



KEY PROJECT

Housing Support Service



Annual Report

April 2009- March 2010

Key Project, Castlehill Housing Association

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Background

Castlehill Housing Association's Key Project is a housing support service offered to tenants. The aim of the housing support service is to help sustain a successful tenancy, in other words, to 'keep the key'. The service provides a holistic approach to tackling any risk which may threaten the tenancy and supporting the individual whatever their particular needs may be.

The Key Project was established in April 2001 and was originally financed through the National Lottery Community Fund. In 2003, the Key Project secured funding from Aberdeen City Council Supporting People for 60 hours housing support per week and in August 2005, funding was secured from Aberdeenshire Council through Supporting People for 18 hours per week.

As of 1st April 2008, 'ring fencing' around Supporting People funding from the Scottish Government to the local authorities was removed. Aberdeen City Council continues to have a Supporting People Team and funding for 60 hours housing support from the Key Project is in place until 1st April 2011.

In Aberdeenshire, however, funding for Key Project housing support service was transferred from the Supporting People Team to Housing (Options and Estate Management), within Housing and Social Work. A 3 year contract, until 31 March 2011, is now in place to provide 18 hours per week housing support within Aberdeenshire.

Staffing

The project employs 3 part time members of staff;

1 Housing Support Officer	22 hours per week
2 Housing Support Workers	28 hours per week each

Within Aberdeen City, each member of staff works 20 hours per week. For the Aberdeenshire contract, the Housing Support Workers each provide 8 hours per week and the Housing Support Officer 2 hours per week.

Statistics 1st April 2009- 31st March 2010

Tenancies receiving Key Project housing support

	On 1 st April 2009	On 31 st March 2010
ACC	44	41
Aberdeenshire	23	18
Total	65	59

Over the past 12 months, there has been a slight decrease in the number of tenancies where the Key Project has been offering housing support. One variant is that the level of housing support is tailored to the individual's need. This can mean contact on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis, with usually between 2-3 hours per tenant per contact. For Aberdeen City we have an agreed capacity of 45 plus or minus 5 tenancies, dependent on need.

The contract with Aberdeenshire is for housing support in a minimum of 15 tenancies. The proportionally higher decrease in the number of tenancies receiving support in Aberdeenshire is not however, a reflection of decreased need, but rather, the result of deliberate rationalisation of workload as the level of supported tenancies was unsustainable within the existing contract with Aberdeenshire Council. We have found that, on occasion, during the past year, we have been unable to accept referrals from Aberdeenshire tenancies and have reluctantly operated a waiting list.

Referrals

From 1st April 2009 to 31st March 2010, there were **41** new referrals for housing support from the Key Project, **29** of these were tenancies within the Aberdeen City area and **12** within Aberdeenshire.

	ACC	Aberdeenshire
Assessed as having housing support need and receiving service	20	7
Not wishing service or no contact	5	0
Significant support from other agencies	2	2
Very short term	2	
Not yet allocated		3
Total	29	12

Increased housing stock within Castlehill Housing Association links directly with increased demand for housing support. Castlehill's new housing developments over the past 12 months have been in Aberdeenshire. This has put pressure on the housing support service in Aberdeenshire and the resultant unallocated referrals.

Ending the Service

During the 12 month period, housing support was ended in **38** tenancies, **23** in Aberdeen City and **15** in Aberdeenshire.

Reasons for ending

No longer requiring support	20
No longer wishing support	3
Moved to residential	1
Deceased	2
Moved from area	5
Abandonment	1
Imprisoned	1
Contact lost	5
Total	38

The majority of the endings were for very positive reasons, that is, that the tenant had received support and no longer required this. There has also been a reduction in the number of tenancies where contact has been lost.

