



Seven weeks to avoid homelessness Case Study 2015-16

Mr and Mrs Jones are a couple in their 50s who had been living in Merton for less than a year. They were living in a privately rented one-bedroom property under a one year fixed-term assured short hold tenancy. The only income coming into the household was via welfare benefits and as their rent was higher than the Local Housing Allowance, there was a shortfall between rent and Housing Benefit. Mr and Mrs Jones were therefore reliant on Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) to meet the rent shortfall and to prevent them falling into arrears. They were due to reapply for DHP but they were so worried about not getting it, they had cancelled their tenancy agreement and were trying to find another property at a cheaper rent.

When Mr and Mrs Jones contacted us, the couple were at risk of homelessness. They had given written notice to leave their privately rented property because of their worries about the possible rent shortfall. The notice period was running out within the next seven weeks, and they did not have another property to move into. At a home visit, we explored their options and looked at what would happen if Mr and Mrs Jones were not able to withdraw the notice, were not able to find another privately rented property to move into and had to make a homelessness application to Merton Council. Our advice was that Merton would not owe the full housing duty to them and that Merton would, at best, provide them with interim (emergency and short-term) accommodation only. They would probably be referred back to their previous borough, who had already decided that they did not have a priority housing need.

Options discussed:

1. Withdraw their notice and agree a further tenancy with the landlord.
2. Alternatively, do not withdraw notice and focus all energies on trying to find another private sector tenancy.

Advice:

We advised Mr and Mrs Jones to take option one and agree a further tenancy with the landlord

Outcome:

Mr and Mrs Jones were able to withdraw the notice and negotiate a new tenancy. Therefore, potential homelessness was prevented.

We also supported Mrs Jones to successfully apply for a Personal Independence Payment (PIP), and she received standard rate for the care component.

Mr Jones was able to successfully reapply for DHP by himself, although the new award meant they would have to make a £10 per week contribution towards the rent, following a rent increase under the new tenancy.

Mr Jones is now in the process of migrating from Disability Living Allowance to PIP, and we will be assisting him with this.