

# CONNSWATER CHRONICLE

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Tenants' Newsletter published by Connswater Homes

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## Bye Bye Netta



In this issue of the Newsletter we say Goodbye to not only the longest serving member of staff, but the first member of staff that the Association ever had.

To you, she's Netta, your housing manager. Many of you will know her well, some of you for many years, others more recently.

For us as an Association, it will be a great loss, her knowledge and ready wit will be missed by all her colleagues, not only in Connswater, but throughout the housing association movement.

Netta's story on her years and experiences at Connswater are inside.



We offer Language Line services to people whose first language is not English.

This newsletter and other documents can be translated into different languages on request. Please contact us if you require any of these services.

The newsletter is also available electronically from our website.

# PULL YOUR FINGER OUT

Smoke alarms are fitted for the safety of you and your family, please **DO NOT** switch off at the mains or remove batteries



Check batteries  
Remove dust  
Test regularly



### Easter Opening Hours

The office will be closed on Friday 21st, Monday 24th and Tuesday 25th March re-opening at 9.00am on Wednesday 26th March

For emergencies during this period please use the Telecare number  
**0800 731 3081**

# Consumer Helpline



Consumerline is a telephone and online advice service for Northern Ireland. Their telephone advisors will listen to each caller's query and provide clear, practical advice on a wide range of consumer issues. If it is appropriate they will forward details of your complaint to the Trading Standards for investigation. If it is a civil matter they will give you advice. Consumerline have an excellent referral system if they need to re-direct your enquiry on to someone better able to help you.

Be assured that any concerns you raise will be taken seriously. Where matters need to be investigated further, they will advise you of the progress and the action being taken.

However in some complex cases, delay is often inevitable and unavoidable.

It is always their policy to deal with cases as quickly as possible and to keep you fully informed

**For more information  
check out their website**

**[www.consumerline.org](http://www.consumerline.org)**

**or if you need to call them use this number**

**Tel: 0845 600 62 62**

## Garden Competition

Spring is in the air, and the growing season has started. The Association is running a garden competition during June, July and August and the winners will be invited to a presentation in September. The competition is open to all the Association's tenants. The judges will base their decisions on the best display (colour and design) and ability (resources, technique and effort). The competition categories are:

**Best House Garden    Best Container / Patio Garden  
Best Hanging Basket / Tub**

**£25 gift vouchers of your choice (Tesco, M&S or B&Q) for each category**

Throughout the summer months housing staff will be carrying out estate inspections and shall look out for the best blooms in your area. Those that are identified in the above groups shall be noted and independent judging will take place at the end of the summer. So come on, join in by planting up your tubs, getting the grass cut and making your area blooming lovely!!

**[www.connswater.org.uk](http://www.connswater.org.uk)**

# Tenants Forum

If you would like to improve the area you live in, why not do something positive and join the tenant's forum.

The Association will be holding an informal meeting for those interested.  
This will be held in the Association's office  
at 7.30pm on Tuesday 8 April 2008

Do you have mobility problems?

Do you find getting around the city centre or outlying areas difficult?

Have you tried Shopmobility Belfast?

Shopmobility Belfast is a charity, which provides **FREE** daily and long-term hire of the following equipment:

**Powered wheelchairs**  
**Manual wheelchairs**



**Electric scooters**

Helps people with mobility problems to use the facilities of Belfast City Centre and surrounding areas with greater **FREEDOM, INDEPENDENCE** and **DIGNITY**.

Their service is open to **EVERYONE** who finds access to the city centre difficult, including those with disabilities, older people, or people who, due to accident or illness, find themselves with temporary mobility difficulties.

Its **FREE** & simple to join, all you have to do is contact Shopmobility on **028 90808090** and they'll tell you what you need. Or check out their website for more information

**[www.shopmobilitybelfast.co.uk](http://www.shopmobilitybelfast.co.uk)**

Tenants are again reminded that the out-of-hours telephone number we have provided is to be used for **emergencies outside office hours only**

Any calls other than emergencies and/or that are not the Association's responsibility will be charged directly to the tenant. Please check your list of Repairs Rights and Responsibilities before making that call!



