



Free Energy Advice



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Try our quiz to be in with a chance of winning £50 of vouchers!

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Success at National Good Practice Awards

North East tenants and housing professionals are celebrating this week after being recognised for their work with young people in social housing at a prestigious awards ceremony

NETRALT (North East Tenants, Residents and Landlords Together) were the winners of the Good Practice in Involving All – Youth Involvement award at the TPAS Scotland National Good Practice Awards 2016 on Friday 18th November at the Fairmont Hotel, St Andrews hosted by STV weather presenter Sean Batty.

Catherine Coutts of Castlehill Housing Association and Katie Taylor of Grampian Housing Association were presented with the award after they took the lead in managing and facilitating a series of radio shows involving local communities, younger tenants and housing professionals.

The aim was to provide younger tenants and applicants with the opportunity to participate in an exciting and rewarding project, whilst informing them about all aspects of social housing including housing options, waiting lists and expectations, allocations, homelessness, benefits and support.



North East Tenants Residents and Landlords Together

NETRALT is a group of tenants, residents and staff from local authorities and registered social landlords that encourage tenant and resident engagement across the North East of Scotland. Tenants and residents can get involved in their landlord's decision making processes and have their say on issues that affect them.

NETRALT are looking for young tenants to take part in future radio shows throughout Aberdeenshire and Moray. If you are between the ages of 16 and 25 years old, are a social housing tenant, waiting to be housed, or are just interested in finding out more, please call Catherine on 01224 628109 or email catherine.coutts@castlehillha.co.uk



Letter from our Chief Executive...

2016 has certainly been a year for surprises or unexpected results. There are perhaps few of us who would have predicted the outcome of either the referendum on membership of the European Union, or indeed the result of the presidential election in the USA. So what does this have to do with Castlehill? The answer is perhaps, more than you might think at first glance!

Freedom of movement within the EU, for citizens of member countries, has had a significant impact on the population of the North East and, no doubt, there are many folks originally from this area that now live and work in other parts of Europe. Castlehill is keen to reflect the diversity of the communities we serve and we have welcomed the opportunity to assist people with housing and employment opportunities, whatever their background. Building trades and construction are sectors that have in the past found it difficult to recruit skilled workers and have relied on being able to source skills from throughout the European economic area. This is important to Castlehill to ensure that we can continue to keep our houses in good repair and employ suitable contractors to build new ones!

Uncertainty is something that no economy welcomes and the recent US election has left a lot of folks wondering what will happen next? Banks, in particular, tend to "pull up the drawbridge" in uncertain times and this can affect our ability to source the loan finance we need towards funding new housing developments.

These are interesting times indeed and we will continue to take notice of the environment we are working in to ensure that we continue to do all we can to meet peoples housing needs.

Early in 2017, we are undertaking a tenant satisfaction survey to hear your views on the services and homes that the Association provides. This full survey is carried out every three years and plays a very important part in shaping our future priorities and the services we provide. I would encourage you to please take part and let us know what you think.

Best wishes to everyone for the festive season.

David Lappin

Chief Executive



First tenants move into our newest scheme

The first tenants at our brand-new scheme at Corsmanhill Way in Inverurie have been given their keys to their new homes in time for Christmas.

The scheme forms part of housebuilders Malcom Allan's Westgate development in Inverurie. Castlehill are the only social housing provider to offer homes at Corsmanhill.

Castlehill will have 58 properties available to rent, comprising 2 x 1 bed bungalows, 4 x 2 bed, 16 x 3 bed and 4 x 4 bedroom semi-detached houses. There will also be 12 x 1 bed and 20 x 2 bedroom flats. The first 16 households will start their tenancies by Christmas, with the remaining properties being a phased handover to be completed by June 2018.

All our properties, including new schemes, are advertised on www.homehunt.info and in the Press & Journal every 2 weeks.



Clerk of Works, Colin Walker, hands over the keys to Housing Officer Claire Macdonald.

Free Energy Advice Service from Castlehill



Most people are not used to thinking about how they use the energy that powers our homes. But simple changes to your daily habits could have a huge effect on the gas and electricity bills that drop through your door. Surveys have shown that around 75% of people find their energy bills difficult to understand. It's not easy considering the amount of information and different terms used on each bill; estimated reading & actual readings, dual, standard, or fixed tariffs, personal projections etc.

Not understanding an energy bill can cause a great deal of stress. You may feel it's too complicated, or that there is nothing you can do about it.

