

Orbit Life

Building thriving communities...

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building communities

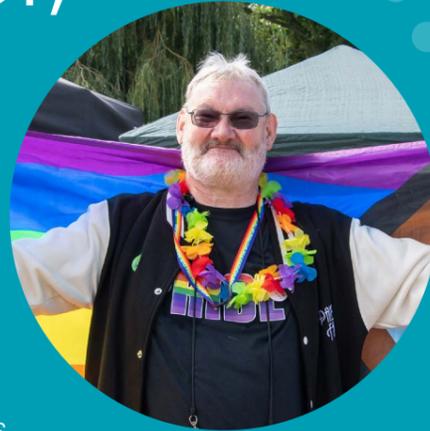


An introduction from our guest resident editor, **Phil Coldicott**

We would like to introduce you to Phil, one of our Engaged Customers and guest editor of this edition of Orbit Life. Phil has worked with us for over 15 years now on a wide range of projects, always with the aim of improving our services for all customers.

We're proud of Phil's shortlisting for a prestigious West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) 'Mental Health Star Award' for the work he's done in founding the first ever Stratford-upon-Avon men's mental health support group. Prior to the pandemic, he volunteered as a Digital Champion in our Greenhill Street location and is a brilliant Orbit ambassador in his local community. Phil was also nominated for Orbit's Thriving Communities Better Days Award, which he won a highly commended nominee prize. Meet Phil...

Hello and welcome to your Winter edition of Orbit Life magazine. The increased cost of living continues to affect us all, so we've got an update on changes to the Energy Price Guarantee, plus a reminder of the 'Winter wellbeing' events being held in local communities. Customers who attend will receive a free 'Winter warmth support pack' worth £50 (see page seven for more info). Be sure to visit the 'Cost of living hub' for tips on saving money, becoming more energy efficient, cutting costs on food and clothing and advice for managing your wellbeing.



Click to visit our website

If you'd like to find out more about becoming an Engaged Customer, then please get in touch. Engaged Customers are those residents who get involved in reviewing the way we work and make suggestions for improvements from a customer perspective. Visit our [website](#) to find out more.

We hope you enjoy the magazine. If you have any feedback then please let us know. We'd love to hear from you!

Good Neighbour campaign

Orbit has just launched a new Good Neighbour campaign to promote the little things that you can do to be a good neighbour and help make your community one you can be proud to call home. One of the best things I did to help my own community was arrange a site inspection with Orbit and my local councillor. We were able to get some footpaths fixed and it made a difference. If you would like to join us on our next inspection at your estate, just get in touch or reach out to your Property Manager.

Be sure to visit the Good Neighbour hub to find out more!

Click to visit

Your rent and service charge explained



We will be writing to you this month to let you know what your rent will be from the year starting April 2023 through to the end of March 2024.

If you pay a service charge, we will also be writing to you to let you know about your service charge budget for the same 12-month period.

Our Service Charge team works with your local Property Management team or Scheme Manager/Scheme Officer to review the budget for your estate, so that we can be as accurate as possible in predicting the cost of the services you'll receive. Please be assured, we will only charge you for services that we complete.

Your rent

This year, the Government has set a price cap of 7%, which puts a limit on how much housing associations, including Orbit, can increase rent charges. Find out more about how your rent is calculated [here](#).

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.

Your service charges

Your service charge budget will set out what we expect your service charges to be for the 12 months from April 2023 and will include a breakdown of those charges, so you'll know exactly what's included.

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.

What to do if you're experiencing any difficulty paying your service charge or rent

We're here to help if increases in the cost of living are putting pressure on your household finances. Please visit our 'cost of living hub', where you will find expert advice and guidance, including details of free support and our ['Better Days'](#) services.

Click to visit our Cost of living hub

Everybody needs Good Neighbours...



We can't choose our neighbours, but we can choose how we treat them. We can all do something, no matter how small to be a good neighbour. There are lots of easy and quick things that you can do, it could even be as simple as a smile and a hello when you see a neighbour in the street.

This month we are launching our **Good Neighbour hub** where we will be sharing some fantastic tips and ideas about how you can be the neighbour that you would like to live next door to. We've also included some advice to deal with those tricky situations that we can all find ourselves in from time to time.

