



Craigdale
HOUSING ASSOCIATION

INFORMATION AND ADVICE SERVICE POLICY

Date of Review: 18.03.22
Date of Approval: 28.03.22
Date of Next Review: March 2025

Craigdale Housing Association can provide this document on request, in different languages and formats, including Braille and audio formats.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 We aim to provide high quality information and advice to everyone using our services. We want to ensure that customers understand their housing rights, responsibilities and options and will provide information, practical assistance and support where appropriate. Appendix 1 sets out the responsibilities of staff members for the provision of information and advice. The remit for our Housing Information and Advice Service and the type of information and advice we will provide is attached at Appendix 2.
- 1.2 We believe that bad advice, however well intentioned, is the worst possible advice therefore it is essential that our staff are supported by access to good information and training.
- 1.3 We recognise that advice must be timely and available when it is needed, not when it is convenient for us to provide it. It is also critical that staff fully understand when and where not to advise, to prevent them from feeling obliged to give advice on a subject they may not be fully conversant with. Staff must have up to date information on other appropriate advice providers and support agencies, and wherever possible have referral arrangements with key agencies.

2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 This policy aims to:
- Comply with the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers and Good Practice Guidance
 - Ensure that our service is accessible to all client groups
 - Set out the expectations placed on staff in relation to the provision of information and advice
 - Ensure that advisers receive sufficient and appropriate training in order to demonstrate competency

3.0 REGULATION

- 3.1 Section 31 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 introduced the Scottish Social Housing Charter which sets the standards and outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve when performing their housing activities. This Charter was further reviewed in 2017 and is currently being further reviewed. The Scottish Housing Regulator monitors social landlords' compliance with the outcomes. This Policy will take account of and comply with the relevant outcomes contained within the Social Housing Charter. These are:
- Outcome 1 - Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that *tenants and other customers have their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.*

- Outcome 2 - Social landlords manage their businesses so that *tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.*
- Outcome 6 - Social landlords, working in partnership with other agencies, help to ensure as far as reasonably possible that *tenants and other customers live in well-maintained neighbourhoods where they feel safe.*
- Outcome 7, 8 & 9 - Social landlords work together to ensure that *people looking for housing get information that helps them make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them. Tenants and people on housing lists can review their housing options.*

Social landlords ensure that *people at risk of losing their homes get advice on preventing homelessness.*

- Outcome 10 - Social landlords ensure that *people looking for housing find it easy to apply for the widest choice of social housing available and get the information they need on how the landlord allocates homes and on their prospects of being housed.*
- Outcome 11 - Social landlords ensure that *tenants get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home; and ensure suitable support is available, including services provided directly by the landlord and by other organisations.*
- Outcome 13 - Social landlords manage all aspects of their businesses so that *tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.*
- Outcome 14 & 15 - Social landlords set rents and service charges in consultation with their tenants and other customers so that *a balance is struck between the level of services provided, the cost of the services, and how far current and prospective tenants and service users can afford them. Tenants get clear information on how rent and other money is spent, including details of any individual items of expenditure above thresholds agreed between landlords and tenants.*

The Scottish Housing Regulator has seven Regulatory Standards (2019), which all Scottish registered social landlords must meet. This policy aligns with the following Standards from the SHR's Regulation Framework:

- Standard 1 - The governing body leads and directs the RSL to achieve good outcomes for its tenants and other service users.
- Standard 2 - The RSL is open about and accountable for what it does. It understands and Takes account of the needs and priorities of its tenants, service users and stakeholders. And its primary focus is the sustainable achievement of these priorities.
- Standard 3 - The RSL manages its resources to ensure its financial well-being and economic effectiveness.
- Standard 5 – The RSL conducts its affairs with honesty and integrity.

- Standard 6 - The governing body and senior officers have the skills and knowledge they need to be effective.

4.0 PRINCIPLE AND STRUCTURE OF HOUSING ADVICE PROVISION

- 4.1 The Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers is a quality assurance framework for agencies involved in the provision of information and advice and incorporates performance indicators, competences for advisers and good practice guidance.
- 4.2 Where information is requested, staff will advise in accordance with the Staff Competency Table attached at Appendix 3, and provide details of other potential advisors, or make a referral, as detailed in the Staff Competency Table.
- 4.3 We will inform our customers about our own services in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to:
- A range of service and policy related leaflets
 - All our policies available on our website
 - Quarterly newsletter given to all tenants and members
 - Via our website www.craigdaleha.co.uk
 - Formal / informal tenant group meetings
 - Information and promotional events in the community
 - Comprehensive information for new tenants on the commencement of the tenancy

Our Tenant Participation Strategy sets out the ways that our tenants can become involved in our work.

