Six Key Areas for consideration for AHBs during the current Pandemic

Note: These considerations should be reviewed by large and medium sized AHBs

It is essential that all AHBs follow HSE guidance on public health and ensure that all appropriate measures are in place to protect staff and tenants alike. AHBs should ensure constant review of HSE guidance and updates from relevant Government Agencies.

1. Business Continuity

Business Continuity Planning	Business Continuity Checklist

• All AHBs should have a Business Continuity Plan in place to ensure that the organisation is able to deliver essential services, whilst protecting staff and tenants during this significant event
 	
• It is vital that AHBs ensure that their Business Continuity Plan is now fully operational and fit for purpose, including:
 	
   o the establishment of critical tasks
 	
   o ensuring key personnel contact details are fully recorded and up to date
 	
   o that the Business Continuity Arrangements have been communicated appropriately
 	
• It is vital that during this pandemic, where staff shortages are likely, that deputies to key personnel roles have been identified and that those individuals are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities
	• AHBs should have in place a checklist of preparatory actions to be taken (including risks to completion) where contingency arrangements are being put in place.
	
	• Organisations should fully document:
	
	   o what activities need to be carried out
	
	   o who is responsible for key tasks
	
	   o monitor progress on completion
	
	• Useful links to good practice checklists are provided at the end of this document

2. Establishing and Maintaining Critical Business Functions

Prioritise Activities	Staff & Delivery

• Clearly Establish Critical Functions:
 	
    ○ Essential Activities
 	
    ○ Non-Essential Activities
 	
• Identify key processes and critical personnel and resources
 	
• Scope the level of resourcing required to deliver critical functions
 	
• Assess capacity and capability for delivery of critical functions
	• Ensure employees are cross trained for delivery of identified critical functions
	
	• Manage the formal delegation of tasks and the distribution of work
	
	    ○ Establish back-up for each critical position
	
	    ○ Identify key man dependencies
	
	• Redeploy personnel as appropriate
	
	• Stress test capacity and capability where workforce is significantly depleted for periods of time

3. Operate and Communicate

- Develop a detailed communication plan for staff, tenants and key stakeholders

- Keep staff, tenants and contractors appraised of impacts to service and delivery

- Issue regular, transparent communications that reassure employees and align with current government policies

- Stay in contact with suppliers regarding ability to deliver and supply services

- Review terms and conditions of loans and contracts with creditors and funders

- Keep abreast of HSE, DoH and DHPLG guidelines

- Leverage all available communication channels

- Ensure emergency communication channels are tested

- Fully communicate the organisation's position at regular intervals including:

  - Working arrangements of the organisation and impact on tenants

  - Changes to service delivery, including but not limited to rent, repairs and maintenance and Health & Safety precautions

  - Changes to care and support services including impacts on tenants/service users

4. Tenants and Housing Functions

Health and Safety Compliance	Repairs and Maintenance

• Health and safety of tenants, service users, volunteers and employees is the absolute priority
 	
• Establish risks associated with the delivery of key services:
 	
    o including difficulties with access to properties
 	
    o health and safety risks, which could present risks to staff, contractors and/or other occupiers
 	
• Take account of these risks and ensure that the actions taken are in the best interests of both staff and tenants
 	
• Ensure changes to service and delivery are clearly established and communicated with all tenants, staff and contractors
 	
• Ensure all key stakeholders are fully informed of the organisation's policies and procedures during the current crisis
	• Establish approach to repairs and maintenance
	
	    o Essential and emergency maintenance
	
	    o Non-essential that can be postponed
	
	• All requests for repairs should be risk assessed
	
	• Review all legal and compliance obligations, assess risks where works not completed pose a risk to both tenant and organisation. e.g. gas boilers
	
	• Record all works not carried out, enabling prioritisation of works when operational capacity resumes

5. Financial Management

Financial Management	Stress Testing

• Ensure ability to maintain business-critical systems, including payroll and the ability to maintain supply chains
• Liquidity Focus:
    o Scenario Test adequacy of cash and cash buffer
    o Re-double efforts on cash forecasting
    o Bring cash under central control and visibility
    o Manage liquidity impact of disruption between finance and operations
    o Monitor credit limits tightly
    o Maximise opportunities to reduce outflow
• Budget Review
    o Review and reassess key assumptions relating to 2020 budget including:
        ➤ Income
        ➤ Expenditure
        ➤ Fundraising
        ➤ Cashflow & Liquidity
        ➤ Creditor & Debtor Management
        ➤ Financial Viability
 	
• Continuously evaluate cash and liquidity position and potential impact on financial and operational viability
	• Recast your cashflow and stress test assumptions
	• Stress test scenarios should consider:
	    o Potential for increased costs
	    o Increase in Rent Arrears
	    o Significant reduction in donations
	    o Impact of non-delivery of new units or significant delay of such
	    o Align to risk register
	    o Align to business continuity plans
	
	• Recast mitigations actions during 'live' scenario
	• Financial impact is likely to be more acute for AHBs that are operating a deficit, experienced cash-flow or liquidity issues in 2019.
	• Organisations with a high degree of diverse service provision such as care homes or supported housing will additionally experience a more acute impact.

6. Decision-making/Governance/Risk Management

Governance	Risk Management

Manage Dynamically
 	
 • Establish regular cross-functional status and decision meetings
 • Confirm responsibilities and delegated authorities under contingency measures
 • Agree trigger points for mitigating actions
 • Agree key measures for tracking developments
 	
 Ensure Board is fully informed and engaged
 	
 • Establish appropriate Board communication via electronic participation
 • Establish decision-making authority during critical period
 • Increase communication and information flow in line with business continuity plan
 • Leverage skills and expertise of Board members from different backgrounds and industries
 • Record all minutes of meetings and decisioning
 • Establish critical indicators and monitoring
 • Continue to practice the principles of good governance
	• Recast your risks and impacts
	 • Establish critical risks in current environment:
	   o Staffing
	   o Tenants
	   o Housing Management
	   o Care and support delivery
	   o Homelessness support and delivery
	   o Liquidity
	   o Cash
	   o Operational and financial viability
	 • Recast mitigating actions
	 • Monitor and review actions and effectiveness
	 • Issue regular and transparent communications relating to key risks ensuring Executive and Board decisioning is based on critical risk identification and mitigation

Useful links:

Health Service Executive

https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/

Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

https://www.housing.gov.ie/

Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation

https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Business-Continuity-Planning-Checklist-COVID-19.pdf

Irish Council for Social Housing

https://www.icsh.ie/content/icsh-news/covid-19-guidance-and-advice-icsh-housing-association-members

Charities Regulatory Authority

https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/en/information-for-charities/coronavirus-covid-19-and-charities

The Wheel

https://www.wheel.ie/COVID-19