



Housing Action Southwark & Lambeth

14.05.2024

haslcases@gmail.com

OPEN LETTER TO METROPOLITAN THAMES VALLEY HOUSING ASSOCIATION



Dear Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association,

We are writing to you from Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth (HASL).

HASL is a member-led housing action group of families and individuals struggling with homelessness, overcrowded housing, and other poor housing conditions. With mutual support, protests and campaigns, and legal action we fight together for our housing rights and the high-quality council homes we all need and deserve.

We are families who are tenants with Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association and we all live here in the borough of Lambeth. We are all overcrowded in our homes and the overcrowding is so serious that we meet the legal definition of 'statutory overcrowding' which has a very high threshold to meet. We are on Lambeth council's housing waiting list and we have been bidding for years for the spacious, family-sized homes we need but with no success. We have learnt about Metropolitan Thames Valley's 'Housing Jigsaw' waiting list

which we have registered for but the only properties available are one or two bedrooms which are unsuitable for our needs and often outside of London. Our families need 3, 4, and 5 bedroom social homes in our local communities.

When we have written to Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association about this severe overcrowding, we have just been sent generic advice about joining our local council's housing waiting list as well as Housing Jigsaw. This is not an adequate response.

Our living conditions are unbearable. As well as the severe overcrowding, we also have damp and mould in the properties which is related to the overcrowding as the small homes we live in were not made for our family sizes. Our attempts to highlight our dangerously overcrowding living conditions as well as the damp and mould have not been properly addressed by Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association.

Pawan's case

Pawan's family of 5 live in a 1 bedroom flat. There is Pawan, her husband and their three children. Pawan's 2 year old daughter has respiratory problems (asthma) and this living arrangement exacerbates her condition. The children do not have sufficient space to play indoors and weather doesn't permit them to take them outside. The situation is quite frustrating, stressful and scary especially when her daughter is having asthma attacks and has to be admitted to hospital. The fact that there is mould and damp and being overcrowded does not help the situation. The perpetual worry of her daughter having to be hospitalised and having to recover in this property is very daunting.

Esther's case

Esther's family of 7 live in a 2 bedroom flat. The parents, the three teenagers - including a 19 year old son and an 18 year old daughter - and two younger children have two bedrooms between them. There is no privacy or space for anyone, especially these young people. Her oldest children are studying for their vital A level examinations but they do not have adequate study space at home.

Esther has medical issues (back/legs and joint problems) but she is unable to be cared for by the nurse as the home is too small and overcrowded for the nurse to provide treatment and physiotherapy.

Everyone's mental health is being affected by the cramped living conditions. Teachers contact Esther to complain about the children's lack of focus and tiredness at school which is caused by the difficulties sleeping and studying in such a small space at home. There are multiple arguments, bickering and the parents are really stressed about seeing their children going through this situation.

Simret's case

Simret's family of 5 live in a 1 bedroom flat. There are the parents and their three children. The parents and children have to use bunk beds for their sleeping arrangements. The family's health visitor assessed the home explaining "the state of the flat is unsuitable for the

child's health and well being..." she goes on to explain that the overcrowding makes the property unsafe for young children. There is no space for children to play and explore.

The parents are really stressed and scared. One of their son's had an accident and fell out of the window of the first floor flat. Yet despite the family raising these safety concerns about the inadequate locks on the windows, this has still not been addressed.

Tekeste's case

Tekeste's family of 5 live in a 1 bedroom flat. There are the parents and their three children. There is no space for the young children to play in the home. There is mould in all the property and this is worse in the bedroom. The family is anxious and stressed by these living arrangements. Their children's health, well being and sleep patterns are being affected.

Hubeden's case

Hubeden's family of 3 live in a studio flat. Hubeden and his wife have a baby daughter. Hubeden's wife has suffered for a number of years with a cough which medical professionals have linked to the damp and mouldy conditions in the home. This has damaged her lungs. A health visitor wrote a supporting letter about their housing explaining that there is no space in the flat for the baby to be placed down on the floor and "this will delay her ability to sit down and start crawling". The health visitor notes that the cramped housing conditions are preventing the parents from following their health visitor's advice on how to stimulate their baby to enhance her development.

As you can see these families' lives are being seriously affected by these intolerable and dangerous overcrowded living conditions. Their mental and physical health are being harmed by their housing conditions. They are all constantly stressed and scared for themselves and their children's well being, mental health and future.

Urgent action needed

We ask that as our social landlord Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association take the following urgent action to ensure that our families, and all other Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association tenants, are able to live in safe, spacious social housing where our families can thrive.

- 1) Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association must use their own stock to urgently re-house our families who are statutory overcrowded into local social housing suitable to our needs.
- 2) Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association must negotiate with Lambeth council to amend the council's housing allocations policy so that Housing Association tenants who are statutory overcrowded qualify for band A on Lambeth's council's housing waiting list. Currently, only Lambeth council tenants who are statutory overcrowded qualify for band A, while our families who are statutory overcrowded in housing association homes only qualify for band B. Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association make their homes available for Lambeth council's housing

waiting list, so Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association should ask the council that in return, Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association tenants who are statutory overcrowded have the same rights as council tenants. This would allow Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association tenants to be re-housed quickly through the council housing waiting list.

- 3) Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association must make a commitment to their tenants that all new homes are for social rent for those at the worst end of the housing crisis. The majority of any new homes must also be family-sized 3, 4, 5 bed homes that Londoners desperately need to end overcrowding.

One of our families lives on the [Ashmole estate](#) where 30 new homes are being built by Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association. But on the website advertising these new homes it says only 15 of these will be “affordable units”. The term “affordable housing” has long been misused and has replaced “social rent” which is genuine social housing. We imagine that the other 15 homes will be for private sale. This is a huge loss of 30 homes that our families could have to immediately end our overcrowding. We call on Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association to make these 30 new homes social housing and prioritise our families for re-housing here.

We hope to receive a positive reply from you by 28.05.2024.

Kind regards,

Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth

