

Background

This Freedom of Information request is for the attention of the department that oversees the private rented sector and enforcement.

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the Rt Hon Michael Gove has written to all councils in England following the tragic death of Awaab Ishak to enquire about activity taken over the last three years to address damp and mould hazards in the private rented sector. This includes specific activity covering the amount and nature of remediation and enforcement activity, civil penalty notices and prosecutions. The full letter can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1118877/SoS_letter_to_local_authority_chief_executive_and_council_leaders.pdf

We understand that a further correspondence was sent out by the Department dated 25th November, requesting an initial response to be sent to them by 30th November 2022 from all local authorities.

- The NRLA therefore requests a copy of this initial response sent by this local authority to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Please see following page

[Redacted]
 Director, Private Rented Sector and Leasehold
 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and
 Communities
 C/o housingstandards@levellingup.gov.uk

Our Ref:
 Your Ref:
 Please ask for: [Redacted]
 [Redacted]
 Telephone: [Redacted]
 Date: 30/11/2022

Dear [Redacted]

Re: Housing Standards in Private Rented Properties - Wigan

I am writing in response to your letter to all Housing Enforcement Teams dated 25.11.22 following the tragic and avoidable death of Awaab Ishak. Thank you for providing clarification on the information you require by 30.11.22. Set out within this letter is the initial response to the information you have requested for Wigan Council.

1. **Confirmation you have received and will pick up the request:** Please accept this response as acknowledgement and commitment to pick up the request.
2. **A plan setting out how you are intending to prioritise addressing the issues of mould and damp for privately rented properties in your area, with specific reference to how you intend to meet the request:** Please see below:

Ref	Details	Timescale
1.	Wigan Council introduced an updated Private Sector Housing Standards Enforcement Policy in March 2022 which incorporates recent changes in legislation. The Policy is to address the legal responsibilities, policies and principles that Wigan Council will adhere to when undertaking enforcement action in relation to private sector housing and sets out the powers the Council has at its disposal to improve housing standards, such as penalty notices and prosecutions. This will be reviewed to ensure it provides a robust framework for enforcement action taken in relation to mould and damp.	Immediate
2	Communications: a) A mail out to all private sector landlords and letting agents reminding them of their responsibilities to address cases of damp and mould as a priority and setting out the actions that will be taken by the Council if they fail to do so. This will also be raised at Landlord forums and highlighted in communications such as newsletters to raise awareness and encourage co-operation. b) A mail out of advice literature to private tenants with a flyer to raise awareness about mould and damp issues and advice on what steps can be taken. This will also include details on how to get support from the Council where landlords fail	Immediate

	<p>to remedy any cases of damp and mould that are reported to ensure tenants can access timely advice and support.</p> <p>c) Production of a communications plan to raise awareness and signpost to support services.</p>	
3	Revise methods of assessing damp on property inspections. Housing Standards Officers are currently using a non-abrasive method of recording damp present at the property and taking evidential pictures to show the extent. This places the emphasis on the landlord to provide a safe home which we must ensure is highlighted within the schedule of works.	Immediate
4	To recommend a damp and timber survey in the event high readings are taken throughout the property and requesting the action taken is relevant of those findings listed in the inspection report.	Immediate
5	Mindful of adjusting and manipulating the likelihood and spread of harms within the HHSRS, Housing Standards Officers will be taking extra considerations when calculating the assessment and airing on the side of caution to ensure the score is reflective of the hazard.	Immediate
6	An additional section has been added to the survey report used by Housing Standards Officers for recording damp readings within each room/ area of the property, this will strengthen an evidence-based assessment and audit trail.	Immediate
7	To ensure a correct diagnosis of the type of damp, there will be an additional check by an experienced Technical Officer on every case before document production to any tenant / landlord.	Immediate
8	A further field has been added within the Housing Standards recording systems to reflect the score of the damp and mould (if applicable) in the property. For example, 104/2 would represent a Category 2 hazard within banding F.	Immediate
9	Investment in training for Housing Standards Officers to further improve knowledge and understanding of damp and mould. This ensures officers are confident in diagnosing disrepair within homes across the borough and applying the relevant corrective action.	January / February 2023
10	Housing Standards Officers will ensure there is a holistic assessment of any damp and mould cases and take account of broader factors such as cost of living pressures. If there are any other contributing factors affecting the prevalence of damp and mould, officers will be considerate in providing relevant advice and guidance to both landlord and tenant and signpost to other support services as required.	Immediate
11	Wigan Council have developed a Landlord Hub which is scheduled to go live in early 2023, this is an online portal that will make pro-active compliance checks easier to undertake and enable officer to identify those properties at risk of being non-compliant. It is recommended that this system be re-tested to ensure its efficient at identifying mould and damp risks.	Testing – January 2023 Launch – April 2023
12	<p>Following the recent announcement of additional funding for Housing Enforcement, Wigan will be working with Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) to maximise use of additional investment for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforcement officer funding • Equipment • Training 	Immediate

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External commissions • City region delivery function 	
13	<p>Wigan Council invested in the expansion of the Housing Standards Team in 2021, it is recommended that a review of the impact of this investment is brought forward considering the additional responsibilities being placed on Council's to offer a robust and pro-active housing standards function, in alignment with the recently announced GM funding and any future discussions with DLUHC about the availability of additional funding.</p> <p>The tragic death of Awaab Ishak has rightly brought the importance of this function under the spotlight, but in addition the forthcoming changes from the PRS White Paper that are designed to tackle poor housing standards also place further importance on the role of the local authority housing standards function.</p>	Immediate
14	<p>Complete an in-depth assessment of the private rented sector provision by January 2023 to provide the information that has been requested, and will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Have particular regard to high scoring (bands D and E) category 2 damp and mould hazards, as outlined in the guidance 'Housing health and safety rating system (HHSRS) enforcement guidance: housing conditions; Supply an assessment of damp and mould issues affecting privately rented properties in your area, including the prevalence of category 1 and 2 damp and mould hazards; and Supply an assessment of action you have identified that may need to be taken in relation to damp and mould issues affecting privately rented properties in your area. 	January 2023

Ahead of our full response in January 2023, I trust this return sets out our commitment to improve living conditions for tenants with assurance of immediate action to ensure that changes are made.

Yours sincerely,



**Service Manager – Strategic and Private Sector Housing
Wigan Council**