

## YOUR VOICE.

November 2022

Welcome to the latest edition of Your Voice – the newsletter that keeps members of our Customer Engagement Community updated on how customers have been involved over recent months. A warm welcome to all our new members...we now have over 10% of our customers signed up to the Community, and new members are continuing to join.

It certainly has been a busy few months, with customers getting involved in all sorts of activities and initiatives, from going to London to attend a national housing conference to visiting our Contact Centre in Accrington. It was great to meet up recently with customers who attended our Systems for the Future workshops, lots of great ideas were flowing on how we can introduce digital approaches to improve customer experiences.

There certainly is something for everyone to get involved in, so read on to find out more, and if there is something that you are interested in then get in touch.

### INSIDE HOUSING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT CONFERENCE.

A few members of our Customer Engagement Community recently attended Inside Housing's Customer Engagement conference in London. The conference saw over 400 landlords, tenants, government bodies and key partners come together to explore the value of involving tenants in shaping services, and decision-making. Services that directly affect their lives and that they are best qualified to influence.

The day was packed with speakers, discussions, and opportunities to share experiences with each other.

The Regulator of Social Housing updated attendees on the reforms that will put tenants at the centre of social housing. Including how the new tenant satisfaction measures will work in practice to improve accountability.

Workshops explored digital exclusion, the power of data, improving diversity and inclusion and how to work together to improve landlord services.

Discussions also explored how to engage tenants on crucial issues such as building safety, climate change, disrepair and the cost of living crisis.

#### Here is what Edith and June had to say about the conference...

*"I thoroughly enjoyed this one-day conference in London. In the unstable and negative economic times, we currently find ourselves, it was both refreshing and stimulating to spend time, listening to and discussing a variety of ways landlords/housing associations are exploring engaging positively and more effectively with their customers"* **Edith**

*"I enjoyed meeting customers from all over the country involved in Engagement, it was good to hear what's good and not so good in their tenancies. I spoke up that I'm interested in training and meetings, also that our repairs mostly seem to get sorted, especially when I heard some other stories from their regions. The staff and speakers were really caring and looked after us, I learnt about future plans to improve all aspects of Onward."* **June**



**ESTATE FUN.** Onward hosted an Estate Fun Day, at Limeside Park in Hollinwood Oldham. The day was a great opportunity to bring together partners, including local community initiatives and Oldham Council to celebrate the community, whilst providing free kids activities at the end of the summer holidays.

Alongside the main event Onward Neighbourhood and Customer Engagement team's ran a consultation on the future of the local Tenants Hall. We had lots of valuable conversations with residents to ensure the future of the space is shaped by local people. The overwhelming feeling of those we spoke to is to create a multi-use community space with a focus on youth provision, to help tackle local issues with anti-social behaviour, but we also had many other suggestions including a space for karaoke nights! Watch this space for the development of the Limeside Tenants Hall

## SYSTEMS FOR OUR FUTURE.



Giving our customers a voice is important to us, we want to make sure that they can influence and shape things here at Onward. So, it only felt right that after collaborating with over 300 colleagues on what our Systems for the Future should look like, we also had a similar conversation with some of our engaged customers last month.

The sessions were held in all 3 of our regional offices and it was great to have these conversations with customers face to face!

Wendy Derbyshire, our Head of Digital Services, asked customers to reflect on what digital transformation the world has seen in recent times.

From the explosion of social media to new messaging platforms and being able to ask Alexa anything you can think of. We discussed how differently we do things now (especially after lockdown), with most services we want/need being available at the touch of a button.

If you weren't able to attend the session, don't worry we are planning another one in the New Year register for a place [here](#)

Alison Joyce from our Project Team then talked through the typical Customer Journey – looking at all the different interactions that take place during the lifecycle of a tenant. Creating a visual step by step journey allowed customers to come up with new ideas about what would improve their customer journey.

Customer feedback will now be considered and will be added into our requirements when looking at any new systems for the future.

Wendy said of the sessions, 'Meeting with our customers and discussing their homes, their future needs, and their experiences about access to Onward services was illuminating. It was great to hear so many different views and their expectations for the future – but also, how much they valued their homes. A key message that came through very clear for me, was how they felt they were in a partnership with Onward to support them in their homes.'

# KITCHEN AND BATHROOM PROGRAMME.

Did you know in the last financial year Onward renewed **714 kitchens and 699 bathrooms at a cost of over £7 million!**

Your feedback about the work in your home helps us to improve the things that make a difference to you.

A customer from Accrington told us this month that on the first day 'they worked quickly and were very polite but they didn't cover the oven and washer and it got covered in brick dust' later 'the tiler was quick and cleaned up after himself he just didn't tell us he was going' near the end 'brilliant job by everyone, all polite and cleaned up after themselves.'

All this feedback goes back to the contractor, and we ask them to make improvements to the way they work. We can't do this without you.

Contact us [customerengagement@onward.co.uk](mailto:customerengagement@onward.co.uk) if you have been notified about a planned replacement of your kitchen or bathroom and would like to keep a short diary on the installation process. Sharing your experience with us will help to ensure that we are providing the best service that we can.

## ONWARD SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE.

Over the last few months the Scrutiny Board has met with Directors and Heads of Service to receive updates on the recommendations customers on the group have previously made about planned maintenance, repairs and the management of Onward homes and estates.

### Recommendations that have now been implemented and/or evidenced include:

- An agreed approach to planning and advertising estate walkabouts and environmental inspections (where these take place)
- Assurance that Neighbourhood Specialists can raise issues and influence changes in the way they work
- Agreement to implement approaches to better inform and receive feedback from customers receiving planned maintenance.



