

Allocations and new tenant information pack consultation report

June 2023



CHESTERFIELD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

'Human connection is crucial, so tenants know they are more than just a number. Six months ago, I didn't want to live and now I have a bird feeder and watch nature'

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 When carrying out the sign-up process for a property with a new tenant, Chesterfield Borough Council have traditionally provided paper documentation. The allocations team wanted to review this practice to explore alternative ways of making this information available to new tenants. The aim of the review is to make the new tenant paperwork more streamlined to their needs, environmentally friendly and more cost effective to provide.
- 1.2 Currently tenants who move into a home owned by Chesterfield Borough Council receive a sign-up pack, including a tenant handbook. The sign-up pack consists of approximately 21 forms, booklets, and leaflets (*see figure 1.1.*) in a zip-up wallet. The current pack provided costs approximately £25 per property to produce.
- 1.3 The initial proposal was for the new tenant pack to be slimmed down into what is legally required and for additional documentation to be available online for tenants to access as and when they need it (*figure 1.2*). Paper copies of relevant documentation would remain available for those tenants who request it and / or do not have access to the online versions.
- 1.4 Before making changes the allocations team worked with the tenant engagement team to understand tenant views on:
 1. The allocations process
 2. New tenant pack including making the pack available online
- 1.5 The purpose of the proposed changes are:
 - To continue to provide tenants with timely information related to their home and tenancy
 - To reduce paper use and printing (reflecting Chesterfield Borough Council's climate change strategy aims)
 - To lower costs (the current pack costs approximately £25, the proposed new pack will cost approximately £3).
 - To reduce the time and resources required to produce the sign-up packs.
- 1.6 In addition to gathering tenant's views on the proposed changes to the sign-up pack, it was agreed that consultation on the allocation process overall, (from a tenant completing an application to join the housing register through to moving in) was required.
- 1.7 This report presents the findings and recommendations from consultation work and focus group sessions implemented by the tenant engagement team. The aim of the consultation was for tenants to give their views and talk about their experience of the allocations process. The focus groups were carried out on the 12th and 22nd of June and the 7th of July 2023. Three face-to-face focus groups were held and one digital focus group over MS Teams.

Figure 1.1. Content of current sign-up pack


Tenant Handbook	Who is responsible for repairs?	Repairs guide	Repairs obligation	Direct debit form	New tenant checklist <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____	Core lettings form and privacy notice	Gas and electricity supplier
Methods of payment	Pay point locations	Severn Trent Water rates	Changes to housing benefit entitlement	Good neighbour agreement	Registering a claim for HB/CT support	Asbestos	Housing Benefit
Home Contents Insurance	Careline Referral form	Notice of termination of tenancy	Decorating vouchers agreement	Allocations survey 	What's in the current pack?		

Figure 1.2. Content of proposed new sign-up pack

New tenant checklist <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____	Your tenancy details _____ _____ _____ _____	Methods of payment	Authority to share with DWP	HB/CT support contacts	Information for tenants leaflet	Core lettings form and privacy notice	Direct debit form
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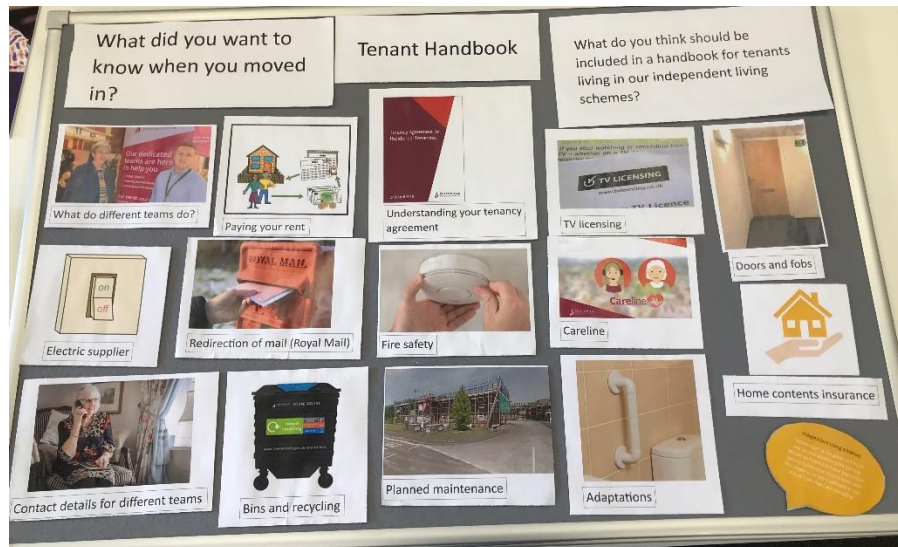
Proposed new pack

