

TheChain

...linking people together

ISSUE 25 • WINTER 2020



Castlehill tenant turns 100

War hero and Castlehill tenant Flight Lieutenant John Cruickshank celebrates during lock down.

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Digital solutions planned

We plan to use email and SMS to contact tenants in 2021.

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Winter advice

Sensible winter advice from our Property Services team.

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Tenant satisfaction survey

What you've told us and how we will improve.

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Castlehill's 50th Year

Castlehill's 50th year was not one we could ever have imagined. It will not be one we will ever forget.

As the pandemic continues and the months have progressed, and the restrictions have both eased and tightened, Castlehill has worked hard to ensure that we can continue to provide as many of our services as possible. Our primary concern has been to do this while ensuring the safety of both our staff and tenants and adhering to Government rules and guidelines, which as you know, change daily. It has been a difficult and complex year.

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank our tenants for their patience. We are living in very uncertain times and everyone is having to adapt to new ways of living and working. Castlehill has endeavoured to provide the same high-quality service throughout. We have quickly embraced digital ways of doing things which previously we did in person. Some things have worked, others not as well, and we are grateful that people have quickly brought this to our attention so we can adapt service provision accordingly.

As we face the winter we intend to continue to work to ensure that tenants homes are meeting our standards. Much will depend upon any further restrictions imposed by Government, and PSO's will maintain the gas safety and work their way through the backlog.

There is some respite on the horizon, with the news of a vaccine, a promise of a way back to a more normal life. We understand it has been tough and there are many resources available which tenants may find useful on our website.

Until then, remember the FACTS and stay safe!

Letter from our Chief Executive...

I am sure that everyone will be glad to see the back of 2020 – a year like no other! I would again like to thank all our tenants for their patience and understanding through this difficult time. As you will see from the contents of this newsletter, our staff have been putting maximum effort into maintaining as many of the services we provide as we possibly can while adhering to Government rules. Hopefully, with some more positive news on the development of vaccines we will be able to get back to a more normal way of life before long.

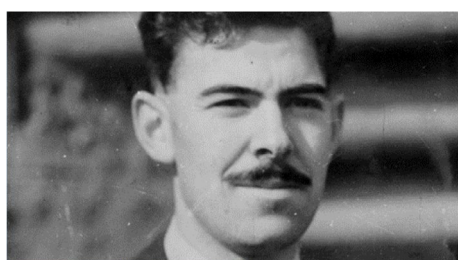
One thing that the pandemic has brought home to me is just how important having a safe and secure home is to every one of us. The negative impact on the economy has put many people's jobs at risk and it is absolutely vital for wellbeing that no one is put at risk of losing their home too. Homelessness in Scotland remains a significant issue and again the pandemic has focussed attention on the need to really address this. As we move forward, there is a strong case to be made for a significant programme of new build affordable housing that as well as addressing homelessness can also help kickstart the economy in construction and supply.

With health advice and restrictions level changing on a regular basis it's very hard to predict what Christmas may be like this year but I hope that everyone does get the chance to enjoy time with their family and that we can all look forward to 2021.

David Lappin
Chief Executive



The epitome of duty – War Hero celebrates his 100th birthday



Birthdays are always a celebration. Castlehill had lots of plans to celebrate our 50th year in business, but as the year progressed, and restrictions seemed here to stay, we realised we could not do. We were therefore delighted to be able to celebrate a very special birthday for one of our tenants. Our tenant, Flight Lieutenant John Cruickshank was 50 when Castlehill was established and this year, reaching his 100th birthday he allowed us to make a small fuss of him!

100 years is one which should be celebrated, and Mr Cruickshank did just that mid-way through the initial lockdown. RAF hero Mr Cruickshank was celebrated in the local paper, having received the Victoria Cross (which is the highest honour) during the second world war when he was just 24 years old. Despite being badly injured, Mr Cruickshank managed to bomb a German submarine and return with his crew to the base at Sullom Voe in Shetland. He saw his time with the RAF as 'his duty' and has many interesting stories to tell.

