

Issue 13, Spring/Summer 2021

New family homes for Killynure Green in Carryduff



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with QUB and Ulster
University**

A message from Michael, our Group Chief Executive



Welcome to the Spring/Summer 2021 edition of Choice News.

With the change in season and the roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccines, there is a definite sense that brighter days are coming. I hope that you and your family and friends are keeping well and that you share this optimism for the year ahead. We have tried hard over the last 12 months to deliver the services that you expect from Choice despite the obvious challenges. And in very large part, I think we have succeeded in placing our tenants and the broader community at the very centre of our decision-making in difficult times.

So it's perhaps not a huge surprise that a large section of this edition of Choice News focuses on our newly formed Community Development Team. Whilst Richard and Anne are recently recruited to Choice, they have lots of experience in community development and I am excited at the prospect of 'joining the dots' on lots of really great Choice initiatives. As an organisation with a charitable purpose for over the last 40 years 'to benefit the community', investing in community empowerment is a natural extension of our tenant engagement activities. Please take the time to read more about the success of our Peace IV

and T:Buc projects which have brought significant and lasting benefits to the communities involved.

The implementation of Universal Credit continues across Northern Ireland and this edition of Choice News provides an update on the progress of this key welfare change. As a response to the challenges created, Choice continues to expand our Financial Inclusion support, a service that has delivered over £2 million of financial gains for our tenants in the last year. We are also pleased to continue our partnership with both Ulster University and Queen's University Belfast in providing financial support to students with restricted means. These initiatives reinforce the determination of Choice to play our part in the post-Covid recovery.

Two other features in this newsletter to highlight are the completion of the transfer of tenants from the former Victoria Housing Estates (VHE) and our new build programme. I'm delighted to say that the VHE project has now completed its first phase, with 301 former VHE tenants opting for a Choice tenancy and the prospect of significant investment to upgrade

their homes. The second phase of work has now commenced to void properties that will act as decant homes for the third and final element, namely the upgrading of existing tenant homes across West Belfast, North Belfast, East Belfast and North Down.

The success of the VHE project also reflects our ongoing commitment to meeting housing need and addressing the shortfall in housing supply. Access to a decent and affordable home should be available to everyone in our society and Choice is pleased that despite a global pandemic, we have managed to start and complete a very high number of new build projects across the country. I know that this is something which remains a priority for our incoming Chair, Ciaran McAreavey. You should be assured that Choice will continue to invest significantly in creating and sustaining vibrant neighbourhoods.

Thanks for being a tenant of Choice and I look forward to your participation and support in the year ahead.

Introducing

Ciaran McAreavey, our new Chairperson



We are pleased to introduce Ciaran McAreavey as the new Chairperson of the Choice Group. Ciaran was appointed in September 2020 and follows Hazel Bell who stepped down from the role, after several years leading the Association.

Ciaran joined the Choice Group Board as a Non-Executive Director in April 2016 and became Chair of the Group Development & Assets Committee in April 2018. He is also the Chairperson of two Choice subsidiaries, Maple & May Limited and Maple & May (Homes) Limited.

In his role as Group Chairperson, Ciaran will draw on his wealth of experience in the private sector. He is currently Managing Director of Close Brothers Commercial Finance in Ireland, a division of Close Brothers Group Plc. which is a leading provider of finance to SMEs. Having qualified as a Chartered Accountant with Coopers & Lybrand specialising in the area of Corporate Finance, he then moved into the banking sector and has held a number of senior leadership roles in the financial services sector based in the UK and Ireland. Ciaran has a degree in Law and Accounting and a postgraduate Diploma in Accounting from QUB.

On taking up his appointment as Chair, Ciaran McAreavey said:
"Although we are working in very uncertain and difficult times, as Group Chair I look forward to building on the positive contribution Choice has made to the wider community. I know that Choice is well placed to support our tenants and stakeholders as we continue to provide high quality homes and crucial services to our communities."

Our Community Development Team



Richard Mealey
Community Development Manager

Now is an exciting time for our Community Development team. With more resources and new team members, we are really looking forward to the opportunities we can create for our tenants and our communities.

Here's what Richard has to say about his new role with Choice

"I feel really privileged and excited to be the first Community Development Manager for Choice. I will be working alongside Choice colleagues to bring real benefits to the organisation and to the communities in which we work. My work has provided me with many opportunities to develop fantastic relationships with all sections of the community over the years. Something I really enjoy is supporting community groups and individuals to build confidence through training.

I have seen first-hand the impact the right knowledge and skills can have to the benefit of a community. Choice provides a wide range of opportunities for individuals and communities to contribute to Choice. We provide training, support and guidance for tenants to help build their skills and confidence to engage more effectively with Choice. Finally, I would like to stress the importance of good open communication with Choice staff. I know that when we work in partnership we can build communities that are great places to live for everyone.

If you are interested in using your voice to help shape our services, please get in touch and find out how we can help. I look forward to working with you!



