

Winter 2023 / 2024

Your help
and support
guide

Winter is always our busiest time. From repairs and financial support to boiler breakdowns and frozen pipes, we always get more calls and messages from you, our customers. We want to support you to prepare for winter and prevent problems from happening in the first place.

In this leaflet we've got all the information you will need on our support services.

What's inside

- Protecting your home from winter weather
- Repairs, condensation, damp and mould
- Cost of living support
- Staying safe – fires, accidents and more
- What to do in an emergency
- Customer checklist



Tackling winter weather

We didn't have the sunniest of summers this year. And you can bet your bottom dollar that we'll see plenty of icy temperatures and snow this winter.

We can't promise a white Christmas, but we can promise that if you read all the information on this page, and follow the advice, you and your home will be better prepared for what could be a cold winter ahead.

Frozen pipes

Frozen pipes can cause problems with heating and boilers when the cold weather arrives. In fact, this is one of the biggest causes of call outs when temperatures drop.

When that happens, it often occurs in large numbers all at once, meaning we can't always provide a fix inside of a day.

A tell-tale sign of a frozen pipe is if you turn a tap on during a period of freezing temperatures and you find that little to no water comes out.

So how can you prevent and resolve this common problem? Read our step-by-step guide here.

STEP
1

Ensure you're prepared before temperatures drop

- The first thing to do is identify any taps that continually drip. Even a small trickle can lead to a frozen pipe when temperatures drop below zero. So don't wait, report those issues to us now.
- You should also find out where your stop tap is – most are fitted under the kitchen sink – and understand how to turn it off so you can do step two.



STEP
2

How to thaw a frozen pipe

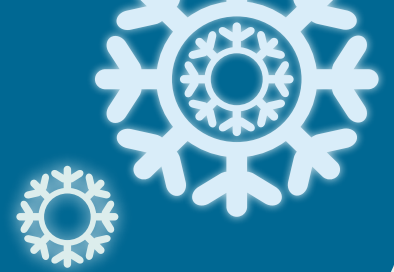
- Turn off the water supply at the stop tap.
- Check any pipes that run outside of your property. If the pipe has burst, you will need to contact us, skip on to step three.
- If it hasn't burst, slowly thaw the pipe by holding a hot water bottle or a towel soaked in hot water around the pipe. You can also use a hair dryer on the lowest setting.
- When it has thawed, reset your boiler by holding in the reset button for 10 seconds and waiting for the boiler to re-fire.

STEP
3

If a pipe has burst

- Turn off the water supply at the stop tap.
- Turn on all your taps to reduce any flooding and soak up any escaping water with towels.
- Report it to us immediately.

Protect your home now!



Staying safe

Thawing a frozen pipe is a safe thing to do so long as you follow the tips below:

- Don't disconnect the pipe
- Don't try to thaw it above waist height.
- Don't try to access the pipe or other pipes within the boiler.
- Look out for ice on the ground where you poured hot water to thaw the pipe. This could make the ground below slippery.
- Never use a naked flame or blowlamp to thaw it.



Don't wait – test your heating now



Boiler breakdowns and heating problems are common in winter. We get a lot of callouts at a time where demand for all of our services, and for replacement boiler parts, is at its highest. That means that waiting times can often be longer than during summer or autumn.

But did you know that often those problems could be identified and fixed before winter comes?

One of the biggest pieces of advice we can give is to check your boiler now.

Make sure you're satisfied that it's working perfectly by turning it on for a few hours.

If it's not, don't wait until winter.

Get it solved now by reporting it to us.



Video support guides

When people want to find out how to do something, these days the first thing many people do is search it on YouTube.

So, we're making our own. Just head to our web page below to take a look.

www.riverside.org.uk/winter

Pre-payment energy meters

If your pre-payment meter has run out of credit, you will need to reset your gas meter after topping up to reinstate your gas supply.

Please visit your supplier's website for instructions on how to do that. If you are unsure who the supplier is, you can find out by visiting

www.findmysupplier.energy

Our repairs services

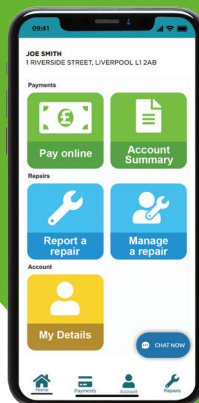
We know that if you've got a problem in your home, whether it's minor or major, you want it to be resolved quickly. It's the number one issue that customers tell us matters to them.

