

Lancaster West Refurbishment “HomeSwitch” Proposal

05 January 2020

Summary

This document outlines the options and benefits for allowing residents to transfer to already refurbished properties, permanently vacating their own homes which are turn refurbished.

This is in response to a formal proposal from the LWRA at the LWE Programme Board to explore if this is feasible, to minimise disruption, costs and maximise the benefit of refurbishing empty properties for the whole estate beyond those who qualify for the Local Lettings Plan.

Summary The refurbishment of Lancaster West is taking place in the context of widespread trauma, anxiety and underlying stress.

Residents have already raised numerous concerns around noise and disturbance where works have been undertaken in their homes, with a relatively high number requesting temporary accommodation, decants to void properties, or other respite facilities.

Where in situ major works have taken place, around 50% of households have been moved out temporarily for some period of time, citing issues concerning emotional wellbeing and PTSD.

If applied at scale, there are clear cost implications to this, we will not be able to fund provision of temporary accommodation to all of those residents who ask for it, and therefore need a range of creative solutions to meet the needs of residents whilst reducing costs.

Even where void properties are used for temporary decanting, the process of boxing and storing items to move them out to a temporary home, and then doing the same to move back is in itself twice as stressful as moving once.

The Local Lettings Plan will enable around 10% of tenants to potentially move. However, this leaves 90% who are currently left to wait for in situ refurbishment.

Benefits of allowing property switching

- **Reduce potential costs of TA** (potentially around £10k-£15k per property for an 8 week period in hotel accommodation). This could amount to around £4.5m out of the £57.9m based on current demand.
- **Ensure a more efficient use of resources, in refurbing a void property and reducing claims of damage and loss**
- **Reduce disruption and stress of a household effectively** moving twice.
- **Ensure LWE residents get a more immediate benefit of the refurbishment**, rather than those not on the estate at the time of the tragedy
- **Improve satisfaction of residents with RBKC and LWNT**

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Interdependencies The scale of noise and disruption to a community in recovery cannot be underestimated. However, we will offer a range of measures in addition to this proposal.

- **Ensure noisy works only takes place between agreed hours**
- **Promote respite at community centres in the area**
- **Ensure welfare facilities** for use by residents during the hours of work
- Flats for temporary use for those who require them and do not wish to move permanently.

Given the shortage of social housing in the borough, it is important that through this proposal, housing needs in terms of bedroom size, accessibility or tenure is not affected, and that the allocation of properties is not affected.

Scope	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Lancaster West Estate secure tenants only, who were resident on LWE at the start of the tragedy2. Whole households only. Split households would be dealt with through the the LLP.3. Households where there is a housing need that should be met through the Local Lettings Policy
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It is proposed that:

1. In the event of **more than one family being interested**, tenancy start date will be used
2. In the event of **rent arrears**, a payment plan will need to be have been adhered to for a minimum of three months to be eligible to move
3. Any live **ASB enforcement activity taken against the household** will exclude them from the HomeSwitch proposal.

Resident engagement	The LWRA are keen to ensure that the residents of Lancaster West are the first to benefit from the refurbishment, and have raised concerns about the amount of disruption to people’s homes.
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The proposal was made at the last LWE Programme Board.

Costs/risks	There could be a perception that this will deny access to housing stock on LWE from the wider borough. However in practice, the process recognises the significant trauma that residents of LWE have gone through.
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There is a risk that without using a rigorous process already in place, that significant officer time and expense will need to be used to devise a new process.

This proposal – for those homes that utilise it - will reduce the likely TA costs of around 5-10% of households which we anticipate will seek to utilise this process.

The demand for temporary accommodation during major works on the estate is extremely high. For a 10 week refurbishment the costs could be £15k for a large family. This proposal therefore will make the most efficient of refurbishment funds.

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Options **Option 1 – Utilise management transfer process**

Use existing Management Transfer process to transfer those who declare an interest in moving, with tenancy start date used to rank households.

This option uses an existing and recently reviewed process, and contains checks and balances between Housing Management and Housing Needs and Allocations.

Properties, once fully refurbished, will be made available alternatively, so that throughput on the LLP and the wider register continues.

If a property does not attract sufficient interest through the MT process, it will also be made available through the LLP and to the wider register.

This would commence from April 2020, at which point the majority of LLP need will be met.

Option 2 (Preferred): Integrated approach with the LLP – Technical decant

LWE develops a waiting list of those willing to swap and holds properties, and where a property does not become let through the LLP, it would then be offered for a HomeSwitch through technical decant

Should this not result in interest within a two-week period, then the property will be made available to let on the borough wide register.

Should more than one household interest in this period, then tenancy start date will be the deciding factor.

A technical decant does not go via the RBKC Allocations Policy.

This ensures that those in housing need on LWE are prioritised first, however required oversight for audit purposes would need to be secured.

Next steps in improving

Discuss with Housing Needs and Supply the most appropriate way to administrate this with required oversight

Develop systems and processes

Launch HomeSwitch by the end of the financial year, with relevant communications and terms and conditions agreed with Housing Needs.