

# TheChain

...linking people together

ISSUE 27 • WINTER 2021



## New policies and advice



Key advice is available – we share where to look.

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## New tenant group in Tomintoul



We can help you set up your own tenant group too.

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## New staff



Staff changes at Castlehill with new appointments in Housing and Property Services

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## Fire detection required



Relaxing of restrictions means this important work is underway.

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## National role for CaRTO Chair



Colin Stewart now Chair of North of Scotland Regional Network

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## Considering Sky Q?



Check our policy before you sign up.

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# Rent Review



During the summer we began an exercise to review the many different rent levels and service charges Castlehill used. We wanted to create a system which was simple, fair, and consistent across all tenants, where no one paid more or less than they should for the property they live in and services they receive.

We engaged independent consultants to review our rent structure, and we consulted with our tenants by sending out a questionnaire to all our tenants and holding virtual focus groups with those who wished to attend. We had an excellent response to the consultation, with many of you getting in touch to let us know your views. All this information was presented to Castlehill's Management Committee in August, and they agreed to simplify the rent process.

The new model will be implemented from 1st April 2022.

Rents will now be based on:

- Property size (number of bedrooms)
- Property type (flat / house etc)
- Location (Aberdeen city/within the Aberdeen market area/rural)
- Accommodation type (general needs/sheltered/very sheltered)

Feedback also told us that tenants wanted many charges to be included in one rent payment, not as separate service charges, but that it was important that communal cleaning and grounds maintenance charges were kept separate from the rent.

This new model will not lead to a change in overall income for Castlehill and it is not about making more money, it is about making it simpler, consistent and more transparent across all our housing – what many tenants told us they wanted to see.

With any changes of this nature, some people will benefit, and some will see increases in their rent costs. To limit the impact of any cost increases, tenants told us that the new model should be phased in. Therefore, these changes will be brought in over 5 years, so there will be increases above any agreed inflationary rises until April 2027, at which point, all tenants will have reached the new agreed rent level.

We will be writing to all our tenants and providing detailed information on what this new model will look like in the next few weeks.



# Letter from our Chief Executive...

Challenging Times....

As we move towards the end of 2021, the impacts of the Covid pandemic and Brexit on businesses are becoming increasingly apparent. We have all seen empty shelves as shops struggle to get supplies, rising fuel and energy costs, difficulties in recruiting staff and rising inflation. In Castlehill's case, it has been most stark in the rising costs and shortages of materials to carry out property repairs or build new houses and in recruitment of housing support staff. Combined with this, we are also facing challenges with climate change and the need to significantly reduce the carbon footprint of our housing as we move forward beyond the use of fossil fuels.



As we further develop our strategy to address these issues it is important that Castlehill tenants voices are heard and help shape the decisions that are taken by our Management committee. We need a partnership approach to set priorities and balance the need to meet new regulations, keep our properties in good order and ensure they remain affordable and comfortable to live in. If you haven't done so before, please consider getting involved with CaRTO and help shape the future of your housing and the services we provide for you.

I hope you find this issue of the Chain useful and informative and that everyone has a safe and enjoyable festive season without all the restrictions that we had this time last year – onwards and upwards into 2022!

Best wishes to all,

**David Lappin**

Chief Executive



## We are open

It is a different world from the one that existed in the last winter edition of The Chain. Castlehill has been adapting working practices to reflect this. Our office is open to staff who are working on a blended Office/Working From Home basis. We are happy to be able to welcome tenants for in-person appointments. Appointments are on the hour and will last 40 minutes, giving staff enough time to prepare the room safely. Tenants and staff safety are our priority, and we would ask that only one person attends an appointment as we cannot offer a place to wait within our building. We would ask that those coming to the office wear a facemask when attending the office and make use of hand sanitiser and social distancing.

We also offer tenants phone appointments and appointments using the internet should they prefer. Please contact the Office at the usual number to make an appointment.

## Common Rooms are now open

Being able to open our Common Rooms as we emerge out of the pandemic has been a positive move for all our tenants who live in our Sheltered and Very Sheltered Schemes.



Sue Ward, scheme manager at St John's Court in Stonehaven, gives us the lowdown on what's going on at our sheltered schemes.

