

# Orbit Life

Autumn/Winter  
2021



Building thriving communities...

## Customer annual report special edition!

### in this issue...

Delivering our Customer Promise, our 2020-21 customer annual report  
Pages 2 and 3

Our first ever Orbit Life reader survey and your chance to win!  
Pages 4 to 6





## Welcome message from Paul Richards

What a difference a year makes. It's been over a year since we first entered lockdown and while we are now seeing restrictions easing and life returning to some sense of normality, the past year and a half has been extremely challenging for everyone.

The enormity of the task to keep you - our customers - and your homes and neighbourhoods safe and supported throughout lockdown has not been taken lightly, and our teams have worked tirelessly to deliver everything from essential repairs and maintenance to wellbeing checks.

During this time, communication and engagement were more important than ever. We made tens of thousands of welfare calls to our customers and where possible, we maintained our presence on our estates. We also helped others in the community who were making a difference, making donations and supporting local foodbanks and community groups. Following feedback from you, we have made significant improvements to our digital service. We launched a brand-new customer website followed by our new myAccount portal. This online tool allows you to report repairs more easily and view your account information.

We've also simplified our organisational structure to help us work more efficiently. More details can be found by visiting our customer website. Delivering the best customer service we can remains our absolute aim. Our new Customer Promise has a clear purpose: 'to help you and your communities to thrive'. The new Promise contains four clear commitments: delivering an excellent customer experience; providing high quality safe and sustainable homes; bringing positive change to places and communities; and working together for a better day.

In our Customer Promise we prioritise safety and value for money, while addressing environmental challenges, by making our homes more energy efficient. We also commit to being inclusive, valuing the diversity of the communities we work in.

This has been, without doubt, the most challenging time for everyone. We know how much you rely on us to be a great landlord and we also know we don't always get things right. However, we are listening and striving to improve, and hopefully you will recognise this through our actions during this difficult period, and through the commitments we are making in our Customer Promise.

I look forward to your ongoing feedback and I hope that you enjoy reading this summary of the report.

Kind Regards,  
**Paul Richards,**  
Director of Customer and Communities

To read the full version of our customer annual report, please visit: [bit.ly/3q3Lrz5](https://bit.ly/3q3Lrz5)



## Welcome message from Fiona, one of our Engaged Customers in Warwickshire

In more normal times, Engaged Customers use a combination of Your Voice, Orbit's online platform, and face-to-face meetings, to share customer feedback. Because of the pandemic, everything had to move online. One positive was we were able to get to know other residents from all over the country, but it also meant we needed to learn to collaborate in a different way, and it sometimes proved challenging.

Senior managers have been involved in meetings, which has given everyone more insight into how things work and fit together. With management's support, Engaged Customers have contributed to the following:

- Helping to shape Orbit's new Customer Promise, which puts customers at the heart of everything Orbit does
- Reviewing the Government's 'Social Housing White Paper', which focuses on customer voice and influence, to help Orbit achieve greater accountability
- Creating an EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) survey for customers to feed into via Your Voice, to ensure Orbit's services are accessible to everyone
- Learning more about the work of Orbit's Tenancy Sustainment team, and how the introduction of a Tenancy Intervention Officer has helped support new customers who may be struggling with a new tenancy, particularly during the pandemic.

This year, we plan to look at how Orbit ends tenancies with customers and review the policies and procedures that go with that. We will also review how Orbit works with contractors, and how systems and communications can work together effectively to improve our customers' experience.

**"This last year has been unique and changed the way we work with Orbit to bring the customers' voice to the forefront. Despite the pandemic, Engaged Customers were still involved in a whole number of ways. We continued to be included in policy making, as well as challenging and holding Orbit to account, so that services can continue to be improved for all customers."**

Fiona, from Warwickshire, who is a member of our Engaged Customer Group



To find out how you can get involved, please visit [orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/getinvolved](https://orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/getinvolved)



## 2020-21 highlights

We are committed to delivering our Customer Promise and building thriving communities. Our aim is to provide good quality housing that you can be proud to call home, whilst investing in your

communities to make them great places to live in. Over the last 12 months, we've invested over £82m in existing homes, which translates into 27,000 improvements to homes and estates.

We remain committed to meeting quality, safety, environmental and design standards, so that you, our customers, live in modern, well maintained homes.



