



# Castlehill Housing Association

## Strategic Plan 2015-18



Approved by Management Committee 26.10.2015.

# Castlehill Housing Association

## Strategic Plan 2015-18

Contents	Page
Introduction	2
Association Objectives	2
Management Committee and Governance	2
Risk Mitigation Approach	3
Core values and culture	4
A personal service	4
Customer participation & communication	5
Our staff	5
Partnership working	6
Independence	6
Opportunities	7
Equalities & diversity	7
Key strategic issues	8
Financial issues	8
New housing development and procurement	8
Capacity to develop	12
Castlehill Solutions Ltd	13
Rural housing	13
Membership of “Our Power”	14
Asset management	15
Adaptations	16
Castlehill housing support services	17
Health & Social Care Integration	19
Scottish Social Housing Charter	19
Welfare reform mitigation & Impact on rent arrears	20
Contribution towards addressing homelessness	21
Homehunt NES – future development of service	22
Tenant participation and Scrutiny	23
Grampian Community Care Charitable Trust	24
Care and Repair Services	25
Factoring	26
Complaints	26
IT systems	26
Corporate Services	27
Offices	28

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to consider the Association's strategic direction for the next three years. Our approach to strategic planning is to look at this on a "rolling basis" reviewing the plan annually but continuing to focus on the next three year period.

Castlehill Housing Association has clear Core Objectives, detailed below, and this Strategic Plan underpins our approach to achieving these objectives over that period. This document also highlights a number of specific objectives we will strive to achieve in implementing our strategy and these aim to give over-arching goals that link into the delivery plans taken forward through Department Work-plans.

We recognise that external factors such as Government policy and legislation, funding and the wider economic climate all impact on our ability to deliver our objectives. We also recognise that the requirements of regulatory bodies such as the Scottish Housing Regulator, OSCR and the Care Inspectorate and the Strategic Planning role of Local Authorities help to determine the operating environment of the Association. Within that context, this document aims to express the direction the Association wishes to take and to define the activities we wish to be involved in.

### 1.1 - Association 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

This plan aims to provide over-arching direction but the ongoing implementation of our strategic approach relies on a number of other policies and plans:

- Financial Forecasts and Projections
- Department Work Plans
- Annual Risk Management Plan
- Internal Audit

The 2015-2018 plan rolls on from previous documents and also reflects outcomes and ideas arising from strategic planning events attended by the Association's Management Committee and Senior Staff.

### 1.2 - Management Committee and Governance.

The Association has had a strong Management Committee over the years, with members committed to the Association's objectives, and in particular the provision of quality housing and support work for more vulnerable members of the community. The Committee has also had a good range of expertise, which is essential as the work of associations becomes ever more complex.

The Association reviewed our Committee Procedures and Standing Orders in 2010 and we are content that our Committee structure remains fit for purpose. Our key operational sub-committees are: Housing Management, Development and Finance, along with Audit and Personnel sub-committees covering these specialist functions.

In 2015, Castlehill adopted the new model Codes of Conduct for Staff and for Governing Body members that have been published by the SFHA. From 2016, the Association will introduce a programme of annual review for Committee members to ensure that their contribution to the work of Castlehill is fully recognised and supported and to help inform training needs that will keep members up to date with all current governance issues and requirements.

Increasing tenant/customer involvement at Committee level has also been identified as a priority and it is hoped that work being done to encourage involvement via the tenant's panels will assist with this aim.

Historically, membership levels have remained fairly low and this is an area we will continue to try to address on an ongoing basis, particularly through encouraging tenants, sharing owners and other service users to consider becoming members of the Association. This approach has met with some success to date with a number of tenant panel members now joining the Association.

***Plan Objective 1 – We will ensure that we maintain the range of skills and perspectives on our Management Committee to promote continued good governance of the Association.***

### **1.3 Risk Mitigation Approach**

The Association recognises that risk management is central to good governance. Castlehill's approach to risk management aims to ensure a co-ordinated and proportionate response to risk across the organisation and we have a regularly reviewed risk register in place confirming the controls in place to mitigate each identified risk. The Association has generally taken a conservative approach to risk, giving a high priority to maintaining a sound financial position that protects the interests of our tenants and other customers. The Senior Management Team takes operational responsibility for risk management with responsibility for overseeing the risk management framework delegated to the Audit Sub-Committee by the Management Committee.

Our approach to risk management was considered by our Internal Auditors (Scott-Moncrieff) in November 2013 and no major weaknesses in controls were found. Some scope for improving how we document and format our approach was identified and we have now implemented improvements to this, including re-formatting the register incorporating "Red, Amber, Green" scales.

***Plan Objective 2 – We will continue to ensure that our risk management controls are always relevant and fit for purpose.***

## 2. Core Values and Culture

Castlehill Housing Association is a registered charitable organisation, established in 1970. The Association has a long, successful, track record in the provision of housing and associated support services. Our current housing stock includes general needs properties, amenity, sheltered and very sheltered housing. We operate across three Local Authority areas; Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray. Through our subsidiary, Grampian Community Care Charitable Trust (GCCCT), we provide specially designed housing for people with particular needs. The bulk of our stock is for affordable rent but we also have a number of shared ownership properties. As of 2015, we currently own and manage over 1900 properties and over 7000 households are registered with us seeking housing. In 2011, we established a non-registered, non-charitable subsidiary, "Castlehill Solutions", to enable us to carry out activities that are complementary to the core objectives of Castlehill but could not be done by the parent charitable Company.

In addition to our core activities as a registered social landlord, Castlehill also manages Aberdeen Care & Repair, undertaking a range of services for older and disabled people throughout the City.

### 2.1 - 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.

## 2.2 - Customer Participation and Communication

The Scottish Government's "Social Housing Charter" outcome on participation states:

Social landlords manage their business so that:

- tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

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.

The Charter also states that:

Social landlords manage their business so that:

- tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.

Castlehill employs a wide range of communication methods including our website, newsletters, meetings, tenant's handbook, service information brochures, tenant's panel, sheltered scheme meetings, annual charter report and tenant satisfaction surveys, for example.

## 2.3 - Our staff

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

We have around 150 staff in our offices and schemes. Approximately 60 staff are employed at our offices in Aberdeen and around 90 staff are based at our schemes across Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray.

Many of our staff work for us part-time or job-share and we operate 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



Staff on a sponsored walk raising funds for local charities

promote healthy and active lifestyles for staff through involvement in Grampian NHS “Healthy Working Lives” programme where we hold the highest level Gold Award.

#### **2.4 - 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. We work closely with local authority partners in areas such as strategy development and support service provision.

