

Choice News

SPECIAL EDITION

Issue 12
Special Edition
2020
The Newsletter
for Choice Housing
Ireland Tenants



*“Somewhere over
the rainbow...”*

choice 
Together we enrich lives

choice-housing.org

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A message from our Group Chief Executive

Michael McDonnell

Welcome to a special edition of Choice News.



Firstly, I hope that you and your family and friends are all safe and well. When we planned the summer edition of our newsletter, the greatest concern for colleagues within Choice was whether or not welfare mitigations would be extended for our tenants. And whilst the latter has thankfully come to pass, no-one could have foreseen that all our lives would be turned upside down through a global pandemic. This terrible disease has wreaked havoc across the country and brought suffering and pain to so many. The heartfelt condolences of everyone at Choice goes out to tenants and communities who have lost loved ones in the last months.

I apologise that the imposition of government restrictions impacted significantly on the services that we offer to tenants. Whilst all our staff successfully reverted to home working within the first few days of lockdown, our ability to deliver maintenance and housing management support was severely curtailed. However, we have 'turned the corner' and you will find that we are now accepting all response repair requests and that our planned maintenance and new

build projects have recommenced on site. It is also great to see recent Departmental guidance now enabling the allocation of our homes to those on the waiting list, albeit with new protocols. You should be assured that any changes that we make will be based on the latest health and safety advice.

Not surprisingly, quite a lot of the content of this Special Edition is focused on your well-being. Clearly, the latter is dominated by Covid-19 and we would reiterate the public health guidance for tenants to maintain good hand hygiene and to observe the requirement for social distancing with your neighbours, our staff and contractors. However, this edition of Choice News also revisits what might be described as good 'housekeeping' practices in relation to fire safety, the dangers of carbon monoxide and the importance of tenants facilitating access for our annual servicing checks to gas boilers, etc. I'm also acutely aware that the negative repercussions of this pandemic could extend for some time to come. So please take the time to read about the support that Choice can provide to

tenants experiencing difficulties, albeit in a challenging operational environment. Don't forget about the dedicated financial inclusion team within Choice and the help and advice that they can provide to tenants who are struggling financially. Quite apart from the trauma of Covid-19, the uptake of Universal Credit continues to increase across Northern Ireland and this can be both unsettling and confusing for many.

Whilst there are increasing reasons on a day-to-day basis for feeling more optimistic, we are all still taking cautious steps forward. Please be assured that my colleagues within Choice and our partners externally will do all that we can to provide you with the certainty and support you require. These remain challenging times, so it is all the more important that we live up to our values as a landlord who is trustworthy, dynamic and places you at the very centre of our decisions.

Thanks for continuing to bear with us as we strive to get our services back to normal.

Somewhere over the rainbow...

By Siobhán Rogan

Tenant Editorial Team Member

When I look back on the Covid-19 lockdown of 2020, I remember watching events in Italy unfold just as if I were watching a tornado approach – feeling frightened and helpless. When PM Boris Johnston announced the beginning of lockdown on 23rd March 2020, I felt like I was in a science fiction film. Only this wasn't Hollywood. This was really happening. To me. To you. To all of us. At the same time.

The first day I went out to the chemist to collect my asthma inhaler refill, I stood in a socially-distanced queue in the street. The man next to me complained about the waiting time. I looked up to the sky, saw the bright, spring sun, turned to him and said: "It could be worse; we could be standing queuing in the rain." He didn't seem convinced. But that sentence set the tone for my attitude of gratitude during lockdown. I decided to accept this fear-fuelled pandemic as a blessing. I knew it was the only way I would get through it. As an asthmatic, I was obviously worried about myself and my daughter, also asthmatic. When the chemist told me my inhalers were out of stock (just like loo roll, pasta and flour in Tesco) I will admit, I panicked. Is this the start of it? I asked myself. Several phone calls later and numerous trips to various chemists saw my prescription refilled. But it wasn't easy. I have arthritis and fibromyalgia, so walking to the chemist was challenging. But all the while, the sun still shone. Almost as if we had a new fifth season: Lockdown Weather! Who among us won't remember the months of glorious sunshine? It was as if Mother Nature stepped in (or stepped up) and said: If you're gonna be housebound, at least you'll have good weather to make it more bearable.

An attitude of gratitude



Now, I'm not lucky enough to have a garden of my own. I live in a first floor apartment. My neighbour's young child enjoyed the use of our communal garden. I figured his need was greater than mine. Besides, I live across the road from a beautiful park. So I was lucky to be able to go out for my daily exercise, watch the swans swim elegantly by and observe the families enjoying their play time together. While the playgrounds were empty, the parks were filled with peals of laughter of young children. And all the while the sun kept shining. The traffic stopped. My asthma abated. And each morning I woke to the dawn chorus of beautiful birdsong. How could I complain?

