

TheChain

...linking people together

ISSUE 29 • WINTER 2022



Tenant Satisfaction Survey



please fill
yours in

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Rent Freeze and what it means for Castlehill Tenants



You may have seen in the news over September/October that the Scottish Government passed legislation to cap any rent increases at 0% in both the public and private sector until April 2023 – known as the rent freeze – and wondered how this will affect you and your rent charge.

The law that the government passed on 6 October means that no landlord can apply a rent increase up to 31 March 2023. As a registered social landlord, Castlehill only reviews your rent once each year, and applies any increase from 1 April so this means that there is no change to what we already do.

The government has so far only said what needs to happen up until 31st March. They are in the process of deciding what needs to happen after that. They may decide to increase the cap so that landlords have a maximum rent increase they can apply, keep the cap at 0% or remove it completely. At the moment we don't know what they will decide, but they have committed to make that decision by the middle of January.

By law, we must give you a month's notice of any increase in rent, so we must write out to you at the end of February to let you know what decision our Management Committee has made on rents. This means that we need to start consultation with you in time so that the Committee has time to take your feedback into account when it is making its decision. This is why we have begun consulting with you on our proposals so that if the cap is not extended beyond 31st March we are able to review rents as we normally would.

We understand that it is a very difficult time for everyone, and the rising costs of goods and services affect us all. We're living in difficult times now, and we know that many of you will be concerned about your job security and your family's health and well-being. We'd like to assure you that we'll take all of these into account when we set next year's rent.

Letter from our Chief Executive...



How can Castlehill contribute to a sustainable future?

"Sustainability" is something we hear mentioned frequently, but what do we really mean by this in our role as a housing provider? The more obvious connections are to how we contribute to carbon reduction by reducing the use of fossil fuels in our property to achieve the ultimate goal of net zero emissions from our homes.

Castlehill has had a longstanding commitment to renewable technology with ground or air source heating, biomass and solar PV panels installed at a number of our properties. The driver for introducing these new renewable technologies was to reduce tenants' bills, particularly in areas where the cheaper mains gas alternative was unavailable, and to replace the use of environmentally damaging fuels such as oil. The current outlandish increases in energy costs, including gas, have changed the landscape dramatically. In the coming years, fossil fuels such as gas are to be phased out and the heating that we have in all our homes will have to come from environmentally sustainable sources.

The move to replace existing heating types with sustainable sources will, of course, come at a cost and we will require significant financial investment from Governments and elsewhere. In my view, sustainability and affordability are inextricably linked, and it is vital that rents are not forced up to unaffordable levels to cover the cost of meeting new environmental standards. There is no point in saving someone a few pounds on their heating bill if their rent must increase by more than that to pay for a new heating system being installed. Genuine sustainability in housing needs to be around people being able to afford to live there, meet household bills and heat their homes adequately. We need to develop a strategy for reducing the amount of energy that we use to keep our homes warm if we are to lower bills and make people less vulnerable to the uncertainty of energy costs.

Housing is, of course, only one factor in how we consider building a sustainable future for the communities that we all live in. The Scottish Government has committed itself to working with Councils and other partners to take forward ambitions for 20-minute neighbourhoods in Scotland. "20-minute neighbourhoods" are places that are designed so residents can meet their day-to-day needs within a 20-minute walk of their home; through access to safe walking and cycling routes, or by public transport. Making this happen will be a significant challenge, particularly in rural areas where access to local facilities or transport can be limited but the concept does demonstrate that true sustainability for communities relies on a wide range of factors such as schools, shops, health & care services, not just suitable housing.

As we move forward, Castlehill remains committed to supporting the communities we serve and playing our part in providing sustainable and affordable housing for tenants and their families.

David Lappin
Chief Executive

Tenant Satisfaction Surveys

SURVEY

Castlehill conduct a large-scale survey every 3 years to understand our tenants' views on the services they receive and to help to influence how we can shape and improve services. Research Resource will undertake the survey, with email and postal invitations reaching tenants shortly. Taking the time to fill out the survey helps us to improve our services and gain an insight into our customer base so please look out for it in November.