**4.2 out of 5 overall customer satisfaction**

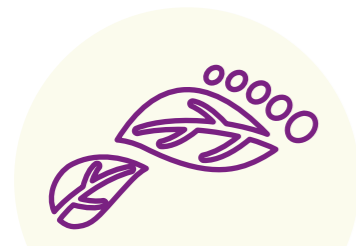
(increase from 4.1 in 2019-20)



**Over 45,000 homes, 848 brand new homes**



**£64.2m invested in repairs, home improvements, customer safety and heating/electrics**



**21% reduction in our carbon footprint since 2018-19 and a switch to 100% renewable electricity in our offices and communal areas**



**914 customers helped through employment and skills training**



**3,039 coaching sessions on jobs, training and volunteering**



**101 customers found employment with our support**



**559 customers were supported with their mental wellbeing via our free wellbeing support programmes**



## Customer engagement

Our customers make a real difference, by getting involved and helping us to shape our services, voting on our online polls, taking part in local activities, or sitting on our Housing Association Board.



**Delivered 242 customer engagement activities\***



**378 customers regularly engaged with us**



**Achieved an average customer satisfaction Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 52.5 for the year**

(anything above 50 is generally considered excellent).



**167 improvements were identified through our activities**



\*Across a range of channels such as conference calls, webinars and through our digital engagement platform (Your Voice) on a range of topics.

### Award winning engagement

Working in partnership with customers, we won the Outstanding Tenant Engagement Award at this year's Tpas Awards. Tpas is a not-for-profit organisation that promotes, supports and champions tenant involvement and empowerment in affordable housing across England. We won the award for the work we do together to bring the customer voice to the forefront everything we do and for the range of ways we give customers to

feedback on your experiences, review our performance, influence decisions and help shape recommendations for improvement. Our Virtual Customer Inspection activity also won the Delegates' Choice award at the National Housing Maintenance Forum (NHMF) Conference Awards 2021.

We would like to say a big thank you to all our Engaged Customers who not only helped win these awards, but more importantly shared their views and experiences. We're always grateful for your support!



## Customer engagement continued...

### Together with Tenants

This year, we co-created our approach to Together with Tenants. In consultation with several working groups, we completed a self-assessment against the charter commitments, to look at where we need to improve and to help shape our communications and new Complaints policy.

### Scrutinising our services

Our scrutiny champions meet regularly, to review our performance and customer feedback, and to decide on scrutiny topics. We collect data and insight to help get a better understanding of topics, and support our customers in getting involved, so that we can find solutions together.

### Your Voice

Your Voice is an online platform where we engage with our customers, on the topics that matter to you. It provides an opportunity for you to feedback on your experiences, make recommendations for improvement, and help to influence our future decisions, through surveys, polls, and discussion forums.

This year we introduced a brand-new virtual activity, which provides our customers with an opportunity to hold us to account and improve the standard of the homes we let. Videos of homes for re-let are filmed and posted on the platform and a survey function allows our customers to provide feedback. This gives us vital feedback that improves those all important first impressions when our customers move into their new homes.

### Your Voice Communities

We have introduced Your Voice communities, which provide an opportunity to engage with your local neighbourhood, scheme, or community. Local events, information and estate inspection dates are regularly posted, and you can tell us what you would like to improve in the area you live.

Your Voice virtual conference  
We delivered our first ever virtual conference, bringing together customers, senior Orbit leaders and our Board to engage on a variety of topics, helping to shape our new Customer Promise.



## Lettings, rent and service charges

### Lettings

Last year, we welcomed 2,171 new customers into a new home with us, either in a re-let or a brand-new home. Customers who experienced a good first impression of us as a landlord has remained steady at a score of 4.2 out of 5.

- **96.3 days** is the average amount of time taken to re-let one of our empty properties, compared to 59.4 days in 2019-20, due to the pandemic
- **97.8%** of our properties currently occupied (compared to 98.1% last year).

### Rent

Building thriving communities is our vision, and the rent you pay helps us achieve this together. This includes providing maintenance and improvements to your homes, building much needed new affordable homes for people who need them, and a range of support services for everyone.

Thank you to the 97.8% of customers who pay their rent on time. This helps us to keep collection costs down and allows us to focus on delivering better services and improving your homes.

### Service charges

It's important to us that the services we provide to you represent good value for money and that we provide you with a breakdown of your annual service charge statement so that you know what services were delivered and how much they cost.

