

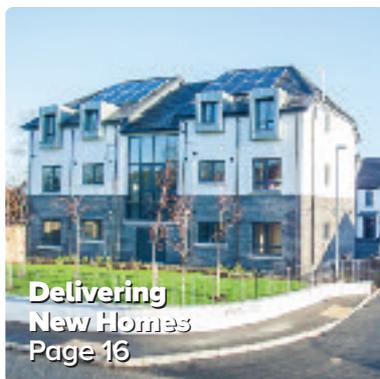
Choice News

Issue 2
Spring 2016
The Newsletter
for Choice Housing
Ireland Tenants

Our new Chief Executive and his vision for Choice



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Our new Chief Executive and his vision for Choice



Leading change and doing things differently

Michael McDonnell
Group Chief Executive

Since joining Choice earlier this year, I have been fortunate to meet and spend time with many of the people we serve and hear more about the issues that matter to you. I have been particularly pleased and impressed by the high regard in which our staff are held and it is clear that you value the personal service that we strive to deliver.

In June, the Choice brand was launched with a promise that our customers would be at the centre of our business. Our core values can be summarised into three key principles; customer-focused, trustworthy and dynamic. We've carefully invested time and effort to bring our values to life and make our mission – “Working Together for Positive Change” – meaningful to you and the many communities we support. My vision is that Choice will be recognised as a leading social enterprise, generating a sustainable surplus to apply to our social and charitable purpose.

The quality of the services we provide and our value for money proposition are, quite rightly, shared priorities for us all. In more challenging times, we need every penny to go further and to be better prepared – with our partner organisations – to deliver for those who may need a helping hand.

The implementation of Welfare Reforms poses uncertainty for some customers and, during this period of change we are redoubling our efforts to keep our rents and service charges at a low rate. We've also introduced financial inclusion plans to support some of our more vulnerable customers.

At every level in Choice, our commitment to you is about doing more than just meeting your needs.

Improving how we work with you and giving you a louder voice in our plans and actions are core priorities for us in the year ahead. There is an opportunity for all of us to benefit from closer working and sharing new ideas that can make Choice even better.

We know that many tenants are interested in taking a more direct role in our work and we have developed a unique Menu of Tenant Involvement that sets out different ways that you can become active in issues that matter to you. The various options include representing your community at resident group meetings, taking part in Estate Walkabouts, shaping our policy and even contributing to this publication. The menu is explained in forthcoming pages and includes details of how much time is usually needed. I would encourage anyone with an interest helping us meet our shared ambitions to come on board.

During a period of unprecedented change, communication has become more important to us all. We have looked hard at how we can make it easier for you to get the information you need, when you need it and to report problems or issues as they arise.

Our Tenants' Forum continues to be a valuable source of advice, feedback and motivation. In recent months they have reminded us of the value and strength of resilient communities and challenged us to look at how we can invest more in community development. Some successes are presented in this edition and I can say with confidence that there are plenty more to come.

In the weeks and months ahead, you will also see more of Choice in your area as we continue

to introduce new signage across all of our housing schemes and developments. It is a small, but visible way for all our customers and staff to identify our work and what we stand for.

The Choice brand will be evident too on sites where we are building new homes. We have set ambitious targets for our building programme in the months and years ahead and are starting 2016 strongly with work already underway in 15 sites.

You can keep up-to-date on our developments on the Choice website www.choice-housing.org where you'll also find the latest facts and advice on issues like Welfare Reform and managing your finances just a few simple

clicks away. As always, our staff are also happy to talk through any queries or concerns.

Finally, this year our Customer Satisfaction Survey will gather your views on what is working and where we need more improvement, large or small. This entirely confidential process relies on your honest feedback to be effective.

I'd welcome your views and encourage you to use your voice in the year ahead. Together we can do great things!

**Working
together
for positive
change**



Choice Customer Satisfaction Survey

Your Choice, Your Voice

Choice is committed to ensuring that we treat all our customers fairly, making sure that we offer the best service we can while meeting individuals' needs as much as possible. Our vision is to be a leading provider in customer service. To succeed in this, we must seek your views as customers to help develop our services. Gathering this information will also allow Choice to compare our satisfaction levels with other housing associations within Northern Ireland and across the UK.

The Tenants' Forum have worked in partnership with us to plan the Customer Satisfaction Survey to ensure that we focus on the issues that matter to you most. An independent market research company will carry out this work on our behalf. In doing so we aim to produce independent results and eliminate any bias from your feedback.

The aim of the survey is to get your views on the various services provided by Choice. We would encourage you to be as honest and open as possible with your feedback. In taking the time to complete the survey you will help guide Choice to make decisions about service delivery. We want to hear what you think about:

- Rent and Charges
- Repairs
- Your Home and Local Community
- Anti-social Behaviour
- And much more...

What will be happening?

- The survey will be carried out during the Spring
- Improvement Action Plan will be agreed with the Tenants' Forum
- Results will be published throughout 2016 on our website and in Choice News

The information we collect will be kept strictly confidential. Choice staff will not be able to identify individual customers from their answers or comments.

"This survey is a huge undertaking, but we are confident that the results will be used to improve services and strengthen the voice of the tenants." Bill Jeffery, Chairman Tenants' Forum.

We want to hear from as many customers as possible, therefore there are a number of ways which you can complete the survey. You can:

- complete a postal survey; or
- complete a survey online through our website www.choice-housing.org.



This is a great opportunity to provide constructive criticism, comments and compliments. This survey is important to Choice and your input is vital to its success. To thank you for your time and contribution we will enter every tenant who completes the survey into a prize draw for a HD television.

Choice Customer Satisfaction Survey

We want to hear what you think about

- **Rent and Charges**
- **Repairs**
- **Your Home and Local Community**
- **Anti-social Behaviour**

We would encourage you to be as open as possible with your feedback. In taking the time to complete the survey you will help guide Choice to make decisions about service delivery.

To thank you for your time and contribution we will enter every tenant who completes the survey into a prize draw for a HD TV.

For further information contact **0300 111 2211**
or visit **www.choice-housing.org/satisfaction**

Your
Choice
Your
Voice

New Choice homes in Armagh



Mervyn Storey MLA, officially opened a new £500,000 Choice housing scheme in Charlemont, County Armagh.

The scheme consists of four new family homes which have been built on a previous derelict site on the Church View estate. It was completed by Choice with assistance from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Department for Social Development.

Speaking at the official opening, former Minister Storey said: “One of my first engagements as Social Development Minister was cutting the sod at this Charlemont scheme. It brings me great pleasure to return today for the ribbon cutting and see at first hand the culmination of hard work by Choice, the Housing Executive and my Department who have transformed a once derelict site into high standard family homes.”

During the visit, the former Minister also viewed the home of new resident Ms Nicole Campbell who has recently moved into the development with her baby son.

