



Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

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Ref: Housing Standards In Rented Properties In England

Dear Michael

I am writing in response to your letter dated 19 November 2022.

In your letter you made a direction that all local housing authorities must have particular regard to high scoring damp and mould hazards, and supply your department with an assessment of damp and mould issues affecting privately rented properties in our area, including the prevalence of category 1 and 2 damp and mould hazards, and an assessment of action we have identified that may need to be taken.

You asked for data covering the last three 12 monthly reporting periods for privately rented properties in relation to remediation and enforcement action to remedy damp and mould hazards and how many civil penalties and prosecutions have been taken in relation to damp and mould hazards.

Additionally, you asked us to set out how we are prioritising enforcement of housing standards more generally in our authority, across all tenures, including what plans we have to ensure adequate enforcement capacity to drive up standards in the private rented sector.

You asked for an initial response setting out how we are prioritising this work and a full response by 27 January. This letter is Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC) initial response. I am sorry it did not reach you by end of November as you had requested.

WBC employs 3.6 fte Environmental Health Officers whose work includes investigating and taking action to resolve disrepair complaints and failure by landlords to meet statutory obligations in respect of housing conditions. All the officers are trained to use HHSRS and are delegated and authorised to implement the powers available in Housing Act 2004 and other relevant legislation and regulations. The Service Manager is highly experienced and a fully qualified Environmental Health Practitioner and her line manager (the Head of Service) is a Full Member of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and has many years' experience in Private Sector Housing.

Having sufficient staff resources available to devote to this work is challenging in the current economic climate, given the volume of work and competing priorities. However, WBC has mitigated this risk by creating (with new resource allocation) a separate team tasked with dealing with low level environmental and pollution issues, including investigating statutory nuisances, which would otherwise have to be dealt with by EHOs. This means that EHOs have more time to concentrate on Private Sector Housing cases, Caravan Site Licensing, Integrated Pollution Control and Planning Consultations.

An initial review of WBC's case records, shows that in the last 3 years 17 statutory notices have been served on private landlords (Improvement Notices and Prohibition Orders) and 93 damp and mould related service requests have been received. By the time we submit data for the 27 January deadline, further analysis will be undertaken to establish what type of action was taken to resolve them.

It is straightforward for customers to report housing disrepair to WBC - there is information on the Council's website here [Report housing disrepair - Wokingham Borough Council](#)

With regard to Housing Association tenants, like most councils WBC's usual approach is to advise tenants to report directly to their social landlord, if necessary using their complaints procedure if the response is not satisfactory, and the Housing Ombudsman service. If central government were to advocate that councils should investigate all reports of disrepair which are (or could be) made by housing association tenants, this would be an extra burden which this council and many others would not have the capacity to meet from its own resources.

Social housing providers should be taking action to protect their tenants from hazardous housing conditions, without being required to do so by enforcement action taken by councils. However, if WBC becomes aware that a housing association landlord has failed to take necessary action to remediate a Category 1 or high Category 2 housing hazard, it will investigate and if necessary take enforcement action.

I hope this response gives you the necessary reassurance that WBC does indeed have regard to high scoring damp and mould hazards, along with all types of serious housing hazard generally.

We are happy to send the full response by 27 January and I have delegated the task of collecting data and submitting the response to appropriate officers.

Regards



Steve Moore
Director of Place & Growth