



SPRING 2014 : ISSUE 01

ST MATTHEW'S HOUSING ASSOCIATION

QUALITY, AFFORDABLE LOCAL HOUSING

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ABOUT ST MATTHEW'S



OUR VISION IS TO BECOME
A MODEL OF EXCELLENCE
FOR COMMUNITY BASED
HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS
IN NORTHERN IRELAND

WELCOME

St Matthew's Housing Association has been in operation for almost four decades and remains committed to its original mission of delivering quality, affordable local housing.

delivering high quality results for our tenants and communities.

In early Spring, we welcomed a report from the Department of Social Development which validated the Board of St Matthew's Housing Association and the manner in which it allocates homes on a fair and equitable basis. It underlines that the right decisions are being made for the right reasons.

St Matthew's Housing Association has been in operation for almost four decades and remains committed to its original mission of delivering quality, affordable local housing.

There are significant changes ahead for the housing landscape and the Social Development Minister has outlined his proposal for reform. Housing associations will be challenged to play a stronger role in shaping society in Northern Ireland and meeting the future needs of the population.

St Matthew's is excited at the prospect of driving further transformation that supports prosperous and peaceful communities into the future.

Patrick Devlin
Chairperson
St Matthew's Housing Association



I am pleased to welcome you to this special newsletter from St Matthew's Housing Association.

This is a time of great change for tenants and providers of social and affordable homes. While that brings opportunities for us to grow and develop, we've also redoubled our efforts to support the people and communities we serve as the major programmes of reform get underway.

The last year has been a busy one for the team at St Matthew's and this newsletter reports some of the successes we've had and the difference we are proudly making in the lives of many families and individuals. We greatly value the views of our tenants and in recent surveys you told us the three things that matter most to you are

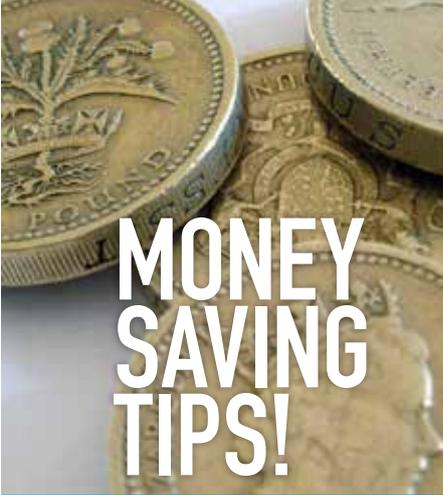
being kept informed; the quality of your home; and repairs and maintenance.

These are areas matter to us too and we continually seek new ways to improve on how we deliver for you, including through this newsletter.

The association will soon enter the final 12 months of our five-year strategy, during which we've invested more than £1 million to bring our tenants' homes up to a high standard. A further £50,000 has been committed to planning priorities for the next five years. We continue to work hard to defend the credibility and integrity of our tenants, our Board and staff. Erroneous reports in the press last year were hurtful and unhelpful, but they did not distract us from

RELIABLE QUALITY
TENANT FOCUS
TRUST COMMUNITY
PROFESSIONAL
OUR VALUES





MONEY SAVING TIPS!

We tend to use less energy in the warmer months of the year, but that's no reason to stop looking for smart ways to make the pound in your pocket go further.

- The average household spends between £50 and £90 per year by leaving appliances on standby. When items are left plugged in and switched on at the plug socket they are still using energy - that's a lot of money to spend powering the digital clock on your cooker! Be sure to turn off appliances at the socket when they are not in use.
- Replacing standard light bulbs with energy saving alternatives, can save you £50 over the lifetime of the bulb. Best of all however, is to switch the light off when it is not needed and make use of the longer, brighter nights.
- Only boil the water that you need when making a cuppa, you do not need to fill it to the top. Kettles use a lot of energy and you could save at least £8 a year by only boiling what you need.
- Set your thermostat timer correctly so you have enough hot water when you want it rather than all day long. Setting it to the right temperature will also save on money.
- Shop around for the best-priced electricity provider. Some offer double-digit savings for switching while some smart deals on keypad meters will also reward you for each top up.

HOW ARE WE DOING?

Last year we carried out a survey of our tenants to assess their satisfaction with current service delivery. The findings of the survey help us to establish priorities for the future and for improving services. The Northern Ireland Housing Federation's Standardised Tenant Satisfaction questionnaire formed the basis for the self-completion questionnaire and was sent to 197 homes along with some additional questions relevant to St Matthew's.