"The tenants around our Castlehill schemes are delighted that the common rooms can be opened again, and that life can get back to nearer a new normal. If we follow all the very sensible guidelines as provided in the September update to keep safe, then hopefully we will all stay covid free. It is so good to be able to welcome larger groups including relatives and friends and start old favourites again like coffee and tea mornings, games afternoons and many more activities. Tenants are beginning to trickle back now, and newer tenants are meeting, sometimes for the first time those who have lived in their scheme longer. Understandably some may be feeling a bit reticent, but with encouragement from the scheme manager we are sure it will not be long before we are all back into the swing of things, and just in time to make plans for Christmas too!"



## Changes to Pet Policy

The Association recognises the benefits that pets can bring to our tenants and their families and that they can improve physical health and/or emotional well-being. It also recognises that irresponsible pet owners can cause issues for others. The Association has recently reviewed its pet policy and a few changes have been made.

Under our new policy, Castlehill will usually permit the following pets:

- General needs houses – maximum of one dog and/or one cat OR two cats.
- General needs flats – no dogs allowed. Maximum of two indoor cats.
- Sheltered housing flat within a scheme – no dogs allowed. Maximum of two indoor cats.
- Sheltered housing cottages out with a scheme – one dog and/or one cat OR a maximum of two cats.
- Very sheltered housing – no pets allowed.
- Permission for smaller domestic pets in multiple numbers will be at the discretion of the Housing Officer although no cages/huts etc will be permitted in any communal areas.
- Permission for fish will not be required except large fish tanks over a certain volume of water



We recognise that there will be occasions when the restrictions should not apply and if you think that this is the case, please speak with your Housing Officer.

You can read the full new pet policy at <https://www.castlehillha.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Owning-a-pet.pdf> or contact your Housing Officer if you have any queries.

## Call 159 to report scammers



Stop Scams UK a coalition of banking and technology companies, has launched a new phone line to help those targeted by scammers. The new 159 number will put customers directly through to their own bank's fraud department to enable them to check any issues.

### When should I call 159?

If you think someone is trying to trick you into handing over money or personal details. Hang up immediately and wait a few minutes before calling the 159 number – this ensures that the line is free.

### Call 159 if:

- Someone contacts you saying they're from your bank – even if they are not suspicious
- You receive a call asking you to transfer money or make a payment – even if it seems genuine
- You receive a call about a financial matter and it seems suspicious

For further information check out the Stop Scams UK website.



## Financial help is out there.

As we slowly move out of the pandemic and the UC uplift is cancelled, it is sadly possible that more people than ever will be facing financial pressures.

Charity 'Face debt with dignity' has launched some helpful online resources to help people regain control of their finances. People can access the free non-judgemental and completely confidential help at the website <https://ditchdebtwithdignity.com>

We at Castlehill would recommend those experiencing issues to access the help available and deal with financial difficulties as soon as possible. Rent is a priority bill and there is information available here about how to pay it. There is specific Benefit information available on our website and there is also the Aberdeen city council Financial inclusion team. If you are experiencing problems you can talk to your Housing officer or ask to be referred to Key Project, our team who will try to help you keep your key.

### Advice available

Key advice on our policies on issues that tenants may have questions about are also available in handy guides. Subjects covered include owning a pet, CCTV and our recently published policy on satellite dishes. More in-depth policies on all these subjects are also available on the website.



Any questions? Please don't hesitate to call your Housing or Property Services Officer.

## National role for CaRTO Chair

Castlehill tenant Colin Stewart has been elected as Chair of North of Scotland Regional Network – Region 1. The North of Scotland Regional Network covers Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Angus, Argyll and Bute, Dundee City, Highland, Moray, The Western Isles, Orkney Islands, Perth and Kinross and the Shetland Islands.



The Regional Networks were established to enable tenants and residents to engage and work practically with the Scottish Government on the development of national housing policy. Their objective is to improve the housing and wellbeing of tenants and residents in Scotland.

4 Regional Networks cover the whole of Scotland. Each Network covers several local authority areas, and their membership is drawn from representatives of Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs) and recognised landlord Scrutiny groups.

Castlehill's tenant participation officer, Catherine Coutts said, "This is such an exciting development and reflects the dedication and energy that Colin gives to the sector voluntarily. I'm certain his years of experience and knowledge will set him in good stead to take on this leadership role."

