

Allocations and new tenant information pack report

Easy read and accessibility

June 2023



CHESTERFIELD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Background information

Earlier this year the allocations team wanted to review the content and availability of the sign-up pack and hear from tenants about their experience of the allocations process.

The tenant engagement team created a consultation survey to gather initial feedback from tenants to explore how the sign-up pack could be slimmed down and reviewed to ensure it:

- Meets the needs of tenants
- Reduces paper use (reflecting our climate change strategy aims)
- Reduces costs (current pack costs approximately £25 per property, the proposed new pack will cost approximately £3).

Between 6th of March 2023 - 23rd of March 2023, the tenant engagement team completed a consultation via telephone and paper survey with tenants who had been in their tenancy for two years or less.

On completion of the consultation and analysis of the results, a report (*appendix 1.*) was produced to share initial findings. The key themes which were most prevalent were:

- Communication within the allocations process
- Information within the sign-up pack and new tenant handbook
- Easy read and accessible information

Tenants who had previously expressed an interest in discussing their views from the survey in more detail were given an opportunity to attend a focus group or where required meet individually with members of the tenant engagement team to share their views and experiences.

Methodology

During stage one of the consultation, a tenant who completed a telephone consultation, spoke of the difficulties they had experienced because of information not being available in a pictorial format. They expressed a desire to help us look at this as they '*wanted to make it easier for other people*'. We were aware that for a number of tenants communication needs aren't being met by traditional written information, therefore we felt this was an opportunity to explore how and where easy read and accessible information could be developed to assist the tenants who needed additional resources.

Through discussion meetings were arranged on an individual basis to meet the tenants needs. The aim of the meetings was to work together and learn what our tenants needed to inform how we offer information. The tenant with support met with a member of the tenant engagement team and discussed the work we wanted to do. Following this and the tenant expressing that they would like to help shape this work, several meetings were held where the person could share their experience and look at documents including the website to ensure the information provided whether online or in written format was easier to understand and accessible.

To assist the tenant's engagement, we created easy read information such as an easy read guide to communication through the allocations process and referred to the Easy Read Guide (created by Leeds and York Partnership NHS Trust) to discuss what would be beneficial for our tenants. (A copy of this document is included as appendix 3).

Findings

Communication – allocations process

Where tenants are moving from an existing Chesterfield borough council property into another property there is a process where pretransfer checks are completed. The tenant expressed they *'had not understood the purpose of the visit to check the condition of the previous property and felt they (the Council) were saying had done something wrong or damaged the property'*. The tenant feels it would have been beneficial for someone to have explained why the pretransfer checks are completed to offer reassurance to tenants.

The tenant also expressed that in their view the Housing service can *'tell tenants what to do and what not to do'*. They feel this could be improved through an engaged discussion.

The tenant had support from his social worker to help him complete the initial housing application form and felt the process could be improved stating: *'the form was quite long and asked for a lot of information which was difficult to get or very personal. It can be overwhelming and if I had to move again I would have the same problems if it doesn't change. There should be a quicker / shorter way. People are delving into all aspects of your life.'*

Regarding their experience of bidding on properties the tenant explained *'There were no pictures when I was bidding apart from of the properties. It's also difficult to know what you are supposed to click on, it would be good if there were videos to help you know how to do this'*.

One area the tenant would have liked to have been explored related to the view that they would benefit from a two-bed property so they could have a dedicated sensory space to help with self-regulation regarding their autism. The tenant was bidding on two bed properties and not getting any offers. They feel it would have been helpful for additional needs like those described to be explored during the process.

When a property became available the tenant received a phone call from the allocations team and was also informed by his social worker which he preferred as his social worker knew him well. He explained it then *'took over a year to move in after receiving the provisional offer'* and he *'wasn't sure what was happening as no one updated him'*.

There was no communication from the allocations team and his social worker was having to chase this up on his behalf. He feels it would have been beneficial for allocations to have contacted him as he found it difficult to ask what was happening and resorted to visiting the property to try and get updates and check on progress.

Once the property was ready the tenant was offered a viewing with an allocations housing officer and explained 'I met the housing officer to look around the property and accepted it. They gave me a big folder and said all the information is in there and any repairs just ring up' They had highlighted key information in the pack for the tenant which was helpful.

Once moved into the property they had a new tenant visit and reported no one had asked about their communication needs within the process or during this visit.

Sign up pack

Regarding the sign-up pack the tenant expressed they '*had not found the information helpful*' as they '*could not understand the information due to it not being in a suitable format*' to meet their communication needs. They expressed they would have benefited from '*pictorial and easy read information*'.

Understanding your tenancy agreement

Through discussion it became apparent that for some tenants the tenancy agreement is a complex document which they struggle to understand before signing this.

'I felt scared to sign it as I couldn't understand the information and what I was being asked to sign'.

Potential tenants are encouraged to ask if there is anything they don't understand however tenants will not always express that they don't understand something. This presented an opportunity to create an 'easy read guide to your tenancy', which can be made available to people who may require additional support to understand a tenancy agreement before signing this. This document is to be used in conjunction with the tenancy agreement (where needed) and does not replace the actual legal tenancy agreement document.

In collaboration with the tenant and by following guidance regarding easy read information we developed an easy read guide and shared this to gather any further views with our tenant. They felt it covered the key areas and '*hope that it may assist others with similar needs going through the process*'.

Website information

Changes to the website were also identified as beneficial including using pictures and simple language but also how to guides and videos regarding bidding and your new tenancy so they can not only see pictures but receive clear instruction on each step including things such as where to click on a particular website page.

The tenant had used his PC to help him with information through the allocations process but explained '*it takes a long time to type everything in and listen to it*'

A further difficulty identified was the use of acronyms such as p/m being used instead of per month. A suggestion of more information about properties should be included and the tenant shared an example of having *'a fear of heights so wouldn't have been able to live on a property higher than a first floor'*.

During one meeting we looked at examples of different video and audio moving in guides which have been developed by other housing providers and the tenant felt this was useful, but the videos need to be easy to follow and to be mindful that when *'a product changes how it looks this can confuse me'*.

Other comments

Additional comments were received during the meetings, and these have been included for consideration when considering accessibility and people who may require additional support.

'After the viewing it was a mad rush and I had to be in within two weeks, I panicked and struggled to find people and I wanted people who were good (to help with moving) and who I could trust. It would have been helpful if the Council could have helped me with moving'.

"It's not just housing, it's things like information on the different bins, I don't understand what goes in which bin'

'You are expected to call repairs yourself and this is something I can't do; I need someone to call for me'

'I was offered a one-bedroom flat but would have liked to have been considered for a two-bedroom flat so I could have had a sensory room as I need this to help me'

Next steps

The tenant will continue to work with the housing strategy and tenant engagement team to inform development of the website content. At present this work will continue as meetings with the tenant where and how they feel comfortable and not in groups.

A final version of the reports will be collated and developed into a short video for tenants and others to ensure communication needs are met accordingly.

Recommendations

- Easy read and audio / videos to be developed to assist people with additional communication needs
- A guide to your tenancy agreement to be implemented and shared with tenants who require this

Final word

A huge thank you to the tenant who gave their time and knowledge to inform our learning and advise us around accessibility.

Appendices

1. Phase 1 survey consultation report and findings
2. Easy read guide to your tenancy agreement
3. Easy Read Guide (created by Leeds and York Partnership NHS Trust).