



February 2026 Newsletter

Welcome to the next edition of our tenant newsletter.

For those of you who read this newsletter regularly, you will know that each month, we provide you with information and updates from within our communities. This month, we share an update on rent changes, a success story from our Money Matters service, an overview of how your feedback has helped us improve our services, how to identify safeguarding issues, an invitation to complete our customer data survey and some feedback from our 2025 Shoebox Appeal.

Read on to find out more...



An update on rent changes from April 2026

Last month, we explained that from April 2026, rents will increase by 4.8% which is based on the price inflation rate of last September. We also mentioned that it was possible that the government may allow housing associations to add a further small amount to some rents. The government decided that this will be introduced from April 2027, at an amount of £1 per week for some tenancies. This means the change will not be coming into effect this year.

As a reminder, if you are already receiving housing benefit or the rent element of Universal Credit (UC), then the rent increase in April will be covered with your existing benefits, so you should not be worse off. Other benefits will increase from April too.

If you're worried about not having enough income, or you need help claiming what you're entitled to, please speak to us – you can call our Customer Service Team or our Money Matters team on:



0300 111 3555

We're here to help.

Please see our <https://www.chsgroup.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CHS-Group-January-26-Newsletter-2.pdf> for other sources of help and advice such as the online benefits checker or Citizens Advice.



Money Matters delivers

Over the last 18 months, we've expanded our Money Matters team to meet growing demand for money advice. This has allowed us to take a more proactive approach, reaching out to new tenants and those affected by welfare policy changes before problems arise.

The results speak for themselves: **we've helped 429 people access £1.35 million in benefits they're entitled to, easing financial worry and stress.** Better still, we've achieved this without increasing our costs.

If you would like advice and support around your money matters, please contact us: moneyadvice@chsgroup.org.uk or [0300 111 3555](tel:03001113555) or talk to your Housing Officer about the service.

Case study

Helping Mr and Mrs Smith find financial security

Mr and Mrs Smith* were referred to our Money Matters team by the Customer Service team after Mr Smith made a call expressing concern about their finances. Years of carefully managing on a low income had become increasingly difficult, and the couple were feeling overwhelmed and unsure where to turn.

Now retired, Mr and Mrs Smith relied entirely on their state pensions and Mrs Smith's Attendance Allowance. Despite this, they were paying full rent and council tax and had never claimed any additional benefits. As day-to-day costs rose, the pressure began to take its toll, leaving them anxious about how long they could continue to cope.

Our Money Matters team carried out home visits to gain a full understanding of the couple's financial circumstances and health needs. These visits provided the time and space for open conversations, allowing our advisor to offer reassurance, explain entitlements clearly, and support the couple through what initially felt like a daunting process.

With tailored guidance and hands-on support, Mr and Mrs Smith were helped to apply for benefits they did not realise they were entitled to:

Attendance Allowance: £3,843

Housing Benefit: £6,742

Council Tax Benefit: £2,196

Pension Credit, including Carer's Allowance

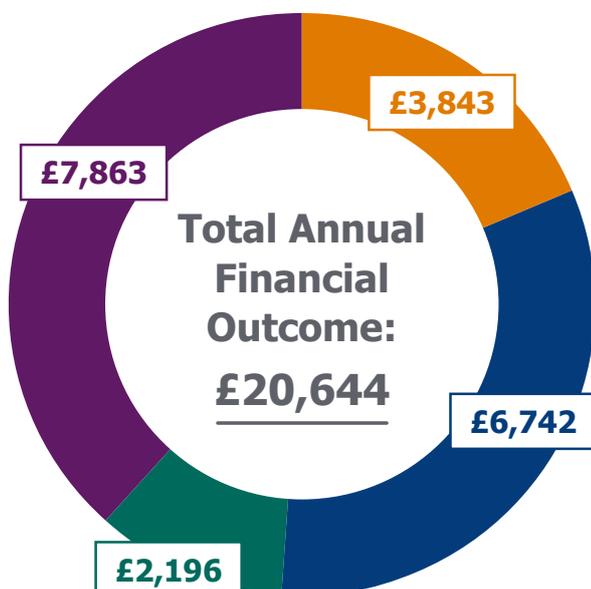
Premium and Severe Disability Premium: £7,863

Total Annual Financial Outcome: £20,644

The impact of this support was life changing. Mr and Mrs Smith no longer live with the constant worry of making ends meet. Their rent and council tax are now manageable, and the anxiety that once dominated their daily lives has eased.

For the first time in years, they feel financially secure and supported.

*Names have been changed





You Said, We Did

At CHS, we welcome and value the feedback we receive from our tenants and shared owners, as it plays a vital role in helping us continually improve our services and ensure they exceed expectations. We gather feedback through a variety of channels, including online surveys, formal consultations, and day-to-day interactions.

