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Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities
Minister for Intergovernmental Relations
housingstandards@levellingup.gov.uk

30 November 2022

Dear Rt Hon Michael Gove MP,

**Ensuring Quality in Social Housing
Housing Standards in Rental Properties in England**

Thank you for your letters of the 19 November and the follow up of the 25 November 2022, from the Director, Private Rented Sector and Leasehold in your department, regarding the tragic and shocking case of Awaab Ishak. The correspondence requests details from the Council concerning the critical matter of taking damp and mould seriously and actions we are taking to urgently improve conditions for private and social renters.

I therefore write to you on behalf of the London Borough of Hackney (LBH), confirming that we have received your request and are taking appropriate action to address the items in your letters.

As you will read below we are and have been taking this and similar issues seriously for many years. We have also campaigned for government to do much more to support this work including properly funding decent home programmes, allowing us to keep and use all our right to buy receipts and by properly funding fire and other building safety issues in all our housing stock.

This letter sets out our initial response, as requested, by 30 November 2022. I confirm that we will provide the performance data that you have requested by your deadline of January 2023. I know that LGA and London Council officers have offered to work with your officials to agree a common format for that data return, and Hackney officers would be happy to support that urgent work to ensure we have a format which would work and be meaningful for both DLUHC and local authorities.

For completeness, our response below, is presented in terms of both social and privately rented housing in Hackney.

Hackney Council is one of the largest social landlords in the country. We have more than thirty thousand homes, comprising around twenty four thousand social rented homes and eight thousand private leaseholders. We also have a large private rented sector of around thirty-four thousand homes. I want to assure you that tackling damp and mould is something we take extremely seriously. It is one of the biggest concerns of our tenants, and we have, and will continue, to put steps in place to combat the issue

For **LB Hackney council stock** we are instigating a number of key additional measures:

- We aim to inspect damp cases reported to us within five working days
- We have put in place a dedicated option on our repairs reporting line for damp and mould
- Where damp and mould is caused by a leak, we are changing our repair priorities so that all reports of a leak will be responded to within 24 hours
- Next year, we will be undertaking a stock condition survey, incorporating specific assessments of damp and mould across all Hackney's council stock, including category 1 and 2 hazards
- We will ensure that we fully assess blocks we know are more likely to suffer from damp and mould

We are also working with our **Tenant Management Organisations**, which manage over five thousand homes in the borough, to ensure we have a joined up and clear standard response for tackling damp and mould and that no cases shall fall between the gap between their responsibilities and ours as a Council.

Hackney has a large housing association stock of around 30,000 homes. The Council has already contacted all **housing associations** operating in Hackney, asking that they inform us of the specific actions they are taking to address the issue of damp and mould within their stock and many are already proactively responding to us. As with fire safety, we will make damp and mould a specific part of regular engagement with our housing association partners. I can confirm that some of the very best housing associations are already engaging with us on action they are taking to address those issues in their stock. Where a housing association does not engage with us or has significant issues of damp and mould, we will not hesitate to take action, including enforcement and prosecution.

Our programme will include, where appropriate, upgrades to **temporary accommodation** that we own. This also includes working with landlords to secure long term leases and refurbishment of privately provided temporary accommodation.

We have also committed to ensuring decent homes for the tenants of the thirty-four thousand **private rented properties** across the borough.

As a council we have made a commitment to increase the resources we spend on the private rented sector every single year. We already have in place a dedicated line for private renters to report damp, mould, disrepair and issues of concern. Private renters do also report

issues relating to their landlord as well as ask us for advice. All calls are immediately "triaged." Any category 1 hazards, including damp and mould, are already prioritised for urgent inspection and enforcement action if that proves necessary.

Next year we are also planning to update our evidence base of private sector stock conditions. We will do this by undertaking a private sector stock condition survey as part of the underlying research and evidence base for the new Hackney Housing Strategy.

For many years we have campaigned and asked government, through our Better Renting Campaign, to do much more to ensure better renting and conditions for private tenants in the borough. Capped rents, longer tenancies and ending no fault evictions have all been part of this campaign but so too has been the need for licensing of landlords such that the provision of far higher quality homes and building standards becomes the norm.

It is worth noting the sheer volume of resources that a local authority will need to pursue any form of prosecution in the private rented sector. For example, a recent case in Hackney that involved building safety has taken the resources of five professionally qualified officers over two years to achieve seven successful prosecutions.

We are also raising a number of points of clarification and further discussion. Inevitably some of these touch upon technical considerations. We are therefore raising these separately, as requested, through your specified email address.

I trust the above statements, in this our initial response, provides you with assurance that the issue of damp and mould is considered an absolute priority in Hackney.

Finally, further to the Regulator of Social Housing's letter of the 22 November, I can confirm that we are on course to submit a detailed response via MSForms by the 19 December, outlining the actions we are taking as a social landlord to address risks relating to damp and mould in our tenants' homes.

Yours,



Mark Carroll
Chief Executive
London Borough of Hackney

