

# YOUR VOICE.

Winter 2024/5

Welcome to the Winter edition of the Your Voice newsletter.

Our Customer Engagement Community now has over 3,700 members who help us to prioritise issues, make changes and improve service delivery.

In the last three months, over 890 of you responded to our request for feedback on policies. Thank you for sharing your views which have helped us to improve how we promote mutual exchanges and explain our repair timescales.

In this issue, we share more of the ways you have influenced our services, as well as opportunities for you to get involved in the coming months. If you are interested in joining one of our groups, forums, or the Onward Scrutiny Board, please get in touch by emailing [customerengagement@onward.co.uk](mailto:customerengagement@onward.co.uk) or calling **0300 555 0600** to find out more.

We want to encourage even more customers of all ages and backgrounds to get involved to help shape the services we deliver, so please do ask your neighbours to sign up if they aren't already.

As always, thank you for your continued involvement. We look forward to working with you to make our services even better in 2025 and beyond.

**Val Alker**  
Customer Involvement Manager



## REMEMBERING JO PHILLIPS.

It is with great sadness that we share the heartbreaking news that Jo Phillips, Customer Involvement Manager, has sadly passed away. Jo had been battling with a brain tumour for the past year but passed peacefully at home, surrounded by her loving family.

Jo was truly one in a million. She was not only a dedicated, committed team member and champion for our customers' voices at Onward, but also a source of warmth and positivity to everyone who knew her. Jo's infectious smile and her ability to find the bright side in every situation made her a joy to work alongside.

We know this is very sad news, but wanted you to know so that you can remember Jo in your own private way. Jo's family and loved ones are in our thoughts during this incredibly difficult time.

# AN UPDATE FROM THE ONWARD SCRUTINY BOARD.

Members of the Onward Scrutiny Board provide valuable feedback and recommendations on how we can improve the services you receive. They do this by reviewing service performance, customer feedback and reporting their findings back to the Customer Committee of Onward's board.

Most recently, the Board has reviewed the information customers receive about rent and service charges ahead of this year's communication. Over 200 of you replied to their survey and with your help have worked with us to make improvements including:

- descriptions for of each type of service charge
- clear explanations for any increases in costs
- a new graphic showing how we use every £100 of the rent we collect

The rent and service charge communications will be issued to customers in February.

You can also take a look at the frequently asked questions that the Board helped to

- create by visiting our website ([onward.co.uk/rsc](https://onward.co.uk/rsc)). We've also worked with the Board to introduce a new quarterly update from Onward Environmental and will be launching a new group where customers can regularly give feedback on the environmental services they receive soon.

We currently have vacancies for six more Board members, so if you are interested in joining, please get in touch by emailing [customerengagement@onward.co.uk](mailto:customerengagement@onward.co.uk) or call **0300 555 0600**.



## Your rent - frequently asked questions

### Why has my rent increased?

Our rent increases are set within a limit that is set by the Government called the Government Rent Standard. Under this, rents can be increased by inflation (Consumer Price Index) plus 1%. CPI is a measure of inflation that reflects changes in the cost of living.

Rental income helps housing associations to balance the needs of their customers and maintain properties against the economic environment they operate within.

### How is the rent increase calculated?

Rents are set each year based on the Consumer Price Index figure in September, which was 1.7% in September 2024, plus 1%. Based on this, rents will increase by 2.7% for social, extra care and older persons properties, in line with the Government Rent Standard.

We have reached the decision to increase rents because it means that we can continue to invest in customers' homes, our neighbourhoods and in improvements to our services. We believe in particular there is more investment needed to improve the standard of homes for the long term. We do recognise that the cost of living is a challenge and are here to help customers that might need extra support.

### When will rents go up?

Rents will change from 1st April 2025 for monthly, quarterly, and annual charge accounts. Weekly rents will change from Monday 7th April.

# LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS.



Our Customer Resolution Forum continue to keep an eye on how we respond to customers' complaints, helping us to learn and make improvements to services.

