

Choice News

choice 

Together we enrich lives

Issue 20, Winter 2024

Good Relations Week 2024

**Tenant
Approved**



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choice-housing.org

A message from Michael, our Group Chief Executive



Welcome to the Winter 2024 edition of Choice News.

I'm grateful to our Community Development Team for coordinating a huge range of events to mark Good Relations Week (16th to 22nd September) 2024. From a youth raft race on the Foyle, to a 'mini mela' in Antrim and a challenging uphill road relay for runners in Dungannon, Choice hosted hundreds of participants across the country. Our largest ever programme highlighted the importance of cross-community and cross-cultural diversity and mirrors our daily commitment to 'Housing for All'.

Good Relations Week came 'hot on the heels' of the launch of our latest partnership with the Rio Ferdinand Foundation (RFF). Once again Choice and RFF aim to build the self-confidence, skills and employability of young people through sport, but this time our focus is in the Derry~Londonderry area. Thanks to the Mayor of Derry & Strabane Council for welcoming participants to the launch event and we all look forward to the initiative delivering the same positive benefits that emerged from our programmes in Belfast.

I'm delighted that Choice has been awarded 'Silver Plus' accreditation from Supporting Communities for our Tenant Participation. This recognition bears testimony to the hard work of tenants and colleagues across our regional networks and reflects our desire to place the tenant at the very centre of our plans and activities. This is the first time that we have engaged with Supporting Communities on their tenant participation framework and it won't be the last. We have now identified a number of areas for further improvement to enhance the influence and impact of tenants across the Group.

I'd like to draw your attention to articles within this edition of Choice News which focus on your health and safety. So please take time to consider our 'Every Visit Matters' initiative and flag to my colleagues if you have any concerns on the 'Big 5' areas. These encompass property condition, financial distress, domestic distress, damp and mould and safety concerns. More specifically, there is a really important reminder of fire safety in this newsletter, and we are pleased to highlight that our offices can now act as 'Safe Places'.

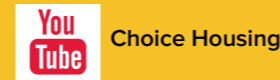
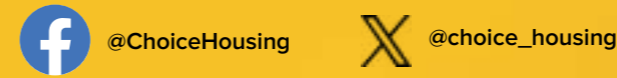
We were pleased to recently welcome the British Irish Ministerial Council to our new mixed tenure development at the Kings Hall site in Belfast. This is the last of 4 new build projects intended to pilot a mix of social rented, private rented and affordable for sale units, with the latter developed through our Maple & May subsidiaries. This edition of Choice News also promotes our significant investment in refurbishing a large number of existing homes across Belfast.

Finally, I'm delighted that Choice residents will soon be joined by the current tenants of Connswater Homes following the decision by both Boards to merge on 31st March 2025. A larger Choice Housing from next Spring will bring benefits to our customers, staff and partners by enabling further opportunities of scale and enhancing the breadth and depth of our service delivery.

Thanks for being a tenant of Choice and I hope you all have a great Christmas and New Year.

Michael McDonnell

Connect with Choice



Join us on Social Media!

Follow us on social media -
from Facebook, X to YouTube
and LinkedIn - we've got
something new for you
every day!

Feel free to like, follow, share,
and ask questions on any of
our social media platforms.



Our first Biodiversity Week!

Biodiversity Week is directly aligned with our Sustainability and Energy Strategy 2022-25, and it underscores our commitment to integrating biodiversity conservation into our broader sustainability efforts, reinforcing our dedication to environmental stewardship and sustainable resource management.

Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth, the communities they form and the habitats in which they live. It maintains ecological balance, economic value, cultural significance, and scientific and educational value, making its continued existence essential to a wide range of groups.

Choice wants to understand the impact we have on biodiversity, and we aim to promote best practice to assist habitats and species, to stabilise declining populations.

During our first Biodiversity Week in June this year, we showcased how Choice is embedding biodiversity into existing schemes, building biodiversity into our new developments, some of our planned biodiversity projects, and offering information and support on ours and our partners efforts.

We are excited to launch our introductory leaflet on biodiversity, giving you some key information on why it is so important, the significance of the 'Biodiversity Crisis', what we are doing within Choice, and what you can do to help. You can download this from our website.

Biodiversity Competition

In June this year we ran our first Biodiversity Week.

As part of that we invited tenants to take and send us pictures from their garden, neighbourhood or community which reflected the biodiversity in the area.

We were delighted with all the beautiful entries! Congratulations to Janine O'Brien of Rothesay Court, Coleraine. By entering her pretty picture of her flowers, Janine has won a shopping voucher.



We are already looking forward to our next Biodiversity Week in June 2025!

Complaints



How to complain

We define a complaint as 'any oral or written expression of dissatisfaction by any person, however made, about the service, action or inaction of Choice or its officers which requires a response'.

Choice has implemented a dedicated Customer Services Centre for you to report repairs or make general housing enquiries. Our first action will be to consider if we can resolve your concern immediately. If we can't, you can ask to register your complaint. We aim to acknowledge all complaints within one working day.

Our three stage complaints procedure is outlined below:

Local Resolution

Problems can be raised informally in the first instance. Please discuss your concerns with your Scheme Coordinator, Housing Officer, Property Services Officer or Development Officer. Where a complainant is unhappy with the initial response, he or she has the opportunity to appeal to a higher level within Choice. We will fully investigate all reasonable complaints made about our service and aim to find a solution as quickly as possible. Where we cannot resolve the issue immediately, you can ask to have your complaint dealt with through our three stage complaints procedure.



If you would like further information about making a complaint please contact Choice on **0300 111 2211** or email enquiries@choice-housing.org



The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman may not investigate your complaint if you make it more than six months after completing our complaints procedure.

SHELTERED LIVING AT CHOICE



Edgar Boyd Court

EDGAR BOYD COURT, SITUATED IN CARRYDUFF, IS A SHINING EXAMPLE OF THE BENEFITS OF SHELTERED LIVING.

This scheme comprises of 24 single-bedroom apartments and 10 double-bedroom apartments, with lift access to the upper floors. The key benefit of sheltered living is the provision of our scheme coordinators and 24-hour emergency assistance.

This helps our tenants feel safe and secure, knowing that assistance is on hand in an emergency. Our scheme coordinators organise support services, linking residents with necessary social help and the wider community.

If you or a loved one are considering a move to sheltered housing, we invite you to visit our communities and see for yourself the vibrant, supportive environment we offer. Our team is here to answer any questions and help you find the perfect home.

We have vacancies at some of sheltered living schemes across the province, visit (our website/our Find a Home page) for more information.

At Edgar Boyd Court, community spirit is alive and well, as evidenced by frequent fundraising and regular social events. In the last 12 months the generous tenants at Edgar Boyd Court have participated in the Macmillan Coffee Morning, which raised £270 in September; Christmas Jumper Day, which raised £35; and Christian Aid fundraising, which raised £152. With further fundraising activities arranged for the coming months, it is clear that Edgar Boyd Court is a force for good in the community.

Regular social events at Edgar Boyd Court include a Chippy and Quiz Night once a month, a Stew and Game or Movie Night once a month, and fortnightly quiz sheets. The Gardening Club meets every other week in spring and summer for gardening and lunch, while a jigsaw table is always available. Coffee and tea mornings are held every Monday and Friday.

Collaboration with local community groups enhances the vibrant life at Edgar Boyd Court. For example, the Killynure Community Association provided a minibus and driver which enabled the tenants to visit the Montalto estate in March. A six-week intergenerational craft project with Carryduff Primary School, culminated in a visit to the school for tea and music with the pupils. In June tenants invited representatives from the community association, neighbours and friends to the annual BBQ.



Chippy and Quiz Night

Every Visit Matters

Through our 'Every Visit Matters' campaign we are focused on building the capacity, confidence and awareness of all staff and contractors to deliver a holistic service to tenants.

We believe that having a great home makes a positive difference to the health and wellbeing of everyone in society and this shared belief is at the forefront of our work.

All staff are aware that 'Every Visit Matters'.

Our staff and contractors know that if they become aware of an issue whilst on a visit to a tenant's home, they have a responsibility to report it so that action can be taken to address it. Although this will be normal practice for the majority of staff, our 'Every Visit Matters' campaign sets out the 'Big 5' areas to look out for and the training gives staff a toolkit to work from.

