



Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

[REDACTED]
*Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for
Housing, Communities & Local Government*
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Your reference: [REDACTED]

Our reference: [REDACTED]

Alison Mutch
HM Senior Coroner
Coroner's Court
1 Mount Tabor Street
Stockport
SK1 3AG

01 April 2025

Dear Alison,

RESPONSE TO REGULATION 28: REPORT TO PREVENT FUTURE DEATHS - INQUEST INTO THE DEATH OF PAUL WILLIAMS

Thank you for your letter and investigative report dated 21 January 2025 into the tragic death of Paul Williams, made in accordance with Paragraph 7, Schedule 5, of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 and Regulations 28 and 29 of the Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013.

First, I want to express my sincere condolences to Mr Williams' family and friends. I was distressed to read about his death, and the situation and circumstances that led to him tragically taking his own life.

It is vitally important that households are provided with the support and care they deserve. From the evidence provided and the information in your report, it appears that Mr Williams' needs were not met.

I have provided more detail below on the relevant frameworks that should have been in place to support Mr Williams to access homelessness support. My officials have spoken to the relevant local authority. In this letter I set out more information on the specific aspects of his case and explain in detail the steps I am proposing to take to increase tenant security and reduce homelessness.

Matter of concern one – eviction at short notice from private rented accommodation

In your report you stated that the housing situation, in particular being given two weeks' notice to find alternative accommodation had a significant impact on Mr Williams' mental health and contributed to his deteriorating condition.

My department oversees regulation of the private rented sector. It appears from our enquiries of Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) that a section 21 notice was served on Mr Williams' partner on 6 November 2023; following this she approached SMBC on 14 November 2023 for homelessness assistance.

A section 21 notice must give a minimum of two months' notice and in this instance, it gave slightly longer as it expired on 5 January 2024. Where a household does not leave by the end of the section 21 notice period, a landlord is entitled to seek a possession order from the court. Where a court issues a possession order, this might only provide 14 days' notice for a household to leave their home. This short timeframe is in light of the fact that the tenants will have already received at least two months' notice plus the time taken for the landlord to obtain a possession order, to make alternative arrangements, and the court must balance the rights of tenants and landlords. Where a household does not leave by the expiry of a possession order, a landlord can apply for a bailiff warrant. SMBC advised that a possession order was served in April 2023 and a bailiff warrant on 1 May 2024, which expired 15 May 2024.

My department is clear that local authorities must step in and assist households when they have received a section 21 notice and do so in a timely way. My department is responsible for the statutory framework that governs homelessness. The Housing Act 1996 Part 7 sets out the duties local housing authorities have towards homeless households, including the responsibilities for assessment, accommodation, and support. The Housing Act makes clear that a household is considered threatened with homelessness if they receive a section 21 notice which expires within 56 days and as a consequence is owed various duties under that Act.

The Homelessness Code of Guidance (the Code) makes clear that once the notice period expires, the local housing authority must consider whether or not it is reasonable for the household to continue to reside at the property.

The Code also makes clear at paragraph 6.35 that where a valid section 21 notice has been served, if after making enquiries it is clear that the landlord intends to seek possession if the household does not leave, it is unlikely to be reasonable for a household to continue to occupy the property beyond the expiry of the section 21 notice unless the local housing authority has taken steps to persuade the landlord to allow time for alternative accommodation to be found.

I am aware however that in some cases families prefer to stay where they are as they judge that this will suit their needs better than the temporary accommodation that might be offered. Local housing authorities must ensure that temporary accommodation is suitable for the needs of the entire household. The code makes clear that B&B should be a last resort for families with children and that it should be used for no longer than 6 weeks. I am aware that in some instances local housing authorities use B&Bs or hotels for households with children due to pressure on temporary accommodation and this leads families to decide to stay put until a possession order or bailiff warrant is received. Staying in accommodation until this point unfortunately means that families end up facing a short-notice to leave.

SMBC does not have a full record of the advice given when Mr Williams' partner first presented for assistance in November 2023, but is of the view that she was probably advised that a B&B is the likely option, and was advised of the same in April and May 2024, which led her to move in with her mother on 3 May 2024 until she was allocated social housing in July 2024.

I am sorry that steps were not taken to offer and provide more suitable accommodation before the family faced this stage. I am writing to SMBC to remind them of this part of the code and the need to take sufficient action early enough to prevent households from being placed in a crisis situation by remaining until a possession order or bailiff warrant is issued.

I will now set out what my department is doing to increase tenant security.

On 11 September 2024, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) introduced the Renters' Rights Bill into Parliament to transform the way the private rented sector

operates. The Bill will give renters much greater security and stability so they can stay in their homes for longer and avoid the risk of homelessness. The Bill will abolish Section 21 “no fault” eviction so that landlords can only evict their tenants in reasonable circumstances. This will provide more security for tenants and empower them to challenge poor practice without fear of eviction.

