

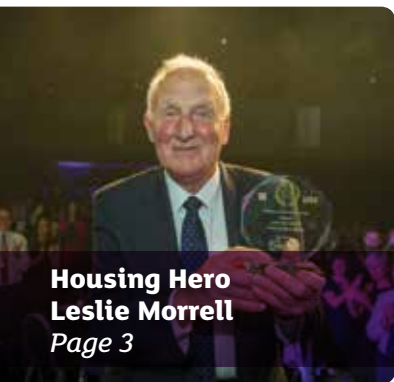
# Choice News

**NEW LOOK**

**Issue 6  
Summer 2017**  
The Newsletter  
for Choice Housing  
Ireland Tenants



## Investing in our Communities



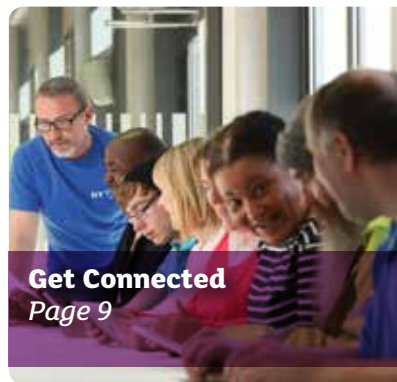
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choice-housing.org

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# A message from our Group Chief Executive

Michael McDonnell



Welcome to the Summer 2017 edition of Choice News and to an update on changes relevant to you.

Welfare Changes continues to create challenges for both tenants and landlords alike. The introduction of a benefit cap and the 'bedroom tax' to Northern Ireland has undoubtedly reduced household incomes for many. The roll-out of universal credit over the coming year will create further uncertainty. However, you should be assured that Choice will continue to communicate the nature and likely impact of welfare changes in conjunction with our statutory partners. Please keep an eye on our website for regular updates and a programme of events to support tenants.

It has been extremely disappointing that government funding for the 'Supporting People' programme will be cut by 5% in the current year. This programme provides a range of services to the most vulnerable including frail elderly, those with mental health or learning disabilities and the homeless. This cut follows many years of frozen funding so I would encourage

everyone to lobby their political and community representatives for protection of the 'Supporting People' programme going forward.

In times of constrained public finances, the onus on Choice and other voluntary housing associations is to maximise the benefits derived from our resources. In previous editions of our tenant newsletter I highlighted the increasing preoccupation of Choice with delivering value for money. Various strands of our new strategy are already in progress and Choice will strive to use every penny that we receive to improve the lives of tenants and your communities.

Our focus on making a real difference to neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland will also lead to change in the way that our services are being delivered for tenants in the coming months. More specifically, our tenant and client services staff will reorganise around area-based teams to provide a more seamless model for service delivery. Whilst retaining specialist support skills in allocations, household income management, property services, etc. the housing officer will

increasingly become the 'face' of Choice in local communities. In turn, our sector-leading customer service centre which manages thousands of calls each week, will be enhanced to enable tenants to do more online through a secure customer account.

We are grateful to tenants in the Greater Belfast area for bearing with us while our day-to-day repairs contracts transitioned to new providers. Customers in South and East Belfast and parts of County Down will have noticed the transfer in response repairs from Noonan to Best Maintenance. In turn, customers in North and West Belfast and parts of County Antrim will have noted the new uniforms of Choice Services – our in-house repairs contractor. I am delighted to say that any back-log in works orders prior to contract change has now been cleared and customer feedback on the new providers has been overwhelmingly positive.

I hope that you all have a peaceful and relaxing summer and thanks for choosing Choice as your landlord.

# 'Housing Hero' Leslie Morrell receives Lifetime Achievement Award



Leslie Morrell, a founder of the housing association movement in Northern Ireland has been awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award at a major UK event.

Organised jointly by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and Inside Housing, the Housing Heroes Awards is one of the largest annual housing events and recognises exceptional individuals who have improved lives and communities through their service.

For more than four decades, former farmer and politician Leslie Morrell has been an advocate for fair and proper social housing and believed it could contribute positively towards a peaceful and reconciled society. Despite significant personal risk at the height of the Troubles, he took bold steps to bring leaders in all communities together with local and regional government to establish the first housing associations. Leslie Morrell said: "It is surprising and humbling to win an award like this. My focus has always been on collaborating with as many people as possible to create the conditions for everyone to move forward. So many other people took great leaps of faith

to make it possible and this award is for them also.

"When we started out we knew that something had to be done urgently to improve the lives of people and communities in Northern Ireland. We had no idea at the time exactly how housing associations would work here, we just knew that good homes should be at the heart of social change. There is still much work to do of course, but we can be proud of the difference we've made and are continuing to make.

Leslie Morrell remains Honorary President of Choice which can trace its roots back to James Butcher Housing Association, which he established in 1975. Michael McDonnell, Group Chief

Executive of Choice said: "The housing association movement has evolved significantly in the last four decades, but it continues to reflect the original values and vision that Leslie set out. His contribution to a peaceful, reconciled society is evident in every part of Northern Ireland. His influence enabled housing to underpin social integration and helped pave the way for a shared future.

"Today's housing associations provide a third of affordable homes in Northern Ireland, employ more than 3,000 people and manage 44,000 homes, as well as providing high-quality care and support and many community services. It is impossible to imagine the movement without Leslie Morrell and this honour is richly deserved."



# Welfare Changes - summary of changes to the benefits system



The Welfare Reform Act is introducing a range of changes to the benefits system in Northern Ireland. Many current benefits are going to be abolished and replaced by a new benefits system, including those listed below:

## Universal Credit will replace many existing benefits

Universal Credit is a new single benefit for working-age people. From September 2017 it will gradually replace most means-tested benefits such as income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, tax credits and Housing Benefit. A comprehensive guide to Universal Credit and how it may effect you will be circulated to all tenants in the near future.

## Personal Independence Payment will replace Disability Living Allowance

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) will gradually replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for people of working age with daily care needs or difficulty getting about. From 20 June 2016 if you make a fresh claim or report a change of circumstances you will be assessed for PIP. If you are of working age and have an existing indefinite award of DLA you will be contacted to be reassessed for PIP from December 2016 onwards. Not everyone who gets DLA will be able to get PIP in future, but if you lose your award or are paid a lower amount of PIP, you may be able to get a supplementary payment for a year to compensate you for your financial loss.

## Cuts to Housing Benefit if your social housing is too large

If you live in social housing, such as Housing Executive or housing association accommodation, your Housing Benefit may be cut. This will only apply if you're of working age and you have more bedrooms than you're allowed after the new rules come in. If you are affected you will be given a supplementary payment so that you will not be financially worse off.