Post-war he worked in banking and has been a Castlehill tenant since 2011 - around his birthday he had a great chat with his housing officer Suzanne, who described him as unassuming and very funny. This kind and generous man wanted 'no fuss'. He celebrated his birthday modestly with cake and with his agreement, the Association donated to the Gordon Highlanders in his name.



Letting process to begin



Be assured that lots of work is being carried out in the background to ensure that we can provide our services as thoroughly and safely as possible. Government advice is complex and ever-changing. We were pleased to be able to resume reletting properties across all sectors. Keep an eye on the website for information. Please remember that

whilst Covid restrictions remain in place tenants of Sheltered Housing, Amenity and very Sheltered schemes should note that communal areas and hobby rooms, remain out of bounds due to government guidance and that Scheme managers are available to discuss any issues on an appointment basis or doorstep meeting only.

Hopefully, if we all adhere to these precautions laid out by the authorities, we can ensure everyone's safety.

Care and Repair



Care & Repair

We are delighted to report that Care and Repair Services Charity is now operating at 90%, although delivering services and communicating differently. Due to the local restrictions, and that a large proportion of clients were shielding, there were some delays in carrying out some of the work that they do. Administration and service delivery processes have been adapted to be able to operate and staff have been proactive and creative in finding ways to support their client group in these strange times. Repairs, improvements and adaptations are now proceeding normally and they have been particularly busy with minor adaptation work which is delivered in partnership with health and social care OT's/Physio's. All Care and Repair Services are now available including assisting clients with claiming Attendance Allowance; Blue Badges; PIP etc. Bookings are available for 'free home safety assessments' for older and disabled people living in Aberdeen and hope to reintroduce this valuable service shortly.

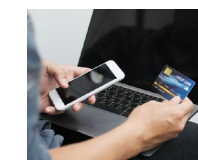
Digital solutions

Here at Castlehill, we have had to change procedures to ensure tenant and staff safety and many of the obvious solutions have involved the adoption of digital practices. We feel it is the safest way we have, given the changing nature of the pandemic, in trying to ensure that we can keep you updated with information connected with your tenancy. We intend to move forward with our digital practices as next year progresses. When you sign up for one of our properties you give us up to date email and mobile phone details and moving forward, we will use these to send you important documents and updates using email or SMS links. If



anything has changed please fill in the go paperless form and we will do the rest. If you would rather receive these in paper format, we'd ask that you contact your Housing Officer to opt-out.

Another way to pay



Castlehill realises closing our office because of the pandemic has meant our tenants have had to adopt new ways to pay their rent. We are pleased that we can now take rent payments over the phone. Just call the office on 01224 625822, choose option 4 and one of our helpful Customer Service Team will be able to help you. Receipts will be sent out via email. Other methods to pay can be found here on the website.

Charity News



Castlehill staff like to fundraise internally for every year. This year we had picked local charity Charlie House.

Many events were planned but the pandemic put paid to that. We have sponsored Charlie House's Santa and Elf costumes for their Grotto which runs in the Bon Accord Centre. Charlie House is a fantastic charity which offers support to families of children with a life-limiting illness. If you want to donate their funds please check out their website www.charliehouse.org for further details.

Scammers beware!

A small benefit to lockdown has been a distinct lack of scammer calls. Unfortunately, as we eased out of the restrictions, the calls have restarted. One that is quite common is the call that tells you that there is an issue with your TV license. We can offer this basic advice. STOP. CHECK. ASK.

Scammers often don't use your name or have your full address. They will call you sir or madam and likely only have part of your address. If something feels off, it probably is – so we'd encourage you to check. TV licensing have a useful leaflet, available on our website in the guides section, which you can download. Never feel worried to check and ask if you are unsure!

Housing Services Update from Senior Housing Officer Alana Allison



During the last 8 months, we have all been confined to our homes much more than ever and the Housing Services department have found this has led to an increase in neighbour complaint cases.

The Association can find it tricky to resolve some of these cases and sometimes action cannot be taken if it concerns everyday noise-related sounds. Everyone will be experiencing difficulties and stresses due to ever-changing restrictions from the Scottish Government.

We hope people can be considerate of each other and think about how your noise may cause someone else issues or upset. It's important to be more tolerant and patient with noise that we are not used to hearing from our neighbours. Try to understand that household living generates noise such as a washing machine, the TV or doors closing, which can be annoying but isn't necessarily anti-social.