Well, being human, I obviously did. When the arthritis got so bad I couldn't leave my home for days, I got down and frustrated. At least I have a beautiful view of the park, I told myself. When I heard on the news that in the UK, 14 women and three children were killed due to domestic violence in the first three weeks of lockdown, my heart sank. At least, I am safe, I told myself. When I felt lonely, and my depression and anxiety were kicking in, I told myself: It could be worse. I could be living in a densely-populated area in India with no privacy. When my hands were red and raw from all the washing, I told myself: At least I have clean water and sanitation.

I'm tired of Netflix and WhatsApp. I miss talking face-to-face, hugging and singing in the choir. But I will remember the rainbows on windows; countless acts of random kindness; community food drives. Not only did the sun shine throughout, but the true beauty in neighbours; friends; communities; frontline workers and even our politicians working together, showed everyone's true colours in all their glory. Let us hope this is the new normal. That somewhere over the rainbow, we will continue to appreciate each other and all the blessings in our lives. In the words of Van Morrison: Wouldn't it be great if it was like this all the time? (Coney Island).

Covid-19 Service Information

Choice has implemented the following measures in response to the spread of Covid-19 in Northern Ireland and in keeping with the Northern Ireland Executive pathway to recovery.

Access to Offices

In order to ensure the safety of our customers and staff during the Covid-19 outbreak, our offices remain closed to the public however, we are available by phone, email or through our social media channels. [f](#) [t](#) [in](#)

You can contact us on 0300 111 2211 or email enquiries@choice-housing.org

Service Delivery

We worked hard together to maintain our essential services and help keep you safe. The Association will strive to continue to deliver services with reduced face-to-face contact. However, please note that staff will not be undertaking home visits, except for emergency situations, until further notice.

Rent Payments

We have a sensitive approach to those in financial difficulty. If you are worried about money, our Financial Inclusion Team are available to help with benefits, debt and budgeting issues.

You can contact our Financial Inclusion Team on 0300 111 2211 for advice and support.

Repairs and Servicing

We continue to prioritise critical service delivery including works of a health and safety nature and essential servicing. Our contractors are now also undertaking urgent and routine repairs where possible and are endeavoring to attend within agreed timescales.

To minimise the spread of the virus and in keeping with the Government's advice on social distancing, when reporting repairs, staff will be asking all customers if they are self-isolating or shielding, and if so, our contractors will be advised. Our contractors will carry out a risk assessment when attending to the works and will contact you to advise on what to do next. Repairs can be reported by calling us on 0300 111 2211 or by email to repairs@choice-housing.org

Allocations

The Association has recommended allocations for our general needs and sheltered housing accommodation. For the protection of staff and applicants, additional safety measures have been implemented to allow viewing and signing of tenancy agreements to take place.

Sheltered Schemes

Until further notice sheltered housing scheme communal gatherings have been suspended. This includes lunch clubs, coffee mornings, use of the hairdressing facilities etc. We ask that all visits to sheltered schemes take place in accordance with Government advice and that social distancing requirements are maintained.

We will continue to keep you updated and very much appreciate your assistance and co-operation.

For more information on our services visit: choice-housing.org

For more information on Covid-19 visit: publichealth.hscni.net

Repairs and Servicing Guidance



Maintain minimum 2 metre social distancing from any contractor or Choice staff member visiting your home



Wear a mask or mouth covering such as a scarf



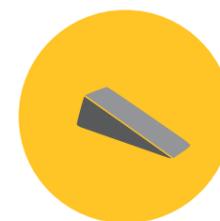
Clean contact points such as door handles before and after the visit



If requested, please allow our contractors and staff to wash their hands



Please advise Choice and any visiting contractors if anyone in your household is symptomatic



Wedge open doors to any room we need access to



Ventilate any room we need access to by opening windows



Keep all family members and pets out of affected rooms

Help with your money

Bedroom Tax Update

What is the Bedroom Tax?

Bedroom Tax is the reduction in housing costs for people who live in a property owned by a housing association that is deemed too large for their household.

It is also known as the 'Social Sector Size Criteria (SSSC), or more commonly known as the 'Bedroom Tax'. Under housing benefit and Universal Credit rules, those with one or more spare bedrooms will see reduction in their benefits towards housing for living in a property that is big for their current needs.

Mitigation payments

A special financial package was designed in NI to help those affected by the bedroom tax and most of those people affected have had a top up payment made to Choice called a 'Welfare Supplementary Payment'. This package was due to end in March 2020 and tenants would have had to make up the payments themselves.

April 2020 onwards

Good News! It has been announced that the mitigation package for Bedroom Tax will continue beyond April 2020 and our tenants will continue to receive the 'top up' payments we have been receiving on their behalf. We do not know how long this mitigation package has been extended for, therefore we ask our tenants affected by bedroom tax to ensure you keep up to date with all your charges and your benefit entitlement.



