

## **Monday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020**

Dear Resident,

A couple of weeks ago we set out our recovery plan based on the Government's alert levels. Today, the 1st June, the alert level remains at 4, although the Government is starting to ease the lockdown and has announced a number of changes to take place over the next few weeks. These measures are primarily to kick-start the economy and reduce the public spending bill. Despite these measures, in principle social distancing remains in force and people are still being told that they should work from home if possible. The risk of infection is still high and a second spike is highly possible. Whilst this remains the case, PCHA staff will continue to work from home and deliver a service remotely.

The reality is that, until there is a vaccine, Covid-19 remains with us. Even when a vaccine is found, life will not simply return to a pre-Covid status. We will be living with this virus, and the economic, psychological and social effects, for many years. Life will simply not return to the old "normal" and we need to decide what the new "normal" might look like. Whilst this is scary, for PCHA there is a real opportunity to shape the way we do things going forward, and we would like your input in this. We now know we can do a great deal from home and by phone, and this gives us an opportunity to think differently about the future. For example, rather than simply returning to a Monday to Friday 9 to 5pm, we could work more flexibly to meet your needs... we literally have a blank page to redesign our services.

One of the current challenges is the number of mixed messages and inevitable confusion as the Government tries to ease out of lockdown. However, it is simply NOT "business as usual" and will not be for many months. We want to be honest about this. We all want to get back to normal but this is not a simple process and will take time.

In the meantime, for the foreseeable future:

- The office will remain closed to the public – visits by appointment only (social distancing must be observed). We will be reconfiguring our office to allow for this
- Home visits will be severely restricted
- Most staff will continue to work from home where possible
- Services such as rent payments, tenancy matters, ASB, complaints etc. are to be managed by phone or virtual meetings
- Day-to-day repairs and maintenance work may start again, but with a risk-based approach – i.e. we will assess risk to both resident and contractor (and ‘willingness’ of both) to decide if and when work can go ahead
- Repairs may be delayed due to difficulty sourcing contractors and supplies
- We will continue to carry out weekly fire alarm tests at communal blocks together with monthly health and safety inspections.

We will continually review the situation and regularly publish updates on our website and Facebook page.

We would welcome your input on how we can design our service for a post Covid-19 world so if you would like to be involved, please contact Karen on [karen@pcha.co.uk](mailto:karen@pcha.co.uk).

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On the 18<sup>th</sup> May, **the** Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP, Minister of State for Housing, published a letter to social housing residents regarding the steps that the Government is taking to reopen society and support you and your family to move on with your lives. This letter can be found on the Government website.

The following is our response and sets out our current position.

### **Keeping you safe**

This remains our priority. The safety of residents, staff and partners remains our primary driver in everything we do and every decision we make.

## **Maintenance and Repairs**

You should have a decent, warm and safe place to live, this is indisputable and we are committed to provide this.

However, there are some significant challenges to offering a normal repairs service as our contractors and supply chains are also affected by the current crisis. We have continued to offer an essential repairs service throughout the last 10 weeks and we will continue to do so. We also know many of you do not wish to have contractors in your home, unless essential.

As we start to ease lockdown measures, our recovery plan sets out our desire to start looking at how we might carry out routine as well as essential repairs for most households. Our approach works on the following 3 principles:

- That we, and our contractors, have the capacity/resources to deliver a safe service
- That the repair is mutually agreeable to all parties, with a willingness from the resident, PCHA and contractor to proceed and
- That it is SAFE for all parties to do so.

We will risk assess every repair individually and discuss the way forward with you. However, there will be a backlog of repairs and it will take longer than normal to carry out more non-essential work. Our current target times for repairs have been suspended. Additionally, some routine repairs such as fencing may be put on hold due to budgetary concerns.

When we do carry out any repairs, our contractors should notify you in advance of arrival, maintain a safe distance and follow hygiene procedures, as set out in this guidance: [Working safely during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#). No work should be carried out in any household which is isolating or where an individual is being shielded, unless it is to remedy a direct risk. In such a case, prior arrangements should be made to avoid any face to face contact, for example when answering the door.

We want to be clear that when we talk about self-isolating, we mean when you have been instructed to self-isolate because you, or a member of your household, has symptoms or has tested positive for Covid-19.

Where you simply would prefer not to have a contractor in your home, we will discuss this with you to agree the best way forward.

### **External maintenance and services**

We may start to resume external planned maintenance works and services where we believe we can do so safely. However, we are not expecting to carry out a full programme this year.

### **Internal planned repairs**

We will not be carrying out internal planned maintenance, such as new kitchens and bathrooms, unless deemed essential. This is, in part because the length of time it takes to complete these works make it hard for us to ensure everyone is kept safe. Where we do carry out these works, they will only take place in homes where residents are not shielding or self-isolating.

We will be starting to carry out maintenance and repairs in empty properties, so that they can be re-let to new tenants.

### **Gas safety checks**

Every year, people die and are seriously injured by poorly maintained gas appliances. We continue therefore to make every effort to abide by our statutory safety obligations, such as annual gas safety inspections, particularly as people are spending most of their time at home.

If you are formally self-isolating, you should inform us and we will rearrange the gas safety check to take place after your isolation period has ended. If you are shielding, we will balance the risk presented taking into account factors such as the age and type of appliance, previous maintenance history and date of the last gas check. In some situations, this might indicate that the gas safety inspection should still go ahead. In such a case, prior arrangements should be made to avoid any face to face contact, for example when answering the door. Our contractor, Clairglow, will be up to date with the latest guidance on how to work safely.

If you smell gas, or if you have concerns about the safety of your appliances, you should call the gas emergency service provider on 0800 111 999, and switch off appliances until the gas emergency supplier, or a registered gas engineer, has attended and advised that the appliances are safe to use.

### **Building safety**

We are clear that making buildings safe is a key priority and if you have any concerns please contact us on [healthandsafety@pcha.co.uk](mailto:healthandsafety@pcha.co.uk).

**For tenants seeking to move home**

We will risk assess any request to move on an individual basis.

Our Recovery plan is constantly being assessed and updated and we would welcome your views on this and our future service. Please contact me if you would like to be involved in shaping our post-Covid world.

Best wishes

*Karen*

Karen Cooper  
**Chief Executive**  
PCHA