

# Newsletter



## NEW SERVICE STANDARDS



In our last newsletter we outlined our proposed new Service Standards that had been produced with the help of our Customer Panel. No amendments were proposed by any of our residents and the Service Standards were approved by our Board without alteration. A summary of the new Service Standards is included later on in this Newsletter.

The Service Standards are very important as they directly affect the services provided to our residents. The new Service Standards come into effect from the 1st April 2011 and the Association has put in place all the necessary procedures to monitor our performance.

Our Annual Report to our Tenants is published in July each year. This years Annual Report will contain more detail on our new Service Standards and how we have implemented them.

The first year of the new standards covers the period from 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012. We will publish details of our performance during this time in our 2012 Annual Report to Tenants.

### Also in this issue -

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- Rita's Retirement
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- Cars blocking your driveway?
- Summary of Service Standards
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# RESIDENTS ROBBED!



In recent weeks, two of the Association's tenants have had their homes burgled. Both events were very upsetting for those tenants concerned. All our residents are at risk and so everyone should take great care that they do not fall victim to similar tactics.

In the first event the thief preyed on an elderly tenant. He told her that he was from the Water Board and was carrying out tests in the area. He was nicely dressed, sounded well spoken and very plausible. Once inside her flat he asked our tenant to fill a pan full of water so he could monitor the water pressure. Whilst the elderly lady was filling the pan the thief stole valuables from the flat.

In the second event a youth knocked on the door of a young couple and through verbal abuse managed to draw the male tenant into the road. He was then set upon by a gang and physically assaulted. Whilst his partner was trying to break up the attack their house was ransacked and valuables stolen.

Please take great care that you are not the next victim of this type of reprehensible behaviour. If you do not recognise the person at the door then do not open the door. Under no circumstances should you let anyone into your home unless they have made an appointment and have identification. If you are in any doubt at all, phone the Association to confirm that they are genuine. We will always be happy to help.

# Happy Retirement Rita

After over twenty five years loyal service to the Association, Rita Ludden retired at the end of last year. Rita received lots of lovely cards and messages. Rita was overwhelmed by the number of cards and retirement gifts she received. She asked us to thank everyone for their kindness and good wishes.



In her twenty five years with the Association, Rita has seen it grow from only a hand full of properties to its current 366 properties.

Rita's wealth of experience and hard work is a loss to the Association but we all wish Rita a long, happy and healthy retirement.

## It's no use if you can't reach it!



Some of our older persons properties have the benefit of pull cords or pendants that can get you help in an emergency. All too often we find that these cords are tied up near the ceiling or the pendants are kept in a drawer.

If you have a fall they will be no use to you if you can't get to them to activate the alarm. Always leave the cords hanging and wear your pendant if you have one. It does not matter if the alarm is triggered accidentally. The response centre expects this occasionally and would rather have a few false alarms rather than you not be able to activate your alarm in a genuine emergency.



## Going Away?



If you are going on a short break or a longer holiday, always tell one of your trusted neighbours. If you don't know your neighbours that well then please let us know. This is particularly important if you are older or not in the best of health.

If your neighbours don't know that you have gone away they may think you are unwell or missing and call the Police. In these circumstances the Police often have to force entry to establish whether you are in difficulty within the property.

## Your home too big for you?

Larger homes with three or four bedrooms are in desperately short supply. If you live in a larger property and it is now too big for your family the Association can help you transfer to a smaller property of the appropriate size.



If you would like to explore this possibility further please contact the office on 647 5000.

## Text Messaging



Did you know that you can now contact the Association by text message.

You can report repairs or anti-social behaviour, request a statement or anything else.

The number to text is:

**07854 313 193**

## Eyesore!



If you have trees or bushes in your garden please make sure they do not overhang the pavement.

If overhanging branches poke someone in the eye, you could be held responsible!

The Association is responsible for maintaining trees and bushes in communal gardens so if you notice them dangerously overhanging the pavement please let us know.