Last year, the Forum also met with members of Onward's Board alongside customers from the Onward Scrutiny Board. At the workshop, we discussed what was important for customers when they complain and how we can improve communication throughout the process.

One of our Forum members also recently met with colleagues from across Onward to share their valuable insight and provide recommendations based on their experience of the resolution process.

We'll be working with the Customer Resolutions Team over the coming months to implement some of their ideas, such as ensuring problems are resolved in a timely manner, regularly updating customers on the status of their complaints and improving communication with customers about ongoing issues and repairs.

# REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE.

Our Regional Repairs and Maintenance Groups meet with their local Onward Repairs Team online four to five times a year to discuss the day-to-day service that we deliver, review plans and make recommendations on how we can improve.



Here's what our members had to say about being part of the groups:

“ I'm involved in the group because I think it's important that Onward see the impact good or poor service has on customers and their housing stock, and to learn the rationale behind decisions made and how they progress these. ”

**Sara**

“ Anyone thinking of joining the group should jump at the chance of being part of a great team of people. We get to see behind the scenes within the Repairs Team and ask questions as to why and how it's running. The new year brings new areas to the group, and I see an exciting start to the new year. So do your bit for Onward and speak up for the customers that we all are. ”

**Amanda**

“ Your experience of Onward's Repair Teams both bad and good can make a real difference to the future. ”

**Stephanie**

In the coming months these Groups will be reviewing maintenance programmes to replace things like kitchens and bathrooms and energy efficiency projects to make our homes warmer, quieter and more comfortable. They will also be helping us to create website pages that will provide key information on these items for customers, in addition to sharing their views on how we can improve the ways these are delivered.

We are looking for more customers to join our regional Repair and Maintenance Groups, so if you're interested in attending one of our upcoming sessions on **Monday 17th February at 12pm** (Greater Manchester and Cheshire East), **Thursday 20th February at 11am** (Lancashire) and **Thursday 27th February at 12pm** (Merseyside), please email [customerengagement@onward.co.uk](mailto:customerengagement@onward.co.uk) or call **0300 555 0600**.



## BUILDING SAFETY.

Last year, we consulted customers in Handforth and Preston who live in high rise buildings about safety in their homes.

During drop-in sessions, customers told us how they want to be informed about building safety issues, what matters most to them, and how they can be involved in safety decisions.

We have created specific building safety engagement strategies for these buildings that will be shared with all customers who live there.

In the coming months we will be consulting all remaining customers who live in high rise buildings, so do keep an eye out for an invite.

## AN UPDATE FROM THE EQUITY FORUM.

In line with the Equality Act 2010, our services must be accessible to all to ensure that there are no barriers in place for protected groups, with our policies being easily available outside of our website.

Members of our Equity Forum recently reviewed our policies on mutual exchange and tenancy fraud by completing the equality impact assessments. Through their assessments, the Forum found that we regularly promote our key policies via our newsletter which is sent to all customers via their preferred communication

preferences, such as email, text message and by post. They also found that they can contact us for help understanding policies or to request a printed copy by emailing [customerservices@onward.co.uk](mailto:customerservices@onward.co.uk) or calling **0300 555 0600**.

The Forum will be reviewing more of our policies this year, so if you'd like to get involved, please get in touch for an informal chat before coming along by emailing [leanne.baldwin@onward.co.uk](mailto:leanne.baldwin@onward.co.uk).

## IMPROVING SERVICES FOR LEASEHOLDERS AND SHARED OWNERS.

Last year, the Home Ownership Forum were involved in shaping the Home Ownership Matters newsletter, budget letters, subletting procedure and much more.

The Forum kicked off the new year in January by meeting with colleagues from our Repairs Team to share their experience of the service and look at how it is performing. They reviewed information shared by our contractors, Liberty, and this will be a regular feature in future meetings.

These meetings will continue throughout the year, with the Forum reviewing the services they receive to provide valuable feedback and influence any changes where needed.



## DIGITAL ONWARD.

In the last edition of Your Voice, we asked for your views on the data we should transfer to our new IT system.

