

Thank you Cllr Evans for your question. On behalf of the Council, I would like to express my deep shock and sadness following the news of the death of Awaab Ishak, an innocent child living in a mouldy home in Rochdale. The case has highlighted the urgent need to ensure a decent standard of properties for tenants in all sectors.

On 19th November the Rt honourable Michael Gove MP wrote to housing providers robustly requiring them to ensure all social homes meet the Decent Homes Standard. Properties not meeting the standard must be remedied without delay. Housing providers have also been asked to go further than the standard and have particular regard to damp and mould and acknowledge they are not 'lifestyle issues'. Complaints must be listened to and when found prompt action must be taken.

The Regulator of Social Housing will be writing to housing providers imminently requiring them to make assessments of damp and mould affecting their properties and report back the actions required. Housing providers are required to self-refer to the Regulator should they become aware that they are in breach of regulatory standards.

Officers have approached our largest housing provider, Hyde for comment and will update all Members in due course. I will also be writing to all housing providers operating within the district to ask them about the assessment of their stock, the processes they have in place for dealing with poor housing conditions and their plan for action as required.

The Rt honourable Michael Gove MP has also written to all local authorities requesting that everything is done to prioritise the improvement of housing conditions for private and social tenants, in line with existing duties in the Housing Act 2004. As we go into winter this becomes ever more urgent with a cost of living and energy crisis, which may exacerbate damp and mould conditions in some homes.

Local authorities have been asked to provide data detailing the number of damp and mould cases they have dealt with in the last 3 years, and enforcement action taken by the end of this month. They should also detail how housing standards work is being prioritised.

I would like to assure Members that the Council takes its statutory and moral responsibilities concerning housing conditions in private and social housing very seriously and will not hesitate to use formal enforcement action if required.

All tenants are asked to engage with their landlord in the first instance to ensure they are aware of the housing issues and provided with the opportunity to remedy them before council officers intervene. In the case of social housing, tenants are asked to escalate complaints through the housing providers formal complaints procedure to ensure matters are reported, investigated, and concluded in accordance with the provider's procedures. Tenants who remain dissatisfied with the response received are entitled to register a complaint with the Housing Ombudsman who will investigate fairly and impartially.

Members should also be aware that the Government intends to strengthen the regulation of social housing further with the forthcoming Social Housing Regulation Bill. The Bill will look to enhance the powers of the Regulator of Social Housing to ensure decent standards in homes including a new proactive inspection regime, unlimited fines and the ability to require new management. Furthermore, tenants will have greater powers and there will be improved access to swift and fair redress.