This is where I can help. As part of my new role with Castlehill, I can offer free advice including; energy saving information, information on energy discounts, and also help to compare and switch energy providers. My aim is to: help tenants understand their energy bills, get the best tariffs available and give tips on saving energy in the home.

If you have any issues, or questions regarding your energy bills & usage, I can pop out and see you, or phone, or email you. Please contact me on

01224 974569 or email at jodie.dunbar@castlehillha.co.uk.





Homehunt NES is 10 years old

Homehunt NES is 10 years old this year. We started in 2006 with two landlords, Castlehill Housing Association and Tenants First Housing Cooperative.

There were approx. 4000 applicants waiting for housing with us and between the two landlords there was a stock of around 3000 properties. In 2013 Homehunt NES changed from an Access database system to a web-based system which allows applicants to register, apply for priority and bid for properties online. Grampian Housing Association joined Homehunt NES in March 2016 and Tenants First became part of Sanctuary Scotland in July 2016. Today there is a stock of around 6000 properties between the three landlords and there are approx. 11,000 applicants on the system.

The Homehunt NES office is manned with three members of staff, one full time and two part time. We have a very busy office dealing with phone calls and people who come into the office looking for assistance. We process around 100 new registrations each week and then have to process the priority for these applications. Each month we advertise 20 - 30 general needs properties and 10 - 20 sheltered housing properties. We also advertise very sheltered housing, amenity housing and shared ownership housing properties and recently we have started advertising properties on behalf of Aberdeen City Council. The administration for creating the fortnightly advert keeps everyone busy but we are always ready to help anyone with any queries they may have.



The Homehunt team (from L-R) Nicola Shand of Castlehill HA, Jackie Ross and Pauline Murray of Sanctuary Scotland and Nicola Smith of Grampian HA.

A Day in the Life...of Nicola Shand, Homehunt Administrator



So with the new advert sent off to the Press and Journal, it is time to focus on processing all the bids placed in the last two weeks. The computer system will print off lists of all bids placed. Myself and another administrator will check the list for each property to ensure all the bids are in the correct order of priority (bronze, silver, gold). I will then mark the list to show which applicant has made a successful bid. Often applicants will bid for more than one property. When that happens we look at what order the bids were placed. The order in which you bid is taken as your preference, so it is important you bid carefully. Once this has been done, we update the applications to show who is being considered and the lists are then sent to each landlord (Castlehill, Sanctuary and Grampian). Housing Officers will then contact the

There is no typical day in Homehunt as the enquiries that come in can be varied. However, every second Monday a new advert must be ready to go to the Press & Journal, before the current advert closes at 10:30am. That way, the new advert of vacancies is ready to go the very next day.

successful applicant and advise them they are being considered for a vacancy.

Other days consist of answering emails and phone calls from applicants, assessing the priority pass applications and dealing with change of circumstances. The administrators also provide information and advice to any applicant who visits the Homehunt office, based at Castlehill.

I hope this has given you a flavour of the type of work that goes on behind the scenes at Homehunt.

All our properties, including new schemes, are advertised on www.homehunt.info and in the Homes section of the Press & Journal every second Tuesday.

Complaint to the Ombudsman

A tenant, after going through the Associations Complaints Handling Procedure, took a complaint to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The following is the SPSO's summary of the complaint.

Mr and Mrs C's washing machine failed and caused a flood to their downstairs neighbour's flat. Both Mr and Mrs C and the tenant below them are tenants of the housing association.

Mr and Mrs C's contents insurer said that as Mr and Mrs C had not been negligent, they would not cover the cost of repairing the damage. The association rectified the problems in the tenant's flat below and charged Mr and Mrs C for the cost of this.

Mr and Mrs C complained that this was unreasonable. We considered this complaint carefully and asked some specific questions of the association. Following this, the association decided that without a clear policy and legal guidance around these types of situations, they had not acted reasonably. We agreed a number of steps the association could take to resolve the matter to Mr and Mrs C's satisfaction.

Following discussion we have a procedure which we agreed with Mr & Mrs C that we would notify all tenants of in our newsletter. Tenants are reminded that they should have

contents insurance and that should a situation such as this occur in future, the tenants will be required to claim for the cost of repairing damage through their own contents insurance. The Association will carry out any necessary health and safety work in the flooded flat but that work will be recharged to that tenant. The tenant who was flooded would have the responsibility for claiming against the tenant responsible for the flood.