2. Engagement Methodology

- 2.1 Between 6th and 23rd March 2023, the tenant engagement team completed a survey with tenants who had moved into their home during the previous two-year period. The purpose of this consultation was to gather tenant's views and experiences of the allocations process, including the sign-up pack and tenant handbook received. The consultation incorporated:
 - Postal surveys
 - Online surveys
 - Telephone surveys for tenants where their tenancy had commenced within the last 2-3 months. Tenants were also able to opt for a telephone survey to meet their individual communication needs.
- 2.2 On completion of the consultation and analysis of the results, the findings were used to identify the key themes which were most prevalent:
 - Communication within the allocations process
 - Information within the sign-up pack and new tenant handbook
 - Easy read and accessible information
- 2.3 Through discussion with the allocations Manager, it was agreed that focus groups would be facilitated to focus on these areas. To ensure a cross representation of tenants it was decided to offer different focus group formats:
 - Independent living group at Leander and Mallard Court (face-to-face)
 - Face-to-face
 - Online (via Teams)
- 2.4 Tenants who had previously expressed an interest in discussing their views from the survey in more detail were given an opportunity to attend.
- 2.5 Face to face sessions were held at the Town Hall and Mallard and Leander Court. Mallard and Leander Court were identified as the most suitable independent living scheme for a focus group as many tenants had recently moved into the scheme following a programme of refurbishment.
- 2.6 The online and face to face sessions at the Town Hall were attended by the Allocations Manager who was able to respond to questions which arose during the meeting. The focus of all the sessions was to provide information, promote interaction and open discussion, tailoring our approach to meet the needs of our tenants. We considered how to meet the needs of attendees who have dyslexia and other communication needs and adapted the presentation to reflect this.
- 2.7 Facilitators led different areas of discussion and asked a series of open questions which tenants could respond to. Information was presented visually to support tenants understanding, encourage their interaction and be able to express their views and experiences. A PowerPoint presentation was created as

2.10 The board shown in *figure 2.3*. compared the content and price of the old pack with the proposed new pack.

Figure 2.3. Sign up pack content display board



2.11 The board shown in *figure 2.3*. provided image and text-based examples of information which new tenants may find useful. This provided a starting point for discussion with tenants around what they found useful and what they would have liked to have known when they moved into their new home. The purpose of this was to help determine what should be included in the tenant handbook.

3. Findings

3.1 Allocations and new tenant information pack survey consultation

3.1.1 A total of 859 tenants were identified within the two-year period and from this 64 people (tenancy commenced during the period 07/11/2022 – 02/01/2023) were identified for a telephone survey. To encourage tenants to complete the consultation and to demonstrate appreciation for tenants taking the time to respond, a £50 shopping voucher prize draw was offered for those tenants who chose to take part.

3.1.2 The consultation ran from the 6th of March 2023 to the 23rd of March 2023, the short time frame for the consultation was a result of following guidance around Purdah and the upcoming local elections. A total of 89 responses were received from tenants. This is a response rate of 10.36%.

Consultation findings

3.1.3 The results below show the quantitative responses received by tenants and identify key themes from the qualitative responses received.

