

Learning from: Severe Maladministration



**Taking the key lessons from our
severe maladministration decisions**

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Introduction

A core purpose of social housing is to provide decent, affordable homes to people who may have long-term health needs.

For decades landlords have helped millions of people who may otherwise have experienced poorer housing conditions.

But this achievement should not obscure the significant failings identified in this report and the searching questions it presents to landlords about handling requests from residents with disabilities, adaptations, and mental health needs.

Callous and uncaring systems and processes are repeatedly exposed through these investigations, from the family whose daughter has terminal cancer but must wait 12 months for an application for adaptations, to the disabled resident confined to one room because his wheelchair cannot access parts of his home, through to the heavy-handed treatment of a resident who cannot store their wheelchair so is told by the landlord it may be confiscated. The people operating these systems may care, but the outcomes for residents may not be reflective of that commitment.

Why?

Etched across these cases is a lack of resources, compounded by homes designed in a different era that can be less practicable and more expensive to adapt. There are no easy answers to this, but 2 things are striking from these cases: some homes were let when the landlord knew it would not meet the resident's needs but addressing this can be delayed and, at the other end of the process, adaptations being cancelled because the landlord opts to move the resident but that does not happen. This points to system failings which go beyond resources.

A more coherent system would also future proof existing homes for the needs of tomorrow's residents, offering a more efficient use of stretched resources.

Repeatedly, we have investigated cases where adaptations to kitchens and bathrooms are mishandled and delayed, with residents unable to cook or bathe adequately. Under the current Decent Homes Standard, kitchens are not expected to be replaced for 40 years and bathrooms for 30 years. A new standard is desperately needed. Given our aging society and around half of landlord's households reporting at least one member with a long-term health condition, is this an opportunity to think about how the requirements of an ageing population or different disabilities are integrated into planned works. There are also issues to unpick relating to disabled facilities grants and the interface with landlord responsibilities.

Yet this challenge with resources does not excuse the shamefully poor communication that some residents have experienced. Considering the challenging circumstances of each resident, empathetic, clear and tailored communication is paramount. This is even more important where landlords may need to communicate bad news and manage expectations.

However, time and again, these cases reveal communication that is unreliable, inconsistent, and unsophisticated for the complexity of the circumstances. It can also be worse than that and indicate cultural issues, with communication adopting a tone and approach that is both dismissive and disrespectful of residents. This is another aspect of the stigma that can exist towards social tenants.

This extends not only to some of the cases summarised in this report but also those we have provided links to as further reading: including poor communication with a terminally ill resident who was caring for her disabled children and a disabled resident sleeping on their sofa for 18 months.

Another area these cases suggest landlords should consider developing specialisms is with autistic residents.

This need to improve the quality of communication extends to landlord interactions with other professionals too, whether GPs, carers, or crucially occupational health.

The relationship between occupational therapists and landlords provides the heartbeat to this report, with our casework offering lessons about commissioning assessments, responding to them and communicating that response to the resident and practitioner.

It is an area where the governing body Member Responsible for Complaints may want to seek assurance around their organisation's approach. Another one is how effectively the landlord is fulfilling its obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

Throughout these cases we highlight where the landlord did not make reasonable adjustments or have due regard to the legislation and given the demographic shift happening in social housing since the act was passed, it is vital landlords become confident making decisions under the legislation. Our casework would suggest this is an area where some landlords are failing to demonstrate they are confident and consistent.

A final observation. While the focus of several cases is on disabilities and other physical health needs, the impact on resident's mental health is also present. Understandably, both can be relevant when handling a complaint.

Our response to mental health as a society is changing and social landlords should be at the forefront of evolving services to meet different mental health needs – about 40% of social tenants report mental health concerns. However, in some cases the landlords are open about their inability to respond to these needs, and it strongly suggests, as was evidenced in our **Spotlight on attitudes, respect and rights – relationship of equals** last year, that stronger frameworks and staff support are needed around handling mental health.

We hope this casework review helps landlords to learn from complaints alongside the insight being provided through our **Centre for Learning** to foster fairer, better services.

Richard Blakeway, Housing Ombudsman

The following report contains distressing references, including to suicide and self-harm.

Samaritans contact details

When life is difficult, Samaritans are here – day or night, 365 days a year. You can call them for free on 116 123, email them at jo@samaritans.org, or visit www.samaritans.org to find your nearest branch.