*The Scrutiny Board will receive updates on the implementation of all the above in April 2023.*

**So what's next?** The Scrutiny Board have now decided to look at the communication with customers about repairs, their recommendations will feed into a wider review of the repairs service. Members are keen to see how they can help Onward to keep customers better informed throughout a repair. We will update you on their findings in early spring.

**Are you interested in becoming a member of the Scrutiny Board?** We currently have vacancies. For more information and a short application form contact [customerengagement@onward.co.uk](mailto:customerengagement@onward.co.uk) **We particularly welcome applicants who want to gain great experience for their CV.**

## JOIN US FOR AN ESTATE INSPECTION.

Look out for your email invite to your local Estate Inspection.

An Estate Inspection involves walking around places where we have external communal areas, to identify any issues that might need to be tackled. This can include things like untidy gardens, fly tipping, or grounds maintenance issues. The Estate Inspection also give you the opportunity to talk to your Neighbourhood Specialist and discuss any issues or concerns you would like to raise.

Don't forget you can call our contact centre on 0300 555 0600 to raise repairs in your home or report any issues you have.

# REVIEW OUR POLICIES WITH US.

We regularly share our policies with customers for feedback, getting your views helps us to shape our services.

Our Tenancy Succession and Income Management policies need reviewing, we will email you with an invite to get involved so keep your eye out.

Our **Customer Resolution Forum** meet bi-monthly to review how we are handling complaints, look at cases sent to the Housing Ombudsman and last month overviewed the annual board report, which you can find [here](#). Would you like to be part of the Customer Resolution Forum contact Leanne for more details [leanne.baldwin@onward.co.uk](mailto:leanne.baldwin@onward.co.uk)

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Our **Customer Diversity & Inclusion Forum** is helping to ensure that we embed diversity and inclusion into all that we do. All of our customers have individual needs and preferences, so by involving and listening to them we can achieve our aim of providing services that meet their needs. Diverse customers create diverse communities and supporting our communities will bring benefits to all residents by improving community cohesion.

At the last meeting we spoke about how we advertise our groups with suggestions of noticeboards, texts/WhatsApp's and radio adverts. Do you have any ideas? Would you like to join our next group discussion? let leanne know [leanne.baldwin@onward.co.uk](mailto:leanne.baldwin@onward.co.uk)

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# CELEBRATING SERVICE.

For **National Customer Service Week**, as the theme was Celebrate Service, some of our Customer Engagement Community Members came on a tour of our Contact Centre.

They saw first-hand what happens when you call our contact centre, but also, how much more they do. From dealing with emails, web chats and escalated calls, as well as My Onward queries. Our members also benefitted from talking to the Team Leaders, asking questions, and giving feedback for improving service. We also chatted about some top tips for the cost-of-living increases, check out the information [here](#) to see if you can benefit from any of the tips or help.

Feedback following the session:

**'I enjoyed the meeting and thought it was very productive.'**

**'A real-eye opener and I've learnt so much. I'm very impressed with all the people and once again feel so positive.'**

**'Loved it.'**

We hope to run some more of these visits to the Contact Centre in the future, if you are interested, please let Leanne know [leanne.baldwin@onward.co.uk](mailto:leanne.baldwin@onward.co.uk)

# Onward

## We're here to help you.

Need support with the cost of living? Find out more about the support available.

0300 555 0600

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



Request a call from our team.

If you need to speak to us about your money, our Financial Inclusion Team is always here to help. You can request a call from a member of the team by scanning the QR code below and completing the form on our website.



### Help with work

You may be eligible for the Onward Employment and Training Fund. This grant is available to Onward customers to help them access work, training or educational opportunities to support future employment, self-employment or in-work progression.

We can support you with training costs, job-specific courses, or help



### Support available in your area.

Wherever you live, Onward has excellent links with a range of local organisations that may be able to provide you with the support that you need.

If you'd like more information, please email [socialinvestment@onward.co.uk](mailto:socialinvestment@onward.co.uk) with your query and the neighbourhood you live in and someone will be in touch with you to find you the right local



### Supporting community organisations.

The Onward Community Fund offers community groups a chance to secure up to £2,500 to support their work. Do you have a project that is supporting your community with the cost-of-living?

If so, we'd love to hear from you. Please get in touch with [socialinvestment@onward.co.uk](mailto:socialinvestment@onward.co.uk) to find out more information on how to apply.



### Help with the cost of living.

There are a range of support services that are available to help with costs.

Please take a look at the cost-of-living hub on our website to find out more.



### Avoid high-cost lenders.

As costs increase, this makes us vulnerable to illegal, high-cost lenders such as loan sharks. Loan sharks often seem like a good option but it is easy for your loan to spiral out of control and the loan sharks soon become intimidating when it is time to pay.

If you're struggling to keep up with bill or rent payments, or are already in debt, contact us in confidence on **0300 555 0600**. You can also find out more about support available by visiting [www.stoploansharks.co.uk](http://www.stoploansharks.co.uk)



### Managing your rent payments.

If you're struggling to pay your rent, or have already fallen behind with your payments, please don't ignore the problem. It's important that you let us know.

Our Income Team can help you to manage your payments and work out what you can afford to pay towards any arrears.

Contact us today: **0300 555 0600**.



### Emergency support.

#### Onward Financial Inclusion Emergency Fund.

In extreme cases of financial difficulty, we can provide help with essential items. This scheme is discretionary, so please speak to one of our Financial Inclusion Specialists for further information.

We can also provide support in accessing local grants, schemes or charities who offer free or affordable household items, including furniture packages.



### Looking for financial advice?

Onward's Financial Inclusion Team is on hand to support with the cost of living. We can help you with managing payments, budgeting and getting the most out of your money.

If you want to speak to someone about your finances, get in touch.



0300 555 0600



[FinancialInclusionTeam@onward.co.uk](mailto:FinancialInclusionTeam@onward.co.uk)