How easy or difficult did you find the following: -

	Very easy		Easy		Neither easy nor difficult		Difficult		Very difficult	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
To apply for a Council property (make a housing application)?	14	15.9%	32	36.4%	18	20.5%	20	22.7%	4	4.5%
The process of bidding on potential properties?	16	28.1%	5	8.8%	20	35.1%	11	19.3%	5	8.8%

3.1.4 A total of 46 people felt making a housing application was very easy or easy however for bidding on properties this figure dropped to 21 people.

How would you describe the level of information you received from the allocations team once you were advised you were successful?

	Too much		Correct amount		Not enough		Don't recall / don't know	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
How would you describe the level of information you received from the allocations team once you were advised you were successful?	4	4.5 %	62	69.7 %	20	22.5 %	3	3.4%

When you moved into your new property you received a 'new tenant pack' as part of the sign up.

	Yes		No		Don't recall / don't know	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Did you find the information contained in the pack useful?	70	79.5%	14	15.9%	4	4.5%
Was the information in a format suitable for you?	70	82.4%	10	11.8%	5	5.9%

How do you feel about the amount of information contained within the pack?

	Too much		Correct amount		Not enough		Don't recall / don't know	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
How do you feel about the amount of information contained within the pack?	12	13.6 %	61	69.3 %	9	10.2 %	6	6.8%

3.1.5 Although 61 tenants expressed the level of information, they received was the correct amount and 70 tenants expressed they had found the information useful, the qualitative comments identified that some tenants had not used the information and felt alternative formats would be beneficial. (Details in Appendix 1-3)

The Housing Service is proposing to publish the Tenant Handbook on our website. Paper copies and alternative formats would be available for those who request them. Do you support this proposal?

	Yes		No		Don't know	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
The Housing Service is proposing to publish the Tenant Handbook on our website. Paper copies and alternative formats would be available for those who request them. Do you support this proposal?	80	90.9 %	3	3.4 %	5	5.7%

3.1.6 Regarding the tenant handbook being published on Chesterfield Borough Council's website 80 tenants supported this proposal, however within the comments received a number of responses focused on the need for alternative formats to be available to those who need this.

Allocations follow up survey – qualitative comments

3.1.7 Within the consultation, tenants were given an opportunity to provide comments on answers they had given. Below is a summary of the key themes identified from comments received and whether the comments were positive or negative regarding tenants' experience.

Question(s) on the survey	Number of comments received
About the application and bidding process	47
About the information pack and the handbook being available online or paper form	39
Do you have any further comments or suggestions regarding the allocations service?	33

Total	119
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Key themes qualitative responses

34 positive comments were received	55 negative comments were received
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 comments on the allocations process • 8 comments were received on the welcome pack • 16 comments were received on suggestions and wider comments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 negative comments regarding the application process • 8 comments regarding poor quality repairs • 7 comments regarding waiting time for a property • 3 negative comments regarding the viewing/sign up process • 2 comments regarding bedrooms not being allowed for children who do not live at the address full time • 13 comments concerned about people not being able to access the internet and the older generation and others may prefer paper copies of the tenant handbook • 5 negative comments about communication from the allocations team • 2 comments about the experience being overwhelming.

Next steps

3.1.8 To follow on from the surveys, further consultation took place in the form of focus groups with tenants who expressed an interest in having further involvement as part of the survey. The focus group explored in further detail the content proposals for the new tenant pack and the communication within the allocations process.

3.2 Face-to-Face – Focus Group Consultation Responses

3.2.1 The findings for the face-to-face groups held at the Town Hall and the online session have been collated below for ease of reference. The findings from the group held at Mallard and Leander Court are detailed in section 3.3.

Communication

3.2.2 Attendees shared their experience of communication throughout the allocations process. Experiences were varied and it was apparent that tenants

did not receive a consistent experience. Some tenants reported feeling communication had not been an issue.

'I found the communications with allocations ok. I moved quite quickly and got a match and moved within a month,' however most attendees felt communication could be improved.

3.2.3 Tenants felt the emphasis was on them to contact the allocations team to find out what was happening:

'The initial offer I received was in June 2022 and I was ringing every week and then every day. I felt lied to and was told people were working on the house and they weren't as I was going down and no one was there. Just be honest with me, it's the communication.'