Good Neighbour tip

You can connect with your neighbours and stay informed of what's going on in your community by downloading the Nextdoor app from your app store.

What else can you find on our Good Neighbour hub?

Good Neighbour Award

Do you know someone who is a brilliant neighbour? Someone who goes that extra mile and checks in on the community, arranges events, or keeps an eye on the estate? Now is your chance to recognise them by entering them for a Good Neighbour award. Just visit our [website](#) to find out more!

Say hello!

It can be daunting moving into a new community. Make it easier for your new neighbours by saying hello with our downloadable handy postcard. Opening the lines of communication with a friendly hello can help you start your relationship with your new neighbours on a positive note. Find it on our [Good Neighbour hub](#)!



Click to visit the Good Neighbour hub



orbitcustomerhub.org.uk

To learn more, check out the **Good Neighbour hub** on our [website](#)

Good Neighbour

Hot topics!

- A few 'rubbish' ideas: We want everyone to live in a community that is safe, tidy and free from bulky waste. Protect your family by knowing how to manage your own bulky waste and know what to do if you see someone else disposing of it illegally. Love your community, help keep it tidy for everyone to enjoy!

Tonia, one of our Customer Board Members, says;
"We all have power. We know that a smile or kind word from a stranger can transform a day. Reporting a hate incident can build a picture of what is happening in an area, it can also put an end to the isolation, fear and violence that blights lives."

- Making your communities safer: Thriving communities are diverse, welcoming, fair and equal to all. It's important to understand that each person is unique, and that our individual differences should be respected, valued and welcomed. It helps us to be more tolerant and understanding of different cultures, making our communities better. Look out for stories from your communities on social media about how coming together makes us stronger.

- Everyone together: Not everyone will be a respectful neighbour, sometimes neighbourly disputes may turn more negative and result in anti-social behaviour (ASB). ASB can include a range of unacceptable behaviours that can cause nuisance and, or harm and distress to somebody else. We will be sharing a range of resources to help anyone who may experience ASB in their communities.

Call out prejudice if you see it, report it if you experience it, talk, share and educate. Let's stand together and make our communities no place for hate. You can read Tonia's full blog [here](#)

Good Neighbour tip

Freecycle.org

Do you have an old sofa you need to get rid of? Or do you need some furniture and looking to save some money? **Freecycle** is a fantastic way to buy and sell stuff for free!

Stay up-to-date

For all of our Good Neighbour updates, follow us on our social media. Just search @OrbitHelp on **Facebook** and **Twitter**.

Good Neighbour tip

Changes to the Energy Price Guarantee



The Energy Price Guarantee helps protect you from increases in energy costs by limiting the amount suppliers can charge you for the energy you use and has reduced the amount of money we all pay for our energy.

If the support wasn't extended, it's projected that energy bills would have increased even further to £3,500 per year, so the extension of the scheme is still saving you money.

Originally, the guarantee was applied from 1 October 2022 until the end of March 2023. The Government has now announced that it will be extended until April 2024, but with some changes. From April 1 2023, energy unit rates are increasing by 20%. This means, the average energy bill will rise to about £3,000 for a typical household.

Want to save even more? The Energy Price Guarantee varies by region and how you pay. Direct Debit is the least expensive way to pay for your energy. If you pay by prepayment meter, you are usually paying 2% more than someone who pays by Direct Debit. If you pay when you receive the bill, the premium is 6% higher than someone paying by Direct Debit, that's potentially an extra £150 a year. To find out more about the benefits of paying by Direct Debit, visit our [website](#)

Energy myths debunked! There is so much advice surrounding energy saving nowadays that it's hard to know what is true and what is, well, a myth. Our in-house energy expert, Dan Welch, has looked at some of the popular myths and gives us the facts behind the tales. Check out our short film [here](#). Are there any others that you can think of? Share them with your community on social media by tagging us @OrbitHelp.

Did you know?
One of the best ways to keep up with the cost of living changes, is by following us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). Just search @OrbitHelp!



