

Assistant Mayor Briefing

31st July 2017

Housing Scrutiny Commission

14th August 2017

Progress report for the Under-occupation Project

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr Andy Connelly

Lead Director: Chris Burgin

- Ward(s) affected: ALL
- Report authors: Justin Haywood, Business Change Manager, ext. 37-1712
- Head of Service: Caroline Carpendale, ext. 37-1701
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1. Summary

- 1.1. To update the Assistant Mayor for Housing and Scrutiny Members of Leicester City Council's progress against objectives set out in a pilot to tackle under-occupation and overcrowding within LCC tenancies.
- 1.2. The report sets out the progress made to date, and makes recommendations to Members for the next steps in the initiative.

2. Context/Background

- 1.3. A report was presented to Housing Scrutiny Commission on 20th March 2017, outlining a plan to pilot use of the HomeSwapper product as an effective tool to tackle under-occupation and overcrowding in LCC tenancies.
- 1.4. The HomeSwapper product is a website for tenants to use to find a mutual exchange. (a mutual exchange is a legal swap of properties between two or more parties). Leicester City Council currently pay £11,000 annually for all council tenants to be able to have free access to this service.
- 1.5. A target group was established for the pilot, consisting of all under-occupying or over-crowded LCC tenants who had expressed, by joining the Housing Register, a wish to move home.
- 1.6. The objectives that were set were as follows:
 - Increasing the amount of LCC tenants using the HomeSwapper service, thus enriching the user base and widening the options available to users;
 - Improving the ratio of under-occupied : over-crowded tenants on HomeSwapper, thus addressing a current imbalance and improving the maximum potential of user matches;
 - Use existing HomeSwapper functionality to 'suggest' swaps to registered users, thus improving the service offered by the product and ease of use; and,
 - Increasing the number of housing resolutions achieved through mutual exchanges.
- 1.7. Scrutiny Members were in favour of the approach and requested a progress update at a later date.

3. Progress against objectives

3.1. Increasing the amount of LCC tenants using the HomeSwapper service, by completing a registration drive

3.1.1. A registration drive was completed in three phases:

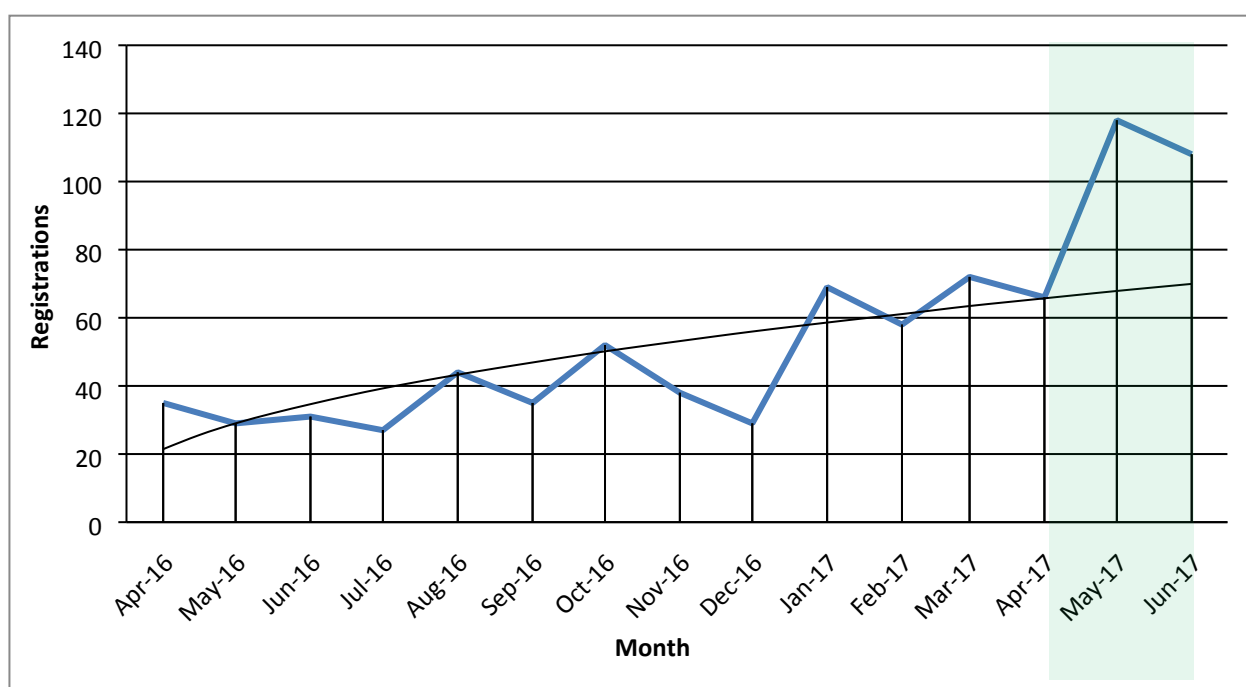
- In April approx. 300 letters were sent to all under-occupying LCC tenants on the Housing Register.
- In May approx. 300 letters were sent to overcrowded LCC tenants on the Housing Register.
- In July approx. 300 letters were sent to the remaining overcrowded LCC tenants on the Housing Register.