'It was up to the person to chase up what was happening'

3.2.4 Tenants within the groups expressed the allocations process could feel overwhelming:

'People need to be patient with tenants. As soon as my property was ready, they wanted me in immediately, it spiralled and was too much.'

3.2.5 Tenants felt it would have been beneficial for someone to call them a couple of weeks after they moved in to check how they were settling in and if there were any issues.

Note: There are new tenant visits which have recommenced following the Coronavirus pandemic however these currently take place after six weeks.

'I signed for the house and never heard anything from anyone again. There was no continuity of care.'

'Being left isolated is the worst bit.'

'It would have been good if someone had called to just check if everything was fine, once I moved in'

3.2.6 Tenants also expressed disappointment that they struggled to make contact and were unable to leave a message

'Communication being key and that there are voicemails / messages if someone is not at their desk.'

3.2.7 A reoccurring theme was the lack of local information provided, particularly for tenants moving to a new area of Chesterfield or from outside of the borough. Tenants felt that better provision of information would be beneficial. Details of GP surgeries, bus times, Post Office, shops, dentist, and pharmacy were given as examples.

3.2.8 An attendee spoke about how they had been a private tenant previously and had felt *'bullied and intimidated'* as their landlord wanted to evict them and *'put an immediate rent increase in place'* to try and force the tenant to leave.

3.2.9 Regarding the application process:

'It's difficult to apply for housing as I'm not computer literate and I had a lot of help to do this from P3. I was offered a two-bed bungalow in Staveley it was very overgrown and so small and had lots of repairs issues. My wife and I were told we had to decide if we wanted to accept it within a week and informed that if we turned it down, we would lose our priority for housing. We turned the property down and about a week later the property I have now came up. I went to look at this place and was over the moon. I moved in with a chair, a stool, and a mattress. The crossover was the difficult part, I can't fault the council but would ask for less work to be done when someone moves. Although I had no furniture my housing worker did ask for the blinds to be left up, so I had some privacy. I feel more secure being with the council and no more rogue landlords. I feel safe'

Personal Housing Plans (PHP)

3.2.10 There has been a recent change to allocations and now all potential new tenants will be offered a meeting to develop a personal housing plan. The allocations Manager explained that it is hoped this change will help the team to gather further information about vulnerabilities of tenants and identify where they may need additional support. This information will follow the tenant throughout their time as a tenant of Chesterfield Borough Council.

3.2.11 All tenants present expressed support for this change with one tenant stating:

'I feel this is really good and could have helped my mental health from deteriorating.

'It took two years to get a property, lots of anti-social behaviour in previous property. I heard nothing from June 2022 when I was initially offered a property to October, I was suicidal. This is exactly what I was asking for. It was me through all those months contacting the council not them updating me. I felt I couldn't be a dad and keep my kids safe where I was. Well done and thumbs up for the PHP, it's particularly needed for people with poor mental health. I never want anyone to experience what I did.'

'I was informed 16 weeks before that I could move into new property. I had to be out of my old property. I was priority banding.'

3.2.12 Another tenant expressed

'The initial process was very stressful. I'd got enough worry about falling down, it was probably one of the worst experiences I have had.'

3.2.13 The allocations manager was asked if any disabled tenants had informed the development of the personal housing plans and they replied that as far as they were aware they had not. Tenants present felt this should have been done.

Sign-up pack

3.2.14 Examples of the old and new sign-up pack were shared both via the boards and hard copy versions of the packs. Tenants were asked how much they thought the current packs cost to put together and were surprised at the costs.

'£25 per pack is ludicrous. I've had 4 properties and have never seen the pack change and, I got a pack every time I moved which wasn't needed, just a refresher.'

3.2.15 Discussed information which should have been included.

'Gas, Elec suppliers, repairs number and key contacts. Important to separate out voids from main repairs number, should also give details about additional support. Also, helpful if the allocations team check things like there is a wheelie bin at the property when someone signs up. Most of this can be on the website.'

3.2.16 The allocations Manager explained new leaflets have been developed for tenants when they move in with details of key contacts. Copies of these leaflets were distributed to tenants who again felt this was beneficial for new tenants to have.