Mervyn Storey continued: “This new development means that four families from the local community have had the opportunity to be housed in familiar surroundings.

“I am committed to delivering social homes to those who need them and this also includes a commitment to building more homes in rural areas.

“I know from chatting to Nicole that her new house has made a big difference to her and her son. I want to thank all the residents for taking the time to welcome me today and I wish them well in their new homes.”

Ian Elliott, former Chief Executive of Services said: “This scheme enhances the vibrancy of our rural communities, providing affordable, modern family homes in Charlemont and has helped alleviate housing waiting lists in the area while providing a bespoke Wheelchair Bungalow for a family with complex needs.

“Building works commenced in September 2014 and the Association accepted handover in August 2015. We appreciate the work of all the firms in the design team, ably led by McGirr Architects, and the quality of the finished product provided by M.J. McBride Construction Limited. May I also express our sincere appreciation for the ongoing support we have received from the DSD and the Housing Executive. Finally, we wish all our tenants every happiness in their new homes.”



Energy Week 2015

To support National Energy Week in October, Choice held a week of information and events for our staff and tenants. This opportunity was used to highlight some of our recent work and to launch new, innovative initiatives for our tenants. Throughout the week, staff were encouraged to take part in online training and each day there was a specific theme with the following topics covered.

A History of Energy Management at Choice

Information was provided to staff and tenants on measures we have taken in the past and how the function of energy has evolved and developed within Choice, with three staff members now working in this area. This highlights a significant investment on the part of Choice, which ensures that we are best placed to provide; sustainable and energy efficient homes for our tenants, meet legislative requirements, and offer enhanced levels of support and advice. One example of this was our recent investment in Solar PV Systems at some of our sheltered housing schemes.

Building Sustainable Homes

In October 2015 tenants moved into the first scheme in Northern Ireland designed to meet Level 5 of The Code for Sustainable Homes. This innovative development by Choice, is the latest of a number of sustainable developments by the Association demonstrating how we have been leading the industry in Northern Ireland. We have previously built some of the first homes to Levels 3 and 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes, used alternative renewable building materials, and developed the first certified social housing passive house scheme in Ireland.

Sustainable Transport

Choice recognise that our staff have an impact on the environment with one of the aspects being the way in which they commute to work. During our energy week we took the opportunity to give advice on options available and tips for driving, but also highlighted our cycle to work scheme with companies coming into our offices to show our staff some options for bicycles and electric bikes.



Smoothies for Staff

As part of Energy Week 2015, Choice staff were invited to generate power and make their own healthy smoothies! Smoothie bikes were used to promote how power can be generated, the benefits of cycling and also the importance of healthy eating. At the same time we were pleased to be able to raise almost £200 for our nominated charities!



Save money on your Energy Bills!

How much do you pay for your electricity, gas or oil? Have you compared suppliers recently?

Electricity

Did you know, there are currently six companies who can supply you with electricity? It is worth checking to make sure you are on the best rates possible as some customers could save between £50-100 in a year, just by changing electricity suppliers.

Each electricity supplier is normally able to offer prices across different electricity tariffs and also various payment options. Suppliers may offer incentives and have specific terms and conditions e.g. after one year your price may revert back to a standard rate, and so you should satisfy yourself that you are getting the best possible deal.

Switching supplier is easy and doesn't mean your electricity meter has to be changed or your supply of electricity cut off. In most cases it could take less than five minutes to switch!

Budget Energy

www.budgetenergy.co.uk
0800 012 1177

Click Energy

www.clickenergyni.com
0800 1 070 732

Electric Ireland

www.electricireland.com
0345 600 5335

Open Electric

www.openelectric.co.uk
028 9507 2800

PowerNI

www.powerni.co.uk
03457 455 455

SSE Airtricity

www.sseairtricity.com
0345 864 3546

Natural Gas

In Northern Ireland natural gas is available in two different network areas, Greater Belfast (which includes towns such as Lisburn, Bangor and Larne) and the 'Ten Towns' network (which includes

towns such as Warrenpoint, Newry, Banbridge, Antrim, Londonderry and Coleraine). At present only one supplier, Firmus Energy, is able to offer natural gas to domestic homes in the Ten Towns network but this market is expected to open in the future. Within the Greater Belfast network domestic customers can choose between two suppliers.

Firmus Energy

www.firmusenergy.co.uk
0800 032 4567

SSE Airtricity

www.airtricitygasni.com
0345 900 5253

The Natural Gas Network is extending!

'Gas to the West' is a new initiative to bring natural gas to the West of Northern Ireland in coming years, with Strabane the first town to be able to benefit by the end of 2016. This will be followed by natural gas being available to towns such as Dungannon, Omagh, Enniskillen and Magherafelt.

Within the same time frames, natural gas is being brought to other parts of County Down, to include Ballynahinch, Crossgar, Hillsborough, and Newcastle.



Heating Oil

Around 60% of homes in Northern Ireland use heating oil for heating and hot water with numerous suppliers able to supply heating oil. Heating oil prices have fallen dramatically in recent years but there are still ways to save money!

One option is to look for a local oil buying club which you may be able to join. In 2015, Choice worked closely with Bryson Energy to identify relevant homes, with a letter sent to each home to explain the benefits. You can check if you are near an oil buying club by contacting Bryson Energy on 0800 1422 867 or by visiting www.brysonenergy.org/projects-and-partnerships/140-oil-buying-club-scheme.



For more details visit www.zeemaps.com/map?group=1502916

If you aren't in an area supported by an oil buying club then you could consider forming your own small oil buying group by joining with other homes in your area to buy heating oil in larger volumes.

Another easy way to save money is by comparing heating oil suppliers, which can be done simply by phoning a number of local companies or using online comparison sites. One useful service is provided by the Consumer Council who provide weekly prices in different areas which you could use for comparison, visit their website for further information www.consumercouncil.org.uk/energy/home-heating-oil.

Choice Energy Advice Service

During Energy Week 2015 Choice took the opportunity to launch the trial of a new tenant energy advice service. As part of the service, the Energy team will take referrals directly or indirectly to visit our tenants in their own homes and offer energy advice and support.

We have already visited a number of homes to offer energy saving advice, highlighting opportunities to switch energy suppliers and signpost to other organisations for

specific issues which may arise such as debt or the ability to have a benefits check carried out. Feedback to date has been positive and organisations such as National Energy Action have been particularly supportive of this new service for our tenants, as a means of helping to address fuel poverty.

If this is something you would be interested in then please contact us on **0300 111 2211** or email energy@choice-housing.org.

How Energy is purchased by Choice

Choice purchase energy (electricity, natural gas and heating oil) for a number of the landlord or communal areas at our schemes. Many of these charges are then passed on to our tenants through their service charges, and so we recognise the importance of securing the best possible price in the most appropriate manner.