People's circumstances should be considered too. Does your neighbour have young children or are they retired? How is your household noise impacting on others? Respecting other's right to enjoy their home without hearing all that is going on in yours is so important. You may also wish to contact your Housing Officer for advice if there anything that the Association can do. Now more than ever is the time to show some goodwill to your neighbours and community.

The Association has a useful information sheet on Anti-social behaviour – please check out the website for it and other information on Covid and non-Covid related subjects. www.castlehillha.co.uk and click the pink box.

Hints & tips

Castlehill considers the following behaviours to be classed as anti-social.

- **noisy parties/music/tv**
- **dumping of litter and rubbish**
- **vandalism**
- **verbal abuse**
- **threatening or violent behaviour**
- **criminal behaviour - drug dealing or drinking alcohol in the communal areas**
- **excessive noise**
- **noisy visitors late at night**

Not all behaviour can be classed as anti-social, the following is irritating but not anti-social.

- **one-off parties**
- **DIY or working on cars or bikes**
- **children playing outside**
- **youngsters hanging out with friends - unless they are being offensive or aggressive**

How you can help

- **Don't use household appliances late at night or early in am e.g. between 10 pm and 7 am.**
- **Castlehill doesn't permit laminate flooring for tenants in an upstairs flat. If this is something that you have historically, please consider investment in carpets or rugs and wear soft shoes/slippers.**
- **Try speaking to your neighbour whilst observing the two-metre rule.**
- **Call Anti-Social Behaviour Investigation Team on 08000 510 434 (Aberdeen City tenants only) out with office hours.**
- **Call and speak with your Housing Officer for advice.**
- **If you feel the ASB is excessive, consider calling Police Scotland on 101**



Key Project

Please be aware that Key Project is quite stretched following the departure of support worker, Fiona Anderson. Our new support worker Janice Ann Reid will take up position before the end of the year. Housing difficulties can be overwhelming and Key project can help at any point in your tenancy, they want you to 'Keep your Key'.

Property Service Update from Property Service manager Phil Nicol



Our team has been working hard as we try to navigate the government rules and regulations. Staff have been working remotely which has been an adjustment, but by putting coordinators in place for void and fire safety works, Castlehill has been able to deliver these services safely and effectively throughout the pandemic. We have also managed to carry out Legionella safety checks in communal areas in General needs, Sheltered and Trust properties throughout. Property Services Officers have adopted digital forms to carry out void inspections and communal scheme inspections and will

be using them to carry out ground's maintenance inspections when the new contracts are in place.

Over the last six months, Property Services has continued to provide an emergency repairs service and ensure that homes remain gas safe. The strict regulations have complicated carrying out our usual ways of working, but certain tasks have been given priority. Among other services, we have managed to continue throughout the lockdown months were the repairs and servicing of lifts and communal stairlifts.

We are also starting to carry out routine repairs in tenants homes again and the Property Services Officers have recently started carrying out home

visits in general needs tenants' homes, bringing back some normality to our customers. We hope tenants appreciate that visits are entirely dependent upon Government recommendations and we are trying hard to keep staff and tenants as safe as possible during the pandemic. The servicing of fire safety equipment along with the fire risk assessments are ongoing. Void repairs are ongoing, and we are working through the backlog of what has built up during the period of suspension. We have also had an Internal Audit done on our Gas Safety systems, and we are pleased to report the overall conclusion from the audit was Strong.

What happens when you have a gas leak:

Gas Repairs Water Supply All gas leaks or suspected gas leaks should be reported immediately to Scottish Gas Network (SGN) on 0800 111 999.

If you suspect a Gas Leak you should:

- **Turn off the gas at the meter, or the emergency control valve**
- **Put out all sources of ignition**
- **Do not smoke, operate electrical switches or use mobile phones**
- **Open doors and windows**
- **Ensure there is access to the building**
- **Keep people away from affected areas**
- **If the smell persists, leave the property and do not return until instructed to do so**

You must call Castlehill Housing Association when SGN has been notified as SGN will only shut off the mains gas and ensure the property is safe. They will not carry out a repair if the fault is within the property. The Property Service Department will then arrange to have our appointed Gas Contractor attend to repair the cause if it's emitting from the pipework serving the boiler or from the boiler itself. If the issue is with an appliance belonging to you - a gas cooker etc then you must arrange for the repair or contact the Association for advice.

