
As we reflect on 2018, our staff and tenants have had a busy year and some challenges were faced along the way. This included managing a busy year of handovers across the province; the planned evacuation of Russell Court Block B; and dealing with the roll-out of Universal Credit.

We took 296 new homes into management in 2017/18. We were especially delighted in the run up to Christmas to take handover of a number of new build homes in Bangor, Belfast and Coalisland. Our focus in the next few months will be on completing the final handover of the Peter Pan apartments on the Springfield Road.

We know our tenants are deeply concerned about the ramifications of Universal Credit and the ending of bedroom tax mitigations in 2020. We have allocated two Welfare Advice Officers to assist you with the changes ahead. We will continue to work in partnership with the many advice agencies supporting tenants, to ensure we do everything to help you at this difficult time.

As we closed 2018, we completed our charity partnership with the Northern Ireland Hospice. I am pleased to report we raised £56,000. The NI Hospice was chosen because we recognised the value of the support they provide to people in the most difficult of circumstances. Families greatly appreciate the work they do.

I would like to thank each and every one of you who contributed to fundraising throughout the two year partnership.

As that partnership ends, I am delighted to announce our new partnership with AWARE NI. We chose AWARE NI based on their positive impact within local communities. At Radius, we pride ourselves in not just housing people, but ensuring their social, physical and mental well-being is cared for. We are excited at the prospect of supporting AWARE NI in their work over the next two years.

We continue to work in partnership with South West College in our ‘Radius Connects’ apprenticeship programme. This promotes employment and progression towards employment by signposting participants to suitable courses offered by South West College.

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Hopefully the worst of the winter weather has been and gone. We look forward to the longer nights and enjoyment of our gardens! I do hope you enjoy this edition of Radius News and thank you for your continued support.

John McLean OBE
Chief Executive
Radius Housing Association
... Got an idea for a business/service improvement? ... we want to know!

Click on the Bright Ideas link on the Radius website or pick up a Bright Ideas form at one of our receptions, and you could get a £50/£20/£10 voucher if implemented

radiushousing.org
Raising AWAREness in the name of mental health

Get ready for an action-packed schedule of fundraising on behalf of our new charity partner AWARE.

AWARE delivers mental health and wellbeing programmes in communities, schools, colleges, universities and workplaces throughout Northern Ireland. The charity has an established network of 23 support groups in rural and urban areas across the country, which are run by trained volunteers. Support groups welcome people with depression and bipolar disorder as well as those who care for people with the illness.

Announcing the partnership, John McLean said: “We are proud and extremely excited to be partnering with AWARE in 2019-20. In today’s society, with suicide rates locally higher than anywhere else in the UK, the work that AWARE does is vital and extremely respected by all in Northern Ireland. With a large team at Radius, many of whom work directly with members of the public; we recognise the importance of a positive approach to mental wellbeing.

AWARE was chosen as our charity partner for 2019-20 because we have seen the positive impact they have had in local communities. At Radius we pride ourselves in not just housing people, but ensuring their social, physical and mental wellbeing is all cared for and we are absolutely delighted that we will be able to support AWARE in their work over the next two years.”

Karen Collins, Chief Executive at AWARE, said: “We are delighted to be the chosen charity partner of Radius Housing and I am really looking forward to seeing what the partnership has to offer over the year ahead. As a charity, the money that people fundraise is vitally important to allow us to continue delivering our services in schools, communities and workplaces across Northern Ireland.

AWARE delivers a series of Mood Matters programmes including a Young People programme into schools and community groups for children aged 14-18 years old. This programme gives them the skills and knowledge which they can use to maintain good mental health and build resilience in order to better deal with problems and challenges. The money Radius Housing raises will help AWARE deliver more of these types of programmes to our young people in Northern Ireland.”

Keep your fundraising ideas coming in!
No matter how big or small, send them all to: communications@radiushousing.org
Rathain Fold takes home award for ‘Best Sheltered Scheme’

Congratulations to the staff and residents of Rathain Fold on winning ‘Best Sheltered Scheme’ at the annual Best Kept Awards.

The judging panel accredited Rathain Fold’s winning edge to the “exceptional neatness and cleanliness of the entire complex” adding that the entrance and floral hall contributed to a “delightful, colourful and welcoming impression”. This is an impressive win and one that reflects the attentiveness and dedication of the scheme’s staff and residents.

Maurice raises £3,820 for MYMY

Donard Fold resident Maurice has raised £3,820 for Newcastle-based charity, Mind Your Mate and Yourself.

The money was raised through a number of activities, including bag packs at Tesco and a raffle night at the local O’Hares Lounge Bar.

A number of local retailers backed Maurice’s fundraising by donating 62 prizes for the raffle. All in all, it was a well-attended event with many happy winners!

Congratulations to Maurice, his daughter Mary and his fundraising supporters Lily and Cheryl.