Money Advice
for our Tenants

"Our financial inclusion service is free, non judgemental and fully confidential. We are simply here to help you!"
Aidan McCrea, Financial Inclusion Manager

What about other Mitigations?

At this time we are unsure in relation to other welfare supplementary payments. If you have been affected by the Benefit Cap and are receiving payments these will continue. If you have been newly affected, due to a loss of job for example, there are currently no protections in place. Likewise, with DLA changing to PIPs and awaiting a tribunal date, or if you have lost your carers allowance in the past 12 months there are currently no protections in place. However, the Department for Communities have advised these are being looked at and it should be announced soon whether any further package will be available for these Welfare Changes also. As soon as Choice have any further information regarding these further mitigations we will inform you immediately via our website and social media.

If you need any further information please contact our Financial Inclusion Team on 0300 111 2211 who can answer any questions for you on Welfare Supplementary Payments and the latest updates on the new package.



**Our Financial
Inclusion Team
are here to help**

**Give us a call and see
how we can help.
0300 111 2211**

Furlough Scheme

The Government's Furlough scheme will end this October. If you will be affected or have any concerns please contact our Financial Inclusion team, we are here to help.

If you need any further information please contact our Financial Inclusion Team on 0300 111 2211 who can answer any questions for you.

How we're performing

Choice are at the forefront in the provision of social housing and are committed to delivering quality housing and excellent customer services that enhance the lives of customers and communities.

It is important that your voice, in relation to our services, is heard as the feedback that we receive is vital for Choice to identify and correct any problems within our service delivery and to ensure that we meet the needs of all our customers.

Gas Safety



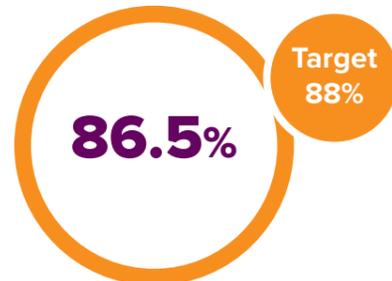
98.37%
Units with valid gas certificate

Repairs



91.47%
Average repairs completed on time

Customer Satisfaction



Satisfaction with the overall services provided by Choice

Complaints Resolved



Average stage 1 and 2 complaints resolved within target (days)

Human Resources



2.44%
Staff absenteeism (days)

It is important that your voice, in relation to our services, is heard.

The Performance figures are for the period April – July 2020.

Construction begins on £1.6m investment in Coleraine

Work is now officially under way at a new housing scheme on Beresford Avenue, Coleraine, which will see 14 new homes developed in the area. The £1.6 million development will offer general needs accommodation for up to 36 people and will be a mix of two-bedroom houses and one-bedroom apartments.

The new 14-unit scheme by Choice and supported by the Housing Executive is much needed good news for the Coleraine area, where demand for quality affordable social housing is high.

Working in collaboration with contractor O'Kane Group Ltd and Here Architects, construction is expected to be completed by November 2020, bringing together the best standards and latest energy saving technologies to another Choice scheme.

The new scheme is located a few minutes away from Coleraine town centre and is close to amenities including GP Surgery, local shops and public transport.



Image taken on site before the pandemic.

Michael McDonnell,
Group Chief Executive of Choice said:

"This investment continues to demonstrate our commitment to ensuring supply of social housing for local people. A new development will also bring a new vibrancy to the area, which in turn will be good news for the town centre, local businesses and the local community.

"This is an important project that will bring 14 high new quality homes and I look forward to welcoming new tenants into their new homes towards the end of the year."

The Beresford Avenue development will offer general needs accommodation for up to 36 people.

Carbon Monoxide (CO) Safety

What causes it?

CO is produced when any type of fuel (e.g. oil, wood, coal and gas) is incompletely burned. This usually only happens when appliances are incorrectly fitted, maintained, tampered with, damaged or poorly ventilated.

Recognise the signs!

Typical signs of faulty appliances include:

- Gas appliances with lazy yellow or orange flames rather than blue flames (except fuel effect fires)
- Soot or yellow/brown stains around appliances
- Pilot lights (where fitted) that frequently blow out
- Increased, unexpected condensation around windows in the room where the appliance is installed.

Recognise the symptoms!

Inhaling CO reduces the oxygen carrying capability of the blood and leaves vital organs and tissue starved of oxygen. Every year in the UK, around 4000 people visit an A&E department with suspected CO poisoning and around 60 people die as a direct result of exposure to CO. Many more people die as a result of strokes and respiratory illness made worse by inhaling low levels of CO over prolonged periods.

Early symptoms of CO poisoning can mimic many common ailments and may easily be confused with food poisoning, viral infections, flu or simple tiredness.

Those at particular risk include babies and young children, pregnant women and people with heart or breathing problems. The smaller the person or animal, the faster CO will affect them.

Symptoms are dependent on the levels of CO and may range from mild, where there are low levels of CO, to severe/deadly within seconds where levels are very high.

Be alert to symptoms improving when you go out or others in your home are affected.