The Association views successful partnership working as key to delivering on issues such as the Government’s National Outcomes agenda.

North East Scotland has a successful track record of partnership working between local RSLs and Local Authorities on a variety of projects such as the Devanha procurement programme that delivered over 1300 new homes. Castlehill will continue to pursue opportunities to work with partners to deliver on our objectives.

#### **2.5 - 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. We have continued to promote an ethos of care and support in the work we do, taking business development opportunities based on our perceived strengths and areas of expertise. Examples of this include our Key Project, which has now been successfully providing a wide range of housing support for fifteen years and our successful bid to take on Grampian Community Care Charitable Trust within Castlehill. A crucial factor in the transfer of the Trust was our shared ethos and values.

Our Management Committee wishes to see Castlehill continue to build on past success and have a long future as a strong independent organisation.

- 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
- 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 have established a group structure with parent and subsidiary companies allowing us to undertake a range of activities contributing to our overall aims and objectives.
- We are financially viable, but also aware that we must continually take steps to control our unit management and maintenance costs, and thus demonstrate efficiency.
- 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. We see no conflict between retaining an independent organisation whilst working with partners to deliver on our objectives, as appropriate.

The sector in North East Scotland consists of a limited number of regional and national RSLs rather than a large number of smaller community based Associations and we view the retention of independent organisations as healthy situation enabling both customer choice and benchmarking to improve services.

## **2.6 - Opportunities**

The Association will continue to consider opportunities for providing new developments or services which are in accordance with our Core Values and Culture.

## **2.7 - 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, marriage or civil partnership 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.

Our approach to Equalities aims to ensure we can achieve the outcome stated in the Scottish Social Housing Charter:

Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that:

- Every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and other services.

***Plan Objective 3 – We will improve how we record and monitor our performance in relation to equalities issues.***



### 3. Key Strategic Issues

#### 3.1 - Financial Issues

The Association has in place robust financial processes – regularly reviewed by both external auditors (Anderson, Anderson & Brown) & internal auditors (Scott Moncrieff). Regular 5 and 30 year forecasts are produced, in line with the Scottish Housing Regulator’s annual requirement for submission of the forecasts .Assumptions for the preparation of the figures are based on general inflation at 3% & inflation for direct maintenance costs at 1% higher than general inflation.

RPI for the most recent 3 years indicates that 3% (& 4% for direct maintenance) is a reasonable assumption:

	RPI %
30 September 2015	0.8
30 September 2014	2.3
30 September 2013	3.2

Rent income increases included in forecasts are assumed to be 1% above general inflation. This is in line with assumptions used in relation to HAG and loan calculations for the new build housing that we have developed over a number of years.

#### 3.2 - New Housing Development and Procurement

Development of new build housing has been at the heart of Castlehill throughout its history. Since the construction of our first new build property at Fountville Court, Aberdeen in 1974, the Association has built up a substantial housing stock which in 2015 numbered over 1900 properties (inclusive of our GCCCT stock).



Abbey Court, Mintlaw. Very sheltered development built in 2011.

Our development strategy from the mid 1980s onwards had been based on steady growth with a target of around 50-70 units per year on average and this has served us well in term of managing financial risk and ensuring we maintain the resources and income we need to secure the long term management and maintenance of our property assets.

Between 2008-2011, our development activity took place through the Devanha joint procurement initiative, along with other local RSLs, using “open book” contracts. While there were challenges and difficulties to overcome in this new way of working, the Devanha programme was successful in delivering some 1383 new properties for rent or shared equity for the participating RSLs, representing a significant contribution to meeting identified housing needs. For Castlehill, Devanha resulted in 173 new properties for affordable rent (including a 23 unit Very Sheltered scheme) and 38 homes provided for the Governments New Supply Shared Equity (NSSE) scheme.

The continuation of our development and stock growth up to the conclusion of the Devanha programme was underpinned by Housing Association Grant (HAG) levels that enabled building for affordable rent using sustainable levels of private borrowing to top up the grant. Reductions in HAG benchmarks for RSLs from c.£65k per unit to c.£40k per unit in 2010-11 meant that the “traditional” model no longer worked to deliver affordable rent and there was, effectively, a “gap” that needed to be filled from other funding sources.

Our Management Committee gave careful consideration to the impact of these changes and to whether we should continue as a developing organisation. A clear strategic decision was made that we should indeed continue to pursue development opportunities and to work on models of delivery that could be implemented without putting at risk the sound financial position of the organisation.

Our commitment to taking forward new ways of working has already been demonstrated by establishing a non-registered, non-charitable subsidiary (Castlehill Solutions Limited – see below) to allow consideration of schemes with alternative tenure options such as Mid Market Rent (MMR). We were also successful in submitting a bid for funding through the Scottish Government’s Investment and Innovation Fund to take forward the development of a mixed scheme of 12 units of affordable rent together with 6 mid-market units at Port Elphinstone, Inverurie. To make this scheme happen with the £40k HAG benchmark that was in place at the time, however, required both significant investment from Castlehill’s own reserves and a further grant from Aberdeenshire Council. This is, therefore, not a model that Castlehill could sustain for the longer term.

In 2012, The Scottish Government targeted a national provision of 6000 new build units per annum for the next five years, of which 4000 were for social rent. The reinstatement of grant levels up to the benchmark of £58k for a three person equivalent property was a welcome move, but in the context of the housing and construction market of North East Scotland, particularly within the “Aberdeen Market” area, there remains a significant gap between the available level of grant from the Scottish Government and level of borrowing that can be sustained at genuinely affordable rents for new housing development. High costs and lack of available land together with higher construction costs in the local economy have meant that in order to complete our most recent developments with affordable rents we have had to rely on “top up” funding from our local authority partners to make the developments viable.

This approach of securing additional funding for new developments is currently being pursued for the following projects as required:

Mugiemoss Road Aberdeen due on site early 2016	Aberdeen City council Area  Application for additional funding pending	40 units 2 x 4 person houses for affordable rent 7 x 2 person flats for affordable rent 15 x 3 person flats for affordable rent 4 x 2 person flats for MMR 12 x 3 person flats for MMR
Maidencraig, Aberdeen – due on site early 2016	Aberdeen City Council Area  Application for additional funding approved	24 units (part of joint development with Grampian HA totalling 36 units): 8 x 4 person houses for affordable rent. 16 x 5 person houses for affordable rent.
Westgate South, Aberdeenshire – due on site early 2016	Aberdeenshire Council Area  Application for additional funding not required	38 units all for affordable rent (required under a section 75 agreement) 12 x 2 person flats. 8 x 3 person flats 2 x 2 person houses 2 x 4 person houses 10 x 5 person houses 4 x 6 person houses

At a local level, Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Council have produced a joint Housing Needs and Demand Assessment that demonstrates a clear shortfall in the supply of affordable housing and a growth in the level of net housing need in both housing market areas.

