

# **Coronavirus – council strengthen procedures to protect vulnerable residents**

**The City of Edinburgh Council has taken steps this morning to strengthen the way they work to provide support to those who need it most.**

Locality offices have been closed and the council is putting in place measures to support those who are financially affected. You are particularly encouraged to use their online services wherever possible, leaving the phone lines free for those in critical need.

The phone line for emergency use is 0131 200 2000. This should be used for urgent calls about social care, repairs and welfare support.

Locality offices and the hub and 249 High Street will be closed from today and in their place Local Critical Resilience Centres will be rolled out. They will provide somewhere for council officers to work from, and they will be targeting those most in need. The centres will possibly hand out food vouchers in the coming days.

No debt recovery action will be taken on council tax and rates meantime. Council tax payments will be deferred for three months if anyone is struggling to pay, but it is important that anyone who can pay does as it will help the council provide services.

A council spokesperson said: "Following the Scottish Government announcement to increase funding for crisis

payments, plans are urgently being put in place that will allow us to deal with an expected increase in applications for this important fund.

“Council tenants who are concerned about being unable to pay rent during this emergency will be helped to manage rent payments and directed to advice on benefits they may be entitled to. No Council tenant is at risk of losing their home during the current emergency.

“We will continue to increase the number of homes and bed spaces available for those who are or become homeless and are aiming to have a bed space for those who need it, prioritising families and those most at risk, alongside individuals needing to self-isolate. Street-based outreach services continue to operate to support those who are rough sleeping and shelters remain open.

“We’ve created an online Q&A detailing [Council Tax, benefits and welfare advice](#). Updates on our [homelessness services](#) and information for [Council tenants](#) can also be found on our website. Keep checking [edinburgh.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://edinburgh.gov.uk/coronavirus) for the latest service updates.”



Council Leader Adam McVey said: “This is a difficult time and

we need to adapt as circumstances change in order to provide support to those who need it most. We're continuing to work round the clock with our partners to identify those most at risk and make sure people get the help they need.

"In just a few days, we've seen welfare fund requests rise rapidly – around 80% up on average volumes – so it's absolutely critical we work to meet this demand. By closing our Locality Offices we are able to limit face-to-face contact, pool resources towards our new Resilience Centres and, in doing so, target support for those who are most vulnerable.

"As part of this we're working really hard to step up the supply of temporary accommodation we have. This is to ensure those experiencing homelessness remain as safe as possible and we'll be setting out further detail this week.

"I'd really like to thank all our staff, partners and volunteers who are working in what are challenging times and Bethany Christian Trust for their continued efforts to keep Edinburgh's shelters open."

Depute Leader Cammy Day said: "In order to provide these critical services, we're asking everyone to bear with us and help us keep our phonelines free for emergency calls. Please do this by getting in touch online in the first instance if you can, so that enquiries from those hardest hit can be put first.

"This will drastically help our officers focus efforts on work to help our most vulnerable residents – those who are financially affected by this outbreak and really need our services right now."

## **HOW TO ACCESS COUNCIL SUPPORT ONLINE**

You can access a wide range of Council services at [www.edinburgh.gov.uk](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk) and report many concerns through the

website. If the matter relates to debt, benefits or welfare please contact the Advice Shop or the new local critical response centre for your area:

Advice.shop@edinburgh.gov.uk

Northwest.locality@edinburgh.gov.uk

Northeast.locality@edinburgh.gov.uk

Southwest.locality@edinburgh.gov.uk

Southeast.locality@edinburgh.gov.uk

Parking queries should be done online and email

Residentsparking@edinburgh.gov.uk

Licensing queries should be done online and email

Licensing@edinburgh.gov.uk

All other requests can be done via our [website](#).

**Support for those most at risk and hardest hit by the coronavirus outbreak will be prioritised in all circumstances – if you are experiencing an emergency or critical situation please call 0131 200 2000.**