Symptoms to look out for include:

- breathlessness
- nausea or vomiting
- drowsiness, tiredness, sudden collapse or loss of consciousness
- headaches and/or pains in the chest or stomach
- erratic behaviour, confusion, irritability or difficulty in concentrating
- visual problems.

Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas sometimes called the 'silent killer' because you cannot taste, see or smell it.

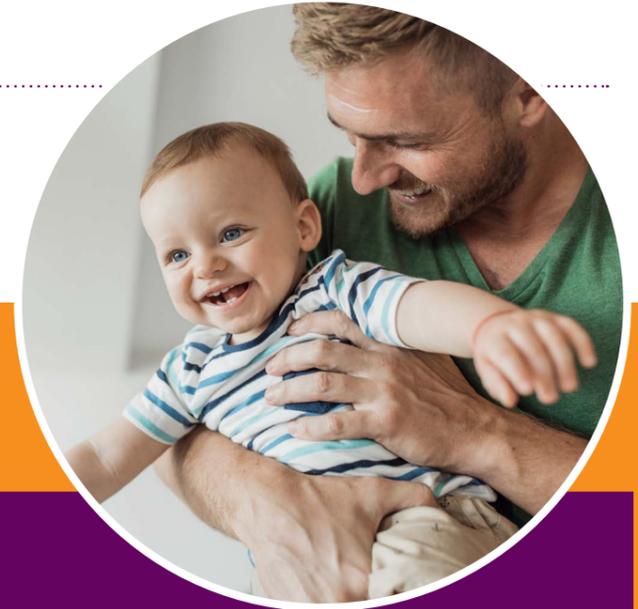
What can I Do?

Ensure your appliances are correctly installed and serviced annually. As a landlord we are legally required to service your gas boiler (if fitted) annually. It is essential that you allow us access. We will also service oil boilers and solid fuel burners annually. Our contractor will contact you in advance to advise when they intend to service your boiler. Please contact them immediately if the proposed date does not suit. Your tenancy is in jeopardy if you do not cooperate. We will seek to recover any additional costs from you.

If you have an open fire, you must have the chimney swept regularly. We also recommend that you use good quality smokeless fuel appropriate for your appliance type. Ensure that rooms in your home containing heating appliances are properly ventilated and never block vents.

Choice fit CO detectors as standard which you must check and test regularly. If necessary, replace batteries. You may fit one yourself but you must ensure it is properly fitted, tested and maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Only detectors to BS EN 50291 and CE or Kite marked should be used.

Remember that CO can enter your home from appliances fitted in neighbouring properties.



Don't:

- Try to repair gas appliances or pipework yourself
- Use any appliance if you suspect it might be faulty
- Use barbecues or generators indoors
- Use paraffin or bottled gas heaters

Do:

- Use appliances only for the purpose which they were designed and always follow the operating instructions
- If undertaking alterations to your home which may affect the safety or efficiency of your heating installation you must seek our permission
- Ensure your own appliances such as cookers are regularly serviced by a 'Gas Safe' registered engineer
- Ensure you recognise the difference between an alarm activation and an audible battery warning

If your carbon monoxide alarm sounds or you suspect a leak:

- Open doors and windows to ventilate the property and switch off all fuel burning appliances
- Evacuate the property immediately; stay calm and avoid raising your heart rate (unlike in a fire situation, doors and windows should be left open where possible)
- Call the relevant emergency advice line: Gas Emergency Service on 0800 002 001 or Oil (OFTEC) 0845 65 85 080, to report the incident
- Don't go back into the property; wait for advice from the emergency services
- Seek immediate medical help if you feel unwell or there is a confirmed CO incident;
- Contact Choice on **0300 111 2211**



Don't tip your oil tank!

Choice are aware of increased incidences of tenants wedging or tipping oil tanks before arranging a refill.

Whilst we appreciate that many of our tenants suffer from fuel poverty, it is extremely important that you do not tip your tank to increase the oil flow as this often results in damaged oil lines, oil leaks, environmental contamination, damage to oil burners and makes the tank unstable and dangerous.

Oil tanks are designed to retain a small amount of oil at the bottom of the tank. This is intended to act as a reservoir for sediment and moisture, which may damage the oil burner if used. Where damage is caused by tenant misuse, we will recharge all costs and your tenancy is at risk.



USEFUL TIPS FOR REFILLING YOUR OIL TANK...

- Always refit and secure the lid
- Avoid running out of oil and check oil levels regularly
- Avoid refilling with small drums as these are expensive and increase the likelihood of contamination
- Consider joining an oil buying club in your area to help budgeting for oil.

For further information on oil buying clubs please visit our website <https://www.choice-housing.org/energy/buying-your-energy>

If you require any further information and advice on refilling your oil tank please contact Choice Services Centre on **0300 111 2211**



Customer Surveys

At Choice we use Voluntas to carry out customer feedback surveys. From August this year their name is changing to IFF Research. IFF joined forces with Voluntas in March of last year so that they could better support the housing sector. Over the last 16 months their team has grown, and their name changed to IFF-Voluntas, reflecting the union.

