

# **Learning from: Severe Maladministration**



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

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# Introduction

It can be inspirational to hear adults talk about their experiences of growing up in social housing. The sense of pride, the strong bonds created in communities, and the stability afforded family life.

This was recently captured powerfully by Shelter's 'Made in Social Housing' campaign.

Yet, this is not always the experience of children growing up with damp and mould.

The impact on them is written across this report. In some cases, children are sleeping on the floor for more 2 years. Their bedrooms become unusable. The embarrassment of bringing their friends home becomes too great.

And parents tell of health impacts, with asthma repeatedly mentioned.

We now know that Awaab's Law will apply to social landlords responding to damp and mould, and emergencies, from October 2025. The sector has 7 months left to mobilise, and we know many landlords are doing so.

Central to an effective response is the landlord's diagnosis of what is causing damp and mould. This can be complex and require expertise. These cases focus on landlord's use of inspections.

Our casework highlights 4 common failings across landlord inspections.

1. Failing to do an inspection, or the inspection being limited or incomplete.
2. Multiple or conflicting inspections, without the outcomes being reconciled.
3. Disconnects between the inspector's recommendations and the landlord's proposed works.
4. Poorly communicated inspection results, where residents often chase for any information, even if it is vague.

The human impact of these failings is stark. From a pregnant lady waiting for works to be carried out to a vulnerable resident's specialist mattress becoming covered in mould. In one case inspections were conducted for 10 years without progress. In another, inspections happened but the landlord was concerned about the costs of works, and during these delays household's health deteriorated.

In some cases, the local authority's environmental health has also been involved and again it is concerning to see some social landlords not always taking action in response.

Residents' expectations will be raised following a survey in their home. But repeatedly our cases show communication vacuums lasting for months as the resident – and sometimes our investigation – tries to establish what is happening. With Awaab's Law, these silences will need to stop, with communication with residents needing to be open, specific and accurate.

Poor communication can be the result of poor records. Once more, weaknesses in knowledge and information management are shown to hamper the landlord's response to residents, including knowing the status of repairs. This provides the other focus for this report. Our recent **evaluation of our Spotlight report on knowledge and information management** showed some progress, but these cases are a reminder for senior leaders to continue focusing on this issue.

Crucially, this includes landlords recording vulnerabilities in a household, and taking appropriate action, including accelerating repairs or arranging a temporary move.

Landlords need robust records on household circumstances to triage cases and know whether an emergency response is required. And if landlords are not triaging cases, this is something they should urgently look at introducing.

Unsurprisingly, where a landlord's response falls short, residents may feel dismissed. In some of these cases there is evidence of the landlord inferring the resident's lifestyle is to blame for the damp and mould.

It is more than 3 years since we called for culture change in response to this issue. While we know some behaviours have changed, there is still work to do.

We hope these cases help landlords learn from complaints to improve their response to an issue which continues to dominate our casework.

**Richard Blakeway**

**Housing Ombudsman**

## Inspections

It is important that landlords undertake inspections in a timely fashion when an issue is reported, and that any recommendations from that survey are actioned. This report has split the failings the Ombudsman sees into 4 groups that look at inspections from inception to the actions that should come from it.

### 1. No or delayed inspection cases

#### Greenwich Council

**Greenwich Council (202342852)** failed to undertake an inspection for a year, despite the significant impact it was having on the children's bedrooms. This meant works did not start for 2 years, despite the acceptance that parts of the home were uninhabitable.

The resident said her baby had a continuous cough for 8 weeks and was prescribed with an inhaler due to the mould. The family were also left sleeping in the living room, causing stress, overcrowding and immense disruption.

The landlord's policy said it should have inspected the home within 20 days but there is no evidence this happened, despite chases from the resident. When an inspection still failed to take place, the resident made a complaint highlighting the impact on her children and asking for an inspection. Again, this failed to take place. The landlord's

failure to conduct an inspection or damp and mould survey early caused the resident distress and inconvenience.