This has arisen from a range of factors. These include:

- The decline in the supply (lettings) of affordable lettings which has constrained the ability of social landlords to address housing need.
- The continuation of difficult housing market conditions which have increased the numbers of households seeking re-housing.
- The increase in house prices relative to earnings at the lower end of the earnings distribution curve which has ‘squeezed’ growing numbers of new households with low to modest earnings out of the market place.

There is a clear demand for affordable housing and a stated desire from Government to increase the supply. The current Scottish Government has given a commitment to build 50,000 affordable homes nationally in the lifetime of the next Parliament, subject to their re-election, with around 35,000 of these being for social rent. At the time of writing, the outcome of discussions on increasing current

grant benchmarks for new build is awaited and should this prove a positive outcome this may assist in increasing the viability of a number of potential developments in the North East. Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils are currently pursuing a bid for a “City/Region Deal” that could inject significant resources into the North East economy with housing and infrastructure projects playing a central role in making the business case.

Castlehill is committed to playing our part in meeting needs and the following will be key to taking this strategy forward:

- Continue to work with local authority partners in their strategic role in setting investment plans through the SHIP. Increasingly local authorities are keen to ensure that all development opportunities are realised and are taking a more strategic and proactive approach to their delivery. To this end Castlehill needs to be clear of its capacity to take on new development opportunities.
- Castlehill has land-bank sites including large sites at Balmedie and Mintlaw that Aberdeenshire Council is keen to see developed and is suitable for mixed tenure schemes and it is anticipated that these will be taken forward with both a private developer and the Local Authority.
- Work up plans with individual developers on “Section 75” sites in conjunction with local councils in their strategic and enabling role with a view to accessing alternative grant funding through sources such as second home council tax, or planning gain funds from local authorities.
- Continue to access “top up” funds while available but lobby for realistic capital grant levels in the North East market that allow delivery of genuinely affordable rented housing reducing long term reliance on revenue subsidies such as Housing Benefit for tenants.
- Along with our previous partners in Devanha, we recognise that working together on future development opportunities is key to finding a model that may deliver. There is a clear willingness amongst local RSLs to take this issue forward on a joint basis and build on the Devanha initiative, learning from past experience.
- A number of large scale “new town” type developments are planned for the area in the next few years and these will incorporate significant provision for affordable housing either on site or provided elsewhere with funding from commuted payments. We will work with other RSLs to find a way to deliver on such sites.
- Needs and Demand Assessment has also identified issues around an ageing population with Aberdeenshire predicting the highest proportion of population over retirement age in Scotland. Given our specialisation in housing older people, the Association would be ideally placed to consider specific provision for this client group, for example on these large scale new community sites.
- While we will aim to maximise the provision of housing for affordable social rent, we recognise the difficulties in developing this tenure alone. We will, therefore, consider mixed developments incorporating an element of MMR and also schemes without an element of social rent where suitable needs and sites are identified that make this the viable option.
- There are opportunities for RSLs to share development services to maximise efficiency and control costs. Castlehill has considerable staff experience in housing development and we aim to take opportunities to provide services to others.

- To monitor the requirements of housing for people with particular needs and the ability of Castlehill to develop these on behalf of GCCCT

### **3.3 - Capacity to Develop**

Historically, Castlehill has accessed funding on a scheme by scheme basis. This means that the association has nearly 75 loans outstanding as at 2015.

There are covenants associated with these loans. As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, all the covenants have been met.

Some issues regarding covenants & financial reporting exist – in particular the implementation of FRS 102 will mean the creation of a pension reserve for the contractual agreement to recover historic deficits on the final salary pension scheme (Castlehill is a member of The Pensions Trust SHPS scheme). This may impact on covenant calculations.

Aside from the FRS 102 issues, Castlehill has sufficient unencumbered stock (including some within its subsidiary, GCCCT) and has spare capacity to enable it to continue to develop, within the scale allowed for in our current financial forecasts. In the recent past, sourcing potential funding has become slightly easier. More banks are promoting the availability of long term money – i.e. 20 or 25 year loans compared to the 5 year loans of a couple of years ago. Recently, both Lloyds Bank & the Clydesdale Bank returned to the market. In addition, bond finance is also available. Rates are relatively cheap (base rate has been ½% since 5<sup>th</sup> March 2009), although arrangement fees are expensive compared to 5 years ago. It is acknowledged that this is just a snapshot & conditions are prone to change, but the position is more encouraging in terms of putting together a suitable funding package subject to grant availability.

We recognise the need to employ a more flexible and sophisticated software model for financial analysis of new build projects and sensitivity analysis. During the plan period we will purchase a suitable programme to take this forward.

***Plan Objective 4 - Our strategic aim is to facilitate an ongoing new build programme with ambition to deliver an average of up 50 to 70 units a year, working in partnership with Local Authorities, our RSL colleagues and housing developers to deliver this in a financially sustainable way. We acknowledge that in an ever changing and challenging funding environment every new development needs to be individually appraised to ensure we are increasing our asset base whilst not increasing our liabilities and risks. We will improve our approach to financial modelling of new development to ensure our assessment of capacity is robust at all times.***

### 3.4 - Castlehill Solutions Ltd



Castlehill Solutions Ltd (CSL), our non-charitable subsidiary, will play an important enabling role in delivering our overall strategic objectives. References to the role of Solutions are made at various relevant sections of this document.

With the establishment of CSL in 2011, the following core objectives for the company were agreed:

- To carry out activities that are complementary to and supportive of the core objectives of the parent company, Castlehill Housing Association Ltd.
- To provide high quality housing over a range of tenure options, including renting and housing for sale.
- To carry out trading activities that aim to support the charitable activities of Castlehill.

The Association recognised that continuing to grow the business based on our traditional structure would be increasingly difficult given funding restrictions and the need to find innovative approaches in the future. The strategic rationale behind establishing CSL is to give the organisation a structure that allows a more flexible approach to enable us to take up opportunities that may arise to continue to deliver on our core activities and objectives.

CSL now manages our first 10 Mid Market Rent properties at Port Elphinstone, Inverurie and Cattofield, Aberdeen. Additionally, CSL has taken on the Handyman Service for Aberdeen Care and Repair in order to build a plan to increase income generation and reduce reliance on core grant funding. During the plan period, The Association will fully assess the ability of the handyman service to deliver this objective and ask the CSL Board to detail their business plan for the forthcoming years.

