

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

22 November 2022

Dear Secretary of State

RE: ENSURING QUALITY IN SOCIAL HOUSING

Like everyone who followed the inquest, I have been horrified to understand the circumstances of Awaab Ishak's tragic and untimely death.

Every person in this country deserves a decent, safe home. Where residents in social housing experience problems, their concerns must be heard and acted upon. Awaab and his family were let down in the worst possible way.

There is a problem with the quality of some social homes that must be fixed. I am writing to you to explain how the National Housing Federation (NHF) intends to work with our members, sector stakeholders and government to tackle these issues.

Learning lessons from Awaab Ishak's death

The coroner's report into Awaab Ishak's death is clear where there were failings in the way damp and mould was treated in his home. We are committed to ensuring all our members understand the detail of Joanne Kearsley's findings and conclusions, and to identifying swift and effective action housing associations can take to make sure such a tragedy cannot happen again.

We will do this by holding meetings, webinars and briefings to disseminate the inquest documents and reiterate the messages from your letter to the sector. We will also work with experts and sector stakeholders to share good practice from organisations who have tackled housing disrepair challenges head on.

The Better Social Housing Review

You may be aware that the NHF and Chartered Institute of Housing had already started work to address problems with poor quality social housing by commissioning an independent review earlier this year.

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The Better Social Housing Review, led by Helen Baker (bio below), has been meeting with residents, customer facing staff, housing experts and leaders, and government officials over the summer to understand more about why quality issues are occurring and the practical actions housing associations must take to deliver real change.

The review is expected to publish its final report before the end of the year and the NHF and CIH will be developing from this a sector action plan in response to the review's recommendations.

I think it would be hugely valuable to brief you on the Better Social Housing Review in person. I will contact your team to find out whether it would be possible for you to meet with me, Helen Baker and the chairs of our member steering group on quality in December or very early in the New Year.

Working with the government

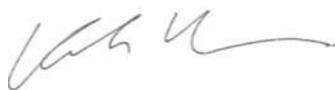
I am most grateful that in your letter to social housing providers you reflected on the need for the sector to collaborate with government on ensuring homes are of a good standard. The NHF wants to work closely with the Department as you consider the national policy response to this matter.

We strongly support the Social Housing Regulation Bill, and in particular stronger and more proactive consumer regulation. The sector understands the need to be more transparent and accountable to their tenants.

We also agree with plans to refresh the Decent Homes Standard and significantly raise the bar on quality. We would also like to explore the wider causes of ailing housing stock in this country with your officials.

I am sure nothing I can say today could bring peace to Awaab's parents, but I want you to know that I am personally committed to ensuring the National Housing Federation plays a positive, proactive and constructive role in responding to this tragic event.

Yours sincerely



Kate Henderson
Chief Executive, National Housing Federation

Annex 1:

Helen Baker, Chair of the Better Social Housing Review

Helen has held many board level leadership roles in the civil society and public sectors across a career spanning social care, housing, health and education. She has chaired organisations ranging from national housing associations to NHS trusts and social care providers, a multi-academy trust and both local and national charities.

Helen has set up and managed a number of charities and began her career as a social worker. She has always had a strong focus on working with those who have been marginalised and disadvantaged – in particular those with disabilities, mental health issues or other long-term health conditions. Board appointments with Government arms-length bodies have included roles with the General Social Care Council, the Commission for the Compact and the National College for School Leadership.

Helen is currently the chair of Shelter and vice chair of The What Works Centre for Wellbeing and is also a deputy lieutenant for Oxfordshire.