

# TheChain

...linking people together

ISSUE 34 • Spring 2025



## 100-YEAR-OLD TENANT RECEIVES LETTER FROM THE KING

### Spotlight on St John's



Putting the 'fun'  
into 'fundraising'

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### Foudland turns 40



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### Win £50 prize draw

**WIN  
£50**

Tell us what  
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We would like to extend our Congratulations to our tenant Marshall Philip who turned 100 years old recently receiving his letter from the King. Marshall who has been a tenant at Victoria Grange since 2006, celebrated his birthday in late April with his family and other tenants at the Scheme.

A fantastic excuse for a celebration.

## Letter from our Chief Executive...



Developing and building new housing has been central to Castlehill since the Association was established, more than 50 years ago.

You may have noticed that we have not completed any more new houses since those built in Inch in 2022 and wondered why this is the case. The short answer is that developing new housing that can be provided for genuinely affordable rent does not stack up financially right now. Costs in the construction sector have increased dramatically in recent years, with the average cost of building a 3-bedroom house now well over £200,000. Funding for new Housing Association homes comes from a combination of grants from the Scottish Government and borrowing from banks. Continued high interest rates have made borrowing more expensive and the level of grants available for new builds have not increased sufficiently to keep borrowing requirements down. This means that the rents that would have to be charged to meet costs would be unaffordable to

many households. In this climate, Castlehill has been prioritising our resources on our existing housing stock to ensure all our tenants have a safe and secure home.

We have accelerated our programme of planned maintenance and improvements, and a significant number of our properties will benefit from new heating systems, enhanced insulation, solar panels, window replacements and new kitchens and bathrooms. As you'll appreciate, we cannot upgrade all our housing at once but over the long term we have plans in place to ensure our homes continue to meet tenants' needs into the future.

We do plan to be able to start building new homes again in the future as there are so many families who do not have a suitable home, but we will only do this when the conditions are right.

*David Lappin*

David Lappin  
Chief Executive

## Energy - help is out there

Once again, we have reached the time of year where the Energy Price Cap has been all over the news. Ofgem announced that the new price cap will be a rise of 6.4% on the current level. Remember this is the default standard variable rate on the unit rate for gas and electricity. If you use more energy you will pay for more energy.

Many of us will have seen an immediate effect on our bills when the cap changed in April. We would encourage you to speak to your supplier or investigate your options on their website. If you are concerned about money matters and how this increase will affect your priority bills, then there are several organisations around the region we can recommend.

[VSA Fuel Fund, Financial Inclusion Team,](#)

[Warm and Well with Age Scotland for elderly tenants,](#)

[Money Talk Team - Citizens Advice Scotland, SCARF,](#)

[British Gas Energy Support Fund](#)

[Scottish Power Hardship Fund](#)

[Ovo Energy Fund](#)

[E.ON Energy Fund](#)

[E.ON Next Energy Fund](#)

[EDF Energy Customer Support Fund](#)

[Octopus 'Octo Assist Fund'](#)



Always discuss issues with your Housing Officer if you have any concerns.

### Eligibility Criteria - SCARF

To be eligible for support, SCARF have shared some criteria - households must be facing financial pressures, be at risk of self-disconnection and have a pre-payment meter.

Applications can be made for up to 6 vouchers in one year.

Please contact SCARF for further details. <https://www.scarf.org.uk/>

## Customer Services Standards

– one year on

Castlehill recognises that each of our tenants is unique, with different needs and circumstances. We strive to deliver excellent customer service to everyone. One of our core values is keeping customers at the heart of our service and decision-making, and we take this very seriously.

We are committed to our Customer Service Standards, which include:

- Providing quality customer service
- Expanding digital services for tenants
- Encouraging tenant participation

When we launched this initiative, our goal was to ensure that all our services treat everyone fairly and with respect. A year later, we are pleased to see that our staff have embraced this strategy, ensuring our interactions with tenants are effective.

Since the strategy's launch, we have won a TPAS award for 'Good Practice' and have been shortlisted for 'Housing Team of the Year' by the Chartered Institute of Housing for our Independent Living Service rollout team.

Our complaints have decreased significantly, with seventy-eight stage one complaints compared to 188 the previous year. We received twenty-four stage two complaints, of which only five were partially upheld.