Planned Maintenance Works delays

Over the past 8 months, the Association has not been able to carry out planned works such as kitchen and bathroom upgrades within our properties. The Covid19 pandemic has meant that carrying out such works in people's homes posed too high a risk of the potential spread of the virus, particularly to our more vulnerable residents.

We are grateful for tenant's patience. We will let you know as soon as we can about when the work will take place.

FAQ - Grit bins

If there are grit bins within the boundary of the development, they are generally topped up by us, if they are out with the boundary and next to the public road they are generally maintained by the Local Authority. When we are at the development we will check to see if the grit bins within the development need topped up and arrange for this to be done, in periods of prolonged bad weather grit will be needed more frequently if you notice the grit supplies are running low in the grit bins within the development, please contact us and we will arrange for more to be supplied. The grit is supplied for our residents to use within the developments.



New Staff

Castlehill is delighted to have welcomed new staff members. Our long-term Property services Officer for Moray, Saunders McNaughton, retired in late summer after being with Castlehill for the last 17 years. His role has been taken by Joanne Breese. Joanne is a very experienced Officer having worked as Land Manager for Camphill Schools for several years. Joanne is a great asset to the team, and we hope our Moray tenants will make her welcome.

Tomnabat Court has welcomed Tina Wood as the new part-time scheme manager and she has been in post since May.

Sadly, we announce the passing of our long-term Scheme manager Pam Anderson who had recently retired from Kindrochit Court in Braemar. She was an amazing force at Kindrochit Court and will be missed by our tenants and the wider community. Castlehill Housing Officer Mandy Rae supported the cortege on the pipes and several representatives from the Association, including our Chief Executive David Lappin, joined a large turnout of people throughout Braemar who turned out to pay respect to this much-admired lady. Susan Pirie our Senior Housing Officer, in-charge of support services said, 'She was an absolutely lovely lady, I was so sad to hear the news. She gave so much to Castlehill and the tenants at Kindrochit and deserved a long and happy retirement, spending time with her family'.

Are you digitally included?



Throughout the coronavirus crisis, the internet is keeping us connected to friends and family, informed and entertained, and able to learn, work, shop and access health information and other public services.

However, some people cannot access these benefits because they do not have the confidence, kit, and connectivity at home.

Castlehill has been extremely fortunate to secure a small number of digital devices via Connecting Scotland, an initiative which aims to get digitally excluded households online. Most of these devices have been allocated, but more may become available. If this is something that you would like to be considered for, please call 01224 625822.

CaRTO have been at the forefront of digital inclusion at Castlehill since their drive to supply sheltered tenants with iPads for use in common rooms. This project is of course on hold; however, CaRTO and staff are still on hand to support any tenant (including general needs) with any digital help they need. Please call 01224 625822 if this is something you would like to find out more about.



Winter updates

General Advice for the winter when temperatures drop most of us will be spending even more time indoors, so it's important to make sure that your home is safe and warm.

- **Keep your heating on at a low constant temperature, rather than heating your home up quickly allowing it to cool down again**
- **If you have a pre-payment meter, make sure you have sufficient credit!**
- **Close all blinds and curtains at night**
- **Keep furniture away from radiators to allow heat to circulate freely**
- **Keep outside doors shut and report any obvious draughts**
- **Make sure to order repeat prescriptions in good time, don't wait until you run out**
- **Keep a snow shovel handy**
- **Be aware of where your grit bins are**
- **Stay at home in really bad weather, even if that means re-arranging non-urgent appointments**
- **If you do have to venture out in bad weather, ensure you have adequate clothing. Wrap up in plenty of layers, and don't forget hats, scarfs and gloves!**
- **Look out for your neighbours in extreme weather and give your neighbours your phone number in case of emergencies**
- **If you have a mobile phone, make sure that it has sufficient credit Also, remember to make sure to...**
- **Know how to turn off your gas**
- **Know how to turn off your power**
- **Check where your stopcock valve is for turning off your water**

Meet others for a virtual Cuppa and Catch up!