So, just in case you need it, here's our quick guide to all things repairs.

If you haven't already, download **My Riverside App** to report repairs ▶▶▶

How to report issues

With the **My Riverside App** you can update your details, make secure payments or report a repair in a few taps.



Go to the Apple App Store or Google Play or simply scan the QR code, it's free!

Want to report a non-emergency repair?

The **quickest and easiest way to report a repair is via our app**. Simply scan the QR code to get started. You can also use the online version of **My Riverside** via our website. You can still call us, but we recommend you use this method in all non-emergencies as it is much quicker.

Is it an emergency?

Call us immediately on 0345 111 0000.

You can find out more on what we class as emergencies on our website but things like loss of heating or hot water, gas or water leaks, broken toilets, floods, loss of electricity, issues that cause your home to be unsecured or anything that is hazardous to health and wellbeing are all included.

Need to report a communal repair?

For repairs to communal areas, you can also now use our app or use **My Riverside** via our website. You can still call us, but we recommend you use this method in all non-emergencies as it is much quicker.

Our service standards

To be clear on what you can expect from us, our repairs policy sets out clear standards on how quickly a job should be done.

We always aim to meet these standards and in more than 90% of cases, we do.

If we don't, we expect our contractors to be in touch with you to explain any challenges they have in completing the job, and ensure you're not inconvenienced.

If that doesn't happen, please let us know urgently.



Emergencies

Within 12 hours



Urgent gas repairs

Within 24 hours



Urgent repairs

Within 5 Days



Routine Repairs

Within 28 days

Tackling condensation, damp and mould



Condensation, damp and mould

A key priority for Riverside is to ensure we're providing customers with warm, dry homes which are free of condensation, damp and mould. So, what should you do if you identify signs in your home?

The key thing to remember is not to wait – report it straight away. Even a small sign of condensation, damp or mould can be a sign of a defect with your property which is better addressed proactively, rather than waiting until the problem gets worse.

Reducing the possibility of condensation

Condensation usually appears where there isn't enough ventilation, so you might see it in the bathroom or kitchen, or in places where air doesn't flow easily.

In the kitchen



When you're cooking or boiling a kettle, try to keep the door closed to prevent steam moving around your home. Steam will collect on walls and windows and create condensation.



Make sure your extractor fan is switched on if you have one, if you do not have one in your kitchen please report this to us as soon as possible so that we can arrange one to be installed.



Cover your pans with lids when you're cooking and leave your extractor fans on, you can also open your windows. Both of these will help to clear the air of moisture.

In the bathroom



Condensation, damp and mould in the bathroom is caused by hot baths and showers that send moisture into the air. When you're taking a shower or bath, make sure your extractor fan is switched on if you have one. If you do not have one in your bathroom please report this to us as soon as possible so that we can arrange one to be installed. You can also open a window to get rid of the steam.



Elsewhere in the home



When possible and safe, try to keep your windows open to encourage fresh air to flow around your home.



Try to avoid drying clothes inside or over radiators.



Try and keep your furniture at least 5cm away from walls to allow air to flow around it.



Try to leave your central heating on a constant, low setting for as much time as possible, or set the timer to boost the heating in the morning and the evening.



Don't overfill your wardrobes and cupboards as warm, damp air can collect inside.



If you have a tumble dryer, make sure that it is vented to an outside wall, or the condenser is regularly emptied.

Cost-of-living crisis

The cost-of-living crisis has impacted us all. From rising prices in the supermarket, higher energy bills and pay packets that don't keep up with inflation, it has impacted everyone. So, we're here to help.

Across these two pages, we've set out the package of measures we've put in place through our Let's Talk campaign to support you, including details on how to apply to access our £500K Helping Hand Fund.

Check them out and remember, if you've got a problem, **Let's Talk!**



Let's Talk Rent

Our Let's Talk Rent team are here to help you if you face financial difficulty that affects your ability to pay your rent.

They are able to help you manage a crisis and can look at how we can help with payment arrangements which work best for you.

They can also help you access financial support, including from our £500K Helping Hand Fund.



Let's Talk Money

Our Let's Talk Money team are here to help you with money and benefits advice.

They can support you to ensure you're receiving all of the benefits and support you're entitled to and challenge decisions if they are unfair.