When the inspection did take place, it recorded that major mould was visible and the bedroom could not be used. The other bedrooms were also severely affected by mould. It recommended an additional survey of the property and a very urgent mould wash. It passed the works to its damp team to conduct a survey. This never happened.

During this time, no risk assessments were undertaken into the severity of the ongoing mould. And temporary moves were not considered until the repair works caused more damage to the home, despite the whole family sleeping in the living room.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says its repairs service is undergoing long term transformation, and it has also provided staff with refresher training and guidance on how to accurately record conditions within a property.

## **A2Dominion Group**

The Ombudsman found severe maladministration after **A2Dominion Group (202229072)** failed to conduct a survey for 3 and a half years, instead relying on mould washes. No explanation has been provided for this delay.

This was despite the resident telling the landlord his daughter had to increase treatment for asthma as a result. He also said he had to throw out various belongings which had been damaged by mould.

The landlord's actions were not in line with its repair obligations and suggested that it did not take the resident's reports seriously.

During our investigation the landlord did not provide any survey reports, or any evidence of an investigation into the underlying causes of damp and mould.

Environmental health carried out an assessment finding significant damp and a category 2 hazard.

Five years from the date of the first report by the resident, the landlord undertook a damp and mould survey to assess the root cause of the issue. An inspection report following this stated that none of the works recommended in the previous inspection report had been carried out.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has introduced case managers to oversee the whole process of damp and mould repairs, that residents can contact directly. It has also expanded its databases to allow improved tracking and automate processes.

## RHP

In case **202347109**, RHP failed to inspect a home that it knew had damp and mould for nearly a year, which caused the resident stress and delayed works being completed to resolve the issue.

It took 8 months for the landlord to attend the property to inspect the bedrooms. The reason for this delay is unclear and there is no indication the landlord contacted or updated the resident during this time. This was poor and demonstrated a lack of urgency in responding appropriately to reports of damp and mould.

Subsequent landlord visits to the home took place but it did not provide us with a report of these findings. However, the repair log notes that the operative was “not sure” if the issue was with the brickwork and said a bricklayer was needed.

There are no records to indicate that a bricklayer or any other operative attended the property following this visit. It is also unclear from the landlord’s records what action the landlord took regarding the damp and mould reported in the bedroom.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has strengthened leadership in this area, enhanced repairs processes, brought in additional resources, and introduced a more proactive approach to damp and mould management.

## 2. Multiple or conflicting inspections cases

### Lambeth Council

It took The Ombudsman made a finding of severe maladministration for how **Lambeth Council (202401512)** handled a damp and mould complaint, with 2 unexplained inspections being undertaken 3 months apart.

The landlord's records do not explain why it arranged for a second inspection. While it may be appropriate to obtain a second opinion, there is no evidence that the landlord acted with urgency in arranging this or the basis for it.

This was unreasonable. It resulted in the resident experiencing a further delay before any remedial work was carried out despite the initial inspection recording leaks and mould.

The second inspection report also was at odds with the works undertaken by the landlord months previously. The landlord said it had completed works to the guttering, but the later inspection recommended the repair of defective external rainwater goods, suggesting these earlier works were not effective.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has reviewed the management of contractors, and restructured, retrained and increased the resources of its complaints teams. It has also expanded its repairs team and made significant investments in internal systems and processes.



In case **202331494**, we ordered **Westminster City Council** to pay £7,000 in compensation following multiple surveys that contradicted each other and led to conversations about value for money instead of repairing the resident's home.

Following repairs to fix the roof, the resident chased the landlord to say it was not fixed properly and needed more work. It took the landlord 6 months to inspect the roof. This inspection then did not identify any recent repairs to the gutter and set out further recommendations to resolve the issue.

When the landlord attended to repair, they said it could not be done as the guttering was too rotten. The landlord failed to inspect the home again after this and did not explain any reasoning to the resident.

When asked for a reason why it did not carry out any works, the landlord said the quotes were too high and that its value for money obligations meant it was unable to undertake the repairs.