If you are experiencing any issues or have concerns please contact us on 0300 111 2211.

Look out for the Big 5!

The 'Big 5' areas staff look out for whilst on a visit to a tenant's home are:

1. Damp and Mould
2. Issues in relation to Property Condition
3. Domestic Distress
4. Financial Distress
5. Ensuring tenants homes are safe



At Choice we share a passion for enriching lives through great homes, services and communities.

Housing for All

Good Relations, a strategic priority for Choice

As the dust settles on Good Relations Week 24, we reflect on the fundamental role the programmes deliver for our communities.

Through Choice's five Shared Housing schemes across Northern Ireland, the association contributes significantly to the delivery of the Department for Communities' 'Housing for All programme' – creating communities through diversity and inclusivity.

Choice is building foundations for these communities to thrive and prosper through a range of good relations initiatives and projects, tailored for the communities. To date, £34m has been invested in the Choice Shared Housing developments, and associated five-year Good Relations Plans.

Choice is committed to the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Northern Ireland Housing Executives' 'Housing for All' Shared Housing Programme. The Programme has its origins in the NI Executive Together: Building a United Community Strategy which reflects the Executive's commitment to improving community relations and continuing the journey towards a more united and shared society.

Choice deliver a range of good relations initiatives and projects throughout the year across all five of their shared housing schemes, but during Good Relations Week, which took place during September 2024, the association took the opportunity to work with a range of partners and deliver impactful events and activities all tailored to the local communities involved.

Young people from across Derry/Londonderry took part in a 3-mile rowing race in the River Foyle followed by a 2-mile cycle race. Working alongside Northwest Youth Services, participants from across secondary schools in the area signed up for the challenge which ended with a community celebration.

A cross-community football tournament in Ballymena brought together 250 young people across 20 youth teams and a range of partners, including the PSNI and Glasgow Rangers Football Academy with participating teams from all backgrounds including the Irish traveller and migrant communities.

Culture, diversity, and inclusion were all celebrated during a mini-mela in the Castle Mall in Antrim. The event brought together the world of dance and music, global cuisine, and amazing arts and crafts experiences for all the family. Partnering with Antrim Community Fridge, Castle Mall, C21 Theatre Company and ArtsEkta.

Dungannon also welcomed the return of the popular event which brought 400 runners together to compete in the one-mile relay in partnership with Galbally Runners. People of all abilities from running clubs, families, sporting clubs, businesses, and local schools competed on the iconic 'Hill of the O'Neill' in Dungannon.

Jonathon Blakely, Community Development Manager-
"It has been another incredibly successful Good Relations Week for Choice, filled with events, activities and initiatives aimed at developing and sustaining healthy shared communities. These events bring people together from all communities to cheer on participants and enjoy a day with friends and neighbours."



"If we are to deliver on our commitment to the Shared Housing Programme, we have a responsibility to support the communities that are embracing these housing options. This is more than just a financial contribution; this is a long-term commitment to providing the foundations to improve and build community relations."

Michael McDonnell,
Group Chief Executive



WE WANT OUR
TENANTS TO
GET INVOLVED

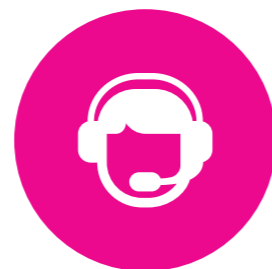
Menu of Tenant Involvement



Community Network



Community Champion



Service Improvement Team



Editorial Team



Financial Stakeholders Group

Choice Community Network

The Network provides more opportunities to impact services in your area and have a stronger voice.

Community Champion

Become a Community Champion to represent tenants in your local community, working alongside staff to improve your neighbourhood.

Service Improvement Team

Working alongside Choice to help improve service delivery in your area.

Editorial Team

The Team review articles to showcase the activities for Choice News.

Financial Stakeholders Group

Receive information on annual rent increases and service charges as well as an explanation on how these have been calculated.

Find out more!

Contact our Community Development Team
get.involved@choice-housing.org

Choice achieves silver Tenant Participation status

Choice has been awarded silver level Tenant Participation Accreditation by the independent charitable body, Supporting Communities.

Sheenagh McNally, Supporting Communities, said “Choice deserves many congratulations for achieving a Level 4 Silver Tenant Participation Accreditation award. Our Tenant participation Accreditation process is extensive. It includes a forensic examination of the organisation’s engagement practices through documentary evidence and further validation with focus groups of tenants, staff, and senior managers.

The staff team should be proud of their efforts, hard work, and dedication. I have no doubt that if our report’s recommendations are embraced, a Gold-level award is in Choice’s future.”

Choice scored highly in each of the ‘Ten Standards’, including the information it provides to tenants as a landlord; the effectiveness of its tenant structures; the degree to which tenants are involved in making decisions; and its commitment to actively promoting equal opportunities.

The exercise required Choice to critique its standards and competencies, identify areas for improvement, and score its performances. Following an assessment by an independent panel, the housing association was deemed worthy of Level Four status – the equivalent to silver grade.

William Wilson, Chair of Choice’s Community Network said, “Choice aims not only to meet housing needs but also to empower all of us—tenants, staff, and partners—to make a lasting, positive impact on our communities. Choice are embracing new, innovative approaches to ensure every tenant feels valued, no matter their background. I have found my involvement during the past few years very rewarding. Having opportunities to discuss issues affecting all tenants with Choice staff is obviously of great benefit to all concerned.”

Tenant Participation Accreditation is a structured process that is relied upon to establish how well landlords involve tenants and residents in their services. The findings also show the level to which an organisation involves residents and helps to flag up opportunities for improvement.

Jonathon Blakely, Choice Community Development Manager, said: “This reflects Choice’s ongoing commitment to empowering residents and enhancing tenant engagement. This award acknowledges the effectiveness of our work in giving tenants a strong voice in shaping our services, reinforcing our role as a leader in tenant participation, and fostering deeper trust and collaboration across our community.”

Jonathon Blakely, Choice Community Development Manager, said: “We are extremely proud to have achieved Silver ‘Level 4’ status in the Tenant Participation Standards Accreditation.”



Carol Ervine, Group Director of Tenant and Client Services, Sheenagh McNally, Head of Corporate Services, Supporting Communities, William Wilson, Chair of Choice Community Network and Jonathon Blakely, Choice Community Development Manager



Our online tenant portal, 'My Choice' is available now to all Choice tenants



We have carried out some recent improvements to allow you to raise routine response basic repairs at any time, as well as view the repair history for your home and the status of your repairs.

What Services can I access through 'My Choice'?

You can quickly and securely:

- Access your rent account online to view your account
- Report a routine response basic repair and view current/past repairs
- View your contact information and update your contact details
- Report an issue or concern

How do I register for 'My Choice'?

You can register with 'My Choice' on your smartphone, tablet, laptop or computer.

To register you will need the following information:

- Account Reference number (this can be found on your rent account statement)
- First Name
- Surname
- Date of birth
- National Insurance Number – format is AB123456C – capital letters and no spaces

You will also need an email address. If you do not provide an email address, you will not receive the activation token to allow you to complete the registration process.

To register now, simply scan the QR code or use the link below:

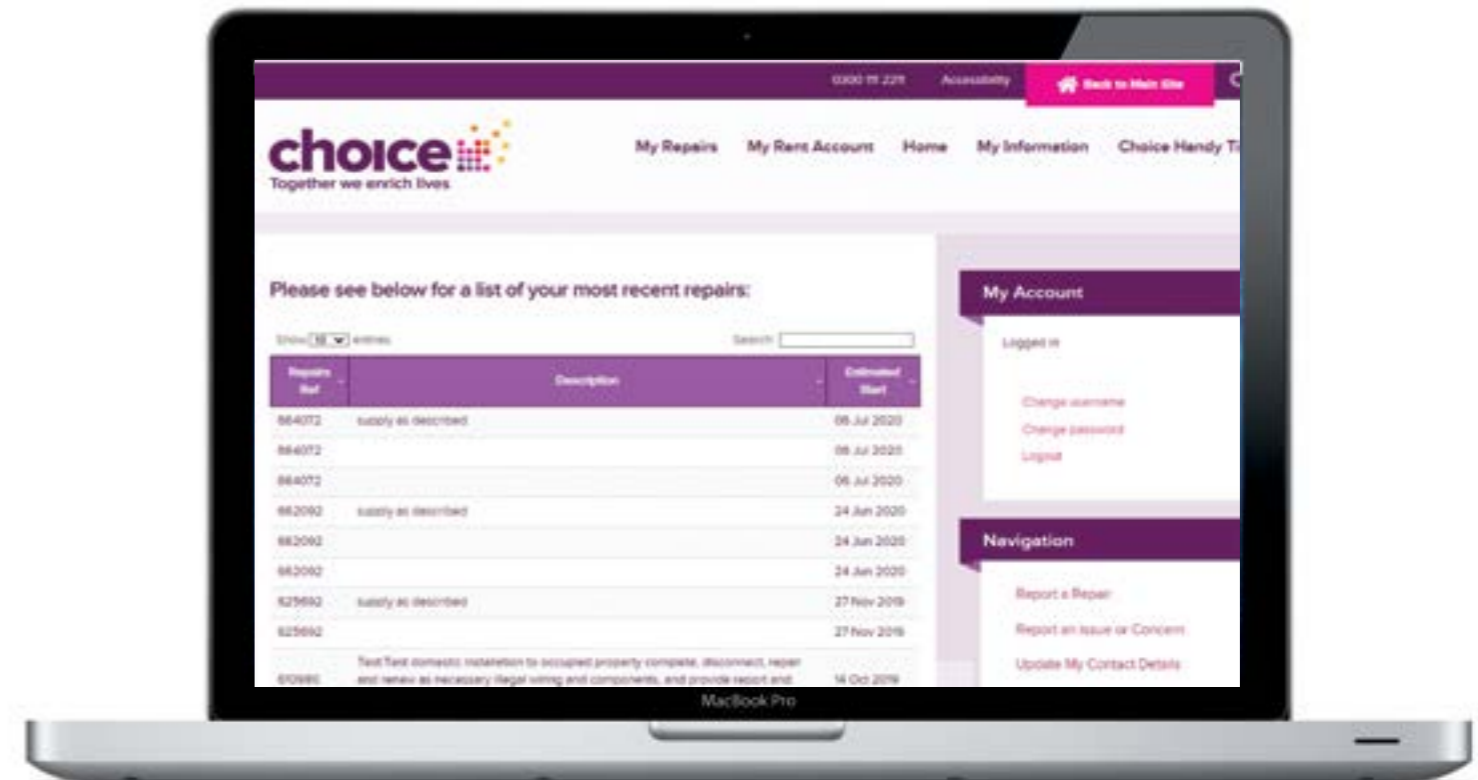


<https://my.choice-housing.org/>

This will take you to the 'My Choice' Homepage. Click on 'Register New Account' and follow the instructions. If you already have an account just log in using your username and password.

If you experience any issues with login or registration you can contact tenantportal@choice-housing.org for assistance.

Clare, Tollgate House, Belfast-
'My Choice works for me as I can check my rent account or the status of a repair at any time of the day or night. It's so easy to use and I would certainly recommend it to all Choice tenants.'



Home Contents Insurance – are you covered?

It is difficult to expect the unexpected, however over the past number of years there have been many examples of extensive damage to tenant's properties being caused by flooding, fire and severe cold spells. Unfortunately, many of the tenants affected had no home contents insurance. Choice strongly recommends all tenants insure their home contents.

Choice are responsible for, and will carry out repairs to the structure of the properties. It is however, the tenant's responsibility to have insurance cover for personal property, furnishings and the decoration of their home (including floor coverings).

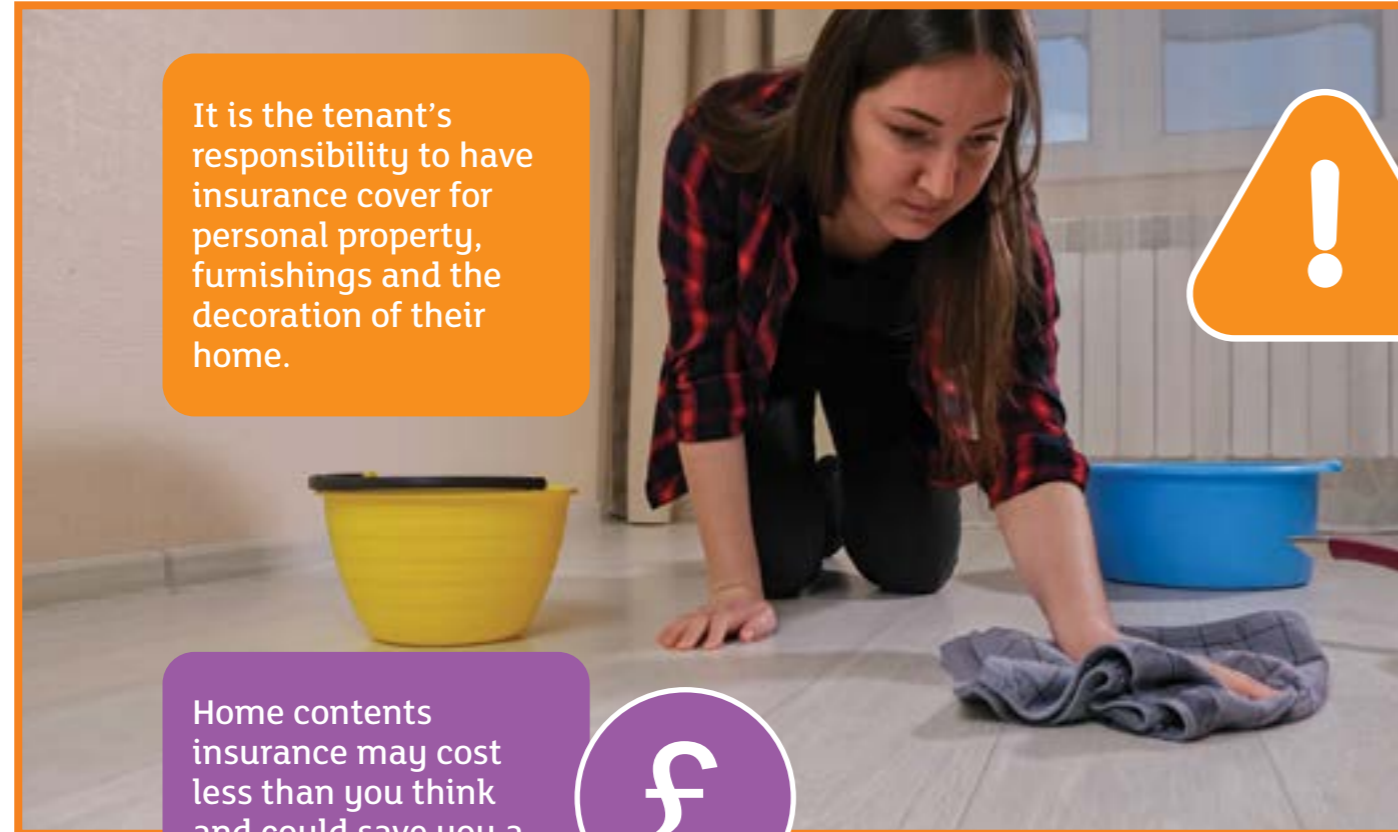
We realise that home contents insurance may be the last thing on many tenants' minds, especially when there are so many other outgoings. However, if you do not have insurance for your personal property, you run the risk of having to find all the money necessary to

repair or replace items that have been damaged. There are a number of contents insurance policies available which you can pay monthly or annually.

Details of insurance companies are easily available on the internet or you can contact your local insurance broker for further details. Home contents insurance may cost less than you think and could save you a significant amount of money if something did go wrong.

The cost of your home contents insurance will depend on how much the contents of your home are worth and where you live.

Having home contents insurance will give you the peace of mind that should something unexpected happen, any potential damage to your home contents are covered, leaving you to concentrate on the things that really matter in life.



It is the tenant's responsibility to have insurance cover for personal property, furnishings and the decoration of their home.

Home contents insurance may cost less than you think and could save you a fortune if something did go wrong.



King's Hall Development



Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons visits mixed tenure scheme in Belfast

Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons MLA joined the Choice team as he viewed the first fully mixed tenure apartment scheme in Northern Ireland, located at the King's Hall site in Belfast.

The £14m project managed by Choice, and subsidiary Maple and May, incorporates affordable social housing and private rental units all designed to be part of one integrated scheme with shared communal areas, parking and access.

