

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
 Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing And Communities
 House of Commons
 London
 SW1A 0AA

30th November 2022

Dear Secretary of State

HOUSING STANDARDS IN RENTED PROPERTIES

This is Brentwood Borough Council’s initial response to your letter of 19th November asking for information from local authorities about damp/mould issues.

Brentwood has relatively small private rented (PRS) and social rented housing sectors. 13.67% of the District’s homes are in the PRS and 10.3% are social housing, mainly council housing but with a smaller percentage owned by registered providers. Within the PRS only a small minority is comprised of homes in multiple occupation.

The council’s enforcement service investigates all complaints of disrepair in the PRS (including damp and mould). Our statistics for the last three reporting periods (as requested), are as follows:

Year	No of damp/mould complaints	No of cases remediated	Enforcement action taken	No of civil penalty notices	No of prosecutions
2021/22	15	11	Hazard Awareness Notice (x2) Consultation Notice (x1)	0	0
2020/21	15	6	N/a	0	0
2019/20	21	13	Abatement Notice (x1)	0	0

As can be seen, the Council received a relatively small number of complaints in respect of the PRS. We have a record of remediating a majority of damp and mould in the PRS, relying on guidance and advice, or issuing Notices to landlords. We intend to follow up on recent unremediated cases, to review whether they have subsequently been resolved, or whether further action is needed.

As a local authority we use a small number of homes as temporary accommodation (TA). We have recorded four cases of damp and mould in TA for the last three recording periods (up to and including the current year) Two of these were remediated by works to the property, and two were successfully remedied following advice to the residents. Brentwood retains a council housing stock of approximately 2,500 homes. We have received significant number of disrepair featuring cold, damp and mould complaints for the last three years:

Year	Number of complaints
2022/23 (ytd)	194
2021/22	250
2020/21	200

All cases are investigated and actioned, with follow up works undertaken, and/or advice given to residents. We are in the process of going through the individual records in detail to ascertain any cases that remain outstanding or unresolved. All these cases will be visited by our technical team to identify whether further works or interventions are required. We are reviewing our responsive and planned maintenance programmes to make sure that damp and mould is prioritised. We have adopted a fabric first approach to our planned programmes, where we aim to tackle all components of affordable warmth in each property. However we are also investigating whether interim solutions can be installed to resolve some damp and mould issues in high risk cases, for instance positive input ventilation.

Within the last four financial years we have received 19 formal legal actions from council tenants for disrepair involving damp and mould. All of these are reviewed by the technical management team on a regular basis. Eight of these cases have subsequently been closed to the satisfaction of the tenants. There are seven ongoing cases where the Council has agreed to carry out remedial works. One case reached court last month, where the judge found in favour of the council, finding that we had discharged our responsibilities satisfactorily.

The Council has contacted all registered providers operating within our area. We have asked for data on all damp and mould cases, and how these have been dealt with. We have also asked for their policies and tenant information about damp, mould and disrepair. Council finances at Brentwood are under significant pressure. The Environmental Health Service (which includes private housing enforcement) has a number of vacancies at present which has reduced overall capacity. However the Council retains the capacity to investigate all complaints of disrepair (including damp) within the private rented sector. The Council's and help on damp on mould includes:

- The Council's website provides information to tenants on how to report disrepair
- Advice on damp and mould is provided in the form of an information leaflet (web based and in print)
- Earlier this year the Council produced a new damp and mould policy (multitenure) which received Housing Committee approval

- We have a dedicated private sector section of the Council's website, offering help and support to private tenants and landlords
- Jointly with other Essex Councils we hold regular landlord forums
- We offer additional help through an Affordable Warmth Programme
- We have submitted bids for additional insulation programmes
- We publicise our cost of living support programmes (in partnership with a range of local organisations).

We will be reviewing our tenant information and damp/mould information leaflet, to ensure they reflect best practice. Our communications team is ensuring that damp and mould reporting is highlighted and easily accessible on the Council website and other media. We will shortly be taking a report to the Council's Housing Committee on damp/mould in residential homes, reporting our performance, capacity, communication and areas for improvement.

Finally, through the "One Team" partnership with Rochford District Council, our two councils are reviewing our full range of services, including enforcement/environmental health. We are evaluating the best delivery models for our customers and whether sharing knowledge, experience and creating shared services can improve outcomes. I trust this response addresses the request in your recent letter. Please get in touch if you need any clarification or further information.

Yours Sincerely



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