

coronavirus update



WE ARE HERE TO SUPPORT YOU!

From the start of the coronavirus crisis we have been monitoring the situation and how it could affect our residents and staff, and taking steps to prioritise their safety and wellbeing in the delivery of our core services.

Please be reassured that our teams will be following the latest advice from government and Public Health England if they need to visit you in your home.

Office closures

Due to the government restrictions, all our offices are closed to the public until further notice and many of our staff are working from home and so we have had to change the ways in which we work. In this newsletter we hope to let you know how we are doing things differently.

For more details on the current restrictions, please go to the government website: www.gov.uk

If you are feeling unwell, please use the NHS 111 coronavirus website for what to do rather than using the telephone number.

You can still contact us via myhomeonline or by **email**. You should only call our Customer Services team on **0300 123 6000** if it is an emergency.

If you have any concerns, please email: enquiries@emhhomes.org.uk

We thank you for your support and co-operation during this difficult period.

Inside you will find the latest information about how we are continuing to support you with:

- ▶ Repairs & maintenance
- ▶ Grass cutting & grounds maintenance
- ▶ Housing & neighbourhoods
- ▶ Money matters
- ▶ Your rent
- ▶ Advice on anti-social behaviour, domestic violence, data protection and your wellbeing

REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE

At present we are only carrying out emergency repairs and essential safety works - including but not limited to gas servicing, uncontrollable water leaks, loss of electricity, structural damage, lift maintenance, legionella testing, and fire safety - until government restrictions change.

Some of our operatives will also be working in empty homes that need to be made available for emergency and high priority cases.

To keep our tenants and staff safe, we have created new risk assessments, safe systems of working, and training materials that have been issued to all our operatives. During the crisis we are using a small team of specially trained tradespersons who are all equipped with the right personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitising materials. To protect our staff and limited supplies we ask that tenants only report emergency repairs.

All our employees and contractors required to travel to attend emergencies and essential works have been issued with a letter of authority to provide to the police if required in order to avoid any delays in attending works.

Our work schedulers/planners will be asking you a few questions when making the appointment. Our operatives will be phoning and asking you the same questions immediately before arriving and entering the property. In the event of our work schedulers/planners being unable to contact you beforehand, the operative will still attend but will knock on the door and retreat to a safe distance (2m) and then ask you the same set of questions.

The questions will be:

Are you or anyone in your household self-isolating?

Are you or anyone in your household displaying any symptoms listed on the NHS website for coronavirus?

Are you or anyone in your household on the NHS Vulnerable list?

If the answer to any of the questions is **Yes**, our operative will only enter your home if it is absolutely necessary that the works are completed there and then, and for which they may seek further advice. Should the job not go ahead, the operative will leave site and a new provisional appointment made for you.

Before entering the property our operative will dress in the appropriate PPE, and will ask that you respect the 2m boundary and where possible move to an area of the property away from the work area.



NEED AN EMERGENCY REPAIR?

You can report emergency repairs by calling Customer Services on 0300 123 6000 and selecting option 3.



GRASS CUTTING & GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

After establishing safe systems of working in line with government guidelines, our grounds maintenance operatives have started working again.

While the operatives are following these new procedures, we ask that all residents politely help them carry on with their work by adhering to the government guidelines on social distancing.

The team will be wearing extra PPE (e.g. masks and gloves) for their protection as well as your protection.

Please respect any safety barriers or cones the team may have put in place and do not cross these boundaries. Do not approach any of the team or any of their machinery and vehicles. If you feel that this is unavoidable and you need to speak to them about something important, please follow the two metre rule. Do not offer the team any refreshments.

Only be outside on schemes if absolutely necessary while we are working in your area. If you usually have to give access to the team, please do so as usual but make sure you observe the two metre safe distancing rule at all times.

We will be deploying additional resources to ensure that all scheduled grass cutting that has been delayed will be carried out as soon as possible. It is our intention that the service provided to customers will be delivered in accordance with the specification as far as is possible given the current exceptional circumstances and so refunds of service charges will not be applicable at the present time.

