

Choice News

choice 

Together we enrich lives

Issue 18, Winter 2023



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your Home

A message from Michael, our Group Chief Executive



Welcome to the Winter 2023 edition of Choice News.

There is lots in this edition of our newsletter about our work with tenants and communities across the country. Increasingly, our focus on tenant engagement is becoming a preoccupation with community development, something which reflects our core purpose as a housing charity. As one of the largest contributors to the 'Housing for All' programme, Choice supports integrated, diverse and thriving communities, where the focus is on bringing people together. I am delighted that one of the largest housing projects in Northern Ireland for decades is a new Choice scheme at Rosses Gate in the North West and that this development will be both mixed tenure and 'Housing for All'.

I can't recall a year with a higher planned maintenance budget than the £16m which we have allocated for projects in 2023/24. This is a demonstration of our ongoing commitment to ensuring that our existing homes provide decent, secure and affordable accommodation for years to come. Whilst we are absolutely committed to addressing the growing demand for housing through an ambitious new build programme, our current homes must remain fit for purpose. We are also investing in a range of pilot schemes testing out the costs and benefits of various retrofit options. Feedback from these projects will inform the next phase of our strategy to decarbonise our stock.

Our support for tenants in the midst of persistently high inflation continues through various initiatives. We are delighted to extend our partnership with both Homeless Connect and Trussell Trust, harnessing their skills and expertise to bring some relief for tenants from cost of living pressures. If you have any concerns about making ends meet then please reach out to the

Choice Financial Inclusion Team through the Customer Services Centre. In the first 5 months of 2023/24, this resource within Choice has generated over £3m in additional financial support through the welfare system for our tenants and their families.

Finishing on the theme of tenant support, please take some time to read about the upgrade to our tenant portal and consider the information on damp, mould and condensation. The Choice tenant portal is another way for you to quickly and effectively access our services, and complements the work of our Customer Services Centre. As we enter a period of colder weather, it's also really important that you understand how best to manage heat in your home and thereby maintain a healthy living environment. I'm also delighted that Choice offices are now designated as 'Safe Places' under the national network designed to offer help if someone is out and about and is feeling anxious, scared or at risk.

Thanks for being a tenant of Choice and I hope everyone has a really great Christmas and New Year.

Michael McDonnell

Connect with Choice



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enquiries@choice-housing.org



Choice Housing Ireland Limited



Choice Housing

Follow us on social media - from Facebook, X to YouTube and LinkedIn - we've got something new for you every day! It's a great way to stay connected, engaged, informed and entertained! Feel free to like, follow, share, and ask questions on any of our social media platforms.

We're looking forward to connecting with you!

Join us on Social Media!

Picnic in the Park

Local community groups from across the Rowallane area in partnership with Choice came together in September to mark five years of shared housing in the local area.

The Picnic in the Park event, which took place in the Walled Garden, Montalto Estate in Ballynahinch welcomed more than 200 guests who were treated to music, dancing, and a range of activities and multi-cultural displays.

Organised by the Rowallane and Slieve Croob Community Twinning Group, in association with Choice, the event welcomed representation from a wide range of local community groups and partner organisations who support local community relations efforts in the area.

This marked another successful year for Choice and partners in working together to deliver local, tailored initiatives that strengthen community relations.



Jonathan Blakely, Community Development Manager said,

“For Choice to continue to deliver long-term tenancies across a range of housing provision there is a need to create sustainable communities as part of this process. In order to achieve this, it is vital that we engage and communicate with local communities, and work towards empowering them to deliver real change for their area.”

The Picnic in the Park event was supported by the Department for Communities and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive’s ‘Housing for All’ Shared Housing Programme. The Programme has its origins in the NI Executive Together: Building a United Community Strategy which reflects the Executive’s commitment to improving community relations and continuing the journey towards a more united and shared society.

Jonathan Blakely, Community Development Manager added,

“It was great to see so many local groups and partners as well as tenants at the event. It demonstrates the importance of involving a wide range of stakeholders if you really want to achieve sustainable community relations that plays a positive role in that local community.”

Good Relations Priority All Year Round

As we look back on another successful 'Good Relations Week' filled with events, activities and initiatives aimed at developing and sustaining healthy shared communities, it is important to highlight the impact these programmes are having on local communities and the importance of consistently delivering on this commitment throughout the year, every year.

Choice plays a key role in the delivery of the Department for Communities' 'Housing for All programme' – creating communities through diversity and inclusivity. With six shared housing schemes across Northern Ireland, Choice has demonstrated the impact these schemes can have for the benefits of the local communities. Focusing on the needs of the local community and using this to bring local residents and communities together can bring significant benefits to the area and peoples lives.

A key element of much of the good relations work carried out across Choice schemes is identifying gaps in services and challenges that the local community are facing and using this to develop tailored projects that support these areas.

Collaborating with partners and other organisations is another key element of delivering beneficial community relations.



During Good Relations Week in September of this year, a partnership between Choice and Galbally Runners brought 400 runners together in Dungannon Town Centre to participate in the inaugural 'One Mile Road Relay'. The event, which was organised by Galbally Runners in association with Choice, attracted people of all abilities to compete in teams of four to battle for honours on the iconic 'Hill of the O'Neill' in Dungannon. Teams included running clubs, families, sporting clubs, businesses, and local schools.

The event showcased true diversity and inclusiveness bringing together local communities from many areas to participate and enjoy a great community atmosphere.

