



KEY PROJECT

Housing Support Service



Annual Report

April 2015- March 2016

4 Carden Place
Aberdeen
AB10 1UT
Tel: 01224 625822
Fax: 01224 625830
www.castlehillha.co.uk

Key Project, Castlehill Housing Association

Annual Report

April 2015-March 2016

Background

Castlehill Housing Association's Key Project is a housing support service offering direct support to a number of Castlehill tenants in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire, underpinned by a flexible approach to meeting individual needs. Housing Support from the Key Project aims to assist tenants to sustain a successful tenancy and 'to keep the key'.

The Key Project was established in April 2001 and was originally financed through the National Lottery Community Fund. Since 2003, the Key Project has been partly funded by Aberdeen City Council for 60 hours per week and from August 2005, Aberdeenshire Council had partly funded 18 hours per week. In March 2014, Aberdeenshire Council agreed to fund a further 14 hours per week to assist Aberdeenshire to meet its new statutory requirements in respect of homelessness. This additional funding from Aberdeenshire Council continued in financial year 2015/16 but ended 31/3/16. Additional funding for Key Project is met by Castlehill Housing Association itself.

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

Castlehill Housing Association has a housing stock of 747 general needs and amenity tenancies in Aberdeen City and 349 general needs tenancies in Aberdeenshire. There are 229 Sheltered and very sheltered tenancies in the City and 250 in Aberdeenshire.

In the main, Key Project housing support is offered to general needs and amenity tenants but increasingly, especially where tenants have no family support, Key Project offers support in sheltered/very sheltered accommodation. This reflects the allocation of sheltered housing to a wider range of age and housing support need.

Over the last 15 years the Key Project has provided housing support in 453 Castlehill tenancies.

Staffing

The project employs 4 part time members of staff, 3 Housing Support workers and 1 Housing Support Officer.

The stability of staff has enabled the establishment of an extensive pool of resources and wide partnership working, leading to effective housing support service for tenants.

All staff use Guardian 24, a personal safety telephone link, when lone working. We are also now using mobile tablets. This means that we can complete the increasing number of online applications when we are with tenants.

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

- Sequestration
- Supporting Vulnerable Adults
- Mediation
- Universal Credit
- Civil Legal Assistance
- Gas Voids
- Dementia Awareness
- First Aid

In March 2016, our newest member of staff completed Personal Development Award in Housing Law Advice, Level 7. This training meets the Housing Information and Advice Standards and was delivered by Shelter Scotland.

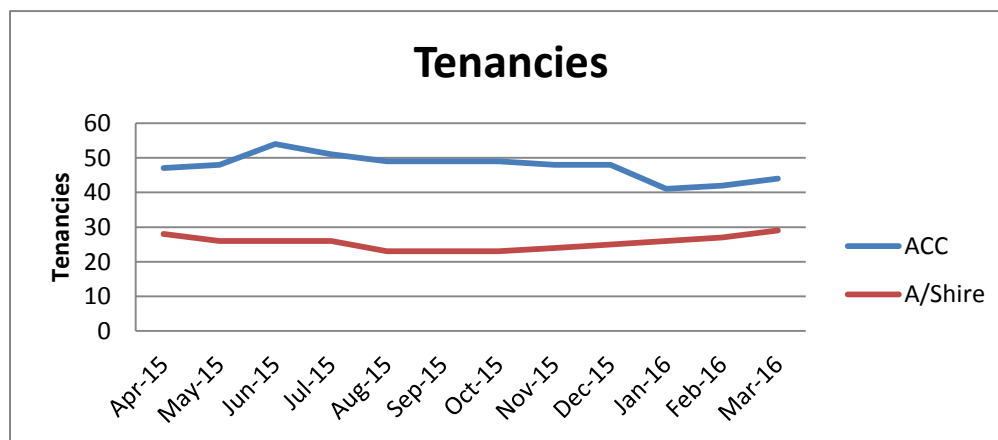
Activity Levels 1st April 2015 -31st March 2016
Tenancies receiving Key Project housing support