6 months after the contractor apparently resolved the issues, the landlord carried out another inspection finding heavy water penetration in the front bedroom and very high damp readings. This meant the landlord once again put scaffolding up.

Another 6 months passed with the same pattern occurring, the landlord unable to resolve the leak and therefore scaffolding returning. The resident confirmed the leak was still ongoing as the Ombudsman issued its findings.

These multiple inspections often found the same thing but were at odds with other records that suggested work had been completed but had not been.

2 members of the household were diagnosed with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) during the lifetime of this complaint, which the resident said related to the damp and mould.

In its learning from this case, the landlord has reviewed its approach to managing complex leaks to make sure they are referred for specialist review at an earlier stage when multiple repairs have been made. It has also adopted a new vulnerability policy and now carries out household support reviews to better understand residents.

### 3. Disconnect between inspections and schedule of works cases

#### Metropolitan Thames Valley

The Ombudsman found delays in repairs by **Metropolitan Thames Valley (202308147)**, despite an improvement notice from the council.

After the local authority issued its notice, no action was taken for a further 7 months by the landlord to address damp and mould. When it did act, it was with limited effect.

At one point the landlord claimed not to have received any reports of damp and mould, despite the involvement of the environmental health team, and the resident's reporting evidence. This carried on until eventually the home was transferred to another social landlord.

The lack of action until transfer made the resident believe the landlord was doing it deliberately to not spend money on a home which was not going to be their responsibility soon, although the Ombudsman saw no evidence of this.

The environmental health team also stated the landlord seemed unwilling to listen to issues raised by the resident and ordered the landlord to undertake a range of actions, including a full damp and mould survey. The landlord failed to do this.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says follow up visits are now scheduled between 9 to 12 months after works are completed to inspect the condition of the property, has introduced new case management tools, and now use new digital

survey equipment and reporting software which provides a more comprehensive record of property conditions, surveyors' findings, and recommendations.

## L&Q

**L&Q (202342217)** failed to undertake works following inspections for over a decade.

The resident believes these ongoing problems have resulted in her gaining a respiratory illness and experiencing joint pain and stress.

On multiple occasions issues were marked as complete and then discovered to not be resolved by the next inspection. In others, cases were closed within days but with no record of work carried out.

Despite these surveys over several years, the landlord later said it needed to do further investigation to understand the root causes. But no further action was taken for 10 months when the damp worsened again. Repairs were repeatedly marked as complete, but the source not found. This suggests a weakness in the way the landlord recorded and monitored its complex repairs in this case.

A single point of failure seemed to cause some delays too, with the landlord saying the surveyor was on holiday, had changed their role, and then eventually no longer worked in that area.

In its final stage response, the landlord said it would carry out another inspection and get to the root causes of the issue. However, this still had not happened when the resident brought their complaint to us for investigation. This was not disputed by the landlord who said it would now be carrying out an urgent inspection.

Some of these issues were ongoing during the **special investigation into the landlord**, with the recommendations put forward in that report forming part of the landlord's plan to improve its services.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has undertaken 32,000 home visits and installed 17,000 humidity sensors in residents' homes, and also introduced new policies, procedures and staff training focused on damp and mould. It has also recruited additional staff, training and other resources, prioritising efficiency and good communication, and embedding learning from complaints.

### **Bristol City Council**

**Bristol City Council (202340989)** failed to follow survey recommendations which caused a family with young children severe distress. Amongst the family members, one of the children has a respiratory illness and one injured themselves trying to clean the mould.

After a surveyor first attended the home, it is not clear if any works were completed as a result.

The information given to the resident following the survey was vague and showed a lack of understanding about the impact on the household. It was particularly concerning that the surveyor believed the root cause of the mould was the loft insulation, but the landlord did not prioritise this.