The 'Together Art Exhibition' in Ballymena brought together 200 people over a period of three days, building relationships, and supporting health and wellbeing. This project formed part of a partnership with a range of local organisations, including Carson Project, Scullery O'Tullagh, Harryville Mens Sheds, Ballykeell Community Association, Harryville Environmental Action Team, Veterans Support Group, Ballymarlow Cultural Group, Ballymena Cares, & Tenants from Nursery Close.

A similar art exhibition was delivered in the Atlas Centre, Lisburn – 'Together with a flow', partnering with the local Atlas Women's Centre and bringing more than 50 participants together.

The 'Knowing me, Knowing you', intergenerational event, also held in Lisburn brought together more than 40 attendees and working with Lisburn Learning Area Community and Praxis Care, bringing together schools and older people from the local area.

Other activities delivered during Good Relations Week included the 'Mini Mela' in Ballynahinch with more than 250 attendees, partnering with Ballynahinch Community Collective and Artsekta. The expression of cultural traditions event took place in the town square and brought together world music and dance, global cuisine and amazing arts experiences for all the family.



GOOD RELATIONS WEEK 2023 18-24 SEPTEMBER

The impact of these and many more projects like them facilitates important community relations, sometimes in the hardest to reach areas with the aim of developing shared communities where people can live with mutual respect and peace of mind.

Choice and USPCA forge a new partnership

Choice and the animal welfare charity USPCA have forged a new partnership, working together to roll out a series of pet education talks across local communities.

The collaboration will bring local communities together to talk about the importance of responsible pet ownership and signpost to programmes of support available to help with the rising costs of pet care.

Nora Smith, CEO of USPCA commented:

"We are delighted to work with Choice. Partnerships make a real difference. We are a nation of animal lovers, so the chance to bring communities together to talk about their pets is fantastic."

As a charity, we know first-hand that the cost-of-living crisis has impacted all aspects of our lives. Pet poverty unfortunately is real and is impacting many homes."

We offer a fantastic programme of support offering pet food parcels, which could be a lifeline for many of Choice's tenants."

Jonathan Blakely, Community Development Manager with Choice stated:

"Pets play such an important role in our lives. Animals help break down barriers to create human-to-human friendships and social support, both of which are good for long-term mental and physical health. Our partnership will create openings for communities to connect over their love of animals and provide much needed support during these financially difficult times."

Dates of community events will follow shortly. In the meantime, to find out more information on the USPCA's community outreach and pet food programme you can access the USPCA website.

<https://www.uspca.co.uk/education-outreach>

World Mental Health Day- Listen Up partnership

A partnership between Choice, Ark Housing and mental health and well-being organisation ALPS brought together local schools in the Lisburn area to launch their 'Listen Up Campaign'.

St Patrick's Academy, Lisnagarvey High, Malone College and St Colm's High Schools came together to raise awareness of the importance for young people to talk about their mental health, with a particular focus on understanding the impact of suicide among young people.

The initiative includes a powerful video, developed by the students who discuss the impact of suicide and the need for meaningful dialogue between young people and adults, fostering understanding, empathy, and support. The initiative was launched at the Civic Centre, Lisburn.

The Listen Up campaign was supported by the Department for Communities and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's 'Housing for All' Shared Housing Programme. The Programme has its origins in the NI Executive Together: Building a United Community Strategy which reflects the Executive's commitment to improving community relations and continuing the journey towards a more united and shared society.

Director of Tenant & Client Services, Carol Ervine said, "Choice's Good Relations programme allows us to partner with grass roots organisations across Northern Ireland working to support local communities."

"Through engagement with schools in Lisburn it was clear young people need a platform to talk openly about their mental health. Alongside Ark Housing, we partnered with ALPS (All Lives are Precious) who provided the expertise to support our young people in what is a sensitive and sometimes difficult topic to talk about."



As part of the partnership, a series of training sessions were delivered to students of all four schools and their family networks on a range of areas, including suicide, online safety and personal development.

Carol added,

"It's great to see so many young people willing to take the lead and start the conversation around mental health and wellbeing. At Choice we are pleased that we can play a role in facilitating these support networks."

Ronan Gilchrist from ALPS added,

"This campaign aims to shed light on the experiences, struggles, and aspirations of teenagers facing mental health challenges today and serves as a call to action for adults to actively engage in creating a safe and supportive environment for young people."

Tenant Portal Update

Our on-line tenant portal, 'My Choice' is available now. Recent improvements include the ability to raise non-emergency, simple repairs any time. Repair history, including the status of repairs, is also available.

What services can I access through 'My Choice'?

You can quickly and securely:

- Access your account online to view your rent account
- Report a non-emergency repair and view current/past repairs
- View your contact information and update your contact details
- Report an issue or concern

