



Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
*Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing
and Communities*
Minister for Intergovernmental Relations
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Althea Loderick
Chief Executive, Southwark Council
Cabinet Office
160 Tooley Street
London
SE1 2QH

4 September 2023

Dear Althea,

I write following four findings of severe maladministration by the Housing Ombudsman; two published on 16 May, and two further cases published on 25 July.

In the cases published in May, one finding was for your failure in complaint handling following a resident's loss of heating during the winter. The other concerned a leak that caused damp and mould. In the first case, the resident, who was pregnant with a young child, reported loss of heating during the winter months. The delay in your handling of the complaint left the family without heating for six months. You failed to respond to the complaint in a timely manner or in accordance with your own complaint policy and you failed to address the concerns raised by the resident, nor did you offer an apology. Leaving a resident without heating for that length of time is wholly unacceptable and I am very disappointed to hear about the lack of support provided to the resident.

The second case saw a family left with a deteriorating leak for eleven months, during which time you refused the residents' requests for rehousing and compensation. The leak impacted multiple rooms and you did not address the damp and mould issues for seventeen months. This understandably caused distress to the family, whose children suffered from eczema and allergies. You also failed to keep proper records and to provide survey reports when requested to do so by the Ombudsman.

In the first of the two cases published in July you failed to act appropriately following a request for a service charge bill relating to major works. It took you three years to provide details. In the second case, you declined a resident's mutual exchange application on the basis that the resident had been responsible for vandalising his own kitchen, when in fact, your own contractors had removed kitchen units to carry out works. You alleged that a criminal act had been committed and on top of this, asked them to pay for the repairs.

I was appalled to hear about these cases. Your response to these complaints fell well below the standard your residents should expect. To have four separate judgements published about your service failures gives cause for concern about the quality of service that you are providing.

I have been clear that social housing residents must be able to put their trust in their landlords to provide a decent home and deal with complaints effectively. The Social Housing Regulation Act is bringing in a tough new regulatory regime to support this Government's commitment to driving up standards and holding landlords accountable for providing social housing residents with decent homes.

I note that you say you are working actively to improve your customer service and complaints processes and implementing changes to prevent these types of failures from happening again. I expect these necessary improvements to make a difference to the service you deliver. You must treat all tenants with respect and dignity. I will be taking a personal interest in how your organisation delivers its responsibilities.

I am copying this letter to Neil Coyle MP, the Rt Hon Harriet Harman KC MP, Helen Hayes MP, Councillor Kieron Williams, Councillor Victor Chamberlain, the Select Committee for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Housing Ombudsman.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Gove". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities
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