

Newsletter

Improving Your Homes

At Family Housing Association we aim to provide good quality homes for all our residents. In 2004 we carried out a survey of all our properties. With this information we developed an improvement programme that would be delivered over a five-year period.

The improvement programme started in 2005 and focussed on our properties in Wallasey. In 2006 the work moved to Port Sunlight. During 2007, 2008 and 2009 the work will focus on our properties in Birkenhead.

The improvements include double glazing, replacement of kitchens and bathrooms where they are old plus general repairs.

In an ideal world we would have carried out the work to all our homes in 2005 but unfortunately that was unaffordable. In total the improvements are expected to cost well in excess of 2 million pounds. By splitting the cost of the programme over five years the work can be funded without the need to borrow large sums of money.

Merry Christmas!



The Board Members and Staff at Family Housing Association wish you a very enjoyable festive season and a happy and prosperous 2008.

Caroline Place

10 Caroline Place was one of the Association's first properties, which it bought almost 40 years ago.

A long awaited refurbishment costing over a quarter of a million pounds started in October 2007 and is due for completion in March 2008.

Also in this Issue

- *Is your rent too high?*
- *Energy Performance Certificates*
- *Rechargeable Repairs*
- *Racial Harassment Policy*
- *HELP!*
- *Are you Insured?*
- *Who runs Family Housing?*
- *Digital TV Switchover*



Is your rent too high?



Deciding how much rent to charge for each of our properties used to be a very difficult decision. There was always a great deal of debate over how to keep the rents affordable whilst ensuring the Association had enough money to maintain its homes, as well as provide enough funds for some modest development.

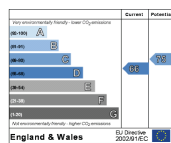
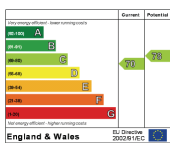
Whilst the debate over the affordability of our rents still rages on, the Association no longer has any difficulty deciding what to charge! The reason for this change is that we can no longer decide what to charge!

The government took control of our rents in 2002 when it introduced a programme of 'Rent Restructuring'. The governments plan was that similar homes should be at the same level of rent, regardless of which social housing landlord provided it, whether it be a housing association home or council home.

To achieve this the government introduced a formula to calculate the rent for every social housing home. All social landlords have to ensure that their homes have reached this rent by 2012. The formula to calculate each rent includes the value of the property, the number of bedrooms and average local earnings. Every year we review our Rent Restructuring plan to keep our increases to a minimum whilst ensuring that we reach the target rent in 2012.

During the last year's Customer Satisfaction Survey, our tenants identified 'Minimising Rent Increases' as the Association's highest priority. Whilst the Association recognises that this is a very important issue, it can do very little to affect the rent you are actually charged.

Energy Performance Certificates



The Association is in the process of obtaining Energy Performance Certificates for its homes. These certificates show how energy efficient a home is, as well as suggesting ways it could be improved. Three quarters of our homes now have a Certificate.

If your home has a certificate you can arrange to see a copy by contacting the office in the New Year.

Save up to £70 a year!



Energy Saving light bulbs use up to 80% less electricity and last up to 15 times longer than conventional bulbs.

10 to 15% of electricity in most homes is used for lighting.

By switching to energy saving bulbs you can save money whilst doing something to protect the environment.



HELP!



When we were younger, so much younger than today, we never had a Customer Panel to help in any way. Now those days are gone, we are much more self-assured. Now we have a Customer Panel to help us do so much more!

We want to provide the best service possible but we need your help so that we know what we do well and where we need to improve. Ideally we would like lots of people to join our Customer Panel and come to the office a few times a year to discuss our work.

However, we recognise that many people do not want to make a commitment of this nature. If this is the case you can still help by answering a brief questionnaire a couple of times a year. If you can help in this way please get in touch.

Finally, if a questionnaire is not your style, you can still make a valuable contribution by returning your repairs questionnaires and making suggestions to improve our service.

Rechargeable Repairs

Rechargeable Repairs are repairs that have been carried out by the Association where the tenant is responsible for the cost. Examples could include loss of keys, broken window glass or other damage to the property.

Every year the Association is inspected by an Internal Auditor. Their role is to examine our working practices to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

During this year's inspection the Auditor recommended a tightening of the processes to record and monitor rechargeable repairs. This has now been implemented and the Association will be pursuing those tenants that owe money in a much more structured way.

Racial Harassment Policy

The Association has a Racial Harassment Policy to ensure that any incidents of this nature are dealt with in an efficient and effective way.

The Association takes allegations of Racial Harassment very seriously and will do everything possible to identify and pursue the perpetrators.

Where appropriate, in consultation with the victim, the Association will involve other agencies such as the Police and the Merseyside Racial Harassment Prevention Unit.

Where applicable the Association will report the incident to the owner of the perpetrators home and discuss the possibility of joint action.



Are you Insured?



We insure all our homes but our insurance only covers the structure of the property.

In the event of a fire or flood our insurance will repair the property but will not cover damage to any of your furniture or possessions.

We recommend that all our tenants purchase their own contents insurance to cover their possessions in the event of fire, flood or theft.

As the Association is a member of the National Housing Federation all of our tenants are eligible for the 'My Home' contents insurance policy.

This is a special policy for Housing Association tenants. If you would like more information on 'My Home' contents insurance please contact the office.

Who runs Family Housing Association?

We are a charitable organisation that exists to provide homes for people who can't afford their own. Any surplus we generate is invested back into our homes. We do not make a profit. We employ four staff to provide the services that you need. Whilst the staff manage the day-to-day affairs of the Association, the key decisions are taken by a voluntary Board of Management. The Board consists of 9 people, who give up their time freely, to help provide homes for people in need. We have a Customer Panel to ensure the views of our residents are considered in all our activities. One member of the Panel is also a member of the Board.

Please look after your home as if it were your own. By looking after your home you can help us to provide homes for other people in housing need.



TV Switchover



In the last three months of 2009 the traditional analogue TV signal will be switched off in our area. To continue to receive TV channels you will need a digital TV receiver and a compatible aerial. Those watching Satellite or Cable TV will be unaffected.

The Association will ensure that our shared aerials are compatible before the 2009 change over. Those without shared aerials will need to make their own arrangements. If you need further advice, please contact the office. More detailed information will be sent to all our tenants in the near future.

How to make a complaint

If you are dissatisfied with the service we provide we have a simple complaints procedure so that you know who to complain to and how quickly we will respond. Contact the office for more details and an information leaflet.

Family Housing Association (Birkenhead & Wirral) Ltd
Marcus House
Marcus Street
Birkenhead
CH41 3NY

Telephone : 0151 647 5000 Fax : 0151 647 5007
e-mail: admin@familyha.org
Emergency Repairs (out of hours) : 0845 345 7808