## Employment and Support Allowance

From 31 October 2016 a time-limit has been set on claims for contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance for people in the work-related activity group. If you are in this group and have been getting contribution-based ESA for 365 days, you will no longer be eligible. If you are in the support group you will not be affected.

If you are affected you may be able to get supplementary payments for one year to make up for any financial loss.

The special conditions for Employment and Support Allowance for young people were abolished in February 2016.



You can download our information leaflets on our website now [choice-housing.org](http://choice-housing.org)



## Benefit Cap

From 31 May 2016 there is a cap on the total amount of benefit you can get. To begin with, the cap may affect you if you're getting Housing Benefit and could mean you will get less money towards your rent. If you are affected you may be entitled to financial help.

## Benefit appeal rights will change

From 23 May 2016 if you don't agree with a social security benefit decision you must ask for it to be reviewed before you can appeal the decision. This change applies to all decisions made on or after this date.

The rules for disputing a decision will be explained in your benefit decision notification. If you think a decision is wrong, you can ask for it to be looked at again for any reason. This is known as mandatory reconsideration.

## Changes to the Social Fund

In November 2017 there will be a change in how some Social Fund payments are made. Crisis loans and community care grants have become part of a new Discretionary Support Payment scheme.

## Will you get less money under welfare reform?

If you're worried that the benefit changes will reduce the money you have coming in, it's a good idea to start thinking ahead. For example, you could get a benefits check on your current entitlement and see whether there will be any transitional protection available. You could also get some advice about budgeting.

## You can find out how Welfare Changes might affect you in a number of ways:

- 1 Phone our Services Centre: **0300 111 2211**
- 2 Email our Services Centre: [enquiries@choice-housing.org](mailto:enquiries@choice-housing.org)
- 3 Visit Choice's website: [www.choice-housing.org](http://www.choice-housing.org)
- 4 Visit the Government's Welfare Changes website: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/welfare-changes>
- 5 Contact the Independent Welfare Changes Helpline on **0808 802 0080**

## Make the Call



To check if you're getting all the money you're entitled to Make the Call free to the Benefits Advice Line on **0800 232 1271**, or alternatively, text **CHECK** to **67300** and an advisor will call you back. All calls are confidential and a friend or relative can even make enquiries on your behalf.



*"This is a wonderful place that will bring joy to many people and I would like to thank our partner, Choice, for creating this dementia-friendly garden for our residents."*

*Rev. John Seawright,  
convener of the PCI's Older  
People's Services Committee*

## *Choice and PCI open first 'dementia-friendly garden'*

Corkey House, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's (PCI) residential care home for older people in north Belfast has become the first of its six care homes to have its own purpose built dementia-friendly garden.

Run in partnership with Choice, Corkey House is home to 35 older people. While many of the residents do not have dementia, the garden has been specially designed to provide a relaxing and safe place for those who do.

The garden incorporates many features, including highly fragrant and colourful plants that provide sensory stimulation, safe pathways that will mitigate injuries from potential falls and raised bedding areas for residents to garden themselves.

Rev. John Seawright, convener of the PCI's Older People's Services Committee was joined by one of the residents and Michael McDonnell, Choice Group Chief Executive, to plant a special rose bush to commemorate the official opening of the garden.

Mr. Seawright said, "This is a wonderful place that will bring joy to many people and I would like to thank our partner, Choice, for creating this dementia-friendly garden for our residents."

"With more people being diagnosed with dementia, as care providers and as a denomination we are responding in a number of ways to enhance and improve the quality of life for those we care for.

Mr. Seawright continued, "Outside of providing professional training for our staff, we also want to provide opportunities for those with dementia



to live as full a life as possible. The dementia-friendly garden is one such creative and holistic example that will provide a stimulating, yet safe environment, and will encourage independence, relaxation and a sense of calm."

Michael McDonnell, Choice Group Chief Executive said: "Providing facilities that meet the needs of our communities and enhance tenant lives is a key priority for Choice. I am proud and enthused by the quality of facilities at Corkey House and the support provided by the PCI.

"The new dementia friendly garden is a welcoming place that promotes activity and wellbeing of body and mind. Spaces like this can play a vital role in local life and we wish our residents well as they enjoy and develop the garden together."

Along with the garden, Corkey's 'Vintage Café' is another dementia-friendly area of the home that seeks to support people with dementia. Decorated in an older style and full of memorabilia, it is a place for residents and families to gather, relax and reminisce. It leads to the garden and was also officially opened today.

Like all PCI homes, Corkey House welcomes residents from all denominations and seek to provide care in a specifically Christian ethos and environment. Residents have the choice of attending regular worship services and fellowship times held within each home and a conscious effort is made to ensure that residents are offered spiritual support and encouragement when requested.

choice

126  
Strand  
Road



£3 million  
redevelopment  
to deliver 1, 2 and 3  
bedroom apartments

To arrange an appointment  
to view our show apartment  
Call:

0300 111 2211

enquiries@choice-housing.org  
choice-housing.org



## BT launches digital skills initiative for Choice residents



BT has launched a new pilot initiative to provide digital skills training for up to 25 residents of Choice schemes in Belfast.

The innovative 'Get Connected' programme is a 12-week digital training course to be held at the Skainos Centre in Belfast with the aim of helping to build digital confidence among those taking part, improve their employability and social mobility, and develop the skills they need to engage in a technology led world.

Supporting Communities, an independent charitable organisation which champions tenant and community participation, is delivering the training alongside a team of BT volunteers, who will provide support to the participants throughout the scheme and for up to one year afterwards.

The training programme will cover a range of topics from email and basic typing through to managing finances, preparing CVs as well as tutorials on how to use the internet to access public services online.

Mairead Meyer, Managing Director of NI Networks at BT, said:  
"At BT, we have a long-term commitment to help build a culture of tech literacy and to use the power of communications to make a better world. As more essential parts of everyday life take place online, digital skills are now a necessity and without training many people are at risk of being left behind, unable to actively engage online, find employment or access other support services."

"We're delighted to launch this initiative working with Choice and Supporting Communities to deliver invaluable skills training and give real and lasting benefits to those in our community who need additional support."

Michael McDonnell, Group Chief Executive of Choice said:  
"We know that some of our service users can feel overwhelmed by digital technologies and it is important that they build the confidence and skills to overcome that challenge. Technology should be about making life easier and giving people the means to better connect with services and advice online."

"This kind of digital inclusion initiative can make a real difference to our tenants' lives and we're thrilled that BT has stepped forward with the funding to enable Supporting Communities to deliver the training, meaning that even those with no experience of computers can quickly get to grips with digital life and its advantages."