## Watch this space!

Our Tenant Portal is coming!

As stated Castlehill takes its' Customer Service Standards, seriously and is excited to be progressing our commitment to increasing our customers digital services.

Discussion with tenants has shown the Association that most of our customers want a digital way of managing their own tenancy. This need for more autonomy has been met with the Association moving to launch a user-friendly Tenant Portal. My Home portal is currently being tested with a wide focus group of current tenants. We hope to be rolling it out to the full tenant community later this year.

Ultimately My Home will give tenants a comprehensive way of managing their own tenancy. You will be able to access all documents connected with your tenancy: personal data; property information; rent statements; report repairs (for property, building or scheme). We know that most people will embrace the opportunity to have to all this information in one place.

Watch this space to see when we will roll out 'My Home' tenant portal to all tenants.



Spotlight on

## St John's Court, Stonehaven

St Johns has been raising money to fund our day trips, barbeques, Easter teas etc. for the last 20 years or so but has branched out in the last 8 years into including the wider community and fundraising for others. We have also given donations to many worthwhile causes, some who have personally helped tenants or their families in St Johns and others that we just want to support, our local doctors' surgery, Alzheimer's Scotland, Motor Neurone Disease, Blood Bikes, First Responders, and Stonehaven Outdoor Swimming Pool to name a few.

Latterly we have had a tenant fundraising entertainment committee who have supported us and brought many fresh ideas with them. The committee is made up of both tenants and some family members and runs in a friendly relaxed way with everyone having an equal voice. No other issues not relating to fundraising or entertainment are discussed at the committee.

We raise money with, amongst other things, sales of home-made goods such as knitted and baked items, raffles, coffee

mornings, and our own St Johns weekly lotto which is extremely popular.

We feel doing this has brought us closer to others in the community and forged links with the lions, the men's shed, the co-op, Aberdeenshire supported living and many others who now support us.

When we can we like to be able to include as many people from other schemes and areas as we can, this isn't always possible due the size of the common room and the need to be able to move, but once we are outside in the garden the sky's the limit, which is our next project!





Happy 40th Birthday

## Foudland Court 40th Birthday Party

In April our Independent Living Scheme Foudland Court in Inch celebrated its 40th birthday having been open since 1985. The Foudland Court Social Committee did a fantastic job in organising a celebration party with a lovely spread of food, cake and entertainment by local Ukulele group The Strumbelles which was enjoyed by all. The celebration was attended by residents of Foudland Court, Castlehill Chief Executive David Lappin, Castlehill staff who have been involved in the scheme over the past 40 years, the local minister and other friends of the scheme.

Housing officer Lynne Murray said, "everyone from Castlehill Office really enjoyed the party and were delighted to have been invited along, it was great to see everyone come together to celebrate Foudland Court".

Some interesting facts about 1985 the year Foudland Court opened, the average price for a loaf of bread was 48p, the average cost of a pint of milk was 20p and the average cost of a pint of beer was 61p, thanks to tenant Alison for providing this information... it certainly shows how things have changed in the past 40 years.



### Join the conversation – Join CaRTO!

Did you know Castlehill tenants have their very own independent tenants' group? It's called CaRTO – Castlehill Registered Tenants Organisation – and it exists to make sure your voice is heard on the things that matter most to you and your home.

CaRTO is made up of tenants just like you, who care about improving housing services and making a difference in their communities. The group works closely (but independently) with Castlehill to give feedback, influence decisions and help shape policies in a way that reflects what tenants really want.

Whether it's repairs, rent or communications, CaRTO looks at a wide range of issues that affect tenants' day-to-day lives.

Getting involved doesn't have to mean lots of meetings – you can take part in a way that suits you. Even just sharing your thoughts now and then helps!

If you're interested in finding out more or coming along to an online meeting to see what it's like, we'd love you to get in touch. CaRTO is friendly, informal and always happy to welcome new faces.

Want to learn more? Contact our tenant participation officer on 01224 625822 or [info@castlehillha.co.uk](mailto:info@castlehillha.co.uk)

### Community Benefit Fund

Castlehill operates a Community Benefit Fund, a fund set up to allow schemes to apply for money to go some way towards a task or project which will be of benefit to the area they live in.

