

# TheChain

...linking people together

ISSUE 28 • SPRING 2022



## Three storms in one month.



What the storms taught us.

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# Happy news for tenant Amy



We are thrilled for our tenant Amy, who dramatically gave birth to her baby boy in the bathroom of her home in March when her labour went a bit quicker than expected. Born before the medical staff could reach her, Amy's partner Joey delivered their 7lb 1oz little boy, in under an hour who was thankfully born 100% healthy.

When talking to her Housing Officer Mandy, Amy said she 'felt very brave and empowered and felt mother nature showed her the way!'

We would like to congratulate the new family on their sons' birth. Little Millen Joseph is absolutely gorgeous.





## Letter from our Chief Executive...

We are currently in one of the most challenging times for household budgets that any of us can remember. The impact on jobs and income from the Pandemic has been followed by levels of inflation and price hikes not seen for many years. These uncertain times underline just how important having a secure home with an affordable rent is, and while Castlehill cannot influence prices in energy, fuel, or food bills, we are fully committed to doing all we can to support our tenants in these difficult times. Increasing costs from our suppliers and contractors bring pressure on our budgets making it challenging to keep delivering a level of service that tenants should expect while keeping any rent rises to the minimum. Remember, our staff are there to help and if you're struggling with rent our household costs it's important to get in touch as early as possible. We won't have all the answers but may be able to point you to advice to make sure you are getting the best deals on your bills and getting any financial help that you are entitled to.



*David Lappin*  
Chief Executive

## New Property for Castlehill

Castlehill Housing Association took delivery of 24 flats at **Deer's Den, Kintore**. This newly built development comprising 18 x 1 bed and 6 x 2 bed affordable rented homes is located on the West side of Kintore.

Built by CHAP Construction the project has used a brownfield site in the heart of the village and was the first traditional style project undertaken for some years, where the Association was a client and had tendered the build contract competitively.

David Lappin Castlehill's Chief Executive says, "These new flats are a great addition to the area. Castlehill is committed to providing good quality homes at affordable rents. We are pleased to be able to complete this project after minor delays due to the pandemic."

Castlehill Housing and Property Services Director Isla Gray said "We are delighted

to be starting the year with a new scheme of beautiful and spacious flats in Kintore. Our new tenants are very pleased with the properties which are close to amenities and links to the village and city beyond."

Castlehill is also nearing completion of our latest new homes at **South Road, Insch**. The development consists of 4 x 4 bed and 6 x 3-bed semi-detached and terraced houses. These properties benefit from Air Source central heating and Solar PV panels which coupled with modern insulation levels should help reduce running costs. The houses have individual gardens and off-street parking. There will also be an area of amenity space attached to the development. The homes have unrivalled views of Bennachie to the rear. We are hoping to take delivery of these properties in late spring and like all Castlehill properties, they will be advertised through These Homes NES.



## Battling the elements

As many of our tenants know we have had to deal with a series of unusual storms in the Northeast during the early part of the year.

In November, a rare red warning was issued for storm Arwen by the met office, with winds of more than 100mph, bringing down phone and powerlines and cutting off water to towns and villages around the region. Thousands of trees were brought down, making it almost impossible for emergency services and electricity engineers to reach places safely. On top of that the temperature dropped. We have learnt that power firms had to deal with almost 2 years' worth of faults in the 12 hours following the height of the Storm. 135,000 homes were affected, and many people were without power, heat and water for several days. The worst affected were over a week.

Storm Malik and Corrie followed in quick succession late January battering our area with yet more gusts of 80-100mph wind and often destroying the work carried out earlier in the month to repair the consequences of Arwen.

We have 12 schemes in Aberdeenshire, 8 of which were affected by power outages following the month of storms. Behind the scenes at Castlehill, our teams in Housing and Property Services worked hard to get things sorted as quickly as we could. We worked with SSEN to try to get them to recognise these schemes as a priority but, like everyone else we had to wait for the power to be restored and faults to be fixed. Often hampered by inaccessible roads due to fallen trees and advice not to travel, staff tried their best to help wherever they could. Our staff were working hard trying to find solutions to often very complex issues which were arising from the aftermath. We do recognise it was difficult for everyone and really appreciate the patience and kindness shown to our staff who were doing their utmost to help where they could.



Three major storms in the space of four weeks are unprecedented. Scotland had not seen a red warning in the region since 2018. The events of the 1st quarter of 2022 have given Castlehill reason to further revise our emergency plans, which while we hope we would not have to use, may go some way to helping should we suffer once again at the hands of mother nature.