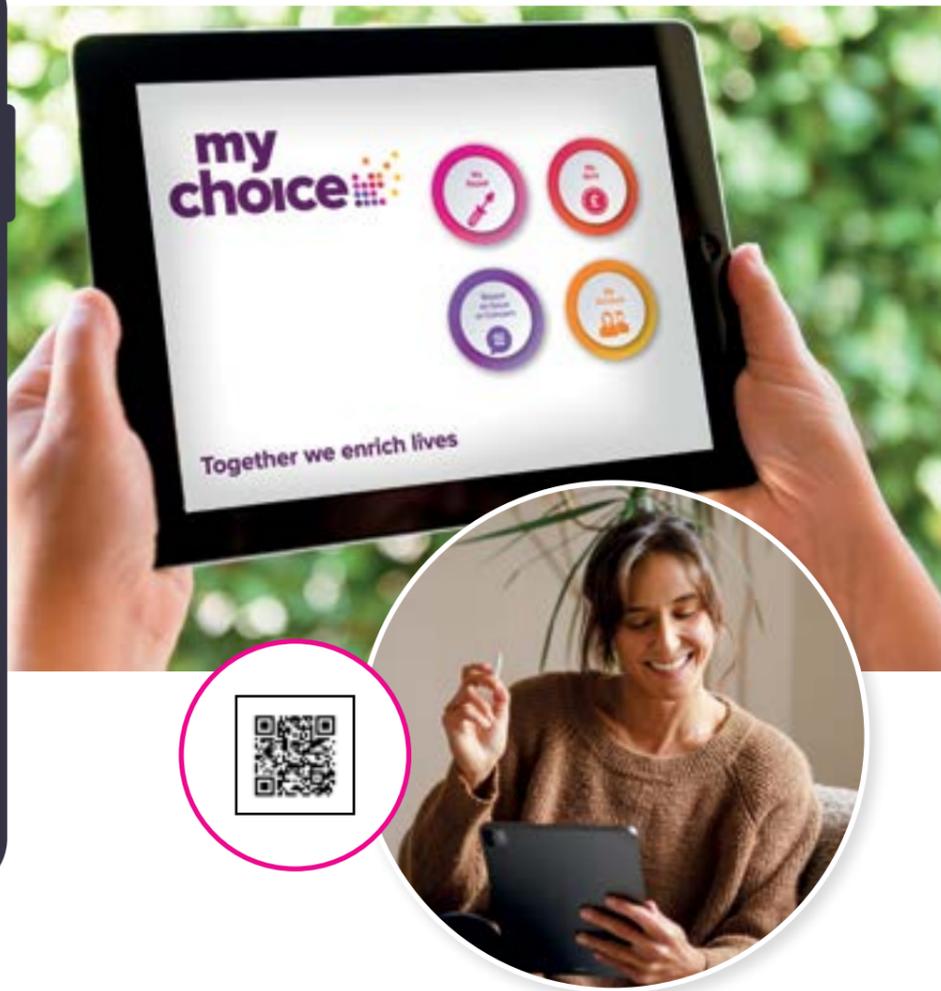
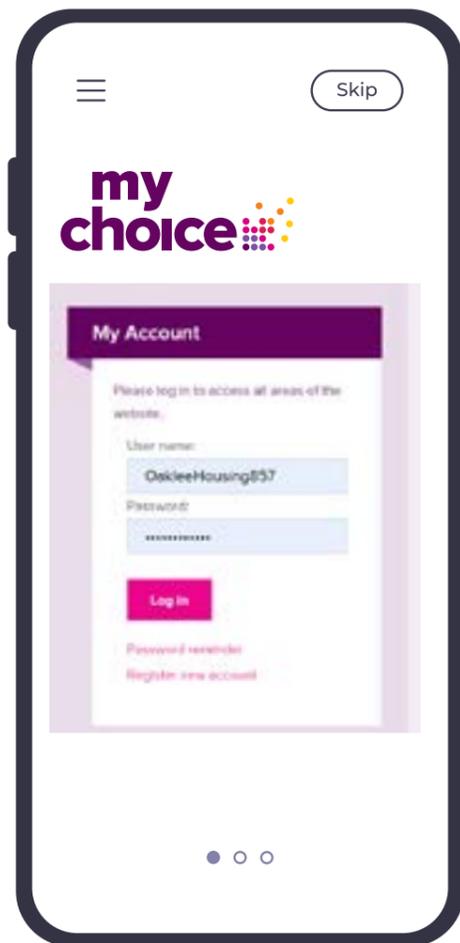
How do I register for 'My Choice'?

You can register with 'My Choice' on your smartphone, tablet, laptop or computer.

Just use the QR code or click on the link <https://my.choice-housing.org/>



This will take you to the My Choice home page. Click on '**Register New Account**' and follow the instructions. If you already have an account just log in using your username and password.



Our Developments New Homes Update



173 Lisburn Road, Belfast

Choice recently completed a £4,000,000 contract to provide 23 apartments for active older persons at the corner of the Lisburn Road and Tate's Avenue within South Belfast.

The completed units were designed and constructed to achieve current Building Regulations as well as Lifetime Homes and Secured by Design standards, and were allocated by the Association in May 2023 to provide new housing for up to 58 people.

This scheme was designed with communal terraces and private balconies providing excellent panoramic views stretching from Belfast City Centre to the Belfast Hills, Stormont and beyond. The communal terraces foster a sense of community, promoting well-being for residents encouraging social interaction and cohesion amongst neighbours.



Crannog Way, Old Eglish Road, Dungannon

A total of 49 new build homes were provided at the Old Eglish Road site through a Design and Build project. The properties include 45 general needs family homes (2, 3 and 4 bedroom houses) and 4 wheelchair bungalows with car ports.

The scheme also has a large open space area with seating benches for residents to enjoy. Completion of the properties took place between November 2022 and May 2023.

This project was part of an £8,000,000 investment in the area and Choice is currently working to secure a second phase of development at this location with the same private developer to provide a further 27 homes.



100 Rugby Avenue, Belfast

100 Rugby Avenue, a three-storey red brick Georgian-style apartment block, was the second and final phase of Choice's re-development of the former H & J Martin builder's yard at the junctions of Rugby Avenue, University Avenue and the Ormeau Road. In total, the Association has invested £8,000,000 in new social housing in this area.