5.0 ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND ADVICE

- 5.1 Housing advice and information is available through our office, via our website or, where a request is reasonable, through home visits from staff.
- 5.2 Because of the wide variety of information we publish or may have enquiries about, it is not practical to provide copies of all our documents in alternate formats such as large print, audio cassette / CD or foreign languages. However, where the need arises, we will endeavour to provide information in whatever format is necessary. We currently:
- Provide documents in large type
 - Have access to Glasgow City Council Cordia Translation services

On our websites, we:

- Subscribe to Browsealoud for those who are visually impaired or have literacy problems

- 5.3 We aim to deal with all requests for advice at the point of contact. If the advice required is not within the competency of the staff member dealing with the customer, they will try to get a suitably trained staff member to deal with the request. If no-one is available, the customer will be offered the option of making an appointment to come back when a suitably qualified staff member is available. Where the required advice falls out-with our overall competency we will try to signpost an appropriate agency for the customer.

6.0 SERVICE STANDARDS

- 6.1 Our Customer Service Standards detail the level of service that customers can expect when they contact the Association with a service query or request. Our aim will be to achieve high levels of customer care on a consistent basis whilst also recognising the individual needs and preferences that customers have.

7.0 RESOURCES & TRAINING

- 7.1 We recognise that effective information and advice provision cannot take place without a commitment of resources, both financial and human. We make provision in our budgets and in our staffing resources for publicity, promotional activities, tenant involvement and staff training.
- 7.2 We review staff training requirements annually, as part of the Appraisal Process and plan for appropriate training. All staff expected to provide information and advice will undertake the appropriate Scottish National Standards training.

8.0 MONITORING SATISFACTION

- 8.1 We carry out a range of surveys to measure satisfaction with the information and advice provided to tenants and other customers and will continually review these.
- 8.2 We will monitor complaints to ensure that all learning points are known and acted upon to improve our advice and information provision.
- 8.3 We will ensure that passive information (as a minimum) is available to customers, and the range of advice leaflets and other material that we produce will aim to encourage feedback about the service provided.
- 8.4 Additionally, the take up of leaflets will be monitored, and where there is greater demand, we will seek to build referral pathways into related services in order to improve our service to customers.

9.0 MONITORING OF SERVICE

- 9.1 The Operational Services Committee are responsible for monitoring our Information and Advice Service. To do this effectively, the Committee will be provided with:
- Quarterly reports on service use and activity
 - An Annual Service Review; looking at the work; i.e. service delivery and administrative systems for the past year

10.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

- 10.1 Craigdale HA will act in a manner that encourages equal opportunities and complies with all relevant equal opportunities requirements. The Association's Equalities Policy provides further information on these and the Association's approach to equalities issues.

11.0 RIGHT TO COMPLAIN

- 11.1 In the event of you not being satisfied with the service received, please contact Craigdale for a copy of the Complaints Policy or download from our website.

12.0 POLICY REVIEW

- 12.1 This policy will be reviewed every 3 years in accordance with the policy review programme agreed by the Board.

If there are significant changes to legislation or regulation or there are found to be deficiencies or failures in this policy, because of complaints or findings from any independent organisations, the Chief Executive Officer will initiate an immediate review.