3.1.2. Each of these mailings was followed up by a round of telephone calls to increase the chances of engagement and offer advice and support to those who needed it. The final mailshot was sent very recently and the follow-up calls are currently under way.

3.1.3. During the May/June period there have been 226 registrations, compared to just 60 in the May/June period last year. This is a 277% increase.

3.1.4. 124 of those 226 HomeSwapper registrations (more than half) were as a direct result of this registration drive. This is expected to rise further as the third mailshot and associated telephone calls are completed.

3.1.5. The chart below shows that the registrations on HomeSwapper have been naturally increasing at a slow rate and the green section highlights the registration drive period in which we can see a spike.



3.1.6. For a detailed breakdown of the registration drive, please see Appendix A.

3.2. Improving the ratio of Under-occupied / Over-crowded Tenants on HomeSwapper, by completing a registration drive

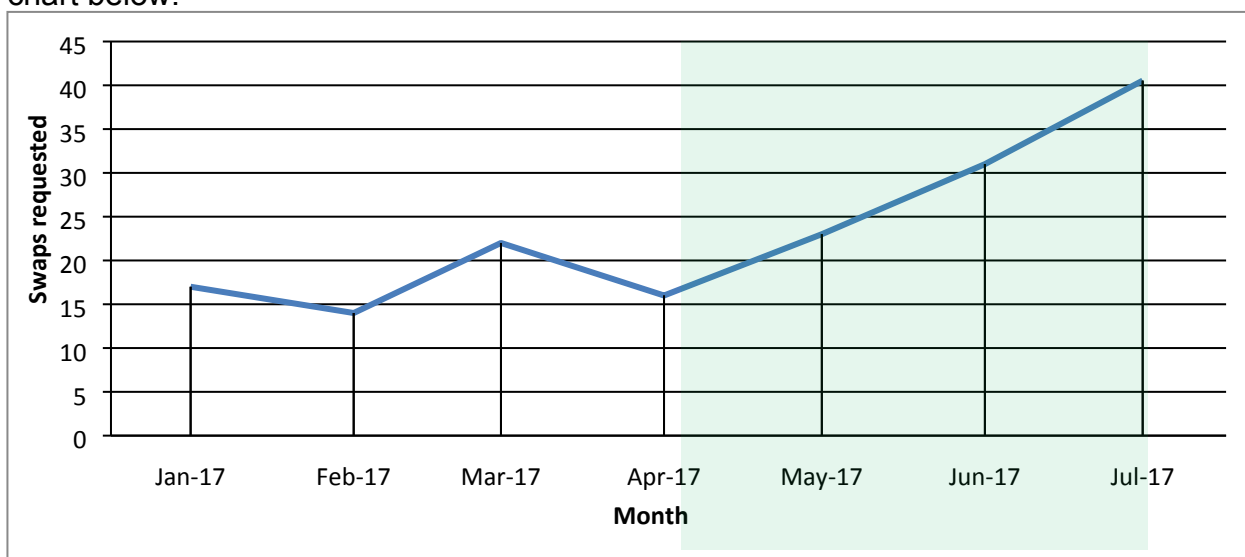
- 3.2.1. Research prior to this project indicated that there was a 1:19 (5% to 95%) ratio of under-occupied LCC tenants to overcrowded LCC tenants in the 'Serious about swapping' group.
- 3.2.2. Maximum potential swaps will always be limited to the number of users in the smaller of the two groups. We therefore wanted to improve the balance.
- 3.2.3. The registration drive resulted in 124 additional registrations, 23 of which are under-occupiers. This is a ratio close to 1:5 (20% to 80%).
- 3.2.4. Combined with the existing numbers this has resulted in an improvement to the user-base balance on HomeSwapper, and this will mean that more swaps can potentially take place.