The second phase apartment block comprised of nine 3 person 2 bedroom apartments and one 3 person 2 bedroom wheelchair apartment, with landscaped amenity space and shared car parking to the rear. Additionally, a tenant hub was incorporated on the ground floor, which Choice Tenant and Client Services team will utilise for informative events and tenant surgeries.

Choice completes £290k Bangor refurbishment scheme

Choice has invested almost £300,000 up-grading one of its larger sheltered living schemes in the Ards & North Down Borough Council area. The changes at Tughan Court on the Bloomfield Road in Bangor form part of the housing association's overall £16m capital investment programme this year.

Originally opened back in November 1980, the scheme – which comprises of 43 homes, received a range of important upgrades. In collaboration with Project Manager Stephen Bunting and Foreman Andrew Gibson, work was carried out by CB Contracts

(NI) Ltd who are part of The Bell Group – a leading property services business in the UK. Changes centred around replacing each properties' kitchen with new cupboards and doors and worktops. Square footage has grown by extending the communal kitchen into a previously unused room, with decorative work and the installation of new electrical wiring formed part of the six-figure investment.

The changes at Tughan Court on the Bloomfield Road in Bangor form part of the housing association's overall £20m capital investment programme this year.



Wilton Farrelly, Choice Group Director of Asset Services said:

“Tughan Court is a very important and long-standing Choice scheme in Bangor. It is well-established in the local community and well-known in the greater Bangor area which makes it popular and sought after.

“This investment will raise quality standards in these properties – something Choice places great emphasis on – and therefore helps to meet the needs and expectations of our current tenants.”

“The investment has allowed for timely – and welcome – improvements to be made to Tughan Court by modernising the kitchen areas. Having spoken to tenants, we know how important a functional and modern kitchen is to them and we have successfully delivered on this.”

Wilton Farrelly,
Choice Group Director
of Asset Services



Inverbeg House Wins Best Kept Garden Award 2023

Congratulations to the team at Inverbeg House in Bangor. The communal garden is a joy to be in, filled with colour, care and creativity. A true team effort by tenants at the scheme with the heavy lifting done by Rachel, Ruth, Eleanor, Carol and Janet.



These women all play their part whether it's digging, pruning or purchasing the plants. Ruth's husband had been a keen gardener before he passed away and the ladies have really taken care of the garden since his passing.

The garden team have created a tranquil space for all to enjoy, and they are excited about their big plans.

The team are currently making plans to transform an unused space of south facing land into an enjoyable, accessible area in which to relax.

You've got a friend in me



Our Muriel Smyth Good Neighbour Award 2023 goes to Nancy Green from Tughan Court in Bangor. Nancy was nominated by a number of her neighbours at our sheltered living scheme in Bangor.

Nancy has a larger than life presence at the scheme and is always at hand to give her time, support and assistance to anyone who needs it.

Eddie Weir, Nancy's neighbour said: *"Nancy deserves the Good Neighbour Award because she is always happy to help. She will help anyone at Tughan Court that needs it."*

Nancy is known by all her neighbours for her kindness and generosity. She plays a big part in the social activities at Tughan Court and takes pleasure organising the weekly darts club and chip shop dinner night!

Sounds like we could all be a bit more like Nancy! Congratulations Nancy! You are greatly appreciated by your neighbours and friends at Tughan Court.

Choice Appoints New Heating Maintenance Contractor, Connect Transform Sustain



Choice recently appointed a new heating maintenance contractor. Connect Transform Sustain (CTS) will complete all servicing and heating repairs reported from 1 November. Other work such as solar panel maintenance and Mechanical Ventilation and Heat Recovery (MVHR) systems, where fitted, are also included in the contract and will be completed by CTS or their sub-contractor.

Choice and CTS are committed to improving service delivery and overall customer service experience in relation to heating maintenance. However, we acknowledge that this change in contractor may have led to some delays in repairs and servicing being completed within designated timescales and we apologise for any disruption to service provision. We are working hard to ensure that the transition is as seamless as possible.

If you are aware of any overdue repairs issued to Fusion Heating, that relate to heating repairs in your home, we would be grateful if you could email our Service Centre on servicescentre@choice-housing.org to advise. Our Services Centre Team will be happy to ensure that Fusion Heating will complete the repair, or they will reallocate the order to CTS. Alternatively,

if you are resident in a Sheltered Housing Scheme, please contact your Scheme Co-ordinator who can pass on the necessary information on your behalf.

We would like to apologise again for any delays that may have occurred during this transition period and thank you for your understanding and patience. Should you have any concerns or suggestions for improvement in how we deliver services, please do not hesitate to contact our Customer Service Team on **0300 111 2211**.



**WE KNOW
WHAT MAKES
A HOUSE,
A HOME**



EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS



Who is IFF Research and why have they contacted me?

Your experience as a customer is a priority for us throughout our organisation. It is vital that we listen to your feedback and develop new ways of working to make experiences effortless and services accessible. We can't move forward without knowing where we're going, and the feedback you provide helps us map out how to get to where we want to be.

We have commissioned IFF Research to undertake surveys on our behalf. IFF Research is an independent social and market research agency with a strong reputation for delivering high quality and high impact research.

