

Newsletter

ALL OUR HOMES ARE DECENT!

Over the last 5 years the Association has been implementing a plan to ensure all of our homes meet the Government's 'Decent Homes Standard'.

The Decent Homes Standard requires homes to meet a minimum standard where key elements of our properties, such as kitchens and bathrooms, have to be under a certain age. It also requires properties to be in a reasonable state of repair, have reasonably modern facilities and provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

At the end of our Improvement Programme in 2009 all of our properties met the Decent Homes Standard. To reach this milestone has taken a huge amount of work and investment with the total cost to the Association exceeding £2,500,000.

All of this investment has been funded without borrowing money. This has been achieved through low administrative costs, excellent arrears performance and careful financial management.

Work to ensure our properties continue to meet the standard never ends, as each year various property elements reach the age threshold where they need to be replaced.

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CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY 2009

The Association carried out a Customer Satisfaction Survey towards the end of 2009. The survey was carried out by an independent company called Kwest Research.

They sent questionnaires to all of our residents and those that returned their questionnaire were entered into a prize draw. Thank you to everyone who returned their questionnaire. Your views are important and help us shape our services for the future.

The results from the survey are now in. They found that the Association is above average in all key service areas. The overall satisfaction levels were:

Services provided by landlord	99%
Area as a place to live	83%
Repairs service	99%
General condition of the property	95%
Value for money for rent	94%
Taking tenants' views into account	91%
Keeping residents informed	94%

The average satisfaction level for Housing Associations across the country is 79.5% so the results are very encouraging. The final report is seventy seven pages in length and identifies where the Association is doing well and where there is scope for improvement.

More details of the survey will be included in this year's Annual Report but if you want to see the full document, a copy is available to view in the office.

Wirralhomes

Affordable rented accommodation in Wirral

The Association became a member of Wirralhomes in January 2010. Wirralhomes provides a single point for people to apply for social housing in Wirral and should not be confused with Wirral Partnership Homes which is a Housing Association that took over what was Wirral's Council Housing.

The Association still owns, manages, maintains and repairs all of its homes as before but when a tenant leaves, our property is re-let through Wirralhomes rather than people applying directly to us.

Wirralhomes is a Choice Based Lettings Scheme where people choose which properties they would like to live in, rather than the traditional system of landlords deciding which property they would be offered.

Our membership of Wirralhomes creates many more opportunities for our tenants who wish to transfer, as they can apply for Family Housing properties as well as any suitable properties offered by other Housing Associations. If you wish to transfer it is important to register with Wirralhomes and also to inform the Association, so that we can keep you in mind for any suitable properties that become available.

For more information contact the Association or visit the Wirralhomes website at www.wirralhomes.net

LARGE PRINT

The Association sends out a statement every three months so that you can keep up to date with your account.

If you find our standard statements difficult to read, the Association's computer system can automatically send your statements in large print.

ASSOCIATION TENANT FACES PRISON

One Family Housing Association tenant is facing time in prison because they failed to tell the Housing Benefit Department about a change in their circumstances. Over a number of years this resulted in over £18,000 of fraud.

If you are claiming benefit, it is vitally important that you declare all your earnings and any changes during the year. It is also very important that you declare the income of your partner or anyone else living with you, as this can also affect your benefit.

If you don't, over time the amount of benefit fraud you could be committing could reach the level where you could face prison. Remember - it's your claim and your responsibility to declare the earnings of your household.

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

Our 2009 Customer Satisfaction Survey found that 58% of our tenants had access to the internet.

If you have internet access, did you know that you can pay your rent on-line using your debit card?

If there are other features you would like to see on our website please let us know.



SMOKE CAN KILL YOU IN LESS THAN 1 MINUTE



Did you know?

- 90 people a year die because their smoke alarm did not work due to a missing or flat battery.
- 5 fires a day are caused by candles.
- Half of all fires are caused by cooking accidents.
- Every 3 days someone dies from a cigarette fire.
- 7000 fires every day are caused by faulty electrical appliances and wiring.

Top Tips to Survive a Fire

- Test your smoke alarm every week. When did you last check yours? Your life could depend on it.
- Close internal doors when you go to bed as this will help stop a fire and smoke from spreading.
- Make a fire escape plan and practice it. Imagine a fire in different locations in your home and consider how you would escape.
- Where do you keep your keys for windows and doors - could you find them in a fire?
- Keep low to get out of the smoke.
- If your escape route is blocked, get everyone in one room, close the door and use bedding around the bottom of the door to keep out smoke. If you have access to a phone dial 999. Open a window and shout "FIRE - HELP". Could you escape through the window by using bedding to cushion your fall?
- Don't tackle a fire yourself. Leave it to the professionals. Get out and stay out.

DO WE KNOW YOUR NEXT OF KIN?

For many of our residents we have contact details for their next of kin so that we know who to contact in an emergency.

If your next of kin contact information has changed, or you have not provided next of kin details before, please let us know.

We would only contact next of kin in an emergency, so you can be confident that we will not contact them unnecessarily.



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



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY

The Association has recently introduced a Domestic Violence Policy. The aim of the policy is to communicate our belief that none of our residents should live in fear of violence from any member of their household. A summary of the policy is included in this newsletter to help our residents understand how we deal with reports of domestic violence.

Definition of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence could include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse. Examples include:

- Physical abuse – e.g. slapping, pushing, kicking, punching and stabbing, attempted murder or murder
- Sexual abuse – e.g. rape and non-consensual sex acts
- Emotional or psychological abuse – e.g. intimidation, isolation, verbal abuse, humiliation, degradation, etc
- Financial abuse – e.g. denial of rights or restriction of personal freedom, e.g. withholding money or financial help

Victim-centred approach

We will adopt a victim-centred approach. This means that we will take all reports of domestic violence seriously and that a victim's report alone will be sufficient for them to be given advice and assistance as a matter of priority.