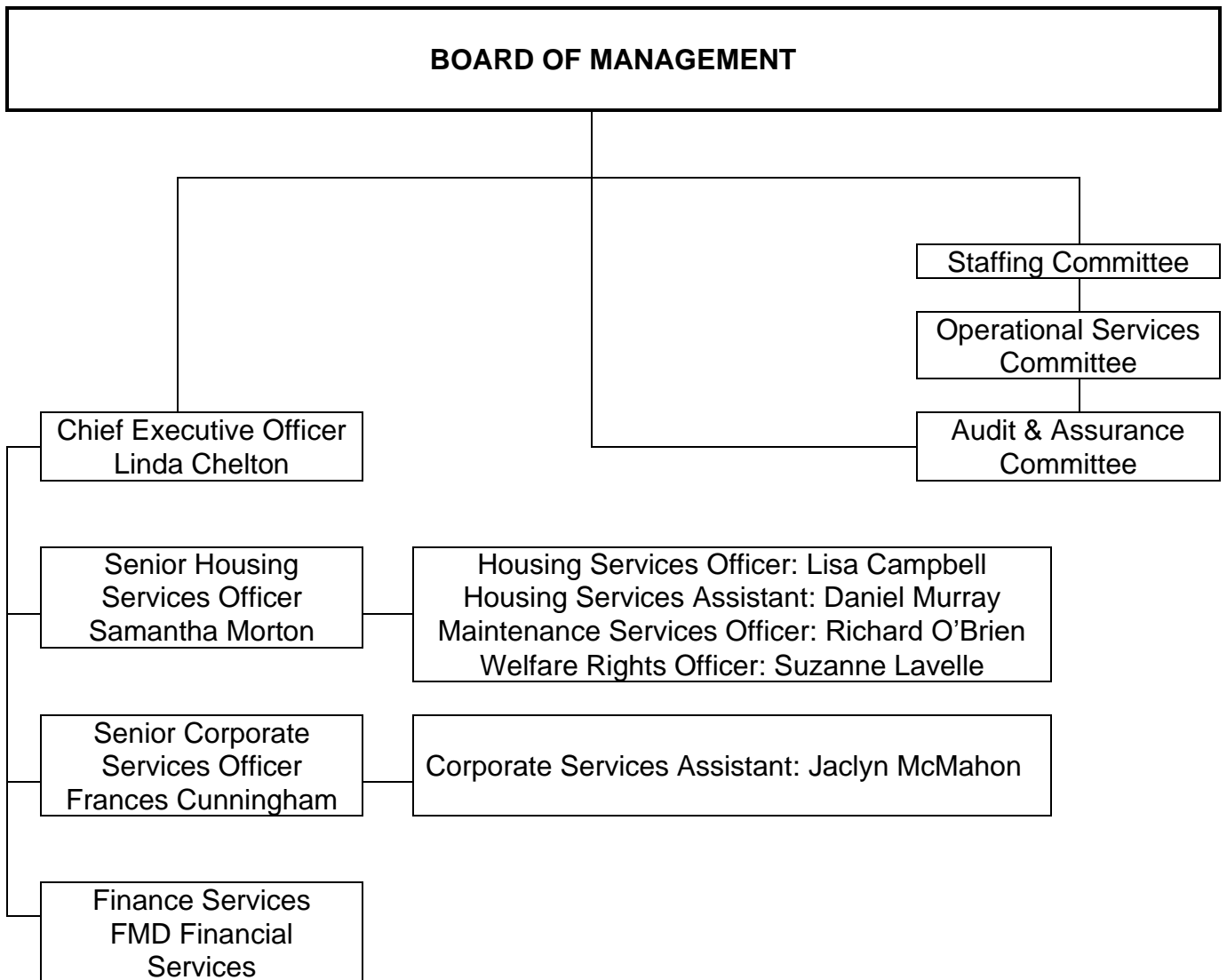
APPENDIX 1

Responsibilities for the Provision of Our Information and Advice Service

A staff structure chart is attached. The members of staff with responsibility for the provision of our information and advice service are described below. Staff responsible for offering advice to customers will refer to the competency table attached at Appendix 3.