Smart meters

Smart meters are the new generation of gas and electricity meters which will replace the traditional meters in our homes. Every home in Scotland will be offered a smart meter by their energy supplier, at no extra cost, between now and 2020. Your supplier will be in touch to arrange an appointment when they are ready to install yours.

Smart meters will enable you to see exactly how much energy you're using, as you use it, and what it costing in pounds and pence.

Smart meters take regular readings and share these wirelessly, through a secure network, with your energy supplier. This means your bills will be accurate, not estimated, and you will no longer need to have manual meter readings.

In the future, smart meters will make switching between suppliers, or between credit and prepay, quick and easier. If you are a prepay customer, you will also be able to top up online or via mobile phone.

Worried about your energy bills?

You may be spending more than you need to on fuel bills, especially if you choose Pay As You Go. **OurPower** offers a brighter solution...

- Fairer energy costs – no penalties for choosing Pay As You Go
- 'Friendly Credit' – we keep your supply going until you're able to top up
- Smart meters help you keep track of costs
- Choice of payment options: Direct Debit or Pay As You Go

It's easy to switch to a fairer energy supply

Simply call 0808 168 4534 or go to www.our-power.co.uk for details

OurPower making energy fairer

For more information about smart meters and how they can help you, visit smartenergyGB.org

TENANTS' NEWS...

Tenants Panel Steps Forward



Our Tenants Panel is a group of tenants who meet to discuss Castlehill's housing and housing-related services, give us feedback on policies and publications, suggest new ideas and provide us with a fresh perspective.

The Panel have recently become officially

registered with the Scottish Government and is now known as Castlehill Registered Tenants Organisation (CaRTO). This is a really positive step and reflects the commitment of our tenants, who can now engage with the Scottish Government on national policy affecting tenants through the Regional Network.

We are always happy to welcome new members, whether you are a new tenant or you have been a Castlehill tenant for years. Please contact Catherine on 01225 625822 or catherine.coutts@castlehillha.co.uk to find out more.



Want to be part of our decision-making process?

We offer many ways for you to get involved and help make a difference to your housing and housing services.

- CaRTO (Castlehill Registered Tenants Organisation)
- Scrutiny Panel
- Readers Group
- Focus groups
- Scheme walkabouts
- NETRALT meetings and/or events

- Moray Tenants Partnership meetings and/or events
- Sheltered scheme meetings
- You could set up your own tenants group

Tenant participation is open to all our tenants and residents. We can find a way to get involved that works for you.

If you would like more information, please contact our Tenant Participation Officer, Catherine, on 01224 625822 or catherine.coutts@castlehillha.co.uk

How Are We Doing? Our latest performance report is available now!

Castlehill's 2015-2016 performance report is now available on our website www.castlehillha.co.uk

or you can call 01224 625822 to request a copy.

Copies are also available in sheltered/very sheltered schemes' common rooms. We would love to hear your feedback on the report, and on our performance.

If you would like to be involved with producing next year's report, please contact our Tenant Participation Officer, Catherine on 01224 625822 or catherine.coutts@castlehillha.co.uk



Tenancy Fraud

Earlier this year Castlehill had reason to take legal action against two tenants after being made aware the information they had provided on their Homehunt application was false. The family had stated there were four of them living in one room of a House of Multiple Occupation (where each room is rented out individually and facilities are shared). In fact the family were really living in a private rented two bedroom house.

The case resulted in a court hearing where a Sheriff received the evidence, spoke to the tenants about their actions and made the ruling that they purposely falsified their circumstances to gain a higher level of priority for re-housing, and be housed before other applicants who did have a genuine housing need.

The Sheriff awarded decree for repossession which is a legal mechanism to enable a landlord to repossess the tenancy. Castlehill did repossess the tenancy.

The reason for providing this information is to raise awareness of tenancy fraud. It is not common, however it can and does happen. This example was providing false information to be allocated a tenancy. However tenancy fraud can happen during a tenancy also.

The Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement states that the property you are allocated must be your sole and principal home. The SSTA gives tenants the right to apply for permission to exchange, assign and sub-let. Castlehill has 28 days to consider your request, only once Castlehill has replied to your request should you take any further actions. For example, if you apply to do a mutual exchange you should not make any arrangements to move until you receive Castlehill's decision in writing.

Tenant Participation Conference 2016

Tenants and staff recently attended the biggest conference of its kind in Scotland, the TPAS Scotland Annual Conference 2016.