Better collaboration between our Service Charge team and Property Managers has resulted in more efficient ways to manage your service charges, so statements are issued earlier. This means more accurate and transparent service charge costs for you and a reduced number of customer enquiries.



**If you're ever experiencing any difficulty paying your rent please let us know - we're here to help and there are a number of options to support you if you're struggling.**

Period	2020-2021	2021-2022	Number of enquiries	Percentage increase or decrease
April	650	586	64	-9.85%
May	563	450	113	-20.07%
June	488	384	104	-21.31%

We've developed a brand new customer handbook, which provides an overview of all our services in one helpful booklet. You can check out the new handbook by visiting: [orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/customerhandbook](https://orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/customerhandbook) or by scanning our handy QR code:





## Customer Service Centre

Our aim for last year was to deliver a clear and consistent service to all customers and ensure that your queries were dealt with effectively. Despite the challenges the pandemic presented, we continued to deliver a full service to customers. In addition to being responsive to nearly 400,000 incoming calls and queries, we also made 11,000 outbound calls to see whether you required any additional support.

### How our Customer Service Centre performed:

Overall customer satisfaction with the Customer Service Centre **4.36 out of 5** (compared to **4.3** in 2019-2020)

Call abandonment rate –  
2019-20 - **22%**,  
2020-21 - **10.8%**

As we seek to improve our digital services, we also responded to **3,000** live chat conversations via the 'contact us' webpage on our new customer website.

Our frontline teams handled a total of **490,000** inbound queries (both phone and digital) from customers. We improved on our overall call abandonment rate for the year, with the number of calls that we did not reach reducing from **22%** in 2019-20 to **10.8%** in 2020-21.

**1,410** complaints received, compared to **893** in 2019-20 (an increase of **517** or **57.9%**)

- We substantially reduced the average number of working days we target to respond to formal complaints from **25 to 13**
- **95.8%** resolved within timescales (**91%** last year)
- **0.6%** of customers who had a complaint dealt with informally, wanted to escalate it to a formal complaint
- **37** cases investigated by the Housing Ombudsman.\*

\*Some of these relate to complaints reported in 2019-20

### Complaints

Our Customer Promise outlines our commitment to deliver excellent services and high-quality homes. We've made our complaints processes clearer, so our customers can raise their concerns. Complaints have gone up as demand for our services increased during the pandemic, and also due to our more open approach to encouraging complaints and feedback as part of the new 'Housing Ombudsman Code'.

We're making it easier for you to contact us and access our services through our new customer website and improvements we've made to myAccount. By creating an account you can access myAccount and report a repair or view statements 24/7, and at a time that suits you. We are continually updating this service and looking at new features and benefits.



## Working together to improve your neighbourhood

We manage our public spaces more effectively when our customers and teams come together. By delivering a coordinated 'taskforce' approach, we aim to improve the look, management and design of your communities.

Our Property Managers completed 16,330 tasks last year, including cleaning, repair and maintenance requests. 4,479 (or 98%) estate inspections were carried out on time and in line with social distancing legislation. 290 (8%) of these inspections took place alongside Engaged Customers.

### Independent Living

Following a substantial customer feedback exercise in 2019 where we surveyed over 1,200 customers and a review of how Independent Living operates, our new employee structure went live in October 2020. We're pleased to say that as part of the many improvements from this organisational change, we now have a designated employee for each of our Independent Living schemes.

- Number of wellbeing calls made by the teams during the pandemic – **5,000 calls per week**
- Total number of food parcels arranged by employees for customers – **60 per week**
- Number of referrals made to supporting agencies – **216 to Better Days** and **over 600 to other external support agencies**, such as food banks and befriending services.



To hear about the difference our wellbeing calls made to one of our customers, just visit: [bit.ly/2YBoc4c](https://bit.ly/2YBoc4c)



Providing high quality, safe and sustainable homes

## Responsive repairs

Despite the obvious challenges, we continued to provide a repairs service throughout the pandemic. Our focus was to complete repairs whilst applying coronavirus safe practices, so all our customers, employees and contractors remained safe.



## Home improvements

We had to scale back our home improvement programme, including kitchens and bathrooms, as they take time to complete. Instead, we focused on completing essential works that didn't require us to enter customers' homes for long periods of time.



