



CASTLEHILL HOUSING ASSOCIATION

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Why have a complaints procedure?

Castlehill Housing Association aims to provide a high quality of service but there may be occasions when you are not happy about something, and if this is the case, it is important for you to tell us.

The aim of this complaints procedure is to give you clear details of what steps you can take to try to get things put right when there is a problem.

The complaints procedure also gives us the chance to keep an eye on the quality of service we provide so that we can continually work to improve it.

Who can use the complaints procedure?

Anyone who receives or requests a service from Castlehill can use the complaints procedure. This includes tenants, people applying for housing, owners or sharing owners and people living in neighbouring property.

The procedure is also open to people who may be acting on your behalf, such as a Councillor, Member of Parliament, advice agency or solicitor (but, as you will see later, we do encourage you to try to sort things out with us first).

People who supply a service to us - such as contractors - can also use the complaints procedure. The complaints procedure, however, is not for use by members of staff. However, a separate procedure is available for anyone, including staff, who believes that there has been improper conduct within an association (see final paragraph of this document 'Improper conduct and whistleblowing').

What can you complain about?

You can complain about any aspect of our service which you are unhappy about, for example:

- if a repair has not been carried out properly
- if you have not received information you have asked for
- if you feel that a member of staff, a committee member or a contractor has not behaved acceptably towards you
- if you feel your housing application has not been handled properly
- if you consider any aspect of our housing policies or procedures to be unfair (we would define 'policies' as formal statements of the Association's rules of operation and 'procedures' as the way in which policies are carried out).

Please note

- 1 Applications for our housing are administered through *homehuntNES*. If your complaint is regarding the processing of your housing application, this should be addressed to *homehunt NES*, 4 Carden Place, Aberdeen AB10 1UT
- 2 Users of our Housing Support Services (eg sheltered housing, or Key Project) also have a right to make a comment, or complaint about the housing support service they receive direct to the Care Commission or Local Council. Contact details are noted on p6.

Complaints against neighbours will be dealt with under our neighbour disputes procedure. However, if you have a complaint about the process we have used to handle a neighbour dispute, then you can use the complaints procedure.

Similarly, complaints about the level of rent or service charges should not be pursued through this complaints procedure. Tenants should refer to their handbook for further information.

We will always try to deal with complaints sympathetically, but there are some things we will not be able to give you information about. For example, it would be wrong for us to discuss with you the details of someone else's housing application, as this would be breach of confidentiality, but we can of course talk to you about how our allocations procedure works.

Steps to take to resolve a complaint

1 Try to sort things out informally

You have every right to make a formal complaint whenever you wish to, but in the first instance it can often be quicker and easier for everyone if the problem can be sorted out informally.

To try to resolve a problem informally, the best thing for you to do is talk to (or drop a line to) the appropriate member of staff and let him or her know what you would like to be put right. He or she will let you know how long it should take for the problem to be sorted out, and hopefully a solution will be reached.

Indicated below are the members of staff you may require to approach, and their various areas of responsibility.

Housing Manager (Non sheltered): *Mrs Mhorag Ewen*

Is responsible for estate management and general tenancy matters, rent arrears control, allocations and applications - covers all housing other than sheltered.

Housing Manager (Sheltered): *Mr Jim Anderson*

Is responsible for the supervision of sheltered housing schemes and the allocation of sheltered housing tenancies. If you are a tenant of sheltered accommodation, you normally should speak about any problems or complaints to your scheme manager first, unless there are particular reasons why this is not appropriate.

Housing Support Officer (Key Project): *Mrs Sheila Duthie*

Is responsible for our Key Project, a housing support service for tenants.

Administrative Officer (Housing Management): *Ms Debbie McVean*

Covers administrative procedures, particularly rent payment procedures and policies.

Maintenance Manager: *Mr Graham Robertson*

Deals with issues regarding our maintenance and repair service, including contractors' conduct and services.

Asset Manager: *Mr Kevin Lynch*

Organises and supervises planned maintenance programme eg replacement of kitchen units, installation of central heating.

An information sheet is available for tenants describing our policy on planned maintenance works. All tenants should receive this sheet prior to works commencing.

Care & Repair Projects:

Mrs Karen Milne (Aberdeen Care & Repair - Project Manager)

Ms Shona Milne (Aberdeenshire Care & Repair – Project Manager)

Mr Derek Davidson (Moray Care & Repair – Senior Project Officer)

All staff members will keep notes of your complaints and discussions, but at any time during the informal process you can request that the note of your complaint is formally recorded and put on file with a copy being sent to yourself for future reference. If you wish to examine the information held in your file, this is possible - except for information supplied to the Association by a third party. You should request a policy on 'Access to Personal Information' from the office. Further information is given in the Tenants Handbook.

2 The formal complaint procedure

If the problem has not been resolved by the informal approach, you may contact a Director of the Association to make a formal complaint - the appropriate Directors are:

Director of Housing Services: *Mrs Gail Robertson*

Covers all matters relating to Housing Management and day-to-day Maintenance and issues relating to Housing Support services.

Director of Development Services: *Ms Fiona Murray*

Covers all matters relating to the development of new schemes, planned Maintenance and the Care and Repair projects.

You can contact the appropriate Director in one of the following ways:

- a) By completing and returning an official complaints form. This is our preferred method - please contact our office for a formal complaint form:

Castlehill Housing Association, 4 Carden Place, Aberdeen AB10 1UT

Tel: 01224 625822 *E-mail:* info@castlehillha.co.uk

If you require assistance to write or complete the form, you could seek this from - a member of staff, a family member or friend, or from a professional advice centre such as Grampian Welfare Rights, Citizens Advice Centre or Grampian Society for the Blind.

