

# Choice News

Issue 11  
Autumn 2019  
The Newsletter  
for Choice Housing  
Ireland Tenants

CHOICE  
CUSTOMER  
SERVICE  
CHARTER

## Launch of new Customer Service Charter for tenants



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

**choice**  
Together we enrich lives

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# *A message from our Group Chief Executive*

*Michael McDonnell*

## *Welcome to the Autumn 2019 edition of Choice News.*

**At the risk of being repetitive, I'm going to pick up where I finished off in the Spring edition of Choice News. Specifically, at the time of issue of this newsletter, there are less than 5 months left before the current discretionary payments for both the 'bedroom tax' and 'benefit cap' are due to cease.**

Whilst Choice continues to lobby across the housing sector for the retention of welfare reform mitigations, legislation is required to retain the current 'top ups' in benefits after March 2020. Can I therefore encourage tenants to speak to your Choice housing officer to find out more about Welfare Reform. If it doesn't affect you directly, it is bound to impact on someone you know, so please help Choice to raise awareness about this huge change in the local welfare system.

It has been a busy summer for community engagement. Specifically, we have hosted half a dozen community events in July and August and were delighted at the interest and participation by tenants, their

family and friends. You will see lots of photos in this newsletter from these events reinforcing the fundamental focus of our Association on building thriving and sustainable communities.

I'm also delighted that our first multi-cultural community festival in Ballynahinch in early August was a great success under the 'Together Building a United Community (T: Buc)' programme. Over 200 local people enjoyed music, dance, food and fun....albeit with only a little bit of sun! Separately, positive progress on our Housing Association Integration Project (HAIP) has been recognised by an independent evaluation. Launched last summer, HAIP brings together social housing residents from a range of religious and cultural backgrounds to share experiences, learn about differences and embrace diversity in the communities in which they live.

Autumn is the time for our Annual General Meeting, where the Choice Board and Senior Management Team present the results of our work from the previous year, namely the 12 months ended 31st March 2019. Our focus on community investment is hopefully very evident in the Annual Report for

2018 / 19 with new initiatives launched in conjunction with Young Enterprise ('Access Enterprise'), Queen's University Belfast ('Widening Participation') and Simon Community ('Tenancy Sustainment'). We also supported another 'WorkChoice' programme designed to provide 6 months employment, skills development and a recognised qualification to a number of previously unemployed participants, including Choice tenants. In 2018/19, Choice also launched our financial inclusion support service for tenants, aimed at boosting money management skills and maximising household income. We spent over £10 million on planned maintenance to upgrade our current homes and started the construction of 399 new homes in the year. All of this whilst improving our value for money to keep our rents affordable.

So please take the time to read the Choice Annual Report for 2018/19 in full by visiting the publications section of our website. I hope that you enjoy this newsletter and thanks for being a tenant of Choice.



# Connect with Choice



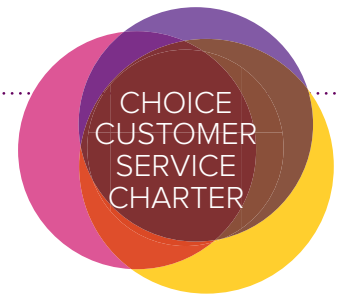
@ChoiceHousing



@choice\_housing



enquiries@choice-housing.org



# *We are proud to present a new Customer Service Charter*



Lawrence Jackson, Group Director of Corporate Services with Tenants' Forum representatives Roisin Hall, and Rita Murray

## **The Choice Customer Service Charter sets out our customer service standards.**

At Choice we are committed to excellence in customer service. We regularly review our service and reward staff members who embody this core value of our business.

The Customer Service Charter has been developed by staff from across the organisation working closely and liaising with our Tenants' Forum to ensure the Charter focuses on both business and customer priorities.

Our Customer Service Charter makes six promises, which are all aligned with our core values. We will be reporting on these standards on our website and in Choice News.

Our staff and tenants are confident the Customer Service Charter is fit for purpose, concise and useful for all stakeholders.

We will publish our first report on the Charter early in the new year. You will find it on our website and in the next Choice News.



We want you to be completely satisfied with the service you receive from Choice.

As a tenant, you're the focus of all we do, and we're committed to delivering the highest levels of customer service.

choice 



So, whether you are applying for a new home, or you are a long standing tenant, we want you to be satisfied with our customer services at all times.

The **Customer Service Charter** is supported by our ambitious standards which are regularly monitored and adhered to by staff.

**We will:**



**Build great homes**

We will provide and maintain high quality affordable homes. All our homes are built to the Lifetime Homes Standard.



**Complete repairs within target timeframes**

We have set targets for each of our repairs. You can follow our performance on our website: **choice-housing.org**



**Be polite and helpful**

Our staff must adhere to our Code of Conduct which demands courtesy and professionalism from every employee.



**Listen to and take on board our customers' ideas**

We want to hear from you and we have a dedicated Tenant Participation Team to ensure we work closely with our tenants.



**Ensure your rent provides value for money**

Our rent and other charges are set with guidance from the Department for Communities ensuring rents are affordable.



**Make our services accessible to all**

You can contact us on a number of different platforms including phone, email, social media and in person at our offices or your home. We also provide any publication in alternative formats upon request.



If you feel that we are not meeting these standards we would love to hear from you - [enquiries@choice-housing.org](mailto:enquiries@choice-housing.org) 0300 111 2211



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

# Help with

# your money

FINANCIAL  
INCLUSION

Money Advice  
for our Tenants

## New team for a new service!

At Choice, we know that the changes to the benefit system have made it more challenging for many of our tenants to keep on track with rent and household bills. As a response to these welfare changes we committed to assisting tenants by providing specialist advice and support for any tenant that chooses to access it. In January this year we set up our Financial Inclusion Team, who are here to help tenants specifically with benefits, debt and budgeting issues.

The team is ready to support you in many ways –

- We can provide benefit checks to ensure you are receiving the correct entitlement.
- We can help if you have a change in circumstances such as changing jobs, reducing hours at work or leaving work due to ill health and need to some advice on what you may be entitled to.
- We can provide help with filling in all benefit forms and assist with any current benefit disputes you may have such as Personal Independence Payments, Universal Credit or Housing Benefit.



**“Our new service is free,  
non judgemental and fully  
confidential. We are simply  
here to help you!”**

**Aidan McCrea, Financial  
Inclusion Manager**

## Other Benefits

Our team provides advice to all new tenants on how to apply for any relevant benefit to help pay for your home. The team will also give advice on any grants and loans available to furnish a new home as well as local charities that could help.