We received a proposal from Cromar Court to transform a neglected, unused area of garden at the scheme into an attractive and useable space where tenants and their families can relax and enjoy.

The group proposed a paved area, raised planters which would allow tenants with limited mobility to participate in gardening, more accessibility aids and benches and

a table were mentioned. This would improve the look of the garden, be easily maintained by several tenants who have already expressed interest in the idea and encourage more social interaction, thus enhancing the wellbeing of those who live in the scheme.

We are delighted to be able to agree to donate some of the funds towards this project and will keep you updated with how it looks when finished.



### Tenants Together Scotland – Your Voice in Housing



Tenants Together Scotland is a national network that brings social housing tenants and tenant groups together to make a real difference.

By working with the Scottish Government, landlords, policymakers and housing organisations, the group ensures that tenants' voices are heard at every level.

Whether it's improving housing services, influencing decisions or sharing experiences with other tenants, Tenants Together Scotland gives you the chance to be actively involved in shaping the future of social housing. The group is open to tenants from all backgrounds and getting involved can be as simple as attending meetings, joining discussions online, or taking part in workshops and events. If you would simply like to be kept informed, you can register for email updates.

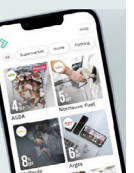
Your views matter, and by working together, tenants can create positive change for communities across Scotland. If you're interested in finding out more or getting involved, now is the perfect time to take that step. Join Tenants Together Scotland and help make a difference! Find out more at [tenants-together.scot](http://tenants-together.scot)

### Another year of Housing Perks

Castlehill is delighted to confirm that the savings made by users over the past year, have ensured that we think that we should continue to provide Housing Perks for another year.

Housing Perks was an idea backed by our brilliant, registered tenants' organisation CaRTO. Housing Perks is a discount app which you can use to make savings on all manner of things. Discounts are available for everything from groceries, clothes, restaurants and nights out. We know the cost of living is high and being able to share these savings is one way to help.

Not only did CaRTO bring us Housing Perks but they are responsible for many initiatives for tenants and are a huge part of the Association's decision-making process, policies and procedures please contact our TP officer if you have anything you would like CaRTO to consider.





Please be respectful  
to our staff



As set out in our Customer Service Standards, we do have some requirements from those who meet with our staff and contractors who work for the Association.

We at Castlehill expect tenants to treat staff as they would expect to be treated and be polite and courteous to them. Recently there have been several unpleasant instances where our staff have experienced difficult situations and behaviour and we would like to remind people that our staff are simply doing their job and following guidance from the Association, and we have several ways for people to make their feelings known.

We would request that people are as patient as possible while we deal with your requests.

We do not tolerate abuse of our staff. Aggressive or threatening behaviour will be dealt with under our Unacceptable Actions Policy and may result in action being taken against your tenancy or restrictions of the services we provide to you.

## Staffing updates

Castlehill continues to welcome new members of staff to the Association.

We have new members to the Housing Services Support team. We are delighted that Alise Tkacuka, Lauren Campbell and Mandy Roy have taken up posts and have settled in quickly. Our Housing Services team are the first point of contact for many of our clients.

We also have two new staff who have joined us as relief scheme co-ordinators. Julie Montgomery and Marney Lees are a welcome addition to the staff in our Independent Living schemes,

We also hope to have a few more additions in our Property Services department in the next couple of months and will be able to confirm these appointments in the next edition.

## Have you heard about?

Are you receiving Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, but your full rent is not being covered... did you know that you may be entitled to Discretionary Housing Payment to make up the shortfall?

If your full rent costs are not being covered, you may be able to apply to the Local Authority for Discretionary Housing Payment. Often referred to as DHP, this sum is paid by the local authority and can be a one-off payment or regular payments.