Meet Sharon Leslie

Sharon is a key point of contact for our Forum members and she assists in the effective management and maintenance of the Choice tenant forums. Sharon provides support duties for the Central and Regional tenant forums and is a fantastic advocate for all the Forum members. She is an information sharer providing a two way flow between tenants and Choice helping to keep tenants up to date on developments within Choice and keeping Choice staff updated on the views and thoughts of the tenants.



Anne McAllister
Tenant Engagement Officer

Our Tenant Engagement Officer advocates for our tenants, and builds strong working relationships between our tenant groups and management.

Anne has worked for Choice for two years as Good Relations Officer. During this time, Anne delivered on the Housing Associations Integration Project, a Peace IV Good Relations programme.

With over 30 years' experience in community development we are looking forward to the positive impact Anne will make for Choice and more importantly for you, our tenants.

"I look forward to using my experience to help us reach into communities and work together to support and help each other."

As Anne steps into her new role, it's a great time to introduce her to all our tenants.

What are you most looking forward to in your new role?

I am looking forward to meeting more tenants and building relationships, working closely with the forum members and beginning the consultation process for the new tenant participation strategy.

What challenges are you expecting?

There are common barriers to engagement such as lack of confidence; training; language; transport & childcare, and I will address these with creative solutions to ensure that every tenant has the opportunity to get involved.

It goes without saying that this past year has been challenging for everyone. It has been fantastic to see the Tenants' Forum successfully navigate throughout this difficult time, they have been meeting virtually, ensuring that the tenants' voice continues to be heard and considered, I am inspired by their efforts.

What will be a key focus for you?

We are keen to involve more hard to reach groups, work more with diverse and ethnic communities, and create a space where we can discuss and understand the specific issues affecting these groups of tenants.

I will be working with local organisations and community groups to provide a broader range of training & education for our tenants. In this way we can build the capacity of those who want to be involved and have a voice in the delivery of our services.

Read through our menu of involvement (on page 6) to find out how you can work with Anne on one of our many tenant groups.

MENU OF TENANT INVOLVEMENT

Choice welcomes the views of tenants with regards to enhancing the services we provide. We are committed to ensuring that tenants are at the heart of service delivery and we believe that by listening to and taking on board their views we can ensure that policies and services are more responsive to changing needs and rising aspirations.

Choice recognises the importance of offering a range of methods which are fit for purpose and provide the opportunity for tenants to get involved on whatever level best suits their lifestyle.

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

Why get involved?

Being involved with Choice will give you the chance to:

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

How do I get involved?

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

Please complete the Menu of Involvement and return to our office or hand it to a member of Choice staff.

If you would like more information on our Menu of Involvement contact **0300 111 2211**.

Alternatively you can email us at **enquiries@choice-housing.org**.



TENANT ENGAGEMENT



Menu of Tenant Involvement

Resident Groups

Represent your community on a wide range of issues by being part of a Resident Group in your area. Meetings are arranged as and when required – 2.5 hours per meeting.

Community Champion

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

Tenants' Forum Group

We currently have one Central Forum and four Regional Forums, (Belfast, South East, South West and North West), discussing housing related issues and sharing best practice ideas. Meetings are held bi-monthly and last 2 hours.

Service Improvement Team

Carry out a review of our services alongside housing staff to help identify areas for improvement. Training will be provided. Meetings are held quarterly and there may be additional project work every 6 months.

Editorial Team

Write and review articles to showcase the activities undertaken by the Tenants' Forum for our Tenant Newsletter (published bi-annually). Meetings are arranged as and when required.

Estate Walkabouts

Walk around your estate with your Housing and Property Services Officers to identify areas of concern and agree priorities for the local community. Walkabouts occur annually and last approx. 2 hours.

Financial Stakeholders Group

Receive information on annual rent increases and service charges as well as an explanation on how these have been calculated. There are two meetings held per annum.

Mystery Shoppers

Review our services and provide feedback as a mystery shopper by carrying out a series of pre-agreed tasks, such as telephone calls or reception visits. Mystery shopping exercises are carried out bi-annually – 1.5 hours per meeting.

Register of Tenants

Respond to surveys or comment on specific service areas which you are interested in from the comfort of your own home. We can contact you by text, post, email or telephone. Time required, as and when appropriate, commitment can be as little as 20 minutes.

YOUR DETAILS

Name:

Address:

Email:

Mobile Tel:

Home Tel:

RETURN TO: CHOICE HOUSING IRELAND, FREEPOST BEL2371 or email: enquiries@choice-housing.org

Get to know the tenant representatives



Rita Murray, Chair of Central Forum

I was pleased to learn Choice have invested and resourced a new Community Development Team. This shows commitment on the part of the organisation for true, meaningful tenant engagement and opportunities for everyone, staff and tenants, to get involved. This can only be for the good of tenants and help build strong relationships going forward.

The past year has been difficult and trying for everyone and the Choice Community Development Team did an excellent job in keeping us updated and informed as circumstances allowed, Zoom has become a very common word, almost like Google!

I would hope that moving forward the new Team, in consultation with tenants, will find a dynamic approach that will see us all engaging better, especially with the hard to reach and under-represented tenant groups. Finding the right approach is key and the answer is quite simple, ask the tenant.