You can contact our Financial Inclusion Team on **0300 111 2211** and ask to speak with a member of the team today.

**welfare  
changes**



## Mitigation payments

Some households in Northern Ireland may have a cap on their benefits, known as the benefit cap. This affects your housing benefit by reducing the amount you get per week towards the cost of your rent.

Further to this, if you live in a housing association property and you have one or more spare rooms you are now seen as under occupying your property and will have a reduction in your benefits towards housing costs of between 14-25%.

In Northern Ireland we have what is known as Mitigation Package. This is a fund to help those affected by Welfare Changes with financial support. Households will receive this financial top up until March 2020 when the fund is due to run out.

After this time we are unaware if any further package will be put in place to help tenants with these costs. We therefore advise strongly that you speak with your housing officer if you feel you may struggle to pay the additional costs from 1st April 2020. This is not a long way off and will come around very quickly – speak with us to see if we can provide any help.

## Current changes to Universal Credit

It has been announced by parliament that from 24th July 2019 those that moved to Universal Credit who did not receive any transitional protection and lost money will now receive additional support under the benefit.

### What does this mean?

If you had a severe disability premium in your old style benefit claim and you had to move to universal credit resulting in the loss of this premium, the department will now be looking over all current Universal Credit claims in Northern Ireland to see who will be entitled to this additional monthly top up.

### What do I need to do to receive this if I am entitled?

The answer is nothing! Universal Credit in NI have advised they will be checking these claims and will pay any money owed from August 2019. If you are owed this top up amount they will simply add it to your Universal Credit benefit.

If you believe you may be entitled to this and would like to check entitlement, you can seek advice from our financial inclusion team by calling **0300 111 2211**.

Will you struggle finding this extra money per week?  
Give us a call and see how we can help.

Please give us a call now on

**300 111 2211**



It's much easier for us to help if you get in touch straight away.

# Choice begin £2.1m development in Ahoghill

A new housing scheme, which will accommodate 37 people in Main Street, Ahoghill is under way. The new development by Choice, in collaboration with the Department for Communities and the Housing Executive, will offer general needs accommodation for people from the local area.

Construction is expected to be completed in May 2020 and the 16-unit scheme will include a mix of 2 x three-person two-bedroom houses, 3 x three-person two-bedroom apartments and 11 x two-person one-bedroom apartments.

The scheme will provide much needed housing in the area with the availability of a range of local amenities including shops, cafés and medical care within a short distance.

To deliver the project, Choice are working with Michael Whitley Architects, BW Murray Structural & Civil Engineering, Cogan and Shackleton Engineers and Donaldson Associates Quantity Surveyor.



**Michael McDonnell,**  
Group Chief Executive  
of Choice said:

“This project will ensure quality secure housing in the North Antrim area, specifically Ahoghill where there is a growing need. Choice have consistently committed to addressing the social housing need across the region and we are pleased that this development has got under way. “We expect to have tenants into their new homes by May 2020. As with all of our developments we are working with the best partners to deliver this scheme and look forward to welcoming everyone back to open the new development.”



# You Can Stop Harm

## Worried or concerned?

If you're worried or concerned about an adult who needs help to protect themselves from harm you should talk and listen to them. If possible, write down exactly what they tell you.

If the person you are concerned about is a Choice tenant, you have a range of options:

- If you live in a sheltered living scheme bring your concerns to the attention of the onsite Scheme Coordinator who will ensure that a Choice Safeguarding Champion is notified.
- Contact Choice Services on **0300 111 2211** a Safeguarding Champion will respond to your call.
- Contact the police or social services.



## CALL

### Police Service Northern Ireland

In an emergency call: 999

To report your concerns, call: 101

### Social Services

Monday to Friday - 9.00am to 5.00pm call:

Belfast Trust	028 9504 1744
South Eastern Trust	028 9250 1227
Northern Trust	028 2563 5512
Southern Trust	028 3756 4423
Western Trust	028 7161 1366

Evenings and weekends call: 028 9504 9999

If you see something...  
**SAY SOMETHING**

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

T: 0300 111 2211  
[choice-housing.org](http://choice-housing.org)



# Choice begins work on £500k refurb of Kimberley House

Choice has begun an ambitious £500k refurbishment project which will see a complete transformation of Kimberley House in Newtownards. Funded by the Housing Executive's Development Programme Group, the project will mark a new chapter for the supported housing scheme and its tenants.

The current scheme comprises of 13 bedsits, a communal living lounge and staff offices. Tenants can expect to see a complete

overhaul of existing facilities undertaken by lead contractor, Hetherington Painting and Building Contractors as they remodel the property into 7 self-contained apartments.

The transformation of Kimberley House will be led by Choice Building Surveyors and help create more inclusive living spaces and meet the diverse needs of people who are in supported living. Upgrade works of the existing amenities will include

new doors, windows and heating services. The renovation is expected to be completed within eight months.

Other partners involved in this project include VB Evans Quantity Surveyors and R&H Design Mechanical and Electrical.

Michael McDonnell, Group Chief Executive of Choice Housing said:

“Choice is not only committed to addressing the current social housing need across Northern Ireland with new build projects but we are equally committed to continuing to improve our current housing stock.

“This investment in Kimberley House not only offers more housing options for those who are in need but it will continue to enhance the local community and area through a refresh and upgrade of the building and specific amenities.”



Adrien Hetherington at Hetherington Painting and Building Contractors added:

“We were delighted to have been appointed lead contractor on this project which will work in collaboration with Choice to deliver high quality housing for its current and future residents. There is no doubt the seven new self-contained apartments to the scheme will be welcomed to provide further supported housing.”



# How we're performing

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

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

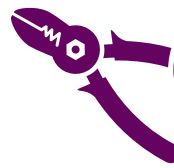
## Gas Safety



**100%**

Units with valid gas certificate

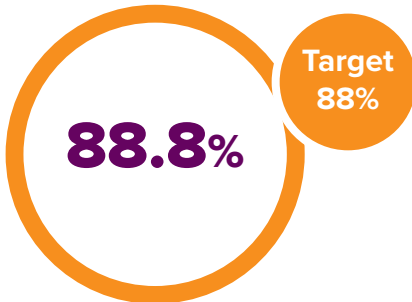
## Repairs



**94.7%**

Average repairs completed on time

## Customer Satisfaction



Satisfaction with the overall services provided by Choice

## Complaints Resolved



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

## Human Resources



**3.26**

Staff absenteeism (days)

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

The performance figures are for the period April - July 2019

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# Legionnaires' Disease and Water Hygiene

Legionnaires' disease is one of several diseases caused by the inhalation of water droplets which have been contaminated by legionella bacteria. Legionella bacteria occur in most water systems and are harmless at low concentrations.

