

THE CHAIN

CASTLEHILL HOUSING ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 24 SPRING 2020

OUR 50TH YEAR



STRANGE DAYS - ADAPTING TO THE NEW NORMAL

Life has changed. All of us will feel changes to the way we live, shop, work and interact with people. COVID-19 has transformed our day to day life into something different.

We know tenants will face challenges in the coming months. Some will be facing job issues. Some will be accessing benefits of the first time. Many will have realised that they live too far from family and friends and may want to reregister on Homehunt.

We will be here with you – learning about the new normal. We'll be adjusting our service to ensure you get the information and help you need. The Key Project remains available to tenants who need it and our [website](#) is updated daily and full of up to date material and advice.

Castlehill are attempting to keep in touch with tenants, starting with those who have indicated they could do with some assistance. These calls are to see what we can do, and to point you to those organisations who can offer help. If you'd rather speak to someone immediately, your Housing Officer is available, just call 01224 625822 or email info@castlehillha.co.uk and request a call back.

During the current crisis, we want to make sure your home is safe, this is a legal requirement, so we are continuing to carry out gas boiler safety checks and servicing to confirm that they are operating safely. You can also continue to report emergency repairs via the website. Speed of repairs will be governed by the Govt advice on social distancing but we will try to ensure you are completely informed if there are to be delays.

Like you we have been working with the information given by the Government. We must operate within the social distancing directives given. We are putting things in place to enable us to provide the best service we can, where we can.

We are all in this together and we need to pull together to ensure that we look after each other throughout these strange new days.

LETTER FROM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

This is a most unusual edition of our tenant's newsletter, with all of us having to put our normal lives on hold to adjust to lockdown and protect ourselves from the spread of Covid 19. I hope that you will find the various articles and links to support and advice to be useful at this difficult time.



This is the first time in over 30 years of working in Housing Associations that I've had to be involved in a Critical Incident Management Team for real and I want to reassure all our tenants that we continue to work closely with the Association's Management Committee throughout the current situation to ensure that Castlehill functions to the maximum that we can, looking after the welfare of our tenants and staff and keeping vital services going. It's been a huge exercise re-locating services so that people can work from home and I would like to record my thanks to all Castlehill tenants for your patience and understanding at this time. Castlehill is an organisation that is all about people and both tenants and staff are very much part of the Association.

Our main priority is that you and your family remain safe and secure in your home and we will do all we can to support and assist you. Just get in touch if we can help – that's what we're here for!

All the best to you and your family – stay healthy and safe.

David Lappin

COVID-19 updates -

We want you to be fully informed during this time of change. Our website has new [pink sections](#) which have useful links to sites like NHS, Government, DWP and benefits and local organisations offering help and advice during the pandemic. This is updated daily and you should be able to find information which answers most questions there.

Housing Officers remain your first contact if you have any tenancy issues and they can be contacted in the usual ways by calling 01224 625822 or emailing info@castlehillha.co.uk

CASTLEHILL PICKS CHARLIE HOUSE AS CHOSEN CHARITY

As an organisation Castlehill is proud of the work we do raising funds for various charities around the North East.



This year is our 50th year in business and we have decided to raise funds for a specific charity to celebrate. Staff have chosen Charlie House Big Build for a unit being built for children with life limiting illness. We felt this was a fantastic fit for us, as we too work across the North East and staff felt any one of us could be affected by the issues Charlie House go some way to helping with.

Life is precious Obviously we have had to put our fundraising plans on the backburner due to the virus. We will return to it as soon as we can

COVID UPDATES - WAYS TO PAY

COVID-19 has changed things. We know many will be facing uncertainty with jobs and finance and this will be making you feel increasingly anxious about the future.

Rent should remain a priority bill and we would encourage you to chat to your Housing Officer if you are experiencing any difficulties and they can help you navigate the help that is available.

Allpay has adjusted its service provision and offers various new methods for those with an Allpay paycard to use if you cannot get to a shop or post office to use the paycard machines.

On our website we have compiled information sheets about ways to pay. This can be accessed [here](#).

The site also has links to government and benefit websites which can help you access all the help you may need. The site is updated daily and we would encourage you to check them out!

NEW LOOK RENT LETTERS

All tenants received their annual letter from Castlehill at the end of February that detailed what your rent and services costs would be from the 1st April 2020.

