



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

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

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# FOREWORD



In the pages of this report, alongside an overview of our governance, you will find an update on how we are performing across a number of key areas, namely our environment, our communities and our people. It is very clear to the Group Board and the Senior Management Team at Choice that we must always act responsibly. We serve thousands of tenants, deploying the efforts of hundreds of colleagues to deliver services essential to our communities. Our success relies in no small part, on the fact we do so responsibly and with integrity, every day.

We are committed to being transparent, showing you in the pages of this report where we have made good progress and where we have more to do. And we believe that we are making some progress – reflected in part by our environmental data which this year shows an 16.7% reduction in our Scope 2 emissions.

That said, geopolitical events have meant that delivering a year-on-year reduction in emissions has not been possible and Choice has seen a 2.6% rise in our Scope 1 emissions and a 21.6% rise in our Scope 3 emissions. This does not mean collective progress has halted. Rather, it highlights that progress is likely to accelerate at a point when energy systems are ready for a significant switch to electricity. Gradual improvement is possible, but lasting and truly impactful change is something which will require input from more than Choice. We remain committed to working with others to deliver a permanent reduction in emissions.

Many of our stakeholders are aligned to a goal of delivering net zero. But some are nervous about what this means for them and their communities, about how this can be done both at speed and with value for money, and about the lasting impact on biodiversity and landscapes. Our sector is not alone in facing this challenge, but with the extensive life cycle of our new homes, we must be at the forefront of finding solutions. In doing so, we will be working to lower our tenants' bills over the long term, to encourage more green jobs and to support the steps required to tackle climate change. We are working with regulators and policymakers to progress the transition at pace and deliver a net zero future.

And we are helping right now, too. For many of the communities we serve, this past winter has been more difficult than those before it. Global spikes in energy prices have driven bills to unprecedented levels and

it is clear that this has had an impact on households across Northern Ireland. Last year we announced a £500,000 support fund to assist tenants facing the cost of living crisis. We are delighted that we were able to reach 6,099 households that needed our support. Of those we helped, 1,972 were supported with emergency energy supplies and 94 were supported with essential household purchases. Our Financial Inclusion Team realised £6.06m in financial support for tenants through grants and additional claims for Universal Credit. These additional funds will have been spent in Northern Ireland and will have helped to support our tenants and local businesses.

Our people are the lifeblood of our business. The health, safety and well-being of employees and tenants is our primary concern and a key priority for everyone at Choice. After the death of a young child in England from a respiratory disease linked to damp and mould in their home, we established a working group to review how we recognise and treat the issue in our tenants' homes. That group expanded its remit to include other issues that may be affecting the health and well-being of our tenants and is due to conclude its work shortly. The outcome of this work will see us launch a new campaign in the autumn for our employees called 'Every Visit Matters'. All of our staff who have a reason to be in a tenant's home will be able recognise any signs of disrepair or of distress impacting on our tenants and will have the capability and support to report and address the underlying issues.

It matters deeply to us as an organisation that we reflect the communities we serve. Our Group Board and Committee membership and our Senior Management Team are diverse forums but we recognise that there is always more to do. Our commitment to equality of opportunity and removing barriers to participation remains undiminished. We are very proud of the work that Choice staff are engaged in day and daily to promote shared housing and to enable integrated, diverse and successful communities across our neighbourhoods.

Thank you for the interest in the third edition of our Annual ESG and we look forward to building upon our recent achievements in the years ahead.

**Joe Higgins**  
Group Chairperson

# INTRODUCTION

Choice has adopted the Sustainability Reporting Standard (SRS) which is divided into the following twelve ESG themes:



## 01/ENVIRONMENTAL

Theme 6 – Climate Change

Theme 7 – Ecology

Theme 8 – Resource Management



## 02/SOCIAL


Theme 1 – Affordability and Security

Theme 2 – Building Safety

Theme 3 – Resident Voice

Theme 4 – Resident Support

Theme 5 – Place Shaping

These themes have been aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)'.  




## 03/GOVERNANCE

Theme 9 – Structure and Governance

Theme 10 – The Radius Board

Theme 11 – Staff Wellbeing

Theme 12 – Supply Chain



Climate Change

## C14 - Core

Distribution of EPC ratings of existing homes (those completed before the last financial year).

Criteria	Measurement Unit	Response
Distribution of EPC ratings of existing homes (those completed before the last financial year).	% of homes rated A	0.8%
	% of homes rated B	30.8%
	% of homes rated C	36.2%
	% of homes rated D	11.9%
	% of homes rated E or worse	0.7%
	% of homes without EPC rating (unknown)	19.6%

## C15 - Core

Distribution of EPC ratings of existing homes (those completed in the last financial year).

