

YOUR VOICE.

Spring 2024

Welcome to the Spring edition of the Your Voice newsletter.

Spring is finally here. I am sure you will join me in welcoming the brighter days and warmer weather. In this edition:

- Learn about how we are listening to your feedback during neighbourhood walkabouts and our regular contact with customers to make meaningful changes
- Meet Jude, a member of our Equity Forum
- We share what our Onward Scrutiny Panel have been reviewing on your behalf
- An opportunity to win a new slow cooker which you won't want to miss out on

And much, much more!

Thank you to all our members who continue to get involved and share their views with us. We look forward to working with you this year.

Val Alker

Interim Customer Involvement Manager

GIVE YOUR VIEWS ON A NEW APPROACH TO RENT AND SERVICE CHARGES.

We're looking at a new approach to rent and service charges. But before we do that, we want to hear what our customers think.

As a member of our Customer Engagement Community, we'd like to get your views on this.

What happens now?

Currently, our customers pay their rent at different frequencies, with weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual cycles.

What are we proposing?

We're looking at a new approach, where all customers will have one rent and/or service charge payment each month. This will be a quicker and easier way to manage your payments.

Customers would still pay the same amount over the year with a variety of payment methods, such as direct debit, online, by phone or a payment card, with the frequency of your payments remaining flexible.

Why are we proposing the change?

We want to make it as easy as possible for our customers to manage their tenancies. Monthly payments are used in other organisations because they are simple and easy to arrange.

Let us know what you think!

We want to make sure that your voice is at the heart of everything we do, and providing your feedback on these proposed changes will help us do just that.

We haven't made a decision to do this and want to hear what our customers think first.

Please complete the five minute [survey](#) before 28th May.

If you have any questions, or would like to give feedback in another way, please email customerengagement@onward.co.uk or call **0300 555 0600**.

OUT AND ABOUT IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS.

Colleagues from across Onward have been out and about speaking to customers across our neighbourhoods. We've taken your feedback on board and made some meaningful changes across Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside.

Thank you, as always, for sharing your views as without your voice, these changes may not have happened.



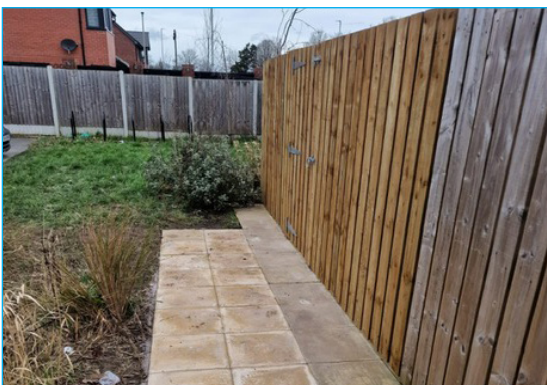
GREATER MANCHESTER.

When we run our neighbourhood inspections in Oldham South, customers in Limeside are notified by text message and are given a card to place in their window if they want to have a conversation with us. This way, they get to chat to us on their doorstep and share their views while we are out and about inspecting the neighbourhood.



LANCASHIRE.

Local people were invited to Ribblesdale Community Centre in Accrington to celebrate 100 years of social housing in Laneside. The community came together with teams from Onward, Hyndburn Council and Councillor Lorraine Cox, to reminisce about their time living in the area and its transformations over the years, exploring historic images and newspaper clippings whilst enjoying free ice cream.



MERSEYSIDE.

Customers at Blossom Place let us know that they were concerned about the bins and bike storage for their block. Our Neighbourhoods Team talked to the customers who agreed that the bike storage next to the bins was not being used and the space would be better as an extended bin store. Customers are now happy with the new bin store and have told us it looks much neater and has the capacity to store all their rubbish.



During one of our walkabouts in Windmill Hill customers told us that they'd like us to fix issues with fly tipping in the area. We provided skips and visited the neighbourhood with local partners and customer volunteers at a community clean up day. Together we cut back overgrown hedges and cleared litter and fly tipping and made a real difference to the community living there.

SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE.

The Onward Scrutiny Board consists of 13 dedicated customer volunteers from across the North West, who meet with Onward to review the performance of the services you receive and provide valuable feedback and recommendations on what we can improve.

A huge welcome to our three new members who have joined the board in recent months.

Topics the Scrutiny Board have discussed recently were repairs and service charges.

Repairs

The board looked at our plans for the new Onward Repairs service in Greater Manchester and explored the changes we made following their recommendations. They were pleased to hear that customers will have improved text message updates and an app showing when an operative is on the way. There are plans to roll this out across other regions in the future.

Service charges

The board also asked questions on your behalf about energy costs for communal areas and requested more information on service charges. They have requested for customers to be involved in contract decisions and that we provide more detailed information about energy unit costs in the future.

