



KEY PROJECT

Housing Support Service



Annual Report

April 2010- March 2011

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Key Project, Castlehill Housing Association

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Background

Castlehill Housing Association's Key Project is a housing support service offering direct support to a number of Castlehill tenants in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire, underpinned by a flexible approach to meeting individual needs. Housing Support from the Key Project aims to assist vulnerable people who may otherwise be at risk of homelessness through loss of their tenancy, to help sustain a successful tenancy and 'to keep the key'.

The Key Project was established in April 2001 and was originally financed through the National Lottery Community Fund. Since 2003, the Key Project has been funded by Aberdeen City Council for 60 hours housing support per week and from August 2005, Aberdeenshire Council funds a further 18 hours per week.

The Key Project is based within the Housing Management department and forms part of Castlehill Housing Support Services, which are registered with SCSWIS (formerly the Care Commission). The Key Project housing support service is specifically identified as an element of Castlehill's contribution to addressing homelessness in the organisation's Strategic Plan. It thereby contributes to the Association's aim of assisting local authority partners to meet legislative targets with regard to homelessness.

Castlehill Housing Association has a housing stock of 704 general needs and amenity tenancies in Aberdeen City and 321 general needs tenancies in Aberdeenshire. In the main, Key Project housing support is offered to general needs and amenity tenants but occasionally, especially where tenants have no family support, Key Project has offered support in sheltered/very sheltered accommodation. There are 251 Sheltered and very sheltered tenancies in the City and 255 in Aberdeenshire.

Over the last 10 years the Key Project has provided housing support in 305 Castlehill tenancies.

In 2000, Castlehill Housing Association's figure for tenancy sustainment was 79%. By 2010/11, this had risen to 92%. Housing support from the Key Project has contributed to this increase in tenancy sustainment.

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.

The Housing Support Officer and one of the Housing Support Workers have been in post since 2001 with the third member of staff joining in 2007. The stability of staff has enabled the establishment of an extensive pool of resources and wide partnership working, leading to effective housing support service for tenants.

Ongoing training and awareness sessions during the past twelve months have included:

- Welfare Reform
- Cash in Your Pocket
- SOLO
- Ethnic Housing
- Personal Safety
- Domestic Abuse
- IT
- Adult Support and Protection
- Mediation
- Homepoint
- First Aid

Statistics 1st April 2010 -31st March 2011

Tenancies receiving Key Project housing support

	On 1 st April 2010	On 31 st March 2011
ACC	41	51
Aberdeenshire	18	23
Total	59	74

Over the past 12 months, there has been an increase in the number of tenancies where the Key Project has been offering housing support and the Key Project is currently operating at capacity in Aberdeen City and over capacity in Aberdeenshire. 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.

Referrals

From 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2011, there were **59** new referrals for housing support from the Key Project, **40** of these were tenancies within the Aberdeen City area and **19** within Aberdeenshire. This represents an increase of over 40% from the previous 12 months. During this period, the new development of 44 properties at Rona Place in Aberdeen City, accounted for some of the increase in the City. In Aberdeenshire, having had a waiting list, we were able to take on new tenants with an assessed housing support need.

	ACC	Aberdeenshire
Assessed as having housing support need and receiving service	30	15
Not requiring/ wishing service or no contact	6	2
Significant support from other agencies	0	0
Very short term	1	1
Not yet allocated	3	1
Total	40	19

Ending the Service

During the 12 month period, housing support was ended in **31** tenancies, **20** in Aberdeen City and **11** in Aberdeenshire.

Reasons for ending

	ACC	Aberdeenshire	Total
No longer requiring support	8	3	11
No longer wishing support	3	1	4
Moved to residential	2	1	3
Deceased	1	0	1
Moved from area	3	3	6
Abandonment	0	0	0
Imprisoned	0	0	0
Contact lost	3	3	6
Total	20	11	31

Number of tenancies supported 1/04/10 – 31/03/11

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

105 Castlehill Housing Association tenancies
71 within Aberdeen City and **34** in Aberdeenshire.
 This equates to approximately 10% of general needs/amenity stock.

*Profiles of tenants receiving support – 1/04/2010 - 31/03/2011

	Aberdeen	Aberdeenshire	Total
Older people	10	1	11
Young people	1	7	8
Learning disabilities	3	1	4
Physical illness/disability	16	9	25
Mental health related problems	16	5	21
Alcohol related problems	3	2	5
Drug related problems	4	1	5
Domestic Violence	4	2	6
Single homeless	8	1	9
Homeless family	3	1	4
Psychological Trauma	1	2	3
Other	2	2	4
TOTAL	71	34	105

* Self assessment on first contact

Age Profile of tenants - 1/04/2010 - 31/03/2011

	Aberdeen	Aberdeenshire	All
Under 18	0	0	0
18-25	9	6	15
26-59	45	23	68
60-70	11	5	16
70+	6	0	6
	71	34	105

Castlehill has very few under 18 tenants and those who are allocated a tenancy are generally receiving existing support from other agencies. Over the past 12 months there has been an increase however, in the number of 18-25 year olds using the service and we are continuing to see an increase in the number of older tenants with an assessed need for housing support.

