

Onward

HOME OWNERSHIP MATTERS

April 2023

Welcome to your second edition of Home Ownership Matters. We had some positive feedback about the first edition of our newsletter and managed to increase membership to our Homeowners Forum as a result.

New forum members joined our existing group to review our new major works repayment policy, s20 and budget setting procedures, as well as taking a look at our performance in December and January. The forum is invaluable in playing the role of critical friend and of holding us to account. Their scrutiny of policies and procedures helps to ensure we are continuously improving and providing a high level of service to our customers. If you are interested in taking part in the forum, please contact us at customerengagement@onward.co.uk. Meetings are held alternately in the daytime and early evening.



We are very mindful of the current financial climate that we are living in, and I would like to take the opportunity to assure leaseholders that Onward and Contour Property Services are working hard to source the best possible deals on the open market to keep the cost to our leaseholders as low as possible.

This year service charges will increase, largely because of rising energy costs for communal buildings. Energy costs have risen significantly due to ongoing instability in the energy markets which has resulted in much higher costs for wholesale electricity. Over the past twelve months, we have been working with our suppliers to secure a deal that provides the best possible value for money. In January, we wrote to those leaseholders who pay for communal electricity to provide an update on the outcome of these discussions.

Unfortunately, due to the volatility of the market and uncertainty of government support at that time, most suppliers would not quote for new business, or quote for a contract less than twelve months. As a result, we decided to secure a deal for a period of twelve months, rather than risk being tied into an expensive long-term contract. We have awarded a contract to EDF until September 2023 at the cheapest rate available to us. We believe that this offers the best value for money to customers in the current circumstances but are keeping the market under regular review and will re-consider our position again in the coming months.

At the point of re-tendering the insurance cover in 2022, many insurers had left the market, reducing the options available to us. We negotiated the best deal available from the options presented to us at the time, but some leaseholders will see increases in the cost of cover this year.

We are also in the process of reviewing how we deliver our grounds maintenance and cleaning contracts. Once this process is completed, we will write to you to advise of any changes at your scheme.



We are committed to reducing our carbon footprint, which is why future editions of this newsletter will be sent digitally to leaseholders and be made available on our website. To make sure you receive your copy, please make sure we have an up-to-date email address for you on file. You can update your contact details via the customer portal.

CHANGES TO THE TELEPHONE SERVICE

We have listened to customer feedback and made some changes to the way you contact us. We hope that this new way of working will improve service standards and customer satisfaction.

From 3rd April, all homeowners will call the same telephone number and get through to the Onward Homes Customer Service Team. Our Customer Service Team are being trained to handle home ownership queries and will aim to respond to most of your questions at the first point of contact.

If they cannot resolve your query at first point of contact, they will refer you to a colleague in the home ownership team who will aim to respond in full within 48 hours. Where we cannot do this, we will acknowledge your call and tell you when you can expect a full response. For most enquiries, this will be within ten working days.

From April, you can contact us on **0300 555 0600**, or you can continue to email us at **homeownership@onward.co.uk** and we will aim to respond to your email in full within 48 hours. Where we cannot do this, we will acknowledge your email and tell you when you can expect a full response. For most enquiries, this will be within ten working days.



The benefits of moving home ownership calls to the contact centre are:

- A dedicated team of staff ready to answer your calls
- Clearly-defined response times
- Recorded contacts and referrals passed on using a central contact management system, to ensure you get a response from a member of the team, even if your main contact is not available.
- Call recording to aid training and development
- Self-service facility using the payment line
- Telephone contact service:
 - Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday - 8am to 8pm
 - Wednesday - 10am to 8pm

CUSTOMER PORTAL & WEBSITE

Homeowners are now able to access the My Onward customer Portal via the Onward Homes website. On the portal you will be able to:

- Check your account balance
- Send a message to the team
- Update your contact information

To register on the portal you will need your 8-digit account number (tenancy number), which can be found on your latest budget letter.

OUT OF HOURS

From 31 March 2023, we have moved to a new out of hours service provider, Davies Group, who we hope will offer an improved response time and better customer experience. If you experience an emergency outside of our customer contact centre operating times (8am – 8pm, Monday to Friday) any calls you make to us will automatically transfer to Davies Group.

This service is for emergencies only. Emergency repairs are those which put the health and safety of you or anyone else at immediate risk or can affect the structure of your home or nearby properties. These include:

- A flood or leak that cannot be contained
- Dangerous structural issues, including wall or ceiling collapse
- Broken lifts

If the out of hours team are called to attend to a matter that is not an emergency, has been caused by customer negligence or is not the responsibility of Onward or CPS to fix, we may seek to recover our costs from you.

PROTECTING CUSTOMER DATA


Keeping your data safe and secure is a priority for us and over the past few months we have been reviewing our customer data procedures, to make them more robust and clearer.



To help us keep your data secure, it is important that we have your correct phone number and email address on record. You can update these details using the customer portal and it is your responsibility to keep these details up to date. We cannot speak to any third party about you, your lease or your service charges but in some specific circumstances you can nominate someone to act on your behalf. If we are asked to communicate with someone other than the named leaseholder, we may apply reasonable admin charges to your account to recover the costs associated with doing so.

We have made the following changes to ensure the continued protection of your data:

- You will be taken through ID checks every time you contact us, or we contact you – these checks are to ensure we are only speaking to the named leaseholder
- The introduction of an optional password to support the ID verification process
- If you sublet your property, we will not speak to your sub tenants about anything to do with your lease, the property or your account
- We will speak to a recognised managing agent acting on your behalf as long as you have completed a Confirmed Authorisation to Disclose (CADIS) form and paid our reasonable admin fees
- We will never discuss details about your service charge account or payment with a third party, including your management agent
- We will only send emails or make phone calls to the addresses or phone numbers we hold on file.



Fire door
keep shut

FIRE SAFETY

This year, the new Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 came into effect, with new responsibilities for building owners and landlords, aimed at ensuring any people living in multi-occupancy buildings are kept safe.

As part of the new legislation, all residents of buildings with two or more homes and shared communal spaces need to receive information about what to do in the event of a fire, as well as how to maintain fire doors in their building.

Fire Safety information packs are being sent to all residents of Onward's multi-occupancy buildings, with details of each building's evacuation strategy and a list of Dos and Don'ts when it comes to fire doors. Where notice boards are installed in communal areas, this information will also be displayed on posters and signage.

Our contractor Savills is currently undertaking inspections of fire doors (including flat

entrance doors), to ensure that they would provide an effective barrier to slow or stop the spread of fire in an emergency. All residents affected by the first phase of inspections have now received notice of our programme and their responsibility to allow us access to complete these important safety checks. Homeowners who live elsewhere should also have received this information.

It is essential that all relevant fire safety information is read and understood by anyone living at your property. If the person currently living in the property moves out, then this important information must be shared with any new occupant(s).

If anyone living in your property would struggle to evacuate themselves from your building in an emergency, or would prefer to receive this information in any other language, please contact us on homeownership@onward.co.uk

COMING SOON: HOMEOWNERS GUIDE

We have been working with our Homeowners Forum to develop a guide for leaseholders that will tell you everything you need to know about living in an Onward or Contour Property Services leasehold home. You will find information about paying your charges, scheme inspections and waste management and much more. We will be providing digital copies of this handbook to all leaseholders in the Spring.

