

Coronavirus Frequently Asked Questions

Updated: 2 September 2020

We've answered some of the most common questions about our services and coronavirus below.

What services are you running?

As of 2 September 2020, we are running the following services:

- Our full repairs service
- Letting properties
- Mutual exchanges
- Property inspections
- Housing estate visits
- Anti-social behaviour and breach of tenancy cases
- Grounds maintenance
- Fire risk assessments
- Buddy Club calls
- Employment support
- Financial support
- Our community cafes (Roundabout Café and Café 1759) are open
- Welfare checks for Independent Living
- Independent Living meals service (Yarlington customers)

Are you carrying out repairs?

Yes, our full repairs service is back up and running.

However, we have still paused our internal planned works (including kitchen, bathroom and boiler installations) and will let you know as soon as these start again.

What is an emergency repair?

An emergency repair is when something has the potential to cause danger to a person's health and safety or cause damage to the property.

Emergency repairs include severe roof leaks, burst pipes, blocked drains, loss of electrical power and loss of heating (during winter months or if a customer is vulnerable).

What is the difference between an emergency and a critical repair?

An emergency repair is when something has the potential to cause danger to a person's health and safety or cause damage to the property.

During lockdown, we had to reduce our emergency repair service to just gas servicing, significant water leaks and electrical outages, which, during this time, we called these critical repairs.

Now that we come out of lockdown we are able to get back to our usual emergency repairs service.

What is the difference between report and book a repair?

If you report a repair either on the portal or over the phone, you are letting us know that you need a repair and what type of repair it is.

Booking a repair, means that you have a date and a time agreed with us for your repair to be carried out.

You can report and book all repairs with us now.

How will you keep me and my family safe when delivering services?

Your safety and the safety of our colleagues is our highest priority. We continue to follow the advice of the government, the NHS and Public Health England.

Visits will be carried out outside or on your doorstep. If we have to enter your home (say, for a repair), we will follow social distancing and wear the relevant personal protective equipment. We may also ask you to move to another room when a repair is being carried out.

I'm paying for a service I haven't received, will I get a refund?

We would like to assure you that you will not be charged for any service you have not received. At the end of your account year (this could be December or March) we will calculate the exact cost made by you for services not received and make changes to the service charges you will pay in your next account year, to reflect this.

Why are you waiting to look at refunds?

There are several reasons why.

Because the level of service has varied for customers, it is difficult to understand exactly what costs have been incurred by customers. We will be able to give customers a more accurate amount at the end of each account year.

The level of service we will provide for the rest of the year may change if the government makes any changes to its restrictions or if we carry out additional work to play 'catch up' on work that was due in lockdown.

Additionally, some customers who pay service charges are in receipt of Universal Credit or Housing Benefit. If we were to make a change now, this may negatively affect these benefits and cause some customers financial difficulty. It may also affect direct debit payments.

Will a change to service charges affect my Universal Credit/Housing Benefit claims?

No. By waiting until the end of your account year to calculate the exact cost made by you for services not received, we are able to make amends to the service charges you will pay in your new payment year, to reflect this.

Are you letting properties again yet?

Yes. We are letting properties, including mutual exchanges. For property viewings, we will have strict measures in place including social distancing, limiting the number of people in a property and minimising touch points (like keeping doors open).

I no longer want to mutually exchange, what do I do?

Please let our Lettings Team know you no longer want to move as soon as possible. It is also your responsibility to inform your swap partner.

I'm worried about paying my rent, what do I do?

Whether you are in arrears or not, we're here to help. We know you'll make every effort to maintain your rent payments but if you do get sick or can't work because of the coronavirus, we'll do everything we can to help you maintain your tenancy. Get in touch with us to find out what's available to you to help financially.

Are your offices open?

We want to keep all of our customers and colleague as safe as possible. Right now, our offices are still closed as the risk of spreading the coronavirus continues.

How will I know if I have coronavirus?

Diagnosis of coronavirus should only be given by a trained physician however common symptoms of the coronavirus include:

- Sudden onset fever/high fever
- Cough
- Headache
- Stuffy/runny nose
- Sore throat
- Muscle and joint pain, body aches, fatigue
- Loss of taste or smell senses

What do I do if I think I have coronavirus or have been in contact with someone who could have it?

If you think you have coronavirus or have been in contact with someone who could have it, visit the NHS' website to find out if you need medical help and what to do next.

You will also need to tell us if you have an appointment.

Do you need to know if I am self-isolating?

Yes, we want to make sure that you, your family and our colleagues are safe and try reduce the spread of the virus. Please contact us as soon as you can to make us aware that you are self-isolating. We will keep this information only for as long as necessary to keep you and our colleagues safe.

