

Onward

The Onward Newsletter

Enabling you to be your best, in a home you love, and a place you are proud of.

Spring 2023



IN THIS ISSUE: An update on new contact centre opening hours, rents and service charges and financial support and news from our neighbourhoods.

WELCOME.

After a long and tough winter, spring is finally here. I know that this will be a relief to many customers as the weather



improves and it becomes easier to get out and see people.

In this spring edition of your newsletter we talk about the April changes to your rent and service charges.

Asking you for any increase is not something we take lightly.

We know how hard it is to keep up with rising

costs and, as we explain in these pages, there are lots of ways we can help.

Increases to service charges in particular have been driven by international energy prices. We have absorbed these costs throughout the winter, protecting customers from increases, but we cannot afford to do so indefinitely without jeopardising investment in your homes and services.

Please read on for news about your services and the work happening in local communities.

Whether you are looking for free financial advice, or help supporting your community; we are only a telephone call away and will do everything we can to help.



Bronwen Rapley,
Chief Executive



NOW OPEN FOR LONGER!

We know how important it is to get the help and support you need, when you need it.

On the 3rd April, we introduced our new opening hours meaning you can now contact us between 8am and 8pm, Monday to Friday.

Outside of these times, you can raise emergency repairs or report anti-social behaviour via our new out of hours partner, the Davies Group.

If you need to speak to a member of the team please call us on **0300 555 0600**.

For more information on how to get in touch, visit www.onward.co.uk/contact-us

YOUR RENT AND SERVICE CHARGES EXPLAINED.

Most of our customers' rent will rise by 7% starting in April 2023

Every year, we review our rents and service charges. This year's rent review comes at a challenging time for customers as the cost-of-living increases.

As a result of rising costs, the Government has capped rent increases for this year at 7%. Most housing associations are applying this increase.

From April 2023, some customers will also see an increase in their service charges. Service charges cover extra services in schemes such as communal electricity and water, scheme managers and grounds maintenance. Service charges are shared equally between those living in schemes and you will only pay for the services that you use.

Over the past year, energy costs have risen significantly and households across the UK have seen their bills increase dramatically.

Over the winter, Onward has subsidised energy increases for customers who pay their energy through Onward, meaning that these customers have not had to pay higher energy bills throughout the winter.

Unfortunately due to rising costs on different fronts we cannot continue to subsidise energy costs indefinitely, so from April some customers will see an increase in service charges.

We are here to help anyone that is worried about the increase in rents and service charges. Our Financial Inclusion Team helps hundreds of customers every year that need some extra support with managing their finances.

To find out more about the support available please call us on **0300 555 0600** or email income@onward.co.uk

Our promise is that no one will lose their home where they are working with us to make payments.



STEPPING INTO SPRING.

Spring is here and the growing season has begun.

We began our grass cutting visits from mid-March and will continue right through until around October.

Whilst we're there cutting the grass, we'll also do a tidy up and inspection and trim shrub beds and hedges unless bad weather prevents us from doing so.

For more information about our environmental services please visit the **'For Tenants'** section of our website.



AN UPDATE ON OUR REPAIRS SERVICE.

This winter our repairs service experienced higher levels of demand than usual. If you have recently contacted us, please be assured that we have got your request and will be in touch as soon as possible to book an appointment.

There may be occasions when we need to change the date of your repair appointment. If this is the case, we will contact you to find another time.

If your plans change and you need to reschedule your appointment, we would ask that you let us know as soon as you can by calling **0300 555 0600** or by using the My Onward portal.

If your repair is an emergency, please report this to us straight away. You can do this by calling **0300 555 0600** 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

An emergency repair includes things like a complete loss of power, no heating or hot water during the winter, gas leaks or faulty boilers, or a flood or leak that can't be controlled. You can find out more about different types of repairs by visiting the 'Repairs' section of our website here.

Remember, the My Onward portal is the most convenient way to report non-urgent repairs.

Once you have registered, you can let us know if something needs fixing in just a few clicks and keep track of our progress.

If you spot any damp or mould in your home please report this to us straight away.

More information about spotting damp and mould and how to report it can be found here:
www.onward.co.uk/reporting-damp-and-mould

You can report damp and mould by calling us or emailing customerservices@onward.co.uk



The Onward Difference

Our Corporate Plan, 'The Onward Difference' is all about enabling you to be your best, in a home you love and a place you are proud of.

Supporting our communities through the Onward Community Fund.

