

Newsletter

AUTUMN 2010 UPDATE

Welcome to our Autumn Newsletter. We hope you find it interesting and informative. The Association Staff have been busy over the summer months and an update on many of their projects are included within this newsletter.

The Tenant Services Authority has asked us to make a 'Local Offer' to our residents as to what our Service Standards should be in the future. Our Customer Panel has been reviewing our Current Service Standards and related Policies and with their help we have produced an offer of new Service Standards that can be found from page 7.

Our improvement programme focuses on Wallasey this year and is progressing well. When complete, 36 properties will benefit from new UPVC double glazing, 12 will have new kitchens and 8 new bathrooms.

We have continued to work hard to reduce Anti-Social Behaviour and are working more closely than ever with the local Police.

Despite the challenging economic climate we have managed to keep our rent arrears low but unfortunately, in one case, we have had to resort to eviction.

Also in this issue -

- Our 'Local Offer'
- Changes to Housing Benefit
- Wirralhomes Consultation
- Fire Prevention Tips
- Sub-letting
- Gas Fires Safety
- Faulty Electrical Appliances
- Postal Customer Panel
- Website Update

Changes to Housing Benefit

The Government announced in the Budget earlier in the year that there would be changes to Housing Benefit that would come into effect from April 2011.

There are a number of changes proposed but there are two that could affect Family Housing Tenants.

1) Changes for Tenants on Job Seekers Allowance

If you are receiving Job Seekers Allowance the Government is proposing that you can only receive Full Housing Benefit for 12 months. This means that if you receive Job Seekers Allowance and all your rent is currently paid by Housing Benefit, after 12 months your Housing Benefit will be reduced by 10% and you will have to pay the difference to the Association.

2) Changes for Tenants of Working Age

If you are of working age, from April 2011 you will only get Housing Benefit for the size of accommodation appropriate for the size of your household. For example, if you are an individual or couple you are entitled to 1 bedroom and 1 living room. If you are living in a 2 or 3 bedroom house your Housing Benefit will be reduced to the equivalent level of a 1 bedroom flat.

If you think you might be affected and would like to know more, please contact the office.





Sub Regional Consultation

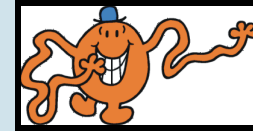
Wirralhomes is the Choice Based Lettings scheme that has been operating in Wirral since 2003. The Association has been a member since January 2010.

Wirral Borough Council has been working with the Councils of Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool and Sefton and more than 20 Housing Associations to develop a new scheme that will cover all of these areas. The new scheme will be called Property Pool Plus and is likely to replace Wirralhomes some time next year.

The proposals include a common application form, a common housing register, a common allocations policy and a shared computer system. The aim is to offer a simplified, more accessible service for customers as well as saving money for partner organisations.

Consultation on the proposals is now underway and will last until 15th November 2010. A consultation pack can be picked up at the Association's Office, at any one stop shop or downloaded from our website. An on-line survey can also be completed.

How long are your arms?



Many of our older persons flats have pull cords in each room so that if a resident has a fall or feels unwell they can pull the cord and get help.

We have been concerned to find that many residents have tied the cord up near the ceiling. If you have your pull cords tied up near the ceiling, unless you have arms like Mr Tickle, you should untie them so that in an emergency you will be able to reach them.

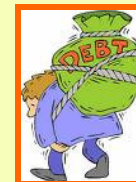


Are your Debts getting you down?

Many of our tenants are on low incomes and find themselves with ever increasing debts, including rent arrears. Many people try to ignore the problem but this often makes matters worse. Others find their debt causes constant worry and stress.

There is help available. Your local Citizens Advice Bureau provides free, impartial debt advice and can help you turn your debt problems around. Why not give them a ring? What have you got to lose? Call the CAB on **0844 477 2121** or visit your local office:

Birkenhead	50 Argyle Street, Birkenhead
Wallasey	237 Liscard Road, Wallasey
Port Sunlight	57 New Chester Road, New Ferry



HOW WOULD YOU LIKE US TO CONTACT YOU?



The Association wants to communicate with you in a way that is most convenient for **you**. This could be by telephone, letter, text message or e-mail.

Next time you speak to us, let us know how you would like us to talk to you in future. We will then ensure that we contact you through your preferred method wherever possible.

If you change your landline number, mobile number or e-mail address, please let us know so that we can keep our records up to date.

FAMILY HOUSING WEBSITE



To keep in touch with the latest Association News, Properties to Let, Jobs and much more, please visit the Association's website at:

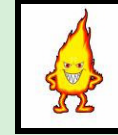
www.familyha.org

The website now includes more detail than ever to allow you to monitor the Association's performance.

You can view statistics relating to rent arrears, re-let times, repairs and the results of the questionnaires returned following repairs.



2-3 BREATHS OF SMOKE AND YOU'RE UNCONSCIOUS



Taking these simple steps could help prevent a fire, which could save your life or the lives of your family.

- Test your smoke alarms at least once a week. Get into the routine of testing them.
- Half of accidental fires at home relate to cooking. Don't leave pans unattended on the cooker, especially those containing hot oil.
- Chip pans are very dangerous. If possible replace them with a deep fat fryer which is thermostatically controlled to prevent the oil getting too hot. If you must use a chip pan, never fill it more than a third full with oil and take extra care.
- Don't keep pans, oven gloves or tea towels on your cooker. Cookers stay hot for a long time after they have been switched off and some cookers can accidentally be switched on.
- Don't plug lots of electrical items into one socket using adapters or trailing sockets. This is particularly important for items that use a lot of electricity such as fires, irons, and tumble dryers.
- Fires caused by cigarettes kill more people than any other cause of fire. Put them out, right out.
- Appliances such as tumble dryers, washing machines and dishwashers are a common cause of fire. Don't put them on whilst you are out or when you are in bed.
- Candles are an obvious fire risk. Make sure they are in a suitable candle holder and put them out if you leave the room.

Our Offer of Service Standards

On the following pages you will find our offer of new Service Standards. You may have already been involved in this process after reading the articles earlier in the year in our Annual Report or on our website.

The proposed standards have been developed in conjunction with our Customer Panel. The Customer Panel used the results of our 2009 Customer Satisfaction Survey to help develop the new standards to address issues identified by the Survey. The proposed standards reflect the priorities identified by our residents during the survey. They also referred to all our relevant policies and existing service standards. Our offer of new service standards has been included in this newsletter to give all of our residents an opportunity to have their say.

Please take the time to read the offer and contact the Association if you have any comments or suggestions. A brief questionnaire is available on request.



The regulator of Social Housing, the Tenant Services Authority, requires all Housing Associations to make a 'Local Offer' of service standards to their tenants. All the feedback from our Local Offer will be discussed at the next Customer Panel meeting before the new service standards are finalised.

This is an important process as the new service standards will help shape the service we provide to our residents in the years to come.

A) Tenant Involvement and Empowerment

Offer of Service	Standard Proposed	How we will Measure Performance	How Performance will be Monitored
1 Support and service a Customer Panel made up of a cross section of tenants.	Involve Tenants in monitoring, evaluating and reviewing services, with a minimum of 2 meetings each year.	Number of meetings and size of panel will be recorded. Services and policies reviewed will be recorded.	Details will be published in our Annual Report and monitored as part of Key Performance Information.
2 Menu of involvement options, including surveys, phone, e-mail and meetings.	Involvement options to be publicised in Newsletter, to all tenants at sign up and at home visit to new tenants.	Size of Customer Panel and the number becoming involved will be recorded.	Details will be published in our Annual Report and monitored as part of Key Performance Information.
3 Consultation on major changes to service delivery.	Consult with all tenants affected giving a one month consultation period and provide feedback on outcome.	Number of consultations undertaken will be recorded.	The Customer Panel will be kept informed of consultations undertaken.
4 Consult on Business Plan proposals.	Involve Customer Panel and all tenants who have expressed an interest in being involved.	Number of residents involved in Business Planning process will be recorded.	The Customer Panel will be informed of other residents that have been involved.
5 Consultation on new customer service or tenant related policies.	Policies will be reviewed by the Customer Panel and interested tenants.	A record of the policies consulted on will be maintained.	The Board will be informed of all policies reviewed by Customers.
6 Ensure tenant representation on the Board.	Tenant representation on the Board to be between 1 and 3 members.	The number of Tenant Board Members to be recorded.	Details to be published in our Annual Report.
7 Provide choice during planned maintenance works.	Provide options for tenants regarding kitchen style and UPVC door design.	Percentage of tenants allowed a choice during planned maintenance works to be recorded.	Details reported to Customer Panel and included in our Annual Report.