Number of tenancies supported 1/04/09 – 31/03/10

During the 12 month period, Key Project has provided housing support in:

97 Castlehill Housing Association tenancies
64 within Aberdeen City and **33** in Aberdeenshire.

*Profiles of tenants receiving support – Snapshot at 31/03/2010

	Aberdeen	Aberdeenshire	Total
Older people	9	1	10
Young people	1	3	4
Learning disabilities	1	1	2
Physical illness/disability	8	2	10
Mental health related problems	8	5	13
Alcohol related problems	1	1	2
Drug related problems	2	1	3
Domestic Violence	4	0	4
Single homeless	2	0	2
Homeless family	1	1	1
Other	4	3	7
TOTAL	41	18	59

* Self assessment on first contact

Age Profile of tenants - Snapshot at 31/03/2010

	Aberdeen	Aberdeen shire	All
Under 18	0	0	0
18-25	3	3	6
26-59	25	14	39
60-70	7	1	8
70+	6	0	6
	41	18	59

Over the past 18 months we have seen a significant increase, particularly in Aberdeen City, in the number of older people where there has been an assessed need for housing support. Key Project is now providing housing support to tenants in sheltered housing and even very sheltered housing. It is suspected that there may be a link between this rise and the reduction of other services to older people in Aberdeen City.

Previously Homeless

17 of the 41 tenants (41%) currently being supported in Aberdeen City area were previously homeless and 6 of the 18(33%) in Aberdeenshire. Strategically, the work of the Key Project links with both homelessness and vulnerability.

The nature of housing support within the Key Project

It can be quite difficult to describe what we actually do in the Key Project, as there is often no set pattern. People and their widely varying housing support needs often produce unexpected difficulties in areas where staff have little or no previous experience. Research is therefore a crucial tool.

The difficulties which tenants are experiencing may not be obvious at the outset and are only shared once there is trust in the relationship. The presenting difficulty may, for example, be a rent arrear, yet the circumstances around this may range from a one-off crisis to a longer term multiple debt situation with an added physical or mental health related problem. As a result, some of the Key Project contact with individual tenants can be short-term, yet, others may have long term housing support needs.

There remain two main strands to our work, housing support to existing tenants and housing support at the beginning of the tenancy. Housing Officers are now very skilled at identifying potential housing support need, both as a result of their contact with existing tenants or when new tenancies are being allocated. This early identification, typically of a potential risk to the tenancy, enables effective housing support from the Key Project.

At the beginning of a tenancy, the first 6 months can be critical in terms of sustaining a successful tenancy. First of all, the tenant may have difficulty in moving in, particularly if they have no furniture, floor coverings etc. The demise of the furniture package from **furnitureinc** as of 1st April 2009, has seriously impacted on the tenant's ability to move into a property. Key Project housing support work now focuses on the completion of Community Care Grant applications, where relevant, to secure funds for floor coverings, white goods and other furnishings. As decisions about Community Care Grants can take up to 6 weeks, this can seriously delay the occupancy of the tenancy. This in turn can affect eligibility for Housing Benefit.

Secondly, completion of Housing/Council Tax Benefit application forms and submission of required evidence to substantiate the claim is another main focus for housing support. This is particularly important at the beginning of a tenancy but can also pose a threat to the sustainability of an existing tenancy.

Income Maximisation

Over the last 12 months, Key Project housing support staff have generated approximately **£14,357** for tenants and a further **£5,151 per annum** in eligible State Benefits. This is mainly as a result of assistance with State Benefit claims, applications for backdated Housing/Council Tax Benefit, applications for Discretionary Housing Payments and Trust Fund applications for individual tenants.

In addition over the last 12 months we have developed a valuable partnership with the Income Advisor, appointed in April 2009, to provide Benefits Health checks to tenants of Housing Associations in Aberdeen City. The Income Advisor has generated an incredible **£38,720** for only 7 tenants in Aberdeen City during the 12 month period. This comprises of awards for State Benefits, such as Pension Credit, Income Support, Disability Living Allowance and Housing/Council Tax Benefits. The real value of these lies in the fact that these are not one-off payments but will contribute to annual income over the years. Key Project staff have worked in partnership with the Income Advisor to achieve these real and lasting increases for these 7 tenants.

We have also developed an increasingly productive partnership with the SMART Project Money Advisers, available to tenants of housing associations both in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. Again, Key Project housing support workers have worked with the tenants and the Money Advisers, leading to considerable debt reduction and more manageable financial positions.

Key Project Home Decoration and Hardship Fund

The Key Project is indebted to the Trustees of the George Crombie Fund for the award which has enabled Castlehill Housing Association to set up the Key Project Home Decoration Fund and the Key Project Hardship Fund.