## Customer safety

Our priority is to keep you safe in your home and we remained every bit as focused on carrying out over £10m of safety enhancements. We expanded our Customer Safety team to ensure we are working to keep you and your family safe.

Last year, we achieved:



Our new fire safety tool has been shortlisted for a 2021 Safety and Health Excellence Award. Designed to help you identify the fire risks in your home, check out the interactive video please visit [bit.ly/38KHRAw](https://bit.ly/38KHRAw) or scan our handy QR code:



[orbitcustomerhub.org.uk](https://orbitcustomerhub.org.uk)



Providing high quality, safe and sustainable homes

## Energy efficiency

Many of us spent more time in our homes in the last year, making our home more important than ever before. We have continued our energy investment programme to ensure all our homes are safe, warm and affordable. 99.1% of our homes meet the Government's Decent Home Standard and 80.39% of our homes achieve Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band C or higher. We aim to reach 100% by 2030.

vehicles, purchasing renewable electricity and improving energy efficiency in our communal areas and homes.

We've also:

- Planted 1,020 trees and hedges at Applegarth House in Erith.
- Transformed an underutilised corner in Tanyard Farm, Coventry into a beautiful pollinator-friendly 'pocket park'.
- At Pathways Care Farm in Lowestoft, we're helping customers become more green by teaching them how to grow vegetables and how to compost.

## Caring for our planet

We've made real progress with our carbon footprint.

Since we first began calculating in 2018-19, we have achieved 21% reduction. This is due to actions like using more fuel-efficient

**Like you, we care about our planet. The plastic bag that this edition of Orbit Life magazine came in is now fully recyclable, so please include it in your plastic recycling.**

We have made a firm commitment to achieving net zero carbon in our operations by 2030 and to become net zero carbon with our homes and supply chain before 2050. To find out more about our sustainability strategy, please visit: [orbitgroup.org.uk/our-esg-strategy/](https://orbitgroup.org.uk/our-esg-strategy/) and to learn more about our net zero carbon roadmap, go to: [bit.ly/3Du1vhx](https://bit.ly/3Du1vhx)

## Wildlife outside your window

We've partnered with The Wildlife Trusts to better support nature's recovery and improve outdoor spaces for everyone. Together, we've created a handy free booklet full of easy ideas and tips to try in your own outdoor space - whether it be a garden or window ledge, to improve the wildlife outside your window. We



also held a photography competition over the summer and have just announced our winners.

Check out the their photos and the booklet by visiting: [orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/wildlife](https://orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/wildlife) where

you can download your free copy (and save on printing!)

## Your energy, our support

You've probably seen stories in the news about how energy prices are going to be going up this year and we want you to know we're here to help. From guidance to support, money advice or even if you just need general support for you or your family's wellbeing, we have some amazing people who understand and can provide quick and simple advice.

We've pulled together some practical advice about how you can access support through our Better Days programme and find out more about discounts available from the Government and energy suppliers. To find out more, please visit:

[orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/help-support/your-energy-our-support/](https://orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/help-support/your-energy-our-support/)





Bringing positive change to people and communities

## Estate Services

Our Estate Services teams responded quickly to the pandemic and continued to deliver grounds maintenance and cleaning services throughout the year.

- Over **6,000** cleaning and grounds maintenance quality inspections were carried out – **25%** more than last year
- We achieved an **89%** average quality score out of 100, a **1.5%** increase from the previous year (against a target of **85%**)
- We also took a further **12%** of cleaning and grounds maintenance services in-house, which saved over **£100,000**.



Our independent Living schemes Buckles Court, Sherwood House, Lambert Court, Bushey Court, Marler House and Flaxman Court (pictured) in South London, have all been awarded certificates in the Royal Horticultural Society's national gardening competition – Britain in Bloom. A big thank you and well done to our customers who worked so hard to create such beautiful spaces. Blooming lovely!

## Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

Our Customer Promise sets out a clear commitment to deliver the best customer experience. With over 100,000 customers, we want our services and how we interact with you, to be representative of the diverse range of people who make up our communities.

We've created a brand-new EDI webpage that contains information about the events we support each year. This year, we've supported LGBTQ+ History Month, Dementia Awareness Week, Pride Month and Black History Month. To find out more, visit: [orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/equality-diversity-inclusion/](https://orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/equality-diversity-inclusion/)



## Supporting our communities

We achieve something called 'social value' when we work with our partners to deliver improvements in our communities. The companies who build, refurbish and maintain your homes use their skill sets such as plumbing, carpentry and landscaping to give back to our communities.