***Plan Objective 5 – Castlehill will retain strategic control over CSL, its subsidiary, and monitor its role in relation to delivering the Associations aims.***

### 3.5 - Rural Housing

The Association has a long successful track record of providing housing in rural communities. We recognise the vital role affordable housing plays in community sustainment with knock-on effects to local schools, employment, businesses and amenities. Our most recent rural development, in 2012, consisted of 6 x 3-bedroom family houses for affordable rent in Braemar, representing the first new social housing in the village since the completion of our own sheltered housing in 1989. This family housing had an immediate impact in sustaining the viability of the local primary school.

Further provision of new affordable housing in rural areas is affected by all the issues outlined above and these are exacerbated by the issue of scale where larger developments are simply not possible or indeed needed. We recognise the impact a small scale development can make on a community and will continue to seek innovative solutions that could deliver in rural areas. Castlehill is a member of the Rural Housing Service and the SFHA Rural and Islands Housing Association Forum (RIHAF). We

will continue to work with partners to develop ideas and seek alternative funding streams that could make further rural developments viable.

We are acutely aware of the issues around “fuel poverty” in rural areas without access to mains gas and will continue to pursue innovative solutions, accessing available funding to install renewable technologies such as ground-source heating. During 2015-16 works will be carried out at three of our rural sheltered schemes at New Deer, Braemar and Ballater. Additionally, we will consider participation in community energy schemes, such as IREC in Inch, where this may benefit our tenants and enhance our housing stock.



Invercauld Gardens, Braemar October 2012.

***Plan Objective 6 – We will continue to work to provide appropriate housing options and services to rural communities.***

### **3.6 - Membership of “Our Power”**

Our Power is a new Industrial and Provident Society that has been set up with the aim of addressing market failure in the energy sector that has resulted in low income households paying more for their energy and receiving a poor service often resulting in fuel poverty. In 2013, an initial group of 8 Scottish social housing providers (not involving Castlehill) working with the Edinburgh based, Renewable Power Exchange identified the opportunity to create a licenced energy supply company targeted at tenants of social landlords and their communities. It is planned that Our Power will begin operating in a phased manner from 2016 onwards.

Our Power has been established as a membership organisation with a non-profit distributing mandate with membership open to RSLs, local authority landlords and community controlled organisations.

Castlehill’s Management Committee considered the Our Power business plan and its proposals and agreed that the Association should become a member. The Association formally joined Our Power in March 2015. The aims of Our Power are a good fit with Castlehill and in particular those that state:

- Address the market failure impacting on low income households with particular emphasis on tackling fuel poverty issues directly through price.

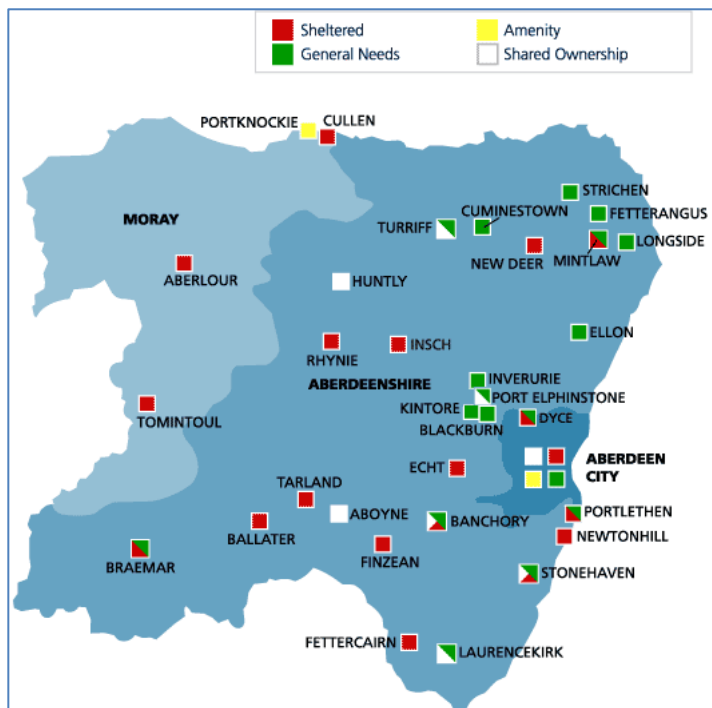
- Offer a simple, affordable, transparent and fair pricing structure that does not penalise low income customers regardless of location or payment method e.g. in areas where no “dual fuel” discount is available or those using pre-payment meters.
- Deliver a higher standard of customer focussed service than currently experienced in the sector.
- Promote efficient energy use through technology e.g. smart meters.

Castlehill’s financial risk is minimal with a membership fee of £1.00 per property and our initial commitment will involve switching of void properties to Our Power as the preferred supplier when a new tenancy commences. Individual tenants will retain their ability to switch to any other supplier should they choose. Castlehill will also raise awareness of Our Power to existing tenants who may wish to choose to switch.

Our Power is to be structured to ensure that members can influence its direction and have input to its Board in a way that does not happen with existing suppliers. This will ensure that we can promote the best interests of our tenants to enable them to access better services and a fair deal with regard to their home energy supply and dovetails well with our other initiatives addressing fuel poverty.

***Plan Objective 7– As a member of Our Power Castlehill will become involved in developing its business, switching void properties and promoting awareness of its services.***

### 3.7 - Asset Management



Location of Castlehill’s properties,

Castlehill produced a formal Asset Management Strategy in 2014.

The Association has always given a high priority to maintaining a high quality housing stock and ensuring it meets changing standards and expectations of our tenants. Maintaining and ensuring best use of our housing stock and other built assets is increasingly important as these assets get older, with a significant proportion of our stock built before 1990 and now, therefore, more than 20 years old.

The purpose of our Asset Management Strategy is to set out the framework for our approach to managing our property assets in order



that we achieve our aims and objectives both in the short and long term. It concentrates on the things that matter most to Castlehill and that allow us to make the best possible use of the assets we have.