The Tenants' Forum is keen to offer a range of opportunities for all our tenants to get involved and I would encourage everyone to read the Menu of Involvement to see if there is anything you would be interested in and contact Choice to be a part of this process in the months and years ahead.

William Wilson – Vice Chair, Central Forum and Chair of North West Regional Tenants' Forum

I feel it is like a new beginning for Choice Tenants' Forum and exciting times are ahead. We have a new Community Development Team who between them have many years' experience in this field. I hope when lockdown ends we can start to have meaningful engagement events where we can promote participation, especially among under-represented groups, and I look forward to seeing many new faces when we get around the table.

At The Rosses, In Derry~Londonderry, we initiated a project to freshen up part of the garden area for the benefit of all tenants. We laid gravel, painted furniture, planted bulbs and seeds and bought ornaments.

It would be great if projects like this could be replicated with Choice general needs tenants – with focus on the hard to reach ones. Initiatives like this, in collaboration with Choice can only help build and sustain good working relationships. As the strapline says – 'Together we enrich lives'.



Peace IV Initiatives

The SEUPB Peace IV funded Housing Associations Integration Project (HAIP) ended in November 2020. Choice as a key partner in HAIP delivered a wide range of initiatives over the previous 3 years within 10 identified areas across the region. The successful delivery of HAIP activities provided many opportunities for participants to develop new skills, meet new friends and help improve good relations between communities.

A significant number of tenants progressed on to achieve OCN accreditations in Good Relation training. Tenants also had the opportunity to participate in a number of study visits and complete projects with tenants from other communities and Housing Associations. Due to the success of this award winning project Choice hopes to develop similar initiatives in the future to enable all tenants the opportunity to get involved.



Laura Galbraith & Tomas Corr from Crewhill Gardens, Ardglass were awarded OCN for 'Dealing with Contentious Cultural Issues' & Communication skills (via zoom). These were awarded at the virtual showcase event on 19th October 2020.



Tracey Rooney, Cahal Rooney & Sharon Hoffman from Burrendale Close, Newcastle were awarded OCN for 'Dealing with Contentious Cultural Issues' at the virtual showcase on 19th October 2020.

Housing for All

Congratulations to all the winners who participated in the Halloween project in association with our Shared Housing schemes.



The children enjoyed themselves and Choice look forward to future collaborations in the name of promoting community relations.

The Shared Housing initiatives strive to improve community relations and continue the journey towards a united and shared society. The Shared Housing programme is delivered by the Department for Communities and the funding to support Good Relations activities in Nursery Close, Manse Court and Ballymaglave Court, was provided through the Together: Building a United Community (T:buc) strategy.

We were thrilled to see the children of the local primary schools throw themselves into the project. The P1 – P5 age group took on a Halloween art project while the older children in P6 & P7 practiced their pumpkin carving skills.

Choice Tenants' Forum members were tasked with the difficult job of picking a winner from the amazing entries, so well done to all the children and of course their Principles for getting everyone involved.

The pumpkin carving winner received an Amazon Fire Tablet, and the art project winners each received an arts and crafts kit and a beautiful children's book, "We All Belong" celebrating diversity, and inclusion.

Spotlight on success at CIH Awards



Choice Housing's commitment to innovation and collaboration in the social housing sector has been recognised by the CIH Housing Awards which took place, virtually. The coveted awards celebrate the creativity, passion and innovation of housing organisations and individuals across the sector in Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Shortlisted for seven awards, Choice won three, demonstrating our championing of equality and diversity, support for the health service during heightened service demands due to the pandemic and recognising the best in young talent within the sector.

Michael McDonnell, Choice Group Chief Executive said, *"These awards are a testament to the work of colleagues across many areas within the organisation and it is important for them to be recognised. The last twelve months have been very challenging for everyone in society and within the social housing setting we have had to re-evaluate a lot of our support mechanisms to adapt to the new normal."*

"The 'Step Down Care' Project at The Bank in East Belfast which won 'best housing story' demonstrates exactly that. The Belfast Trust needed urgent patient accommodation to free up space for their Covid-19 facility at Belfast City Hospital. Through our subsidiary Maple and May we have provided appropriate accommodation for acute mental health inpatients in one of our new developments on Belfast's Woodstock Road – The Bank."

"Initially conceived as a short term "Covid" arrangement, such has been the success of the project, the Trust has now decided to make it part of a long-term care provision."

Choice Housing's other award wins came in the Inspirational Young Housing Professional category (Catriona McCann) and Excellence in Championing Equality and Diversity for their Diversity Programme.

Michael McDonnell added, *"I would like to congratulate our colleague Catriona McCann for being recognised as an inspirational young housing professional. Catriona has worked with tenants to deliver real change in their lives whilst engaging with the local community and local partners on a range of important issues. Catriona displays the type of commitment and drive that see many of our housing teams recognised for their work".*

Choice Housing's Equality and Diversity Programme, which was also recognised at the awards included a wide range of schemes and initiatives which promoted integration, raising awareness of key issues and building futures through scholarships and accreditation.