Recently they have made the decision to remove the word Voluntas, using solely the name IFF Research for all their housing services.

What this means for you

All your services and support will continue to be delivered by same team and to the same high standard under the IFF Research brand; although there may be some minor changes to the questions you are asked during feedback surveys. This change is effective from 1st August.

If it's not
PEE, POO
or **PAPER**
it will block
the pipes



northern ireland
water



Delivering what matters

Find out more at
niwater.com

What a year it has been so far! The Tenants' Forum has risen to all the challenges that 2020 has thrown our way. We were quick to adapt to virtual meetings and we will continue to meet online to progress our work on behalf of all tenants. Virtual meetings are easy to attend and take up less time with no travel so if you are interested in joining us please call 0300 111 2211 and ask for the Tenant Participation Team.

Just before lockdown began, back in March 2020, we held 2 really successful showcase events in Derry~Londonderry and Enniskillen. These free events invited tenants to come along find out about the work of our Forums and Tenant Participation Team. Our Financial Inclusion Team were also out in force, assisting our tenants and answering any questions. Both events brought people together for a fun day with some practical advice!

Monday
9th
March



Enniskillen

Stands at the event included representatives from Choice's Energy Team, Tenant Engagement Team and Financial Inclusion Team with the emphasis on benefit checks. Other stands present on the day included: PSNI, Enniskillen Credit Union, Parkinson's, Centre for Independent Living, Department for Communities, INSEC, Cause and Jumping Clay.

Feedback from the day included:
"... PSNI was very worthwhile",
"Choice and PSNI stands interesting."

"They were all very positive."

Survey returns rated the event as 'excellent' and 'good'.



Tuesday
10th
March

Derry~Londonderry

The event was held in Caw Youth Centre, close to a general needs housing scheme.

The invite was extended by post and text to all tenants living in the Derry~Londonderry area.

Stands at the event included representatives from Choice's Energy Team, Tenant Engagement Team and Financial Inclusion Team with the emphasis on benefit checks. Choice also hosted a craft stand for planting. Other stands included: PSNI, Waterside Credit Union, INSEC, Stroke Association, Cancer Focus, Balloon Making and Face Painting. Musical entertainment was also provided by Dougie Breslin.

Feedback from stands was also very positive with many contributors thanking Choice for giving them the opportunity to reach so many tenants.



Money Advice
for our Tenants

Feedback from the day included:
"PSNI and planting good."

"Credit Union explained things, I'm re-joining."

"It was a very well done event ... Nice evening out ...very informative."

"Got my blood pressure checked."

"All very interesting in their own unique way."

"Aidan talked me through my finances and Universal Credit."

In & Around



On 23 March 2020 the Stay Home directive was announced and life changed for everyone in Northern Ireland, and across the world, as we collectively fought to control the COVID-19 virus.

Stay Home Memories project

As the Official Archive for Northern Ireland, Public Records Office NI will archive and record activities that took place during the Stay Home directive.

It is also important that PRONI is able to collect, preserve and make available the experiences of as many members of our community as possible, and for this they need help.

Record keeping is vital to our understanding of the past, and the present. In recent years PRONI has been able to investigate and understand events around the Decade of Centenaries because of the historical records that were kept and it's important that we collect information now for researchers of the future.

PRONI has launched the Stay Home Memories project to gather information on the lives of the people of Northern Ireland and how the pandemic effected everything from work and education to shopping and family and social life.

There are three ways that you can participate in the Stay Home Memories project:

- Stay Home Census, Stay Home Web Archive and the Stay Home Diaries.
- If you would like to know more about this once in a lifetime project, please visit NI Direct at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/stay-home-memories>
- You can also email pronievents@communities-ni.gov.uk if you would like to contribute to the Stay Home Archive.

A FOND FAREWELL

We bid farewell to Margaret Tanner, Scheme Co-ordinator at Lowtherstown Court. Margaret retired earlier in the summer after 22 years with Choice.

“Over the years Margaret has made an incredible contribution to life at Lowtherstown Court. I know every resident along with all her colleagues at Choice will be sad to see her go. We hope that she won't be a stranger, and we send her on her way with all our best wishes for a happy and fulfilling retirement.”

Leeanne Magee, Housing Manager



PIPE BAND ENTERTAINS

During this pandemic social distancing is being strictly adhered to in Tughan Court. This has resulted in the cancellation of all normal activities and get togethers.

Along with the rest of the United Kingdom, everyone at the scheme joined the Thursday evening “clapping” to show support and appreciation to all NHS staff, carers and essential workers.

On the evening of Thursday 28th May 2020, residents were entertained with wonderful music played by the Ballycrocken Old Boys Brigade pipe band.