You may receive a phone call from **0203 148 7645** asking about the services we provide. It's entirely up to you whether you take part, and if you have any questions about this process please contact us on 0300 111 2211 or email enquiries@choice-housing.org



Choice sign up to become a Safe Place organisation

Choice have signed up our offices, Maple House and Leslie Morrell House to the Safe Place initiative run by Onus. Safe Place is a simple but effective way for anyone affected by domestic abuse to receive information on the support available to them. The support is available both for Choice staff members and the general public who visit Choice offices.

Our Safe Place sites displays the Safe Place logo and posters on the premises and have Safe Place cards with details of helpline numbers in an accessible location.



Further information on Safe Place can be viewed on the Onus website <https://www.onustraining.co.uk/play-your-part>



Helping housing providers, government and businesses to better understand their customers and make better decisions

Choice renews partnership with Homeless Connect



Choice and homelessness charity Homeless Connect are aiming to support more than 1,700 Choice tenants in their journey from temporary accommodation to more sustainable tenancy living.

The partnership, now in its second year, will provide vital 'Getting Started Boxes' to families across Northern Ireland aimed at making the transition from temporary to more permanent accommodation easier. The £20K project is part of Choice's ongoing commitment to support their tenants in achieving financial security and sustainable living.

In the period 2022/23 the partnership between Choice and Homeless Connect delivered support to 2,500 households across the region with 'Getting Started Boxes'. This is a food parcel with items to start filling the cupboard with the essentials needed when setting up home. This accompanies the very successful Starter Pack project offered by Homeless Connect, with essential household items such as small electrical items, bedding, crockery, cutlery and a range of cleaning products. Providing both essential household items and food is a foot forward for tenants that may be overwhelmed with the costs associated with taking on a new home for the first time.

L-R: Carol Ervine (Choice Group Director of Tenant & Client Services), Kathy Henry (Homeless Connect Home Starter Pack Project Manager) and Aidan McCrea (Choice Financial Inclusion Manager).



Kathy Henry from Homeless Connect said:

"Homeless Connect's Starter Packs project, which is funded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, works in partnership with a range of providers to address the risk of homelessness and provide household items that provide a foundation for tenants as they move in to a new home. We are grateful to our partners Choice for their support in the provision of 'getting started boxes' which truly make a real difference for those who receive them."

Considering getting a mobility scooter? What you need to know.

We acknowledge that mobility scooters can be a valuable aid and we also recognise our duty to protect the health and safety of our tenants, staff and colleagues, as well as conform to fire safety regulations.

In this article we aim to inform you regarding the key considerations that must be satisfied before obtaining a scooter.

You must apply in writing for permission to have a mobility scooter

If you live in housing with communal areas e.g. a sheltered scheme or an apartment block, then you need to request permission before obtaining a scooter.

This is because mobility scooters may pose a fire risk as they can be combustible and, if stored incorrectly, can block corridors and fire exits. A fire risk assessment must therefore be carried out before permission is granted.

What other things are considered?

In assessing your request for a mobility scooter your Property Services Officer will also need to be satisfied that there is safe place for the scooter to be stored and charged. If not permission will not be granted.

I have been granted permission- what now?

If your application has been approved there are a number of conditions including;

- You must not have a class 3 scooter for internal use
- Subject to approval you may obtain a type 2 scooter only
- You must show proof of current valid insurance
- You must commit to safe use of the scooter onsite
- You must abide by all terms in your mobility scooter agreement
- You will be charged an annual fee of £40 for charging your scooter onsite

I was told there is no room for anymore scooters at my scheme – what can I do?

Unfortunately, applications may be refused simply because the site cannot accommodate further scooters. If this does happen you can re-apply when the numbers of scooters onsite reduce.



If you have further queries please contact your Property Services Officer to discuss.

ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY

Our team is here to help you. So please treat them with respect.

Choice operates a zero tolerance policy in respect of abusive/threatening behaviour towards our staff and contractors.



ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY

Our team will not stand for any form of abuse.

Choice operates a zero tolerance policy in respect of abusive/threatening behaviour towards our staff and contractors.

We are here to keep our customers safe and to provide the best service we can, but we're also responsible for protecting our staff from abuse, hostility and violence.

These are the kind of behaviours we consider to be unacceptable:

- Verbal abuse, aggression, violence including derogatory remarks, rudeness, inflammatory allegations, and threats of violence
- Unreasonable demands
- Unreasonable persistence
- Excessive letters, calls, emails or contact via social media.

What action can Choice take?
We can:

- End a call, visit or appointment
- Provide a single point of contact
- Limit contact to a single form, letter, or email
- In certain cases we may involve the police or other legal action
- Unacceptable behaviour towards our staff can put your tenancy at risk.



L-R Martin Flynn, Michael Ireland and Jeanette McLaughlin, Scheme Co-ordinator.

James Court, Belfast

SITUATED OFF KANSAS AVENUE IN NORTH BELFAST AND SURROUNDED BY BEAUTIFUL CHERRY BLOSSOM TREES, THIS SHELTERED LIVING SCHEME COMPRISES OF 41 SINGLE BEDROOM APARTMENTS AND 13 DOUBLE BEDROOM APARTMENTS, WITH LIFT ACCESS TO THE UPPER FLOOR.

A short walk from the Holy Family Church on the Limestone Road, James Court is right at the heart of the community and a hive of activity all year round.

Located close to local amenities such as shops and medical centres, the scheme is conveniently positioned on a main bus route with easy access to Belfast city centre and Glengormley, allowing residents to live independently but access support if needed.



