

A photograph of a man and two children sitting at a table, looking at Christmas cards. The man is in the center, wearing a black t-shirt with the 'elap' logo. To his left is a young girl with brown hair tied in a ponytail with a white and gold bow, wearing a yellow turtleneck sweater. To his right is a young boy with short brown hair, wearing a grey and maroon long-sleeved shirt. They are all looking down at red Christmas cards with white snowflakes and the words 'MERRY CHRISTMAS'. The background shows a window with sheer curtains and a kitchen counter with a white jar.

Onward

Creating positive spaces

The Onward Conversation

February 2020



Let's have a conversation

In December we met with over 30 of our customers at the DW Stadium in Wigan.

The event gave us an opportunity to bring together members of our Regional Scrutiny Boards, customers Onward colleagues and members of the Board with the aim of:

- Exploring how we can listen better to our customers
- Creating Customer Service Standards for Onward
- Shaping new engagement priorities for 2020

Delivering excellent customer services at all times is our priority.

Whilst it was difficult to hear some of the experiences shared by customers on the day, it was clear we are making progress. The event provided the opportunity to have a really positive conversation and



we agreed to work more closely with our customers over the next couple of months to help us create an Onward Customer Charter together.

If you want to be part of shaping the Onward Charter, then come along to one of our future events.



Woodcroft Close, Preston
Tuesday 11 February
10am – 2pm

Weavers Court, Bolton,
Tuesday 11 February
10am – 2pm

Porchfield Community
Centre, Croxteth
Wednesday 12 February
10am – 2pm

2020 vision

A new year - a new conversation. We are always working at ways to communicate better with you - and this update is another way to develop that conversation.

I wanted to tell you about a few things that I feel are important as we start 2020. And I want to listen too - so look out for ways to give us your feedback in the update.

Bronwen Rapley
Chief Executive

If you would like to come along, call us: **0300 555 0600**
or email: customerengagement@onward.co.uk

Rent reviews in 2020

Following a four year period between April 2016 and April 2019 which saw rents reduced by 1% each year, it is now possible for housing associations to increase their rent again.

The Board has carefully considered the impact of increasing rent on customers now and in the future and has made the decision to increase rent this year by 2.7%.

This reflects government guidelines as well as the amount we have calculated that we need to continue to deliver and improve our services to you.

We have, for the most part, managed to absorb the impact of the rent reductions by carefully managing our resources but our costs continue to rise.

The increase is now vital for us to continue to manage and maintain your homes, build new ones and invest in and support the communities we serve.

To provide an example, if your weekly rent was £80.00, applying the 2.7% increase will mean your new weekly rent would be £82.16. An increase of £2.16. We will be writing to you later this month with details of your rent and service charge for the year ahead.

Even with this increase, rents are still lower than they were in 2015. However, we appreciate that even a small increase in costs can have an impact, so if you are struggling to pay your rent then we can offer support. Our Financial Inclusion Team is here to help on **0300 555 0600**.

Repairs service

The new repairs service, which came into effect on 1st April 2019, is designed to deliver a reliable and consistent service across all our homes, with a focus on resolving your repairs first time.

Unfortunately there have been some difficulties during the transition, and service improvements are taking longer than expected. However, we wanted to reassure you again that we are working through agreed plans for improvement.

Our teams are closely monitoring the situation, particularly outstanding and overdue repairs. As part of this, our contractors are also recruiting additional people to ensure they can meet the demand for repairs, and are increasing the number of appointment slots available to you. We will continue to work closely with them to ensure that you receive the standard of service you can expect and we want to deliver.



citrus energy

“Cheaper energy bills can offset the impact of rising costs for many households”

We know that a rent increase may have an impact on some households so we are looking at ways we can help you reduce your other costs at home.

An example of this is our recent partnership with Citrus Energy, a social enterprise that could help you reduce your energy bills.

Citrus Switch provides a free, independent and impartial energy switching service that takes into account your individual circumstances. Citrus may still be able to help you even if you have arrears. Switching through their service could save you up to £300 a year on energy bills, so it's worth calling them as soon as possible.

