

- There is no need for professionals to use protective equipment when handling physical documents. Current [guidance](#) from Government does not provide any obligation to do this.
- Terms and conditions of services offered to clients should be varied to allow for potential problems or restrictions arising from COVID-19.
- To avoid physical document exchange for anti-money laundering, electronic identification verification systems should be utilised in accordance with legal sector affinity group joint [guidance](#) and/ or guidance from the [FCA](#).

4. Getting the property on the market

- Where possible, all paperwork should be signed electronically.
- Where using an electronic signature not possible, paperwork should be posted. Where the client has to personally attend the office, consider requiring that this is by appointment only, when the office safely re-opens, to minimise physical contact in offices.

5. Preparation: Home inspections/visits/ home viewings

- No open house viewings should take place.
- Before arranging a physical viewing consider whether a virtual viewing can be undertaken but acknowledge that most consumers are not likely to make a binding offer without a physical viewing.
- Consumers should be advised that physical viewings should be limited to members of the same household. For example if a couple wish to view but are currently living in separate households, they should book separate viewings.

- Any professional planning or organising a visit to the property needs to check first with the occupiers whether anyone has had COVID-19 or has any COVID-19 symptoms, are shielding or clinically vulnerable, or have not yet completed the required period of household self-isolation.
- Any professional planning or organising a visit to the property needs to confirm that they have no COVID-19 symptoms.
- Only one professional and up to two other adults to attend viewings, and where viewers need to be accompanied by small children they should be kept from touching surfaces.
- Whenever possible, an agent should accompany a consumer on a viewing. However, when not possible, consumer must all agree to follow recommendations set out on the '*Consumer Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance on safe home moving*'.
- Liaise with other professionals involved in the home moving process, but avoid physical contact while social distancing measures apply and adhere to existing social distancing measures at all times.
- To ensure the client/occupier and industry professionals' health and safety, it is important that firms/individuals adhere to current PHG relating to health and safety and PPE.
- Viewings should ideally take place outside of commuting times to avoid rush hour, particularly in areas where people are taking public transport. Whenever possible, public transport should be avoided.
- Where practical, professionals and applicants should visit the property using their own transport.
- Professionals must take all reasonable steps to ensure the client and/or property occupier is provided with as much information as possible about the visit/s and service in advance to agreeing the service. For consistency, please share '*Consumer Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance on safe home moving*' prior to the visit.
- The visit, service and arrangements should be agreed by all parties prior to visit or inspection.
- New instructions, terms of engagement and/or client letters must be amended to confirm restrictions or information on the physical inspection/visit. For existing instructions, clients must be notified in writing of any restrictions/changes to terms of engagement.
- Secure as much information as possible and practical from the client/occupier or representative prior to the visit and as part of pre-inspection research, including property use, occupancy, location and potential risk to occupants, including carrying out a pre-inspection questionnaire/risk assessment with the occupier/client.
- Minimise physical contact during key handover where possible and ensure keys are sanitised at each handover.
- Sanitise equipment, in line with current PHG, periodically and as often as practical. Hand sanitiser should be carried when travelling and applied where available outside the home, especially when entering a building and following contact with surfaces. Clothes should also be washed regularly, as there is some evidence that the virus can stay on fabrics.
- The occupants should be asked to clean door handles before and after each visit.

3. [Check list of questions to ask pre-visit/inspection/home viewing](#)

Please note there are [interactive tools](#) available to support you from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). See also the [latest government guidance on COVID-19 vulnerable groups](#).

1. Health related

- ✓ Are you in the at 'risk' category as outlined by [Government](#)?
- ✓ Are you/anyone in your household [symptomatic](#)?
- ✓ Have you/anyone in the household previously tested positive and have since recovered?
- ✓ Have you got access to gloves, sanitising gels, etc?
- ✓ Are occupiers able to leave the property for the duration of a visit/view/inspection?

2. Property related

The following questions are designed to ensure professionals have adequate information pre-visit to avoid physical contact with client/occupier.

- ✓ Is the property occupied?
- ✓ What is the current and future use of the property?
- ✓ Where are the electrics located in the property?
- ✓ Where is the gas meter located?
- ✓ Where is the stop cock located?
- ✓ Where is the water meter located?
- ✓ Where is the boiler located?
- ✓ Are you aware of any issues in the property? If yes, please specify where?
- ✓ Do you have any certification in regard to gas and electricity safety?
- ✓ Do you have any guarantees or warranties for windows, boilers, historical damp treatment, extensions, etc?
- ✓ Where is the cold-water storage tank located (if applicable)?
- ✓ Where is the hot water cylinder located (if applicable)?
- ✓ What is the broadband service and where is the connection point?

4. Considerations during inspection/visit/home viewing

- Professionals to consider health and safety aspects in relation to traveling to the property, accessing the property, carrying out an inspection/visit, and delivering the service.
- Occupiers should not be in the property when possible in order to avoid physical contact and ensure compliance to existing social distancing measures Consumer recommendations are set out on the 'Consumer Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance on safe home moving'.
- Any client/occupier considered to be in a high-risk category should not be in the property and a representative may need to be appointed in their place.
- When occupiers are in the property, it is important to ensure Government guidelines are followed, including maintaining a two metre distance from others.
- Only one professional should visit the property at a time and only two adult viewers per household to attend viewings. Where small children need to accompany adults, they should be kept from touching surfaces.
- Whenever possible, an agent should accompany a consumer on a viewing. However, when not possible, the consumer must agree to follow recommendations set out on the 'Consumer Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance on safe home moving'.
- All visitors need to adhere to PHG on cleaning hands thoroughly prior to and upon leaving the property.
- In accordance with current PHG, appropriate PPE is utilised according to the service delivered.

- Where possible, minimal contact should be made with surfaces when inspecting elements of the property.
- Keep a record of the visit and inspection using appropriate recording equipment especially for restrictions as a result of social distancing measures.
- Appropriately dispose of any PPE used during inspection/visit/home viewing in line with Government and PHG guidelines.

5. Considerations post-inspection/visit/home viewing

- Communicate outcome/findings appropriately with the client/consumer.
- Reports and findings should be delivered in line with current industry standards and guidance.
- Any restrictions of information/advice should be made clear and stated in report/s and client correspondence.
- Note any limitations to inspection/service delivered as a result of current social distancing measures and health and safety risks.
- Highlight any risks and hazards found during the inspection with your client, depending on the service delivered.
- Recommend a deep clean, while adhering to [NHS guidance](#) or leave 72 hours between moving.

6. Professional accountability and responsibility

Industry members are expected to behave ethically and professionally, while taking adequate steps to consider health and safety at all times for all parties involved.

The Government has set out enforcement measures to ensure compliance to social distancing measures. Professionals must adhere to Government guidelines at all times.

Sector specific additional guidance:

Links to follow.

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