New property



In September Castlehill took delivery of 10 beautiful new houses at South Road, Inch. This modern development comprises 6 x 3-bed and 4 x 4-bed affordable rent homes. Each property has its own parking space and good-sized garden. Continuing with the Association's effort to adopt sustainability in their new homes, these properties have a modern Daikin Air Source Heat pump heating system and solar panels which should help with the cost of energy.

David Lappin Castlehill's Chief Executive said, "This not only contributes to meeting environmental standards but also aims to assist tenants with energy costs in a time where energy supplier prices are rising sharply, and household budgets are under intense pressure"

They are close to all the amenities in the village. All ten properties have been handed over to new tenants.

Care and Repair and CaRTO initiative



Have you heard about the new initiative that Care and Repair and CaRTO (Castlehill Registered Tenants Organisation) are carrying out in some of our sheltered schemes?

Care and Repair has been visiting schemes with members of CaRTO to let tenants know about the services Care and Repair provide and show them how they can be of benefit to them. Topics including home safety, benefit checks, smart meters and adaptations are covered. Over a cuppa and some fine cakes provided by CaRTO, our tenant group talks to tenants about what they do and how a tenant group could benefit them.

Catherine our Tenant Participation Officer says that the group from CaRTO were delighted with the turn out and the interesting people they met. They were encouraged by the questions and hope that tenants think about forming their own groups.

Care and Repair's Karen says she has been very encouraged by the reception at the Schemes they have visited so far and knows that tenants have been impressed with the services offered and the uptake for the sessions was quite high.

If you think your scheme may benefit from a visit from the team at Care and Repair – please contact them via our office 01224 625822.

CaRTO chair achievement



It is always good to celebrate achievements of our tenant volunteers. Huge congratulations to CaRTO's Chair, Colin Stewart, for completing his Open College Network NI Level 2 Endorsed Course Certificate in Tenant Participation & Community Development

Colin has been active within tenant participation (TP) for many years and has won national awards for his efforts. Explaining further about why he did the course Colin said, 'I felt it consolidated knowledge I had picked up over the years, acting as a refresher and ensuring that the legislation and statutory requirements were the most up to date and accurate.'

The course has some great hints and tips and the material is a great reference point for anyone interested in learning more about tenant participation. Our Tenant Participation Officer Catherine completed this course too, saying she has gained some great new ideas which she hopes can be put into practice and is delighted to have achieved this accreditation.

Cleaning survey – please take part if asked



Our Aberdeenshire tenants have had a change of cleaning contractor mid-August and cleaning will now be carried out by Tidy Green Clean Ltd. We rely on tenant feedback to let us know when something is not working well, and this enables us to take appropriate steps to ensure that we can improve things. We'd be grateful if tenants would remember to return their cleaning survey information. Being able to make decisions that are based on feedback is integral to how we want to operate as a business.

The cleaning surveys take place once a quarter and are anonymous apart from the scheme. Tenants will be sent a letter with a QR link or information to the website. If you would rather return the letter a freepost address is provided.

Food information for everyone struggling



In the North East the local papers and Original 106 have launched the Big Food Appeal highlighting where families can get food around the Northeast. The Trussell Trust runs several foodbanks in the area as do Cfine.

Community food pantries are a way to access healthy foods, toiletries, baby products and household items at a low cost. They operate differently to food banks and no referral is needed. They are set up to give a shop-like experience where you choose items yourself. They often work on a membership basis.

C-Fine operates 3 pantries in Aberdeen. You pay £3 for annual membership,

entitling you to visit once a week. The cost of your shopping is £2.50 per week and you can choose up to 10 items. The estimated value of the weekly items is around £15.

