

Coronavirus Outbreak – Our Service FAQs

Following advice from the Government, PCHA is taking essential measures to protect our residents, staff and contractors during the coronavirus outbreak. Our office is closed to visitors and we have now moved to carrying out essential repairs only. In this leaflet we have answered some ‘frequently asked questions’ regarding the services we are providing during the outbreak, as well as questions around paying your rent at this time and support available to you. You can also find the most up-to-date information on our website at www.pcha.co.uk or on our Facebook page [@PengeChurchesHA](https://www.facebook.com/PengeChurchesHA).

Maintenance & Repairs Service

Why are you only carrying out essential repairs during the outbreak?

Following the guidance and instructions from the Government on 23rd March we have taken the decision to only carry out essential repairs so that we can protect you, other residents and our contractors from the spread of the virus as much as possible. We recognise that this may be frustrating but our priority is your safety and that of our staff and partners.

What is classed as an essential repair?

In the main, all emergency repairs as defined in our “Reporting Repairs” leaflet found on our website will be treated as an essential repair. In summary, this will be any repair that may cause further damage to buildings or danger to the resident or other resident. This may include issues such as major leaks, loss of power or major electrical faults, security issues or faults with fire safety equipment or a blocked toilet where it is the only toilet in the property and you have been unable to unblock it yourself. Heating and boiler repairs will usually be classed as essential if there is no other source of heating or hot water available.

What is *not* an essential repair?

Generally this will be any other repair where there is no risk of damage to the property and no danger to residents. This will include minor leaks, fencing, internal doors, kitchen cupboards or an individual plug socket/light not working.



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If I report an essential repair how will you ensure my safety?

During this period, contractors working in PCHA properties are required to:

- Wear gloves and masks as necessary
- Wash their hands on entry
- Keep their distance from residents where practically possible (2 metres minimum). Ideally residents must stay in another room.
- Clean all working areas prior to their work commencing.
- Wipe down any surfaces with anti-bacterial wipes on completion.
- Dispose of their gloves and cleaning materials into a bin bag and wash their hands on leaving.
- Report to PCHA if there is any coronavirus amongst their staff and isolate immediately.

Is there anything else I need to know about repairs?

When booking appointments with contractors, you will be asked the following questions:

- Have you or anyone you live with shown signs or symptoms of the coronavirus over the last few days? (a high temperature or a new, continuous cough)
- Have you or anyone you live with been diagnosed or knowingly been in contact with anyone who has the coronavirus?
- Are you or anyone you live with currently in self-isolation?
- Are you over 70 years old?
- Do you have any health conditions?

On the day of the booking, further processes are in place:

- Contractors are required to phone on the day of the appointment, before their arrival to ask the same questions above – they will only proceed with the appointment if safe to do so.
- You will be asked to keep your distance from the contractors where practically possible (2 metres minimum). Ideally you should stay out of the room throughout the works.

How do I report an essential repair?

For essential boiler or gas repairs call Clairglow on **0800 0748055**. For all other essential repairs you can email us at repairs@housing.co.uk or call our emergency repair number, **07808 608578**. “Out of hours” emergencies should continue to be reported to BAS on **0208 854 8700**.



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Health & Safety

Are you continuing to carry out H&S inspections of communal areas?

We are confident that the communal areas are safe. However, we do currently carry our regular inspections of these areas and following the guidance and instructions from the Government on 23rd March we have taken the decision to suspend these inspections until it is safe to continue. We will monitor Government guidance on a daily basis and update you accordingly via the PCHA website and Facebook page. Meanwhile, if you wish to report any incident that you consider to be a health and safety risk, please do so at healthandsafety@pcha.co.uk.

Will you be continuing to carry out weekly fire alarm checks at communal buildings?

The fire alarm systems within our stock are serviced annually and, in addition to the weekly checks carried out by our caretaker, they are subject to twice yearly inspections by our specialist contractor. We are confident that the systems are reliable and safe and we will continue to carry out weekly checks whilst we can safely do so. However, we will be monitoring the changing situation closely and may need to reduce the frequency of the checks in the coming weeks and months.

What can I do to help ensure my building is safe?

Health and safety is everyone's responsibility. Please ensure that any emergency repairs within your home are reported to us at repairs@pcha.co.uk. With regard to communal areas, please follow the following advice:

- Ensure rubbish is disposed of in the designated bin areas and NOT left in communal walkways or lobbies
- Do not store items in dry risers or electrical cupboards
- Do not leave bicycles or buggies in communal areas or walkways
- Please report any concerns to us at healthandsafety@pcha.co.uk.



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Difficulty in paying your rent as a result of coronavirus

We recognise that as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, the way in which people work and carry out daily activities is changing overnight. This could have a direct impact on your personal finances and your ability to pay your rent.

Why is it important for me to continue paying my rent through this crisis?

As a small non-profit housing association, PCHA relies on your rental income to sustain the business. If residents don't pay their rent we will be unable to carry out repairs and other duties and ultimately we would not survive. In light of the coronavirus outbreak, the National Housing Federation, which represents housing associations in England, said that no one should face the threat of eviction as a result of the coronavirus outbreak and at PCHA we strongly support that view. However, given this current situation may go on for some months, it is imperative that you continue to pay your rent to avoid substantial long-term debts, hefty repayment plans and/or eviction once everything returns to normal. It is vital that you talk to us immediately if you have any concerns.

What help can I get to pay my rent?

We regularly deal with residents who are struggling and we understand how to help you manage your rent payments, sustain your tenancy and remain in your home.

Our top tips for dealing with arrears are:

- If you are in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, update them immediately if your circumstances change and provide them with any evidence requested as soon as possible.
- If you are not currently in receipt of either of these, seek advice about your entitlement to Housing Benefit or Universal Credit as soon as possible and submit the claim as a matter of urgency to avoid delay in receiving your benefits.
- Always update Housing Benefit or Universal Credit immediately to get your claim assessed as soon as possible as payment will likely be delayed and may not be backdated.
- Always stay in communication with PCHA to provide regular updates on the actions you are taking to maintain your rent payments and resolve any arrears.

In addition to the above, the Government has introduced temporary emergency regulations if you are infected, in isolation or caring for your child. For example, 'New Style' Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) lifts the usual 7-day waiting period before the claim can commence. Universal Credit have also put various temporary regulations in place and you should contact them if you think you are affected.



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How can I find out more detail about the help announced by the Government in recent press briefings?

We will aim to keep residents updated as and when further guidance is released. In the meantime, other useful resources include:

Covid-19 and benefits: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/landing-pages/covid-19-and-benefits>

Support for those affected by Covid-19: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-those-affected-by-covid-19>

Coronavirus and claiming benefits: <https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/>

Coronavirus: employment rights and sick pay: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/social-policy/health/coronavirus-employment-rights-and-sick-pay/>

Get coronavirus support as an extremely vulnerable person: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable>

You can also seek advice from:

- Citizen Advice Bureau at Bromley Well Being on **0300 3309 039**
- National Debtline on 0808 8084000 or www.nationaldebtline.co.uk.

I have read the information provided and am still concerned and unclear about how to seek assistance. What can I do?

If you find that you are struggling to pay your rent and are unable to access the help available or make a claim yourself, please contact us as soon as possible at housing@pcha.co.uk. Our Resident Support Officer or another member of the team can assist you to make a claim for appropriate benefits and if necessary we will work with you to agree a suitable repayment arrangement should you fall into arrears. Please note, if you have existing rent arrears and are making payments under an arrangement or Court Order, you should continue to adhere to that arrangement. If you cannot for any reason you must contact us immediately.