	At 31 st March 2015	At 31 st March 2016
ACC	42	44
Aberdeenshire	29	29
Total	71	73

Monthly totals of tenancies supported

	April 15	May 15	June 15	Jul 15	Aug 15	Sept 15
ACC	47	48	54	51	49	49
Shire	28	26	26	26	23	23
Total	75	74	80	77	72	72

	Oct 15	Nov 15	Dec 15	Jan 16	Feb 16	Mar 16
ACC	49	48	48	41	42	44
Shire	23	24	25	26	27	29
Total	72	72	73	67	69	73



The Key Project continues to operate at full capacity in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire.

For Aberdeen City we have an agreed capacity of 45 plus or minus 5 tenancies, dependent on need. The updated contract with Aberdeenshire effective from October 2014 is for housing support in a minimum of 25 tenancies.

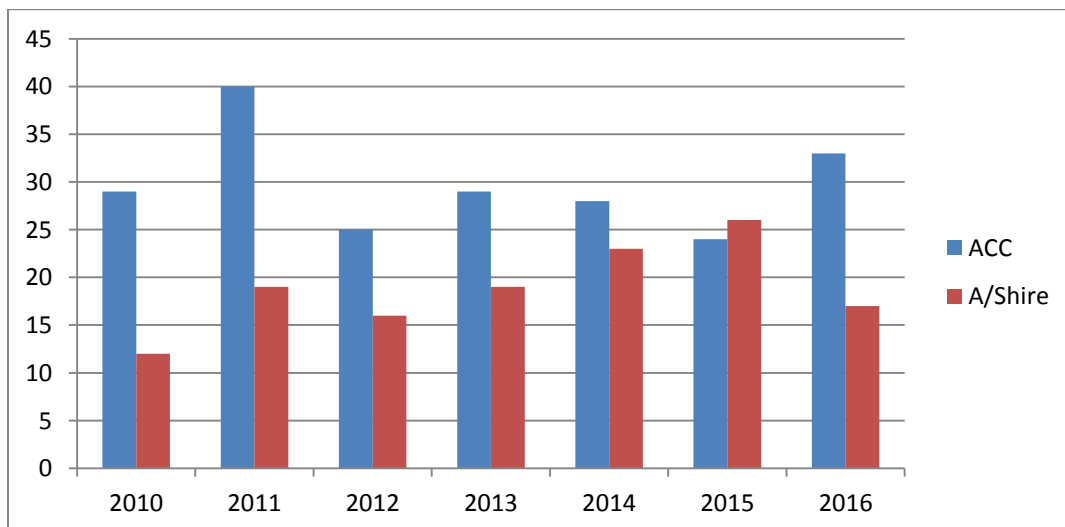
Although the number of tenancies supported is one indicator of demand, the complexities of the needs of individual tenants are not reflected in numbers alone. Some tenants require more input than others, for example, at the beginning of a tenancy, or as their circumstances change during a tenancy, or when they move house.

New Referrals

There were **50** referrals during the 12 month period, **33** in Aberdeen City and **17** in Aberdeenshire. **4** referrals were unassessed at 31/3/15, **2** referrals were unassessed at 31/3/16.

	ACC	Aberdeenshire	Total
Assessed as having housing support need and receiving service	30	13	43
Not requiring/ wishing service or no contact	2	3	5
Significant support from other agencies	0	0	0
Very short term	3	1	4
Support on hold	0	0	0
Yet to be assessed @ 31/3/16	1	1	2
Total	36	18	54

The numbers of referrals in the different local authority areas can fluctuate. One variable is when a new housing development is released for allocation. The chart below reflects these fluctuations. For example, in the year 2010/11 there was a new housing development at Rona Place/ Arran Avenue, Aberdeen City then in 2013/14 there was a new development at Ladeside Port Elphinstone, Aberdeenshire. The number of local authority homeless nominations can be a factor in the number of referrals for housing support.



Ending the Service

Housing support ended in **39** tenancies, **27** in Aberdeen City and **12** in Aberdeenshire.

