

# Orbit Life

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Check out our new Day in the Life of video, featuring Josh, one of our Property Managers




# Meet our guest resident editor, Tommy Earley

## Meet Tommy, an Engaged Customer from Hastings and guest editor of this edition of Orbit Life...

*I moved into my Orbit home in 2023, so I'm a newer resident. I like to be involved in community living, so when I saw that Orbit is always looking for customers to help shape and review services, I put my name forward to become an Engaged Customer. Not only does it help Orbit understand how to make improvements for all customers, it also allows me to feedback on the services that residents in my own scheme receive. If you've ever thought about becoming an Engaged Customer, visit Orbit's **Share your views webpage**  to learn more. You can earn reward vouchers from Love2shop too!*

*In this edition of Orbit Life, you'll find a special feature on pages six and seven on estates and property management. Learn about some of the improvements*

*Orbit is making to the services we're receiving on our estates and how you can leave positive feedback as well as help Orbit by reporting any issues in your community.*

*Annual service charge budgets and rent review letters will be with you this month, so see page four for information on how to make sense of these and what to do if you have any queries. If you need a helping hand, you can attend one of the free Better Days winter wellbeing events or get in touch with Orbit's Better Days team to find out what support is available to you. Visit the **Better Days help and support webpage**  to find out more.*

*Finally, see the latest winner of the Love Your Community photography competition along with the overall winner on page nine. Enjoy reading this edition!*



We really hope you enjoy reading the magazine. If you have any comments or ideas for articles, we'd love to hear from you. We're always looking for customers to be guest editors too, so just get in touch if you're interested. It's a fun way to learn more about how we pull the magazine together, plus it won't take a lot of your time. Just email **campaigns@orbit.org.uk**.

# A message from our chief executive, Phil Andrew

Last month, we sent out an update from our Chief Executive, Phil Andrew. In case you missed it, it's your opportunity to learn about the changes we're making to give you a better experience as an Orbit customer and find out how you can shape future improvements.

You can read the update in full [here](#) .



## New Orbit Community Hubs offer face-to-face Better Days support for customers


To help make it easier for you to meet your local team, learn more about the support offered by our Better Days programme and get to know your neighbours through regular activities and events, we've opened two new Orbit Community Hubs.

In Norwich, we held an opening event at the new hub in St Anne's Quarter in December. Customers enjoyed festive activities and had the opportunity to tour the new hub and meet with our team and local partners. It was officially opened by The Lord Mayor Councillor Vivien Thomas and her Consort who unveiled a plaque at a celebration event for the community. She commented: "I was delighted to be invited to

open what will be a valuable community resource in Norwich offering vital face-to-face support for local residents and a space to bring the community together."

Last month at Micklewell Park in Daventry, we invited local residents to come along for a sneak peek of the new Orbit Community Hub ahead of the official opening in March. Customers had the opportunity to have a look around, find out about hub activities and share ideas with us about what they would like to see.

Barbara, a customer who lives at the scheme, said: "I'm looking forward to the Community Hub opening! It's a great space to get to know my neighbours and help create a real community at Micklewell Park. It's a very welcoming space and has great potential to bring the community together – we'll be able to learn new things and have some social events in our own community!"

If you'd like to find out more about events that are taking place near you, just visit our [events webpage](#) .



# Understanding your rent and service charges

## Your rent and service charge explained

We've started sending out the annual rent review and service charge letters, to let you know what your rent and any other charges will be for the year starting April 2025.

General details on rent regulations and calculations are available on our [website](#) .


Look out for your letter as it also includes information on how to pay your rent, including what to do if you receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. You can now request a copy of the letter we'll be sending you through [myAccount](#) . Follow, 'Raise a request' and then, 'Manage my account'.

If you pay a service charge, we'll also be writing to you to let you know about your service charge budget for the same period.


## Your service charges

Your service charge budget will set out what we expect your service charges to be for the upcoming year starting April 2025 through to the end of March 2026. We'll be sending you a service charge budget statement (which shows the amount we expect to spend on each of the services we provide, as well as the amount you'll pay) and a budget information sheet (which shows the comparison in costs over the last year and an explanation of how we've worked out your service charge).