Did you know?

We're helping more than 70% of customers in arrears to clear their debts.



Did you know?

We have helped over 800 customers access £1.2m in unclaimed additional benefits for people since April.



Let's Talk Energy

Our Let's Talk Energy team are here to help you if you are struggling to heat your home or have fallen into energy bill debt.

They can help you tackle these problems head on, access support funding and give advice on how to save on your energy costs.



Let's Talk Jobs

Our Let's Talk Jobs team can help you find a job, upgrade your CV, prepare for interviews and much more.

Their team of experts have a track record of success and make links with employers in our communities who are on the lookout for new team members.



Did you know?

We have helped more than 120 people access major energy savings since April.



Did you know?

We've helped 68 people in to work since April.



Putting money back in your pocket



Let's Talk Training

Our Let's Talk Training team – linked to our Let's Talk Jobs team – support you with gaining the skills you need to start or advance your career.

They can help you with anything from entry level to more complex training.



Did you know?

We've helped more than 30 people get training to improve their skills since April.

Case study

Our customer Sarah, a single mother of two, worked in the same job at her local college for nearly 30 years. But one day, completely out of the blue, disaster struck. She suffered a traumatic brain injury because of an aneurism and underwent emergency brain surgery.

Whilst she recovered well, she was left with permanent health issues and was unable to work.

She lived off her redundancy money for a while – too proud to claim for support – until that money began to run out.

But rent and energy bill arrears soon began to build up and she found herself at risk of losing her home.

Then, she called us and said “Let's Talk”.

We listened and understood her situation and instantly sent her an energy voucher to put her heating on.

Then over a period of less than two months, ensured she was claiming the benefits she was entitled to and managed to negotiate with her energy company on her behalf to wipe out her debt.

Once she was getting the benefits she was entitled to, we put her on to a long-term sustainable repayment plan to tackle the rent arrears she had built up.

We also adapted her home to meet her health needs, fitting a wet room and other adaptations. She is now living a happy, healthy life whilst managing her condition and financial situation comfortably.



For more information on our **Let's Talk** services, and to book an appointment with them at a time that suits you, visit: www.riverside.org.uk/letstalk

Staying safe in your home

Fire safety

We want you and your neighbours to be safe in your homes – but to do this we need a little help from you.

Being familiar with your fire evacuation procedures and understanding the role of fire doors and other fire safety measures can make a huge difference and save lives.

Fire safety in flats and shared buildings

There are two main types of evacuation procedure in Riverside flats and shared buildings.

Stay put


This means that you only need to evacuate if the fire is in your own flat, otherwise you should be safe to remain.

Full evacuation

This means that if any detector activates, all flats will be alerted, and everyone should evacuate and call **999** followed by **Riverside** on **0345 111 0000**.

You will have a sign in your entrance lobby, which will tell you which procedure applies to where you live.

Please look for the sign next time you leave the building to check which one applies.



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FIRE ACTION NOTICE

IF FIRE BREAKS OUT IN YOUR FLAT:


- 1: Get everyone in your flat to leave straight away, closing the front door behind you.
- 2: Do not stay behind to try and put the fire out.
- 3: Do not use lifts.
- 4: Wait outside away from the building.
- 5: Dial 999 for the Fire Service.

IF THERE IS A FIRE IN ANOTHER PART OF THE BUILDING:

- 1: The building is designed to contain a fire in the flat where it starts. This means it will usually be safe for you to stay in your own flat if the fire is elsewhere in the building.
- 2: Leave immediately if heat or smoke affects your own flat.
- 3: If you are in the communal area evacuate the building.
- 4: Do not use lifts.
- 5: Wait outside away from the building or at the designated Assembly Point:
- 6: Dial 999 for the Fire Service.

If you have any queries regarding fire safety within these premises, please contact Riverside Customer Service Centre on: 0345 111 0000

Stay-put sign



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FIRE ACTION NOTICE

IF FIRE BREAKS OUT IN YOUR FLAT:

- 1: Get everyone in your flat to leave straight away, closing the front door behind you.
- 2: Do not stay behind to try and put the fire out.
- 3: Do not use lifts.
- 4: Press the nearest fire alarm call point.
- 4: Wait outside away from the building or at the designated Assembly Point:
- 5: Dial 999 for the Fire Service.