The issues raised in the inspection were not resolved for at least 17 months, despite the ongoing impact on a vulnerable household. It failed to follow the recommendations of this survey which would have minimised distress.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has used the orders and recommendations from the report to improve its services and will continue to make improvements to its repairs and communications.

### **Cornwall Council**

The Ombudsman found **Cornwall Council (202346623)** failed to take decisive action following an inspection. Despite extensive damp and mould in a home containing a pregnant woman.

Photos sent to the landlord from the resident made the triage assessment set the case as a high priority and ordered an urgent inspection from a surveyor. This took place but there is no record of the surveyor's report.

Another inspection took place a month later, highlighting several defects and proposing recommendations. Including a more specialist survey, which took place 2 days later and found similar conclusions.

Still no actions to resolve the issue were taken by the landlord, despite the resident now sleeping on the sofa as the mould was so bad in the bedrooms. The dehumidifier purchased for the resident was faulty and unusable and the resident repeatedly said the home was not liveable. However, the landlord failed to action the recommendations from the earlier surveys and the issues endured.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it is carrying out a major project to change the way it delivers responsive repairs. This involves moving from one main contractor to 4 new contractors, splitting Cornwall into 3 'patches' for responsive repairs and delivering heating breakdowns and servicing on a separate regional-based contract. This new way of working is designed to deliver a more timely and efficient repairs service.

### **Freebridge Community Housing**

**Freebridge Community Housing (202347029)** failed to act on inspection recommendations, including urgent matters being dealt with in months rather than days.

The landlord also failed to inform the resident of any inspection outcomes, leaving them having to chase the landlord for updates. While the Ombudsman understands that dealing with leaks can be complex, this makes it even more important to be proactive with communication.

The resident sent a follow up report to the landlord, stating the leak was now affecting 2 bedrooms. The landlord arranged an inspection that made several recommendations. There is no evidence those works were ever completed and a later inspection found the same issues.

Despite some of this urgent work showing as needing to be completed within 3 months, some took as long as 16 months. These delays were not reasonable and meant the resident had to wait a significant amount of time before any meaningful repairs were complete.

The lack of urgency suggested a dismissive attitude towards the resident in reports. Compounded by their daughter's lifestyle being blamed by the landlord, despite inspection evidence of structural issues.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has formed a specialist damp and mould team, increased staffing resources, and developed new policy and process in collaboration with customer panels. It has also procured new specialist contractors and invested in a compliance IT system.

#### 4. Poorly communicated inspection cases

##### Ealing Council

**Ealing Council (202306717)** failed to progress damp and mould inspections and communicate with the resident about its actions. This also led to unattended appointments and eventually struggles with access.

When the resident first reported the issue, the landlord asked for photos to allow a surveyor to assess the situation before visiting. While this was reasonable, it took another 2 months for an inspection to be raised.

The landlord raised 3 inspections in the space of a month with no explanation as to why. Not all of them happened and it was not explained to the resident why some were cancelled and others not.

The resident was forced to follow up with the landlord on numerous occasions regarding the inspections and subsequent works. The landlord failed to act urgently or communicate effectively, despite knowing there was a young child living in the property.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has undertaken a thorough review of its record keeping, resourcing, systems, processes, and culture, adopting new data management systems and processes. It is also investing in more staff resource and taken on two new repairs contractors.

### Together Housing Group

**Together Housing Group (202327540)** made significant failings in a damp and mould case, including not disclosing inspection notes to the residents when requested.

The delays in this case led to children sleeping in bedrooms impacted by damp and mould for 2 and a half years. The home had widespread black mould on the walls, skirting, and furniture, including the bedframe and mattress which the asthmatic resident was sleeping in.

The landlord failed to provide us with the report or any evidence of the findings from the damp and mould survey. It is unclear if it was really carried out or whether it was recorded incorrectly.

The landlord also failed to communicate its concerns that the home was too small for the family. It did not explore this or the options available to her. When an operative did attend for a mould wash, the landlord failed to communicate this beforehand, and the resident was not ready or happy with the treatment going ahead. This could have been prevented with improved communication.