## Digital updates

The pandemic has taught everyone about the importance of computing systems as a means of contact. Castlehill has quickly adapted to this new requirement, and we are pleased to report that over 80% of our tenants have agreed to be contacted by digital means. We have digitised forms and make it simpler for tenants to let us know about a variety of things from a change of name or occupants and requesting pets or running a business from home.



From the new year, we will have a variety of the above forms available to complete on the website. These forms will be sent directly to our info team who will ensure it goes to your Housing Officer. Simplifying the process and enabling you to keep us updated with a push of the button.

The website is also a useful source of information with a variety of information sheets explaining how the Association deals with everything from Anti-social Behaviour to Adaptation requests.

For tenants, all information sheets and forms can be found in the tenant's section of the website

<https://www.castlehillha.co.uk/publications/>

Should you require a paper version of any of our forms please contact our reception team.

## CaRTO Virtual Chats



In September, tenant group Castlehill Registered Tenants Organisation (CaRTO) emailed and posted invitations to join them for a friendly video chat online. The virtual chats aim to have a conversation with tenants who are not already involved with CaRTO to explain what the group does, find out what is happening at schemes and encourage more people to take part in either CaRTO or CaRTO Home Link. Staff are not involved in the meetings so as not to change the dynamic of tenants talking to tenants.

At the time of writing, the virtual chats are well underway, but there is still time to sign up if you wish.

CaRTO meets on the first Thursday of each month at 2 pm online. Those without internet access can phone in to take part. There is also the CaRTO Home Link option, which is an online/postal way of joining in without attending meetings.

If you would like to sign up for a virtual chat, CaRTO, Home Link or to find out more, you can contact CaRTO's Chair, Colin at [carto@colinstewart.com](mailto:carto@colinstewart.com)

## New tenant group in Tomintoul

Residents have created their group to improve the living conditions, community facilities and services for tenants of Tomnabat Court in the village of Tomintoul.

Tomnabat Court Tenants Group have agreed on a constitution and are in the process of becoming a Registered Tenants Organisation (RTO). Becoming an RTO is a significant milestone, meaning that the group will be formally recognised by both Castlehill Housing Association and the Scottish Government.

We encourage tenants to set up their own groups and will provide support if required. For more information or help to set up your group, contact our Tenant Participation Officer on 01224 625822 or [info@castlehillha.co.uk](mailto:info@castlehillha.co.uk)



## New Co-Chairs for NETRALT

At its Annual General Meeting, NETRALT (North East Tenants, Residents and Landlords Together) appointed Catherine Coutts, Castlehill's tenant participation officer and Katie Taylor, participation lead at Grampian Housing Association as co-Chairs

Celebrating its milestone 10th anniversary this year, NETRALT is a nationally known award-winning group of tenants, residents and landlords at the forefront of best practice in tenant participation in Scotland. NETRALT is a community for sharing experiences and resources to enhance participation and engagement for its members as well as the wider community.

Catherine said: "NETRALT's tenant and resident members are its biggest asset. Working with them is a privilege and leads to creative and meaningful engagement in housing across the North East."

Highlights of NETRALT's success over the last 10 years include scooping a TPAS Good Practice Award in the 'Involving All – Youth Involvement' category for a collaborative radio show with young teenagers, the TIS 'Most Inspiring Scrutiny Group' award for its innovative cross-landlord mystery shopping project and the TPAS 'Tenant Participation Champion of the Year (Group)' award.



Catherine Coutts and Katie Taylor at the TPAS Awards with TV weatherman Sean Batty

NETRALT's popular housing cafes providing information and advice on social housing and community issues have been replicated by many other organisations. They are an opportunity for tenants and landlords alike to engage with each other and influence decisions relating to their homes and communities.

NETRALT's members include Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council, Blackwood, Castlehill Housing Association, Hillcrest Homes, Grampian Housing Association, Langstane Housing Association and Moray Council.

## Satellite Dish policy



We appreciate that Sky Q is potentially an attractive upgrade from the basic Sky HD system, but it does operate in a very different way and unfortunately is not compatible with all of our communal television and satellite systems.