Reasons for ending

	ACC	Aberdeenshire	Total
No longer requiring support	17	7	24
No longer wishing support	1	0	1
Moved to residential/sheltered	1	1	2
Deceased	5	0	5
Planned tenancy ending	1	2	3
Abandonment	0	0	0
Other agencies	1	0	1
Contact lost	1	2	3
Total	27	12	39

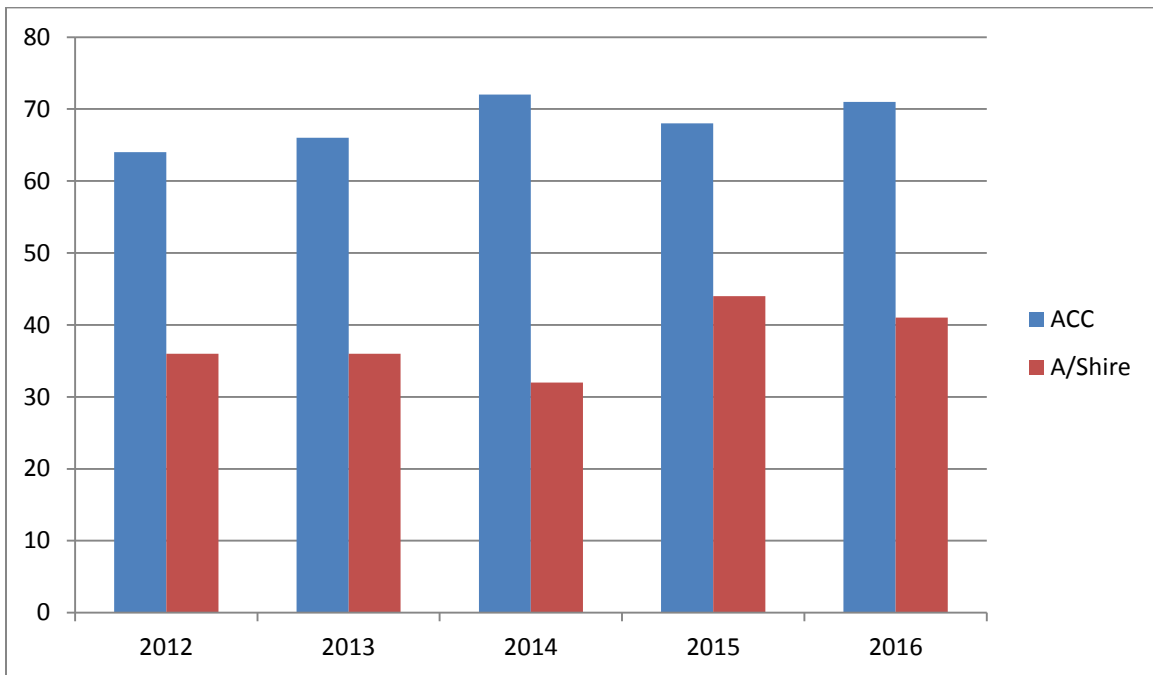
Almost 77% of the reasons for ending housing support were because the tenant no longer required housing support or had moved to accommodation more appropriate to their needs. A further 12% of tenants had passed away during the year, reflecting multiple health problems of tenants receiving housing support. This leaves a balance of around 10% where either contact with the tenant was lost or the tenant no longer wished housing support.

Number of tenancies supported 1/04/15 – 31/03/16

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

112 Castlehill Housing Association tenancies
71 within Aberdeen City and **41** in Aberdeenshire.

No of tenancies supported	@ 31/3/16	Ended during year	Total no of tenancies	Total no of tenants supported during year
ACC	44	27	71	71
Shire	29	12	41	41
Total	73	39	112	112



The impact of the increased funding from Aberdeenshire is clearly seen in the number of tenancies support in Aberdeenshire in the last 2 years

Gender		@31/3/16	Ended	Total
Male	ACC	21	8	29
	Shire	12	4	16
Female	ACC	23	19	42
	Shire	17	8	25
Total		73	39	112