A) Tenant Involvement and Empowerment (Continued)

Offer of Service	Standard Proposed	How we will Measure Performance	How Performance will be Monitored
8 Provide feedback on Surveys and Consultations undertaken.	Publish feedback on all surveys and consultations undertaken so that it is available to all tenants.	Details of surveys / consultations and how results were publicised will be recorded.	Details will be published in our Annual Report.
9 Provide residents with information regarding the Association's Performance in relation to service standards.	Publish our performance on key service standard information in our Annual Report.	Inclusion of key service standard information in Annual Report.	Annual Report to be monitored by our Customer Panel.
10 Maintain a high standard of Customer Care.	Respond to letters within 5 days, answer phone within 5 rings, keep appointments and customer friendly offices.	Internal monitoring of response times.	Monitored by the Customer Panel and Board as part of Key Performance Information.
11 Offer a straight-forward and clear Complaints Procedure.	Meet targets in 3 stage procedure of responding initially within 7 days and then if taken to stage 2 (considered by the Board) respond within 7 days of Board Meeting.	Response times for each complaint to be recorded.	Monitored by the Customer Panel and Board as part of Key Performance Information.
12 Provide a fair, equal service to all regardless of disability, gender, race, age, sexual orientation, religion or philosophical belief.	Ensure all of our activities are compliant with standards. Regularly review policies to ensure compliance.	Periodic independent tenant survey, repair customer satisfaction questionnaires and Key Performance Information.	Monitored by the Board and Customer Panel.

B) Home Standard - Repairs, Maintenance & Quality of Accommodation

Offer of Service	Standard Proposed	How we will Measure Performance	How Performance will be Monitored
1 Ensure a variety of methods for reporting repairs are available.	Allow repairs to be reported by telephone, e-mail, text message, in person or through our website.	Record the number of repairs reported through the various methods available.	Details of reporting methods to be included in our Annual Report.
2 Provide an out of hours emergency repairs service.	Emergency repairs can be reported 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.	Record the number of emergency repairs and whether they used the out of hours service.	Details of reporting methods to be included in our Annual Report.
3 Prioritise repairs so that those that are most urgent are dealt with first.	Attend within: Emergency - 24 hours Urgent - 5 working days Routine - 21 working days	For each repair, record priority allocated and length of time to completion.	Monitored by the Board and Customer Panel as part of Key Performance Information. Include in our Annual Report.
4 Ensure our customers are satisfied with our repairs service.	For each repair a questionnaire will be sent out to the tenant along with a reply paid envelope. To encourage responses, a monthly prize draw will be held.	Returned questionnaires will be analysed and the results for each question reported.	Monitored by the Board and Customer Panel as part of Key Performance Information. Include in our Annual Report.
5 Ensure repairs are carried out to a good standard.	Repairs are carried out to the appropriate technical standard relevant to the type of repair.	A sample of repairs will be sent to an independent qualified surveyor for inspection.	Monitored by the Board and Customer Panel as part of Key Performance Information.
6 Ensure all properties are in a good state of repair.	All properties will meet the decent homes standard and will be periodically inspected to ensure compliance.	Maintenance of an accurate database of property condition allowing evaluation of stock condition.	Compliance with decent homes standard to be included in our Annual Report.

