

**SOUTHWARK COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL ASSEMBLY**

**(ORDINARY MEETING)**

**WEDNESDAY 23 NOVEMBER 2022**

**LATE QUESTION**

**1. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR VICTOR CHAMBERLAIN**

Following news from Rochdale on the tragic death of Awaab Ishak, it is absolutely integral that Southwark Council reflects on its own performance in tackling mould and damp. This is especially important as the Housing Ombudsman ranked Southwark as one of the worst landlords in England for dealing with damp and mould in an October 2021 report.

How many reports of mould or damp have residents sent to the council, broken down by the estate these reports came from, since November 2021? How many of these reports are from a property that has previously reported mould or damp issues? How many complaints have there been since November 2021 on the council's handling on a report of mould or damp?

**RESPONSE**

Our hearts go out to the family of Awaab Ishak, who died aged two after this father had been reporting mould in their Rochdale home for three years. The report from senior coroner Joanne Kearsley found that "Awaab died as a result of a severe respiratory condition due to prolonged exposure to mould in his home environment." As the coroner said in her report, this should be a "defining moment" for the housing sector.

Councillor Chamberlain is right to raise this. It is a time for careful, thoughtful introspection and for taking urgent action. We will do both. I also call upon the government to think about its role as we think about ours.

The coroner's report on the cause of Awaab's death was published only a few days after the conclusion of the Grenfell Inquiry. We are already reviewing our investment plans and making sure in all ways that we keep our residents safe from the risk of fire, in line with requirements from the Fire Safety Act and the Building Safety Act. Clearly the risks to health from damp and mould must be seen in the same light as all issues concerning resident safety. The government must address the years of

underfunding brought about by its decision to reduce rents and a much longer failure to properly invest in social housing.

The cabinet is due to consider a revised housing asset management plan early next year that contains, for the first time, a chapter on damp and mould. This signals that our changing investment plans will include tackling and eradicating the most harmful damp and mould from our tenants' homes. At the weekend the strategic director of housing and modernisation wrote to all councillors to advise them about the action we are already taking and how our residents can get help if they need it.

Sadly, damp and mould is not a new issue and it is fair to say that the council, like all landlords, has to do better. Our new team and reporting phone line are the result of the council working on a new approach for some time.

Unfortunately, we are not be able to provide the information requested on reports of damp or mould by estate at this short notice. However, I can confirm that the council has received 92 Stage 1 complaints since November 2021 where damp or mould was recorded as an issue. 24 were actually the first request for a service, so the true number of complaints on damp or mould is 68.