Adaptations: responding effectively to occupational therapists

The first area of focus is making Occupational Therapist (OT) referrals. When looking at installing aids and adaptations in a resident's home, often an OT will be involved. Whether through referral or commission, these reports should be taken seriously and implemented where reasonably practicable.

Rooftop Housing Group

In case **202317069**, **Rooftop Housing Group** failed to grasp concerns raised by an Occupational Therapist (OT) and implement adaptations that a child receiving chemotherapy needed. It failed to progress repairs or reallocate them as urgent, despite policies saying it should.

Before even moving in, the landlord was aware of the resident and her daughter's condition and should have instructed an OT to review if the home was suitable for their needs.

The OT said bathroom adaptations were needed promptly, and the daughter's hospital also wrote to the landlord to emphasise the urgent need for them as without, it could lead to serious infection. 27 months after it was told it was required, the landlord had still not acted on the OT report and installed an adaptation.

While some delay could have been from the resident's end, the landlord could have been more proactive.

The OT reported that the paving in the back garden was uneven and with the daughter prone to trips and falls during treatment, it made it non-accessible for her.

The landlord asked the local authority for funding from a Disability Funding Grant (DFG). But as this would have taken over 12 months to obtain, the OT pleaded with the landlord to fund it "in light of this little girl's life limiting condition". The landlord did not respond.

The OT also wrote to the landlord raising concerns about a leak in the ventilation system into the daughter's bedroom. The OT stressed that the repairs the resident wanted at the property were needed as her daughter's immune system was "highly compromised" because of chemotherapy.

The landlord knew the ventilation system was obsolete before the resident moved into the property, but it still took over 2 years for them to replace it.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has restructured the way it handles complaints to focus on early resolution and is reviewing how it delivers aids and adaptations following this investigation. It has already changed its lettings and voids teams' process to identify any needs for aids and adaptations at the earliest opportunity.

Kingston upon Thames Council

In case **202221617**, the Ombudsman ordered £10,000 in compensation due to the significant impact on a disabled resident for 8 years as **Kingston upon Thames Council** failed to install adaptations despite multiple reports from the Occupational Therapist (OT).

This meant the resident was largely confined to his living room and had to pay far more in carers fees. The landlord offered no compensation during its complaint's procedure.

The resident was told the property was unsuitable as soon as he moved in, as the space was not open plan. While the OT recognised the landlord had no suitable properties at that time for the resident, it said it might only be possible to fully meet those needs with a new build specifically for the resident. However, some adaptations could be made to improve the situation.

The OT report said suitable wheelchair access to the front door would reduce functional deterioration, minimise pain, and increase quality of life. Following this, the landlord did install an electrically operated wider front door and an entry ramp.

While this was a positive, there is no evidence a suitably qualified member of staff carried out a feasibility survey for the other recommended adaptations.

While the landlord is not obliged to conduct any or all recommendations, it should demonstrate they have been considered in full.

Four years after the initial assessment, the OT again reviewed the home. Due to the adaptations not being done, the resident was unable to use his wheelchair in the house and this made moving around very difficult and impacted his ability to utilise his property.

The OT report also recommended a wet room with showering space, automatic washer dryer, toilet and a fully accessible kitchen. There is no evidence once again the landlord considered these recommendations in full or that any were implemented, even the smaller works such as height of plugs, light switches, or door handles.

The landlord asked the OT to review a new build it believed would be suitable for the resident, being built specifically with them in mind.

However, the OT concluded it may not be suitable, with issues around parking, lift usage, and height of work surfaces in the kitchen. This has caused further disappointment for the resident after expectations were increased when he was told about the property.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has reviewed its policy on adaptations, as well as introducing new housing management systems to collect better data on individuals.

L&Q

The Ombudsman made a finding of severe maladministration for how **L&Q (202202357)** handled adaptations by not acting on 2 separate Occupational Therapist (OT) reports to allow a disabled resident a functioning bathroom and kitchen.

It received 2 reports at a similar time for the bathroom and the kitchen. While one of the reports was acknowledged, it is unclear which one the landlord was referring to in its subsequent actions.

It then failed to upload the assessment for the bathroom on its system for 5 months and therefore delayed a decision on these adaptations for a significant period.

The landlord did not implement the OT assessment due to operational failures. When the landlord did take action, its procedure was not followed effectively, with a plumber attending before a surveyor, leading to the appointment being cancelled on the day. These failings were compounded by further delays and poor communication, which had a considerable impact on the resident.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has introduced a new approach which gives it access to a wider range of contractors to help speed up non-emergency work such as aids and adaptations.

This is alongside other transformations to services that have occurred since the Ombudsman's special investigation report into the landlord.

