



Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

*Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing
and Communities*

Minister for Intergovernmental Relations

Fry Building

2 Marsham Street

London SW1P 4DF

Linzi Roberts-Egan
Chief Executive
Waltham Forest Council
Waltham Forest Town Hall
Forest Road
Walthamstow E17 4JF

22 March 2024

Dear Linzi,

I write to you following three findings of severe maladministration by the Housing Ombudsman.

In the first case you failed to respond adequately to a damp and mould issue. You left a vulnerable family in substandard accommodation for a year, and failed to respond to a request by the resident to move while works were ongoing. I was shocked and disappointed to read that the family, including an autistic son, had to move into a caravan during the repairs. The Ombudsman highlighted poor communication with the residents throughout, including one instance where the case was closed without explanation. Residents must be confident that issues will be rectified when raised, and that their needs will be considered in that process. The tragic death of Awaab Ishak has shown that there is no room for complacency about issues that risk residents' health.

In the second case, you allowed a resident to live in his mother's property for seven years before determining that succession had not occurred and that he had to leave the property. This was despite communications to the tenant at the property address regarding council tax, housing benefit and a carer's bill, demonstrating that he was clearly known to you. This understandably caused the tenant significant distress.

In the third case, you failed adequately to respond to a resident's repeated complaints regarding antisocial behaviour (ASB). You continually referred her to the police rather than taking effective action yourself. The resident endured five years of upheaval, fears over her safety and the safety of her children, and health problems as a result. You failed to provide an adequate risk assessment or action plan. Again, this is unacceptable.

Your handling of these cases fell well below the standard your residents should expect. Complaints must be acted on swiftly and effectively, especially when the residents concerned are vulnerable. 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. Landlords must become more reflective, improve their performance, and prevent residents from needing to use the services of the Housing Ombudsman in the first place.

I understand that you have made some changes to your processes including introducing a damp and mould taskforce, reviewing your procedures around succession and developing a new ASB procedure. I will be taking a personal interest in the changes you make to improve the quality of service you deliver to your residents, and ask that you meet with the Minister for Social Housing to discuss your work to address your failings.

I am copying this letter to The Rt Hon Sir Ian Duncan Smith MP, Stella Creasy MP, John Cryer MP, Mayor Roy Berg, Councillor Grace Williams, Councillor Emma Best, the Housing Ombudsman, and to the Select Committee for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Yours,

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