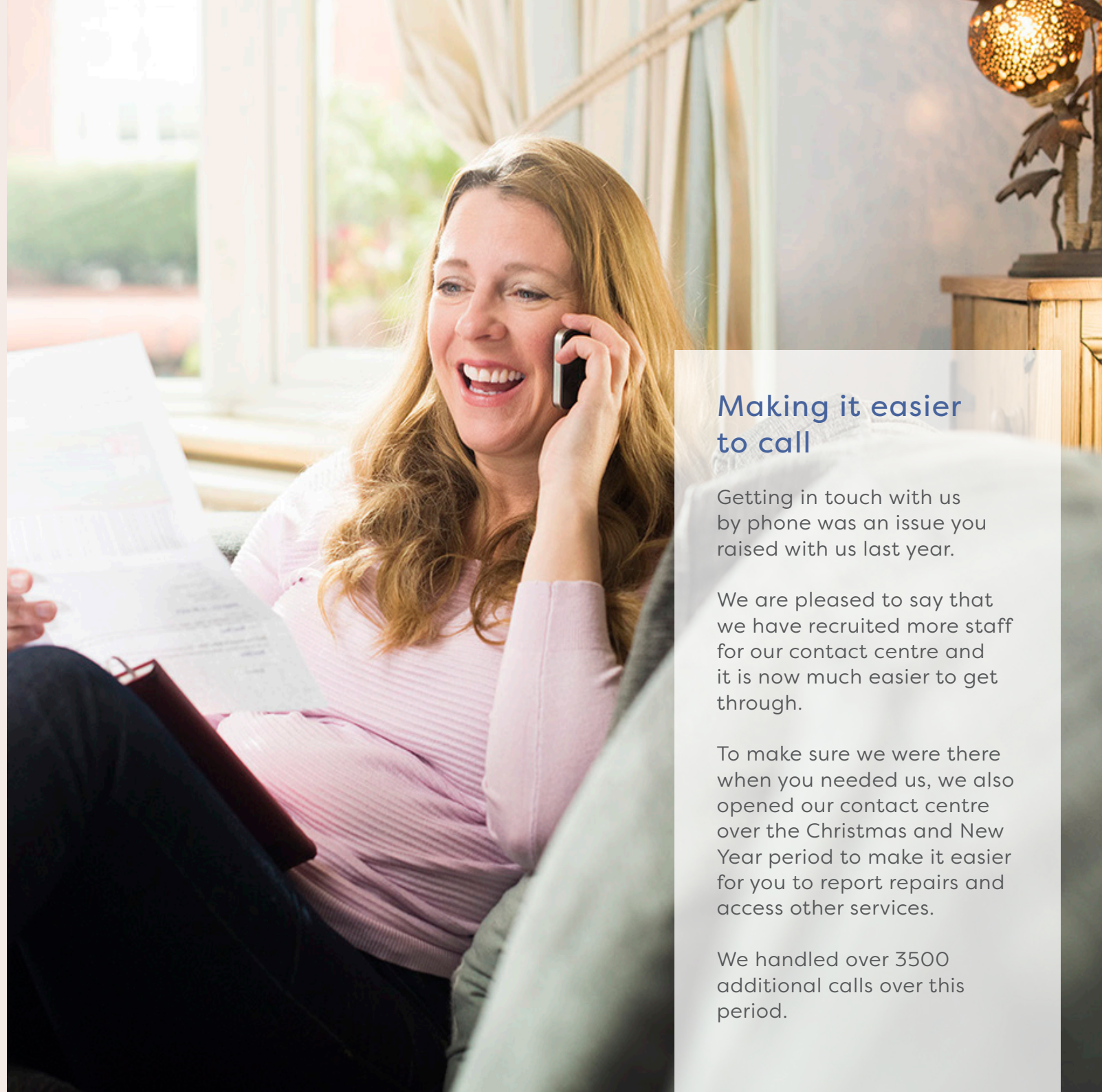
Call the Citrus freephone number: **0800 221 8089** or visit **www.citrusenergy.co.uk**.

Neighbourhood Plans – April 2020

Our purpose is to make a positive difference in the communities we serve and we are all passionate about it.

We recognise that each community is different and, as a result, have developed a series of Neighbourhood Plans tailored to each individual area, letting you know what our service commitments are where you live. The plans have been informed by feedback from you through the recent STAR survey and also through the work we already do in your area.

Through our Neighbourhood Specialists, we are committed to providing a visible presence and a responsive service in your local area. We also promise to work with partners and the local community to improve the area as a place to live. You will be able to access each of our neighbourhood plans from mid-April 2020 via our website.



Making it easier to call

Getting in touch with us by phone was an issue you raised with us last year.

We are pleased to say that we have recruited more staff for our contact centre and it is now much easier to get through.

To make sure we were there when you needed us, we also opened our contact centre over the Christmas and New Year period to make it easier for you to report repairs and access other services.

We handled over 3500 additional calls over this period.