IF THERE IS A FIRE IN ANOTHER PART OF THE BUILDING:

- 1: If a communal fire alarm sounds or the smoke alarms within your own flat sound, leave immediately as the fire may be elsewhere in the building.
- 2: Leave immediately if heat or smoke affects your own flat.
- 3: If in doubt – Get out.
- 4: Do not use lifts.
- 5: Wait outside away from the building.
- 6: Dial 999 for the Fire Service.

If you have any queries regarding fire safety within these premises, please contact Riverside Customer Service Centre on: 0345 111 0000

Full-evacuation sign

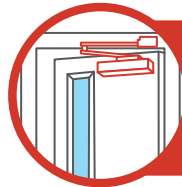
Fire doors

Fire doors help to create a barrier from the spread of fire and smoke and prevent it from traveling around a building, allowing safe access for the fire service or evacuation by residents.

Flat entrance doors and communal corridor doors should never be wedged open and closing devices should never be removed.

We carry out annual checks of all flat entrance doors and quarterly checks for communal doors in blocks of five storeys and above.

Checking your fire doors – it's as easy as 1, 2, 3



1

Check you have a self-closing device. The door should close firmly onto the latch without sticking to the floor or the frame.



2

Check fire strips (usually a plastic strip with a fuzzy brush) are around the top and sides of the door or frame. Check they're intact with no signs of damage.



3

Check your door fully shuts into the frame, and has no damage or holes. Open it six inches and make sure it can fully self-close.

What we do to keep you safe

We check all communal areas and shared facilities such as corridors, stairwells, lounges, kitchens, and laundry rooms regularly to make sure they're clear and safe for everyone. We also carry out fire risk assessments in our buildings and follow up any concerns to reduce the risk of fire.

Wherever fire alarms, fire doors and safety equipment such as emergency lighting are needed in communal areas, we fit them and check them regularly.

When we carry out safety checks, we'll report any emergency repairs in communal areas, which usually means one of our repair's contractors will visit within 12 hours. We'll also carry out regular visual checks of your front door, if it opens into a communal area, for any repairs needed to the door, frame, closer and fire strips.

These checks are part of your tenancy, lease, or license agreement with us. We may need access to your home to do them, so please let us in when we call.

Here's a few things you can do to keep your home and family safe from a fire:

Check your smoke alarm works

We want to keep you safe. We recommend you check your alarm once a week to make sure.

All you have to do is press the button on your alarm. If there is no sound, change the batteries.

Take extra care when you are cooking

When the cooker is switched on, don't leave children alone in the kitchen and stay alert. Keep tea towels, cloths and any other materials away from the cooker. Make sure when you are finished, all of the appliances are switched off.

Be careful when smoking in your home

It is always best to use glass, metal or ceramic ashtrays that can't burn. Make sure when you stub your cigarette it is right out and not still alight. Don't smoke in bed where you could fall asleep and forget about it.

Tidy homes are less hazardous

Rubbish can be a fire accelerant so make sure your home is clean and tidy so you can easily escape if there is a fire.

Check your electrics are safe

At night, switch off all of your plugs and any air-fresheners. Regularly check for any hot plugs or plugs that have black or dark marks. Check if there are any broken or loose wires. If you find any of these, or feel there is a fault, contact us straight away.

Emergencies

Priority Services Register

The Priority Services Register is a free support service to help people in tough situations.

Energy suppliers and network operators offer it and each company keeps their own register.

If you're eligible, it's well worth contacting your energy supplier or network operator to get on it.



The benefits

- Wherever possible, advanced notice of scheduled power cuts. If you rely on your energy supply for medical reasons your network operator can tell you about planned power cuts. For example, when they plan engineering work.
- Priority support in an emergency.
- Priority support when calling your network operator.
- Identification and password scheme. This could include arranging a password or agreed on picture cards if callers need to visit or contact you. This way you can feel confident they are genuine.
- Nominee scheme. You can nominate someone to receive communications and bills from your supplier. For example, a family member, carer or someone you trust.
- Help with prepayment meter access. For example, moving a meter if you can't safely get to it to top up.
- Regular meter reading services. For example, if nobody can read your meter.
- Accessible information. For example, account info and bills in large print or braille.
- Help reconnecting your gas supply, if you need it.