During the visit, the Minister viewed the newly built apartments, alongside the wider shared and communal areas that make up this innovative development. Minister Lyons said: "As Minister, I am pleased to visit this pioneering project as it nears completion. I have said that we need to be innovative as we seek to address the housing need in our society. In providing high-quality accommodation across a range of tenures – both social housing and private rentals – this scheme is an example of progressive thinking in action. I hope it will have a positive impact on the people who live here, and also the wider community in this area."

81 new apartments

This new housing development forms part of a wider £100m regeneration project, being led by Benmore Octopus which will also include medical and life sciences accommodation, a multi-storey car park, a central plaza, a creche and retail/café/restaurant and leisure facilities.

With 81 new apartments in total, the mixed tenure development offers 45 1- and 2-bedroom social apartments for over 55s alongside a further 36 apartments for private rent, which will be leased via Maple and May.

Choice Group Chief Executive, Michael McDonnell said,

"We are pleased to welcome Minister Lyons to view this ground-breaking development. Mixed tenure is a strategic priority for Choice and our subsidiary Maple and May, with the focus on offering a range of living options whilst facilitating the opportunity to foster greater social, economic and community cohesion."

The social housing apartments have been constructed to Lifetime Homes standards with all apartments benefitting from Secured by Design 'Gold' accreditation.

The development is also served by private parking, internal and external amenity space and a concierge service.

Fire Safety

Fire Safety At Christmas

- ◆ Do not over overload sockets or daisy chain electrical extension leads.
- ◆ Check that your Christmas lights do not have frayed wires and are in good condition.
- ◆ Replace candles with battery powered type.
- ◆ When placing gifts under your tree, do not place on top of electrical power leads.
- ◆ If you have a real tree, water regularly to stop it drying out. Keep away from heat sources.
- ◆ Put in place a nighttime plan where all Christmas lights are turned off and candles are blown out.
- ◆ If you are leaving your property unattended for any reason turn all Christmas lights off.



Fire Safety in internal communal areas

- Be aware of the nearest exits in communal areas.**
- Keep all communal escape corridors and fire exits clear from obstructions**
- Report any fire hazards to the appropriate authorities.**

If you are concerned about a perceived fire safety risk, contact us today on 0300 111 2211.

You can report anonymously if you like and our specialist team will take appropriate action. We value your support in our efforts to reduce fire risks.

Sea Swimming in North Down

Tenant Focus- Dirk Lakeman

With over 12,000 homes across Northern Ireland our tenants' hobbies and interests are exceptionally wide and varied. Through this new addition to Choice News tenants can share their knowledge, skills and passions - contact editor@choice-housing.org if you would like to inspire the Choice community!

Dirk Lakeman lives at Trinity Heights, Bangor and at 80 years of age he is the poster boy for functional movement and life long wellbeing.

Unless I've seen the sea in Ballyholme, my day isn't complete. I walk, bike or drive along the concrete seafront every day, the weather dictates the best way to enjoy this unique part of Bangor.

I have enjoyed swimming at Ballyholme for the past 3 years. Just down from Ballyholme Yacht Club is a slip road to the sea, I check regularly to make sure that the water quality is dark or light blue. Next I check the tides as I like to swim only with high tides and then I check the weather.

Lastly, the wind, even when the temperature is around 8°C to 10°C and there is little or no wind, it's still great for a swim, even in autumn or winter.

When I first started to swim in the sea even with a wetsuit on I was still shivering occasionally from the cold, until a couple of fellow swimmers in the autumn wearing gloves and socks pointed out that the body extremities, i.e., hands and feet should be covered, they were right I've NEVER been cold again since wearing socks and gloves.

I never forget my Safety Float bag, for car keys, purse, mobile phone, other valuables and in case I want a break, I can rest on it.

Another lady on Groomsport beach mentioned that all pain in her body would be gone for a number of hours as a result of a sea swim. I consciously checked the next time I went for a swim with a headache, rotator cuff pain and shoulder and neck discomfort, I swam 300 to 400 metres and jumped in the car, driving home I realised she was right I was not aware of a headache, it had completely gone and only a few hours later was I aware of neck & shoulder discomfort returning.

I'm quite a few years over the age of 75 and thus still middle aged according to BBC4, and according to the programme producers and participants, we are still only middle aged until we hit 90, but yes then we are considered old!



NEW
FEATURE

Important information for all tenants



Rates Rebate

If you are making a claim for Universal Credit you will also need to make a claim for Rates Rebate.

You apply online for Rate Rebate at Land and Property Services.

Before you can apply, you need to create a Rate Rebate account online. Time limits might apply to backdating a Rate Rebate claim.

To claim Rate Rebate, you must provide:

- your date of birth
- National Insurance number
- tenancy reference number
- information about a partner if you have one
- landlord information
- how many people also live in the property

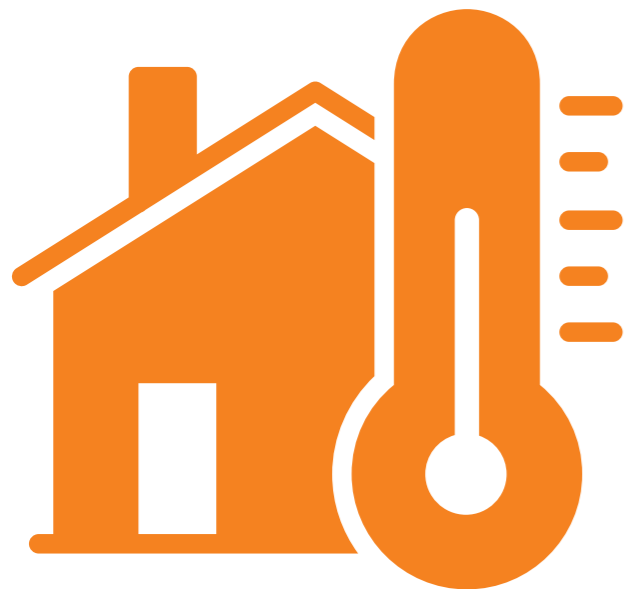


Land and Property Services will ask your landlord to verify the number of other people living at your address.

<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/land-property-services-lps>
Land & Property Services (LPS)

If you need support please contact our Financial Inclusion Team on: 0300 111 2211.

Winter Fuel Payment



You could get a Winter Fuel Payment for winter 2024 to 2025 if you were born before 23 September 1958.

You may be eligible if you or your partner are currently in receipt of any of the following benefits: Pension Credit. Income Support.

Visit NI Direct for more information.



Choice celebrate 25th Anniversary at Clonard House, Belfast



Residents and staff of Choice came together to mark 25 years of their West Belfast sheltered housing scheme – Clonard House. The development, which was first opened in September 1999, provides secure independent living for older tenants.

Clonard House is suitably located in the heart of West Belfast – close to a wide range of amenities, public transport links and for example, local pharmacy, several churches, and a range of shops making it a convenient location for tenants who have a need for facilities close by. In 2019, the scheme was part of a £585,000 refurbishment project that provided tenants with new kitchens as well as a range of other upgrades.

Stephen Adair, Area Manager said:

“I have been to several of these events this year already, and the one key theme across them all has been the commitment and dedication of both the tenants and scheme coordinators – without which we would not be able to make these schemes as successful and as sustainable as they are.”

“Clonard House continues to thrive here in West Belfast with tenants at the heart of everything we do. Hearing about the activities and friendships that have been made is exactly what makes these schemes homes.”

“Choice is committed to ensuring our existing homes continue to be sustainable and are of a high quality and we have invested in Clonard House recently to ensure this standard of living is sustained. This is something we will continue to do.”

The scheme is comprised of 40 self-contained apartments, which include 3 fully wheelchair accessible properties and a further five sheltered bungalows connected to the scheme. The scheme has been a vital social housing provision for Belfast, supporting people to live safely and independently in their own home.



Phase one of new 40 home Enniskillen Development underway



Michael McDonnell, Choice Group Chief Executive; Jayne McFaul, Choice Development Officer and Simon Johnston, Project Manager Newpark Homes.

Simon Johnston from Newpark Homes said, "We are delighted to see construction work progressing well at our Sligo Road Development. Once completed it will provide much needed housing in the local Enniskillen area and we look forward to working together, in partnership with Choice to achieve this."

