

# **The Tenant's Handbook**

## ***Foreword***

The Housing Executive aims to manage its stock in an efficient and effective manner and to consult with its tenants thoroughly on all matters affecting their terms and conditions of tenancy.

In this Handbook you will find information on your rights and obligations, finance, moving home, what to do in emergencies and what to expect in relation to tenant consultation. It may not answer all your questions, but it could save you time and trouble when you need advice and assistance.

While every effort has been made to include as much information as possible you may require more specific advice. In that case you should contact your District Office or other public body, whose addresses and phone numbers are in the section "Useful Addresses".

I hope you will find this Handbook useful and informative but remember, our District Offices are there to help, so don't hesitate to contact them.

**Brian Rowntree**

Chairman Northern Ireland Housing Executive

PLEASE KEEP THIS HANDBOOK IN A SAFE PLACE

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## **Section 1 – Your Rights & Obligations**

This section outlines your legal rights and obligations as a tenant. If you want to know about them in more detail, contact your District Office.

### **Your Rights**

#### **Your legal rights**

When you signed an acceptance of tenancy you received a tenancy agreement. A copy of this agreement is provided as a separate part of this handbook.

You are now a secure tenant and you have the following legal rights under statute, i.e. the Housing (NI) Order 1983.

- Security of tenure
- The right to succession
- The right to assign your tenancy
- The right to consultation
- The right to information
- The right to take in lodgers
- The right to sublet part of your home
- The right to improve your home
- The right to exchange your home

#### **Security of tenure**

This means that we cannot end your tenancy without a court order for possession, except if you have abandoned your home. We can only apply for a court order for possession for certain reasons which are contained in legislation, i.e. the Housing NI Order 1983, schedule 3.

#### **Succession**

From 1 January 1998 an application to succeed to a tenancy where the current tenant has died may be granted in the following circumstances:

- a) The applicant is the spouse;
- b) The applicant was the deceased's partner or is a member of the family and has lived there for over 12 months;
- c) The applicant is a carer who has given up a tenancy or license or sold their house in order to live with and care for the tenant who has then died.  
Tenancies or licenses will be ignored if the landlord or licensor was a relative of the carer;
- d) The applicant has accepted the responsibility for the tenant's dependants;
- e) If the tenant was himself/herself a successor no further successions will be permitted except in special circumstances. Please ask at the District Office for advice on this matter. If this applies to you, please contact your District Manager for clarification.

## **Joint Tenancies**

A request for a joint tenancy will only be granted in the following circumstances:

- The proposed joint tenant is your spouse;
- The proposed joint tenant would at the date of application be entitled to succeed to the sole tenancy if the existing tenant died;
- The proposed joint tenant was part of the current tenant's household when the current tenant was awarded the tenancy.

The District Manager may also grant a joint tenancy if the proposed joint tenant has been living as part of the same household as the existing tenant at this address for over 1 year.

## **Assignment**

The Housing Executive's policy on assignment changed from 1st January 1998. As a general rule the Housing Executive will not consent to an assignment unless it is legally obliged to do so. Exceptions to this may occur, for example, in situations in which it would not be practicable for the existing tenant to act as the tenant.

The Housing Executive is legally obliged to consent to an assignment in the following circumstances:

- a) If a Court orders an assignment as part of family law litigation;
- b) If you have a legal right to an exchange

## **Consultation**

You have the right to be consulted about any changes in your conditions of tenancy or any housing management proposals which are likely to affect you. Your rent or District Heating charge can be increased without consultation, but we will give you 4 weeks notice. If changes in your tenancy conditions are proposed, we will give you preliminary notice and details of the proposed changes.

You will be able to comment before any changes are made.

Details about consultation on improvements to your home are contained in Section 5. This section also provides information on how you can get involved in the management of your estate.

## **Information**

You have the right to check that the information held about you on computer is accurate and up to date. You also have the right to see the information you provided in your application for housing or in relation to your tenancy. If you wish to see this information ask your District Manager whose name and address is in Section 6.

He/she will give you access to this information within 14 days of your written request.

## **Lodgers**

You have the right to take in lodgers. However this may affect your benefit entitlement. You should contact your local office for advice.

You also have the following rights, provided the Housing Executive has given permission:

- Subletting - You may sublet part of your home. You may not sublet your whole home. This may also affect your benefit entitlement. Contact your local office for advice.
- Exchanges - You may exchange your home with another secure tenant. See Section 4 on Housing Issues.
- Improvements - You may carry out certain improvements to your home. (See Section 3 on Maintaining and Caring for your Home).
- Repair (See Section 3 on Maintaining and Caring for your Home).

Permission for all the above must be obtained in writing from the District Manager before any action is taken.

## **Your obligations under the Tenancy Agreement**

As a tenant of the Housing Executive you also have certain obligations towards us and your neighbours. These obligations are part of your tenancy agreement and if you do not comply with them we may consider ending your tenancy. This may mean you will have to leave your home.

### **Rent**

You must pay your rent, rates and other charges promptly when due.

### **Nuisance**

You must not do or allow to be done anything in or around your home which could be an annoyance or nuisance to people living next door or nearby. You must not use your dwelling or garden area or allow it to be used for illegal or immoral purposes. The Housing Executive may take action to end the tenancy if any tenant who is convicted of using or allowing his/her home for illegal purposes such as drug storage, drug dealing, prostitution, illegal gambling or illegal drinking. Action will also be taken if anyone living with the tenant is convicted of such offences.

### **Use of your home**

You must use your home only as a private dwelling. You must not run a business in your home or facilitate a mobile shop in the vicinity of your home. This does not include working from home. If you are in doubt about this, contact your local District Office for advice.

### **Occupation**

You must occupy your home as your only or main dwelling in order to be a secure tenant.

### **Repairs**

You must maintain your home in a clean and tidy condition and keep in good repair anything which is listed as your responsibility in your tenancy agreement. This includes gardens and outside areas within the curtilage of the dwelling.

### **Structures**

You must not erect or suffer or permit to be erected within the curtilage of the dwelling, any movable or immovable structure without the prior written consent of the District Manager, except to the extent that this is permitted by Statute.

### **Caravans/boats/vehicles**

You must not park or allow to be parked any caravan, boat, vehicle or other items or goods in or around your home if they could cause nuisance or annoyance to people living next door or nearby.

### **Pets**

If you live in a flat or maisonette, you must not keep any domestic pets without the written consent of your District Manager. If you live in a house, you must ask your District Manager for his written consent if you want to keep more than one pet. The

District Manager will give you rules regarding the keeping of pigeons. For clarification of domestic pets consult your District Manager.

## **Gas**

If you live in a flat or maisonette in a block of 4 or more storeys high, you must not have any liquid petroleum gas cylinders in your premises. If your block has less than 4 storeys, you must ask your District Manager for his written consent to store such cylinders on the premises.

## **Ending your tenancy**

At the end of your tenancy you must give us “vacant possession”, that is, you must give us back the keys and not leave anyone living in the property. You must give us 4 weeks’ written notice of when you plan to leave the property.

All keys must be returned to the District Office by 12.00 noon on the final Monday. You will be responsible for any damage done to the property while you were a tenant. The District Office will give you details of the charge which will be levied for such damage. You can then make the necessary arrangements for payment.

## **Access**

If we need to gain access to your home to inspect it or carry out works to install, service, improve or remove meters, you must allow us to do so. We will try to give you at least 24 hours notice unless there is an emergency.

## **Insurance**

We are responsible for the structure of your home. At any time, through no fault of your own, clothing and personal belongings may be stolen or damaged by fire, storms, flood or burst pipes. Minor accidents such as accidental breakages can also happen. If you are not properly insured you will almost certainly have to pay the cost of replacing your household goods and possessions. We strongly recommend that you arrange for insurance of the contents of your home so that you will be protected against accidental damage, loss or theft. You can arrange house contents insurance through any bank, building society, or insurance agent.

## **Your neighbourhood**

As a tenant you have a duty to observe the terms of your tenancy agreement. Your neighbours have the same duty. As a member of the community you have the right to live free of nuisance from neighbours and you in turn should not cause nuisance to your neighbours.

The Housing Executive is not liable for any nuisance caused by its tenants in regard to any aspect of the tenancy agreement. The Housing Executive is willing to advise tenants who are suffering nuisance from a neighbour. A separate leaflet is available which details possible remedies.

The following paragraphs explain the tenancy agreement as it relates to your neighbourhood.

## **Pets**

You can keep only one domestic pet; if you want to keep any more you should ask your District Manager, who will consider your request. If you live in a flat or maisonette, you cannot keep any pets unless your District Manager has given you written permission.

