

Consultation response

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea consultation

Local Lettings Plan

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Shelter helps millions of people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. And we campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help.

We're here so no one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

Introduction

- For the residents of the Lancaster West Estate, and the surrounding neighbourhood, the Grenfell Tower fire caused exceptional levels of trauma, in terms of witnessing the horror of the blaze, dealing with the loss or injury of relatives, friends and neighbours, and in coping with the aftermath.
- Shelter responded immediately to the Grenfell Tower fire, mobilising a team of housing advisors, solicitors and volunteers from our London Hub to provide rapid support to people affected by the fire. Eighteen months on, we maintain a presence in the borough and run advice sessions for those in situations of bad housing and homelessness.
- Our approach from the outset was to take our lead from the local community, listening and responding to the needs and preferences of individual households and working in partnership with established local agencies, such as the Westway Trust and North Kensington CAB.
- The disaster shone a light on the housing need of people living in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and we recognise the significant efforts made by the local authority to address this.

Response

- In our view, the borough's Local Lettings Plan seeks creative ways to help those affected by the Grenfell fire and those who are living in unsuitable accommodation on the Lancaster West Estate. However, it is restricted to a very small locality and does not allow for flexibility when considering the circumstances of people from the wider neighbourhood.
- It is very important that people who live in the neighbourhood are given preference for homes that are available as a result of former residents relinquishing their tenancies. This allows for households already living on the estate to move from unsuitable accommodation but remain near their support networks and community after such a traumatic time. We welcome RBKC's efforts to enable people with a housing need to remain in their neighbourhood.
- We also welcome the introduction of the five new priority categories, which acknowledge that households who do not meet the level of need stated in the borough's allocations policy are still covered by the allocations scheme. We welcome the borough acknowledging the varied and complex housing problems people in the community face, and providing solutions that allow households to retain secure tenancies and stay in their neighbourhood.
- We continue to work with households who lived, or continue to live, in the surrounding area who have a very compelling need to move as a direct result of the Grenfell Tower fire but who have only been offered the solution of a homeless application under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 as a means to move to a suitable home. The prospect of long spells in insecure temporary accommodation, with no guarantee of a permanent home, will compound their trauma.
- We believe that the geographical scope of the proposed policy is too narrow. Households, who live in close proximity to the tower but not on the Lancaster West Estate or Bramley House, and whose accommodation has become unsuitable – or more severely unsuitable – as a result of the fire, should be able to bid on the properties available on the Lancaster West Estate. We recommend that they are, at the very least, treated as an exception to the Local Lettings Plan.
- It is imperative that all those who have a need to move receive a compassionate, person-centred and efficient service. Therefore, if two households have the same number of points, we recommend that a full needs-assessment be carried out to ensure that empty homes are allocated based on the greatest level of need.
- We strongly support the policy of including homeless households living in temporary accommodation within the Local Lettings Plan. They have already been through the trauma of homelessness, and

may have spent years in temporary accommodation on the Lancaster West Estate. It is therefore right that they should be able to access a permanent home in the same area if they wish to.

- However, we recommend that the plan apply to residents of all tenures, including private renters and housing association tenants, whose current home is unsuitable but want to stay on the Lancaster West Estate.
- Our services continue to see a high number of people who are on the housing register and who live in highly unsuitable accommodation who will be affected by the Lancaster West Estate properties being ring-fenced. We therefore recommend that a full assessment be undertaken to understand how the Local Lettings Plan might impact on households who have been on the housing register for many years.
- We recommend that there be a system whereby, if a property is not let under the Local Lettings Plan, it is offered to households in the following priority order:
 - 1) Split households who were not included in the Walkways Rehousing Policy and subsequently made Part 7 allocation scheme applications.
 - 2) Households in close proximity of the tower who are in unsuitable accommodation or some other pressing need to move, but do not live on the Walkways, Treadgold House or Bramley House and who were therefore not included in the Walkways Rehousing Policy.
 - 3) The Council's general housing register.
- We strongly recommend that the borough reviews its homelessness strategy to set out how it will make sure that sufficient accommodation is available in the neighbourhood to tackle homelessness and poor housing conditions.
- The Grenfell Fire was unprecedented, and affected different people in different ways. We therefore recommend that the Local Lettings Plan allows for discretionary applications for households in exceptional circumstances. We also recommend that it is kept under review if further households come forward, perhaps because of the onset of post-traumatic stress, who are not covered by the Local Lettings Plan.