'Having phone numbers is the most important information. One tenant commented 'the rest is just in a cupboard in that safe place where I do not know where it is'

3.3. Face to face group at Mallard and Leander Court

Allocations process - communication

3.3.1 Generally, tenant views on communication during the earlier stages of the allocations process were positive. Some tenants had differing experiences or did not go through the initial stages of the process (from completing an application to join the housing register), such as those decanted from Aston Court and tenants who were supported by a social worker or housing officer.

'Housing officers helped me to bid, I was in a care home before that. I wanted a Bungalow before here, I came here to look round and I love it. This is a palace. I love it and all the neighbours. My move happened quite quick and felt communication was good.'

3.3.2 One tenant did not realise what sort of accommodation they were moving into and stated that information about independent living schemes was not provided.

3.3.3 Some tenants decanted from Aston Court did not feel like their health and mobility needs were considered and they were not given a choice of flats,

where other tenants were. Some ground floor flats appeared empty, but no information was given on whether they were still available.

- 3.3.4 All tenants we spoke to found viewing their flat and communal areas beneficial prior to moving in.
- 3.3.5 Some of the tenants we spoke to found the communication and support offered after their property had been allocated to be poor. They felt that there was no one to go through the sign-up pack information with them to make sure they understood the charges, the terms of their tenancy agreement and tasks they need to complete, such as purchasing a television licence. This led to some issues with benefit claims, some of which are still being resolved and additional stress and anxiety from rent arrears letters received.
- 3.3.6 There were also ongoing issues with a broken lift and drains which were not communicated to tenants prior to moving in.

Scheme Charges - Communication

- 3.3.7 Many of the tenants we spoke to voiced confusion around the charges they were required to pay, in addition to their rent. *'Service charges were not made clear'* and it was often difficult to understand which charges were covered by Housing benefit or Universal Credit and which were not.

'Would be good to know the precise amount of rent and have a breakdown of the charges.'

Sign-up pack comparison

- 3.3.8 Several of the tenants we spoke to advised that they had received the sign-up pack but had never looked at it. Another tenant was generally happy with the information given but was particularly pleased that a member of staff had gone through the pack with them, which they found *'much better.'* Comments received about the proposed new sign-up pack were very positive:

'New one looks to the point, simple and better'

- 3.3.9 There were discussions around the costs of producing the old pack versus costs for the new pack. Tenants felt that these were *'significant savings'* as *'the old pack just got thrown to one side.'*

Information provided to new tenants

- 3.3.10 Several themes emerged during discussion with tenants around topics they would have liked to have received additional information about when they moved in.
- Better information on bins/recycling (including where the bins are located, what should go in each bin, bulky waste collection)
 - Clearer information about TV Licensing (to make sure tenants understand that they need their own licence)

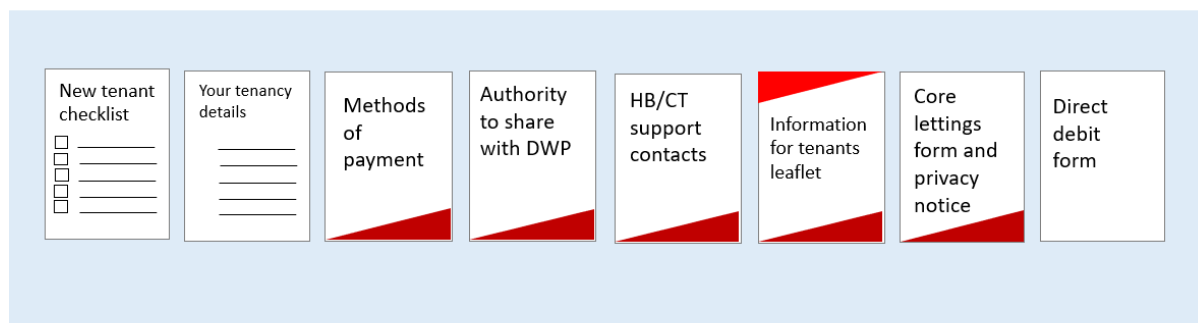
- Better information about mobility scooters storage (where can scooters be stored and charged, availability of parking spaces)
- Information about heating (how it works, how much the heating charge is)
- General information on water meters

3.3.11 Tenants also expressed how useful they thought the Digi Boards would be, both for new and existing tenants to provide key information. The Digi Boards are currently in situ but are not operational.