In addition, Sky Q TV boxes can interfere with the cabling set up of the communal system and may affect neighbours' TV signal and possibly cause unnecessary repairs. Where a tenant wishes to take out a subscription to a premium satellite service, they are advised to check with the satellite provider that the communal satellite feed and/or dish can support the service before subscribing as Castlehill will not take responsibility for upgrading a communal feed or dish for this purpose. We will only replace systems when they start to fail or become unreliable for Freeview or standard satellite channels.

You can view our satellite dish policy on our website or request a printed copy from our office.

## How Are We Doing?

Each year, we work with CaRTO to produce our Annual Charter Performance Report. This report is based on how we meet the standards and outcomes expected of registered social landlords in the Scottish Social Housing Charter. We compare our performance against the national average and previous year's data.

This year's report is available on our website. If you would like to receive a printed copy, please contact the office.



## Housing Officer retires



All good things must come to an end and our Housing Officer Shelia Murray has announced her retirement having been with Castlehill for over 25 years. A popular figure with both colleagues and tenants alike, her cheery nature, kindness and experience will be a loss for the Housing department. All her colleagues at Castlehill wish her a long and happy retirement. A special retirement card and a collection was sent to her.

Shelia's departure means more change for this department, with her post being advertised internally at first – we will introduce tenants to her replacement once this has been confirmed.

## New staff at our Sheltered Schemes

Over the summer we have had some big changes in our staff at our Aberdeenshire Sheltered schemes. Jaki Pithie, Scheme Manager at Cromar Court and Jane Esslemont, Scheme Manager at Monaltrie Court have left the Association. We were sorry to see them go and wish them all the best for the future. They will both be missed, for their hard work and dedication to the tenants they supported. Both ladies would always go above and beyond in their work. Tenants always commented on how kind and helpful they were.



We are delighted to have some new people taking up posts in our Schemes. We now have a permanent Scheme Manager at Kindrochit Court after some time – Fiona Lees has taken up this role. Jennifer Pymm is now Scheme Manager at Nethermains Court and Linda Ramsey has been appointed Scheme Co-ordinator at our Cullen scheme, Bayview Court.

Also joining us is Susan Lockhart, who will be acting as relief scheme manager for Aberdeenshire North Schemes. Chris Booth will be Relief Scheme Manager supporting schemes in the West of Aberdeenshire and Fiona Mcintosh will be supporting our Moray Independent living schemes as Relief Manager.

We hope you will give them a warm welcome when you see them!

## New staff appointments in Housing and Property Services

Returning to the building after the pandemic we have had several staff changes in our Housing and Property Services departments.

We welcomed our new member of the Customer Services team Charlotte Mackintosh. Who joins us from mid-October. Charlotte has lots of previous Housing experience and will be one of the first people to speak to if you call our Offices.

New to the Property Services team is Rachel Mutch who brings with her many years of experience working in local property leasing and Offshore. Rachel is a welcome addition to the team and will largely be responsible for the North of Aberdeen properties.



## Fundraising efforts by Castlehill's Chief Executive



Massive congratulations to our CEO David and our friends at Dynamic Edge who have completed their charity cycle in aid of local sick children by supporting the Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital and Raigmore's Highland Children's Unit. Money raised will be used to fund specialist equipment, advanced staff training, emergency grants for patients and their families.

Starting on 13th September 2021, the team completed their epic cycle known as the North Coast 500 on their bikes in just 5 days. Taking a route from Inverness to Applecross, Ullapool, Lochinver, Durness, Tongue, Helmsdale and back to Inverness. They cycled over uneven terrain and braved weather and midges, with only one major bike incident when someone lost a pedal, two miles from Helmsdale.

The team raised over £ 12,000. Cycling the last hour in the pouring rain and challenging conditions, they managed to arrive in Inverness earlier than originally expected.



**Charlie House is Castlehill's Charity of Choice**

For the second year, Castlehill has chosen to donate to Charlie House as our Charity of Choice. We have decided to fund the Santa and elves suits for the Christmas Grotto held in Bon Accord centre in the run-up to Christmas.

Charlie House is a local charity who support children with life-limiting illness and their families, they are fundraising to build a centre in Aberdeen. The charity was thrilled with our involvement and would like to thank all staff for their continued support.

## Care and Repair



And just like that, we're into November! At last, we are back to business as usual and can offer advice and assistance with repairs, improvements and safety at home. No repair is too small.