Colm McDaid, Chief Executive of Supporting Communities, commented:  
"Supporting Communities is delighted to be delivering the Get Connected digital project. BT's collaboration with Choice and ourselves is a win win for everyone. Working with four different schemes will undoubtedly bring together a unique and innovative digital learning experience for those who use the service and I look forward to the impact that the project will have."

# Choice Services Centre Celebrates 750,000 Caller!

**Congratulations to Mr William Hamill from Bangor who was recently announced as Choice Services Centre 750,000th caller.**

To mark this significant milestone for the Services Centre, Carol Ervine; Group Director of Tenant and Client Services, Martin Murphy; Services Centre Team Leader and Corey Rogers; Services Centre Advisor presented Mr Hamill with a £100 shopping voucher.

Choice Services Centre continues to grow from strength to strength and last year our Services Centre received 142,000 calls to help resolve tenants repair and housing requests quickly and effectively. Excellent customer service remains a key priority for Choice and last year our tenants rated the high standard of call advisors with a satisfaction level of 93%.

Let us know if there are any housing repairs and enquiries that we can help with by contacting Choice Services Centre any weekday from 9am to 5pm on **0300 111 2211** or by email at [servicescentre@choice-housing.org](mailto:servicescentre@choice-housing.org)



Excellent customer service remains a key priority for Choice and last year our tenants rated the high standard of call advisors with a satisfaction level of

**93%.**

# Greenisland House

Accommodation for older people with support needs.

Greenisland House is a joint initiative between the Northern Trust, Choice Housing Ireland Ltd, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Triangle HA. The accommodation will provide 32 apartments which will have a mix of 1 and 2 bedrooms.



**choice**

**HSC** Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Department for **Communities**  
[www.communities-ni.gov.uk](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk)

**Housing Executive**

**TRIANGLE**

supportingpeople

# SCAM ALERT

*The Consumer Council and Choice want to help tenants stay safe and avoid becoming victims of a scam.*

Nearly 1 in 5 consumers in Northern Ireland has been taken in by a scam in the last 3 years. The Consumer Council and Choice want to help tenants stay safe and avoid becoming victims of a scam.

## What are the different methods and types of scams?

The most common method to scam consumers is by telephone, but you can also be targeted by post, email, doorstep sellers and charity collectors, and online scams.

Sadly we're seeing that scams are becoming more and more sophisticated but the aim remains the same – to take money from innocent members of the public.

## How can you avoid scams?

The Consumer Council is part of the ScamwiseNI Partnership, an initiative established to raise awareness of scams in Northern Ireland. For more information visit [www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/scamwiseni](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/scamwiseni)

The Consumer Council has produced, in conjunction with the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI) and Trading Standards Service, *'Scams – Know the Sign ... Stop the Crime'* - which provides information on the different types of scams, what to look out for and how to report them. You can download a copy from [www.consumercouncil.org.uk/publications](http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/publications) or contact The Consumer Council on **0800 121 6022** to request a copy.

## Here are some pointers to alert you to a possible scam:

- > Your bank will never contact you to ask for your PIN or your password, or send a courier to your home to collect cash, your PIN, card or chequebook.
- > Your bank will never ask you to transfer money to a new account because of suspected fraud on your account.
- > Never click on links in emails that take you to another website, it's better to enter a website address yourself into the internet browser.
- > If you haven't bought a lottery ticket – you can't win it!
- > You should never have to ring a premium telephone number or send money to claim a prize, not even the cost of a stamp.
- > Telephone scammers will often ask you to call another number, but then stay on the line. Check the number is genuine and call a friend first to ensure the line is clear.
- > Genuine computer firms do not make spontaneous phone calls to help you fix your computer.
- > Use the "Quick Check Service" by calling 0800 013 2290 to see if doorstep callers are genuine.
- > If in doubt, don't reply. Bin it, delete it or hang up.



## What should you do if you have been caught out by a scam?

If you have been caught out by a scam or you think a friend or family member has been affected, contact Consumerline who can give advice and, if necessary, pass the matter onto the Trading Standards Service.

**Consumerline**  
Telephone **0300 123 6262**  
[www.nidirect.gov.uk/consumerline](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/consumerline)

Bogus callers should be reported to the PSNI; scams should be reported to Action Fraud.

**PSNI**  
Telephone **101** (or **999** in an emergency)  
[www.psni.police.uk](http://www.psni.police.uk)

**Action Fraud**  
Telephone **0300 123 2040**  
[www.actionfraud.police.uk/contact-us](http://www.actionfraud.police.uk/contact-us)

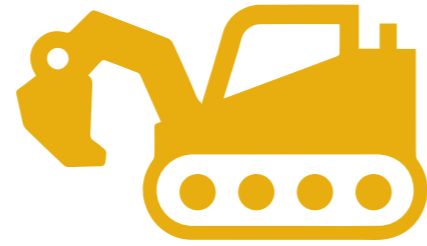
*Nearly 1 in 5 consumers in Northern Ireland has been taken in by a scam in the last 3 years.*

If you have any information about unknown doorstep callers, call Crimestoppers on **0800 555 111**. Your call is free, you are not obliged to give your name, and you may receive a reward.

There are also useful websites with tips for protecting yourself and reducing unwanted mail and calls, including:

- > [www.consumercouncil.org.uk](http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk) has guides to download, including 'Guide to Shopping Safely Online' and 'Safer Ways to Pay';
- > [www.getsafeonline.org](http://www.getsafeonline.org) has tips on how to protect yourself online;
- > [www.tpsonline.org.uk](http://www.tpsonline.org.uk) is the Telephone Preference Service, a free service to get your number removed from unsolicited sales and marketing callers; and
- > [www.mpsonline.org.uk](http://www.mpsonline.org.uk) is the Mailing Preference Service, a free service to get your address removed from lists used by direct mail companies.

## Choice begins £1.5m development on Beersbridge Road



Choice have begun construction on a new £1.5 million housing development in East Belfast. The nine-unit scheme will create a mix of two and three bedroom homes and two apartments on land adjoining Elmgrove Primary School on

the Beersbridge Road. Pupils from the school along with tenants and staff from Elmgrove Manor helped cut the first sod on the development which is expected to be completed within 12 months.