If a neighbour's pet is causing nuisance, you should tell your neighbour about the problem. If the nuisance persists, contact your local District Office. We will send a member of our staff to speak to your neighbour on your behalf. We may also contact the USPCA or the public health department of your local District Council.

The Housing Executive has made provision for tenants who wish to keep more than one pigeon. A tenant who wishes to build a pigeon shed should seek written permission from the District Manager who will give clear instructions.

## **Car parking**

Most flats and houses have car parking space which you can use. If you want to park your car in your own garden, you must build a proper hard standing and arrange for a footpath or crossing which you will have to pay for. Do not start to do this work without first asking the District Manager, who will advise you. If you have a caravan, boat or any other vehicle, you must not park it at or near your house in such a way as to cause nuisance or annoyance to your neighbours.

## **Gardens**

You are responsible for maintaining your own garden. We are responsible for shared grass areas. If you live in a property with a shared yard, tenants have to arrange among themselves to take it in turns to keep it clean.

## **Rubbish**

When you take up your tenancy, we will make sure that you have a wheelie bin. If you lose or damage your bin, you will have to supply a new one. You can do this either by asking your local District Office who will supply a new one and then send you the bill, or by contacting your local Council directly and paying them. The phone number is in the section "Useful Names and Addresses".

All rubbish should be placed in the wheelie bin and placed outside your home for collection on the day specified by the Council. If you need to dispose of household items too bulky to go in your bin, you should contact your local Council who will collect them free of charge. You should arrange for this to be done promptly to ensure that they do not cause a nuisance or danger on public footpaths.

If you have rubbish that you want to dispose of yourself, the Council provides dumps in your area.

## **You and your neighbours**

If a neighbour is causing difficulties – for example, making noise late at night – you should tell him/her about the problem. Usually this will be the end of the matter.

If not, contact your local District Office in writing and we will send a member of our staff to visit your neighbour on your behalf. We will try to sort the matter out for you. If the problem persists, we may ask someone else who is independent to talk to you and your neighbour. If that does not work, we may have to use legal remedies.

We will try all reasonable means to help you resolve your dispute with your neighbour. If this is not successful we may have to consider eviction.

## **Illegal activities**

If you or a person residing with you is convicted of illegal activities at your home the Housing Executive may take legal action to end your tenancy.

## **Use of your home**

You must not run a business in your home or facilitate a mobile shop in the vicinity of your home.

## **Complaints**

### **What is a complaint?**

A complaint is any dissatisfaction expressed about a decision made by the Housing Executive or about the performance of any aspect of its work. Complaints may be made about decisions, about the lack of the service or about the manner in which service was provided.

### **How to complain**

Before entering the Complaints Procedure you should try to resolve the matter with the appropriate manager. The Housing Executive's Complaints Procedure has two stages. These are detailed in the Complaints leaflet.

The addresses and telephone numbers of the Housing Executive's District and Area Offices are detailed in the BT telephone directory. Complaints should be made in writing. If you would like some help in making your complaint, a member of our staff will assist you. In exceptional circumstances, details may be accepted by telephone.

When details of your complaint have been received, an acknowledgement of receipt will be sent. Following this, your case will be investigated. It may be necessary to contact you for more details or invite you for an interview. In these circumstances you may wish to bring a friend to help you explain your case.

Following investigation a reply will be sent to you from the manager, usually within 15 working days. If your case is particularly complex, it may take longer, but you will be advised in writing of any delay

For an informal talk about your complaint before submitting your form or letter, you may telephone the Housing Executive's Complaints Officer in the Area Office. They will advise you on how to proceed.

The second and final stage of the Complaints Procedure is an appeal to the Chief Executive. He will investigate your case and seek to reply to you within the same timescale as the previous stage.

The Chief Executive is located at the Housing Centre, 2 Adelaide Street, Belfast BT2 8PB

### **The Commissioner for Complaints**

The procedure outlined above is not a substitute for your right to complain to the Commissioner for Complaints, who is independent of the Housing Executive.

The Commissioner does, however, expect complainants to use this procedure before referring complaints to him.

NOTE: A leaflet is available at all local District Offices which will explain the Complaints Procedure.

## **Complaints about homeless decisions**

The Housing Executive operates a separate internal appeals system to deal with applicants dissatisfied with the decision taken on their homeless application.

If you are dissatisfied with the decision taken by the District Manager you can ask the Area Manager to investigate. The Area Manager will acknowledge your appeal within 3 working days and where possible you will be notified of the decision within 10 working days of your appeal being received.

If you are dissatisfied with the decision you may then appeal to the Director of Client Services who will acknowledge your appeal within 3 working days, have your appeal investigated and reply to you within the same time limit. If for any reason the Director of Client Services cannot reply to you within 10 working days you should be advised in writing that there will be a delay. This letter should give reasons for the delay and an indication of when you are likely to receive a response.

## **Housing Benefit complaints**

If you are dissatisfied with the level of service which you receive or the amount of time it takes to process your Housing Benefit claim, then you have the right to make a complaint through our internal Complaints Procedure. Please see our leaflet on the Complaints Procedure, which can be obtained from your local District Office.

However, there is a separate appeals process that you can use if you feel that your Housing Benefit decision is wrong. Please refer to the section of this handbook entitled 'What can I do if I disagree with the Housing Executive's decision?'

## **Payments to Tenants**

The Housing Executive can make different types and levels of payments to tenants under various circumstances. A brief description of each payment and of the circumstances under which it will be paid is given below.

The levels of payment are available on a separate leaflet in the Handbook or at your local District Office. You should check with your local office for the up to date rates.

### **Home loss**

This is usually a statutory payment of £1500 made to tenants who lose their home as a result of renovation, redevelopment or demolition.

If you have to move because improvements are being made to your home this payment may also be available to you. You must fulfil certain statutory criteria before a payment can be made.

### **Disturbance**

This payment may be made to tenants who move from their homes by arrangement with the Housing Executive. This may happen because of demolition or improvement work or a tenant may agree to move from a home which is required for a family with special needs such as a bungalow or an adapted house. A basic sum of £400 has been set by the Department of the Environment and tenants do not have to provide receipts to receive this payment. However, if tenants feel they are entitled to more they may make a claim on their own behalf or through an agent; in these cases receipts must be provided for consideration by the Housing Executive and payment (if due) will be delayed.

### **Temporary displacement**

Tenants who are moved temporarily to another house or mobile home or who have to move in with relatives may receive a payment both on moving from their home and on moving back.

There are two levels of payment. A standard amount is paid to tenants who can be temporarily housed by the Housing Executive within a scheme. A higher amount is paid to tenants who assist the Housing Executive by finding their own accommodation because the Housing Executive could not readily provide reasonable temporary accommodation.

### **Special decant allowance**

The Housing Executive will make a payment where temporary accommodation is not readily available and a tenant moves into private accommodation or in with relatives/friends to assist the completion of the work to their home. There are three rates of allowance dependent on family size.

### **In situ payments**

The Housing Executive may make payments to tenants where extensive improvement or repair works are carried out to their homes and they continue to reside in their home.

Payment can be made only where in normal circumstances the manager would arrange temporary removal but cannot because it is not available on reasonable terms. The payment will be made if the works last for longer than 6 days and amounts are based on the number of weeks the works last.

### **Cold weather payments**

When tenants are temporarily moved to mobile homes in the period between 1 November and 28/29 February, they may receive payments to assist with extra fuel costs.

### **Redecoration allowance**

The Housing Executive may make payments to tenants whose decoration has been disturbed as part of a scheme within their home. The payment is made on the basis of the number of rooms affected. In some instances where works which are normally undertaken in a scheme but were done as a “one off” repair a redecoration allowance may be payable.

For most tenants the lower level rate of payment is made. A higher level of payment may be made to people who are elderly or have a disability where no able bodied person lives with them.

## **Section 2 – Financial Issues**

### **How we work out rent**

The Housing Executive uses a points system to work out the amount of rent to charge. Points are awarded according to the age and type of property, number and size of rooms and facilities such as heating.

Points will be deducted if a dwelling lacks certain basic amenities or has an unusual type of access. You can find full details of the number of points awarded or deducted for the various features of your home in the comprehensive leaflet included in this Handbook.

No charge is made for any alterations or improvements to your dwelling carried out by you, at your own expense. You must, however, ask for written approval from the Housing Executive before carrying out any improvements or alterations.

The value of a point will change each year and this amount, multiplied by the number of points allocated to your home determines the amount of rent you will be charged.

Sometimes, the number of points allocated to your home, will change, for example if we carry out an improvement scheme. This can alter the amount of rent you will be charged.