We really are grateful for everyone's patience and understanding with events which were out of every service's control and hope that it is sometime before the region is shaken by weather events again.

## Dog fouling



Having a pet can be a wonderful thing and can bring huge benefits to your life. However, they are your responsibility, and we need to make certain that your pets don't disturb your neighbours and that your property is suitable for one. For this reason, we ask that if you want to have a pet you remember

to ask permission of the Association. Many of our properties are no pet schemes so permission should be requested before getting a pet. Those with pets are reminded that they are your responsibility, and that dogs must not cause damage or foul within their property or scheme.

Tenants with dogs should keep them on a lead within the scheme and ensure that they are exercised appropriately. Dogs should not be allowed to foul in the communal areas and gardens. If a dog does foul within the scheme, owners must ensure that the pet waste is cleaned up immediately. If the Association must clean up dog mess, this cost may be recharged to the responsible tenant. It is an offence under the Dog Fouling (Scotland) Act 2003 to allow a dog to foul and not remove the mess immediately. It is also a breach of tenants' tenancy conditions to allow a pet to cause a nuisance. If these conditions are not upheld, then permission to keep a pet may be withdrawn. If you'd like to learn more about Castlehill's rules regarding pets, please look at our pet policy.



## Staffing Updates

2021 has been a year of change for us all with the effects of the pandemic. We have had several staff changes over the last six months and there are a few more to update you on.

We welcome more staff members to the Association. Our new Office based staff – Victoria Matthew who begins as Administration Team Leader and Mhairi Beattie who starts as our part time Housing Officer job sharing with Susan Matson. In Corporate Services we have Taru Kiskinen who started with us as HR Officer. In Finance we have Lesley Hendry who is dividing her time between this department and the Care and Repair team doing an Admin role. Our long-term Administrator Susan Murray has a new role within Castlehill as a full time Housing Officer. A natural fit to the role, Susan is excited about the changes and challenges her new job provides. She is enjoying meeting new people and problem solving for tenants. She covers the patch previously handled by Sheila Murray.

Housing senior Alana Allison has been seconded to a new digital process project which will be happening within Housing for the next six months. With Alana being seconded to this project, Suzanne Reid will act as cover for Alana while she works on the project, with Emma Roberts covering Suzanne. Emma has been with Castlehill for the last 6 years and is excited to be able to put what she has learnt in reception into practice and will be working towards her Housing qualifications.

In April we welcomed our new Property Services Officer, Dianne Macfarlane. Dianne will be working full-time in Aberdeen and North Aberdeenshire areas.

In the Sheltered side of business, we are pleased to be able to welcome Susan Padgham who joins us as relief scheme manager. Susan has an extensive career in the Care sector and loves meeting people and hearing their stories – she says she feels privileged to be able to support them, which is great to hear.



Susan Murray



Mhairi Beattie



Emma Roberts

Joining us at Monaltrie Court is Nicola Eddie. Nicola has been working in Health and Social Care for the last 22 years and is looking forward to helping build a community within Monaltrie Court, especially after the pandemic. She hopes to help build a positive and social environment for tenants which is lovely to hear.

Kate Leitch is our new Scheme Manager at Glebe Court; Kate will be covering 5 days at the scheme.

## Cost of living crisis



A cost-of-living crisis occurs when the cost of living, namely energy, fuel and food is rising faster than the household income. Our current crisis has been escalating for some time hampered by the end of benefits brought in to help during the pandemic and shortages in staffing, and global supply chains. Council tax, rent, petrol, and other bills will increase, as will national insurance all of which will have a detrimental impact on the amount of money in our pockets.

Most of the news is taken up with the reality of the huge energy price costs which will be felt by most of us. The energy price cap has risen by over 50% from 1st April and will likely rise again on 1 October, making our household energy bills soar. There is help there for those struggling with the increasing costs.

Castlehill has links to many advice services. We have plenty available on our website where you can get information pertaining to Benefits and local services that you can

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access if you are experiencing a crisis. The tenants' section has a useful list of numbers for organisations which can help and the purple square under covid information has plenty of information on benefits and financial inclusion and is updated regularly. Citizens Advice has a comprehensive list of grants and schemes for paying your energy bills on its website.

Online we recommend the Money Saving Expert Martin Lewis. He has useful information on whether to fix your price with your supplier and whether it would be cheaper to pay your bill or use the direct debit service. His advice is free and up to date.