Criteria	Measurement Unit	Response
Distribution of EPC ratings of new homes (those completed in the last financial year).	% of homes rated A	0.0%
	% of homes rated B	100.0%
	% of homes rated C	0.0%
	% of homes rated D	0.0%
	% of homes rated E or worse	0.0%
	% of homes without EPC rating (unknown)	0.0%

## C16 - ENHANCED

Scope 1, Scope 2 and Scope 3 green house gas emissions.

Criteria	Measurement Unit	Response
Scope 1, Scope 2 and Scope 3 green house gas emissions.	Scope 1: Kg CO2 equivalent	3,710,800
	Scope 2: Kg CO2 equivalent	1,068,300
	Scope 3: Kg CO2 equivalent	81,600
	Scope 1, 2 & 3: Total Kg CO2 equivalent	4,860,700

## C17 - ENHANCED

What energy efficiency actions has the housing provider undertaken in the last 12 months?

### Energy Saving Week

Choice hold an annual energy engagement week to raise awareness of ways to save money and help the environment. During this week Choice publish articles, videos and tips on our website and social media platforms to engage with tenants on saving energy.

During this year's event Choice took focus on five key areas: (1) energy efficiency, (2) fuel switch, (3) heating controls, (4) behavioural change tips and (5) switch and save. Choice's Energy Saving week is a central part of our efforts to combat fuel poverty throughout our tenant base.

Choice also made significant investment in energy efficiency. Through our planned maintenance programme we completed works on boiler replacements with a focus on conversion from oil to gas, we installed LED lighting in place of less efficient options and upgraded the loft insulation in many homes. To support an enhanced approach to planned maintenance energy efficiency, Choice created a new role for a Mechanical & Electrical Project Manager.

Choice have published our Sustainability & Energy Strategy 2022-2025 which outlines our ambition to become net-zero by 2050. This three year Strategy details the body of work we will undertake to continue reductions in Scope 1&2 emissions, whilst starting to addresses scope 3 emissions otherwise not reported presently. i.e. we aim to establish a full lifecycle carbon footprint

and set an interim 2030 decarbonisation target in line with net-zero trajectories to 2050.

in 2022/23 we commenced some key parts of our new sustainability strategy. Including, (1) Increasing coverage of EPCs from 84% to 90% to determine properties at risk of climate non-compliance, (2) adopted retrofit data modelling software to determine pathways to our 2030, 2040 and 2050 net-zero targets, (3) completed 5 shallow retrofit projects (i.e. EPC Band EFG to Band C), (4) outlined three properties for 'deep retrofit' pilots (i.e. EPC Band D-G to Band A), (5) completed PAS2035 training to manage our retrofit projects, (6) assigned a development project to our next 'landmark' sustainable homes project, (7) agreed project aspirations for our 'landmark' project, (8) commenced training on modern construction practices and sustainability accreditations & (9) agreed the projects for our Greenhouse Gas innovation fund to reduce current scope 1&2 emissions.

In addition to these works we have enhanced our Mechanical and Electrical design guide to reflect a best in class approach to energy system specification and maintenance. Likewise our new-build design guide has been enhanced to reflect research completed by our Sustainability & Energy Team to deliver thermal efficiency above and beyond the June 2022 uplift to Part F of the NI Building Regulations. This is otherwise referred to as our 'Energy Efficiency Blueprint'.

## C18 - ENHANCED

How is the housing provider mitigating the following climate risks:

- Increased flood risk
- Increased risk of homes overheating

Our staff are being trained to assess these risks.

## C19 - ENHANCED

Does the housing provider give residents information about correct ventilation, heating, recycling etc? Please describe how this is done.

Choice publishes articles, videos and tips on our website and social media platforms to engage with tenants on correct ventilation, heating systems and controls and recycling. We provide information in New Tenancy Packs, place posters at schemes and distribute leaflets on particular topics so that our tenants have the most up to date information available.



## C20 - ENHANCED

How is the housing provider increasing Green Space and promoting Biodiversity on or near homes?

Choice have commenced the Green Space projects outlined in our new Sustainability & Energy Strategy. We have continued to develop our relationship with local authorities that enhance the local biodiversity of the communities we serve. In addition to our work with Belfast City Council's 1 Million Trees project, we have established local tree & shrub supply chains with Lisburn City & Castlereagh Council and agreed to support Mid and East Antrim Council on their 1 Million Trees project. Furthermore, we are scoping out opportunities to develop biodiversity spaces within existing developments in partnership with our community development team.