The Onward Community Fund provides support to community organisations and projects in our neighbourhoods across Lancashire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Cheshire. Organisations can submit a funding application of up to £2,500 for a project that tackles one of our social investment themes: building stronger communities; employment and training; digital inclusion; building community food resilience; youth provision; mental wellbeing; and green spaces.

This year, the Onward Community Fund has supported groups across our neighbourhoods. One of these is The Bridgefield Water Polo Club in Merseyside.

The Bridgefield Water Polo Club applied for the Onward Community Fund to help launch the Bridgefield Future Leaders Programme. The aim of the programme is to provide young people aged 16-19 with the opportunity to undertake training courses, leading to recognised sports sector qualifications, and gain practical experience.

Chris Price, Chairman of the Club, said:

“Thanks to the Onward Community Fund, young people in our club have the opportunity to learn valuable new skills and gain industry recognised qualifications, which not only improves their career options and employment prospects, but it also provides our club with a well-trained volunteer workforce to continue to deliver activities”.

Got a great idea for a community project, but need a little help to get it off the ground? For more information on the Onward Community Fund please email socialinvestment@onward.co.uk



Bridgefield Water Polo Club's Future Leaders Programme.

NEW GREEN AFFORDABLE HOMES.



Earlier this year, we welcomed residents to their brand-new apartments at our Spring Street development in Rishton, on the banks of the Leeds-Liverpool canal.

Completing the modern Melrose House apartment building, which features homes for affordable rent, discounted from market rent, marks the final phase of housebuilding at Spring Street.

Our one and two bedroom homes at Spring Street are designed to support first time buyers, couples and individuals who feel priced out of the local area.

As well as homes and apartments for affordable rent, 12 homes have been made available for Shared Ownership, with prices starting from as little as £70,000 for a 40% share.

To find out more about Shared Ownership and whether it's right for you, please visit www.onward-living.co.uk

Onward
living



**DIGITAL
ONWARD**

STRUGGLING TO GET ONLINE?

There are lots of benefits of getting online to finding cheaper food, energy and help managing your home. However, not everyone has access to smartphone data and the internet or knows how to do this.

Onward is launching a new fund to provide digital equipment as a gift and help connect you to the internet.

If you or another Onward customer doesn't have an email address or mobile phone and would benefit from free data or a phone for six months, then please contact a member of the Social Investment Team on **0300 555 0600**.



SPRING SUPPORT SESSIONS.

This Spring, Onward will be hosting a series of free events across our neighbourhoods that will bring together a range of local support services.

At these events, residents will be able to speak to advisors on the cost of living, with a wealth of support services and organisations in attendance. We can help across a range of areas including finances, debt, housing, food, employment and mental health and wellbeing.

If you or someone you know needs some extra support, please come along and talk to the team. We are here to help.

Scan the code to find events happening in your area or email socialinvestment@onward.co.uk

NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD COMMUNITY SUPPORT DIRECTORY.



Want to find local places offering cheaper food, warm spaces, free activities, and local budgeting advice? Then help is at hand, thanks to our new online 'Neighbourhood Support Directory'.

Find details of hundreds of great organisations doing fantastic work across your community. You can explore the seven themed topic areas and filter your search through your local authority and neighbourhood.

Scan the QR code to start exploring or visit www.onward.co.uk or visit the cost of living section of our website to find out more.

THE MEADOW COURT ORCHESTRA.



We're offering lots of activities at our older persons schemes, ranging from bingo through to therapy.

Our older residents can try out activities ranging from yoga, chair-based exercise and music.

Residents at Meadow Court, one of our older persons schemes in Liverpool, were recently offered a music-making session with the Glyndebourne Opera Company.

Residents were treated to several Opera arias and invited to play musical instruments. One of our residents, Marie, said: "I wasn't too sure about it being opera but what an enjoyable experience."

Another resident, Jim, added "It was brilliant that we could play instruments; we should start our own orchestra!"

We're always looking for ways to improve how we deliver our services and carry out surveys with customers to get a better understanding of their views about what we're doing well and where we can improve.

We will shortly be asking some of our customers to complete a Tenant Satisfaction Measure questionnaire, and will share the results with the Social Housing Regulator. We will carry out this survey on a yearly basis and will publish the results on our website.

We provide a range of ways for customers to tell us what they think. By joining our Customer Engagement Community you will have the opportunity to:

- Help to shape and improve services
- Take part in activities to help improve your neighbourhood and local area
- Share concerns, views and ideas
- Help to shape policies and strategies
- Gain useful experiences, develop new skills and increase your confidence

Scan the QR code to 'Opt In' to our 'Community' email list or email customerengagement@onward.co.uk



SHARING YOUR VIEWS