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CHESTERFIELD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Good Practice Case Study

Connecting Communities –
WhatsApp Channel





Soft Launch of Chesterfield Borough Council's WhatsApp Channel

Objectives

- Co-create the channel with tenants to ensure it meets their needs
- Make information more accessible and inclusive
- Maximise the number of ways tenants can receive updates
- Share a variety of content, including videos, polls, and links

Chesterfield Borough Council is the landlord for a diverse community of residents, many of whom have varying communication needs. The council currently manages over 8,600 homes.

Like most other councils, over recent years, the council has moved most of its communication online, but feedback from tenants highlighted a need for more accessible and varied ways to stay informed.

A communications and accessibility group was established, bringing together staff from the communications team, tenant engagement team, and tenant representatives. This group worked together to identify barriers and co-create solutions to ensure all tenants could keep up to date and access information, which is relevant for them and in a format which meets differing communication needs.

For the past 18 months, tenants have played an active role in redesigning materials and reviewing communication methods, ensuring their perspectives are central to every decision.



The Challenge

Tenants expressed that they wanted more timely and accessible updates, and a broader range of communication channels. Traditional methods like newsletters were not always effective, and social media platforms such as Facebook did not suit everyone. The council needed a solution that would deliver information directly, reach people who are not on social media whilst also protecting personal data.

Why a WhatsApp Channel?

A WhatsApp Channel was chosen because WhatsApp is a platform widely used by tenants and the channel tool offers a straightforward, one-way communication channel.



Unlike social media, WhatsApp messages are delivered straight to users' phones without being filtered by algorithms, meaning tenants are more likely to see the messages in a timely manner.

The WhatsApp channel is GDPR compliant, protecting personal information and not requiring a designated person to respond to messages. This approach doesn't allow space for negative comments or online disputes and is purely for sharing information and updates.



Planning and Stakeholder Involvement

Following research from the council's communications and tenant engagement teams into the different options, the idea of a WhatsApp channel was presented to the communications and accessibility group, who agreed with the idea and chose this as the preferred option for a new communications tool.

The tenants felt empowered, knowing their input was actively creating positive change. The council spent several months ensuring GDPR compliance and gathering feedback on what content tenants wanted to see. The project received strong support from the council's Service Director for Housing and the Cabinet Member for Housing.



The Set Up

Message templates were introduced to simplify communication. Tenant representatives proposed a "how-to" guide to address security concerns and explain how to join the channel. Co-created with tenants, the guide and a step-by-step video were published on the council's website. Residents can access the channel via website links or QR codes.

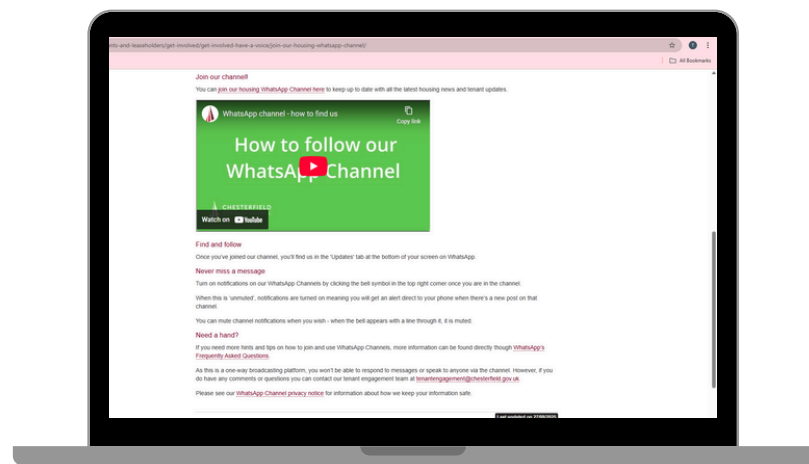
The housing team was notified to inform tenants, and further internal communication will encourage staff to promote the channel. It is managed by the central communications team, with monthly core messages agreed with the tenant engagement team and shaped by tenant feedback.

"As a responsible landlord, making sure that tenants are kept informed on our services is one of our key priorities, and we're always looking at different ways that we can communicate and make sure they can access information.