While our priority is to sustain tenancies as far as possible in all circumstances, we recognise that landlords sometimes need to evict their tenants. This may be when the tenant is unable to comply with the terms of their tenancy agreement or to respond to their own changing circumstances to move in or sell. The Bill will increase notice periods for many grounds for possession, giving tenants more time to find a new home, and to avoid homelessness, when a landlord does need to end a tenancy.

Matter of concern two – homelessness assistance

In your report you stated that being required to live separately from his family, whilst waiting for suitable accommodation to become available, had a significant impact on Mr Williams’ mental health and contributed to his deteriorating condition.

When making our enquiries SMBC advised that when Mr Williams’ partner presented for homelessness assistance in November 2023, the application was only made for herself and their children. Mr Williams was not mentioned or included on the form. It also advised that Mr Williams’ partner made an application to join the social housing register on 2 October 2023, shortly before being served with the section 21 notice, with further updates made to that application in May 2024. That application was also only made for Mr Williams’ partner and their children and Mr Williams was not listed in the application. Mr Williams’ name also did not appear on the section 21 notice or the possession order. As far as we are aware Mr Williams did not present himself for any assistance.

This means that sadly, SMBC was not aware that Mr Williams was part of the household and needed homelessness assistance. There are several provisions of relevance to the situation faced by Mr Williams and his family which I will set out first.

Section 184 of the Housing Act 1996 provides that when a local authority has reason to believe a person is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless within 56 days (which will be the case if a household has been served with a section 21 notice which expires in 56 days or less), it must make inquiries to determine what legal duties it owes the person and their household. The local housing authority will have a duty to prevent the homelessness where possible, and if not, to assist the person to relieve their homelessness.

Where a person is homeless, eligible for assistance (which is determined by immigration status and residency) and in priority need (a household with children is automatically considered in priority need), the local housing authority must provide the household with suitable temporary accommodation. A household which has been served a section 21 notice will be deemed homeless when it is no longer reasonable for them to occupy the property. As I have set out above, the code makes clear that it would unlikely be reasonable for a household to continue to occupy a property beyond the expiry of the notice period unless arrangements had been made with the landlord to delay possession proceedings whilst alternative accommodation is found.

A local authority also has a duty to develop a personalised housing plan, tailored to focus on the needs and circumstances of the household and what accommodation would be suitable for them (s189A Housing Act 1996).

Section 206 makes clear that any accommodation provided to discharge duties to homeless applicants under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 must be suitable. The accommodation must be suitable in relation to the applicant and to all members of their household who normally reside with them, or who might reasonably be expected to reside with them. Section 210 sets out that space, arrangement and location will always be key factors in determining the suitability of accommodation.

To summarise, local authorities have legal duties to make sure any accommodation is suitable for the needs of the entire household and should keep the suitability of accommodation under review.

I will now set out what my department is doing to prevent and reduce homelessness.

In recognition of the scale of the challenge and the priority this government is giving to reducing homelessness, funding for homelessness services is increasing this year by £233 million compared to 2024/25, bringing the total spend to nearly £1 billion in 2025/26. This includes increasing funding to the Homelessness Prevention Grant to assist local authorities with preventing homelessness in the first place.

To ensure this mission is being driven across government, I am chairing an Inter-Ministerial Group focused on developing a long-term strategy to get us back on track to ending homelessness.

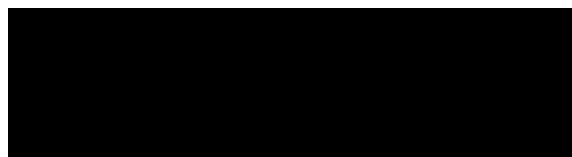
This government is committed to delivering 1.5 million new homes by the end of this Parliament, including the biggest increase in social housing and affordable housebuilding in a generation. In October 2024 and again in February 2025, we announced additional funding for the Affordable Homes Programme, which will build more social and affordable new homes, including Social Rent homes.

The supply of temporary accommodation is extremely challenging nationwide. MHCLG administers the Local Authority Housing Fund, which is providing £1.2bn to local authorities to acquire and create homes for families at risk of homelessness and will create over 7,000 affordable homes for vulnerable families.

Additionally, MHCLG is also working with 20 local authorities through the new programme of Emergency Accommodation Reduction Pilots to test innovative approaches and kickstart new initiatives to provide more suitable accommodation for homeless families.

The death of Paul Williams is a tragic example of the impact poor and insecure housing can have on people's lives where assistance is not provided soon enough. I want to thank you for bringing this to my attention and once again, I wish to express my sincere condolences to Mr Williams' family and friends.

Yours sincerely,

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Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government