BENEFITS OF SHELTERED LIVING

The key benefit of sheltered living is the provision of our Scheme Co-ordinators and 24 hour emergency assistance. This helps our tenants feel safe and secure – knowing that assistance is on-hand in an emergency. Our Scheme Co-ordinators are on hand to organise support services and all our sheltered schemes are linked into social help and care services.

Social activities and contact with other residents enables sheltered living tenants to maintain an active social life even as life circumstances change. Our tenants in sheltered living have over come issues such as social inclusion, loneliness, isolation, anxiety and depression.



Jennifer McCloskey

GARDENING AT JAMES COURT

Gardening has really taken off at the scheme following the renovation of the courtyard. The garden club meets daily and have produced their own vegetables.

The gardeners kindly donate surplus vegetables to the People's Kitchen. Happily Jeanette McLaughlin, Scheme Co-ordinator rustled up a cottage pie for some of the tenants, using potatoes grown at the scheme.



“The tenants tell me that the best thing about James court is the friendship they have formed. The craic is great when they get together in the evenings to play games on Fridays nights, and bingo on Tuesday and Thursday nights. Having communal areas can take some getting used to but the tenants have found a way of helping to ease new tenants into the scheme and making them feel welcome.”

Jeanette McLaughlin, Scheme Co-ordinator

ART CLUB

The Art Club is a recent addition to the sheltered living scheme this year and is already proving very popular. The group focus on both individual and group projects, supporting each other as they learn new skills and hone existing talent.

“The art is very good for the mind but the most enjoyable part of our art group is the craic. We laugh a lot and it is as much a social gathering as an art exercise - it's fun, try it yourselves and see.”

John Clark, tenant

FUNDRAISING

An active group of tenants recently pooled their resources to collect money for Trocaire. This year the tenants were proud to donate a staggering £1000. The sense of community at the scheme sees the tenants looking out for others at a time when finances are so tight for everyone.



“Over the last two years, Choice has invested over £20m in capital spend on planned maintenance on existing housing stock. This investment ensures that existing developments continue to meet the growing needs of tenants and the quality standards of any new build that we commission.”

Michael McDonnell, Group Chief Executive

We have sheltered accommodation to let NOW, search our available housing at: choice-housing.org



L-R John Clarke, Jennifer McCloskey, Selina Quinn



Celebrations All Around

Choice have celebrated a number of Sheltered Living Scheme anniversaries over the recent months, including:

- 30th Anniversary of Victoria Court in Whitehead
- 25th Anniversary of Pound Green Court in Larne
- 30th Anniversary of McNeill Court in Larne

As part of the celebrations, tenants and staff came together to mark the important milestones for each of the wonderful schemes and its tenants.

Our schemes are at the heart of their communities and that is largely down to the people who call it home. Over the years, our tenants have put their own unique stamp on their homes and our sheltered living schemes. Lasting friendships and wonderful memories have been made, we have seen love blossom and wedding bells ring for some tenants. Our sheltered living schemes are more than just homes, they are communities within the wider community.

So as many of our schemes celebrate big milestones it is a great opportunity to pause and acknowledge all that they offer, as we look to the future.

We would like to thank all our tenants for making Choice their home! Here's to the next 30 years and beyond of Choice Sheltered Living Schemes!

If you would like further information on Sheltered Living and to view our available accommodation, please visit our website: choice-housing.org



Pound Green Court, Larne



McNeill Court, Larne



Victoria Court, Whitehead

Congratulations



Protecting your home from condensation & mould

Where does the moisture come from?

All air contains some moisture. Modern appliances such as dishwashers, washing machines and tumble dryers all produce large amounts of moisture. As many as 20 pints of moisture is added to the air in the home by an average family per day.

How do the problems start?

Generally, the problems start in winter when there is too much moisture in the air which condenses on cold surfaces. In older properties which were poorly insulated and drafty, any excess moisture could easily escape.

Today our homes are much better sealed and insulated. Unfortunately excess moisture, once sealed into our homes now makes them prone to problems such as windows streaming with condensation. Excess moisture, if left unchecked, will lead to damp in the building fabric. Double glazing, insulation and draught proofing all help to retain heat, but can make condensation problems much worse by reducing natural ventilation. Since it is neither practical nor desirable to make our homes less-well sealed, the answer is to reduce the amount of moisture we produce and physically remove the excess moisture.

If excess moisture is allowed to build-up in the home, moist air will inevitably come into contact with a cold surface such as a window or external wall when the outside temperature falls. At these low temperatures beads of condensation form, initially on windows and then spread elsewhere. Soon the condensation turns into damp and may result in mould spots growing.

How does the moisture spread?

Moist air is never concentrated in one place for long, it will drift around the home. Moisture produced in one room, for example a kitchen or bathroom will circulate around the house, until it finds a cold place where it will condense and create areas of localised damp. This may be a cool bedroom or inside a wardrobe for example. Condensation and damp can, therefore occur in any room of the home. Usually these are the rooms that are least well heated, not necessarily the ones where the moisture was produced.

How do you reduce condensation?

Condensation can be effectively managed by controlling moisture generation, adequate heating and ventilating your home.

In cold weather, opening windows for 5-10 minutes several times a day will remove moist air without allowing the fabric of the building to cool significantly. This method will conserve heat and reduce energy loss as most heat in a property is held within the building fabric (walls, floors etc.) and not the air itself.

If you suspect rising damp, penetrating damp such as defective render or leaking pipework please contact us to arrange an inspection.