Jim Black, Chief Executive of St Matthew's Housing Association said, "The overall results of the Residents Satisfaction Survey are positive and make for very good reading when compared to our last survey in 2011. We have recorded improvements in most areas of the survey and there are positive soundings across all performance indicators. We can take heart from these returns and the fact that among our tenants there are no glaring concerns or major worries. This is indicative of a quality housing service and a solid Housing Association that strives for constant improvement and excellence regarding service provision."



Percentage of tenants satisfied with:	2013 performance	2011 performance
The services provided by SMHA	90%	88%
The overall quality of their home	85%	83%
The value they get for their money	85%	84%
The ease of speaking to the right member of staff	95%	94%
The repairs maintenance to their home	90%	86%

GET INVOLVED

We want our customers to be engaged in the work that we do. Like all housing associations SMHA is an independent, not-for-profit organisation set up to provide much-needed homes for people in housing need. It is run by the community for the community and we want you to

have your say and to be involved as much as you want.

The survey is just one way we seek feedback and our office values and welcomes all correspondence, new ideas and comments on any issue. If you have something to say or suggest please get in touch using the details on the back of this

newsletter.

We also welcome interest from community members who would like to support our efforts to build peaceful and prosperous neighbourhoods and would consider joining our Board. To find out more about the Board Member application process contact us on 028 9045 1070.

Patsy Curran has seen many great changes in the Short Strand area, but he says its best days are still ahead and St Matthew's Housing Association is helping make them a reality.

Q&A

WITH LOCAL RESIDENT



One of the Short Strand's senior most respected tenants, Patsy Curran, takes great pride in his community. His parents, just like him were both born and raised in the area and today it shoulders a fifth generation of his family line.

To Patsy the area is more than a collection of homes and familiar faces. It is a thriving community that is emerging from a tough period and offering a bright future to its residents including nine of his 22 great grandchildren who live there.

"There are 3,500 people in this area," says Patsy "there is a lovely school and a gorgeous park. You get to know everybody here and they all know me. I feel safe getting out and about and

everyday people stop to chat to me and Buddy on our walk. There's real sense of community"

A German Schnauzer, Buddy lives with Patsy's son just a few yards from Sean Martin House where Patsy has been living for 10 years. Having his family close is important to him.

After his wife Maureen sadly passed away, Patsy had to change accommodation leading to a difficult and stressful period during which his health suffered. He wished to continue living in the area and while in hospital, he completed application forms for a flat with St Matthew's Housing Association.

Patsy was still in the hospital when, some weeks later, news came through that he would

receive a flat. "I was delighted," he says "A member of the team came to visit me. He told me the good news and explained what would happen next. When I got out I was able to move in right away. There were a few hiccups early on getting things ready, but they sorted out all the issues quickly and got the place as I wanted it to be."

Patsy says the support of the association has helped him to live independently but still remain connected to his family. He puts the uniqueness of the organisation down to the people that work at St Matthews.

"The association has been very important to me and they've been very good to me. There is a very happy team there and they are very quick to see that you

get help. They all know me and there's no airs or graces, they'll always help you right away."

He adds that building a personal relationship with the staff meant a lot. "They have personality and good humour that I enjoy. Some organisations are good at helping you out and that's important, but it means a lot to know people listen and understand you. This area is changing for the better because people care for each other. You're not just another number to them. St Matthew's is very much part of the community and always has been."

When asked what changes he would make in the area, Patsy says he has just single simple wish.

"As long as peace stays for the kids I'm happy enough."

CUTTING OUT ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

MAKING YOUR COMMUNITY SAFER

We want tenants to live in safe, happy communities and work hard to provide support and advice to ensure they are just that.

WHAT IS ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) is behaviour that lacks consideration for others and may cause damage to the society, whether intentionally or through negligence. Broadly, it is acting

in a way that causes or is likely to cause alarm or distress to one or more people in another household.

There may be a fine line between antisocial behaviour and disputes between neighbours over relatively minor inconveniences, although these may, if persistent, become antisocial behaviour.

WHAT WILL WE DO?

We will use everything at our disposal to prevent ASB. When

reported, we will:

- Take instant action, including trying preventative measures to resolve issues where possible.
- Be constantly proactive in tackling ASB.
- Protect and support victims and witnesses.
- Keep you informed with all ASB cases right to the end including when we intend to close a case.
- Work with Police, Local Authorities and other agencies to resolve issues.