Eligibility

Eligibility for the Priority Services Register is assessed by the companies that run them but you may be eligible if:

- you have reached your state pension age
- are disabled or have a long-term medical condition
- are recovering from an injury
- have a hearing or sight condition
- have a mental health condition
- are pregnant or have young children
- have extra communication needs (such as if you don't speak or read English well)
- need to use medical equipment that requires a power supply
- have poor or no sense of smell
- would struggle to answer the door or get help in an emergency.



Make sure you're prepared

Power cuts, floods and other problems

Every year, at least some of our customers get into difficulty due to events beyond their control, such as power cuts or floods. So, it never hurts to be prepared, just in case. Here are our top tips for preparing for potential emergencies.

Flooding

- Sign up for flood alerts
- Prepare a personal flood plan
- Check your long-term flood risk

www.gov.uk/prepare-for-flooding



Power cuts

- Ensure you have an alternative source of lighting e.g. torches or a well-charged smartphone
- Keep a supply of food which doesn't require electricity to heat and eat
- Sign up for the Priority Services Register if you rely on electricity for your health and wellbeing or that of a dependent e.g., a young child.

www.nationalgrid.com



Home contents insurance

We know that money is tight for people right now. But one essential you really can't do without is having the appropriate insurance.

When it comes to your home, Riverside is responsible for insuring the structure of the building you live in; we've got that covered for you.

However, we don't insure your furniture or personal belongings – that's your responsibility.

There have been many times we've seen customers come unstuck after experiencing an issue at their property and not having the appropriate cover.

So don't get caught out – make sure you're covered.

Social phone and broadband tariffs

One thing that can help you prepare for an emergency is having phone and internet access.

You can find a wealth of supporting information on the web, apply to get help and a landline can be a key lifeline.

But did you know that, if cost of paying for phone or internet services are a challenge, many providers offer reduced cost tariffs for people facing financial difficulty.

Contact a provider for more information or visit www.ofcom.org.uk and search social tariffs for more information.

Your checklist

Make sure you're ready



Run through our checklist below and tick-off the things you need to do.

- Have you turned on and tested your heating?
(See pages 2 & 3)
- Do you know where your stop tap is?
(See pages 2 & 3)
- Do you know how to tackle frozen pipes?
(See pages 2 & 3)
- Have you downloaded the **My Riverside app** and reported any outstanding repairs?
(See pages 4 & 5)
- Have you reported any damp, mould or condensation in your property?
(See pages 4 & 5)
- If you're in rent arrears or facing financial hardship, have you contacted our **Let's Talk Rent** team?
(See pages 6 & 7)
- If you receive benefits and you're worried you're not getting what you're entitled to, have you contacted our **Let's Talk Money** team?
(See pages 6 & 7)
- If you're looking for work, have you contact our **Let's Talk Jobs** team?
(See pages 6 & 7)
- Have you read our fire safety advice and identified your evacuation plan and procedures?
(See pages 8 & 9)
- If you're eligible, have you registered for the Priority Services Register?
(See pages 10 & 11)

Doing more for you on energy

In recognition of the challenges customers are facing with the rising costs of energy, we're doing more than ever to try to help keep prices down, help you access support and affect change. Check out this summary and visit our webpage for more information.

Helping customers access Government funding support

We've helped thousands of customers access reduced energy unit prices through the Government's Energy Bill Relief Scheme and passed any discount onto our customers. We will be working to do the same through the new Energy Bills Discount Scheme.

Smart metering

We've installed thousands of these devices in homes up and down the country in recent years and we're extending that project now to help more customers keep a handle on their energy use.

Communal energy costs

We buy energy on behalf of customers to power things like lighting and other systems in buildings which have communal areas. By buying in bulk and scouring the market for the best deals using the expertise of our procurement team and energy broker, we've managed to keep prices comparatively low. We've also absorbed some of those costs ourselves and decided not to pass them on to customers to help share the burden you face.

Campaigning for change

Finally, we have joined forces with 33 housing associations representing more than 1.7m households to campaign to the Government about energy prices and urge them to provide more support to households on lower incomes. We have asked them to introduce more targeted support for energy bills this winter, extend the eligibility criteria for Warm Homes Discount and re-open the now-closed Energy Bill Support Scheme which provides support of £400 for energy bills for households without a direct relationship to a domestic electricity supplier. Whilst the Government hasn't yet acted, we intend to continue to use our influence to bring pressure to bear on behalf of our customers.