

# TheChain

...linking people together

ISSUE 26 • SPRING 2021



## These Homes



Castlehill now uses These Homes to advertise our available properties.

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## Qualifying repairs



what we can repair during the Covid lockdowns.

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## New contracts awarded



new gardeners appointed

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help is available and we show you where

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## CaRTO awards



CaRTO has money available for projects. Apply now

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funding secured for more support

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## You said – we did!

Here at Castlehill we are committed to listening to your feedback and acting on it to improve our services, and in each edition of 'The Chain' we will let you know about actions we have taken to improve our services as a result of your feedback.

**You said:** during the bad weather could Castlehill clear the car parks in amenity housing to enable tenants to get to vaccination appointments?

**We did:** we arranged for contractors to clear the snow from the car parks as soon as was possible.

**You said:** can Castlehill provide more digital options for completing satisfaction surveys?

**We did:** we are currently working with our IT services to begin using text messages as a way of quickly and easily seeking feedback on repairs

We're always keen to hear from our tenants. If you have something you'd like us to know or if you'd like to compliment or provide other feedback on our services, please get in touch.

## Letter from our Chief Executive...

At the time of writing this, we are finally starting to see some significant easing of covid restrictions after such a long hard winter lockdown for everyone. For Castlehill, this means that over the next months we can start to bring back some of the services that we have had to put on hold such as non-essential repairs and planned works such as the kitchen and bathroom replacements and smoke detector upgrades.

I hope that all Castlehill tenants are also able to take advantage of the improving situation to get out and about more and meet up with friends and family. We will continue to follow the published government advice and make sure that the safety of everyone remains the highest priority as we open things up again. As we look to shape how we deliver our services in the future we are always keen to get your feedback on what has worked well or where things didn't work, and your comments will help inform the decisions we make moving forward.

For me, one of the key reasons to be hopeful that we can avoid any more lockdowns is the roll-out of covid vaccines. I hope that many of you will already have had at least your first jab and would encourage everyone to take up the vaccine offer as this has already had a clear impact on reducing cases and the numbers who have become ill. As we get back to some kind of "normal" I think we will all have a greater appreciation for all the things we used to take for granted and hope that we can all enjoy a good summer.

David Lappin

Chief Executive



## Happy Easter

Residents at our Kindrochit Court Sheltered Housing scheme were cheered up over Easter when the Easter bunny taking the form of staff member Chris popped round with chocolate Easter eggs for the residents. What a thoughtful way of brightening up the wintry Easter weekend!



## These Homes system replaces HomeHunt.



We hope you are happy in your Castlehill property. However, should you wish to move for any reason, there are new ways to apply which have replaced ways you may have applied in the past. Our properties are now advertised and allocated through a choice-based letting scheme, These Homes (NES) which replaced HomeHunt (NES) on 22nd March.

We were delighted that the transfer to the new system went smoothly, and we began advertising properties on the 20th April.

These Homes gives applicants greater choice and control in the process of finding a home. Like HomeHunt, allocation is based on those who have expressed an interest in the property, with priority given to the household which makes the best use of it and has the highest level of housing need. It also gives applicants

a wide variety of different housing to apply for. Operated in the North East jointly by Castlehill, Sanctuary Scotland Housing Association and Hillcrest Homes, These Homes will advertise all available properties on its website for these landlords every two weeks, and an advert will be published in the Press & Journal every two weeks.

If you have any queries or need support to complete the registration process you can contact us on 01224 628119 or [TheseHomesNES@castlehillha.co.uk](mailto:TheseHomesNES@castlehillha.co.uk)

You can also apply for a housing swap through the Mutual Exchange website. Details of this and how to go about it, is available on our site.

To apply you must register with These Homes:

### What you need to do

You will need to register with These Homes by going to [thesehomes.com](http://thesehomes.com) and completing an online application.

