

coronavirus update #2



STAY ALERT ► CONTROL THE VIRUS ► SAVE LIVES

WE ARE HERE TO SUPPORT YOU!

After three months of operating under strict government guidelines, we are restarting some of our services as the restrictions start to be eased. Our priority is to keep staff and residents safe, so please be reassured that we will continue to follow the latest advice from government and Public Health England if we need to visit you in your home.

All our offices are still closed to the public, but you can contact us via **myhomeonline** or by email: **enquiries@emhhomes.org.uk**

You should only call our Customer Services team on 0300 123 6000 if it is an emergency.

If you have any concerns about coronavirus and how it has affected our services, please email **coronavirusinfo@emhgroup.org.uk**

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

WHAT'S INSIDE...

Your guide to the latest information about how we are continuing to support you with:

- repairs & maintenance
- money matters
- your home and your rent
- resident involvement
- wellbeing calls and community support groups
- volunteering for our carers
- keeping communities clean

On 18 May the government published an open letter on its website to all social housing residents, setting out the level of service it expected your landlord to be delivering during the coronavirus crisis. We covered most of the points raised by the government in our April coronavirus update newsletter, and over the last few weeks we have been making plans for when lockdown restrictions were eased to restart more of our services.

You can read the government letter here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-letter-to-social-housing-residents>

Our current position covers the remaining points raised by the government:

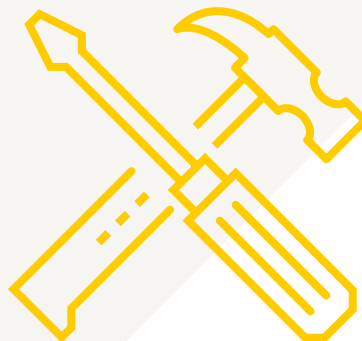
PLANNED MAINTENANCE

We are currently putting measures and plans in place to restart our regular maintenance work safely. This should enable us to resume planned maintenance work towards the end of June.

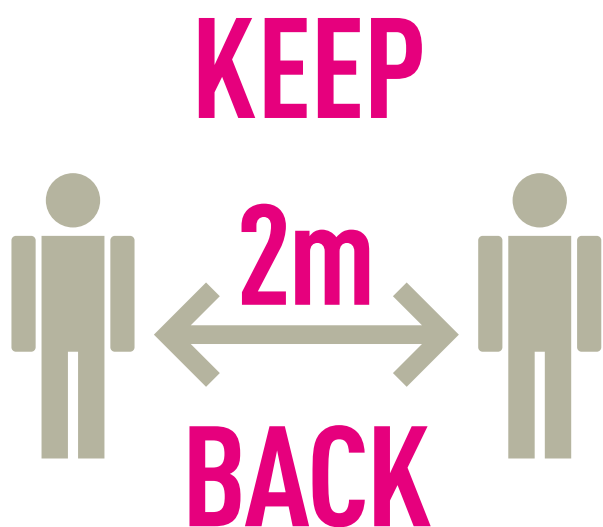
At that point we will also be able to restart undertaking **routine repairs**. We will be looking to clear the backlog as quickly as possible in the first instance and will get in touch with residents to schedule the appointments.

If you receive a letter from us and are currently self-isolating or shielding, or the repair is no longer required or the appointment inconvenient, please call **0300 123 6000** and speak to one of our Customer Services advisors.

Our priorities for urgent repairs - including but not limited to uncontrollable water leaks, loss of electricity, structural damage, and lift maintenance – and gas safety checks remain unaffected.



Once this process is up and running, we will review the situation with the aim of having bookable repairs available again in mid-July. Please keep checking our website and social media for the latest updates.



WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN WE VISIT

Before we enter your home, we will check if you or a member of your household has any suspected or confirmed coronavirus symptoms, and where necessary rearrange the appointment.