Thank you for your cooperation and patience during this very difficult time.

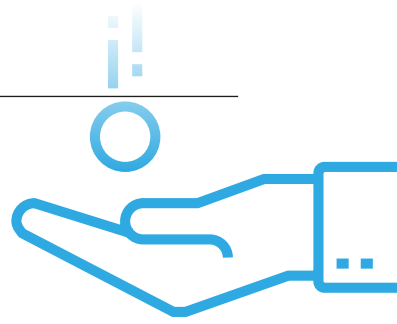


HOUSING & NEIGHBOURHOODS

Our teams are currently working remotely, and we regret that we are only able to offer a limited service.

The changes to our service are as follows:

- ▶ We cannot accept any new mutual exchange applications as we are only offering emergency repairs and visits, and so we are unable to carry out property inspections
- ▶ Welcome visits for new residents will be carried out by phone
- ▶ We will not be carrying out any estate inspections and encourage you to contact us to report any concerns or hazards
- ▶ Customer queries around tenancy and housing matters will be dealt with by phone
- ▶ For sheltered residents the daily wellbeing checks will be carried out by phone
- ▶ Anti-social behaviour investigations will be carried out over the phone, and any follow up communication either by phone or letter



Changes to:

YOUR INCOME/WAGES

If you cannot work because of the coronavirus and are struggling to pay your rent, we are here to support you and where appropriate agree temporary adjustments to rent payments.

Be aware of loan sharks. We have heard several reports of them taking advantage of people suffering financial difficulties during the coronavirus crisis.

We have specialist Financial Inclusion officers who help residents who are struggling to manage their money.

If you would like to speak to one of our officers, please e-mail us at moneyadvice@emhhomes.org.uk or call us on 0300 123 6000, select option 4, and leave your name, contact number, tenancy number and/or address along with brief details and we will respond accordingly.

Please be aware that due to staff working remotely, customers may be contacted by mobile phone.

We also work closely with Citizens Advice, who offer help and support for our residents in financial difficulty. If you need their help with your finances, please contact them directly.

WELFARE BENEFITS

Many changes to welfare benefits have been announced by the government since the start of the crisis. We welcome the fact that **Statutory Sick Pay** has been extended to people affected by coronavirus. However, if you are eligible we urge you to claim **Universal Credit** or **Employment and Support Allowance**. We can help you to do that if you need us to.

For the latest information, please go to: www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/employment-and-benefits-support/

Universal Credit includes housing costs and should be applied for as soon as you are no longer receiving a salary/wage as it cannot be backdated.

You will be entitled to an advance payment of 100% of your total monthly payment at the point you apply, but please note that you will have to repay this by deductions from your ongoing benefit. You will have to wait five weeks before your claim is processed and your housing costs will be paid directly to you. **It is your responsibility to ensure that the housing element is used to pay your rent.** You may have to top up any shortfall with your personal allowance.

You should regularly check your UC Journal for updates from your work coach.



UC *Universal Credit*



PAYING YOUR RENT

While many paypoints and post offices are closed, we are encouraging residents to use electronic payment methods such as Direct Debit, re-occurring debit card payments, myhomeonline, the allpay payment app, or by using the automated payment line using your allpay rent card.

The Income team understand that many residents will find themselves in difficult financial circumstances as a result of the crisis, and we are committed to supporting all residents to apply for relevant benefits which will support them with their rent payments. **Last year we supported residents to apply for benefits which increased their income by almost £2m.**

If you are struggling to pay your rent, we will work with you to agree an affordable payment plan based on your individual financial position.

Your rent and service charges will continue to be charged and you will need to pay any arrears as soon as possible.



RENT IN ADVANCE

Over the last four years more than half of our residents have built up a month's credit on their rent account in line with their tenancy agreement to pay their rent in advance. The credit built up by these residents can be used to support them while applying for benefits and waiting for them to be paid, ensuring that their rent account will not get into high arrears at this difficult time. This is the reason why we encourage all residents to gradually build a credit on their account as circumstances beyond your control can change your financial position very quickly.