Adaptations: failure to undertake works or delayed timings

Longhurst Group

In case 202221733, a wheelchair user was left with inadequate bathing facilities for 15 months, and **Longhurst Group** also failed to consider its fire safety obligations by creating a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP).

The lack of adaptations meant the resident was unable to leave the building without help, with additional works needed to the entrance's threshold, ramp, and the need for an internal door release button.

It took 6 months for the landlord to begin discussing options for the adaptations with local partners, and those same local partners had to regularly chase for updates. A further 15 months after being told adaptations were needed, the landlord considered and looked for confirmation that the resident's needs could not be met better elsewhere. This would have been an appropriate course of action to take at the beginning of the process rather than 18 months later.

It was also inappropriate the landlord did not provide the resident with alternatives to the accessibility adaptations after explaining that it could not consider these. The resident reported her multiple complex health issues and disabilities were worsened by her inability to go outside without help at her property and building.

There was no evidence the landlord gave the resident appropriate fire safety information, in the form of a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) as required by its policy. Or ensured a safe and effective escape route for her instead of only relying on the fire service to do so.

The landlord should instead have complied with the policy by outlining what its actions and those of other agencies would be in such circumstances to assist the resident with escaping, and recorded communicating these to her, its staff, and any other relevant agencies.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has made significant improvements and introduced a new process which makes sure each complaint is managed by an operational lead. It has also delivered training to increase awareness of supporting vulnerable residents and those with health and safety concerns, improved record keeping and better visibility of residents' communication preferences.

Lambeth Council

The Ombudsman found severe maladministration for how **Lambeth Council (202208047)** left a resident unable to wash herself for 14 months due to a lack of wet room adaptations.

Following a vulnerability assessment of the resident and their property, the landlord identified a number of adjustments that could be made to assist the resident.

This followed the resident being stuck in the bath for almost 16 hours, causing significant trauma and a hospital admission.

The hospital itself wrote to the landlord to suggest a walk-in wet room due to the trauma experienced. Little action was taken with it taking 9 months for the referral and occupational therapist assessment of the bathroom to be undertaken.

The landlord said staffing resources had delayed the installation of a wet room as no action had been taken following the occupational therapist assessment.

The landlord should make sure it has enough resources to fulfil its obligations to its tenants, as per its policies. This demonstrates a significant failure in implementing required adjustments within a reasonable amount of time.

The length of time the resident lived without the appropriate adaptations was excessive.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has reviewed its approach to vulnerability assessments. Its home improvement agency team now prioritises fast track cases and supports other teams to make sure these are processed without delay.

Southwark Council

In case **202310781**, the Ombudsman found severe maladministration for **Southwark Council** after a resident was unable to access their kitchen without assistance for 11 months due to delays. The resident said these failings prevented her from living an independent and fulfilled life.

She reported having to pay a cook to prepare her food despite being on a low income, was unable to get a drink or a snack outside her carer's hourly visit and was confined to her bedroom or living room.

In not proceeding with widening the kitchen doorway, the landlord did not demonstrate due regard for the resident's vulnerabilities, or the duties placed on it as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

In the original occupational therapist assessment, it was not possible to assess the suitability of the kitchen due to the doors not being wide enough. As this would have cost below £1,000, the landlord referred this to its Housing Adaptation team.

According to the landlord's process, after receiving the referral for the work it would arrange a pre-work assessment meeting in the resident's home with its contractor, the surveyor, and the resident.

There is no evidence the landlord communicated with the resident about arranging this meeting and therefore no evidence it assessed the complexity of the job.

In its stage 1 response, the landlord confirmed it would widen the door, despite the resident looking to move home.

This was appropriate but the landlord then did not explain further delays, despite the resident chasing on numerous occasions. The landlord's Housing Adaptation team contacted the resident 115 working days after the occupational therapist referral, significantly outside of its target timescales.

It also exceeded the maximum target of 80 working days for delivering the most complex adaptations, as stated in government guidance on delivering disabled facilities. In the end, the adaptation job was cancelled after it confirmed the resident was still pursuing rehousing, although the resident was still living at the property at the time of the Ombudsman's decision.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has implemented interim measures that can be put in place when residents are awaiting rehousing, and improvements have also been made to internal communications. Training on complaint handling has also been rolled out to all staff who handle complaints.

Clarion

The Ombudsman made a severe maladministration finding for how **Clarion (202234071)** dealt with kitchen adaptations, which were not completed for 3 years, causing a resident with limited mobility significant distress.

