

SPRING 2020



LINKHOUSING

housing news

The newsletter for Link tenants

Coronavirus – we're here to help

To say the last few weeks have been eventful would be an understatement. So, let me start by saying that while the situation around the coronavirus is challenging for everyone, we'll do everything we can to keep you safe in your home.

How quickly we return to normality depends on how well we all follow the government's guidelines. In the space of a few short days, we have closed our offices to the public, revised how we deliver essential services and put in place arrangements for staff to work from home.

In this edition of Housing News, we have tried to give you clear messages about what level of services we're providing. Please pay special attention to the contact details and bear with us if it takes longer than usual to get in touch.

We've also included some important messages about staying positive, looking after your body and mind during this difficult time and who to contact for support and benefits advice.

Happy Easter and stay positive.

June Green
Director of Housing Services



Coronavirus information and advice for customers

Tenant and staff safety is our priority and, in line with UK and Scottish Government advice, we have taken the decision to close our offices to the public until further notice.

Keep up to date with what we are doing to help our customers during this time by visiting www.linkhousing.org.uk/coronavirus or following our Facebook page [@LinkGroupLtd](https://www.facebook.com/LinkGroupLtd).

What does this mean for you as a tenant?

We're working hard to continue to deliver essential services such as emergency repairs and gas safety checks.

Please note response times for our enquiries, complaints and customer services teams will be slower as we focus on emergency contacts.

To reduce spread of the virus, we will limit services to the following:

- **Housing team:** Our housing officers are offering an email and telephone service for urgent enquiries between the hours of 9am and 4pm. Please email csc@linkhaltd.co.uk in the first instance or, **if urgent**, call **03451 400 100**.
- **Money and benefit advice:** Our advice team continues to provide benefit, money and debt advice. Please email adviceserviceteam@linkhaltd.co.uk or, **if urgent**, call **03451 400 100**.
- **Repairs:** Our teams will be carrying out emergency and urgent repairs only. Emergency repairs are repairs that require immediate attention to ensure the safety of tenants and the security of the property. They include:
 - total loss of water or electricity;
 - total loss of heating (in cold weather);
 - serious roof leaks; and
 - breaches of security to outside doors and windows.

If you have reported a repair and we aren't able to carry out the repair, we'll arrange this to happen at a later date.

The only exceptions to this are:

- if your gas service needs to be carried out and we are close to the anniversary date, or if you require an emergency repair. When this happens, we'll let you know what actions we'll need to take; and
- works associated with empty properties, which we are delivering to ensure our empty homes are ready if needed to help ease social issues such as homelessness or other emergency circumstances.

If you have an **emergency repair**, please call **03451 400 100**, pressing option 1. You can also report a repair at linkhousing.org.uk/report-a-repair/. When you contact us about your emergency repair, we will ask you some questions about your current situation and whether you are self-isolating. Please be patient with us while we ask these questions. These are required to protect the health and wellbeing of you, our staff and our contractors, which is essential in allowing us to maintain services.

If it is deemed essential and a member of staff does attend your home, they will:

- ask some further questions at the front door before entering the property;
- distance themselves by at least two metres from anyone in the property;
- avoid touching surfaces where possible;
- wear protective gloves and other additional protection equipment where necessary; and
- use hand sanitiser before and after the visit.

To keep our colleagues/contractors safe, we ask you also stand at least two metres away from them where you can.

Please note: our planned maintenance programme, including adaptations, kitchens, bathrooms, windows and doors, is suspended until further notice.

- **Housing applications and allocations:** We are no longer advertising properties but continue to work with councils to house people facing homelessness, or other critical housing need. If you are at risk of homelessness, please contact your local council.
- **Stair and close cleaning:** We have written to all our cleaning contractors to advise we expect them to follow government guidance in relation to social distancing and the correct use of protective personal equipment when working. It is up to the contractor whether they follow government guidance or not. We will keep you updated by social media of any changes to this position.
- **Grounds maintenance:** Where possible, our grounds maintenance contractors will continue to deliver services whilst following government guidance in relation to social distancing and the correct use of protective personal equipment. This position may change, and we will keep you updated via social media.
- **Tenant engagement:** In the interests of tenant and staff safety, meetings of our tenants' and residents' associations and the tenant scrutiny panel have been suspended.

If you're struggling to pay your rent, we're here to help.

If you have lost income and think you will struggle to pay your rent as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, please contact us as soon as possible on **03451 400 100**.

We've also created a dedicated section on our website which includes a list of frequently asked questions: www.linkhousing.org.uk/coronavirus.