Key aspects are:

- Property information – detailing our stock profile
- Legislative compliance – outlining specific statutory and safety obligations that ensure we minimise risks to tenants and the Association and maintain our buildings as safe and attractive places to live or work e.g. Fire Safety, Asbestos, Legionella, Gas and Electrical safety.
- Housing Standards and Energy Performance – SHQS Compliance, The Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH), technology and advice relating to energy use and performance.
- Asset Investment – Condition surveys and stock information, reactive repairs, planned and cyclical maintenance programmes, lifecycle costs and spend, adaptations, “estate” services.
- Renewable technology – targeted at “off gas” areas to access innovative solutions and funding streams to deliver efficient affordable solutions for our tenants
- Demand and Delivery – empty property and voids management, letting standards, housing demand, factoring service delivery.
- Challenges for Future Property Use – identifying challenging stock and specific issues and solutions, approach to meeting EESH requirements in period to 2020.

We will continue to report to appropriate Sub-Committees on aspects of asset management strategy delivery and have re-designated our staff Technical Liaison Group forum as the “Asset Management Group” to ensure we can focus on the common goal of delivering good asset management across all relevant departments of the Association. It is intended that the formal strategy will be reviewed in 5 years to coincide with implementation of EESH.

***Plan Objective 8– We will implement the key aspects of our asset Management Strategy to ensure we make best use of the assets we have.***

### 3.8 - Adaptations



**Adaptation completed by Castlehill.**

Over the years, many Castlehill tenants have benefited from “Stage 3” adaptations in their home, carried out following an Occupational Therapy assessment of their needs. These adaptations have been funded by the Scottish Government and Castlehill has generally secured a budget enabling us to meet all submitted requests. We recognise the difficulty of continuing to secure adequate budgets in a period of tight public spending but see funding adaptations as a “spend to save” approach avoiding costly options such as hospital admissions and bed blocking and the need for people to

move to other suitable accommodation that is already in short supply. This links into the Health and Social Care Integration issues detailed below and we will continue to lobby, and work in partnership with others, for a sustainable solution to maintain our ability to meet the needs of tenants requiring adaptations to their home.

### 3.9 - Castlehill Housing Support Services

Since the formation of Castlehill, one of our key objectives has been to provide appropriate care and support for vulnerable members of the community, particularly those housed in our properties. In parallel with our role as a housing developer and landlord, direct provision of housing support services has been a core business of the Association, dating back to the 1970s. The Association remains committed to directly providing tenancy support services.

Castlehill housing support services are delivered in 3 elements:

1 **Sheltered Housing** - we currently staff the housing support service in 20 of our 21 sheltered developments. (Our 4 Very Sheltered developments are staffed by other support providers, registered to provide a mix of housing support and care)

In 2010, and again in 2014, we reviewed our sheltered housing staffing following an extensive consultation process with tenants. As a result of this exercise, we no longer have “resident” scheme managers but rather operate two models of “non-resident” service provision. 10 schemes have a 7 day per week service and 10 of the smaller schemes are staffed on 5 days per week. Outside these hours emergency cover is provided via the Community Alarm service.

2 **Key Project** - our team of 4 part-time staff provide 60 hours of housing support per week to our tenants in Aberdeen City, and a further 26 hours in Aberdeenshire. A varied range of support tasks is undertaken, with the needs of the individual paramount, and with the overall aim of sustaining a successful tenancy.



Key Project

3 **Linksview Project** - we employ a Support Worker for 3 hours per week to work with Older Chinese People who are tenants in our Amenity scheme of 8 flats. Support is focussed on issues around language translation and access to services.

All 3 elements are registered with and inspected by the Care Inspectorate under the banner of “Castlehill Housing Support Services”. The services are primarily funded from local authority support budgets but with an element deemed “housing management” costs funded from rents. Our services have been inspected, to assess compliance with National Care Standards for Housing Support, by the Care Inspectorate and its predecessors on regular occasions and we have received consistently good reports rating services as either level 4 “good” or level 5 “very good”. The most recent “unannounced” inspection in 2015, confirmed this high level of performance.

Castlehill has built up a very good reputation as a support provider over many years and our future strategy should build on this. The Association’s strategic approach must ensure that we can deliver the organisation’s overall aims and objectives and, in order to do so, it is vital that we continue to

provide high quality, responsive support solutions, meeting the needs of current and future Castlehill customers as a core element of our business. To reach this outcome, we must be able to respond and adapt to the challenges presented both by funding issues and by the wider external environment within which we operate.

The main issues that have faced the Association for some time can be summarised as follows:

- High and increasing demand for housing support for vulnerable people e.g. continually increasing population over retirement age with longer life expectancy.
- Lack of coherent strategy from Local Authority departments responsible for commissioning of housing support services. This makes it particularly difficult to see where services are going in the longer term. Taking the example of sheltered housing, there are as many models of service delivery as there are service providers and to date there has been no move to “standardise” this.
- The need to put in place formal long term contracts with local authorities to give certainty and enable planning for service delivery.
- Funding - while the Association has been able to cope with funding deficits to date, often by reducing services, this is not sustainable in the longer term. This is exacerbated by the current financial climate for local authorities, which has made it impossible, so far, to get funding commitments beyond one year.

It is particularly difficult for the Association to control the direction and future strategy that we need to ensure a secure future as a support provider. The integration of local authority care services with health services being taken forward under the Public Bodies Joint Working (Scotland) Act, 2014 is likely to significantly impact on the services that are currently commissioned by local authorities including our housing support provision. (see 3.10 below). This presents both risks and opportunities for our services.

Our strategy in the near future will be to continue to work closely with local authority partners to put proper contracted services in place for a sufficient period to enable us to plan service delivery adequately and to ensure that these services are financially viable, sustainable and properly funded. We understand that this may in future fall within the remit of the integrated health and social care body and will continue to pursue these issues in this new context.

We must keep services under review to ensure that we can operate within the boundaries imposed by the external environment, that our services remain “fit for purpose” and that we can adapt our approach to meet any new opportunities that arise. Tenant/staff consultation and involvement must be at the heart of any review process but the outcomes must also ensure that the Association’s business needs, in terms of funding services, are met and take account of the overall affordability of living in a Castlehill property with appropriate support.

We recognise that quality of service is vital to maintain customer satisfaction and aim to maintain and, if possible, build on our current Care Inspectorate grades. Quality of staff, training and service user involvement remain key to delivering our objectives.

***Plan Objective 9 – We will continue to provide appropriate housing support services and to deliver support under sustainable models.***

### **3.10 – Health and Social Care Integration**

The Public Bodies Joint Working (Scotland) Act, 2014 aims to facilitate the integration of local authority and health services over a range of functions. A key aim of integration is to shift the balance of care to community settings and to ensure services and resources can be used more flexibly to better meet need, including through earlier intervention. The Act recognises the importance of people’s home to their health and wellbeing and the vital role housing organisations can play.