A new development on the Sligo Road in Enniskillen will bring 40 new homes to the area. The first phase of 20 units will be handed over in early 2026. This general needs scheme is part of our commitment to deliver quality affordable housing across Northern Ireland.

Incorporating a range of living options – apartments, 2, 3, and 4-bedroom houses and wheelchair accessible bungalows, the new development will bring much needed homes to the Enniskillen area.

Michael McDonnell, Choice Group Chief Executive, said: "Our Sligo Road scheme is yet another example of the association delivering on its commitment to addressing the growing demand for social housing across the region. This is one of 22 schemes our development team currently has on sites across Northern Ireland, in what has been a very busy eighteen months for our new build programme."

"With approximately 50k still on the waiting list for social housing these schemes cannot come quick enough but equally we cannot do it on our own. There are a range of challenges that will have an impact on our, and the sectors' ability to deliver these types of developments across Northern Ireland."

"As a housing association, Choice Group will continue to focus on supporting our tenants, their families, and communities across Northern Ireland."

The site on the Sligo Road is within walking distance of local retail units at the Sligo/Derrylin Road junction.

As one of the largest housing associations in Northern Ireland, Choice currently provides 12,000 homes to meet the diverse needs of c.30,000 tenants and residents. We have 283 properties in the Fermanagh and Omagh area, including 89 Sheltered Living, 113 Family homes and 81 Supported living homes.

Alongside this new scheme, Choice has plans to invest further in new homes across Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, including 26 units at Coolnagard Glen, Omagh, 28 units at Mullaghmore Road, and 27 units at Old Eglis Road Dungannon.

Working in partnership with lead contractor and developer – Newpark Homes, the Sligo Road Development represents an investment in excess of £7m and brings together the latest in design and technology, making these new homes more energy efficient for its new tenants.

The wider project team includes Architects - McCartan Muldoon, Quantity Surveyor - Naylor Devlin alongside McAdam Design and McGahon Surveyors.



Celebrating 10 years of Inspire, Peter's Hill

It has been 10 years since Inspire Peter's Hill opened their doors and began supporting individuals with mental health and intellectual disabilities. The vision for Peter's Hill has been to create a supportive environment, promote person centred care, develop skills, and deliver empathic care in a trusted safe environment. All the while ensuring that each person has the opportunity to engage in local community events and have their voices heard.

We celebrated this by holding a garden party for our service users, staff, neighbours, friends and family to come together to celebrate a successful 10 years. We had musical entertainment from Belfast Ukulele Jam, they created an amazing atmosphere for the occasion. We had a magical performance from Jimbo the magician, who really wowed the audience with all his tricks!

Belfast's Lord Mayor, Micky Murray, came along to join in the day - he really enjoyed the celebrations and plans to come back to visit us again soon to see more of the work we do to support the people who live here. The weather held out for us and we all had an amazing day!

Conor Mullin, Area Manager said "This is a fantastic service that I feel proud to be a part of, the staff team provide a supportive and therapeutic environment to the service users at Peter's Hill."

The staff team have proven over the last ten years on numerous occasions that they're willing to go the extra mile to ensure all those using the service receive the best possible care, this ranges from community engagement, tenancy support, building daily living skills, achieving person centred goals and feeling valued in and outside of their homes.

The service users at Peter's Hill advocate for those with learning disabilities and mental health disorders and attend events such as Learning Disability and World Mental Health Day workshops, they're committed to giving back to the wider community and with support from our staff we have been honoured to raise money for other charities that are close to their hearts. I look forward to seeing what the staff and service users at Peter's Hill will achieve over the next 10 years, from what we have seen so far, it will be nothing but amazing."

Protecting your home from condensation & mould

Where does the moisture come from?

All air contains some moisture. Modern appliances such as dishwashers, washing machines and tumble dryers all produce large amounts of moisture. As many as 20 pints of moisture is added to the air in the home by an average family per day.

How do the problems start?

Generally, the problems start in winter when there is too much moisture in the air which condenses on cold surfaces. In older properties which were poorly insulated and drafty, any excess moisture could easily escape.

Today our homes are much better sealed and insulated. Unfortunately excess moisture, once sealed into our homes now makes them prone to problems such as windows streaming with condensation. Excess moisture, if left unchecked, will lead to damp in the building fabric. Double glazing, insulation and draught proofing all help to retain heat, but can make condensation problems much worse by reducing natural ventilation. Since it is neither practical nor desirable to make our homes less-well sealed, the answer is to reduce the amount of moisture we produce and physically remove the excess moisture.

If excess moisture is allowed to build-up in the home, moist air will inevitably come into contact with a cold surface such as a window or external wall when the outside temperature falls. At these low temperatures beads of condensation form, initially on windows and then spread elsewhere. Soon the condensation turns into damp and may result in mould spots growing.

How does the moisture spread?

Moist air is never concentrated in one place for long, it will drift around the home. Moisture produced in one room, for example a kitchen or bathroom will circulate around the house, until it finds a cold place where it will condense and create areas of mould. This may be a cool bedroom or inside a wardrobe for example. Condensation and mould can, therefore occur in any room of the home. Usually these are the rooms that are least well heated, not necessarily the ones where the moisture was produced.

How do you reduce condensation?

Condensation can be effectively managed by controlling moisture generation, adequate heating and ventilating your home.

In cold weather, opening windows for 5-10 minutes several times a day will remove moist air without allowing the fabric of the building to cool significantly. This method will conserve heat and reduce energy loss as most heat in a property is held within the building fabric (walls, floors etc.) and not the air itself.

IF YOU FIND MOULD, HIGH LEVELS OF CONDENSATION or you suspect rising damp, penetrating damp such as defective render or leaking pipework, please contact us to arrange an inspection.

CALL US ON:
0300 111 2211



It is important that tenants are aware of the need to control and manage indoor air quality which contributes to condensation and mould growth that may damage your health, home and belongings.

All homes produce some amounts of excess moisture and we are all familiar with condensation on windows and pools of water on window sills. In severe cases, if not managed, this can lead to damp patches on walls and mould growth. In homes, unsightly mould can form around window panes, corners of rooms and behind furniture.

Condensation is the first sign that your home is producing excessive moisture or that moisture cannot escape through ventilation. Moisture and mould build up is not only unsightly but can cause damage to clothing, furnishings, decorations and can aggravate certain health conditions.

TOP TIPS!

- Do not dry your clothes indoors - each load of washing will contain 5-10 pints of water
- Wipe condensation from windows in the morning and wring the cloth or sponge into the sink
- Treat mould with a mild acid, such as undiluted white vinegar
- Keep lids on pots when cooking, open a window and use the extractor fan if provided
- Keep bathroom doors closed during and after bathing or showering. Open the window or use the fan if provided
- Let fans run or leave windows open for at least 15 mins after showering, bathing or cooking
- When filling a bath or sink run the cold water first before adding hot - this reduces steam and will prevent scalding
- Ensure all rooms are adequately heated even if rarely used
- Don't use stand-alone gas heaters as these appliances produce water
- Consider using mould resistant paints in rooms exposed to high humidity such as bathrooms and kitchens
- Keep a space behind furniture to allow air movement and avoid placing furniture against external walls
- Ventilate properly to remove stale, moist air. The most effective way is to open several windows to allow a through draft
- Don't block or close wall, ceiling or window vents
- Don't isolate fans or ventilation systems if fitted - they are efficient and cost very little to run
- Don't cover radiators with curtains or furniture



Competition Winners



Colouring Competition

Zach Wightman, Hamilton Court, Comber, won the Summer Colouring Competition!

Zach's beautiful design really stood out for the judges and he won a family pass to Belfast Zoo, just in time for the half term break.

Our judges were very impressed with all the entries so a huge thank you to every child who took the time to send in their entry. Well done!



Garden Competition

A huge congratulations to the gardening group at Edgar Boyd Court, Carryduff.

The sheltered living scheme has been chosen as the winners of this year's Best Kept Garden award. The standard of entries was exceptionally high this year, so well done to all our keen gardeners who took the time to enter.

The gardening group at Edgar Boyd Court submitted a very strong entry, with a real focus on the collaboration between tenants and staff and their partnership with local garden centre Saintfield Nurseries.

Helen Proctor, founder of the gardening group, was presented with the award on behalf of the scheme by Housing Officer, Amy Blemings.



