



Scrutiny Group review - Home Swap (Mutual Exchange)

February 2025


Summary

During January and February 2025 our tenant-led Scrutiny Group conducted a review of how we support tenants with swapping homes (mutual exchanges). This report details how the review was conducted, its findings and its recommendations.

Context

The Tenancy Standard sets out that landlords should give support to tenants wishing to swap homes. This includes giving tenants clear and simple information about the process, the responsibilities of the landlord and of the tenant, and helping tenants to register with an online mutual exchange service if required.

The Scrutiny Group wanted to review whether Wythenshawe Community Housing Group (WCHG) makes the process of swapping homes accessible and user-friendly for its tenants.

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The Review

Members set out to answer the following questions:

1. Do we offer a home swap service which allows tenants to access details of matches without a fee?
2. Do we promote this service?
3. Do we help tenants who may be unable to gain access to the service, e.g due to digital exclusion?
4. Do we offer tenants with information about implications for tenure, rent and service charges?
5. Is there quality and easy to understand information available for tenants?
6. What information is available for people wanting to swap before they swap, i.e. how long they have to remain in the property before moving again, repairs etc.
7. Is there a satisfaction survey asking tenants who have swapped homes in the last 12 months what they thought of the service? Were residents who moved from one WCHG home to another satisfied with the service?

In completing the review, members of the Scrutiny Group carried out the following activities:

- Interview lead manager, Simon Melloy, Head of Housing Services
- Review of WCHG website section on swapping your home
- Review of other Housing providers websites
- House Exchange website review
- Review of the home swap procedure document
- Mystery shopping tasks phoning the Customer Hub and asking for support with swapping homes

Findings

Q1: Do we offer a home swap service which allows tenants to access details of matches without a fee?

Findings

Is the Service Free to Use?

Yes, the service is free to tenants through the House Exchange website <https://www.houseexchange.org.uk/>. WCHG – along with the other Manchester housing providers - pay a subscription to House Exchange and there are currently 27 housing providers that are signed up.

Is it Easy to Use?

Yes, it is easy to navigate in terms of clicking and scrolling. You can search by area, radius from an area, property type, and the number of bedrooms. However, when it comes to finding a suitable property for exchange, the website is frustrating and time consuming. There is no facility to put in a rent range as part of the search.

Support is provided via a YouTube video for less experienced users.

One member advised they did not find it very good and lacking data.

- You cannot search for properties by landlord or specifically for the Wythenshawe area. Searches are for the broader "Manchester" area.
- To find properties in Wythenshawe, you must increase the radius to 10 miles, which then results in an overwhelming number of properties (for example, 1,357 properties within 10 miles). Wythenshawe is not listed, while areas like Stretford, Altrincham, Wilmslow, and Sale are included. One user only found three properties in Wythenshawe after spending about 30 minutes on the site.
- Many listings lack photos or do not include the property area in the basic information.
- An app is available to download and there is an option to review properties without signing in and registering.

Recommendations:

- Work with other Manchester housing providers to consider whether other home swap websites that may offer a better service to tenants. SG members preferred the [HomeSwapper](#) website.

Q2: Do we promote the home swap service?

Findings:

Yes, we do promote the service on the website, and it is promoted in the WCHG newsletter and on Manchester Move.

Recommendations:

- Consider including more promotion of swapping homes in WCHG News
- Develop a leaflet to promote the home swap process in places like the job centre, library and community centres
- Use signage in the reception area to promote to tenants that they can use the computer in reception to do home swap searches

Review of other Housing Provider websites

Findings:

How Does Information Compare to WCHG's?

- **Bolton at Home:** Their mutual exchanges page outshone ours and was significantly better.
- **Gentoo:** Their page was on par with WCHG's.
- **Stockport Homes:** Their page was poor and contained a lot of outdated information.

Do Other Providers Offer Information That We Should Include?

Yes, many features we found on other RP websites, such as:

- Video content, safety information, FAQ sections, and a brighter layout.
- Bolton had a downloadable leaflet and directed tenants to the HomeSwapper website, which is better than the Home Exchange website.
- Although Stockport Homes' website was lacking, they ran mutual exchange events with dates for various areas, helping tenants fill out forms and discuss exchanges.

Was Their Information Easy to Find?

- **Bolton** and **Gentoo** were similar to WCHG, requiring two clicks. However, Gentoos' site was a bit tricky to navigate on an iPad due to small writing on a dark background. But it was clearer on a computer.
- **Stockport Homes** took three clicks.

Q3: Do we help tenants who may be unable to gain access to the service, e.g. due to digital exclusion?

