

TheChain

...linking people together

ISSUE 21 • WINTER 2018



Therapy Ponies put smiles on faces



Banchory tenants enjoy visit from miniature Shetland ponies

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Housing, health and everything in between



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Your views sought



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Can you help our gardeners?



Inverurie community garden group appeal for help

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Castlehill's Colin crowned Champion!

Castlehill Housing Association is delighted that our tenant Colin Stewart has won the acclaimed Tenant Champion of the Year Award at the Tenant Participation Advisory Service Scotland National Good Practice Awards 2018.

The awards were held in Aviemore and judges were bowled over by Colin's level of involvement in tenant participation with Castlehill Registered Tenants Organisation (CaRTO). He is also a member of North East Tenants, Residents and Landlords Together (NETRALT), Regional Networks and carries out other voluntary work outside of social housing in the wider community, all of which make him a worthy winner.

Colin received his award from two stars of long-running Scottish sitcom *Still Game*; Mark Cox who plays skinflint Tam, and Jane McCarray a.k.a Craiglang's resident busybody, Isa.

Our Tenant Participation Officer, Catherine Coutts, was shortlisted for the final for the Tenant Participation Champion – Staff category for her work with tenants and groups in the North East.

There was yet more success to come for Castlehill, with local partner group NETRALT being runners up in the Best Practice in Involving Customers in Services category. This was for the mystery shopping project we reported in our last edition.



Letter from our Chief Executive...

In October this year, we were delighted to be one of the host organisations bringing the annual conference of the Rural and Islands Housing Associations Forum (RIHAF) north to Inverurie. It is several years since the conference was held in the North East and it was a great opportunity to showcase the work of Castlehill and other local Housing Associations in providing a wide range of housing options in our rural areas, to delegates from all over Scotland. We were pleased to have Housing Minister and North East MSP Kevin Stewart (pictured on the left) as our keynote speaker and the Minister was also happy to take part in a lively question and answer session on rural housing issues and beyond.



One of the issues raised with the Minister, of particular importance to Castlehill, is that of funding of Adaptations for tenants who need them. Housing Associations across Scotland receive funding from the Scottish Government each year towards the costs of adapting homes for tenants where an Occupational Therapist has specified works that are needed. These works range from minor items such as a grab rail at a door to installing an accessible shower or a hoist for someone with a disability. These adaptations are vital to help people retain their independence and reduce hospital admissions arising from unsuitable housing conditions. Each year Castlehill submits a request for funding based on our previous years spending but the sum we get is much less than we ask for. This results in us running out of funds and people having to go on a waiting list until further funding is available. This is simply unacceptable as people need the adaptations immediately, not in six months time. It is also a "spend to save" issue as these relatively low-cost works can save so much on the cost of a hospital admission to the NHS. We will continue to lobby the Government and raise the issue with the local Health and Social Care Partnerships to try to find a satisfactory solution.

Once again, this is a packed edition of the newsletter and thanks go to everyone involved in pulling it all together and to those contributing articles. I hope you enjoy reading it!

Best wishes to everyone for the Festive Season.

David Lappin
Chief Executive

How are we doing?

Our latest Annual Charter Performance Report has been published. This offers an insight into how we are performing as your social landlord. It is available on our website www.castlehillha.co.uk or you can call 01224 625822 to request a copy. Copies are also available in sheltered/very sheltered schemes' common rooms.

Our Annual Charter Performance Report is full of interesting information on how we are doing, including tenant satisfaction levels, repairs statistics and information about CaRTO (Castlehill Registered Tenants Organisation) and our mystery shopping project with NETRALT (North East Tenants, Residents and Landlords Together).

All registered social landlords are responsible for meeting the standards and outcomes

set out in the Scottish Social Housing Charter. We report our performance against these standards every year to the Scottish Housing Regulator, and we publish our Annual Charter Performance Report to make this information easily accessible to our tenants.

The Regulator collects this information from all Registered Social Landlords and then publishes the findings in an individual Landlord Report and provides a comparison tool so anyone can compare their landlord against other RSLs across Scotland.

Thank you to CaRTO members who were involved in creating this publication and we hope you find the report interesting. We would love to hear your feedback on the report, and on our performance.