Age		@31/3/16	Ended	Total
Under 18	ACC	0	0	0
	Shire	1	0	1
18-25	ACC	2	4	6
	Shire	3	1	4
26-59	ACC	34	14	48
	Shire	17	9	26
60-70	ACC	6	4	10
	Shire	8	0	8
70+	ACC	2	5	7
	Shire	0	2	2
Total		73	39	112

Ethnicity		@31/3/15	Ended	Total
White	ACC	41	26	67
	Shire	29	11	40
Asian	ACC	1	0	1
	Shire	0	1	1
Other	ACC	2	1	3
	Shire	0	0	0
Total		73	39	112

Category of Need *	At 31/3/16	Ended	Total	Total
Physical Illness				
ACC	16	4	20	29
Shire	5	4	9	
Mental health				
ACC	14	6	20	30
Shire	9	1	10	
Learning disability				
ACC	4	1	5	5
Shire	0	0	0	
Alcohol related problems				
ACC	1	1	2	6
Shire	4	0	4	
Drug related problems				
ACC	2	0	2	3
Shire	0	1	1	
Young with housing support need				
ACC	1	2	3	5
Shire	2	0	2	
Older with housing support need				
ACC	2	6	8	12
Shire	2	2	4	
Women fleeing violence				
ACC	2	2	4	5
Shire	1	0	1	
Harassment/ Psychological Trauma				
ACC	0	0	0	1
Shire	1	0	1	
Offender/Ex Prisoner				
ACC	0	0	0	0
Shire	0	0	0	
Prev.Homeless				
ACC	1	3	4	7
Shire	1	2	3	
Ex travelling people				
ACC	0	0	0	1
Shire	1	0	1	
Other vulnerability				
ACC	1	2	4	9
Shire	3	2	5	
Total	73	39	112	112

**Self assessment on first contact. Other needs can become apparent during contact with the tenant.*

In the main, the above statistics reveal similar trends as in previous years. Tenants with physical and/or mental health needs account for over 50% of those being supported and the next largest group is older people with a housing support need. However, there is a wide range of other housing support needs, albeit in smaller numbers.

Homelessness and Tenancy Sustainment

Previously homeless	@31/3/16	Ended	Total
ACC	11	7	18
Shire	12	5	17
Total	23	12	35

Strategically, the work of the Key Project links with both homelessness and vulnerability. This is important, as having a tenancy in itself may not be enough. The factors which led to homelessness may still exist and these vulnerabilities may still pose a risk to sustaining the tenancy.

Likewise, existing tenants whose circumstances change, may also find that there are risks to their tenancies.

All tenants who were receiving housing support from the Key Project remained in their tenancies or had moved out in a planned way either to another landlord or to sheltered/residential care.

In 2015/16 Castlehill Housing Association allocated 95 general needs properties in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. Overall tenancy sustainment for 2014/15 was 89%. A further 53 sheltered properties were allocated and 44 very sheltered

Key Project housing support contributes to this overall Castlehill position.

The nature of housing support within the Key Project

It can be quite difficult to describe what we actually do in the Key Project, as there is often no set pattern.

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

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

Housing support work has continued to be wide ranging and varied as described in previous annual reports and the input from Key Project staff has continued to be extensive, creative and at times doggedly persistent. Along with 'successes', however, we recognise the inevitable 'failures'. Sometimes tenants' needs are greater than our housing support can resolve or perhaps the timing isn't quite right for the tenant in terms of accepting housing support.

Some new areas of housing support

Welfare Reform

Over the past 12 months, there has been an increase in requests from tenants for assistance to complete Employment and Support Allowance(ESA50) review forms. These are lengthy, complex forms which are time consuming to complete. They are also time limited and if not completed then benefit is stopped.

Those now receiving Personal Independence Payments(PIP) are also being reviewed within 1 year of the award so again these are lengthy forms, time limited and have the sanction that the benefit will cease if form not completed.

Increasingly we are finding that a greater number of ESA and PIP claims are initially being refused. Key Project staff assist with requests for mandatory reconsideration but generally pass on to another agency if the matter is unresolved at that point and the tenant wishes to appeal.