The landlord confirmed that the adaptations were feasible and would start following an electric meter being moved. But at the point of determination, the landlord had still not completed the adaptation.

The resident knocked and injured herself on the worktop corners due to the lack of space.

As she struggled to stand to complete kitchen tasks, and a chair could not be accommodated due to the size of the kitchen, she faced increased risk of injury.

She said the situation made her feel suicidal, resulting in engagement with the landlord's mental health team.

The landlord said there were reasons for the delay, such as the occupational therapist and resident changing specification and the electric board being unable to relocate the meter, which impacted on kitchen design. The landlord asked the contactor to put the adaptations on hold as the resident wished to move. However, the resident was not informed of this pause.

The resident did not know the kitchen adaptation was on hold or that her rehousing request had not been assessed or progressed by the landlord. The landlord eventually organised a joint visit with the occupational therapist and decided that the adaptations could not go ahead, and the resident would be rehoused. An unreasonable length of time was taken to reach this decision.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it's Scrutiny Panel has since carried out a comprehensive review of its aids and adaptations policy, with a new process being implemented to streamline the process for efficiently managing, tracking, and reporting on aids and adaptations cases through its systems.

Others found in this category:

- **202221966** North Yorkshire Council
- **202209262** Southwark Council
- 202207102 Hull Council
- 202220591 Hyde Group
- 202101272 Cornwall Council
- **201906579** Inquilab
- **202207742** Lambeth Council
- 202337199 Folkestone and Hythe Council

Key learning related to adaptations

Occupational therapists

Landlords should review whether an Occupational Therapist (OT) is needed to visit a home based on either a request from a resident or knowledge about their individual circumstances. Good practice is to do this early to understand what may be required to make the home suitable. Special consideration should be given where the landlord is aware at point of letting of household circumstances that make this relevant and landlords should also consider any mitigations needed if there are delays to an assessment.

It is good practice and appropriate for the OT to attend the property viewing and contribute their professional opinion.

Once the assessment is complete and the landlord is in receipt of the report, it should complete a feasibility survey and benchmark this against any relevant policies. The outcome of this should be communicated with the resident.

It may be that the adaptations are not possible for structural reasons due to the dimensions and layout of the property or may be cost prohibitive.

However, landlords have a responsibility to assess the feasibility of the adaptations and make informed decisions whether to proceed with them.

It is also vital that residents are afforded respect by decisions being communicated in a timely way, clear explanations given, and expectations managed appropriately.

If a feasibility assessment concludes that the majority of the adaptations are not possible, landlords should continue working with the resident and the OT to find a suitable alternative property.

If there are disagreements about what is holding up work, landlords should engage with the resident local partners in a proactive manner to find a resolution.

Adaptations being carried out

Adaptations are key to make sure residents are able to live an independent and fulfilling life in their home. Landlords should have an effective adaptations policy in place, which allows both its staff and residents to understand the expectations surrounding this issue.

Any policy should at least think about the extent of the work required, availability of alternative accommodation, length of the time the adaptation would be needed, if there are other ways to meet the needs of the resident, if a temporary move (or decant) may be required, and what the procedure is for rejecting an adaptation whether on the grounds of feasibility or practicality.

This all helps to manage the expectations of a resident and will also help with timescales for implementation. Landlords should make sure that throughout the process, residents and any key third parties are kept up to date to reduce frustration or miscommunication.

This extends to operatives and other groups such as external architects or surveyors that may be involved in the process. These visits should be factored into plans and not delay the schedule of works.

Landlords considering temporary moves should look at the Ombudsman's **severe maladministration report** on this topic for more learning around handling these effectively and sensitively.

If the adaptations are unable to be completed, it is a landlord's responsibility to decide and inform the resident of this in a timely manner. The resident would then have the knowledge to make informed choices about their future.

Communication: responding effectively to vulnerabilities

When an issue is reported to a landlord, it must decide how best to act to resolve the situation. This can vary considerably from person to person and depending on any vulnerability that may be present within the household.

What may seem like a small issue to some, may be a much more serious and urgent to others who are in a vulnerable position. It is important landlords know the residents that live in their homes, so they are able to effectively respond to issues.

Southern Housing

The Ombudsman made a severe maladministration finding after **Southern Housing (202303097)** was heavy-handed and caused a resident significant distress as it was threatening to remove her wheelchair from a communal area.