## SPARE KEYS



Please always leave a spare set of keys for your home with family or friends. Ideally, also let us know who has your spare keys. We do not keep any spare keys for your home.

If you lose your keys you would have to pay to have your locks replaced.

Also, in an emergency it would be possible to gain access to your home without needing to force entry.

## Out of Hours Emergency Repairs Service

The Association uses Sitex ORBIS to manage our 'Out of Hours' emergency repairs service.

They have recently launched a new number for us so that when you call they know it relates to a Family Housing Property. The new number to call when the office is closed is **08 448 933 979**.

# LOAN SHARKS



In the UK it is estimated that over 200,000 people use a loan shark. It is illegal to lend money without a licence. Loans from illegal lenders are not enforceable and it is the loan shark that is acting illegally, not the borrower.

How can you identify a loan shark?

- They often ask for security such as passports, bank cards or benefit cards.
- They rarely offer any paperwork.
- They refuse to specify the interest rate.
- They refuse to tell you how much you owe.
- Impose huge interest rates or random charges.
- Become intimidating, threatening or violent if they are not paid.

If you think you have borrowed money from an illegal loan shark then there is free, confidential help available from North West Trading Standards:

- Call 0300 555 2222
- Text 'Loan Shark' and details to 60003
- E-mail [reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk](mailto:reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk)

For more information please visit:  
[www.direct.gov.uk/stoploansharks](http://www.direct.gov.uk/stoploansharks)



## Do neighbours block your driveway?

Under the Council's Parking Policy it is an offence to park a car where the kerb has been lowered for pedestrian or vehicular access.



This means if someone parks across your driveway without your permission they would be committing an offence that merits an instant £70 fine.

If someone parks across your driveway, phone Wirral Borough Council on 0151 606 2004.



## Do you need help with Debt?

If your debt problems seem to be getting worse, or you feel like you will never be able to get out of debt, 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



# New Service Standards

Our new Service Standards are important because they shape the way our service is delivered to our residents. They are in three parts.

## **Part 1 - Tenant Involvement and Empowerment**



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.

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.

3) Consultation on major changes to service delivery; Consult with all tenants affected giving a one month consultation period and provide feedback on outcome.

4) Consult on Business Plan proposals; Involve Customer Panel and all tenants who have expressed an interest in being involved.

5) Consultation on new customer service or tenant related policies; Policies will be reviewed by the Customer Panel and interested tenants.

6) Ensure tenant representation on the Board; Tenant representation on the Board to be between 1 and 3 members.

7) Provide choice during planned maintenance works; Provide options for tenants regarding kitchen style and UPVC door design.

8) Provide feedback on Surveys and Consultations undertaken; Publish feedback on all surveys and consultations undertaken so that it is available to all tenants.

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.

10) Maintain a high standard of Customer Care. Respond to letters within 5 days, answer phone within 5 rings, keep appointments and provide customer friendly offices.

11) Offer a straight-forward and clear Complaints Procedure; Stage 1 - Chief Executive to respond within 7 days.

Stage 2 - Complaint to Board. Respond within 7 days of Board Meeting.

Stage 3 - Complaint to Housing Ombudsman.

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.

## **Part 2 - Home Standard**



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.

2) Provide an out of hours emergency repairs service; Emergency repairs can be reported 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

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.

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.

**(Continued on next page)**

## **Part 2 - Home Standard (continued)**



- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 8) Test gas and electrical installations in all our homes regularly; Test gas installations every year and electrical installations every five years.
- 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.
- 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.

## **Part 3 - Neighbourhood and Community Standard**



- 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.
- 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.

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.

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.

5) We will work to improve poor local environmental standards; We will work with other agencies to meet minimum environmental standards.

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.

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.

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.

9) We will secure abandoned or insecure properties within 24 hours.

10) We will rapidly remove syringes or other drug related equipment within 24 hours.

11) We will work to encourage recycling of household waste.

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.



## 2011-12 Rent Review

Last year saw very low rent increases for the majority of our tenants as the inflation figure used to calculate the target rent was very low.