The two areas of Castlehill most likely to be impacted on by the changes are Housing Support services and Care & Repair. As budgets to provide these services will in future be integrated into new joint delivery Boards it is important that Castlehill ensures that the new Boards recognise the important role the Association plays in ensuring that tenants and home owners remain in their home for as long as possible whether through providing suitable or adapted housing or by providing practical or emotional support. There is overwhelming evidence that the types of services Castlehill provides make a major contribution towards avoiding the need for expensive long term hospital or residential care.

Castlehill is representing the locally based RSLs on the Strategic Planning Group for the health and Social Care Partnership across the three local areas but the position of both housing support services and Care & Repair in relation to the remit and, crucially, the funding streams of H&SCI have yet to be clarified.

***Plan Objective 10 – We will play our part in taking forward the Health and Social Care Integration agenda and promote the services we provide in the interests of our tenants and other who receive services from us.***

### **3.11- The Scottish Social Housing Charter**

Section 31 of the Housing (Scotland) Act, 2010 required that there be a Social Housing Charter setting out the standards and outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve when performing their housing activities. The Scottish Government’s published Charter came into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012.

The introduction of the Charter phased out the Annual Performance and Statistical Return (APSR) and replaced it with the Annual Report on the Charter (ARC). 2014 saw our first returns to the Scottish Housing Regulator under the Charter and the publication of our first “How are we doing?” performance report to tenants. The format for this report was developed in consultation with our Tenants Panel and incorporated feedback that we have used to revise how this document is presented from 2015 onwards.

During the 2015-18 period it is anticipated that there may be further changes and new guidance on some reporting aspects of the ARC as the system beds in and we will ensure that our integrated housing management system reporting continues to meet our information requirements.

***Plan Objective 11 – We will continue to review our approach to reporting Charter performance in line with the views of our tenants.***

### **3.12 - Welfare Reform Mitigation and Impact on Rent Arrears**

Castlehill has a long track record of successful rent collection performance and has maintained historically low levels of rent arrears.

In recent times and during the 2015-18 period, the UK Government's Welfare Reform agenda will have a significant impact on Castlehill tenants, particularly those of working age. As of 2015, there is considerable political uncertainty as to the ongoing impact of welfare reform and possible mitigation measures to be put in place by the Scottish Government that depend largely on how the proposals contained in the Smith Commission report are implemented, or otherwise. At the time of writing, we have to plan on the basis that Universal Credit incorporating the Housing Costs element will go ahead although this may still be changed or further delayed.

Restrictions on Housing Benefit eligibility based on numbers of bedrooms relative to household size and composition affects some household's ability to meet rent costs and has a knock on effect on household disposable income. We have been able to successfully mitigate the impact of this by a pro-active approach identifying affected households and maximising discretionary payments from housing benefit to address shortfalls. We have also amended our Allocations Policy to enable affected households, who may get into financial difficulty, to downsize should they wish to do so.

The introduction of Direct Payments and Universal Credit replacing existing benefits present a challenge to our income stream but we are confident that we have sufficient measures in place to protect our revenue. Approximately 23% of our tenants are on full housing benefit that is paid direct to the Association, but a substantial number of these households are not of working age and excluded from Universal Credit e.g. sheltered housing tenants. Approximately 37% of our tenants get part rent paid through housing benefit and are already, therefore, familiar with having to make their own rent payments to the Association for the balance. The "personal" approach referred to in our Core Values section above plays an important role in ensuring Housing Officers can identify tenants who may be vulnerable under the new arrangements and make sure they get any help and support they need to avoid rent arrears.

Our strategy for dealing with the potential impact of these reforms includes:

- Review our approach to rent collection and arrears in the light of these changes.
- Appointment of specialist Income Management Officer to concentrate on debt recovery and former tenancy debt.
- Review our Allocations Policy to account for the impact of these reforms.
- Action to identify tenants affected by welfare changes.

- Providing effective advice and assistance – Housing Management staff and Key Project support staff will work closely with specialist advice agencies such as the SMART project (which Castlehill jointly funds) to access appropriate services.
- Close liaison with local authority Housing Benefit staff.
- Ensure Castlehill tenants are fully aware of the implications of introducing Universal Credit and manage this process to protect our business objectives.
- Maximise the information available to tenants via our newsletters.
- Our provision for bad debts within our financial forecasts has been adjusted upwards to allow for some impact of the welfare changes (from c.£60,000 to £100,000) although we aim to minimise the impact on rent arrears levels through the strategies outlined above. It is our target to hold the amount of bad debt at existing levels, but for financial prudence an additional reserve has been considered and allowed.

***Plan Objective 12 – Will monitor the measures in place to protect our income in light of Welfare changes and ensure we have adequate and well targeted resources in place to keep rent arrears under control.***

### **3.13 - Contribution towards addressing Homelessness**

Castlehill is a major social landlord within the North East and, as such, has a significant role in housing homeless people and families and in assisting local authority partners to meet legislative targets with regard to homelessness. Under current legislation, local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure all unintentionally homeless people will be eligible for a permanent home.

Our strategy to assist in achieving this aim has the following elements:

- Development of new build housing stock to expand the supply of available housing. This involves close work with local authorities at a strategic level, to ensure stock built is of the correct size and in the right locations as identified in their Local Housing Strategy.
- Specific nomination agreements with local authorities for first lettings in new build schemes.
- The Association’s Allocations Policy is configured to ensure that “reasonable preference”, as defined in current legislation, is given to homeless applicants. Under our Homehunt Choice Based Lettings system, a gold priority pass is awarded to any applicant who has been assessed by the local authority as “statutory homeless”.
- Maintain appropriate allocations protocol agreements with local authorities to allow effective operation of Choice Based Lettings (CBL) in meeting agreed homelessness targets.
- Notwithstanding the above comments, the Association has a statutory duty to comply with a request by the local authority to house a homeless household under Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act, 2001 and will do so in situations where the operation of the CBL protocol is not appropriate. An example of this would be in Moray, where no protocol exists, as we have no general needs stock. Any Section 5 referral that can be accommodated within our stock of sheltered or amenity housing would then be the most appropriate way to assist the Council in housing a homeless person.