3.3. Use existing functionality in HomeSwapper to 'suggest' swaps to registered users.

- 3.3.1. This phase of the project was started as early as 28th June. Swaps have been suggested taking into account factors such as size of accommodation, area, and school catchments.
- 3.3.2. This is an ongoing process, in the early stages, and results will become apparent in the longer term. We are expecting that mainstreaming this service improvement would slowly improve the level of user engagement as they discover that their Landlord is taking an active role in their mutual exchange search. The time it takes to suggest swaps is low and could be absorbed by the Housing Options Service with no additional cost.

3.4. Increase the number of housing resolutions achieved through mutual exchanges.

- 3.4.1. There has been an increase in the number of swaps requested, as illustrated by the chart below:



(Figure for July is extrapolated for the month based on data as at 13th July)

- 3.4.2. Taking the May-July period and comparing it to the proceeding three-month period, we can see there is an 83% increase in swaps requested.
- 3.4.3. It is too early to report on success rates as many of these new requests are still in progress, but it is likely that the increase in requested swaps will directly translate to an increase in actual positive resolutions.

4. Next Steps;

- 3.5. It is planned to take the following next steps:
 - 4.1.1. Extend the pilot to include all LCC under-occupiers (i.e. those not on the Housing Register), and complete an additional registration drive phase for these tenants.
 - 4.1.2. Complete additional work alongside the Income Management Team to engage those tenants who were not interested in the initiative, but are in receipt of Discretionary Housing Payments to make their home temporarily affordable.
 - 4.1.3. Complete visits to those tenants who were not interested in the initiative, who are not in receipt of Discretionary Housing Payments, but meet the criteria for a Housing Welfare Visit.
 - 4.1.4. Complete visits to those tenants who responded favourably to the initiative but told us they would need support to register to the website and use the service.
 - 4.1.5. Pro-actively encourage new under occupying Housing Register applicants to also register on HomeSwapper, and provide the information for them to be able to do so.

5. Conclusion

- 4.2. The initiative was received positively by tenants.
- 4.3. The registration drive was a success, and resulted in an injection of new enthusiastic HomeSwapper users. The registration drive also improved the balance of under-occupiers and over-crowded Tenants using the service. Overall we can see this has resulted in a rise in activity on the website, and a rise in the number of mutual exchanges requested by tenants.
- 4.4. We will continue to monitor the success of the registration drive and will start to slowly increase the number of swaps we suggest to further improve tenant engagement.
- 4.5. We believe that this initiative creates an additional option for tenants who want to move to an appropriately sized home. This is a much needed option due to the reduction of Social Housing, and increasing waiting times on the Housing Register.

Appendix A

How many Tenants were we able to talk to?

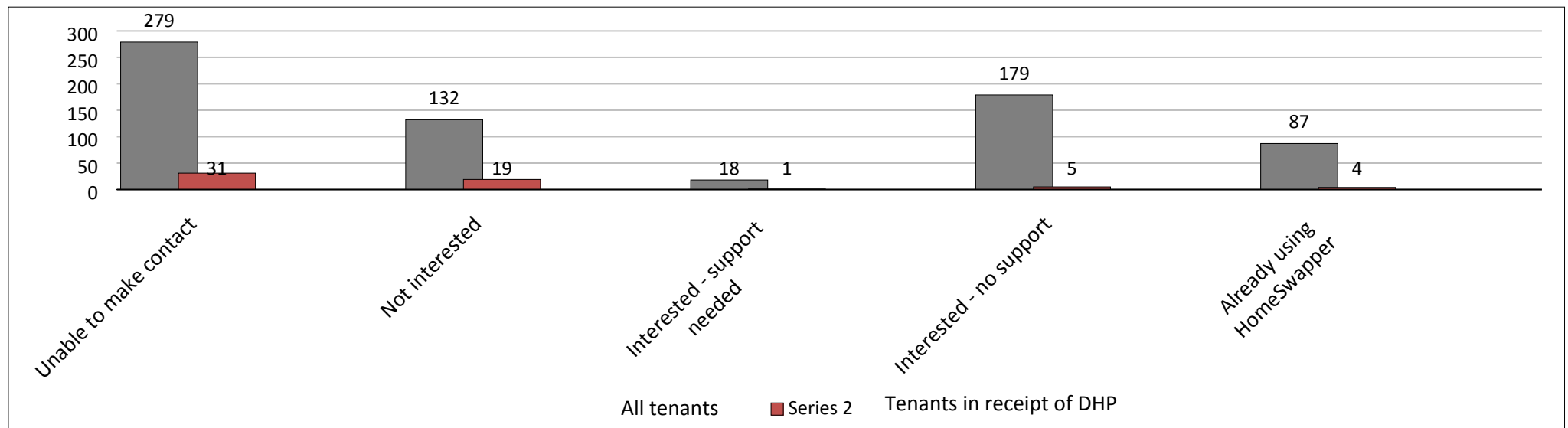
Of the 695 Tenants we have written to so far, we were able to speak with 416. This is approximately 60%.

