

Our Ref: RL-1631/lj
14th May 2015

Hansen Palomares Solicitors
153 Kennington Road
London
SE11 6SF

Councillor Richard Livingstone
Cabinet Member for Housing
Labour Member
for Livesey Ward

Cabinet Suite
Southwark Council
P.O. Box 64529
London SE1P 5LX

Tel: 020 7525 7159
E-mail: richard.livingstone@southwark.gov.uk

Dear Hansen Palomares and Housing Action Southwark & Lambeth,

Re: Right to be accompanied in relation to Homelessness Applications

Thank you for your letter dated 24th March 2015, concerning this important matter. Cllr John has asked that I respond on his behalf. I apologise for the delay in responding.

Southwark appreciates and understands how difficult and stressful it can be for anyone facing homelessness.

We are very proud of our record of providing assistance to those with housing needs. Our commitment to significantly increase the number of council homes is testament to that. Our aim is to provide the best homelessness service in London. We want to ensure that customers receive the best advice and support we can offer.

I therefore can confirm that we think it is reasonable for customers to be accompanied to homelessness interviews by their representatives, family or friends.

Furthermore, we welcome the support that they give to customers at a difficult time. Our Housing Solutions service would also welcome the opportunity to work more closely with advocates in order to improve the provision of services to the customer and also improve partnership working arrangements with the legal representatives across Southwark.

I would like to point out that the purpose of the homelessness interviews with customers is in order to establish the facts of their particular circumstances. It has never been the intention that Housing Solutions officers would discuss the legal issues of any particular case with the customer. It is for the council to determine an application by applying the law to the facts of each case, and with each case considered separately from all other cases.

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If a customer is unhappy with the decision made by the council, they would be entitled to appeal against the decision and we will support them in this. Thereafter legal representations may be made to the authority concerning homelessness application or homelessness review.

Southwark launched the Homelessness Forum in 2014. The forum encourages stakeholders to attend meetings in partnership with the council to help shape and improve the provision of homelessness services locally. Legal agency representatives and other stakeholders from across the borough regularly attend these meetings and are contributing to improvements in the provision of the homelessness services. Please accept this letter as an invitation for you to attend future meetings and play your part in shaping homelessness services in the borough.

I must point out that the first sentence of the fourth paragraph of your letter is incorrect and misleading. *The case of A (anon) –v- London Borough of Southwark (Claim No. CO/2035/2014)* was a judicial review; it was never determined by the High Court. Following permission being granted for your client to seek a judicial review, the authority agreed a consent order prior to the judicial review hearing. As a result of that consent order, your client's judicial review claim was withdrawn. Therefore the High Court did not make any finding whatsoever in relation to the merits of your client's case.

Finally, I would welcome once again the opportunity to work in partnership with your legal practice in the future to ensure that the customers of our Housing Solutions service receive the best advice and support available.

Yours sincerely,

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

Councillor Richard Livingstone
Cabinet Member for Housing

Cc: Cllr Peter John
Gerri Scott
Richard Selley