Remember we can also apply for attendance allowance benefit on your behalf if applicable – if your health has deteriorated then you may qualify for extra income – your current financial circumstances don't apply as it's purely based on health. <https://www.gov.uk/attendance-allowance/eligibility> is where you'll find more information.

If you know any homeowners that are over the age of 60/living with a long-term health condition then we can advise on the new legislation for smoke alarms that need to be in place by February 2022. We are offering free of charge home safety checks too – call 01224 251133 to enquire. External handrail installations and gas boiler checks are popular with us just in time for winter.



## Legal requirement for fire detection

You may have noticed lots of adverts about fire detection systems in recent months. Rest assured that the Association have been installing upgraded fire detection systems to comply with the new Government Legislation in our general needs stock over the last 2 years. Due to the impact of the pandemic, we have been unable to carry out this work in our Sheltered schemes, however, due to the relaxing of restriction's, this work is scheduled to commence later this week, with all Castlehill properties being compliant by the deadline of 28th February 2022.



If you have any questions please contact your Housing or Property Services Officer on the usual numbers.



## What happens when you have a gas leak:

Gas Repairs Water Supply All gas leaks or suspected gas leaks should be reported immediately to Scottish Gas Network (SGN) on 0800 111 999.

If you suspect a Gas Leak you should:

- Turn off the gas at the meter, or the emergency control valve
- Put out all sources of ignition
- Do not smoke, operate electrical switches or use mobile phones
- Open doors and windows
- Ensure there is access to the building
- Keep people away from affected areas
- If the smell persists, leave the property and do not return until instructed to do so

You must call Castlehill Housing Association when SGN has been notified as SGN will only shut off the mains gas and ensure the property is safe. They will not carry out a repair if the fault is within the property. The Property Service Department will then arrange to have our appointed Gas Contractor attend to repair the cause if it's emitting from the pipework serving the boiler or from the boiler itself. If the issue is with an appliance belonging to you - a gas cooker etc then you must arrange for the repair or contact the Association for advice.

## SMS text improves communication

To help us improve customer communications we have been working on a project to send out text messages to our customers. These texts follow works being carried out and completed in their homes.

### The message will read:

Castlehill Housing Association works satisfaction survey, on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest how satisfied are you with the recent works/service from CHA.

The text messaging service will help to make it easier for customers to give us their views and feedback on customer satisfaction levels. It should give us a more accurate reflection of customer satisfaction levels and help us put measures in place to improve service delivery to our customers.

We will follow up on poor customer satisfaction replies and work to put improvements in place.

If you do not want to receive a text message survey you can reply with STOP to the message and you won't receive further text messages regarding the survey. If you would prefer to continue to reply to our current survey by post, you can do so.

## January Direct Debits



If you pay your rent by direct debit, **please note** that your payment will come out of your bank account on **Tuesday 4th January 2022**, instead of the usual 1st of the month. This is due to the banks being closed on the 3rd January.

**Please ensure** that you have money in your account to allow your rent to be paid on **4th January 2022**.

**Thank you!**

## Contact us...

### Castlehill Housing Association

4 Carden Place,  
Aberdeen AB10 1UT

Tel: 01224 625822

Website: [www.castlehillha.co.uk](http://www.castlehillha.co.uk)

Email: [info@castlehillha.co.uk](mailto:info@castlehillha.co.uk)

### Office hours are:

Mon – Fri 9.00am – 5.00pm



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



## Christmas & New Year office closure

Christmas & New Year Staff will be on holiday from 12pm on Friday 24 December 2021. We will re-open at 9am on Wednesday 5th January 2022.

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 0800 3899463**

For central plant/air-source heating:

**Heat Care Oil & Gas 01343 842042**

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

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

Tell us what you think about this newsletter for a chance to win a £50 voucher for a shop of your choice!

Fill this short survey online <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/chain21>, or post your entry to Castlehill Housing Association, 4 Carden Place, Aberdeen, AB10 1UT.

**Q.1 Did you enjoy reading this newsletter?**

Yes / No

**Q.2 What was your favourite article?**



Name:



Address:



**Q.3 What could we do to improve this newsletter?**



**Q.4 Would you like someone to contact you about CaRTO, CaRTO Home Link or the Scrutiny Panel?**

Yes / No

Tel

Email