The tradesperson will wear appropriate PPE, follow sanitised practices, and observe social distancing by keeping at least 2 metres away. We request that you and members of your household do the same, preferably keeping the area clear for the work to take place and keeping doors open to avoid contact. Please also keep pets away.

If social distancing cannot be maintained, we may not be able to complete the repair.

GAS SERVICING

We have a legal obligation to carry out gas safety inspections. You could be putting yourself and others at risk by not allowing us access. Our operatives will observe social distancing and wear PPE.

If you are at all concerned about this, please call 0300 123 3645.

CHANGES TO SEEKING POSSESSION

The government has strongly advised all housing providers that they should only serve notice of seeking possession on tenants with rent arrears if they have good reason to do so. We have not issued any new notices of seeking possession since the lockdown began. Therefore, if you receive a notice of seeking possession in the coming weeks, we will have carefully considered this prior to sending it to you. Letters about your rent will have been sent to you and we will have also attempted to contact you over the phone. A notice of seeking possession is the first stage in the legal process to encourage you to pay your rent and arrears. Any notice served will give you three months to clear the arrears or reduce the debt by making an affordable repayment arrangement with us. After three months we could take you to court to ask the judge for possession of your home.

We urge you to contact us if you have any concerns about paying your rent. Our Financial Inclusion team is here to support you.



Since the beginning of April, our Financial Inclusion team has supported residents to increase their income by over £104K.

Read about some of the ways we have helped...



Mrs. A

Mrs. A does not have access to the internet and so was unable to apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) to cover the shortfall in her rent due to the bedroom tax. We helped her to create a My Erewash account and then completed the form on her behalf. Supporting evidence was required so, following social distancing rules and wearing appropriate PPE, we arranged to visit her and collect it. Through our actions we were able to get her bedroom tax reduction covered by DHP for 13 weeks. We also contacted the Council Tax department and secured a saving of £285. The financial situation was causing our customer stress, but our support has helped give her peace of mind.

Mr. B

Through contacting the Pension Service to ensure that Mr. B's details were correct and speaking to Northampton Borough Council, we were able to get his Housing Benefit payments reinstated and a backdated payment of over £1,500.

This resulted in his rent account going from arrears of more than £1,000 to being in credit. This has provided some reassurance during these difficult times.

Mr. C

Mr. C's Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) ended in March 2020. To start a new DHP application normally requires 2 months' bank statements being submitted to the local authority. Due to the lockdown, Mr. C was not able to obtain the bank statements. We e-mailed the local authority and suggested that due to the current circumstances they should consider renewing the DHP without a new application. Our request was successful and the DHP was renewed.

If you would like to speak to one of our Financial Inclusion 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.



UNIVERSAL CREDIT

The government has announced many changes to welfare benefits since the start of the crisis.

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

Universal Credit includes an element for housing costs and should be applied for as soon as you are no longer receiving a salary/wage as it cannot be backdated. It is your responsibility to ensure that the housing element is used to pay your rent, so please set up a Direct Debit or a reoccurring card payment to ensure we receive your payments on a regular basis.

You will be entitled to an advance payment of 100% of your total monthly payment at the point you apply, but you will have to repay this by deductions from your ongoing benefit. Please use the housing element of the advance to pay your rent to prevent you from getting into a large amount of worrying debt.

You will have to wait five weeks before your claim is processed, but we have been assured by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) that 94% of claims are first paid after five weeks. You should regularly check your UC Journal for updates from your work coach (front-line DWP staff based in Jobcentres that support claimants into work).



HOW TO PAY YOUR RENT DURING THE CRISIS

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

PAYING YOUR 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. This credit 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 during difficult times. This is the reason we encourage all residents to gradually build up credit on their account as circumstances beyond your control can change your financial position very quickly.

The number of residents who are able to pay their rent in advance remains over 50% despite the coronavirus crisis. We would like to thank these residents for keeping to the terms and conditions of their tenancy.

