

Please ask for: Sean Atterbury
Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services



Date: 20th December 2022

Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities
By Email

Housing Standards in Private Rental Properties in Leicester

I am writing in response to the request of Rt Hon Michael Gove on 19th November and the subsequent letter from DLUHC on 25th November requesting information on the work of Leicester City Council within the private rental sector (PRS) here in Leicester. The death of Awaab Ishak in Rochdale was a terrible tragedy and the circumstances surrounding this only serve to underpin the work that we are doing with local PRS tenants and landlords to improve the sector.

Leicester is a city with over 50,000 privately rented dwellings which represent approximately 35% of the city's housing stock. The Council has an ambition to ensure that the Private Rental Sector in Leicester is fit for purpose, and this is set out in the City Mayor's manifesto as a priority. In response to this the council launched its PRS strategy in 2021 which is focussed on six priorities:

1. Improving housing standards
2. Improving support for landlords
3. Improving support for tenants
4. Improving enforcement and protection of tenants and resident's rights
5. Improving access to market
6. Improved intelligence, monitoring and joining up of services

Private Rented Sector strategy aims to drive up standards within this sector. This includes help, advice, and support for landlords to be good landlords and support for tenants who have concerns about their home. The strategy also included several enforcement strands, to identify and tackle the poor conditions that can be prevalent in PRS homes, including mould and damp.

The City Council already has a dedicated Private Sector Housing (PSH) team that deal with poor property conditions across the City in properties owned by both private landlords and

housing associations. In response to these tragic events, this PSH team have heightened their response to reports of damp or mould, ensuring that reports are quickly investigated, and firm action is taken where damp or mould are identified with the team ensuring they work closely with our Homelessness teams where there is an urgent need to support people to find alternative accommodation.

This year the council launched selective licensing to three designations within Leicester which encompasses a total of 9000 dwellings. In forming these designations, we consulted with all landlords within the city and their tenants which has led to strong representation and participation in local meetings and importantly our local landlord forum. Although this is only in its early stages it is already highlighting areas for improvements within the private rental stock to improve living conditions.

We have also received £99k to engage with landlords of EPC F and G rated properties in the City which are likely to incur damp and mould because of their poor thermal performance. 2384 PRS properties across Leicester are registered as with an EPC within this banding which the PRS team are currently working to address. This project will focus on improvement measures to achieve at least an E rating or alternatively apply for an exemption along with prohibiting the reletting of these properties until work is complete. This is a cross departmental piece of work that will inform targeted funding using government grants to improve poor performing properties subject to landlord eligibility.

Finally, the Council has also more broadly successfully secured £3.5m of funding to enhance the thermal efficiency of private homes in the city, alongside wider funding of £15m for the city targeted at other housing sectors. Investment that can assist in addressing mould or damp problems in a property.

Tackling condensation, damp, and mould

I have brought together a specialist group to focus on all live issues of condensation, damp and mould and we have doubled our already significant efforts to tackle this problem. This includes:

- Additional resource to tackle damp and mould enquiries even more swiftly
- Re-assessing every home that has reported damp in the last 3 years
- We are reviewing all existing reported cases of condensation, damp, and mould and what additional interventions can be made to address and resolve the issues
- A review of the procedure used to investigate damp and mould cases and the way data is recorded and shared
- Promoting grant schemes that may help landlords improve the thermal efficiency of homes.
- Strengthening our advice and communications with tenants over damp and mould

Beyond the actions set out in this letter we have increased and enhanced communications around damp and mould, including the fact we are providing tenants and residents with support and advice on how to combat the early signs of damp and mould in their property. We are linking this into our local landlord forum to as well as cascading messages directly to tenants.

Summary of cases

In the last year this service has visited 156 properties to investigate complaints of excess damp and cold that could be linked to mould cases. In all cases the landlord of the property was informed of the inspection and any required works to remediate any causes of concern. Formal enforcement action was taken on 3 occasions with landlord's being issued with Improvement Notices. All Improvement Notices were complied with.

Specifically in the past 3 years we have received the following reports of either damp or cold that have been investigated by the council;

Year	Total reports	Improvement notices	Emergency prohibitions	Civil penalties	Prosecutions
2020	91	0	0	0	0
2021	167	0	0	0	0
2022 to 6 Dec	156	4	1	0	0
Grand Total	414	4	1	0	0

The private sector housing team investigate all cases of damp and mould as they are received which includes undertaking an inspection of the property to assess the likely cause. Like many cities Leicester has a vast range of housing stock and typically our complaints are linked to poor ventilation and inadequate insulation

Where tenant lifestyle is a factor advice is provided including the provision of printed material. In significant cases of welfare concern our private sector housing teamwork with our adult social care team to support the tenant.

I do hope this letter provides comprehensive reassurance of the work of the Council that was already in place prior to the tragic case of Awaab Ishak and the work we continue to do across the city.

I look forward to receiving further instruction from DLUHC on the information required in January 2023. If you would like to discuss in more detail, please do not hesitate to make contact

Yours sincerely,

Sean Atterbury – Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services.