Tenants told us that they wanted to see a breakdown of their service charges and this is exactly what we did. Working with CaRTO on what was a mammoth task, these letters now show what you wanted and detail the breakdown of the service charges and what they cover. If you have any questions about your rent or service charges you should call your Housing Officer to discuss further. Your rent is due on the 1st of each month. So remember:



If you pay by **direct debit**, the Association will make the necessary changes to the amount.



If you pay your rent by **bank standing order** you will need to contact your bank to change the standing order to the new amount.



If you use **online banking** you can change your standing order by logging into your account.



If paying by **Allpay card** you can make rent payments online, via an app, at Paypoint outlets, and at Post Office branches.



If paying your rent with **Universal Credit**, you will have to log into your online journal and tell the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) about the change in your housing costs.



Are you on **Housing Benefit**? No action is needed as the Association will advise Housing Benefit of the changes.

THIS TOO WILL PASS

It's a worrying time for everyone. Everyone is feeling anxious. It is important to realise that no matter how bad things feel at present that it is normal to feel lonely, bored, frustrated and scared. Everyone reacts to situations differently but please remember that this will pass and the whole situation for the vast majority of us will be temporary.

There are loads of online sites which offer great advice about taking care of your mental health while we navigate the lockdown. Here's a few of our favourite pieces of advice.

1. **Concentrate on the practical** - work out how to get your shopping, try click and collect or shop locally. Order things like repeat prescriptions online or by telephone. If you need help to do these things contact one of the many volunteer groups who can offer help. Try Grampian Assistance Hub 0808 196 3384 (8am - 8pm daily)
2. **Check things with your employer or benefits advisor.** Nothing can help your mindset more than getting your finances sorted. A quick call or email can stop these things becoming unnecessary worry.
3. **Focus on what you can control.** It's normal to feel scared. The virus has shifted everything in a way we couldn't have seen at Christmas, so try to focus on the things you can control like who you speak to and how you act and where you get your information. If you are feeling overwhelmed talk to a trusted friend or your doctor.
4. **Get a routine.** This is not that weird bit between Christmas and New Year where you eat too much and watch all manner of rubbish on telly. Try to get up at the same time daily and create new positive goals for your day. Eating at regular times and exercising at the same time also helps. Humans love routine. It's great for your mental health.
5. **Keep connected with friends and family.** It's important for your mental health to keep up with folk you trust. Email them, telephone, skype, facetime or even the zoom app can all help keep us feel connected. Everyone is finding things peculiar so your call could help them feel better too.

It is hard to stay in, but you are helping protect the NHS by doing this and you are protecting yourself and those you care about.

SILENT SOLUTION FOR DOMESTIC ABUSE VICTIMS

Are you aware of the Silent Solutions system, a system promoted by the Police and Women's Aid which can help victims of domestic abuse who fear further danger and harm if overheard when calling the police. The system works when somebody calls 999, an operator will ask which emergency service is required. If the caller is unable to audibly signal to the operator, the call will be forwarded to an operating system. If 55 is pressed by the caller, the system will detect this. The operator will then transfer the call to the relevant police force as an emergency. Further details are available [here](#).

Castlehill is proud to be part of the Institute of Chartered Housing's 'Make a stand' campaign which tackles this ongoing issue. Further details can be found on our website.

COOKING ON A BUDGET

Cooking on a budget has never been easier - here are a couple of our favourite recipes. It's a new skill and baking is fun with the kids. If you check on the website there is information on foodbanks and food delivery in the region.



Ingredients

400 g (14oz) self-raising flour, plus extra to dust
175 ml (6 fl oz) double cream
175 ml (6 fl oz) lemonade

LEMONADE SCONES

Directions:

Preheat oven to 220°C (200°C fan) mark 7. In a large bowl mix all ingredients to make a dough. Knead briefly, then tip onto a floured surface and use your hands to press to a 2cm (3/4in) thickness. Line a baking tray with parchment. Stamp out rounds and place on tray. Bake for 12-15min until golden. Cool on a wire rack.

PEACH AND CHICKPEA CURRY – JACK MONROE

400g canned chickpeas, 40p
1 onion, 5p (54p/1kg)
2 fat cloves of garlic, 4p (17p/bulb)
1 chilli or a pinch of dried chilli flakes, <1p (80p/100g)
a splash of oil, 2p (£1.10/1l)
1 tsp cumin (ground or seeds), 2p (£1.15/100g)
1 x 400g tin of peaches (or apricots or mandarins), 33p (33p/411g)
1 x 400g carton or tin of chopped tomatoes, 30pa
1 stock cube, 5p (49p for 10)



First drain your chickpeas and rinse them vigorously. Pop them in some fresh water in a saucepan and boil rapidly for 10 minutes to soften. Meanwhile, peel and finely chop the onion and garlic, and chop the chilli. Pour a little oil into a medium, heavy bottomed pan, and add the onion, garlic and chilli, then the cumin, and cook gently on a low heat for a few minutes to soften the onion. Don't be tempted to turn the heat up – burned onions will permeate your whole curry, whereas sweating them will add a delicious sweetness.