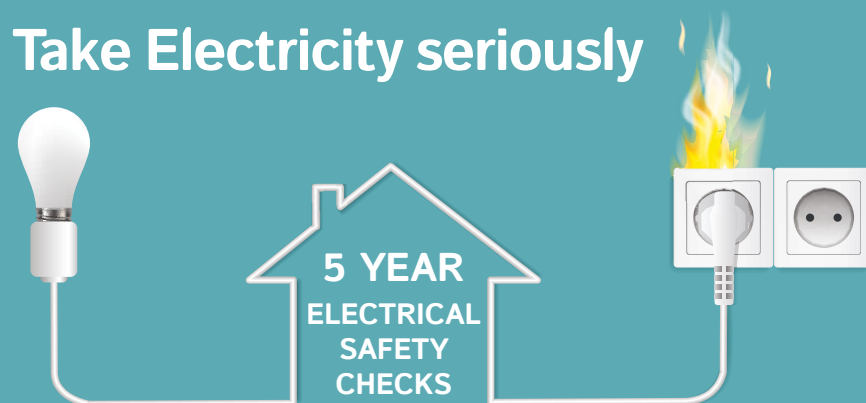
Discretionary Housing Payment can help if you have a shortfall due to having an extra bedroom (the bedroom tax) but can also be applied for if you are affected by the benefit

cap. It will not cover things like service charges, your gas, electricity or water, it cannot be used to offset rent arrears nor for benefits that you may have been overpaid and are paying back.

The Association wants to assure tenants that we are aware that the cost of living is making finances difficult, and we want you to be aware of all options available to you – rent remains a priority bill and if you are having difficulties please talk to your Housing Officer.

To apply for Discretionary Housing Payment please visit your local council's website or contact your Housing Officer for more information.

## Take Electricity seriously



It is too easy to forget how important it is to take electrical safety seriously.

Thousands of injuries every year are caused by electrical accidents in the home, this includes minor fires. As a responsible landlord we have an obligation to ensure the electrical safety of your home.

We carry out electrical safety checks, in every home every 5 years and when we contact you about these safety checks, we'd really like to impress upon you that it is important that you make the time to let our contractors in.

It is the tenants' responsibility to ensure you are using electricity safely, especially outdoors. Extension cables, domestic appliances, lighting, etc. that are not certified for outdoor use, should never be used out with your home or the main building. Doing so can have catastrophic results, so please abide by these rules. The Association requires you to seek the permission before making any alterations to your home, including installations of any outdoor electrical equipment. We just need to be assured that the work is carried out safely by a qualified electrician, and comply with current building standards, electrical standards, and current health and safety regulations. If you have any questions, please contact your Housing or Property Services Officer they'll be happy to discuss with you any issues you may have.



## Please report drug use to the police

Housing Officers confirm that they are still receiving complaints about Cannabis use within some of our schemes. We remind tenants that Cannabis is a class B drug and is illegal with penalties including large fines and prison sentences. If you have concerns about illegal drugs and related anti-social behaviour, then in the first instance you should report it to Police Scotland on 101. You can also report them anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

## Scams and what to do...



There's been a recent increase in phone and doorstep scams related to housing repairs, where a cold caller says they work for the local council or a housing maintenance department and asks if there are any outstanding repairs to be carried out on the resident's property.

There have also been cases where a caller says they work for a 'social housing repairs forum'. They say they're offering free housing repairs and have obtained the resident's details from the social housing repairs portal. They offer to arrange for a surveyor to visit the property.

Asking for householders' personal details and ultimately to gain access to their homes.



## How to Avoid Don't deal with cold callers

Phone scammers will call, unsolicited and pretend to be from an organisation you'd trust, perhaps your bank, your mobile provider, energy provider, Amazon, an insurance company or even your landlord. If you receive an unexpected phone call purportedly from your local council or housing association, hang up, clear the line and call the council or housing association using a publicly listed number to verify that the call was genuine.

They can seem friendly, and their requests can seem minor, but please be aware they are usually trying to get financial details.

Please remember to never share personal or financial information with unknown callers. Don't share passwords or pin numbers. If in doubt, tell them you'll call them back – get a name, and google the number and call and ask if they called you.

You can report suspicious calls to [www.ncsc.gov.uk](http://www.ncsc.gov.uk)



You can sign up to the Telephone Preference Service for free by calling 034 070 0707 or online at [www.tpsonline.org.uk](http://www.tpsonline.org.uk).

Many home phone providers offer services (some of which are free) to block unwanted calls.

There is also a range of standalone devices that can be used to block/ monitor calls such as [trueCall](http://trueCall) Secure call blockers.