**TELECARE— 0800 731 3081**

# Netta's story...



I started working for the Association in 1977 after an interview in the Mersey Street Presbyterian Church Hall. The interview panel consisted of Rev McAllister (now decd) – Rev Hanna – Billy Taggart (now decd) Harold McClean (now decd). The post was advertised as secretary/bookkeeper. There were no office premises and no stock. I originally worked from NIFHA headquarters which at that time were at 123 York Street. Erskine Holmes was the Director. I had a desk and a typewriter.

Early 1977 the Association purchased 50 Mersey Street for office premises at a cost of £800. Desks and filing cabinets for the office were purchased from the army and navy surplus store.

I was born at 1 Meekon Street and when I married I moved to a house fifteen minutes away. Although the area of operations was called Connswater to me it was, and still is, the Oval.

I loved the terraced streets and the buzz of the shipyard, ropeworks and the mill. It was always lively with larger than life characters. That may have changed now but for the best part of my time with the Association I worked with people I had known from childhood and I always felt comfortable and safe.

Our first scheme consisted of one house at 5 Parkgate Gardens – purchased in January 1978 and fully rehabilitated in 1979.

During 1978 and 1984 the Association owned approximately 360 properties, half were acquired by voluntary purchase and the remainder by vesting. The houses in what was Armitage Street were demolished as were houses in Mersey Street and Severn Street. Armitage Street and Mersey Street were replaced in 1984 by 36 units and Severn Street was replaced by 25 units in 1985.

At one time during demolishing and rebuilding the Association's stock level decreased to around 164 tenanted properties. At the present time it is now around 362 which takes us back to where we started.

We moved to 2 Severn Street in 1994 and I got used to the new offices very quickly. The one thing I missed and still do if I'm honest is that in our old office in Mersey Street tenant's came in just to chat and sometimes have a cup of tea. Initially we had a large number of elderly tenants in Mersey Street and Armitage Street and some of them looked on the office as a social centre to drop in when they were passing. The saddest part is that a lot of the older tenants didn't get an opportunity to enjoy improvements in their homes. Those that did really appreciated central heating and bathroom facilities. Although we provide high standard accommodation now I don't think tenants get the same joy out of their surroundings as did the original tenants.

A three bedroom rehabilitated house was approximately £5/£6 per week.

It wasn't particularly sad to see the old houses demolished. They were in poor order and didn't give people the facilities they needed. It was sadder for the older people who would have quite happily seen out their days in the house they had always lived in. It was a big upheaval for them at the time. I have always thought I was extremely fortunate to be in a job that I wanted to come to every day but now I know it is time for me to go. It is a new ball game now and I don't have the same enthusiasm (or energy) I had 31 years ago.

I have always loved my job and never wanted to rise above the position of dealing directly with the people on the ground. The first 25 years were definitely the best for me, during that time we had schemes on site almost continuously and the work was never boring, it was a learning Experience and there was less bureaucracy.

The proudest moment I have was when I was awarded the MBE for services to housing. I felt that this was a great honour, not only for me, but for everyone who put in such hard work to make Connswater Homes in to the organisation it has become.

I don't think I'll miss working. I'll miss the people I work with and I'll miss tenants I have known over the years, some of them I went to school with and now it's their children and grandchildren who are tenants.

Eddie and I look forward to enjoying our home in Ballywalter and to taking time to get the garden into shape and to taking long walks along the beach. We would also like to travel, not to exotic foreign places, just to the mainland and short trips to Europe to see the sights.



Netta and Eddie at  
Buckingham Palace  
when she received her MBE from the  
Queen

## Your Views

Is there anything that you would like to see featured in this **YOUR** newsletter?

Please let us know.

Any ideas just give us a ring at the office or send an e-mail to [catherine@connswater.org.uk](mailto:catherine@connswater.org.uk)

## Paying rent with your rent payment card

If you pay your rent with a payment card please note that in addition to the post office you can now also make rent payments with your card at any shop or outlet displaying the Pay Zone logo.





# Easter Anagrams



PASTY HEAPER	
DAY SUN LAMP	
STEERED A RAPA	
CRUSH BOSTONS	
SEEN ANY TRUB	
CT GOOGLE ACHE	
RUSTY AND A SEE	
TREE BANS TONE	
HUG STRANGE TREE	
SKEIN A CLAM	

They are all phrases related to Easter or Eastertime.....