HOW CAN I REPORT ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR?

There are a number of ways to report incidents of anti-social behaviour. They include:

- Contacting us by telephone on 028 9045 1070.
- In person at any of our offices, details of which can be found at the back of this newsletter.
- Contact your local police station or in case of emergency ring 999.

WELFARE REFORM

You may already be aware that the Government is making big changes to many benefits, including housing benefit, across the UK. While legislation has already been passed in Great Britain, the Northern Ireland Executive is discussing new legislation for potential changes here.

The proposals contained within the Welfare Reform Bill for Northern Ireland may see new benefits and payment systems introduced in place of current benefits. You and your family may be affected by some of the changes and we want to make sure that you are aware of what to expect.

THE MAIN CHANGES

- Housing Benefit will be based on new rules about how many bedrooms you need. You may

lose out if you have bedrooms that the Government thinks you don't need.

- Benefits could be capped at a certain level. This means the Government would add up all your benefits and if the total is more than the maximum amount allowed, your Housing Benefit payments could be reduced
- Plans have been considered for a number of income benefits and Housing Benefit to be replaced with one single

monthly payment

- If someone in your home is over 18, not in full time education, works or claims benefit, they will be expected to pay a contribution to your rent. Your housing benefit will be cut in line with this expected contribution.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The Department for Social Development also has useful up-to-date information on its website to let you know what's

happening:

<http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/ssa/welfare-reform-ssa.htm>

The team at St Matthew's Housing Association is also happy to help talk you through what the changes could mean for you.

CALL US:

028 9045 1070

EMAIL US

office@smha.co.uk

ABOUT ST MATTHEW'S HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Established as a community organisation in 1976, St Matthew's Housing Association has been transforming housing and bringing much needed social homes to East Belfast for almost 40 years.

It remains a non-profit making organisation embedded in the heart of the communities it serves and offers a complimentary service to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, providing small-scale new housing in an area with limited land.

Today St Matthew's Housing Association manages 198 homes. The bulk of which, some 160, are in the Short Strand area but the association also has responsibility for 30 homes in the Clonard area of West Belfast and a further eight units in Poleglass.

The association provides a responsive and effective approach to meeting tenant needs and is staffed by a team of four full time and one part time housing professionals who – between them – hold more than 75 years' experience.

A 10-person strong Board of Management is responsible for the strategic direction of the association's operations. Most of whom live in or are from the communities which St Matthew's was established to serve and hold a clear view of the challenges facing local neighbourhoods.

A five-year business plan designed by the Board will have delivered around £1.3million investment to improve the association's housing stock for



the five years the ending March 2015.

The association takes pride in the fact that all its homes meet government's Decent Home Standard, but is continuing to invest for the future. Surveying all our housing stock will begin soon as part of the planning for the next five-year maintenance programme and ensuring standards of repair remain high and more people benefit from modern facilities.

The Board of St Matthew's Housing Association is also reviewing a number of options to develop new social homes in the Short Strand area along with our partners APEX HA and the APEX procurement consortium. This would be an important achievement in an area where waiting lists remain unacceptably high.

More than just a landlord, St Matthew's Housing Association continues to be an important part of the communities it serves.

INVESTING IN YOUR COMMUNITY

St Matthew's housing Association is proud to work with local people to help set up and support community development. Our aim is to develop and grow stronger communities, helping them become more resilient through these difficult times, we are making a real difference in our neighbourhoods.

ABOVE:

ST MATTHEW'S HOUSING ASSOCIATION

VISIT US – OPENING HOURS

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday
9.00am to 12pm & 2pm to 4pm
Wednesday 9.00am to 12pm

CALL US:

028 9045 1070

EMAIL US
office@smha.co.uk

WRITE TO US:

St Matthews Housing
Association 58 Harper Street,
Belfast, BT5 4EN

If you cannot get to our office easily, please call 028 9045 1070. We can arrange to visit you in your home.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

St Matthew's Housing
Association out of hours:
0800 731 3081

NI Gas Emergency Service:
0800 022 011

NIE Emergency Helpline:
08457 643 643

Northern Ireland Water
Emergency Helpline:
0845 744 0088

REMEMBER!

If you smell gas in your home you should:

- Put out all cigarettes and other naked flames
- Switch off all gas appliances
- Turn the gas off at the mains (the main tap is usually beside your gas meter)
- Make sure you do not turn on any lights or other electrical switches (this could cause a spark)
- Open your windows
- Contact Gas Emergency Service