Sheltered Housing

We are continuing to see an increase in demand for Key Project housing support for tenants who are living in sheltered housing. However not all of these tenants are older people as sheltered housing is considered to be the most appropriate housing option for a range of housing need, for example those with mental health problems, learning disabilities, physical disabilities. No longer are the Benefits claimed simply State Pension or Pension Credit but, income can be from employment or any other State Benefit.

As daily life becomes more digitalised, this leads to communication difficulties for those who are not computer literate. Tenants in sheltered housing may be more disadvantaged in this respect. Overall the housing support needs are the same in sheltered as in general needs properties, mostly dealing with benefits / official paperwork, financial problems etc

EEA Nationals

Key Project staff have seen an increase in the number of EEA national tenants with a housing support need. Language problems can make communication difficult but we have become adept at Google Translate conversations. We have learned about new resources – for example in Aberdeen City, that the Bethany Trust offers English Language classes, that Homestart has a Polish volunteer, etc. Right to reside can also be a challenging issue and for staff in the Key Project, this is very much a learning situation.

Foodbanks

Key Project is a registered partner organisation with the Trussell Trust foodbanks in Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire North and Aberdeenshire South. Key Project staff have issued food vouchers for these centres. Key Project staff have also assisted tenants to access food parcels at Somebody Cares and Instant Neighbour.

Warm Homes Discount

Again last winter, Key Project staff have assisted tenants, who are on qualifying benefits or low income, to apply for the Warm Homes Discount. This is a joint venture between the Westminster Government and the energy suppliers. Tenants who qualify have £140 each year credited to their electricity account. This has helped many tenants with their mounting energy bills.

Income Maximisation

Over the last 12 months, Key Project housing support staff have generated an additional **£85,312.92** on behalf of tenants. This is mainly as a result of assistance with applications for State Benefits, eg ESA, PIP, backdated Housing/Council Tax Benefit, Discretionary Housing Payments and Warm Homes Discounts. This figure is much higher figure than in previous years, mainly because the Income Advisor from SMART was on extended compassionate leave and Key Project staff were undertaking more benefits work themselves. As in previous years, the real value of this additional income lies in the fact that many of these gains are not one-off payments but will be ongoing payments which will continue to contribute to the tenant's income.

In addition, Key Project staff have assisted tenants with applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund . Community Care Grants awarded during the year consisted of floor coverings for 5 properties, curtains for 3 properties, 3 cookers, 3 fridge/freezers, 3 washing machines, various other furnishings and 2 removal costs.

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

Key Project Home Decoration and Hardship Fund

The Key Project is indebted to the Trustees of the George Crombie Fund for the award which has enabled Castlehill Housing Association to set up the Key Project Home Decoration Fund and the Key Project Hardship Fund in 2009.

Key Project Home Decoration Fund

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

The Home Decoration Fund operates on 3 levels:

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

Over the last 12 months, the Key Project Decoration Fund has assisted in **2 tenancies**. The total spent was **£709.27**.

Key Project Hardship Fund

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

Grants from the Key Project Hardship Fund have been awarded in **7 tenancies** during the past year. The total spent was **£512.84**

Tenants who have been assisted by the Home Decoration and Hardship Fund have appreciated this help, especially when it is unavailable from other sources.

There has been less activity in both funds this year. This was partly due to the fact that the Funds were both quite depleted. However a further application to the George Crombie Trustees was submitted in February 2016 and in March 2016, the Trustees granted a further £5000 to be split between the two funds. This will enable Key Project to continue to assist tenants.

Some Agencies we work with:

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

Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils

Council Tax, Housing/ Council Tax Benefit, Social Work, Housing, Adult Protection, Scottish Welfare Fund, Bereavement Services.