Some of those we were unable to make follow-up contact with did later register with HomeSwapper, indicating that the letter they received prior to telephone contact attempts was sufficient.

Of those Tenants we were able to talk to, what was their response?

Of the 416 that we were able to make telephone contact with;

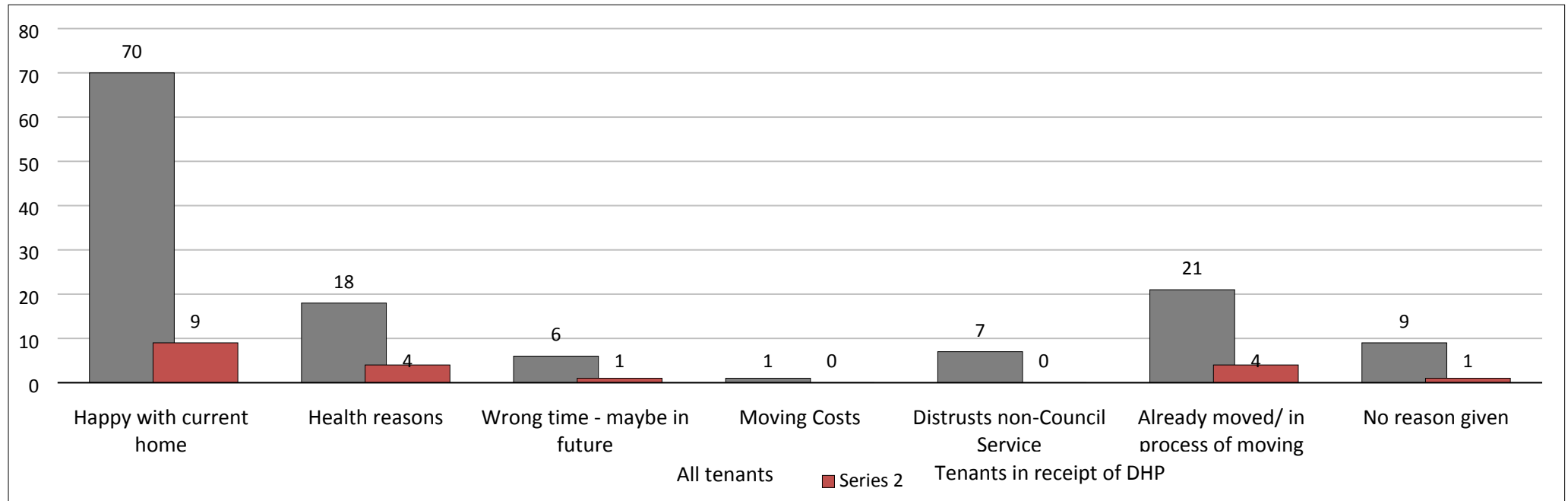
- 179 were interested in joining HomeSwapper and needed no support to do so;
- 132 were not interested in joining HomeSwapper;
- 87 were already using HomeSwapper; and,
- 18 were interested in joining HomeSwapper but needed some level of support to register on the website.



Of those Tenants that were not interested, what was their main reason?

Of the 132 that were not interested in joining HomeSwapper;

- 70 (53%) said they no longer wanted to move because they were happy with their current home;
 - 21 said they were already in the process of moving home and did not need to join;
 - 18 said they no longer wanted to move because of health reasons;
 - 7 said they did not trust or like HomeSwapper;
 - 6 said they did not want to move right now but would consider it again in the future; and,
 - 1 said that moving costs would make it impossible for them to move.
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- The remaining 9 refused to give a reason.



Of those that no longer wanted to move, 14 are in receipt of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) meaning that they cannot currently afford their homes without help.