Energy vouchers for Pay as you go customers - an advisor from SCARF confirmed that anyone with PAYG meters at risk of disconnection due to low or no credit on meter can call ACC Hardship fund on 0800 030 4713 to request an Energy voucher.

If you are experiencing issues paying your rent, we would encourage you to talk to your Housing Officer. You may be able to get help through claiming universal credit. If you already claim benefits, and they don't cover your housing costs, you may be able to get a discretionary housing payment through the City or Shire Councils, that can help to cover the shortfall. You can also apply for Council tax relief - have a look through the government's website to find out how to do this.

If you pay your Council Tax bill by direct debit and are in council tax bands A-D, you should get an automatic rebate of £150 in April. If you pay another way, you should check with the Council as to how you can claim.

On the Castlehill site there is information about where you can access help if buying essentials is becoming an issue. There are foodbanks and places where you can get hot food throughout the city. You can always self-refer to our Key Project team who can help.



## Condensation and Mould Prevention

There seems to be no escape from the rising energy costs we are all facing now. As prices continue to increase, heating your home may become less of a priority and this may have an impact on issues such as mould and condensation forming in cold areas of your home.



Condensation forms as a direct result of airborne moisture particles turning back to water when they encounter a cold surface. This, in turn, may result in mould growth if it goes undetected or is left untreated. Internal corners and glazing/window frames and their surrounds are usually the most common areas where mould spores form. Drying clothes indoors and poor ventilation coupled with low room temperatures will significantly increase the likelihood of condensation becoming an issue in your home. Preventative measures such as using extraction fans during showering or bathing, adequately heating the property, and opening the window vents built into the

frames will help to reduce moisture in the air. De-humidifiers are also an effective way to reduce the moisture in a room.

Please call our Property Services Department should you wish to discuss any of the above matters and we will be happy to provide advice where we can. Alternatively, independent advice on issues such as mould and condensation can be downloaded from the Energy saving Trust website on the link below.

<http://energysavingtrust.org.uk/advice/fixing-damp-and-condensation/>

## Keep using Covid sense

With the government phasing out free testing, how do you recognise if you have the symptoms of Covid-19?

The government has updated its symptom list from the three traditional symptoms of a fever, a new and persistent cough, and a loss or change in taste or smell to include a further nine symptoms to watch out for. According to NHS.uk the signs of Covid-19 that people should look out for also include:

- shortness of breath.
- feeling tired or exhausted.
- an aching body.
- a headache.
- a sore throat.
- a blocked or runny nose.
- loss of appetite.
- diarrhoea.
- feeling sick or being sick.

The website says the symptoms are similar to those of cold and flu. People are encouraged to keep using Covid sense; limit contact with others; keep washing hands and wear a mask in shops to keep safe and try and reduce the spread.





## Digital forms online



We want to make it as simple as possible for tenants to contact their Housing Officer or Property Services Officer to request changes to their tenancy. We have developed some forms which you can simply fill in online through our website.

Under the tenants' section on the website, you can find a section in tenancy information with links to the forms. You simply fill in the online form and click send and it will come straight through to the office. By doing this we hope to make it as simple as possible for you to let us know of any changes to your circumstances.

If you have any questions regarding your tenancy – we are sure that the information will be available in the Tenant Handbook which you can find online – but feel free to speak to your officers if you would rather have a chat.

## Ukrainian Donations



We know many of you are wondering if there is anything you can do to help with the appeals for help for Ukrainian refugees escaping the horror of the current war in the region.

The City council has an appeal for money which will be used to distribute to local charities which are assisting in humanitarian aid to Ukrainian residents and refugees. People can donate through a just giving page.

Community Learning and Development team is working hard to get properties ready for the arrival of Ukrainian families. They are looking for new or nearly new items which can make the properties look more homely and welcoming. They are also looking for toys. If you can help, please contact a member of the Community Learning & Development Team during working hours, Monday – Friday on 01224 291874. Out with these hours there will be the facility to leave a message and someone from the Team will get back to you.

## Have you thought about Rhynie?

If you are currently considering Sheltered Housing for you or a loved one, Castlehill would like to draw attention to MacKay Court in Rhynie as a place to live.

Rhynie is a beautiful restful village in Aberdeenshire 14 miles from Alford. We have several flats available in the scheme. These well-appointed one-bedroom flats have a residents' lounge and kitchen, a laundry, and a guest bedroom where visiting relatives or friends can stay. The property is surrounded by well-kept communal gardens and is close to the centre of the village which has a shop and medical practice. There are regular links to Huntly and Alford and Aberdeen city.