In 2015 we entered into new electricity, natural gas and heating oil contracts anticipated to deliver savings of over £200,000 for our tenants! Along with managing the procurement of energy we also validate all of our energy bills to ensure prices are kept and billing errors do not occur.

One other new initiative was a 'Preferred Supplier Arrangement' which we believe is one of the first of its kind in Northern Ireland. As part of this arrangement we have selected a new electricity supplier for all of our new homes to ensure our new tenants receive cheaper electricity as soon as they move into their new homes. If all of our new tenants stayed with this supplier then we estimate savings of £20,000 or more could be collectively achieved, when compared to the typical price of electricity. We would hope to examine the success of this initiative and if possible look for ways to expand this to other homes to deliver further savings for our tenants.

Choice Energy Team City and Guilds in Energy Awareness

In 2015 the Energy Team at Choice expanded with three staff now working in this area. In January 2016 all three staff members successfully undertook a City and Guilds Energy Awareness (6281-01) qualification, through National Energy Action (NEA). This training will help the team fulfil their roles and further improve our delivery of services for our tenants.

In relation to this training, Peter McCluney, Energy Officer at Choice said: "The City & Guilds Energy Awareness course was an excellent course and by taking part in this training I will be able to provide an improved service to colleagues and tenants."



Killynure Green, Carryduff is a pioneering energy efficient social housing development. The development comprises of 39 dwellings with a mixture of 2, 3 and 4 bedroom houses designed to meet Level 5 of the UK Code for Sustainable Homes. Each home has efficient building fabric and technologies installed to reduce the need for heating, with solar panels installed to reduce the electricity bills of the occupants.

Home Content Insurance – are you covered?

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

Choice 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. We realise home contents insurance may be the last thing on many tenants' minds, especially when there are so many other outings. 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 fortune 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 in bad situations your home contents are covered, leaving you to concentrate on the things that really matter in life.



New Choice Signage Coming Soon

Following the merger of Oaklee, Trinity, Open Door and Ulidia, the newly formed Choice Housing Ireland wish to rebrand all existing and future new development external signage at their schemes and sites. The initial focus of this rebranding exercise will be to update all existing schemes within our portfolio and will involve enlisting the services of a contractor to manufacture, supply and install rebranded external signage across all communal, sheltered and general needs sites.



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.

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

Customer Enquiries



of enquiries resolved at first point of contact



of customers satisfaction rating of Choice Services Centre



of first stage complaints were resolved quickly within 14 days

Gas Safety



98.47%

of gas boilers were serviced within a year

Human Resources



3.3%

overall sickness absence in the year

Repairs



98%

Customers satisfied with repairs carried out



91%

Emergency repairs completed within 24 Hours



94%

Urgent repairs completed within 4 working days



98%

Routine repairs completed within 20 working days

The performance figures are for the period April 2015 – January 2016.



The Chartered Institute of Housing Awards 2016



The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) Awards 2016 took place at Belfast City Hall on Friday 4th March 2016. The annual awards ceremony gather the best in practice of housing associations from across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and showcase the remarkable work and inspirational people seen in communities every day. As lead sponsor, Choice were delighted to be shortlisted in two categories; Sustainable Development and Promoting Integration. Staff from across the organisation attended the awards and celebrated winning both of these categories.



Killynure Green in Carryduff won the Sustainable Development of the Year. As the first scheme designed to meet Level 5 of The Code for Sustainable Homes, this scheme is one of the most sustainable in the country. Killynure Green incorporates energy efficient building fabric including the 'Fabric First' approach and provision of renewable technologies such as PV solar panels and mechanical heat ventilation systems which will reduce running costs of the property for tenants and rain water harvesting which will assist in water conservation.



The scheme of 39 homes is the largest social housing development built in Carryduff for several decades, meeting vital housing need, and has been designed to show how higher standards can be achieved without taking a radical approach to construction, which Choice



hope can inspire future developments. Well done to the development team involved and our partners; Architect – PDP London, Structural & Civil Engineer – Ian Black Consulting Environmental Services Consultant – Caldwell Consulting, Code Assessor – Eight Associates, Cost Consultant – Consarc Quantity Surveyors, Landscape Architect – The Paul Hogarth Partnership, Contractor – GEDA Construction. With special mention to Brian Rankin, Energy Manager, and Jayne McFaul, Development Officer who were key to this development and its success.



The Supporting Integration category was won by our Root Soup initiative in partnership with L'Arche. Root Soup is a social enterprise that brings together people who have learning disabilities and people who are homeless to learn and grow as individuals. The overall vision is that, through partnership and by sharing resources and expertise, Root Soup will become a dynamic social enterprise that is part of an overall 'Field to Fork' initiative, offering training and employment opportunities across the food chain.



In addition to our winning nominations, Laura Moore, Housing Officer, was announced as Post Graduate of the Year by Ulster University. Laura O'Dowd, Choice Tenant and Client Services Committee member, was also announced as Housing Professional of the Year. At Choice, we value the contribution of experienced and qualified individuals on our Board and staff, and this year the CIH Awards provided us with plenty of reasons to celebrate.

It was a very successful night for Choice, showcasing how, as the largest association in Northern Ireland that we are leading change and doing things differently in the social housing movement.

Congratulations to all the winners at the CIH Awards!

Anti-social Behaviour support for customers

Choice has 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.

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-ordinators 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.

Insec Security
028 9020 0080



Victoria Court celebrates 25th Anniversary



Victoria Court in Whitehead, a Choice sheltered housing scheme, recently celebrated their 25th Anniversary. A party was held at Whitehead Golf Course and attended by staff and residents to mark the significant occasion. As long standing residents, Nan Burns, Anne Young and Ruth Boyd, were presented with flowers. Choice is proud to have been providing customer focused support services and housing in Whitehead since 1990.

Dirty Dozen

Flushing these items down the toilet can damage your home and the environment



Disposable Nappies



Bandages / Plasters



Tampons / Applicators



Razor Blades



Condoms / Femidoms



Waste Wrappers



Syringes / Needles



Cleaning Wipes



Cotton Buds



Sanitary towels / Panty liners
/ Incontinence Pads



Facial / Baby wipes



Cotton Wool



**Flushing inappropriate items can block YOUR sewers
and even end up on our beaches.**

Remember only to flush the 3P's: • Pee • Poo • Paper

Delivering New Homes

Our Development Team are working on new housing schemes to deliver much needed homes across Northern Ireland.

Old Belfast Road Bangor

March 2016 sees construction commence of the new-build development at Old Belfast Road in Bangor, the largest scheme that Choice will be building in 2016. The scheme is adjacent to Clifton Special School and will provide a total of 106 family homes, 55 two bedroom houses, 48



three bedroom houses and 3 wheelchair accessible bungalows. Choice purchased the land at the end of December 2015. The build will take approximately two years to complete with an estimated construction cost of £9.9 million.



