



# 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

Shokat Lal  
Chief Executive, Sandwell Council  
Sandwell Council House  
Freeth Street  
PO Box 2374,  
OLDBURY  
B69 3DE

4 September 2023

Dear Shokat,

I write following a finding of severe maladministration by the Housing Ombudsman for your failure to consider a resident's vulnerabilities during an anti-social behaviour case.

In this case, despite your resident having told you about their significant and complex mental health needs, you failed to act appropriately under the Equalities Act 2010. Over the course of five months, the resident reminded you six times about their concerns and the impact the anti-social behaviour was having on their health, during which time there was little action or response from your organisation. You let your resident down on this occasion and in a way that is totally unacceptable.

Your inaction understandably left the resident feeling that his needs were not being taken seriously. It was three months after the complaint was made, before you referred the resident to Victim Support, and two months after that to other agencies. The Ombudsman's investigation showed that it was only after the resident contacted the NHS 24-hour Mental Health Helpline seeking support that referrals to the appropriate mental health safeguarding services were made.

In your final response to your resident, you did not respond to his query concerning Reasonable Adjustments, neither did you provide evidence of your own policy when requested to do so by the Ombudsman.

You failed to provide the level of service your residents should expect to receive. This is deeply disappointing. When your residents report an issue, it should be acted upon swiftly, effectively, and fairly. 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 expect the changes you are implementing to make a significant difference to the service you deliver to your residents. 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 John Spellar MP, Nicola Richards MP, Shaun Bailey MP and James Morris MP, Councillors Kerrie Carmichael and David Fisher, 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 style with a large initial 'M'.

**Rt Hon Michael Gove MP**  
Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities  
Minister for Intergovernmental Relations