WINNER!
Edgar Boyd Court
Carryduff

Major kitchen replacement programme as part of Choice's Asset Management Strategy

Over the next year Choice, the leading social housing provider in Northern Ireland, will spend over £15m on our planned maintenance programme.

£1.3m has already been invested in a significant number of kitchen replacements across Belfast, which involved an ambitious programme of renovations across almost 200 homes, delivering modern, functional kitchens that meet the needs of tenants.

This investment is part of Choice's new Asset Management Strategy which will progress Choice's ongoing investment in their full portfolio which will see the housing association spend over £80m on maintenance and new housing projects over the next three years.

In Carrick Hill, 104 homes underwent extensive upgrades, executed by Bells / CB Contracts. The project was completed in six phases, showcasing Choice's commitment to high standards and tenant satisfaction. In East and West Belfast, the Kitchen Replacement Programme, managed by Equans, encompasses over 67 general needs homes.

The new kitchen design features modern finishes, offering tenants a choice of colours and styles for

units, worktops, and flooring. The kitchen replacement programme, which includes fire, heat and smoke detectors, not only improves the quality of life for tenants but also represents Choice Housing's commitment to invest in the future. Each renovation was completed within a timeframe of approximately 7 to 10 days per property, ensuring focus on efficiency and minimal disruption to tenants. The first phase of this initiative commenced in February 2024, with final projects scheduled for completion by mid-October.

Over the next three years, Choice aim to invest over £50m in capital projects alone, all informed by the association's annual stock condition survey programme which allows Choice to prioritise planned projects.

A range of other commitments forms part of this ambitious strategy, for example, the increased use of data and new technology to deliver a better service for tenants, staff and the sector and formally benchmarking stock, response, planned and void maintenance costs on an ongoing basis to ensure value for money. Choice also aims to increase its Energy Performance Certificates Rating to 78 by 2030.

John Legge, a Choice tenant was very pleased with the new upgrades to his home -

"I couldn't be happier with my new kitchen. The design is modern, and I love the choice of colours and finishes. It's not just about looks; everything is so much more functional now."

Choice remains dedicated to investing in the future of the community, ensuring that all tenants have access to safe, comfortable, and high-quality homes.



Mr & Mrs Legge,
Greer House,
Belfast



Choice announces c£1m refurbishment of supported accommodation in West Belfast

Choice, in conjunction with The Cedar Foundation, has announced investment of nearly £1m for the extension, remodelling, and refurbishment of Lanthorn Mews, an existing supported housing scheme located on the Falls Road in Belfast.

The refurbished scheme, representing an investment of £975k, will feature five self-contained units, each designed to accommodate one individual. These units will enable residents with intellectual disabilities to achieve their potential for independent living, supported 24/7 by on-site staff. The scheme will also provide a staff office and staff welfare area, including a kitchenette and shower room. Ideally situated for access and connectivity, the scheme is on the Glider route and within easy walking distance of local amenities, ensuring residents can easily access the services they need.

The project has been developed in close consultation with the Belfast Trust and The Cedar Foundation, who have been actively involved from the outset. The Belfast Trust, which endorsed the scheme in September 2021, will be responsible for identifying new service users for the five apartments, ensuring that the accommodation is provided to those with the greatest need. This innovative project has also received funding from the Department for Communities as part of the Social Housing Development Programme.



Grainne Donnelly, Supported Housing Manager, emphasised the importance of this development: *“This refurbishment represents a significant step forward in meeting the high demand for supported accommodation in West Belfast. It will provide a safe, supportive environment where individuals can develop their independence, with the reassurance of having support staff available around the clock.”*

Commenting on the investment announcement, Kelly Devlin, Cedar Foundation said: *“The Lanthorn redevelopment will offer opportunities, choice, and inclusion for people with learning disabilities in the locality. By partnering with Choice, Supporting People, and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, we aim to create a future where tenants can fully embrace life. This service reflects our collective efforts and the success of our strategic partnership, demonstrating our shared commitment to addressing the accommodation and social care needs of disabled people now and in the future.”*

Construction began in July 2023, and the works were completed in August 2024. The refurbishment delivers significant improvements in the quality and effectiveness of existing services, enhances the quality of accommodation for the five tenants and staff, and increases confidence and capability among the people and communities served.

Magda Keeling, Service Manager, Belfast Trust, said: *“Belfast Trust is delighted to be working in partnership with Choice and The Cedar Foundation to provide this exciting opportunity for service users to access appropriate accommodation and 24-hour support to meet their individual needs. These single person apartments promote choice and inclusivity because service users have the option to live alone but they also have access to their peers and shared social opportunities if they wish to avail of this. The support levels available will foster independence, life skills, and will provide empowerment for these service users. The accommodation is ideally suited to enable service users to access all community-based activities and events. The Belfast Trust is excited that this bespoke accommodation will continue to improve service users’ quality of life.”*



Choice sign up to become a Safe Place organisation

Choice have signed up our offices, Maple House and Leslie Morrell House to the Safe Place initiative run by Onus. Safe Place is a simple but effective way for anyone affected by domestic abuse to receive information on the support available to them. The support is available both for Choice staff members and the general public who visit Choice offices.

Our Safe Place sites displays the Safe Place logo and posters on the premises and have Safe Place cards with details of helpline numbers in an accessible location.



Further information on Safe Place can be viewed on the Onus website <https://www.onustraining.co.uk/play-your-part>



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.



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

99.1%

Target - 100%

Units with valid gas certificate

Repairs

94.7%

Target - 90%

Average repairs completed on time

Customer Satisfaction

84%

Target - 86%

Satisfaction with the overall services provided by Choice

Complaints Response Time

14

Target - 20 days

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

Staff Absenteeism

3.6%

Target - 3.8 %

Staff absenteeism

We want to hear from you!
It is important that your voice, in relation to our services, is heard.

Performance figures are from April to August 2024

XL Bully Advice

It will be illegal to own an XL Bully dog in Northern Ireland without an Exemption Certificate after 31 December 2024.

From 5 July 2024 all owners of an XL Bully type dog:

- can not use the dog for breeding
- can not sell or exchange ownership of the dog, including giving it away
- can not abandon the dog
- keep the dog muzzled and on a lead in public spaces and do not permit it to stray
- keep their dog in a secure place



Out & About

Choice has more than 11,000 tenants, over 400 staff and works with numerous partners and stakeholders; so it's no surprise that there is always plenty of activity going on in all the communities we support.

Read our Out & About section to find out more and don't forget to let us know about your events!

Contact us at:

editor@choice-housing.org



10TH ANNIVERSARY AT CHURCH LANE MEWS

Earlier this month staff, past and present, gathered with tenants, family and friends to celebrate 10 years since Church Lane Mews, Magherafelt, welcomed its first tenants.



ELMGROVE DANCE

Tenants at our Sheltered Living Scheme in east Belfast, Elmgrove Manor, recently enjoyed an afternoon of music, dance and laughter!



GARDENING AT JAMES COURT

Tenants at James Court, Belfast, recently completed a 6 week programme delivered by Groundwork NI to bring some life back into the raised beds in the courtyard area at the scheme. Everyone attending really enjoyed the fun and informative sessions.



TENANTS AT TUGHAN COURT GET A TREAT FOR THEIR TASTE BUDS!

Here is beautiful Betty Scott enjoying her ice cream, the ice cream van visited the sheltered living scheme at their regular weekly tea party in Bangor.

Not a bad way to spend the day!



DAISY LODGE VISIT

Our fantastic tenants from Craginagore, Newcastle, recently visited @Daisy-Lodge-Newcastle to donate £90 and take part in a very enjoyable coffee morning.

We are both proud of, and inspired by our tenants' generosity.



INSPIRATION FROM OUR TENANTS MOYA AND PATRICIA FROM THE ROWANS

Moya and Patricia, in Warrenpoint, have embarked on their volunteer training with the Southern Hospice.

Both ladies are motivated by the desire to give something back to their community. As well as making a meaningful difference to people's lives they are both enjoying learning new skills, making new friends, and better wellbeing.

Moya and Patricia are already looking forward to supporting people in the future.

