

**Pathfinder Inspection Report  
Summary  
January 2004**

# Castlehill Housing Association



# Castlehill Housing Association: Pathfinder Inspection Report Summary

1. Communities Scotland is responsible for the regulation and inspection of all Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). We inspected Castlehill Housing Association in October 2003. This summary report sets out the main findings from our inspection.

## Castlehill Housing Association

2. Castlehill Housing Association was set up in 1970 and registered with Communities Scotland (Scottish Homes) in 1975. Castlehill has a stock of 1,350 properties, including 395 sheltered properties and 74 very sheltered housing units. The Association's properties are located over a wide geographical area within the local authority areas of Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray. Castlehill is an Industrial and Provident Society and has charitable status.

## Inspection Grades

3. These are the inspection grades achieved by Castlehill Housing Association:

Overall Performance	B	Castlehill is a good performer with many strengths and some areas where improvement is needed. The prospects for improvement overall are promising.
Governance and Financial Management	B	Castlehill is a good performer in governance and financial management with many strengths and some areas where improvement is needed. The prospects for improvement in governance and finance are promising.
Housing Management	B	Castlehill delivers a good housing management service with many strengths and some areas where improvement is needed. The prospects for improvement in housing management are promising.
Property Management	C	Castlehill delivers a fair property management service with some strengths but with significant areas where improvement is needed. The prospects for improvement in property management are uncertain.
Property Development	B	Castlehill delivers a good property development service with many strengths and some areas where improvement is needed. The prospects for improvement in property development are promising.

## Overall Performance

4. This section describes how good Castlehill's services are overall and how well they are managed.
5. These areas are working well overall:
  - ✓ Castlehill has adopted a positive approach to issues of sustainability.
  - ✓ Castlehill has recognised its own strengths but also has a good awareness where further improvement is required.
  - ✓ The quality of information provided to tenants is good, particularly in the Tenant Handbook.
  - ✓ Castlehill offers good access to its services for tenants and other service users.
  - ✓ Castlehill has taken a good approach to developing a tenant participation strategy.
  - ✓ Castlehill has produced a good internal management plan.
6. These areas could be working better overall:
  - Castlehill does not carry out sufficient monitoring of equalities issues and review of its equal opportunities policy is overdue.
  - Castlehill does not regularly seek feedback on every service. Where such information is collected, it is not routinely analysed.
  - Castlehill does not report regularly on its performance to tenants or other service users.
7. These are our key overall recommendations:
  - ❖ Castlehill must actively address equality and diversity issues in order to demonstrate that it meets legal requirements.
  - ❖ Castlehill should further develop its strategic planning framework to incorporate action plans for achievement of identified objectives.
  - ❖ Castlehill should seek more feedback on the services provided and tell tenants and other service users how the feedback has influenced service delivery.
  - ❖ Castlehill should report its performance to tenants and other service users.

## Governance and Financial Management

8. This section describes how well Castlehill's governing body of volunteer members control the organisation, and examines the wider opportunities for tenants and other members to become involved in managing Castlehill. It also looks at Castlehill's financial health and how it manages its finances.
9. These areas are working well in governance and financial management:
  - ✓ The Management Committee controls Castlehill effectively.

- ✓ There is a good awareness among Committee members of Castlehill's strengths and weaknesses.
- ✓ There is a good awareness of the risks Castlehill faces and there are procedures in place to minimise and manage them.
- ✓ Castlehill has detailed financial projections that are updated annually. These indicate that the organisation will be viable in the long term.
- ✓ Castlehill has a strong financial management framework, a good approach to budget setting and produces well-structured and informative management accounts.
- ✓ The finance function is very organised and well managed.

10. These are the areas that could work better in governance and financial management:

- Although Castlehill makes membership accessible, it does not have a lot of members.
- Castlehill carries out internal audit, but this is not done comprehensively across all services.

11. These are our key recommendations in governance and financial management:

- ❖ A longer-term plan for internal audit should be developed and implemented.
- ❖ Castlehill should more proactively promote membership of the Association, particularly amongst tenants.