With regards to new-build biodiversity, Choice have partnered with Ulster Wildlife to provide consultation on the landscape plans of five 2023/24 developments. The outcome of this project is to provide Choice with an enhanced design guide which includes a natural environment specification complete with stipulations on habitat creation. In doing so we have established partnerships with other conservations charities, such as RSPB and Conservation for Swifts. Part of this project includes integration of 16 swift bricks at one of our 2022/23 development projects to understand the benefits of this and our tenants reaction.



Ecology

Included in Choice's sustainability & energy strategy is our three stage plan to transform ourselves into a 'Net-Zero Housing Association' by 2050. In order to achieve this Choice need to make significant emissions reductions at all lifecycle stages of our homes, including tackling pollutants other than Carbon Dioxide. Our interim plan to 2030 includes the development of a complete 'value chain' emissions footprinting exercise and decarbonisation plan inline with the requirements of the Paris Agreement.



## C21 - ENHANCED

Does the housing provider have a strategy to actively manage and reduce all pollutants? Yes.

If so, how does the housing provider target and measure performance?

Included in Choice's Sustainability & Energy Strategy is our three stage plan to transform ourselves into a 'Net-Zero Housing Association' by 2050. In order to achieve this Choice aim to make significant emissions reductions at all lifecycle stages of our homes, including tackling pollutants other than carbon dioxide. Our interim plan to 2030 includes the development of a complete 'value chain' emissions footprinting exercise and decarbonisation plan in line with the requirements of the Paris Agreement.



Resource Management



## C22 - ENHANCED

Does the housing provider have a strategy to use or increase the use of responsibly sourced materials for all building works?

If so, how does the housing provider target and measure performance?

Planning to develop one.

## C23 - ENHANCED

Does the housing provider have a strategy for waste management incorporating building materials?

If so, how does the housing provider target and measure performance?

Planning to develop one.

## C24 - ENHANCED

Does the housing provider have a strategy for good water management?

If so, how does the housing provider target and measure performance?

Planning to develop one.



### C1 - Core

For properties that are subject to the rent regulation regime, report against one or more Affordability Metric:

Rent compared to Median private rental sector (PRS) rent across the Local Authority

% of PRS rent  
(e.g. 80%)

**45.8%**



### C2 - Core

Criteria	Measurement Unit	Response		
"Share, and number, of existing homes (owned and managed) completed before the last financial year, allocated to:  - General needs (social rent) - Intermediate rent - Affordable rent - Supported Housing - Housing for older people - Low-cost home ownership - Care homes - Private Rented Sector - Other	Number of General Needs units	7487	% of General Needs units	65.1%*
	Number of Intermediate Rent units	0	% of Intermediate Rent units	0.0%*
	Number of Affordable Rent units	0	% of Affordable Rent units	0.0%*
	Number of Supported Housing units	1853	% of Supported Housing units	16.1%*
	Number of Housing for Older People units	1911	% of Housing for Older People units	16.6%*
	Number of Low-cost Home Ownership units	0	% of Low-cost Home Ownership units	0.0%*
	Number of Care Home units	0	% of Care Home units	0.0%*
	Number of Private Rented Sector units	253	% of Private Rented Sector units	2.2%*
	Number of Other units	0	% of Other units	0.0%*

\*% of total homes i.e. 11,678

### C3 - Core

Criteria	Measurement Unit	Response		
"Share, and number, of existing homes (owned and managed) completed in the last financial year, allocated to:  - General needs (social rent) - Intermediate rent - Affordable rent - Supported Housing - Housing for older people - Low-cost home ownership - Care homes - Private Rented Sector - Other	Number of General Needs units	235	% of General Needs units	95.1%
	Number of Intermediate Rent units	0	% of Intermediate Rent units	0.0%
	Number of Affordable Rent units	0	% of Affordable Rent units	0.0%
	Number of Supported Housing units	0	% of Supported Housing units	0.0%
	Number of Housing for Older People units	0	% of Housing for Older People units	0.0%
	Number of Low-cost Home Ownership units	0	% of Low-cost Home Ownership units	0.0%
	Number of Care Home units	0	% of Care Home units	0.0%
	Number of Private Rented Sector units	12	% of Private Rented Sector units	4.9%
	Number of Other units	0	% of Other units	0.0%

### C4 - Core

How is the housing provider trying to reduce the effect of fuel poverty on its residents?

Choice is one of the first housing associations to join the Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition, where we engage with other stakeholders to tackle this issue.

Fuel poverty occurs when 10% or more of household income is spent on energy costs with the main causes being high energy costs and low household incomes.

Choice manages some of the most energy efficient homes in Northern Ireland and continues to invest in energy efficiency. To help reduce fuel poverty levels, we advise all of our customers to:

- use energy wisely,
- compare energy suppliers and switch if beneficial and
- have a benefits check carried out by our Financial Inclusion Team.