The Haven Community Larder in Stonehaven operates slightly differently. Single membership costs £5 a year, and family £10, allowing you to access the larder, with a pay-as-you-feel donation encouraged but not expected.

There are similar initiatives popping up around the North East, so check with your local authority to see if there is one near you.

We would encourage you to let us know if

you are facing problems, our trained staff can signpost you to organisations who can help, and we do have our in-house Key Project available to all tenants who need it.



Getting together and having fun

Recently our colleagues at our Sheltered Housing schemes have been pulling out the stops for tenants and encouraging them to get together for all manner of mini celebrations. This has been lovely as we celebrate being able to do more together.



Ascot Ladies Day at St John's

Our colleagues and tenants at St John's Court got together in the summer to watch The Royal Ascot lady's day. Tenants were treated to a cream tea and lovely sandwiches, a glass of bubbly and a posh ice cream wearing their most fancy hats, frocks, or suits they also had a small flutter while watching the races and had a fabulous time.

Many thanks to the staff for helping with arrangements.



Victoria Grange Musical afternoons

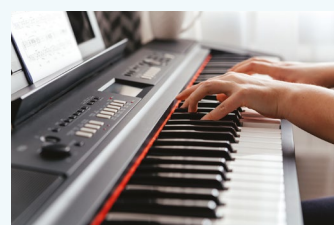


It was fantastic to learn that our tenants at very Sheltered scheme Victoria Grange are getting together in their common room to enjoy various things, including music and TheraPets. Last week local band – County Edition were the big draw. The band has visited the scheme four times and is very popular with residents and their friends. Singer Nikki, her dad Mike on the keyboards and brother Anthony on the guitar, play a combination of hits of the decades and Scottish tunes to the delight of the residents.

The staff said that these social events are proving very popular with residents, and

they are encouraged by the fact that so many of them are returning to the common room events post covid. New resident, Betty, says she has really been enjoying the events and friends and residents of the schemes Ishbel and Maureen say it is nice to be doing these things again.

It has been hard for residents to feel that it is safe enough to mix with others, and it is so important for their mental health to see other people in a social setting.



Jubilee Celebrations

One of our tenants, Hazel, who lives in Ruthrie Court, got in touch to tell us about the Ruthrie Court Jubilee celebrations. Hazel and her fellow tenants had gathered in the common room for some fine pieces and celebrating. The city council generously supplied some party food and Hazel says that a 'lovely time was had by all.'

It's always nice to hear good news, so if anyone has anything they'd like to share do get in touch – use info@castlehillha.co.uk and mark it for The Chain good news section.

Cost of living crisis



Bingo

It's lovely to be able to foster a sense of community with your neighbours, especially as things open up post lockdowns, a fun way to do this has involved the resumption of many activities in the common rooms.

Our tenants at Foudland Court have been holding regular Bingo sessions with round 20 people getting together to have some fun. We're told the favoured prize is Tunnock's Snowballs.

Big shout out to Frances McDonald, who helps to set up and pour the teas who wrote the following Bingo inspired ditty:

Eyes down, look in

The caller's ready tae begin

Cock yer lugs an concentrate

If ye miss a numer - nowt ye'll get.

Many of the other tenants are involved and the Bingo callers are CHA staff Susan Lockhart and Diane McCallum.

It's fantastic to see folk having fun together after what has been a very long period of keeping our distance.



We are living through a period of continuous crisis. Castlehill is aware that the current cost of living crisis will disproportionately effect many of our tenants and we are constantly updating our services to reflect this. On our website our previous Covid info button has become an advice section where information and advice is kept in an easy to access place for tenants. We would encourage you, to discuss issues with your Housing Officer before things get out of hand. There are many things that can be done in house to help, and that is before we sign post you to external agencies.

Sadly, the cost-of-living crisis will have an enormous impact on families in the Northeast. Food insecurity is a real issue. Did you know that thousands of children are entitled to free lunches out of term time?