The landlord was also aware of the resident's other vulnerabilities, which included mental health problems such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

While the landlord has health and safety obligations to follow, its handling was unresponsive to her needs and regularly sent her formal legal letters which she found harassing. She had also previously kept her wheelchair in the communal hallway for 20 months before the first letter. This mismanaged her expectations.

The resident found this approach extremely distressing, threatening to dispose of her only means to access outside of the building, when it was not a choice and there was nowhere else for it to go.

Furthermore, when she urgently tried to contact the landlord to discuss the issue and stop its disposal, she was not able to get a response from the landlord on 3 separate occasions.

She engaged with an advocate organisation to help with her case but despite them telling the landlord they feared the resident may be close to “giving up on life”, it failed to respond or make any further contact with the resident. Therefore, the landlord did not follow its safeguarding procedure.

Following further legal letters, the landlord did explore some other options for the wheelchair, but these were deemed uneconomical or unviable.

After 5 months of fear that her wheelchair was going to be disposed of and she would not be able to leave her home, the landlord offered £15 in compensation. It also sent out further legal letters, which put unnecessary worry and stress on the resident.

It also rejected a single point of contact when it was requested by the resident and when it provided a private occupational therapist assessment, it found that the property was not suitable for the resident. It should not however have taken 9 months and the need for the resident to go through 2 stages of the landlord’s complaint process, for it to have properly considered the residents vulnerabilities. Nor was the landlord able to demonstrate that it had considered its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 in the way it handled the issue.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has updated all relevant procedures since this determination and has assurances that a similar outcome will not happen to other residents.

Somerset Council

In case **202305160**, the Ombudsman found severe maladministration for how **Somerset Council** communicated with a resident who had vulnerabilities and complex needs.

The landlord was aware of the resident’s vulnerabilities, which included Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and autism.

When she raised issues around pest infestation, the resident asked the landlord for support in communication and understanding, as well as if there was anyone that had a real awareness of autism. The landlord said it did not have the expertise to provide additional support.

The resident was unable to communicate with the landlord by phone or face to face, putting her at a disadvantage. However, the landlord put in place no reasonable adjustments or communications plan. There is also no evidence the landlord sought to educate itself on the resident's diagnosis.

The landlord did offer to make referrals to external community organisations, but this missed the point of her request. It said it would look into how it could flag on its system her communication preferences.

However, there were times the landlord spoke to her parents rather than her, which made the resident feel like the landlord had taken away her choice, her independence as an adult woman, and her voice.

The resident's GP informed the landlord of her deteriorating mental health that was linked to her housing issues, adding that strangers in her home would not help.

The resident had previously asked for the landlord to give at least 24 hours' notice of any appointments. The GP also asked the landlord to source alternative housing options. There is no evidence the landlord responded to this letter.

The landlord continued to insist on meeting in person, despite her not being able to do so and wanting to talk via email. It is clear from the evidence provided that the resident was often distressed by the landlord's insistence on visiting her, when it was not necessary, and its attempts to provide unsuitable and inappropriate support.

The Ombudsman's investigation found that the landlord did not have a vulnerable person's policy and that it had failed to have due regard to the Equality Act 2010 when it came to adjusting its communication.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has undertaken a thorough management review and identified staff training needs, including refresher training on the Equality Act 2010 and its reasonable adjustments training for staff. The landlord has also implemented a new process to minimise the disruption if an officer leaves or is absent for a long period of time.

Bristol City Council

In case **202118413**, **Bristol City Council** failed to consider the impact Antisocial Behaviour (ASB) would have on a vulnerable resident with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), with its approach lacking empathy. It offered him no additional support and therefore he felt his only option was to leave his home.

The landlord failed to carry out a risk assessment or meet with the resident to discuss the issues and his request to be moved for his own safety. When he asked the landlord to follow up on a police position regarding his safety, the landlord asked the resident to contact them and update it. Given his distress, vulnerabilities, and the landlord's policy that it works with partner agencies to deliver a proactive approach to ASB, the landlord's failure to liaise with the police was inappropriate.

Due to its failings in this case around his vulnerabilities and the lack of communication, the resident felt that he was being discriminated based on his race and disability.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has introduced a new and stronger antisocial behaviour policy and procedures that adopt a victim-centred approach.

It has also set expectations to regularly review resident risk assessments, establish regular contact with residents, and provide trauma-informed training to staff. Additionally, it is enhancing its response to vulnerabilities by introducing further reasonable adjustments training.

Sovereign Network Group

The Ombudsman found severe maladministration for how **Sovereign Network Group (202224092)** failed to handle repairs sensitively, causing an autistic son living in the property to attempt suicide due to distress caused by the thought of more people having to be in his room.