Changes for those on benefits

The Government also announced further support for those in receipt of benefits, with an additional cost of living payment of £900. We don't have full details on this yet, however it's likely to be similar to the £650 payment last year. To receive the payment, it's likely you'll need to be in receipt of

benefits such as Universal Credit (to name one). Pensioner households will likely receive an additional £300 cost of living payment too, probably later in the year. Households who receive certain Disability Benefits will also likely receive a one-off payment of £150 in 2023.

You don't need to apply for any of the discounts and there's no need to contact your energy supplier, it's automatic. If you get a message telling you that you need to apply, or asking for your bank or credit card details, it could be a scam. You can report messages you think are suspicious directly to the [Government](#)

Again, we don't have all of the details on this yet, we'll keep you updated as soon as we know more.

Have you checked out one of our free Winter wellbeing events?

To help you manage the increased cost of living, we've been out and about in your communities with free advice and support at our free Winter wellbeing events. Have you been out to see us when we've been in your area? It's not too late! We've got events running through to the end of March. Not only will you be able to find out more about the free support we have available through our [Better Days programme](#), you'll also receive free expert energy advice from our partner, National Energy Action (NEA). To find out more visit our [website](#)

Caroline, a customer from Leamington Spa who attended one of the events, said; "It was useful being able to speak with someone from Orbit near my home. I needed some advice on my energy bills and was able to get it today."

Residents who attend a 'Winter wellbeing' event will receive a free 'Winter warmth support pack' worth £50 containing: advice on how to manage increased energy bills and tips on how you can reduce them, a thermocard, a thermos flask, energy saving LED lightbulbs, packets of soup and hot chocolate, a wearable blanket, a windup torch and a draughtproofing strip/reflective radiator panel.*

*Some items may change due to availability



Feel a little love on Valentine's Day

Who says Valentine's Day is only about sweethearts?

The world needs a little more love, so make your own rules and share the love not only with those around you, but also yourself. Here's a few simple Valentine's Day ideas you can share to feel the love:

Reach out to friends and family:

Valentine's Day can be about anyone you care for – friends, family, a beloved pet or even your neighbours. Why not invite your friends over for a 'Pal-entine's' coffee date or meal? If you know someone who may be isolated or feeling lonely this Valentine's Day, make a point of checking in on them and sending a little love their way, it could mean more than you know!

Be kind to yourself:

Don't forget to include yourself on that list and maybe give yourself a little treat like a nice tea or coffee, a bubble bath or watch a film that you love. Perhaps cook yourself your favourite meal? Just do something that makes YOU happy.

Spend some time outdoors:

Get out into the fresh air and sunshine – even in Winter. Nature has a wonderful way of lifting our spirits by connecting us to the world around us.

It's okay to not be okay:

If you are alone on Valentine's Day and think that it's starting to affect your daily life and mental health, we can help you find the free support you need. Just visit **Better Days** to find out more about the different programmes we have on offer, including **Togetherall**, our free peer-to-peer support programme.



It doesn't have to cost a lot to show some love for those you care about! We've pulled together some inexpensive ways you can show the people who bring a little warmth to your life that you care about them too. Check out our 'Love doesn't have to be expensive' blog.

Click to read our blog post



Recruiting 'Building Buddies'

Primary school children will get an exciting look at how homes are built, as part of a new educational programme we've launched with local schools near new housing developments we're building.

'**Building Buddies**' is aimed at children aged 7 to 11 (Key Stage Two) and will see local schools being invited to experience a unique hands-on site visit, where children can develop their knowledge and skills by safely exploring the site, speaking to our development team, learning the importance of health and safety and discovering how brand-new houses are constructed.

There will also be an opportunity for the pupils to build a home of their own, with a special 3D model house, which teaches young Building Buddies the stages of building a new home.

Classroom resources are available for teachers to **download** from our website and includes worksheets for all KS2 pupils, as well as a supporting teachers pack. To book your day visit or for more information, contact: building.buddies@orbit.org.uk

Ray Winney, Construction Director at Orbit, said: "We have created an engaging new educational programme for children to discover house building and just how exciting it can be. We want to show young people that anyone can work in the construction industry – in jobs varying from design and planning, to site management and bricklaying. The children will be able to build a 3D house, learn about the stages of construction and get an insight into the job roles within the industry."