To feature your fundraising story in Radius News, contact us at communications@radiushousing.org
Friendships blossom as part of ‘Linking Generations’ project

Spelga Mews has introduced an intergenerational programme in partnership with Little Friends nursery in Banbridge.

The project, bringing together residents with local pre-school children, focuses on enriching the lives of older and young people as they explore together and “take joy in the here and now”.

Residents of Spelga Mews, many of whom have varying degrees of dementia, have so far enjoyed a host of activities with the children including art therapy, ball games, sing and dance sessions, planting flowers and nursery rhymes.

Louise McConville, Manager at Spelga Mews, said the programme “helps to boost residents’ mental well-being while reducing feelings of loneliness and anxiety”. The children are also able to benefit from increased speech and language development through story-telling and role play activities.

To learn more about this project, please get in touch with Louise McConville at louise.mcconville@radiushousing.org
New Homes

Everyone has a place
Homes has a place
Affordability now biggest barrier to a vibrant housing market says Chair of CIH NI

Affordability - both in the private housing and social housing sector - is now the biggest barrier to people being able to live in the homes of their choice - that was the message from Radius Housing’s Director of Communities Eileen Patterson as she took up the reins as the new Chair of the Northern Ireland Board of the Chartered Institute of Housing.

“Across the public and private sector affordability is now the biggest barrier to people being able to live in the homes of their choice - that was the message from Radius Housing’s Director of Communities Eileen Patterson as she took up the reins as the new Chair of the Northern Ireland Board of the Chartered Institute of Housing.

CIH is the professional body for those working in housing across the UK, and Eileen, who has over 30 years working in the sector here, said the biggest challenge in housing in Northern Ireland is now affordability. She said:

“Across the public and private sector affordability is becoming the biggest barrier to people being able to choose the best type of housing for themselves and their families. Tightening access to mortgage credit means that rates of home ownership are declining, but there is no pick-up from the private rented sector which is becoming more expensive in some areas and short in supply in others. While there is an active new build programme for social housing, the undeniable fact is that social housing waiting lists continue to grow across Northern Ireland.

“Changes in welfare benefits present a double whammy for the social housing sector - it means that tenants in some cases may no longer be able to pay their rent, and it presents challenges to social housing providers because it changes the financial assumptions on which their current investment plans are based,” she added.

Eileen said that it is essential we find local solutions if we are to avert a housing crisis similar to that in other cities and regions across the UK and Ireland.

“Welfare reform mitigation needs to be extended to ensure that people can continue to meet their rental commitments and remain in their homes, the development of affordable homes needs to be increased and the level of capital investment in social housing should be increased so that rents can be maintained at affordable levels. While reforms of the planning system are well underway, delays are still impeding the development of housing, especially in areas of housing stress.”

“We also need to develop a strategic approach to tackling the housing crisis which should include housing professionals, financiers, developers, architects, planners and other experts.

By working together we can ensure that housing takes centre stage in policy debates in Northern Ireland. For too long housing policy in many ways has been led by welfare policy and this cannot continue,” she added.

Eileen was speaking at the CIH’s NI board meeting where she was appointed Chair. Eileen will hold the post for the next three years.

“Across the public and private sector affordability is becoming the biggest barrier to people being able to choose the best type of housing for themselves and their families.
Give a brief outline of your career to date

After graduating with a degree in Politics and Law in 2000 I took up a role in the advice sector, and have now been working in this area for 18 years, specialising in welfare advice and money management.

I started as welfare rights adviser offering general benefit advice; I then developed a speciality in money and debt advice, spending six years working on the Debt Action Project, before going back into the field of welfare advice and representation. Welfare advice and money & debt advice have a great deal of crossover, and having experience in both areas is a great benefit in my role.

My current role sits within the Communities team where I advise and assist tenants on a range of benefit-related issues.

As a Welfare Advice Officer, what does a typical day entail?

A typical day usually begins with checking and responding to emails, calls, posts and queries.

From then on the day is spent engaging with tenants, assisting and advising on benefits and maximising income by carrying out Benefit Entitlement Checks to ensure tenants are receiving their full entitlements; assisting with benefit applications / claims; assisting with budgeting and working on appeals, representation and ongoing casework. It’s amazing how many people are unaware of the full range of benefits to which they may be entitled.

Welfare changes have presented many challenges for our tenants not least the impact on how people engage with the welfare system. As a result, much of the day is dedicated to assisting tenants with these changes and preparing people for end of mitigation payments, which will be in March 2020.

I also work closely with the Housing team in relation to specific cases. Benefits can often be complex, and it takes time to work through each case to ensure the best outcome is achieved.

What aspects of your job would you consider the most challenging?

Every day you are dealing with people who face incredibly difficult circumstances and this is challenging. However, knowing that you have been able to get the best outcome for people helps massively. On a practical level, it has been a challenge adapting to universal credit and other changes within the welfare system. It is imperative I keep myself up to date with the continuous changes being implemented.