The projects we deliver together help reduce anti-social behaviour, feed families, get customers online, provide mental health

support and offer training and apprenticeships to help encourage employment.

We've just launched a Winter Support programme to see what additional support they can provide to help customers get through the colder months.

We will be matching every penny they donate, so that we can really make a difference to those families who need it most this winter.

Working together for a better day



## Better Days

We are proud to be more than just a landlord, and by funding additional support services through our Better Days programme, we are able to offer you help and advice in a number of ways. Last year, we supported over 3,000 people and this year, we want to help even more. Here's what some of our customers who received support from Better Days had to say:

"The Better Days team referred me to Breathing Space early on in the pandemic and they have been absolutely brilliant over the last few difficult months. Thank you to everyone who made that happen."

"My coach was just amazing. I was not getting anywhere with the job centre, but she helped me to get a job and plan for the future. Could not have done it without her!"

"I would like to thank you for my Super Surfer grant. I received a tablet and 'At Home Support' lessons to learn how to use it. It will help me keep in touch with my children and grandchildren in America, China and Manchester. Many thanks, much appreciated."



Better Days is a free service available to all our Orbit customers. We can provide help and support on a wide range of topics, including wellbeing and mental health, money advice and support, employment and digital skills. These are just some of the things we can help you with.

To find out more, visit our website or contact us using the information below – we're here to help.

Visit: [orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/help-support/](https://orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/help-support/)  
• Email: [betterdays@orbit.org.uk](mailto:betterdays@orbit.org.uk)

Text: 07860 017 857 • Phone: 0800 678 1221 and select option 4

## Thriving Communities

Our Thriving Communities team worked hard to enable our Better Days programmes to adapt and continue to provide invaluable advice and support services to our customers and communities throughout the pandemic. There was a big increase in online and phone support across the programme with an increase of 300% on the previous year.

Our Thriving Communities Awards celebrate Orbit customers and partners who go the extra mile to make a contribution to their local area or who have made a positive impact on their own lives. Normally, the winners are announced at an annual ceremony in London. This year, we made socially distanced surprise visits to the winners, to deliver the good news! To view our winners' video, please visit: [bit.ly/3mZqnrN](https://bit.ly/3mZqnrN)



## Thriving Communities continued...

In response to the pandemic, we invested £40,000 into food banks and other welfare support projects to support customers and help ensure that no one had to go without the basics. In January 2021, we supported 20 local community projects through our Covid Recovery Fund, investing over £150,000 to help communities to recover from the pandemic and access vital community resources.



**We've helped resource a mental health project in Suffolk for young people, supporting children to deal with the effects of covid on their mental health through a digital upskilling course, counselling and a mental health ambassador scheme in schools.**

## Tenancy Sustainment

Early on in the pandemic, we reached out to help our most vulnerable customers. Our team made over 5,000 wellbeing calls, and referred 5,279 customers to our support services, so that the people who needed us most received the additional support they needed.

We supported thousands of Orbit customers in what has, for many of us, been the most difficult time of our lives. Last May, we moved our face-to-face services online so we could continue to offer support and coaching to both existing and new customers. This included our group and 1-2-1 coaching, employment support, and all

training programmes offered by our third-party partners. The team was proud to be able to continue their work to help people sustain their tenancies, improve their financial positions, and move into training and employment, ensuring they were better off than before they reached out to us.

### Key achievements this year:

- 592 (100%) of new customers deemed as needing additional support when they began their tenancies with us, sustained their tenancies for at least 12 months
- We delivered a total of 3,039 coaching sessions on jobs, training and volunteering
- We referred 5,279 customers to additional support services, with 55% being at first point of contact to gain the right support, first time. 2,365 of those referrals were directly supported by a Tenancy Sustainment Job coach
- 76% of customers who received Tenancy Sustainment coaching have the same, or improved, their rent balance (an increase of 19% since 2019-20)
- We helped 101 customers find employment.

To find out how our Tenancy Sustainment supported a customer who needed an extra helping hand, please visit: [bit.ly/3mTDYk4](https://bit.ly/3mTDYk4)

## Just in time for Christmas...

Complete our readers' survey and you could be entered to win £100 of Love2Shop shopping vouchers!