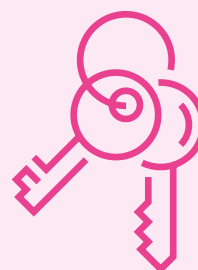
Remember you can view your rent account and print a statement via myhomeonline, or if you have not yet registered and require a statement you can email us at enquiries@emhhomes.org.uk or call us on 0300 123 6000 with your details.



BUYING YOUR HOME

We are aiming to progress with your home purchase through Right to Buy/Right to Acquire/Preserved Right to Buy, 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 could delay the purchase process. Please take this into account before submitting any new applications.

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



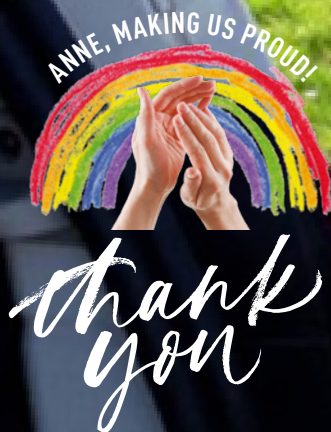
KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH INVOLVED RESIDENTS

The delivery of our resident involvement services has changed since the start of lockdown. All resident face-to-face meetings have been suspended until we receive further guidelines from the government.

Community Investment Officer Anne Phillips has however been keeping in touch with our involved residents any way she can - by email, text, or phone - to offer them a listening ear, a friendly voice, signposting them to food banks or advice services, or just allowing them to chat to someone other than the four walls. Anne has also agreed the frequency of future contact with them too.

"I have found this work very rewarding," said Anne. "I now know the names of their children and pets, the jobs they used to do, their opinions on the world, and how they are coping. I think the residents are amazing, and I want to say thank you to them all for spending time with me, imparting their knowledge, humour, personal struggles, and their positive attitudes. The whole experience has made me think about not what I cannot do but what I can do."

Anne has also been volunteering and delivering PPE to the emh care & support teams in Kettering and Chesterfield.





RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT: OUR NEW OFFER

Like every other organisation we have had to respond to the coronavirus crisis and the challenges that it brings by working in different ways. This includes adapting the way in which we engage with involved residents.

We have set up a new engagement offer for involved residents who have access to the internet and have expressed a wish to remain involved. We are aware that their health and wellbeing and that of their family are the most important considerations at the moment, and that they may not want to engage for the time being. However we wanted to make sure that they had the opportunity stay involved if they wish to.

Through an online survey we asked our involved residents if they would like to be involved in a range of suggested topics. 53 responded as follows:

- **Coronavirus research: looking into what other housing providers are publishing on their websites** (18 residents replied they would like to be involved)
- **Reviewing the articles and proof-reading the residents' newsletter** (32 residents)
- **Providing feedback and suggestions on policy reviews** (33 residents)
- **Providing feedback on the *Together with Tenants* report, including challenging the findings and providing evidence of your experiences** (29 residents)
- **Proof-reading and updating documents** (35 residents)
- **Carrying out research for our Environmental Strategy** (17 residents)

Some of this work has already started, but we will be in touch with everyone who expressed an interest in any of the other topics when we are ready to go ahead. **Thank you for helping us to continue improving!**



The Residents Action Committee South is back open for business.

Led by residents, RACS is a voice for residents and works in partnership with emh homes to improve and shape services.

"If it matters to you, it matters to us."

To contact RACS:

E racemh@btconnect.com

T 0116 278 6228

M 07880 823 126



FOR INDEPENDENCE
FOR PEACE OF MIND

With many older and vulnerable people shielding or self-isolating, it is more important than ever to know that there is help available when you need it.

Lifeline is a 24-hour personal alarm service that can give you confidence in the current situation. It is simple to use and comfortable to wear. In an emergency you simply press the button to connect to a response centre who will provide you with assistance at any time of the day or night.