Did you know March is Free Wills Month?

Although it's not always a comfortable subject to talk about, you can give yourself and those you love peace of mind knowing that your life is in order and a plan is in place upon your passing. It can also make it easier for your loved ones if they understand your wishes and know what to do.

Free Wills Month brings together a group of well-respected charities to offer anyone aged 55 and over the opportunity to have their simple wills written or updated free of charge. To find out more visit the Free Will Month [website](#)



How we can help you if you're experiencing issues with **damp or condensation**

Now that it's Winter, you might have noticed condensation appearing in your home. Condensation is quite common, particularly during colder months, and is usually easily managed.

However, condensation and damp left unchecked can lead to wider issues, including mould growth.

If you need support managing the increased cost of living, we're here to help. Just visit our **Cost of living hub**

We always want to hear about cases of damp and mould, so we can address them as soon as possible. Just report them to us in the usual way, either via **myAccount**, by visiting our **customer website** or by calling 0800 678 1221.

For more information on condensation just visit our website.

Click to visit our website

Here are some top tips to help you effectively manage condensation in your home:

- We know energy prices are high right now, but it's important to heat your home too. A warm home helps prevent condensation and mould growth
- To reduce condensation, cover pots and pans with a lid when cooking
- If you dry your clothes indoors, ensure it's in a well-ventilated room, such as the bathroom, with the extractor fan running to help remove moisture. Try to avoid drying your clothes over radiators or heaters
- If you use a tumble dryer, please ensure it is vented to the outside. If you're thinking about buying one, consider a self-condensing model
- It is quite normal to find your bedroom windows misted up in the mornings. To control this, be sure to wipe down any moisture on your windows and windowsills.
- Keep air vents and extractor fans clear.

Working together to create diverse and inclusive communities

HouseProud Pledge Pioneer



"Orbit and I met by accident. By 'accident' I mean in the Autumn of 2014 when I first moved into an Orbit home within an Independent Living scheme (Beaufort Court, a block of self-contained and easy-to-manage flats). I had

lost some of my mobility and although it was returning, I wanted the security that Independent Living housing provided.

I had retired from a busy London-based life where I had achieved a measure of success in both business and my social life in a male role. It seemed that I would continue this path, but the gender identity issues which had been with me all my life had never gone away. It took the pandemic to bring those matters to a head. Prompted by my splendid carers, I took the decision in 2021 to begin the long-delayed transition and was delighted with the support I received from friends, family, financial institutions, Adult Social Care and Orbit staff. I want people to know that it IS possible to undergo gender transition when you are older and in an Orbit home AND you will find a small, but welcoming community to support you."

You can learn more about Sandra's brave journey **here**.

Click to watch

We believe in providing an environment for our customers that gives everyone an equal chance to live, learn and work – free from discrimination, harassment, victimisation and prejudice – space where everyone can thrive.

Last year, we formed a customer-led LGBTQ+ diversity group to help us support **our commitment to LGBTQ+ equality**. The group is currently working on a range of activities including the development of an education programme to help people improve their understanding of LGBTQ+ lives. They're also looking at how we can increase Orbit's visibility within the LGBTQ+ community, by attending events such as Warwickshire Pride.

If you would like more information or to get involved, we would love to hear from you. Just visit our **website** or email **customer.engagement@orbit.org.uk**

Sandra, one of our Engaged Customers, shares her inspiring story of finding her true self...

Share 'Your view'



Would you like the opportunity to share your views on the issues that matter to you? We're looking for customers to get involved in our monthly blog 'Your View'.

Published on our customer website, 'Your View' is written by people like you about what it's like to live in one of our communities. Have you worked with other residents to make something better? Is there a Community Champion you want to share a story about?

Click
to read more



How are people in your community supporting each other? You can read our blogs [here](#).

If you're interested in getting involved, please email: media@orbit.org.uk or give us a call.

Click
to email us



Get in touch:

You can visit our website:
orbitcustomerhub.org.uk

For more information, please contact us at:
orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/contact-us

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

Textphone: **18001 0800 678 1221**

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