Current HomeHunt applicants will need your HomeHunt registration number. This is so you can keep your original registration date and means that we can transfer any priority on your HomeHunt account to your new These Homes account.

To have retained your HomeHunt registration date you should have registered with These Homes by 16 April 2021. Doing this will have kept your Priority Pass award date.



## These Homes, What's New?

### New changes include:

Priority Passes are now included during the registration process to ensure we capture all your needs.

Customised searches – available properties can now be filtered to display your preferred property type and location automatically.

Email alerts – you can set up your account to send you an email if a property that matches your preferences is listed.

FAQ's are available here which may help. If you are homeless or threatened with homelessness, please also contact your local authority directly for advice and assistance.

## Update from Property Services



### Working During Covid-19 Restrictions

2020 was a challenging time for everybody, and our Property Services Team have worked hard to adjust to the changes to daily life caused by the pandemic. Working from home and being unable to carry out inspections has meant Customer Services Officers and Property Services Officers have been adapting and finding new ways to ensure that all our properties are well maintained, despite the restrictions of Covid-19.

An important factor in helping us to keep everything running smoothly whilst remaining "Covid safe" has been assistance, patience and understanding from you, our tenants. Special thanks to those of you who have taken the time to show us repairs by video-calls and through emailing us photos and videos. It is important that you continue to report any repairs or maintenance issues to us, even if we are under lockdown conditions, so that we can ensure that works are carried out as soon as it is safe to do so.

Please ensure that your contact details with us are up to date. It can be very difficult for us to arrange repairs if we do not have your correct phone number. You can update your contact phone number(s) and email address with us by calling the office, or by emailing: [info@castlehillha.co.uk](mailto:info@castlehillha.co.uk) (remembering to provide us with your full name and address).

### Repairs during the Covid-19 restrictions – What we can and can't do

As you may already be aware, the current Covid-19 restrictions called a halt to us carrying out all but emergency and essential repairs in our tenants' homes. With the easing of restrictions, we have been able to restart non-essential repairs from 26th April. If you have previously reported a repair that we have been unable to attend to due to the restrictions, we will be in touch with you to make arrangements for it to now be done.

Under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, Scottish secure tenants and short Scottish secure tenants have the right to have small urgent repairs carried out by their landlord within a given timescale. This is called the Right to Repair scheme. The Right to Repair scheme covers certain small repairs and these are known as 'qualifying repairs'.

### Qualifying Repairs under the Right to Repair Scheme include:



- Unsafe power or lighting sockets or electrical fittings
- Loss or part loss of electric power
- Loss or part loss of gas supply
- Blocked flue to an open fire or boiler
- External windows, doors or locks which are not secure
- Loss or part loss of space or water heating if no alternative heating is available
- Toilets which do not flush (if there is no other toilet in the house)
- Blocked or leaking foul drains, soil stacks or toilet pans (if there is no other toilet in the house)
- Blocked sink, bath or basin
- Loss or part loss of water supply
- Significant leaking or flooding from a water or heating pipe, tank or cistern
- Unsafe rotten timber flooring or stair treads
- Unsafe access to a path or step
- Loose or detached bannisters or handrails
- Broken mechanical extractor fan in a kitchen or bathroom which has no external window or door.

When you report a repair, we will let you know if it is a qualifying repair. Further information on Right to Repair is available on our website:

<https://www.castlehillha.co.uk/repairs/right-to-repair/>

### Contracts awarded

We are nearing the completion of procuring new contracts for our day-to-day and empty homes repairs and our communal grounds maintenance services. The grounds maintenance services are for areas out with your own garden on communal areas that Castlehill look after. The day-to-day and void contracts are due to start in May 2021 and the grounds maintenance services are due to start in mid-April 2021. We are pleased to confirm that Roy Cowie was successful in being awarded Aberdeenshire South and Aberdeenshire Central. This covers the areas to the south and west of the City. Idverde was successful in being awarded the City, Aberdeenshire North and the Moray and Banff areas.