Lifeline could be for you if you:

- have recently been discharged from hospital
- are housebound
- have a disability
- are living with a long-term medical condition
- or have been the victim of domestic abuse

Lifeline is made up of two parts: a homecare unit and an alarm with a single button that you can wear around your neck or as a wristband. The homecare unit plugs into your phone socket and has a range of 50 metres, so you can use it anywhere in the house or even out in the garden.

It costs from just £3.99 a week, and installation is free of charge if you live in certain operational areas.

For more information please call us on 0300 123 6000.



WELLBEING CALLS

Since the start of the lockdown we have made more than **13,000** calls to residents and service users to check on their wellbeing.

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.

LOCAL VOLUNTEER SUPPORT GROUPS

If you are without family or friends to help with food shopping or collecting prescriptions, on our website we have listed many volunteer support groups across the region that can help you.

If you know of someone in your community who may be struggling, why not find the contact number for their local support group and pass it on?

If you do not have access to the internet, please call our Customer Services team and they will be pleased to help you find an organisation near you where you can get help. Call them on 0300 123 6000.



CRUSE BEREAVEMENT CARE

Cruse Bereavement Care helps people dealing with bereavement and to understand their emotions at a traumatic time in their lives. During the coronavirus crisis it has expanded its services to help people being bereaved in isolation, not being able to attend a funeral, and coping with talk and media stories about death and dying.

www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief



A pioneering partnership has helped domestic violence victims, street homeless, and other vulnerable residents find safe accommodation during the pandemic.

We have teamed up with Erewash Borough Council to get empty homes turned around and into immediate use by those with no safe refuge.

One of those helped is Mrs. A (name changed for anonymity and safety) who had been waiting for a property for her and her two children, having escaped an abusive relationship.

Although the majority of lettings across the UK had to immediately cease when lockdown started at the end of March, our Allocations and Housing & Neighbourhoods teams have devised creative ways to ensure they can support Erewash Borough Council house those in most need.

This has enabled 16 people who were without a home or living in unsuitable or difficult circumstances to access safe, affordable accommodation during the coronavirus crisis, including some who had been sleeping rough.

We had an established partnership with Erewash Borough Council which enabled this to happen.

We have been flexible together seeking verbal references and our Housing & Neighbourhoods team has gone above and beyond to help people move contact free. This includes wearing PPE to check the property, phoning the customer to say it is open and empty while they then sit in the car outside, and non-contact tenancy signing and key handover.

We have been sensible in ensuring those with homes can afford it and are able to manage a tenancy, so we aren't setting them up to fail. By being adaptable and thinking differently as to how we can make this happen quickly, we have together made a significant difference to people's lives.

Karl Morris, Allocations Officer

Helping domestic violence victims **flee safely**

I'm literally on a very tired Cloud 9 at the moment. You should totally be acknowledged. You didn't have to help me in the way that you did, and I know I've said it so many times, but you really have changed our lives. emh homes saved my life and given me the opportunity to live again.

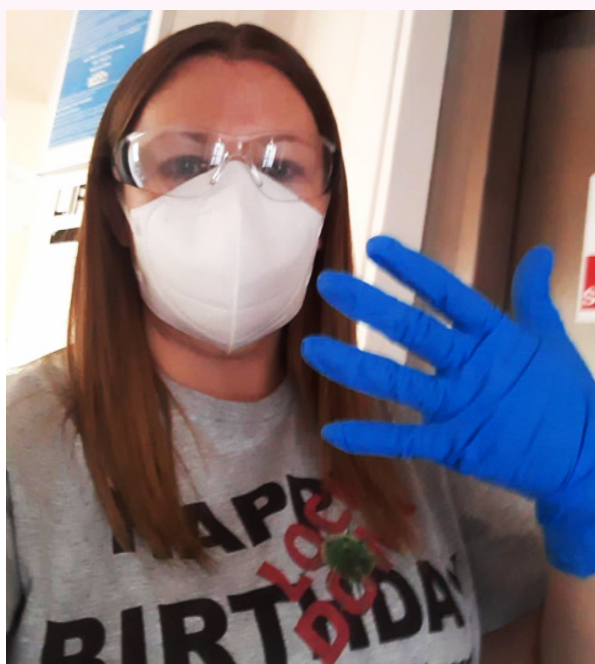
We are getting there one room at a time, but we are so over the moon with the house, the area, and our neighbours. They have all offered to help where they can and all sorts.