Risks arise where the bacteria multiply to high levels which are then dispersed in droplet form by showers, sprays and splashing. These droplets, when inhaled, can cause potentially fatal forms of pneumonia. Both hot and cold water systems can be affected.

**Everyone is susceptible to infection with symptoms similar to those of flu:**

- Fever, chills or high temperature
- Headaches and/or muscle pains
- Dry coughs



If you have any concerns about Legionnaires' Disease and Water Hygiene or need further advice please contact us on: **0300 111 2211** or **[enquiries@choice-housing.org](mailto:enquiries@choice-housing.org)**

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### Those most at risk include:

- People over 45, smokers and heavy drinkers.
- People with chronic respiratory or kidney disease.
- Anyone with an impaired immune system.

### The bacteria can quickly multiply where:

- Water temperatures are between 20 - 45°C.
- There is a source of nutrients such as rust, sludge and scale to feed the bacteria.
- Water stagnates eg. hoses or when tenants are on holiday.

### The following simple precautions will help keep you safe:

- Hot water cylinder thermostats, where fitted, should be set at 60°C.
- When you return home if you have been away for more than a week (for example holidays or hospital stays) heat up your system to the normal temperature, slowly open each tap and run for at least five minutes.
- Cold taps should be flushed until the water runs cold. When flushing taps and other outlets, open slowly and take care not to cause splashing or release of spray droplets to the atmosphere. Remove shower heads or flush into a plastic bag. The bacteria may be extremely harmful if inhaled in droplet and mist form.
- Tap spouts on your bath, basin and sink may become contaminated from external sources. To be safe, regularly sterilise tap spouts by wiping with a dilute bleach solution, if the tap is heavily scaled or contaminated this can be dislodged using a nylon brush or shop bought descaling solution. Shower heads can be removed and cleaned in the sink or dishwasher.

- Flush toilets with the lid down.
- Hosepipes should be stored out of the sun and flushed slowly and carefully if unused for more than a few days. You can remove the head, select a non-spray pattern or flush into a plastic bag before using spray settings.
- Don't remove or interfere with cold water storage tank lids and screens or water pipe insulation.

**Risks arise where the bacteria multiply to high levels which are then dispersed in droplet form by showers, sprays and splashing.**





# Electrical Safety at Home

Electricity can kill or injure either directly by electric shock, electric burns and electrocution or indirectly as a result of fires caused by faulty electrical systems or appliances.

Choice has a legal duty to ensure that the electrical installation and electrical equipment that we own in your home, is safe. Choice provides a response maintenance service which is detailed in your Tenant Repairs Handbook. We will also carry out electrical inspection and testing where we check the condition of the electrical system and complete repairs and improvements where necessary.

All electrical installations are tested before a property is let. We previously inspected and tested every 10 years and are in the process of changing to testing every five years in line with current best practice. Testing typically takes 3 - 4 hours to complete.

## We will:

- Advise you in advance when testing is required
- Appoint qualified and competent electricians
- Ensure your home is safe and free from electrical hazards such as exposed wiring, broken sockets or switches and poor or defective installation
- Ensure the risk of fire is minimised by the installation of Residual Current Devices (RCDs) and the wiring and fuses are in acceptable condition and correctly rated
- Carry out repairs as quickly and efficiently as possible

- Keep disruption and inconvenience to an absolute minimum
- Remove illegal wiring.

Please remember that you are required to provide access. Your tenancy is at risk if you fail to co-operate. We will seek to recover legal fees incurred where you do not co-operate.

## Electrical Dos and Don'ts for Tenants

### Don't do it yourself!

- All electrical installation and repairs must be carried out by a qualified electrician
- If you would like to alter the electrical system in your home you must seek our permission.

### Don't overload sockets

- Overloading sockets and extension leads may cause over-heating and fire
- Don't drill into walls without checking for electric wiring
- A cable detector can help identify if there is concealed wiring.

### Do buy reputable electrical goods

- Cheaper, unofficial electrical products such as phone chargers may not meet safety regulations and increase the risk of fire or injury.





Do allow access for electrical inspections

- Inspection and testing helps to ensure systems are safe and will identify defects before it is too late.

Do report defects to Choice as soon as possible

Do install, use and maintain electrical appliances in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Do test your RCD every 3 months, where fitted

Do regular visual inspections

- Of your own electrical appliances and extension leads and have them fixed by a competent person or dispose of them responsibly
- Of the electrical installation such as switches, sockets, light fittings and fans and report to Choice if faulty.

Do read both the Choice Repairs Handbook and Fire Safety Handbook

- Be aware of the hazards, manage the risk and understand the controls such as the mains isolator and RCDs, fuses and Miniature Circuit Breakers (MCBs) in your consumer unit (fuse box).

## Typical Defects

- Light fittings that do not work or blink regularly (Choice are not responsible for replacing bulbs or starters)
- Switches and sockets that are loose, do not work, are burnt, blackened or smell of burning
- Bare wiring or exposed coloured wiring and frayed or damaged leads
- Fuses, MCBs or RCDs regularly tripping where appliances are not defective
- Metallic surfaces that give out weak electric shocks
- Loud buzzing or crackling sounds from switches, consumer units or appliances
- Frequent power spikes or failures affecting only your home.

Further information is available from:

The Electrical Safety First  
([www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk](http://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk))

The Electrical Safety Roundtable  
([www.electricalsafetyroundtable.co.uk](http://www.electricalsafetyroundtable.co.uk))

The Health & Safety Executive  
([www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk))

The Tenants' Voice  
([www.thetenantsvoice.co.uk](http://www.thetenantsvoice.co.uk))

# Together: Building a United Community

## Multi-cultural festival in Ballynahinch

Building strong and resilient communities is just as important to Choice as building great homes. That's why, through the Together: Building a United Community Strategy, we were delighted to host this wonderful multi-cultural festival in Ballynahinch in partnership with Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and the Housing Executive.



Over 200 people attended the event which showcased food, music, arts and dance to celebrate local and ethnic diversity.