*“This project is one of many new developments we are embarking on this year across Northern Ireland. It is great to see new housing breathing life back into a site that has laid derelict for too long. This is a further boost to East Belfast and efforts to reduce housing waiting lists.” Michael McDonnell, Group Chief Executive.*



Michael McDonnell said at the Sod Cutting:

*“There is a feel good factor on the Beersbridge Road and we are making the most of the links and partnerships to further support positive change. We look forward to welcoming tenants into the new homes next year and playing a greater part among an exciting and vibrant community.”*





# Live Here Love Here Small Grants Scheme



Building strong and resilient communities is just as important to Choice as providing high quality homes. Across Northern Ireland, we are supporting individuals and groups to enhance their environments, skills and prospects for long term prosperity.

In the last year, we were pleased to partner up with the Live Here Love Here small grants scheme and help community groups contribute to the development of civic pride and environmental improvements. Michael McDonnell, Choice Group Chief Executive recently visited some of the community groups to learn more about their Small Grants Scheme projects and find out how they were getting on!



## Pond Park Primary School

Pond Park Primary School, Lisburn was awarded £2,500 to set up a Polytunnel at the school which is open to the community. This project is building a stronger relationship between the school and local community as pupils and residents grow produce and develop new skills together.



## Growing the Garden of Eatin'

The Donegall Pass Community Forum in South Belfast was awarded £1,400 towards a programme that encourages local residents to grow and eat their own fresh fruit and vegetables.



## Mid Waterside Transforming Alleyways

With £1,900 of support, the Mid Waterside Residents Association in Derry~Londonderry has reclaimed unused, littered and derelict alleyways and transformed them into clean and welcoming public spaces for the whole community.



## Mucky Paws

The Outer West Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership in Derry~Londonderry received £2,500 for an allotments project in the newly developed Brook Park. The initiative has given local schoolchildren a chance to learn about the environment and foster a sense of pride in the park.



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The Donegall Pass Community Forum in South Belfast was awarded £1,400 towards a grow your own programme.



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## Construction work starts on 16-home development in Glenavy

Choice has officially started construction on a new £1.7m housing project in Glenavy, County Antrim.

Scheduled for completion in March 2018, the Main Street scheme will provide 16 much needed new homes in the village comprising of 12 houses and 4 apartments. The development will accommodate up to 60 people and is funded through a mix of private financing secured by Choice and grants from the Department for Communities.

Michael McDonnell, Group Chief Executive of Choice said:

“This is an important development for Glenavy and particularly for those on the housing waiting list. We have worked closely with the local communities in the design and build of this scheme to ensure it meets high standards of efficiency and quality but also to ensure that it can reflect the type of future we all want to see.

The scheme is one of a number of new Choice developments that are at various stages of planning and construction across Northern Ireland. It was designed by RPP Architects and construction work is being undertaken by Kelly Bros.

*Housing can be a powerful catalyst for positive transformation and this scheme is about supporting thriving and sustainable communities. It is great to see the project really getting underway and I look forward to welcoming tenants into their new homes next year.”*

*Michael McDonnell,  
Group Chief Executive of Choice*



## Pond Park Big Spring Clean!

The sun was shining on volunteers from Choice, Live Here Love Here and tenants to tackle litter at Pond Park in Lisburn.

The community initiative was organised as part of the Live Here Love Here BIG Spring Clean, which provides opportunities for community groups and individuals to get out and clean up!

Choice would like to thank everyone who took part, and got involved in improving their neighbourhood!

*“We were delighted to welcome so many volunteers to the Spring clean up at Pond Park. Clean ups such as this contribute in creating sustainable and thriving neighbourhoods and is a key example of how we can all work together for positive change”.*

Brian McKenna, Group Director of Governance & Communications

**We can all do one small thing**



## *Delivering New Homes*

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

### *First Phase of New Homes in Bangor*

Choice have recently handed over the first phase of 11 new family homes in the Old Belfast Road development in Bangor. These new homes are part of a development consisting of 106, two and three bedroom homes. At a total cost of £13.2 million, this development will be on site for a further 15 months with building contractors; EHA Construction.



**£13.2 million  
Development**

### *New supported Housing Scheme with Woman's Aid*

Choice handed over a £1.15 million supported housing scheme, Carniny Court in May 2017 consisting of 23 apartments for Woman's Aid. Woman's Aid has been fully involved in the design and layout of the proposal of the remodelled scheme. Choice and Woman's Aid hope to hold an official opening of the supported housing scheme later in the year.



**£1.15 million  
investment  
from Choice**



### *New Family Homes for Belfast*

Choice were delighted to hand over 8 new two bedroom Houses and 1 three bedroom bungalow at our new family housing scheme in Fortwilliam Parade, Belfast. The bungalow has been tailored by the Development team to meet the needs of a family with complex needs.

Lee Armour, Allocations Officer met with the new tenants in May to hand out the keys to the new properties. The new Choice tenants were delighted with the standard and finish of their properties. We wish them all many happy years in their new homes!

*Age Sector Platform (ASP) is a charity, established in 2008, to represent the voice of older people across Northern Ireland. Through a base of individual members and groups, ASP has connections to approximately 200,000 older people in Northern Ireland. The organisation is managed and directed by a Board of Trustees who are all older people with experience and knowledge of the challenges that older people face and the issues that are important to them.*

In 2011, ASP launched the Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament, which enables older people to have their say on issues that matter to them. This has become the focal point in the Age Sector Platform calendar. The Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament takes place over two days in Belfast and sees around 200 older people from across the province coming together. The Parliament involves participation from policy experts, influential people and high level politicians; and allows for debate and voting on Parliament motions. The 2017 Parliament will be held on the 26 and 27 October.

If you would like to get involved, please contact the ASP office on: **028 9031 2089** or visit the website at [www.pensionersparliament.org](http://www.pensionersparliament.org).

*\*Please note spaces will be limited\**

Since it was established, the parliament has engaged with thousands of older people across Northern Ireland through a variety of ways:

#### Surveys

Pensioners Parliament surveys provide Age Sector Platform with quantitative data in relation to the main problems older people in Northern Ireland are concerned about.

#### Local Parliaments

These parliaments provide older people from across Northern Ireland with a local forum to discuss concerns they have in greater detail, enable both local and regional issues to be identified, debated and voted upon. These events are also an opportunity to provide older people with information on services and facilities in their local communities.



#### *Interested in becoming a member of Age Sector Platform?*

*If you are over 50 years old and interested in becoming more involved in campaigning work and lobbying on behalf of older people in Northern Ireland, then joining Age Sector Platform would be ideal for you. Visit our website at: [www.agesectorplatform/membership](http://www.agesectorplatform/membership) for more details.*



## Anti-social Behaviour Support for our customers

Insec Security  
028 9020 0080

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.

