



# 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

Mr Bjorn Howard  
Chief Executive, Aster Group  
Sarsen Court, Horton Avenue  
Cannings Hill  
Devizes  
Wiltshire  
SN10 2AZ

4 September 2023

Dear Bjorn,

I write following two findings of severe maladministration by the Housing Ombudsman for your organisation's handling of flooring complaints at the start of the tenancy and your organisation's associated complaint handling.

In this case, you failed to make the necessary repairs to the flooring of a vulnerable resident's home, which was potentially hazardous, particularly as she used a wheelchair. This understandably caused her distress and affected her mobility as well as her ability to settle into her property. She was left with her possessions in boxes and in storage which also limited her ability to properly use her home. You failed to have sufficient regard to your obligations under the Equality Act 2010 in terms of making necessary reasonable adjustments.

Further to this, you issued the resident with an invalid Section 21 eviction notice. Again, the resident was caused distress and worry together with significant legal costs due to your mishandling. You refused to progress her complaint due to her engaging a solicitor to help her move through your complaints process. The delays in your complaint procedures led to the Housing Ombudsman issuing a second finding of severe maladministration.

Your handling of this case fell well below the standard your residents should be able to expect to receive. You are reported to have come across as unhelpful, heavy handed and unsympathetic towards your resident which is not acceptable. When your residents report an issue, it should be acted upon swiftly, effectively, and fairly, particularly when the resident concerned is vulnerable.


You failed your resident, and your offer of compensation did not reflect the distress the resident had suffered and the time and money she had put into trying to get the issues resolved.

The Social Housing Regulation Act, which has just completed its passage through Parliament, 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 have made changes following this case and I expect these necessary improvements to your processes to make a difference to the service you deliver to your residents. You must treat all tenants with respect and dignity. I will be taking a personal interest in how your organisation continues to deliver its responsibilities to its residents.

I am copying this letter to the Housing Ombudsman and the Select Committee for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

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  
Minister for Intergovernmental Relations