4. Summary and recommendations

- 4.1 Changes to processes and new practices that have already been made were welcomed by tenants during focus group discussions. This includes:
- Changes to the allocations process to ensure that properties are not advertised until they are ready to let, significantly reducing the wait time for tenants
 - The introduction of Personal Housing Plans to ensure key information about tenants needs and vulnerabilities is gathered to identify where they may need additional support during the allocations process and beyond
 - A leaflet of useful contact details for new tenants
 - An easy read guide to the tenancy agreement
- 4.2 This report highlights that the experience of tenants throughout the allocations process has been inconsistent. Although the housing service is unable to mitigate all the issues raised, a focus on where and how communication can be improved and led more by the team would be welcomed by tenants.
- 4.3 Feedback received from tenants regarding the proposed streamlined sign-up pack and moving additional information online was positive. The contents shown in *figure 4.1* will result in significant savings and lessen the environmental impact.

Figure 4.1 Proposed sign-up pack contents



Proposed new pack

- 4.4 Additional information will be made available in a 'moving in' section on the website. Some of the tenants involved in this consultation have opted to join our website working group (launching in August 2023) to help shape the look and content of the 'moving in' section and other housing pages on the website.
- 4.5 The launch of Personal Housing Plans for tenants was welcomed by the tenants we spoke to. It is recommended that the knowledge and information gathered

is utilised effectively and options for contacting tenants after they have moved in is explored.

- 4.6 A reoccurring theme throughout all focus groups was the need for clear and consistent information for tenants from the beginning of the allocations process to the information provided at sign up. Recommendations 4 -7 relate to the provision of information.

The recommendations from all groups are summarised in the table below:

1	A focus on where and how communication can be improved and led more by the allocations team would be welcomed by tenants.
2	Carry out proposed changes to streamline sign-up pack and provide relevant information for new tenants on the website.
3	Identify tenants who may require additional support following their home move at an early stage. The method of follow-up contact should meet the needs and wants of the tenant.
4	Ensure information provided about independent living schemes is consistent on the website, in the sign-up pack and when provided by Allocations Officers and other housing staff.
5	Provide clear information to applicants interested in moving to an independent living scheme on availability of flats and how an applicant's health and mobility needs are considered.
6	Provide clear information on additional scheme charges at the sign-up visit and ensure general information on service charges is made available on the website.
7	Ensure that information on bins and recycling, television licensing, scooter storage, heating and water meters is provided to new tenants within an independent living scheme handbook. Note: It was previously identified that much of the information required by tenants moving into an independent living scheme differed from the information required by those moving into general purpose housing (<i>appendix 2</i> .) It is recommended that a separate tenant handbook is developed for tenants moving into an independent living scheme.
8	Provide clarification of rules around pets for tenants living in independent living schemes and consider the introduction of a 'pets policy.'

4.7 Through the completion of this work, areas for further review by tenants have been identified. This will help us to understand if the tenant experience of allocations is more positive because of some of the changes that are being introduced. It will also allow us to consider other topics raised during the consultation in more depth including:

- New sign-up pack
 - Personal Housing Plans
 - Rent charges for new tenants
 - Voids not being advertised until ready to let
- Furniture starter packs for tenants who have no belongings to be explored

5. A final thought

5.1 Thank you to every one of our tenants who gave up their time and shared their views and experiences with us. We wanted to give the final word in this report to one of our contributing tenants who demonstrated the importance of the impact securing a council home can offer but also the importance of providing a personal, caring service:

'Human connection is crucial, so tenants know they are more than just a number. Six months ago, I didn't want to live and now I have a bird feeder and watch nature'