## Housing Management

12. This section summarises how well Castlehill controls access to its houses and rents levels, and deals with empty houses and rent arrears. It also describes how Castlehill manages its estates and deals with antisocial behaviour.

13. These are the areas that are working well in housing management:

- ✓ There is a good range of support services available to tenants through the Association's Key Project.
- ✓ Castlehill has made excellent progress in signing up tenants to the Scottish Secure Tenancy.
- ✓ The Association's performance on collection of rent arrears is good and improving.

14. These are the areas that could work better in housing management:

- Castlehill has not implemented the Allocations Policy that was approved by Committee in May 2002 and as a result may not be meeting its legal obligations.
- The Association's system for recording allocations outwith the Homechoice system does not provide a clear audit trail.
- Monitoring of rent arrears and voids could be improved.

15. These are our key recommendations for housing management:

- ❖ Castlehill should implement the Allocations Policy approved in May 2002 and must make sure that it is complying with the requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.
- ❖ Castlehill should make sure that all allocations records provide a clear audit trail.
- ❖ Castlehill should review reporting of performance on arrears and voids.

## Property Management

16. This section summarises how well Castlehill maintains the fabric of its houses. It describes the quality of repairs that are done when they are needed (“responsive repairs”) as well as maintenance and improvements planned in advance. It also looks at how Castlehill adapts houses so that tenants can stay in their homes when their needs change.

17. These are the areas that are working well in property management:

- ✓ Castlehill has set targets to complete responsive repairs and meets these targets.
- ✓ Tenants can easily report repairs to Castlehill.
- ✓ Castlehill responds well to requests for medical adaptations.
- ✓ The Association’s Technical Liaison Group provides a good forum for considering issues relating to property management.

18. These are the areas that could work better in property management:

- Castlehill is not meeting its statutory duty with regard to gas safety. It did not have current gas safety certificates for all properties.
- The information sought from tenants regarding their satisfaction with repairs that have been carried out is limited.
- The Association does not have a systematic approach to carrying out pre and post inspections of repairs.
- Castlehill does not have formal procedures to deal with Right to Repair and Right to Compensation for Improvements in accordance with the requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

19. These are our key recommendations for property management:

- ❖ Castlehill must review its procedures for carrying out gas safety checks and comply with legal requirements.
- ❖ Castlehill should review its system for monitoring tenants’ views on the repairs service and report results to tenants.
- ❖ Castlehill should develop a systematic approach to carrying out pre and post inspections of repairs.
- ❖ Castlehill should formalise procedures for dealing with Right to Repair and Right to Compensation for Improvements to ensure that it is meeting the requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

## Property Development

20. This section summarises how good Castlehill's newly built houses are. It also looks at how Castlehill managed the construction of these houses.

21. These are the areas that are working well in property development:

- ✓ Castlehill has good working relationships with the local authorities in whose areas it operates and with the Communities Scotland area office.
- ✓ The physical quality of Castlehill's completed developments is good.
- ✓ Castlehill carries out good quality financial assessment of development proposals.

22. These are the areas that could work better in property development:

- Castlehill does not monitor tenant satisfaction with new houses.
- Castlehill could make clearer how proposals for individual developments link in to its overall development strategy.

23. These are our key recommendations for property development:

- ❖ Castlehill should monitor tenants' view of new properties and use this to improve future developments.
- ❖ Castlehill should make sure that proposals for individual developments are clearly linked to its overall development strategy. It should also review the strategy regularly to make sure that it is still appropriate and up to date.

24. Anyone can ask for a copy of the full inspection report. All reports are on the Communities Scotland website at <http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk>

25. This summary can also be made available on tape, in Braille, MOON, large print and community languages. For information please contact Janette Campbell on 0131 479 5162 or email [campbellj@communitiesscotland.gov.uk](mailto:campbellj@communitiesscotland.gov.uk).

26. We have asked Castlehill to produce an improvement plan within eight weeks of publishing the inspection report to show how it intends to respond to all our recommendations. We will agree the plan with the organisation. We will re-inspect Castlehill in five years' time.