This is a challenging time for many people, however, tenants who can afford to pay rent should do so. This means our essential services can continue to run smoothly.

Tenants should keep in touch and make payments when they can towards rent and arrears. If you do this, we will continue to review rent accounts and won't take any action (relating to rent payments and arrears) against tenants for three months.

Other ways to pay your rent

If you currently pay your rent in cash, we ask you consider one the following options:

Direct Debit Paying by Direct Debit is stress free and ensures your rent is automatically paid each month.

Payment is taken directly from your bank account. This is now a completely paperless process and can be set up over the phone using your bank account number and sort code.

To set up a Direct Debit, please contact csc@linkhaltd.co.uk or **03451 400 100**.

To make this process quicker, please have your tenancy number handy.

Allpay Call allpay on **0330 041 6497** or visit www.allpay.net to pay by credit or debit card. You can also download the allpay app (via Apple App Store or Windows Phone store and Google Play) onto your mobile phone to pay by credit or debit card.

Remember to quote your name and allpay reference number with each payment.

MyLink app With MyLink, you can report a repair, check your rent balance, pay your rent and much more 24 hours a day, seven days a week!

Search MyLink in Google Play and the App Store. All you need to register is your tenancy reference number. For more information, visit www.linkhousing.org.uk/mylink.

If you need help with any of the information above, please email csc@linkhaltd.co.uk.

Taking care of your mental wellbeing

While staying at home due to coronavirus, it's important to take care of your mind as well as your body.

Below are some tips and advice from NHS One You to help you keep on top of your mental wellbeing and cope with how you may feel while staying at home. To read the full article, visit www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-tips.

Plan practical things Work out how you can get any household supplies you need. You could try asking neighbours, family or friends or find a delivery service. Continue accessing treatment and support for any existing physical or mental health problems where possible. Let services know you are staying at home and discuss how to continue receiving support.

If you need regular medicine, you might be able to order repeat prescriptions by phone, or online via a website or app. Contact your GP and ask if they offer this. You can also ask your pharmacy about getting your medicine delivered or ask someone else to collect it for you.

Connect with others Maintaining healthy relationships with people you trust is important for your mental wellbeing. Think about how you can stay in touch with friends and family while you're at home – by phone, messaging, video calls or online – whether it's people you usually see often, or reconnecting with old friends or neighbours.

Talk about your worries It's quite common to feel worried, scared or helpless about the current situation. Remember, it's ok to share your concerns with others you trust – doing so could help them too. Or you could try a charity helpline or webchat.

Support is also available from the following organisations:

- Breathing Space: **0800 83 85 87**
- MIND: www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing
- Samaritans: **116 123** or www.samaritans.org
- SHOUT: Text SHOUT to **85258** or visit www.giveusashout.org

Look after your body Our physical health affects how we feel. Try to make sure you and your family eat healthy, well-balanced meals, drink enough water and exercise regularly. Avoid smoking or drugs and try not to drink too much alcohol. It can be easy to fall into unhealthy patterns of behaviour that end up making you feel worse.

Do not stay glued to the news Try to limit the time you spend watching, reading or listening to coverage of the outbreak, including on social media, and think about turning off breaking-news alerts on your phone. Use trustworthy sources – such as the UK Government, Scottish Government and NHS websites – and fact-check information from the news, social media or other people.

If you are experiencing domestic abuse, you can call the National Domestic Abuse Helpline on freephone **0800 200 0247** or visit www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk.

If you're worried about a vulnerable child, please contact the NSPCC helpline on **0808 800 5000** or help@nspcc.org.uk.

Staying in touch by video

Now more than ever, it's important to stay in touch with loved ones. What could be better than a phone call to a relative or friend to cheer up their day? A video call!

If they have an internet connection, smart phone, tablet, laptop or desktop computer with a webcam, they can video call you as easily as making a voice call.

There are lots of ways to video call and almost all of them can be done using any type of phone, tablet or computer. Below is a list of services which are the easiest to use – most can have more than two people chatting at the same time. All of them require you to either download an app for a phone or tablet, or sign-in and use the service on a browser such as Chrome.

The icon which activates video calls on most of these apps looks like this:



Different video call services do not work with each other – someone only using Facetime can't video call with someone only using Duo – so everyone needs to use the same service.



Facebook Messenger: If you want to use this, you will need to have, or set up, a Facebook account. You will need to be 'friends' with someone on Facebook to video call them. For phones, find this in the app stores, or search for 'Facebook' in a browser for computers.