### C5 - ENHANCED

What % of rental homes have at least a 3 year fixed tenancy agreement?

**93%**  
% of homes





Building Safety and Quality



Resident Voice

### C6 - Core

What % of homes with a gas appliance have an in-date, accredited gas safety check?

% of homes  
**100%**

### C7 - Core

What % of buildings have an in-date and compliant Fire Risk Assessment?

% of buildings  
**99.4%**

### C8 - Core

What % of homes meet the national housing quality standard?

% of homes  
**99%**

### C9 - Core

What arrangements are in place to enable the residents to hold management to account for provision of services?

Choice believes it is essential to consider the views of tenants with regards to service provision. The Association is committed to putting customers at the heart of service delivery and believes that by listening to and taking tenants' views on board we can ensure that policies and services are more responsive to changing needs and rising aspirations.

Choice deliver an annual Tenant Engagement Action Plan. This is compiled by Choice in consultation with the tenant representatives involved in the Choice tenant engagement structures. One of the key strategic actions identified with tenant representatives during the reporting year was a restructure of the tenant engagement framework. This further improves opportunities for engagement and ensures dissemination of key information relevant to their area ensuring that the voice of the tenant continues to be central to our work.

The Association's Menu of Involvement offers tenants a wide range of platforms to engage and work with us, including formal and informal group structures and specialist posts. We encourage and enable tenants to have a

say in the decisions that affect their homes and communities and to scrutinise the services they receive and the decisions that impact them. Tenants can participate in the a variety of ways including:

#### Choice Community Networks

The Association has six Community Area Networks which align to the housing management areas within the organisation. Each Network discusses housing related issues and shares best practice ideas. Throughout 2022-23, contact was maintained via bi-monthly meetings to ensure area issues continued to be identified and addressed. A total of 12 meetings of the Community Area Networks were facilitated, either in face-to-face engagement or utilising a hybrid method through Zoom.

#### The Central Community Network

The Central Network consists of tenant representatives from the various Networks to ensure there is representation from all areas. There are a total of 12 members on the Central Networks who are elected from each Area on a two yearly cycle. The Central Network's role is to consider policies, review service areas, participate in specific working groups / task groups and raise and address outstanding issues from the Area Networks. During

2022-23, two Central Network meetings were facilitated. Central Network members received governance training to enable effective participation in meetings.

This provided the opportunity for tenants to continue to be involved in influencing key decisions and policies. In 2022-23, Central Network members contributed to a review of tenant engagement documentation, including the restructuring of the tenant engagement model, and had significant input into the shaping of the key priorities for Choice as:

- The Chair of the Central Community Network is a member of the Association's Tenant & Client Services Committee (T&CS) and attends bi-monthly meetings to review information and performance of the Directorate, and to represent the views of tenants. The Chairperson then feeds back to Central Network helping to keep Central Network connected to T&CS Committee.
- The Central Network Chair and Vice Chair meet the Group Chief Executive and Group Director of Tenant & Client Services regularly providing a platform to discuss and raise tenant issues. The Chair and Vice Chair of the Central Network also have the facility to meet directly with the Chair of the Group Board and the Group Chief Executive to discuss service delivery and tenant related issues.





### C10 - Core

How does the housing provider measure Resident Satisfaction and how has Resident Satisfaction changed over the last three years?

Choice values tenant feedback and uses a variety of methods to collect feedback from tenants, as detailed above. In addition, the Association currently works in partnership with IFF Research, an independent company who carry out satisfaction surveys on our behalf. Tenants are contacted in real time once a repair or call has been completed ensuring that tenant feedback is timely and accurate. It is important that tenants feel that their opinions matter and that their voices are heard and as such, all feedback is monitored, reviewed and actioned as necessary. Tenants have the option to opt out of these surveys if they do not wish to participate. IFF Research surveys allow us to see how we are performing in relation to customer contact and repairs and to analyse what areas we can improve on.



For all response repairs, Tenants are issued a works order confirmation notice which includes an option to provide satisfaction feedback on both Choice and contractor performance, with all returns monitored and reported for continuous improvement purposes. Our contractors complete and share quality performance questionnaires for all repairs/adaptations, the results of which are shared with Choice. These are completed by tenants on completion of the works and include a proportion of supervisor inspection or tenant call-backs.

Additionally, we consult tenants prior to planned maintenance works, providing options where appropriate, and complete bespoke tenant satisfaction questionnaires for all planned and adaptations works.

In addition to measuring our performance, we also use Housemark's Sector Scorecard to benchmark with our peers to measure success and ensure we continue to aspire to achieve best practice standards, helping to do things better, faster and more cost effectively. Benchmarking reports are presented to SMT and the Board.