This year the inflation figure was just over 5% and therefore rents are likely to increase by a larger figure during 2011. Typically, this year, rents will be increased by between £3 and £6 per week.

The rents we charge are set using a government formula so the Association can do little to influence the rents that our tenants actually pay.

### **PORT SUNLIGHT VILLAGE FESTIVAL**

The Port Sunlight Village Festival will take place on Sunday 24th July 2011 between 11am and 5pm.




As in previous years the Association will sponsor the free to enter Dog Show. Anyone can attend the Festival and there is always lots to do including fairground rides, live music, food and craft stalls, vintage vehicles and much more.

For more information visit: [www.portsunlightvillage.com](http://www.portsunlightvillage.com)



# Fires Kill



-  90 people die every year because their smoke alarm did not work. Test your smoke alarm regularly - When did you last test yours?
-  120 people die every year because of a fire caused by a cigarette. Put it out, right out.
-  Over 1800 fires each year are caused by candles. Make sure they are safe. Put them out if you leave the room or feel tired.

You and your family are much more likely to survive a fire if you have planned how you would escape.

- ➔ Imagine a fire in a variety of different locations in your home. Decide on the best way to get your family safely out of the building.
- ➔ Make sure you have access to door and window lock keys.
- ➔ Make sure that all your exits are free from clutter.

If your exit is blocked by a fire;

- ⊙ Get everyone into one room, ideally one with a window and a phone.
- ⊙ Put bedding around the bottom of the door to block out smoke.
- ⊙ If you can escape out of a window use bedding to break your fall. Lower yourself down, don't jump.

The Association is working towards having mains powered smoke alarms in all our homes. If you think you only have battery powered smoke alarms please contact the office.



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.

## **Rent Payment Cards**

The Association offers a variety of ways to pay your rent with Direct Debit becoming increasingly popular. Some tenants choose to pay using their Rent Payment Card at local shops or Post Offices.

The Rent Payment Card system has proved extremely reliable and it is very rare for payments not to reach us. However, if you pay by Rent Payment Card you should always check the amount on your receipt matches the amount you have paid. You should also keep your receipt until the payment appears on your next rent statement.

Allpay guarantee that if you have your receipt they will honour your payment.

## Please Report Repair Problems

We want to keep your home in good repair but we can only do this if you let us know when you have repair problems. It is often much cheaper for us to attend to a repair problem when it first appears rather than waiting for it to get worse.



So if you have a loose kitchen drawer, a wobbly door hinge, a dripping gutter, a damp patch or anything else please report it straight away and don't wait for it to get worse.

In fact, you have an obligation under the terms of your tenancy to report defects to us and so failure to report repair problems would be a breach of your tenancy. So please report your repairs so we can keep your home in good condition.

## Problems with Neighbours?

If your neighbours behaviour is getting you down, don't wait until you have a row before speaking to us. Very often we can help resolve neighbour disputes at an early stage.



Give us a call on 647 5000 so we can have a chat about it and discuss the best way forward.

## Scheme Inspections

The Association carries out regular external inspections of all of its homes.

Homes with shared facilities such as gardens or hallways are inspected every four weeks. Roads where we own a good proportion of the homes are inspected every ten weeks. Individual properties are inspected every six months.

Below are a selection of inspections so that you can meet the staff and raise any concerns you may have.

10/05 10.00am - The Birches  
17/05 10.30am - Leighton Rd  
01/06 10.00am - The Firs  
06/06 10.00am - The Rowans  
27/06 10.00am - The Lindens  
28/06 10.30am - Fairway South

## 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.



**(Birkenhead & Wirral) Ltd**

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Marcus Street

Birkenhead

CH41 3NY

Telephone : 0151 647 5000

Text Message: 07854 313 193

Fax : 0151 647 5007

e-mail: [admin@familyha.org](mailto:admin@familyha.org)

web: [www.familyha.org](http://www.familyha.org)

Out of Hours Emergency Repairs

08 448 933 979