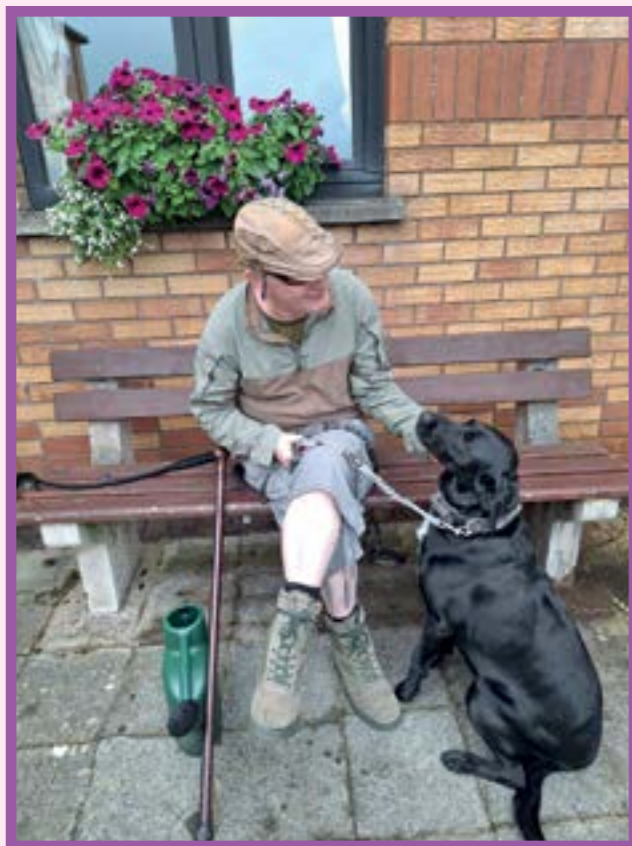
Well done ladies you are an inspiration.



80TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

Kathleen McElroy from Clachan Court, Enniskillen, celebrating her 80th Birthday party with her family and fellow residents!

Many happy returns!



JEROME, FROM THE ROWANS AND HIS DOG JACK

'Working in the garden boosts my mood, helps me connect with nature, maintains my independence and improves social functioning.'

Jerome grows his own food such as beetroot and chives, another rewarding experience. Jerome also says that gardening helps enrich Jack's life and improves his welfare. Tenants at the Rowans in Warrenpoint, often comment that the colourful flowers create a space that has a feeling of warmth and is inviting.



GARDEN CENTRE VISIT

The residents of Edgar Boyd Court, Carryduff went to Colemans Garden Centre in Templepatrick for the afternoon.



HALLOWEEN AT ROTHESAY COURT

Pizza, singing and Halloween festivities at Rothersey Court, Coleraine.



PEMBROKE LODGE TURNS 40!

Our sheltered living scheme in West Belfast has been at the heart of the community for 4 decades and demonstrates our commitment to quality, affordable housing that contributes to sustainable and cohesive communities.



LOOK AT THESE BEAUTIFUL HALLOWEEN CREATIONS!

Our tenants at Benmore Court, Newry, have been busy crafting and preparing for Halloween.

Well done to all involved.



GOOD RELATIONS AT GANNAWAY

Thanks to everyone at Ballycraig Primary School staff, pupils and parents who attended the Ballycraig Open To All Programme at Gannaway, Millisle.



HAPPY HARVESTING AT JAMES COURT

Everyone at our sheltered living scheme in Belfast has enjoyed tending the raised beds over the summer months.

With their haul of potatoes and scallions, champ is on the menu!



Children's Colouring Competition

Open to children 16 years and under



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.

One lucky winner will receive this great prize! Entries must be received by **Friday 14th February 2025**. (Please note that the parent or guardian must be a tenant of Choice Housing Ireland). Ts & Cs apply.

POST TO:
Choice Housing Ireland LTD
Freepost BEL 2371 Belfast BT1 6BR

**Win
a family
pass to
Belfast Zoo!**

Name Age

Address

Daytime Tel. Evening Tel.



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:

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

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.

Phone us using 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 is automatically paid directly to your rent account. However, if this does not cover the full amount of your rent you need to pay the difference.

Have you registered for My Choice?

You can pay rent, report a repair and more through My Choice.

Use the tenant portal- 'My Choice'- a minimum of two times between December 2024 to March 2025 to be eligible to be entered into the prize draw to win a £50 voucher.

4 winners will be selected at random per month! Ts&Cs apply. To get started simply register today by scanning the QR code.



Choice and Rio Ferdinand Foundation launch cross-community youth project in Derry-Londonderry

A successful cross-community pilot project launched by Choice in conjunction with the Rio Ferdinand Foundation is being expanded to support young people in Derry-Londonderry.

Over an initial six-month period, last year, the two organisations collaborated to improve the lives of 100 young people in South and East Belfast. It proved so effective at engaging with school goers – and building community cohesion – the work was extended by twelve months.

Now, children in Northern Ireland's second largest city are going to benefit from the initiative, which will have a key focus on the area surrounding Strand Road – an area where Choice has residents and properties, and where it is felt positive community intervention can strengthen relations.

The scheme will deliver a range of both personal and professional development programmes and involve a blend of sport and music, media, and art projects. Progression opportunities are also being offered with established partners of the Rio Ferdinand Foundation, including Warner Music UK/Ireland, UEFA Foundation, Community Foundation NI and Catalyst Belfast.

An event in the Waterside Shared Village community hub kicked-off the new project as it played host to a football tournament that brought together several teams, players and coaches from Belfast, Enniskillen, Omagh and Sligo. Squads from the Bogside, Waterside, and Fountain Estate in Derry-Londonderry also participated in the competition.

Choice Group Chief Executive, Michael McDonnell, and Rio Ferdinand Foundation CEO Gary Stannett were joined at the event by Chelsea FC ambassador Paul Canoville who spoke about how he overcame racial barriers by becoming the first black person to play in the famous blue jersey, and how he battled addiction issues after a serious injury forced him to retire aged just 24.

The Mayor of Derry and Strabane, Councillor Lillian Seenoi-Barr also spoke at the launch event, commending the young participants and welcomed the partnership between Choice and the Rio Ferdinand Foundation and the important support young people in the area are getting because of this initiative.

Michael McDonnell said: *“Choice’s work extends beyond merely building quality and affordable homes. We are also deeply committed to supporting local communities, and by extending our cross-community project in partnership with the Rio Ferdinand Foundation, we’ll achieve this by creating new opportunities for the young people of Derry-Londonderry.”*

“Similar to the positive work that has been taking place in South and East Belfast since early last year, participants will be given the opportunity to develop and significantly enhance their prospects, while also improving their mental health and well-being.”

“By working with partners like the Rio Ferdinand Foundation, we can identify where projects can have the greatest impact, and those areas that will benefit most from it moving forward,” he added.

The seven-a-side football tournament was the first in a series of initiatives planned over the next twelve months. These are intended to bring together diverse communities to foster community spirit and promote good relations by encouraging interaction and collaboration.

Increasing youth engagement by using sport as a positive outlet and creating networking opportunities, between local community members and organisations, are also cornerstones of the cross-community project in Derry-Londonderry. It is anticipated that a total of 200 participants aged between 13 and 19 will engage in positive activities. 100 of these will achieve at least one accreditation, with 50 participating in social action projects and a further 50 per cent benefiting from engaging and motivational careers events.

Rio Ferdinand Foundation CEO Gary Stannett said: *“The Rio Ferdinand Foundation is really pleased to extend our partnership and work with Choice to Derry-Londonderry. Housing associations can play a key role in developing communities, and in Northern Ireland Choice have been a key partner for us in delivering positive activities that bring people from all communities and backgrounds together, offering training opportunities and introducing career pathways and opportunities for young people.”*



The Rio Ferdinand Foundation was set-up by ex-Manchester United and England defender Rio Ferdinand and has worked across Northern Ireland since 2016, providing mentoring and employment pathways to help young people in economically deprived communities.

This extension will give young people in Derry-Londonderry an opportunity to access new opportunities similar to those delivered in Belfast over the past year, and the network of local organisations that have come together to deliver this launch event has demonstrated not only the appetite for this initiative, but also the great work already going on across the city. I am looking forward to seeing the project and the partnership network grow and flourish in the coming months.



Winter weather advice

Protecting your home from extreme cold weather is vital during the winter months. This information will help you prepare and assist you if you experience any problems during the cold weather.

It is important to recognise if there is extreme weather and subsequent high call volume, we will prioritise repairs such as heating failure, where there are young children, elderly or people with medical or mobility problems.