Why is what you do so important?

With so much change within the welfare and benefit system, having an in-house welfare advice services for our tenants is crucial.

This service is designed to assist our tenants as they navigate the welfare system and the subsequent impact of these changes on their own particular circumstances.

It is vital tenants are fully prepared for the end of mitigation payments in 2020.

Our welfare advice service also provides budgeting advice and a referral process to other advice services.

What advice would you give to anyone considering a similar career path?

Many people start by volunteering in an advice centre such as Citizens Advice where you can build your experience in welfare rights and money advice. Avail of training and networking opportunities. Expand your knowledge of welfare rights legislation policy and practice and keep ahead of the continuous changes. Qualifications and experience that reflect caring for people and for the community are also beneficial in helping you get into this area of work.
Tenant Engagement: the next chapter

At Radius, we strive to maximise opportunities for our tenants. Throughout the past year, we have laid the groundwork for a range of tenant-centred initiatives and the good news is this is just the beginning!

In 2018, we:

- Prioritised areas for service improvement
- Conducted Estate Walkabouts covering over 1,400 properties
- Approved £4770.00 as part of our Community Chest project
- Hosted 4 Tenant Forums along with our first Tenant Conference
- Maintained Area Panels
- Appointed a Tenant Executive Committee
- Created a new Tenant Engagement Strategy

Get involved in 2019

Following consultation from the Area Panels, our Tenant Executive Committee has prioritised the below areas for service improvement:

- Communication
- Reporting of repairs
- Anti-social behaviour
- Parking
- Communal cleaning/monitoring

Estate Walkabouts

Would you like your Housing Officer and Assets Officer to visit your neighbourhood as part of an estate walkabout? These walkabout sessions usually last two hours and are fully tailored to your neighbourhood.

Area Panels

Meet every three months with fellow Radius tenants from your area to discuss strategic matters with your dedicated Housing and Assets teams.

Readers Panel

Play your part in the review of official publications where you have the opportunity to present ideas and recommendations.

Events and Awards

The Radius Tenant Forums and Scheme Awards will run from 8th to 12th April 2019 where we expect to welcome over 600 guests.

The Scheme Awards celebrate the success of our accommodation for over 55’s and includes categories for Healthy Living & Learning, Outstanding Scheme Community Pride and Best Kept Garden.

If you would like to get involved in shaping any of these initiatives, please get in touch with the Tenant Engagement team

T: 0330 123 0888 Marty Downey (Ext. 2237) Christine Cackett (Ext. 7263)

E: tenant.engagement@radiushousing.org

We are delighted to introduce our new Tenant Approved Logo. When you see this on our documentation, you will know our tenants have been consulted on the contents.
Managing Complaints for Service Improvement

When a tenant raises a complaint, it creates an opportunity for us to improve.

We are committed to investigating tenant complaints in relation to what we did or didn’t do and the standard of our services.

Here, we review some recent tenant complaints demonstrating how we responded and what action was taken to resolve each complaint in line with Radius’ complaints protocol.

**Customer complaint**
I am currently on credit on my rent account and I requested a refund of this money several weeks ago but I have not yet received my money.

**How we responded**
Area Housing Manager issued a written response to tenant apologising for the unreasonable delay in processing refund. The Area Housing Manager assured tenant the refund would be processed as a matter of priority.

**What we did**
The Area Housing manager investigated the circumstances surrounding the refund and ensured the involved members of staff were briefed on how to prevent this from reoccurring. The tenant was reimbursed and was satisfied with the manner in which complaint was handled.

**Customer complaint**
I have no floor covering in my home. When are you going to carry out this job?

**How we responded**
A member of the Assets team issued a written response to the tenant apologising for the inconvenience and the delay in scheduling the repair. The Asset Officer explained the repair was initially logged to wrong contractor and this created a delay. The Asset Officer assured tenant the repair would be reassigned correctly and a contractor would be out to complete the work.

**What we did**
The Asset Officer reassigned the repair to the correct contractor and ensured all required components were ordered. A contractor attended the tenant’s property to complete the repair. Tenant was satisfied with standard of service. Repair was updated accordingly on the system.

**Customer complaint**
I have had to log the same maintenance repair on numerous occasions as each time the system categorises it as ‘resolved’, yet no repair has been carried out.

**How we responded**
A member of the Assets team issued a written response to the tenant apologising for the inconvenience and the delay in scheduling the repair. The Asset Officer explained the repair was initially logged to wrong contractor and this created a delay. The Asset Officer assured tenant the repair would be reassigned correctly and a contractor would be out to complete the work.

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**What happens when I complain?**

**Our internal complaints process has two stages.**

At Stage 1, we aim to deal with your complaint within two working days. Hopefully we can resolve things for you, but if you’re not satisfied you can request to proceed to Stage 2. If your complaint warrants further investigation, it will be categorised as a Stage 2 complaint. We aim to resolve your complaint within 20 working days.
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