Choice Annual Report provides a summary of annual performance against targets. Overall Customer Satisfaction in 2020-21 was 87%, in 2021-22 it was 86% and 84% in 2022-23.



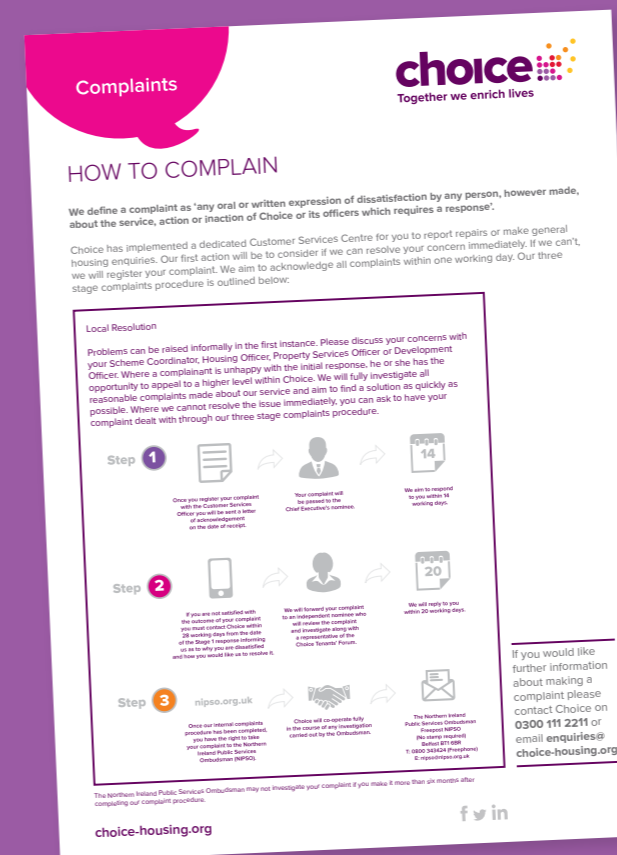
### C11 - ENHANCED

In the last 12 months, how many complaints have been upheld by the Ombudsman. None.

How have these complaints (or others) resulted in change of practice within the housing provider?

To facilitate tenant feedback and help improve service delivery, Choice provides a robust and transparent two stage complaints process. Details on how to make a complaint are included in the Tenant's Handbook with the complaint form being displayed in communal areas of our Sheltered Housing schemes. A copy of the Policy is accessible from the Association's website and can also be obtained on request by telephone, email, in writing or via social media. In addition, complainants are also issued with a printed copy of the procedure with every complaint acknowledgment.

Board/Committee and SMT receive regular reports, detailing the number of complaints received during the period, trends and performance against targets. A report is also prepared at the end of the year, detailing all formal complaint activity for the period including any lessons learned and recommendations for improvement in service provision. Throughout 2022-23, Supporting Communities continued to act as an independent panel to review Stage 2 complaints alongside elected tenant representatives.





## Resident Support

### C12 - Core

What support services does the housing provider offer to its residents. How successful are these services in improving outcomes?

#### Community Investment

As a social purpose organisation, Choice has a key role to play not only in providing homes, but also in creating vibrant and resilient communities, and supporting individuals and families through the provision of great services. We have a history of providing a variety of services for our tenants that can broadly be understood as 'Community Investment'. This is a key way that we, as a housing association, differentiate ourselves from other landlords, and is central to how we demonstrate our social purpose.

We are utilising the UK Social Value Bank ('UKSVB'), developed by HACT and Simetrica to measure the impact of our Community Investment activity. In 2022-23, there were eleven initiatives for which we could clearly identify the costs of delivery and subsequent impact on tenants and wider community. In the reporting year Choice spent £482,835 generating £10,762,182 of additional Social value. The estimate Gross Value Added to the Northern Ireland economy through Choice's business activity is GVA £75,288,378

sustaining an estimated 1,306 jobs throughout the supply chain.

Our 'Community Investment' is an essential commitment, and we deliver this in a range of support services. 'Economic Resilience' and 'Health and Well-being' are the two themes under which community investment activities are considered for funding. In the year 2022-23, Choice partnered with 11 organisations supporting nearly 270 individuals in accessing education and skills and/or improving their physical and mental health. Details of the initiative are listed below.