- b) By writing to the appropriate Director, explaining the nature of your complaint and the steps you have already taken.
- c) If writing to us or completing the form are not possible options for you, you may make a direct approach to the Director in person (by appointment), or by telephone.

The Director will normally acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 3 working days. A full response to your complaint should be forwarded within a further 14 days, unless further and prolonged investigation of the matter is required.

If your complaint is about the Director of Housing Services or the Director of Development Services, then your complaint should be addressed to the Chief Executive, Mr David Lappin.

3 Taking your complaint further - the appeals procedure

If you are still unhappy with the response received to your complaint, you have the right to request the Director to bring the matter to the attention of the Housing Management Sub Committee, or the Development Sub Committee, which meet every 3 months. Alternatively, you can write to the Sub Committee through the Association's office.

If, in addition to your written complaint, you are keen to talk to the Sub Committee you can do this and, if you want to bring along a friend or adviser, then this is fine.

The Convener of the Sub Committee will write to you within 3 working days of the meeting to let you know the decision. If you are not happy with it you will have the right to contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, whose details are given below.

As stated on p1, users of our Housing Support services have a right to make a comment or complaint about the service to the Care Commission or local Council who commissions these services from Castlehill. Contact details are given on p 6.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman for Scotland investigates individual complaints against Housing Associations and Co-operatives - this is a free and impartial service.

The service is available to anyone who receives a service from a Housing Association or Co-operative, or who has applied to one of them for housing. Normally, you must have gone through the Association's own complaints procedure before the Ombudsman can deal with your complaint. The Ombudsman cannot deal with complaints from contractors or people such as neighbours, who do not receive a direct service from the Association. Complaints should normally be submitted to the Ombudsman within 12 months of the day on which you first had reason to complain. However, the Ombudsman does have discretion to consider complaints outside the normal timescale if there are special reasons for doing so.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman normally deals with complaints about procedures, whereas complaints about the Association's policies can be referred to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
4 Melville Street
EDINBURGH
EH3 7NS

or

SPSO
Freepost EH641
EDINBURGH EH3 0BR

Tel: 0800 377 7330
Text: 0790 049 4372
Fax: 0800 377 7331

E-mail: ask@spsso.org.uk
www.spsso.org.uk

Scottish Housing Regulator
Highlander House
58 Waterloo Street
GLASGOW
G2 7PA

Tel: 0141 271 3810
Fax: 0141 221 5031

E-mail: shr@scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk

Who will know about my complaint?

We will, as far as possible, respect the confidentiality of your complaint. Whilst we are looking into your complaint your name will not be divulged any more than is absolutely necessary within the Association.

You will appreciate, however, that if your complaint involves another tenant or a member of staff, it may be very difficult for us to look into this without talking to that tenant or staff member. If you ask us not to talk to the tenant or staff member, we will try to respect your wishes, but it will probably not be possible for us to take any action to tackle the problem.

It will not normally be possible for us to deal with anonymous complaints as it is obviously difficult for us to check things with the person making the complaint.

Getting independent advice

We would always hope that a problem can be sorted out informally.

However, you may feel it is important for you to get independent advice before you decide whether to complain to us formally. Advice agencies in this area include:

- Welfare Rights Service
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Law Centre
- Solicitor

How do we record and monitor complaints?

A record of all Formal Complaints will be kept by the Corporate Services Officer, with details, correspondence etc held in the appropriate departmental file (eg tenant's house file).

The Directors will report to the Housing Management Sub Committee or Development Sub Committee on a regular basis on the type of formal complaints received and subsequent action taken.

Improper conduct and 'whistleblowing'

If anyone, including a member of staff, believes that there has been improper conduct in an association, the person can raise the matter confidentially without any fear of repercussions against him/her.

The Association defines improper conduct as conduct where an individual or individuals act in a fraudulent, discriminatory or criminal way, or in a way whereby actions or behaviour are motivated by self interest or cast doubt on the individual's integrity.

If anyone wishes to raise concerns, this should be done by contacting the Association's Convener, either by telephone or in writing. Respect will be given to the confidentiality of the person raising the concern, and an investigation will be carried out in as confidential a manner as possible. In exceptional circumstances, if a person wishes to contact an outside body, the concern can be raised with Communities Scotland Registration and Supervision Department at the address given on page 4.

The Association undertakes that, normally, initial investigations will be carried out within 21 days, and if the investigation cannot be finalised within this time, then details will be given to the person making the complaint of the initial findings and any additional action proposed.

Whilst/

Whilst the Association wishes to be open and accountable, complainants must be aware that any person who has been proved to have deliberately made false accusations will be firmly dealt with, as considered to be appropriate.

The Association regards this Complaints Procedure as a positive way of encouraging feedback on the quality of service we offer. As a matter of principle, we will not view complaints in a negative way, but will use the opportunity to consider improvements to our service.

DL\GR\LN\July 2010 - minor updates
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Contact details *(re note 2 on page 1)*

Care Commission Headquarters

Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
DUNDEE DD1 4NY

www.carecommission.com

Tel: 01382 207100

Care Commission - North Region

Regional Office
Johnstone House
Rose Street
ABERDEEN AB10 1UD

Tel: 01224 793870

Local Council contacts for Housing Support services

Aberdeen City Council
Supporting People Team
Housing and Environment
St Nicholas House - 1st floor
ABERDEEN AB10 1BX

Tel: 01224 523791

Aberdeenshire Council
Commissioning Team
Housing and Social Work
Unit 12 - Blackhall Industrial Estate
Burghmuir Circle
INVERURIE AB51 4FS

Tel: 01467 629034

The Moray Council
Community Services
149 High Street
ELGIN IV30 1DS

Tel: 01343 563536