Senior Management Team (SMT)	<p>The SMT has overall responsibility for ensuring that the information and advice service (the service) is adequately resourced, managed and risk assessed. They must ensure that the quality of the service is effectively monitored. This is achieved primarily through the production of the Business Plan and annual budgets.</p> <p>These are line managers to the staff who provide information and advice to customers. They provide support to staff in their individual roles and must ensure that their staff are adequately trained and have access to up to date and reliable information. Managers are also responsible for ensuring that adequate and accurate records are kept to inform the review of the service and allow effective performance monitoring.</p>
Housing Services Team	<p>These are the frontline staff who visit customers at home and are responsible for most of the face to face contact we have with customers out-with our office. They must be aware of trends in the type of advice they are being asked for and ensure that their Line Managers are aware of any information or training gaps so that these can be filled. They will be trained at Type 1 level of the information and advice standards.</p>
Housing Services Assistant Maintenance Services Officer	<p>Respond to telephone, internet enquiries, social media posts and visits to the office from our customers and members of the public and have a wide knowledge of our services and other services available locally. They will be trained at Type 1 level.</p> <p>Our Maintenance Services Officers and Housing Services Assistant are primarily concerned with the maintenance of our housing stock. The advice that they offer is mainly in relation to technical matters. However, since they are part of the “public face” of Craigdale HA it is important that they are able to accurately signpost customers to the right place for help. They will be trained at Type 1 level.</p>
Corporate Services Assistant	<p>Is the first point of contact for everyone who phones or visits our office and deals with as many issues as possible to avoid having to pass the customer on. Working in a public area constrains their ability to offer in depth advice. They are trained at Type 1 level.</p>

CRAIGDALE'S ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



APPENDIX 2

Craigdale Housing Association

Housing Advice Service Remit

Type of Service: Housing Advice - Our staff will actively work with you to identify the specific housing issues that you want help with. They will discuss your options and agree a course of action with you. They will provide practical assistance according to your needs. If it is necessary and appropriate they will refer you to another agency that is better able to take action on your behalf.

Location: The service is provided from Craigdale Housing Association's office at 83/85 Dougrie Road, Castlemilk, Glasgow, G45-9NA.

Methods of delivery: We provide passive advice online at our website www.craigdaleha.co.uk 24-hours a day.

The service is also available by telephoning or calling in person to our office during our normal office opening hours;

Monday	09.00 am	-	5.00 pm
Tuesday	09.00 am	-	5.00 pm
Wednesday	09.00 am	-	12.30 pm
Thursday	09.00 am	-	5.00 pm
Friday	09.00 am	-	3.45 pm

Closed for Lunch 12.30 pm - 1.15pm

If none of these methods suit, a home visit can be arranged. We also provide general information by leaflet, and in our Newsletter.

Remit / Purpose of the service We provide general housing information and advice to our tenants, and to housing applicants.

We aim to ensure that our customers understand their housing rights, responsibilities and options. Our staff provide information and advice on housing issues and our Housing Team can provide practical assistance including explaining decisions, writing letters and completing forms.

Information and advice is available on the following issues.

- Rent Arrears
- Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit
- Welfare Rights
- Disrepair in Rented housing
- Discrimination in Housing
- Eviction: Anti-Social Behaviour
- Homelessness: Relationship Breakdown
- Security of Tenure: Statutory Tenancy Rights

If you need more help than we can offer our staff will, wherever possible, refer you to another agency which has the expertise to help.

Craigdale Housing Association

- Provides the service free of charge
- Processes all data held in line with Data Protection legislation
- Complies with all Health and Safety and Human Rights legislation
- Ensures the staff member providing the advice will not discriminate between clients for any reason
- Will make information available in different formats, or provide appropriate translation services, if you need them
- Ensures the remit, boundaries and limitations of the advice service are identified to the customer
- Ensures a complaints procedure is in place and all customers are made aware of this

APPENDIX 3

Staff Competency Table for Housing Information and Advice

This table is for staff to use and is designed to give guidance on how to respond to enquiries. It details the areas of housing law where they can give advice and also when they should signpost or refer the customer to a more appropriate agency.

It is also a guide to be used by staff and their line managers to assess any skills shortfall and consequent training requirement.

We will ensure that all members of staff expected to act as advisors undertake the appropriate Scottish National Standards training modules in that area of law, for most staff to 'Type One Provider' level. Some staff will be trained to Type Two to give them a wider appreciation of the issues and to assist them with dealing with other agencies on the customer's behalf, but we are a Type 1 Advice Provider.

Please note: Our reception staff are usually the first point of contact within the Association. Where they do not have the required competency, they will facilitate an appointment, interview or telephone call with a member of staff who does, wherever possible, on the same working day and/or provide the customer with passive information, such as a leaflet (if one is available), and a copy of the appropriate information or contact sheets.