If you would like to be involved in producing next year's report, please contact our Tenant Participation Officer on 01224 625822 or info@castlehillha.co.uk



Cold Weather advice

With temperatures falling, we would like to remind you of some simple precautions you can take to protect yourself and your home.

If you are away from home in the winter, remember that pipes may freeze and burst.

If you are going away for only a few days, you could leave your heating on at a low temperature e.g. 5°C, or you could use the timed program to have the heating come on 2 or 3 times over each 24 hour period.

If you are leaving for a longer time, please consider leaving the heating on a normal levels or draining all storage tanks and pipework. Your Property Services Officer can give you advice. Please be aware that if you do not take reasonable precautions and water damage occurs, you may be recharged for the repair costs.



If the pipes have frozen...

Thaw them out slowly using warm air from a hair dryer. Or you could take cloths that have been heated in hot water and wrap them around the pipes. Turn on the taps so hopefully when the water thaws it has some way of escaping.

If a burst happens...

Turn off the stopcock.

Turn on the taps to drain the system.

If possible, try to bind the damaged length of pipe with an old cloth.

Phone us immediately on 01224 625822 during office hours. Outside office hours, call Camwater on 01651 872929.

Grit Bins

Sheltered and Very Sheltered schemes

Where practical and safe to do so, Castlehill will ensure that one access path to the public footpath and common facilities is cleared and gritted. Please note this will not apply to the car parks or individual spaces.

General Needs and Amenity schemes

Castlehill will ensure there are adequate supplies of grit for tenants' use.

Sleep in the Park 2018

A team of intrepid Castlehill employees and committee members will brave the elements on Saturday 8 December by sleeping out in Aberdeen's Duthie Park to raise funds and awareness to tackle homelessness.

Social Bite's Sleep in the Park 2018 is the world's largest mass sleep out, with events taking place in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee.

We are committed to playing our part in ending homelessness and rough sleeping. As well as providing a roof over someone's head, we recognise the need to provide appropriate support and help to ensure that tenancies are sustained in the long term.

We are proud to support the Aberdeen Sleep in the Park event. For us, it's just one night but those doing it for real are not so fortunate and deserve our support. If you would like to make a donation, please visit our fundraising page at <https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/Team/castlehill-housing>

To learn more about Social Bite's "End Homelessness" campaign, visit www.sleepinthepark.co.uk



Connecting Communities

Connecting Communities is a project that aims to help people who are feeling socially isolated or lonely. This support will help to increase confidence and independence whilst engaging in community-based activities.

Support is tailored to the individual and helps people realise what they want to achieve. This could be anything from joining the library to martial arts classes or a jogging group. The volunteer will help the individual make a plan of activities or tasks that focus on helping them be better connected to the community and have social input outwith their home environment.

The only criteria is that you live in the Aberdeen area and are 16 years or older. We'd encourage any of our tenants who feel they could benefit from these services to contact Connecting Communities at the numbers provided.



Supporting



BritishRedCross

Working together to tackle loneliness across the UK



A HELPING HAND FOR PEOPLE WHO FEEL ALONE

Whether you're struggling with life's demands or simply don't know where to turn for a friendly chat, the British Red Cross can help.

To find out more contact:

Aberdeen Community Connector

British Red Cross

07872839864

connectaberdeen@redcross.org.uk

redcross.org.uk/tackleloneliness

#tacklingloneliness

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

The British Red Cross Society, incorporated by Royal Charter 1908, is a charity registered in England and Wales (220940) and Scotland (SC037738). Photo © Simon Rawles

Rent Review Consultation 2019/20

As a Scottish Secure Tenant of Castlehill Housing Association, you have the right to be consulted about any proposed changes to the rent for your home. We review the rent annually and the process of reviewing the rents started early in October when we sent out information about our rent consultation events and some information on how rental income is spent.

We held three events in Aberdeen, Stonehaven and Inverurie. Thanks to those tenants who came along; we appreciate the time you gave and we found it useful to discuss some of the issues with you. Staff have provided our Management Committee with feedback from these events. The Management Committee has now considered the matter and asked that we consult with tenants on a proposed increase of 2.9%. In previous years we have adopted a policy of RPI (Retail Price Index) +1%. However, the Committee took the decision to restrict the increase this year. The September RPI figure is 3.3% and the proposed increase is 0.4% below this.