Whatsapp Videocall: For phones, find this in the app stores, or search for 'Whatsapp' in a browser for computers. You sign up for the service once the app is downloaded and can invite contacts from your phone. You can then videocall any other Whatsapp users who you're connected with.



Google Hangouts: You will need a Gmail email account to use this. For phones, find this in the app stores, or search for 'Google hangout' in a browser (Chrome is best for this service) for computers.



Duo: This is particularly useful on Android phones as you can videocall anyone directly from your contacts, although for the first call they will need to give permission on their own phones to accept the request. For phones, find this in the app stores, or search for 'Google Duo' in a browser for computers.



Skype: Perhaps the best known videocall service. For phones, find this in the app stores, or search for 'Skype' in a browser for computers.



FaceTime: For Apple devices only – iPhones, iPads, and Mac computers. This is built into Apple devices and allows you to video call your contacts for free.



Zoom: Connect with anyone on iPad, iPhone and other mobile devices. The basic package is free for 40 minutes and allows to you video chat with up to three participants.

We'd like to know what your favourite services are for staying in touch by video call. Please complete our short survey: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/Linkcommunication

Learning at home – let's do this!

We know this is a worrying time for parents and kids, with new routines, extended times at home and uncertainty. You may be worried about how your child will learn over the coming weeks, but please don't panic.



You're not expected to provide the curriculum your children receive from school. Give your children fun, everyday learning activities! Play is the greatest work a child can engage in and don't underestimate the enormous learning opportunities offered by:

- planting and nurturing seeds and bulbs;
- writing letters to elderly relatives or those in care homes;
- letting them do chores around the house;
- building dens, chill out zones and quiet places;
- reading books;
- writing a recipe for dinner and helping in the kitchen;
- taking part in arts and crafts activities;
- playing board games;
- making a vlog/blog (for older children – remember to stay safe online - keep your personal details private);
- having a movie day/night - take time together to relax; and
- watching child friendly news – talk about what's happening, reassure them they are safe and loved.

Here's a list of free online sites to try too:

www.glowconnect.org.uk: Allows learners to work in a variety of ways, from collaborating with peers to working individually at their own pace. All school children will already have an account.

www.sumdog.com: Helps children enjoy maths and spelling.

www.sqa.org.uk: Provides users with access to past papers and national qualification course information.

www.myworldofwork.co.uk: My World of Work is Scotland's career information and advice website run by Skills Development Scotland. Don't forget to also look out for online fitness classes and downloads for audio reading. Joe Wicks and David Walliams are currently offering free access to fitness classes and audio books respectively.

Please remember, if your child has an entitlement for meals at school you can still access help through your local council. Details can be found on their website or social media pages.

Retirement roundup

Sheltered and retirement housing officers are now working from home, however, we will continue to provide the following services:

- Morning calls remain available Monday to Friday as usual. This service can be reinstated for tenants who have previously opted out and would like to receive a wellbeing call while the coronavirus situation is ongoing
- Staff are offering extra calls to tenants who feel they will benefit from additional contact and will continue to provide a range of support, advice and signposting services to tenants
- Bield Response 24 and Hanover Telecare continue to provide an emergency assistance service to tenants who require this. Telecare services operate 24/7
- Communal lounges are unavailable until further notice. We'd also ask tenants to follow social distancing rules and not gather within other communal areas in developments
- Communal laundries remain open for tenants who don't have access to their own washing machine. Please observe the hand washing guidance from Scottish Government and NHS Scotland and wash your hands frequently with soap and water and for at least 20 seconds
- Guest bedrooms will not be available for booking for the duration of the coronavirus outbreak
- Cleaning services in developments were suspended while we sourced additional personal protective equipment for staff. These have now recommenced. This also applies where contractors provide cleaning services on behalf of Link. Cleaning staff will be focussing on high contact areas such as door handles and handrails
- Fire alarm testing will continue to be carried out by Link staff

Link staff and cleaning contractors will be observing the social distancing guidance from the Scottish Government and NHS. To help with this, don't approach staff members you see on site and please don't be offended if you're asked to observe the social distancing guidance.

Be assured, we are following government guidelines and taking all necessary steps to support you and provide the best possible service.



Emergency contact numbers

- Call **0800 783 7937** (out-of-hours service provided by **Bield 24**)
- Call **Lochaber HA** on **01397 702 530** if you live in **Fort William** or **Skye**. Call **Lochalsh HA** on **01478 612035** if you live in **Kyle of Lochalsh**. If you live in **Oban** call **West Highland Housing Association** on **01631 566451** or **Hanover** on **0300 323 1170**.



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