Previously Homeless

In the last 5 years, **75** of the **157** tenants (**48%**) supported in Aberdeen City area were previously homeless and **39** of the **80** tenants(**49%**) in Aberdeenshire. On an annual basis this figure varies and links with the allocation of properties within Castlehill.

Strategically, the work of the Key Project links with both homelessness and vulnerability. This is important as having a tenancy in itself may not be enough. The factors which led to homelessness may still exist and these vulnerabilities may still pose a risk to sustaining the tenancy. Similarly existing tenants who develop vulnerabilities may also find that there are risks to their tenancies.

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.

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. As a furniture package is no longer available to tenants of Castlehill Housing Association, 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. During the last 12 months we have noted that the criteria for awarding Community Care Grants have become tighter and many more tenants are being offered a Social Fund Loan rather than a Community Care Grant. However, when Key Project staff have assisted tenants to request a review of the Community Care Grant decision, the Community Care Grant has very often been awarded. We have also developed important links with Somebody Cares which has been generous to tenants, especially in emergency situations, such as flooding.

Secondly, completion of Housing/Council Tax Benefit application forms and submission of required evidence to substantiate the claim is the other 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.

Recently we have seen an increase in the number of tenants whom we support having difficulty in making contact with various agencies, especially those with 0845 numbers and long waiting times. It is not surprising that people give up trying to make contact with agencies to try to resolve any difficulties. However the difficulty tends to worsen and housing support work encourages tenants to persist in making contact with the agency either by phone or assisting with letter writing.

Some excerpts from Housing Support Plans

Tenant A – Young family

Support Offered/ Requested

To assist tenant to maximize family income

To help with letters and application forms

Assistance with tenancy matters

Summary of support carried out

Phone calls and visits

Supporting letter for DLA application prepared

Application to Buttle Trust

Draft letter for DLA appeal

Info on medical condition supplied

Letter to Family Fund

Contact with SMART Money advice project

Plan for future support

Continue with phone calls and visits

Assist with researching employment options

Continue with help re state benefits

Assist with new application to Family Fund

Tenant B – Young single man

Support Offered/ requested

Weekly office appointments, joint monthly appointments with SMART money advice project

Assistance with debts

Explore housing options

Assistance with insurance claim

Help with Working Tax Credit claim

Summary of support carried out

Weekly office appointments, monthly joint appointments with SMART

Assistance re new tenancy following decant and termination of previous tenancy

Help to acquire new furnishings following insurance settlement

Arranging energy supplier following move

Working Tax Credit claim successful

Encouraging on weekly basis to make payments to rent, Council tax and other debts

Assistance to get tax rebate following NI mix up

Info re dental advice line, now has dentist

Plan for future support

Weekly office appointments, monthly joint appointments with SMART

Continue monitoring and encouraging to reduce debt

Tenancy matters and other concerns as they arise

Income Maximisation

Over the last 12 months, Key Project housing support staff have generated approximately **£16986.79** on behalf of tenants. This is mainly as a result of assistance with applications for backdated Housing/Council Tax Benefit, applications for Discretionary Housing Payments, Community Care Grant applications and Trust Fund applications for individual tenants.

In addition over the last 12 months we continued 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 **£31660.14** for only 8 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 8 tenants.

We have also continued a very 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 in 2009.

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.

Over the last 12 months, the Key Project Decoration Fund has assisted in **11 tenancies**.

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 **10 tenancies** during the past year.

Most frequently grants have been awarded to tenants who are working but on a low incomes and therefore not eligible for state benefits. For example, for floor coverings at beginning of tenancy, replacement white goods during tenancy

Tenants who have been assisted by the Home Decoration and Hardship Fund have appreciated this help as it appears to be unavailable from other sources.

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	

Gas and electricity suppliers

Debt collection agencies

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:

'You've been a star to me, helped me through so much'

'Like having the security of knowing I can call and speak in confidence about any problems I have'

'Without this service I could have been out on the streets'

'Happy to continue as the advice and help has been invaluable'

'Dee a' richt'

'You've been major in this household'

This is also a useful way of consulting with tenants regarding any suggestions re improving or altering the service.

Summary

Before the establishment of the Key Project housing support service, Housing Management staff at Castlehill were acutely aware that some of the tenants had needs which were not being met and they were concerned about the tenants' vulnerability and the risk to their tenancies. However, staff were also aware of their limited capacity in meeting these needs, both in terms of time and resources. A successful application to the Community Fund enabled the establishment of the Key Project in March 2001 and from very small beginnings, the Key Project has over the last 10 years developed into an integral part of Housing Management within Castlehill Housing Association. On average, the housing support service is offered in around 10% of Castlehill general/amenity needs stock per year. As the housing stock has grown, so has the demand for housing support.

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 and Key Project has contributed to the substantial increase in tenancy sustainment over the last 10 years.

There continue to be concerns about long term funding for the project and this has an inevitable effect on planning for the service. One area which would seem ripe for development is the provision of a basic furniture package, such as, floor covering and white goods as this continues to be a major obstacle for those previously homeless moving into an allocated property. This, in turn, can lead to difficulties with Housing Benefit as the tenancy has to be occupied before Housing Benefit will be awarded.

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

Sheila Duthie
Housing Support Officer

26th July 2011