The procurement process has been done to guarantee we provide a good quality of service and to ensure we get value for money for our customers. The process followed the current procurement legislation set by the Scottish Government.

There will be no disruption to services but you may see some new contractors involved in carrying out the repairs to your home.



## Help is available

Coming out of the most recent lockdown is expected to result in an increase in calls to all variety of helplines and at Castlehill we are completely aware of the impact the pandemic has had on all our lives. We have worked hard to ensure that there is plenty of advice and information available on our website and would encourage tenants to check and see which information sheets could be of use. <https://www.castlehillha.co.uk/advice/>

### Domestic Abuse



Situations out with people's control can result as a trigger for various kinds of abusive behaviour. There are many different organisations available which can help. Grampian's Womens Aid can be contacted on 01224 593391 or on their web page Home | Grampian Womens Aid <https://www.grampian-womens-aid.com/> Castlehill has collated some information on other useful organisations where help is available.

### Financial Advice



The pandemic has caused many economic problems for everyone. Did you know if you have been working from home for much of the last year, you can go online and claim tax relief for this. <https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home>

There is also a useful sheet on Benefits and Wellbeing which can help steer you to organisations who are expertise in what to apply for and how to go about it. Please check out the information behind the click through purple button on our website.

## Scammers

The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a huge increase in online fraud according to data released by the UK Finance banking industry body. Exploiting real fears about the pandemic, criminals have managed to extort people out of a massive £479 million and part with their personal details by preying on fears about vaccination appointments and missed parcels or even computer issues.

One of the most common scams this month has been the email from Royal Mail saying that you have missed a delivery and it will cost £2.99 for re-delivery. The Royal Mail website says it would not send you a text unless you have requested it and it would never request money using anything other than a grey card through your door. Their website requests you do not click on any links. Royal Mail would encourage you to report anything you are unsure of to [www.royalmail.com/reportingscams](http://www.royalmail.com/reportingscams)

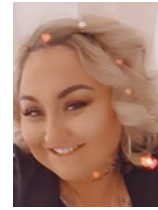
### It is important to remember:

- Be wary of unsolicited approaches by phone or email, especially if you are asked to provide any personal information.
- If you are in doubt, don't be afraid to end the call and refuse requests for information.
- If you suspect the email is fraudulent, don't open attachments, click on links or reply. Report it to us, delete it and empty your deleted items.
- Castlehill can set up direct debit payments by phone if you are comfortable to do so, alternatively this can be done by post.
- Never share your rent account or bank details with anyone.

Think carefully before parting with your personal details, it could save you masses of heartache and money.



## Key Project



The Key Project has welcomed a new member to the team. Janice-Ann has settled quickly into her new role as Support Worker and has been working with

Lorraine to deliver housing support to our Key Project clients. The Key Project staff can support tenants who are struggling in maintaining their tenancy or need help to resettle into a new home. They have connections with specialist agencies to ensure that tenants receive the correct welfare advice and can access services. If you think you would benefit from support to manage your tenancy, please speak with your Housing Officer to discuss a Key Project referral.



## Sheltered Housing

There have been several changes in the housing support service. Following government guidance, staff have returned to full time working on site. This is great news for tenants, and a sign that we are slowly moving out of lockdown. We have been consulting with our sheltered tenants in Moray to reshape the way we provide housing support, following the withdrawal of funding from Moray Council. This is a change in the way we work but continues to allow for staff to be onsite to assist tenants and we are pleased that we will be able to continue the service. We are also advertising several Scheme Manager and Relief Scheme Manager posts. We want to assure you that we are doing everything we can to recruit good quality staff to provide sheltered housing support at the schemes.



# What is Tenant Participation?

## What is Tenant Participation?

Tenant participation means tenants helping to make decisions about housing services and the way their homes are managed. It is a two-way process which involves sharing information and ideas.

It is all about working together for common goals; better service delivery and improved outcomes for tenants which give value for money.