The band formed at 7.30pm performed until 8pm when they joined tenants to show appreciation for essential workers. They

recommenced again playing for a further hour entertaining with hymns and tunes actively encouraging residents to participate in a sing along. Seats were provided for those in need.

Neighbouring residents from both dwellings adjacent to, and opposite, Tughan Court joined in with this uplifting entertainment, adhering to social distance guidelines throughout the evening.

Sincere thanks goes to Ann and Nancy, our active tenants, and to Gillian, the Scheme Co-ordinator for organising a wonderful event.



In & Around

We know that there have been many more staff and tenants going above and beyond to show their support to their neighbours and communities during the past few months, and we would like to express our sincere appreciation on behalf of all our tenants and staff. Now more than ever we are in this together.

DJ BOB'S DELIVERIES

In Fermanagh, local celebrity, DJ Bob delivered gifts to our tenants at two of our sheltered living schemes, Drumkeen Court and Westbridge House. The tenants, many of whom were unable to see their families face to face, were delighted and grateful for his kindness.

Nearby, the Devenish Partnership in Enniskillen delivered meals to Westbridge House. Thanks to the support of our Scheme Co-ordinator, Carmel Corrigan, nine tenants in Westbridge House received weekly food parcels.



MANY ACTS OF KINDNESS

As our weeks in Lockdown rolled by, we enjoyed reading about the wonderful acts of kindness and generosity being shown to our more vulnerable tenants by our colleagues from across the

community and voluntary sector. From Easter baskets to food donations, it is clear to see that community spirit is thriving during this difficult time.

A special thank you to the wonderful volunteers from Saint Vincent de Paul, who provided hand sanitiser bags

Community Spirit is thriving

for our tenants at Sperrin Court in Cookstown.

Some Clonard House residents in Belfast have received support in the form of food parcels, from Clonard Residents Association, which have been very much appreciated.

MANY MORE ACTS OF KINDNESS ACROSS NORTHERN IRELAND

During these challenging times, it was the generosity and compassion of individuals across the country that really brought life to our communities.

Rosemary McQuaid, Scheme Co-ordinator, provided Easter cards and gift bags for all the tenants at Drumkeen Court in Ederney. Rosemary also sent all tenants and staff in Lowtherstown Court in Irvinestown an Easter card to let them know she was thinking of them all.

Caroline Monroe is the Scheme Co-ordinator at Sperrin Court in Cookstown. Caroline made lunch and treats at her own home for the 30 tenants at the sheltered living scheme. Caroline delivered each meal by leaving it outside doors, ensuring that everyone at the scheme enjoyed a home cooked meal.

Andrew McCaroll kindly tended to the communal gardens for the whole community at the sheltered living scheme to enjoy. He is a former landscape gardener who lives in Harris Crescent, Dunmurry.



Rita Longlands, of Lawnfield Close in Newcastle, used her skills to play her part. During lockdown Rita was busy making much needed masks, scrubs, and uniform washbags for NHS staff and key workers in the area.

Well done Rita, your contribution to your community has made a huge difference and is very much appreciated by all!



Some more great Rainbow creations from our tenants at Castlehill House, Lisnaskea

Generosity and Compassion

In & Around

£400 GENEROUS DONATION

The tenants at Lowtherstown Court received a surprise £400 donation from DJ Conor McCann in June. They were all absolutely delighted. The local community have been so good to them!



Support for the NHS



RAINBOW JOY

Our residents at our sheltered living scheme at Harris Crescent stayed positive and spread the Rainbow joy!

MANY MORE ACTS OF KINDNESS

This is Linda Mulholland, during lockdown, Linda made scrubs and masks. With the money she raised, and along with donations from our tenants at Elmgrove Manor in east Belfast, Linda was able to give these treats to staff in the hospital. Well done Linda and everyone at Elmgrove Manor!

First Aid Training

Emergency First Aid at Work training is offered to all new Scheme Co-ordinators and a refresher course is completed every 3 years.

The course ensures all our Scheme Co-ordinators have and maintain good basic First Aid skills, as well as receiving a qualification in Emergency First Aid at work.

The training is primarily provided to Scheme Co-ordinators so they can assist with First Aid incidents involving tenants whilst professional medical advice is sought, if required.

Congratulations to all our Scheme Co-ordinators for completing this vital training.



Training was completed before the pandemic. This training took place before social distancing was introduced.

Fire Safety at Home

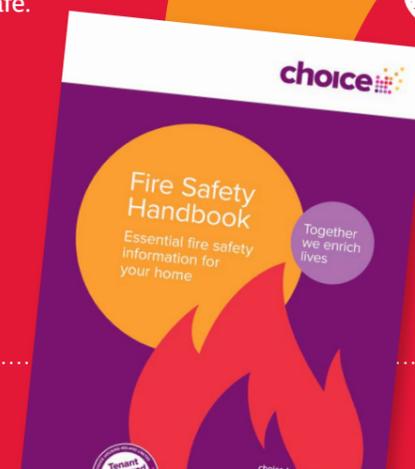
At Choice we work closely with our tenants to ensure our homes are safe and well maintained. This maintenance is a shared responsibility between landlord and tenant. There are simple steps you can take to protect against fire.