Internal communication was poor too, with language inferring blame on the resident and her family for having too many people in the house and failing to heat it properly.

It also said its damp and mould reports were not for residents, with an unprofessional email back to the resident showing poor attitudes towards her.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has improved its complaint handling; established a dedicated team to manage damp, mould and condensation cases; and revamped internal systems and processes.

**Others found in this category:**

- 202306479 Clarion
- 202323686 Croydon Council
- 202231311 Croydon Council
- **202308633** Enham Trust
- 202403025 Hammersmith and Fulham Council
- 202341070 Hillingdon Council
- **202347088** Longhurst Group
- 202223389 Milton Keynes Council
- 202340110 Notting Hill Genesis
- **202223502** Sutton Housing Partnership
- 202310032 Together Housing

## Key learning relating to inspections

Damp and mould are potential category 1 hazards that fall within the scope of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). Landlords should be aware of obligations under HHSRS and where a potential hazard is identified, conduct inspections and additional monitoring of the home.

Inspections should be carried out as soon as possible after an issue is reported, with any recommendations being followed up and actioned. Communication with the resident during this time is essential to set out clear expectations and timescales for the works that have come from the inspection.



Vulnerabilities should also be considered if an inspection and remedial action is needed more urgently, and effective triaging of cases by landlords can help at this stage.

Awaab's Law, when implemented in October 2025, will provide landlords with stricter timescales in this area and landlords should prepare accordingly for that so they do not find themselves on the backfoot from the start of an issue being reported.

While reasonable for the landlord to trust the advice of their expert surveyors, if there is a dispute about this from the resident, it may be fair to commission an independent surveyor to ascertain if the same conclusions are met.

When an inspection gets arranged, if it were to be cancelled or missed, a new appointment should be scheduled as soon as reasonably possible. Any appointment should be communicated with the resident and takes the resident's life into consideration when doing so.

If a landlord undertakes multiple surveys with conflicting results, it should reconcile the differences. Landlords should be careful to avoid opting for the recommendations that require the most limited action or continue to commission inspections as an alternative to decisive action.

Another key element of getting the flow from inspection to works right is internal communications within a landlord. Too often there is poor communication or single points of failure. This poor communication can be exacerbated by inadequate record keeping.

## Knowledge and information management

Knowledge and information management is the foundation of an effective service delivery. The consultation on Awaab's Law stressed the importance of record keeping for landlords to fulfil their obligations and this will be a core component of effective communication with residents. Better knowledge and information management will be vital from October 2025 onwards.

### Newlon Housing Trust

**Newlon Housing Trust (202103589)** provided limited repair records, no contractor notes for the majority of any booked repair appointments or inspections, and limited details of action taken in response to inspections.

This hindered its response to the resident and our investigation. It is reasonable to expect a landlord to provide details to support an investigation, which can set out the landlord's position on what action it has taken. In this case, the evidence provided was minimal and inadequate. The landlord was unable to evidence it kept full and detailed records of its actions or provide a clear audit trail of its management of the leak.

There was also little evidence of communication from the landlord to resident during inspections and works. It also failed to provide surveys and reports to the resident when asked. This poor communication continued when the landlord was considering a temporary move for the resident.

It is clear the impact of the poor records on the landlord's handling of this case. There is no evidence the landlord has resolved the leak, or even if it has been located. There is a lack of inspection reports which questions the basis of which the landlord is supposed to reach a resolution.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has changed the way it manages ongoing repairs, and all staff have been briefed on their role in handling complaints.

It has also carried out quality audits to ensure this and other learning has been embedded. It has also used the Spotlight reports and self-assessed against these.

## Windrush Alliance UK Community Interest Company

In this case there was significant failings around records as **Windrush Alliance UK Community Interest Company (202310419)**. The landlord failed to provide evidence throughout the case and eventually told us the resident no longer lived in the property when they still did.

The damp was so severe in the home that the resident said it was causing hives, and she had developed asthma. This meant the lack of accurate records, which delayed works being undertaken, was particularly concerning.

