

CASTLEHILL HOUSING ASSOCIATION

AIMS and VALUES

Castlehill Housing Association was established in 1970 by VSA, a large Aberdeen social care agency.

From the start, a major objective was to provide housing with support, and this is still a significant part of our work. In recent years, the emphasis has been on the development of general needs houses and flats in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

Our current housing stock is over 1,600 homes, and over 8,000 people are registered with us to be considered for allocation of one of our properties.

Core objectives

- To provide high quality affordable housing, and an efficient, responsive and personal housing management and maintenance service.
- To provide appropriate support services to sustain independence and quality of life.
- To contribute towards sustaining rural communities through providing housing, associated employment and using local maintenance contractors

A personal service

The Association believes that quality services can best be delivered by ensuring that, as far as possible, front line staff build up direct relationships with tenants or other service users.

Housing Officers and Maintenance Officers each provide a service to a distinct group of properties. In this way, they get to know their tenants, and deal with the full range of issues that may arise during a tenancy. Housing Support staff from the Key Project work with individuals who need additional support, and to be effective it is essential that trust is built up between the support worker and tenant.

In sheltered housing, individual housing support plans are shaped to meet a tenant's specific needs.

Care and Repair Officers provide a service which is based on home visits, primarily to older and disabled owner-occupiers. They aim to provide a holistic service which can address 'quality of life' issues, as well as assisting with repairs and improvements to their home.

Customer Participation

Integral to the 'personal service' approach is involving users of our services in shaping how these services are delivered. The Association recognises that customer feedback and participation are vital in assessing our performance and identifying improvements in how we work. We will actively promote a culture that values the contribution users of our services can make to Castlehill.

Key factors in this strategy are:

- Tenant Participation Strategy – the Association will ensure that we have a formal strategy in place meeting the statutory requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act, 2001. This will include promotion and recognition of formal Registered Tenants Organisations where appropriate, as well as a range of measures to encourage participation.
- Positive promotion of Association Membership to all those with an interest in our work, including our tenants. We recognise the importance of a tenant perspective at Management Committee level and will actively promote such involvement.
- Statutory rights to consultation – we will ensure all statutory rights, provided under the Scottish Secure Tenancy agreement, are adhered to e.g. on rent review consultation.
- Customer Surveys – we will implement a range of methods to obtain feedback including a full tenants survey at least every 5 years and ongoing questionnaires on aspects such as major

repair works, adaptations and care & repair works. Periodic surveys on services such as homehunt NES will also be undertaken in conjunction with partner organisations.

- Ensure that people receiving our housing support services are informed and consulted on appropriate aspects of the service in line with published National Care Standards.
- Promotion of the interactive elements of the Association's Website to ensure that customers can put forward ideas or make views known.
- Production of regular Newsletters with an emphasis on encouraging resident involvement in the successful operation of their housing development.
- The Association will view complaints about services in a positive way and use the outcome of any complaint to further drive service improvements.

Castlehill will ensure that all comment and information gathered through customer participation provides an important input to future planning and strategy with the aim of continuing to deliver a high quality service based on the needs of those who wish to access our services.

Our staff

We are proud of our staff and the work that they do.

We have around 170 staff in our offices and schemes. Approximately 70 staff are employed at our offices in Aberdeen, Ellon and Elgin and 100 staff are based at our schemes across Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray.

Many of our staff work for us part-time and we are happy to allow a variety of working patterns to allow staff to maintain the work life balance they choose. Our employment policies are typically top quartile for our sector and we monitor this through regular benchmarking activities. We have an active Joint Consultative Group, involving staff representatives and Committee members, which is an important part of our communication process with all our staff.

We offer a wide range of training and development opportunities to all staff - much more than that which we are legally obliged to provide. Our annual review process encourages staff to think about the direction their career might follow and how the Association might support their aspirations. A number of senior staff have taken part in the 'Common Purpose' programmes. We recently achieved the Healthy Working Lives Bronze Award and are now actively working towards the Silver.

Partnership working

Partnership working has always been important to the Association, and enabled us to bring together the complementary skills of organisations. We have many examples where we have provided accommodation, and our partner voluntary organisation provides the support and care.

Many people have complex needs and authorities commissioning services are now looking to organisations to demonstrate the outcomes from their service. It is also recognised that services will be most successful where care is taken that the design of the services is focussed on meeting the needs of individual service users.

This 'outcomes' agenda is also used to set broader policy objectives. The Scottish Government and local authorities have developed a new framework to promote better outcomes from publicly funded services. The Scottish Government has set 15 national outcomes, and local authorities and their partners are to work towards improving outcomes for local people in a way that reflects local circumstances and priorities - this is the Single Outcome Agreement. It will be increasingly important for the Association to participate in this process to ensure that we influence the setting of priorities locally.

Some of the 15 national outcomes are listed below and it will be obvious that our work makes a significant contribution to many of the outcomes:

- We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need.

- We live longer, healthier lives.
- We live our lives safe from crime, disorder or danger.
- We have improved the life chances for our children, young people and families at risk.
- We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.

The 'outcomes' agenda is at the early stages of development, but is indicative that good partnership working will be even more important in the future.

Independence

Over the last 4 decades, the Association has developed a distinctive identity and culture:

- We have developed services based on areas of expertise and experience, for example:
 - our work with older people in sheltered housing led naturally to the development of Care and Repair services for older and disabled owner-occupiers
 - our tradition of providing support for vulnerable people led to the development of Key Project, to help tenants sustain their tenancies
- We are well respected by local partners, and recognised for our commitment to housing support.
- Our tenants and other service users regularly report high levels of satisfaction with our services
- Our regulators consider that we are performing well, and the Scottish Housing Regulator considers we require " low regulatory engagement "
- We have a strong financial management framework, and we have always been prudent when evaluating risks and managing our finances.
- We have favoured a policy of steady, measured growth and developed a stable organisation with committed and motivated staff.
- We have a simple governance structure, and a strong, supportive Management Committee who are committed to our objectives.
- We are financially viable, but also aware that we must continually take steps to reduce our unit management and maintenance costs, and thus demonstrate efficiency savings.
- We have concentrated staffing resources on front line services, and we consider we operate a lean, efficient 'back room' service.

For all the above reasons, we consider our work can best be delivered by an independent Castlehill, provided that we continue to focus on managing our costs as well as delivering a quality service.

This section provides the rationale for the Association maintaining its identity as a separate organisation. However, the development of new housing by Castlehill has recently been carried out as a member of the Devanha partnership, together with 4 other RSLs.

There have been many benefits to working in partnership on the procurement of new developments, as well as many challenges! The Scottish Government recently completed consultation on the future approach to procurement by the sector, and we await their conclusions with interest.

We will consider further partnership approaches to future procurement , whilst also assessing which approach will best enable us to deliver Castlehill's strategic objectives.

Opportunities

The Association will consider opportunities for providing new developments or services which are in accordance with these aims and values.

Equalities and diversity

The Association is committed to the promotion of equalities and to combating discrimination, direct or indirect in all areas of our work.

The Association is committed to complying with current anti-discrimination legislation, regulations and good practice.

We aim to ensure that in all our policies and decision making there is no unfair discrimination of the grounds of gender, marital status, age, ethnic origin, religious belief, sexual orientation, disability or any other relevant ground.

We aim to make our services as accessible as possible and will endeavour to provide information in appropriate forms for those requiring it.

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