We will notify you if your rent changes. You will always receive 4 weeks written notice any time your rent is to increase. Your District Office will be able to tell you the current value of a point and you can then check if your rent has been correctly calculated.

If you think your rent has been wrongly calculated contact your District office which will investigate and, if necessary, make any changes.

### **Rates**

Rates are not covered by the points scheme and are charged in addition to the rent. The Rates Collection Agency tells the Housing Executive how much to charge you for rates.

We will give you as much notice as possible of any change in rates due.

### **Rates allowance for people with disabilities**

If a person with disabilities lives in your household a reduction in the rates payable may be due if:

- the property has been specially adapted and this has increased the rates;
- you use a garage to keep a vehicle used by a person with disabilities.

Your local Rates Collection Agency office can give you full details.

## **How and when to pay your rent and rates**

Normally you should pay your rent and rates every fortnight. However, if you find it more convenient to pay weekly or monthly you may do so. If you wish to pay monthly your payments should be made in advance.

## **Payment methods**

### ***Cash/Rent payment card***

You will have been issued with a rent payment card which allows you to make cash/cheque payments at any Post Office. The Post Office will provide you with a receipt which you should keep as your record of payment.

You can also make cash payments at any District Office. You will receive a receipt which you should keep.

### ***Standing order***

If you have a bank account you may find it convenient to make payments by standing order. This method allows your bank to make regular payments, on your behalf, to the Housing Executive.

Standing Order forms are available from your District Office which will be pleased to assist. If your rent changes you will have to complete a new standing order form as we cannot vary the amounts involved.

### ***Post***

You may send a cheque or postal order through the post to your District Office. The cheque or postal order should be made payable to Northern Ireland Housing Executive and crossed A/C PAYEE ONLY.

Please remember to write your name and address on the back so that we will be able to credit your account. We will send you a receipt for any payments received by post.

## **How can I check my account?**

We will send you a statement every three months which will detail all the charges made and any payments received. You should check this statement to ensure that the amounts correspond to the payments made by you, or on your behalf. This is why it is important for you to keep any receipts you have received for payments made.

Do remember, however, that payments made around the time the statement is produced may not appear until the next statement. Payments made on your behalf by the Social Security Agency will appear on your statement on the date we received the payment not the date it was taken from your benefit.

If you discover any discrepancy in your statement you should contact your District Office as soon as possible so that this can be investigated.  
**PLEASE DO NOT SEND CASH THROUGH THE POST**

## **What if I fall behind with my rent?**

If you experience any difficulty in paying your rent it is essential that you contact your District Office as soon as possible. We can offer advice and assistance on:

- claiming Housing Benefit (see next section);
- arranging for your rent to be paid directly to the Housing Executive, by your employer, if you work in the public sector;
- the most convenient method for you to pay.

If necessary we may accept an agreement to clear arrears by payment of regular instalments along with your rent. If you do not clear arrears or make an arrangement to do so you may not be able to get a transfer and could be excluded from improvement schemes. If you wish to buy your home any arrears must be cleared before the sale is completed.

If you do not make a reasonable attempt to repay arrears the Housing Executive may:

- take legal action to recover the rent arrears, for which you will have to pay any legal costs, if the Housing Executive is successful;
- apply for deductions from certain social security benefits;
- as a last resort, start legal proceedings for possession which could lead to eviction.

This incurs substantial costs which you would also have to pay if the Housing Executive is successful.

## **Housing Benefit**

Housing Benefit is a social security benefit administered by the Housing Executive which can help people on a low income pay their rent and rates. Even if you work full time you may still be able to get help. Anyone who is a tenant can claim Housing Benefit. If you are living with your partner we will accept a claim from either of you. We may still be able to help if you are not the tenant but are paying the rent. Ask at your District Office for details.

This section tells you how and when to claim and also gives some details of the Housing Benefit scheme which you may find useful. Staff at your local District Office will be pleased to assist if you have any queries concerning Housing Benefit.

## **How to claim**

If you are making a new claim for Income Support you can also claim Housing Benefit by completing form NHB1 available from the Social Security Agency. This should be returned to your local Social Security Agency Office which will, in turn, pass it to the Housing Benefit section to the Housing Executive.

If you already receive Income Support/Job Seekers Allowance complete form NHB1 and return it to your local Social Security Agency Office. This form notifies the Social Security Agency of your change of address and is used to claim Housing Benefit at your new address.

We do not need to know details of your income if you are in receipt of Income Support/ Job Seekers allowance. We do however, need to know if anyone aged over

18 lives in your household or if you receive Attendance Allowance or Disability Living Allowance. We also need to know if you are a registered blind person. We need to know these details to work out how much (if any) rent and rates you have to pay.

If you do not receive Income Support/Job Seekers Allowance then you will need to complete a housing benefit application form which must be returned to your local District Office.

You must declare all earnings, benefits, pensions, investments and savings although not all income is taken fully into account. We will ask to see benefit books or payslips (either 5 weekly or 2 monthly) as proof of your income. Alternatively we may check with the Social Security Agency or ask your employer to complete a certificate of earnings. If you are self employed we will ask for a set of accounts. We may also ask you to complete a further form to help us calculate your income.

### **When to claim**

You can claim Housing Benefit at any time during your tenancy. It is essential that you do not delay submitting your claim even though you may not have all the information we need. This is because claims cannot normally be backdated.

If you do delay you may lose money. Claims take effect from the Monday following the date we receive your form unless your tenancy has commenced within the week we receive your form.

### **How much Housing Benefit can I get?**

If you receive Income Support/Job Seekers Allowance and no one (other than your partner) aged over 18 lives with you, you will receive a full rebate of rent and rates and will have nothing to pay.

You may still receive a full rebate if you or your partner is a registered blind person or if either of you receive Disability Living Allowance/ Attendance Allowance.

All other claims are individually assessed so the amount of Housing Benefit will vary according to your personal circumstances. The calculation will take account of factors such as age, family size and disability. The amount you receive can be anything up to the full rent and rates charged for your home.

In general the more money you have coming in the less Housing Benefit you will get. You may also get less help if there are people living with you who are not supported by you. Some people cannot get Housing Benefit including anyone with savings over £16,000 and most students. Some students, however, may be able to get help and you should ask for details at your District Office.

### **When will I know the result of my claim?**

Once we have received all the information we need we will work out your Housing Benefit within 14 days. We will then write to you and tell you whether you are

entitled to Housing Benefit or not. We will tell you how much Housing Benefit will be paid into your account each week.

We will also give you a statement of reasons to explain how your Housing Benefit was worked out if you request this.

### **How long will I receive benefit for?**

Normally Housing Benefit is paid for a fixed period which can be no longer than 60 weeks. If you are working we will review your claim after 6 months. If your only income is state benefit we will review your claim once a year. We will advise you when benefit is to end.

### **What can I do if I disagree with the Housing Executive's decision?**

If you would like an explanation of how your claim was worked out, then we will be happy to provide this for you. If you believe that our decision is wrong after we have explained it, then we will look at the decision again for you.

If you remain unhappy after your case is reconsidered, then for certain decisions, you may be able to appeal to an independent appeal tribunal. The tribunal is independent of the Housing Executive and can change the decision if they agree that it is wrong.

There are time limits for asking us to look at decisions again and for making an appeal. If you would like some more information on these time limits and on the Housing Benefit appeals process in general, then please take a copy of our leaflet DMA/1 which you can collect from your local District Office.

### **Further information**

This handbook gives only brief details of the Housing Benefit scheme. Staff at your local District Office will be pleased to help if you have any queries.

**DO REMEMBER THAT YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BY MAKING A CLAIM**

## **Other financial help**

### **Working Families Tax Credit**

Working Families Tax Credit is a regular cash payment made to people who have at least one child under 16 (or 19 if the child is in full time education up to and including A level or equivalent) living with them. To qualify you or your partner must work for at least 16 hours a week. Family Credit can be paid to couples, lone parents, whether employed or self-employed people. For more information contact:

Tax Credit Office (NI)  
Dorchester House  
52-58 Great Victoria Street  
Belfast  
Helpline Tel. No. 0845 6097000  
7.30a.m.-6.30 p.m.  
Textphone No. 0845 6076078

### **The Social Fund**

The Social Fund helps people with exceptional expenses which are difficult to pay for out of regular income. The help available may be in the form of a grant or a loan depending on the type of expense. Your local Social Security Office will be able to assist.

## **Section 3 – Maintaining & Caring for Your Home**

### **Repairing Your Home**

#### **Reporting repairs**

You can report a repair by calling personally at your local District Office, by telephoning the District Office or by writing to them. Whatever way you contact the District Office please remember to give the following information:

- Your name, address and telephone number;
- A description of the repair needed in as much detail as possible;
- Times when you are usually at home to let the workmen carry out the repair.