FRIENDS OF THE NOOK

At the start of the lockdown, Becky Cliff and Lesley Oakes from our Housing & Neighbourhoods team set up a community support hub in Agar Nook in Coalville in partnership with the community association and the Friends of the Nook.

As well as securing funding from several charities - including the Coronavirus Martin Lewis Help Fund and the Coronavirus Support Fund: Leicestershire and Rutland Community Foundation - the team also reached out and received donations from Morrisons and Warren Hills primary school.



"We have a small group of amazing volunteers without which none of this would be possible," said Becky. "They pass over any shopping orders or prescription collections to the three volunteers who are still able to go out and drop off the deliveries on doorsteps."

Becky also rang all her high-risk tenants and passed the details of those who would like a wellbeing phone call to Customer Services.

It is not just our tenants that we are helping. The team is also getting referrals from North West Leicestershire District Council and the local GP.

Becky and Lesley – along with Helen Cuttle from the Agar Nook Community Association – are making a real difference. It is wonderful to see how everyone in the community has come together, and the key role our dedicated Housing & Neighbourhoods team is playing in ensuring this lifeline exists.





VOLUNTEERING FOR OUR CARERS

Libby Duff from our Property Services team shares her experience of volunteering for the frontline emh care & support team.

"Before lockdown I heard that some people would have to self-isolate for 12 weeks. I realised the impact that this could have on vulnerable people, so I contacted two councils in my region to ask what the set-up was to help them and was shocked to hear that there was nothing! I was perturbed that they were on their own and hoped we were not a care-less society.

"My hope was answered when I received a brilliant email sent out by the lovely Michelle Drain from emh care & support to recruit an army of volunteers.

"On my first day I was struck by the absolute kindness, selflessness, positivity and sheer grit of the care and support team!!! Instead of spending time with family, every day the team was working hard up until nine at night. Not one person moaned about anything, it was just "how can I get past this obstacle". I must also add that I really enjoyed the sense of humour within the team.

"Speaking to the carers has left me feeling very inspired and humbled. I even became teary driving home after finishing my first day of PPE deliveries. They all came across as selfless and so passionate about what they are doing. They are away from their families and putting their own lives at risk to be a surrogate parent to those with special needs or caring for the elderly in nursing homes like they were their own family."



STAY ALERT • CONTROL THE VIRUS • SAVE LIVES



“

It has been an absolute privilege to have volunteered. I hope management recognises the absolute value in this beautiful workforce.

The emh care & support team has restored my faith in people and filled my soul with love and warmth.

”



BEFORE



AFTER

KEEPING COMMUNITIES CLEAN AND CLEAR

Earlier this year we brought fly-tipping services in-house. Sharpes, our grounds maintenance service, recruited a dedicated two-man team to work across our entire area to respond to dumped items and waste issues.

Despite the lockdown restrictions, the team has continued their duties, with new health and safety processes in place to ensure they and residents are kept safe.

We caught up with Phil and Ian - aka the Clean & Clear team - to find out more about their work, life under lockdown, and how residents can support them.

Thanks for pausing the day job to talk to us. How is your role going?

- **Phil:** It's going well, thanks. It is a little difficult in this heat wearing extra PPE, but we are working faster to get the work done and the equipment on and off between jobs! When lockdown happened, we had a few days just being on call for urgent needle removal jobs only while a risk assessment was done, but since then we have been back working as normal.
- **Ian:** The only real change is we can only do external works, not staircases and the like, and of course we are having to stay two metres away from people. We travel in different vehicles and are working on staggered starts. So sometimes we are up working by 7am with an early finish.

