



Direct telephone: 01822 813560 or 01822 813713
E-Mail: Isabel.Blake@swdevon.gov.uk

or Ian.Luscombe@swdevon.gov.uk

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP Secretary of State for Levelling
Up, Housing & Communities
4th Floor Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW10 4DF

Our ref: MGD&M2
25th January 2023

Dear Mr Gove

Housing Standards in Rental Properties in England

I write further to our letter of the 30th November 2022, following the tragic death of Awaab Ishak as a direct result of damp and mould in his family home. As we explained in our letter it was our intention to set out to you before the 27th January 2023 a comprehensive answer to your questions and the to provide the data requested.

The Council's approach to damp and mould is two-fold, firstly ensuring that we are responding to complaints from tenants in private sector housing in an effective manner and also engaging fully with partner organisations and Registered Providers. We have already started to receive letters from our local RPs about action they are taking in their own stock.

And secondly; continuing to improve the fabric of all housing in the South Hams and West Devon area by accessing and effectively using Government Retro-fit Grant schemes, such as Green Homes Grants and Home Upgrade grants.

The Council has in the last 12 months declared a Biodiversity and Climate Crisis, a Housing Crisis and a Cost-of-Living crisis. Each of these features the need to ensure that people can live in homes that are warm and efficient. Housing is also a top priority in the Council's strategic plans.

Information requested in your letter of 19th November 2022 may be found below.

The table below shows the numbers of cases reported and remediated in each of the last three calendar years for South Hams and West Devon Council areas.

The vast majority of damp and mould cases have been investigated and resolved by taking an informal approach with either Private Sector landlords or Registered Providers, in line with the Councils enforcement policy.

Where civil penalties have been served, damp and mould was one part of the wider defects with the property, for example lack of heating.

There were no prosecutions pursued in relation to damp and mould hazards.

Table of data requested

| Date | Damp and Mould | South Hams | West Devon |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|------------|
| 01/01/2020 - 31/12/2020 | Cases reported and remediated | 14 | 14 |
| 01/01/2021- 31/12/2021 | | 7 | 3 |
| 01/01/2022- 31/012/2022 | | 20 | 17 |
| | | | |
| 01/01/2020 - 31/12/2020 | Enforcement action | 1 | 0 |
| 01/01/2021- 31/12/2021 | | 0 | 0 |
| 01/01/2022- 31/012/2022 | | 1 | 0 |
| | | | |
| 01/01/2020 - 31/12/2020 | Civil penalties | 1 | 0 |
| 01/01/2021- 31/12/2021 | | 0 | 0 |
| 01/01/2022- 31/012/2022 | | 1 | 0 |
| | | | |
| 01/01/2020 - 31/12/2020 | Prosecutions | 0 | 0 |
| 01/01/2021- 31/12/2021 | | 0 | 0 |
| 01/01/2022- 31/012/2022 | | 0 | 0 |

We are prioritising enforcement of housing standards more generally in our authorities, across all tenures, including ensuring that we have adequate enforcement capacity to drive up standards in the private rented sector.

The Council's enforcement policy provides guidance to Officers regarding when to escalate a non-compliance to formal action

All our Environmental Health Officers are fully trained on HHSRS, and we have also trained our locality staff who are out and about in our communities and complete a number of home visits

(not always housing related) to look out for the signs of mould and damp in properties that they visit. We already have particular regard to high scoring (bands D and E) category 2 damp and mould hazards, as outlined in the guidance 'Housing health and safety rating system (HHSRS) enforcement guidance: housing conditions'

The Council's Environmental Health Officers and Housing Officers working together, triage complaints from private sector tenants, based upon where there may be greater risk, or when there are children in the household (and particularly if they have health vulnerabilities), significant damp/mould growth and poor energy efficiency. We ensure our officers are equipped to get to the heart of the problem, i.e., to determine if the damp is due to the construction of property (rising/penetrating/poor ventilation or energy efficiency) or whether the occupiers are exasperating the situation by not taking care with drying clothes in doors, not ventilating etc. We are concerned that due to the cost-of-living crisis there is a third category emerging of damp caused by high fuel bills and households not being able to afford to put the heating on. We are already working on an education campaign locally to support people with this and have completed numerous actions as part of the Councils wider approach to the Cost of Living crisis.

We have requested an update from all Registered Providers in the Council's area regarding the prevalence of Category 1 and 2 damp and mould hazards within their housing stock. Once we are in receipt of this information we will work with them to drive up standards and improve the process by which damp and mould is identified and dealt with both as a result of their internal inspection programmes and when in receipt of complaints.

We are continuing to improve the fabric of all housing in the South Hams and West Devon area by applying for and effectively using Government Retro-fit Grant schemes, such as Green Homes Grants and Home Upgrade grants. Our most recent application for Home Upgrade Grant assistance if successful will enable us to improve 250 of the hardest to heat homes in the South Hams and West Devon.

We remain committed to working with you on this serious matter to continue our support for people living in poor conditions where it is detrimental to their health

Yours sincerely



Ian Luscombe
Head of Environmental Health and Licensing
South Hams & West Devon Councils



Isabel Blake
Head of Housing
South Hams & West Devon Councils