You should always report repairs to your District Office which is open from 9.00 am to 4.00 pm Monday to Friday. Offices will close to the public each week for a half day for staff training. However, you can still report your repairs to the District Office by telephone until 5.00pm each day. Please check with your local District Office for the day on which it closes as this can vary from office to office.

#### **Time scales for carrying out repairs**

The Housing Executive classifies all repairs reported to them into one of three groups depending upon how serious they are.

- **Emergency** - Repairs which could be a risk to health or safety, could lead to a major structural problem with your home or could cause you a major inconvenience. These repairs will be dealt with on the day they are reported if possible or within 24 hours at most.
- **Urgent** - Less serious repairs such as electrical and plumbing work which will be completed within 4 working days.
- **Routine** - Most repairs will be classed as routine work and will be carried out within four weeks unless they are programmed as part of a planned scheme of work within the District. In such cases the time scale may be longer.

#### **Planned schemes**

The Housing Executive aims to paint all external woodwork, clean and repair gutters and down pipes and complete minor repairs to the outside of your home every five years.

Work that would normally be classified as routine repairs may be held over and included in a planned repair scheme if one will be carried out in your area in the near future.

#### **Right to Repair scheme**

The Right to Repair scheme is a Citizen's Charter initiative, the object of which is to ensure that Housing Executive tenants have urgent, minor repairs costing under £250 which might affect their health, safety or security, completed quickly by Housing Executive contractors and at no cost to the tenant. If such repairs are not carried out within the predetermined time periods, tenants can request that the Housing Executive issues the work to another Housing Executive contractor. If the second contractor fails to complete the repair within the second predetermined time period the tenant may be

entitled to an initial compensation sum of £10.00 with further sums of £2.00 per day for each day that the repair remains uncompleted.

The maximum sum for compensation under the Right to Repair scheme is £50.00. A leaflet on this scheme is available from your local District Office.

## **Dampness**

Dampness occurs in houses when there is a fault in the structure of the building that lets in water from the outside. There are 2 kinds of damp.

### ***Penetrating Damp***

This happens if water is allowed to come into the house through the roof or the walls. The most common causes are missing roof tiles or cracks in the external plasterwork. The usual signs are mould growth or wet patches appearing on an internal wall after it has been raining.

### ***Rising Damp***

Rising damp will occur if there is a problem with the damp proof course. The damp proof course is a barrier which is built into the walls and solid floors of your home to prevent ground water from entering. Rising damp is quite easy to spot. The main symptom is a tidemark stain which will appear on ground floor walls, there may also be a musty smell.

Rising damp will only occur on ground floor walls and will not normally rise more than three feet above the ground level. If you think that you have a problem with either penetrating or rising damp you should contact your local District Office. A Maintenance Officer will make an appointment to visit your home to investigate the problem.

## **Condensation in your home**

Tenants often confuse condensation with penetrating or rising damp. Condensation is caused by water vapour which is trapped inside your home and cannot escape. When air is heated it picks up tiny droplets of water and when that hot air meets a cold surface such as a wall or window, it condenses and leaves the water droplets on the cold surface. If this is allowed to happen on a regular basis then a mould growth will occur. Mould growth is the main symptom of condensation. You can help prevent condensation by taking the following simple steps:

- Make your home a little warmer by ensuring that there is background heat throughout the day;
- Allow air to circulate throughout your home by opening doors occasionally.
- Never over pack your wardrobes with clothes and open your wardrobe door a little to let the air circulate ;
- Ensure that there is some ventilation in your home especially in bedrooms during the night;
- If there is water lying on the inside of your window sill in the morning, wipe it up immediately. If you do not it will add moisture to the room as it heats up during the daytime;
- Use extractor fans in the working kitchen and bathroom if they are fitted;

- Open windows if you are cooking and do not allow the steam from cooking to enter other rooms in the house;
- Do not block air vents. They are fitted to reduce condensation;
- Dry clothes outside if possible and if you do use a tumble drier then ensure that it is vented to the outside;
- Avoid using paraffin or bottled gas heaters. These put about a pint of water into the air for every pound weight of fuel they burn;
- If you do experience mould growth on walls you can wipe it off with a solution of one part of bleach to four parts of water. Special paints can also be applied to prevent mould growth.

If condensation is a major problem in your home, contact your local District Office for advice.

## **Protecting your home**

Police statistics indicate that most house break-ins are carried out on the spur of the moment and during the day time. There are a few simple steps that you can take to prevent a break-in:

- Always close your windows and lock the doors when you go out, even if it is only for a few minutes.
- Make sure that you do not leave tools or ladders lying about in the garden of your home.
- Never leave keys on a string behind the letter box, hidden under the door mat or in other “secret” places. Thieves can usually find them!
- If you have to go out at night time, consider leaving a light on in the bedroom or living room. You might consider fitting, or having fitted, an automatic control which turns on a light at dusk. Controls like this are available from most large do-it-yourself stores;
- Do not leave notes on the door saying that you are out;
- Cancel milk and newspaper deliveries when you go on holiday and tell the police that you will be away;
- Never leave valuables lying around where they can be seen through a window;
- If you have a controlled door entry system make sure that the master door is kept closed at all times. Always ask callers to identify themselves before you let them in.

Thieves may try to gain entry to your home by posing as officials or workmen. Never let a stranger into your home unless you are certain of his/her identity. Take the following precautions:

- Ask to see the caller’s identity card. All officials carry one and will be pleased to show it;
- Take time to look at the identity card. Examine the photograph and ask the caller to spell his or her name;
- If the caller does not have an identity card ask them to call back later and use the extra time to check with the organisation they represent;
- Telephone the police if you are suspicious.

If you are unfortunate enough to be burgled, it will improve your chances of getting your property back if you have kept the serial numbers of equipment, taken photographs of personal property and had your postcode engraved on items such as

bicycles. Your local police Crime Prevention Officer will be happy to give you more advice, free of charge, on the subject of crime prevention.

## **Insurance**

The Housing Executive will repair any accidental damage to the structure of your home. It is your responsibility to provide insurance cover for your personal property and furnishings. Home insurance policies vary greatly. Any policy you take out for home contents should at the very least cover you against fire, flood and theft. As a Housing Executive tenant you may be responsible for damage you have caused to items in your home such as cracking a toilet bowl, wash hand basin or bath. You may wish to discuss cover for such items with your insurance broker.

Remember if you do not have insurance for your personal property you run the risk of having to find all the money necessary to repair or replace items that have been either damaged or stolen. Contact more than one insurance broker and ask them to quote you rates for insuring your property.

## **Protecting your home from frost**

During periods of cold weather there are a number of steps that you can take to prevent your water pipes from freezing:

- Provide background heat in your home during the cold spell;#
- Leave your internal doors open slightly, including the doors under the sink unit, and take the hatch cover off the roofspace. This allows the warm air to circulate throughout your home;
- Find out where the stopcock for turning off your water is. This will probably be under your sink unit but in some houses will be in a back hallway or inside the larder beside the sink unit. You will need to know this if a pipe in your home does burst. If you cannot find the stopcock contact your District Office and a Maintenance Officer will make an appointment to call to show you where it is;
- If you have a burst pipe, turn off the mains water at the stopcock. If the flow of water does not stop you will need to drain down the cold water storage system. This is best done by turning on the cold water taps at the bath and wash hand basin and by flushing the toilet several times. This will empty the cold water tank in the roofspace provided that you have turned off the mains supply at the stopcock;
- If you have drained the cold water system you will need to let your fire out if you have a back boiler. Remember do not use your immersion heater!
- If you are going away on holiday over the winter you should turn off your water at the stopcock and drain the water storage system as previously described;
- If water comes into contact with electrical fittings you should turn off the electricity at the meter box.

Burst pipes should be reported either to your local District Office if they occur during office hours or to the Emergency Services number in the evenings, at weekends or during public or bank holidays.

## **Safety in the home**

### **Fire safety**

Most fires are caused by carelessness and can be prevented by following these tips:

- Never leave a chip pan on the cooker while no one is in the kitchen;
- Unplug electrical appliances when they are not in use and always before you go to bed in the evening;
- Keep matches where children cannot see or reach them;
- Make sure that open fires have fire guards fitted;
- Do not leave cigarettes burning and empty all ashtrays last thing at night;
- Do not overload sockets with adapters and plugs;
- Never smoke in bed;
- If you have an electric blanket make sure it is serviced every three years;
- Settle all coals before you go to bed and fit the fire guard.