Antrim Road Ballynahinch

Work is due to begin in March 2016 to provide 24 new family apartments and houses at Antrim Road, Ballynahinch. The scheme will be a mix of one and two bedroom apartments as well as two and three bedroom houses.



Situated on the Antrim Road, tenants will benefit from the close proximity to local shops, doctors' surgeries, post offices and places of worship, as well as, good public transport links.





Manse Court Saintfield

In January 2016, we successfully handed over 12 new apartments for families in Manse Court, Saintfield. The scheme will provide eight two bedroom apartments and 4 two and three bedroom houses. Manse Court is part of the 'Together Building United Communities Scheme' (TBUC) where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance.

Choice have worked with two local primary schools; St Mary's and Academy and artist, Alison Lowry to produce a unique art feature for the scheme to celebrate building a new community and to convey the children's thoughts and ideas of what a TBUC scheme means to them.

An official opening with the Minister for Social Development will be held later in the year. We wish all our tenants many happy years in their new homes!



If you would like any further information on the new developments please contact Choice Services Centre on **0300 111 2211**.

Get ready for Spring! Cleaning

The flowers are blooming, the birds are serenading so don't let your house be still stuck with the winter blues!

Spring cleaning is a tradition that allows us to freshen up our homes and get a head start on the busy seasons of spring and summer. Before you pick up a duster, here are five top tips to help you clean up, declutter and revitalise your home!



Take it one room at a time

One of the most common mistakes people make when spring-cleaning is moving randomly around the house. Try to clean methodically from room to room. Work from the top down, inside to outside, to avoid getting what you just cleaned dirty again.

Get behind the big stuff

Now is the time to move the sofa, beds, and other heavy furniture to clean the areas you normally don't clean. Pull the item away from the wall, one side at a time, clean behind it. Push the item back in, pull out the other side, and repeat.

Get your duvet dry-cleaned

It's all too easy to overlook, but duvets should be cleaned twice a year and now is the perfect time to do it, as you switch between winter and summer quilts. Rotate, flip and vacuum your mattress too for a fresh, clean bed.

Store away your winter woollies

Always wash or dry-clean your wool clothing before putting them into storage. Moths feed on the proteins in wool – and they especially love the food, skin and hair particles that are left behind on our clothes.



Replace batteries

Adopt your annual spring cleaning as the best time to replace the batteries in smoke detectors and carbon-monoxide detectors.



Estate Walkabouts Pilot

Choice believes that Estate Walkabouts are an excellent way for tenants to participate in improving the areas where they live.

Basically local tenants, Tenants' Forum Inspectors and Choice staff 'walk-around' an estate to review and record the condition of the estate.

During October and November Choice staff and Tenant Forum Inspectors, accompanied by local tenants, participated in a pilot study of twelve general needs schemes across Northern Ireland. Some of the comments from tenants who participated in the pilot were as follows:

- Tenants said it was good to meet Choice staff and enjoyed the face to face contact.
- Tenants believed it was important for Choice to get to know tenants and to demonstrate an interest in the schemes where tenants live.

The pilots also highlighted the following issues:

- The need to have a consistent approach when carrying out Estate Walkabouts.
- The need for relevant Choice staff to promote 'ownership' of the process.
- 'School runs' to be considered when deciding on timing of future visits.
- Information provided to tenants prior to the walkabouts should be clear and precise.

Choice now plans to roll out a programme of Estate Walkabouts for all our General Needs schemes during 2016.

Feedback from the Tenants' Forum Inspectors was very positive with one Tenant Inspector commenting:

"It was good to see the tenant-staff dynamic working so well."



The programme for Estate Walkabouts will be available on our website choice-housing.org



Come join us, get a spring in your step

Menu of Tenant Involvement

Putting
Customers at
the heart of
everything
we do

Together
we will
achieve more

Why get involved?

Being involved with Choice will give you the chance to:

- Be active in shaping Choice services
- Make your area a better place to live in
- Give Choice your views on the services you receive
- Be part of a group to review and improve services
- Help Choice better understand the needs of tenants
- Gain useful skills
- Receive relevant training
- Meet new people

How do I get involved?

You can choose how to get involved and when by selecting the type and level of involvement that suits your lifestyle.

Choice would be delighted to hear from you

Please complete the Menu of Involvement in this newsletter and return to Choice or hand it to a member of Choice staff.

Telephone 0300 111 2211 and ask for the Tenant Involvement Team.

Choice Housing Ireland believes that it is essential to consider the views of our tenants with regard to the services and housing schemes we provide. We are committed to putting our customers at the heart of service delivery and we believe that by listening to and taking on board your views, we can ensure that policies and services are more responsive to changing needs and rising aspirations.

We recognise that it is important to offer a range of involvement methods which are fit for purpose and appropriate to the needs of our tenants, providing the opportunity for you to get involved with us on whatever level best suits your lifestyle.

If you are interested in working with Choice Housing Ireland staff to improve our services, please indicate in the table overleaf which option would be most appropriate for you and return the completed form to the Association.

Have a
say in how
Choice
services are
delivered

Menu of Tenant Involvement

YES NO



<p>Resident Groups Represent your community on a wide range of issues by being part of a Resident Group in your area. Meets as and when required – 2.5 hours per meeting</p>		
<p>Tenant Champion Where no formal Tenant Association exists become a Tenant Champion to represent your local community, working beside Choice housing staff to address any issues in your area. 1 hour per week</p>		
<p>Tenants' Forum Group We currently have one Central Forum and three Regional Forums to cover the province, (Belfast region, North West region and Southern & Western region), discussing housing related issues and sharing best practice ideas. Meets every 6 weeks – 2.5 hours per meeting</p>		
<p>Tenant Inspectors Carry out an inspection of our services alongside housing staff to identify areas for improvement. Training is provided and expenses paid. Meets quarterly – Additional project work every 6 months</p>		
<p>Editorial Team Write and review articles for our Tenant Newsletter and website and report on the work of the Tenants' Forum. Meets quarterly – 2 hours per meeting</p>		
<p>Estate Walkabouts Walk around your estate with your Housing and Property Services Officer to identify areas of concern and agree priorities for the local community. Meets annually – 2 hours per meeting</p>		
<p>Financial Stakeholders Group Review the financial areas of housing, eg Tenants' Forum budgets, service charges and related financial matters. Meets quarterly – 2.5 hours per meeting</p>		
<p>Policy Consultation Group Assist with the development and review of policies and procedures as and when required. We anticipate approximately 4 meetings per year – 2 hours per meeting</p>		
<p>Mystery Shoppers Test services and provide feedback as a mystery shopper by carrying out a series of pre-agreed tasks, such as telephone calls or reception visits, and report on findings. Training will be provided. Meets quarterly over set days</p>		
<p>Information Technology Assist with the development of a new customer website and innovative self-service technology. 1 meeting per month until website published</p>		
<p>Tenant Satisfaction Survey Assist with the development of a Tenant Satisfaction Survey to help us identify our strengths and weaknesses. Meets once per year or less, as agreed with staff</p>		
<p>Register of Tenants Respond to surveys or comment on specific service areas which you are interested in. We can contact you by text, post, email or telephone call. As and when required – time commitment can be as little as 20 minutes</p>		
<p>Tenant Translator Team Offer your services to other tenants in explaining documents or correspondence to help ensure they are understood. As and when required</p>		

