



# CUSTOMER UPDATE

April 2020

It is now very clear that we are all living through an unprecedented event that is having a massive impact on everyone's lives.

We are determined to help you, our customers, through this difficult period. We are available when you need us and will do everything we can, especially to help those who are more vulnerable at this time.

## These are the three priority steps we are taking to support you:



We are **continuing to deliver an emergency repairs service**, and our compliance inspection programmes including gas servicing, making use of the very best safe-working practices. We are following Government guidance and are confident that we will be able to complete emergency repairs to keep you safe in your home.



We have **extended our core Contact Centre hours from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday**. This will make it easier for you to speak to us when it is convenient for you. Whilst most of us are now at home, we know many customers are still working very hard in the NHS and elsewhere to tackle this crisis. As always, we are available 24/7 for emergencies.



We are **continuing to provide key services**. Some services usually provided face to face are being delivered online or by phone. Our office staff are working from home using new technologies but are still available.

# We are proud to support the national response of housing associations to the coronavirus crisis. Onward is committed to:

- 1. Keeping people secure at home**  
No one will be evicted from an Onward home as a result of financial hardship caused by coronavirus.
- 2. Helping people to get the support they need**  
We are helping residents to access benefits and other support to alleviate financial hardship.
- 3. Acting compassionately and quickly where people are struggling**  
We are working with customers to understand how we can help you. This can include flexibility on collecting rent where that would make a difference. If you are worried about paying your rent please contact us, we want to help.

**On 16 April, the UK government announced that the lockdown is likely to last for at least three more weeks. We understand that this will have a significant impact on your lives and so we want to reiterate that we are here to help you through this difficult period.**



## Keeping in contact with you

As part of our commitment to keep in touch with our customers during this crisis, we have made over 20,000 calls to customers and have had responses from over 6,400. Whilst 91% of these customers told us they were ok, 570 told us they were not ok and that they needed some extra help. This has included everything from financial support, related to rent and benefits, to help with accessing prescriptions and food.

We will continue to communicate with you over the coming weeks using automated phone messages, text, social media and via our website but if you need help, please call us.

Our Contact Centre is operating extended hours, but all our offices are closed to customers until further notice.

Please do get in touch if you have any questions or concerns, we will do our best to help. You can contact us by telephone on the usual number, **0300 555 0600**, email us at [customerservices@onward.co.uk](mailto:customerservices@onward.co.uk) or through our social media channels.



## Keeping you safe

We are committed to ensuring that our customers and colleagues remain safe during the COVID-19 crisis. We are following government guidelines and are carrying out emergency repairs and vital safety checks, including servicing gas appliances. Based on Public Health England advice, we have introduced Safe Systems of Work that allow us to deliver essential services and vital safety checks within a safe working environment.

Our colleagues are all equipped with the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

If you are self-isolating, or feel uncomfortable about us entering your home, please inform us immediately and we will make appropriate arrangements. Where we can, we will delay, but in an emergency, we will be able to make your home safe.



## The latest update on our environmental services:

We are continuing to deliver cleaning services wherever we can. Cleaning can reduce the risk of transference of the virus and keeps communal areas clean and tidy.

We have developed safe systems of work for a range of activities that protect the environment around your home. Our colleagues are now able to deliver more services including grounds maintenance and grass cutting. The growing season has begun, and it is especially important that we keep our green spaces available for use by customers during lockdown.

We will also be carrying out our programme of safety and compliance inspections so that common areas are kept free from hazards to keep you safe in your home.

***When you see our colleagues and contractors out and about in your area, do give them a friendly wave, but please remember to maintain social distancing at all times.***



## The latest update on our repairs service:

We are continuing to provide an emergency repairs service, making use of the very best safe-working practices to protect you in your own home.

Any non-emergency repairs are suspended for the time being.

We are following Government guidance and are confident that we will be able to complete emergency repairs and keep you safe in your home.



## What if I have an emergency repair and I, or someone living in my household, is self-isolating with coronavirus symptoms?

We will aim to carry out the emergency repair if possible. However, please follow a few simple steps to help keep everyone safe:

- *Remain at least two metres away from any worker, or ideally in another room, with the door closed.*
- *Windows and doors should be opened to ventilate the area.*
- *Wipe down door handles and surfaces before the operative comes into your home.*

The operative will wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) before and after the visit. They will remove any used materials from your home.

If you are unable to follow social distancing instruction, our operative will be required to remove themselves from the property.



## What about other types of building work such as new kitchens and bathrooms, doors and window installations?

We have paused our planned maintenance work in customers' homes, including kitchen and bathroom installations, window and door fitting and central heating works.

If work has already begun in your home, then the work will be completed to a satisfactory standard to ensure your safety. We will seek to resume work at the earliest opportunity and will let you know when this is confirmed.



### Our approach to letting homes

We are still letting our homes but are doing so in close partnership with our Local Authority partners. This is to ensure that those who are most in need during this crisis get priority.

Our homes to let are accessible through the relevant local authority Choice Based Lettings Scheme.



### Combating food poverty

Food poverty was already a serious issue before the current crisis. If you are finding it hard to feed yourself and your family, please call us for support – we can offer help.

We are also actively supporting several organisations which are alleviating food poverty, such as [Open Kitchen MCR](#).

### Financial support

We understand that the current situation has put pressure on household finances for many. If you are in any doubt about your ability to pay rent, the best thing to do is to pick up the phone and call us to discuss your circumstances. We will listen and do our best to help you find a way through.

We have a dedicated team on hand to provide guidance and support. The team are accessible via our Contact Centre on 0300 555 0600.

Alternatively, you can contact the Citizens Advice Bureau and Welfare Rights Service, or access the latest Government advice about financial support at [www.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus).

*You may also find some useful information through the following links:*

[www.gov.uk/universal-credit](http://www.gov.uk/universal-credit)

[www.entitledto.co.uk](http://www.entitledto.co.uk)

[www.ofgem.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.ofgem.gov.uk/coronavirus)



## We value your feedback

Your feedback helps influence our priorities and improve our services to enable us to provide you with the best possible support going forward.

## Take our survey

To help us help you through the coronavirus crisis, we ask that you please take three minutes out of your day to complete our [short survey](#). Thank you.

As always if you would like to speak with us directly, we are available from 8am to 8pm every weekday on 0300 555 0600.

We hope that you and your loved ones remain safe and well during this difficult time.

For our most up-to-date information, please visit [www.onward.co.uk/coronavirus](http://www.onward.co.uk/coronavirus).