### ***Smoke alarms***

The Housing Executive may not have fitted a smoke alarm in your home but if you do have a smoke alarm follow the advice below to ensure that it works properly:

- Check the alarm each week by pressing the test button for at least ten seconds. Make sure that the smoke alarm battery is changed at least once each year;
- Never paint over your smoke alarm;
- Never remove the battery from the smoke alarm, except for replacement purposes;
- Your smoke alarm should be fitted in the best position to detect a fire. Do not be tempted to remove it and fit it somewhere else.

### **Electrical safety**

If you have a failure of all lighting and power in your home the cause may be an interruption in supply by Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE). You can check this by finding out if your neighbours' homes are without electricity. If they are then the fault lies with NIE and you can contact them on their emergency number which is listed under Electricity in the telephone book. If only your home is affected you should check the following:

- If only one circuit of lights or sockets is not working the fuse may have blown. Check the fuses or the trip switch in the meter box;
- If all lights and power are off it is likely to be the trip switch. You can re-set the trip by switching the switch to the ON position. If the trip continually cuts out you should contact your local District Office;
- Most electrical faults are caused by faulty appliances such as kettles, fires or table lamps. If a fuse blows or the trip cuts out when you turn one of these on you should unplug the appliance and replace the fuse or re-set the trip switch. Do not use that appliance again until you have had it checked by a qualified electrician;
- Most faults on cookers are due to a faulty cooker and not the electrical wiring. This is your responsibility. Check that the red indicator light on the cooker switch on the wall is working. If it is, then the fault will be with your cooker. If the red indicator light does not light, try replacing the fuse or re-setting the trip switch;

- Your home may have circuit breakers fitted instead of fuses. These act like trip switches and are easy to re-set. If your power supply fails and you do not know what has caused it you should switch everything off including any lights. Set all the circuit breakers to the ON position and switch on your lights and appliances one at a time. If there is a fault, the faulty light or appliance will trip the circuit breaker. The Housing Executive will send an electrician out to fix your lights. If the fault is caused by one of your appliances, you should unplug it and have it repaired by a qualified electrician.

### ***Plug tops***

Many appliances now come with a plug top fitted. If you have to fit one yourself you should make sure that it has the British Standard Kite Mark on it and that it is to BS1363. Make sure that all plug tops are wired correctly as follows.

Brown	Live
Blue	Neutral
Green & Yellow	Earth

### **What to do in an emergency**

#### ***After hours Emergency Service***

The Housing Executive operates an Emergency Service for repairs when the District Offices are closed. This service is only for genuine emergencies such as burst pipes or burst back boilers. If you use the service without good reason you can be asked to pay for the repairs.

The After Hours Emergency Service telephone number is 028 9024 6111 or 028 7126 2628 if you live in the North West.

## **Improving Your Home**

### **Improvements**

If you carry out work which would increase the value of your home, we may be able to give you money towards the cost when you move out. You will have to obtain our permission before you carry out the work and the work must be done to our standards. If the work adds to the value of the property, for example, if you installed central heating for the first time or added an extension we will value the improvement and reimburse you for all or part of the cost. Ask your District Manager for details.

### **Self Help Repairs**

You can do minor repairs yourself under the Tenant Self Help Repair Scheme and we will meet the cost up to a maximum of £200. The Scheme covers most minor repairs e.g. replacing defective doors, retiling a floor or even replacing slates. Urgent or major electrical work or plumbing is not included in the Scheme, and for minor plumbing or electrical work, you must use a qualified contractor. The content of the work you would like to undertake must be agreed beforehand with the Maintenance Officer at your local District Office who will also tell you what level of payment you can expect to receive.

You must always get the go-ahead from your District Office before starting work. We also reserve the right to inspect any work carried out and to withhold payment until the work is completed to our satisfaction.

#### ***How it works***

If you would like to tackle the job yourself, here's what to do. Check your Tenancy Agreement, which will indicate if the repair would normally be the Housing Executive's responsibility. If it is, contact your District Office, telling them the exact nature and extent of the repairs needed and that you would like to carry it out under the Self Help Repairs Scheme. For repairs costing under £200 in total you will be told the amount we are prepared to pay. If the repairs cost over £200 you can still carry them out, provided you meet the difference between the £200 limit and the full cost of the repair.

When you apply to use Self Help a Maintenance Officer will visit your home and inspect the item that needs repaired. If it is appropriate to use the Self Help Scheme in the circumstances, the Maintenance Officer will complete a form giving details of the repair and the value of the work which you will be asked to sign.

When you start the repair you should sign the yellow coloured copy of the form putting your name or your contractor's name in the section where it says contractor and send it to your local District Office.

When the repairs have been completed either by a contractor or yourself, you should send the buff coloured copy of the form to the District Office. When this has been received a Maintenance Officer will call out to inspect the finished work. If the work has been completed satisfactorily, the Maintenance Officer will then authorise payment for the sum agreed.

If you use a contractor, pay him only when you are satisfied the work has been correctly completed and send the buff copy of the Repair Request Form to your District Office to claim your money. If, after starting the work, you discover additional work is necessary, stop work and contact your District Office immediately.

The District Office will either authorise you to carry out the additional work or arrange for it to be carried out by others. Normally you pay for the work and then claim the amount agreed from the Housing Executive. If it would be difficult for you to pay the amount agreed it is possible for you to use the Housing Executive's mandated payment scheme under which you authorise the Housing Executive to pay the total amount of the allowance direct to the contractor carrying out the work or to the supplier of your materials.

If you have difficulty in meeting the initial costs of the repair please ask your District Office for further details of this mandated payment scheme.

### ***Payment***

When the work is completed, a cheque for the agreed amount will be sent to you. If you are in arrears the money may be credited to your account instead. We reserve the right to carry out an inspection of the work, and to withhold payment until the work is completed to our satisfaction.

If you use a contractor it will be your responsibility to ensure that work has been carried out in a satisfactory manner before you pay him.

### **Heatsmart**

Heatsmart offers a free and independent advice service for Housing Executive tenants who have or are about to have a new heating system installed:

This will include tenants who:

- are due to have a room heater replacement;
- have commenced a new tenancy;
- are having central heating installed for the first time.

Heatsmart will advise tenants on:

- Fuel choice - The Housing Executive may offer you fuel choice if you are due to have a room heater replacement or getting central heating installed for the first time. The Housing Executive will let you know what your options are, depending where you live.
- Energy Efficiency - Hints and tips that will reduce your fuel bills and improve the warmth and comfort of your home.
- Using your system - You can get the best from your heating system if you understand the controls and know how to operate them.

## **Roomheater Replacement Scheme**

The Housing Executive is in the process of replacing solid fuel room heaters, which have come to the end of their useful life. In some cases tenants may be offered a choice of fuel. The Housing Executive will let you know which fuel options you can choose from as these may vary depending on where you live. The Housing Executive may recommend a particular fuel, however the final decision is up to you.

### ***How can I contact Heatsmart?***

You can ring Freephone 0800 512012 or write to

Heatsmart  
FREEPOST BE 2159  
Belfast  
BT1 4BR

Bryson House the charity operates Heatsmart on behalf of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

## **Section 4 – Housing Issues**

### **Moving Home**

This section gives you advice on what to do if you would like to transfer to a new tenancy or if you have obtained alternative accommodation. It also tells you what to do before you move out. You may decide that you would like the Housing Executive to move you to another home. If so, there are several ways that we can help you.

### **If you want to stay in Northern Ireland**

You can either apply for a transfer to another Housing Executive property or to property owned by a Housing Association in Northern Ireland. You can also arrange a direct exchange yourself or ask the Housing Executive to help you arrange an exchange through the Mutual Exchange Scheme.

If you want to move outside Northern Ireland to somewhere else in the United Kingdom ask at your local District Office. We participate in 2 schemes called Homes and Homeswaps, but usually you have to need to move for work reasons or for health/social reasons to be accepted onto these schemes.

We can also help you to apply for a move to housing association property through any of these schemes.

### ***Transfers***

You can apply for a transfer once you have been a tenant in your current home for 2 years. Your rent account should be clear. If you have not been a tenant for 2 years or your account is in arrears, we may still consider your transfer if you need to move urgently for health or social reasons, or if your home is no longer suitable because your family size has changed.

To apply for a transfer you need to fill in a transfer application form which you can get from your local District Office. When you have completed the form it should be returned to the same office. We will send you a card to let you know we have received your form and we will visit you within 2 weeks of your application to talk to you about your transfer. We will assess your current housing needs and inspect your house during this visit.

If you have kept your property in good repair and you are not guilty of any serious breach of tenancy conditions, your name will be put on to the Waiting List with the appropriate level of points arising from your housing needs assessment.