TPAS stands for Tenant Participation Advisory Service and TPAS Scotland is the national tenant and landlord participation advisory service for Scotland. They promote good practice in tenant participation throughout Scotland for both tenants and landlords.

The three day event was packed full of keynote and workshops sessions including:

Housing, Health and Social Care Integration – what does this mean for tenants

Should Scotland's Freedom of Information Act cover social landlords?

Understanding Value for Money – what's in it for tenants?

Digital Customer Communication in Social Housing

After a successful night at the National Good Practice Awards on Friday, and a full program of learning and sharing, a 1960s-themed night brought another award when tenant and committee member Paul King won Best Outfit prize for his Austin Powers-inspired costume!



(L-R) Paul King (tenant and committee member), STV weatherman Sean Batty, our Tenant Participation Officer Catherine Coutts & Larry Duncan (tenant)

Tenants' first Scrutiny Report

Castlehill are delighted to announce that our tenant Scrutiny Panel have completed their report on Sheltered Housing Voids and have presented their findings and recommendations to the Management Committee. The Scrutiny Panel independently review housing and housing related services

Scrutiny provides an ideal opportunity for tenants and the Association to work in partnership to improve our service and performance.

Castlehill's Management Committee is considering the panel's recommendations and will report back with how these will be implemented. The report will be available for tenants to read in early 2017. It will be on our website, or you can request a copy from our main office at 4 Carden Place, Aberdeen (01224 625822).

The Association recognises the hard work, time and commitment that our tenants have volunteered, and is looking forward to working with the Scrutiny Panel in the future. Thank you to those who were involved.

Try something new in 2017!

We have a culture of tenant involvement at Castlehill and would encourage more tenants to join the Scrutiny Panel. Recruitment and induction will take place in the first half of 2017 before a topic is decided upon.

If you would like to find out more about getting involved in scrutiny, please contact our Tenant Participation Officer, Catherine, on 01224 625822 or catherine.coutts@castlehillha.co.uk



Tenant Satisfaction Survey – tell us your views

In 2014, Castlehill sent out a survey to our tenants to find out what our tenants think we do well, and which areas we need to improve. We do these surveys every three years.

Our annual performance report refers in part to the results of our tenant satisfaction survey, so it is really important that we hear from you to get a clear understanding of what our tenants think, so that we know where to focus on.

The survey will cover different areas of service delivery and ask how satisfied you are with them.

The 2014 survey had a 48% return rate, but we would like to hear from even more tenants this year, so please look out for the survey being delivered to you in early 2017.



Tenant visit hailed a success

Castlehill tenants were involved in three days of learning, discussion and sharing ideas with a group of tenants from East Ayrshire.

NETRALT (North East Tenants, Residents and Landlords Together) tenants and staff worked together to plan a meaningful and fun event for our visitors and our local tenants.

The programme included a tour of new developments, the Community Safety Hub, C-Fine (Community Food Initiatives North East) and Aberdeen City Council's new £5.5 million homelessness accommodation unit and support facility. A conversation café provided the ideal forum to discuss allocations, ways to involve tenants in participation and the new build process. Tenants enjoyed afternoon tea with some great live music thanks to a Castlehill tenant, and a civic dinner at the Beach Ballroom.

Bruce from East Ayrshire Tenants and Residents Federation said,

"The whole event was exceptional, and our members were really pleased to find out all about the tenant participation and scrutiny work going on in and around the Granite City, the hospitality was second to none and we left rather reluctantly wishing we had a venue as fabulous as the Beach Ballroom in our own area."

We would like to thank everyone involved – tenants, staff, Aberdeen's Lord Provost and elected members who made this such a successful and memorable few days for us all."

Feedback was extremely positive and there is potential for North East tenants to visit the East Ayrshire tenants in the future.



North East tenants raise their glasses with Aberdeen's Lord Provost.

Be Prepared – Flooding



In Scotland, 1 in 22 homes are at risk from flooding. Roads, transport networks and community facilities such as schools and health centres can be affected.

To help prepare for flooding here are some simple steps you can take to protect your family and property:



1. Sign up to Floodline to get free advance notice of flooding in your area
2. Have a flood plan and flood kit ready, with dry clothes, a torch and fresh water
3. Know how to turn off your gas, electricity and water supplies
4. Keep a list of contact numbers handy, including the Floodline number
5. Ensure that your property has insurance that covers flood damage



To learn more about preparing for flooding, visit the Floodline website or you could ask someone to download leaflets for you.