The evidence requested by the Ombudsman was ignored or not provided, resulting in a Complaint Handling Failure Order (CHFO) being issued to the landlord. This still did not push the landlord into action and hampered our investigation.

We approached the landlord for comment but on this occasion, they decided not to include a learning statement.

## Hyde Group

**Hyde Group (202328571)** failed to record significant vulnerabilities in a household, including a disabled child and another under 12 months old.

This record failing potentially led to the resident not being prioritised. The resident also reported her disabled daughter collapsed during the timeframes of this case, which she put down to the damp and mould.

Because of the poor records, it was also unclear whether the surveyor had adequate training on assessing the mould. Although internal emails from the landlord stated the mould was out of control, the only actions noted is a mould wash that was marked as complete but again the landlord could provide no evidence of.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has improved its complaint handling process, procedures for accessing homes to carry out works and has set up a separate team that specifically monitors and manages damp and mould cases to give them the specialist focus they need.

## L&Q

In this case, **L&Q (202228178)** were unable to evidence whether it had inspected or undertaken any repairs, with poor records throughout. The ongoing damp caused the family embarrassment due to the smell, had the son sleeping in the living room, and unable to invite friends or family to the home.

Due to poor records, the Ombudsman could not confirm the exact start date of the reported issues, whether inspections took place and in what timescale, or what repairs were identified and how they were actioned or communicated.

There was also no evidence to show the landlord's response to the reports of damp and mould was either reasonable or appropriate.

At the point of our findings, there was no evidence that the landlord has completed all the repairs it had agreed to. This is despite it being over 3 years since the resident originally notified the landlord about the damp and mould problems, and 18 months after the landlord told the resident it would complete the repairs in its stage 2 response.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has undertaken 32,000 home visits and installed 17,000 humidity sensors in residents' homes, and also introduced new policies, procedures and staff training focused on damp and mould. It has also recruited additional staff, training and other resources, prioritising efficiency and good communication, and embedding learning from complaints.

## Croydon Council

Record keeping failings by **Croydon Council (202320212)** resulted in damp and mould not being effectively tackled for 39 months.

The resident described how the situation worsened his family's physical, mental and emotional health, wellbeing, and education, with 5 young children and 3 family members with asthma.

The landlord confirmed it had not kept full records of the case, including not recording the vulnerabilities present in the household. The landlord's lack of full records for the resident's case again meant it was not possible to confirm the dates, details, or any actions taken for the report and inspection.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has launched an ongoing project to capture accurate records of key resident data and increased resources for managing resident complaints, procured specialist damp and mould contractors and delivered training to all staff on the impact of damp and mould.

**Other cases in this category:**

- 202227158 Freebridge Community Housing
- 202234547 Hyde Group
- **202338603** L&Q

## Key learning relating to knowledge and information management

Landlords' systems should enable them to keep accurate records of repair reports, responses, inspections, and investigations.

A successful response to Awaab's Law relies on effective knowledge and information management. It is key landlords get this right and put in place effective policies and processes to accurately record and store data.

This enables landlords to inspect and raise works correctly, reducing the need for clarifications or delays in works being progressed. Repair logs are a vital source of intelligence for landlords, showing a clear activity plan of what has been achieved. When these are not done, the Ombudsman often sees it lead to more delays and frustrations for the resident.

It is also vital that landlords have clear records of any vulnerabilities within the household which might inform its approach.

Ensuring that accurate, robust, and accessible records of key data support a risk-based approach to issues, which can be essential when tackling a complex case such as a leak or a hazard with multiple touch points.

## Centre for Learning resources

**Damp and mould key topics page** containing reports, podcasts and case studies.

**Damp and mould eLearning and workshops** available on the Learning Hub.

**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.

**Attitudes, respect and rights eLearning** and workshops available on the Learning Hub.

**Decants key topics page** containing reports, podcasts and case studies.

# Housing

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