#### 'Economic Resilience'

##### Young Enterprise NI – Access Enterprise Programme

Four groups of young people aged 13-18 in Belfast and the North-West were supported by Choice to take part in the Access Enterprise Programme organised by Young Enterprise. The programme introduces the young people to the world of business, challenges them and ultimately raises their educational and career aspirations. The business environment offers a unique opportunity that will act as a mechanism to provide young people with an insight into the world of work, whilst enhancing their softer skills in teamwork, communication, presentation skills, confidence, and problem solving. The programme is also accredited with an OCN Level 1 in Vocational Skills and provides each participant access to gaining a recognised qualification.

##### The Rio Ferdinand Foundation Community Pilot Programme

In February 2023, Choice became the first housing association in Northern Ireland to partner with the well-established Rio Ferdinand Foundation (RFF) to support young people through a range of personal and professional development programmes. The RFF has worked in Northern Ireland since 2016 and provides mentoring and employment pathways to help young people in economically deprived communities.

The initial six-month pilot, running from January to June 2023, involved a combination of sports, music, media, and arts projects and was initially delivered to young people across South and East Belfast. The pilot project delivered progression opportunities with established partners of RFF including Warner Music UK / Ireland, UEFA Foundation, Community Foundation NI and Catalyst Belfast.

#### During the pilot:

**215 participants (aged 13 – 19) engaged in positive activities involving twice weekly sports and youth activities and personal development projects. Further engagement included:**

- Community Football Tournament with panel discussion featuring football legends – East Belfast (x35 Young People - YP)
- Refugee Integration Cup (x12 YP)
- Big Data In Sports Event (x24 YP)
- Digital Skills Workshops



(x80 YP)

- Community Football Tournament – HAPANI (x50 YP)
- Graffiti Art Project (x14 YP)

**69 accreditations achieved including:**

- Community Sports Leader Award (CSLA) Level 1 – East Belfast (x10 YP)
- CSLA Level 1 – HAPANI (x19 YP)
- Equality, Diversity, & Inclusion (x10 YP)
- Digital Skills Level 1 (x10 YP)
- Mental Health & Wellbeing (x20 YP)

**199 participants engaged in social action projects:**

- Graffiti Art Project (x14 YP + 10YP helped at painting sessions)
- Community Football tournaments (x85 YP)
- Somali National Day (x90 YP)

**98 Participants engaged with motivational and careers events:**

- Big Data in Sport learning about the use of technology within jobs in sport (x24 YP)
- Into the Sport Industry with Glentoran FC (x32 YP)
- Into the Tech Industry with Fibrus and W5 Life (x42 YP)

#### Choice Housing Scholarships

During the year, Choice also continued to work with Queen's University and Ulster University to provide financial support to

students facing financial, social or logistical barriers to furthering their education through its scholarship programme. The scheme, now in its final year, has run for five years with each awardee receiving £1,000 which helps to reduce the stress of financial pressures while studying, improve their self-confidence and give them an emotional boost.

#### Brian McKenna Student Placement Programme (incorporating the Brian McKenna Prize)

Brian McKenna, who passed away in February 2019, was a member of the Choice team for more than twenty years and, during his time with the organisation made a huge contribution to the lives of tenants, colleagues, and the communities he worked in. As a board member of the Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC), Brian was committed to working to improve the lives and opportunities for young people both professionally and personally.

In memory of Brian, the student placement programme offers seven students the opportunity to work for a year in the ICT, Assets, Finance and HR departments.

During their time with Choice they will receive support from a dedicated line manager who will guide them as they develop skills aimed at preparing them for employment, through practical learning and real time problem solving. Students earn a living wage during the year's placement and the opportunity to win

payment of their final year's tuition fee for submitting the winning entry in a business innovation programme.

#### Overlapping Themes Initiatives

##### Street Soccer NI – Four Nations Challenge Cup

Choice have supported Street Soccer NI (SSNI) on a number of occasions to attend the Homeless World Cup. Due to Covid restrictions this year's world cup was cancelled and replaced with the Four Nations Challenge Cup. This was a 3-day event held in Edinburgh and brought men's and women's teams from each of the UK home nations.

SSNI selected 8 men and 8 women from their projects in Belfast and Derry~Londonderry to represent Northern Ireland. Both teams got to the finals. All 16 players went through five weeks of trials and training in the lead up to the event. Each player completed a support plan was given one to one support to help make positive changes in their lives.

#### 'Health and Wellbeing'

##### Destitute Asylum Seekers Accommodation Project

This service commenced in 2018 to provide support to four women asylum seekers with no recourse to public funds. Choice partnered with Participation in Practice of Rights (PPR), Community Foundation Northern Ireland (CFNI), East Belfast Mission (EBM) and the NI Law Centre (LCNI) to provide furnished accommodation





and support services to support the women.

**Groundwork NI – Pop-up and Grow Workshops**

Groundwork NI deliver services and support across the region and have partnered with Choice to deliver six Pop-up and Grow workshops across the Choice Community Network.