This year we will not be sending out the annual rent statements.

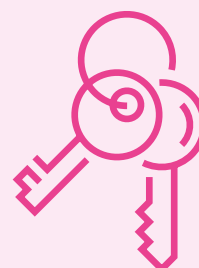
You can still view and print your statement via [myhomeonline](#), or if you have not yet registered and require a statement you can email us at enquiries@emhhomes.org.uk with your details.

IN THE PROCESS OF BUYING YOUR HOME?



We are aiming to progress with your home purchase through RTB/RTA/PRTB, but unfortunately some elements – such as a surveyor visiting your home and final completions which require you to attend your solicitors to sign relevant documents – are not considered to be essential during the current crisis and will not be going ahead. We therefore ask you to take this into account as it is likely to delay the purchase process.

Our Leasehold & Homeownership team can be contacted by email at leasehold&homeownership@emhhomes.org.uk



DOMESTIC ABUSE

For anyone who is experiencing or feels at risk of domestic abuse during this time, it is important to remember that there is help and support available.

The government has issued new advice on its website, and the **National Domestic Abuse Helpline** website provides guidance and support for potential victims as well as those who are worried about friends and loved ones. They can also be called for free and in confidence 24 hours a day on **0808 2000 247**. The website also has a form through which you can book a safe time for the team to call you.

If you are in immediate danger, please call 999 and ask for the police.

If you are in danger and unable to talk on the phone, call 999 and then wait until prompted by the operator before pressing 55. This will transfer your call to the relevant police force which will assist you without you having to speak.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Please remember we are all in this together. With everyone at home there will be an increase in general household noise. Be kind and tolerant to your neighbours. Use your daily exercise to help clear your mind in stressful situations.

We do not have the same powers as the police, so if you are concerned about your neighbours not following the government guidelines on social distancing, we suggest that you contact your local police force via their website. **Please only use 999 for emergencies and 101 for urgent enquiries.**

Reports about anti-social behaviour can be made via our asb@emhhomes.org.uk email address. This is monitored regularly throughout the day and we will respond to you as soon as we can. All investigations will be carried out by phone.



childline

It is a worrying time for children with schools closing and maybe friends or relatives getting ill, but Childline can help support them during this crisis.

Like many organisations, Childline has been affected and many of its volunteers are not able to go into work as usual, so they are offering a reduced service.

ONLINE, ON THE PHONE, ANYTIME

Children are still able to speak to a counsellor online or on the phone between 9:00am and midnight. To make sure they can answer everyone who is waiting, you will not be able to join the queue for a 1-2-1 chat after 10:30pm.

You can find Childline at www.childline.org.uk

Or call them on 0800 1111.



DATA PROTECTION

To help protect your data from email and phone scammers looking to capitalise on people's vulnerabilities during the coronavirus crisis, we have put together some practical tips on the action you can take to ensure you stay safe and do not fall victim to these invisible criminals.

Before you respond to any emails, texts or phone messages, pause for a moment to consider:

- ▶ Is the email addressed to you personally or is it addressed to "Dear customer" or "Valued customer"?
- ▶ Does the email/text message ask you to urgently verify details or click on a link within a specific time limit?
- ▶ Does the sender's email address look legitimate?
- ▶ Is the phone number one you know to be genuine? Are you expecting a call from us? (Please be aware that as many of our team are working remotely, we are using mobiles to call residents back so this may be a withheld or an unknown number.)
- ▶ Does the email look like previous emails you have legitimately received from the same organisation?
- ▶ Does the email ask for your bank account details, online banking passwords, or your PIN number and CVC code for your debit card?
- ▶ Does the caller's offer sound too good to be true? Then it probably is.

Agencies across the UK and beyond are working together to provide advice on how to stay safe online. There is plenty of guidance online, including how to spot and deal with suspicious emails, top tips for staying safe online, and securing your devices.

