

# Reigate and Banstead Borough Council

Meeting of Council 9 February 2023

## Public Questions

	<b>Question by</b>	<b>To be answered by</b>	<b>Subject</b>
1.	Ms Jemma De Vincenzo	Councillor Neame, the Executive Member for Housing and Support	Housing Association Properties Maintenance

**Ms Jemma De Vincenzo** will ask the **Executive Member for Housing and Support, Councillor Neame**, the following question:

### **Question 1: Housing Association Properties Maintenance**

We have all been distressed by the recent death of Awaab Ishak from mould growth in the family's Housing Association Property in Rochdale. It is horrifying that this could happen in this day and age, and distressingly, the Housing Ombudsman for England has said that it will happen again. What will the council do to hold Social Housing partners to account, to ensure it doesn't happen in Reigate and Banstead?

### **Response:**

Thank you Mister Mayor, and thank you for your question Ms De Vincenzo.

I think all of us here will agree that it should not happen again, and it is very sad that the Ombudsman for England has said that this will happen again.

I will answer the question in two halves. The first half is what the government is doing with our providers and the second half is how we as a council are involved.

The Regulator of Social Housing wrote to all Registered Providers last autumn instructing them to explain their approach to assessing the extent of damp and mould issues affecting their properties. They also had to provide their most recent assessment of the extent of damp and mould hazards in their homes and given those findings, they have requested that Registered Providers explain the action they are taking to remedy any issues and hazards and ensure that their homes meet the Decent Homes Standard. Finally, they had to report on how they will ensure that individual damp and mould cases are identified and dealt with promptly and effectively when raised by tenants and residents.

On the 2 February this year, the Regulator of Social Housing published their initial findings. It found that most Registered Providers understand the extent of damp and mould in their tenants' homes and take action to tackle it but could strengthen their approach. The report confirms that the majority of people living in social housing have homes that are free from damp and mould. Some landlords apparently submitted poor quality responses or reported high numbers of damp and mould cases and the Regulator of Social Housing will take regulatory action where needed. Finally, the headlines included that the best estimate from the information provided suggests that less than 0.2% of social homes nationally have the most serious damp and mould problems, 1-2% have serious damp and mould problems and a further 3-4% have notable damp and mould.

Locally, we have spoken with our larger Registered Providers who have confirmed that they are either already carrying out stock condition surveys on all their properties or are about to start these surveys and have also carried out much investigation of the information they already hold on their property's condition and historic concerns reported by tenants on their property condition. They will also take action when required.

From an Environmental Health perspective, the Council takes a robust approach to the investigation and where necessary enforcement of all reported housing health issues, in both privately rented and registered social landlord properties. Due regard is given to all identified hazards, in accordance with our published Housing Enforcement Policy, which can be found on our website.

As part of the housing complaint process, tenants are asked to first have contacted their landlord to report their concerns and for a reasonable period of time to have been allowed for action to be taken. An initial triage and assessment process will be used. Having received a complaint report and associated supporting information, officers will usually arrange to visit and inspect the property, having informed the landlord and invited them to attend if possible. The whole property will be inspected, and all serious hazards identified will be rated using the HHSRS, which is the housing, health and safety rating system. Action will be taken depending on the hazards found and in accordance with our Housing Enforcement Policy.

In some cases, where there is early and positive engagement by the landlord or letting agent and clear evidence that appropriate works are being done voluntarily, an inspection may not be required, and progress will be monitored remotely and via on-going correspondence with all parties.

If complaints are received about Registered Providers, these will be investigated in line with our standard procedures. Complaints about Registered Provider's properties are normally resolved via their internal complaints process, but exceptions can occur and if formal enforcement action is needed in a Registered Provider property, we can and will undertake this.

Web links:

Regulator of Social Housing Report:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/damp-and-mould-in-social-housing-initial-findings>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/regulator-of-social-housing-publishes-initial-findings-on-damp-and-mould-in-social-housing>

RBBC Housing Enforcement Policy:

[https://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/info/20072/private\\_sector\\_housing/526/housing\\_standards\\_in\\_the\\_private\\_sector](https://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/info/20072/private_sector_housing/526/housing_standards_in_the_private_sector)

**Supplementary question:**

When I had a look online I could only see an enforcement strategy for private landlords, so if a resident of Reigate and Banstead, was unhappy with the standard of their social housing because, for example of mould growth, and they did not feel listened to, as our parents do not, the step for them to take would be to complain through Reigate and Banstead's complaints procedure and enforcement action could be taken if needed?

**Response:**

Yes, basically, they should go to the social housing provider first. If they are unable to remedy the situation through their processes or they do not have any, then contact RBBC who can take it that next step further.