The housing association was shortlisted in a further four categories:

- Working in Partnership
- Housing Team of the Year
- Excellence in Housing Innovation
- Excellence in Health and Wellbeing



Hat trick for Choice at CIH awards

Investing in our workforce

Apprenticeships at Choice

Speaking of his apprenticeship with Choice Services, Daniel Mackey said: "I feel like my apprenticeship with Choice Services has allowed me to learn a new skillset and I have enjoyed this learning curve."

Choice currently maintains over 13,000 high quality homes and employs over 400 people in a Group structure that includes our own repairs and maintenance (Choice Services), private rented and affordable for sale (Maple and May) and Republic of Ireland (Oaklee Housing & Comhar FM) subsidiaries.

We are a 'profit for a purpose' social enterprise and, as part of our commitment to investing in communities, we have recruited a number of apprentices. Apprenticeships are an exciting opportunity for both employer and apprentice and create the best learning experience, giving the apprentice hands-on training

and the chance to put their skills into practice on a daily basis.

Our current apprentices include Daniel Mackey and Luke Patterson. Daniel is working towards completing his NVQ in plumbing and heating level 2 and Luke is currently working towards his a four year level 3 electro-technical apprenticeship.

Speaking of his apprenticeship with Choice Services, Daniel Mackey said: "I feel like my apprenticeship with Choice Services has allowed me to learn a new skillset and I have enjoyed this learning curve."

Another apprentice, Luke Patterson has found: "Working for choice has helped me understand and enjoy the trade I'm in and the people I have worked with have helped me improve in my work."

James Sterling, Managing Director of Choice Services would like to see these apprenticeship opportunities propel the participants towards sustainable employment. "We have worked closely with Belfast Metropolitan college to ensure employment and college training have continued throughout the Pandemic.

We feel that this has given the apprentices a boost in confidence, letting them know that they are valued members of the overall Choice Services Team."

If you are interested in an apprenticeship with Choice Services Ltd and would like more information, you can contact HR@choice-housing.org

choice
services

Carbon Monoxide (CO) Safety

What causes it?

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

Recognise the signs!

Typical signs of faulty appliances include:

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

Recognise the symptoms!

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

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

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

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

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

Symptoms to look out for include:

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

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

What can I Do?

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

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

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

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



DON'T:

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

DO:

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

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

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



Help with your money



Money Advice
for our Tenants



Advice on Benefits and Grants

Our Financial Inclusion Team provides advice to all new tenants on how to apply for any relevant benefit to help pay for your home. The team can also give advice on any grants 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.



The past year has created uncertainty for all of us and with it many challenges. For many people job security and the impact of the pandemic on personal finances are a primary concern. At Choice we are ready to support all our tenants through this difficult time.

Our Financial Inclusion Team are on hand and available to speak to you should you have any questions or feel you would like practical advice about money issues. Personal finances can be a challenge to confront, but our dedicated team are always sensitive and discrete. Aidan and his team have been able to use their combined experience over many years, responding quickly and creatively to tenants' concerns.

The Financial Inclusion Team are delivering value for money for both the organisation and tenants alike. In the last year the team helped tenants access £1.76 million in financial gains, such as:

- Benefit maximisation and help applying for financial uplifts
- Housing benefit entitlement checks and assistance to increase where possible
- Securing grants to help set up home
- Support for tenants in arrears by establishing sustainable repayment plans based on the tenants personal budget
- Applications to benevolent funds
- Support with Universal Credit applications and maintenance of claims.

A family member of a Choice tenant, who was contacted by the team when her brother had fallen into arrears after his benefits had stopped, commented.

"We could not have managed without the help of the Financial Inclusion Team. I would encourage anyone to make use of this service. If you need help just ask for it...The team are more than happy to help."

So if you would like to speak to a member of the team please call 0300 111 2211 today.



Please give us a call now on
0300 111 2211

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

Give us a call and see how we can help.

Connect with Choice



@ChoiceHousing



@choice_housing



enquiries@choice-housing.org

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.

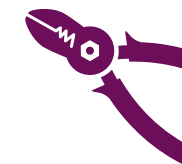
Gas Safety



Target
100%

100%
Units with valid
gas certificate

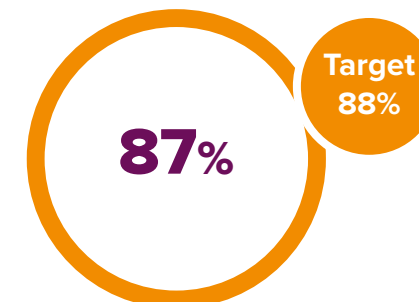
Repairs



Target
90%

96.4%
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



Target
6%

3.03%
Staff absenteeism (days)

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

Performance figures are for the period April 2020 - March 2021

59 new defibrillators installed at our sheltered living schemes across Northern Ireland.



Choice invests £145,000 life saving equipment

Investing in our communities is a priority for Choice, and in 2020 we installed 59 new defibrillators at our sheltered living schemes across the province. This life saving initiative involves an initial cost of £115,000 with a further £30,000 over the next 8 years.