Findings:

- A series of **mystery shopping phone calls** took place and though it was felt that staff wanted to help, there was clearly a lack of knowledge on the process and what can and cannot be offered to tenants. One shopper was advised when she informed WCHG she could not read or write to go to the CAB and could not come into the office to be supported.
- Other mystery shoppers were not probed for their queries, and it was assumed they just wanted the home swap forms and were advised these would be posted out to them, these documents were never received.
- A call from Village 135 was immediately identified by the hub and immediately advised no home swapping could take place from V135 due to specific needs.
- One SG member commended one hub member who did not rush her and was very good with her on the phone, she was advised exactly what she needed to do and that she could come into the office.
- WCHG utilise language line or offer for applicants to bring an interpreter, appointments can be done at people's homes.

Recommendations:

- Training for all customer hub staff is required and clear guidance on how they can support tenants with accessibility issues, regardless of what they may be.
- Guidance for customer hub and neighbourhood teams on how to home swap at Village 135

Q4: Do we offer tenants with information about implications for tenure, rent and service charges?

Findings:

Yes, this information is included in a response letter to tenants once they have completed an application.

One member felt that the information could be further improved by providing a comparison in the table of what someone is paying now and what they would be paying in the new property, although recognised that this information would not be available if it was not a WCHG property or was around the time of a rent increase.

Recommendations:

- None

Q5: Is there quality and easy to understand information available for tenants?

Website review findings:

A total overhaul of the website is required, these will be shared with the Communications team when the new website is being developed.

- Brighten up the page and add colour, such as changing the colour of the dots at the start of each section.
- Break up the sections to avoid large blocks of text, making the page easier to read.
- Highlight the "Please Take Note" and "What You Need To Do" sections by increasing the font size for better visibility.
- Provide more information about the potential impact on tenants' right to buy, tenancy status, etc. Offer this upfront, rather than requiring tenants to speak with the Neighbourhood Officer for advice.
- Include information about who is not eligible to exchange, such as residents in Village 135, etc.
- Specify who can act as a second reference, for example, someone who has known the tenant for a specific number of years or a manager.
- Include guidance on what to look for when visiting a property, such as checking for repairs or water damage.
- Offer advice on staying safe when visiting another property, and suggest that tenants do not go alone.
- Add a FAQ section with answers to common questions about mutual exchanges.
- Consider adding a video explaining what mutual exchanges are and how to proceed.

Q5: Is there quality and easy to understand information available for tenants?

Letter and leaflet review findings:

- The letter issued to tenants wanting to home swap is simple and easy to understand.
- Whilst the WCHG website certainly provides the information needed clearly, it is overly 'wordy' and probably less accessible for many tenants wishing to exchange.
- A leaflet is currently being updated.
- The process is clear and simple and has a number of appendices – a summary of this process would be of benefit for tenants

Recommendations:

- Include the feedback from Scrutiny Group on Home Swaps when designing the new WCHG website and leaflet

Q6: What information is available for people wanting to swap before they swap, i.e. how long they have to remain in the property before moving again, repairs etc.

Findings:

- There is reference to this in the process document and on the website to seek advice and to contact the Neighbourhood Officer for information.
- Website very wordy and could be simplified to include this information for tenants.

Recommendations

- Develop a set of Home Swap Frequently Asked Questions for website. Include practical things like implications for repairs and future swaps once you've moved. If they're not too long, consider adding to a leaflet.

Q7: Is there a satisfaction survey asking tenants who have swapped homes in the last 12 months what they thought of the service? Were residents who moved from one WCHG home to another satisfied with the service?

Findings:

No, but this is being developed currently.

Recommendations:

- Introduce a survey of tenant's satisfaction with the home swap process after moving. The Scrutiny Group would like to review the survey once it is created and prior to being put in place.

Recommendations

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1. Work with other Manchester housing providers to consider whether other home swap websites may offer a better service to tenants. SG members preferred the HomeSwapper website.
2. Consider including more promotion of swapping homes in WCHG News
3. Develop a leaflet to promote the home swap process in places like the job centre, library and community centres
4. Use signage in the reception area to promote to tenants that they can use the computer in reception to do home swap searches
5. Include the feedback from Scrutiny Group on Home Swaps when designing the new WCHG website and leaflet
6. Training for all customer hub staff is required and clear guidance on how they can support tenants with accessibility issues, regardless of what they may be.
7. Guidance for customer hub and neighbourhood teams on how to home swap at Village 135
8. Develop a set of Home Swap Frequently Asked Questions for website. Include practical things like implications for repairs and future swaps once you've moved. If they're not too long, consider adding to a leaflet.
9. Introduce a survey of tenant's satisfaction with the home swap process after moving. SG members would like to review the survey once it is created and prior to being put in place.

Management opinion:

- All the recommendations made have been accepted by management. Subject to CXC approval, the recommendations will be added to the Scrutiny Group recommendations tracker with target dates and progress will be reported monthly to Scrutiny Group members. The recommendation tracker is reviewed annually by Group Audit & Risk Committee.



Wythenshawe
Community Housing Group