**TACKLING  
ANTI-SOCIAL  
BEHAVIOUR  
TOGETHER**

## Change afoot at Lisnavar Court

£150,000  
Investment

Choice has invested £50,000 in Lisnavar Court in Derry/Londonderry as part of our planned maintenance programme.

The six-month project carried out by H & A Mechanical included bathroom and kitchen upgrades for the 32 apartments and an internal redecoration of the common room. The common room now has a wooden floor area for the scheme's avid ballroom dancers!

Michael McDonnell, Group Chief Executive of Choice said: "We are continually investing in our housing to ensure customers have comfortable and suitable homes that they

are proud of. These timely upgrades are the latest part of a multi-million pound improvement scheme aimed at bringing older units up to a higher standard. The refurbishments will make a real difference for residents improving their comfort and living environment and ensuring that the social calendar at the scheme continues to thrive".

### What is a planned maintenance programme?

Planned maintenance is work that is identified in advance, carefully planned and delivered through an agreed programme during the financial year (from April to March).

The programme of work is targeted to address specific issues that we have identified within our properties and based on information we hold such as surveys and known component life-cycles. In some instances you may not even realise that any works are required. One of the aims of this type of maintenance is to address any issues before they become problems.

If you would like any further information on our planned maintenance programme please contact Choice on **0300 111 2211** or email [enquiries@choice-housing.org](mailto:enquiries@choice-housing.org)



# Networking with the Tenants' Forum

## Election of Tenants' Forum

April 2017 saw the election of The New Choice Tenants' Forum. Following a consultation period with the former Tenants' Forum members and with support and mentoring from Supporting Communities, the new Tenant Forum structure was developed and agreed.

Choice now have a Central Forum group and four Regional Forums. Mr Bill Jeffrey was elected by Tenants' Forum members as the overall Chair of The Tenants' Forum. The Central Forum Group is made up of a maximum of 12 elected

tenants all representing geographical areas. Their main task is to consider Policy, review service areas, participate in specific task groups and address issues outstanding from The Regional areas. Central Forum meetings are held every two months in Belfast and should anyone need to make contact with Central Forum members please do so initially through The Choice Tenant Involvement Team on 0300 111 2211 and ask for Sharon Leslie or Claire Darby.

The four regional areas are made up of tenants who reside in those particular areas as highlighted in the map on page 27. In each Region we have elected a Chair and Vice Chair. Regional Tenants' Forum members represent the views of their local areas and will consider and address issues specific to the area they represent. Meetings are held locally to each region and take place every two months. *If any tenant is interested in joining their Regional Tenant Forum group please contact The Tenant Involvement Team on 0300 111 2211.*

### Regional Forum Chairs and Vice Chairs:

#### North West Region:

Chair - Neil Holmes, Shiels Court, Ballymoney  
Vice Chair - Marjorie Gearie, Rothsay Court, Coleraine

#### South West Region:

Chair - Alan Davenport, Burnside Park, Tempo Road, Enniskillen  
Vice Chair - David Brown, Westbridge House, Enniskillen

#### South East Region:

Chair - Sylvia Conachan, Cowan Heron House,  
Vice Chair - Robert Carvill, Stevenson Park, Lurgan

#### Belfast Region:

Chair - Rita Murray,  
Vice Chair - Bill Jeffrey, Elm Court, Belfast



**Empowering Communities**  
Tenants' Forum attended the launch of Empowering Communities Enterprise Ltd, a new independent tenant organisation to assist landlords develop & support tenant participation.



**Thinking outside the box**  
Choice staff and Tenants' Forum members 'Thinking outside the box' with Housing Rights and Supporting Communities.

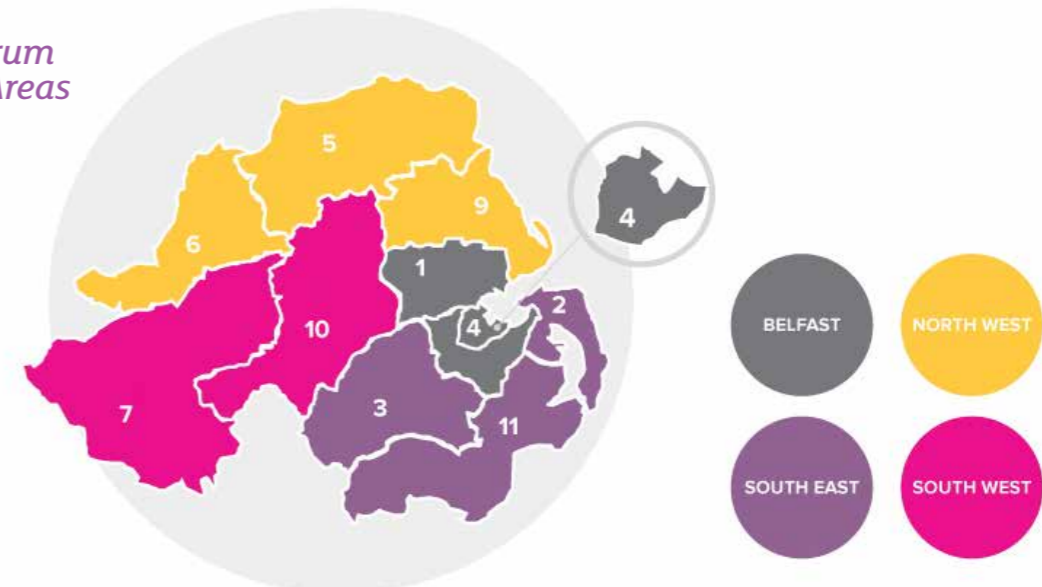


**Rural Housing's 25th Anniversary**  
Claire Darby, Tenant Involvement Champion with Supporting Communities and NIFHA celebrating Rural Housing's 25th Anniversary in Omagh.



**Your Choice Your Voice**  
Our staff working together with the Tenants' Forum on a new Choice Tenant Involvement Strategy and Action Plan. Your choice your voice!

### Tenant Forum Regional Areas



# Fire Safety at Home

*Following the tragic fire at the Grenfell Tower Block in London, we would like to offer both assurance and fire safety advice to all tenants. Your safety and the safety of your home is our main priority.*

Whilst Choice is committed to ensuring our homes are managed to the highest standards, fire safety is a shared responsibility. We have set out some useful fire safety advice below:

Fire may cause serious injuries and extensive damage to property and possessions. By following a few simple steps and maintaining a basic level of awareness you can considerably reduce the chances of fire in your home.

Your home is already equipped with smoke alarms which you should test weekly. Never remove your batteries, disconnect or cover your smoke alarm. Where alarms are connected to a communal building fire alarm system they will be tested by Choice staff and contractors.