The workshop lasts 2.5 hours with a maximum participant numbers of 12 per workshop. This workshop brings a mobile garden workshop to the community, teaching them the basics of growing their own food and lets them touch, smell and sample produce they could grow at home.

The benefits of getting involved in growing their own are clearly explained to participants, and includes reference to local spaces they could use (community gardens/allotments etc) and the legacy is that some will continue to grow their own.

The workshops help people come together to change the places where they live for the better and to develop their skills, build their confidence, improve mental health and wellbeing and make new friendships. It is aimed at giving communities the tools to take the lead for themselves and support collective action to tackle environmental challenges.

**Assist NI – Social Inclusion and Development Programme**

Assist-NI is a charity that works with people from the BAME communities suffering long-term illnesses and disabilities and who have been living in Belfast and surrounding areas. Their aim is to counter social isolation and serve as a base for community development.

The Social Inclusion and Development Programme (SIDP) brought together 30 men and women from the refugee and asylum seeking community, minority ethnic groups and settled/indigenous community. They participated in a series of workshops, group work sessions, and information sessions with the aim of reducing isolation, improving health and well-being, promoting inclusion and good relations and providing volunteering opportunities to individuals affected by intersectional discrimination.

02/SOCIAL 



Place Making

**C13 - ENHANCED**

Provide examples or case studies of where the housing provider has been engaged in placemaking or placeshaping activities.

Choice is committed to promoting inclusive and diverse communities. Throughout 2022-23 we continued to deliver on the Together: Building United Communities (T: BUC/Housing For All) shared housing programme. Choice is keen to participate in future peace funding models supporting shared housing and are key partners in a new Peace Plus partnership working through a new peace building bid for the sector.

The new shared housing schemes in Mullaghmore Road, Dungannon and Stiles Way Antrim will be ready for handover in the near future, however we have been very active partners in the Joint Advisory groups in Dungannon and Antrim, delivering various good relations initiatives in preparation for our new tenants taking up occupancy in their new homes.

Choice have submitted four new schemes for consideration onto the 2022-23 T: BUC Housing for All shared housing programme, Ballyoan Derry~Londonderry, Stiles Way Antrim (phase 2), Clonaver Drive Belfast and Greengage Ballymoney which, if successful, will further expand our portfolio of shared housing schemes.

The Association’s shared housing developments at Manse Road Saintfield and Ballymaglave Court Ballynahinch, are into their final year of their good relations action plan and has been successful in building community relations both within the development and with the wider communities.

The partnership approach utilised by Choice through working with local authorities, statutory, community and voluntary sectors in the delivery of the T:BUC/ Housing for All programme is a key factor in helping to meet the outcomes of improving good relations, promote community integration and successfully delivering the shared housing programme.



**Tenants in participating communities benefit from:**

- A community where residents feel welcome and where everyone has opportunities to make positive contributions to their community; developing a sense of belonging, community ownership and shared identity;
- Enhanced neighbourliness through building community spirit and encouraging involvement; and
- Opportunities to live in a shared housing environment thus increasing access to housing opportunities.



Structure and Governance



Board and Trustees

Criteria # and Type	Criteria	Measurement Unit	Response
<b>C25 - Core</b>	Is the housing provider registered with the national regulator of social housing?	Yes / No	Yes
<b>C26 - Core</b>	What is the most recent regulatory grading/status?	Varies by nation	1
<b>C27 - Core</b>	Which Code of Governance does the housing provider follow, if any?	Name of code	The National Housing Federation Code of Governance 2020
<b>C28 - Core</b>	"Is the housing provider Not-For-Profit? If not, who is the largest shareholder, what is their % of economic ownership and what % of voting rights do they control?"	Yes / No If no, name, %, %	Yes

### C29 - Core

Explain how the housing provider's board manages organisational risks.

Choice operates a robust internal control framework covering all aspects of the business. This is evidenced by policies, procedure manuals, staff training and supervision and management reporting. Internal controls are reviewed regularly as part of the risk management policy and are subject to external review by internal and external auditors.

The Audit & Risk Committee scrutinises the internal control framework on behalf of the Board. A range of corporate materials covering strategy, planning and risk are fully accessible by Board and Committee members on our e-Board solution.

### C30 - ENHANCED

Has the housing provider been subject to any adverse regulatory findings in the last 12 months (data protection breaches, bribery, money laundering, HSE breaches etc) - that resulted in enforcement or other equivalent action?