We work hard to make sure that Orbit Life magazine gives you all the latest news and updates, however we want to get a better understanding about what YOU want to read about.

Submit your response by tearing off this page, completing the survey and popping it into the free business reply envelope included or you can complete it online by visiting [orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/OLreadersurvey](https://orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/OLreadersurvey)\*. We will enter the names of everyone who submits a response into a prize draw! The survey should only take about five minutes of your time and must be received by 5pm on 13 December in order to be eligible. For complete terms and conditions, please visit our website\*.

### 1.) How do you generally get information about Orbit and our services?

- Orbit Life magazine
- Orbit customer website ([orbitcustomerhub.org.uk](https://orbitcustomerhub.org.uk))
- Social media (@OrbitHelp on Facebook and Twitter)
- Your Voice (engaged customer postal)
- Your Property Manager or noticeboard in your scheme (if you have one)
- Other – please specify \_\_\_\_\_

### 2.) We publish, two print editions and four email versions of Orbit Life every year.

#### How often do you read Orbit Life?

- Always, every edition
- Only the email versions
- Only the print versions
- Rarely.

### 3.) What types of articles interest you the most (please select all that apply):

- Real life stories about customers and their achievements
- Local community news
- Improvements to our services (such as our new customer website, new myAccount portal etc)
- Customer annual report summary (how we perform as your housing provider)
- The environment and how we can all be greener
- 'Day in the life of' articles about the people who deliver your services
- Updates about Government changes (Universal Credit, energy spending cap etc)
- Safety information (keeping you and your family safe in your home)
- Competitions.

### 4.) If you could make one improvement to Orbit Life, what would it be?

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### 5.) Would you prefer to receive a print or digital version of Orbit Life?

- Digital
- Print

continued...



We're making every effort to reduce our carbon footprint and offer a digital version of this magazine! If you currently receive the print edition of Orbit Life and would like to help save the environment and switch to our digital version, we'll need a couple of extra details to help set it up:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth (so we can link up to your Orbit account) \_\_\_\_\_

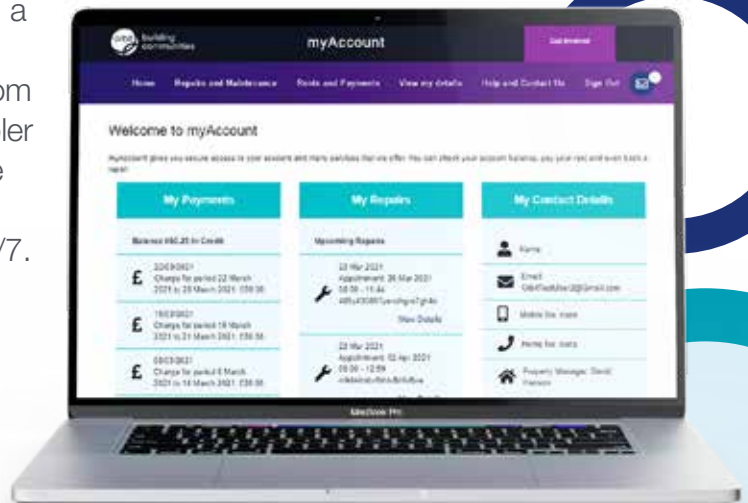
## Your new and improved myAccount!

Following the launch of your new customer website earlier this year, we're excited to be able to tell you about your new and improved myAccount. We have worked closely with customers to make sure we provide you with a service and function that you need from us. Once logged-in, you will be able to benefit from a better online experience thanks to the simpler navigation and improved look and feel. We're making it easier for you to provide or find the information you need, when you need it – 24/7.

You'll still be able to benefit from all of the existing features such as; viewing your rent balance and transaction history, making a payment and/or setting up a Direct Debit or booking a repair.

To learn more about all the exciting new features and to sign-up, please visit:

[orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/myaccount](https://orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/myaccount)



## Get in touch:

You can visit our website:

[orbitcustomerhub.org.uk](https://orbitcustomerhub.org.uk)

For more information, please contact us at:

[orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/contact-us](https://orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/contact-us)

Take a look on social media:

[f /OrbitHelp](https://www.facebook.com/OrbitHelp)

[@OrbitGroupUK](https://www.instagram.com/OrbitGroupUK)

[@OrbitHelp](https://www.twitter.com/OrbitHelp)

If you need information in a different format please contact us on **0800 678 1221**



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