- Use the heating system provided. Do not use additional heaters that have flames (gas and paraffin) or electric bar heaters.
- Do not store things in gas or electric meter cupboards.
- Always treat an alarm as a real fire – it might be someone burning toast, but it might not.
- Make a fire action plan so that everyone in your home knows how to get out if there is a fire.
- Keep the exits from your home clear so that you can escape if there is a fire.
- Make sure that everyone in your home can easily find the keys for doors and windows.
- Take extra care in the kitchen – accidents while cooking account for over half of fires in homes. Never leave young children alone in the kitchen.
- Take extra care if cooking with hot oil and never throw water onto or try to move very hot or burning oil. Consider buying a deep-fat fryer which is controlled by a thermostat (if you don't already have one).
- Never leave lit candles in unoccupied rooms or in rooms where children are on their own.
- Make sure candles are in secure holders on a surface that doesn't burn and are away from any materials that could burn.
- Make sure cigarettes are stubbed out properly and are disposed of carefully, and never smoke in bed.
- Get into the habit of closing doors at night. If you want to keep a child's bedroom door open, close the doors to the lounge and kitchen; it might help to save their life if there is a fire.
- Regularly clean the filters in tumble dryers and kitchen extractor hoods
- Keep matches and lighters where children can't see or reach them.
- Take special care when you're tired or have taken alcohol.
- Don't overload electrical sockets. Remember, one plug for one socket.
- Don't leave the TV or other electrical appliances on standby. Always switch them off and unplug them when not in use.
- If you or a member of your household has any difficulty seeing, hearing or moving about your home, you will need to take extra care to deal with the risk of a fire.
- Flats are built to be fire-resisting and should contain fires until the NIFRS arrive



provided doors are kept shut.

- Walls, ceilings and doors will hold back flames and smoke, so if there's a fire somewhere else in the building, you're usually safest staying in your flat unless you're affected by heat or smoke.
- If you live in a flat you should plan how to escape if there is a fire in your home or your block. It is likely that a flat will share common areas with other flats, such as corridors and stairways. The owner of the building will have the responsibility of making sure that the necessary fire safety measures needed in these areas are installed.

For example, there may be a communal fire alarm, fire doors and other fire safety features of the common areas which will need to be regularly maintained. Never interfere with fire detection equipment or fire safety measures such

as fire doors and never leave rubbish, unwanted furniture etc in the communal areas. If you come across materials that have been left, they may present a risk to you and your family. Please contact us immediately.

- It is important to understand the fire safety measures built into the common areas; contact Choice if you want us to explain the safety plans for the premises and make sure that you are familiar with what you should do if a fire happens.
- You should not use a lift if a fire happens
- If you cannot escape because of smoke in the corridors, you will need to stay in your flat, near a window, where you can wait for assistance. Call 999 and tell the fire service operator which flat you are in. The operator will tell the fire fighters to come and assist you or let you know that your

flat is not in danger. This is particularly important if you have difficulty moving around or using the stairs. Tell your Housing Officer or let the Fire Service know that you would be unable to evacuate if there was a fire in your building.

- The consequences of a fire can be devastating, even if it doesn't result in the loss of life or injury. While Choice will repair or replace damaged fixtures and fittings, we will not replace your personal items.
- You are therefore strongly advised to take out home contents insurance to cover your personal affects in the event of fire.



# Out & About



*Rothesay Court's Walk Down Memory Lane*



*Artistic Mornings at Shiels Court*



*Fundraising at Wentbridge House*



*Paul Wallace Hits the Headlines*

Rothesay Court has been a hub of activity, with tenants taking part in a number of exciting initiatives and projects. The Big Telly Theatre Company recently facilitated a project involving the tenants and local artists. Tenants were invited to reminisce about prominent landmark buildings and shops in Portstewart, Portrush and Coleraine.

A record was taken of people's memories, with as much detail as possible including items for sale, people who worked there and memorable events. Once all the information was recorded, local artists were asked to create boxes depicting the landmarks. As well as including the memories and recalled details, each box also contained items relating to the building's current use.

The staff from the Big Telly Theatre Company then returned with the finished boxes and exhibited the creations. A fun time was had by all guessing which box belonged to which place. The boxes were co-created by the tenants and the artists, who collaborated to bring this project to life.

Our Scheme Co-ordinators are a very creative bunch, always coming up with new projects. Lynda Hennings, who has been covering at Shiels Court recently, invited everyone to take part in a colouring in morning, bringing tenants together to chat and reminisce. This project shows just how easy it is to make connections at our sheltered living schemes.



*Boys Days Out*

The men of Galway Court in Dundonald and 'Men United' have enjoyed a number of summer day trips recently including Downpatrick Gaol and the third annual fishing trip. We hope you enjoyed yourselves boys!

Congratulations to the tenants at Westbridge House in Enniskillen who have raised a fantastic £215.00 for the Northern Ireland Hospice. The sheltered living scheme presented the money raised to NI Hospice in May, with the money going to a very worthy cause.

Choice sheltered living scheme, The Silvergrove In Belfast, marked its 25th anniversary with a special celebration for tenants, staff and friends. The Silvergrove was opened in 1991 and provides 40 homes to residents who enjoy independent living within a safe and supported environment.

Longstanding tenants, Sadie & Sidney Garrett and Betty Johnston were presented with flowers. Councillor Michael Long joined the celebrations, and Carol O'Connor, Scheme Co-ordinator said, "We are delighted that so many people could come join us. It is fantastic for everyone to come together to celebrate this special milestone for The Silvergrove over the last 25 years."



*The Silvergrove marks 25 years*



*The Silvergrove marks 25 years*



# Out & About



*Homelessness in the spotlight*

Choice and the Simon Community recently hosted a performance of *Hostel*, a play inspired by the experiences of critically-acclaimed Belfast playwright Fionnuala Kennedy as she fought for a home in 2010.

Putting homelessness in the spotlight, the hard hitting play highlights that over the last seven years, the availability of accommodation has become a critical issue. In the last year alone, more than 18,600 households presented themselves as homeless to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Meanwhile Supporting People, a government funding programme that helps residents with multiple challenges into housing and services, has been frozen for a decade, a real-terms cut of 25 per cent. You can find out more and watch a feature video on *Hostel* at [www.choice-housing.org](http://www.choice-housing.org) to learn more about the homelessness crisis in Northern Ireland.



*Lowtherstown Bottle Top Fundraising*

Margaret Tanner, Scheme Co-ordinator at Lowtherstown Court, was overjoyed by the kindness of the tenants, who have collected milk bottle tops. Margaret's grandson attends school in England, where they use the bottle tops to provide funds for local hospices, and he was able to take the donated bottle tops back to school with him.