Area of Law	Staff Member	Required Competency
Security of Tenure	Senior Housing Services Officer Housing Services Officer Housing Services Assistant	Knowledge of all tenancies in common use, and advice on rights of tenant in repossession action. Offer referral to Glasgow City Council where homelessness may arise. Advise on support agencies and legal advisors in all other situations.
Housing Benefit or Universal Credit	Senior Housing Services Officer Housing Services Officer Welfare Rights Officer	To understand the principles of Housing Benefit and Universal Credit, be able to read and understand a determination letter, and to advise how to make a claim. No advice should be given on the likely success (or otherwise) of any claim, or in response to any detailed or technical request. The claimant should be directed to the local Housing Benefit Office in these circumstances. The client should always be advised of their responsibility to ensure their Housing Benefit or Universal Credit claim is correct, and of their entitlement to appeal if they feel a determination to be incorrect.
Housing Benefit (continued)	Housing Services Officer	As above but may include assistance with completing an application form and advice on applying for back dates / 2 homes payments.
Discrimination in housing	All Staff Members	To understand and comply with the Association's Equalities and Diversity Policy. To understand how discrimination may occur. In terms of a complaint or

Area of Law	Staff Member	Required Competency
		allegation, if it is about the Association, the customer should be encouraged to use our Complaints Policy, but if not, advised of support agencies or legal advisors.
Disrepair (CHA)	Maintenance Services Officer Housing Services Officer Housing Services Assistant Corporate Services Assistant	To be aware of our policies and responsibilities as a Landlord, and to arrange such work as is necessary. In terms of any other landlord, not to advise, but to advise of agencies that can help.
Disrepair (Other Landlords)	Maintenance Services Officer Housing Services Officer Housing Services Assistant Corporate Services Assistant	As above, to be aware of issues, but not to advise, but to advise of agencies that can help.
Harassment and Illegal Eviction	Senior Housing Services Officer Housing Services Officer	Understanding of the different types of tenancy and the definitions of harassment and illegal eviction. General advice about the rights of tenants in such circumstances. Advice about relevant support agencies and legal advisors should be given, except in the case of a homelessness situation, where a direct referral to Glasgow City Council should be offered.
Homelessness – Priority Need	Housing Services Officer Housing Services Assistant Corporate Services Assistant	Basic understanding of the definitions of homelessness, priority need, intentionality and local connection and the changes coming through in the lead up to 2012. Provide details of other support agencies.
	Housing Services Officer	Ability to refer cases directly to Glasgow City Council and to explain arrangements for temporary accommodation.
Homelessness – Non-Priority	Housing Services Officer Housing Services Assistant Corporate Services Assistant	As above, but only to make people aware of what non-priority means, and that we are not in a position to judge whether or not this is the case, and where required, to offer to refer to Glasgow City Council, or provide details of other support agencies.
Mobility and Transfer	Housing Services Officer Housing Services Assistant	To have full knowledge of the Association's allocation and transfer policy.
Housing Options: General	Housing Services Officer Housing Services Assistant Corporate Services Assistant	Awareness of different types of tenure and of tenancies used. Arguments for/against owner occupation. Provide contact information about Glasgow City Council's Housing Options advice, local providers, and estate agents only.
Housing Options: Private Rented	Housing Services Officer Housing Services Assistant	Awareness of different types of tenure and tenancies used by private landlords.

Area of Law	Staff Member	Required Competency
and Owner Occupation	Corporate Services Assistant	Provide contact information about local providers and estate agents only.
Relationship Breakdown	Senior Housing Services Officer Housing Services Officer	For the Association's tenants to advise on occupancy rights, our Allocations Policy and to offer referral to Glasgow City Council where homelessness is arising. In addition, to advise of support agencies and legal advisors. In the case of non tenants, to offer referral to Glasgow City Council where homelessness is arising, and in addition, to advise of support agencies and legal advisors.
Rent: Private Sector	Housing Services Officer Housing Services Assistant Corporate Services Assistant	To advise of relevant agencies who can advise and where to look for private rented accommodation.
Rent Arrears	Senior Housing Services Officer Housing Services Officer	For current tenants, a full understanding of the Association's arrears recovery policy and ability to advise appropriately. Understanding of causes, and solutions other than legal action. Offer referral to Welfare Benefits Service. Provide advice on other support agencies. As a matter of practice, once legal action has commenced, offer advice on support services and legal advisors only. For non-tenants, advise of support agencies and legal advisors only.