Over the past 12–18 months, we have listened carefully and acted on the feedback received, resulting in a number of positive changes, including:

POLICY CHANGES

- ✓ We held a workshop with the Tenant Committee to update the current Customer Service Standard and they agreed it needed to be updated and simplified, with more information on safety in the home.
- ✓ In consultation with the Tenant Committee and survivors of domestic abuse, the Domestic Abuse policy was simplified and made more user friendly. It was published in November 2025.
- ✓ In consultation with the Tenant Committee and to help reduce the risk of anti-social behaviour, the Lettings Policy was amended to include a history of use or dealing of illegal drugs as an example of tenancy breaches would be considered as a reason to decline a housing application.

EFFECTIVE INVESTMENT

- ✓ In response to CHS noticing that housing issues were often having a negative effect on some tenants' mental health, we created a new Housing and Community Connector role to support those tenants who might need help connecting to the right services.
- ✓ Following a research project carried out by our Tenant Scrutiny Panel, a new contract with our rent payment collection company Allpay led to annual savings of £27,000 in fees.

IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT

- ✓ Following discussion around how to encourage more tenants to attend meetings, the Tenant Committee decided to change the format and timing of its meetings with hybrid meetings becoming standard and new venues being explored. CHS purchased new audio-visual equipment to facilitate this. The number of tenants attending meetings has increased from an average of 13 in 2024 and 2025 to 25 at the January 2026 meeting.
- ✓ Following the publication of the Annual Tenant Engagement Report, Tenant Committee members requested a twice-yearly update on engagement. Future engagement updates will be published to coincide with Tenant Committee meetings.
- ✓ The Chair of the Tenant Committee requested that we publish the minutes of each Tenant Committee meeting on the website to encourage more tenants to get involved.



SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

- ✓ Recent survey responses from both shared owners and tenants identified that information around service charges can be confusing. To address this, we now include an explanatory leaflet with all service charge schedules.
- ✓ We have been reviewing the data we receive from sending out our Tenant Newsletter emails and have identified that some articles are more popular than others. In response we have increased our articles that are more tenant focused (e.g. rent increases, repairs) and decreased the number of corporate announcements. We have also increased the promotion of prize draws to incentivise more tenant engagement and feedback.

COMMUNAL AREAS

- ✓ Tenants and our estate inspectors highlighted that their feedback about the cleaning in communal areas was not being passed on to the cleaning operatives. We have appointed a new internal cleaning contract for all communal areas that we directly manage, which should lead to improved service.
- ✓ At a building safety forum, tenants said they would like to be able to report repairs and hazards digitally. We are currently trialling the use of QR codes at Samuel Jones Crescent in Little Paxton to allow tenants to report communal repairs and hazards.

IMPROVEMENTS TO OUR WEBSITE

- ✓ Through a tenant survey, we were asked to provide more 'how to' videos for DIY repairs. We have now added a number of videos and guidance from Sureserve and Fortem to the repairs page (<https://www.chsgroup.org.uk/repairs-maintenance/>) on our website to help tenants address some repairs.
- ✓ Through a tenant survey, tenants asked for easier ways to report damp and mould. We created a digital form on our website where tenants can report incidents of damp and mould directly to our Property Services team.

HOUSING WITH CARE

- ✓ Tenants at our Housing with Care schemes wanted to improve wellbeing with more social activities and, in response, our Dunstan Court scheme has started Women's Wellbeing meetings and is trialling a hobby lounge.
- ✓ At a tenants' meeting at our Moorlands Court Housing with Care scheme, tenants said they would like an additional local gardener to help manage the grounds. A new gardener from the local area has been appointed and will begin tending to the grounds in the Spring.
- ✓ Following a request from tenants at our Housing with Care schemes, we have implemented a welcome pack in each communal lounge.

SHARED OWNERS

- ✓ To address current low satisfaction levels among shared owners and their awareness of responsibilities that were identified through survey responses, a new separate twice-yearly newsletter was launched in January 2026.
- ✓ Feedback from shared owners also identified that they did not have confidence in service charges being set correctly and so we changed the timetable for service charge setting process to ensure greater checks and accuracy.
- ✓ Following a complaint from a shared owner, we have reviewed our sinking funds for shared owners and stock condition surveys will be carried out to provide more accurate cost estimates for sinking funds.

TENANT COMMITTEE

We were so pleased that 25 tenants attended the Tenant Committee meeting in January, either in person or on Zoom for a lively meeting with a lot of valuable feedback, for example about repairs to streetlighting and about how to update our Customer Service Standard. You can see the minutes of the meeting [here](#). If you are interested in attending these meetings and would like chat about it, do get in touch - email lpap@chsgroup.org.uk or telephone [07540 122624](tel:07540122624).