If you have urgent reasons for needing to move then we will try to help you as soon as possible. We cannot help everyone at once and those in greatest housing need will be the first to be offered another property. We will not be able to tell you how long you will have to wait for a transfer.

### ***Offering you a tenancy***

If we are able to transfer you, we will send you an offer of tenancy for your new home. You will be given the opportunity to see inside the property before you make

your decision and we will give you a list of repairs that we will carry out. We will also tell you when the repairs are going to be done.

### ***Direct exchanges***

You may exchange your home with any other Housing Executive or housing association tenant as long as you obtain our permission. We can only refuse in certain circumstances, such as where either dwelling would be too large or too small for either family. Any refusal must give reasons and be in writing. If you know of another tenant who would be prepared to exchange with you, then you should both contact your local District Managers. Both of you do not have to live in the same District. We will let you know within 6 weeks of your application whether you can proceed with the exchange.

### ***Mutual exchange scheme***

We keep details of tenants prepared to exchange their homes. The details include information about the dwellings offered for exchange, including location, type of heating and any special features. You can ask to see the details and include your own home, if you wish, at your District Office.

### **Ending your tenancy**

You must tell us at least 4 weeks before you move house, and you must tell us in writing. If you fail to give 4 weeks notice and a squatter moves in, you may not be able to apply for housing in future and you may not be eligible for public sector housing in future.

We will ask you to allow new tenants to come and look round your house, at a time that is convenient for you.

### ***Homeless or threatened with homelessness?***

Should you become threatened with homelessness or indeed are homeless, you should contact your District Office immediately. The address is in Section 6.

### **Moving with Housing Executive agreement**

Tenants may be asked to move by officers of the Housing Executive. If this comes about because the Housing Executive wishes to improve or demolish their homes as part of a planned scheme, tenants will be fully consulted and involved in this decision, and they will be given at least 4 weeks notice to vacate their homes. In such circumstances tenants may be entitled to Home Loss and Disturbance Payments. See the section for details. If the tenant of a property, adapted for the tenant with a disability dies, and the person entitled to succeed to the tenancy is asked to move to allow the Housing Executive to allocate the property to another person with disabilities, the successor will be entitled to a Disturbance Payment. The Housing Executive will discuss the successor's housing options with the family concerned and an agreement should be reached which will suit both parties.

### **Housing for people with disabilities**

The Housing Executive provides a range of high quality housing services which offer people choices for independent living. It can directly assist in meeting the special needs of people with disabilities in a number of ways:

- i. It can build specially designed homes
  - to mobility standards;
  - to wheelchair standards;
  - to meet other special needs;
- ii. It can adapt an existing dwelling to the requirements of a person with a disability, including the provision of special equipment such as lifts, handrails, ramps or level deck showers;
- iii. It can rehouse a person with a disability and their family where appropriate and required.

In establishing the required solutions, the Housing Executive works closely with the Health and Social Services Trusts. They obtain assessments of the needs of people with disabilities and make recommendations on adapting dwellings or rehousing tenants to more suitable accommodation. If you require more suitable housing owing to your own disability or that of a member of your family, you can obtain a transfer form from your District Office. Fill in the form and the self certification medical form provided with it and return it to your District Office.

## **Adaptations to Housing**

### ***Executive property***

Where adaptations are required the assessment of need is based on the following criteria:

- i. The person should have a substantial disability which is of a permanent or lasting nature and which inhibits mobility to such an extent that it is hazardous to negotiate stairs or travel a reasonable distance to a bathroom or bedroom or other needed facility unaided;
- ii. The planning of the adaptation should take into account the age and prognosis of the person with the disability and their long term needs, and should be such that the adaptation of the dwelling would be a distinct benefit for the foreseeable future.

The District Office is responsible for receiving all requests for adaptation services from tenants. The District Manager will arrange for the Housing Officer to visit the tenant and obtain information regarding the nature of the adaptation required. Where the adaptation is of a minor nature the District can process the request without referral to the local Health and Social Services Trust. In all other cases the information will be forwarded to the Trust for assessment.

Completed assessments are forwarded to the District Office for minor works and the Area Office for major works.

### ***Upgrading or change of heating on medical grounds***

A change or upgrading to a heating system will be considered only where:

- i. the person is permanently and severely disabled and has severely limited functional ability;
- ii. is unable to manage the heating system, and
- iii. the heating system is a manual system, normally a solid fuel system.

The need for a change of heating is assessed by the Housing Executive. Requests for changes of heating should be made to your District Office.

### ***Grants for future homeowners***

If you are considering purchasing your home you may apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant. For further information you can contact the local Grants Manager. (See Section 6).

## **Section 5 - Consulting and Involving You**

### **Tenant and Community Framework**

The Tenant's Charter details the services and their performance standards which you, as a Tenant, can expect to receive from the Housing Executive.

The Housing Executive has always been keen to involve Tenants and their local Community Associations in discussing and developing their local services and housing issues generally. To that end, the Tenant/Community Involvement Framework has been drawn up and implemented with the agreement of the Community Advisory Group, Northern Ireland Tenant Action Project (NITAP) and the Housing Executive.

### **Framework**

The Framework operates at four levels - Estate, District, Area and Centre.

At the Estate or Community level the District Manager will be available to assist Associations to set themselves up as *bona fide* groups to represent the views of the local community;

The District Manager will also look for representatives from each of the local Associations to come together at a District level forum, as a District Consumer Panel to discuss service standards delivery and performance standards issues across the District, including the identification of best practice;

In turn, there is a forum set up in each of the Housing Executive's 5 Areas to which each District Consumer Panel will send 2 representatives. The Community Advisory Group will monitor and review services throughout the Area, as well as comment on the District Housing Plans and the Physical Programme of work to the housing stock.

It will also deal with issues submitted to it from the various District Consumer Panels and the Central Community Advisory Group. The Central Community Advisory Group is the Housing Executive's central Consumer Panel, and advises on housing policies and procedures, particularly on their implications for individual Tenants, local Communities and other client groups

### ***Terms of reference***

A Terms of Reference has been drawn up for each of the above levels of Tenant and Community involvement, describing their purpose, membership and the support provided by the Housing Executive and the Northern Ireland Tenants Action Project.

If you are a member of a local Association or are interested in setting one up and wish to see a Terms of Reference, please contact your local District Office.

### ***Tenant/Community representative training***

In order that Tenant Representatives can fully participate with the Housing Executive; a series of Tenant/Community Representatives Training courses have been developed. The courses are being made available to the representatives free of charge.

The courses are aimed at providing additional skills in communicating and meeting with statutory and voluntary agencies, as well as understanding how the Housing Executive is structured. Particular policy areas of interest to local representatives are also included in the training. Tenant and Community representatives in particular will have the opportunity to go on the courses, if you are interested, please contact your local District Manager.

### ***Publications***

To ensure that tenants are kept abreast of developments, particularly where they relate to community involvement, the Housing Executive has published a range of literature for the advice of tenants and their representatives.

In addition to this Handbook and the Tenant Charter the Housing Executive has also published the Community Association Handbook. The Handbook is a useful reference document detailing Housing Executive policies, useful addresses and other information which may be of interest.

If your Association would like a copy of the Handbook, please inform your local District Manager.

### **Continuous Tenants Omnibus Survey**

The Continuous Tenants Omnibus Survey is a quarterly survey of a panel of some 1000 Housing Executive Tenants.

The tenants, randomly selected from each of the District Office areas across the province, provide valuable feedback on housing services, on concerns such as vandalism and crime, on general customer satisfaction with the services of the Housing Executive and its staff. Other areas of particular community interest, some of which have been included by the Central Community Advisory Group, are also included in the Survey on areas such as home security, design standards and community facilities.

The survey work and analysis is carried out by an outside opinion research organisation, on commission from the Housing Executive. To inform Managers, at the local level, on the levels of customer satisfaction the Housing Executive also carries out exit Polls and Estate Surveys to provide information on service delivery and related tenant expectations.

If you are interested in becoming more involved, on behalf of your Community, with the Housing Executive, please contact your local District Office which will be pleased to provide further advice.

### **Consultation Standards**

The Housing Executive recognises that tenants will have first hand knowledge of local issues. Consequently it is committed to involving tenants and others affected to undertake Scheme work in the estate in which they live.

In April 1996 the Housing Executive introduced new standards for tenant consultation on Scheme work. The standards are based on three key principles.