Your Details

Name

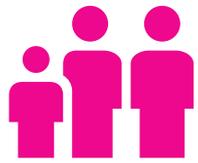
Address

Telephone

Return to: **Choice Housing Ireland Ltd, FREEPOST BEL2371, Belfast BT1 4BR**

In Choice we listen to your feedback and act on it

Tenants are best placed to tell what is being done well and what needs improving. Below are some of the examples of how we have responded to your feedback from matters raised at Tenants' Forum meetings.

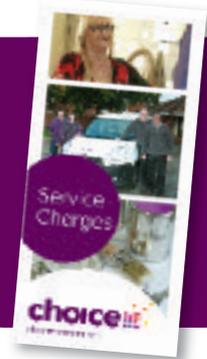


You said...

We did...

Provide service charge information to general needs tenants where they are applied and improve the lay out of the new Service Charge leaflet.

Choice liaised with the Tenants' Forum and together we redesigned the Service Charges leaflet. General Needs tenants now receive this information where applicable.



Consider ways to improve relationships on the ground, i.e. tenants meeting their Maintenance and Housing Officers to discuss specific improvements.

We developed a pilot scheme of Estate Walkabouts where both tenants and staff walk the estate together and discuss possible improvements and actions needed. The pilot was a terrific success. Estate Walkabouts will become an integral part of our work on general needs estates.

Make the website easier to navigate and provide an opportunity for tenants to access systems and information online.

We are working with a focus group of tenants and staff to review the current website with a view to making it easier for our tenants to find information. This is ongoing with positive work in hand.



Choice demonstrates their commitment to Tenant Participation (TP) by providing invaluable training on TP delivered by Supporting Communities. 40 Tenants' Forum members received this training and feedback was very positive from staff and tenants. Claire Darby, Tenant Involvement Champion, who was also present at the sessions commented on the commitment from Choice towards the 16/17 Tenant Engagement Training Programme: "Developing the skillset of our tenants is important to us at Choice to help more meaningful tenant engagement in the scrutiny of our services"



Credit Union

Choice Staff and the Chair of the Tenants' Forum recently met with a representative from the Northern Ireland Board of Credit Unions to explore the possibility of running a pilot project to promote credit union membership in some of our schemes.

The initiative is currently at the development stage, however, Choice is hopeful that the pilot will be successful and tenants will be able to avail of low cost affordable loans in the future.

You are stronger than you think!

Choice continues the positive working partnership that has developed with Cancer Focus and the successful implementation of “The Well Aware Programme” to the Over 55’s.



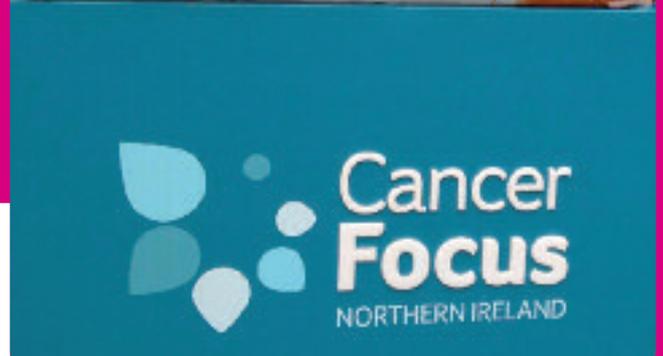
In the lead up to No Smoking day on 9th March 2016 Choice met with a number of

schemes to discuss the Smoking Cessation Programme delivered by our partner Cancer Focus. A Smoking Cessation Programme was piloted in two sheltered housing schemes – Knockagh Court in Greenisland and Westbridge House in Enniskillen.

The Tenants’ Forum and Choice want to continue to promote the benefits of health awareness to tenants and the “Smoking Cessation” pilot will hopefully be expanded to other schemes following the pilot.

The 12 week pilot programme will involve an introductory session, followed by a tailored programme to suit and support any interested tenants. One to one and group support will also be offered by the Cancer Focus team.

This is a great opportunity for tenants and staff to work together for a positive healthy change to their lifestyle.



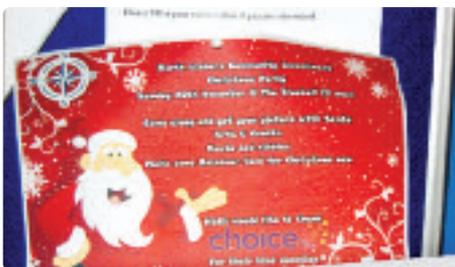
**Most smokers
want to stop
Choice wants to help!**



Choice sponsored the Pond Park Community Christmas Event and staff attended alongside The Police Service of Northern Ireland and special guest, Santa.

North Lisburn Community Investment Christmas Party

Choice proudly sponsored the North Lisburn Community Investment Christmas Party where the local community were able to get involved in arts and crafts and meet Santa!



The Muriel Smyth
Good Neighbour Award
 2015



Out and About
 stories from our customers

Hike4HopeNI

The Hike4HopeNI walk from Londonderry/Derry to Belfast took place over five days from the 17th-21st December 2015. Each day the walkers covered between 11-20 miles. Hike4HopeNI have raised £4,343 and the donations are still coming in!

Congratulations to Austin Mulvenna, Ian Stewart, Courtney Scates, Oonagh Todd and Jim Chapman for taking part on behalf of Choice. They all showed fantastic commitment and enthusiasm to help a great cause. The money raised will benefit four charities; Simon Community, Shelter NI, Cycle against Suicide and Samaritans.

Inspired by the British Psychological Society's 'Walk the talk' campaign and Cycle Against Suicide; Hike4Hope was conceived by Siobhan O'Neill, Professor of Mental Health Sciences, and Paddy Gray, Professor of Housing. They have both been concerned about the links between housing and mental health and this initiative comes as they embark on

a new programme of research with Bronagh Delargy.

Austin was instrumental in encouraging his colleagues to take part in this initiative and after the walk he commented: "The people were fantastic and it was a great initiative, I'm so pleased with the very positive contribution from Choice walkers! Paddy and Siobhan are very grateful for our input and support and the funds keep rolling in on the donation pages."