Answers are available on the Association's website: [www.connswater.org.uk](http://www.connswater.org.uk)



## Stay Safe Stay Secure



Are you worried about debt?  
Concerned over credit card bills etc?  
Feeling anxious about what might  
happen or how you are going to cope?

There is help out there— Debtline NI  
They are not a debt consolidation  
service, they are a charity—so you  
aren't charged for their services.

Everything is free and confidential, from  
budgeting advice to practical debt  
management plans.

No matter how serious your situation  
seems right now there is a way out of it.

Free helpline from 8.00am—8.00pm  
Monday—Friday

**0800 027 4990**

### Dealing with an unknown caller

Most people who call to your home will be genuine. But sometimes, people turn up unannounced, with the intention of tricking their way into your home. Their aim is to get into homes to distract people and steal their money or valuables.

Be aware when someone you don't know calls at your door:

- Use security bar / chain
- Check identification
- Ask them to call back when you have company

Remember, most callers to your home will be genuine and none of these things will be a problem and they will have their ID for you to check.

If an unknown caller tries to enter your home, telephone the police.

# Policies & Equality Duty



## Complaints Policy

The Association's complaints policy outlines the avenues open to customers wishing to complain. It aims to provide a means of redress to complainants wherever possible, provide a system that can deal with complaints as quickly and efficiently as possible and improve service delivery through actively addressing the concerns that others may have.

There are four stages to the Association's complaints procedure. These are:

### Stage 1

Catherine Waterworth, Business Improvement Manager is responsible for receiving any complaints about the Association. If you have a complaint you are welcome to contact us by telephone, by using the Association's Comments, Compliments and Complaints form, by calling into the office or by reporting your complaint to your housing officer or by emailing [catherine@connswater.org.uk](mailto:catherine@connswater.org.uk). You do not have to put matters in writing, we can do this on your behalf and you will receive a copy to ensure accuracy.

All complaints will be recorded in a register and acknowledged within 5 working days.

### Stage 2

If the matter is not resolved and you have cause to make a further complaint, it shall be referred to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive shall investigate thoroughly and make a written response within 10 working days. In the event that this written response does not resolve the issue, an interview may be arranged.

### Stage 3

If the complainant still remains dissatisfied, the last internal stage allows for an appeal to the Board of Connswater Homes.

Tenants should not report complaints directly to Board members outside the office as members cannot bring matters to the attention of the Board without the Business Improvement Manager and the Chief Executive first having had the opportunity to resolve complaints. Tenants approaching Board Members will be directed to stage 1 of the procedures.

The complainant should advise the Chief Executive of his/her wish to move to this stage and the complainant will be advised of the next date on which the Board will meet. As Board meetings are quarterly, the Executive Committee at the discretion of the Chairman may deal with emergency matters.

The Chief Executive will provide a written report to the Board, including all correspondence to and from the complainant. A complainant may meet with the Board by giving notice that he/she wishes to do so, such a meeting will be at the discretion of the Chairman.

The Chairman shall give a written reply to the complaint within 5 working days of the meeting.

### Stage 4

If the complainant is unhappy with the decision made by the Board, he/she may take their complaint to the Commissioner for Complaints for Northern Ireland (The Ombudsman). His offices can be contacted for advice on **Freephone 0800 343424** or by writing to:

**The Ombudsman, Freepost BEL 1478, Belfast, BT1 6BR**

It should be noted that the Ombudsman normally expects that a tenant will have used the Association's internal complaints procedure before bringing a complaint to him.

## Comments, Compliments and Complaints

Connswater Homes is committed to providing the highest standards of customer service. If you like the service we provide, please tell us and others. If you don't or are unhappy with the service in any way, please let us know.



You can do this in a variety of ways, by completing this form, by telephone to the office, directly to your housing manager or by email to [catherine@connswater.org.uk](mailto:catherine@connswater.org.uk)

Your comment, compliment or complaint will be recorded and dealt with according to the time-scales set out in our complaints policy, which is available on the Association's website [www.connswater.org.uk](http://www.connswater.org.uk) or in hard copy from the office by telephoning 90656155.

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Address</b>	
<b>Telephone</b>	
<b>E-mail</b>	
<b>Please tell us about your comment, compliment or complaint:</b>	
<b>Date</b>	