Information about our current and upcoming obligations with regard to ensuring compliance with health and safety legislation and ensuring our homes are fit for your future was sent to every tenant in October. This information is also available on our website.

At time of writing, we are collating any feedback to pass on to the Management Committee for their December meeting. Tenants will be notified of the outcome a minimum of 28 days prior to 1 April 2019.

Therapy Ponies put smiles on faces



Miniature Shetland ponies have delighted tenants at Dalvenie Gardens, one of Castlehill's very sheltered schemes as part of a new therapy initiative.

Residents at Dalvenie Gardens were treated to a visit from the specially-trained therapy pets who have been brought into care homes and hospitals throughout Scotland with positive results. This was the ponies third visit to Banchory and their visits are always looked forward to by tenants, families and staff alike. Therapy Ponies Scotland say that they bring a mixture of calmness and joy to the people who meet them.

Elaine Sangster, of Therapy Ponies Scotland, said: 'The responses that the ponies evoke from the residents is amazing. They cuddle them, they kiss them, they throw their arms around them, it's lovely to see them so happy. It takes them back to times in the past when they maybe had ponies or associated with ponies.'

Almost all of the residents at Dalvenie Gardens took to the day centre to meet the ponies.

Fiona Pirie, Co-ordinator at Dalvenie Gardens Resource Centre said,

'The ponies are so good with the tenants, no bad behaviour! Flicker and Applejack positively look for cuddles and affection and stand patiently for as long as the tenant wishes. They are

always beautifully groomed and smell wonderful. The ponies are trained to go in the lift and can visit tenants who are not as able to come down. They bring such joy to the tenants, big smiles and all eagerly awaiting their turn to pet our unusual visitors. The look of surprise on unexpected guest's faces is priceless (our Property Services Officer Allan's was brilliant!) - a pony inside?!'

Our popular Dalvenie Gardens in Banchory, 18 miles from Aberdeen, consists of 24 one bedroom flats in a three-storey block. The scheme is linked to a large resource centre offering day care, meals, activities, classes and clubs and is operated by Aberdeenshire Council. Activity groups and events that take place in the resource centre including day care, discussion groups, classes and clubs.





North East Tenants Residents and Landlords Together

This free, drop-in event was held in September with the aim of showcasing what many organisations can do for people living in Aberdeen.

NETRALT (North East Tenants, Residents and Landlords Together) organised this event with TPAS Scotland and Aberdeen Health and Social Care Partnership.

Attendees enjoyed a free barbeque with burgers, veggie burgers and drinks courtesy of EVH (Employers in Voluntary Housing), who also brought along their 1970 VW Camper Van and lots of freebies.

There was a variety of stalls from partners all over the city, highlighting the varied wellbeing opportunities Aberdeen has to offer. Fun activities on offer included such as making your own lip balm, boccia, indoor curling and games for the kids.

Keep an eye on our website for details of future events for tenants.

NETRALT is an award-winning team of tenants, residents and staff from social landlords across the north east of Scotland. They work in partnership to promote innovative tenant participation and to encourage engagement, whilst sharing good practice and resources.



housing, health and everything in between



One Click Away - Building Digital Communities



Three CaRTO members attended an information day, "One Click Away - Building Digital Communities" organised by TIS (Tenants Information Service) in Glasgow. The day aimed to explore a variety of pioneering digital practices, break down barriers, learn more about digital inclusion and attain value for money. Digital technology and the role it plays in communication goes a long way in tenant participation and engagement. The day showed that it is becoming increasingly important for tenants and has an impact on quality of the services housing associations provide.

Evidence has shown that individuals can enjoy a greater quality of life and wellbeing when they have the basic digital skills they need to thrive in today's ever-changing world. A lack of digital skills and access can have a huge, negative impact on our housing and communities – leading to poorer health outcomes, increased loneliness and social isolation, limited access to services, jobs, and education.

Feedback from attendees was very positive and has given them ideas to help bring digital participation to our other tenants.



Changes to Housing Officer areas

Castlehill Housing Association would like to make tenants aware that as of December 1st Housing Officer areas will be changing. For some tenants this could mean a new Housing Officer and Property Services Officer will be responsible for their tenancy.

For most tenancies this should be straightforward, but those in sheltered accommodation should know that they will now be covered by one of the Housing Officers.