## What to do if you have any questions about your service charge and how it's been calculated

Find out more about what's included in your service charge and how it's calculated [here](#) . If you still have questions, you can speak to your Scheme Manager/Scheme Officer or email us directly at [ServiceChargeTeam@orbit.org.uk](mailto:ServiceChargeTeam@orbit.org.uk).

## Do you need advice or support? Better Days is here to help

Our Better Days programme has partnered with Citizens Advice to provide you with expert money advice and support across a range of services. Visit our [MyMoney webpage](#)  for more information. You can also pop into one of our Community Hubs if there's one near you.



# How to be your pet's best friend

Being a pet owner can do wonders for our wellbeing. Pets can bring companionship, joy and love into our lives. At the same time, we can be their best friends by being responsible pet owners and care for their health and happiness for the whole of their lives.

We encourage responsible pet ownership; balancing the positive impact pets such as dogs, cats and other small animals can have, while ensuring they don't negatively affect others or cause a nuisance. As your housing provider, we won't unreasonably refuse permission for you to keep pets.

Our Engaged Customers are a keen group of animal lovers and recently reviewed our 'animal ownership policy'. As part of the review, they helped create some new guidance on owner responsibilities when it comes to pet ownership:

## Owner responsibilities

- If you wish to keep an uncaged domestic pet (such as a cat or dog), you must obtain our permission unless there is a special exemption (such as a guide dog or assistance dog). You can email [tenancymanagementtriage@orbit.org.uk](mailto:tenancymanagementtriage@orbit.org.uk) to request a form or raise a query in myAccount
- All pets must be kept in a reasonable manner and not be allowed to cause a nuisance to anyone or cause damage to your home
- Animals must not be kept for the purposes of breeding or sale

*Janine Barlow, an Engaged Customer who lives in Ipswich and has a hearing disability, told us what her cat, Ruby, means to her:*

*"Ruby is more than a cat you see, she's my mental health support cat and she does a lot of hearing for me because of my deafness. She alerts me to things going on outside my door. She also provides company and solace. From a wellbeing perspective, she's invaluable on the rough days."*


- The number of pets you can keep may be limited to ensure there are no issues of overcrowding (for the health of the animals, people or the upkeep and condition of your home)
- Dogs (including those visiting with friends or family) shouldn't be kept outside for long periods and must be kept on a lead at all times in communal areas
- Pets should have regular routine healthcare including vaccinations and regular control of parasites (such as fleas and worms)
- You are responsible for cleaning up after your pet within your property and in any gardens, pathways and/or communal areas.


To find out more about responsible pet ownership, download our 'animal ownership policy' [here](#). 

# Great estates!

We've been making some changes to improve the standard of services we provide in your estates.

Across all our estates, we've put new contracts in place for window cleaning and communal cleaning, along with new grounds maintenance contracts in the East and South. We're holding more customer meetings on your estates to address any issues.

We're committed to keeping you better informed about the services we're providing on your estates and if you visit our **Communal area maintenance webpage** , you'll see we've added more detailed information about these.

It's important you're able to contact us quickly and easily if you've got any estate services queries and you can now raise these in **myAccount** .

Look out for further updates as we continue to make improvements to your estate services.




Sylvia, a customer who lives in Northend, Warwickshire, said,

**"Ash, who comes here to do the grass etc, is always very good and works hard to keep things looking nice."**

## "...and action"... check out our new Property Management film

Our Property Managers are the eyes and ears of your communities. They play a vital role in keeping your buildings safe and running smoothly. By regularly visiting estates and by talking to you, they can report back to create long lasting solutions that benefit you and the community you live in.

To shine a light on the day-to-day responsibilities of a Property Manager, we've created a new film. Josh from our Midlands region is the star of the screen as we follow him out and about on a typical day to help keep communities safe, well maintained, clean and sustainable. Check out the film **here** .

Look out too for a series of interviews with Property Managers from some of our other regions. These conversations will appear as **blogs**  on our customer hub website in the coming months.