Our Fire Safety Handbook contains everything you need to know to keep your home safe.

You can download a copy of the Fire Safety Handbook from our website choice-housing.org or call 0300 111 2211 to request a copy.

STAY SAFE

If there's a fire:
**Get out, stay out,
and call 999.**



Delivering New Homes In 2020

We are working on new housing developments across Northern Ireland to deliver much-needed homes.

Family Housing for Dunmurry

February saw the handover of new homes to 48 families in Dunmurry. Gardenmore Way consists of houses and apartments and was completed in 3 phases. The scheme was onsite for approximately 15 months and the tenants are settling in well to their new community.



New Homes in Ballymena

The Association completed 40 new apartments at 52 – 54 High Street, Ballymena on 3rd March 2020. The scheme, which includes 36 General Needs apartments and 4 wheelchair accessible apartments, was designed by RPP Architects and constructed over a period of 22 months by Connolly & Fee.

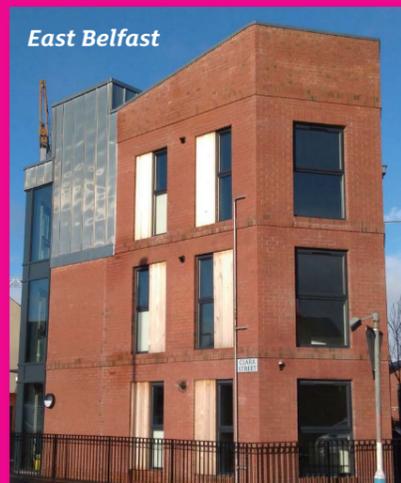


The building was previously used as a government office and was fully refurbished to deliver the apartment scheme. This involved the demolition of internal and external structures of the former building, stripping it back to the core steel frames and concrete slabs and constructing updated internal layouts, including dividing the building into two distinct blocks, as well as new external walls and façade.

The homes were handed over to tenants on 3rd March 2020 and we wish them happiness in their new homes.

New Apartments in East Belfast

19 new build apartments were handed over to tenants in February earlier this year. The apartments are spread across 3 sites on the Beersbridge Road in east Belfast. We are delighted to provide these much needed quality homes.



Choice to welcome new tenants through £28m Investment Programme



Choice Housing, along with Victoria Housing Estates Limited (VHE) approved a £28m investment programme, which will see over 300 properties transfer to Choice Housing ownership.

The approval of the investment follows an extensive period of consultation, announced in January of this year, in which both Choice Housing and VHE engaged on the investment programme and the range of options open to tenants.

The investment plan will see tenants move from VHE to Choice and the Housing Association take ownership of the properties. The investment will ensure each home receives significant renovations and refurbishments to meet the Decent Homes Standard.

Announcing the approval of the investment programme, Michael McDonnell, Chief Executive of Choice Housing said:

“This investment programme is welcome news for VHE’s tenants who have long been campaigning for upgrades to their homes. As part of their new Choice tenancy they will see an upgrade to their properties which will bring it up to Choice standards.

“I would also like to pay tribute to the team at VHE who have been working hard to facilitate the engagement and ensure that tenants availed of a

range of independent advice and support throughout the process. Now that the plan has been ratified by our respective boards we can move to the next phase of finalising tenancy agreements and transferring stock. We aim to have all the refurbishment work completed within three years of taking ownership of these homes”.

Dawn Purvis the Chief Executive of Victoria Housing Estates added:

“Following an assessment of our 429 properties in late 2016 it was found that significant investment was required to bring these homes up to a required standard that unfortunately we were not a position to manage. This new investment programme, facilitated by Choice Housing will ensure that all current VHE tenants will see significant investment in their homes as well as long term secure tenancy agreements for those who take up that option”.

The investment programme covers all of VHE’s properties across Northern Ireland, including Riverdale (West Belfast), Worcester Avenue (Bangor), Cherryhill, Holywood Road and Clonaver (East Belfast) and Harmin in Glengormley.

The programme has been developed in consultation with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.



“I was pleased to see the level of engagement from tenants throughout the consultation process, especially given ongoing challenges to the process as a result of Covid-19.

“It was also pleasing to see some tenants take up the option of applying to buy their own home, an element of this investment programme which showed a tenant centered approach”. Dawn Purvis the Chief Executive of Victoria Housing Estates

Children's Colouring Competition

Open to children 16 years and under



One lucky winner will receive this great prize! Entries must be received by Friday 23rd October 2020.