Anyone wishing to know which officers now cover their address please call reception on 01224 625822 or email their current officer and they will be happy to let you know.

Housing Officer Changes



Take part in our Allocations Policy review

We'd like your opinion on how Castlehill allocates properties, by completing a short survey to help us shape our allocations policy for the future.

What is the Allocations Policy?

Access to all social housing is governed by legislation and guidance received from the Scottish Government. Our Allocations Policy sets out our legal obligations for the allocation of our housing stock and explains how we prioritise our applicants, taking into consideration the needs, demands and where possible, the aspirations of applicants. The policy is needed to make sure there is clear and transparent guidance on how we match people who apply for housing with the properties that become available. Our available properties are advertised on a choice-based letting system called Homehunt.

Why are we reviewing our policy?

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 has now been passed by the Scottish Government and the provisions relating to Allocations come into force from 1 May 2019. All social landlords must comply with this legislation when managing their housing lists and allocating housing. Within these legal constraints, landlords have discretion to develop allocation policies in line with local priorities. As a result of this, we will work with tenants and applicants to review and amend our Allocations Policy so that it reflects these features and captures their priorities.

How can I get involved?

Your feedback is important to us so we hope you can spare a few moments to tell us your views. Our survey is also available on our website www.castlehillha.co.uk if you prefer to do it online.

1. ARE YOU

- an applicant?
 - a current tenant?
 - a housing professional?
 - other? (please specify)
-

2. DO YOU THINK PRIORITY SHOULD BE GIVEN TO APPLICANTS WHO WISH TO DOWN-SIZE THEIR HOME?

Example: grown up children have moved out, leaving parent(s) in a 3 bedroom home

- Yes
- No

3. WHEN ASSESSING AN APPLICANT'S LEVEL OF HOUSING NEED, DO YOU THINK HOME OWNERSHIP SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT?

Example: applicant owns a home but it is overcrowded and larger accommodation is required

- Yes
- No

4. DO YOU THINK THE ALLOCATIONS POLICY SHOULD BE CHANGED TO GRANT SHORT SCOTTISH SECURE TENANCIES TO HOMEOWNERS?

Example: giving a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy to allow a homeowner to seek alternative private housing

- Yes
- No

5. DO YOU THINK THE ALLOCATIONS POLICY SHOULD INCLUDE ADDITIONAL POWERS ON SUSPENDING APPLICANTS FROM BEING ABLE TO BID OR BE MADE AN OFFER?

Example: suspending an applicant who abandoned their previous tenancy

- Yes
- No

6. DO YOU THINK HIGHER PRIORITY SHOULD BE GIVEN TO APPLICANTS LIVING IN SPECIALIST HOUSING THEY NO LONGER REQUIRE?

Example: giving a high priority in order to make the specialist housing available to an applicant who could make best use of its facilities

- Yes
- No

7. DO YOU THINK APPLICANTS LIVING IN TIED ACCOMMODATION, INCLUDING THE ARMED FORCES, SHOULD GET HIGHER PRIORITY WHEN THEIR EMPLOYMENT ENDS?

Example: service personnel getting high priority to help prevent them having to become statutory homeless on their discharge

- Yes
- No

8. DO YOU THINK APPLICANTS WHO ARE LEAVING INSTITUTIONAL CARE/SUPPORTED CARE, INCLUDING CARE LEAVERS, SHOULD RECEIVE A HIGHER PRIORITY?

Example: giving high priority to what can be a vulnerable group to prevent them having to become statutory homeless

- Yes
- No

9. SHOULD PRIORITY BE GIVEN TO APPLICANTS LIVING IN UNSATISFACTORY HOUSING CONDITIONS?

Example: giving priority to an applicant whose current property is in disrepair or needs to move to be nearer family for support

- Yes
- No

How should we define “unsatisfactory living conditions”?

.....

What happens next?

This survey will close on Friday 21 December 2018. We will use your feedback to prepare a revised draft Allocations Policy for CaRTO (Castlehill Registered Tenants Organisation) to review prior to being presented to the Housing Management Sub Committee in March 2019. Following Committee approval, the revised Allocations Policy will be implemented on 1 May 2019.