A defibrillator is a device that gives a high energy electric shock to the heart of someone who is in cardiac arrest. This high energy shock is called defibrillation, and it is an essential part in trying to save the life of someone who is in cardiac arrest. The British Heart Foundation website has lots of helpful information about defibrillators.

Choice is working closely with Aero Healthcare to deliver this project. Aero Healthcare are a major brand in Healthcare, First Aid and First Response and will also provide training for staff and tenants in the use of defibrillators if needed in an emergency situation. The defibrillators being installed are easy to use and come with step-by-step instructions.

Choice sheltered living schemes are centrally located within their respective communities, each unit will be registered with Northern Ireland Ambulance Services and available to the local community and as such, this investment will reach beyond Choice tenants and benefit the entire community.

Michael McDonnell, Group Chief Executive said: 'Choice, working in partnership with Banner and Aero Healthcare, are delighted to be installing defibrillators in nearly 60 sheltered living schemes across Northern Ireland. This investment demonstrates Choice's continued commitment to providing great homes and services in the community.'

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.

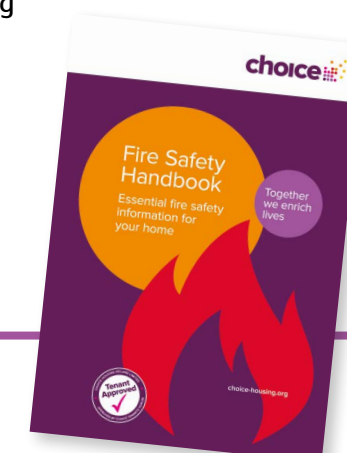
INSEC WILL NOT VISIT THE TENANT MAKING THE COMPLAINT. THIS PROCESS IS TO ENSURE CONFIDENTIALITY IS MAINTAINED.

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 or call 0300 111 2211 to request a copy.



STAY SAFE

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



LED Upgrade saves money for Choice Tenants

annual cost
savings of over
£2,000

In 2019/20 Choice carried out lighting upgrades at a number of our sheltered and supported housing schemes, with LEDs fitted along with sensors to ensure lighting is available when it is required.

Choice has an 'Energy & Sustainable Development Strategy' in place, as well as a target to invest £150,000 over two years in enhanced energy projects. LED lighting in common areas of housing schemes was quickly identified as a worthwhile investment, and so 3 housing schemes were selected to have this upgrade carried out. This is in addition to other schemes where similar upgrades were carried out due to existing lighting coming to the end of its life.

In total, across these 3 schemes over £60,000 was invested, with numerous benefits for Choice and our customers. Electricity costs are normally passed on to tenants

as part of service charges, and so reduced electricity consumption will not only have a positive impact on the environment, but it will also deliver financial savings for our tenants. In addition, the new lighting is anticipated to reduce maintenance costs for the Association and have an extended life expectancy.

One area often overlooked is the quality of light which offers health and safety improvements. Positive feedback was received in this area from a number of tenants, including one comment that it was an improvement for their painting classes which were held in the common room at one of the schemes.

Following the lighting upgrade, another tenant commented, **"We are all really impressed with the new lights. They are so much brighter than the old one's and really help to provide a nice bright and**

safe atmosphere in the corridors and outside areas of the scheme. We also really like the automatic lights in the corridor which works really well staying on long enough to get from the lift to our apartment. We also haven't noticed any not working, where with the old one's every week there was always one or two in our corridor that needed to be replaced."

As these upgrades are recent, data is not yet available on reduced electricity consumption, however based on 3 similar previous upgrades at other schemes Choice estimates an annual saving of around 20,000kWh per scheme, with annual cost savings of over £2,000 per housing scheme.

Choice and Victoria Housing complete £20m stock transfer

Choice Housing and Victoria Housing Estates Limited (VHE) have finalised their £20m stock transfer which has seen over 300 previously managed VHE properties move across to Choice with more than 130 tenants opting to purchase their own home. As part of the transfer agreement, the properties will undertake a programme of renovation and refurbishment which will ensure they not only meet the Decent Homes Standard but they align with the quality services currently provided to more than 10,000 Choice tenants across Northern Ireland. The investment programme, which was approved at the start of 2020 included a period of consultation between the two housing providers and all VHE tenants.

Michael McDonnell, Chief Executive of Choice said: "We are pleased to be able to complete this stock transfer which further demonstrates our commitment to investing in sustainable social housing which will stand the test of time. "Throughout this process we were acutely aware that this was more than an investment project between two organisations, this was about the future of tenants and their homes – their engagement and contribution was vital to making this a successful outcome for all. "It was pleasing to see many tenants take up the option of purchasing their own homes – something we actively encouraged. Now that we have finalised

tenancy agreements and stock has successfully transferred we are working towards completing the agreed renovations. "I would like to welcome our new tenants to the Choice family and we look forward to continuing with our commitment to investing in local communities.