Drain the peaches, reserving the juice, and chop into small pieces. Add to the onion mixture in the pan, along with the reserved juice. By this time, the chickpeas should have finished boiling, so remove them from the heat and drain them, and tip them into the peaches-and-onion pan.

Pour the chopped tomatoes in, add the coriander, and crumble over the stock cube, then stir everything together. Reduce the heat to a low setting, and cook gently for 30 minutes.

You may need to add a cup of water to the sauce if it starts to get a bit thick. Stir well, and serve. Will keep in the fridge, cooled and stored in an airtight container, for three days, or in the freezer for three months. Reheat to piping hot to serve.

We are delighted to welcome new permanent sheltered scheme managers to the Castlehill team in our Aberdeenshire and Moray schemes.

Castlehill provides the staff at our Aberdeenshire and Moray Sheltered housing schemes, with Cornerstone being responsible for those schemes within the city boundaries.

Susan Pirie is the manager in charge of the scheme staff and she can be contacted through the Aberdeen office on 01224 625822.



NEW MANAGERS FOR SHELTERED

Elaine MacLennan is a familiar face at St Johns Court in Stonehaven having worked as relief Scheme Manager for a number of years. We are delighted to be able to confirm that from January she has been appointed Scheme Manager.

Michelle Bruce has been appointed to role of scheme manager at Conval Court in Aberlour.

NEW OFFICE START

Aberdeen Care & Repair is part of the Youth Employment scheme. As such it works with young people giving them a one year contract which gives them hands on experience of an office environment which can be invaluable for their c.v.

Joining us is Aimee McPherson who will be working as an administrative assistant in Care and Repair.

HOUSING OFFICER CHANGES

There have been changes to the staff members in our Housing Services Team.

Housing Officer **Sharon Travers** has left the Association after 18 years and we are happy to confirm that her patch will be covered by **Leisha Bishop** and **Susan Matson**.



From April, housing officer **Suzanne Reid** will be working full time, covering the same area as before ensuring that tenants get the support they have come to expect from our Housing Services team.

Castlehill likes to encourage staff with their Continued Professional Development. We were delighted that two of our valued scheme managers have recently completed their level 3 Health and Social Care SVQs.

Senior Support Housing Officer Susan Pirie paid tribute to Jaqui Cooke, relief manager at Queen Elizabeth Court and Shirley Thomson at Nethermaines Court for their achievements,

'I am delighted that both staff members have completed their SVQs, and produced work to such a high standard. Completing an SVQ takes a lot of commitment and time.'

DIGITAL INCLUSION SUCCESS

CaRTO training took place

Castlehill's tenants' group, CaRTO, knows that in the 21st century a lack of digital skills and access to the internet can be a major disadvantage for people. Having signed up to the Digital Participation Charter, CaRTO have devised a pilot initiative to help residents at one of Castlehill's sheltered housing schemes get online.

Queen Elizabeth Court, Fettercairn has been selected as the first recipient for the scheme, which, if successful, may be rolled out across other Sheltered schemes. CaRTO has ensured that the scheme has secure broadband and connectivity in the common room and has provided means of accessing the internet, which tenants can use at any time.



CaRTO tenants have been holding regular digital clinics at Queen Elizabeth Court to help fellow tenants use the available tools and develop necessary skills to access the wide variety of services available.

'In our research and talking to tenants we found that being unable to access the internet can increase feelings of loneliness and isolation. It is fantastic to be able to keep in touch with friends and family by text and email and even video calling, and it is hoped that we'll be able to show tenants how to do this with our training session today.' said Ken Willox of CaRTO.

David Lappin, Castlehill's Chief Executive, commented, 'it would be nice to be able to roll similar projects out in the future, so we will be watching the uptake carefully.'

CARTO INITIATIVES



Put your ideas into action - use the CaRTO participatory budget

Applications are now open for CaRTO's participatory budgeting scheme.