- Make available to local authorities housing stock for use as temporary homeless available.
- Continue to be a partner in appropriate local authority groups responsible for development of Homelessness Strategy in their area *i.e.* Homelessness Operational Group in Aberdeen City and Homelessness Strategy Group in Aberdeenshire.
- Provision of appropriate housing support to previously homeless people accommodated by the Association. In addition to support from housing staff, this is particularly delivered through the Key Project which continues to assist vulnerable people who may otherwise be at risk of repeat homelessness through loss of their tenancy.
- We recognise that furnished accommodation has enabled many households to set up and sustain a tenancy that otherwise may have failed and, in doing so, makes a significant contribution to the prevention of homelessness agenda. We will work in partnership with NESCU (Credit Union) and local RSLs to operate a sustainable project providing furniture packages.
- Formal referral arrangements from organisations supporting vulnerable people may be considered to enable the Association to directly house people who otherwise would have to negotiate the route of statutory homelessness and likely temporary accommodation.
- The Association's policies on Debt Recovery and Anti Social Behaviour are designed to support the aim of sustaining tenancies and supporting tenants and ensure that eviction action that leads to homelessness is very much viewed as a last resort.
- Front line staff are trained to Homepoint standards, to ensure appropriate advice and information in relation to homelessness can be given.

***Plan Objective 13 – We will continue to play an active role in addressing homelessness through direct provision of housing, tenancy sustainment work and involvement in local strategic groups.***

### **3.14 - Homehunt NES - Future development of service**

In allocating tenancies with Castlehill, the Association uses a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) approach. To deliver CBL, we make use of the Homehunt system through our partnership with Tenants First (Sanctuary HA), in HomehuntNES (North East Scotland). From 2016, Grampian Housing Association will become the third partner in Homehunt NES.

Strategy for future use and development of our approach is as follows:

- Promotion of Homehunt nationally as a recognised Common Housing Register, in line with the Scottish Government's agenda on this issue.
- Full involvement in the Homehunt users group.
- Further develop HomehuntWEB to allow for applicant management of applications and priority passes online.

- Ensuring that, in addition to web development, all applicants can access Homehunt, whether or not they have use of a computer.
- Promotion of particular initiatives to ensure disadvantaged groups can easily use the Homehunt system e.g. action on language or translation issues.
- Positive promotion of HomehuntNES to other RSLs who wish to use a CBL approach.
- Where working in partnership with other RSLs and Local Authorities in further development of Common Housing Registers for their area, ensuring that this is compatible with Homehunt NES, to deliver our allocations policy. e.g. Apply4Homes, in Aberdeenshire/ Moray.

### **3.15 - Tenant Participation and Scrutiny**

Participation remains a core value and we will ensure that we can meet the Participation outcome detailed in the Scottish Social Housing Charter, as introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act, 2010. Key areas are:

- The Association will ensure that we have a formal strategy in place meeting the statutory requirements first introduced in 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.
- Tenant Participation Strategy – we reviewed our Strategy in 2012 with assistance from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS).
- We have established a “Tenant’s Panel” that :
  - Gives tenants a say in issues affecting their housing
  - Helps us look at improvements to the services customers receive
  - Can be consulted on changes to service provision
  - Can have a say on new policies/procedures being introduced
  - Be involved in assessing our performance
  - We are proud of the work and achievements of those involved in the Panel to date that include developing a new “letting standard” for voids, assessing policy on dealing with anti-social behaviour, revamping our Tenants Handbook and designing the content and format of our ARC report to tenants.
  - From 2015, we have engaged TIS (Tenant Information Service) to provide training on formal “Scrutiny” for tenants and staff. On completion, a programme of scrutiny of various aspects of the Associations operations and services will be undertaken with a view to driving service improvements and providing input to the decision making processes of our Management Committee.
- We positively promote 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 tenant’s survey at least every 3 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. A full Tenants Satisfaction Survey was most recently undertaken in 2014.
- We will 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.
- We will continue to work with all other social landlords and tenant groups in Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray through NETRALT (North East Tenants Residents and Landlords Together) and aim to further increase tenant involvement in this group.

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.

***Plan Objective 14 – We will further build on the work to date in encouraging active and meaningful participation by tenants in a way that suits their needs.***

### **3.16- Grampian Community Care Charitable Trust (GCCCT)**

GCCCT became a wholly owned subsidiary of Castlehill in 2011.

The Trust was established in 1996 in response to the increasing demand for adapted accommodation for disabled people. Since then it has provided housing solutions in over 30 locations throughout the North East for over 150 people with physical disabilities, sensory disabilities, autistic spectrum disorder and challenging behaviour.



In making the decision to transfer the Trust to Castlehill it was felt that the organisations were a “good fit” with similar objectives and a shared commitment to housing vulnerable people and ensuring their support needs are met. GCCCT is not a direct provider of support but works with a variety of support agencies commissioned by the local authority to provide the service.

Operationally, GCCCT is overseen by its own Board within the group structure but overall strategic direction for the trust lies with Castlehill as the parent organisation. During 2015, Castlehill commissioned a consultant to carry out an options appraisal on the future of GCCCT and how it sits within our group structure. During the 2015-18 period, we will consider the outcome of this exercise and look to implement the recommendations in the report to ensure that the Trust can continue to deliver a high quality service for its clients and partners.

***Plan Objective 15 – We will consider and implement the recommendations of the options appraisal for future operation of GCCCT.***

### **3.17 - Care and Repair Services**

Castlehill has managed Care and Repair services in Aberdeen City for over 20 twenty years and remains committed to the core values that these services represent, allowing vulnerable people to remain safe and secure in their own homes.



The service in Aberdeen offers advice and assistance with repairs and improvements but has a significant direct labour force who carry out small repairs for clients. This service also runs income maximisation and Affordable warmth projects and an adaptation service. This service is funded from a variety of sources, including income generated from charging and Aberdeen City

Council, its largest funder. The ongoing support for the service from a variety of sources and its role in delivering the Council's scheme of assistance emphasise the importance of its continuity but the increasing complexity in funding the various elements make this a particularly challenging time.

Our strategy for sustaining, and further developing, Care & Repair services is to work closely with our local authority partners to maximise funding and ensure we can deliver on their strategic priorities. We recognise the difficulties relating to local authority funding and will continue to take forward the development of income generating works through our subsidiary company, Castlehill Solutions Ltd, with the goal of reducing reliance on Council funding to sustain services. We recognise, however, that core funding from the Council has remained static while costs of running the service have increased and that this is not a sustainable situation in the longer term. During the plan period we will negotiate with the Council on the terms of extending the current contract and service level agreement to achieve a workable funding settlement.

Care & Repair has a proven track record of securing funding from a wide variety of sources e.g. Change Fund and of operating a flexible approach to service provision. In addition to securing the core Care and Repair functions and services we will continue to explore and take advantage of opportunities to provide new or additional services that meet the needs of our clients.