Where third parties (such as neighbours) report domestic violence, we will take appropriate steps to investigate these reports whilst ensuring those involved are not put at risk. We will seek advice from the Police / voluntary sector as necessary.

Confidentiality

Strict confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Victims will be encouraged to allow the Association to share information with other agencies (including the police and local authority departments) in order to ensure that the full range of remedies are available. All information provided by the victim will be treated with the utmost confidence and only passed on to external agencies with their consent.

Timescale

Victims reporting domestic violence should be interviewed at the earliest possible opportunity, normally by the end of the next working day, however the victim may need to delay the interview. The victim should be advised of their right to alternative accommodation through the Local Authority when they first report the domestic violence and a contact number should be made available.

Dealing with reports of Domestic Violence

The Association will:

- Ensure that the victim is offered the opportunity to be interviewed by someone of the same gender. This same officer should then deal with the case thereafter.
- Thoroughly investigate all reports of domestic violence.
- Respect the victim's views when deciding on action.
- Keep the victim informed about progress.
- Refer the complainant to other agencies who need to take action or who could offer support.
- Consider a range of responses and enforcement actions depending upon the circumstances of the case and the wishes of the victim.
- With the agreement of the victim, arrange regular contact either via telephone, e-mail, text message or personal visit.

FAMILY HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Many of you will know that Family Housing Association is a non-profit making charitable organisation whose main aim is to provide good quality homes for people in housing need.

Our aims, objectives and goals are the principles which guide our work and are reviewed on a regular basis as part of our business plan.

Our Business Plan identifies our Aims as:

AIMS

- 1) To help those on low incomes who are in housing need in its area of operation.
- 2) To maintain its properties to a good standard and within the timescale laid down in its Repairs Policy.

- 3) To ensure prudent financial practices in accordance with its Financial and Treasury Management Policies.

CORPORATE GOALS

Our corporate goals highlight key areas and what we aim to achieve.

- 1) Providing caring and courteous services to all existing and potential residents that are customer focussed and respond to our customers needs and aspirations as set out in our resident involvement strategy.
- 2) Maintaining our properties to the best possible standards.
- 3) Providing a good standard of housing which offers value for money for people in housing need.

We are interested in your opinions regarding our aims and objectives

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

4) Exploring innovative new initiatives that are in keeping with the tradition and skills of the Association.

5) Ensuring equality of opportunity in the allocation of housing, employment of staff and appointment of Board Members.

6) Planning and controlling all aspects of business activity so as to maintain the Association's financial strength and viability.

7) Retaining a well-motivated professional workforce.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives in our Business Plan exist to add clarity to decision making, particularly in the medium and longer term.

1) To ensure a quality service by delivery through professional well-motivated staff and external consultants which meet the customers' needs.

2) To establish an ongoing asset management programme for repairs and improvements that accord with good practice and legislative requirements.

3) To explore appropriate mainstream opportunities for achieving steady and controlled growth through new development or acquisitions in partnership with other agencies in our area of operation.

4) To achieve an operating surplus sufficient to enable effective re-investment to support the Association's ongoing activities and to retain the support of funders.

ves, so please contact the office if you would like to discuss them

LIFT IT UP!



Criminals are targeting UPVC doors because many people do not lock them properly. When they are locked correctly they are far more secure than traditional wooden doors.

To lock a UPVC door properly you must lift the handle fully before turning the key. If you do not lift the handle before turning the key, your door will only be secured in 1 place and could easily be opened.

Police across the area are routinely checking UPVC doors at night to see if they are properly locked. If they aren't they are letting themselves in and waking up the residents to demonstrate that it could have been a criminal that had just walked into their home.

Remember - always lift the handle before turning the key.

PORT SUNLIGHT VILLAGE FESTIVAL

The Port Sunlight Village Festival will take place on Sunday 25th July 2010 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

ANNUAL RENT REVIEW



The rents for our properties are dictated by a government formula that includes property value, average local earnings and the number of bedrooms.

The formula generates a target rent for each property that the Association must reach by 2012. The target rent changes every year by the rate of inflation and as this is not known for future years, it is very difficult to accurately predict what rent we have to achieve for each property in 2012.

The Association aims to increase each rent in equal steps to reach the predicted target rent by 2012 but to do this we have to estimate what the rate of inflation is likely to be. The published inflation figure last year was negative, so target rents are now slightly lower than they were 12 months ago.

We have recently reviewed our rent plan and whilst most properties will see a small increase in rent this year, some rents will remain the same and a small number will be reduced to ensure they can reach their predicted target rent in 2012.

When we carry out the annual rent review for each property, we will write to each tenant and explain how their rent will change.



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.

Free Security Marking of your Valuables

Merseyside Police have recently launched an initiative in Birkenhead where a Police Officer, or Police Community Support Officer, can visit your home and place security markings on your valuables, so that they could be more easily identified if they were stolen.

During their visit, they could also provide advice on the security of your home and could also discuss any problems you may be experiencing with crime or anti-social behaviour.

This service is also available to our residents in Wallasey and Port Sunlight. To arrange free security marking of your valuables, phone (0151) 777 2357.

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. We want all of the main areas where we operate to be represented on the panel, but we don't currently have a tenant from Wallasey.



If you live in Wallasey and are interested in the work of the Panel, please contact the office and we will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

The Association is also looking for tenants who are interested in the work of the Association but are unable to come into the office to attend Customer Panel Meetings.

For these tenants we could send out all the information that is presented to our Customer Panel and provide a brief questionnaire for you to give your feedback. You could discuss any of the documents over the phone if you needed any further information.

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

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

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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