

WINTER 2019

Word *on the street*

NEWS & INFO FOR CO-OP HOMES' CUSTOMERS

co-op
HOMES
part of RHP Group



WELCOME TO YOUR WINTER 2019 EDITION OF WORD ON THE STREET



We hope you enjoy reading it and find it useful. If you'd like to suggest an article for a future newsletter or have exciting or interesting news to share with fellow residents, we'd love to hear about it.

2019 has been a busy year for us. We've processed over 3,000 repair requests, taken 8,372 telephone calls, provided paperwork for 264 co-ops' meetings and attended 91 (where this is a service we provide for our clients).

A major development has been the introduction of Fixflo: our new online repairs service for customers and

clients. There's more about this later, but we hope booking repairs in a few simple clicks and getting solutions to common repair requests (without the hassle of waiting for a contractor, where we organise this for you) will improve your overall experience of our service.

We really want to get things right and use your feedback, comments and complaints to shape our services for both tenants and client co-ops. You can share your views by emailing customer.services@coophomes.coop or contacting us at www.coophomes.coop.

On behalf of the team, I wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Neil Tryner, Managing Director

CHRISTMAS OPENING HOURS

All our offices including those of our co-ops generally staffed by Co-op Homes will be closed over the holiday period:

Christmas Eve	Open
Christmas Day	Closed
Boxing Day	Closed
Friday 27th December	Closed
Monday 30th December	Closed
New Year's Eve	Closed
New Year's Day	Closed

Co-op Homes head office will re-open on Thursday 2 January.

If you have an emergency that threatens life, danger of serious injury or major damage to property, call Pinnacle on 020 3166 2608. If you need to report a repair that's not an emergency or check the status of an existing request, you can do this online from any place or device at <https://repairs.coophomes.coop> although please note that only emergency repairs will be attended to over the closed period.

If you're a Longlife, Minster or Bramleys member, please check your own repairs service Christmas arrangements.

If you're an Ealing, Chippenham, Flame or Nimbus resident, please contact a committee member for advice.

FAREWELL TO ROB WARREN

In January, we'll be saying goodbye to Rob Warren, who will be following his passion for everything theatre.

Rob joined us as a Senior Community Housing Advisor in 2015 after a long stint as a housing officer for RHP. He's been the key contact for several housing co-ops, and we'll all miss his knowledge and humour.

We'll update all affected co-ops in the New Year.



YOUR FREE GAS AND ELECTRICAL SAFETY CHECKS

Keeping your home safe is a top priority for us, and an annual gas safety check is a legal requirement. We need to carry out an electrical check too to make sure your wiring is safe.

Our Electrical Safety Policy outlines how we:

- ✓ maintain a five-year programme to test and repair landlord and domestic electrical installations
- ✓ maintain records of electrical installations, testing and repairs
- ✓ upgrade landlord and domestic systems as required.

If these checks aren't carried out, you could be putting yourself and your family in danger. It's absolutely essential you let us into your home to carry out these checks, so if we've contacted you about an appointment, please make sure you either keep it or get in touch as soon as you can to reschedule.

We're proud of our safety record at Co-op Homes - 100% of our residents' annual gas safety checks and 97% of electrical tests are completed on time. We're also grateful to those of you who have allowed Corgi's Gas Safe auditor into your homes to carry out random checking of gas installations.

Sometimes, we resort to emergency measures to get the safety checks done on time. This may mean capping off your gas supply or taking legal action to access your property and recharging you for the costs.

MAKING REPAIRS BOOKINGS EASIER

16 September was a date we'd been waiting anxiously for. We'd spent months planning, cleansing our data, training our team and letting everyone know that we were introducing a new online repair booking tool – Fixflo! We were the first social housing provider to purchase Fixflo.

In a few simple clicks, at any time of day or night, users can now

- submit repairs requests in one of 40 languages
- easily attach photos and videos of the repairs issue
- get solutions to common, easy-to-fix repair requests, allowing you to resolve issues yourself without waiting for a contractor
- receive a record of every repair request immediately by email
- track a job's status

In the ten weeks since Fixflo went live:

- ✓ one in four customers are reporting their own repairs at repairs.coophomes.coop
- ✓ 99% of our approved contractors are using Fixflo, either through the web dashboard or the dedicated contractor app

Fixflo works through the internet so can be used on any smartphone, iPad or PC, laptop or desktop computer. If you don't have access to the internet or a smartphone, you can still call, text or email us.

"Fixflo is so easy to use and I can quickly identify my issue from the pictures - I encourage all residents to use it." - CFG Member

WELCOME BACK ORTS ROAD

In December we welcomed back Orts Road Housing Co-op, who are based in Reading and have 92 units, including some shared accommodation. Orts Road were one of our previous clients but changed managing agent in 2010. We'll be providing repairs & maintenance and health & safety services and are really pleased that our new customers will benefit from our new online repairs service, Fixflo.

