

Response from Metropolitan Thames Valley
07/08/20

Dear Ms Muna

Thank you for the letter to our CEO, Geeta Nanda, from the Social Housing Action Campaign regarding the end of the evictions moratorium. Geeta is currently on leave and as I have accountability for our Income collection as well as our support delivery to residents experiencing financial hardship, your letter has been passed to me for response.

Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing (MTVH) is acutely aware of the hardship being experienced by our residents at this time and we have put a number of measures in place to enhance the support we provide. Our initial response was to set up a Covid 19 Support Hub which can be accessed by residents and colleagues directly, offering signposting and direct support to those struggling at this time.

Through the Support Hub we have helped hundreds of residents experiencing food or fuel poverty and also those struggling to make rental or service charge payments. At the start of the pandemic, we doubled the money available to support residents in financial hardship through our tenant welfare fund, offering deferred payment plans and distribution of food vouchers, amongst other things. We have also tolerated extra rent arrears in the region of £1M for social rented tenancies. Since lockdown we have suspended sending out traditional arrears letters and instead have focused on increasing customer engagement and offering more support.

As an organisation we are committed to reducing our eviction numbers and have done so every year for the past six years. MTVH offer extra support at every stage of the arrears process, supporting with benefit applications and appeals through our specialist Money Advice Team, helping those transitioning to Universal Credit and providing employment support through our team of Resident Connectors. For customers in financial distress we offer 'breathing space' while a customer seeks advice from a support provider, internal or external. We follow the pre action protocol and complete an Equality Act and Proportionality Assessment prior to the commencement of possession proceedings. We also plan to update our processes in line with the new process around 'reactivation notices'. For any of our customers who are engaging with us and are maintaining the arrangements they have made, we will not be applying to court. This has always been our approach.

In order to further support those who have faced financial hardship due to Coronavirus, MTVH will initially only pursue priority eviction cases when the ban is lifted later this month. Priority cases include those involving anti-social behaviour, extreme rent arrears with no engagement, domestic abuse, cases involving squatters, fraud or unlawful subletting. This means that for non-priority arrears cases, tenants will have more time to work with us to secure their tenancy. Please be aware that MTVH does not use ground 8 for social rented tenancies and we have not done for some time.

We will work with tenants in arrears to establish affordable repayment plans, offering support and those who keep to agreed repayment plans will not be evicted. Furthermore MTVH will postpone pending possession claims to 31 October and not issue new claims until 31 October, with the exception of priority cases as identified above.

We do hope the above provides some assurance on how we will always seek to exhaust all reasonable options to help sustain a customer's tenancy before going to court.

Yours sincerely

Ann