Following the success of the event Siobhan noted: "Things can go wrong, very, very badly wrong and, as I've discovered, there's little point in thinking that you can have a plan, if you do you're doomed. Life delivers the most amazing surprises but you need to actually be alive to experience them. Please have that hope and if you don't have it, look for the hope; talk to someone, keep seeking help and looking at options. It's ok not to feel ok and it's definitely ok to ask for help."



Donna Bates from Belfast has won the Good Neighbour Award 2015 for her caring nature to her fellow neighbours who wrote into Choice and nominated her for the award. Carol Ervine, Director of Housing met with Donna and learnt about how she often cooks and visits her neighbours for a chat and some company. Many congratulations Donna!



Pancake Tuesday at Pound Green Court

Choice Tenant Involvement Champion, Claire Darby and tenants joined with The Lunch Box in pancake making at Pound Green Court in Larne. The Lunch Box is a Social Enterprise involving students to help them with employability. Caron who is a client on the Hands on Training programme made and served the tenants at Pound Green Court with delicious pancakes for Pancake Tuesday. A bit of flipping the pancakes was tried by tenants and the students!



Happy 100th George Kirkpatrick

Happy birthday to George Kirkpatrick from Rothesay Court, Coleraine who recently celebrated his 100th birthday with friends and family at the scheme!

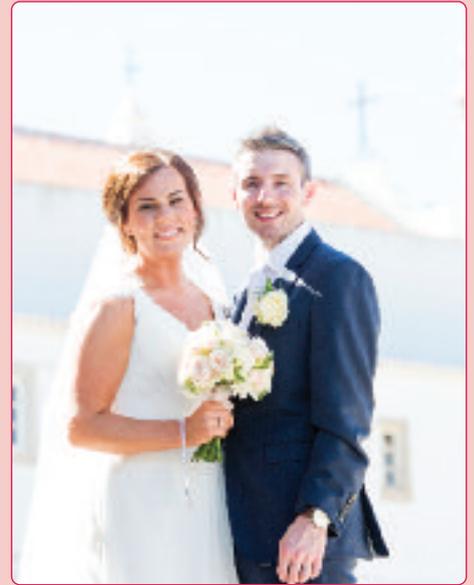
Choice Weddings



We are delighted for our Marketing Officer (and Choice News Editor!), Jenny Mawhinney who married Matthew Mawhinney on 26th September at Whitehouse Presbyterian Church. They celebrated in the sunshine with their friends and family at the beautiful Orange Tree House on the Ards Peninsula.



Congratulations to Barry O'Neill, Development Officer and Julie O'Neill, Corporate Services Officer who married on a beautiful sunny day in August. The ceremony was held in the historical Armagh Cathedral with the reception followed in Corrick House Hotel. Barry first met Julie when she came to work for Choice in 2011, and when introduced he reportedly said: "There goes the future Mrs Barry O'Neill", how right you were Barry!



Wedding bells rang for Grainne Donnelly, Senior Supported Housing Officer on 19th September 2016, in an intimate wedding in the Algarve, Portugal. Grainne and her husband Colin wed in a traditional picturesque whitewashed church followed by a cliff top reception overlooking the sea. Parabens Grainne and Colin!



Castlerocklands trip to Bangor!

Tenants of Castlerocklands, Carrickfergus and Knockagh Court, Greenisland braved the cold weather for a trip to Donaghadee Garden centre and Bloomfield in Bangor for lots of shopping to banish the January blues! The tenants would like to thank George Walker, Choice Minibus driver, for being so helpful and kind on their day out.



Benmore Court Christmas

Benmore Court, Belfast held its Christmas dinner on 18th December. Following the meal the tenant's presented a cheque for £400 to Deputy Sister Patricia and colleague Anne-Marie from the Children's Cancer Unit in Royal Victoria Hospital. This money has been raised by the tenant's coffee morning held every Friday. Congratulations to all the tenants for their fundraising efforts!



Trinity Lodge Christmas Coffee Morning

Trinity Lodge in Belfast held a Christmas coffee morning with visitors from the Hope Project and Stephen Gourley, Community Outreach Worker. Mrs Carol Duplessis, a daughter of a former tenant who has recently moved onto a care home, provided homemade cakes and mince pies for the festive celebrations.



Tom's Birthday Surprise!

Staff and tenants at Rothesay Court in Coleraine surprised Tom Dowds with a birthday cake to celebrate his 80th birthday. We hope you enjoyed your birthday cake Tom!

Black's Court and Black's Mews Coffee Morning

Black's Court and Black's Mews held a very successful coffee morning to raise money for Macmillan Cancer Support. The tenants raised a fantastic £333 for the charity, well done to everyone involved!

MACMILLAN.
CANCER SUPPORT

Out and About

stories from our customers



The Metropole celebrates its 30th Anniversary

Choice sheltered housing scheme; The Metropole celebrated its 30th anniversary with a party which was attended by customers and Choice staff. The scheme which is in the centre of Derry/Londonderry is very much at the heart of its local community and the warm and supportive atmosphere at the scheme makes it a flagship for the work of Choice. We wish our customers well in their continued enjoyment at the scheme.



Knitting and Natter Club raise money for local charities

Orchard Court in Newtownards runs a weekly Knit and Natter Club for all tenants. The club make hand knitted products which are sold to raise money for local charities. Over the past three months, the club have made; rugs, hats, scarves and gloves raising £250! The fundraising is being split across two charities; Forget Me Not and St. Mark's Parish Church, Newtownards. The Knit and Natter Club presented a cheque to Forget Me Not and celebrated their fundraising efforts at the scheme recently. Congratulations to all involved for raising money for such worthy charities!



Lily Mansbridge's 98th Birthday

Lily Mansbridge of Ellis Court, Belfast celebrated her 98th Birthday in October! We hope you enjoyed all the celebrations Lily!



Active tenants at Hill Court

Active tenants at Hill Court, Lurgan enjoy a weekly Armchair Aerobics class every Monday followed by a bowl of healthy homemade soup made by Natalie Fan, Scheme Co-Ordinator. Tenants really enjoy the aerobics and always feel better for it!



Happy Hill Court

Hill Court in Lurgan held its Christmas Party on 17th December, a great time was had by all!



Tall Ship Day Trip

A great day was had by all tenants from Stevensons Park in Lurgan who visited both Mount Stewart and the Tall Ships on day trips during the summer months, with even the sun making an appearance!





Jumpers for Charity

Choice staff celebrated Christmas Jumper day on 18th December and raised money for the Choice nominated charities.



Festive Bearnagh Glens

Festive celebrations were in full swing at Bearnagh Glens Christmas Party!



Ashley Lodge Festive Celebrations

Ashley Lodge, Belfast held their Christmas Dinner on 16th December. Enjoying the festive celebrations are tenants; Maureen, Joyce, Anne and Harriet!

Ballydown Court looking good!
Tenants at Ballydown Court in Belfast grouped together to improve the external front area of the sheltered housing scheme by power washing the area and decorating the entrance with lots of colourful hanging baskets and fresh flowers. Well done to all tenants involved in improving the area in which they live!