6. Appendices

Appendix. 1 Proposed Tenant Handbook topics for independent living schemes

Proposed handbook topic	Additional/different scheme info needed?
Moving in info	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Home contents insurance - Communal bin info - Redirection of mail service - TV licensing (need own TV licence in scheme) - Who to inform of new address - Help and support
Understanding your tenancy agreement	Same
Rent rises	Same
Making changes to your home	Same
Living in a flat	Some information specific to independent living schemes
Mobility scooters	Specific info for schemes required (location of scooter store, limited spaces)
Parking	Scheme specific information
Pets	Scheme specific information
Gardens	Info on communal garden areas
TV, radio and satellite tv	Specific scheme information (tv licence information needed)
Satellite dishes, CB and amateur radio aerials	Scheme specific information
Paying your rent	Same (service charge information specific to schemes)
Service charges	Scheme specific information
Help to pay your rent	Same
Maintaining your home	Same
Reporting a repair	Same
Our responsibilities (maintaining your home)	Same
Repairs you are responsible for	Same
Planned maintenance	Same

Adaptations	Same - more information required
Staying safe at home (fire safety)	Scheme specific information on fire safety and fire alarm testing (currently in scheme leaflet and on back of flat doors)
Your neighbourhood (ASB)	Some information scheme specific
Keeping you informed and getting involved	Some information specific to scheme
Complaints, comments and compliments	Same
Other info required for independent living schemes:	
Bins and cleaning of communal areas	(Location of bins, bulky waste, frequency of cleaning, window cleaning)
Doors and fobs	Information on getting extra keys and fobs, how/where fobs work
Showers and water testing	How showers work (pump), water testing
Careline info	How to use pendant alarm/unit, when to press, range of pendant, units located throughout scheme.
Communal facilities	Specific to each scheme (lounge/kitchen, laundry, hair salon, accessible bath, meter location, post room where applicable)
Noticeboards	Location, what used for
Smoking	Where permitted/not permitted
Ending a tenancy	How to end a tenancy, useful contacts

Appendix 2 Other findings / discussions

- 1 The tenant engagement team wanted to ensure that tenants were given the opportunity to talk about other areas of importance for them within the allocations process and these views and queries are included below. There have been some changes made to the allocation process since phase one of the consultation and these changes are referenced below where applicable.

My Chesterfield

- 2 Tenants who are registered for My Chesterfield reported finding it useful to check their rent account, bin days and council tax information. There was also the suggestion of adding 'how will you pay your rent' onto the tenant checklist form which the allocations manager agreed to action.

I like My Chesterfield it is easy to navigate and not a lot of faff

'Best thing I applaud the council for is My Chesterfield, I just wish it were an App. My Chesterfield makes it easier to understand my council tax rather than a 16-page letter and see my rent without having to ring up'

Repairs

- 3 A theme identified through the focus groups related to repairs when people moved into their new home. Tenants also expressed confusion over who is responsible for some low-level repairs.

'It is confusing as to what the council are responsible for and what a tenant is responsible for. Need clear information.' (Note: this is on the website but no one present was aware or of where to find it).

'There was a hole in the loft ceiling and water was coming through the light in the living room. The items were ticked on inspection which had not been completed' (lettable standards had been signed off).

- 4 The allocations manager explained that the process around this has now been changed so properties are not advertised until they are back from voids and suitable to advertise. It is hoped this will reduce the wait time and stress for tenants when they are offered a property and reduce the number of repairs identified when a tenant moves in.

'I took the wallpaper off in the living room and there was a massive damp patch, more repairs and I was left in a building site for weeks. I didn't expect them to come straight away but when you're in that situation it feels like a very long time. If I had been on my own with no family or friends, it would have been worse'

'The previous tenant hadn't reported any repairs so there were lots of issues when I moved in like the shower not working and pipes being loose.'

- 5 Tenants felt the changes as explained by the allocations manager would be a

'positive change and would work out better.'