Tenant group meetings - 2026

Scrutiny Panel

19th March, 10.30am

CHS Head office in Histon and online

Complaints Panel

9th April, 12.30pm

CHS Head office in Histon and online

Tenant Committee

29th April, 10.30am

Meadows Community Centre and online



Safeguarding: looking out for each other

At CHS, the safety and wellbeing of our tenants and their households is our top priority. Safeguarding means protecting people from harm, abuse, and neglect, and ensuring everyone feels safe in their home and community.

What does safeguarding cover?

Safeguarding isn't just about children—it applies to adults too, especially those who may struggle to protect themselves from abuse because they're older or have a disability or long-term illness. It includes:

- Physical safety – preventing harm or injury
- Emotional wellbeing – protecting against bullying, harassment, or intimidation
- Financial safety – avoiding scams or exploitation
- Neglect prevention – ensuring basic needs like food, warmth, and care are met

Spotting the signs

You might notice something that doesn't feel right, such as:

- A neighbour who seems withdrawn or distressed
- Signs of neglect (e.g., lack of heating, poor hygiene)
- Someone being pressured or controlled by others
- Unexplained injuries or sudden changes in behaviour

If you're concerned, don't ignore it.
Acting early can make a big difference.

What should you do?

- In an emergency, call 999 immediately.
- If you're worried about someone's safety: you can contact Cambridgeshire County Council on [0345 045 5202](tel:03450455202) (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday) or outside these hours, telephone: [01733 234 724](tel:01733234724).
- For advice or support, you can also call the NSPCC (for children) helpline on or emailing help@NSPCC.org.uk. The voice helpline is currently available 10am – 4pm Monday to Friday or you can email help@NSPCC.org.uk 24/7. You don't have to say who you are.

Our commitment

We take safeguarding seriously. Our staff are trained to respond to concerns promptly and confidentially. If you need help or want to report something, please contact us through our Customer Services Team.

Together, we can create a safe and supportive community for everyone.



Customer data survey – your chance to win £500

In our January tenant newsletter, we shared that we would soon be launching a new customer data survey. This survey will ask you to confirm the details of everyone living in your home, helping us ensure our records are accurate and up to date.

We have appointed Acuity Research and Practice, an independent customer research and benchmarking organisation, to carry out the survey on our behalf.

Taking part will help us better understand your household and improve the services we provide to you as a tenant, as well as plan more effectively for future needs. As circumstances



can change over time, it's important that we have the most current information, and this survey gives you an easy opportunity to update your details. It would also be helpful to know more about any adjustments you may need to the service CHS provides.

Over the next couple of months, you will receive an invitation to complete the survey. We encourage you to take part and complete it as fully as possible. As a thank you, everyone who completes the survey will be entered into a prize draw, with one tenant winning a £500 shopping voucher and five runners-up each receiving a £100 shopping voucher.

Shoebox Appeal

We are delighted to share that 2025's Shoebox Appeal (our seventh to date) has been our largest and most successful yet. We saw a significant increase in support from local businesses and organisations, with several companies choosing to donate to the appeal instead of sending gifts to their clients.

In total, we received over 400 shoeboxes. As this exceeded the number required for our own supported housing residents, we were able to redistribute the surplus donations to several partner organisations, including YMCA, Amplus, Orwell/Whitworth House, Riverside, and Winter Comfort. We were also pleased to pass on surplus chocolate selection boxes to Addenbrooke's Charitable Trust (ACT) in Cambridge, who distributed them to the children at Addenbrooke's Hospital this Christmas.

For our 2025 Appeal, our local food bank was unable to provide hampers for 25 of our CHS families experiencing financial hardship. In response, we reached out to the local community who stepped in to donate 25 food hampers. In addition to this, we approached our contractors, who responded with a wonderful selection of toys and generous financial donations. This enabled us to purchase age and gender appropriate gifts for each child living in these households.

We have calculated that this year's appeal generated over £10,000 worth of donations in total from the shoeboxes and gifts, food hampers, and monetary donations through our JustGiving page and gift cards.

This truly was a community team effort, and we would like to extend our sincere thanks to everyone involved.



"I am going to save my presents so that I can open them slowly on Xmas day. I am so happy to have some gifts to open. Thank you so much. I am so grateful and surprised at how kind everyone is."



CHS GROUP
housing, care, and community services in Cambridgeshire

For more help and guidance, to check your rent account and raise repairs, don't forget to log into [myCHS](#). We'd also love to hear your thoughts on our newsletter. To get in touch, email: info@chsgroup.org.uk.