To the Regulator of Social Housing

I am writing on behalf of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) in order to self-refer SMBC for non-compliance with the Home Standard (Part 1.2 (b)) in relation to damp and mould.

Following the conclusion of the inquest into the death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak on 15 November 2022, I ordered an immediate review of our repairs service to identify to what extent council owned properties in Sandwell may suffer with damp and mould related issues.

The outcome of this review is that we have significant levels of mould that would result in 45 of those properties as having a class category 1 hazard.

Work carried out as part of the review:

Following the publication of the coroner’s verdict at the conclusion of the inquest we immediately interrogated our job management system to identify to what extent council owned properties in Sandwell may suffer with damp & mould related issues. Using that data, we produced a list of properties where the tenant has raised a repair associated with damp and mould in the last four years, the limit of the current Job Management system. This is our “Damp Register”.

Our surveying team completed an initial assessment of the Damp Register records and were able to prioritise each case based on the assessed risk to occupants.

We have established a dedicated Damp Team and they have completed the desktop assessments to high priority cases to identify which properties are still experiencing issues related to damp and mould. That assessment determines if immediate action is required such as an antifungal wash and following any initial intervention, what remedial works are needed to deal with the issue where there is a problem within the property.

All new damp & mould related enquiries are to be channelled through this route to ensure we will continue to manage the situation effectively and that we are always dealing with the highest risk properties, in a consistent manner and learn lessons from each case in order to provide the right level of customer communications and advice.

It should be noted that this self-referral is in conjunction with the request received in on 22nd November from the Regulator of Social Housing requiring Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council to report the number of Category 1 and 2 damp & mould related hazard instances under HHSRS (Housing Health & Safety Rating System) in its properties by 19th December 2022.

Our immediate priority following assessment has been to remove mould hazards from properties regardless of the cause and our longer-term strategy is to continue to invest into our housing stock to ensure properties are fit for modern living, including adequate heating, ventilation & thermal insulation. This needs to be combined with improved support to customers to ensure they are aware of the importance of adequately heating & ventilating a modern home and also providing energy efficiency advice and other related support.

**Conclusion**

The outcome of our initial review has resulted in the Council taking the decision that we should immediately advise the RSH of the current position as outlined above. We have taken this decision in recognition of the importance of both transparency to the Regulator and the essential interests of our residents in respect of their Health and Safety relative to the clear requirements of the Home Standard Part 1.2 (b).

We have moved quickly to action early interventions that will alleviate the immediate risks to health from damp and mould, and we are developing our medium to long term strategy to ensure we prioritise this area of work in our improvement actions. It is possible that further issues may emerge and, whilst no review can be certain to identify everything or give complete assurance, we believe we are now in a position to robustly address damp and mould related issues identified in any of our properties.

We have communicated this issue and our Improvement Plan to Elected Members and at a full Council meeting on 13th December, Cllr Padda - Cabinet Member for Housing confirmed “We are 100% committed to tackling damp and mould in council homes”. In his response he set out details of the progress we have made so far and the long term strategy to ensure we provide energy efficient homes that are warm and well ventilated.

We do of course welcome any support and guidance that the Regulator can provide, to assist us with the rectification of this issue.

Yours Faithfully,

Gillian Douglas

Director of Housing, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council