Teacher, Karen Hardy, from Layston School, wrote to the tenants to thank them for their thoughtful act. Ms Hardy said that her local hospice will use the funds raised through the bottle tops to purchase much needed wheelchairs. This was an enjoyable project for the tenants with a really positive outcome!



*100th Birthday Celebrations at Medway Court*

Happiest of birthdays to Christine Jordan who celebrated her 100th birthday this week at Medway Court in East Belfast. Christine celebrating her birthday milestone with a tea party with family and friends with relatives providing some fantastic entertainment that everyone enjoyed!



*Tenant Repair Feedback Winner*

Congratulations to Janet McVeigh from Belfast! At Choice we are committed to delivering excellent customer service. When tenants report a repair, a letter is issued to confirm details of the repair that is to be carried out alongside a short survey about the service received from the contractor. We welcome any comments that our tenants have regarding their service received and will follow up with any concerns raised. To thank our tenants for completing this short survey, tenants are entered into a prize draw for £200. Martin Murphy, Service Centre Team Leader was delighted to present Janet McVeigh with her fantastic prize!



*Nazareth House, Derry/Londonderry*

Choice Development Officer Jennifer Overend working with Rolston Architects at a community consultation for Nazareth House in Derry/Londonderry.



*Old Belfast Road, Bangor*

Choice were delighted to welcome Louise Warde-Hunter, Deputy Secretary of the Department for Communities to visit our new housing development Old Belfast Road in Bangor.



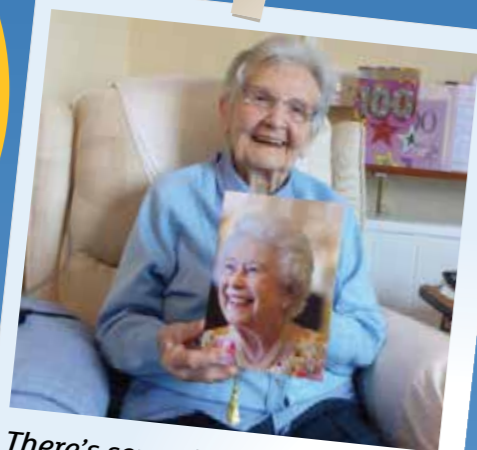
*Pancake Tuesday at Rothesay Court*



*Pancake Tuesday at Rothesay Court*

Tenants at Rothesay Court, patiently wait for their pancakes to arrive. With toppings ranging from –fresh cream, strawberries, blueberries, maple syrup, jam, lemon juice and sugar everyone was spoilt for choice.

# Out & About



*There's something about Mary Sloane!*



*Congratulations Jonny Moore*



*Choice staff commended at Quarter 4 Staff Awards*

Wishing Mary Sloan from Aughrim Court in Kilkeel a very happy 100th birthday! Mary has lived at Aughrim Court since it first opened in 1992 and the sheltered living scheme held a party to celebrate Mary's milestone birthday! Mary commented; "I still can't take it in that one hundred years has passed by, I don't feel one hundred... my oh my!"

Congratulations to Jonny Moore, Choice Services Centre Advisor who has successfully attained Chartered Institute of Housing Level 4 accreditation. The year long course included housing areas such as:

- Housing Policy
- Housing Finance
- Housing Law,
- Professional Practice Skills
- Housing Management
- Promoting Independent living and Wellbeing

Jonny commented: *"I just wanted to thank you all for your support, help and guidance over the last year whilst completing my course. I got word today that I have passed my final assignment and as such have now completed the Level 4 Certificate in Housing. I would consider doing the PGC and studying further but only if in a Housing position. The course lasted a year and I'm actively seeking Housing Officer jobs."*

The quarterly staff awards were presented by Michael McDonnell to; Patrick Coyle, Majella Boyd and Stephen Adair. The worthy staff members were awarded on their work and performance, which exemplifies the three Choice values; Dynamic, Trustworthy and Customer Centred.

### **Patrick Coyle – Dynamic**

Patrick Coyle is a Development Officer with Oaklee Housing. Over the last number of months Patrick led successful bids to the Housing Agency, securing three portfolios of over 100 units in total. Patrick is managing this complex project dealing externally with legal, valuation and surveying advisors, as well as senior officials in the Housing Agency and the Department of Housing. Internally he is coordinating activity across Property Services, Housing Management, Finance, and is also preparing and presenting papers to the Board and Committees of Oaklee Housing. He has demonstrated a dynamic, positive, professional and collaborative approach to the entire project.

### **Majella Boyd – Trustworthy**

Majella is an ICT Officer and was nominated for her work on the scheme upgrade project. This was a large project covering 65 schemes which involved coordinating the work of the three engineers installing the equipment, the phone and broadband, installs by BT

and Novosco whilst checking availability of scheme coordinators. This project required clear thinking, hard work and good communication in order to maintain progress and deal with any obstacles along the way. This extensive project could not have completed within the timescale without Majella's hard work and dedication.

### **Stephen Adair – Customer Centred**

Stephen Adair is a Housing Officer covering Belfast City Centre and has worked extremely hard to resolve serious Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) issues, going above and beyond what is required from his role. He has recently attended problematic schemes at night time to address urgent ASB incidents and reassure tenants who are concerned for their safety. Stephen has also worked hard over the past number of months to resolve historic issues in his patch and has made great progress in doing so. He consistently demonstrates a Customer Centred approach in all tasks he undertakes.

**Kiara Dryden, Procurement Manager** also received a special recognition award for managing over 30 procurements for Choice Services in a very short timeframe.

Congratulations again to Patrick, Majella, Stephen and Kiara on their hard work and dedication!



*Bertie's Birthday*


Bertie Ellis the oldest resident at Dillon Court in Strabane recently celebrated his 80th Birthday with four generations of his family! We hope you enjoyed the celebrations Bertie!


# Different ways to pay your rent and other charges





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](http://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.

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

## Gardening Competition 2017

Green-fingered tenants are being urged to 'grow for it' as part of the annual Choice gardening competition.

Calling all keen gardeners! To the green fingered among you or your friends and neighbours, it's time to remind you of the annual Choice Best Kept Garden Award. You can nominate your own or another customer's garden, or a scheme garden providing it is tended by the customer and not Choice contractors. If you wish to submit an entry please complete and return the information slip plus photo(s) of the nominated garden by Friday 1st September 2017 to the Editor, Choice News, FREEPOST BEL2371, Belfast BT1 6BR.

Please be advised that this competition is open to Choice customers only.