If you have a good idea for something which may benefit your scheme, CaRTO may be able to help you - CaRTO has funds set aside to help you. All you have to do is download the form on the [CaRTO section](#) of the website and email it in. If you aren't online you can call our Tenant Participation Officer on 01224 628109, who will take your application over the phone.

You will need to tell us your idea, the cost and how it will benefit tenants at your schemes.

In the past CaRTO has funded garden projects and social activities and it is felt that this greatly benefits the schemes involved.

So put your ideas into action and get in touch.



Alan Morrison Above and Beyond Award - applications are open

Alan Morrison was a Castlehill tenant who devoted a considerable amount of time and effort into various groups connected with Castlehill. He was a founding member of CaRTO and sat on the Management committee. He made such a positive impact in tenant participation that we wanted to show appreciation for people who, like him, go above and beyond for others.

The winner receives a £100 and a trophy and the person who nominates the winner will receive £50.

Forms can be downloaded from the CaRTO page on our website and you can email it in or call our TP Officer on 01224 628109 to complete a form over the phone. You are encouraged to have a think - is there anyone who makes your life a bit easier? Has someone helped you throughout the COVID-19 - Send us your nominations now.

JOIN CARTO



CaRTO are Castlehill tenants who:

- Want to get involved in making important decisions about their homes and services
- Want to work in partnership with Castlehill
- Are willing to share ideas
- Like to meet new people
- Are willing to learn and develop new skills

There are lots of options to get involved at any level to suit you.

INTERESTED?

Please contact Catherine on 01224 628109 or catherine.coutts@castlehillha.co.uk for more info.

SIMPLE CHANGES CAN BENEFIT YOU



We'd also like to draw your attention to our '**Go paperless**' initiative and encourage you sign up on our website.

Once we have 50% of tenants signed up we will be able to send you the Newsletter, TP documents and links digitally, which would substantially reduce the amount of paper we are sending out as an organisation. It is hoped if more tenants sign up we can start sending documents pertaining to your tenancy. So check it out - help us keep costs down and save the planet

Did you know that **Citizens Advice Scotland** has an online tool which can enable you to check if you are entitled to Council tax exemptions, reductions and discounts?



This useful tool also can show you the advisory support that Citizens Advice can offer to people who are having problems with council tax payments or who are in council tax debt.

Citizens Advice say "We know that over 80,000 fewer people in Scotland are claiming Council Tax Reduction than when the system was introduced seven years ago, and we fear that lots of families are missing out on savings they are entitled to."

It's worth noting that the money for these changes comes from central government, so saving on your Council Tax doesn't take away from local services. Five minutes of your time online could save you hundreds.

Check it out at:

www.checkmycounciltax.scot

It's really important that you remember to **update Castlehill if anything changes with the people living in your property.**

Apart from it being a legal part of your tenancy agreement, letting us know who lives in your home can simplify situations further down the line.



For example, if you wish to add someone to the tenancy we have to know that they have been resident in your home for the last 12 months.

It only takes a couple of minutes to let the office know - so give us a call on 01224 625822 or email info@castlehillha.co.uk

Have you thought about overpayments?



Christmas is an expensive time and can leave some tenants struggling to pay their bills, rent is a priority bill. If you break your tenancy agreement by not paying your rent, you risk losing your home.

Some tenants save for it each month in advance, but others overpay. This enables them to take a rent break during the festive season when they need it the most. Think about it - if you overpaid every month from now you could significantly reduce the amount due in December's payment.

Remember, your housing officer is here to help you so please let us know if you are facing financial difficulties.



WHEN THIS IS OVER

While the pandemic continues, and following government advice, Castlehill offices will remain closed with staff working remotely. We want to provide as full a service as we can without compromising tenant or staff safety.

Tenants can still talk to their Housing Officer or Property Service Officer and can still report repairs via the link on the website. Naturally due to social distancing restrictions there may be limits to the service we can provide but we are trying to ensure that emergency repairs are carried out as quickly as possible and tenant issues are being addressed.

We hope all our tenants are keeping safe and well and look forward to seeing you in person once the lockdown restrictions are lifted.

SHOULD WE KEEP THE NEW LOOK?

A new decade calls for a fresh approach to how we at Castlehill keep tenants up to date.

We decided to overhaul the tenants news letter, giving it a fresh new look which would look good on your digital devices. We also listened to what tenants would like to hear and are including a wider selection of helpful advice and contacts for issues you may come up against.

If you have anything you think we should be including please send your suggestions to info@castlehillha.co.uk marked **The Chain** and we will try to include it.