## How can you get involved?

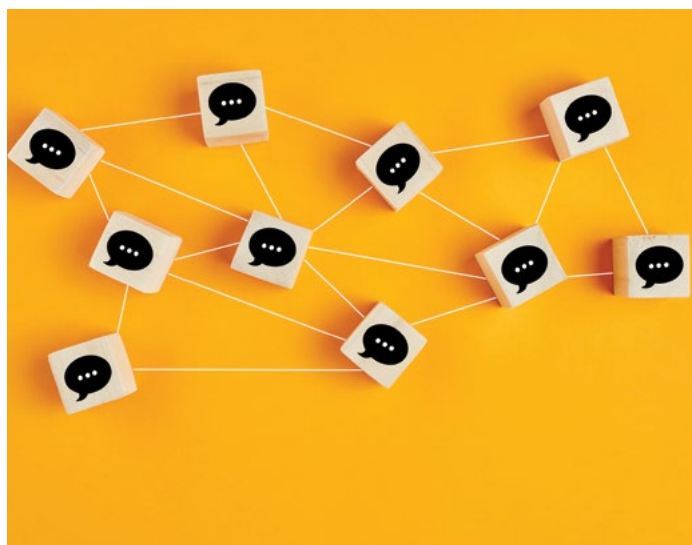
We provide a range of opportunities for you to become involved, and have your say in how services are delivered, at a level that best suits your needs and interests.



## Join CaRTO (Castlehill Registered Tenants Organisation)

CaRTO are an independent tenant group who are involved in a wide range of issues from making recommendations, reviewing policies and co-producing documents. You will have seen on your rent letter that CaRTO pushed for a breakdown of service charges so that tenants can see exactly where their money goes. This group have gone from strength to strength and would love to have some new faces join them.

CaRTO meet on the first Thursday of every month, at 2pm. Currently, all meetings are held online via Zoom. If you are not online, you can phone in to the meeting instead.



### Join CaRTO Home Link

Join CaRTO, without the meetings. You will get access to our online system where you can give your opinions and join in on the message boards.

### Join our Scrutiny Panel

An in-depth way to assess and make recommendations about Castlehill's performance, standards and services. Training is available and we are very keen to hear from anyone who would like to take part in this essential process.

**Set up your own tenants group (support is available)**

**Fill out feedback forms and surveys**

**Read our newsletter The Chain**

For more information, or to speak with another tenant about how it all works, please contact our Tenant Participation Officer, Catherine Coutts, on 01224 628109 or [info@castlehillha.co.uk](mailto:info@castlehillha.co.uk)

## Alan Morrison Above & Beyond Award 2021

Do you have a good neighbour? Are there any unsung heroes in your community? Perhaps somebody has gone above and beyond the normal call of duty during these challenging times? Whether they have provided care and support for others, are always on hand when needed, or simply been a friendly face around your neighbourhood, you can nominate them for the Alan Morrison Above and Beyond Award. This could be anyone from a tenant to a volunteer, a delivery driver – anyone, so long as they have gone that extra mile to help or bring positivity in some way. This annual award commemorates former Castlehill tenant Alan Morrison,

who volunteered a huge amount of time and energy to tenant participation at Castlehill and beyond. Those that knew him remember his compassion and kindness to others, therefore this award celebrates these attributes in the everyday heroes of our communities.

The winner will be chosen by a panel of tenants from CaRTO and will win £100 and a trophy. If you nominate the person who wins, you will win £50!

More details and the short application form are available on our website or call Catherine on 01224 628109 for a paper copy.



## Go digital!

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

However, some people can't access these benefits because they don't have the confidence, kit and connectivity at home.

Castlehill have been working with Connecting Scotland to change this and help as many tenants as we can to get online. We have given 100 digital devices to tenants who fit the criteria and hope to source more funding so that we can help even more tenants to go digital. Support is available and we hope to roll out a training program soon, once social restrictions are relaxed.