Please contact us at [info@castlehillha.co.uk](mailto:info@castlehillha.co.uk) for further information.



## Castlehill pledge to 'Make a Stand' to tackle Domestic Abuse

The Make a Stand pledge has been developed by the Chartered Institute of Housing in partnership with Women's Aid and the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance. It was created to encourage housing organisations to commit to supporting people experiencing domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is one of the biggest issues in society today. The true scale of the problem is difficult to determine because a sizeable proportion of domestic abuse goes unreported, but studies suggest many

millions of people are affected every year. Tragically, two women are killed every week by their partner or ex-partner.

As part of our commitment to the pledge, we will put in place and embed a policy to support tenants who are affected by domestic abuse



## Tenant Participation



### Tomnabat Residents Association

Tenants in Castlehill's Housing for Older People scheme in Tomintoul are making fantastic progress with their own group. After a change of office bearers and a slight name change, they continue to hold regular meetings and are already seeing some of their projects underway. Thanks to funding from the Tomintoul Development Trust, planters have been replaced, new durable seating has been ordered and a communal external hose is in place to enable easier access for tenants to maintain their flower displays. The group are full of ideas for fundraising, and hope to start up social activities again, like bingo, quiz nights and a movie night to build up community spirit again.

Allan Foster, Chair of Tomnabat Residents Association said, *"These projects will bring a breath of fresh air to Tomnabat Court, and we hope our activities will inspire more people to get involved. It's amazing what we can do in such a short amount of time, and I'd like to thank everyone who has helped us to achieve so much already."*

If you would like support to set up your own tenants' group where you live, please let us know at [info@castlehillha.co.uk](mailto:info@castlehillha.co.uk) or 01224 625822.

## CaRTO funding applications are OPEN



Tenants group CaRTO are delighted to see the work that has been done to improve the outdoor area at Cooper's Court in Ellon. Tenants got together to apply to CaRTO for funding to extend their existing patio area and replace benches, so that they could enjoy a cup of tea and a chat with their neighbours when the nicer weather comes.

### 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 have funding available as part of their 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.

Successful applications have been made for benches, planters, gardening supplies for a patch of undeveloped land, and even a tea set for a tenant group so that they could enjoy refreshments at their meetings.

If you have an idea for a project that needs funding, please get in touch at [info@castlehillha.co.uk](mailto:info@castlehillha.co.uk), 01225 625822 or download an application form from our website.

## Tenant Participation feedback results

A huge thank you to everyone who took part in our short online tenant participation survey. This gave a valuable insight into how tenant participation is perceived, and what we can improve upon.

*"I think it's a good process to keep tenants up to date and to get involved if they wish too"*

*"I love the inclusivity, how everyone is considered"*

*"At first, I was not aware of the fact that Castlehill let their tenants in decision making so it's a complete game changer for me. Knowing this I'm thinking about getting involved more and starting to attend its annual general meetings with hope that I can get a feel of how does all of this work exactly..."*

*"We appreciate that you are looking at our concerns and ideas for our living conditions here at Castle Hill as we are securely happy here and enjoy the fact that the workers are so caring for your tenants"*

Not everybody felt the same way, and we are working on how we can raise satisfaction levels across the board, thanks to this important feedback.

We had a great response and are in the process of contacting those who wanted a call back. If you have any suggestions or comments, please do let us know.

The lucky winner of the £50 shopping voucher prize draw was a tenant from Stevenson Court, in Aberdeen's city centre.

## Alan Morrison Above and Beyond Award 2022



**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 the office for a paper copy.

**Castlehill is delighted to have the office open for in-person appointments. Please contact reception to arrange an appointment.**

Out of Office times, our emergency repairs service will operate. Please phone the main office number 01224 625822 for our emergency call-out details.

**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

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

**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

**GOOD LUCK**

**Tell us what you think about this newsletter for a chance to win a £50 voucher for a shop of your choice! Email your answers to [info@castlehillha.co.uk](mailto:info@castlehillha.co.uk) or post your entry to Castlehill Housing Association, 4 Carden Place, Aberdeen, AB10 1UT.**

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

2. What was your favourite article?

3. What could we do to improve this newsletter?

4. Would you like someone to contact you about CaRTO, CaRTO Home Link, or the Scrutiny Panel?

Name:

Address:

Tel

Email