Drumkeen's farewell to Ian Elliott

Drumkeen Court, Ederney said their fair well's to Ian Elliott, former Chief Executive of Choice. Ian was presented with a picture of Florence Court, Enniskillen by tenant, Mena Hegarty. Mena was a project campaigner for Drumkeen Court and worked alongside Niall Sheridan, Group Director of Operations on the development of the sheltered housing scheme.



Wilbur and Veronica Cockcroft 50th Wedding Anniversary

Wilbur and Veronica Cockcroft of Ellis Court, Belfast recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary with their fellow tenants and family. Instead of presents, Wilbur and Veronica asked for donations to Macmillan on their behalf. A fantastic £212 was raised! Many congratulations Wilbur and Veronica!

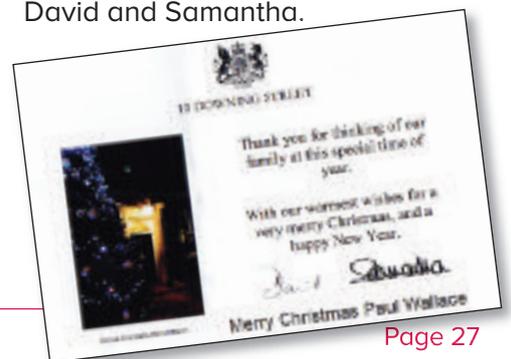


Sadie is 105

Sadie Norris a tenant at Kirk House, Belfast recently celebrated her 105th birthday with staff at the scheme. Happy birthday Sadie, we hope you had a lovely day!

Paul gets Royal Seal of Approval!

Paul Wallace, tenant at Belfast Road in Antrim has featured in a number of local newspapers for his acknowledgments from the Queen and Prime Minister, David Cameron and wife Samantha Cameron. Paul has written many letters over the years including Christmas wishes. Paul recently received a lovely acknowledgment from 10 Downing Street thanking him for his warm wishes for Christmas and the New Year which was signed by both David and Samantha.



Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland

The NI Executive at Stormont has been debating how to implement Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland since the Westminster government introduced changes to the welfare system in March 2012.

In November 2015, as part of the 'Fresh Start' agreement, the NI Assembly agreed a Legislative Consent Motion to allow the UK Government to legislate for Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland.

A Bill was subsequently introduced in Westminster, under this fast-track procedure, which became the Northern Ireland (Welfare Reform) Act 2015.

It was agreed that £585 million would be allocated from Executive funds to 'top-up' UK welfare arrangements over a four-year period. An expert working group led by Professor Eileen Evason was appointed by the NI Executive to identify how to mitigate the introduction of Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland.

The Evason Report recommended supplementary payments to carers, people suffering ill health and families on low incomes. The main recommendations are:

- The mitigation of the bedroom tax in Northern Ireland, for a period of four years. The administration of this scheme has not yet been decided: options could include the non-application of the bedroom tax, or the creation of a dedicated bedroom tax mitigations fund to which affected claimants could apply. Alternatively, it may be decided not to implement the bedroom tax within Northern Ireland for the four year period.
- A package of supplementary payments for varying periods for carers, claimants with disabilities, claimants suffering from ill health and families. This includes a supplementary payment to fully mitigate any households affected by the benefit cap.
- Publishing a dedicated advice strategy, which will aim to ensure that claimants have access to skilled, independent advice throughout the implementation of Welfare Reform. This would include an independent helpline to assist claimants with any sanctions applied.



- A package of mitigations relating to Universal Credit, including:
 - ~ Payment of rent directly to landlords;
 - ~ The expansion of the Discretionary Support Scheme to specifically include 'working poor' families, with a dedicated budget of £35 million per year from 2017/18; and
 - ~ The creation of a contingency fund of £2 million to make emergency payments where hardship occurs due to difficulties with Universal Credit.

Universal Credit will be one single benefit for people aged 18 to 64 years old paid to each household. It will replace the following means-tested benefits:

- Child Tax Credit.
- Working Tax Credit.
- Housing Benefit.
- Income-Related Employment and Support Allowance.
- Income-Based Jobseekers Allowance.
- Income Support.
 - ~ Steps to improve the financial capability of those affected including: support for food poverty measures; the creation of a Welfare Reform Information Network involving the voluntary, faith and public sectors; and support for credit unions in providing socially responsible credit.

A number of concessions for Northern Ireland have been made including payment of Housing Benefit directly to landlords and fortnightly payments rather than monthly payments as seen in England, Scotland and Wales.

The practical implementation, such as dates and practical support for claimants, of the welfare changes are presently being agreed and Choice will keep our tenants informed as Welfare Reform is gradually introduced.

Different ways to pay your rent and other charges

You can now pay online

In order to make paying your Rent 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 now 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 or Windows Phone store and Google Play enabling you to pay your rent from your Apple, Windows or Android smartphone.



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

Debit Card
Credit Card

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 or shop or 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.

Housing Executive

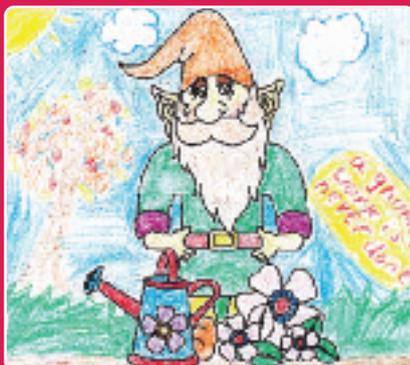
Housing Benefit direct payment – If you claim Housing Benefit, it can be paid directly into your rent account. However, if your Housing Benefit does not cover the full amount you still need to pay us the difference.

choice

Choice Offices – You can pay with cash, cheque, or debit card. We accept MasterCard, Visa, Visa Electron, Solo and Switch.



Colouring Competition Winner



Congratulations to Sarah Fleck of Markstown Grove, Cullybacky the winner of the Choice News colouring competition. Sarah is pictured with dad, Samuel Fleck and Sinead Crumell (Housing Officer) and won the fantastic prize of a family pass to We are Vertigo!