Due to call volume, access difficulties, or where other agencies are responsible, repairs may not be completed within the designated time-frames. Once you have reported your repair, try to avoid repeat calls to our Services Centre. Our contractors will deal with repairs issued in order of priority. We appreciate that this may be a difficult time and your co-operation is very much appreciated.

Prevent your pipes from freezing

The following tips will help stop the pipes in your home from freezing:

- Turn your heating on for short periods throughout the day and night.
- Leave the heating on at a low level when you are away from home. This can be done by lowering the main heating control thermostat and turning thermostatic radiator valves down, but not off. Consider leaving a key with a family member, friend or neighbour who can check your home regularly.
- Don't leave taps dripping or running as the water in waste pipes can freeze.
- Allow hot air from the main house into the loft, if there is a cold water storage tank. This may mean opening a trap door during extreme cold periods.
- Open the cupboard under the sink to ensure warm air can circulate round the piping.
- Ensure that all doors throughout the house are slightly open for warm air to flow around the property.

How to deal with frozen pipes

Pipes are more likely to freeze in the roof space, below sink units and external taps.

- Turn the water supply off at the stopcock. The stopcock is a valve for turning off and on the cold

water supply in your home. Stopcocks are usually located below the kitchen sink. However, in some properties the stopcock may be elsewhere. Please ensure that you know where the stopcock is located. You can shut off the supply by turning the stopcock in a clockwise direction. To turn the supply back on, turn the stopcock in an anti-clockwise direction. We recommend that you test the stopcock now to ensure it operates.

- To thaw frozen pipes, place hot water bottles or thick cloths soaked in hot water, over the frozen pipe. A hairdryer at its lowest setting can also be used. Please be careful not to warm the pipes too quickly as this may lead to the pipe bursting. It is important that you thaw along the pipe starting from the end nearest the tap, which you should open.

What to do if a pipe bursts

- Turn off the stopcock by turning it clockwise
- Try to block the escaping water with thick cloths such as towels or duct tape.
- Turn off your central heating, immersion heater and any other water heating systems.
- Once you have shutdown your water heating, open all taps to drain the system.
- If water leaks near anything electrical, switch off the mains electricity immediately. If the mains switch is wet, don't touch it as you risk electrocution.
- If water has been leaking for some time and ceilings are bulging, the room may not be safe to enter. If the ceiling has started to bulge or water is leaking through, you could punch a small hole in the ceiling with a screwdriver. Use a bucket or basin to collect dripping water.

COMMON FAULTS WITH GAS HEATING IN EXCEPTIONALLY COLD WEATHER

Frozen condensate pipes

Modern boilers produce significant volumes of condensate (water) which normally discharges into a gully. In very cold weather this condensate may freeze, particularly where it discharges to an external gully. To prevent this you can place a hot water bottle on the pipe close to where it discharges (this advice also applies to some oil boilers). In exceptional

circumstances we may need to disconnect the condensate pipe internally and allow it to drain into a basin. The basin will need to be emptied regularly and the pipe reconnected when the weather improves.

Frozen gas meter regulators

There may be a small amount of water vapour in the gas regulator which, if it freezes, may cause the gas supply to your boiler to fail. You should cover your meter with a towel or old clothing to provide some insulation. Place a hot water bottle on the regulator (grey metal fitting on the top left hand side of the meter) and remove once an ice has thawed and dry the regulator immediately.

Home Contents Insurance

Please be aware that it is your responsibility to insure your home contents. Choice insures the buildings only. Any damage to your personal property, including flooring and decoration, regardless of the cause, is not insured by Choice.



Help your neighbour

During extreme weather conditions please check on your neighbours if they are elderly, have a disability or are housebound as it can be a difficult time for them to get out and about. A friendly visit from a neighbour will be appreciated. Further advice is available from your gas supplier and water service, which may include helpful hints and video tutorials.

How can I find out more?

For further information please contact Choice at:
Tel: 0300 111 2211
Email: enquiries@choice-housing.org
www.choice-housing.org

Never tip your oil tank. This practice is dangerous and can cause costly damage to the tank, boiler, pump, burner, and pipework. It can also lead to environmental damage and oil contamination.

Protecting your home from extreme cold weather is vital during the winter months



Social Supermarkets

Four Social Supermarkets in Northern Ireland are able to provide much-needed support to people and families thanks to a £20,000 donation from Choice.

The five-figure sum has been awarded to two Belfast-based charities, In This Together and Footprints Women's Centre as well as, Lisburn Food Bank, and Affordable Food Club in Ballymena. Each of the four charities received £5,000, and between them they offer an important service to thousands of people through referral agents, ensuring support gets to those who are most in need of it.

Awarded through Choice's Tenant Support Fund, the funding means that shelves remain stocked for the months ahead as supplies of tinned and frozen foods and other essentials can be bought by those trying to make ends meet in a cost-of-living crisis for a small, weekly nominal fee.

Small changes from falling ill for a couple of days and being off work, to being made redundant in the short-term, is enough to leave people unable to afford to buy food, pay rent or utility bills.

Carol Ervine, Group Director of Tenant and Client Services said: *"Providing quality, affordable housing is just one part of what we do at Choice, we are committed to making a positive difference in local communities and to working with and supporting organisations like these exemplary charities, to help those most in need through our Tenant Support Fund."*

"In This Together, Footprints Women's Centre, Lisburn Food Bank and the Affordable Food Club are a lifeline to those struggling to afford the essentials and unfortunately, over the last number of years, demand for these type of services has risen dramatically. I would like to pay tribute to those who work at the four charities and the role they play in trying to combat poverty and hunger in their communities."

Approximately 4,200 Choice owned properties fall within the catchment areas these four Social Supermarkets operate in, and each of these can avail of the services offered by the social supermarkets.

Michele Campbell, the Affordable Food Club's Operations Director said: *"We're very much indebted to Choice and we're incredibly grateful to them for thinking of us. We have seen a 50 per cent uptake in the demand for our service over the last twelve months and extra funding like this is absolutely vital for our sustainability and allows us to reach out to more people."*

Lisburn Food Bank Manager, Lynsey Agnew BEM, added: *"The help from Choice's Tenant Support Fund has allowed us to meet the growing demand on our Social Supermarket."*

"The struggle of being the only adult in a house and having to cover bills on one income is enough to push them into poverty. With our support they can get back on their feet."

Commenting on the extra financial support, Eileen Wilson, Footprints Women's Centre's Food Services and Sustainable Living Manager said: *"The Choice Tenant Support Fund enables us to supplement this supply when necessary, reaching more people who are currently experiencing food insecurity. We're extremely grateful to Choice's Tenant Support Fund for their generosity and support for local families."*

A fund that tackles financial hardship across Northern Ireland, Choice's Tenant Support Fund was recognised at last year's UK Affordable Housing Awards. Introduced in 2021/22 as part of its Financial Inclusion Services, it won the 'Financial Inclusion Initiative of the Year' category.



Lisburn Food Bank Manager, Lynsey Agnew BEM, added: *"The help from Choice's Tenant Support Fund has allowed us to meet the growing demand on our Social Supermarket."*

"The struggle of being the only adult in a house and having to cover bills on one income is enough to push them into poverty. With our support they can get back on their feet."

Update your emergency contact number

Keep your information up to date.
Provide us with next of kin details.

Call our Services Centre to
update your information:

0300 111 2211



ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY

Our team is here to help you. So please treat them with respect.

Choice operates a zero tolerance policy in respect of abusive/threatening behaviour towards our staff and contractors.



ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY

Our team will not stand for any form of abuse.

Choice operates a zero tolerance policy in respect of abusive/threatening behaviour towards our staff and contractors.

We are here to keep our customers safe and to provide the best service we can, but we're also responsible for protecting our staff from abuse, hostility and violence.

These are the kind of behaviours we consider to be unacceptable:

- Verbal abuse, aggression, violence including derogatory remarks, rudeness, inflammatory allegations, and threats of violence
- Unreasonable demands
- Unreasonable persistence
- Excessive letters, calls, emails or contact via social media.

What action can Choice take?
We can:

- End a call, visit or appointment
- Provide a single point of contact
- Limit contact to a single form, letter, or email
- In certain cases we may involve the police or other legal action
- Unacceptable behaviour towards our staff can put your tenancy at risk.

AVAILABLE HOUSING

The Square Ballyclare



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