Looking after drains to prevent blockages, leaks or floods

You may have seen Scottish Water's advert highlighting their "keep the water cycle running smoothly" campaign recently. Scottish Water's main concern is for their sewers, water treatment works and the environment as a whole, but please note their advice applies equally for the good of your own home's drainage system!

The main message is to avoid flushing the likes of wipes or fat down toilets or sinks. We had a recent incident where an entire basement in a block of flats was flooded with raw sewage after blocked drains backed up. This was caused by the main connection

to the sewer being chocked with baby wipes, which had been flushed down a toilet. This was very expensive to clear and clean, and the problem could so easily have been avoided.

Please note that blockages can occur from time to time even with responsible use. Sink, bath or shower wastes can become blocked or slow to drain. In these instances we would kindly ask that you try clearing the drains yourself firstly by using one of a variety of "sink un-blocker" products available at supermarkets.

If your own attempt proves unsuccessful then please call the Maintenance Department on telephone number 01224 628104.



Lower cost contents insurance for tenants

Are you aware that as a Castlehill tenant, you are eligible to sign up for lower-cost contents insurance designed specifically for Scottish social housing tenants?

Castlehill does not insure your furniture, belongings and other personal items within your home against theft, fire, vandalism, burst pipes and other household risks. It is highly recommended that you have your own contents insurance. Don't leave it too late.

Please contact the office on 01224 625822 if you would like to be sent information on two of these providers – Thistle Tenant Risks and Diamond/SFHA.

Need travel advice for attending health and social care appointments?



Talk to THInC
Helping you get to health and social care

Contact us:

01224 665568

travel@thinc-hub.org

In support of the Grampian Health and Transport Action Plan
www.thinc-hub.org



Please be aware that changing lightbulbs within your property is the responsibility of the tenant. Castlehill are not responsible for changing lightbulbs in properties.

You don't need a laptop or desktop computer to use House Exchange



The free House Exchange app allows users to access their matches from any smartphone or tablet!



For more information please visit
www.houseexchange.org.uk

Drug Dealing



Unfortunately a small number of tenants deal in drugs despite it being a breach of their tenancy agreement and against the law. Castlehill works with the Police, the Community Safety Partnership and other agencies to tackle the problem of drug dealing.

Housing Officers liaise with local Police and information from other tenants about drug dealing helps the Police assess the pattern of drug dealing in an area. The Police carry out targeted initiatives against known and suspected drug dealers and frequently raid the homes of tenants where drug dealing is suspected. The Police also advise local Housing staff about tenants convicted of drug dealing.

Tenants who illegally deal in drugs jeopardise their tenancy as the Association will raise repossession action to evict tenants convicted of dealing. In addition, any damage caused to a property (such as breaking down doors) as a result of a drugs raid will be recharged to the tenant if they are dealing in drugs.

Tenants who have been evicted because of dealing in drugs who reapply for housing will be considered to be intentionally homeless.

Christmas & New Year

office closure



The main office at 4 Carden Place, Aberdeen will close at 5pm on Friday 23rd December for the Christmas break. We will re-open at 9am on Wednesday 4th January 2017.

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 and ground source heating:
Heat Care Oil & Gas
01343 842042

For general 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.

The Committee and staff of Castlehill would like to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year for 2017.

January Direct Debits



If you pay your rent by direct debit, please note that your payment will come out of your bank account on 4th January, instead of the 1st of the month. This is due to the banks being closed on the 2nd and 3rd.

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

Contact us...

Castlehill Housing Association

4 Carden Place,
Aberdeen AB10 1UT

Tel: 01224 625822

Fax: 01224 625830

Website: www.castlehillha.co.uk

Email: info@castlehillha.co.uk

Office hours are:

Mon – Fri 9.00am – 5.00pm

Designed by Foyer Graphics



Win £50 of shopping vouchers

Q.1 What is the new name for our Tenants Panel?

.....

Q.2 What is the address of our new development in Inverurie?

.....

Q.3 When will our Tenant Satisfaction Survey be delivered to your home?

.....

Q.4 What is the name of our staff member who can help you with energy advice?

.....

Q.5 What type of meter will be replacing traditional gas/electric meters by 2020?

.....

Name:

Address:

Tel/Email

Return to: Catherine Coutts by **31st January 2017**

4 Carden Place, Aberdeen. AB10 1UT

Or email to: catherine.coutts@castlehillha.co.uk

The lucky winner from the Summer newsletter was a tenant from Stockethill Crescent in Aberdeen.