What kind of work are you focusing on?

- **Ian:** We are finding that some people are leaving more bin bags outside the communal bin stores, rather than putting them in. I know the tips are shut, but people making the effort to not block the bins would attract less rats and cause less problems for everyone. We have seen a decrease in dumped fridges and sofas though, as I guess people can't go out and buy new ones.
- **Phil:** We have also had an increase in people undertaking removal or decoration work, without then thinking through what they will do with the debris. So we have had to take away an old shed dumped in an alleyway for example.



It must be disheartening to clear up an area, and then get a future job to go and remove more fly-tipping?

- **Ian:** We keep our sense of humour – you have to in this job! As well as clearing, we also look for evidence of who has dumped the items illegally. As the behaviour of the minority causes a problem for the majority, we will photograph any addresses or other evidence and pass it along to the Housing & Neighbourhoods team to take action.

What does a typical day involve for you both?

- **Phil:** We have been working together for about eight months now, and we make a good team. First thing, we decide together the best route each day to get all the jobs done. We have to work as a pair as you never quite know what a job will involve until you get there – it could be a heavy item or something such as a needle which requires us to get fully suited up. We are used to hazards, such as rodents and needles and what we call bin juice. Each day is different, and jobs can come in during the day which we need to do as a priority. We also work closely with the other teams based with us, so the gardeners for example will help clear a reported item if they are already in the area.

Finally, what could residents do to make your life easier?

- **Phil:** It's about thinking of others. We don't mind being busy and I would probably go bonkers sat at home, but people making an extra small step of putting something in a communal bin and not blocking it would make a big difference. It would then give us more time on other jobs.
- **Ian:** We came across one site the other day with a huge pile of fly-tipped rubbish directly under a 'no fly-tipping' sign. It is illegal and you could have a £2,000 fine if you are caught. We are looking at security cameras, but the answer is for people not to do it in the first place.

I would also remind people to keep their social distance. We do have hi-viz jackets asking people to keep away – for their benefit as well as ours – but we can't wear them over the PPE as it defeats the purpose of wearing the PPE!

If you want to let us know of fly-tipping or urgent waste removal, please report it via myhomeonline and include pictures of what needs removing. This helps us to know how big the job is and if we need any special equipment. If you have not registered on myhomeonline yet, you can call Customer Services on 0300 123 6000.



Earlier this year we leased a property to Erewash BC as part of a temporary housing arrangement. The council arranged for the property to be carpeted, but unfortunately the firm assigned the task was put into lockdown before the job could be completed. The doors still needed to be rehung, and the cut-off pieces of carpet cleared away.

The council contacted us to see if we could help, and Shaun Featherstone from our Property Services team kindly parachuted in and finished the job. He also arranged for the gas supply to be uncapped.

The property was needed urgently for a family living in a bed and breakfast following a house fire. One of the children was in hospital with leukaemia and could not be discharged to the bed and breakfast, so the property had to be ready for the boy to return to his new home and be reunited with his family.



MENTORING JOBSEEKERS

Back in March before everyone went into lockdown, a group of volunteers from across the group came together to support local jobseekers with CV writing, job applications, preparing for interviews and mock interviews.

We recently supported five jobseekers from Coalville Job Centre with work trials within the Income team, resulting in three of them securing jobs, so when they approached our Head of Income, Gwyn Gascoigne, about mentoring other jobseekers who were keen to find employment, she jumped at the chance. Gwyn was soon able to recruit six volunteers willing to help local residents fulfil their potential. The volunteers used their charity days to give back to the local community, demonstrating that we are far more than just a landlord.

"I am sure we can all remember a time when we really wanted a job, and just needed that little bit of support and encouragement to point us in the right direction," said Gwyn. "I certainly wouldn't be a head of service if others around me hadn't supported me along the way."

The mentoring was completed over a three-week period, with two volunteers working together in each two-hour session to support the jobseekers on each topic. Support was also on hand from the Job Centre.

Once they got over their initial nerves the jobseekers took full advantage of the opportunity, gaining confidence as the sessions progressed. By sharing their thoughts and confronting their fears, they were able to break down barriers and build up their job application and interview skills. They were also able to offer constructive feedback, both

individually to our volunteers and about what we as an organisation could do better to promote housing as a career of choice.

The jobseekers all found the sessions useful. *"I was a bit dubious about coming but it was actually really helpful,"* said Zoe after the final session. *"The mixed group of people really helped, and the great feedback from the mock interviews helped you understand where you are going wrong and gives you something to build on. I am so glad I came today."*

Our team also found the sessions rewarding. *"It is great to help out with things like this, and I am glad I was given the chance to be part of it,"* said David Turner, Clerk of Works in Property Services.



ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Earlier this year we were named best housing association/landlord at the Energy Efficiency Awards (East Midlands) and achieved the runner-up (highly commended) position in the large-scale project and vulnerable customer support categories. The awards were in recognition of our work in installing air and ground source heat pumps and related measures at over 400 of our properties.

22 THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO!



- | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| Seeing friends | No social distancing |
| Visiting family | Back to the gym |
| Back to school | Haircut |
| Festivals | Slowing down |
| Sport | The natural world |
| Pubs | Holidays |
| Eating out | Galleries |
| Travel | Theatres |
| Cinema | Belated birthdays |
| Weddings | Freedom |
| Cafes | Beach |

Send your entry to:

Helen Prew, Summer wordsearch competition, emh group, Memorial House, Stenson Road, Coalville, Leicestershire LE67 4JP.

Closing date:

Friday 31st July 2020. Please note that the competition is not open to emh group employees.

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Tel:

SUPPORTING LOCAL CHARITIES

Many people in our communities are struggling during lockdown, but so are many of the charities that support them. Homelessness and food poverty are having a devastating effect on the lives of people in our communities, and we are seeing record numbers needing to use their services.

For the last few years our volunteers have taken part in the Long Eaton Sleep Out to raise funds for the Canaan Trust.

The charity has been providing supported accommodation for homeless men in and around Erewash since 1995, and the annual Sleep Out is one its main fundraising events. But due to social distancing restrictions the event had to be cancelled this year.

We have a strong working relationship with the charity, and in the year that it celebrates its 25th anniversary we are pleased that we have been able to make a donation to help towards the funding the charity has lost out on.

Throughout lockdown our Housing & Neighbourhoods team has maintained its customer focus and high standards of service. During April and May 97% of all queries were RESOLVED AT FIRST CONTACT.

78% of residents rated the service they received as VERY GOOD or EXCELLENT.

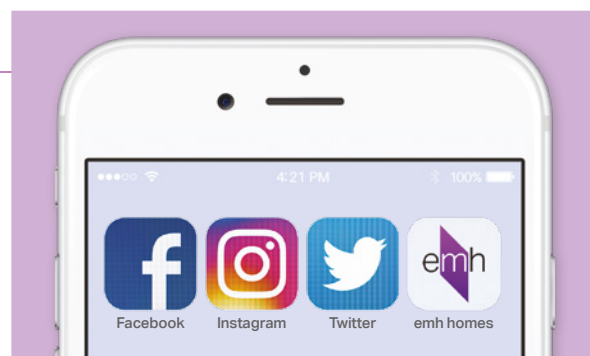
97% of residents thought the communication and information they received from the Housing Officer was JUST RIGHT.

CONTACTING US

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

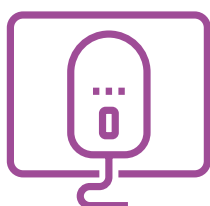
Over the last few weeks our Customer Services team has been contacting customers who have registered for myhomeonline but not used it for a while, reminding them of how easy it was to do the following:

- ▶ 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.