



NORTH STAR

Creating homes, building futures

Updated information about our services in light of the Coronavirus.

In April we wrote to you to share information about the services we continued to offer during the coronavirus pandemic. On Sunday 10th May the Prime Minister announced plans to begin lifting the 'lockdown' restrictions. Details shared by Government in the announcement and briefings which followed mean we've been able to review some of the restrictions on the services we provide. The purpose of this letter to set out what you can expect from North Star over the coming weeks.

We are clear we will continue to face disruption to our services but throughout this our absolute priority is the wellbeing and safety of customers, staff and contractors. We remain open for business with all staff working from home for the foreseeable future, apart from our essential support workers who continue to be based at our supported housing schemes. This means that our offices remain closed.

Maintenance and Repairs

During 'lockdown' we continued to complete urgent and emergency repairs. We are now also able to schedule routine repairs. The earliest date routine repair jobs can be booked in is **Monday 8th June 2020**. This is to enable our contractors time to complete any repairs which have been reported during lockdown or which were paused as a result of adhering to the 'lockdown' working restrictions.

As we restart our full repair service customers should expect:

- When arranging an appointment to be asked some questions relating to coronavirus and your household. This is to make sure it's safe to proceed with an appointment. If you are self-isolating or shielding you must make us aware.
- When we visit your home, we will operate safe ways of working and respect social distancing. To keep customers and staff safe we have issued specific guidance on how we will complete repairs safely.
- Any routine repair reported on or after 8th June will be completed within 20 working days.

In some exceptional circumstances, there might be unavoidable delays due to the contractors ability to source parts or materials as national supply businesses get back up and running. Where this is the case, we will regularly update you with progress.

To report a repair 24/7 please register at www.mynorthstar.online or call us on **03000 11 00 11**.



Customer Service Team

Delivering a high quality and effective telephone customer service is a high priority. Our Customer Service Team continue to be available to schedule repairs and resolve customer queries. During 'lockdown' we experienced a 50% reduction in the number of calls being received by the team. Since 11th May we have started to see a gradual increase in the number of calls we take and as a result during busy periods it may take longer to answer your call.

The best time to contact us by telephone is during an afternoon. Customers can also log repairs, make payments and check accounts and book appointments with our team online by registering at www.mynorthstar.online.

External Maintenance

Our contractors completing grounds maintenance are back working and completing services in communal areas. External work such as work on roofs, walls, fencing and paving will recommence with our contractor at the end of May and external decoration work will re-start in June 2020.

Building and Gas Safety Checks

Gas servicing remains a priority for us and we continue to complete gas servicing to comply with safety regulations. Additionally, we are also continuing our programme of building safety inspections and work.

When arranging a gas servicing appointment our team will ask some questions to make sure we can complete the appointment safely. If you're self-isolating or shielding, it's important to share that with us so we can consider how best to complete this work.

If we're unable to gain access to complete work as result of the Coronavirus we will document our attempts to do so and communicate this with you.

Moving Home

We continue to let our homes in partnership with the Local Authorities and during 'lockdown' our team has been able to complete house moves for those in urgent need of rehousing.

The Government has now announced that restrictions on moving are being eased. We will continue to work in partnership with Local Authorities to make sure are homes are prioritised to those people who need them the most.

To get households moving again, we are working closely with our contractor to ensure any empty homes requiring repair work are ready to let as soon as possible.

We will begin to let homes where we have already matched a new household with a property. To complete the letting process safely, we have established safe ways to complete viewings and appointments in line with Government guidance. However, to improve safety even further we are exploring ways to complete 'virtual viewings' and lettings using digital methods where possible.

If you would like to discuss options for moving, please contact your Housing Officer.



Support

The impact of the pandemic continues to disrupt our lives in ways we couldn't have imagined a few months ago. But, we continue to offer a range of support to help customers address some of the most challenging aspects of the situation.

Income: Following Government guidance we continue to charge rent and customers should continue to make payments.

We recognise this is challenging for some customers who have experienced disruption to employment and benefit claims. Our Welfare Benefits Team can assist if you're worried about money or paying your rent but it's vital that customers make contact early early contact with us to alleviate worry and make a plan for the future.

Anti-social Behaviour: Spending long periods of time at home can be stressful without worrying about nuisance or anti-social behaviour. If the enjoyment of your home is being impacted by anti-social behaviour we continue to have a range of options available to us to try and resolve the situation.

Domestic Abuse: We know the current situation of isolating with perpetrators of abuse could be causing survivors to feel especially unsafe. We take domestic abuse extremely seriously and have specially trained staff available to offer support during this challenging time.

If you're in immediate danger call 999. More information and support is available on our website <https://www.northstarhg.co.uk/about-north-star/news/coronavirus-domestic-abuse-support-help-guidance/>.

Wellbeing: Customers have told us that 'lockdown' is having an impact on people's mental health, feelings of loneliness and is putting strain on relationships. Our team are here to assist you. Whether it's with advice and guidance on getting support with mental ill health, a conversation to ease feelings of loneliness or addressing concerns for your safety, we're here for you.

Our Communities Team are connected with a range of projects across the North East who can assist with collecting shopping and prescriptions.

To discuss any support you might need please contact us through our website or by calling 03000 11 00 11.

Customer and Community Involvement

Although social distancing has meant our regular involvement of customers in person has not been possible, we have remained in contact with our involved customers and can continue to connect on the phone, digitally and through surveys.

Our Communities Team is currently planning new ways we can connect with customers and involve you in our decision making whilst social distancing continues. We look forward to sharing these options with you soon.

We will experience the effects of the coronavirus for many more months to come but we wanted to share these first steps we are taking to reset our services. We would like to thank you for your continued patience whilst we work as quickly and safely as possible to reset all of our services to the levels you have come to expect.

Kind Regards



Angela Lockwood

Chief Executive

