



Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

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**Department for Levelling Up, Housing and
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To: All providers of social housing

ENSURING QUALITY IN SOCIAL HOUSING

The tragic case of Awaab Ishak, who died at two years old as a direct result of mould in his family home, has rightly shocked people across the country. This is an appalling case of the utmost gravity, and it is abhorrent that anyone should have to live in such conditions in Britain today.

As I said in Parliament this week: every single person in this country, irrespective of where they are from, what they do, or how much money they earn, deserves to live in a home that is decent, safe and secure. I expect those who hold the high responsibility of managing people's homes to ensure that no family experiences such a tragedy again.

Together, we must raise the bar dramatically on the quality of social housing and empower tenants so that their voices are truly heard. I want to be clear about what this must mean in relation to damp and mould, as I have been made aware of many cases where this has gone unaddressed for far too long and am concerned that they are not treated with sufficient seriousness.

Treating damp and mould seriously

The coroner's report into Awaab's death is a litany of failure. As housing providers, I expect you to read it in full and absorb its lessons. All social homes must meet the Decent Homes Standard; you must be aware of any that do not and undertake rapid remedial works. However, in light of this case I expect you to go further than the letter of the Standard and have particular regard to damp and mould.¹ Damp and mould are not 'lifestyle issues' as the Housing Ombudsman Service underscored last year. Where people complain about damp and mould, you must listen; where you find them, you must take prompt action. To keep tenants safe, you must not hide behind legal process.

It is vital as we go into a challenging winter that you know the extent of damp and mould issues in your stock and that these are being addressed. To that end, I expect you to be undertaking assessments of:

¹ Specifically, as well as category 1 damp and mould hazards, to have regard to and take action on high scoring (bands D and E) category 2 damp and mould hazards, as outlined in the relevant guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-health-and-safety-rating-system-enforcement-guidance-housing-conditions>

- damp and mould issues affecting your properties, including the prevalence of category 1 and 2 damp and mould hazards;
- the action you have identified that may need to be taken in relation to damp and mould issues affecting your properties.

The Regulator of Social Housing will be writing to you imminently on this and you should respond promptly. You should also self-refer to the Regulator of Social Housing should you become aware through those assessments, or other means, that you may be in breach of its regulatory standards.

Taking responsibility

I am more determined than ever to deliver our drastic reforms to the housing sector, protecting the rights of tenants and ensuring social landlords do not put people's lives and livelihoods at risk. Our Social Housing Regulation Bill will enable a rigorous new regime that holds all landlords to account for the decency of their homes and the service they provide. The Regulator of Social Housing will proactively inspect landlords – and will have the power to issue unlimited fines. It will be able to intervene in those cases where tenants' lives are being put at risk because landlords are dragging their feet in actioning repairs. And in the very worst cases, it will have the power to instruct that properties are brought under new management.

We are bringing in these changes to rebalance the relationship between residents and landlords by enhancing the current system of regulation and redress, but there is already a well-recognised minimum quality standard, the Decent Homes Standard, and clear guidance from the Housing Ombudsman Service on how complaints should be handled. Landlords must ensure their homes meet this Standard and handle complaints in line with the Ombudsman's guidance.

It is vital that we learn from the mistakes that led to the tragic death of Awaab, and I look forward to working collaboratively with you to improve standards. I firmly believe in the right of everyone to feel safe in the place where they and their loved ones sleep at night. I hope you will join me in doubling down on our efforts to provide the high-quality social housing this country deserves.

Yours,

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