



Councillor Graham Arthur
Portfolio Holder, Resources
LONDON BOROUGH OF BROMLEY

Ms Paula Peters

12th March 2014

Dear Ms Peters

I write with reference to the petition that you submitted to the LB Bromley on the 24th February 2014. For ease of reference I have entered the subject of the petition below.

"We the undersigned demand that the council will give a guarantee that they will use all the powers they have to ensure that no Bromley resident will face eviction or forced relocation as a result of the bedroom tax or the benefit cap limit."

Our key principle relating to the benefit cap changes is that workless households should no longer receive more in benefits than the average earnings of working households. Removal of the spare room subsidy aims to ensure support is provided only for the number of bedrooms that a household needs. These changes affect claimants of working age, but there are a number of groups exempted from the changes. The reduction in benefits also contributes to the need to reduce public spending.

The Authority shares the Government's vision of supporting individuals into training and employment, as well as providing the means for them to have a greater say on decisions affecting their health and wellbeing. However, linked to this empowerment comes responsibility and, where deemed possible, the Authority will expect the individual to be taking active steps to improve their standard of living and that of any dependent family member. The Authority's decisions also need to be viewed in light of increased financial pressures.

To assist as a safeguard against hardship resultant from the removal of the spare room subsidy and the introduction of the benefit cap, the Government's Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) contribution for Bromley increased from £226,883 in 2012/13 to £700,174 in 2013/14. In recognition of the increase, the Authority's policy was presented to Members of the Executive and Resources PDS on the 18th July 2013. Some of this support is time limited to enable claimants to find more affordable accommodation.

The London Borough of Bromley does not own a housing stock and Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) provide the social housing in the borough. As such, Bromley has very limited information as to the "state" of an individual's rent account,

or the reason as to why any arrears have accrued. As such we are unable to provide the guarantee that you are seeking in respect of evictions.

However, the Benefits Section does meet regularly with representatives from the RSL's, both at an operational and management level. Attendees of these meetings have all been advised as to the existence of DHP's and the content of Bromley's policy. Publicity of the scheme, both locally and nationally, has led to a large request in DHP applications (estimated at a 300% increase in Bromley) for consideration against the said policy.

The Housing Needs Service has a dedicated team of officers who work with those households in the borough affected by the welfare reform changes, including the spare room subsidy. The officers' work in partnership with representatives from the DWP and housing associations with stock in the borough to provide advice and assistance regarding a range of options, including accessing training and employment, moving to more affordable accommodation, budgeting and so forth. In this, moves away from the local area for tenants affected by the spare bedroom subsidy would be purely on a voluntary basis where the household decides that this is an option they wished to pursue.

The majority of housing associations with stock in Bromley have specialist officers working with their tenants who are affected by the spare room subsidy. The officers aim to support those households to ensure that they do not fall into rent arrears and face eviction. The housing associations have also worked with the South East London Housing Partnership to develop a protocol setting out the advice and support they provide to their tenants. The protocol seeks to give a clear commitment to working with households to enable them to pursue a range of options to minimise the risk of eviction. For example, where a household is actively seeking to transfer to smaller accommodation, the housing association would provide support to find a suitable vacancy and would not pursue any action to evict because of rent arrears arising from the spare room subsidy arrangement.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Arthur', written in a cursive style.

Cllr Graham Arthur