## Support for Manse Court Residents

Spending time outdoors is a great way to meet people and discover new skills. Our tenants from Manse Court, are participating in Saintfield in Bloom.

We know that including this worthy event in the Manse Court Good Relations Plan over the next 3 years will be a success and we look forward to watching the event grow!



## Bonding in Ballymena

Nursery Close was a hive of activity recently as tenants, staff and council employees came together to build on community cohesion and encourage tenants to feel a sense of ownership over their area. Our Housing Manager, Housing Officer, Property Services Officer and Maintenance Assistant were all there to carry out an estate walk about, giving everyone the opportunity to get to know the scheme.

The Recycling Education Officer from Mid & East Antrim Borough Council, and the Dog Warden were also on hand to give information on their roles and how they will support the community.

A hanging basket workshop and fish and chips for lunch added to the feel good factor on the day, one that everyone will remember!



# *Promoting peace and reconciliation between all of our communities*

**Peace**   
Northern Ireland - Ireland  
European Regional Development Fund

**haip**  
Housing Associations  
Integration Project

Choice is participating in a Peace IV funded initiative, The **Housing Associations Integration Project (HAIP)**, a €1.1m project funded by the EU's Peace IV Programme which is managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), which runs until August 2020. This project is designed to promote Peace and Reconciliation between participating communities and we hope to engage as many of our residents as possible in the project.

Ten areas were initially chosen to take part in this exciting project;

- Crewhill Gardens, Ardglass;
- Cairnmartin, Belfast;
- Cloona Glen, Dunmurry;
- The Moorings, Killyleagh;
- Hawtree Park, Lisburn;
- Burrendale Park Close, Newcastle;
- Orchard Avenue/Court, Newtownards;
- Woodside Park, Loughbrickland;
- Carrickvale Manor, Lurgan;
- Gannaway/Mews, Warrenpoint.

It will give an opportunity for any willing resident to build personal skills, forging new friendships and partnerships between social housing tenants throughout Northern Ireland and Border Counties of the Republic of Ireland.

If you live in any of the designated areas and would like to get involved in the projects please contact the:

**Good Relations Officer**  
**Anne McAllister**  
**0300 111 2211**  
[anne.mcallister@choice-housing.org](mailto:anne.mcallister@choice-housing.org)

## **This is what has been HAIPening**

Tenants from Newtownards had a great weekend visiting The Siege Museum in Derry~ Londonderry, The Famine Village in Doagh and Fort Dunree in Donegal. This was part of the HAIP initiative and an element of the OCN Good Relations course delivered by TIDES.







Kathryn Stewart School of Dance

Choice held a Cultural Event in Loughbrickland in May. The Good Relations Officer worked closely with local resident Raymond Fagan, there were stories and music by Willie Drennan, highland dance by Kathryn Stewart school of dance, wonderful food provided by Mark, Gobi and Gaya from Global kitchen. The event was thoroughly enjoyed by all.



Community events were held in each of the areas which gave tenants an opportunity to meet their neighbours. Tenants also had the opportunity to come and meet Choice staff and to discuss the opportunities the project had to offer.

Tenants from Cairnmartin and Orchard Court enjoyed study visits to the Crumlin Road Gaol and the Titanic Visitors Centre. Other workshops held ranged from Gardening Workshops to 'Reminiscence Workshops'.





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# *Delivering New Homes*

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

## *Lawnfield Close, Newcastle*

Work has recently finished at Lawnfield Close, Newcastle, formerly called Mary Murray House.

The housing scheme for people aged over 55 provides 14 two-bedroom apartments. The build by GlasgIVEN Contracts Limited took 15 months to complete at a cost of £1.5 million. Good luck to all our tenants who have moved into their new homes!



**14**  
two bedroom  
apartments

## *St. Ninian's*

We were delighted to hand over 12 new homes to families on Whitewell Road, Belfast an area of high social housing demand.

The housing scheme is a mixture of two and three bedroom houses. The new homes took 16 months to build by Geda Construction. We wish the families many happy years in their new homes!



**12**  
family homes

## *Nelson Drive, Derry~Londonderry*

43 new homes of the final phase at Nelson Drive in Derry~Londonderry have been handed over to new tenants.

The housing scheme consists of 51, houses, bungalows and apartments. We hope our new tenants settle into their new homes well!



**53**  
homes  
now complete

## Anti-social Behaviour

# Support for our customers

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

**Insec Security**  
**028 9020 0080**

*Please note the following:*

- This service is only available to Choice tenants outside office hours.
- Tenants should continue to report all cases of ASB to the Services Centre on 0300 111 2211, during normal office hours.
- Any tenant who has concerns for their own safety, or believes that a crime has been committed, should contact the PSNI.
- Tenants living in sheltered housing schemes should continue to report all cases of ASB directly to their

Scheme Co-ordinator or to the Services Centre on 0300 111 2211, during normal office hours.

- Insec Security will only visit the person who is causing the ASB. Insec will not visit the tenant making the complaint. This process is to ensure confidentiality is maintained.

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

## Fire Safety at Home

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

Our Fire Safety Handbook contains everything you need to know to keep your home safe. You can download a copy of the Fire Safety Handbook from our website [choice-housing.org](http://choice-housing.org) or call **0300 111 2211** to request a copy.



If there's a fire:

**Get out, stay out,  
and call 999.**

## *Family fun days hosted by your Tenant Involvement Team*

Our Tenant Involvement Team spend a lot of time with tenants, and this summer was particularly busy and fun! The summer months were filled with community days across Northern Ireland.

Our community days gave tenants and families the opportunity to come together as a community as well as meeting and spending time with Choice staff.

The activities on the days were decided by the tenants themselves, through expression of interest forms. We were delighted with the creative suggestions which made sure everyone was keen to get involved.

The community events also proved to be a fantastic opportunity for tenants to meet the Financial Inclusion Team. This was a huge success with many tenants taking the opportunity to seek advice regarding benefits.



Our community days gave tenants and families the opportunity to come together as a community as well as meeting and spending time with Choice staff.





**The events were:**

- **05.07.19** Drumalla Park, Carnlough Planting Day, animal farm, face painting and glitter tattoos and refreshments.
- **06.07.19** 126 Strand Road, Derry~Londonderry Planting Day and support on Benefits from our Financial Inclusion Team and the Social Supermarket in Derry~Londonderry.
- **24.07.19 / 30.07.19** Pond Park, Lisburn and Killaire Wood, Bangor Family Fun Days incorporating a climbing tower!
- **02.08.19** St Galls Avenue, Belfast Planting Workshop to develop the community garden.



## Estate Walkabouts

At Choice, we know that Estate Walkabouts are an excellent way for tenants to participate by improving the areas where they live.

During an Estate Walkabout tenants join their Housing Officer and Property Services Officer to review and record the conditions of the neighbourhood.

Our autumn Estate Walkabouts schedule has commenced and we want you to get involved, so join us on your estate, your voice needs to be heard!

Tenants who have taken part have commented;

**“It was good to meet Choice staff, I enjoyed the face to face contact.”**

**“It was good to see the tenant-staff dynamic working so well.”**



**“It is important for Choice to engage with tenants and demonstrate an interest in the schemes where we live.”**

## Community Champions

To date we have recruited Community Champions within our family housing areas and we would like to build upon this representation over the next 12 months.

A Community Champion is an individual who volunteers, contributing to the estate in which they reside, supporting and signposting residents and to make a positive difference within their Community.

The Community Champion is supported by Choice staff with training and ongoing help available from your Housing Officer.

Should you wish to be considered for the role of Community Champion where you live, please get in touch with your Housing Officer or a member of the Tenant Involvement Team.

Please contact Choice on **0300 111 2211** or email [enquiries@choice-housing.org](mailto:enquiries@choice-housing.org)







# Choice Annual Tenant Involvement Conference

**Choice held its annual Tenant Involvement Conference on Thursday 7th March 2019 in the Clayton Hotel Belfast.**

In total 62 tenants and two Board members attended as well as other invited guests and staff members. Attendees were encouraged to participate in round table discussions giving feedback on the services Choice provide.

Tenants themselves delivered presentations at the event as did Claire Darby, Tenant Involvement Champion. Michael McDonnell, Group Chief Executive and Hazel Bell, Chair of Choice who spoke of the importance and tangible benefits that tenant engagement brings to the business of Choice.

Guest Speaker from PSNI advised on tenant safety, Cancer Focus spoke on raising the awareness of their role in the community and the support they provide. Finally, the Energy Manager from Choice gave great advice to tenants on being energy efficient in their homes.

The aim of the Conference was to celebrate the work of the Tenants' Forum and the Tenant Involvement Team. The conference provided a platform for tenants to listen to, and speak about, topics that are relevant to them. Choice was pleased with what was achieved on the day, particularly enhancing the relationship and communication between tenants and staff.

The table discussions from the Conference provided food for thought for Choice and we will develop on the key areas over the next year and into 2020.

- Communication was identified as a priority for tenants with more visibility of staff on the ground. Our front line staff in their work are out on the schemes daily supporting tenants on a face to face basis but are also available by phone if that is required.
- Quality and speed of repairs are also important to customers and this has been achieved with 94% of repairs carried out

within the timescale. Tenant safety is of great importance to tenants and Choice have listened to this and provided 24 hour security and nightly patrols in many town centre areas.

- Tenants asked for more engagement projects to encourage families and tenants who don't normally engage to participate. So this summer Choice held five engagement events in general needs schemes in Derry~Londonderry, Carnlough, Lisburn, Belfast and Bangor. The events ranged from fun days to planting projects and all five proved successful for the tenants residing in these areas. Choice will develop on these into 2020.

Overall satisfaction levels in relation to the annual Tenant Involvement Conference were excellent with many tenants looking forward to next year's Conference in 2020.

Choice would like to thank all tenant members from the Conference Focus Group for their help in planning the event and also to those who participated on the day.





## *Tenants gather to celebrate International Older People's Day*

This event was organised by Apex Housing Association and Choice Housing Ireland to celebrate International Older People's Day which takes place first week in October.

Held in the Gasyard Centre in Derry~Londonderry, the event hosted older tenants from Apex and Choice. In addition, a number of organisations were present with information stands to provide guidance on everything from community safety, benefits to health information and local social activities.

Deirdre Walker, Director of Supported Living at Apex Housing Association, commented:

"It was a pleasure to see our older tenants enjoying a nice afternoon of food, dancing and chat. Unfortunately, social isolation can often be an issue for the older generation, but it's something we work to reduce by offering our tenants opportunities to meet up with each other; where they live and through events like this. Not only was this a lovely social event for those attending, it was also a way for us to provide tenants with advice and guidance on issues that are important to them."

Carol Ervine, Group Director of Tenant and Client Services with Choice:

*"For many older people sheltered housing is a key part of independent living. Our sheltered schemes strike the balance between security, community and independence. Sheltered living provides opportunities for tenants to meet new people, develop friendships and get involved in social activities. This partnership with Apex is vital in addressing the ongoing issue of isolation among older people, which can have a negative impact on their health and well-being. We value this partnership with Apex and look forward to working together in future initiatives".*



# Mystery Shopping

Choice currently work with a number of tenants who are trained Mystery shoppers and play a vital role in checking the quality of services we provide. The purpose of mystery shopping is to provide information from a customers perspective and the quality of everyday services to assist staff training and improvements in service.

In line with The Tenant Involvement Strategy for Northern Ireland Landlords must demonstrate that they adopt a range of approaches to tenants who then have a choice to participate. Mystery Shopping is another such approach.

Choice are committed to carrying out a Mystery Shopping exercise every two years to give tenants an opportunity to test the services provided by Choice.



Mystery Shopping is a powerful way to assess service standards and complements other methods the Association utilises.

We would like to thank the tenants who took part in the Mystery Shopping exercise and we look forward to working with our tenants and our wider customer group in future to ensure the customer experience is of the highest quality.

## Tenants' Forum Calendar 2020

Keep an eye out for this year's new Tenants' Forum Calendar...  
**COMING SOON!**





# Calling all artists!

*This year we would like to invite any accomplished or budding artists among our customers, of all ages, to contribute a painting for this year's Choice Christmas Card Competition.*

If you are interested in submitting an original painting or drawing in full colour for this year's card, please complete and return the attached slip, plus your artwork by **Friday 29th November 2019** to the address below.



The winning entry will receive a

## £100 shopping voucher

plus the chance to have their artwork as the Choice Christmas Card for 2019. The closing date for entry is fast approaching - so it's time to get your paint brushes out!

Terms and Conditions will apply.

