



Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing & Communities

**Rt Hon Michael Gove MP**

*Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and  
Communities*

*Minister for Intergovernmental Relations*

2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF

Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEX)  
CILEX Regulation  
Law Society  
Bar Council  
Solicitors Regulation Authority  
Bar Standards Board  
Office for Legal Complaints  
Legal Services Board  
Law Works  
Shelter  
Citizens Advice Bureau  
Housing Law Practitioners Association

28 December 2022

Dear legal representatives,

## **HELPING SOCIAL HOUSING RESIDENTS**

The tragic case of Awaab Ishak, who died at two years old as a direct result of mould in his family home, has rightly shocked people across the country. This is an appalling case of the utmost gravity, and it is abhorrent that anyone should have to live in such conditions in Britain today.

I am writing to ask for your help. I know how important the work you and your colleagues do is for people seeking justice. But I would like to emphasise the importance of directing social housing tenants with concerns about their housing to the Social Housing Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is there to help people when their landlord fails to deal with complaints properly. While many landlords provide a good service to residents, unfortunately problems such as those experienced by the Ishak family are not uncommon in social housing.

The Ombudsman investigates the circumstances of each individual case independently and impartially. If the Ombudsman upholds a complaint following investigation, it has powers to order remedies including that landlords make necessary repairs, apologise and/or pay compensation. This can help families to overcome the distress and indignity of living in such terrible conditions.

We have made it quicker and easier to access the Ombudsman. From 1 October 2022, changes introduced by the Building Safety Act, mean that residents will no longer have to refer their complaint to a designated person, such as an MP, or wait eight weeks before the Ombudsman can consider their complaint.

All social housing residents should know about the Ombudsman, which is free to use. Our nationwide campaign, 'Make Things Right', which has reached millions of social housing residents, is designed to inform them of how they can make a complaint and access the Ombudsman.

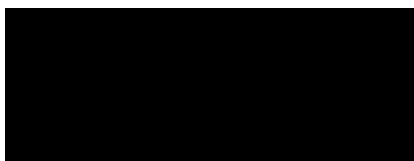
I would like your assistance in ensuring that you and your members are proactive in directing people to the Ombudsman, whose website can be found at [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk).

The Government recommends that people contact the Ombudsman first to receive advice about the best course of action. In some instances, the Ombudsman may recommend the use of the courts, or tribunal.

Access to the law is a vital right for all residents, and the good work you do helps settle issues which may not otherwise be resolved between landlords and residents, but it can be costly and time-consuming. In the case of Awaab Ishak, the legal proceedings led to the landlord slowing down its response to the disrepair. There is no requirement for the landlord to do this and it was wrong of the landlord to let legal proceedings get in the way of doing the right thing.

It is vital that we learn from Awaab's death. I firmly believe in the right of everyone to feel safe in the place where they and their loved ones sleep at night. I hope you will support me in our efforts to help residents receive the high-quality social housing that they deserve.

With every good wish,



**RT HON MICHAEL GOVE MP**

Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities  
and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations