

Date: 28 November 2022
Ref: Private Sector Housing Team, Strategic
Housing
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Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
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Dear Mr Gove,

HOUSING STANDARDS IN RENTED PROPERTIES IN ENGLAND

Thank you for your letter dated 19 November 2022 in regards to the above. I was very saddened to learn of the tragic death of Awaab Ishak.

The contents of the letter has been acknowledged and the directions will be addressed as a matter of priority to ensure a full response is provided by 27 January 2023. I would like to offer my assurance that the Private Sector Housing Team are taking all steps as necessary to prioritise and deal appropriately with damp and mould throughout the borough's private sector.

The safety of residents in the Dacorum borough is paramount, all staff members within the Private Sector Housing Team have been informed of the requirements that have been communicated to the Council. Since your communication an internal team briefing has taken place and the team are liaising across the organisation to ensure a cohesive, inclusive and consistent stance is taken within the private sector.

The team will be considering and implementing/continuing the following approaches to ensure the prioritisation of damp and mould cases:

1. A robust approach to promote legislative requirements and responsibilities of landlords as well as outlining and promoting their powers of intervention and resolution to tenants. Comprehensive, effective and unambiguous advice will also be provided to residents, landlords and property owners. We will review our communication methods and consider all accessible platforms including website, social media, newsletters, email footers.

Data Protection Statement

Dacorum Borough Council may share your information: within the council, with law enforcement agencies, councils and community organisations. This is done to detect/prevent crime, to enable delivery of your services and/or meet our legal obligations. Full details of how we process, use and store your information can be found at www.dacorum.gov.uk/opendata



2. A full review of the council's website and advice pages in regards to damp, mould and condensation to ensure up to date, effective and informative advice is accessible for both landlords and tenants as well as details as to how to make a complaint.
3. A review of current staff skills with upskill training to enhance expertise and a procedure in place to ensure all future officers within the team undergo damp/mould/condensation specific training to ensure skills to identify, advise and enforce resolution.
4. A full review of the team's procedures and processes in dealing with damp and mould cases. To ensure a sufficient and timely investigation of every complaint received is carried out. These procedures will outline a local requirement to consider it a duty to take enforcement action where necessary and/or appropriate where Damp and Mould HHSRS assessment outcomes are bands D and E (CAT 2).
5. The team will continue to utilise the skills of Surveyor's within our Property Team in complex cases for both defect/deficiency identification and assistance with outlining works as required to effectively reduce or remove the damp and mould hazard.
6. The team will source suitable heat and humidity data loggers and review all other options to support intelligence gathering to aide investigations into damp and mould, particularly those that are attributed to condensation.
7. In addition to the above, the council will continue to provide advice to those housed within Registered Provider properties - including damp and mould investigation and enforcement where necessary, but also the complaint and escalation procedures where repair requests have been dealt with unsatisfactorily.
8. Review of existing resources to determine if sufficient capacity to ensure a robust response to management of activity in the private sector.

Whilst I foresee no direct issues in relation to providing the response, there are some factors that will need to be considered:

Cost of Living Crisis – the impact of rising costs on households will have a direct influence on increased fuel poverty and decreased heating usage which can exasperate issues with damp and mould, particularly those associated with condensation. Whilst we are yet to see how this will correlate with the number of damp and mould cases we are expecting an increase in those approaching our service.

Prevalence of Category 1 and Category 2 hazards – the Council's Enforcement Policy includes an informal approach to remedying disrepair and deficiencies (both Category 1 and Category 2) in the private sector in the first instance unless the hazard presents an imminent risk or the landlord is known to be non-compliant, fails to act in a timely matter or where remedial works are determined to be

unsatisfactory. This has led to the majority of damp and mould cases to be resolved informally and without the need for HHSRS assessments.

I hope the above gives a clear outline of the prioritisation of damp and mould complaints within our private sector portfolio, in addition to providing an overview as to our approach ahead of the full submission on 27 January 2023.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Hamilton', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Claire Hamilton
Chief Executive