Eligible school-aged children and teenagers will receive meal payments of around £12.50 per week. Those who are accessing support for the first time or may have found their circumstances have recently changed can apply online for holiday payments. Applications are still open for all councils, each council provides slightly different payments or vouchers at different times, straight to families with the vouchers being able to spend at most supermarkets.

School age children may also be eligible for other benefits and both the Aberdeen council has a useful page and Aberdeenshire Council has a similar page where you can check and see if you can get help.



Alertacall Project



Earlier this year, a pilot project was introduced at two Housing for Older People Schemes. (Conval Court and Tomnabat Court).

The main aims of this project were to evidence how well digital devices would work in rural areas, to gather information on how our older tenant group would adapt to using digital devices as well as evidencing how a digital system could free up time for staff onsite to deal with other housing and support related issues that arose.

For this project Castlehill worked with Alertacall. Alertacall are well established, and already provided this service with other providers across Scotland and the UK.

Tenants who agreed to take part in the pilot project were issued with a digital device with a display panel, which was installed by Alertacall. An arrangement was made for tenants to indicate using the device that they were OK each day. The parameters for the purpose of the project were limited to tenants using the device between 8am

and 10am each day (Monday to Friday). A roll out of any upgrade would afford much more flexibility than these timescales.

Alertacall carried out a Customer Survey and the overall results were positive. The outcomes of the survey supported the aims, with most tenants reporting that they found the system easy to use and liked the fact they could get on with their day without waiting for their daily contact. Because staff were not tied to making daily contacts with all tenants, their time was better spent focusing on those tenants with the greatest need and no issues were reported regarding the connectivity.

There is a requirement for Castlehill to upgrade existing systems at their Sheltered Housing and Housing for Older People Schemes due to the move from analogue (hardwire systems) to digital. This project is just a small but integral part of a larger programme of upgrade for Castlehill.

Castlehill would like to extend its thanks to our tenants who agreed to participate in this project.

Care & Repair



Home Safety and Benefit checks

Care & Repair have recently been visiting Castlehill Sheltered Housing blocks to offer advice on home safety and applying for attendance allowance benefit (related to health and not means tested) and disabled parking badges for their cars. Links to the eligibility for this can be found here - <https://www.gov.uk/attendance-allowance/eligibility> or <https://www.mygov.scot/apply-blue-badge/eligibility>

Please call Leanne on 01224 251133 and she will check if the support team can help you with home safety or a benefit check.

Small Adaptations service

We can also help you with bathroom adaptations, external safety handrails or small repairs such as putting up shelves/pictures or building flat pack furniture etc. Care & Repair will refer you to relevant Castlehill departments where necessary.

Smart Meter funding

Save money this winter wearing lots of layers and contacting your energy supplier to install a smart meter so you can track what you're spending, this useful gadget is free of charge to get installed by the supplier. A smart meter will help you see your energy consumption and Care & Repair can explain how best to use them.



**JOHN IS USING HIS
SMART METER &
IN-HOUSE DISPLAY
TO SAVE ENERGY**

Care and Repair can help you – call 01224 251133

In support of
smart meters
Join the energy revolution

Care & Repair can show you how to make the most of a smart meter.
Call today for their free advice service.

*Eligibility may vary

Importance of Heating and Ventilation in Winter

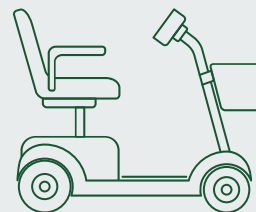
With energy bills rising, many of us will be turning the heating down a little lower this Winter... It is extremely important that your heating is switched on during cold weather. It may be tempting to switch off individual heaters, but instead try turning the valve on each radiator to a lower heat setting. If you have air-source heating don't switch it off as it is most efficient to keep it on all the time.

Ventilation is important, so as the cold weather sets in and we close windows to keep the heat in, remember to open them if you are drying clothes or cooking with steam, and please check that your extractor fans are switched on and working – they can be cleaned with a vacuum cleaner to remove dust.