Key Project Home Decoration Fund

Decoration within a property is a tenant's responsibility. We are particularly pleased that we are able to offer assistance with redecoration costs as we had previously been unable to identify any statutory or voluntary agency funds which would offer financial assistance for this.

The Home Decoration Fund operates on 3 levels:

1. **Materials only.** Where the tenant is able to redecorate themselves then an award can be made for the purchase of decoration materials
2. **Materials and Labour.** Where the tenant is unable to redecorate and is unable to afford decorating materials
3. **Labour alone.** Where the tenant is unable to decorate but can afford the decorating materials.

Since July 2009, the Key Project Decoration Fund has assisted in 12 tenancies.

Feedback from tenants

'Thrilled'

'Ecstatic'

'So happy. It's made such a difference. I'm no longer thinking about moving'

'Made a huge difference to my morale. I love my newly decorated living room.'

Key Project Hardship Fund

This is a smaller fund but is, in some ways, more difficult to make award decisions as we must be satisfied that applications to all other statutory and voluntary agencies have been exhausted. Monies from the fund have been awarded in 4 tenancies.

Feedback from tenants

'Delighted. Could not have afforded this myself'

Some Agencies we work with:

The Key Project works in partnership with a number of agencies within Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. These include:

Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils

Council Tax, Housing/ Council Tax Benefit, Education, Community Education, Social Work, Leisure, Taxi cards, Concession cards

Department of Work and Pensions

Job Centre Plus, Pension Service, Child Support Agency, Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance

NHS Grampian

GP and associated practice based services, Occupational therapy. Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, Stonehaven Community Hospital, Cornhill Hospital and associated psychiatric services, Roxburghe House

Other agencies

Smart Money Advice Project	Instant Neighbour
Outreach Service, Aberdeen CAB	Welfare Rights
Aberdeen College	Adult Learning
Aberdeen Cyrenians	Grampian Police
Grampian Credit Union	SCARF
SSAFA	Sacro – Community mediation
Alcohol Support Ltd	
ACIS(Aberdeen Counseling & Information Service)	
Various Trust Funds – both local and national	

Utilities

Gas and electricity suppliers
Scott & Co (debt collecting agency)
Sterling Park(debt collecting agency)

Care Commission

In February 2010, the Care Commission inspected the work of the Key Project, as part of Castlehill's Housing Support Services and accompanied housing support workers on visits to tenants receiving housing support from the Key Project. We were reassured by the Inspection Report that we are meeting National Care Standards for housing support.

David Lappin, Castlehill's Chief Executive commented "We are very pleased with the outcome of the Care Commission inspection and the report itself reflects well on the staff within our Sheltered Housing and Key Project for the excellent work that they do. Providing housing support is one of Castlehill's core objectives and it is welcomed that the report acknowledges the quality and strengths of the services that we deliver".

Tenants' feedback

Receiving feedback from people who use our service is particularly important and below are some of the comments that have been made in individual's Housing Support Plan reviews:

'Brilliant support and has helped me enormously. I so grateful for your continued support and advice'

'Done an unexpected amount of work for me'

'I cannot express adequately the help and support given to me. It has been an absolute God- send and I could not have coped without the help and support. I shall always be grateful'

'Wouldn't be where I am today if it hadn't been for you'

'Happy to have contact and look forward to visits. Very important to my well being'

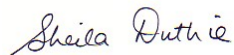
'Mega happy'

Summary

The Key Project continues to provide a housing support service which is valued and appreciated by the majority of the tenants who are offered support. The work can be challenging but can also bring great job satisfaction. Many of the outcomes of housing support as offered by the Key Project are not measurable, but actual increase in income is an area where the outcome is visible and is also much valued by the tenants. Remaining in the tenancy is also a crucial outcome.

In the past 12 months we have noted the rise in demand for Key Project housing support service for older people. We have also been unable to fully meet the demand for Key Project housing support in Aberdeenshire. There continue to be concerns about long term funding for the project and the inevitable direct effect on planning for this service.

We continue to believe that housing support from the Key Project is a cost effective use of public money in terms of prevention of homelessness and has cost benefits for other health and social care agencies.



Sheila Duthie
Housing Support Officer

26th May 2010