POST TO:  
The Editor,  
Choice News,  
FREEPOST BEL2371  
Belfast BT1 4BR

Name

Address

Daytime Telephone

Evening Telephone

Tell us about your design



# Out & About

Choice has more than 10,000 tenants, over 300 staff and numerous partners and stakeholders; so it's no surprise that there is always plenty of activity going on in all the communities we support.

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

Contact us at:  
[editor@choice-housing.org](mailto:editor@choice-housing.org)



## CHOICE STAFF REACH NEW HEIGHTS!

8 of our brave colleagues took on the zip-line challenge in the name of NI Children's Hospice and PIPS NI!

The fearless friends zip lined across the river Lagan and raised over £800 for our two brilliant chosen charities.

Marcia McGrath, "We were all very nervous going up in the crane especially because it was rocking about but once we took off it was great craic and we all felt brilliant when we reached the other side safely cheered on by family and Choice staff."

Well done and on behalf of everyone at Choice a massive thank you to Julie Dineen, Julie McConnell, Matt Burns, Kieran Burns, Ashleigh Kennedy, Louise Dixon, Stephen Adair and Marcia McMath.

## BIRTHDAY BASH AT WESTBRIDGE HOUSE

Happy 65th birthday to Jim Durnien from everyone at Choice!

Jim lives at Westbridge House in Fermanagh, overlooking the river Erne.

Friends and family came together at the scheme to celebrate with Jim and enjoy his birthday bash in the sunshine.



# Out & About



## OUTDOOR TRANSFORMATION AT THE ROSSES!

A gardening group has made big improvements to their outdoor space at The Rosses, Derry~Londonderry.

Tenants came together to enjoy the outdoors together and Damien Tai, Housing Officer, joined in by clearing an overgrown area.

Tenants have made sure that their input guided the process and informed the decisions about planting, water feature, flower pots and window boxes.

The team effort has really paid off and is a testament to what can be achieved through collaboration!



## COLOURING COMPETITION WINNER

The children who take the time to complete an entry are all worthy of mention as it really is a pleasure to look through their creative endeavours. The felt tips, glitter, stickers and crayons used display all the craft and creative skills these young people have to offer.

But, there can only be one winner, and this time it is Skye Galbraith from Ardglass- well done Skye!



## MEET ROCCO

Mrs Courtney lives at Pembroke Lodge, Belfast with Rocco, her much loved fur companion.

As well as being great company for Mrs Courtney, Rocco also entertains many of the other residents!



## 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

Summer 2019 saw two Choice sheltered living schemes celebrate significant anniversaries.

Pound Green Court in Larne and Craignagore in Newcastle have provided homes at the heart of the community for 20 years.







## THE DAISYHILL DIGGERS

Daisyhill Court a sheltered living scheme in the heart of West Belfast is surrounded by an extensive garden. A conversation started amongst the residents to see if it would be possible to use an area in the garden to grow vegetables. That conversation took on momentum and using what they had, and pulling in a few favours, the tenants managed to build three raised beds. Choice provided funding for the compost and basic equipment.

A contact from the Belfast City Council provided support and advice and the raised beds are now producing a range of vegetables; onions, lettuce, spinach, carrots and scallions. At the recent Daisyhill Midsummer Barbeque a selection of the produce was used for salads.

The gardening bug is spreading as tenants are growing peppers, chillies and seedlings for the allotment. The project has inspired other residents to consider growing vegetables and the benefits of 'growing your own' is well documented in terms of it supporting wellbeing and health. It was the enthusiasm of residents, particularly Alan Murphy and Eddie Kelly that transformed a conversation into a result.

Staff and tenants see this as the beginning of something that will continue to grow as a project. Daisyhill would love to connect with other schemes who grow their own and would like to thank all who gave encouragement particularly at the beginning. So get your wellies out and start digging, planting and harvesting!

## FUNDRAISING TEA PARTY AT ELMGROVE MANOR

Well done to our tenants at Elmgrove Manor in Belfast who recently held a tea party in aid of Marie Curie raising over £600 for the worthy charity.

Marie Curie offer free practical information and emotional support for anyone affected by terminal illness. The money raised by our tenants will go a long way providing care and support for people with terminal illnesses.

You can find out more about Marie Curie on their website: [mariecurie.org.uk](http://mariecurie.org.uk)

**£600**  
raised for  
**Marie Curie**



# Out & About



**£200  
Prize**

## TENANT FEEDBACK WINNER

At Choice we are always looking for ways to improve our services. With this in mind, we ask our tenants to give us their feedback through our quick and easy tenant repair feedback surveys.

Every time you return a questionnaire following a repair, it is entered into a quarterly prize draw. Congratulations to Florence McAlister from Belfast who has won £200.



## A NIGHT AT THE THEATRE FOR TENANTS FROM WESTBRIDGE HOUSE

Tenants at our sheltered schemes across the province are no strangers to cultural events, each year trips to theatres, community events, museums and exhibitions take place, keeping our older tenants active and connected to each other as well as the wider community.

The Ardhoven Theatre in Enniskillen recently hosted The Holywood Players and their production of Second Honeymoon. Tenants from Westbridge House, Enniskillen enjoyed an evening meal at the Hunting Lodge before going to the Ardhoven Theater to watch the play.

Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the evening and they are already planning their next outing.

## FIRE SAFETY AT 126 STRAND ROAD

The Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) is committed to 'Protecting Our Community'. Responding to fires, road traffic collisions and other specialist rescue incidents The Fire Service also provides the community with safety education and advice.

Ursula Toner, Regional Head of Housing, met with the local Fire and Rescue team at 126 Strand Road, Derry~Londonderry as they made themselves familiar with the scheme following its complete redevelopment.

Following the visit the Fire and rescue team are now well placed to deal with any incidents should they arise, keeping our tenants safe and well protected.



## BLOOMING LOVELY!

Ballydown Court in Belfast is blooming lovely with new raised flowers beds thanks to an intergenerational project with St. Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School, JP Corry and our wonderful tenants!