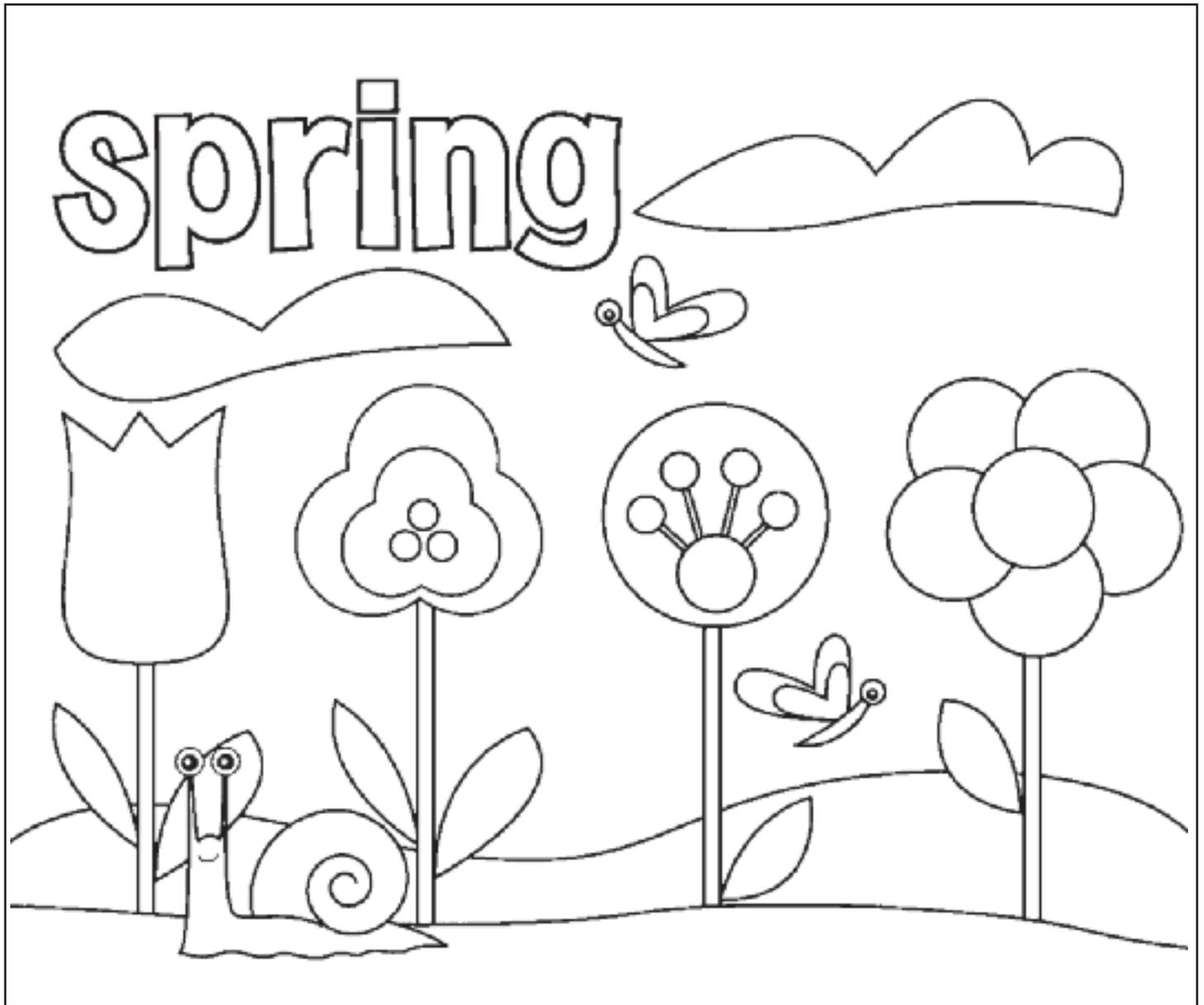


Colouring Competition

Hey kids this is your chance to show-off your colouring skills

Win a Family Pass to Belfast Zoo

It's really easy to enter, just pull out this page and colour it in anyway you like! Then all you have to do is send it off in the post along with your name, age, address (the parent must be a customer of Choice) and telephone number to the address below. The entry that we like the most will receive this great prize!



Name _____	Age _____
Address _____	

Daytime Telephone _____	Evening Telephone _____

Now send this page to:

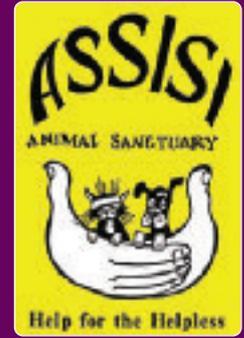
The Editor, Choice News, FREEPOST BEL2371, Belfast BT1 4BR (entries must be recieved by 20/05/16)

Fundraising Committee



choice
Charities for 2015/16

www.homelessbelfast.org
www.assisi-ni.org



In January 2015 staff were given the opportunity to choose two charities for the year from a short list of nominations. The charities for 2015 chosen were the Welcome Organisation who provide much needed support to homeless people in the Belfast area and Assisi Animal charity.

Following the merger of Oaklee, Trinity and Ulidia, the fundraising committee increased our numbers to 14 members. This has greatly increased our ability to carry out our fundraising activities.

A small number of fundraising activities took place throughout 2015 including an Easter Ballot and a number of coffee mornings. A large number of staff have also continued to make a monthly contribution from their salary through the non-uniform day.

In autumn 2015, committee members met with the Welcome Organisation to discuss hosting a major joint fundraising event in early 2016. It was agreed that we would host a Masquerade Ball in the City Hall, Belfast. The date was set for 12th February 2016 and concerted preparations commenced.

The prestigious event took place in the City Hall and was kindly hosted by the Lord Mayor, Arder Carson. 215 party goers enjoyed a fabulous night including

Choice staff, family and friends, Joint Management partners, contractors and staff and supporters from the Welcome Organisation.

The total raised from the event is still to be finalised but it is in the region of £6,000.

Appreciation and thanks is extended to the members of the fundraising committee who worked tirelessly to arrange this extremely successful event.

The committee would also like to thank the staff who supported this event and other events held throughout the year.

Due to the merger and the preparations for the gala ball, the nominated charities chosen in 2015 will continue to be supported until the end of 2016 when staff will have an opportunity to choose two new charities to support.

Current Fundraising Committee Members are Marcia McMath (Treasurer), Lorna Brown, Grainne McGuinness, Ursula Maye, Michael Ferguson, Matthew McLaughlin, Martin Meek, Stephanie Bennis, Charlie Temple, Austin Mulvenna, Paula Rodgers, Gerard McFadden, Mairead Chapman and Monica Genney.



Committee members and the Lord Mayor at the Masquerade Ball in the City Hall, Belfast.

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.



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

Useful tips for refilling your oil tank...

- **Never tip your 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 www.choice-housing.org/news/oil-buying-clubs**

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:

The Editor, Choice News, FREEPOST BEL2371, Belfast BT1 6BR

Similarly, if you would like to join the Tenants' Forum Editorial Team to contribute and review articles for the Newsletter please contact the Services Centre on 0300 111 2211.

All contributions gratefully received! And of course, we always appreciate any comments or suggestions you may have for Choice News in general. After all, it is a newsletter for YOU!

**Working together
for positive change**

choice 
choice-housing.org

Choice Housing Ireland Limited
Leslie Morrell House
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Email: enquiries@choice-housing.org

For all your housing
repairs and enquiries
Services Centre
0300 111 2211