# Looking after your estates during winter

When it comes to grounds maintenance, we carry out different works, depending on the time of year. During the winter months (November to March), we do the following:

- Winter pruning. This includes reducing shrubs and hedges, as well as general tidying of all areas
- Grass edging, which means we cut the edges of the grass back to create straight edges
- Moss control. We use chemical and mechanical clearance methods to stay on top of moss growth over the winter period
- Clearing litter from shrub borders, hedges, grass and paved areas
- Clearing leaves from shrub borders, hedges, grass and paved areas

Our grounds contractors visit the majority of our estates 24 times in a year, with approximately 15 days between each visit and a longer gap over the Christmas period.




To find out more about grounds maintenance and our seasonal works, please visit **our website** .


## Let's talk trees

Did you know, there are around 12,000 communal trees on our estates?

It's our responsibility to care for the trees that are on our estates (and not within the boundary of individual homes), and we have a specialist tree team which oversees our planned and reactive tree works.

We're currently carrying out a survey of our communal trees. When we do this, the trees are mapped. We then make a decision on whether any works are needed to keep trees thriving and when these should be carried out. We expect to finish our survey in March 2026 and we will then have a three-year maintenance plan for all our communal trees. Every three years we'll survey the trees again, so we can monitor their growth and address any issues.

We ran a customer engagement session about estate services in November last year and there were lots of questions about trees and tree maintenance. We've put the answers to these in the 'frequently asked questions' section of the communal spaces area on the **customer website** .

If you're out and about on your estate and you see a tree that looks dangerous, you can let us know by filling in our **tree form** . If you've got photographs of the tree, you can upload these too. We're grateful for your help in looking after the trees on your estate and keeping your community safe.



# Click and check

To help us deliver a better repairs service for you, we've launched a new online **Repairs Responsibility Tool** 🖱️.

We're here to help you keep your home in good condition, however there are some repairs that you have responsibility for. These will differ depending on the type of repair needed and the type of tenancy you have with us.

Your home is made up of lots of different rooms, with a mix of appliances and technology, so we understand it can be confusing to understand who's responsible for what.

Before you raise a repair, you can now check first whether it might be your responsibility to fix. We've made the tool simple to use thanks to clear room layouts and easy to identify symbols.

- If a repair is your responsibility, you can find lots of easy-to-follow Fix It Videos covering some of the most common repairs, showing you how to get the job done
- If a repair is our responsibility, the tool will ask you to **raise a repair** 🖱️ through myAccount.

## Opening the door to fire safety

In buildings, fire doors are designed to help prevent fire and smoke from spreading. We also regularly carry out safety checks to fire doors through annual fire risk assessments and scheduled estate inspections.

### How can you help?

- If you live in a building that requires an annual safety check for your front door, we'll write to you in advance to schedule an appointment. Please make sure that you book this appointment in with us at your earliest convenience and allow us access to your fire door on the day
- **Contact us** 🖱️ if you think a fire door in your building is damaged, broken, or faulty in any way, so we can sort it
- If you'd like more information about fire safety, head to the **fire safety webpage** 🖱️ on our customer website to read our **fire door safety guidance leaflet** 🖱️. You'll also find more helpful information about how to keep you and your home safe.





# Your latest 'Love your community' photography competition winner!

Engaged Customers had a tough time choosing the final winner of the competition and it ended up in a tie. Our Customer Communications team stepped in to cast the deciding vote and the latest winner is... **Imra Blakeman**.


Imra's photo of the Art Deco Alsatian won over our judges not only because of the adorable Alsatian, they also love the composition of the photo and the unique perspective that Imra brought to taking the photo. Congratulations Imra, enjoy your £50 Love2shop voucher!

## An honourable mention...

A big well done and thank you to Shauna Utting for sending in our runner up photo of a beautiful sunset.



## It's a wrap!

We'd like to extend a big thank you to everyone who entered our competition, you sent in some great photos of what life is like in your communities! If you'd like to see more of the shortlisted photos, please visit our [website](#) .


## Drumroll please...

The overall winner of the competition is... **Phil Coldicott** from Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire and a photo of his friend, Rob. Before he moved into one of our sheltered housing schemes in Wellesbourne, Warwickshire, Rob was a local busker who was once living in his van. Phil's photo really captured Rob's character and is a lovely tribute to his memory. Phil, we hope you enjoy your grand prize of a £250 Love2shop voucher.