The resident informed the landlord and the Ombudsman of her son's health and his suicide attempt. She explained how the delays to repairs, the presence of mould, and returning tradesman working in her son's bedroom had caused him distress.

The Ombudsman has spoken to the resident to make sure she is comfortable for this information to be included in the report.

The repeat and cumulative failures in communications and opportunities to put the failures right led to significant distress to the resident and her household. This is demonstrated in the language and tone of the resident's pleas for help.

Some of the repairs that were undertaken in her son's room damaged the walls and while the landlord noted that the repairs needed to be undertaken sensitively, there is no evidence of how this was managed or implemented.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has introduced a new process to ensure that any vulnerability with a household is explicitly considered and has published a new reasonable adjustments and vulnerability policy, developed a quality assurance process for contact logs and vulnerability records, and implemented a portal that ensures greater visibility of all responsive repairs, including those by contractors

VIVID

The Ombudsman found severe maladministration after **VIVID (202228772)** took an unsympathetic, inappropriate, dismissive, and unfair approach to repairs in a household with a resident who was immunocompromised.

It failed to consider the resident's vulnerabilities and the risk to the resident and her son following the leak and flood in her flat. It failed to consider temporary accommodation given the severity of the leak and the resident's vulnerabilities.

At the time of the leak, the resident informed the landlord that she had a disability, and she had just left hospital. The landlord failed to demonstrate it understood the dangers of the issue and its obligations to vulnerable residents.

She also told the landlord she was worried about the electrics in her property as she needed to use a sleeping machine and heart machine. There is no evidence to suggest that the landlord considered the resident's concerns, or considered whether it would have been appropriate to place the resident and her son in temporary accommodation until the damage to the property could be assessed and the property dried out.

Further to this, the resident informed the landlord on several occasions that she was concerned about the unhygienic and unsanitary conditions her and her son were living in following the flood. The landlord unreasonably delayed opening a mould case, carrying out a damp and mould survey, and carrying out remedial repairs.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has designed and implemented an improved process for capturing reasonable adjustments to meet residents' individual needs, as well as rolling out further training on these obligations.

Other cases in this category:

- **202122141** Sanctuary
- **202122294** Welwyn Hatfield
- **202206761** L&Q
- 202301004 Barking and Dagenham Council
- 202117413 Sanctuary
- 202200854 Clarion

- 202220133 L&Q
- 201911513 Onward Homes
- 202210049 Bromford
- **202303652** Longhurst Group
- **202121186** Westminster City Council
- 202205276 L&Q
- 202303995 Islington Council

Key learning related to responding effectively to vulnerabilities

The Ombudsman's **Spotlight report on attitudes, respect and rights** emphasises that a landlords' attitude to vulnerabilities is vital, with a need to recognise, adjust and respond to its residents' individual circumstances.

Under section 20 of the Equality Act 2010, landlords have a responsibility to make reasonable adjustments for residents who are at a substantial disadvantage compared to residents who do not have a disability. Landlords must make sure all staff are trained to fully understand the obligations and responsibilities towards vulnerable and disabled residents. This extends to contractors too.

Communications

There are several key learning points in communication that landlords should consider. Landlords should take into account any vulnerability disclosed to make sure a sensitive and coordinated approach and offers of support being tailored to the individual.

This can include agreeing a formal communications plan, with a preferred method of communication, regular updates being provided, a single point of contact if necessary, and pre-appointment communication if required.

Record keeping

Another key aspect of responding effectively to vulnerabilities is record keeping. Having accurate records allows landlords to have greater oversight of any issues that a resident may face and an understanding on how that will impact them. It also can mean less repeat or failed visits to a resident's home, which can reduce anxiety that residents may feel.

Prioritisation

When a resident with a vulnerability raises an issue, landlords must risk assess the impact this could have on that particular household and how urgent the response needs to be. A small issue may be far more severe for a household containing vulnerabilities due to the impact it can have.

While making sure that landlords are aware of the key issues facing a vulnerable resident right from the start of the process, landlords should also maintain regular contact with the household to see if the response needs to be adapted to suit the current impact. Landlords should also consider whether it needs a dedicated policy to handle vulnerabilities and where one exists, whether it is being fulfilled in practice.

Centre for Learning resources

Knowledge and information management key topics page containing reports, podcasts and case studies

Knowledge and information management eLearning and workshops available on the Learning Hub

Attitudes, respect and rights key topics page containing reports, podcasts and case studies

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