If you go away, even for a couple of days, remember to leave heating on a low setting to avoid the risk of frozen pipes, and if you have prepayment meters ensure there is enough credit to keep everything running until you return.

Further advice and tips on saving energy are available from The Energy Saving Trust Scotland: <https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/hub/quick-tips-to-save-energy/>

Considering purchasing or leasing a mobility scooter?



We strongly recommend you consider the following advice:

You will need written permission from Castlehill to keep a mobility scooter.

Where will you store and charge your mobility scooter?

Permission will not be granted to use, charge or store class 3 vehicles (which can go at a speed above 4 miles per hour) within a tenant's property or in any internal areas.

You will need to ensure that the charging point/socket is appropriate for your Mobility Scooter.

Scooters should not be charged in internal common areas and should not be charged overnight.

Using the lift? You should check that you can safely take your scooter in the lift in your scheme.

You must provide proof of adequate public & third-party liability insurance cover.

You must have the scooter serviced annually – we may ask for proof of this.

Additional costs of having a scooter:

- Insurance
- Maintenance and servicing
- Electricity

We recommend you seek professional advice from an occupational therapist or reputable dealer before buying or leasing a scooter.

Alan Morrison Above & Beyond Award 2022

Do you have a good neighbour? Are there any unsung heroes in your community? Perhaps somebody has gone above and beyond to help you out?

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 you can contact the office for a paper copy. Paper copies are also available at sheltered schemes and homes for older people.



CaRTO Community Funding

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.

CaRTO may arrange to visit you to see how your project is going 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 you can contact the office for a paper copy. Paper copies are also available at sheltered schemes and homes for older people.

Warm homes discount



The Association is aware the Cost of Living will affect everyone and the recently announced Energy Price cap hike is worrying. We would like to make tenants aware that for the Warm Home Discount there has been a review of application process for this award. Energy providers are all showing following message on their sites –

“There is no need to apply for the Warm Home Discount anymore - your supplier will automatically apply the discount to your bill if you are eligible. ”

To find out whether you qualify, you can call the government Warm Home Discount phone line on **0800 731 0214** between 14 November 2022 and 31 March 2023.

Keep Communal Areas Clear of Fire Hazards

We'd appreciate it if all tenants could please keep communal areas clear of fire hazards.

Like all RSLs (Registered Social Landlords) we are subject to the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (section 93). This requires our residents to keep common areas of buildings free of anything which may easily catch fire or obstructs the entrance or exit of the property.

Our Property Services team have put posters up in communal areas to help tenants understand what type of thing is unacceptable to leave outside your property or in the hallways. If things are left out, the Association will remove and dispose of it and the residents in the building will all be charged for the cost if the owner is not identified.



Welcome mats



Single plants



January Direct Debits



If you pay your rent by direct debit, **please note** that your payment will come out of your bank account on **Tuesday 3rd January 2023**, instead of the usual 1st of the month. This is due to the banks being closed on the 2nd.

Please ensure that you have money in your account to allow your rent to be paid on **3rd January 2023**. **Thank you!**



The Management Committee and staff of Castlehill would like to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year for 2023.



Christmas & New Year office closure

Our office will close on Dec 23rd at 12pm and reopen on January 4th. Opening hours are Monday – Thursday 9 – 5 pm Friday 9 – 4 pm

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

- For gas heating: Heatcare Oil & Gas 01343 842 042
- 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.

Win £50 with our quick quiz! All the answers can be found within this newsletter. Scan the code or send your answers in to 4 Carden Place, Aberdeen, AB10 1UT. A winner will be picked at random on 9 January 2023.



Name:

.....

Address:

.....

1. What is the name of Castlehill's independent tenants' group?

.....

2. Who can help with home safety and benefit checks?

.....

3. What time does the office close on a Friday?

.....

Tel

.....

Email

.....