B) Home Standard - Repairs, Maintenance & Quality of Accommodation (Continued)

Offer of Service	Standard Proposed	How we will Measure Performance	How Performance will be Monitored
7 Maintain properties to a good standard through an ongoing planned maintenance programme.	Properties to meet all technical standards published by the Government and Regulatory bodies and will be periodically inspected to ensure compliance.	Maintenance of an accurate database of property condition allowing evaluation of stock condition.	Monitored by the Customer Panel and the Board.
8 Test gas and electrical installations in all our homes regularly.	Test gas installations every year and electrical installations every five years.	A record of all gas and electrical tests will be maintained allowing analysis of compliance with the standard.	Monitored by the Board and Customer Panel as part of Key Performance Information.
9 Ensure communal services such as cleaning and gardening are to a good standard.	Communal services will be regularly inspected to ensure work is being carried out to a high standard.	A record of inspections will be maintained allowing analysis of the standard of work.	Performance reviewed by the Customer Panel as part of their annual review of service charges.
10 Carry out aids and adaptations to assist residents with disabilities.	All applications for adaptations will be considered and a decision made within 28 days.	A record of applications received and adaptations carried out will be maintained.	Monitored by the Board and Customer Panel as part of Key Performance Information.

C) Neighbourhood & Community Standard - Local Area Co-operation & Anti Social Behaviour

Offer of Service	Standard Proposed	How we will Measure Performance	How Performance will be Monitored
1 All new tenants will be made aware of their responsibility in relation to acceptable behaviour.	Acceptable behaviour will be discussed with all new tenants during tenancy sign up.	A sign up check list will be kept for each sign up showing what has been discussed.	ASB performance included in Key Performance Information monitored by the Board and Customer Panel.
2 All new tenancies to be monitored for the first twelve months and Starter Tenancies used where appropriate.	The Operational Services Committee will monitor all new tenancies for the first 12 months. Starter Tenancies will only be converted to Assured Tenancies after 12 months where behaviour has been acceptable.	All new tenancies will be included for discussion on the papers for the Operational Services Committee.	Monitored by Operational Services Committee, the Board and details included in the Annual Report.
3 We will make it easy to report Anti-Social Behaviour.	We will accept reports of ASB by letter, phone, e-mail, text message, in person or via our website.	All ASB complaints will be recorded including the method used to make the complaint.	ASB performance included in Key Performance Information monitored by the Board and Customer Panel.
4 We will work to resolve all complaints of Anti-Social Behaviour to the satisfaction of the complainant.	Tackle ASB in accordance with our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, agreeing appropriate action with complainant, working with other agencies as necessary until complainant agrees complaint is resolved.	All ASB complaints and efforts to resolve to be recorded electronically allowing analysis of ASB work cases.	ASB performance included in Key Performance Information monitored by the Board and Customer Panel.
5 We will work to improve poor local environmental standards.	We will work with other agencies to meet minimum environmental standards.	Compare with published standards of locality.	Performance reviewed by Customer Panel.

C) Neighbourhood & Community Standard - Local Area Co-operation & Anti Social Behaviour

Offer of Service	Standard Proposed	How we will Measure Performance	How Performance will be Monitored
6 We will carry out estate / property inspections and encourage residents to take part.	Part of our regular inspection schedule will be published in our newsletters and on our website.	The number of residents attending our published inspections will be recorded.	The number of residents attending inspections will be included in our Annual Report.
7 All issues identified at scheme inspections will be addressed.	Repair orders will be generated as necessary and a priority allocated. Issues identified for monitoring will be checked at subsequent inspections.	A record will be maintained of all scheme inspections. All issues will be recorded electronically for monitoring.	Details of scheme inspections will be included in our Annual Report.
8 We will ensure offensive and other graffiti is removed.	We will work with Streetscene to remove graffiti within 28 days or 24 hours if offensive.	A record of graffiti problems will be maintained and inspections carried out to ensure they are resolved.	Details of graffiti removal will be reported to the Customer Panel.
9 We will secure abandoned or insecure properties.	Properties will be secured within 24 hours.	Securing properties will be processed as an emergency repair.	Monitored by the Customer Panel and Board as part of Key Performance Information.
10 We will rapidly remove syringes or other drug related equipment.	Items will be removed within 24 hours.	Will be processed as an emergency repair.	Monitored by the Customer Panel and Board as part of Key Performance Information.
11 We will work to encourage recycling of household waste.	Work with Local Authority to promote recycling.	Our promotional activities will be recorded.	Activities reported to Customer Panel.
12 We will work with residents and partner agencies to improve the local environment	We will support and promote events such as clean ups, skip days, scrutiny panels and neighbourhood action plans.	Our involvement in events will be recorded.	Activities reported to Customer Panel.