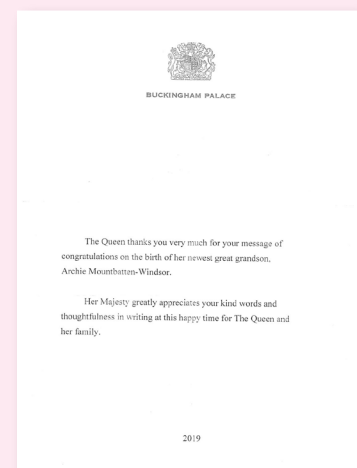
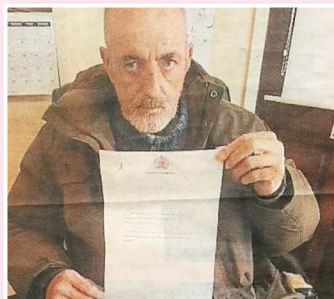


## THE SILVERGROVE FUNDRAISING STARS

Staff and tenants from the Silvergrove in Belfast have raised a whopping £830 for Marie Curie, such a fantastic amount for a very worthy charity!

## ROYAL WELL WISHES

Paul Wallace from Antrim received a letter from Buckingham Palace recently thanking him for his message of congratulations to the Queen for the birth of her newest great-grandson; Archie Harrison Mountbatten-Windsor.





# Out & About



## PLANNED MAINTENANCE SURVEY WINNERS

At Choice we are committed to delivering excellent customer service during our planned maintenance projects and we use the information gathered from feedback surveys to improve our service delivery on future projects. Congratulations to our annual prize draw winners; Elizabeth McCrory, Patricia Martin from Belfast and Sheila Weymes from Derry~Londonderry, who have won £50 M & S shopping vouchers.



## SADIE'S 90TH BIRTHDAY

A very special happy birthday to Sadie Garret from the Silvergrove, Belfast who turned 90 in May. We hope you enjoyed all the celebrations with your friends and family!



## LAST OF THE SUMMER... ICE CREAM!

When the sun comes out, the tenants at Westbridge House make the most of the warm weather.

Everyone enjoyed a delicious ice cream provided by Mr Whippy. The tenants used the opportunity to celebrate the sunshine as we move towards the end of the summer.

Contact us at:

[editor@choice-housing.org](mailto:editor@choice-housing.org)



## WELL DONE TEAM PRIDE!

What an amazing first experience of Belfast Pride for Choice. A fun filled informative week was rounded off with our first ever presence at the celebratory Pride parade on Saturday. Led by Michael McDonnell 31 people represented Choice at the parade, made up of staff, family and friends.

After a week of events to celebrate and support the LGBT community 70,000 people brought Belfast to life with colour and music.

Congratulations to Team Pride in Choice who worked hard to coordinate the Association's contribution, you should all be very proud (terrible pun).

In particular well done Sean McLery, HR Admin Officer, for all your efforts, it's clear your dedication has really paid off.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the coffee morning with money, cakes and tray bakes, raising a grand total of £331.33 for the Rainbow Project NI.

We are already looking forward to next year!



[#BelfastPrideFestival](#)  
[#EqualityForAll](#)  
[#LovelsLove](#)

## MUSICAL BUZZ AT KIRK HOUSE

In an attempt to deal with the onset of dementia the residents at Kirk House, Belfast have been supplied with their own individual, personalised mp3 players.

As we know music has many health benefits and each resident has had songs and music which means something to them recorded on their mp3 player.

Some have chosen music from their childhood and songs that were popular when they were growing up, whilst others have chosen songs they had at their wedding or special family occasions.

Kirk House manager, Leona advises that residents are excited to have their own special music and there is a new musical buzz around the scheme.

We hope everyone at Kirk House enjoys being part of this new initiative and everyone benefits from it.





## STAR SURVEY WINNER

Congratulations to Miss Rea, Bangor, who was our STAR survey winner for this quarter.

As part of our efforts to continually improve our services we carry out a STAR satisfaction survey with a random selection of our tenants on a monthly basis. We aim to complete 110 surveys per month to ensure we obtain a full range of tenant views.

Miss Rea took a few minutes to complete the survey and has won a Samsung Tablet, presented by Jim Chapman, Area Manager.

The STAR survey, is Housemark's framework which allows us to measure customer satisfaction, benchmark our performance with others and assess trends over time. To enable us to gather feedback on a range of key service areas across the organisation, we have included the 7 core STAR questions.

1. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall quality of your home?
2. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your neighbourhood as a place to live?
3. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that your rent provides value for money?
4. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that your service charges provide value for money?
5. Generally, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way Choice deals with repairs and maintenance?
6. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Choice listens to your views and acts upon them?
7. Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service provided by Choice?

We receive timely feedback and therefore can follow up on any concerns tenants may raise through the survey in real-time. We welcome the honest feedback of our tenants as it helps us to understand what we are doing well and where we need to make improvements.

## CHOICE BEST KEPT GARDEN COMPETITION

Our Best Kept Gardening Competition is always highly contested. The panel are interested in how outside space is used, presented and maximised. This is always a difficult one to judge as everyone has different outside space which can include lawns, balconies and communal gardens.

This year the prize for Best Kept Garden goes to Miss Irene Bates at Ainsworth Avenue. The care and attention Irene takes to make the most of her outside space is apparent and has really paid off.

Congratulations Irene!



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## GOOD NEIGHBOUR AWARD

The Muriel Smyth Good Neighbour award is held annually and is an opportunity to nominate a Choice tenant who embodies the values of a good neighbour.

There are many reasons someone would be deserving of this award, they may have helped you out at a time of crisis or are they a good neighbour all the time?

Or helped with your garden or, do some shopping for you? Perhaps they have looked after your children so that you can have a break or go to work? Maybe they have just been there as someone to talk to.

The entries for this competition are always inspiring, and this year was no different. The judging panel read through the many entries and were blown away by the accounts of kindness, thoughtfulness and community that shone out.

In the end it was a very personal entry which won. Roberta McKitrick of St. Elizabeth's Court in Dundonald was nominated by a neighbour, the entry detailed the important ways Roberta makes a difference. Congratulations Roberta!



New website -  
at your service!

Choice Services are pleased to announce the launch of our new website. Visit us @  
[www.choice-servicesltd.org](http://www.choice-servicesltd.org)

**choice services**

Visit us online  
[choice-servicesltd.org](http://choice-servicesltd.org)

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## NEW WEBSITE AT YOUR SERVICE!

Choice Services are pleased to announce the launch of a new website, designed with a fresh new look, user-friendly navigation and updated with the latest information about our range of services for tenants.

We built the website with our customers in mind and worked to ensure that the new website is more agile, interactive, and easy to navigate, enabling our customers to find what they need quickly.

We hope you will enjoy browsing our new site!