## Best Kept Garden Competition 2017

### Your details

Name: .....  
Address: .....  
.....  
Telephone No: .....  
Email: .....

### Nominee Detail (if different)

Name: .....  
Address: .....  
.....  
Telephone No: .....  
Email: .....

## 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.

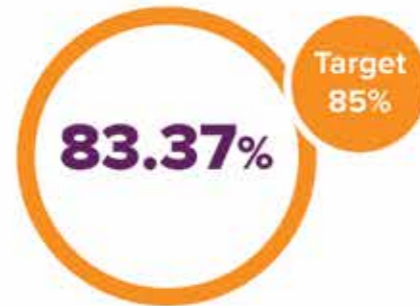
It is important that your voice, in relation to our services, is heard as the feedback that we receive is vital for Choice to identify and correct any problems within our service delivery and to ensure that we meet the needs of all our customers.

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



average working days to respond to stage 1 complaints

### Customer Services



Call Advisor call quality

### Gas Safety



**99.5%** of gas boilers were serviced within a year

Target 100%

### Human Resources



**5%** overall sickness absence in the year

Target 2.52%

### Repairs



**95%** Customers satisfied with repairs carried out



**90%** Emergency repairs completed within 24 Hours



**86%** Urgent repairs completed within 4 working days

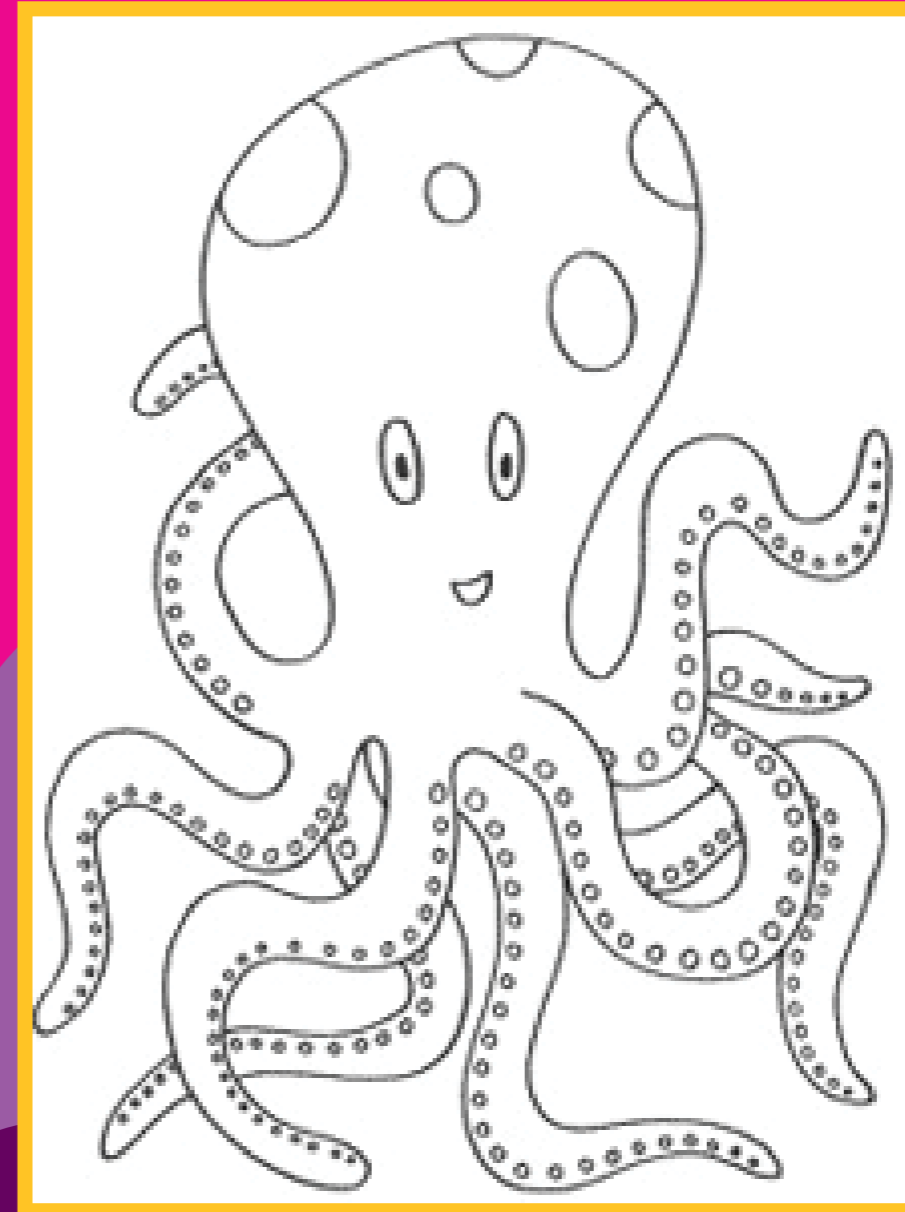


**86%** Routine repairs completed within 20 working days

The performance figures are for the period April 2016 - March 2017

# COLOURING COMPETITION

Hey kids this is your chance to show-off your colouring skills  
Win a family pass to We Are Vertigo!



It's really easy to enter, just pull out this page and colour it in anyway you like! Then pop it in the post along with your name, age, address and telephone number in the reply slip below to The Editor, Choice News, FREEPOST BEL2371 Belfast BT1 6BR. One lucky winner will receive this great prize! Entries must be received by Friday 1st September. *(Please note that the parent must be a tenant of Choice Housing Ireland).*

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

Name ..... Age .....

Address .....

Daytime Telephone ..... Evening Telephone .....

# Property Corner

*Properties to Let*

Customers already enjoy the benefits of living in Choice accommodation and you may know someone, a friend or relative for example, in need of accommodation.

If so we'd be delighted to hear from them.

We currently have vacancies in sheltered schemes and general family housing in a number of locations across Northern Ireland.

## Sheltered Housing

- Carn Court, Fermanagh
- The Milewater, Belfast
- Orchard Court, Newtownards
- James Court, Belfast
- Tamar Court, Belfast
- Rathkyle, Antrim

## General Needs

- Corrigan Court, Armagh
- Millbrook Gardens, Castleterg



Further Information is available through the Services Centre on  
**0300 111 2211.**  
Viewing the accommodation can also be arranged.

Working  
together for  
positive change

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

**T:** 0300 111 2211  
**E:** enquiries@choice-housing.org

[choice-housing.org](http://choice-housing.org)

## *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 complete a Menu of Involvement Form available to download on our website, [choice-housing.org](http://choice-housing.org).*

*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!*