- Tenant Consultation is an essential part of Scheme management.
- Tenants should be made aware of, and their agreement sought on:
  - the detailed work proposals of the Scheme;
  - the implications of the proposals, particularly how they personally will be affected by the work;
  - the proposed approach for carrying out the Scheme work, including the arrangements to be made to minimise inconvenience to tenants.
- The level of Tenant Consultation should be commensurate with the Scheme's proposals, meaning that work involving major disruption to tenants will require a greater degree of consultation than work involving minor disruption.

A successful Scheme will be one which:

- maintains/improves the standard of housing;
- represents long term value for money;
- is carried out to the satisfaction of the tenants affected.

The type of work undertaken in a Scheme can range from relatively minor repairs and external painting to major improvement work such as extensions, window replacement, central heating installation and kitchen replacements.

Irrespective of the type of work to be carried out, each Scheme undertaken by the Housing Executive can be broken down into six key stages of work. Each stage will require some element of Tenant Consultation.

### ***Stage 1***

The first stage begins when the Scheme is placed on the Housing Executive's annual Programme of Works. Members of the professional and technical staff are brought together to form a Project Team.

The Project Team, which will include the local District Manager, will be responsible for the overall management of the Scheme. The District Manager will draw up a District Brief, detailing relevant information about the general area and the households affected by the proposed Scheme. The District Manager will also be responsible for seeking tenant representation on the Project Team.

The Tenant Representative must have the support of the local community and will be the person who ensures that the views of that community are taken into account in relation to the Scheme.

A Household Survey carried out by local District Staff may be necessary. All tenants will be informed, in writing, that a Scheme of work affecting their homes is to be developed and that they will be consulted on it.

### ***Stage 2***

During the second stage, the Project Team will work together to develop what is known as a Client Brief. This document defines the main technical and related issues which the Scheme needs to address.

In addition, the Client Brief must include the Tenant Consultation Plan and the Scheme Implementation Strategy. The Tenant Consultation Plan sets out how and

when tenants should be consulted throughout the life of the Scheme, and who is responsible for that consultation. The Scheme Implementation Strategy outlines how it is proposed to carry out the Scheme, taking account of special requirements such as those relating to elderly people and people with a disability and to the location of the contractor's compound.

As a composite document, the Client Brief should always reflect the views of the local community and the Tenant Representative on the Project Team will be asked to confirm this is so.

### ***Stage 3***

Stage 3 begins with the appointment of a Professional Consultant to develop the design proposals. One of the initial tasks of the Consultant will be to carry out a physical survey of all the houses to be included in the Scheme.

Tenants can expect to be given the Consultant's name in writing, and details of the survey, before the Consultant calls with them. On completion of the survey, the Consultant will begin to develop outline proposals which will be presented to the Project Team for initial approval before formal Tenant Consultation is undertaken.

### ***Stage 4***

This stage covers the formal Tenant Consultation on the work proposals, before the designs and works specification are finalised. Tenants will be formally consulted on the Scheme's proposals, the implications of the proposals, how the work will be carried out, and how long it is likely to take.

This formal Tenant Consultation may be undertaken in one of a number of ways:

- by prearranged house to house visits;
- by use of the Mobile Advice Unit;
- by meetings/presentations in local community premises;
- by other arrangements which may be required for tenants with disabilities or other special needs.

During the formal Tenant Consultation process, tenants can expect to receive information in sufficient detail to allow them to comment on the proposals affecting them.

The Housing Executive also considers it important that tenants are provided with an opportunity to say whether they are satisfied with the standard of consultation so far. For this reason, the Housing Executive may ask tenants to participate in a Customer Satisfaction Survey on the performance of the Consultant and the District Staff to date.

The results of this Customer Satisfaction Survey will be important when the Scheme is submitted for the appropriate formal approvals at the end of stage 4.

### ***Stage 5***

Following formal approval by the Board and the selection by tender of a Contractor, the work will begin on site. Before the Scheme begins, tenants will be informed that it

is to go ahead. At the same time they will be told the Contractor's name and the names of other personnel who will be involved with the Scheme such as the Clerk of Works, the Site Foreman and the Housing Officer from the District Office. The Housing Officer will act in a liaison capacity between tenants and the Housing Executive, throughout the life of the Scheme. Tenants can also expect to be told when work will start. The local District Office will be responsible for telling tenants about the arrangements which will be put in place to deal with any queries or complaints which may arise as the Scheme progresses.

Tenants will also be told of the arrangements for providing them with up to date information about the progress of the Scheme, particularly as and when it will affect them individually. A number of measures may be taken to ensure tenants receive appropriate and timely information about the Scheme.

These could include:

- the opening of a Scheme office/surgery;
- regular Scheme Progress Meetings attended by the Consultant, District Office Staff and tenant representatives;
- meetings with local tenants' groups;
- reports in Community Newsheets.

The underlying principle is that the Scheme is likely to progress more smoothly, and to the satisfaction of tenants, if they are kept informed and involved while the work is going on.

### ***Stage 6***

The final stage in the process follows the Contractor completing the works. Six months after the actual completion, the Clerk of Works will inspect tenants' homes for items of work which may require further action by the Contractor.

It is critical that outstanding items of work, known as 'defects', are dealt with promptly and efficiently. Tenants will always be informed in writing of any defects which the Clerk of Works has found in their home. They will also be told when they can expect the work to be carried out.

One year after completion of the Scheme tenants will be asked to participate in a Customer Satisfaction Survey. The purpose of this Survey will be to discover the degree of tenant satisfaction with such issues as the Contractor's performance including the standard of workmanship and general tidiness, how queries/complaints were dealt with and access to personnel during the Scheme.

The knowledge gained from the Survey will be used to identify good working practices which may be valuable in future Schemes. It will also be used to measure tenants' satisfaction with the particular Scheme.

## **Section 6 - Useful names and addresses**

N.I. Electricity	Failure of supply service	Tel: 08457 643643
	Moving House/Billing/Prices	Tel: 08457 455455
Homeless Advice Centre	32-36 Great Victoria Street Belfast BT2 7BA	Tel: 028 9031 7000
After Hours Emergency Repairs Service		Tel: 028 9024 6111 (Emergencies Only)
Fire Authority for N.I	Headquarters 1 Seymour Street, Lisburn	Tel: 028 9266 4221 In emergency call the operator or dial 999 and ask for 'FIRE'
Belfast City Council	City Hall Belfast BT1 5CS	Tel: 028 9032 0202
Commissioner for Complaints	33 Progressive House Wellington Place Belfast BT16HN	Tel: 028 9023 3821 FREEPHONE: 0800 343424

<b>Belfast Area</b>		
Area Headquarters	32-36 Great Victoria Street, Belfast BT2 7BA	Tel: 028 9031 7000
<b>District Offices</b>		
District 1 Office	District Manager 9 Upper Queen Street, Belfast BT1 6FB	Tel: 028 9032 8282
District 2 Office	District Manager Laganview House 95 Ann Street, Belfast BT1 3HF	Tel: 028 9032 4558
District 3 Office	District Manager Murray House Murray Street, Belfast BT1 6DN	Tel: 028 9032 3642
District 4 Office	District Manager 10 -16 Hill Street, Belfast BT1 2LA	Tel: 028 9024 1525
District 5 Office	District Manager 83/87 Shankill Road, Belfast BT13 1FD	Tel: 028 9032 9442
District 6 Office	District Manager 1st Floor, Spencer House 71 Royal Avenue, Belfast BT1 1FE	Tel: 028 9032 6477
District 7 Office	District Manager 90/106 Victoria Street Belfast BT1 3GN	Tel: 028 9024 8312
<b>Citizens Advice Bureaux</b>		
	211 Antrim Road	Tel: 028 9075 2114
	6 Calendar Street	Tel: 028 9024 3196
	Falls C.A.B. 8 Springfield Road	Tel: 028 9031 0318
	Flat 3, Owenvarragh Buildings Andersonstown Road	Tel: 028 9030 1916
	342 Newtownards Road	Tel: 028 9073 9447
	179 Shankill Road	Tel: 028 9032 7702
Rate Collection Agency	Oxford House Chichester Street Belfast	Tel: 028 9025 0000