Coming soon to your scheme! CaRTO invite you to join them for a virtual cuppa and a chat. This is a great way for you to find out who they are and what they do. Maybe you've heard of CaRTO but aren't quite sure if you would like to get involved? This is a friendly, informal chat over a cuppa for you to get to know them, and them to get to know you! You can still take part even if you are not online, by simply phoning in. Details will follow soon...

CaRTO are remaining very active throughout the Coronavirus crisis. They have embraced the "new normal" and have adapted incredibly well to produce solutions to work around social distancing and other restrictions we are all faced with. They meet virtually via Zoom on the first Thursday of every month, and have also taken part in webinars and meetings with NETRALT (North East Tenants, Residents and Landlords Together) and TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) Scotland, which helps them keep in touch with tenants outside the North East.

Recently, CaRTO have been involved with developing how we ask tenants for feedback, with a recent focus on Property Services. They are also integral to Castlehill's action plan following on from the results of the tenant satisfaction survey.

Castlehill are working with ACC to establish a city-wide youth network, which taps into pre-existing groups and is led by the young people themselves. The aim is to get young people involved in housing (all tenures) and fill the gaps in the limited knowledge



many young people have of housing. This builds on the SHMU radio project we did a few years ago but is on a much larger scale and is youth driven. We have met with members of the Scottish Youth Parliament and Aberdeen Youth Council, as well as ACC and Foyer officers who work with young people, including care leavers and homeless. This is an exciting project to help us listen to young people's opinions and will enable us to consult with our own younger tenants and applicants in a way that is accessible to them. If you are a young tenant or household member, we would love for you to get involved. Please call 01224 625822 or email info@castlehillha.co.uk for more details.

Tenants survey results

We are committed to listening to your views about the services we provide, and every three years we carry out a full survey of all our tenants to find out where you think we are performing well and where we need to make improvements. Earlier this year, Knowledge Partnership - an independent company - carried out this survey on our behalf and 40% of you responded, answering a range of questions about the services we provide. We'd like to thank everyone who took the time to take part and give us their views. We value your feedback.

79.8% of our tenants were satisfied with the overall service we provide, and 77.1% were satisfied with our repairs and maintenance service. 81.5% of tenants were satisfied with opportunities to participate in our decision-making processes.



The survey showed some areas of our service where satisfaction was lower than we would like and where improvements are needed. We have consulted with CaRTO to develop an action plan to help address these issues. This includes:

- Reviewing our repairs and maintenance processes
- Feeding your responses into our Asset Management Strategy and planned maintenance programme with regard to energy efficiency – and investigate options for funding and renewal
- Develop our approach to digital inclusion and communication (including how we use our website, and digital versions of the Chain)
- Investigate options for our tenants to manage their tenancies online
- Work with CaRTO to promote and publicise our approach to tenant engagement
- Target estate management work in areas with low neighbourhood satisfaction
- Develop a Value for Money strategy
- Ensure that we publicise service improvements and our actions in response to complaints

We'll keep you informed about the progress of this plan through the website and newsletter.

January Direct Debits



If you pay your rent by direct debit, **please note** that your payment will come out of your bank account on **Monday 4 January 2021**, instead of the usual 1st of the month. This is due to the banks being closed on the 1st and 2nd. Please ensure that you have money in your account to allow your rent to be paid on 4th January 2021.
Thank you!



The Management Committee and staff of Castlehill would like to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year for 2021.



Christmas & New Year

Staff will be on holiday from 1pm on Tuesday 24 December 2020.

We will re-open at 9am on Monday 4th January 2021.

During the holidays, our emergency repairs service will operate.

Please phone the main office number **01224 625822** for our emergency call-out details.

For gas heating:
Kingdom Gas 0800 3899463

For central plant/air-source heating:
Heat Care Oil & Gas 01343 842042

For other emergencies (floods, leaks, loss of power, etc.): **Camwater 01651 872929**

If you live in sheltered or very sheltered housing, please report any repairs to scheme staff as usual.

Join us!

**Be part of our forward thinking,
positive team and help make a difference!**

WE NEED PEOPLE 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.