Dawn Purvis the Chief Executive of Victoria Housing Estates added: "Following an initial assessment and consultation process it was clear that Choice were best placed to deliver local services to tenants that we could no longer facilitate. This stock transfer not only ensures that tenants keep their homes but that the much needed investment in these properties is guaranteed. Choice Housing has consistently demonstrated their commitment to investing in communities and have always had a tenant focus when delivering key services – these were attributes we felt were central in ensuring a successful transfer of homes to a new housing association."



**£20m
stock
transfer**

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Out & About

Choice has more than 10,000 tenants, over 400 staff and works with numerous partners and stakeholders; so it's no surprise that there is always plenty of activity going on in all the communities we support.

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

Contact us at:

editor@choice-housing.org



BEAUTIFUL LEGACY AT CRAIGNAGORE

We are very proud of our tenants at Craignagore, Newcastle who have raised £220 for RNLI in the memory of their good friend and neighbour, Oliver Smyth.

Oliver was a former tenant of the scheme, who sadly passed away very suddenly and his family asked for donations to be made to RNLI in lieu of flowers.

Our tenant, Colin Moore from Craignagore, was delighted to be presented with a certificate from a member of RNLI to commend their kind donation.

This is such a heartwarming gesture which would no doubt make Oliver very proud.

ACTIVITY PACKS ARE WELL RECEIVED IN FERNANAGH

Tenants at our sheltered living scheme, Westbridge House, Enniskillen were delighted to receive Activity Packs from Lakeland Community Care.

SPRING CLEAN AT THE ROSSES, DERRY~LONDONDERRY

Tenants at the scheme have been fundraising over the winter months. Now that spring has arrived they have sprung into action creating a beautiful outside space for all to enjoy.

"In addition to a tenants fund currently held by Inspire, we ran a weekly Bonus Ball for the past six months costing £2 with £1 going towards the garden fund. The work is now complete and I would especially like to thank the person who came up with the idea, Alwyn Carnwath who also did much of the "heavy" work associated with the project. Other tenants who put in hours of effort to complete the project include Jackie, Anne-Marie, Patsy and Gladys. We would not have been able to do this without the support and co-ordination of Paula from Inspire." William Wilson.



THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

A local business generously provided new festive decorations for Lowtherstown Court, a sheltered living scheme in Irvinestown.

The local business is Castle Irvine Estate which shares a historical connection with Lowtherstown Court. Castle Irvine Estate was originally built in the 17th century by Gerald Lowther, and Irvinestown was originally called Lowtherstown, which is how our sheltered living scheme was named.





CLACHAN COURT COUNTING CASH!

In normal times the Macmillan coffee morning is a huge event for Clachan Court, Enniskillen. Undeterred by the restrictions the tenants and staff were determined to do what they could this year to continue to raise funds for this great charity.

Our fabulous Scheme Co-ordinator, Catherine McManus came up with the simple but effective idea to decorate a stand near the entrance to the scheme on the road. Decked out in Macmillan colours and letting the

local community know through the church newsletter, they attracted plenty of attention!

"Myself and two friends of mine sat at the table with masks, for just one hour! We put the details in the local Church notices, explaining that we couldn't hold the usual coffee morning but if anyone wishes to stop by with a donation we would be so grateful.

We thought if we got a few £100 we would be doing well but the response was over whelming and we collected £1500 we could not believe it."

Congratulations to Catherine and her fantastic team!

100 MILE CHALLENGE

Almost 30 staff from across Choice took part in the 100 mile challenge whether it was walking, running, climbing and cycling all over the country.

Well done to all our staff who helped raise £4000 for Action Cancer and Alzheimer's Society!



CANCER FUND FOR CHILDREN DONATION

Last year Craginagore, held a raffle with proceeds going to Daisy Lodge, Cancer Fund for Children, well done to everyone involved.



TENANTS AT ELMGROVE MANOR HAVE BEEN BUSY RAISING MONEY TO CARRY OUT A GARDEN MAKEOVER AT THE SCHEME.

On Pancake Tuesday two tenants made 200 pancakes and sold them to everyone in the building raising £400!

Their local Community Centre has kindly asked Belfast City Council and the Greenway team if they would be able to assist with the project.

Keep up the good work and we look forward to an update later in the year!



100 YEARS YOUNG!

A very happy birthday to Mrs Hannah Taylor who is celebrating her 100th birthday. Mrs Taylor has lived at our sheltered living scheme, Elmgrove Manor, in East Belfast for over 10 years, since returning from Canada where she lived with her husband for 60 years.

The first centenarian at Elmgrove Manor, Mrs Taylor is a very active member of the community and starts every day with a fry-having missed potato bread in Canada, she is making up for lost time now!

With a letter from the Queen as well as a personal note from the Canadian Prime Minister, the celebrations were not dampened by the current restrictions. Many of her neighbours managed to sing Happy Birthday to her from the garden, and her family provided a beautiful cake fitting for such a fabulous milestone.

Happy birthday and best wishes Mrs Taylor from everyone at Choice.



Creative Corner

Created for our tenants, Choice News provides information on our work as well as connecting our communities.

Our Editorial Team, made up of tenants and staff are always on the hunt for creative input. Do you have something you would like to share?