## Planned maintenance ongoing



2025 has been a busy year so far for our planned maintenance upgrades. Planned maintenance is our programme of upgrades to our schemes, involving heating systems, windows and doors and new kitchens and bathrooms. The maintenance programme is stock condition dependent, and work scheduled is dependent upon PSO inspections and decisions made by our Management team.

So far 2025 has been exceptionally busy. We are pleased to confirm that to date we have completed the following works:

Heating upgrades at Cromar Court, from oil heating to air source heating and photovoltaic panels (PV) on the roofs.

New triple glazed window and doors at the following schemes:

- Cromar Court
- Foudland Court
- Stevenson Court, work is ongoing
- Tomnabat Court

Altdubh kitchen replacements have also taken place, and a new door entry system have been upgraded at Mackay Court and Conval Court.

We have also carried out several upgrades to kitchens and bathrooms, at some of our Trust properties and we are pleased that the work has been completed.

## New contracts



Following an extensive tender process, we will shortly be able to confirm new contractors for multiple trades and cleaning contracts which will enable us to continue to provide the best service we can.

In June 2025, we will be having new contractors on board. Out of hours contractor Camwater will remain the same, and our heating contractor Heatcare will also remain the same.

## Analogue to Digital – giving tenants a choice

There are massive changes afoot across the UK as the process of switching from traditional copper wired analogue phone lines to digital ones is taking place. This means that moving forward the telephone system will be provided in the same way as the internet. The government is hoping to have the switch complete by the end of 2025 and works are underway across the country.

Obviously, this will have a massive impact on all things currently connected to the existing phone system in our Independent Living schemes – things like Telecare, door entry systems, fire detection equipment and lift services will have to be upgraded. The Association understands that the needs of our tenants in this type of scheme has changed. Not everyone who lives in these properties requires Telecare and if they do, they want the flexibility of choosing their own type. We have listened to our tenants and have taken the decision that Telecare will no longer be provided by the Association. Post digital switchover the Local Authority will have responsibility for this provision, and you will have to contact them about this.

Tenants in our Independent Living and Very Sheltered Schemes may have already noticed that there are works underway, all these schemes will be upgraded as part of a rolling planned maintenance programme as the year progresses.

If you are a general needs or Amenity tenant your telephone supplier should be in touch to tell you when they will require you to use digital landlines, any changes will be between you and your supplier.

### Care & Repair small repairs

We are delighted to confirm that Care & Repair are now going to be extending their minor aids (e.g. external handrails) and small repairs to those who live in Blackburn, Portlethen, Newtonhill, Westhill and Elrick, these services are competitively priced and handled by our expert team who have offered this service throughout the city for many years. The service is offered irrespective of whether you own your home or are a tenant, all that is required to be considered is that you are over 60 years of age or have a health condition.

The Care and Repair Service continues to offer its full service throughout Aberdeen City.

For further information contact Care and Repair on 01224 625822.



### 100% compliant for gas inspections

We are delighted that we are 100% compliant on our gas inspection requirements. We are hugely grateful to tenants for understanding the legal requirement to having them and granting access. It really is helpful.

### Contact us...



Castlehill Housing Association  
4 Carden Place, Aberdeen AB10 1UT  
Tel: 01224 625822  
[www.castlehillha.co.uk](http://www.castlehillha.co.uk)  
E: [info@castlehillha.co.uk](mailto:info@castlehillha.co.uk)

OFFICE HOURS:  
Mon / Tue 9am – 5pm | Wed  
10:30am – 5pm  
Thu 9am – 5pm | Fri 9am – 4pm

Please do not call direct dial numbers, staff work varying hours Monday to Friday and if on holiday may not be able access their voicemail for some time. If in doubt, please call reception or email [info@castlehillha.co.uk](mailto:info@castlehillha.co.uk).

Registered Charity Number: SC013584

**WIN £50 VOUCHER** - If you would like to be in with the chance of winning a £50 voucher, this time we are asking for your thoughts on our upcoming tenants portal, My Home. You can answer a short survey online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2505Chain> or use this form and post to 4 Carden Place, Aberdeen, AB10 1UT.



What would you like to be able to do with a Tenant Portal?

☐

Checking my rent account

☐

Reporting a repair

☐

Updating my household details

☐

other (please state)

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

.....

Tel: .....

Email: .....