With 35,000 homes, we have a lot of data and records to transfer, so it's important that this data is correct and that we have access to older records. We proposed that six years' worth of most data would be enough to transfer, and you agreed with this approach, so we are working with teams to ensure that this takes place.

The new system will make us more efficient meaning that we can better focus our resources on improving services for customers. We'll be sharing more updates about this throughout the year.



**DIGITAL  
ONWARD**



# OUT AND ABOUT IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOODS.



## Greater Manchester

In Greater Manchester, we worked with Trafford Borough Council and customers to pinpoint locations where pavements and curbs should be lowered to allow for better vehicle access.



## Lancashire

Over in Lancashire, customers in Rishton told us that fly tipping was an issue in several key hotspots. Working with Onward Environmental, we have improved bin stores and made these more secure and user friendly for customers.



## Merseyside

In Merseyside, customers joined us at a neighbourhood walkabout in Beechwood and told us about some overgrown green space. We worked with colleagues from Onward Environmental to cut back the grass and make the space useable again.



# IN IT TO WIN IT.

From answering surveys, to joining one of our groups, forums, or the Onward Scrutiny Board, we offer different levels of involvement to suit a variety of lifestyles and interests, so customers can participate as much as they like.

We currently have the Onward Scrutiny Board, Customer Resolution Forum, Equity Forum, Home Ownership Forum and our Regional Repair and Maintenance Groups.

We're giving you the chance to win a £30, £20 or £10 voucher in our wordsearch competition. Simply complete the wordsearch below and let us know which word is missing by emailing [leanne.baldwin@onward.co.uk](mailto:leanne.baldwin@onward.co.uk). And if you'd like to join the Onward Scrutiny Board, one of our groups or forums, please do get in touch.

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Scrutiny  
Homeownership

Resolutions  
Equity

Forums  
Repairs

## 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 Lee, Tammy, Karl, Patricia and Susan. Next time it could be you...

# LET'S GET COOKING.

In our Autumn edition of the Your Voice newsletter, we asked you to share your favourite recipe with us. The winner of the competition was Gillian, who sent in her ginger cake recipe.

Gillian is looking forward to putting her new slow cooker to use whilst baking. Well done, Gillian!



## GILLIAN'S GINGER CAKE.

### INGREDIENTS:

225g plain flour	100g margarine
1 pinch of salt	175g black treacle
10g ground ginger	50g golden syrup
5g mixed spice	150ml milk
5g bicarbonate of soda	2 medium eggs
50g soft brown sugar	

### METHOD:

1. Preheat your oven to 150°C, 300°F or gas mark 2.
2. Get two mixing bowls out, and line a 7inch square cake tin.
3. Sieve together the flour, salt, ground ginger, mixed spice and the bicarbonate of soda into one of the bowls, then stir in the soft brown sugar.
4. Put the bowl to one side.
5. Now take the second bowl and put it on top of a pan of simmering water. Add the treacle, syrup, and margarine to the bowl and stir mixture with a wooden spoon until all ingredients have combined.
6. Remove the bowl from the heat and whisk the milk into the mixture.
7. Let it cool down before beating the eggs and whisking them into the mixture.
8. Pour the treacle mixture into the dry ingredients and whisk for 2 to 3 minutes or until the mixture is combined.
9. Transfer the mixture into the cake tin, then bake in the oven for 1 hour and 15 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted comes out clean.
10. Remove from the oven and let it cool down.
11. Once cooled down, put the kettle on, make a brew and cut yourself a slice of the best gingerbread you've ever tasted.

If you need any help understanding this document, please give us a call on **0300 555 0600**, send us a message on WhatsApp to **07793 795882**, or send an email to **customerservices@onward.co.uk**.

Jeśli potrzebujesz pomocy w zrozumieniu tego dokumentu, zadzwoń do nas na numer 0300 555 0600, wyślij nam wiadomość na WhatsApp na numer 07793 795882 lub wyślij e-mail na adres [customerservices@onward.co.uk](mailto:customerservices@onward.co.uk).

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