A story, a piece of art, a poem or a thought led article? If so, we really want to hear from you, so get in touch with us editor@choice-housing.org



Best Kept Garden Competition 2021

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 tenant's garden, or a scheme garden providing it is tended by the tenant 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 17th September 2021
to the Editor,
Choice News
FREEPOST BEL2371,
Belfast BT1 6BR.



WIN
£100
Shopping
Voucher

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

Ts & Cs apply.

Best Kept Garden Competition 2021

Your details

Name:

Address:

.....

.....

Telephone No:

Email:

Nominee Detail (if different)

Name:

Address:

.....

.....

Telephone No:

Email:

Choice Scholarships Supporting University Students

The ‘Choice Scholarships’, in partnership with Queen’s University and Ulster University, provide much needed support to those who face financial, social and logistical barriers to furthering their education.

Launched in 2019, the scholarship scheme supports students who face barriers to participating in higher education, providing financial assistance for the lifetime of the project.

Karen Delgado, Head of Corporate Engagement at Ulster University: *“Since the start of the pandemic, many students have lost part-time jobs and are experiencing reduced family income. It has become even more important to provide financial support so that our students have the means to complete their education successfully.”*

“We are very grateful to Choice Housing for their ongoing support for these Scholarships which make a practical and positive difference to our students’ lives.”

Commenting on the latest Prizes, Outreach Officer for the Queen’s Widening Participation Unit Ted Jensen (above right), said: *“We are delighted to be awarding a Choice Housing Prize to these three students to recognise their academic achievements this year. We are very grateful to Choice Housing for providing this generous support to our students.”*

“The Widening Participation Unit at Queen’s has worked with a range of young people, teachers, schools, colleges and parents to raise the profile of opportunities open to those who want to achieve academic success.”

Welcoming the prizes Teresa Sloan, Head of Health Fundraising in the Development and Alumni Relations Office at Queen’s, said:

“The University welcomes the continued and very generous support of Choice Housing for these important prizes, which celebrate high achieving students who have participated in our widening participation programmes.”

“It is particularly welcome as the prizes acknowledge academic success across our three faculties, Medicine Health and Life Sciences (MHLS), Engineering and Physical Sciences (EPS), and Arts Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS).”

For Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences recipient Sophie Mayse (second from left) the Choice Housing Prize is about much more than money.

Expressing her heartfelt gratitude Sophie said:

“I couldn’t be more thankful to Choice Housing for this award! I have been a lot more motivated in my studies since receiving it as I now feel the work I put in doesn’t go unnoticed. I’m feeling very grateful for this generosity and will certainly put it to good use.”

Speaking about the Choice Housing Prizes and Scholarships, Lawrence Jackson, Group Director of Corporate Services at Choice Housing and a Queen’s alumnus said:

“We are delighted to be continuing this important partnership with Ulster University and Queen’s. “Everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances, should have the same opportunities to go on to third level education and, through this initiative, we aim to support and motivate students from Widening Participation backgrounds to achieve academic excellence and to complete their studies.”

“We hope that through these initiatives, Choice Housing can help the individual recipients to succeed in the future and contribute to creating stronger inclusive communities.”



Tiago Realinho (Biochemistry), Sophie Mayse (Economics with Finance) and Jacob McArdle (Software Engineering) were each awarded prizes of £1,000 in recognition of their academic attainments.



The Choice Scholarship recipients 2019 – Katie Boyd, Michael Cassidy and Callum Edwards with Lawrence Jackson, Group Director of Corporate Services, Choice Housing and Karen Delgado, Head of Corporate Engagement, Ulster University (image taken before the pandemic).



Don't tip your oil tank!

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

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

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



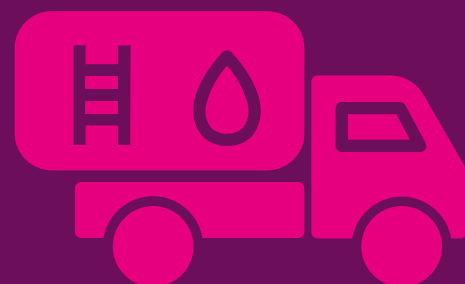
USEFUL TIPS FOR REFILLING YOUR OIL TANK...

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

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

Oil Buying Club

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



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



northern ireland
water

Delivering what matters

Find out more at
niwater.com

Delivering New Homes In 2021

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

28 new homes in Ballybeen Square, Phase 2, Dundonald

This NIHE Transfer Scheme completes the 2nd phase of much needed social housing in the Ballybeen Area of Dundonald. These family homes are accredited to Secured by Design and Lifetime Homes standards. We wish our new tenants best wishes in their new homes.



Award Winning Killynure, Phase 2, Carryduff

This 24 home scheme completes Choice's award winning Killynure Scheme and incorporates design elements from the first phase resulting in a coherent development. The homes are arranged around a communal landscaped area which links to a children's play area. Two complex needs bungalows have been included within the scheme for designated families.