<b>North East Area</b>		
Area Headquarters	Twickenham House, Mount Street Ballymena BT43 6BP	Tel: 028 2565 3399
<b>District Offices</b>		
Antrim District Office	District Manager 48 High Street. Antrim	Tel: 028 9442 8142
Ballymena District Office	District Manager Twickenham House, Mount Street, Ballymena BT43 6BP	Tel: 028 2565 3399
Newtownabbey I District Office	District Manager Rantalard House, Rathcoole Drive Whiteabbey, Newtownabbey	Tel: 028 9036 5911
Newtownabbey 2 District Office	District Manager 2 Ballyearl Drive, New Mossley Newtownabbey	Tel: 028 9084 3711
Carrickfergus District Office	District Manager 19 High Street, Carrickfergus	Tel: 028 9335 1115
Larne District Office	District Manager 5 Main Street, Larne	Tel: 028 2827 4426
Coleraine District Office	District Manager 19 Abbey Street, Coleraine, BT52 1DU	Tel: 028 7035 8111
Ballymoney District Office	District Manager 50-54 Main Street, Ballymoney	Tel: 028 2766 3442
Ballycastle District Office	District Manager Fleming House, Coleraine Road, Ballycastle BT54 6DR	Tel: 028 2076 2014
<b>Citizens Advice Bureaux</b>		
	Pogues Entry, Church St. Antrim	Tel: 028 9442 8176
	28 Mount Street, Ballymena	Tel: 028 2564 4398
	Rathmullan Drive,	Tel: 028 9085 2271

	Rathcoole	
	3 Ballyclare Road, Glengormley	Tel: 028 9084 4592
	65 North Street, Carrickfergus	Tel: 028 9335 1808
	49 Victoria Road, Larne	Tel: 028 2826 0379
	Beresford Place, Coleraine	Tel: 028 7034 4817
<b>Council Offices</b>		
Antrim Borough Council	The Steeple, Antrim	Tel: 028 9446 3113
Ballymena Borough Council	80 Galgorm Road, Ballymena	Tel: 028 2566 0300
Ballymoney Borough Council	Riada House, 14 Charles Street, Ballymoney	Tel: 028 2766 2280
Carrickfergus Borough Council	Town Hall, Joymount, Carrickfergus	Tel: 028 9335 1604
Coleraine Borough Council	Cloonavin, 41 Portstewart Rd, Coleraine	Tel: 028 7035 2181
Larne Borough Council	Sir Thomas Dixon Buildings Victoria Road, Larne	Tel: 028 2827 2313
Moyle District Council	Sheskburn House, 7 Mary Street Ballycastle	Tel: 028 2076 2225
Newtownabbey Borough Council	1 The Square, Ballyclare	Tel: 028 9335 2681
<b>Rate Collection Agencies</b>		
Belfast	Oxford House, Chichester Street, Belfast	Tel: 028 9025 0000
Ballymena	Academy House, 121A Broughshane Street Ballymena	Tel: 028 2566 63134

<b>South Area</b>		
Area Headquarters	Marlborough House, Central Way, Craigavon BT64 1AJ	Tel: 028 3834 1188
<b>District Offices</b>		
Armagh District Office	District Manager 48 Dobbin Street, Armagh, BT61 7BR	Tel: 028 3752 3379
Lurgan/Brownlow District Office	District Manager 122 Hill Street, Lurgan BT66 6BH or 16 Legahory Centre, Brownlow BT65 5BE	Tel: 028 3832 6417 Tel: 028 3834 4631
Banbridge District Office	District Manager 56 Bridge Street, Banbridge, BT32 3JL	Tel: 028 4066 2721
Newry District Office	District Manager 35-45 Boat Street, Newry, BT34 2DB	Tel: 028 3026 7331
Portadown District Office	District Manager 41 Thomas Street, Portadown, BT62 3AF	Tel: 028 3836 1895
Dungannon District Office	District Manager Ballygawley Road, Dungannon, BT70 1AT	Tel: 028 8772 3000
Fermanagh District and Grants Office	District Manager Riverview House, Head St, Enniskillen BT74 7DA	Tel: 028 6632 5770
<b>Citizens Advice Bureaux</b>		
	9 McCrums Court, Armagh	Tel: 028 3752 4041
	Scarva Street, Banbridge	Tel: 028 4062 2201
	Town Hall, Edward Street, Portadown	Tel: 028 3835 3260
	Unit 5 Feenys Lane Dungannon	Tel: 028 8772 5299
<b>Council Offices</b>		
Armagh City and District Council	The Palace Demesne, Newry Road,	Tel: 028 3752 9600

	Armagh Opening Hours 9.00am- 5.00pm	
Banbridge District Council	Council Offices, Downshire Road, Banbridge	Tel: 028 4066 2991
Craigavon Borough Council	Civic Centre, Lakeview Road, Craigavon	Tel: 028 3831 2400
Dungannon District Council	Circular Road Dungannon	Tel : 028 8772 0300
Newry & Mourne District Council	Unit 19, Rampart Road Greenbank Industrial Estate Newry	Tel: 028 3031 3233
<b>Rate Collection Agency</b>	Areas covered Newry & Mourne, Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon South Edward St Portadown	Tel: 028 3839 6200

<b>South East Area</b>		
Area Headquarters	Strangford House, 28 Court Street, Newtownards, Co Down BT23 3NX	Tel: 028 9182 0600
<b>District Offices</b>		
Castlereagh District Office	District Manager 30 Church Road, Dundonald BT16 OLN	Tel: 028 9048 5237
Bangor District Office	District Manager 2 Alfred Street, Bangor BT20 5DH	Tel: 028 9127 0761
Newtownards District Office	District Manager 2 - 32 Frederick Street Newtownards BT23 4LR	Tel: 028 9181 6979
Lisburn Antrim Street District Office	District Manager 29 Antrim Street, Lisburn BT28 IAU	Tel: 028 9166 5222
Lisburn Dairyfarm District Office	District Manager Dairyfarm Centre Stewartstown Road, Belfast BT17 OSB	Tel: 028 9061 1199
Downpatrick District Office	District Manager 51 John Street, Downpatrick BT30 6HS	Tel: 028 8761 3551
<b>Council Offices</b>		
Ards Borough Council	2 Church Street, Newtownards	Tel: 028 9181 2215
Castlereagh Borough Council	368 Cregagh Road, Belfast	Tel: 028 9079 9021
Down District Council	24 Strangford Road, Downpatrick	Tel: 028 4461 080
Lisburn City Council	Island Civic Centre, Lagan Valley Island, The Island Lisburn BT27 4RL	Tel: 028 9250 9250
North Down Borough Council	Town Hall, Bangor, Co Down	Tel: 028 9127 0371
Rate Collection Agencies	Oxford House Chichester Street Belfast	Tel: 028 9025 0000

<b>West Area</b>		
Area Headquarters (Londonderry)	Richmond Chambers, The Diamond, Londonderry BT48 6QP	Tel: 028 7137 2000
<b>District Offices</b>		
Londonderry 1 District Office	District Manager Ulster Bank Buildings, Waterloo Place, Londonderry	Tel: 028 7126 6227
Londonderry 2 District Office	District Manager 2 Glendermot Road, Waterside BT47 IAU	Tel: 028 7131 1490
Londonderry 3 District Office	District Manager 14 Collon Terrace Buncrana Rd. BT48 7QP	Tel: 028 7137 3683
Limavady District Office	District Manager 33 Catherine Street Limavady BT49 9DA	Tel: 028 7776 9618
Magherafelt District Office	District Manager 3 Ballyronan Road, Magherafelt BT45 6BP	Tel: 028 7963 1121
Cookstown District Office	District Manager 15 Morgans Hill Road, Cookstown, BT80 8HA	Tel: 028 8676 2004
Omagh District Office	District Manager 7 Holmview Terrace Omagh	Tel: 028 8224 7701
Strabane District Office	District Manager 48 Railway Road, Strabane BT82 8EH	Tel: 028 7138 2637
<b>Council Offices</b>		
Derry City Council	5 Guildhall Street, Londonderry	Tel: 028 7136 5151
Limavady Borough Council	7 Connell Street, Limavady, BT49 OHA	Tel: 028 7772 2226
Magherafelt District Council	50 Ballyronan Road, Magherafelt, BT45 6BX	Tel: 028 7963 2151
Cookstown District Council	12 Burn Road, Cookstown, BT80 8DT	Tel: 028 8676 2205
Omagh District Council	The Grange, Mountjoy Rd. Omagh BT79 7BL	Tel: 028 8224 5321
Strabane District Council	47 Derry Road, Strabane, BT82 8DY	Tel: 028 7138 2204

<b>Rate Collection Agencies</b>		
	Foyle Street Londonderry	Tel: 028 7131 9900
	Boaz House 15 Scarffe's Entry, Omagh	Tel: 028 8225 4777
<b>Citizens Advice Bureaux</b>		
Derry	1-3 Guildhall Street	Tel: 028 7136 2444 Debt Line: 028 7126 1030
Strabane	31 Patrick Street	Tel: 028 7138 2665
Magherafelt	43 Queens Avenue	Tel: 028 7963 4562
Fermanagh	25 Darling Street	Tel: 028 6632 4334
Cookstown	70 James Street	Tel: 028 8676 6126