YES/NO

**NO**

### C31 - Core

Board demographics

**54%**

% of the board that are women

**0%**

% of board that are BAME

**0%**

% of board that have a disability

**0%**

% of the board that are LGBTQ+

**55**

Average age of board members (years)

**4.8**

Average board tenure (years)

#### Additional Commentary

Choice work with an external recruitment agency to recruit new board members. The recruitment agency encourages all people regardless of background to apply ensuring that the skills and expertise requirements are met.

### C32 - Core

What % of the board AND management team have turned over in the last two years?

**18%**

% of the board

**0%**

% of management team

### C33 - Core

Is there a maximum tenure for a board member? If so, what is it?

**YES**

**9** Years

### C34 - Core

What % of the board are non-executive directors?

**100%**

% of the board

### C35 - Core

Number of board members on the Audit Committee with recent and relevant financial experience.

Risk and compliance, regulatory reporting, financial management.

**2**

members



Staff Wellbeing

Criteria # and Type	Criteria	Measurement Unit	Response
<b>C36 - Core</b>	Are there any current executives on the Remuneration Committee?	Yes/ No	No
<b>C37 - Core</b>	Has a succession plan been provided to the board in the last 12 months?	Yes/ No	Yes
<b>C38 - Core</b>	For how many years has the housing provider's current external audit partner been responsible for auditing the accounts?	Number of whole years	2
<b>C39 - Core</b>	When was the last independently-run, board-effectiveness review?	Date (month/year)	February 2022
<b>C40 - Core</b>	Are the roles of the chair of the board and CEO held by two different people?	Yes/ No	Yes

**C41 - Core**

How does the housing provider handle conflicts of interest at the board?

Conflicts declared at the meeting and those involved do not take part in discussion or voting. All conflicts are recorded in minutes and reported to the Department annually.

**C42 - Core**

Does the housing provider pay the Real Living Wage?

YES/NO  
**YES**

employees. They do not employ the concept of "full-pay relevant employees" and therefore do not exclude these from the calculations.

This difference in methodology does give rise to some confusion when trying to answer the question "What is the average gender pay Gap in the UK?" For example ONS state that in April 2022 the gap for full time employees is 8.3%, however the UK pay gap data set shows the gap as 12.2%.

**C44 - ENHANCED**

What is the CEO: median-worker pay ratio?

**5:1**  
Total annual CEO remuneration divided by annual median working remuneration

**C43 - Core**

What is the median gender pay gap?

26% gap.

In the absence of legislation in place in Northern Ireland, and therefore a lack of local comparative data, we have used the ONS methodology in this report as this allows for comparison with the ONS Northern Ireland data set.

The ONS use a different calculation method for Gender Pay Reporting. The ONS differentiate between full-time and part-time

Using the ONS methodology the data shows that our median Gender Pay Gap is 26%, with our mean gap being 15%. The median gap reduces to 2% with the mean gap reducing to 11%, if we look only at full-time employees. This taken together with the quartile distribution of staff clearly indicates that our primary gender pay issue is tied to the large number of female employees who work in part-time roles which are concentrated at the lower end of our pay scales.

**C45 - ENHANCED**

How does the housing provider support the physical and mental health of their staff?

- Health Cash Plan - Choice pay for Level 1 cover for employees and their children. The Health Cash Plan provides a range of positive healthcare benefits e.g. medical, dental, health screenings, eye care, alternative and complimentary therapies as well as counselling.
- Choice have trained and dedicated Health and Wellbeing Champions whose aim is to improve workplace health and provide wellbeing support for all staff. Choice also have in place Mental Health First Aiders, who provides a point of contact for an employee who is

experienced a mental health issue and can signpost to sources of help. Choice has recently introduced Menopause Champions to help and support staff.

- Personal Protection Equipment is provided for roles which are applicable.
- All lone workers have access to people safe app which is a personal protective system for out of office use.
- Generous leave entitlement.

**C46 - ENHANCED**

What is the average number of sick days (both long and short term) taken per employee?

**8.1**  
Number of days

**C47 - ENHANCED**

How is Social Value creation considered when procuring goods and services?

Procurement Plans for Supplies, Services and Construction are developed in line with PPNO1/21 Scoring Social Value and are reflected in all ITT documentation for above threshold procurements. In respect of below threshold procurements, Social Value

clauses are included as part of construction contracts with the appointed Contractor expected to deliver social value initiatives to a minimum value of 100 points per £1,000,000 of contract value (or pro-rata).

Choice requests that where contracts include social value elements, they are registered with Strategic Investment Board via their portal to enable delivery to be tracked.

**C48 - ENHANCED**

How is Environmental impact considered when procuring goods and services?

Social Value themes and indicators reflect both social, environmental and ethical aspects in terms of zero carbon, ethical and resilient supply chains and increasing secure employment and skills.



Supply Chain



Glen Road Heights, Belfast