It's important for us that tenants are part of this journey with us and help shape our services to make sure that they are meeting tenants needs, so we're really pleased that our communications and accessibility group have been so involved with getting the WhatsApp channel set up. It is important that they take credit for all the work they have done.

We've had a successful soft launch and are excited to continue working with tenants as the channel continues to grow."

Councillor Jean Innes, cabinet member for housing





Rollout

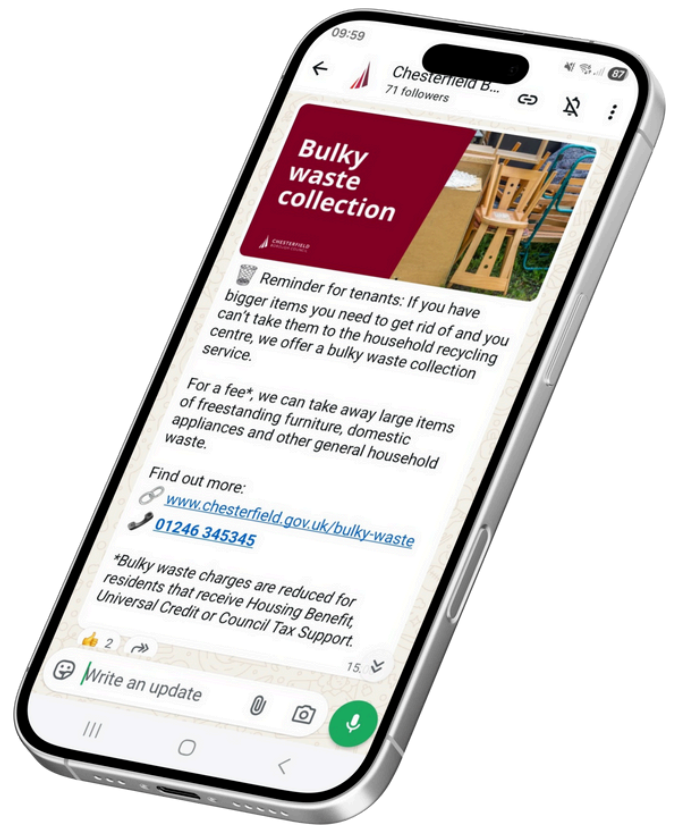
The soft launch included several phases:

- Notifying residents about community events, such as the tenant engagement van visits
- Promoting the channel through a social media campaign, posters, and postcards distributed by the repairs team and tenant representatives
- Highlighting the channel in the council's monthly e-newsletter
- Including information in community Facebook groups and planning to add details to rent letters

After just one month, the channel had approximately 50 users, reflecting a steady start and room for growth as the Council and tenants continued to evaluate how things are going.

Privacy and Compliance

GDPR compliance was central to the project. A WhatsApp Channel differs to WhatsApp Groups in that no personal data is shared. Residents opt in to receive updates, and the channel is strictly one-way, further protecting privacy.





Challenges and Solutions

The team addressed concerns of digital literacy and message volume by providing clear guides and keeping messages concise.

Technical issues, such as WhatsApp's current lack of search function has slowed audience growth. However, the team is working on solutions and monitoring platform updates to improve usability.

A key insight was that residents prefer short, direct updates over lengthy PDF newsletters. The WhatsApp channel delivers this, offering a low-admin, accessible alternative.

Outcomes and Key Takeaways

The “how to” guide and tenant involvement in every stage have been crucial to the success of this launch.

Sal, tenant representative noted that the project has improved communication and modernised the council's approach, thanks to genuine collaboration. Mick, tenant representative, shared that being part of the project from idea to implementation was rewarding, and hopes that other landlords will look to implement a WhatsApp Channel in partnership with their tenants.

Conclusion

The soft launch of Chesterfield Borough Council's WhatsApp Channel demonstrates the value of co-creation, accessibility, and modern communication. By listening to tenants and working together, the council has taken a significant step toward more inclusive and effective engagement.



For further information from the organisation, please contact:

Tenant Engagement Team -
tenantengagement@chesterfield.gov.uk

Sophie Guest -
public.relations@chesterfield.gov.uk