



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

Steve Coffey
CEO Torus Housing Association
Helena Central
4 Corporation Street
St Helens
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22 March 2024

Dear Steve,

I write following two findings of severe maladministration by the Housing Ombudsman. This case involved excessive delays in responding to a resident's complaint about damp and mould.

The Ombudsman found that you failed to respond to the resident's complaint about mould in his home resulting in him having to sleep on the floor after his bed was damaged by the damp. Your communication with the resident was poor and he had repeatedly to contact you to ask for an update. Despite the scale of the problem, you did not start works until an extraordinary long time had passed - nine months after the initial complaint was made. You also wrongly advised him that he would have to wait eight weeks before he could take his complaint to the Housing Ombudsman. This is simply unacceptable.

The Government's new guidance on damp and mould makes landlords' responsibilities clear - you must take residents' concerns about health and safety seriously. Awaab's Law, which was introduced in the landmark Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, requires landlords to investigate and fix reported health hazards within specified timeframes. The new rules will form part of a tenancy agreement, so that tenants can hold landlords to account by law if they fail to provide a decent home.

I understand that you have made some changes, including strengthening your approach to complaints, introducing briefings, improving accountability, recruiting a new team, and updating your approach to damp and mould. I expect these changes to have a real effect and improve the service you deliver. I hope you will take all necessary steps to give your residents confidence that you will act when they raise concerns with you.

I am copying this letter to Charlotte Nichols MP, Andy Carter MP, Councillors Hans Mundry and Nigel Balding, the Housing Ombudsman, and to the Select Committee for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Yours,

RT HON MICHAEL GOVE MP
Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities
Minister for Intergovernmental Relations