If you would like us to keep in touch with you about the Allocations Policy review, or if you have any questions, please call 01224 625822 or email info@castlehillha.co.uk

Please send your completed survey to:

Freepost CASTLEHILL

No stamp or additional address details are required.

Thank you for your feedback. We appreciate you taking the time to tell us your views.

Can you help our Inverurie gardeners?



You may remember from past editions that a group of volunteers have been gradually transforming a disused area of ground at Aquhorthies Circle in Inverurie (off Blackhall Road) with the vision of creating a community garden.

CaRTO members Celia Tremain and Ken Willox recently paid the garden a visit and were very impressed at the work that has taken place by tenant volunteers and the community who have helped them in their quest to create a peaceful place to enjoy nature and to garden together.

CaRTO have agreed to provide a water container for the convenience of the volunteers, and are looking at ways to encourage others to join in and help with the continuing transformation of the garden.

The group are hoping for some more people to help. There are many ways you could get involved, whether it is offering gardening advice, helping with physical work or suggesting fundraising ideas. If you would like to get involved in this project, please call our Tenant Participation Officer on 01224 625822 or email info@castlehillha.co.uk



Tenants look to the future of Scottish Housing



The Scottish Housing Regulator is consulting on proposals for how it regulates social housing. CaRTO members attended their consultation event in Aberdeen in October taking part in discussions, feeding their views back to the Regulator and helping shape their future framework for Scotland.

In its proposals, the Regulator explains how it will continue to safeguard and promote the interests of current and future tenants, people who are homeless and others who use social landlords' services.

George Walker, the Regulator's Chair, said, "Our proposals reflect feedback from stakeholders on our discussion paper earlier this year. Since then we've continued to discuss our ideas at meetings and events, to develop and test our thinking."

Anne Jenkins, the Scottish Housing Regulator's Deputy Chair (pictured above), was delighted to chat and took part in discussions with tenants and staff members throughout the event.

The Regulator will use the consultation feedback to develop its final Regulatory Framework and guidance for publication in February 2019.

The Scottish Housing Regulator are the independent regulator of RSLs and local authority housing services in Scotland. They have one statutory objective, to:

"safeguard and promote the interests of current and future tenants of social landlords, people who are or may become homeless, and people who use housing services provided by registered social landlords (RSLs) and local authorities".

They regulate social landlords to protect the interests of people who receive services from them by assessing and reporting on:

- how social landlords are performing their housing services
- RSLs' financial well-being
- RSLs' standards of governance

and intervene when necessary.

Visit their website www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk for more information.



Important and Useful information



Christmas & New Year office closure

The main office at 4 Carden Place,
**Aberdeen will close at 1pm on
Monday 24 December 2018.**

**We will re-open at 9am on
Thursday 3 January 2019.**

During the holidays,
our emergency repairs service will operate.

**Please phone the main office number
01224 625822 for our emergency call-out details.**

For gas heating:
Kingdom Gas
T 0800 3899463

For central plant / air-source heating:
Heat Care Oil & Gas
T 01343 842042

**For other emergencies
(floods, leaks, loss of power, etc.):**
Camwater
T 01651 872929

**If you live in sheltered or very sheltered housing,
please report any repairs to scheme staff as usual.**

The Management Committee and staff of
Castlehill would like to wish you a very Merry
Christmas and a Happy New Year for 2019.

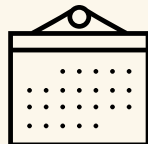


January Direct Debits

If you pay your rent by direct debit, **please note** that your payment will come out of your bank account on **Thursday 3 January 2019**, instead of the usual 1st of the month. This is due to the banks being closed on the 1st and 2nd.

Please ensure that you have money in your account to allow your rent to be paid on **3rd January 2019**.

Thank you!



Win £50 in our Winter Quiz!

Win £50 of shopping vouchers!

Answer the questions and email to
- **E** catherine.coutts@castlehillha.co.uk

or post them to

Freepost CASTLEHILL
by 31 January 2019.

**GOOD
LUCK**

1. Dalvenie Gardens residents recently enjoyed a visit from which animals?

2. When will our Carden Place office open after the festive period?

3. How many rent review workshops did we hold?

4. What type of 1970 vehicle was at the NETRALT 'All About You – housing, health and everything in between' event?

5. When will direct debits be paid in January?