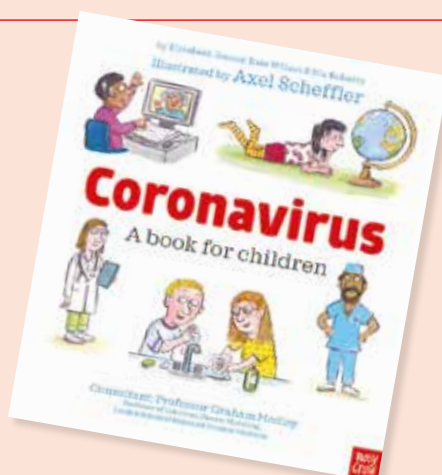
Some useful websites with guidance on how to protect your information:

- ▶ ico.org.uk/your-data-matters
- ▶ www.ncsc.gov.uk/section/information-for/individuals-families

Please take the time to review some of the guidance being issued to protect your information.

If you have made a subject access request (SAR) to emh homes, you should expect delays in the response as we are diverting our resources to help with other challenges due to the coronavirus outbreak. We will do our best to inform you on the revised length of time it will take to process your request.

HELPING YOUR CHILDREN UNDERSTAND CORONAVIRUS



If you are finding it difficult to explain coronavirus to your children, Nosy Crow has just launched a brilliant book full of useful information that can help you. The book is written in simple language appropriate for primary school children, and includes drawings by the Gruffalo illustrator. It can be downloaded for FREE from the Nosy Crow website: nosycrow.com/blog

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WELLBEING CALLS

During this difficult time we want to make sure that you are looking after yourself and are able to access everything that you might need.

Since the start of the crisis our team has been making wellbeing calls to our vulnerable residents. We are able to help with referrals for food and medicine deliveries, signpost you to other support in your area, or to just be a friendly voice on the end of the line.

If you would like us to call you, please call Customer Services on 0300 123 6000 and leave a message, and someone will get back to you.

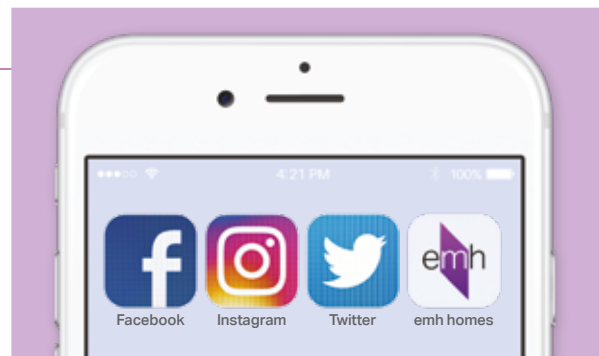


CONTACTING US

The easiest way to access our services is online, particularly via myhomeonline.

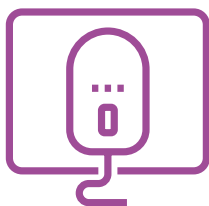
Over the last few weeks our Customer Services team has been contacting customers who have registered for **myhomeonline** but not used it for a while, reminding them of how easy it was to do the following:

- ▶ Pay your rent
- ▶ Set up a Direct Debit
- ▶ Report anti-social behaviour
- ▶ Send us a direct message



You can find myhomeonline on the homepage of our website. It is also available as an app.

This is simply a handy link to the portal on the home screen of your phone. To install the app go to: www.emhhomes.org.uk/contact-us/download-app/ and follow the simple instructions.



You can email us at:
enquiries@emhhomes.org.uk
or visit **www.emhhomes.org.uk**

Follow us on social media:
 **@emhhomes**

Text us on: **07860 024 523**

- ▶ Text the word '**Bal**' or '**Balance**' and your account balance will be automatically sent back to you
- ▶ Text the word '**Callback**' and a member of our Customer Services team will ring you back

You can still call us on **0300 123 6000** but please only try and do so if it is an emergency or if you have been asked to do so via communication from us.