CALL US ON:
0300 111 2211



POOR AIR QUALITY = condensation + dampness + mould

It is important that tenants are aware of the need to control and manage indoor air quality which contributes to condensation and mould growth that may damage your health, home and belongings.

All homes produce some amounts of excess moisture and we are all familiar with condensation on windows and pools of water on window sills. In severe cases, if not managed, this can lead to damp patches on walls and mould growth. In homes, unsightly mould can form around window panes, corners of rooms and behind furniture.

Condensation is the first sign that your home is producing excessive moisture or that moisture cannot escape through ventilation. Moisture and mould build up is not only unsightly but can cause damage to clothing, furnishings, decorations and can aggravate certain health conditions.

TOP TIPS!

- Do not dry your clothes indoors - each load of washing will contain 5-10 pints of water
- Wipe condensation from windows in the morning and wring the cloth or sponge into the sink
- Treat mould with a mild acid, such as undiluted white vinegar
- Keep lids on pots when cooking, open a window and use the extractor fan if provided
- Keep bathroom doors closed during and after bathing or showering. Open the window or use the fan if provided
- Let fans run or leave windows open for at least 15 mins after showering, bathing or cooking
- When filling a bath or sink run the cold water first before adding hot - this reduces steam and will prevent scalding
- Ensure all rooms are adequately heated even if rarely used
- Don't use stand-alone gas heaters as these appliances produce water
- Consider using mould resistant paints in rooms exposed to high humidity such as bathrooms and kitchens
- Keep a space behind furniture to allow air movement and avoid placing furniture against external walls
- Ventilate properly to remove stale, moist air. The most effective way is to open several windows to allow a through draft
- Don't block or close wall, ceiling or window vents
- Don't isolate fans or ventilation systems if fitted - they are efficient and cost very little to run
- Don't cover radiators with curtains or furniture



Out & About

Choice has more than 12,000 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!

Email us: enquiries@choice-housing.org

Contact us at:

editor@choice-housing.org



FINDING ZEN IN THE CITY

Most mornings you can find Andy Cheung practicing Tai Chi in the communal garden at Elm Court in Belfast City Centre!

FIDDLERS GREEN MUSIC FESTIVAL

A huge thanks to the musicians who brought their music to St. Bronagh's in Rostrevor during the recent Fiddlers Green Music Festival. Choice tenant Owen playing the guitar accompanying the musicians from London...what a talent!



HAPPY BIRTHDAY LILY SWAN

Lily Swan celebrated her 90th birthday at the Silvergrove, Belfast.

Lily's smile lights up any room and she was beaming with delight when her friends and family presented her with a beautiful birthday cake at her party in the sheltered living scheme's communal lounge.



THE ROSSES CELEBRATE 30 YEARS

Tenants and staff from the Rosses were in high spirits as they gathered in August to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the sheltered and supported housing scheme in Derry~Londonderry. The Rosses, located in Kinsale Park in the Caw area of the city, was officially opened on 19th March 1993 by the first female Mayor of Derry~Londonderry, the late Marlene Jefferson MBE.

Choice operates the scheme in partnership with local charity Inspire Wellbeing, giving tenants the freedom to live independently whilst also benefiting from support tailored to their specific needs, ranging from assistance with domestic skills, household management, health care and welfare advice.

Joining the event is the scheme's longest standing tenant Frances Bredin, who made her home there 29 years ago!

Here's to more many happy years for our tenants at The Rosses!



GOOD RELATIONS IN THE GOOD WEATHER

Our colleagues from Radius Housing hosted a summer BBQ and invited Choice tenants from Craignagore, Newcastle. The BBQ was part of Radius' Good Relations work relating to their Shared Housing programme.

With the sun out and the BBQ on the go, everyone came together to enjoy an afternoon of dance, music and good food.



SPOOKTACULAR SPREAD

Tenants at Lisnavar Court in Derry~Londonderry had a faBOOulous time at their Halloween party with a spooktacular spread and lots of entertainment to enjoy!





KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON!

A quick change of plans for the summer BBQ.

With heavy rain disrupting plans, tenants at Craignagore, Newcastle, took their gathering inside and carried on regardless.

Everyone had a great afternoon at the sheltered living scheme.



OUT FOR LUNCH

Not satisfied with communal exercise, wellbeing sessions, fundraising and BBQs, the tenants at Craignagore, Newcastle, round off each month with a pub lunch together.

There is a strong sense of community at the sheltered living scheme where tenants love coming together to enjoy a wide range of activities and more importantly each other's company.

PRACTICING WELLBEING

The tenants at Craignagore, Newcastle, certainly know how to look after themselves.

A balance of physical activities and pampering sessions brings a sense of wellbeing to all who take part.

The scheme regularly hosts chair based exercises, a weekly hike and treatments of foot spas and face masks ensuring all bases are covered.

The tenants are certainly setting a good example, showing us all how to take care of ourselves.



MACMILLAN COFFEE MORNINGS

Macmillan's Coffee Morning is an annual fundraising event to support people living with cancer. Many of the generous tenants in our sheltered living schemes across Northern Ireland, organised events generously raising money for this worthy cause.

OH SPUDS!

James Court in Belfast, have been sharing their home grown potatoes with visitors. The tenants have really been making the most of their recently updated courtyard garden.



Rothesay Court, Coleraine, held a coffee morning on Thursday 28th September and have raised £307, so far, for Macmillan.