Sub Letting



Sub-letting is when a tenant rents out all or part of the property to another person. This is strictly forbidden under the terms of their tenancy agreement. The Association has the power to end the tenancy of those responsible through the Courts.

Sub-letting is a major problem for the Association as it can result in people living in our homes that have not been approved by the Association who could have a history of criminal activity or Anti-Social Behaviour. They may also not be in need of social housing and are preventing those who are in need from renting an affordable home.

If you suspect a neighbour is sub-letting all or part of their home, please contact the Association. We will treat all reports in the strictest confidence and will commence our own investigation into those involved.

Gas Fire Safety



On a number of occasions we have discovered as part of our annual gas safety check that a tenant has painted their gas fire. This can be very dangerous as the very high temperatures involved can cause some paints to give off toxic smoke, toxic fumes or even catch fire.

Never paint a gas fire without first seeking guidance from the Association as to which parts you can safely paint and which paint is safe to use. If a fire is painted without permission the tenant could be held responsible for the cost of repairing or replacing the fire.



Electrical Faults



We are often asked by our tenants to send out an electrician because a circuit keeps tripping in their home. In the vast majority of cases this is due to a faulty electrical appliance belonging to the tenant and not a fault with the electrics. If our contractor finds this to be the case, we generally charge the tenant for the call out.

Tracking down a faulty appliance can be quite easy provided a few simple steps are followed.

- 1) Switch off and unplug all electrical items attached to the circuit that has tripped. If this is the circuit for the sockets, this could involve TV's, DVD players, kettles, toasters, fridges, washing machines etc.
- 2) Try to reset the circuit by flicking the switch on the fuse box / consumer unit.
- 3) If the circuit will not reset double check that you have unplugged everything. If you have, then phone the Association and report the fault.
- 4) If the circuit resets ok, plug in and switch on your electrical items one by one. If switching on the appliance trips the circuit, you have found the faulty appliance. To be sure, plug the rest of your appliances back in and reset the circuit. If it works ok, you know you have found your faulty equipment.



The Association has insurance that covers the building in the event of fire or flood. This insurance does not cover your contents. In the event of a fire or flood, if you do not have contents insurance you could lose many of your possessions.

The Association advises all tenants to ensure they have adequate contents insurance. The National Housing Federation offers a low cost contents insurance policy called 'My Home'. For more details on 'My Home' contents insurance contact the office on 647 5000.

CRIMESTOPPERS

If you witness a crime or think that someone may be breaking the law, you can call Crimestoppers and you won't have to give your name.

So if you think that someone might be:

- Claiming benefits they are not entitled to, such as disability benefits
- Have a partner living with them and have not told Housing Benefit
- Dealing or taking drugs
- Driving without a license, road tax or insurance.
- Anything else illegal!

Phone CRIMESTOPPERS on **0800 555 111**

CUSTOMER PANEL

The Association's Customer Panel is a group of our tenants who meet a few times each year to discuss all aspects of our work, review our policies and procedures and help forge the services our tenants receive.



To try and get more residents involved in the work of the Association we are promoting our Postal Customer Panel membership.

Postal members get some paperwork sent through the post a couple of times each year. They will also be given a brief questionnaire to complete to tell us what they think. The views expressed on their questionnaire are then included in the debate during the Customer Panel meeting.

If they have any questions about the papers the Association staff answer them over the phone so there is no need for them to call into the office.

This offers tenants a chance to be involved and influence the way we work without the need to attend meetings.

If you are interested in becoming a postal member of the Customer Panel please get in touch.



Please Report Defects

The Association works hard to ensure its properties remain in good repair by carrying out regular inspections of the exterior and through planned maintenance.

It can often be a number of years between internal inspections and therefore we rely on our tenants to tell us if there are any problems. If you are experiencing any repair problems please let us know straight away. It is often much cheaper for us to rectify a problem early on, as waiting can result in significantly more damage.

We also need you to let us know if there are any health and safety issues, such as trip hazards, so that we can fix them before someone gets hurt.

Is your Smoke Detector Working?



Your smoke detector could save your life in the event of a fire but only if it's working properly. Press the test button and it should chirp, if it doesn't let us know.

How to complain



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.



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Out of Hours Emergency Repairs

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