I'm self-isolating, how can I stay safe at home?

If you are self-isolating, reach out to neighbours, friends and family who can provide you supplies. You can also get food deliveries to your home through all the major supermarkets. Stay away from other people in your home and sleep alone if possible. You must also wash your hands regularly for 20 seconds, each time using soap and water.

I'm self-isolating but afraid of being at risk of domestic abuse, what do I do?

If you or someone you know is at risk, then know that you are not alone, get in touch with us or call 999 if there is immediate danger. There are also a range of support services available for people:

- Women's Aid: domestic abuse support for women
- Mankind: domestic abuse support for men
- GALOP: can help if you experience homophobia, transphobia or biphobia wherever it occurs
- National Centre for Domestic Violence: free, fast emergency injunction service to survivors of domestic violence
- Victim Support: online and phone support
- Dash charity: confidential advice and support
- Paladin Stalking Service: hotline and support for victims of stalking
- Karma Nirvana: help and support for victims of honour-based violence and forced marriages
- Oii My Size: healthy relationship advice and support for teenagers
- Hollie Guard app: an app to keep victims safe and monitor abuse
- Polish Domestic Abuse helpline: for Polish nationals living in the UK
- Hampton Trust: a charity that runs programmes for perpetrators of domestic abuse

How are you keeping people from getting affected in Independent Living schemes?

Whilst our scheme offices are still closed to customers, we hope to start visiting people's homes again soon. We will contact you beforehand to arrange this and will talk to you about how this can be done safely for you and our colleagues including following government advice on PPE. At times you might see us wearing masks and gloves but, if social distancing guidelines can be adhered to, we may not always be wearing them.

Welfare checks and tenancy support will continue. We will respond to your preferred method of remote contact and will start to reinstate face to face contact (where it is safe to do so) at a social distance, where needed. If you previously received support by a home visit, we will review this with you and until the services are fully back up and running, you may receive a mix of home visits and remote contact.

We continue to provide a mixture of on-site compliance and health and safety checks, where required, and you might see us more as we restart services like lettings and essential home visits. Right now, we continue to minimise our presence on schemes (excluding in Extra Care) and will maintain a mix of site presence and remote working. Please continue to contact us, as you have been, throughout these exceptional times.

We have also increased cleaning in the schemes and for our Yarlington customers that receive the hot meal service, meals are delivered in allocated dining areas, allowing our customers important socially-distanced interaction. Based on each scheme's size and layout we will have either socially distanced tables and one-way flows or phased sittings.

I'm in a property with shared facilities, can I use communal/support laundry facilities?

If you have been unwell or are self-isolating then do not use the community laundry facilities. If you have been unwell please follow the following government guidance. If dirty laundry has been in contact with an ill person, you should wait a further 72 hours after the isolation period before washing your laundry in communal facilities. Items that are heavily soiled with bodily fluids, for example vomit or diarrhoea, should be disposed of.

What if I need to attend a medical appointment?

Whether you are showing symptoms or not, it's a good idea to phone ahead to see what your medical professional advises. If you do have symptoms, make sure you tell them.

Is there anything else you think I should be aware of?

Whilst the majority of people are looking out for their family, friends and neighbours at this time, unfortunately there are some people who are taking advantage of the situation.

If you get a call, an email or a knock on your door from people claiming they are offering services or testing for coronavirus, please tell us immediately and follow the below guidance:

- Do not give any personal information (name, address, bank details, contact details) to people without verifying their credentials. Always ask for ID and contact the company they work for directly to check
- Make sure your computer has up to date anti-virus software and a firewall installed
- Many frauds start with phishing emails. Banks and other financial institutions will not send you an email asking you for information or to click on a link
- Never give out personal details or bank details over email or over the phone
- Sign up to Verified by Visa or MasterCard Secure Code when you are given the option to when shopping online. This will involve registering a password with your card company and adds an additional layer of security to your transactions

- Regularly check bank statements for entries you don't recognise. If you don't recognise a transaction, contact your bank immediately
- Destroy or shred any receipts or post with your card details on
- If you think you have been a victim of fraud or want to check unusual activity, contact us immediately

How will you protect my personal data?

We will continue to make sure that your personal information is kept as securely as possible. Any details you give us about your health will only be used by us to make sure we continue to give services in a way that keeps you, your family and our colleagues safe. We will only share that information with those organisations who provide public health support when absolutely necessary and lawful to do so.

If you become ill and have a trusted relative or friend that you want us to contact about your tenancy, please contact us so we can send you some forms to complete.