Tughan Court, Bangor, hosted their coffee morning on 29th September, and raised £410 for Macmillan.

Craignagore, Newcastle, held their Macmillan Coffee Morning on Friday 22nd of September. Both tenants and staff took part and raised £285.

Well done everyone!



LET'S RUN AWAY WITH THE CIRCUS!

Streetwise Circus provided a 6-week programme at Westbridge House, Enniskillen. Everyone enjoyed the performance and learning some new tricks!





Love to move!

MOVEMENT IS FOR EVERYONE

Tenants at Cabin Hill Court, Belfast, enjoy their regular 'chair based exercise'. Elaine Shanks from 'Love to Move' visits the sheltered living scheme each fortnight and leads the exercise session in the communal lounge.

The benefits of chair based exercise include:

- Increased flexibility and strength.
- Increased coordination.
- Increased circulation.
- Reduced risk of falls because chair based exercises improve posture and balance.
- Increased confidence and self esteem.

Elaine focuses on body and mind so by the time the session is over, the tenants are ready for the afternoon tea!

THESE BOOTS ARE MADE FOR WALKING

Rothsay Court, Coleraine, is home to 3 dedicated walkers who between them manage around 60K steps per day.

10K steps is the daily recommendation, so this trio, Seamus Close, Melvin McCauley and June Wells are averaging twice that!

Seamus suffered a stroke in 2023 which affected his mobility and he was advised to lose weight to prevent further strokes. Seamus started walking and increased his daily steps, now he walks between 20K and 30K steps per day!! With diet and exercise changes Seamus lost a whopping 3st. Seamus completed the Foyle hospice walk on 24th September raising £155, he is rightly seen as a real inspiration.

Melvin McCauley 81 and June Wells 77 have both been avid walkers for years - Melvin completed 22 marathons in his time before changing pace from running 150 miles per week to walking.

June took up walking when she moved into Rothsay 15 years ago. Both Melvin and June achieve an average 20K steps each per day in all weathers no matter the time of year. Melvin and June know walking is great for their mental wellbeing, overall health and vitality.



WESTBRIDGE HOUSE DINING OUT IN STYLE

The tenants at Westbridge House never miss an opportunity to get together. Here they are enjoying one of their many outings this year, a trip to the Silverbirch Hotel in Omagh for lunch.

WELCOME HOME ANN- MARIE!

Our Assets Team were delighted to recently welcome tenants back to their newly refurbished properties in Riverdale, Belfast.



Tenants return to refurbished Riverdale Park South, Belfast.

Colouring Competition Winner



Congratulations to **Faye from Belfast aged 8** who won our Summer Colouring Competition. Faye was presented with her prize of a family pass to Belfast Zoo by Nicholas Hammond (Choice Housing Officer). We hope Faye and her family have a brilliant time at Belfast Zoo!

COLOURING COMPETITION WINNER



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.



Performance figures are from April to August 2023

We're Recruiting!

Work with us - Career Opportunities

Choice employs over 400 staff at various locations throughout Northern Ireland providing careers in:

- Housing Management
- Development
- Administration
- Assets
- Information Technology
- Human Resources
- Finance
- Sustainability & Energy

and a range of support roles in our sheltered living schemes

WHY WORK AT CHOICE?

We believe every team member is integral to our success and contributes to achieving our mission of enriching lives through great homes, services and communities. We are driven by our values in being Caring, Committed and Creative:



We are caring:

We offer all employees free access to a Health Cash Plan; we provide Mental Health, First Aiders, Menopause Champions and Health & Wellbeing Champions; Death in Service Benefit and generous holiday entitlement.

We are committed:

We offer family friendly initiatives to help employees achieve work life balance.

We are creative:

We set our people up for success with opportunities to complete external qualifications, training and continuous professional and personal development.

Check out our website for information on our current job vacancies:
<https://www.choice-housing.org/work-with-us>



Choice offices are safe places



Hybrid opportunities available for relevant roles

Children's Colouring Competition

Open to children 16 years and under



Win
a family
Cinema
pass

Can you
name
our Dulux
dog?

It's easy to enter!

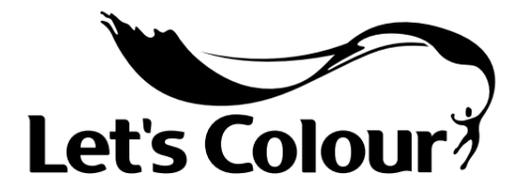
It's really easy to enter, just pull out this page and colour it in anyway you like!
Don't forget to name our dog.

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,
Choice Housing Ireland, Leslie Morrell House, 37 – 41 May Street, Belfast BT1 4DN.

One lucky winner will receive this great prize! Entries must be received by
Friday 26th January 2024.

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



Name Age

Address

Daytime Tel. Evening Tel.

POST TO: The Editor, Choice News, Choice Housing Ireland, Leslie Morrell House,
37 – 41 May Street, Belfast BT1 4DN.



Dog's Name:

Share It

Take a word of kindness,
Mix it with a smile,
Take it with you every day,
And go the extra mile.

Share it with your neighbour,
Or someone you've just met,
It will probably make their day,
Something they won't forget.

Happiness comes from within,
You give and you receive,
It a two-way thing though,
All you do is just believe.

It's not always easy though,
Some days we may feel down,
But a word of kindness,
Will get rid of that frown.

So share your day with someone,
With a kind word or a smile,
You will really be surprised,
It makes living so worthwhile.

By Kathleen Knox
(Choice Tenant)