It's really easy to enter, just pull out this page and colour it in anyway you like! Then pop it in the post along with your name, age, address and telephone number in the reply slip below to

POST TO:
The Editor, Choice News, FREEPOST BEL2371, Belfast BT1 6BR

Win a family pass to Movie House!

Name	Age
Address	
Daytime Telephone	Evening Telephone

(Please note that the parent must be a tenant of Choice Housing Ireland). Ts & Cs apply.

Different ways to pay your rent and other charges

In order to make paying your rent, rates and service charges both safe and easy, we offer a wide range of options that will mean you can choose how you pay. Ways to pay your rent:



Going Online – You can pay your rent online at www.choice-housing.org by clicking on 'Pay Rent' on the homepage.



The allpay App – You can pay your rent via the allpay App which is available to download from the Apple App Store, Windows Phone Store or Google Play .



Direct Debit – You can set up a Direct Debit agreement. Please contact the Income Recovery Team on 0300 111 2211.



Phone us and use your debit or credit card – You will need to give us your rent reference number (on your rent payment card), your debit or credit card details, and the amount you want to pay.



At any Post Office, shop, garage displaying the Paypoint sign – You can pay cash and show your rent payment card. Make sure you get a receipt and keep it safe.



Post – Send a cheque or postal order to our head office. Never send cash. You need to allow three days for your payment to reach us on time.



Universal Credit direct payment – if you claim Universal Credit, the housing cost element can be paid directly to your rent account. However, if this does not cover the full amount of your rent you need to pay the difference.

Poetry Corner

Housewife and Poet

All labour ceased,
she takes her pen in hand.
Pursuing her itinerant thoughts,
Across the unmapped lands
of Xanadu or far Cathay,
Or nearer home, the heavy clays
where Kavanagh toiled.

In the corner, He watches
the Lilliputian throng
on the Lunatics Lantern.
Cartoons of life for the huddled masses.
Late night debates on ephemeral states
of the economy.
Significant dates, twenty years since,
Can it have been so long? And the boy?
Might he need glasses? Or extra classes?
Will the Thing never end?

The zepher coming off the river
cools the brow of the labourer,
harnessed to the plough,
butting down the page
and filling in the furrows,
now the children are asleep.

James Watson
Tenant from
Galway Court, Dundonald

TACKLING ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR TOGETHER

Anti-social Behaviour Support for our customers

Choice appointed Insec Security to provide assistance to tenants whenever problems are encountered in relation to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). This may include problems with excessive noise or threatening behaviour.

Insec Security
028 9020 0080

Please note the following:

- This service is only available to Choice tenants outside office hours.
- Tenants should continue to report all cases of ASB to the Services Centre on 0300 111 2211, during normal office hours.
- Any tenant who has concerns for their own safety, or believes that a crime has been committed, should contact the PSNI.
- Tenants living in sheltered housing schemes should continue to report all cases of ASB directly to their Scheme Co-ordinator or to the Services Centre on 0300 111 2211, during normal office hours.
- Insec Security will only visit the person who is causing the ASB. Insec will not visit the tenant making the complaint. This process is to ensure confidentiality is maintained.

Please contact the Association if you require further information regarding this service.



A message from our Chair Hazel Bell

Our experiences over the last few months will ensure that 2020 will not be forgotten. Someone very much wiser than me has said that “Hope is the pillar that holds up the world”.

Feelings of loneliness and isolation are now known to most of us with lockdown and social distancing limiting our contacts with family, friends, colleagues as well as our wider neighbourhoods and communities. However, as the weeks and months pass, let's try and ensure that we maintain our new connections with our neighbours, that we emerge more tolerant towards others and that we put our positive energy into concentrating on everything that is really important to us.

All of us in Choice are here to ensure that we provide you with the best services possible. We hope that you feel that you are able to contact us for any help and guidance - we have a wide range of contacts who can give assistance and advice.

The wise man quoted above was Pliny the Elder who was a Roman author and naturalist who lived in the first century nearly 2,000 years ago! He also suggested that we should “always act in such a way as to secure the love of our neighbour”. Wise words. Hopefully, the coming months will build on the generosity of spirit that has emerged within communities. Choice will continue to play its full part in ensuring that your home is a safe haven and that your neighbourhood is supportive.

Hazel Bell, Chair

Looking for your new home?

The Find a Home page on our website is up to date, visit it to find out where we have homes immediately available and how to apply!

<https://www.choice-housing.org/find-a-home>



We welcome your input

Here is your chance to become involved in future editions.

If you would like to submit a feature for consideration – such as a poem, a personal achievement, an interesting story, or indeed anything you feel would be of interest to other Choice tenants – then please send your article(s) to:

enquiries@choice-housing.org

*or post to: The Editor, Choice News,
FREEPOST BEL2371, Belfast BT1 6BR*

choice 
Together we enrich lives

Choice
Leslie Morrell House
37 - 41 May Street
Belfast
BT1 4DN

T: 0300 111 2211

E: enquiries@choice-housing.org

choice-housing.org

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