



Homes for Us Alliance
New Economics Foundation
10 Salamanca Place
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Rt Hon. Mr M. Gove MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

By email only: michael.gove.mp@parliament.uk

21 December 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

THE DEATH OF AWAAB ISHAK AND SOCIAL HOUSING STANDARDS

We are writing to you as the [Homes for Us Alliance](#): a coalition of grassroots organisations, charities, and tenants unions who have come together to fight for more and better social housing. We ask for your response to a number of specific questions included below, and to meet with you to discuss these matters further.

While the terrible death of Awaab Ishak was a tragedy, it is not an isolated case. Each organisation in our Alliance has seen conditions like those suffered by the Ishak family in homes up and down the country. Each has heard tenants raise concerns about the safety of their homes and been similarly ignored. Each has seen how marginalised communities face discriminatory treatment and worse conditions within the housing system. Each feels strongly that our broken housing model has created a public health crisis in which there are likely many more Awaabs who we simply do not know about. Each knows there will be more deaths if the government does not act.

We welcome your clear response to Awaab's death, and the willingness you have shown to ensure landlords face consequences when they fail tenants. However, we wish to make the following points, and request that you provide detailed responses to each:

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Chief Executive: Miatta Fahnbulleh
Chair: Lord Bob Kerslake

Registered charity in England and Wales number 1055254
Registered as a company limited by guarantee in England
number 3193399

1. It is right that the board of Rochdale Borough Housing ('RBH') have finally resigned in disgrace following the scandalous death of Awaab Ishak, three weeks after Awaab's family called for them to step down. As you will know, RBH shockingly waited nearly two years following Awaab's death to inspect other properties on the estate, leaving hundreds more families exposed to dangerous mould and damp in the meanwhile.

What further steps beyond the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill will the government take to improve the culture within social landlords' organisations – including standards of candour – in order to ensure social landlords who fail their tenants are transparent regarding their mistakes?

2. Tenants, not landlords, ultimately suffer when cuts are made as punishment for failure. Instead of cutting grants to social landlords, the government should look at ways to ensure grants genuinely push up standards and new housing supply on a systematic rather than ad-hoc basis.

What steps are the government taking to further these aims?

3. There are around 900,000 homes in England with damp and mould, including 465,000 PRS properties; around 10% of all homes contain 'category 1' hazards.¹ This government must take responsibility for the poor standards of homes and for cutting local authority budgets, hampering their ability to inspect for hazards and enforce legal standards, putting families' health at risk. Your own department's research shows significant non-compliance with hazard notices.² You have recently agreed this is a significant problem and pledged that "*local government [must have] the enforcement resources it needs*".³

Please clarify what steps you will take to ensure the proper enforcement of standards – including in relation to the Decent Homes Standard once it has been extended to the PRS – and whether you intend to require PRS landlords to demonstrate compliance through the proposed property portal as a pre-requisite for inclusion on the National Landlord Register.

¹ Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, [English Housing Survey 2021-22](#) (tables 2.4 and 2.6) (15 December 2022)

² Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, [Local authority enforcement in the private rented sector: headline report](#) (June 2022). Only 47% of local authorities reported that over 90% of notices had been complied with in 2019-20, and 23% reported that fewer than 50% of hazard notices had been complied with.

³ i, ["It is a public health issue": Michael Gove urges Treasury not to cut housing funding after Awaab Ishak death](#) (24 November 2022).

4. We welcome many of the measures contained within the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill. The behaviour of RBH is yet more evidence that the Regulator of Social Housing must be given proper powers to tackle the bad practice of social landlords - including intrusive no-notice inspections and robust penalties for failing social landlords - to root out the rotten culture which exists in other organisations as it did at Grenfell and at RBH. However, we remain concerned that residents' voices will continue to remain too distant from the Regulator; the [Social Housing Quality Resident Panel](#) is insufficient to provide tenants with a proper voice.

What steps is your department taking to ensure residents and tenants can raise systemic concerns about landlord malpractice directly with the Regulator and ensure tenants' voices are integrated throughout the regulatory system?

We look forward to your response and would be grateful to meet with you to discuss these matters at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

ACORN the Union
Advice for Renters
Breathe: Community Organising for Climate Justice
Disability Rights UK
Inclusion London
London Renters Union
Medact
New Economics Foundation
The Runnymede Trust
The Social Housing Action Campaign (SHAC)

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