Department of Work and Pensions

Job Centre Plus, Pension Service, Child Support Agency, Disability Living Allowance/Personal Independence Payment, Attendance Allowance

NHS Grampian

GP and associated practice based services, Occupational Therapy, Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, Cornhill Hospital and associated psychiatric services,

Other agencies

Smart Money Advice Project
Smart Income Advisors
Welfare Rights
Home Start
Bethany Trust English Classes
Trussell Trust
Grampian Police
Grampian Credit Union
North East Scotland Credit Union
Cash in Your Pocket
Family Holiday Association
SSAFA
SCARF
MacMillan
CAB
Instant Neighbour
Somebody Cares
Magpie
Various Trust Funds – both local and national
Other social landlords
Apply4Homes
House Exchange Register
Gas and electricity suppliers
Debt collection agencies

Care Inspectorate

There was an unannounced Care Inspectorate inspection in August 2015. Key Project was inspected as part of Castlehill Housing Support Services (Sheltered Housing, Chinese Project and Key Project). Grades achieved were 5 for Quality of care and support, 5 for Quality of staffing, 4 for quality of management and leadership. During the verbal feedback the high quality of housing support delivered by the Key Project was acknowledged. The report is publicly available.

Tenant feedback

Receiving feedback from people who use our service is particularly important and is also a useful way of consulting with tenants regarding any suggestions re improving or altering the service.

Some tenants express their appreciation in writing, others are encouraged to give feedback when the 6 monthly Housing Support Plans are being completed.

Written feedback

*'Seeing *** has helped me maintain my tenancy. She has helped when my mental health has been poor, as well as advice re benefits etc. I have found *** to be both supportive and encouraging and I am very grateful for her support. I don't mind when she asks me how I am feeling, I can tell her how I am. I haven't had that before.'*



Sent as a text

Some comments from Housing Support Plans

Feedback/Comments:

More confident, and not as lazy to deal with debt and bills, grateful to deal with everything she has and will continue to do in time to come.

The service provides me is great and helps me out a lot with her advice + knowledge has been a great help in getting me where I am these days 5 star service

HAS HELPED ME SOMUCH IN THE LAST PERIOD OF TIME. HAVING DEPRESSION IS VERY DEBILITATING, & MAKES THE MOST SIMPLEST OF THINGS IMPASSIBLE BUT GIVES ME THE BEST I NEED. I COULDN'T COPE WITHOUT HER

Support has been fantastic helping me sort problems like rent, Council Tax, Electric, & Gas that I was unable to deal with. She came in sat down went through everything & got problems sorted within a week which took a lot of pressure off me and stopped my Mental Health getting worse. She told me about Warm Homes Discount & helped me apply.

Invaluable support with housing and benefit concerns and forms knowing someone there at the end of a phone when something unexpected or worrying happens is great as I have no one else to lean on. monthly visits good to bring up things that have been worrying me.

Very happy with service which is still needed as I tend to let important things slip.
GENUINELY NEEDED HELP.
WOULD BE LOST WITHOUT TIM'S HELP,
GREAT SERVICE.

Summary

Before the establishment of the Key Project housing support service, Housing Management staff at Castlehill were acutely aware that some of the tenants had needs which were not being met and they were concerned about the tenants' vulnerability and the risk to their tenancies. However, staff were also aware of their limited capacity in meeting these needs, both in terms of time and resources. A successful application to the Community Fund enabled the establishment of the Key Project in March 2001 and from very small beginnings, the Key Project has over the last 15 years developed into an integral part of Housing Management within Castlehill Housing Association. On average, the housing support service is offered in around 10% of Castlehill general/amenity needs stock per year. As the housing stock has grown, so has the demand for housing support.

Key Project continues to provide a housing support service which is valued and appreciated by the majority of the tenants who are offered support. As the age range is wide and housing support needs are varied, the work can be challenging but can also bring great job satisfaction. By focusing on risk to tenancy, Key Project has contributed to tenancy sustainment at Castlehill Housing Association.

It was rewarding that the Care Inspectorate acknowledged the quality of housing support delivered by the Key Project. However, both Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire are reviewing their procurement policies and the outcome of this review in respect of the Key Project is at present unclear.

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

Sheila Duthie

Sheila Duthie
Housing Support Officer

4th August 2016