If you would like to be considered for an iPad or a laptop in future, please call Catherine on 01224 628109 to see if you are eligible.



## Participatory Budgeting – what is it?

Do you have an idea that would benefit people living at your scheme?

Do you need funding to put your ideas into action?



**If the answer is yes, then this could be the opportunity for you to make your project happen.**

CaRTO has funding available as part of its participatory budgeting scheme. Any Castlehill tenant or group may apply, so long as your idea will benefit the people who live at your scheme.

Applications are taken throughout the year. CaRTO will look at each application and decide to award funding based on the information given. Remember to include how much funding you are applying for, specifics of where this money will be spent and how this will benefit people living at your scheme. This will increase your chance of a successful application.

CaRTO may arrange to visit you to see how your project is going (restrictions permitting) and may take photos to showcase what you have done and inspire others, for publishing in The Chain and on our website.

More details and the short application form are available on our website or call Catherine on 01224 628109 for a paper copy.

## Care and Repair services working as normal



Care and Repair has many services available to the over 60's or anyone living with a long term health condition across Aberdeen, regardless of tenure. Our grass cutting/hedge cutting service is running in Aberdeen over the spring and summer as always at a rate of £18 per hour plus vat (one hour minimum charge).

Care and repair's electrician and joiner are also available to carry out small jobs relating to their trade or other handyman tasks



both external and internal in line with the current government guidelines. We can help with various safety measures in the home including free home safety checks as well as bigger works such as ramps, handrails, roof works and bathroom/kitchen adaptations. We can also raise charitable funding for these things if applicable and assist with applying for attendance allowance and blue disability car badges. <http://www.aberdeencareandrepair.co.uk/> is our website, you can call us on 01224 251133 or check us out on our Facebook page.

We are delighted to announce that from 1st April we will have a dedicated part-time Support Officer based within housing to assist older and or disabled people living with mental health, dementia, or a learning disability. The Support Officer can provide additional support to access relevant services, and/or information to enable them to remain living independently within their own home. The service is available to anyone living in Aberdeen City irrespective of tenure.

Staff within the service are fully trained in dementia support and mental health first aid having been involved in a 4-year Dementia Project.

For further information, please contact Lyn Cullum on 01224 251133

## Emergency Numbers – out of hours

We've had a few requests for information concerning numbers to use when out of our normal working hours. The emergency repairs – out of hours:

- For gas heating please call, Kingdom Gas on **0800 3899463**
- For central plant/air source/ground source heating call, Heat Care Oil & Gas on **01343 842042**
- For other emergencies (floods, leaks, loss of power, etc.) call, Camwater on **01651 872929**

Should you need further information please phone the main office number 01224 625822 for our emergency call-out details. If you live in sheltered or very sheltered housing, please report any repairs to scheme staff as usual.

## Contact us...

### Castlehill Housing Association

4 Carden Place,  
Aberdeen AB10 1UT

**Tel:** 01224 625822

**Fax** 01224 625830

**Website:** [www.castlehillha.co.uk](http://www.castlehillha.co.uk)

**Email:** [info@castlehillha.co.uk](mailto:info@castlehillha.co.uk)

### Office hours are:

Mon – Fri 9.00am – 5.00pm

Tell us what you think about this newsletter for a chance to win a £50 voucher for a shop of your choice!

Fill this short survey online by scanning the QR code, or post your entry to Castlehill Housing Association, 4 Carden Place, Aberdeen, AB10 1UT.

**Q.1 Did you enjoy reading this newsletter? Yes / No**

**Q.2 What was your favourite article?**

Name:

**Q.3 What could we do to improve this newsletter?**

Address:

**Q.4 Have you heard of Go Paperless, our initiative to move towards digital to speed up communication with you? Yes / No**

**Q.5 Would you like someone to contact you to join CaRTO, CaRTO Home Link or the Scrutiny Panel?**

Tel

Email