GET INVOLVED

Would you like to influence how things are done at Co-op Homes? We welcome residents who want to make a positive difference to our service. Depending on how much time you can commit, we have different levels of involvement.



ONE-OFF PARTICIPATION

From time to time, we need customers to contribute to projects or surveys we're working on. One of these is a plea for co-op committee members to give us their insight into our services, as part of our CCH accreditation framework renewal. Accreditation gives our existing co-ops and potential new customers confidence that we provide quality management services and have the necessary knowledge and experience to work successfully with housing co-ops, particularly in relation to meeting regulatory standards.

As our accreditation is due for renewal, we're keen to gather views on how we help committees meet their own governance and financial obligations. If you would like to participate, we'd be pleased to hear from you.

To find out more please get in touch with Jay-Dee.Albert@coophomes.coop.

Please note: we will never pass your details on to a third party without your consent. Where we are gathering feedback for an agency that relates to the services we provide, we will email you and give you the choice to contact them.

ESTATE CHAMPIONS

- Our 'eyes and ears' on the street.
- Report communal repairs and other estate issues, check that work has been done and contribute to selection exercises when we choose contractors in grounds maintenance, communal cleaning, repairs and maintenance and gas servicing.
- Those with an interest can also be involved in editing publications, like the Tenants' Handbook and this newsletter.





CUSTOMER FOCUS GROUP (CFG)

- Meets three to four times a year to scrutinise complaints performance and monitor the performance of our key contractors.
- Welcomes new members from both Co-op Homes and our co-ops.
- Contributes to procurement exercises.
- Agrees content of publications, review policy changes and offered training to increase confidence and skills.
- Has responsibility for a small budget for environmental improvements and approves funding bids.
- Checks that Co-op Homes is progressing with activities set out in the Resident Involvement Action Plan.
- Receive a small allowance towards expenses.
- Stepping stone to full board membership.

BOARD MEMBERSHIP

- Our aim is to try to ensure there is at least one representative from the community housing sector on the Board who has the required experience and skills.
- Existing residents and co-op members are encouraged to apply if they feel they meet the requirements of the job description which is displayed on our website at <https://www.coophomes.coop/about-us/about-us/board-member-recruitment/>
- All candidates, whether existing residents or external applicants, will go through a recruitment process, where they must demonstrate appropriate skills and experience.
- Existing residents will be asked to gain some experience on the CFG before progressing to full Board Membership.

This is because of the depth, nature and responsibility of the work of the Board, unless they have already fully satisfied the points in the selection criteria.

- The Board of Management steers the strategic direction of the company.
- Requires an average of five hours commitment a month.
- Involves attendance at quarterly board meetings, regular training and other events in the evenings and occasional Saturdays.
- Is an unpaid position, although all reasonable out-of-pocket expenses are met.
- Receive remuneration.

NOISE NUISANCE & BEING A CONSIDERATE NEIGHBOUR

At Co-op Homes, and most of our co-ops, you're free to choose any type of floor covering you like to make your home comfortable. For practical or economic reasons, many residents choose to lay wooden or laminate flooring, which can often amplify noise (particularly in flats).

As part of everyday living, and the fact that no home is totally soundproof, we should all expect some noise from the people living around us. Common everyday noises include:

- TVs and stereo
- children's movements
- DIY
- dogs barking
- intruder or car alarms
- slamming doors
- simply walking around.

Sound insulation in some properties is better than others, but all were designed according to the building regulations at the time. We've had the acoustic levels checked in a selection of our flats and they're within acceptable levels but we would still ask

residents who have wooden floors to please consider the effect any noise you make is having on neighbouring properties and consider laying some rugs or mats.

If you believe your neighbours' noise is not being caused by normal household activity, or it's outside the hours of 7 am-11 pm and is having a detrimental effect on your life, the first step is to have a gentle word with them or drop them a note to explain the problems you're experiencing. Don't shout or become abusive - they may not even be aware what impact their noise is having on you! From our experience, people can usually reach an amicable solution.

If you've tried talking to your neighbour but there's been no improvement, you have the right to ask us to take formal action. The noise nuisance would need to be witnessed by the council's noise team, who would need to confirm it was unreasonable or excessive. They cannot take special sensitivities or illness into consideration.

If your neighbour's behaviour is threatening, violent or abusive (including harassment), or they're breaking the law, you should always call [999](tel:999).

WINTER SAFETY REMINDER

Co-op Homes' Customer Focus Group would like to remind everyone about the need to be prepared in case of bad weather over winter. Why not put an 'emergency box' together, that everyone in your house can quickly grab in an emergency? Suggested contents include:

- ✓ Battery – operated LED lights
- ✓ Wind-up battery-operated radio/torch
- ✓ Basic tool kit
- ✓ Basic first aid kit
- ✓ Bottled water
- ✓ Tinned food you can eat cold (and a tin opener if they're not ring pulls)
- ✓ Emergency telephone numbers (NHS 111, GP, local chemist, local taxi, family and friends, Co-op Homes or your co-ops emergency repairs numbers)

- ✓ Phone number of gas emergency ([National Grid 0800 111 999](tel:0800111999))
- ✓ Phone number of electricity, gas, water and broadband suppliers
- ✓ Small amount of cash
- ✓ List of prescription medicines
- ✓ Passport and NI numbers
- ✓ Car registration and insurance details

Make sure everyone in your home knows where your emergency box is stored and how to turn off your water, electricity and gas supplies. It's also a good idea to discuss and practise your escape route if you need to leave the building in an emergency.