The Regulator of Social Housing expect us to be open with our customers, treating you with fairness and respect so that you can access services, raise complaints, influence decision making and hold us to account. If you are interested in learning more, please visit [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

CUSTOMERS WELCOME NEWS ABOUT WARMER HOMES.

Over the next two years we are making energy efficiency improvements to over 600 homes across the North West.

The improvements, funded by Onward and the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, will see homes increase to an Energy Performance Certificate rating of 'C', with our customers benefitting from warmer homes that are much better at retaining heat.

We were joined by our contractors at launch events in Kirkdale, Coldhurst and Oswaldtwistle to discuss the project with customers who were excited to learn about the improvements we'll be making to their homes.

Customer volunteers have been recruited from each area and we'll be keeping in touch with them whilst the project takes place, to help make improvements from their feedback. We'll also work with them once the project is complete to understand the benefits they experience.

If your home is included, you will have already received a letter and will also receive information about how you can become a volunteer.



TAKING PART LEADS TO BETTER HEALTH.

Did you know that our Older Persons Team arrange wellbeing and engagement activities for customers living in our schemes?

Taking part in regular activities with neighbours can help to improve health and wellbeing. The activities mean we can also chat to customers to find out what they think about our services. It's a win - win!

638 customers took part in wellbeing and engagement activities across our schemes between April 2023 and March 2024. That's a lot of improved wellbeing and lots of useful feedback for us!

Look out for information about a wellbeing and engagement event in your schemes communal lounge or get in touch with Eddie by emailing eddie.weston@onward.co.uk or calling **07826 89 1610**.



MEET JUDE, A MEMBER OF OUR EQUITY FORUM.

February was LGBT+ History month and we caught up with our Equity Forum member Jude.

What was it like growing up at a time when views towards to the LGBT community were different to what they are today?

I was born in 1962, the youngest of three children in an Irish Catholic family. I knew I was different from the age of seven or eight, and being educated at a strict Catholic school, where being gay was considered a sin, often left me feeling isolated. I was also bullied. By the time I went to secondary school I knew I was gay. I went to a strict catholic school that preached against being LGBTQ leading to me feeling isolated and rebelling. I eventually came out to my parents as gay at the age of 19, when I did, I was surprised by the reaction, they said they knew I was gay and had known for a while. It seemed my dad was angrier at me no longer being a catholic than being gay.

What challenges did you face growing up and coming out?

The biggest challenge I faced growing up and coming out was that being gay was never spoken about in school. It was a closed subject and because of that I was always afraid of being discovered and fearful of being sent for conversion therapy.

Do you feel you were able to be a true version of yourself throughout that period?

When I was younger, although to some extent I was accepted as gay by my close family, I was never able to be a true version of myself because of a general intolerance in society and very strict religious beliefs at my school.

Today there is more tolerance and acceptance of the LGBT community. Homosexuality is no longer a crime, same sex marriage is now legal and gay couples are able to foster and adopt children. There's been a big improvement in medications available to people who are suffering with HIV, many years ago there was nothing.

Despite these positive changes there is still a long way to go before LGBT people can feel fully accepted in society.



As a member of our Equity Forum, Jude works alongside other customers in partnership with our Colleague Equity forum on key projects and campaigns. The group ensure that:

- our customer facing policies address the needs of our communities
- customer communications are written clearly and are accessible to all
- we promote and celebrate diversity and support our HouseProud Pledge

Working across the North West the HouseProud Rainbow Roofs LGBT+ Customer Forum is a group that brings together customers from housing associations, housing professionals, agencies and local authority representatives.

If you would like to join our Equity Forum or attend a Rainbow Roofs meeting, please contact Leanne to find out more by emailing leanne.baldwin@onward.co.uk.



LET'S GET COOKING.

Is there a tasty dish that you love to cook, a family recipe that's always a win, or a throw together recipe that's become a weekly favourite? You could win a slow cooker, cookbook and bag of ingredients by taking part in our Spring recipe competition!

Share your favourite recipe with us by Friday 31st May to be in with the chance of winning. Simply email your recipe to leanne.baldwin@onward.co.uk to take part.

The winner will be selected at random, and the winning recipe will be shared in our next newsletter. Good luck!



WE'RE NOW ON



Trustpilot

We wanted to make it easy for customers to provide feedback to us on the services they receive. That's why we're now on Trustpilot, an independent digital platform built on transparency with the aim of bringing organisations closer to their customers.

Whilst we've been out and about in our customer's homes and neighbourhoods, we've been requesting Trustpilot reviews and it's great to hear about our colleagues going the extra mile and making The Onward Difference.

If you'd like to leave Onward a review, you can do so by visiting [Trustpilot](https://www.trustpilot.com).

PRIZE DRAW WINNERS.

As a member of our Customer Engagement Community, you are automatically entered into our monthly random prize draw for the chance to win a £50 high street voucher.

Congratulations to our latest winners Neil, Karl, Lee, Sandra and Angela!

Next time it could be you...