***Plan Objective 16 – Care & Repair services remain a core activity for Castlehill and we will work to ensure stable sources of funding are in place to secure future operation.***

### **3.18 - Factoring**

The Property Factors (Scotland) Act, 2011 introduced a Property Factor Code of Conduct applicable from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2012.

***Plan Objective 17 -During the lifetime of this Plan, the Association will maintain compliance with the Code in relation to our management of Shared Ownership properties and any other owner occupied dwellings where the Association is appointed as Factor.***

### **3.19 - Complaints**

From October 2012, the Association adopted the Model Complaints Handling Procedure published by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). Castlehill recognises that complaints give us valuable information that we can use to improve customer service. The complaints procedure allows us to formally address customer dissatisfaction and may help prevent similar problems arising in the future. Customer complaints give a useful first-hand account of the service user's views and experience and can highlight problems we may otherwise miss.

Our strategy aims to get things right first time or, where things have gone wrong, resolve complaints at the earliest possible stage. In accordance with the SPSO model, all complaints will be recorded and monitored and we will ensure that customers are aware of their right to complain and how to access the procedure.

### **3.20 - IT Systems**

- **Infrastructure**

We currently have a contract with Dynamic Edge Ltd to provide our IT support and maintain our infrastructure.

Our IT system is now working on an advanced platform and there are no large upgrades or changes expected in the near future. We are currently operating Office 365 and all users will over time, be upgraded to Office 2010 which provides better functionality for Outlook, Word and Excel.

Office 365 also delivers SharePoint which the Association will develop as a shared document repository and a document based communication tool that will improve efficiency and communication for remote workers.

- **Integrated Housing Management System**

The Association operates with Aareon QL Housing as our management system.

All critical packages to allow the Association to complete its finance, rents, repairs, planned maintenance and housing management responsibilities are in place, however, these packages will be

improved and refined. This will involve developing complementary packages which have been purchased but as yet, not implemented.

We will further develop the reporting capabilities of the system and of staff with specific regard to any changing requirements of the Annual Report against Charter (ARC).

- **Mobile Technology**

The Association will continue to develop its capacity for mobile working with front line staff having access to packages which relate to their specific role or to have general access into the CHA network. As well as improved communication by emails when out of the office, staff have full access to QL, house files and policy documents as well as internet access to assist tenants to complete online forms for rehousing and benefits. Better communication while out of the office, reduction in travelling time and less reliance on office admin are proving efficiencies and benefits to the staff and to the Association.

- **Electronic Document Storage**

The Association will continue to develop its capacity for Electronic Document Management. Currently finance, housing management, Homehunt and scheme health and safety files are all available electronically. This provides significant savings as documents do not need to be filed, we use less paper and printing facilities and documents are available to all staff regardless of location. This is especially useful in both arrears management, allocations and anti-social behaviour cases as staff can view correspondence and reports remotely while with tenants and applicants.

All our development drawings have also been stored electronically with the advantage that drawings can be easily viewed or sent.

***Plan Objective 18 – We will ensure our IT systems and infrastructure remain fit for purpose and take advantage of technology to improve efficiency and services for tenants.***

### **3.21 - Corporate Services**

The main function of Corporate Services is to provide a comprehensive administrative support service to the organisation as a whole, including servicing of our Management Committee and associated sub-committees. Within the period of this plan, the Association recognises the potential impact of changes in areas such as pension provision and will take appropriate steps to mitigate and control the impact of these changes.

- **Pensions**

Due to changes in financial reporting with FRS 102, the Association will take the necessary steps to provide for a past deficit contribution in respect of its defined benefit scheme, the Pensions Trust SHPS scheme.

The Association has expressed its desire to retain the 60ths defined benefit scheme, as it is attractive to recruiting staff, particularly in a competitive jobs market such as Aberdeen where salary levels are generally inflated due to the impact of the oil industry. However, we will review the most appropriate benefit structure & adjust if necessary. This may involve considering options of closing the scheme to new entrants, or changing the benefits structure to 70ths or 80ths.

The Association will obtain professional advice where necessary from the Pensions Trust and auditors/accountants.

Auto-enrolment for pensions was implemented at Castlehill from May 2014 and we have set up a defined contributions scheme as the “default” to enrol new staff. We have suitable systems in place to ensure that we continue to meet our auto-enrolment obligations and that staff are aware of their options with regard to pensions.

- **Human Resources**

The Association recognises the benefits of having a motivated and appropriately trained workforce. We will continue to offer a range of vocational, health and safety and career training opportunities. Priority will be given to Scheme based staff to obtain Vocational Qualifications to meet requirements of SSSC (Scottish Social Services Council) registration.

During the plan period we will further develop the HR database on our QL system. Castlehill is proud to have achieved the NHS Grampian Healthy Working Lives Gold Award and we recognise the benefits to both staff and the Association of promoting such initiatives. We aim to maintain our Gold status throughout the 2015-2018 period.

***Plan Objective 19 – We will ensure that our Corporate Services systems and HR functions continue to meet our need and that we ensure compliance with our obligations as an employer.***

### **3.22 - Offices**

The Association owns office accommodation at 4 Carden Place and 7/11 Waverley Place, Aberdeen. Carden Place comprises of a mix of open plan and individual offices, meeting room, staff room and kitchen, and public reception area with interview room. Public areas have ramp access and disabled toilet facilities. The Carden Place office was substantially extended in 1996 with a view to continuing to meet the long term needs of the Association.



**Head office, 4 Carden Place**

Waverley Place consists of 4 self contained offices. Aberdeen Care and Repair occupy the ground floor unit at 11 Waverley Place. Our Development department occupy the first floor at No 11. Waverley Place has two meeting rooms and a staff room/kitchen. The Care and Repair office has level access for the public and the first floor office is served by a stair-

lift. The whole of number 7 is currently leased to our IT support provider Dynamic Edge Ltd. Car parking is available at both office locations.

7/11 Waverley Place is less than 200 yards from Carden Place, and working with these 2 bases has been satisfactory.

During 2015, the Associations Management Committee considered a proposal to sell 7 Waverley Place but decided to retain this to keep options open for future expansion without any need to relocate. The long-term office requirements will be kept under review, and may be influenced by improvements in technology and the potential for increased remote working. It is anticipated that operating with 2 bases at Carden Place and Waverley Place will be satisfactory for the 2015-2018 period.

The Association also has office premises in Ellon, in the form of a converted flat in one of our housing developments. This was the base of Aberdeenshire Care & Repair until its transfer from Castlehill to Aberdeenshire Council during 2015. It is intended to continue to let out this property as office accommodation, ideally to a community benefit organisation, but its longer term use and possible conversion to housing will be considered during the plan period.