PROTECT YOUR POSSESSIONS

Whether you're a Co-op Homes or a co-op resident, you are responsible for replacing the contents of your home in the event of theft, fire, flood or criminal damage. If you need home contents insurance cover or are looking to renew your existing cover, consider contacting 'My Home': an affordable scheme provided by the National Housing Federation for social housing tenants and residents. For more information, check out www.thisismyhome.co.uk.

You can also physically mark your belongings so they can be easily identified by the police. This will make it more difficult for thieves to 'cash in' your belongings. It may also improve your chances of being reunited with stolen items later. You can register smart phones, computers, laptops, tablets, cameras and bicycles free on www.immobilise.com. It's the only site supported by all UK police forces and the mobile phone industry. If the police find a device which has been registered on the website, owners will be one step closer to being reunited with it.

If you're thinking of getting your child a bike for Christmas, here are some tips from the Police to keep it safe and secure:

Register it - Get the bike security marked and registered at www.bikeregister.com. It's a highly effective, visible deterrent. Thieves know that if they're caught with a registered bike, the owner can be traced, and they will be arrested.

Record it - Record bike details like the frame number (normally found underneath the bike between the pedals or where the back-wheel slots in), Bike Register number and any other distinguishing features, and take a photo.

Double lock it - It can take thieves just a few seconds to cut through some locks, so use two good quality ones, and make at least one a D-lock.

Lock the lot - Show your child how to lock the frame and both wheels to the cycle parking stand.

Secure it - Secure the bike as close to the stand as possible to give any thieves little or no room to manoeuvre.

Check ownership - If you're thinking of buying a secondhand bike, ask for proof of ownership and check the bike frame number on the Bike Register.

Act fast - If the bike does get stolen, contact your local police force as soon as possible (you can report it online). Give them your frame number, BikeRegister number, a photo and any other details and make sure you update the status on BikeRegister. The sooner they know, the sooner they can act, which might stop it being sold on.

DON'T FALL FOUL OF DRAINS

If we are called to a repair that's not your housing provider's responsibility, we will recharge you directly. This applies to toilet, sink and drain blockages caused by things like solidified cooking fat (normally turkey at this time of the year) and sanitary products.

You can help keep things sweet by throwing everything away with your household rubbish. This includes cooking fat, nappies, feminine products and wet wipes.

It's also a good idea to clear your plugholes regularly using hot water and soda crystals, as a preventative measure.



DON'T LOSE YOUR HOME IN 2020

Paying your rent is not always the first thing you think about when making plans for Christmas, but it is a priority debt. Sadly, over the last few months, several residents have been evicted and lost their homes due to rent arrears.

Eviction is our last resort, but it is every tenant's responsibility to pay their rent weekly or monthly in advance. So, please plan your Christmas spending carefully to make sure that your rent is paid on time and you avoid falling into arrears.

You can pay online at any time with your Allpay card as reference by going direct to www.allpayments.net. Alternative methods of rent payments available to you can be found under 'Pay Your Rent' at www.coophomes.coop.

If you'd like to talk about your rent account, make a payment over the phone, or set up a new direct debit please call us on [020 3166 2608](tel:02031662608).

You can make the most of your household budget by checking out www.moneyadvice.service.org.uk, where you'll find no-nonsense tips to help you save money as well as links to budget planners and benefit-checking tools.

www.turn2us.org.uk is a national charity set up to help people when times get tough. They can provide financial support to help people get back on track whether you're working but on a low income, a carer, looking for work or elderly.

Subletting your home illegally or without your landlord's permission is a criminal offence which carries a fine of £5,000 or even a two-year prison sentence. Co-op Homes recently evicted an illegal occupier and took formal action against them.

Illegal sub-letting is not only a crime, it is theft – profiting from a social rented home that many homeless people would love the opportunity to live in. If you suspect any of our homes is being illegally sublet, please let us know so we can investigate and if necessary, take urgent action to get the property back.

DIRECT DEBIT LUCKY WINNERS

The names of all our residents who pay by Direct Debit were put into a prize draw and 10 lucky households were sent £100 in High Street Vouchers, or had the equivalent amount wiped off their arrears!

One delighted resident in south east London said:
"I'm speechless and over the moon: I can't thank you enough for the magnificent gift. Especially at this time of the year - your present is wonderful. Much appreciated."



If you would like to set up a Direct Debit and gain peace of mind that your rent will always be paid, give us a call on [020 3166 2608](tel:02031662608).



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