# Have you met our new chatbot? Say hello to Orbot!



Last December, we introduced our brand new chatbot, **Orbot**.

Orbot is designed with new features to help improve your online experience and make it easier to communicate with us. You can find Orbot by clicking on the 'Chat with us' icon in the bottom right corner of the **website**  and you can either ask a question or use the prompts in the chat to find the information you need.

If your question is more detailed and you'd like more information at any point in the chat, you can type 'live chat' to speak to a friendly advisor who will be happy to help.

We've added a brand-new speech-to-text option, which makes it even easier for you to use by simply using your voice. You can also leave feedback on every Orbot answer at any time, if it's not quite what you were looking for.

## Coming soon:

We've listened to your feedback and are developing automatic translation into our chatbot, meaning you'll soon be able to communicate with us in other languages.

We used our **Your Voice Facebook group**  to ask customers what we should name our new Chatbot, and we went with Robert's suggestion of Orbot. We hope you enjoy your £20 Love2shop voucher Robert!

Here's what Robert said:

**"Orbot just clicked for me—it's Orbit with a twist! As an autistic adult, I love things that are clear and literal, so 'bot' in the name makes it obvious it's a chat bot, not a person. It's playful, memorable, and funnily enough, I only realised later it's also an anagram of 'robot,' which makes it even better!"**



# Your Voice Awareness Week is coming!

Since our last update about the exciting events you can get involved in, we've been working hard behind the scenes and we're thrilled to announce Your Voice Awareness Week will be running from **31 March to the 4 April 2025**.

This week is all about showing you how to get more involved with us, so you can learn how you can shape the services you use, and yes - there are prizes to be won!

Here's what you can look forward to during the week:

- **Learn how to earn reward points and exchange them for vouchers**
- **Discover how to become a Mystery Shopper and contribute to service improvements**
- **See the changes our customers have influenced to make our services better**
- **Meet different Orbit teams and hear how you can connect and interact with them.**

## How to get involved

Interested in joining the fun? Sign up to our **Your Voice Facebook Group**  for regular updates or email us at **customer.engagement@orbit.org.uk** to let us know you'd like to participate.

**We can't wait to see you there!**

Most events will be held online, making it easy for you to participate from anywhere. Whether you're at home, at work, or on the go.

Every event you join as part of Your Voice Awareness Week gets your name entered into a prize draw to win one of four £50 Love2shop vouchers.

## Take part in our new monthly ageing well events!

Discover the variety of activities we have to offer at our monthly ageing well events, designed for anyone aged 55 and over. Connect with others, stay active and enjoy a couple of hours filled with opportunities to relax, exercise and socialise in a welcoming atmosphere. With a variety of activities and support from our partners, these events are all about YOU! Here's what you can look forward to\*:


**Opportunities to make new friends**

**Help getting online**

**Health checks with qualified professionals**

**Weekly fall prevention or seated exercise classes (from £3)**

**Better Days help and advice**

To find out where and when your nearest event is taking place, visit our **Ageing Well event page** . We hope to see you soon!

Please note: activities vary at each ageing well event

# Contents insurance all wrapped up



Having home contents insurance can't prevent floods, thefts or fires from happening, but it can help you get back on your feet.

## Insure your belongings

It's our responsibility as your housing provider to insure the structure of your home, however this doesn't include what's inside, like your furniture, clothing and personal possessions.

As our customer, you are eligible for an exclusive home contents insurance scheme, starting from just £1.98 a month for £4,000 standard cover. There's no long-term commitment and you can cancel at any time.

- Pay-as-you-go
- Choice of payment methods paying monthly

**Call: 01962 892086**  
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A policy holder dropped her mobile phone on the concrete and it wouldn't switch on afterwards. Her claim was settled in cash within three days of her making the claim. She said:

**"It was easier than I thought.  
It was a great experience.  
Thank you."**

## 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)

Or to talk to us, please call: **0800 678 1221**

Textphone: **18001 0800 678 1221**

**Take a look on  
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 @orbithousing

Our postal address:  
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