The design of the units incorporates an aesthetic palette of materials including self-coloured render, grey window frames, coloured entrance doors, grey feature cladding panels and black roof tiles. The building fabric has been designed to reduce heat loss and includes triple glazing and photovoltaic panels to provide electricity for tenants.



Contemporary design for 42 homes at The Brick Works, Belfast

The recently completed Design & Build development at 163 Ormeau Road provides much needed social housing accommodation in the Lower Ormeau area. The Brickworks was developed by H & J Martin Ltd at their former headquarters of over 100 years. The site's historical use as a former brick works has been incorporated into the design.

This development offers contemporary design in keeping with the existing streetscape of the Ormeau Road and is accredited to Secured by Design and Lifetime Homes standards.



Building work is underway for 17 new homes at Hulls Hill, Lisburn

Choice Housing Ireland Ltd with support from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive are providing much needed social housing on the Moira Road, Lisburn, where demand for quality affordable social housing is high.

The development, named Hulls Hill, located at 198-200 Moira Road will complete in June 2021 providing 17 new homes consisting of;

- 4no. 4-person 2-bedroom apartments
- 4no. 3-person 2-bedroom apartments
- 1no. 6-person 3-bedroom house
- 8no. 5-person 3-bedroom houses

We are pleased to advise that Hulls Hill has been accepted to the 2020/21 Programme for Government 'Housing for All' Shared Housing Programme. The Shared Housing Programmes vision is;

"A united community, based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation - one which is strengthened by its diversity, where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance."

The Shared Housing Programme reflects the NI Executive's commitment to improving community relations and continuing the journey towards a more united and shared society, and it represents a major change in the way that good relations will be delivered across government.



We wish our tenants best wishes in their new homes.

The Muriel Smyth Good Neighbour Award 2021

To assist you in your nominations here are a few guidelines of what the judges will be looking for:

The Muriel Smyth Good Neighbour Award will be judged by a panel made up of Board Members, Staff and Tenants' Forum Representatives. You can nominate your neighbour by completing and returning the attached entry form. If you are unable to complete the form or require assistance, please contact the Services Centre on 0300 111 2211, who will be pleased to help.

- Have they helped you out at a time of crisis or are they a good neighbour all the time?
- Do they help you with your garden or do the shopping for you when you can't?
- Perhaps they have looked after your children so you can have a break or even go to work?
- Maybe they've just been there when you needed someone to talk to?
- The person nominated and the nominator must both be tenants of Choice.
- More than one person can be listed as nominator, however, anonymous nominations will not be accepted.
- Listing the special qualities that are the reasons for nomination of the person concerned will assist in the judging.

Ts & Cs apply.

Closing Date:
17th September 2021

WIN
£100
Shopping
Voucher



The Muriel Smyth Good Neighbour Award 2021

Your details

Name:

Address:

Tel:

Nominee Detail

Name:

Address:

Tel:

Reasons for nomination:

All nominations should be forwarded to:
Marketing Officer,
Choice
FREEPOST BEL2371,
Belfast BT1 6BR
by 12 noon on
17th September 2021

The Muriel Smyth Good Neighbour Award 2020



"The smile and the wave say it all"
Joe Doherty has won the Choice Muriel Smyth Good Neighbour Award 2020.

Joe lives at Donal Casey Court, our sheltered living scheme in Derry~Londonderry. Joe was nominated for the Good Neighbour award by a host of his fellow tenants. It is clear from his friends' many testimonials that he is a support, a gentleman and a friend to everyone at the scheme, he even checks in on Mary the scheme co-ordinator to make sure she is doing ok. One neighbour commented-

"I am not the only one he helps, he helps us all, and nothing is too much trouble, always with a smile and a joke."

Our judging panel found this decision very difficult as they were overwhelmed with the moving nominations of so many of our wonderful tenants.

On behalf of everyone at Donal Casey Court and Choice, congratulations Joe on your well deserved award.



choice 
Together we enrich lives



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 27th August 2021.

(Please note that the parent or guardian 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 Tel. Evening Tel.

Win a family pass to a local Open Farm!

Different ways to pay your rent and other charges

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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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

Focus on The Milewater

If you are looking for Sheltered Living Accommodation take a look at The Milewater. Situated on North Queen Street and with a bus stop just outside the scheme, The Milewater is conveniently located near the Yorkgate Shopping Centre.

The Scheme is only a 2 minute walk to shops, a post office and cafes. The Milewater contains 30 self-contained apartments with lift access to the upper floor and 4 bungalows. This includes; 20 single bedroom apartments, 10 double bedroom apartments, 1 double bedroom bungalow and 3 two bedroom bungalows. Each apartment has just been upgraded to gas central heating and all have the benefit of a new fitted kitchen.

We have immediately available accommodation at The Milewater, contact us if you would like to apply.

✉ enquiries@choice-housing.org

📞 0300 111 2211



Facilities Include:

- Ⓟ Car Parking
- 🌸 Garden
- 🍴 Gardening Club
- 🛏 Guest Room
- ✂ Hairdressing Facilities
- 🧺 Laundry Facilities
- 👥 Communal Lounge

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**

choice 
Together we enrich lives

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f **t** **in**