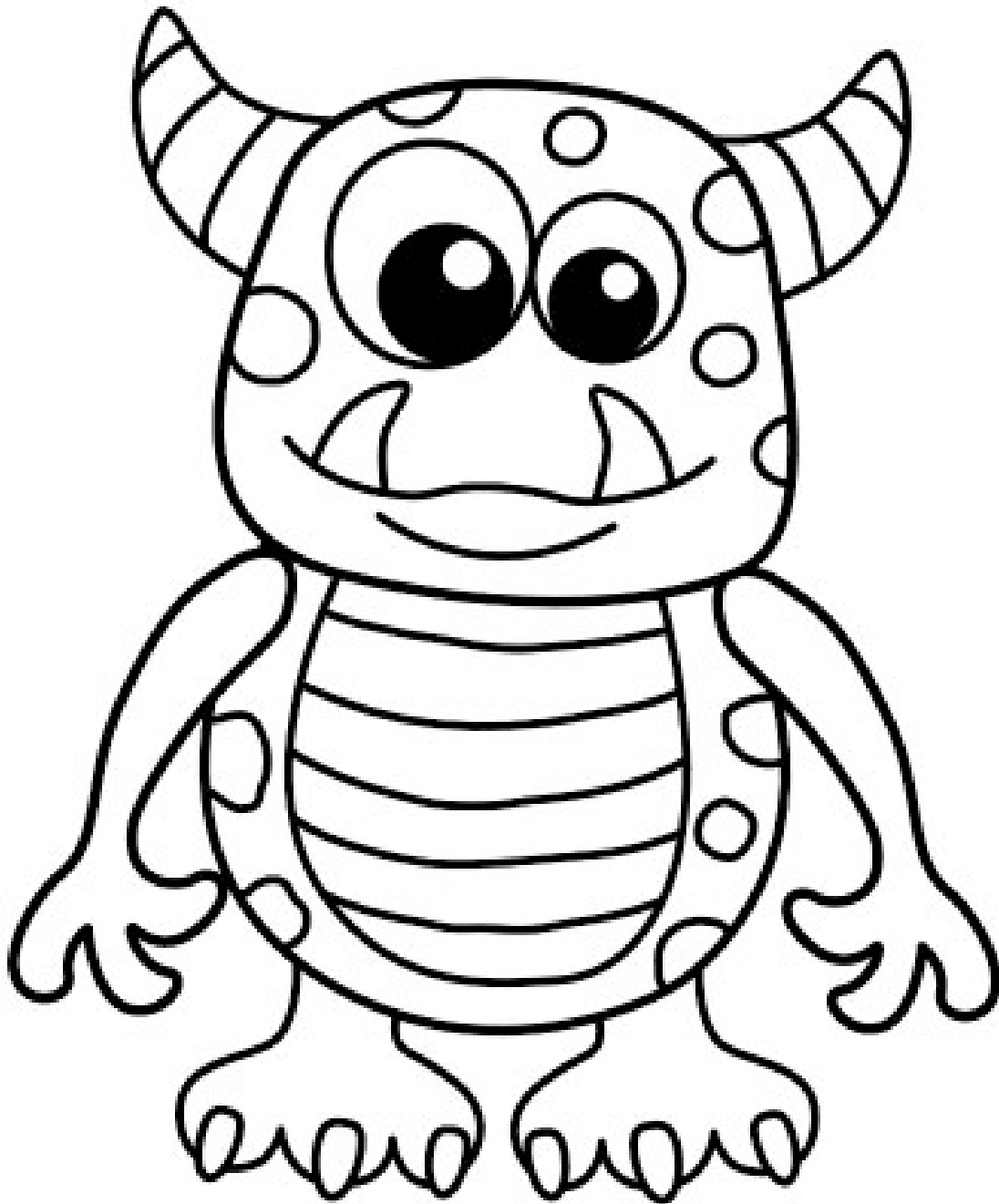
Check out the new Choice Services website: [www.choice-servicesltd.org](http://www.choice-servicesltd.org)





# Children's Colouring Competition

Open to children 16 years and under



It's really easy to enter, just pull out this page and colour it in anyway you like! Then pop it in the post along with your name, age, address and telephone number in the reply slip below to The Editor, Choice News, FREEPOST BEL2371 Belfast BT1 6BR.

One lucky winner will receive this great prize! Entries must be received by **Friday 20th December, 2019.**

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

## POST TO:

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

Name

Age

Address

Daytime Telephone

Evening Telephone

**Win a family pass to Movie House!**

# Different ways to pay your rent and other charges

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



**Going Online** – You can pay your rent online at [www.choice-housing.org](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 Store, Windows Phone Store or Google Play .



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



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



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



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



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



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

## 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*



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

# The Silvergrove Garden

Material Things Don't Matter  
In The World We Know  
So Visit Us At Silvergrove  
And See The Things We Grow

The Trees Are Tall And Solid  
And On The Ground Below  
A Cascade Of Colour  
Makes A Splendid Show

A Butterfly Is Beautiful  
Also Very Smart  
Whilst Circling Our Domain  
He Spied A Work Of Art

Central In The Greenery  
A Water Feature Flows  
Little Duckies Bathe Their Feet  
Whilst We Watch From Our Seat

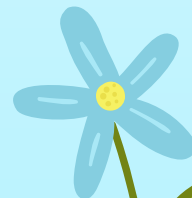
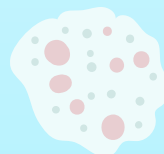
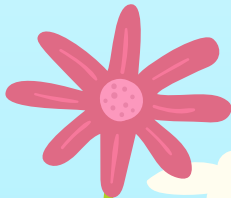
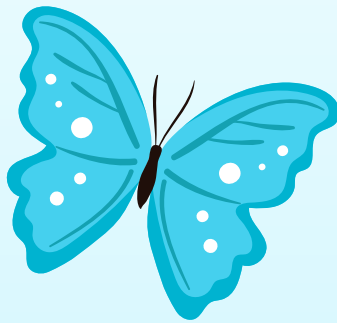
The Greenhouse Stands Amongst It All  
With Tiny Seedlings, Tomatoes Reaching Tall  
Tenants Joyous When Ripeness Reached  
As Fruit And Veg Upon The Table Is Heaped

The Silvergrove Haven A Happy Place To Go

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Poem by Joan Legge, tenant at the Silvergrove, Belfast

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**Choice**  
Leslie Morrell House  
37 - 41 May Street  
Belfast  
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**T:** 0300 111 2211  
**E:** [enquiries@choice-housing.org](mailto:enquiries@choice-housing.org)

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