'When I moved into the property the toilet was broken and had urine in from the work people, the toilet then started flooding and I had already started moving my things in. I was then charged £56 additional rent which should have been written off due to my experience'. I would rather the council under promise and over deliver, much rather this and then tenants' expectations are managed. I didn't see any protection for my kids during the time. I was providing the evidence as asked around the ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour), but I have dyslexia so found it hard to do this and the app used by the council to monitor noise, doesn't pick up the sound. It was a complete shambles'

'I'm a human being and it sounds like things are going the right way, but it shouldn't have taken this long.'

'Some repairs workers will come in and tell you how frustrated they are too. Engineers come and I am not in as take my kids to school and it wastes everyone's time and is frustrating when you have explained you won't be in.'

Adaptations

6 Some tenants present had required adaptations when they moved into their properties and felt it would be beneficial for these to be completed prior to moving in.

7 It was also noted that for Tenants moving into older properties some adaptations were not feasible due to the nature of the existing property.

'Shower is too low, and the rail is too low as the tenant in before me was in a wheelchair. I can't have handrails as it is a studded wall.'

Help with moving

'Could CBC (Chesterfield borough council) carry out decorating work for a charge?'

'Downsizing is stressful and feel the rush to get someone into a property can impact negatively' on the tenant.

A tenant who had lived with their brother who was then evicted had to be moved to temporary accommodation with their children and *'were living out of a few boxes for a period of 3 months. The rest of the family belongings had to be put in storage which incurred significant costs. The council just threatened to throw it (belongings) away.'*

Understanding how to get any gas appliances installed safely: *'I needed help with fitting gas cooker and the information wasn't in the pack'*

Website

8 Tenant commented on the difficulties using the website *'the website needs cleaning up and I am happy to be involved with this, it's too full of text.'* Details

were shared of how we are updating the website and a visual example of the possible improvements was viewed. One tenant commented that they *'like the big red squares and feel it would be easier to navigate, the banner moves round on the current website and that doesn't help.'*

- 9 Discussions were also had about the possibility of having a moving in section on the website which would contain the tenant handbook and other relevant information. Tenant's present felt this was a *'good idea.'*

Other comments

- There was a discussion about the need for people to feel more protected from private rogue landlords.
- Attendees commented that they see a lot of empty properties and the allocations Manager explained the issue with getting skilled workforce and having a considerable number of void properties at present.
- Discussion was had about the confusion of allocating two and three bed houses. *'I was told to bid on 3 bed properties and then when I was top of the list was told no, then I bid on 2 bed properties and was told no – even when I had priority, they pulled the rug. I had to gain permission and further information from social services about what accommodation was suitable for me and my kids. There was upwards of six letters from social services as the wording needed to be exact, I tried calling to explain the situation and was told they couldn't take the information from me, it needed to be from West Street.'*
- *'I wasn't told about having to move and rent starting from a Monday, I had to give a month's notice to my previous landlord.'*

Other findings (Mallard / Leander)

10. The tenants who took part in the focus group also provided their general views on moving into and living in an independent living scheme.

11. Discussions around requests for additional features in communal areas included:

- Installing WIFI in communal areas
- Concerns around scooter storage (not enough spaces for 41 flats and nowhere else to store or charge them)
- Some tenants would like communal dryers
- Some tenants would like a covered smoking area
- Many of the tenants we spoke to requested garden furniture to be available for all tenants to use
- One tenant talked about why they would like a cooker in the communal kitchen (but was also aware of the reasons why there isn't one installed)

12. Other views expressed by tenants during the focus group included:

- Consideration of pets' policy '*They need to look at pets as you can move in with one if you already have one but can't get one when you are here. I think some people need pets to keep them company.*'
- The scheme needs a warden
- Concerns that Careline gave contact details for repairs, but did not report the repair for them
- Would like better information/rules for keeping communal areas clean, e.g., clearing up after yourself when have used the kitchen
- Issues around fire doors being left open and obstructions on the corridors – need better signage
- Need support to understand letters (Council Tax)

13. Areas for future review

- Scooter storage provision in independent living schemes
- Provision of WIFI in communal areas of independent living schemes
- Furniture starter packs